

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Korach 5772

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THE MISSING BOOK :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Earlier this month, in an attempt to prepare for one of my Shavuot night lectures, I was searching to find the source of one of a number of quotations that I wanted to use. I remembered the name of the book where the exact quotation could be found and then began a search of the books that I have here in my apartment in Jerusalem, confident that it was here somewhere.

Thank God, I have an extensive library and my books are spread over a number of rooms in our home, so I spent a considerable amount of time trying to track down the book I was looking for. As you can imagine, I was frustrated to no end by my failure to locate that book. After a long period of soul searching, I suddenly remembered that this book was one of the over one thousand books of mine that I was forced to leave in the United States when I moved to Israel from our previous home in Monsey, New York.

That American home of ours had an enormous room filled with bookcases where my library proudly resided. I knew every book in that room and where it was located. But I was moving into far smaller quarters here in Jerusalem and simply did not have sufficient space for all of my books. So, I had to engage in an intellectual form of triage trying to guess which books I really needed here in Jerusalem and which books would remain in America with my family, students and yeshiva library.

Another factor that influenced my choice of books that I was going to bring to Israel with me was the size and space of the custom made shelving that I had ordered to hold my books in Jerusalem. Outsize books, in the main, had to be left in America because I had no place to put them here in Israel. They simply would not fit on the prepared shelves.

And, I then remembered that the book that I was so diligently searching for here in Jerusalem was a tall thin volume of rabbinic response, exactly what shelf it was on in my Monsey library and, that because of its unusual size and height, I had left that book in America. I also recalled that one of my rabbinic students adopted it as his own.

I was delighted that a student of mine would want to own and use one of the volumes from my personal library but I complained to myself at my shortsightedness at having left the book in America. I should have realized that a time would come when I would need to have that book in my hand. I was chagrined to have thought that simply because a book was outsized - and would not conveniently and neatly fit on my new shelves here in Jerusalem, that it should have been left in the Exile. I reconstructed the approximate quotation that I wanted from the book by memory but I was in doubt as to whether I was truly accurate.

The Jewish people have moved many times in our long and tension-fraught history. Because of this constant, forced movement of ours we have been unable to always bring along everything we once possessed. This is especially true of the memories, works of scholarship and individual people who were somehow outsized and not in societal conformity. To a great extent, their books, opinions and personal life stories have not made the journey with us.

Since they did not conform perfectly to the 'shelf size' demanded of them, someone from the outside picked them up and used them. We could certainly profit from having them with us, for ours is a time that we can use all the help, ideas and opinions that we can obtain.

I have ruefully found that it is the one missing book that I did not bring along with me to Jerusalem that is the book that I need most at a certain given moment. Less concern should have been given to the size of the book or to the non-conformist nature of the author, who most times was a pious Jew who possessed different and innovative viewpoints.

In our times, we are witness to the acceptance in our Torah world of people, educational methodology and institutions which were once considered to be radical or unacceptable. We should never be quick to

judge, for only God and His history of people and events is the ultimate judge. The missing book can always come back to bite you.
Shabat shalom

Weekly Parsha :: KORACH :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The litany of disappointments and failures, of the generation of Jews that left Egyptian bondage, continues in this week's parsha. Except, this parsha relates to us not so much in describing a direct confrontation with God and His express wishes, so to speak, but rather tells of a challenge to Moshe and his authority to lead the Jewish people. Korach essentially engages in a coup, a power-grabbing attempt to replace Moshe from his leadership role and Aharon from his position as the High Priest of Israel.

Throughout the ages, the Torah scholars and commentators of the Jewish people have attempted to appreciate and understand what Korach's true motivations were, to engage in such a clearly suicidal attempt. After all, Korach was also aware that Moshe's countenance radiated Heavenly light that forced him to mask that countenance when dealing with human beings.

Korach was also undoubtedly aware that the High Priesthood and its incense offerings could be deadly to those not entitled to serve in that public role. Again, he saw his relatives, Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon struck down by a heavenly fire, for overstepping their proper bounds in the ritual service of the Mishkan.

So what drove Korach to knowingly risk his life in this doomed and completely unnecessary confrontation with Moshe and Aharon? In the words of Rashi in this week's parsha: "What did Korach see or think that drove him to commit such a foolish act?" That question has puzzled all of Jewish scholarship for millennia.

It would be brazen of me to say that I somehow have the answer to this deeply troubling question. Nevertheless, I do wish to contribute an insight into the narrative as it appears in the parsha. Like many ideologues, Korach is convinced that God agrees with him - that God also has realized that Moshe is too autocratic and given to nepotism in his rule of the people. He saw that even Aharon and Miriam were willing to criticize Moshe, and even though Miriam was punished, the precedent of being able to criticize Moshe was set and established.

Korach may have thought that Miriam was punished because, in essence, she and Aharon were interfering in Moshe's private personal life. But Korach believed that he was embarking on a national crusade to break the power of autocratic rule over the Jewish people. On such a vital national issue, one where he believed himself to be morally and practically undoubtedly correct, he convinced himself that God was also in agreement, so to speak, with him.

And, when one is convinced that his own thinking represents God's opinion on any given matter or issue then there can be no holding back in pursuing one's goals. The one main cause for all religious strife, wars, bans and exclusivity of opinion and actions, is the belief that God also follows that given opinion or belief. Naturally, Korach's personal ambitions and agenda helped convince him that God was on his side in the dispute with Moshe. One should always be wary not to confuse personal wishes and opinions with God's will.

Shabat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Korach

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Insights

The Object Of Desire

"And Korach...took" (16:1)

"And G-d said 'Let Us make man in Our image.'" (Bereshit 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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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Korach

And Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav, and On ben Peles, the offspring of Reuven.(16:1)

Machlokes is a maelstrom that sucks in anyone and everyone. It is a firestorm that feeds on dry vegetation. Nothing is safe from the path of its destruction. The parsha begins with a record of the notorious stars of the Korach dispute. Dasan, Aviram and On are infamous for involving themselves in a dispute which was not theirs, and from which they had nothing to gain. They were not Leviim, so Kehunah was out of the question. Bechorah, the rite of the firstborn, was also not theirs, since they were not firstborn. Other than creating discord, they had absolutely nothing to gain.

The Talmud in Sanhedrin lauds the wife of On ben Peles, calling her a *chachamah*, wise woman, and attributing to her the *pasuk*, *Chochmas nashim bansah beisah*, "The wise among women, each builds her own house" (Mishlei 14:1). She saved her husband from continuing his association with Korach, explaining that he had nothing to gain from it.

Regardless of who won - Moshe Rabbeinu or Korach - he, On, would be nothing but a soldier, functioning in a secondary role. Leadership would elude him, so why bother? For this, she is revered as wise? She manifested nothing more than simple common sense. Why is she praised so lavishly?

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that this is the result of machlokes. It distorts the ability to think properly. If a person is able to come to a sensible conclusion at a time when he or she is witness to the fire of machlokes, it is an indication that *chochmah*, wisdom, has prevailed. To remain uninvolved in a fight that is not yours - and from which you have nothing to gain - is not simple common sense; it is *chochmah*! People lose their senses, their ability to cogitate properly. One who demonstrates self-control exhibits acute wisdom.

Korach separated (himself). (16:1)

The machlokes, dispute, initiated by Korach against Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen was an effort to impugn the integrity of their leadership, with a claim that it had not been Divinely ordained. Hashem proved Korach wrong, as he and his henchmen met a horrible death. It is almost impossible to study this parshah and not be confronted with the question: "Why?" Why would an honorable man of Korach's elite status and lineage make a fool of himself, destroy his reputation and end up as an individual recalled with scorn and derision? Veritably, this question is one that continues to be reiterated generation after generation, as so-called champions of the Jewish People from the far-left to the far-right attempt to recreate the Korach debacle. Some lose outright, while others eventually receive their payback. The question, however, persists: "Why?"

To the innocent spectator, it is difficult to distinguish between the Korachs and the Moshes, since each one presents himself as authentic. Ultimately, the truth will out, and the individual who has acted for personal gain - not *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, which seems to be the clarion call of all *baalei machlokes* - is put in his rightful place.

Introspection is definitely a requisite to joining the fray. What are your real motivations? Is it for Heaven's sake, or is it a guise for self-aggrandizement, jealousy, anger, or destroying the status quo? While I believe most people have their reasons for joining a dispute - some real, some perverted - we often ignore another aspect of machlokes: destroying the status quo; when things are too calm, some people seek to stir up trouble to see what happens.

In its commentary to Parshas Korach, the Zohar HaKadosh makes a startling - almost frightening - statement. Korach *azil b'machlokes*, "Korach went in controversy machlokes, *plugta d'shalom*, controversy - fighting against people, *u'man d'palig al shalom*; and he who fights peace; *palig al Shma Kaddisha*, is fighting the Holy Name, *b'gin d'Shma Kaddisha Shalom ikri*, because the Holy Name is called *Shalom*." The Zohar continues that when Hashem created the world, it could not exist until *shalom* descended upon it. And what was that *shalom*? *Shabbos Kodesh*! Thus, according to the Zohar, Korach was fighting against Peace, Hashem's Holy Name, and *Shabbos*! All of this was included in his disputes. The peaceful status quo, the harmony that existed within Klal Yisrael, disturbed Korach.

