

This seems to say that the earth swallowing Korach was a proof that Moshe was right. How, then, can the Rambam say that even this miracle was not meant as the proof of Moshe's nevuah?

The Purpose of Korach's Punishment

The answer is that the miracle of Korach was not needed to create the basic emunah in Moshe Rabbeinu. That had already been established at Har Sinai. Rather, this miracle was needed for a different reason. It was needed to stop a danger that could spread through Klal Yisrael and through all later generations.

We can see this more clearly by comparing Korach with Miriam. Miriam and Aharon also spoke about Moshe. They said, במדבר יב ב הרק אך במשה דבר ה', *did Hashem speak only with Moshe? Did He not speak with us as well?* They questioned Moshe's separation from his wife. Their argument was that they too were nevi'im, and they had not separated from normal family life. Why, then, did Moshe act differently?

Hashem responded immediately. He called Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam, and said, לא כן עבדי משה בכל ביתי נאמן הוא, *not so is My servant Moshe; in My entire house he is faithful*. He then said, ומדוע לא יראתם לדבר בעבדי במשה, *why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moshe?* Miriam was punished right away with tzaraas.

Why was Miriam corrected immediately, while Korach was allowed to continue until the earth swallowed him? Miriam's question was not a small matter, yet Hashem stopped it at once. Korach, by contrast, was allowed to gather people, argue, spread his shittah, and draw others after him.

The difference is that Miriam's question was l'shem Shamayim. She did not intend to disgrace Moshe. She made a mistake, but she remained attached to the Shechinah. When a person acts l'shem Shamayim, even if he errs, there is a special shemirah from Shamayim. Hashem helps him return to the proper path. Therefore, Miriam was corrected immediately.

Korach was different. His machlokes was not l'shem Shamayim. His words were Torah words, but his heart was not straight. He had already chosen the path of his own daas, his own agenda, his own kavod. Once a person separates himself from l'shem Shamayim, he loses that special shemirah. He is left to his bechirah. That is the hanhagah of התורה, *free choice is given*. Hashem allows a person to go where he insists on going, even if the path leads to destruction.

This is why the Korach miracle was necessary. It was not to create emunah in Moshe from the beginning. It was to uproot a false shittah that could have continued to influence Klal Yisrael. Korach's claim, כלם קדשים, could sound very appealing. It could attract great people. It could pull in roshei yeshivos, leaders, and talmidei chachamim. Therefore, Hashem allowed the matter to reach its full expression, and then showed that this was not a valid path in Torah.

The Protection of L'shem Shamayim

Chazal say in Avos, כל העוסקים עם הציבור יהיו עוסקים עמהם לשם שמים, *all those who work with the public should work with them l'shem Shamayim*. Chazal also say, כל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים, *all your actions should be l'shem Shamayim*. This is not only a high madreigah. It is a protection. When a person acts l'shem Shamayim, the Shechinah remains with him and helps him stay within the proper boundaries.

Chazal say in Pesachim, לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה ומצות אף על פי שלא לשמה שמתוך, *a person should always involve himself in Torah and mitzvos even shelo lishmah, because from shelo lishmah he will come to lishmah*. But this does not mean that shelo lishmah is the goal. The goal is lishmah. A person must keep asking Hashem to help him reach the point where his Torah and mitzvos are truly for Heaven.

This is also hinted to in the pasuk ויקחו לי תרומה, *they shall take for Me a terumah*. Chazal understand as לישמי, *for My sake*. Torah and avodah must be done with the awareness that a person is standing before Hashem and needs the Shechinah to be with him. Without that, even Torah arguments can become dangerous.

As soon as a person relies only on his own daas, he enters danger. We find this by the meraglim. Hashem said to Moshe, שלח לך אנשים, *send for yourself*

men. Rashi explains לך, לדעתך, *according to your own understanding*.

Hashem was saying: I am not commanding this. If you want, send them.

Once Klal Yisrael chose to move forward on their own terms, Hashem gave them room to err. They were allowed to follow their own path, and that path led to tragedy.

The same yesod appears by Bilaam. Hashem told him clearly, במדבר כב יב לא, *do not go with them; do not curse the nation*. But Bilaam still wanted to go. He told Balak's messengers, שבו נא בזה גם אתם, *stay here tonight as well*. He kept pushing, as if asking Hashem not to stop him. Eventually, Hashem let him go. That is הרשות נתונה. When a person insists on his own will, Heaven may allow him to follow it, even toward his own downfall.

Chazal say in Avodah Zarah that if a man sins with another man's wife, one might think the world should stop and prevent a child from being born. But עולם כמנהגו נוהג, *the world continues according to its natural order*, and the sinners will have to answer for what they did. Hashem created a world with bechirah. He does not always interrupt a person's choices, even when those choices lead to terrible results.

This was Korach's downfall. He chose to separate from the guidance of Moshe Rabbeinu and from the protection of l'shem Shamayim. He wrapped his jealousy in holy language. He dressed personal ambition in Torah svara. He spoke about the holiness of the people, but his words were not pure.

Therefore, instead of becoming a lasting machlokes like Hillel and Shammai, his machlokes collapsed completely.

The lesson is frightening but clear. Holy words are not enough. Sharp sevaros are not enough. Even claims about kedushah, equality, and truth are not enough. The question is whether the heart behind them is l'shem Shamayim. When Torah is joined with l'shem Shamayim, it becomes part of the mesorah and endures. When Torah language is used for kavod, jealousy, or self-will, it can become the path of Korach.

That is the inheritance of Torah, ירושת התורה. Torah is not inherited by those who merely speak its language. It is inherited by those who submit themselves to Hashem, to mesorah, and to the path of rav and talmid established by Moshe Rabbeinu.

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Parshat Korach

Translated and adopted from

Iyunim B'Sefer Bamidbar by Nechama Leibowitz

Part 1 - The Machlokes of Korach and His Group

A Machlokes Made of Many Complaints

The Torah introduces Korach's rebellion with the words: ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן Korach ... took himself together with Dasan and Aviram ... and On ... sons of Reuven (Bamidbar 16:1). The next pasuk adds: ויקמו לפני משה ואנשים They rose up before Moshe with 250 men from Bnei Yisrael leaders of the assembly, men of renown (16:2).

Then comes their public claim: רב לכם כי כל העדה כלם קדשים ובתוכם Enough for you for the entire assembly is holy and Hashem is among them so why do you raise yourselves over the congregation of Hashem (16:3).

At first, the words sound almost noble. Korach speaks in the language of holiness and equality. If כל העדה כלם קדשים, the whole assembly is holy, why should Moshe and Aharon hold special positions? Why should one family have leadership and kehuna? Why should any person stand above קהל השם, the congregation of Hashem?

But this was not one pure argument. It was a gathering of many resentments. Ibn Ezra explains that Korach's group included רגנים ומתאוננים ומתלוננים מכל הסוגים grumblers, complainers, and resentful people of all kinds. Each group had its own grievance. Korach and his Leviim objected to Aharon's kehuna and to the fact that the Leviim served under the kohanim. Dasan and Aviram, from Shevet Reuven, carried the resentment of a tribe that had lost the bechorah, the firstborn status. Others were firstborn men from the tribes, who saw themselves as deprived, because the avodah had been taken from the bechorim after the cheit ha'egel and given to Shevet Levi.

Korach's strength was that he did not need to create anger from nothing. He gathered people who already felt wronged. A Levi felt overlooked. A ben Reuven felt displaced. A bechor felt stripped of his former right. Korach gave all of these private grievances one public slogan: כל העדה כלם קדשים The entire assembly is holy.

That is often how machlokes grows. It does not begin with one clean idea. It brings together different wounds, different jealousies, and different disappointments, and covers them with one attractive phrase.

Korach Chose His Moment

The Ramban explains that the timing of the rebellion was essential. Earlier in the Midbar, no rebellion against Moshe could have succeeded. The people had seen what Moshe had done for them.

