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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Jul 4, 2019, 11:25 AM subject: Rav Frand - Korach's Unique Punishment Rav Frand By **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya & Henya Chana Raizel bas Rochel Bayla. To Dedicate an Article click here
Parshas Korach Korach's Unique Punishment

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1081 — Ha'arama: Halachic Loopholes – Advisable or Not? Good Shabbos! Giving Korach and Followers the Opportunity to Say "We Were Wrong!" Parshas Korach contains one of the most upsetting incidents in all of Torah—Korach challenges the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu! Despite the fact that Korach started the fight, Moshe Rabbeinu approached them and tried to make peace. This again points to Moshe's greatness. But Korach does not back down, so Moshe Rabbeinu makes the following challenge: "If Hashem will create a creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive to the pit, then you shall know that these men have provoked Hashem!" [Bamidbar 16:30] In other words, Moshe offered a miraculous Divine sign that it was G-d's Will that Moshe be the leader; if the miracle would fail to occur, it would be a sign that Korach is right and that Moshe usurped the leadership role without Divine acquiescence.

Rashi, on the words "If Hashem will create a creation," writes: "To put them to death through a death which no person has died up to this point. What is this 'creation'? The earth will open its mouth and swallow them. Then you shall know that they provoked Hashem and I have spoken the Word of the Almighty."

Up until this point in history, various strange types of death (miso meshunos) have occurred. Unfortunately, Nadav and Avihu died a strange type of death. There were plagues from Heaven. However, these kinds of death were apparently not sufficient here. It seems strange. Would it have been so bad if Moshe would have merely said, "Listen, if these people suddenly get stopped in

their tracks and drop dead on the spot—that is a sign that Hashem appointed me"? That should have sufficed to convince the people that Moshe was right! Or, what if Moshe would have invoked a fire to come down from Heaven and burn them on the spot? That should have been convincing as well! Snakes coming to bite them would also have been convincing, as well as a host of other types of miraculous punishments.

However, Moshe specifically specified something that never ever happened before, and will never happen again—and that is the earth will open and swallow them alive. Why was that necessary?

Moshe does not just invoke miracles to impress people with G-d's power, as if to say "Watch this trick! I bet you never saw that one before!" Moshe does not do that.

The Margolios HaYam is a Sefer written by Rav Reuven Margolios, who was a prolific author and a great Talmudic scholar. Margolios HaYam is one of the most edifying (Geshmak!) commentaries on Tractate Sanhedrin. There on 109b, he quotes a thought in the name of "the Gaon and Tzadik Rav Yissacher Dov of Belz." (The current Belzer Rebbe bears the same name and is named after this grandfather.) Rav Reuven Margolios writes that he spent Shabbos Parshas Korach 5673 (1913) with the Belzer Rebbe and he heard a thought from Rav Yissacher Dov that he in turn heard from his father explaining why Moshe specifically invoked this miracle:

The Margolios HaYam asks – was Moshe Rabbeinu sadistic? Did he want them, out of personal revenge, to suffer additional suffering before they died, such that it was not sufficient for them merely to drop dead—they needed to slide down into the open earth and feel the terror of being swallowed up like that? The Belzer Rebbe's father said that, on the contrary, Moshe Rabbeinu asked specifically for this punishment out of a sense of mercy and compassion for Korach and his followers. When the earth opened up and swallowed them, they did NOT die then. They were swallowed up and sank into the ground—alive! Suddenly it hit them: Guess what? We are wrong. Moshe was right.

I do not know how long it took for the earth to close back up and for them to suffocate. But they had at least a few seconds to contemplate what happened and to do Teshuva in that interval. Moshe Rabbeinu said, I want them to die, but even if a person is wicked his whole life and the last second of his life he sincerely repents, his Teshuva is accepted! The Belzer Rebbe explained that Moshe requested that their end come this way so that they would have an opportunity during those precious few seconds to recognize their mistake and sincerely repent.

The Gemara in Bava Basra [74a] tells the story of an Arab who found cracks in the ground at the place in the wilderness where Korach and his followers were swallowed up. He heard voices coming from the cracks saying, "Moshe and his Torah are true, and they (themselves) are contrivers." That happened because they had those seconds before expiring to think through the implication of what happened to them. If they would have keeled over and died or if they would have been instantly smitten by a fire from heaven, they would not have had that opportunity.

This speaks to the great compassion and righteousness of Moshe, the great teacher of Israel. Even towards disrespectful and traitorous rebels, he had mercy and was concerned that they be given an opportunity to repent before receiving their final punishment. This was the approach of the father of the earlier Rav Yissacher Dov Rokeach, Rebbe of Belz.

A Second Analysis of the Reason for Korach's Unique Punishment

The current Tolner Rebbe of Jerusalem, Rav Yitzchok Menachem Weinberg, has a different approach to this question. It is a very interesting approach.

Do you know how Korach got people to buy into his rebellion? Korach was selling one of the most popular theories and political philosophies that has been around since the beginning of time. "For all of the congregation, all of them, are holy!" Equality! Everybody is the same. The Tolner Rebbe said they once called this communism. Korach called it Korachism. The motto of the French revolution was quite similar: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity! Equality is the most popular political philosophy that has ever been around. Everybody is equal. Suffrage for women—women getting the vote! Everybody buys into that. Thomas Jefferson: All men are created equal and they have inalienable rights in

the pursuit of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Lincoln freed the slaves. Nelson Mandela stopped apartheid. You want to get popular? Sell them equality!

The Zohar says that Korach disputed Shabbos. What was his problem with Shabbos? His problem was "Why should Shabbos be special? All days are created equal!" All people are the same; all days of the week are the same; all places are the same; everything is created equal. This is Korachism.

The philosophy of the Ribono shel Olam is otherwise. No. Things are not the same. There are Kohanim, Leviim and Yisraelim. There is Shabbos and there are weekdays. There are holy places and there are profane places. And where does the Ribono shel Olam show that this is His opinion? Do you know where He shows that all creation is about differences—varying components of the world which are all necessary for existence? He shows it through G-d's earth. The same earth that gives out wheat, gives out bananas. The earth that gives out and supports life (the Talmud says that animals are considered 'products of the ground') produces all kinds of life—cows, goats, sheep, lions, tigers, elephants, llamas, and all other animals. Creation testifies that components are necessary in this world. Creation testifies that we need differences in this world. Creation testifies that the world is not monochromatic.

Look outside. There is green; there is blue, there is brown – earth colors. This is creation. The earth testifies that the Ribono shel Olam wants symphony in the world. Just like a symphony has different types of instruments, but together they make beautiful music, that is what the world is all about and that is what people are all about. The Almighty did not create a planet of clones. Diversity is the essence of creation.

The biggest single testament to this is the earth. I put man on the earth, but you can only walk on My earth as long as you believe in My philosophy of the earth. Man must believe in My philosophy that everybody is NOT the same. Things are different and they need to be different. Creation requires differences. As long as you believe in that, you can walk on My earth; but the day you say "everything is equal; one size fits all" you cannot walk on My earth anymore.

The natural consequence of rejecting the philosophy of the earth is "the earth opened its mouth." Sorry. You cannot walk on my earth anymore. That is why the punishment of Korach had to be "this new creation which the Almighty will create..." You are wrong Korach. There is Shabbos and there are weekdays; there are the locations like the Sanctuary and there are profane locations; there are Jews and Gentiles; and there are Kohanim, Leviim, and Yisraelim. There are different animals, and plants and colors in the world. This is My world—filled with differences. Not everything is equal.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion.