Truthfully, whenever unity and harmony reign among people it is difficult for anyone to take over the reins of leadership. Only once strife is fomented do factions emerge, a tumult is created, and new leadership is able to prevail. This is what all revolutionaries do. A revolution is a stirring up of the status quo, effectively destroying it.

Shalom is a concept of *sheleimus*, completion, perfection. As the Sfas Emes explains, we Jews believe in One G-d, one unifying factor that harmonizes everything in the world, with Him as its origin and source. Every creation draws its life from Hashem, Who is its unifying force. Thus, a multifaceted creation, such as the world, becomes one with Hashem when we consider that He is our Source of life. The secular world has difficulty with this concept. Therefore, they have adopted an approach which recognizes a pantheon of forces and god heads, each one addressing the conflicting forces within nature. We, however, see no conflicting forces, since they are all subordinate to Hashem.

Shabbos is Hashem's sign, *os hee l'olam*, a sign to the world, that the day of completion, the day of rest, the day of unification, has descended to the

world. It is the day of peace, the day when it all comes together. On Shabbos, the world connects to its roots, and the spiritual unity of Hashem is one. On Shabbos, man relinquishes his hold on the physical world, and individual accomplishment ceases. The world has reached completion. The oneness of Shabbos, which unifies everything in this world, becomes the day of Hashem, Who is Echad, One. It is the day of peace. This is how the Jewish people are to endure: One G-d, One Bais Hamikdash - One!

Korach fought against this perfection. Some people simply cannot deal with the power of One. They create diversity, adversity, dissent and dispute. In the end, all they do is destroy themselves - the source of conflict, so that perfection can once again dominate and peace can reign.

Moshe heard and he fell upon his face. And he spoke to Korach and to his company saying, "Let morning come and then G-d will make known who is His." (16:4,5)

Why did Moshe Rabbeinu find it necessary to fall down on his face? He could have responded to Korach without manifesting what appears to have been a melodramatic reply. The Baal HaTanya, zl, explains that Moshe left nothing to chance. Perhaps Korach was a Heavenly messenger sent to test him. Was it possible that the quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael was a bit too domineering? Was the position of leadership getting to him? Could Moshe be acting pompously? A great man has no qualms about introspecting. He wants to make certain that there is no flaw whatsoever in his leadership. Moshe put his face to the ground in deep thought, to review every minute detail, to discover whether an instance had ever occurred in which he had been even slightly out of line.

After deep review and personal introspection, Moshe arrived at the conclusion that he had been pure in his leadership. He had exhibited no aspect of nasius, pomposity, in his leadership. Clearly, if Korach was issuing a complaint, it was of a personal nature. He was not Heaven-sent. Korach was nothing more than a rabble-rouser, seeking to undermine Moshe's leadership, to impugn the Heavenly decision that Moshe and Aharon were to serve as the nation's spiritual elite. Once this had been determined, Moshe was ready to reply to Korach - on his terms. The "gloves" were off. Korach would be put in his place.

This is a powerful lesson. Part of public life is that one will inevitably have to face challenges and criticism. At first blush, our attitude is that "I" am right - "he" is wrong. Perhaps it is the other way around. Maybe we are not as perfect as we would like others to think that we are. If Moshe introspected before he replied to Korach, it should serve as a directive to each and every one of us to do the same.

And he (Moshe) spoke to Korach and to his company, saying, "Let morning come and then G-d will make known who is His. (16:5) Rashi cites the Midrash that details the conversation between Korach and Moshe Rabbeinu and his followers. Moshe explained that Hashem set boundaries within Creation, such as: night and day. They cannot be changed. It is either night or day. Likewise, Hashem separated Aharon HaKohen for the Kehunah Gedolah, High Priesthood. This was "set in stone." Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita, explains that the division of Aharon from Klal Yisrael was more than a temporary separation that could be downgraded at any time. Aharon was separated in much the same way that night and day were separated from one another. Vayar Elokim es ha'or kitov vayavdel Elokim bein ha'or u'vein ha'choshech. "Hashem saw that light was good, and G-d separated between the light and the darkness" (Bereishis 1:4). Likewise, it is written concerning Aharon, Vayibadeil Aharon l'hakdisho, "Aharon was separated from the rest of Klal Yisrael." It is as immutable as the division of night from day. There is no room for discussion. The words, va'yavdel/vayibadeil, describe a severance that endures forever. This is possible through the notion that Aharon the Levi was transformed into a new entity, a new creation. He became Aharon HaKohen.

Korach and his minions had a problem accepting this verdict, since they were all bechorim, firstborn, who, up until the recent occurrence of the Golden Calf debacle, were the individuals carrying out the avodah, service, in the Mishkan. The bechorim were the original Kohanim. That, however, was then. Now is an altogether different story.

I think a powerful lesson can be derived from here. We often meet friends, classmates, associates with whom we had been friends many years back.

They have changed - and so have we. In some instances, the changes have been so extreme that "we" and "they" are simply not on the same page. What happened? At a critical juncture in their development, an opportunity arose. It was probably a rare experience, a once in a lifetime opportunity, and they "took the ball" and ran with it. Hashem called - they listened, or, it could be vice versa - Hashem called - we listened.

The Jewish People transgressed with the Golden Calf. Moshe declared, Mi l'Hashem ei'lai, "Whoever is for Hashem should come to me!" Shevet Levi separated themselves and, with that move, began their ascension to spiritual distinction.

A well-known story describes a Shabbos visit which Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, had with the saintly Chafetz Chaim, zl. Friday morning, in the middle of a discussion they were having concerning the function of Kohanim, the Chafetz Chaim interjected and asked Rav Schwab, "Are you a Kohen?"

"No," replied Rav Schwab.

The Chafetz Chaim waited a moment, then said, "Perhaps you have heard that I am a Kohen."

"Yes, I have heard," was Rav Schwab's response.

"Perhaps you are a Levi?" the Chafetz Chaim asked.

"No," was Rav Schwab's reply.

"What a shame!" the Chafetz Chaim began. "Moshiach is coming, and this will herald the rebuilding of the Bais Hamikdash. Being that you are not a Kohen, you will not be able to perform the Priestly service in the Sanctuary. Do you know why? Because 3000 years ago, in the midst of the sin of the Golden Calf, your zaideh, grandfather, iz nisht geloffen, did not run forward when Moshe Rabbeinu called out, Mi l'Hashem eilai, 'Whoever is for Hashem should come to me!' Now take heart and listen. When you hear the call, Mi l'Hashem eilai, come running!"

This was the Chafetz Chaim's sage advice. When we hear the call, we must be ready to respond immediately. The window of opportunity closes quickly. The Leviim responded 3,000 years ago, and it was transformative. We all hear these messages every once in awhile, but we think, "If not today - tomorrow." Tomorrow, the window has already closed. This one decision determines where we will be twenty, thirty, forty years later. Is it worth deferring for another day?

"Is it not enough for you that the G-d of Yisrael has segregated you from the Assembly to draw you near to Him...Yet you seek Priesthood as well." (16:9,10)

One day, following the Gemorah shiur, lecture, in Yeshivas Slabodka, Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, turned to his students and said, "You should know that as ones who devote themselves fully to Torah study without any deterrents whatsoever, you are among the greatest mezakei ha'rabim, earners of merit, for the multitudes. It is upon you that the world stands. It is through your learning that Hashem sustains the world. Indeed, you are the ones who impart the greatest sense of bitachon, trust, security for Klal Yisrael.

"This is what Moshe Rabbeinu said to Korach, Rav lachem Bnei Levi, 'As the sons of Levi, Klal Yisrael's spiritual elite, you have much more than the rest of the nation.' Ha'me'at mikem ki hivdil Elohei Yisrael eschem l'hakriv eschem eilav, 'Is it not enough for you that Hashem has separated you from the rest of the nation to draw you near to Him?' Why is this insufficient for you? Why do you denigrate your distinction, u'bikashtem gam Kehunah, Yet, you seek Priesthood, as well! Why do you search for other plaudits and honoraria, involving yourself in mundane areas just for the purpose of recognition? Your service to Hashem earns you the greatest degree of distinction. You need nothing else. The Kesser Torah, Crown of Torah, supersedes the Crown of the Priesthood. Why would you seek anything else?"

These are powerful words from a distinguished and venerable Rosh Yeshivah, Rav, and Dayan. Rav Abramsky understood the significance of being counted among the ranks of bnei Torah. The ranks of those who are counted among the present day Shevet Levi, bnei Torah, has grown by leaps and bounds. While certainly some get lost in the shuffle, many are distinguished talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars, yet manifest no gaavah diKiddushah, religious pride. A ben Torah should feel a sense of pride,

even a sense of superiority, if, of course, everything else about him, his total demeanor, moral/ethical and spiritual, reflects a refinement found only in those for whom Torah is their life's sustenance.

Contemporary society measures stature commensurate with one's financial portfolio. Hence, often one who is either in Kollél or involved in religious endeavor, is viewed as the low man on the totem pole. While it is not my function to change the myopic views of Jewish society, I address the following to the scholars who devote their lives to Torah study and dissemination.