They trusted him and followed him. The Ramban writes: אילו היה אדם מורד על משה בזמן אחר היו העם סוקלים אותו If a person had rebelled against Moshe at any other time the people would have stoned him. ואז מצא קרה מקום לחלוק כי היו אוהבים את משה כנפשם ושומעים אליו Because they loved Moshe like their own soul and listened to him.

But after the חטא המרגלים, the spirit of the nation changed. They had just been told that they would die in the Midbar and not enter Eretz Yisrael. The promise of the land now felt distant. The people were disappointed and broken. The Ramban writes: אז היתה נפש כל העם מרה Then the soul of the whole people was bitter. ואז מצא קרה מקום לחלוק. Then Korach found room to challenge Moshe's actions.

This is why Dasan and Aviram later say: אף לא אל ארץ זבת חלב ודבש Nor have you brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey (Bamidbar 16:14). They take the very language of the promise, ארץ זבת חלב ודבש, and turn it into an accusation. Instead of seeing Moshe as the faithful messenger of Hashem, they speak as if he brought them from Mitzrayim only to fail in the Midbar.

Korach knew when to speak. He waited for a moment when disappointment could be turned into suspicion. A complaint that would once have been rejected now sounded believable. This is one of the dangers of bitterness. When the soul is bitter, it becomes easier to believe the worst about others.

The Weapon of ליצנות

Korach's claim sounded serious, but Chazal show that his method was ליצנות, mockery that makes serious and sacred things look foolish. The Midrash Shochar Tov on Tehillim applies the pasuk זה קרה שהיה מתלוצץ על משה ועל אהרן: Korach: to ובומושב לצים Korach who mocked Moshe and Aharon.

The Midrash portrays Korach as telling the people a story about a poor widow with two orphan daughters. She had one field. When she came to plow, Moshe told her: לא תחרוש בשור ובהמור יחדו Do not plow with an ox and donkey together. When she came to plant, he told her:

Do not plant your field with mixed seed. When she came to harvest, he told her to leave leket, shikchah, and peah. When she made a pile of grain, he told her to give terumah, maaser rishon, and maaser sheini. The widow accepted everything. The Midrash says: הצדיקה עליה את הדין ונתנה לו She accepted the judgment upon herself and gave it to him. Finally, she sold the field and bought two sheep, hoping to live from their wool and offspring. Then Aharon came and claimed the bechor. When she sheared them, he claimed the first shearing. When she slaughtered them, he claimed the foreleg, jaws, and stomach. At the end, when she declared them cherem, Aharon took everything, citing the pasuk: כל חרם בישראל לך יהיה Every cherem in Israel shall be yours (Bamidbar 18:14). The widow was left crying with her daughters. Korach's final line was the sharpest: כל כך הם עושים ותולין בקדוש ברוך הוא

This was not honest argument. It was demagoguery. Korach did not challenge the law with careful reasoning. אין ביקורת החוק מבוססת על נימוקים עקרוניים כי אם על סיפור אודות פרט The criticism of the law is not based on principled arguments but on a story about one individual. He chose an אלמנה and יתומות, a widow and orphans, because those words immediately awaken pity. Once the crowd is moved emotionally, they may stop asking whether the story is fair, complete, or true to the whole Torah.

Korach also showed only one side of the Torah. He listed what the widow had to give, but hid everything the Torah gives to the widow. The same Torah that commands gifts to kohanim and Leviim also says: לא תחבל בגד אלמנה בגד אלמנה Do not take a widow's garment as security (Devarim 24:17). It says: לא תענון כל אלמנה ויתום לא תענון Do not afflict any widow or orphan (Shemos 22:21). It commands the owner of the field to leave produce for the poor: לא תחבל בגד אלמנה ויתום It shall be for the stranger for the orphan and for the widow (Devarim 24:19). It says the same about the olive tree: לא תחבל בגד אלמנה ויתום It shall be for the stranger for the orphan and for the widow (24:20).

Korach erased all of this. He showed chovos without zechuyos, obligations without rights, demands without protections. He made it appear as if Torah only takes from the weak, when in truth Torah is the source of protection for the weak. That is the dishonest power of selective truth. Some of the laws he mentioned were real, but he arranged them falsely. He removed the context, hid the compassion, and turned a Torah of justice into a Torah of cruelty.

The most poisonous part was the attack on the lawgiver. Korach said: כל כך הם עושים ותולין בקדוש ברוך הוא All this they do and they hang it on the Holy One Blessed be He. In other words, Moshe and Aharon are not really speaking in the Name of Hashem. They are inventing these laws for themselves and pretending they come from Heaven.

Once this claim is accepted, everything collapses. If Moshe is not trusted, then Torah itself becomes suspect. If Aharon is only taking for himself, then kehuna becomes corruption. If the mitzvos are personal inventions, then obedience to Hashem is turned into submission to men. Korach's machlokes was so destructive because he tried to poison the trust on which Torah rests.

Holy Words With a Crooked Heart

Korach's slogan was powerful because part of it was true: כל העדה כלם קדשים The whole assembly is holy. Klal Yisrael is a holy nation. The problem was not the phrase itself, but what Korach did with it.

He used the holiness of the people to attack the structure Hashem had commanded. He used the honor of the nation to stir resentment against Moshe. He used sympathy for the widow to make Torah seem cruel. And while claiming that Moshe and Aharon were misusing the Name of Hashem, he himself used holy language to undermine trust in Hashem's Torah.

This is the danger of machlokes shelo l'shem Shamayim. It often speaks in beautiful language. It may speak about justice, holiness, compassion, or equality. But if the heart behind it is crooked, even holy words can become tools of jealousy and destruction.

How Could They Be Fooled

The most frightening question is how the people could be influenced by this. These were not people who had never seen the truth. They had left Mitzrayim לגאולה משעבוד לאורה, from darkness to light, from slavery to redemption. They had seen Krias Yam Suf. They had stood at Har Sinai. They had followed the Ananei Hakavod. They had eaten the manna. They had heard Moshe and Aharon speak in the Name of Hashem.

How could such people be drawn after mockery?

The answer is that miracles alone do not uproot jealousy, resentment, and suspicion from the human heart. A person can see great light and still allow that light to be darkened. Korach's ליצנות did not create a new world. It put a dark lens over the world they already knew. Suddenly Torah looked like oppression. Moshe looked like an opportunist. Aharon looked like someone taking for himself. The mitzvos of Hashem looked like the schemes of men.

This is why ליצנות is so dangerous. A serious question can be answered. A sincere difficulty can be discussed. But ליצנות does not seek an answer. It seeks to make holiness look ridiculous and trust look foolish.

Turning Light Into Darkness

Nechama closes with the contrast between what Torah truly is and what Korach made it appear to be. Tehillim says: פקודי השם ישרים משמחי לב מצות השם ברה מאירת עינים The commands of Hashem are straight rejoicing the heart the mitzvah of Hashem is pure enlightening the eyes (Tehillim 19:9).

Torah is meant to bring light, joy, and clarity. But עקוב לב האדם, the heart of man is crooked. There is no light so bright that a person cannot, בטפשות לבו ובחלקלקות לשונו, with the foolishness of his heart and the smoothness of his tongue, turn its brightness into darkness.

That is what Korach did. He made the mitzvos of Hashem sound cruel. He made leaders chosen by Hashem sound corrupt. He turned the holiness of Klal Yisrael into a weapon against the order Hashem had commanded. Through ליצנות, he took פקודי השם ישרים, the straight commands of Hashem, and made them look twisted.

The sin of Korach was therefore not only ambition. It was ambition dressed in the clothing of principle. It was jealousy spoken in the language of holiness. It was rebellion made to sound like compassion for the people.

That is why the parsha remains so powerful. It warns us that not every holy phrase comes from a holy place. Not every claim of justice is driven by justice. Not every criticism of leadership is sincere. The test is not only what words are spoken, but what heart stands behind them, and whether those words bring light or turn light into darkness.