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Rabbi Yakov Haber Teruma and Ma'aser: Two Models of Divine Beneficence The second half of *parshas Korach* (chapter 18 ff.) outlines the responsibilities of the *Kohanim* to guard and preserve the sanctity of *mishkan*. In this task they are to be assisted by the *Leviyim*. After this outline of responsibilities, the Torah lists the various gifts to be given to the *Kohanim*, the twenty-four *matenos kehuna*, followed by the gift given to the *Leviyim*, namely *ma'aser* - a tenth of the agricultural produce - and the obligation of the Levi to give a portion of his *ma'aser* to the *kohein*, *terumas ma'aser*. At first glance, all of these "gifts" granted to the *Kohanim* and the *Leviyim*, although generally referred to as *matanos*, are not gifts conceptually but actually are a form of remuneration for their service in the *mikdash*. This is seemingly verified by the verse concerning *ma'aser*, "*ki sachar hu lachem cheilef avodaschem b'ohel mo'ed* - for it is a wage for you in exchange for your service in the Tent of Meeting" (*Bamidbar* 18:31, see also 18:21).^[1] However, the fact this verse appears only with respect to the *ma'aser* gift for the Levi and not with respect to any of the gifts given to the *Kohanim* leads several of the commentaries to note

a fundamental difference between the nature of the gifts to the *Kohanim* and that given to his Levi counterpart. *Ohr HaChayim*, on the verse "*ani chelkecha v'nachaloshcho b'toch Bnei Yisroel* (18:20), states concerning the *matenos kehuna*, "there is no item which Israel produces [in which] *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* does not have a share along with them, but the *Kohein* takes it [in His stead], with regard to fruits, bread, meat, wine, oil, and all the other twenty-four gifts." This clearly indicates that the gifts are really due to Hashem, and He grants them to the *Kohanim*. However, concerning *ma'aser*, *Ohr HaChayim* writes clearly, "Concerning the *Leviyim*, He did not state '*ani chelkecha*' etc. for the *leviyim* do not acquire the share of G_d. This is why they too have to give the share of G_d, namely *teruma* - *ma'aser* from the *ma'aser*. This is like common salary to serve the holy one, the *kohein*, and [in] the *Ohel Mo'ed*." Later (v. 31), *Ohr HaChayim* utilizes this distinction to explain why *teruma* has sanctity and restrictions concerning its eating whereas *ma'aser* has no such restrictions. In contrast to the priestly gifts which are granted from Hashem's share, *kiv'yachol*, *ma'aser* is characterized as unsanctified salary for the Levite's work. *Netziv*, in his *Ha'ameik Davar* (18:31), corroborates *Ohr HaChayim*'s thesis and writes concerning *ma'aser*: "And you shall eat it in all places 100% even the portion to be eaten which one might have thought 50% is given for their service and, as a result, one should treat it with a degree of sanctity; therefore, the verse clarifies that it may be eaten even in a cemetery, 'for it is a wage for you 100%', not like the *matenos kehunah*, which come as a present from *cheilek gavo'a* (G_d's portion), rather it is characterized as salary, and, as such, has no sanctity." *Netziv* with the use of the phrase, "*cheilek gavo'a*", alludes to several places in the Talmud where the *Kohanim* are considered as eating from the *shulchan gavo'a*, the table of the One on High (see *Beitza* 21a, *Kiddushin* 52b, and others). *Netziv* apparently extends this Talmudic concept to *kadshei gevul*, gifts granted the *Kohein* even outside the *midkash*, such as *teruma*, and perhaps even to those without specific sanctity such as *reishis hazez* (first wool harvest) and *zero'a*, *lechayayim*, and *keiva* given from each animal slaughtered outside the *mikdash*.^[2] What emerges from the above duality is that there are two forms of gifts granted by Hashem to the *Kohanim* and *Leviyim*; the first type represents eating at the King's table, so to speak, and the second gift is a form of wages for service to be utilized by the public servant. Perhaps these two models can serve as the basis to homiletically derive dual messages for the relationship of Hashem *Yisborach* to each individual Jew. Certainly every Jew can partake of a *korban shelamim* or other *kadashim kalim*, the meat of which is characterized once again as from *shulchan Gavo'a* (see *Beitza* 21a). Even ordinary *Yisraelim* partake of agricultural produce which are imbued with sanctity: *ma'aser sheini* - the second tithe to be eaten in Jerusalem in a state of *tahara* - and *neta riv'ai* - the produce of a tree's fourth year's fruit yield. The Talmud (see *Kiddushin* 52b, 54b) debates whether these are considered *mamon hedyot* or *mamon gavo'a*. Perhaps the latter view (the accepted view of Rabbi Meir) contains an element in common with *teruma*, namely some aspect of even the ordinary Jew receiving sustenance from Hashem's table. Whereas most bounty one partakes of in this world is not imbued with sanctity, all of our physical blessings, in a sense, come from our Creator's "expense account" which he is granting us to utilize for his service. In the famous words of Rambam (*Peirush Hamishnayos*, *Sanhedrin* 10:1 based on *Avos* 4:2, also see *Hilchos Teshuva* 9) explains that the meaning of *Chazal*'s statement, "*s'char mitzvah mitzvah*", is that the purpose of physical "reward" in this world is more physical blessings with which to perform additional *mitzvos*. An analogy can be drawn to a successful salesman, who utilizes his initial budget to great success for his company. His employer is most likely to grant him a large budget for his next trips in order to net an even greater profit for the company. So too when Hashem sees that we are utilizing His blessings properly, He will often grant us more to do even more. This follows the "*ma'aser model*", one of salary. But, at its core, we are all beneficiaries of the "King's table", as represented by the *teruma* model. *Iyov* (35:7) teaches "*im tzodakto ma titein lo* - if you are righteous, what do you give Him?" Ultimately, all that we do does not affect Hashem at all, and, ultimately, the eternity that we gain is for ourselves. Hashem's blessings to us are never really "earned" in the classic sense. In *Ramchal*'s (see *Derech Hashem*) famous explanation of the purpose of *mitzvos*, he explains that Hashem grants us eternal reward in a more perfect

way such that we "earn" it in order to be spared the embarrassment of "a handout". But this is only on the surface level. Ultimately, King David declares, "*mimcho hakol u'miyadcha no'sa'nu loch*", (Divrei Hayamim 1:29:14) - all comes from our Creator, and it is from His bounty and utilizing all the tools He granted us that we serve Him. The verse states "*mi hakdimeini vo'ashalem - who has preceded Me and I shall pay him!*" (Iyov 41:3). On this, the Midrash (Tanchuma *Emor 7*) comments that if a person is feeling that G_d's "owes him" because he wears *tzitzis*, Hashem reminds him that he provided him with the clothing. If one feels he gives massive amounts to charity, G_d reminds him that he provided him with all of the funds.^[3] Even our intellect and our very ability to act in the world are all Divinely granted and sustained. Even if, for the most part, it appears that Divine blessings are granted to us in a "*ma'aser*" style "salary" fashion, fundamentally, we are all like *Kohanim* partaking of the King's table throughout our lives. May we always merit Hashem's blessings, and, even more importantly, recognizing our King and Father's kindness always.

^[1]Indeed, *Ketzos HaChoshen* (243:43.) seems to apply the halachic category of *sechirus po'alim to teruma*. But see *Miluas Even* there that this might be a borrowed use of this terminology. ^[2]Postscript: For a more thorough treatment of the distinction between *matnos kehuna* and *matnos leviyah* including many sources from *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* that do not distinguish between them, see *Minchas Asher al Hatorah (Bemidbar 37)*. ^[3]Also see *Bemidbar Rabba* (14:2) for a different interpretation of this verse which further verifies the Rambam's approach mentioned earlier.

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Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Argument for the Sake of Heaven (Korach 5779) Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Korach rebellion was not just the worst of the revolts from the wilderness years. It was also different in kind because it was a direct assault on Moses and Aaron. Korach and his fellow rebels in essence accused Moses of nepotism, of failure, and above all of being a fraud – of attributing to God decisions and laws that Moses had devised himself for his own ends. So grave was the attack that it became, for the Sages, a paradigm of the worst kind of disagreement:

Which is an argument for the sake of Heaven? The argument between Hillel and Shammai. Which is an argument not for the sake of Heaven? The argument of Korach and his company. (Mishnah Avot 5:17)

Menahem Meiri (Catalonia, 1249–1306) explains this teaching in the following terms:

The argument between Hillel and Shammai: In their debates, one of them would render a decision and the other would argue against it, out of a desire to discover the truth, not out of cantankerousness or a wish to prevail over his fellow. An argument not for the sake of Heaven was that of Korach and his company, for they came to undermine Moses, our master, may he rest in peace, and his position, out of envy and contentiousness and ambition for victory.^[1]

The Sages were drawing a fundamental distinction between two kinds of conflict: argument for the sake of truth and argument for the sake of victory.

The passage must be read this way, because of the glaring discrepancy between what the rebels said and what they sought. What they said was that the people did not need leaders. They were all holy. They had all heard the word of God. There should be no distinction of rank, no hierarchy of holiness, within Israel. "Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" (Num. 16:3). Yet from Moses' reply, it is clear that he had heard something altogether different behind their words:

Moses also said to Korach, "Now listen, you Levites! Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the rest of the Israelite community and brought you near Himself to do the work at the Lord's Tabernacle and to stand before the community and minister to them? He has brought you and all your fellow Levites near Himself, but now you are trying to get the Priesthood too." (Num. 16:8–10)

It was not that they wanted a community without leaders. It is, rather, that they wanted to be the leaders. The rebels' rhetoric had nothing to do with the pursuit of truth and everything to do with the pursuit of honour, status, and (as they

saw it) power. They wanted not to learn but to win. They sought not verity but victory.

