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<http://www.scribd.com/doc/13615801/Rav-SoloveitchikThe-Commonsense-Rebellion-Against-Torah-Authority>

THE "COMMON-SENSE" REBELLION AGAINST TORAH AUTHORITY

By Rav Yosef Soloveitchik

Jews defer only to recognized Torah scholars in the interpretation of Jewish Law. Today many individuals claim the right to exercise their own common sense in determining the relevance and format of contemporary Judaism, despite the fact that they are hardly Biblical and Talmudic scholars. Synagogue ritual committees and popular magazine articles debate the continued usefulness of various religious practices and explore the possibilities of reformulating Judaism in line with modern thought. These self-styled "poskim" concede their lack of formal training in Jewish texts and sources, but they insist nonetheless on their right to decide fundamental religious questions on the basis of "common sense."

This is not a recent phenomenon. It dates back to the earliest period of Jewish history. To the very generation which received the Torah at Mt. Sinai. Not very long after that event, the Torah (Num. Chap. 16) relates, Korach led a rebellion against Moses and Chazal imply that he sought to replace Moses as the teacher and leader of Israel. Korach publicly challenged the halakhic competency of Moses and ridiculed his interpretations of Jewish law as being contrary to elementary reason. Citing the Tanhuma, Rashi records the following clever ploy of Korach: What did he do? He assembled two-hundred and fifty distinguished men and women ... and he attired them in

robes of pure blue wool. They came and stood before Moses and said to him: "Does a garment that is entirely blue still require tzitzit or is it exempt?" Moses replied that it did require tzitzit. Whereupon, they began to jeer at him: "Is that logical? A robe of any other color fulfills the tzitzit requirement merely by having one of its threads blue. Surely a garment which is entirely blue should not require an additional blue thread!" (Rashi, Num. 16: 1). Likewise, the Midrash tells us of another provocation. "Does a house which is filled with Torah scrolls still require a mezuzah on its doorpost?" Korach asked. Moses replied in the affirmative. Korach retorted: "If one brief section of the Torah placed inside the mezuzah [the Shema and v'ehayah im shamo'a] satisfies the mitzvah requirement, most certainly a multitude of scrolls which contain many portions should! Such halakhic decisions do not emanate from God but are fabrications" (Num. R. 18). Korach insisted that to require a mezuzah under such circumstances violated elementary logic.

Korach's Rationale Korach was a demagogue motivated by selfish ambitions. His antagonism began when Aaron and his family were elevated to the priesthood, while the Levites, among whom Korach was prominent were relegated to mere assistants of the Kohanim. Now, we know that every rebellion against authority needs an ideology to arouse the fervor of the people and sustain its momentum. It needs a slogan or a motto which projects a noble ideal to replace the intolerable status quo. The rallying cry which Korach chose was "common sense." He proclaimed that all reasonable people have the right to interpret Jewish law according to their best understanding: "For all the community are holy" (Num. 16: 3). In down-to-earth logic, the lowliest woodcutter is the equal of Moses. This appeal to populism evokes considerable support because it promises freedom from centralized authority; it flatters the people's common intelligence and it approves the right of each Jew or group of Jews to follow their own individual judgment. The Midrash describes how Korach propagandized his cause. "Korach went about all that night to mislead the Israelites. He said to them: 'What do you suppose that I am working to obtain greatness for myself? I desire that we should all enjoy greatness in rotation'" (Num. R. 18).

Korach was an intelligent man, pike'ah hayah (Rashi, ibid. v. 7). He would certainly concede that there were specialized fields in which only experts who have studied extensively over many years are entitled to be recognized as authorities. The intrusion of common-sense judgments in these areas by unlearned laymen would be both presumptuous and misleading. Korach would not have dared to interfere with Bezalel's architectural and engineering expertise in the construction of the Tabernacle, the Mishkan, because construction skills were clearly beyond his competence. Today, reasonable people concede the authority of mathematicians, physicists, and physicians in their areas of expertise, and would not think of challenging them merely on the basis of common sense. Why, then, are so many well intentioned people ready to question the authority of the Torah scholar, the lamdan, in his area of specialized knowledge?

Korach's rationale can be understood more readily if we clarify three terms denoting the various levels of reason and intelligence. The Torah says: "He has endowed [Bezalel] with a Divine spirit, with knowledge[hokhmah], intellect[binah] and intelligence[da'at]" 6 (Ex. 35: 31). Hokhmah refers to the specialized knowledge and scholarship which are acquired by extensive and detailed study. Binah is the capacity to analyze, to make distinctions, to draw inferences and apply them to various situations. When binah is combined with bokhmah, we have the especially gifted and creative

thinker. Da'at deals with common sense, basic intelligence, and sound practical judgment.

Korach's appeal to common sense in Judaism was basically a claim that only da'at, and not hokhmah, is involved in the application of Halakhah. He conceded that the legal aspects of Halakhah require expertise, technical and academic. But he maintained that there is also a psychological and emotional aspect in the practice of Halakhah and the observance of mitzvot. In judging the utility, relevance, and beneficial effects of the mitzvot, all intelligent people are qualified to render judgment on the basis of close and informed observation. For this aspect, he argued, common sense, human experience, and basic judgment are the criteria. And on this basis he challenged the authority of Moses.

Korach was committed to the doctrine of religious subjectivism, which regards one's personal feelings as primary in the religious experience. God requires the heart. Rahmana liba ba'i (Sanh. I 06b), and it is in the mysterious recesses of his personality that man meets his Maker. The mitzvot, by contrast, are physical acts which reflect the inner quest, the hidden feelings of religious emotion. The mitzvah is an external form of a spiritual experience; each inner experience has its external correlate in the form of particular mitzvah performances.