Vayigbah libo b'darkei Hashem, "His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem" (Divrei Hayamim 2, 17:6). Much has been written and said concerning this pasuk which refers to Yehoshafat HaMelech, a righteous king who had amassed great wealth and power, using it to glorify Hashem's Name. His gaavah, pride, was in the ways of Hashem, exalting in the knowledge that he was serving the Almighty. Horav Yitzchak Hutner, zl, explains the concept of gaavah d'kiddushah, religious pride, sort of a spiritual arrogance.

Chazal teach that one who pursues honor will not grasp it, since honor will flee from him. Why is this idea expressed only with regard to honor? We do not find such an idea concerning any other taavah, desire. Do we have such a rule concerning he who is obsessed with money? He either succeeds - or he does not. We do not find money running away from him. Rav Hutner explains the reason for this phenomenon from a practical standpoint: One who requires honor is a person who is beholden to others. He needs their praise and adulation. Such a person is not honorable - he is a shmattah, a rag!

Thus, the only person who is able to achieve true pride is one who has conquered his desire for kavod, honor. He does not need the accolades conferred by others. He is his own man. Such a person can truly appreciate the moral superiority which is the product of religious pride. A true ben Torah is someone who does require kavod. He presents himself with dignity, refinement and shtoltz, regal bearing. He is not arrogant. Rather, he has a sense of pride in who he is, what he represents, and to Whom he has devoted his life. Such a person needs nothing else. In fact, he has it all!

But if Hashem will create a phenomenon...then you shall know that these men p Hashem. (16:30)

Moshe Rabbeinu makes a startling statement. The mutineers who followed Korach in his attempt to usurp Klal Yisrael's spiritual leadership were all going to perish in a miraculous manner. They were not simply going to be punished. Their punishment would be spectacular. It would be miraculous. Indeed, it would be the talk of the nation for generations. Was this necessary? If they would have died right there on the spot without fanfare, without an earthshattering miracle, would it have been any less of a vindication of Moshe's leadership? Why was a miracle an essential requirement for this lesson to be heard?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that Moshe needed an unprecedented miracle to occur in order to expose the profound truth concerning the insurrectors. He explains that the real tragedy of the Korach dispute was the disputants themselves. Korach, Dasan and Aviram were no slouches. They were distinguished members of the nation's elite. They were acutely aware that Moshe did not just proclaim himself as leader-- and Aharon as Kohen Gadol-- on his own. He was commanded by Hashem to do so. Indeed, everything that Moshe did was in accordance with Hashem's directive. Had they not been aware of this verity, their sin of insubordination would have been less severe; thus, it would have mandated a lesser punishment. Their greatest sin was their lying, which was intended solely to incite the nation to rebellion against Moshe. They succeeded in involving an unknowing populace to buy in to their subterfuge. Once the people were caught in Korach's web of deceit, it was almost impossible for them to extricate themselves.

Thus, Moshe did not tell the people that if Korach were to die it would prove that Moshe was right. He needed more than that to drive home his point. He told them that if an unusual death, unprecedented and intense in nature, were to destroy the mutineers, it would prove that niatzu ha'anashim ha'eilah es Hashem. Korach knew the truth, and acted in the way that he did, purely to enrage Hashem. Korach knew his Master and

rebelled anyway. In order to vindicate Moshe, any punishment would have sufficed. To show what was in Korach's heart, what was his true motivation, a miracle must take place. This would wake the people up to the truth.

The Belzer Rebbe, zl, suggests another reason that Moshe was not satisfied with Korach and his henchmen receiving the punishment of death through anything less than miraculous circumstances. It is conceivable for one to be right in his critique, yet still held in contempt for expressing his complaint in an insolent manner. In the Talmud Bava Metzia 58b, Chazal teach that one who publicly embarrasses another Jew is guilty of a sin comparable to murder. He is considered a murderer; hence, he should be punished. It was possible for Korach to have been justified in his challenge to Moshe, but still deserving of death for acting inappropriately and shaming the gadol hador, pre-eminent leader of the generation.

People shame scholars. For some reason, the klei kodesh, those who devote themselves to the saintly, esoteric, spiritually-oriented pursuits, are often victimized by those who live for the purpose of casting aspersions on them. Perhaps it is jealousy, a feeling of inadequacy, which provokes them to vent. Maybe they are even justified. The scholar has acted inappropriately; the rabbi has insulted a prominent member of the congregation. He must be put in his place. After all, he is an employee of the congregation. The Rosh Yeshivah had no right to speak his mind. He needs our money. How can one speak this way? Veritably, the complainer might have reason to justify his chagrin - and even anger - but there is a way - and there is the Torah way. Arguing, character assassination, outright slander and prevarication, and name-calling are not the Torah way. The person might be right, although his methods might be totally wrong.

The Belzer Rebbe explains that the true measure of a person is how he acts when he is right. Korach had issues with Moshe's leadership. Korach was dead wrong. Yet, if he would have gone to sleep that night and not woken up, people might have conjectured, "Korach was actually right, but he employed a method of challenging Moshe which connotes murder. He was punished for his methods. Thus, people would have attended Korach's funeral thinking: Korach impugned Moshe's leadership in a derogatory manner; for this, he was punished. They would still think that Korach was right. Now that Hashem "intervened" in an unprecedented display of miracle, the people had clear proof that not only was Korach's method of challenging Moshe reprehensible, his actual complaint was bogus and totally out of place. Korach was wrong on all counts.

That he not be like Korach and his assembly.(17:8)

It takes two people to sustain a machlokes, dispute. If one seeks a fight and the other one simply walks away, no fight occurs. What should the one who is "right" do? To allow the other fellow to walk away with a "win" would be a travesty; to continue the fight is a tragedy. So what does one do? Let us look at the reaction of Moshe Rabbeinu to Korach's rebellion. Moshe told Korach that if he was right, Hashem would create a new phenomenon in which the earth would open up and swallow all the rebels. From where did Moshe conjure up this idea?

Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, explains that the Torah writes, V'lo siheyeh k'Korach v'cha'ada'so, "We should not be like Korach and his assembly and engage in a dispute" (Bamidbar 17:5). In the Talmud Sanhedrin 110a, Chazal teach that one who engages in a machlokes transgresses a prohibitive mitzvah. Rav Shimshon posits that the issur applies to both parties - even the one who is "right"!

We return to our original question: What is one to do? To get involved in machlokes is prohibited, to walk away from the dispute, appearing as if the other fellow is right, would also be wrong. Rav Shimshon says that if the side that is right can win the dispute - definitively, unequivocally and unanimously - then he should remain in the fray and walk away from the undisputed victor. If, however, the side which is wrong refuses to defer to the truth and is willing to continue the dispute - forever, if necessary - then the one who is right should simply walk away. This could be a time to take a "vacation," be mevater, yield to the other fellow and let the chips fall where they may. To remain in the machlokes constitutes a prohibitive act falling under the rubric of machlokes. Regrettably, rarely is there a dispute

in which the side that is wrong will yield. I guess a lack of vitur, an ability to yield, goes hand-in-hand with being wrong.

We now understand what Moshe was intimating to Korach. If Hashem creates an extraordinary miracle which will effect the absolute demise of his disputants, this will be a Heavenly indication that Korach is wrong, Moshe is right, the argument is now null and void. However, if this does not occur and Korach is still alive and well with his argument in full force, then Moshe must concede - despite his legitimacy. Hashem, of course, backed Moshe. The earth trembled, opened up and swallowed Korach. The machlokes ceased to exist.

Sadly, many of us continue in a machlokes unabated, waiting for our own personal miracle to appear and justify our claims. If one is right, he should make his point and move on. Life is short, and it would be a shame to waste it on dispute. This is applicable when one side is completely in the right and the other side is completely wrong - which is hardly ever the case.

Va'ani Tefillah

Ha'mechadesh b'tuvo b'chol yom tamid maasei Bereishis.

In His goodness He renews daily, perpetually, the work of Creation.

While everything Hashem has created is inherently good, He has added another "good" by renewing Creation on a daily basis. Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, interprets this pasuk practically. Imagine if the sun kept shining on the same surface continuously, all the moisture from the soil would evaporate, transforming the fertile land into desert wasteland. At nightfall, the sun's rays are cloaked, thereby allowing the earth to regenerate itself and regain its moisture. Furthermore, without night, men would continue laboring in their fields until their health fails. Hashem provides a "new day" every day for the soil, for the people. The fact that night ends with daylight is also a wonderful phenomenon which we often ignore. A person goes to bed at night, having had a difficult day, physically and emotionally. In the morning he arises to a new day, with new and increased vigor, looking forward with hope that the issues that plagued him yesterday will "today" be resolved. This inspiration accompanies him throughout the day. Last, the mere fact that Hashem has divided times into segments called "days" encourages men to begin each day anew, with an increased intensity and desire to repair "yesterday." Had time been continuous, men would run in the course of their accustomed and acquired ways in hopeless despair. Hashem's "renewal" allows for us to do likewise - renew, rejuvenate, repair.

In loving memory of my aunt Yolanda bas Baruch A"H Dr. Jacob Massuda

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Korach

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz, a"h

"Equality"

I was blessed with the good fortune of having been born as a Jew in the United States of America. I have often reflected upon the meaning of that good fortune.