We can trace the impact of this in terms of the sequence of events that followed. First, Moses proposed a simple test. Let the rebels bring an offering of incense the next day and God would show whether He accepted or rejected their offering. This is a rational response. Since what was at issue was what God wanted, let God decide. It was a controlled experiment, an empirical test. God would let the people know, in an unambiguous way, who was right. It would establish, once and for all, the truth. But Moses did not stop there, as he would have done if truth were the only issue involved. As we saw in the quote above, Moses tried to argue Korach out of his dissent, not by addressing his argument but by speaking to the resentment that lay behind it. He told him that he had been given a position of honour. He may not have been a Priest but he was a Levite, and the Levites had special sacred status not shared by the other tribes. He was telling him to be satisfied with the honour he had and not let his ambition overreach itself.

He then turned to Datan and Aviram, the Reubenites. Given the chance, he would have said something different to them since the source of their discontent was different from that of Korach. But they refused to meet with him altogether – another sign that they were not interested in the truth. They had rebelled out of a profound sense of slight that the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn son, seemed to have been left out altogether from the allocation of honours.

At this point, the confrontation became yet more intense. For the one and only time in his life, Moses staked his leadership on the occurrence of a miracle:

Then Moses said, "By this you shall know that it was the Lord who sent me to do all these things, that they were not of my own devising: If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all mankind, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt." (Num. 16:28–30)

No sooner had he finished speaking than "the ground under them split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them" (Num. 16:32). The rebels "went down alive into the grave" (16:33). One cannot imagine a more dramatic vindication. God had shown, beyond possibility of doubt, that Moses was right and the rebels wrong. Yet this did not end the argument. That is what is extraordinary. Far from being apologetic and repentant, the people returned the next morning still complaining – this time, not about who should lead whom but about the way Moses had chosen to end the dispute: "The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 'You have killed the Lord's people,' they said" (17:6).

You may be right, they implied, and Korach may have been wrong. But is this a way to win an argument? To cause your opponents to be swallowed up alive? This time, God suggested an entirely different way of resolving the dispute. He told Moses to have each of the tribes take a staff and write their name on it, and place them in the Tent of Meeting. On the staff of the tribe of Levi, he should write the name of Aaron. One of the staffs would sprout, and that would signal whom God had chosen. The tribes did so, and the next morning they returned to find that Aaron's staff had budded, blossomed, and produced almonds. That, finally, ended the argument (Num. 17:16–24).

What resolved the dispute, in other words, was not a show of power but something altogether different. We cannot be sure, because the text does not spell this out, but the fact that Aaron's rod produced almond blossoms seems to have had rich symbolism. In the Near East, the almond is the first tree to blossom, its white flowers signalling the end of winter and the emergence of new life. In his first prophetic vision, Jeremiah saw a branch of an almond tree (shaked) and was told by God that this was a sign that He, God, was "watching" (shoked) to see that His word was fulfilled (Jer. 1:11–12).^[2] The almond flowers recalled the gold flowers on the Menorah (Ex. 25:31; 37:17), lit daily by Aaron in the Sanctuary. The Hebrew word *tzitz*, used here to mean "blossom," recalls the *tzitz*, the "frontlet" of pure gold worn as part of Aaron's headdress, on which were inscribed the words "Holy to the Lord" (Ex. 28:36).^[3] The sprouting almond branch was therefore more than a sign. It was a multifaceted symbol of life, light, holiness, and the watchful presence of God. One could almost say that the almond branch symbolised the priestly will to life as against

the rebels' will to power.[4] The Priest does not rule the people; he blesses them. He is the conduit through which God's life-giving energies flow.[5] He connects the nation to the Divine Presence. Moses answered Korach in Korach's terms, by a show of force. God answered in a quite different way, showing that leadership is not self-assertion but self-effacement.

What the entire episode shows is the destructive nature of argument not for the sake of Heaven – that is, argument for the sake of victory. In such a conflict, what is at stake is not truth but power, and the result is that both sides suffer. If you win, I lose. But if I win, I also lose, because in diminishing you, I diminish myself. Even a Moses is brought low, laying himself open to the charge that “you have killed the Lord's people.” Argument for the sake of power is a lose-lose scenario.

The opposite is the case when the argument is for the sake of truth. If I win, I win. But if I lose I also win – because being defeated by the truth is the only form of defeat that is also a victory.

In a famous passage, the Talmud explains why Jewish law tend to follow the view of the School of Hillel rather than their opponents, the School of Shammai: [The law is in accord with the School of Hillel] because they were kindly and modest, because they studied not only their own rulings but also those of the School of Shammai, and because they taught the words of the School of Shammai before their own. (Eiruvim 13b)

They sought truth, not victory. That is why they listened to the views of their opponents, and indeed taught them before they taught their own traditions. In the eloquent words of a contemporary scientist, Timothy Ferris:

All who genuinely seek to learn, whether atheist or believer, scientist or mystic, are united in having not a faith, but faith itself. Its token is reverence, its habit to respect the eloquence of silence. For God's hand may be a human hand, if you reach out in loving kindness, and God's voice your voice, if you but speak the truth.[6]

Judaism has sometimes been called a “culture of argument.”[7] It is the only religious literature known to me whose key texts – the Hebrew Bible, Midrash, Mishnah, Talmud, the codes of Jewish law, and the compendia of biblical interpretation – are anthologies of arguments. That is the glory of Judaism. The Divine Presence is to be found not in this voice as against that, but in the totality of the conversation.[8]

In an argument for the sake of truth, both sides win, for each is willing to listen to the views of its opponents, and is thereby enlarged. In argument as the collaborative pursuit of truth, the participants use reason, logic, shared texts, and shared reverence for texts. They do not use ad hominem arguments, abuse, contempt, or disingenuous appeals to emotion. Each is willing, if refuted, to say, “I was wrong.” There is no triumphalism in victory, no anger or anguish in defeat.

The story of Korach remains the classic example of how argument can be dishonoured. The Schools of Hillel and Shammai remind us that there is another way. “Argument for the sake of Heaven” is one of Judaism's noblest ideals – conflict resolution by honouring both sides and employing humility in the pursuit of truth. Shabbat Shalom

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The tragedies and difficulties that befell the Jewish people in the desert of Sinai continue to multiply in the Torah reading of this week. This week's sad story involves unique personalities affected by human ambition, jealousy and a complete misreading of one's true role in the family and society.

Korach sees himself as being a far greater person than he really is. He is convinced that he is truly a rival to Moshe and Aaron and is entitled to the same degree of leadership that they enjoy. He is not at all satisfied in being the head of one of the families of the Levites and performing the service in the Tabernacle and Temple. Such false leaders always surround themselves with other malcontents who are also interested in destabilizing the leadership of the people for their own personal, psychological and, many times, financial advantage. In every society there are those who are dissatisfied with their lot in life. Their

frustration translates itself into episodes of anger and the vilification of others, especially of the leadership then present in that society. Revolutions are always popular and those who lead them continually promise a new and better society, a utopia that unfortunately is never realized and usually turns into tyranny and the oppression of others. Jealousy and disaffection are always with us no matter who our leaders may be and what type of society or social norm currently prevails. This frustration and dangerous arrogance always spawns further frustration as the problem that is to be addressed is a personal one.

There are no outside forces or governmental action that can truly solve this inner angst. Truly, we are our own worst enemies. The punishment visited upon Korach and his followers is their complete elimination from society generally. It is as though the Torah is aware that there is no society or leadership that can really satisfy people who are professional malcontents. It is not only individuals that are swallowed up and extinguished, but throughout history it is recorded that ideas, movements, political parties and immoral social norms are also subject to extinction. This doesn't mean that these groupings will never again appear in society. They always do, but they do so in differing forms and morph into changing mores. The Torah itself tells us that even though the original Korach may have been buried and disappeared, the descendants of Korach have not disappeared. Rather, they rise in every generation in different forms, victims of their own inner frustrations, jealous of the accomplishments of others and determined to turn over the entire applecart in order to achieve their own aims.