On the basis of Korach's theory, the mitzvah would have to correspond to the mood that prompts it. The value of the mitzvah is to be found not in its performance, but in its subjective impact upon the person, its ability to arouse a devotional state of mind. Tefillin would be justified, according to Korach's theory, only for their elevating and inspirational quality. The mitzvah of shofar on Rosh Hashanah would be of value only if it succeeded in arousing the Jew to repentance. If these mitzvot ceased having this impact upon people, their observance would be open to question and new rituals, more responsive to changing sensitivities, should perhaps be enacted. What follows from his reasoning is that the mitzvah may be modified according to changing times or even according to the individual temperaments of different people. There is, to him, no inherent redemptive power in the mitzvah beyond its therapeutic effects, its capacity to evoke a subjective experience,

Korach argued, using the mitzvah of tzitzit as an illustration of his point of view, that the blue thread of the tzitzit was meant to make us think of distant horizons, of infinity, and of the mysterious link between the blue sea and the blue sky. The mezuzah, he argued, is intended to increase our awareness of God and to invoke His protection over our homes. Why, then, is it necessary to limit this symbolism to one thread or to the doorpost? Why not extend it to the whole garment and to the entire house? If blue, in the case of tzitzit, is able to evoke feelings of Godliness, then total blueness of the garment should certainly be able to do so. The same reasoning applies to the mezuzah. The mitzvah is thus reduced to the level of an inspirational means and not an end in itself. From the standpoint of religious subjectivism and common sense,

Korach's argument seems quite cogent. In response to Korach, we feel it necessary to reaffirm the traditional Jewish position that there are two levels in religious observance, the objective outer mitzvah and the subjective inner experience that accompanies it. Both the deed and the feeling constitute the total religious experience; the former without the latter is an incomplete act, an imperfect gesture. We can easily demonstrate that the Halakhah values both. In the observance of keriat Shema, of tefillah, of avelut, of simkhat Yom

Tov. We recite fixed and standardized texts and we perform precise ritual acts. Yet, the real consummation, the kiyyum, is realized in the experience, belev. The objective Halakhah recognizes the emotional response as an essential part of the religious experience.

However, we do not regard the qualitative and subjective experience as primary. Rather, the objective act of performing the mitzvah is our starting point. The mitzvah does not depend on the emotion; rather, it induces the emotion. One's religious inspiration and fervor are generated and guided by the mitzvah, not the reverse. The goal is proper kavvanah and genuine devekut, but these can be religiously authentic only if they follow the properly performed mitzvah. The emotion generated by the mitzvah is circumscribed and disciplined by the Halakhah and its character is not left open to possible distortion by human desires and fantasies. The halakhically defined mitzvah has quantitative dimensions and precise perimeters, and these establish the authenticity of the genuinely Jewish religious experience.

This is a hiddush an insight which is not commonly understood. The only solid reality is the mitzvah, the integrity of which the Halakhah can define and control. It is the mitzvah act which has been Divinely prescribed and halakhically formulated; emotional responses cannot be so mandated, because by their very nature, they are not subject to precise definition.

In teaching the Halakhah and its proper application, the hokhmah dimension of knowledge is decisive; da'at, common sense, is insufficient. This was Korach's error, for in the realm of the Halakhah only the Torah scholar is the authority and common sense can be misleading. Why Cannot the Emotions be Trusted? Why does the Halakhah refuse to give primacy to the emotions to the inner feelings?

Why does it not consider devekut, religious fervor, a more genuine and authentic experience than the outward act of performing a mitzvah? It is because there are three serious shortcomings in making the religious act dependent on human emotion and sentiment.

First, the religious emotion is volatile, ever-changing and unstable, even within one individual. To correlate the outward act to the inner emotion would require regular adjustments. The mitzvah would continually have to be modified and, at times, nullified in favor of new symbolic acts that would correspond to the person's emotional state. The format and identity of the mitzvah would be destroyed and no continuity of identifiable performance would be possible.

Second, each person feels an experience differently. Rituals would continually have to be reformulated to correspond to the feelings of different individuals at different times. What was inspiring to one person might not affect another at all. No community (Kehillah) service of God would be possible, since group worship presupposes a unifying constancy. What would be appropriate today would be obsolete tomorrow, and what is appreciated in one community may be unintelligible in another.

This kind of ever-changing worship, which responds to varying sensations, is basically idolatrous. That this was a major point of contention in the argument between Moses and Korach is indicated in the Tanhuma quoted by Rashi (ibid. v. 6): "[Moses] said to them: 'According to the custom of the heathens, there are numerous forms of Divine worship and, consequently, numerous priests, for they cannot assemble for worship in one temple. We, however, have one

God, one ark, one Law, one altar, all constituting one form of worship'." Communal worship should be constant and not buffeted by the winds of fashion and subject to varying moods of diverse individuals. Moses contended that Korach's emphasis on the primacy of the emotions would destroy the religious identity of the people and result in fragmented sects. The fact that Jews of all times and from different parts of the world are able to worship together-even allowing for minor variations of liturgical custom-is directly due to the constancy of form which is controlled by the Halakhah.

Third, we have no reliable gauge to differentiate secular types of response from the genuinely religious experience. There are many non-religious reactions which claim transcendental qualities of holiness. The love impulse, the aesthetic quest of the artist, and, nowadays, the indulgence in potent mind-transforming drugs, can easily be confused with the religious experience. But in fact they are inherently secular and do not reach out beyond the stimulated sense to God. They never transcend man's finite limitations. Pagans in ancient times abandoned themselves to hypnotic trances and orgiastic ceremonies, and mistakenly identified these as religious experiences. The self was never transcended; man starts with himself and does not communicate beyond himself. The Torah, therefore, emphasizes the mitzvah, which reflects God's will; it has the stamp of immutability and universality. The great religious romance of man with God, the emotional transport, follows one's observance of the mitzvah, not the reverse. realm of the Halakhah only the Torah scholar is the authority and common sense can be misleading. Why Cannot the Emotions be Trusted? Why does the Halakhah refuse to give primacy to the emotions to the inner feelings?

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Moses was unquestionably right. If one fulfills the mitzvah of tzitzit, recognizing its religious meaning then a glance at one blue thread will produce an awareness of God. To this day, the tallit (even without the blue thread) is religiously inspiring to the worshipping Jew. Such is the power of the mitzvah. Proceeding from action to feeling, the blue color can remind one of his link with God. However, if one fails to conform to halakhic norms and instead, availing himself of common sense, substitutes a garment that is entirely blue, his response will be divested of its religious meaning and totally secular. And if there is a response at all, it will be a mundane, hedonistic experience, aesthetic appreciation, but not a religious emotion. The color blue, as an aspect of kiyum ha mitzvah, is a source of religious inspiration; but a blue garment that is not prescribed by the Torah merely contains a color and may produce many types of secular associations, some even vulgar and demeaning.