I was born just months after the outbreak of World War II and have often been haunted by the fact that my young cousins living in Eastern Europe did not benefit from my good fortune. Quite the contrary: they were being tortured and killed at the hands of the Nazis at the precise moment that my parents and grandparents were joyously celebrating my birth.

My good fortune has continued over the course of my life in many ways. It has resulted in both material and spiritual blessings, and I am profoundly thankful that I have lived most of my life in the world's greatest democracy.

Living in a democratic society, however, does present potentially conflictful issues for a faithful Jew. Long ago, I began to grapple with the question of whether or not the principles of democracy were entirely consistent with the principles of Judaism. Is the Jewish ideal society really one in which all people are created equal, and in which there is true freedom of religious practice and religious expression?

These questions of course have pervaded the discourse concerning the political nature of the State of Israel since before its inception. To what extent can a modern government be both Jewish and democratic? For Israel, this is not merely a hypothetical question. Rather, it cuts to the core of so many contemporary problems and has already required painfully difficult decisions.

Issues concerning democracy are front and center in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Korach (Numbers 16:1-18:32). Korach's rebellious stance against Moses can be understood as his protest against Moses' autocratic leadership. Korach pleads the case for the equality of all the people of Israel: "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them... Why then do you raise yourself above the Lord's congregation?" (Numbers 16:3)

Does not Korach's opinion sound strikingly familiar to the quotations that every American child who attended school when I did knew by heart: Jefferson's "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal...;" Lincoln's "...Dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal;" and, as my third grade teacher Mrs. Eisner insisted we include in our memorizations, Elizabeth Stanton's "...That all men and women are created equal."

The theme of the Korach story presents a different perspective, that persons for whom the fundamentals of democracy are ingrained find very difficult to accept. That perspective asserts that we are not all equal, but rather have different roles to play in life, that these roles are sometimes assigned to us at birth, and that some of these roles carry special privileges and distinct benefits.

This week's Torah portion concentrates on the one example of such a role: the position of the descendents of Aaron, the kohanim. We are not all equal to Aaron's seed. They have the privileges of Temple service which are prohibited to the rest of us. They have material benefits that we non-kohanim are obligated to provide to them.

The Torah's lesson here seems to be contrary to the concept of the total equality that many feel is a cornerstone of a true democracy. Yet, the Torah's lesson is consistent with a very profound insight of which every thoughtful person is aware. This insight is conveyed so succinctly, and so humorously, by of all people, W. S. Gilbert:

"When everybody is somebody, then no one's anybody." (Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*)

For society to succeed there must be some recognition of the fact that we are endowed with differential talents, skills and strengths. We are not all members of one homogeneous mob, from which any of us can be drawn to perform any task or selected to achieve any goal. A democratic society grants us political equality but recognizes how unrealistic it is to assume that we are totally equivalent to each other in every respect.

There is another profound and sobering idea upon which to reflect when one thinks of the equality of all mankind. For despite the inequalities which characterize human existence, there is, in fact, one way in which we are indeed all equal: we are all mortal. Sooner or later, we will all encounter death.

This discouraging but unavoidable truth is taught to us not by Korach in this week's Torah portion, but by the sons of Korach, in the Torah portion of Pinchas, which will be read in the synagogue in several weeks: "The sons of Korach, however, did not die." (Numbers 26:11)

Are we to understand this verse to simply mean that Korach's sons did not die at the time and in the manner that he did? Or, are we to assume, as some of the rabbis in the Midrash maintain, that Korach's sons never died, that they were somehow immortal?

It is instructive in regard to these questions to read the Psalm which is the heritage of Korach's sons, Psalm 49:

Lamnatze'ach livnei Korach mizmor.

A Psalm of the sons of Korach.

Hear this, all you peoples;

Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,

Men of all estates, rich and poor alike...

Shall he live eternally, and never see the grave?

For one sees that the wise die, that the foolish and ignorant both perish...

Man does not abide in honor; he is like the beasts that perish...

Sheeplike they head for the grave, with Death as their shepherd.

Korach's sons survived their father's ignominious fate. They learned that their father's belief in the equality of all the people of Israel was not true with respect to life, and was not a helpful perspective for the formation of a successful society. Total equality, they learned, was true, but only in that we are all equal in the eyes the Angel of Death. A morbid lesson, perhaps. And one about which we often choose to delude ourselves, at our own ultimate risk.

Personally, I believe that the ultimate lesson of democracy is not that we are all equal. Wisdom, particularly the wisdom of our Torah, teaches us that we are all different. The ultimate lesson of democracy is that we must respect those differences and must come to realize that it is those very differences which make us strong and which ultimately will bring about a perfect society. Perhaps that is the society that only the Messiah himself can bring.

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The Leader as Servant

Korach had a point. "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" (Num. 16: 3). At the heart of his challenge is the idea of equality. That surely is a Jewish idea. Was not Thomas Jefferson at his most biblical when he wrote, in the Declaration of Independence, that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal"?

Of course Korach does not mean what he says. He claims to be opposed to the very institution of leadership, and at the same time he wants to be the leader. "All are equal, but some are more equal than others" is the seventh command in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, his critique of Stalinist Russia. But what if Korach had meant it? If he had been sincere?

There is, on the face of it, compelling logic to what he says. Did God not call on Israel to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," meaning a kingdom each of whose members is a priest, a nation all of whose citizens are holy? Why then should there be a cadre of priests and one High Priest?

Did not the military hero Gideon say, in the era of the judges, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The Lord will rule over you" (Judges 8: 23)?

Why then should there be a single life-appointed Moses-type leader rather than what happened in the days of the judges, namely charismatic figures who led the people through a particular crisis and then went back to their previous anonymity, as Caleb and Pinchas did during the lifetime of Moses? Surely the people needed no other leader than God Himself?

Did not Samuel warn the people of the dangers of appointing a king? "He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots ... He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves ... When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the Lord will not answer you in that day" (1 Sam. 8: 11-18). This is the biblical anticipation of Lord Acton's famous remark that all power tends to corrupt. Why then give individuals the power Moses and Aaron in their different ways seemed to have?

The Midrash Tanhuma, quoted by Rashi, contains a brilliant commentary on Korach's claim. It says that Korach gathered his co-conspirators and issued Moses a challenge in the form of a halakhic question:

He dressed them with cloaks made entirely of blue wool. They came and stood before Moses and asked him, "Does a cloak made entirely of blue wool require fringes [tzitzit], or is it exempt?" He replied, "It does require [fringes]." They began

laughing at him [saying], "Is it possible that a cloak of another [colored] material, one string of blue wool exempts it [from the obligation of techeleth], and this one, which is made entirely of blue wool, should not exempt itself?" (Tanhuma, Korach 4; Rashi to Num. 16: 1)

What makes this comment brilliant is that it does two things. First it establishes a connection between the episode of Korach and the immediately preceding passage, the law of tzitzit at the end of last week's parsha. That is the superficial point. The deep one is that the Midrash deftly shows how Korach challenged the basis of Moses' and Aaron's leadership. The Israelites were "all holy; and God is among them." They were like a robe, every thread of which is royal blue. And just as a blue robe does not need an additional fringe to make it bluer still, so a holy people does not need extra holy people like Moses and Aaron to make it holier still. The idea of a leadership hierarchy in "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" is a contradiction in terms. Everyone is like a priest. Everyone is holy. Everyone is equal in dignity before God. Hierarchy has no place in such a nation.

What then did Korach get wrong? The answer is contained in the second half of his challenge: "Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" Korach's mistake was to see leadership in terms of status. A leader is one higher than the rest: the alpha male, the top dog, the controller, director, dominator, the one before whom people prostrate themselves, the ruler, the commander, the superior, the one to whom others defer. That is what leaders are in hierarchical societies. That is what Korach implied by saying that Aaron and Moses were "setting themselves above" the people.

But that is not what leadership is in the Torah, and we have had many hints of it already. Of Moses it says that "he was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12: 3). Of Aaron and the priests, in their capacity as those who blessed the people, it says "So they will put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them (Num. 6: 27). In other words the priests were mere vehicles through which the divine force flowed. Neither priest nor prophet had personal power or authority. They were transmitters of a word not their own. The prophet spoke the word of God for this time. The priest spoke the word of God for all time. But neither was author of the word. That is why humility was not an accident of their personalities but of the essence of their role.

Even the slightest hint that they were exercising their own authority, speaking their own word or doing their own deed, immediately invalidated them. That, in fact, is what sealed the fate of Moses and Aaron later, when the people complained and they said, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Num. 20: 10). There are many interpretations of what went wrong on that occasion but one, undeniably, is that they attributed the action to themselves rather than God (see Hizkuni ad loc.).

Even a king in Jewish law – the office that comes closest to status – is commanded to be humble. He is to carry a Torah scroll with him and read it all the days of his life "so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites" (Deut. 17: 19-20; and see Maimonides, *Laws of Kings*, 2: 6).

In Judaism leadership is not a matter of status but of function. A leader is not one who holds himself higher than those he or she leads. That, in Judaism, is a moral failing not a mark of stature. The absence of hierarchy does not mean the absence of leadership. An orchestra still needs a conductor. A play still needs a director. A team still needs a captain.