Human history – and Jewish history is no exception to this phenomenon – is littered with the debris of failed personal ambitions and unnecessary disputes and social divisions. We are bidden to learn and benefit from the mistakes and follies of others. The Torah reading this week certainly has many important lessons to teach us about life, society and human behavior. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Ohr Torah Stone <ohrtorahstone@otsny.org> reply-to: yishai@ots.org.il subject: **Rabbi Riskin on the Weekly Torah Portion**

Shabbat Shalom: Korach (Numbers 16:1-18:32) Rabbi Shlomo Riskin Efrat, Israel – “And Korach took...” (Numbers 16:1) Is controversy a positive or a negative phenomenon? Since the ideal of peace is so fundamental to the Jewish ideal – to such an extent that we even greet and bid farewell to each other with the Hebrew word shalom, peace – I would expect that controversy would be universally condemned by our classical sources. But apparently there is a way to argue and a way not to argue. The Mishna in Avot (Ethics of the Fathers 5:20) distinguishes between two types of controversy: “A controversy which is for the sake of heaven, like that of Hillel and Shammai, will ultimately continue to exist; a controversy which is not for the sake of heaven, like that of Korach and his cohorts, will not continue to exist.”

In addition to the problematic issue of the positive description of a “controversy for the sake of heaven,” it is difficult to understand why the Mishna refers to one type of controversy as that of Hillel and Shammai, the two antagonists, and the other as that of Korach and his cohorts, rather than Korach and Moses, which we would have expected.

I believe that the answer to our questions lies in the two legitimate definitions of the Hebrew word for controversy, machloket: Does it mean to divide (lechalek) or to distinguish (la'asot chiluk), to make a separation or a distinction? The former suggests an unbridgeable chasm, a great divide which separates out, nullifies the view of the other, whereas the latter suggests an analysis of each side in order to give a greater understanding of each view and perhaps even in order to eventually arrive at a synthesis or a dialectic, a resolution of both positions!

With this understanding, the initial comment of Rashi on the opening words of this Torah portion, “And Korach took,” becomes indubitably clear. “He took himself to the other side to become separated out from the midst of the congregation.” Since Korach made a great divide between himself and Moses, the Mishna in Avot defines his controversy as that of Korach and his cohorts; he was interested in nullifying rather than in attempting to understand the side of Moses. On the other hand, when the Talmud describes the disputes between Hillel and Shammai, it decides that:

These and those [both schools] are the words of the living God. If so, then why is the law decided in accord with the school of Hillel? Because they are pleasant and accepting, always teaching their view together with the view of the school of Shammai and even citing the position of Shammai before citing their own position. (Eruvin 13b)

According to this view, “these and those [conflicting opinions] are the words of the living God,” the Almighty initially and purposefully left many issues of the Oral Tradition open-ended in order to allow for different opinions, each of which may well be correct when viewed from the perspective of the divine. Indeed the Mishna in Eduyot teaches that the reason our Oral Tradition records the minority as well as the majority opinion is because a later Sanhedrin (Jewish supreme court) can overrule the decision of an earlier Sanhedrin, even though it is not greater than the earlier one in wisdom or in number, as long as there is a minority view recorded on which the later Sanhedrin may rely for its reversal of the earlier decision; and most halakhic decisions rely on a minority decision in cases of stress and emergency (Mishna Eduyot 1:5, Maimonides and Ra’avad ad loc.). In the world of halakha, minority dissenting views are never nullified; these opinions are also part of the religio-legal landscape, and can become the normative law of the majority at another period in time or for a different and difficult individual situation within the same period.

The Talmud likewise powerfully and poignantly confirms the importance of dissenting views in order to challenge and help clarify the alternate opinion. R. Yochanan and Resh Lakish were brothers-in-law and study partners who debated their conflicting opinions on almost every branch of Talmudic law. When Resh Lakish died, R. Yochanan was left distraught and bereft. R. Elazar b. Pedat, a great scholar, tried to comfort R. Yochanan by substituting for Resh Lakish as his learning companion.

Every opinion that R. Yochanan would offer, R. Elazar would confirm with a Tannaic source. R. Yochanan lashed out, “Are you like the son of Lakish? Not at all! Previously, whenever I would give an opinion, the son of Lakish would ask twenty-four questions and I would answer him with twenty-four responses; in such a fashion, the legal discussion became enlarged and enhanced. But you only provide me with supporting proofs. Don’t I know that my opinions have merit?” R. Yochanan walked aimlessly, tore his garments and wept without cease. He cried out, “Where are you, son of Lakish, where are you, son of Lakish,” until he lost his mind. The other sages requested divine mercy, and R. Yochanan died. (Bava Metzia 84a)

This fundamental respect for the challenge of alternative opinions – so basic to the Talmudic mind – is rooted in another Mishna (Sanhedrin 37a), which sees the greatness of God in the differences among individuals and the pluralism of ideas. “Unlike an individual who mints coins from one model and every coin is exactly alike, the Holy One blessed be He has fashioned every human being in the likeness of Adam, and yet no human being is exactly like his fellow!... And just as the appearances of human beings are not alike, so are the ideas of human beings not alike.” It is precisely in everyone’s uniqueness that we see the greatness of the Creator.

This great truth was one of the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, who claimed that multiplicity of ideas is actually the key to understanding God’s truth:

“Scholars increase peace in the world.” A multiplicity of peace means that all sides and all views must be considered; then it will be clarified how each one of them has its place, each one in accordance with its value, its place, and its specific issue.... Only through a collection of all parts and all details, all of those ideals which appear to be different, and all disparate professional opinions, only be means of these will the light of truth and righteousness be revealed, and the wisdom of the Lord, and His love, and the light of true Torah. (Ein Ayah, end of Berakhot) Shabbat Shalom!

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner Joins Twitter [Article from the Jewish Press - By Tzvi Fishman] One of Israel’s leading halachic authorities, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, head of the Ateret Yerushalayim Yeshiva in the Old City, opened a Twitter account, the Internet hotspot for brief communications which has become a favorite amongst politicians.. In terse Twitter fashion, he told the Jewish Press why: “In order to help the Jewish People as much as I can with my

limited capabilities.” We asked if there wasn’t a danger that his joining Twitter may bring others to join as well, people who might fall to the widespread immodesty found there.. “Tzaddikim will walk its paths in safety, and evildoers will fall,” he answered. The account will be operated by a student. Several years ago, in order to answer questions, the Chief Rabbi of Tzfat, Ha-Rav Shmuel Eliahu, opened a Twitter account, also operated by a student. In the first question he answered on Twitter, Rabbi Aviner explained his opposition to President Trump’s “Deal of the Century.” He wrote: “In the Madrid Conference, Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir stated that he didn’t surrender any bit of the Land of Israel. Why? ‘Kacha,’ he replied. (‘That’s the way it is!’) Regarding this, King David said in Tehillim, ‘Ashrei haAm sh’kacha b.’ This can be compared to a man who asks his friend, ‘Why don’t you want to give me your wife for one day a week?’ ‘Kacha!’ Does a husband need to explain? She’s his wife! So too, the Land of Israel is ours!”

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here’s a sample: Name of Eliezer Q: Why isn’t Eliezer’s name mentioned in the entire story of him being sent by Avraham Avinu to find wife for Yitzchak Avinu? A: Because he was not independent but rather an agent of Avraham Avinu (And Ha-Rav Yechezkel Levenstein once answered that it was not for a lack of honor. On the contrary, he was given the most honorable of titles: “Servant of Avraham”. Peninim Mi-Shulchan Gavoha - Bereshit p. 121). Forgotten Items in Shul Q: What should we do with the piles of items which were forgotten in our Shul? A: Hang a sign that they will be disposed of in two weeks (a person uses the Shul based on this understanding). Hitler, may his name be blotted out Q: Is it true that Hitler did not commit suicide in the year 5705 but rather fled and hid in various countries? A: These rumors were spread by Stalin to confuse the West. This issue was researched at length and it was clearly concluded in 5778 that he died in 5705, may his name be blotted out. Flag on Shabbat Q: Is a flag Muktzeh on Shabbat? A: No. Sitting in Bus Stop Q: Is it permissible for me to sit on the bench in a bus stop if I do not intend to ride the bus? A: Yes. On condition that you are not taking the place of someone who is planning to ride the bus. Satmar Rebbe and the World to Come Q: Does the Satmar Rebbe have a place in the World to Come, or does he not, because he separated himself from the community? A: He certainly does! And you must perform Teshuvah for asking such a question! (see the introduction to our book "Alo Naale"). Aa-aa-men Q: Is it permissible to say aa-aa-men at the end of a blessing when it fits the tune? A: No. It distorts the word. Cell Phone in Pocket During Davening Q: Is it permissible to leave a cell phone in my pocket during Davening? A: With two conditions: 1. You do not use it at all. 2. The ringer is off. Arab Children during Military Activities Q: I am a combat soldier. Sometimes during military activities in Arab homes, there are young children who are very scared. I thought about giving them candy. Is it a good idea? A: Certainly. Hashem is merciful to all of his creations. Obviously, you should only do this with your officer’s permission. Books of Heresy Q: Is it permissible to steal books of heresy from a book store and burn them at home? A: No! And you need to learn a lot of Mesilat Yesharim.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison
<chanan@ravkooktorah.org> to: rav-kook-list@googlegroups.com subject: [Rav Kook Torah]

Korach: The Lesson of Ma’aser Rav Kook Torah

Levies for Levites

After the Korach rebellion, challenging the special status of the Levites and the kohanim, God enumerated the various ways the Jewish people support the tribe of Levi. The Levites were engaged in the Temple service and teaching the nation, yet received no inheritance in the Land of Israel.