Halakhah as Hokhmah In Judaism, it is the mitzvah which initiates the religious experience. The halakhic legal system, as a hokhmah, has its own methodology, mode of analysis, conceptualized rationale, even as do mathematics and physics. An analogy with science would be helpful here. Aristotelean physics, which dominated the ancient and medieval world, was in some instances faulty precisely because it relied on common-sense experiences. It maintained that an object falls because it has weight, which seems outwardly reasonable but which Galileo and Newton showed to be wrong. They replaced common-sense, surface judgments by scientific laws, a picture of reality which differs from surface appearances. What are heat, sound, and matter but creations of the human mind in mathematical terms? These are qualities which we perceive with our senses, but their real identity is defined in conceptual, not empirical terms.

Similarly, the Oral Law has its own epistemological approach, which can be understood only by a lamdan who has mastered its methodology and its abundant material. Just as mathematics is more than a group of equations, and physics is more than a collection of natural laws, so, too, the Halakhah is more than a compilation of religious laws. It has its own logos and method of thinking and is an autonomous self-integrated system. The Halakhah need not make common sense any more than mathematics and scientific

conceptualized systems need to accommodate themselves to common sense.

When people talk of a meaningful Halakhah, of unfreezing the Halakhah or of an Empirical Halakhah, they are basically proposing Korach's approach. Lacking a knowledge of halakhic methodology, which can only be achieved through extensive study, they instead apply common-sense reasoning which is replete with platitudes and cliches. As in Aristotelean physics, they judge phenomena solely from surface appearances and note only the subjective sensations of worshippers. This da'at approach is not tolerated in science, and it should not receive serious credence in Halakhah. Such judgments are pseudo-statements, lacking sophistication about depth relationships and meanings.

The approach of Moses prevailed. The survivors of the catastrophe which befell Korach's group later conceded that, in the words of our Sages. "Moses is truth and his interpretation of Torah is truth-and we are liars" (B. Bat. 74a). This judgment is still valid. In our day, we are witnessing a resurgence of strength among those religious groups that are committed to the Oral Law as a hokhmah, and who therefore recognize Torah scholars, Gedolei Yisrael, as the Moses was unquestionably right. If one fulfills the mitzvah of tzitzit, recognizing its religious meaning then a glance at one blue thread will produce an awareness of God. To this day, the tallit (even without the blue thread) is religiously inspiring to the worshipping Jew. Such is the power of the mitzvah. Proceeding from action to feeling, the blue color can remind one of his link with God. However, if one fails to conform to halakhic norms and instead, availing himself of common sense, substitutes a garment that is entirely blue, his response will be divested of its religious meaning and totally secular. And if there is a response at all, it will be a mundane, hedonistic experience, aesthetic appreciation, but not a religious emotion. The color blue, as an aspect of kiyyum ha mitzvah, is a source of religious inspiration; but a blue garment that is not prescribed by the Torah merely contains a color and may produce many types of secular associations, some even vulgar and demeaning.

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<http://doreishtov.blogspot.com/2007/06/reb-chaim-kanievsky-and-computer-search.html>

Monday, June 18, 2007

Reb Chaim Kanievsky and the computer search

Recently an interesting episode occurred with Reb Chaim Kanievsky that demonstrated that despite the amazing advances made by modern technology, nothing can be substituted for diligence in Torah study. A Torah scholar in Bnei Barak was discussing Torah topics with Reb Chaim and he queried Reb Chaim regarding the amount of instances where the name Moshe is listed in the Torah. Reb Chaim immediately responded that the name Moshe is listed 414 times in the Torah, to which the questioner responded that he believes that the name Moshe appears 416 times. Reb Chaim smiled and responded that apparently this person had done a computer search which resulted in the extra listings of the word Moshe, as in one instance the word is misheh, from the sheep, and in the second instance, the word is masheh, which means to lend, but certainly these words do not refer to Moshe.

One may be wondering what significance there is in the fact that Moshe's name is listed 414 times in the Torah: Well, this really shows that everything is hinted to in the Torah, and specifically regarding this past week's parashah, Korach, where the sons of Korach ultimately admit that Moshe and his Torah are true. The number 414, when using mispar katan, digit sum, equals 9, and the word emes, truth, in mispar katan equals 9, so there you have it. The amount of times that Moshe is listed in the Torah signifies that Moshe and his Torah are true.

Posted by ben

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
<info@jewishdestiny.com>
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Jerusalem Post :: Friday, June 24, 2011
A SINISTER PATTERN :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The parshiyot of the Torah of this month reflect a depressing and sad pattern in Jewish public life. The pattern is based mainly in evil speech. It begins with the complaints of the people regarding the food in the desert and the evil speech against the gift of the manna that fed them for forty years in the wilderness. The complainers died horribly and the lesson of evil speech should have been taken to heart.

Nonetheless, we then read of the conversation of Miriam and Aharon regarding Moshe's personal domestic life. Once more this is an instance of evil speech. Though their intentions may have been noble, and in their eyes even justified, the Lord punished Miriam publicly for initiating such a conversation. Again, the message should have been clear to the Jewish people – do not engage in evil speech, the Lord does not tolerate such a breach of etiquette and holy behavior. However, for some reason the message did not sink into the Jewish psyche of the time. Even great leaders did not yet internalize the destructive powers of evil speech. Thus the leaders of Israel who were sent forth by Moshe to explore the Land of Israel and report back upon its goodness and wonders spoke negatively about the land that God had promised to our ancestors and to us.

The prohibition against evil speech is herewith expanded. One cannot say bad things not only about other humans. One cannot say bad things even upon inanimate objects such as the Land of Israel. Evil speech is evil speech and it damages the speaker surely as much as it does the subject of the evil speech.

The fact that the Land of Israel is inanimate is really irrelevant to the issue of evil speech. Ultimately, when one speaks evilly about anything in God's world, indirectly one is speaking about the One Who is the creator of that person, object or place. And therefore evil speech is always evil speech no matter whom or what the subject of the speech may be.