Part 2 – The Assembly of Israel and the Assembly of Korach

Where Was the Nation

The first article on Korach dealt with מחלוקת קרח ועדתו, the machlokes of Korach and his group. It showed who joined Korach, what grievances they carried, and how Korach used ליצנות, mockery, to turn jealousy and resentment into a public rebellion. The second article asks a different question: where was the rest of Klal Yisrael during all of this?

At the beginning of the parsha, the main actors are clear. Korach stands with Dasan and Aviram, On ben Peles, and the two hundred and fifty men described as נשיאי עדה קראי מועד אנשי שם, leaders of the assembly, called to the meeting, men of renown. Moshe and Aharon stand opposite them. But what about the rest of the people? Were they with Moshe, with Korach, or merely watching from the side?

This question becomes central when the Torah says: ויקהל עליהם קרח Korach gathered against them the entire assembly to the entrance of the Ohel Moed (Bamidbar 16:19). Until now, the rebellion seemed limited to Korach and his group. Now כל העדה, the entire assembly, appears at the entrance of the Ohel Moed.

Rashi, based on Midrash Tanchuma, explains how Korach gathered them: דברתי ליצנות כל הלילה הוא הלך אצל השבטים ופיתה אותם Through words of mockery all that night he went among the shevatim and persuaded them. Korach said: כסבורין אתם שעלי לבדי אני מקפיד איני Do you think I am concerned only for myself? I am concerned for all of you. Then he added: אלו באין ונוטלין כל These people come and take all the greatness for themselves, for him the kingship and for his brother the kehuna.

Korach understood that personal ambition sounds ugly, but public concern sounds noble. He therefore presented his quarrel as a fight for everyone's honor. He did not say, "I want power." He said: בשביל כולכם, I am fighting for all of you.

Still, the Torah leaves the people's position unclear. Were they actually convinced by Korach? Did they believe him? Or did they come only to watch the test of the ketores and see who would win? This uncertainty is itself part of the danger. A person can be drawn into machlokes even before he openly chooses a side.

Who Is הזאת העדה

After Korach gathers the people, the Torah says: וירא כבוד השם אל כל העדה The glory of Hashem appeared to the entire assembly (Bamidbar 16:19). Then Hashem says to Moshe and Aharon: הבלדו העדה Separate yourselves from this assembly and I will consume them in a moment (16:21).

The key question is the meaning of הזאת העדה, this assembly. Does it mean עדת קרח, the assembly of Korach, or עדת ישראל, the assembly of Israel?

Rabbeinu Chananel, quoted by the Ramban, explains that הזאת העדה means Korach's group alone. In his view, Hashem was not threatening all of Klal Yisrael, only the rebels. The phrase means עדת קרח, the assembly of Korach and not the assembly of Bnei Yisrael. When Hashem later says: העלו מסביב למשכן קרח דתן Go up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram (16:24), He is clarifying which group must be separated from.

The Ramban rejects this explanation. He says it is difficult to call only Korach, Dasan, and Aviram an עדה in this context. More importantly, it cannot be that Moshe misunderstood the nevuah. The Ramban writes: Heaven forbid that Moshe would not understand his prophecy and err in it.

According to the Ramban, the threat was directed at the broader nation because they had begun to be drawn after Korach. They were not all Korach, and they were not all equally guilty, but they were no longer standing clearly with Moshe.

Suspicion Is Also Dangerous

The Ramban explains that at first the people were loyal to Moshe and Aharon: At first the heart of the people was with Moshe and Aharon. But Korach persuaded them that he was not fighting for himself. He claimed that he was zealous for the honor of all of them. Once they heard that, the matter was good in their eyes.

They may have thought that perhaps Korach's claim had merit. Perhaps the avodah should return to the bechorim. The Ramban says they gathered to see whether perhaps it would be pleasing in Hashem's eyes and the avodah would return to their firstborn.

This was different from Korach's own rebellion, but it was still serious. The people were not leading the attack, but they were allowing suspicion to enter. They became questioning their teacher. Chazal teach that one who is suspicious of his rebbi, is as if he is suspicious of the Shechinah.

That is why the people were in danger. They had not declared themselves rebels, but their hearts had shifted. They had begun to wonder whether Korach was right.

Moshe Pleads for Mercy

Moshe and Aharon fall on their faces and say: God of the spirits of all flesh shall one man sin and You be angry with the entire assembly (Bamidbar 16:22).

According to the Ramban, this does not mean that the people were completely innocent. Moshe and Aharon were pleading for mercy. This is the way of those who seek mercy. When pleading for the people, one tries to lessen the sin of the many and place the main responsibility on the one who caused it. The Ramban describes this as: They lighten the sin from upon the people and place it on the individual who caused it.

Korach was the instigator. He went among the shevatim, used the name of Moshe, and claimed that Moshe had taken the honor for himself and kehuna for Aharon. Therefore Moshe and Aharon ask Hashem not to destroy the whole assembly because of the one man who caused the sin.

The same kind of plea appears by David HaMelech during the plague. David says: I have sinned and I have done wrong but these sheep what have they done (II Shmuel 24:17). The people may not have been free of all guilt, but David pleads by placing the burden on himself. That is the way of those who ask for mercy.

A Limb That Separated

The Akeidas Yitzchak offers another way to understand Moshe's words. How could Moshe say "You be angry with the whole assembly"? We find elsewhere that the nation can be affected by one person's sin. By Achan, the pasuk says: Israel sinned (Yehoshua 7:11), even though Achan was the one who took from the chereim.

The Akeidas Yitzchak answers that there is a difference between a sinner who remains part of the community and a sinner who separates himself from it. A community is like one body. If one limb is sick while still attached, the whole person is considered sick. But if the limb separates from the body, it is no longer part of that body. It becomes a limb separated from the living body.

That is what Korach did. Rashi explains: He took himself to one side to be divided from the assembly. Onkelos translates יקח as he separated himself. Korach was not merely a sinner within the community. He separated himself from the community and stood against it.

According to the Akeidas Yitzchak, Hashem's answer is exact. Since Korach and his group separated themselves from Klal Yisrael in thought and intention, Klal Yisrael must now separate from them in action. The Akeidah's language is: Just as they separated themselves from the community in thought so the community must separate from them and move away from around them in action.

That is the meaning of Hashem's command: Speak to the assembly saying go up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram (Bamidbar 16:24). It was not only a warning about physical danger. It was a demand that the people show where they stood.

Standing Nearby Is Not Neutral

The Malbim deepens this point. The people were still standing near the wicked, and that itself created guilt: They were standing near these wicked people and it appeared as if they agreed with their deeds. Therefore they had to do something visible: They must perform an act in practice to show that they are distancing themselves from them and from their crowd.

There are times when standing nearby is no longer neutral. If a person remains close to rebellion, listens to its words, waits to see whether it will succeed, and refuses to separate from it, his presence begins to look like agreement. Hashem therefore commands the people to move away. They must show that Korach's machlokes is not theirs.

The Danger of Waiting

Many people do not choose immediately and clearly. They do not say openly, "I am with Korach." But they also do not say, "I am with Moshe." They wait and watch to see who will win.

Chazal describe this danger in the story of Haran, the brother of Avraham. When Avraham stood against Nimrod, Haran waited to see what would happen. He said: If Avraham wins I am with him and if Nimrod wins I am with him.

That is not emunah. That is calculation. Haran wanted to stand with the winner, not necessarily with the truth. So too, in the story of Korach, the people could not remain spectators forever. The question

was not only what Korach would do. The question was whether Klal Yisrael would separate from him or continue standing near him.

סורו נא

Hashem says: **העלו מעל משכן קרח דתן ואבירם** Go up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram. But Moshe speaks to the people differently: **סורו נא מעל אהלי האנשים הרשעים האלה ואל תגעו בכל** Please turn away from the tents of these wicked men and do not touch anything of theirs lest you be swept away in all their sins (Bamidbar 16:26).

Why does Moshe change the wording?

Rav Moshe Alshich explains that Moshe spoke gently and persuasively. He used **נא**, please, and spoke **במתק לשונו**, with the sweetness of his tongue. He wanted the people to understand that this was for their good. He did not command them from far away. He came near and pleaded with them to move away from danger.