“To the descendants of Levi, I am now giving all the tithes (ma’aser) in Israel as an inheritance. This is exchange for their work, the service that they perform in the Communion Tent.” (Num. 18:21-22)

It is interesting to note that produce does not always need to be tithed. For example, we need not set aside ma’aser when snacking on fruit while it is still in the orchard. Unless the produce has entered the home, it does not require tithing.

At what exact point does one need to set aside a tenth for the Levites?

The Sages disagreed on this matter. Rabbi Yanai said that the fruit must cross the entrance of the house. According to Rabbi Yochanan, it is enough to enter the courtyard (Berachot 36a).

Why should tithing only be obligatory after the fruit has entered our property? And why did the Sages disagree whether it is the entrance to the house or the courtyard that determines this obligation?

Conquering Avarice

In addition to supporting the Levites, tithing fulfills an important function for the farmer donating his produce. People are naturally possessive of their property and money. Tithing provides us with the opportunity to rise above these selfish feelings of possessiveness, and contribute towards the spiritual aspirations of the community. Instead of merely satisfying our own personal pleasure, our produce acquires an elevated purpose, supporting the Temple service and the education of the nation.

We can distinguish between two levels of possession of property: de facto and emotional .

- De facto possession is when an object clearly belongs to us. It is under our complete control and inside our domain.
- Emotional possession is when we feel that an object belongs to us. However, it is not fully in our domain or jurisdiction, and it may be difficult to assert our ownership.

Rabbi Yanai spoke of the house-entrance as the moment at which one is obligated to tithe. He referred to the first form of ownership, de facto possession. The house is clearly one's private domain, where his property is under his de facto control. According to Rabbi Yanai, the mitzvah of ma'aser teaches us to overcome and free ourselves from the self-centered sentiments of possessiveness when we are in complete, de facto control.

Rabbi Yochanan, on the other hand, pointed to the courtyard as the determining factor. The courtyard is a legal gray area. It is a place where the general public has access; yet, it also has characteristics of a private domain. Here we have a sense of ownership, even though it may not always be easy to enforce that sentiment. According to Rabbi Yochanan, even this weaker sense of possessiveness must be refined, so that we can completely elevate our private desires to universal, spiritual goals.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com www.matzav.com or
www.torah.org/learning/drasha Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky Parshas Korach Internal Combustion

"Any quarrel," says the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (5:20) "that is made for the sake of heaven shall, in conclusion, last. However, if the argument has selfish motivation it shall not last." The Mishnah offers Hillel and Shamai as an example of heavenly opponents. Their arguments will last forever. On the other hand, Korach and his congregation are the examples given for those whose debate stemmed from egotistical motivations. "Those types of disputes," says the Mishnah, "are doomed to fail." The Mishnah, is of course referring to the episode in this week's portion. Korach, a first cousin of Moshe, contested the priesthood. He gathered 250 followers, formed a congregation, and openly rebelled against Moshe and Ahron, claiming that Moshe and his brother underhandedly seized both temporal and spiritual leadership. Moshe, in his great humility, offered a solution in which divine intercession would point to the true leader. Korach and his followers were swallowed alive by a miraculous variation of an earthquake. Yet two questions occur on the Mishnah. By using the expression that, "an argument for the sake of heaven will last," it seems to show that an ongoing argument is a proof of its sanctity. Shouldn't it be the opposite?

The other anomaly is that in referring to the kosher argument, the Mishnah refers to the combatants, Hillel and Shamai. Each was on one side of the debate. Yet, in reference to the argument that is labeled as egotistical, it defines the combatants as Korach and his congregation. Weren't the combatants Korach and Moshe? Why is the latter part of the Mishnah inconsistent with the former?

On the week following Passover 1985, I began my first pulpit in an old small shul in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The scent of herring juice permeated the building and the benches did not creak as they swayed, they krechtsed. As old as the furnishings were, the membership was older. But the Congregation's spirit

of tradition of was feistier than its physical appearance. My first week, I was asked to bless the new month of Iyar, Mevarchim HaChodesh. Then the trouble began. Every Shabbos, a somber prayer, Av HaRachamim, which memorializes Jewish martyrs during the era of the crusades is recited. On holidays or other festive occasions such as Shabbos Mevarchim, in deference to the spirit of celebration, the prayer is omitted. However, the month of Iyar is considered a sad time for Jews. 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva perished in that period. Many congregations recite Av HaRachamim on Shabbos Mevarchim for the month of Iyar. I assumed my new congregation did the same and began reciting, "Av HaRachamim." Immediately I heard a shout, and an uproar began. "We don't say Av HaRachamim today. We just blessed the new month," announced the President. "We say it this month! It's sefirah, a period of mourning," yelled back the Vice-President. "You know nothin'. We never ever say it when we bench (bless) Rosh Chodesh," yelled the Treasurer. "We always did!" asserted the Gabbai. The argument was brewing for five minutes when they all began to smile and instructed me to say the prayer as I had planned. Before I continued the service I sauntered over to the old Shammash who was sitting quietly through the tumult and asked, "what is the minhag (custom) of this shul?" He surveyed the scene and beamed. "This shul is 100 years old. This is our minhag." The Mishnah gives us a litmus test. How does one know when there is validity to an argument? Only when it is an argument that envelops eternity. The arguments of Shamai and Hillel last until today, in the halls and classrooms of Yeshivos and synagogues across the world. Each one's view was not given for his own personal gain, it was argued for the sake of heaven. However, Korach's battle with Moshe was one of personal gain. Moshe had no issue with them. It was a battle of Korach and his cohorts. Each with a completely different motivation — himself. It did not last. A battle with divine intent remains eternal. In a healthy environment there is room for healthy differences. And those differences will wax eternal. Dedicated in honor of the anniversary of Joel & Robbie Martz by Mr. and Mrs. Perry Davis *Good Shabbos Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore. Text Copyright © 1997 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc. Drasha © 2019 by Torah.org.*

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu> to: weekly@ohr.edu subject: Torah Weekly

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Korach For the week ending 29 June 2019 / 26 Sivan 5779 **Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair** - www.seasonsofthemoon.com Insights *Never Enough Goldfish* "And Korach took..." (15:1) In 1820, the ratio between the income of the top and bottom 20 percent of the world's population was three to one. By 1991, it was eighty-six to one. A study by the World Institute for Development Economics Research at United Nations University reports that the richest 1% of adults alone owned 40% of global assets in the year 2000. The three richest people in the world possess more financial assets than the lowest 48 nations combined. Never in the field of human history has so much been owned by so few. The increasing problem for the mega-rich has been: Where in this world can you get a bang for your mega-dollars? There's an old story about a super-rich father who wanted to make the glitziest Bar Mitzvah of all time. He called up NASA in Houston and asked how much it would cost to make a Bar Mitzvah on the moon. "No problem," said the indulgent father. "The sky is not the limit!" And so it was that a select party of 25 invitees was ferried to the moon for the most exclusive Bar Mitzvah in history. On his return, one of the lucky invitees was asked by a friend what it was like to go to a Bar Mitzvah on the moon. He replied: "It was okay, but somehow there was no atmosphere." I have a friend whose job is to 'concierge' parties for the fantabulously rich. He told me that once he booked Stevie Wonder to play at a private party of no more than six people. His fee? One and a quarter million dollars. But that was just Stevie's take-home stipend. In addition to that there was private jet transport, super luxury housing for Stevie and the band, and, of course, food. The total? Somewhere between five and six million dollars. There was an Arab Sheikh my friend 'concierged' who had an obsession with gold. When he came to New York everything had to be gold. The limousine had to be gold. The faucets in the bathroom had to be gold. The bath tub had to be gold. The crowning lunacy was the Sheikh's fantasy to fish with a golden fishing rod for goldfish in the