The Torah then continues with the story of Korach and his rebellion against Moshe and Aharon. Korach, Datan and Aviram, the instigators and ringleaders of the rebellion have terrible things to say about Moshe particularly and the Jewish state of affairs generally. In their twisted diatribe against Moshe, it is the land of Egypt that suddenly is the land of milk and honey and Moshe's intent is to destroy the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai or later in the Land of Israel.

Though they couch their words in populist high-sounding sloganeering, their statements are again only pure evil speech, demagoguery of the worst sort. Having learned apparently nothing from the complainers over the manna, the fate of Miriam and the incident of the spies, they too are doomed to destruction because of this sin of evil speech.

Evil speech wreaks terrible havoc amongst its perpetrators. But tragically, it always seems to live on in Jewish life and society, continually punishing everyone involved in it - victim, perpetrator and society at large.

Then we read in the Torah of the champion of evil speech, Bilaam. His profession and means of supporting himself is evil speech. He is available for hire to curse and ridicule others. The Lord Himself, so to speak, has to intervene in order to prevent his nefarious scheme of cursing the people of Israel from taking hold or effect.

Bilaam's words have a magical quality of literary beauty that envelops them. But they are poisonous and virulently so, evil speech

incarnate. In the great literary storehouse of civilization there certainly is much beauty and genius. Tragically there is also much evil speech and base opinion. And as King Solomon noted in Kohelet: "Dead flies can make even the sweetest and most desirable ointments repugnant."

The harm done by evil speech has over and over again overcome any beauty or genius in the words of that literature. So Bilaam, like his predecessors before him dooms himself to punishment and death because of his intemperate violation of the prohibition against evil speech.

We see that the entire pattern of the parshiyot of the Torah this month revolves itself about this cardinal issue of evil speech and its deleterious effects upon the nation of Israel. I feel this to be a very important lesson that we should take to heart in our current situation and society as well. The absence of evil speech will enhance every aspect of our personal and national lives.

Shabat shalom.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
<info@jewishdestiny.com>
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: KORACH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The effects of personal ambition upon a person's behavior and decisions should never be underestimated. Korach, like many demagogues before and after him, cloaks his personal ambitions in the mantle of populism and democracy. He proclaims against Moshe: "All of the congregation of Israel are holy people and therefore by what right do you allow yourself to lord over them?" Of course when he succeeds to topple Moshe then he will lord over them.

The whole history of humanity is littered with such populist revolutions that only bring in their wake oppression and dictatorship, many times worse than the regime that they dispossessed. The French and Russian revolutions are only two examples of this bitter historical truth. The current "Arab spring" shows signs of turning into such a type of disaster as well.

In the Tanach we read of the revolution of Yeravam against Rechavam in the name of justice and democracy only to see it end up in tyranny, paganism and the division of the Jewish people into two warring kingdoms. It is an interesting point to note that the greatest tyrannies proclaim themselves with the most high sounding and complimentary names and descriptive adjectives.

In our world whenever you see a country that advertises itself as "The Peoples Republic" you can be certain that you are dealing with a tyrannical dictatorship. This is the only way to view Korach's sloganeering and good words. And the true tragedy is that Korach will convince himself and his followers of the rectitude of his cause and be blind to his own burning ambition which fuels this entire incident.

Altruism is a difficult commodity to find in this world. Because of this fact people should always attempt to look at themselves honestly and admit to themselves their true drives and motivations. Channeled and focused ambition directed to the advancement of legitimate causes is part of Jewish tradition. Uncontrolled ambition that can destroy others is certainly outside the pale of Torah behavior.

The necessary vision to create and innovate is always founded on personal ambition and hope. But the ambition to destroy others, to climb over bodies to reach the perceived top destroys all concerned. Hillel's famous statement: "If I am not for me then who will be for me and if I am only for me then of what value am I?" expresses this balance of necessary and destructive ambition clearly for us. It is

reflected in the prohibitions against slandering others and causing others pain and anguish.

It is related that when the great Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter (Chidushei HaRim), the founder of the Chasidic dynasty of Gur, was yet a young scholar he composed a commentary to a certain section of Shulchan Aruch. He received such approbation on his work that great rabbis told him that his commentary would eclipse the commentary of Shach (Rabbi Shabtai Cohen) to that very same section of Shulchan Aruch.

Rabbi Alter never published his commentary because he felt that Shach (already in Heaven in the World to Come) would feel slighted that his commentary would now be replaced. Such are the lengths necessary for one to go to in order to control ambition which even in cases of great scholars and people such as Korach can ruin one to ruin.

Shabat shalom.

From Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
To weekly@ohr.edu
Subject Torah Weekly

TORAH WEEKLY—Parshat Korach
For the week ending 25 June 2011 / 22 Sivan 5771
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
The Object Of Desire

“And Korach...took” (16:1)

“And G-d said ‘Let Us make man in Our image.’” (Bereshet 1:26)

Artists throughout the ages have taken this verse and stood it on its head: Man has ‘created’ G-d in his image. The G-d of Michelangelo, Donatello and others appears as no more than a venerable grandfather, complete with a long white beard and robes. Save for a few thunderbolts, their G-d looks like an Italian zeide in a costume. What does the Torah mean when it says that G-d created man “in His image”?

When G-d created man, He gave him two powers: the power of giving and the power of taking. The power to give is the elevated quality that imitates G-d, for G-d is the ultimate Giver. There is nothing you can give Him in return since He already owns everything. Man is created specifically to imitate G-d by being a giver.

The desire to take is the antithesis of G-d’s purpose in creating man. Furthermore, taking is not about amassing a vast fortune, or a fleet of Porsches; it’s not a matter of “He who dies with the most toys wins.” In truth, the desire to take has nothing to do with toys, trophies or physical objects at all.

The desire to take is the dark side of the power to give. It is the anti-world of giving, its negative doppelganger. The desire to take is never satisfied by the object of its desire. It’s amazing how quickly the sheen wears off a pristine new computer, or a new car, or a new wife (if that’s your view of marriage). For once the object becomes our possession it ceases to interest us, the desire is gone, and we focus on something else. Why?

The desire to take is never satisfied by the object of our desire because the desire to take is really the desire to enlarge ourselves, to make ourselves more, to take up more real estate in reality – to exist more.

And that desire is insatiable.