But there is also a deeper difference between **העלו** and **סורו נא**. **העלו** can mean physical movement. Move away from the tents. **סורו** suggests something more, like **סור מרע**, turn away from evil. Moshe was telling them not only to move their bodies, but to remove themselves from the spirit of Korach's rebellion.

This distinction becomes important in the next pasuk: **ויעלו מעל משכן קרח דתן ואבירם** They went up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram (16:27). Rav Moshe Alshich notes that they did not necessarily do this with a whole heart: **שלא עלו מלבם בעצם** They did not go up from their hearts in essence with a complete heart. Rather, **כי בושו משה**, because they were embarrassed before Moshe. Moshe came personally, and they moved away out of shame before him.

They fulfilled **העלו**, they physically moved away. But they did not fully fulfill **סורו נא** in the deeper sense. Their feet moved, but their hearts had not yet completely separated from Korach.

The Next Day

After the earth opens and swallows Korach's group, one might think the matter is finished. Hashem has made clear who was right. Moshe was vindicated. Korach was punished. The people moved away and survived.

But the very next day the Torah says: **וילנו כל עדת בני ישראל ממהרת על משה ועל אהרן לאמר אתם המתם את עם השם** The entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael complained the next day against Moshe and Aharon saying you have killed the people of Hashem (17:6).

This shows that the poison of Korach's words had not fully disappeared. The people had seen the miracle, but they still accused Moshe and Aharon. They called Korach's group **עם השם**, the people of Hashem. Instead of accepting that the punishment came from Hashem because of rebellion, they accused Moshe and Aharon of causing the deaths.

Physical distance was not enough. The people had moved away from the tents, but some had not moved away from the suspicion. They had stepped back from Korach's camp, but they had not removed Korach's claim from their hearts.

The Lesson

This second article is not only about Korach. It is about **עדת ישראל**, the assembly of Israel, and the danger of standing between truth and rebellion. Korach was the active rebel. He used **לייצנות**. He claimed to fight **בשביל כולכם**, for all of you. He accused Moshe and Aharon of

taking **מלכות** and **kehuna** for themselves. But the people's test was different. Their test was whether they would let themselves be drawn in.

At first, **לב העם אחרי משה ואהרן**, the heart of the people was with Moshe and Aharon. But then Korach spoke in the language of public concern, and **וייטב הדבר בעיניהם**, the matter became good in their eyes. They began to wonder. They began to watch. They became **מהרהרים** **אחרי רבם**, suspicious of their teacher.

Hashem therefore demanded separation: **העלו מעל משכן קרח דתן ואבירם** Go up from around the dwelling of Korach Dasan and Aviram. This meant more than escape. It meant choice. A person cannot remain forever beside **machlokes** and claim to be neutral. Standing nearby can become agreement.

Moshe deepened the command: **סורו נא** Please turn away. Do not only leave Korach's tents. Leave Korach's path. Do not only move away from danger. Move away from suspicion, mockery, and the temptation to wait and see who wins.

The parsha therefore teaches two kinds of separation. There is separation of the feet, and there is separation of the heart. The first saved the people from being swallowed with Korach. The second was harder. The next day's complaint, **אתם המתם את עם השם**, shows that not everyone had achieved it.

The question of the article remains the question of every **machlokes**: where is **עדת ישראל** standing? Is it with Moshe, with Korach, or merely close enough to Korach to be influenced by him? When truth and rebellion stand opposite each other, neutrality cannot last forever. Sooner or later, a person must choose not only where to stand, but what to remove from his heart.

from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org>

date: Jun 18, 2026, 8:25 PM

subject: Rav Frand - When it Comes to Shalom, We Do Not Rely on Chazaka -- Parshas Korach

When it Comes to Shalom, We Do Not Rely on Chazaka

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1386 – The Importance and Power of Saying Parshas Ketores. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Korach contains the terrible incident of Korach's challenge to the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu, which was really a challenge to the entire transmission of Torah. That is why this was such a fundamental event wherein it was necessary to settle once and for all the basic principle that "Moshe is emes (true) and his Torah is emes." Among Korach's cohorts were Dasan and Aviram and Ohn ben Peles of Shevet (the Tribe of) Reuven.

Once again, Dasan and Aviram throw in their lot to torment Moshe Rabbeinu. The good news is that this is the last parsha in the Torah in which we will need to hear about the antics of Dasan and Aviram, because they don't make it past this parsha.

However, if we look through Sefer Shemos, Dasan and Aviram are always the ones who are the rabble-rousers and the instigators of animosity towards Moshe Rabbeinu. It was they who reported Moshe to Pharaoh when he killed the Egyptian. It was they who accosted Moshe Rabbeinu and said that he made the situation worse for them (when Moshe and Aharon first approached Pharaoh). They are the

ones who challenged Moshe Rabbeinu at the Yam Suf. They were his perpetual antagonists, to put it mildly.

Interestingly, before the actual punishment occurred in our parsha, the pasuk says “And Moshe arose and went up to Dasan and Aviram, and the Elders of Israel went after him.” (Bamidbar 16:25). The Gemara in Sanhedrin comments on this and says, “From here we see that one should not hold onto a quarrel.” People get into arguments with friends or neighbors, and everyone stands firm and refuses to be the first one to make shalom or apologize. The Gemara says that from here we see that this is an inappropriate attitude. Moshe Rabbeinu himself went to Dasan and Aviram to try to make peace. Moshe Rabbeinu would be fully in his right to say, “Listen, Korach has to come to me and ask to make peace. They are the ones who started it.” But from here we see that it is wrong for either party to protract a machlokes.

I saw an interesting pshat in a sefer called Menachem Tzion by a Rav Menachem ben Zion Zachs, a son-in-law of Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank. He has a different take on the expression “Eyn machzikim b’ machlokes.” There is a Talmudic concept of “chazaka.” If something happens three times, it creates a “chazka.” It creates the halachic reality known as chazaka. We see this throughout Shas. The Menachem Zion says that “Eyn machzikim b’ machlokes” does not mean that a person should not hold on to an argument. It means a person should not allow the halachic principle of “chazaka” to pasken (i.e. – determine) what is going to be.

Based on past experience, Moshe Rabbeinu could very well have argued “It is futile to go to Dasan and Aviram and try to make peace. These guys have a chazaka that they hate me and are out to get me. This has happened more than three times already! But from here we see that, unlike in other areas of halacha (e.g. – an ox that gores three times), by machlokes, we cannot assume or rely on chazaka based on past experience and history. Maybe the person will have a change of heart. We cannot rely on chazaka.

Fresh As Ever

As a Divine sign to verify the authenticity of the kehunah (priestly status) of Aharon Hakohen, the leader of each shevet was to take his mateh (staff) and place it in the Ohel Moed. The mateh that would blossom and produce a flower would thereby be declared by Divine sign as the shevet chosen by Hashem to be the kohanim.

This is exactly the procedure Moshe followed and behold, the mateh of Aharon, of Shevet Levi, blossomed and produced a flower. The Torah states: “...and behold the mateh of Aaron of the house of Levi had blossomed; it brought forth a blossom, sprouted a bud and developed almonds.” (Bamidbar 17:23).

Moshe then brought out all the matos (staves). Everyone saw which mateh had blossomed, and each tribal leader took back his own mateh. This established once and for all the legitimacy of the kehunah of Aharon Hakohen.

Two strange things happened here. First, the Ribono shel Olam only said that the mateh of the chosen person would bring forth a flower. What actually happened was that not only did a flower come out, but “a flower came out and the flower blossomed and produced almonds.” This is not what the Ribono shel Olam said. Why was that? Why was it not sufficient for the mateh to merely produce a flower?

The Rashbam says an interesting idea: When Moshe went into the Ohel Moed and removed the matos, all that was on the mateh of

Shevet Levi was a flower, just as the Ribono shel Olam had promised. However, after Moshe brought it out for everyone to see, at that point, the flower blossomed and produced a bud from which almonds grew.