Hudson River. I'm not sure when the last time was that a goldfish was sighted in the murky Hudson, but it was probably when little Jimmy got fed up with the prize he won at the fair and flushed it down the toilet. Undeterred, my friend the concierge secured a large 75 ft. yacht, painted it gold (of course), and had a couple thousand live goldfish shipped down from Maine. As the yacht made its stately progress up the waters of the Hudson, a team of scuba divers swimming underneath the yacht released the little fishies. It seems that madness has no limits. And the more money you have, the madder you become. "And Korach took...." This sentence from the beginning of this week's Torah portion has no object. It doesn't say what Korach took. Rather, Korach was completely invested in the desire to take. And so, despite his enormous wisdom, status and wealth, he staged a totally self-seeking rebellion against Moshe. How apt that Korach's voracious desire to engulf led to the earth opening up and devouring him! ©2018 Ohr Somayach International

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald <ezbuchwald@njop.org> subject: Weekly Torah Message From Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald njop.org **Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message Korach 5779-2019 - "Controversy Versus Conflict"** (Revised and updated from Korach 5760-2000)

This week's parasha, parashat Korach, tells of the ill-fated controversy between Korach and Moses, that concludes with the earth swallowing Korach and his followers. The Mishna in Avot 5:20, prominently mentions Korach's rebellion: "Every controversy which is for the sake of Heaven will endure in the end, and every one which is not for the sake of Heaven will in the end not endure. Which is the controversy for the sake of Heaven? Such was the conflict of Hillel and Shammai. Which is not for the sake of Heaven? Such was the conflict of Korach and his entire assemblage." From a superficial perspective, one might easily conclude that all controversies are bad. What difference is there between the controversy of rabbis or the controversy of rebels? The Mishna in Avot argues that there is a profound difference. Although the controversies between Hillel and Shammai were significant and, undoubtedly, heated, both Hillel and Shammai, ultimately, submitted to the majority opinion, even if they were totally opposed to those conclusions. Despite the fact that Hillel was known to be lenient and Shammai more severe, both Hillel and Shammai had one objective—to help the People of Israel grow in their observance of Torah. They only differed in the details. As we all know, controversy has been part of Jewish life from time immemorial. In fact, most of the rabbis of the Talmud had would-be "sparring partners," who would frequently provide opposing opinions to their own. These opposing opinions, even though they were rejected, are considered so valuable, that they are recorded in the Talmud, and are studied to this very day. In the 2nd half of the 16th century, Rama/Rema had begun to write, what he hoped would be, a definitive legal code for both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews. When he learned that Rabbi Joseph Caro was just about to complete his Code of Jewish Law, the Shulchan Aruch, rather than publish his own magnum opus, Rabbi Isserles chose instead to author an Ashkenazic gloss/commentary to Rabbi Caro's Shulchan Aruch. The name that Rabbi Caro gave to his code of law was Shulchan Aruch, which means a fully arrayed table. It was Rabbi Caro's hope to prepare an easy way for all Jews to learn Jewish law, with everything openly arranged on a table. Rabbi Isserles' commentary is cleverly called HaMapa, "The Tablecloth," and although it is only a gloss on the Code of Jewish Law for Ashkenazic Jews, Rabbi Isserles' stature did not suffer, but rather increased as a result of his decision to forgo his own self-aggrandizement. This is, perhaps, what the Mishna means when it says: סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם—"Sofa l'hit'kayaim," controversial opinions which are for the sake of Heaven will endure. Those familiar with Jewish law know that Jews rigorously maintain and study not only the mainstream Jewish legal opinions, but the minority opinions as well. These so-called "minority opinions," often form the basis of new and novel legal decisions that are introduced by scholars in later generations. They do not die, but rather endure, as if their authors were still alive and arguing with one another. And, yet, we know that Korach had his gripes, some of which appear to be quite legitimate. Korach was a Levite, who felt that he did not receive adequate recognition. But, was his motivation to rebel for the sake of the betterment of the community, or for his own self-aggrandizement? The Midrash

relates that it was Korach's wife, who incited her husband to rebel. Apparently, after Korach underwent the ritual of purification required of all the 22,272 Levites, Korach's wife wouldn't let him live down, what she considered, a demeaning ritual—shaving off all the hair of his body and being carried around as a dedication to G-d. Although the Midrash cites Korach as saying that Moses had performed the same ritual on his own sons, Mrs. Korach responded: "Who cares about that! He demeaned you, didn't he?" The famed Chasidic master, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, points out, insightfully, that there is a way to determine whether an argument is for the sake of Heaven or not. Examine the group that is stirring up controversy, he suggests. Are they harmonious? Are they bound to one another in an unselfish manner? It is regarding this particular point that the Mishna in Avot is most revealing. When the Mishna talks of the conflict between Hillel and Shammai, it simply mentions the names of the two sages who argued with each other. However, when the Mishna mentions the controversy that is not for the sake of Heaven, it cites: the conflict of "Korach and his entire assemblage." The Mishna should have stated: Such was the controversy of Korach and his assemblage with Moses. This subtlety of language indicates that there was no harmony between Korach and the men who joined him in rebellion. They were all out for themselves; they were all on their own personal ego trips. They were not even minutely concerned with the betterment of the community. When Albert Einstein was deported by the Nazis from Germany, in addition to being expelled, his ideas were derided. One hundred Nazi "experts" published a book denying the value of any of his discoveries. One great scientist responded to this insult by saying: "If my theories were wrong, it would take only one professor to prove them wrong. If you require one hundred, it's a sign that it's truthful." Had Korach approached Moses and debated the issues that troubled him in pursuit of the truth, he might have been remembered forever as a great sage, an innovator, and one who sought to improve Jewish life, even if his views were not accepted. How sad it is that he is remembered instead as a destroyer, who sought to undermine Jewish life. *May you be blessed.*

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Korach
פרשת קרח... קרח... separated himself. (16:1)
Difference of opinion is a diplomatic term for controversy – aka machlokes. Chazal distinguish between: a machlokes l'shem Shomayim, dispute for the sake of Heaven, in which the opposing opinions are just that, two opposing opinions which have no ramifications concerning the disputants; and one which is she'lo l'shem Shomayim, pure unmitigated dispute between individuals in which either one or both are out to hurt the other. At times, issues require clarification; times and circumstances change, necessitating a new approach to resolving the status quo. Varied ways and perspectives exist for achieving the resolution. This can be good. When jealousy and arrogance enter the fray, Shomayim steps out. Any dispute guided by personal vendetta is not Heaven-oriented. A machlokes, explains Horav Mordechai David Neugroschal, Shlita, is compared to fire, an energy that can either provide warmth or can destroy. If the gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders, who are the "keepers of the flame" guard over the "fire," it will provide warmth and pave the way for achieving greater advances. If the fire descends to the pshutei ha'am, simple people, who are subject to their personal whims, passions and negative character traits, the fire will devastate. Obviously, no respectable member of Torah hierarchy or any ben Torah, for that matter, would ever concede that his position was not for the furtherance of Torah. The problem is that, while we are contentious in promoting Torah, we are failing to be represented where our positions and leadership can be and are most certainly needed. To put it simply: we waste our resources on issues that could best be put on the back burner, while the real issues that are maligning and devastating Orthodoxy are ignored. Every time we ignore the secular oriented left wing, who spend more time apologizing for the Torah than observing it, we lose ground. The Imrei Emes, Gerrer Rebbe, Horav Avraham Mordechai Alter, zl, related the following story to a well-known Polish gadol. A prominent, wealthy Jew married off his two daughters to two wonderful bnei Torah. He