All physical desires have their limits – there’s just so much *pâté de foie gras* you can consume, but the desire to be more, the dark side of giving, is insatiable.

This week’s Torah reading starts with the following sentence, “And Korach (the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kohat, the son of Levi) together with Datan and Aviram (the sons of Eliav) and On ben Pelet (sons of Reuven), took.” There is no object in this sentence. It just says that “Korach ...took...” without revealing what or whom he took. What, then, is the object of the sentence?

What did Korach take?

Korach “took” the entire sad episode that followed: his rebellion and demise are the object of the first sentence of the weekly portion. Korach was the quintessential taker. What he wanted was more, more and more.

Korach wanted to devour the world.

And thus it was apt that the earth opened its mouth and devoured him.

Sources: Based on Rabbi E. E. Dessler’s *Kuntras HaChessed* and Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Korach
Yaakov Recognized That Without Unity, The Jewish People Have No Hope

The blessings Yaakov gave his children in Parsha Vayechi contain the words, "Shimon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence their kinship. Let my soul not come into their council; into their assembly let my glory not be united; for in their anger they slew men and in their self-will they uprooted oxen." [Bereshis 49:5-6]. Rashi there mentions that Yaakov's prayer not to have "his glory united with their assembly" was a request not to have the patriarch's name mentioned in the story of Korach. Indeed, the Torah does not mention Yaakov's name in enumerating the lineage of Korach, but traces Korach only back to Levi (Yaakov's son) and no further.

Sefer Bamdibar starting from Parshas Be'Ha'Aloscha through Parshas Balak contains one unfortunate incident after another. [A Jew once came to the Gerer Rebbe and told him that he got depressed every summer. The Rebbe asked what about the summer depressed him -- "Did it have anything to do with the weather?" he wondered. "No", the Chossid explained, "It's the Parshas haShavua -- one week after another we read about the misdeeds of the Jewish people!"] Indeed, there are grievous aveiyros [sins] mentioned throughout Chumash. Apparently, Yaakov Avinu was not worried about all these aveiyros. Yaakov only beseeched that the Torah not mention his name by the aveyro of Korach. What is so incredibly horrible about this story that Yaakov felt so strongly -- even on his deathbed -- that he must not have his name mentioned in connection with it?

Rav Moshe Shapiro, in his book "Mi'mamakim" [Out of the Depths] offers an approach to this question. However, let us preface it with another question: There is a long-standing Jewish custom -- dating from Biblical times -- to greet people with the word "Shalom". We find the practice already in Bereshis: "And he (Yaakov) said, 'Is there Shalom with him (Lavan)?' and they responded 'Shalom'." [Bereshis 29:6]. We also find this several times in Shoftim [the Book of Judges], for example "And the old man said 'Shalom to you...'" [Shoftim 19:20]. Until this very day, one Jew greets another with the greeting "Shalom Aleichem!" In Eretz Yisrael, one does not greet

people on the street by saying "Hi" or "Hello". The classic greeting is "Shalom!" A person may say it perhaps 100 times or more per day. The Talmud says that Shalom is one of the names of the Almighty [Shabbos 10b]. [The Halacha is in fact that a person may not greet someone (with the term Shalom) in a bathroom. (There is even a question as to whether one may call to a friend whose name is Shalom in the bathroom.)] If this is the case, is it not somewhat flippant and disrespectful to the Name of G-d to repeatedly say "Shalom Aleichem, Shalom Aleichem, Shalom Aleichem"?

Normally, there is a prohibition from mentioning G-d's Name for naught. According to some, this prohibition equates with the third of the Ten Commandments -- not taking the L-rd's Name in vain.

Normative halacha is that when there is a doubt whether one needs to make a Bracha, he is not allowed to make that Bracha lest he take G-d's Name in vain.

Therefore, we have a paradox here. On the one hand, we are very strict regarding not mentioning G-d's Name without a purpose. And yet the institution of how one Jew greets his fellow Jew has always been to do so by invoking one of the Names of G-d: Shalom.

What happened to the concern of uttering G-d's Name for naught? Not only do we use the Name Shalom used for this purpose, the Gemara states that Boaz instituted that one may greet his neighbor with the formal Name of G-d [Makkos 23b]. What does all this mean?

When we need to give the Sotah [suspected adulteress] the special water to test her fidelity to her husband, we take G-d's Name, write it on a piece of earthenware, throw it in the water and erase it. The Talmud says, "My name that was written in holiness shall be erased upon the waters..." in order to bring peace between husband and wife [Shabbos 116a]. The simple interpretation of this is that for the purposes of establishing Shalom Bayis [domestic harmony] between husband and wife, G-d even allows the erasing of His Name.

The Maharal, in his Nesivos Olam, gives a different interpretation to this halacha. When a husband and wife are living in peace, the Shechinah [Divine Presence of G-d] dwells amongst them. When there is disharmony between husband and wife, the Shechinah is not there. In other words, when the husband and wife are in dispute with one another, there is already an erasure of G-d's Name. For this reason, G-d says, "Let them use my Name to bring back Shalom Bayis." Such a process does not cause an erasure of My Name and Presence from this world, on the contrary, that process restores the Shechinah!

This too is the reason we may invoke the Name of G-d to say hello to someone. When Jews are at peace with one another, the Shechinah dwells amongst us. When we are not living in peace, the Almighty removes His Presence from amongst us. It is worthwhile to use the Name of G-d to greet someone and be friendly, thereby promoting unity amongst the Jewish people. Jewish unity causes the Divine Presence to be present amongst us.

This can help us understand the following incident in Chumash: "And Yaakov left Beer Sheva and went to Charan. And he took from the stones of the place." [Bereshis 28:10-11] Miraculously, when he woke up, he took "the (single) stone that he had placed under his head" [28:18]. Rashi notes that he originally took 12 stones and they turned into a single stone. Why did that happen? What is the symbolism of this incident?