A leader need not be a better instrumentalist, actor or player than those he leads. His role is different. He must co-ordinate, give structure and shape to the enterprise, make sure that everyone is following the same script, travelling in the same direction, acting as an ensemble rather than a group of prima donnas. He has to have a vision and communicate it. At times he has to impose discipline. Without leadership even the most glittering array of talents produces, not music but noise. That is not unknown in Jewish life, then and now. "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17: 6, 21: 25). That is what happens when there is no leadership.

The Torah, and Tanakh as a whole, has a marvellous, memorable way of putting this. Moses' highest honour is that he is called eved Hashem, "the servant of God." He is called this, once on his death (Deut. 34: 5), and no less than eighteen times in Tanakh as a whole. The only other person given this title is Joshua, twice. In Judaism, a leader is a servant and to lead is to serve. Anything else is not leadership as Judaism understands it.

Note that we are all God's servants. The Torah says so: "To Me the Israelites are servants; they are My servants whom I brought out of Egypt" (Lev 25: 55). So it is not that Moses was a different kind of being than we are all called on to be. It is that he epitomised it to the utmost degree. The less there is of self in one who serves God, the more there is of God. Moses was the supreme exemplar of Rabbi Johanan's principle, that "Where you find humility, there you find greatness."

It is one of the sadder features of Judaism we tend to forget that many of the great ideas appropriated by others are in fact ours. So it is with "servant leadership," the phrase and theory associated with Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990). Greenleaf himself derived it from a novel by Hermann Hesse with Buddhist undertones, and in fact the Jewish concept is different from his. Greenleaf held that the leader is the servant of those he leads. In Judaism a leader is the servant of God, not of the people; but neither is he their master. Only God is that. Nor is he above them: he and they are equal. He is simply their teacher, guide, advocate and defender. His task is to remind them endlessly of their vocation and inspire them to be true to it.

In Judaism leadership is not about popularity: "If a scholar is loved by the people of his town, it is not because he is gifted but because he fails to rebuke them in matters of heaven" (Ketubot 105b). Nor is a true leader eager for the job. Almost without exception the great leaders of Tanakh were reluctant to assume the mantle of leadership. Rabban Gamliel summed it up when he said to two sages he wanted to appoint to office: "Do you imagine I am offering you rulership? I am offering you avdut, the chance to serve" (Horayot 10a-b).

That, then, was Korach's mistake. He thought leaders were those who set themselves above the congregation. He was right to say that has no place in Judaism. We are all called on to be God's servants. Leadership is not about status but function. Without tzitzit, a blue robe is just a robe, not a holy garment. Without leadership, the Jewish people is just a people, an ethnic group, not a holy nation. And reminders that we are a holy nation, who then will we become, and why?

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Korach

Not Everything Is Black Or White

Whenever there are 10 male Jews together for a prayer quorum, they are able to publicly sanctify the Name of G-d by reciting Kaddish, Kedusha, etc. This well-known fact is derived from the pasuk "V'Nikkdashiti b'Soch Bnei Yisrael" [Vayikra 22:32]. The Talmud [Berachos 21b] teaches that this requires a minimum of 10 Jews. The Talmud derives this from a Gezeirah Shavah (word comparison) between the word "toch" (in the midst) [Bamidbar 14:35] and the word "toch" in the pasuk in Parshas Korach "separate yourself from the midst (m'toch) this wicked congregation" [Bamidbar 16:21]. To complete the teaching however, one needs to go a step further and link the pasuk in Korach which says "from this midst of this wicked congregation (Eidah)" and a pasuk in Parshas Shlach which speaks of the 10 spies who returned the slanderous report about the Land of Israel and calls them "this wicked congregation" (ha'Eidah ha'Ra-ah hazos) [Bamidbar 14:35]. In other words, Eidah means 10 and that derivation can be transferred to the pasuk in Korach, which does not specify a number of people.

[This is the derivation in the Talmud Bavli and it is admittedly somewhat convoluted. In fact, the Jerusalem Talmud has a different derivation using the pasuk "And the children of Israel came in the midst (b'toch) of those who came" [Bereshis 42:5] (regarding the brothers of Yosef's arrival in Egypt).]

It is certainly ironic that the entire concept of Sanctifying G-d's Name in the presence of a minyan quorum is derived from a combination of the

wicked congregation of Korach and the spies in the wilderness, both of whom were guilty of grievous sins.

Here is a similar peculiarity:

Moshe is challenged by Korach: Why have you set up this caste system such that only the Kohanim are entitled to the Divine Service? In response to Moshe's challenge, Korach brought 250 people who all offered Ketores [incense] – a job normally reserved for the Kohanim – and the people were all burnt on the spot as a Divine sign that their challenge had no basis and that Aharon was the legitimate Kohen. What was the aftermath of this incident? G-d told Moshe to melt down the fire pans that were in the hands of these 250 henchmen of Korach who attempted to offer the incense and to make a covering for the Mizbayach as a memorial for the Jewish people. If we were there and someone would have asked "What should we do with these pans?" what would we have said? Most likely we would have shouted "Treife!" These are the pans of sinful people who received Divine punishment. We would have thought that the very implement used to commit their sin would be strictly forbidden for use. It should be buried or destroyed. Certainly it should not be elevated to a holy purpose and become part of the sacred Mizbayach. What is going on here?

My good friend Rabbi Yakov Luban had a simple insight which addresses both of these difficulties: We as human beings view things as either black or white, pure or impure, kosher or treife. They are either one or the other. The Master of the Universe however, in His Infinite Wisdom, sometimes sees positive motivations even in evil deeds.

Korach challenged Moshe's leadership. As Rashi explains, there was an element of jealousy and an attempt to grab power from Moshe. But there was also an element in Korach's campaign to gain a bigger role in the Divine Service. Korach and his followers felt themselves to be Holy and they wanted to live up to their full potential of being Holy by participating in the Divine Service. The Talmud even obliquely criticizes Moshe's put down of Korach and his followers when he told them "Rav Lachem" [Bamidbar 16:7] [too much for you]. The exact same words were thrown back at Moshe, so to speak, when he asked to enter the Land of Canaan, despite Hashem's decree that he would die before entering the Land. "Rav Lach" [Devorim 3:26] is what he is told. This implies that Korach did have within his scheme a desire and a striving to achieve holiness, which should not have been totally rejected. Hashem recognized those aspirations and such aspiration are indeed "holy" and can be used as the basis for deriving the necessary prayer quorum to recite matters of holiness.

Likewise, when 250 people risked their lives to become closer to Hashem and to participate in His Service, there was something good in that motivation as well. There was inherent Kedusha in those pans that they used in their attempts to become participants in the Divine Service. That Kedusha – in the Eyes of the Almighty – could be harnessed for an appropriate covering for the Mizbayach.

In the case of the Meraglim as well, as the commentaries explain at length, there were multiple motivations that caused their report to come out the way it did. There were also positive intentions in what they said. According to some, they felt the people would not be able to live up to the high standards of Eretz Yisrael; according to others they wanted to maintain the idyllic spiritual existence that they had in the Wilderness. Whatever the reason, it was certainly not just a lack of faith in the Almighty. They were wrong, but they were not entirely evil.

The lesson is that the Almighty sees Kedusha even in the apparent evil of the Congregation of Korach and Counsel of the Spies. Even from these less than totally blameless individuals, there is room to find a derivation for the idea of Sanctity within the Jewish people.

The lesson is that people are very complex. They do things for a variety of reasons and there can be Light and Darkness intermingled in their actions and motivations.

The Satmar Rebbe once said that he recalled hearing his great-grandfather (the Yismach Moshe) tell his grandfather (the Yitav Lev) that the Yismach Moshe lived in this world three times. In other words, via the institution of Gilgul Neshamos [transmigration of souls], he came to this world on three different occasions. The first time he was in this world, he claimed, was in the period of the Wilderness at the time of the incident of the Congregation

of Korach. Upon hearing this, the Yitav Lev asked his father to tell him about the events of that time. The Yismach Moshe told his son that all the Heads of the Sanhedrin sided with Korach and the masses of the people sided with Moshe. The Yitav Lev then pressed his father and asked him "Who did you side with?" He responded "I was neutral". Whereupon the Yitav Lev asked him, "How could you not pick sides? – It was Korach against Moshe Rabbeinu and you stood on the sidelines? How could that be?"

The Yitav Lev told his son, I can see that you have no inkling of what a great person Korach was. If you would have been there and you would have seen who Korach was (as Rashi says, Korach was very clever and was one who carried the Aron), you would not be so shocked by my neutrality. Korach wanted Kedusha. There was an element of good within his argument. It was hard to choose sides.

This is the lesson we learn from the fact that the fire pans were utilized as a covering for the Mizbayach. Human beings are very complex. Things are not always just black and white. More often, they are shades of gray.

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A Good and Wise Wife: What Could Be Better?

Rabbi Eliyahu Safran

There is a reason that it is men who charge to war.