supported their every need, as in those days the married children would have their meals at the home of their in-laws. Interestingly, the eating habits of the two sons-in-law did not correspond. One son-in-law ate only meat dishes, while the other one was into dairy exclusively. Thus, during mealtime, the two men ate at different tables. A short time after the weddings, the father-in-law made a bad investment which cost him his fortune. He went from great wealth to abject poverty in a short time. He no longer could provide gourmet dairy and meat dinners. Now, it was dark bread and water. Nonetheless, the sons-in-law continued their “separate seating” during mealtime. This irked the father-in-law. He said to them, “In the past, when there were sufficient options for dairy and meat dinners, I understand that the two of you ate separately. Now that all we have is bread and water – why do you continue with your backs to one another during mealtime?” The Rebbe continued, “The same applies concerning our generation. In earlier times, we noted differences of opinion between gedolei Yisrael which were on a completely specialized realm. These were issues and individuals which affected the most lofty levels of Torah and religious observance. Today, however (this was almost a century ago), the average Jew is exposed to spiritual challenges that previously had never been an issue. The Jew on the street is witness to spiritual and moral depravity, to assaults on our Yahadus from all sides of the spectrum. At this point, we are all equal. It is time that we all come together, unite and come to a meeting of the minds. What is the purpose of disagreement when we are hemorrhaging?” In other words, we must focus on those who would tear down the very principles of Orthodoxy. In order to satisfy the underpinnings and lack of Jewish pride evinced by the secular streams, we tend to ignore their systematic dissecting of Torah law in order to better serve their morally-warped agenda. An incident that occurred concerning Horav Gadel Eisner, zl, legendary Mashgiach of the Gerrer Yeshivah in Eretz Yisrael and mentor to thousands, illuminates for us the concept of acting l’shem Shomayim. One Yom Tov, when Rav Gadel was visiting the Chassidic court of the Bais Yisrael, a Yerushalmi acted audaciously and was pogeia b’kavod, offended the honor, of the Bais Yisrael. An avreich, one of the premier young married men, came out against the offender in an unusually fierce rebuttal, because, after all, he was “concerned” with the honor of the Rebbe. Following the morning davening, Rav Gadel left the bais hamedrash to see the young man surrounded by a group of like-minded chassidim, all reveling in his accounting of the tale and how he put the Yerushalmi in his place. “That mechutzaf will not quickly forget that one does not act this way toward our Rebbe,” he declared. Rav Gadel approached the young man and asked, “Are you that person whose reputation (for your deed) reverberates throughout the country, how you singlehandedly took on the individual who offended the honor of our Rebbe? I’m certain that you acted solely l’shem Shomayim.” “Yes, it is I who put that man in his place, and, of course, I acted l’shem Shomayim,” the avreich replied. “Let me ask you a question,” Rav Gadel began. “How would you have acted had the slanderer come out against another Rebbe (of a different Chassidus)? Would you have been so driven?” The young man quickly replied, “Clearly, I would not have done this for anyone other than the Gerrer Rebbe.” “Then you should know,” countered Rav Gadel, “that you were not acting l’shem Shomayim on behalf of the Rebbe. You were selfishly acting on behalf of yourself. You were offended by his slander of the Rebbe. The greatest proof is that you stated emphatically that you would not have acted so forcefully for any other Rebbe.” We like to attribute all of our actions to the l’shem Shomayim “card,” but, in truth, the only ones whose honor concerns us – is ours.

כי כל העדה כלה קדשים ובתוכם ד' ומדות תתנשאו על קהל ד' For the entire assembly – all of them – are holy and Hashem is among them. Why do you exalt yourselves over the Congregation of Hashem? (16:3) Every person has a unique contribution to make in this world. Only he can complete this task. It is, thus, vital to figure out who “you” are and “where” you fit into the grand scheme of things. Hamakir es mekomo; “Know your place” (Pirkei Avos) means to evaluate your strengths and weaknesses (realistically/honestly) and then decide for what you are best suited. Do not allow personal arrogance or low self-esteem to control your life. Be who you are, so that you can be who you are destined to be. A visionary sees the future based upon who he currently is. Too many of us allow other peoples’ opinions to shape our self-definition. One of the most meaningful quotes I have heard goes something like this, “How many people do you have to be before you can become yourself?” Parents want their children to

live up to their expectations, or, in some instances, to repair their own personal shortcomings. A parent who did not achieve his own potential seeks to push his child into the mold he had contrived for himself. The child is miserable, usually rebelling at some point. If he makes it into adulthood as his parents’ failure, he will expect to repair their “dream” through his own child. This was one of Korach’s (and his followers’) problems. They were myopic in their personal vision, refusing to acknowledge that Klal Yisrael is comprised of classes of Jews: Kohen, Levi, Yisrael. It should incur envy. I, too, want to be a Kohen. When we peruse Jewish history, outside of the Korach controversy, we do not notice any other precedent of such jealousy. Indeed, the mere fact that this is the only isolated incident indicates that even though there might have been reason for one group/class to envy another, it did not happen. Why? Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl explains that when a person self-evaluates and realizes who he really is, he will focus on the purpose in life best-suited for him. He will examine his mind, skills, talent and come to the realization that he has no reason to envy others. Each person is who he is and is endowed with Hashem’s specific gifts that allow him to achieve his goals. Envy is the consequence of a distorted perspective of oneself, of feelings of inadequacy, both in personal worth and success. The result is that one becomes jealous of his fellow who is endowed with his unique talents, because he has an alternate focus in life. When one executes what is demanded of him – he succeeds. When one wants to be someone else, because he is dissatisfied with his personal position, he becomes miserable. Korach was not Moshe Rabbeinu, and, thus, not cut out to lead the nation. It was as simple as that. Unfortunately, Korach did not see it that way. He first became frustrated, then angry, which led to his rebellion and eventual downfall. If he would have first looked inward at himself before looking outward at Moshe, the end of the story would have been so different.

בקר וידע ד' את אשר לו ואת הקדוש והקריב אליו In the morning, Hashem will make known the one who is His own and the holy one, and He will draw him close to Himself. (16:5) The fires of controversy continue to burn and devastate long after the actual dispute has been put to rest. Even when the machlokes, controversy, is l’shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, the riffraff, individuals who thrive on rabble-rousing, continue to stoke the flame, thus creating a fertile climate for destruction. Machlokes has plagued our people for centuries. Usually it was l’shem Shomayim, with each side seeking to support its particular approach to Torah dictate. The primary antagonists remained friends, despite opposing views. The classic example was Bais Hillel and Bais Shammai, who, although disagreeing in halachic interpretation, respected one another, even intermarried with one another. One of the most contentious and enduring controversies was between Horav Yaakov Emden and Horav Yonasan Eibeshutz. They were two gedolim of highest spiritual repute. As always, it is the riffraff, the little people, who have little else to do other than slander and debase, who fanned the flames of this dispute, whose repercussions lasted for quite some time. Once sides were taken, it appeared that the entire European rabbinate was involved. Most of Eastern Europe’s prominent rabbinic leaders took Rav Yonasan’s side. Conversely, Western Europe sided with Rav Yaakov. Rav Yonasan remained passive throughout the entire dispute – a position which did not help his cause. He did finally respond with a single epistle called Luchos Eidus, which not only recorded (with deep humility) his background and approbation of himself, it also served as a denouncement of all slander against him. The controversy between Rav Yaakov Emden and Rav Yonasan Eibeshutz was a sad episode in Jewish life. It is one that we, as spectators, centuries later, cannot even begin to fathom, certainly not attempt to judge. As far as we are concerned, this controversy is beyond our ability to comprehend and should remain so. The following vignette gives us some idea how far removed we are from these two Torah luminaries, whose controversy was truly l’shem Shomayim. Horav Binyamin Diskin, father of Horav Yehoshua Leib, popularly known as the Maharil Diskin, the venerable Rav of Brisk, was an individual known for his amazing diligence and his meticulous use of every minute. One day, a coach pulled up to the door of his house and a well-dressed woman, clearly from the “city,” alighted and entered his home. The city’s dayanim, rabbinical judges, were meeting with the Rav and Av Bais Din, head of the rabbinical court, and they asked her why she had come. She replied that she had an important message to convey to Rav Diskin, a matter of last will and testament. The dayan related the woman’s ambiguous message to Rav