In this way, no one could say that Moshe privately played around with the matos when he was in the Ohel Moed. In order to remove the thought that Moshe somehow rigged the demonstration of the matos regarding the growth of a flower inside the Ohel Moed, a miracle happened, such that in front of everyone, the miraculous growth of the mateh continued until it grew almonds right in front of them.

However, there is another difficulty here. Anyone who has a fruit tree in their backyard knows that the way a tree grows is as follows: First, the tree produces a flower. After the flower falls off, there is a bud. Then the fruit grows from that bud. However, here something amazing happened: The flower, the bud, and the almonds were all present simultaneously. Why shouldn’t the bud and flowers have fallen off like they normally do?

Rav Gedalya Schorr has a beautiful observation in his sefer: The lesson is that a person who is going to be the Kohen Gadol always needs to be in the state of mind and state of being that he is always blossoming, namely that he is always fresh. There is an expression “the blossom has fallen off,” indicating that after a while, a person loses his enthusiasm and excitement regarding a project or endeavor. The reason for this strange occurrence that the flower, the bud, and the fruit were present all at once is to show that Aharon Hakohen had this ability to always remain fresh, as if he just started. It is regarding such an attribute that the pasuk says, “The righteous will blossom like a tamar” (Tehillim 92:13).

There is a famous Sefas Emes in Parshas Beha’aloscha on the pasuk “Va’ya’as ken Aharon” (And Aharon did so). Rashi famously says “Melamed shelo sheenah” (This teaches that he did not deviate). That was the attribute of Aharon Hakohen. On the fortieth year of lighting the Menorah, he had the same enthusiasm and excitement as he did the first year. Therefore, the mateh of Aharon maintained its flower, even after it produced fruit, which is not the normal way that things grow. This shows the freshness and newness that was always part of Aharon’s avodah.

One Last Chance

When Moshe Rabbeinu wants to convince the people that he is the rightful leader, he says, “If these people’s death will be like the death of all other people, it is not Hashem who sent me...” (Bamidbar 16:29) Moshe Rabbeinu did not merely ask that they should be killed. He asked that the ground open up and swallow them alive. This is a “meesah meshuneh” (unnatural death). Imagine what a terrifying event this must have been: The ground opens up and the person knows what is happening to him. He realizes that he is being buried alive. He endures not only death but the whole torment of seeing his life being taken away from him in this elongated process. Isn’t it curious that Moshe Rabbeinu, who was always worried about Klal Yisrael and who always petitioned the Almighty on their behalf, here, on the contrary, asks the Ribono shel Olam to create a new creation and open up the earth to swallow his adversaries alive! This seems somewhat vindictive on the part of our great leader!

The Maragolias Hayam writes in Maseches Sanhedrin that he was once with the Belzer Rebbe, zt”l, during the week of Parshas Korach (in 1913) and he asked about this. The Belzer Rebbe said that this

was not vindictiveness or cruelty on the part of Moshe Rabbeinu. Moshe Rabbeinu, as the earth opened up and the ground came caving down, wanted to give them the chance to do teshuva. Had they died instantly, from a Heavenly fire, or whatever it would have been, they would have had no chance to evaluate their mistakes.

As it turned out, they died in a fashion that provided time to do teshuva. They were looking up at the sky, the earth was open, and the dirt was piling in, first to their ankles, then to their knees, then to their waist, their shoulders, and their mouths. That gives them a few precious moments in which they could do teshuva. As we all know, a person can be a wicked person his whole life and at the very end, if he sincerely repents, he dies as a baal teshuva.

In fact, the Gemara says in Sanhedrin that someone walked by the place where Korach and his followers were swallowed and he heard them say “Moshe is emes and his Torah is emes,” meaning that at least some of them did do teshuva. That, Rav Reuven Margolias says, is why the halacha is that if a building collapses on top of a person and there is a doubt whether he is still alive or not, even if at best he will survive only momentarily, we desecrate the Shabbos to extend his life even for a few moments, because in those few moments he can do teshuva.

This is what Moshe Rabbeinu did over here. It was not cruelty. It was not vindictiveness. It was a question of “I want to give them one last chance to do teshuva.” And that is, in fact, what Bnei Korach did.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem

DavidATwersky@gmail.com Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Korach is provided below: 017 – Visiting the Sick 062 – May the State of Israel Extradite a Jewish Criminal? 106 – The Temple Mount Today-Obligations & Restrictions 151 – The Mitzvah of Pidyon Haben: Some Fascinating Facts ... 1519 – Should You Say Tachnun at Mincha? 1560 – We Want to Make Our Own Shul – Are They Allowed? 1602 – Some Interesting Tachnun Shailos A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information. Rav Frand © 2023 by Torah.org. Torah.org: The Judaism Site Project Genesis, Inc. 2833 Smith Ave., Suite 22 Baltimore, MD 21209 <http://www.torah.org/> learn@torah.org (410) 602-1350

From: allenklein@gmail.com

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Korach - Power versus Influence

The Korach rebellion was an unholy alliance of individuals and groups united by their grievances with Moses’ leadership. There was Korach himself, a member of the tribe of Levi, angry (according to Rashi) that he had not been given a more prominent role. There were the Reubenites, Datan and Aviram, who resented the fact that the key leadership positions were taken by Levites rather than members of their own tribe. Reuben had been Jacob’s firstborn, so some of his descendants felt that they should have been accorded seniority. Then there were the two hundred and fifty “leaders of the community, chosen from the assembly, men of repute” who felt aggrieved

(according to Ibn Ezra) that after the sin of the Golden Calf, leadership had passed from the firstborn to a single tribe, the Levites. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose. The Korach story is an all too familiar tale of frustrated ambition and petty jealousy - what the Sages called “an argument not for the sake of heaven.”

What is most extraordinary about the episode, however, is Moses’ reaction. For the first and only time, he invokes a miracle to prove the authenticity of his mission:

Then Moses said:

“By this you will know that the Lord sent me to do these deeds; it was not my idea. If all these men die as others do, and share the common fate of all humanity, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something entirely new, so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all they have, and they go down alive to Sheol, then you will know that these men have provoked the Lord.”

Num. 16:28-30

In effect, Moses uses his power to eliminate the opposition. What a contrast this is to the generosity of spirit he showed just a few chapters earlier, when Joshua came to tell him that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp, away from Moses and the seventy elders. Joshua regarded this as a potentially dangerous threat to Moses’ leadership and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!” Moses’ reply is one of the most majestic in the whole of Tanach:

“Are you jealous for me? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them all!”

Num. 11:29

What was the difference between Eldad and Medad on the one hand, and Korach and his co-conspirators on the other? What is the difference between Moses saying, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets,” and Korach’s claim that “All the community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s people”[1]? Why was the first, but not the second, a legitimate sentiment?

Is Moses simply being inconsistent? Hardly. There never was a religious leader more clear-sighted. There is a distinction here which goes to the very core of the two narratives. The Sages, in one of their most profound methodological observations, said that “the words of the Torah may be poor in one place but rich in another.” By this they meant that, if we seek to understand a perplexing passage, we may need to look elsewhere in the Torah for the clue. A similar idea is expressed in the last of Rabbi Ishmael’s thirteen rules of biblical interpretation:

“Where there are two passages which contradict each other, the meaning can be determined only when a third passage is found which harmonises them.”

In this case, the answer is to be found later in the book of Bamidbar, when Moses asks God to choose the next leader of the Israelites. God tells him to take Joshua and appoint him as his successor:

So the Lord said to Moses, “Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man infused with My spirit, and lay your hand upon him. Have him stand before Elazar the priest and the entire community, and in their sight, give him this charge. Give over to him some of your majesty, so that the entire Israelite community will obey him.”

Num. 27:18-20

Moses is commanded to perform two acts over and above presenting Joshua to the priest and people. First he is to “lay his hand” on

Joshua. Then he is to give Joshua “some of [his] splendour.” What is the significance of these two gestures? How did they differ from one another? Which of them constituted induction into office? The Sages, in Midrash Rabbah, added a commentary which at first sight only deepens the mystery:

“Lay your hand on him” - this is like lighting one light from another. “Give him some of your splendour” - this is like pouring from one vessel to another.