The Medrash says that Yaakov knew prophetically that the Jewish people were to be composed of 12 Tribes. Yaakov knew that neither Avraham nor Yitzchak had 12 children, so he assumed that these 12 Tribes would descend from him. Yaakov therefore took the 12 rocks, put them under his head, and sought a Divine sign that he would be able to become the father of the Jewish nation and have 12 tribes descend from him. Yaakov said, "If these stones miraculously merge

together and can form a single unit, then I know that I will be able to father 12 Tribes and merge them into a single people." His goal was to build a nation -- to take disparate individuals and blend them into one unit that will bring the Divine Presence into the world. If the 12 stones would come together, then that would be a sign to Yaakov that there could be unity amongst the Jewish people and that a unified Jewish nation could emerge. If the 12 stones would stay separate, Yaakov felt that he would be doomed, because where there is disunity, the Almighty does not allow His Presence to be felt. Yaakov Avinu thus realized from the outset that unity was the key to survival of the Jewish people -- it is their only hope for survival. He knew that the Divine Presence would only reside with the nation through "achdus". Consequently, Yaakov wanted to have nothing to do with Korach and his disputants. In Yaakov's eyes, their aveyro was worse than that of the Golden Calf and the Spies and the Complainers, and everything else. This aveyro resulted in sowing division and dispute amongst the Jewish people. Korach threatened to destroy all that Yaakov had built. About such an aveyro, Yaakov pleaded, "Let my name and honor not be associated with him." Only through unity will the Children of Yaakov be the eternal nation of Bnei Yisrael.

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Rabbi Weinreb's Torah Column, Parshat Korach
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb
Person in the Parsha

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

"Better They Learn From Me..."

Conflict resolution is one of the most important tasks in human relations at every level. Open up any newspaper, and you will read of schoolchildren bullying each other, of married couples who are in bitter conflict, of political parties enmeshed in verbal warfare, and of nations literally at war. What are some of the strategies available to foster conflict resolution?

One of the most interesting strategies can be found in an ancient endeavor known by the generic term of martial arts. I once watched a brief film on the subject in which I observed a fascinating technique. The participant in the battle was instructed not to fight his opponent head on, not to counter aggression with aggression. Rather, he was instructed to yield to the attack, to move paradoxically backwards as if to surrender, and not to move forward in the attack mode. In a sense, he was directed to surprise his opponent by reacting unpredictably. This strategy can be applied to many situations in life in which there is strife and discord.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Korach, we read of such discord. We study the story of the rebellion led by Korach and his cohorts against Moses. Among this band are Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliav, who have long been thorns in Moses' side. They challenge his authority and threaten outright revolt against his leadership. A civil war looms.

Interestingly, Moses' initial response is not one of anger. He tries verbal persuasion, he calls for Divine intervention, and only then does he eventually indignantly express his anger. But before he

reaches that point, he tries something which goes almost unnoticed by most commentators.

He sends for them. He adopts a conciliatory attitude, and invites them into dialogue. "And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram..."

(Numbers 16:12)

Moses does not "come out fighting," at least not until his invitation to discussion and perhaps even compromise is rebuffed. "...And they said, 'We will not come up... Do you need to make yourself a prince over us? ...Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!'

Only after his attempt at conflict resolution does Moses become angry and does he appeal for Divine intervention. But first he signals his readiness to talk things over.

I have been reading a biography of a great Hasidic leader in early 20th century Poland. His name was Rabbi Israel Danziger, known today by the title of his book of inspirational homilies, *Yismach Yisrael*. He was the heir to the leadership of the second largest Hasidic sect in pre-World War II Europe. That sect was known by the name of the town near Lodz where he and his father before him held court. His father's name was Rabbi Yechiel Danziger, and the name of the town was Alexandrow.

The biography contains documentation of several talks Rabbi Israel gave describing many of the lessons he learned from his sainted father. In one of those talks, he tells of the time that he was sent along with several of his father's emissaries to visit the court of another Hasidic Rebbe. He describes how that Rebbe's personal secretary made the delegation wait their turn on a long line. He describes how when they finally got into the Rebbe's reception room, they were treated perfunctorily, if not coldly. And the request that they were instructed to make of this Rebbe was callously rejected by him. They returned to Alexandrow feeling chastised. Rabbi Israel, who led the delegation, reported back to his father and relayed to him every detail of his disappointing experience.

About a year later, the other Hasidic Rebbe needed a great favor of Rabbi Yechiel. He sent a delegation to Alexandrow, headed by his own son. The delegation arrived, and much to Rabbi Israel's surprise, his father issued orders that they be welcomed warmly and be shown gracious hospitality. Rabbi Yechiel further instructed that the delegation be given an appointment during "prime time" and not be asked to wait on line at all. Rabbi Yechiel himself waited at his door for them, ushered them in to his private chambers, seated them comfortably, and personally served them refreshments. He listened to their request for a favor of him and granted it generously.

Then, as Jewish tradition prescribes, he bid them farewell only after first escorting them part of the way along the route of their return journey.

In his narrative, as recorded in this fascinating biography, Rabbi Israel expresses amazement at his father's conduct. He describes how he approached his father and asked him directly, "Why did you treat them so well? Did you not recall how that Rebbe and his followers treated us not so long ago? Did you have to give them such an effusive welcome after they embarrassed us so much?"

I found Rabbi Yechiel's response, in Yiddish of course, so impressive that I committed it to memory verbatim. He said, "Better that they learn from me how to be gute yidden and menschen, than I learn from them how to be boors and brutes!"

The biography does not tell the rest of the story. But when I related the story to an audience of chassidim a short while ago, I found out about part of the rest of the story. An elderly man in the audience approached me and said, "I am a descendant of that other Rebbe. And our family tradition has it that when his delegation returned with news of their special treatment and of the granted favor, the Rebbe

burst into tears and cried, 'He is a better Jew than I am. We must learn a musar haskel (a lesson in ethics) from him.' "

This is a lesson we can all benefit from as we attempt to resolve the conflicts we face, and as we strive to increase the numbers of gute yidden in our ranks and create more menschen in the world.

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Rabbi Yonason Sacks (The TorahWeb Foundation) The Mitzvah of Terumah: Compulsion and Benevolence

The Steipler Gaon (Birchas Peretz, Vayikra) notes that some mitzvos are voluntary, rather than obligatory, based on the generosity of spirit of the giver. Among these are the voluntary sacrifices and the donations for the Mishkan, which have no prescribed amounts, or shiurim, even for those who choose to do them, and the mitzvah of nazir. There are also obligatory mitzvos without shiurim, such as peah, bikkurim, re'ayon and gemilus chasadim. Here too, the shiurim are left up to the generosity of the giver. In this way, they are similar to terumah, where Biblically, chitah achas poteres es ha'kri - a single grain redeems the entire heap of produce. However, asks the Steipler, if these mitzvos are necessary for the proper service of Hashem, why were they or their shiurim not made obligatory after all? And if they are not necessary, why were they given at all?