When is the passion that drives a man to rise up to fight informed by the will of God? When is his rush to arms "righteous indignation" and when is it simply hubris, or worse? Men all too often become consumed with their passions to right a perceived slight; all too often afire by their quest for power. In that heat of passion, of indignation, of perceived righteousness a man's ability to reason is often overwhelmed and his ability to coolly assess his best and most appropriate way forward is too often lost.

He is awash in foolish pride.

When that happens, when the fire of the moment consume a man's ability to reason, he is fortunate indeed if he has a good wife by his side. And if he has the good fortune to have a good wife, then his most sincere prayer should be for the good sense to listen to her.

As the rabbis teach us, the Korach rebellion offers a case in point.

Our understanding of the rebellion is straightforward. Korach, a wealthy leader of the Levites, and a cousin of Moses and Aaron, felt slighted by being overlooked when the highest priestly honors were distributed. Jealousy and envy colored his relationship with Moses and Aaron, as well as his cousin, Elzaphan, who had been placed at the head of the Levites after Aaron's family had become elevated to the rank of Kohanim.

Recognizing that his riches and standing was not enough to undermine the people's faith in Moses and Aaron, Korach sought a rebellion to overthrow their leadership.

He went to the people of the tribe of Reuben and convinced their leaders to join him in his conspiracy, aligning with Dathan and Abiram, troublemakers since their days in Egypt. With his co-conspirators, he convinced as many as 250 leaders to join him in rebellion. 250 men of standing! Emboldened by their numbers, they felt ready to directly confront Moses' leadership.

The horrible result of their hubris is well-recounted by the rabbis. BaMidbar Rabbah recounts how Korach suffered the double punishment of being burned and buried alive. Indeed, the very earth became like a funnel and everything that belonged to him fell along with him into the chasm.

How is it that a man, a mighty and important man, could allow himself to be engulfed with such rebellious passion? There are several explanations but the one that rings true is that he did not have a good and wise wife at his side. The rabbis suggest that when he consulted his wife, she encouraged him to revolt. "See what Moses has done! He has proclaimed himself king; he has made his brother High Priest, and his brother's sons priests..."

How much better for Ohn, the son of Peles, who had a good and wise woman at his side!

Ohn had been an early leader and organizers of Korach's rebellion. However, when the fight was engaged, he was absent. It was no fear that kept him away from the confrontation. It was his wife. And she made sure that his co-conspirators would not have access to him, lest they try and draw him back into the ungodly morass.

Unlike Korach's wife, who fed her husband's wounded pride, Ohn's wife, challenged him, "What have you to gain from this folly? Even should Korach win, he will be Kohen Gadol and you will be subservient to him, as you are now to Moshe and Aaron."

In other words, "Think, you fool! What have you to gain by engaging in this behavior? Nothing!"

The Talmud praises her wisdom, citing a verse in Mishlei "Chochmos nashim bansa beisa" (the wise women [each one] builds her house.) In contrast, the Talmud passes judgment on Korach's wife, "veiveles be'yadeia te'arsenu" (and the foolish one destroys it with her own hands.)

R' Chaim Shmulevitz explains that dispute, conflict, confrontation and chaos inevitably cloud a person's rational thinking. Fury, anger, emotions and tensions simply do not allow one to view situations clearly and honestly. It is then, in the midst of that heat of passion, that simple, rational advice and guidance from a well-meaning, caring wife is praiseworthy. To have a level-headed, clever wife at one's side who can see and evaluate life's situations, especially when chaos and confusion reigns supreme, and who can lead her hot-headed husband away from his shtik is a wife such as Mishlei calls wise.

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Korach: Inclusion and Selection

"Korach was a clever fellow - what did he see to get involved in this folly? His mind's eye fooled him. He saw by prophetic vision that a line of great men would descend from him, including the prophet Samuel, who was the equal of Moses and Aaron together." (Midrash Tanchuma 5)

While the Midrash appears to belittle Korach's dispute as foolish, that argument that Korach put forth - "All of the congregation is holy, and God is in their midst" (Num. 16:3) - does not seem silly at all. Is not Korach simply restating what God told the entire nation, "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2)? What was so wrong with his claim? Why did Moses insist that only Aaron and his descendants could serve as priests?

Korach's mistake is rooted in the dialectic between two distinct forms of divine providence: inclusion (kirvah), and selection (bechirah). During certain periods, the service of God was inclusive, available to all. At other times, God chose certain persons or places to bear a higher level of sanctity, in order to elevate the rest of the world through them.

The Temple and the Bamot

One example of the historical give-and-take between these two conflicting approaches is the status of bamot, private altars for bringing offerings to God.

Until the Tabernacle was set up in Shiloh, individuals were permitted to offer sacrifices on private altars throughout the country. During the 369 years that the Tabernacle stood in Shiloh, these bamot were prohibited, and all offerings had to be brought to the central service in Shiloh. After the destruction of the Shiloh Tabernacle, the bamot were again permitted. With the selection of the city of Jerusalem and the building of the Temple on Mount Moriah, however, the bamot were banned forever.

When permitted, these private altars could be established in any location. They allowed all to approach God; even non-priests could offer sacrifices. The periods when bamot were permitted reflect an inclusive form of divine worship, enabling all to approach God and serve Him.

For the service in the Tabernacle and the Temple, on the other hand, only the descendants of Aaron were allowed to serve. When Shiloh and later

Jerusalem were chosen to host the Holy Ark, the divine service was limited to the boundaries of those cities and their holy structures. Unlike the bamot, which were accessible to all, the Tabernacle and the Temple were enclosed buildings, set apart by walls and barriers. The various levels of holiness were spatially restricted. Thus the Talmud (Yoma 54a) teaches that the Shechinah (Divine Presence) was confined to the space between the two poles of the Holy Ark.

Pillar Service

A second example of the contrast between these two approaches may be seen in the use of a single pillar (matzeivah) to serve God. The pillar was an open form of worship, attracting people to gather around it, without walls or restrictions. This form of Divine service was appropriate for the time of Abraham, who tried to spread the concept of monotheism throughout the world.

In Moses' day, however, serving God through pillars became forbidden (Deut. 16:22). After the election of the Jewish people, it became necessary to first elevate the people of Israel. Only afterwards will the rest of the world attain recognition of God. Divine service thereafter required boundaries - the walls of the Tabernacle and Temple - in order to cultivate the holiness within.

Prophecy Only in Israel

A similar process took place regarding prophecy. Until the Sinaitic revelation, the phenomenon of prophecy existed in all nations. At Sinai, however, Moses requested that God's Divine Presence only dwell within the people of Israel: "[If You accompany us], I and Your people will be distinguished from every nation on the face of the earth" (Ex. 33:16; see Berachot 7a).

While the boundaries created by the selection of Jerusalem and the Jewish people will always exist, the distinction of the Aaron's descendants as kohanim is not permanent. In the future, all of Israel will be elevated to the level of priests. God's declaration to Israel, "You will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to Me" (Ex. 19:6), refers to this future era.

Korach's Vision

As the Midrash explains, Korach was misled by his prophetic vision. He discerned the essential truth, "All of the congregation is holy, and God is in their midst." Yet the time for this vision belongs to the distant future. Korach only saw a private vision -- ruach hakodesh -- not a universal prophecy meant to be publicized and acted upon.

Moses alluded to the future nature of Korach's vision when he dictated the type of test to be used. The dedications of the kohanim and the Tabernacle involved sin-offerings and burnt-offerings, so it would have been logical to suggest that Korach's men attempt to offer similar offerings. Moses, however, suggested that they offer incense. He hinted that Korach's vision reflected an underlying truth, but one for the distant future, when sin-offerings will no longer be needed to atone for our wrongdoing.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 252-255; Adapted from Shemuot HaRe'iyah, Korach (5691/1931))

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

The True Saga of Charles, the "Kohen"

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In honor of Parshas Korach, in which kohanim feature so significantly, I bring you:

Imagine the splendor of the Beis HaMikdash, with the kohanim wearing their pure white robes and turbans and their techeiles belts, racing to fulfill the wondrous avodah that brings the Jewish people close to Hashem! Not to mention the ornate garments of the kohen gadol, so beautiful that a gentile who heard about them was inspired to become Jewish, simply for the opportunity to wear them (Shabbos 31a)!

Indeed, the magnificent role of the kohen, not only for klal Yisrael, but also for the entire world, was not lost on Charles, the hero of the following story.

All his life, even before he was at all observant, Charles had known that he was a kohen. He knew that as a kohen he was entitled to the first aliyah when the Torah is read. When Charles became observant, he began duchening. He then learned about receiving pidyon haben money and began to envision himself wearing kohen's garb and serving in the Beis HaMikdash. And so, Charles made it his hobby to study the laws that affect kohanim and particularly to know the gifts that they receive.

Charles knew about many of the honoraria a kohen receives today, and also began studying about what kohanim will receive when the Beis HaMikdash will be rebuilt. Here are some of the laws he learned:

CHALLAH

Instead of the small challah portion that we separate from our doughs and burn nowadays, when the Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt, we will separate a larger piece that we will then give to the kohen, for him and his family to eat in a state of taharah.

TERUMAH

Similarly, the terumah portion separated on all produce grown in Eretz Yisrael will be larger and given to the kohen, in addition to terumas maaser which constitutes 1% of the crop. Both the kohanim and their family members may eat terumah and terumas maaser when they are tahorim.