In actual fact it is this statement that will enable us to decode the mystery.

There are two forms or dimensions of leadership. One is power, the other, influence. Often we confuse the two. After all, those who have power often have influence, and those who have influence have a certain kind of power. In fact, however, the two are quite different, even opposites.

We can see this by a simple thought-experiment. Imagine you have total power, and then you decide to share it with nine others. You now have one-tenth of the power with which you began. Imagine, by contrast, that you have a certain measure of influence, and now you share it with nine others. How much do you have left? Not less. In fact, more. Initially there was only one of you; now there are ten. Your influence has spread. Power operates by division, influence by multiplication. With power, the more we share, the less we have. With influence, the more we share, the more we have.

So deep is the difference that the Torah allocates them to two distinct leadership roles: king and prophet. Kings had power. They could levy taxes, conscript people to serve in the army, and decide when and against whom to wage war. They could impose non-judicial punishments to preserve social order. Hobbes famously called kingship a ‘Leviathan’ and defined it in terms of power. The very nature of the social contract, he argued, was the transfer of power from individuals to a central authority. Without this, there could be no government, no defence of a country and no safeguard against lawlessness and anarchy.

Prophets, by contrast, had no power at all. They commanded no armies. They levied no taxes. They spoke God’s word, but had no means of enforcing it. All they had was influence - but what influence! To this day, Elijah’s fight against corruption, Amos’ call to social justice, Isaiah’s vision of the end of days, are still capable of moving us by the sheer force of their inspiration. Who, today, is swayed by the lives of Ahab or Jehoshaphat or Jehu? When a king or queen dies, their power ends. When a prophet dies, their influence begins. Returning to Moses: here was a man who occupied two leadership roles, not one. On the one hand, though monarchy was not yet in existence, Moses had the power and was the functional equivalent of a king. He led the Israelites out of Egypt, commanded them in battle, appointed leaders, judges and elders, and directed the conduct of the people. He had power.

But Moses was also a prophet, the greatest and most authoritative of all. He was a man of vision. He heard and spoke the word of God. His influence is incalculable. As Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote, in a manuscript discovered after his death:

... an astonishing and truly unique spectacle is to see an expatriated people, who have had neither place nor land for nearly two thousand years ... a scattered people, dispersed over the world, enslaved, persecuted, scorned by all nations, nonetheless preserving its characteristics, its laws, its customs, its patriotic love of the early

social union, when all ties with it seem broken. The Jews provide us with an astonishing spectacle: the laws of Numa, Lycurgus, Solon are dead; the very much older laws of Moses are still alive. Athens, Sparta, Rome have perished and no longer have children left on earth; Zion, destroyed, has not lost its children.

Rousseau, *Cahiers de brouillons, notes et extraits*, no. 7843 (Neuchâtel).

The mystery of Moses’ double investiture of Joshua is now solved. First, he was told to give Joshua his authority as a prophet. The very phrase used by the Torah - *vesamachta et yadecha*, ‘lay your hand’ on him - is still used today to describe rabbinic ordination, which we call *semichah*, meaning, the ‘laying on of hands’ by master to disciple. Second, he was commanded to give Joshua the power of kingship, which the Torah calls ‘splendour’ (perhaps ‘majesty’ would be a better translation). The nature of this role as head of state and commander of the army is made quite clear in the text. God says to Moses: “Give him some of your splendour so that the whole Israelite community will obey him ... At his command, he and the entire community of the Israelites will go out, and at his command they will come in.” This is the language not of influence but of power.

The meaning of the Midrash, too, is now clear and elegantly precise. The transfer of influence (“Lay your hand on him”) is “like lighting one light from another.” When we take a candle to light another candle, the light of the first is not diminished. Likewise, when we share our influence with others, we do not have less than before.

Instead, the sum total of light is increased. Power, however, is different. It is like “pouring from one vessel to another.” The more we pour into the second, the less is left in the first. Power is a zero-sum game. The more we give away, the less we have.

This, then, is the solution to the mystery of why, when Joshua feared that Eldad and Medad (who “prophesied within the camp”) were threatening Moses’ authority, Moses replied, “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets.” Joshua had confused influence with power. Eldad and Medad neither sought nor gained power. Instead, for a while, they were given a share of the prophetic “spirit” that was on Moses. They participated in his influence. That is never a threat to prophetic authority. To the contrary, the more widely it is shared, the more there is.

Power, however, is precisely what Korach and his followers sought - and in the case of power, rivalry is a threat to authority. “There is one leader for a generation,” said the Sages, “not two.” Or, as they put it elsewhere, “Can two kings share a single crown?” There are many forms of government - monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy - but what they have in common is the concentration of power within a single body, whether person, group or institution (such as a parliament). Without this monopoly of the legitimate use of coercive force, there is no such thing as government. That is why in Jewish law “a king is not allowed to renounce the honour due to him.” Moses’ request that Korach and his followers be swallowed up by the ground was neither anger nor fear. It was not motivated by any personal consideration. It was a simple realisation that whereas prophecy can be shared, kingship cannot. If there are two or more competing sources of power within a single domain, there is no leadership. Had Moses not taken decisive action against Korach, he would have fatally compromised the office with which he had been charged.

Rarely do we see more clearly the stark difference between influence and power than in these two episodes: Eldad and Medad on the one hand, Korach and his fellow rebels on the other. The latter represented a conflict that had to be resolved. Either Moses or Korach would emerge the victor; they could not both win. The former did not represent a conflict at all. Knowledge, inspiration, vision - these are things that can be shared without loss. Those who share them with others add to spiritual wealth of a community without losing any of their own.

To paraphrase Shakespeare, "The influence we have lives after us; the power is oft interred with our bones." Much of Judaism is an extended essay on the supremacy of prophets over kings, right over might, teaching rather than coercion, influence in place of power. For only a small fraction of our history have Jews had power, but at all times they have had an influence over the civilisation of the West. People still contend for power. If only we would realise how narrow its limits are. It is one thing to force people to behave in a certain way; quite another to teach them to see the world differently so that, of their own accord, they act in a new way. The use of power diminishes others; the exercise of influence enlarges them. That is one of Judaism's most humanising truths. Not all of us have power, but we are all capable of being an influence for good.

[1] The first grievance that Korach expresses against Moses, Numbers 16:3.

from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>

date: Jun 18, 2026, 2:53 AM

Rav Kook Torah

Korach: The Corruption of a Judge

What makes a judge dishonest? What are the cognitive stages in the corruption of a leader?

The Torah legislates support for the judges and teachers of Israel — the kohanim and Levites — through a system of tithes and gifts. This system provides them with a degree of financial independence, making them less susceptible to bribes and moneyed interests.

Biblical Scandal

Not every leader, however, maintains the standards of integrity that his public office demands. The Torah notes that the sons of the prophet Samuel did not follow in their father's path of selfless public service. On the contrary, "they went after gain, took bribes and subverted justice" (I Sam. 8:3).

What brought about their judicial corruption? What were the root causes?

The Sages offered several possibilities for the failings of Samuel's sons. At first glance, this appears to be a litany of various abuses of power. A careful reading, however, will recognize a pattern in their statements.

Rav Kook explained that the Talmud describes a progression of increasingly serious offenses. The Sages were not disagreeing about the facts in the case. They were mapping out the moral decline of a leader, step by step, into the morass of deceit and corruption.

Here are the various opinions, as quoted in Shabbat 56a:

- According to Rabbi Yonatan, Samuel's sons were not, in fact, guilty of any true crime. Their fault was in their failure to replicate the exemplary public service of their father. Samuel would travel all over the country, providing judicial services for the people. His sons,

on the other hand, stayed in their own court, and "increased the fees of their clerks and scribes."

- Rabbi Meir said: They would openly demand their salaries.
- Rabbi Yehudah said: They compelled private individuals to conduct their business affairs.
- Rabbi Akiva said: They would forcibly take an extra measure of tithes.
- Rabbi Yossi said: They took gifts by force.