The Steipler suggests that voluntary service for the sake of Heaven is a critical element in the acquisition of ahavas Hashem, love of God, in which we are all commanded. If commanded, it must be within our grasp, yet how exactly can we be obligated in matters of the heart? What should one of a more phlegmatic nature do, who is not able to rouse his heart to burn with the love of God? Mitzvos of the heart are simply not as accessible, nor as readily discharged, as external, active mitzvos.

The Rambam addresses this question in Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah (chapter 2), writing that one arrives at ahavas Hashem through contemplating His incomparable greatness. The Chovos HaLevavos writes that one must reflect on Hashem's goodness, on all the kindnesses He performs for us. Yet, for one whose heart is too dull to be roused by these means, the question remains: How can he too achieve the mitzvah of loving God with all his heart and soul and means?

The Steipler answers by way of a concept developed in Chapter 7 of the Mesilas Yesharim: just as the effects of one's inner flame extend outward, rousing one to zeal in one's actions, the effects of one's zealous actions can penetrate inward, rousing even a dull heart to fervor. This phenomenon is at work, too, with the love of God - just as inner love leads to voluntary service, where one foregoes his will in favor of the will of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, so too, voluntary, selfless acts in service of the Divine rouse one's heart to love and be bound up with Hashem. The more one invests in this voluntary outer service, the more one stokes the fire of his inner love of Hashem. As this is a tried and tested method, it emerges that one is always capable of ultimately fulfilling the mitzvos of the heart by engaging wholeheartedly in the voluntary mitzvos. And, in contradistinction to obligatory mitzvos, which all too often are performed in the manner of one paying off a debt, it is quite possible that the fact that these voluntary mitzvos are so superbly suited to rouse one's love of Hashem is their very *raison d'etre*.

In this way, suggests the Steipler, converts and ba'alei teshuvah have an advantage over other Jews. Having come to mitzvos initially through a free-willed acceptance, they often continue to see themselves in the same light even after accepting the yoke of mitzvos,

and this free-willed acceptance and devotion continually feed the fires of their love and attachment to Hashem, which in turn may lead to greater care in the performance of all mitzvot (see Tosafot, Meseches Kidushin 70b, s.v. kashim geirim).

The Rokeach famously stated that piety never matches its initial levels. This is apparently for the reasons discussed above, namely that piety's inception is accompanied by one's choice to become closer to Hashem, which engenders enormous heartfelt devotion. With the passage of time, however, rote performance - and even additional levels of service, beyond the letter of the law - inevitably come to feel obligatory, dulling one's initial inspiration. It is in this vein that the Torah commands us to freely give to the full measure of our hearts' devotion.

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Some Basics about Redeeming Donkeys! **By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1: Donkey Rides

Have you ever ridden a donkey? Did you stop to wonder whether the donkey might be firstborn and that it might be prohibited to ride it?

Question #2: Pony Rides

May I ride a horse without checking first whether it is firstborn?

Question #3: Ask its mother!

How do I know whether my donkey is firstborn? I can't go ask its mother!

Answer:

As a kohen, I often participate in the mitzvah of Pidyon Haben, redeeming a firstborn male child, a bechor, but I have never been asked to participate in redeeming a firstborn donkey, in Hebrew called peter chamor.

After Korach's maligning Aaron, the Torah lists the awards Aaron and his descendants, the kohanim, receive for their service to the Jewish Nation (listed in Bamidbar 18: 8 -19). There are a total of twenty-four gifts that the Torah grants the kohanim (see Bava Kamma 110b; Rambam, Hil. Bikkurim ch. 1). One of these twenty-four grants is the mitzvah of peter chamor, redeeming the firstborn donkey, the firstborn of a non-kosher animal you shall redeem (Bamidbar 18:15). This is a grant because the kohen benefits by receiving a lamb or goat or the value of the donkey, as I will explain. This is not the only place in the Torah that this mitzvah is mentioned. The Torah mentions the mitzvah of peter chamor in two other places also:

(1) In Parshas Bo, the pasuk says: Every firstborn donkey you shall redeem with a "seh," and if you do not redeem it, you should break its neck. Furthermore, the firstborn of your children you shall also redeem (Shemos 13:13). I intentionally did not translate the word "seh" since it includes both sheep and goats, and I am unaware of an English word that includes both species.

(2) The Torah mentions this mitzvah again in Parshas Ki Sissa: The first issue of a donkey you shall redeem with a "seh" (Shemos 34:20). Here the Torah refers to the first issue, from which we derive that the mitzvah applies only if the donkey was born in the normal fashion. This means that a firstborn donkey delivered through caesarean section does not have the sanctity of being firstborn and that there is therefore no mitzvah to redeem it. Sorry, kohen, better luck next time, or more accurately, on the next mother donkey. -- If a donkey was delivered through caesarean section, the next naturally-born fetus also does not become sanctified.

No Sanctity to a Puppy

Although the verse in Parshas Korach the firstborn of a non-kosher animal you shall redeem, implies that it includes any species of non-kosher animals, including puppies, kittens and baby elephants, since the two verses in the book of Shemos both specifically mention donkeys, the halacha is that the mitzvah applies only to one species of non-kosher animals: donkeys. Thus, although a dog might be man's best friend, a firstborn puppy does not have the sanctity of a firstborn donkey foal. There is no mitzvah to redeem a firstborn colt, camel, or wolf (Tosefta, Bechoros 1:2). Thus we can now answer one of our above questions:

May I ride a horse without checking first whether it is firstborn? The answer is that firstborn horse foals have no sanctity. We will soon learn why the donkey is an exception.

Is a Peter Chamor Holy?

Does a firstborn donkey have kedusha?