Before eating terumah or challah, a kohen will recite a special bracha, "Asher kideshanu bikedushaso shel aharon vetzivanu al achilas terumah," Blessed are You, Hashem our G-d, King of the Universe, who sanctified us with the holiness of Aharon and commanded us concerning the eating of terumah (see Rambam, Hil. Terumos 15:22). The daughter of a Levi or Yisrael who married a kohen may also eat terumah and challah; however, the poskim debate whether she recites this bracha before eating terumah. Some contend that she does not, since she is not "sanctified with the holiness of Aharon," but married into it. Her ability to eat terumah is technically a gift to her husband, since he may now provide for her with his terumah (Yeshu'os Malko, Hil. Bikkurim 1:2). Others maintain that she does recite a bracha, although they are uncertain whether she recites the text of the bracha with the words kideshanu bikedushaso shel aharon, that you have sanctified us with the holiness of Aharon, since she herself does not have this kedusha; perhaps she recites a bracha with a different text (Mishnah Rishonah, Terumos 8:1).

BIKKURIM

When the Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt, each farmer will bring there the first fruits of the seven species for which Eretz Yisrael is famous (wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates) and make a lengthy declaration of thanks to Hashem for all the help He has given us. These fruits (grains are also fruits) will become the property of the kohanim with the same sanctity as challah and terumah. The kohen will recite a bracha before eating them (Rambam, Hil. Bikkurim 1:2).

BECHOR

Male firstborn of kosher animals owned by Jews are sanctified as korbanos. Because, unfortunately, we still have no Beis HaMikdash, the sanctity of these korbanos creates a serious quandary, since using the animal violates a major Torah prohibition. To avoid this problem, we sell part of the pregnant heifer, ewe or nanny goat to a gentile before she births, which guarantees that the calf, lamb, or kid has no kedusha.

When the Beis HaMikdash is rebuilt, we will no longer be permitted to sell part of the mother animal to a gentile since this would be evading the mitzvah. Instead, the firstborn will be given to the kohen, who will bring it as a korban. He and his family receive the meat from the animal, which they eat while tahorim in Yerushalayim.

By the way, the halachic borders of Yerushalayim affecting these and several other mitzvos are not determined by its current municipal borders, nor are they determined by the current "Old City" walls. The Ottomans

built the current Old City walls which exclude parts of the original city that has kedushas Yerushalayim and include areas that were not part of the city. The Mishnah (Shavuos 14a) instructs what one must do in order to expand the city of Yerushalayim from a halachic perspective, and, until the Sanhedrin performs this procedure, one may perform the mitzvos that require being in Yerushalayim only in places that had kedusha in the time of the Second Beis HaMikdash (see Keilim 1:8).

PETTER CHAMOR

A firstborn male donkey owned by a Jew is exchanged for a sheep or goat that is given to a kohen (Shemos 13:13; Mishnah Bechoros 9a). Instead of giving the kohen a sheep or goat, the owner may elect instead to give the firstborn donkey itself to a kohen or give the kohen something of equal value to the firstborn donkey. Exchanging for a sheep or goat is to save the owner money should he want to – he may exchange a more expensive donkey for a newborn lamb or kid which are worth far less.

Why is there no mitzvah to redeem the firstborn of other non-kosher species as well? The Gemara (Bechoros 5b) explains that this mitzvah is a reward for the donkey for helping transport Bnei Yisrael and their property out of Egypt. Thus, this mitzvah teaches hakaras hatov, the importance of gratitude. If the Torah requires honoring an animal as a reward for appreciating and reciprocating the assistance we received from its ancestors thousands of years ago, how much more must we appreciate and reciprocate the good we receive and have received from our parents, teachers, and spouses!

MATANOS

Every time a Jew slaughters a kosher domestic animal, a kohen receives three sections of the animal: the upper right foreleg (this includes half the shoulder roasts); the mandible (cheek and jaw) area including the tongue; and the animal's abomasum, its fourth stomach, which is highly useful in food production. Why does the Torah give the kohen these three specific parts? Rav Hirsch (in his commentary to Devarim 18:1) explains that they represent the Jew's desire that the kohen provide Torah guidance to the Jew's actions (represented by the right forearm), his speech, and his pleasure (represented by the stomach that digests).

THE MEAT AND THE HIDES FROM KORBANOS

The kohanim also receive the hides and meat from most korbanos. The location where the kohen eats this meat and whether his family shares it with him depend on the sanctity of the korban; kodoshim kodoshim are eaten only by male kohanim and only in the chatzeir (courtyard) of the Beis HaMikdash, whereas kodoshim kalim may be eaten by the kohen's family anywhere in the Biblical city of Yerushalayim.

REISHIS HAGEIZ – First Fleece

The kohanim also receive a portion from the first shearing of a Yisrael's wool.

In total, the kohanim receive 24 special gifts (Rambam, Hilchos Bikkurim, Chapter 1) that are meant to remind us of the kohen's special kedusha and to enable him to spend his time bringing the Jewish people close to Hashem by teaching them His Torah.

This all leads to the following question. If the Torah wanted to provide the kohen with a proper stipend so that he could devote himself to teaching Torah and other aspects of kedusha, why didn't it simply provide him with a proper salary? Why provide him with all these small gifts, which add up to a respectful livelihood?

The answer is that the Torah's method requires the Yisrael to interact with the kohen constantly. Since the kohen is a person whose role is to exude holiness, this constant interaction with kohanim influences the rest of Klal Yisrael, increasing its kedusha.

BACK TO CHARLES, OUR KOHEN!

By now, Charles had learned all of these wonderful aspects about being a kohen and this excited him greatly. He also knew about a kohen's special

obligations. Divinely bestowed gifts are accompanied by Torah responsibilities. For example, a kohen may not marry a divorcee or a convert, and may not come into contact with a human corpse. Charles also did not make the common error of thinking that adopting a non-Jewish baby automatically makes the child Jewish. He knew that the baby must be halachically converted, and that a converted girl may not later marry a kohen. Thus, an adopted girl would usually be ineligible to marry a kohen. Charles also learned that a kohen may not marry a woman whose father is not Jewish (Shulchan Aruch Even HaEzer 4:5, 19; cf. Beis Shmuel and Beis Meir, who disagree) and that if a kohen marries a woman forbidden to him, he damages the pedigree of his offspring from this union forever. His wife and children from this union became tarnished and are called chalalim, defiled descendants of a kohen. Not only are the daughters of chalalim forbidden to marry kohanim, but also their sons' daughters and the sons' sons' daughters etc..

PIDYON HABEN FOR A CHALAL'S SON

Charles' rebbe, who was a kohen, told him how he once performed pidyon haben for a baby whose paternal grandfather was a kohen. "How could this be?" Charles asked him.

"The baby's grandfather had unfortunately married a divorcee," the rebbe explained, "and the father performing the pidyon haben was the son of this marriage."

"Prior to performing the pidyon haben for this first-born son," his rebbe had continued, "I met with the parents privately -- very sincere people. I explained to them that any daughters they have in the future may not marry kohanim, although they may marry anyone else. I also told them that when their newborn son has daughters, they also will not be able to marry kohanim. It pained me tremendously to share this information with this sincere young baal teshuvah couple, but I had a halachic responsibility to make sure that they knew this."

WERE THEY REALLY KOHANIM?

Charles had studied the unfortunate story recorded in the Books of Ezra and Nechemiah about certain kohen families who wanted to bring korbanos in the second Beis HaMikdash. He knew that Nechemiah rebuffed them because of concerns about their pedigree (Ezra 2:61-63; Nechemiah 7:63-65). The Gemara states that, although Nechemiah permitted them to eat terumah and to duchen, he prohibited them from eating korbanos or serving in the Beis HaMikdash (Kesubos 24b).

He remembered saying to his rebbe, "Either they are kohanim or they are not! If they are not valid kohanim, then they cannot eat terumah or duchen either. If they can eat terumah and duchen, then why can't they offer korbanos and serve in the Beis HaMikdash?"

His rebbe replied: "The Gemara explains that there is a halachic difference between kohanim meyuchasim, who can prove their pedigree in Beis Din, and kohanei chazakah, kohanim who cannot prove their pedigree, but have a family tradition that they are kohanim. In the time of the Beis HaMikdash only a kohen who could prove the purity of his lineage could serve" (Rambam, Hilchos Issurei Biyah 20:2; Kaftor VaFerach Vol. 1, page 101 in the 5757 edition. Note that some poskim contend that this requirement was not essential, see Shu't Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah #236 and writings of Rav Tzvi Hersh Kalisher).

Charles was stunned, "If only a kohen who can prove his kehunah may offer korbanos, and there are no surviving kohanim who can prove their kehunah, how will we ever again be able to bring korbanos?"

"The Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 12:3) explains that Moshiach will use his Ruach HaKodesh to determine who is indeed a kosher kohen who may serve in the Beis HaMikdash," his rebbe told him.

IS THE REALLY A KOHEN?