What is the significance of all of these offenses? Let us follow the descent of the crooked politician, as he slides into the cesspool of graft and corruption.

Down-to-Earth Leadership

We can learn much about genuine public service from Samuel. The Torah praises Samuel for traveling around the country and judging the people in their towns (I Sam. 7:16). Why was this important?

A true leader considers himself to be literally a servant of the public. His dedication to the community is reflected in his sensitivity to their problems and concerns. He governs and advises them, not according to his own station in life, but as if he is standing in their shoes. This is the significance of Samuel's custom of judging the people in their hometowns. Samuel was able to identify their needs and challenges. As a result, his rulings were appropriate and his guidance was effective.

This type of leader is able to make a direct connection with the people. He does not need the trappings of officialdom. He does not surround himself with layers of bureaucrats and government officials.

Samuel's sons, however, failed to emulate this level of leadership. They would judge the people without leaving their city, without adjusting their mindset. In their eyes, they adjudicated properly. In addition, they required the assistance of a system of salaried clerks and scribes. As Rabbi Yonatan noted, this was not a crime. But it certainly falls short of the ideal of leadership as epitomized by Samuel.

Step 1: Just a Job

The other scholars taught that Samuel's sons were in fact guilty of graft. They described the various steps down the path of political corruption. Like all moral failings, abuse of authority comes in stages. Its danger and severity is magnified, of course, according to the power and influence of the position.

The first failing may appear to be minor, but it is indicative of a problematic attitude that is the root cause of more serious abuse. A community leader, and especially a spiritual leader, should recognize that public service is a great privilege. This recognition should be strong enough to make one willing to forgo financial remuneration. In fact, a true leader, aware of the importance of his work, may even feel a certain degree of impropriety in accepting payment.

Rabbi Meir described the fault of Samuel's sons as "openly demanding their salaries." They failed to value the importance of their public service. By demanding payment, they showed that they looked at their work as a job like any other — and not a sacred calling that is its own reward.

Step 2: Using Others

From this stage, it is but a small step to actual abuse of power. Once a leader is no longer altruistic in his attitude towards public service, he will begin to see it as a burden. He will have no scruples about

forcing others to handle his personal affairs. Since I take care of their needs, he reasons, why shouldn't they take care of mine?

This is the wrongdoing identified by Rabbi Yehudah: "They compelled private individuals to conduct their business affairs."

Step 3: Grabbing For More

From here it is another small step to the next level of corruption. Rav Kook noted that one who fails to live up to the moral demands of his position will ultimately sink below the ordinary standard of ethical behavior.

Leading and judging should be an inspiring vocation. A leader should feel that he is helping build a safer, more equitable society. In the words of the Talmud (Shabbat 10a), an honest judge is "God's partner in creation." But a flawed character, together with a failure to value his public work, will undermine the leader's sense of propriety and justice. Instead of values based on a sense of justice, he is ensnared by the glitter of superficial honors.

His lack of integrity is expressed quantitatively — he takes "an extra portion of tithes" — as well as qualitatively — he takes it by force.

Step 4: Legal in Name Alone

As long as he retains some semblance of morality, such a leader will not try to seize that which he has no legal claim to. But his dishonesty may lead to the lowest level, when justice and propriety are empty shells, high-minded words lacking any true content. He views the judicial system as merely a tool to ensure social order. It has no connection to our aspirations for an ethical society.

This is the level described by Rabbi Yossi: "They took gifts by force." If they were taken by force, how can they be called gifts?

This is a form of legal manipulation that is legal in name only. He may call them "gifts" or "contributions," but in fact they were taken forcibly. Calling them gifts only serves to silence what little is left of his conscience, allowing him to justify his crimes.

These are the stages in the descent of a judge corrupted by the lure of superficial honors and financial gain — a leader who should have been organizing society according to the foundations of justice and morality.

Summary of lecture by Rabbi YY Jacobson rabiyy@theyeshiva.net, Jun 18, 2026 **Where Others Saw the End, He Saw the Beginning** In Tribute to the **Lubavitcher Rebbe, for His 32nd Yahrzeit** Dedicated with prayers for a speedy recovery for Mindel Nechamya bas Malka

The Blossoming Staff

Parshas Korach tells the strange story of the test of the staffs. After Korach challenged the leadership of Moshe and Aharon, Hashem commanded that each tribe place a staff in the Mishkan, with the name of its leader written upon it. Aharon's name was written on the staff of Levi. The next morning, Aharon's staff had blossomed, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds.

The question is obvious. Why was this miracle necessary? The rebellion had already been answered in dramatic ways. Korach and his followers were swallowed by the earth. The 250 men who offered ketores were consumed by fire. A plague struck those who continued to complain. If those events did not settle the matter, what would a blossoming staff add?

The answer is that the staff was not merely meant to prove that Aharon had been chosen. That had already been shown. The staff came to explain why Aharon was chosen.

A staff is a dead branch. Once it was attached to a tree, full of life and growth. Now it is severed, dry, and lifeless. Yet Aharon's staff came back to life. It blossomed and produced fruit.

That is the sign of a true Kohen Gadol. Aharon could look at what others saw as dry and lifeless and see hidden life. He could look at a person who seemed spiritually cut off and still see the possibility of growth. His greatness was not only that he was holy, but that he could awaken holiness in others.

From Ashes to Life

This message speaks powerfully to the Jewish people after the Holocaust. The Jewish world seemed like a dry staff. Communities had been destroyed, families shattered, and an entire world had gone up in smoke. What remained looked like ashes.

Yet survivors and refugees began to rebuild. They rebuilt families, schools, shuls, yeshivos, communities, and Jewish life on new soil. One of the great leaders of this renewal was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

The Rebbe refused to let destruction define the future. Memorials, books, lectures, and conferences were necessary, but they were not enough. The Rebbe urged Jews to bring the staff back to life. Marry, have children, build schools, open shuls, create camps, found yeshivos, send shluchim, reach another Jew, and rebuild a shattered world.

He opened his heart to an orphaned generation and gave it hope. He sent emissaries across the world to rekindle Jewish life wherever Jews could be found. Where others saw only loss, he saw the beginning of renewal. Where others saw a dead branch, he saw the possibility of blossoms.

The United States itself had once been viewed by many as a treifene medinah, a place where Jewish identity dissolved. But the Rebbe saw that America could become a platform for spreading Torah and Yiddishkeit. He understood that the modern world, beneath its secular surface, contained a deep spiritual thirst. He used modern tools to awaken ancient truths.

That was one of his defining gifts. He could see crisis as opportunity. He could see disintegration as the beginning of rebirth. He could see life inside what appeared lifeless.

The Phoenix

Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky related a story that captures this idea. Around 1973, the widow of Jacques Lifschitz, the famous sculptor, came to the Rebbe after her husband's sudden passing. Before he died, Lifschitz had been working on a large sculpture of a phoenix, commissioned by Hadassah for the Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus in Yerushalayim.

His widow, an artist herself, wanted to complete the work. But she had been told that the phoenix was not a Jewish symbol and therefore should not be placed in Yerushalayim.

The Rebbe asked Rabbi Krinsky to bring him a Tanach and opened to Iyov, where it says, אֲרָבָה כְּחֹל יָמִים, *I shall multiply my days like the chol*. The Rebbe explained that Chazal describe the chol as a bird that lives for a thousand years, dies, and then rises again from its ashes. It was therefore very much a Jewish image.

Mrs. Lifschitz was overjoyed, and the project was completed.

In that moment, the Rebbe gave hope to a grieving widow. In a larger sense, this was the story of his life. He helped raise the spirit of the Jewish people from the ashes and showed that even after devastation, new life could begin.

The Student Who Smelled of Smoke

Rabbi Berel Baumgarten, a Jewish educator in Brooklyn before moving to Buenos Aires, once wrote to the Rebbe about a student. Each Shabbos afternoon, when the class gathered to learn, this student would enter smelling of cigarette smoke. It seemed clear that he was smoking on Shabbos. Rabbi Baumgarten worried that the boy's influence might weaken the other students and asked whether he should expel him, even without clear proof.