Prior to its being redeemed, a firstborn donkey has kedusha similar to that of a korban. It is prohibited min haTorah to ride it, use it as a beast of burden, or even use its hair. The hair that falls off it must be burnt and may not be used. Someone who uses this donkey violates a prohibition approximately equivalent to eating non-kosher (Rashi, Pesachim 47a s.v. ve'hein; Rivan, Makkos 21b s.v. ve'hein; cf., however, Tosafot, Makkos 21b s.v. HaChoresht).

Until the donkey is redeemed, one may not sell it, although some poskim permit selling it for the difference between the value of the donkey and a sheep (Rosh, Bechoros 1:11; Tur and Rama, Yoreh Deah 321:8). Many poskim contend that if the donkey is sold, the money may not be used (Rambam, Hilchos Bikkurim 12:4; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah 321:8).

What if the Peter Chamor is Never Redeemed?

If the firstborn donkey is unredeemed, it maintains its kedusha its entire life! If it dies in its unredeemed state, the carcass must be buried to make sure that no one ever uses it. We may not even burn the carcass because of concern that someone might use its ashes, which remain prohibited (Mishnah Temurah 33b-34a). The owner who failed to redeem the donkey missed the opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah. Thus we see the value of redemption.

May I Ride a Donkey — Maybe it is a Firstborn?

Have you ever ridden a donkey? Although it is not common to ride donkeys them in North America, in Eretz Yisroel this is a fairly common form of entertainment. Did you stop to wonder whether the donkey might be firstborn and one is prohibited to ride it? One need not be concerned. Since most of the donkeys of the world are not firstborn, one need not assume that this donkey is. Truthfully, the likelihood of a donkey being holy is very slim for another reason—most donkeys are owned by non-Jews, and a non-Jew's firstborn donkey has no sanctity.

How do we Effect Redemption?

As mentioned above, the Torah commands the owner of a firstborn male donkey to redeem him by giving a kohen a seh, a word we usually translate as lamb. However, we should be aware that the word seh in the Torah does not mean only a lamb, but also includes a kid goat, as we see from the mitzvah of korban Pesach, where the Torah mentions this explicitly (Shemos 12:5; see Mishnah Bechoros 9a). Other species of animal, such as cows and deer, are not referred to as "seh" by the Torah (Mishnah, Bechoros 12a; Rambam, Hil. Bikkurim 12:8; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 321:1).

By the way, one does not need a lamb or kid to redeem a firstborn donkey—a mature adult is perfectly fine. Furthermore, the lamb, kid, sheep or goat that may be either male or female (Mishnah Bechoros 9a). Lamb chops enthusiasts take note -- since they also may be either young or adult, and either male or female.

mitzvah teaches us the importance of acknowledging when someone else helps us, hakaras hatov, for we appreciate the species of donkeys because their ancestors performed kindness for us. If we are required to appreciate the help given to our ancestors thousands of years ago, how much more do we need to exhibit hakaras hatov to our parents, teachers, and spouses for all that they have helped us!

Saving the Owner Money

In actuality, using a sheep or goat to redeem the donkey is merely a less expensive way of fulfilling the mitzvah Hilchos Bikkurim 12:11). There is an alternative way to fulfill the mitzvah -- by redeeming the donkey with anything that is worth at least as much as the donkey (Gemara Bechoros 11a). Thus, someone who gives a cow or deer to the kohen would fulfill the mitzvah of peter chamor if they are worth at least as much as the donkey (Rashi, Bechoros 12a Tur, Yoreh Deah 321; Shach ad loc. #1. and Taz ad loc. #3).

However, if the owner redeems the donkey with a sheep or goat, he fulfills the mitzvah even if the sheep or goat is worth far less than the donkey (Bechoros 11a, Rambam, Hil. Bikkurim 12:11). Thus by giving a lamb or kid to the kohen, the owner saves money.

Some authorities contend that it is preferable to use a seh for the redemption, and that one should redeem the peter chamor with other items only if he has no sheep or goat with which to redeem it (Rambam as understood by Beis Yosef, Yoreh Deah 321 and Perishah ad loc. #6). Others, however, maintain that redeeming a peter chamor with other items is as acceptable as redeeming it with a sheep or goat (see Tur, Yoreh Deah 321; see also Divrei Chamudos, Bechoros 1:26).

By the way, the sheep or goat cannot be a tereifah, meaning an animal bearing a terminal defect, it must be alive at the time of redemption (Mishnah, Bechoros 12a) and it may not be a non-viable premature fetus even if it is still alive (Minchas Chinuch 22:5).

A Blemished Record

On the other hand, the redeeming seh may be of either gender, it may be blemished; and it may be of any age (Mishnah, Bechoros 9a).

Giving the Kohen the Foal

What if the owner decides to give the firstborn donkey to the kohen instead?

What is the halacha if the owner decided to give the firstborn donkey to the kohen, instead of redeeming it with a sheep, goat, or other item? Some authorities rule that if the owner gives the firstborn donkey to a Kohen he has fulfilled the mitzvah (Teshuvos HaRadva, I:496; Birkei Yosef, Yoreh Deah 321:4; Maharit Algazi, Hil. Bechoros 8; Minchas Chinuch 22:16). According to this view, the Torah merely gives the owner the option (emphasize by italicizing the word option) of keeping the donkey by redeeming it and giving the instrument of redemption to a Kohen.

Others disagree, arguing that redemption is not merely an option but the only means of fulfilling the mitzvah, and that one who gives the peter chamor to a kohen does not fulfill the mitzvah (Levush, Yoreh Deah 321:8; Chazon Ish, Bechoros 17:6; see also Terumas HaDeshen vol.II #235).

Conclusion:

Why was the donkey an exception? It is the only non-kosher species of animal whose firstborn carries kedusha!

The Gemara teaches that this is a reward for the donkey. When the Bnei Yisroel exited Egypt, the Egyptians gave us many gifts (see Shemos 11:2-3; 12:35-36). The Bnei Yisroel needed to somehow transport all these gifts out of Egypt and through the Desert unto Eretz Yisroel. The Jews could not simply call Allied Van Lines to ship their belongings through the Desert. Instead Donkey Lines performed this service for forty years without complaint or fanfare! In reward for the donkey providing the Bnei Yisroel with a very necessary shipping service, the Torah endowed the firstborn of this species with sanctity (Gemara Bechoros 5b). In essence, Hashem rewarded the donkey with its very own special mitzvah. Thus, this