When Charles was in Yeshiva, one of his baal teshuvah friends, Mordechai, had the following shaylah: "My grandfather, who was not observant and often boastful, often claimed that we are kohanim, but I have no verification of this. I even had someone check the cemetery where my great-grandfather was buried, and there is no mention of his being a

kohen on his tombstone. Should I be duchening, and may I marry a woman prohibited to a kohen?"

Mordechai was told that he was not a kohen, and should treat himself as a Yisrael concerning all halachos. Since most Jews are Yisraelim, someone who is uncertain of his pedigree should assume that he is a Yisrael. Furthermore, Mordechai was told that there was no point for him to check tombstones unless one knew that a halachically knowledgeable and reliable person had authorized the inscription. One cannot assume that the person who authorized the data on a tombstone had any halachic authority, and therefore its information carries no credibility.

Mordechai's shaylah got Charles thinking. All his life, even before he was at all observant, he had known that he was a kohen. Why did he assume so when no one had been observant in his father's family for several generations? When Charles became observant, he began duchening. He envisioned himself wearing kohen's garb and serving in the Beis HaMikdash. Now he had to try to trace his kohanic origins. Were they authentic? He remembered his grandfather, a proud, although not a halachically observant or knowledgeable, Jew, saying that they were kohanim.

Many times Charles tried to trace the lineage, but each of his leads led nowhere.

Meanwhile, Charles discovered that being a kohen meant more than avoiding cemeteries and funerals; he discovered that there were streets, parks and highways to avoid, and that even going to museums was frequently problematic. Flying to and from Eretz Yisrael required advanced research to make sure that there were no meisim on the plane and that it did not fly over cemeteries. Touring Israel also required advanced planning and certain sites, such as the Arizal's mikveh, Kever Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and Kever Rachel were completely off-limits.

CHARLES STARTS SHIDDUCHIN

When the time came for Charles to begin shidduchin, he could postpone no longer. He knew he had to ask a shaylah, yet he procrastinated for a long time before he asked what to do. Finally, he went to a prominent gadol and asked him.

After hearing Charles' story, the gadol asked him if he had continued to duchen even after he realized that there was no real evidence of his being a kohen. Charles answered that he had continued to duchen. The gadol then asked him why he continued duchening if he was convinced that there was no evidence that he was a kohen. Charles answered because he does not believe his grandfather would fabricate a story that they were kohanim. The gadol then ruled that since Charles truly believed he was a kohen, and had acted as such, he must treat himself as a kohen lechumrah, a term Charles had never heard before.

Afterwards, Charles' rebbe explained to him the rationale of the gadol's psak. By continuing to duchen despite the lack of evidence to that affect, Charles had declared that he believed himself to be a kohen. Halacha calls this shayvei anafshei chaticha de'isura, one who has made items prohibited for himself by his actions or declarations. Since only a kohen may duchen, when Charles duchened he was declaring that he considered himself a kohen, which obligated him to adhere to all the strictures of being a kohen. Thus, he may not marry any woman forbidden to a kohen or make himself tamei to a corpse.

However, since Charles has no evidence that he is a kohen, he is not entitled to the benefits of that noble status. He may not receive the money for pidyon haben, duchen, or receive the first aliyah to the Torah.

Charles stopped duchening and began informing people that they should call him to the Torah as a Yisrael. Upon the advice of his rebbe, he decided not to advertise his unusual halachic status, but would discreetly assume that his shidduchin should only be with women who could marry a kohen. He does not attend funerals and is careful not to travel on roads where trees overhang cemeteries.

The gadol had told Charles that his unique halachic status applies only to himself, but not to his children in the future. Since they never duchened, they never declared that they believe themselves to be kohanim, and are considered Yisraelim regarding all halachos. Charles truly believes he is a

kohen, although he has no evidence to sustain this belief. His sons have no reasons to believe that they are kohanim since they never knew his grandfather.

Charles now uses his Hebrew name, has in the interim become a big talmid chacham, and now has adult children who do not know why their father never seems to have time to go to a funeral. They never noticed that "Charles" rarely goes to museums and is always tremendously curious about kohen-related issues. Aside from his rebbe and his wife, few people know any more about Charles' unique status. He might even be the fellow who was just called up for shlishi!

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Corach - Pidyon Haben (Redemption of the First Born)

Rabbi Asher Meir

The mitzvah of pidyon haben, mentioned at the end of our parsha (Bamidbar 18:15), is the subject of a scintillating Chassidic exposition in the teachings of Rav Nachman of Breslav, as explicated by his disciple Rav Natan Sternhartz in Likutei Halakhot. Rav Nachman's approach uncovers a hidden meaning in the momentous events of the Exodus, and gives us a new insight into the role of the Jewish people.

Chassidic thought discerns an active aspect in creation, associated with the transmission of a seed or potential for growth and development, and a passive aspect which enables the realization of this potential by accepting and nurturing it. G-d's presence is manifest in the world when these two capacities are properly matched and lead to the propagation - that is the conception, birth and development - of holiness in the world. But without HaShem's active influence, there is no growth; the material world in itself is essentially sterile.

The first-born, as the inauguration and initiation of this process of propagation, naturally symbolizes the essence of the process.

But the sad truth is that the creation does not always acknowledge its sacred Progenitor. The essentially sterile material world, which owes all its growth and development to the spiritual influx from HaShem, sometimes declares independence and arrogantly claims mastery over creation. Its favored target is the "first-born", which symbolizes the power of propagation which is in fact completely lacking from this world, as this power is totally dependent on HaShem.

One of the most audacious attempts at this fraud was the sale of Yosef, who was the first-born of Rachel, Yaakov's primary wife. Yosef was also a tzaddik, one who staunchly maintains his connection with the higher world of holiness; his dreams indicated the proper order of creation, where all creatures would bow down and acknowledge the supremacy of righteousness. (Bereshit 37:7, 37:9.)

Yosef was sold for twenty silver pieces into slavery in Egypt (Bereshit 37:28), the ancient world's outstanding example of thralldom to the flesh, where he faced the most strenuous temptations which sought to sever his connection to holiness and modesty. Eventually, as the first-born, he was the vanguard of the entire family of Israel, all of whom entered the exile of Egypt and faced the resolute efforts of sterile materiality to enslave and extinguish the flowering of holiness.

In the end, our Jewish commitment to righteousness and chastity succeeded in completely overcoming this danger. Egypt did not overcome Israel, who are HaShem's first-born (Shemot 4:22); rather, Egypt's first-born were wiped out. And rather than falling into the hands of the wealth of Egypt, the wealth of Egypt fell into our hands! (Shemot 12:36.) We emptied Egypt of its riches - symbolizing our ability to subordinate our material desires and exploit the treasures of this world in the service of holiness. We took the remains of Yosef with us, symbolizing the utter failure of the carnality of Egypt to ensnare us in the slightest degree. (Shemot 13:19.)

However, the Exodus was only a battle in our continuing and unrelenting war against subordination to material desires, a war which will end only in the time of the final redemption. We have to constantly demonstrate that our "first-born", our power of growth and renewal, comes solely from

HaShem. The redemption from the Kohen suggests that the first-born in effect "belongs" to the Kohen, who represents devotion to G-d's service. [It seems that this is particularly important since the sin of the golden calf, where some of the first-born showed that they were still liable to succumb to the rule of gold, of riches. But the tribe of Levi completely resisted this temptation.]

We redeem our first-born from the Kohen for five selaim which are twenty gerah, recalling the twenty silver pieces for which Yosef was sold. (Bamidbar 18:16.) The money which we received from the merchants, who epitomize subordination to earthly concerns, is now given to the Kohen, who epitomize the subordination of earthly concerns to holiness.

We can discern a similar message in the mitzvot pertaining to the first-born of the chamor (donkey), which represents chomer, materiality. We have the ability to redeem the material world by giving its exchange to the Kohen, symbolizing its subordination to holiness; if we are unable to redeem it in this way then we have no choice but to destroy it. (Shemot 13:13.)

(Based on Likutei Halakhot on pidyon bechor and pidyon peter chamor; see also Igrot Rayah 555.)

Rabbi Asher Meir is the author of the book Meaning in Mitzvot, distributed by Feldheim. The book provides insights into the inner meaning of our daily practices, following the order of the 221 chapters of the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh.

by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

What Makes Them Different? Nidah 31b

There are many differences between man and woman as a result of the difference in the raw material from which the original man and woman were created by G-d. In our gemara the focus is on two of them – one regarding personality and the other regarding voice.

"Why is it," ask our Sages, "that a man is flexible in accepting appeasement while a woman is not?"

The answer given is that man was created from soft earth while woman was created from man's hard bone.

"Why is a woman's voice so much more pleasant than that of a man?"

Man was created from earth and if one strikes earth no sound comes forth.

Woman was created from bone that does produce a sound when struck.

To prove the quality of the feminine voice, a passage from Shir Hashirim (2:4) is cited:

"Let me hear your voice," is said to the beloved woman, "for your voice is pleasant."

Tosefot points out that when she speaks of her beloved, she describes him as "pure and ruddy" (ibid. 5:10) but offers no praise for his voice.

What the Sages Say

"There are no days in which one enjoys so much good as those days in his mother's womb before birth."

Gemara - Nidah 30b

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Please address all comments and requests to Hamelaket@Gmail.com