The Rebbe answered with only a reference: עיין אבות דרבי נתן פרק יב, *See Avos Derabi Noson, chapter 12.*

That chapter describes Aharon HaKohen. Aharon brought many people back from sin, not by rejecting them, but by drawing them close. He greeted even sinners with warmth, love, and respect. Later, when such a person was tempted to sin, he would think, How can I face Aharon after doing this? He thinks so highly of me. How can I let him down? And that feeling would lift the person.

This was the answer to Rabbi Baumgarten. Do not throw the boy away. Love him more. Show him dignity. Let him feel that you believe in him. See in him what he cannot yet see in himself. If you treat him like a soul with a future, he may become just that.

That was Aharon's greatness. His staff blossomed because he knew how to make others blossom. He never looked at a Jew and said, This one is dry, brittle, and finished. He saw the hidden root, the possibility of renewal, the future fruit.

The Lesson

Since October 7, the Jewish people have again faced pain, fear, and crisis. These are not simple times. But the message of Aharon's staff is that crisis can become the beginning of life. A dry staff can blossom. Ashes can give way to renewal. A wounded people can rise again.

That was the Rebbe's message. Where others saw the end, he saw the beginning. Where others saw despair, he saw responsibility. Where others saw a dead staff, he saw almonds waiting to grow.

<https://5tjt.com/korach-misreading-intentions/>

Korach: Misreading Intentions

By: **Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

We had hit rock bottom. After the sin of the spies, we were sentenced to wander the desert for forty years. Every adult over twenty was condemned to die before entering Eretz Yisrael.

At this point, we spiraled into a full-blown rebellion against Moshe's authority. Korach and his band of insurgents whipped the nation into a frenzy, accusing Moshe of egotism, nepotism, and deception.

The debacle of the spies reflected a lack of faith in Jewish destiny and in Eretz Yisrael. It was a moment of public panic that overwhelmed reason and led the nation to question both the land and Hashem's promise. The rebellion of Korach was different. It was not driven by fear but by anger and resentment. Korach, a gifted demagogue, manipulated the people into joining a campaign rooted in his own personal ambitions.

Ultimately, the rebellion against Moshe led to a complete breakdown of communication. Repeatedly, Moshe attempted to engage the rebels. They refused to listen. They embraced Korach's accusations and never paused to consider Moshe's perspective.

Once communication collapsed, the two sides no longer understood each other's intentions. Perhaps some of the rebels' concerns

deserved discussion. In the past, when the burden of leadership became too heavy, Hashem appointed seventy elders to assist Moshe. Perhaps there were other ways to broaden leadership responsibilities. But the claim that Moshe was driven by ego, nepotism, and a hunger for power was absurd. Time and again, he had defended the people and saved them from divine punishment. The refusal to listen allowed Korach's camp to completely misread his intentions.

Once communication ceases and intentions are misunderstood, compromise becomes nearly impossible. False narratives take hold, distrust deepens, and every action is viewed through a lens of suspicion. The rebellion of Korach illustrates the destructive consequences of a society trapped within competing narratives.

The Gap In Narratives

We are living through a very delicate moment in Israeli society. The issue of Charedi non-conscription is straining our social fabric and deepening divisions within our society.

Unfortunately, the lack of communication and interaction has created a widening gap in narratives. Charedim are misreading the intentions of the broader public in advocating conscription.

The broader Israeli public has little interest in hollowing out Charedi identity. Many Israelis deeply respect Torah and tradition even if they do not personally commit to a life centered around Torah study. There is no national or political agenda to destroy Torah study or the Charedi lifestyle.

Most Israelis are simply hurting. As the war drags on and fathers of large families report for their third round of extended milium service, they are asking themselves: "Don't they understand the burden we are carrying? Don't they see how this is affecting our families?" Their plea is not to dismantle the Charedi world but to share the burden of this long war more broadly.

Many would argue that military service would significantly affect Charedi identity and lifestyle. That is a legitimate argument, whether one agrees with it or not. Opposition to conscription on those grounds is understandable and coherent. But the call for broader Charedi participation is not rooted in a sinister desire to weaken Torah study or undermine religious commitment.

We are facing a tragedy of miscommunication.

Part of the challenge stems from the inherent nature of Charedi culture. Much of its strength lies in its commitment to continuity. Other segments of Orthodoxy respond to modernity through adaptation; Charedi society responds more cautiously. It places a premium on continuity, cultural insulation, and preserving inherited norms. Change is not rejected, but it is approached slowly.

This instinct has served the Charedi community well. It has helped preserve a robust Torah world through periods of rapid social upheaval. But it can also create a tendency to view contemporary challenges through the lens of earlier historical struggles. New situations are sometimes interpreted as recurring versions of old battles, even when the circumstances are very different.

There is a well-known story about the closing of the famed Volozhin Yeshiva in 1892. The Czarist Russian government, deeply hostile to Jewish life and religion, repeatedly attempted to impose a significant secular studies curriculum on the yeshiva. After years of pressure, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, the Netziv, chose to close what was arguably the most prominent yeshiva of the 19th century rather than

submit to those demands. Whether this was the primary reason for the closure remains debated. Nevertheless, the story became part of the Charedi collective memory.

As a result, whenever governments seek to introduce a core secular curriculum into yeshivot, the story of Volozhin is often invoked. Yet the comparison is not apt. The governments of the United States and Israel are not similar to Czarist Russia. They are not motivated by antisemitism or a desire to uproot Torah study, but by a desire to improve economic participation and gainful employment. One may oppose those policies, but the circumstances are fundamentally different from the struggle faced by the Volozhin Yeshiva, which confronted an antisemitic regime intent on restricting religious life and undermining traditional Jewish education.

We are witnessing a similar misreading today. Calling for Charedi military service is not, for most Israelis, an attempt to destroy Torah. It is a sincere plea to share the burden of a long and exhausting war. One can oppose conscription on the grounds that it will diminish Torah study or weaken Charedi identity. Those are legitimate concerns. But the lack of communication has created a complete divergence of narratives, causing many people to hear motives that were never intended.

Misreading Each Other

This misunderstanding is not solely the result of Charedi hyper-preservation. Reactions from the broader public can sometimes become so sharp and sweeping that they reinforce Charedi suspicions. I have heard people respond to Charedi behavior by declaring, "This is not my Judaism." That is deeply charged language. One may believe that a particular policy or attitude is severely morally or halachically flawed. But no single flaw, however central or painful, renders an entire religious community or lifestyle illegitimate. Every community has shortcomings that require criticism and correction.

To find consensus, we must get on the same page. We must also be careful about the language and rhetoric we use.

Words That Wound

Two weeks ago, a busload of Chasidim attacked the home of my neighbor, a Supreme Court justice whom they viewed as an enemy of Torah study because of his role in rulings surrounding this controversy. I know him personally and can attest that this is a complete misunderstanding of his intentions. One can argue that his rulings will inadvertently harm the Charedi community. But to portray him as someone motivated by hostility to Torah is a profound misreading.

The protest itself turned violent. The protesters shouted at the judge and at our neighbors, repeatedly calling them Nazis. One of my neighbors, a child of Holocaust survivors, was called Hitler.

It should be self-evident that any Jew who labels another Jew a Nazi has lost all historical perspective. The grandparents of both groups may well have shared the same ghettos and concentration camps. In a society of divided narratives in which even the role of the State of Israel is not a matter of consensus, the last shared historical narrative we possess is our recovery from the Holocaust. Sadly, these terms are being shouted by Chasidim whose own communities were disproportionately devastated by Hitler.

To begin healing our fractures, we must properly read intentions and be careful about the historically toxic language we employ. We must repair our communication.

Rabbi Moshe Taragin is a rabbi and educator at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel. His latest book, *Reclaiming Redemption, Volume II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood and the Storms of War*, is available at www.mtaraginbooks.com.