Binyamin, who, surprisingly, gave instructions to permit her to enter. The woman stood at the door of his office and introduced herself as the daughter of the author of *Nesivot Olam*, a notoriously heretical publication, used by the German Reform to push through the legislation banning shechitah, ritual slaughtering, and Bris Milah, circumcision. Moses Montefiore sponsored the publication of a book entitled, *Zerubavel*, which refuted the *Nesivot Olam*. The woman proceeded to relate the following story of her life: “Our father, although not a scholar of note, was an excellent teacher. His ability to grasp a subject and convey it lucidly to the student made him a popular teacher. Complex material became putty in his hands. Unfortunately, this did not last very long, as he became involved in inappropriate behavior and heretical views, causing the parents to remove their children from his care. “The cloud over his reputation caused him to withdraw and disappear from our lives without leaving any trace concerning his whereabouts. Our mother, who was now an agunah, abandoned wife, could not remarry, and she was reduced to working hard in our small store to support the family. The store was successful, and, for a short while, our precarious life became somewhat orderly and calm. This all changed when word of our father’s heresy became public. People avoided the store, and our lives were once again shattered. Our mother bore her shame with dignity. She married me off to a fine young man from distant Prussia, and I was grateful to be able to build a home committed to Torah and mitzvos. “Life seemed to progress normally until, one day, I received a letter from my father. In his letter, he begged for forgiveness, asking us to allow him to return home and live out the rest of his life in penitence. I was not convinced of the veracity of his request. My dear husband read the letter a number of times. He felt the letter manifested my father’s true feelings. Whatever eminence he had achieved only came from priests and gentiles, who lauded the heresy in his book. Once a rebuttal was published, however, he was no longer in their favor. He was now a lost soul with no sustenance, isolated from society. He asked that we give him a chance to prove himself. We permitted him to return home under a strict set of guidelines, ensuring that he would not interfere with our way of life. “Per our request, he let his peyos, side locks, and beard grow, and he committed himself to following all the dictates of the *Shulchan Aruch*. Apparently, this was also his wish. He soon was overcome with guilt, he became sick, thin and frail. We attempted to console him, explaining that his repentance was real and surely had been accepted. However, he refused to be consoled. “It was clear that he was destined to leave this world filled with remorse. One day, he called me to his bedside and told me that he felt that his end was near. He wanted to share a story with me, insisting that I promise to relate this episode to one of the righteous leaders of our generation. Furthermore, I should ask that the leader pray for his soul. This is his story: “I was born in Altona. The rabbi of the community at that time was Rav Yonasan Eibeshutz, who had been accused by Rav Yaakov Emden of being a heretic and follower of Shabbtai Tzvi. (At this point, Rav Binyamin interjected that Rav Yonasan was unquestionably a tzaddik, righteous person, attested to by the saintly Gaon of Vilna.) “My father was one of Rav Yaakov’s supporters, who had written numerous articles and papers against Rav Yonasan. I was born in the midst of this tragic debacle. On the day of my bris, circumcision, my father published a scathing critique of Rav Yonasan. My bris and the published article were celebrated on the same day. Those who were in attendance blessed me that the pamphlet which my father had authored should serve as a source of good fortune for me and that I should merit to follow in my father’s footsteps. Rav Yaakov answered Amen. “Regrettably, in due time, the blessing was realized. I enjoyed making light of and belittling important matters, descending to the nadir of depravity, to the lowest ebb possible for a Jew to reach: apostasy. It was the result of the misguided blessing given to me by those individuals who were embroiled in the controversy – not for the sake of Heaven. They were interested only in the malicious joy that some obtain by destroying the life of another Jew. Rav Yaakov, however, was true and righteous. His Amen response ensured that the blessing would become a reality – which it did. Although this is not an excuse for my miscreant behavior – we all make our choices, in my case, matters were stacked against me. Now, as I am about to die, promise me that you will relate this story to a tzaddik, and ask him to pray for me.’ With these words, my father died.” After explaining to the woman about the effects of repentance and suffering, Rav Binyamin told her that the story emphasized the tragic

consequences of machlokes, controversy, and discord. This is especially true when the machlokes involves the denigration of a Torah scholar. Every time people hear this story and are inspired to distance themselves from controversy, it serves as a tremendous merit for her father.

וַיָּקָם מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל דָּסָן וְאַבִּירָם Moshe stood up and went to Dassan and Aviram. (16:25) The machlokes, controversy, that Korach had initiated against Moshe Rabbeinu has been recorded in the annals of history as the paradigm of machlokes and the devastation that it can – and does – cause. Chazal view the fact that Moshe went to Dassan and Aviram, Korach’s henchmen, as a lesson for posterity: Mikaaan, “From here,” she’ein machazikin b’ machlokes, “(we derive) that one should not maintain/continue a machlokes.” Our leader went to make a final plea to Dassan and Aviram, hoping that they would relent and put an end to their nefarious activities and defer to him as the nation’s leader. Korach refused to listen, but Moshe harbored the hope that his cohorts would agree to come back to Klal Yisrael. He let everyone know that if they were to continue on this collision course, they were doomed. The nation heeded his warning; Korach, Dassan, Aviram and the remaining rebels did not. They received the ultimate punishment. Chazal’s statement that we derive from here -- that it is wrong to support a machlokes --is surprising. It is not as if anyone would contend that machlokes is an ideal for which we should all strive. Machlokes is evil, vile, devastating. Why would anyone think that it deserves support? Horav Yosef Tzvi Dunner (Mikdash HaLevi) suggests that this was not your everyday machlokes in which two sides – both good – became embroiled in a dispute. This was Moshe, the Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael, quintessential Rebbe of all the Jewish People, being attacked and vilified by a scoundrel of the likes of Korach, a man so obsessed with his own narcissism that he was prepared to lead a mutiny against Klal Yisrael’s leadership just to satisfy his megalomania. He was supported by Dassan and Aviram, Moshe’s nemeses, in Egypt. It was they who undermined him in Egypt, who sought to have him killed by Pharaoh. At every juncture they sought to dispute his authority and destroy him personally. Under such circumstances, one might conjecture that not only is machlokes permissible, but that one should support and see it through: “Wash the floor with such people!” Chazal teach us otherwise. When one becomes embroiled in controversy – regardless of his justification – he becomes soiled. It is inevitable.

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<https://www.torahmusings.com/2019/06/early-shabbat-services-plag-or-700/>
Early Shabbat Services: Plag or 7:00?

by R. Yaakov Hoffman

During the summer, many wish to eat the Shabbat evening meal well before dark. To accommodate them, many shuls offer early Friday evening services. Some *daven Mincha* right before *plag ha-mincha* (1 ¼ halachic hours before sunset) and immediately thereafter recite *Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Maariv*. Others begin *Mincha* at a set time all summer long – often 7:00. Are both options halachically valid? Some *poskim* vociferously oppose the fixed-time *minyan*,¹ and one hears many rabbis and educated laymen nowadays passionately espouse this position. However, the fixed-time *minyan* can be justified; in fact, it has some overlooked advantages. To better understand this issue, we must first examine the halachic basis for “early Shabbat” services. The Mishnah records a disagreement pertaining to the latest time one may *daven Mincha* on any day (not just Friday).² R. Yehuda says one must pray before *plag ha-mincha*, but the Sages say the deadline is *ha’erev*, “evening” (commentators disagree whether “evening” in this context means sunset or nightfall). The *Talmud Bavli* explains that the cutoff point for *Mincha* also constitutes the earliest time one can say *Maariv*.³ Thus, R. Yehuda permits reciting *Maariv* after *plag ha-mincha* even on weekdays, whereas the Sages forbid praying before “evening” even on Friday night. The Talmud permits one to follow either opinion.⁴ When making early Shabbat, one *davens Maariv* before “evening,” following the opinion of R. Yehuda. Seemingly, then, one must *daven Mincha* on Friday before *plag ha-mincha*.⁵ In a fixed-

time *minyan*, however, one usually prays *Mincha* after *plag* but *Maariv* before “evening.” In other words, one is simultaneously following the leniencies of both R. Yehuda and the Sages, which would appear to be self-contradictory (*tartei de-satrei*). Hence the opposition to such *minyanim*. Historically, however, many Jews have held such “self-contradictory” prayer services.¹ This practice seems to have a basis in no less a source than the *Talmud Yerushalmi*,² which does not connect *davening Maariv* with R. Yehuda’s opinion regarding the cutoff point for *Mincha*. According to the *Yerushalmi*, the timing of *Maariv* is flexible because it is theoretically a voluntary prayer (although we treat it as obligatory). Thus, even the Sages would place no restrictions on reciting *Maariv* before “evening.” But even if the fixed-time *minyan* is justifiable, it seems that one should ideally favor *davening* at a *plag minyan*, in consonance with the simple reading of the *Talmud Bavli*. Is there any downside to doing so? Many authorities would actually answer in the affirmative. The generally accepted approach nowadays is to determine *plag ha-mincha* by subtracting 1 ¼ halachic hours from the time of sunset. Many *poskim*, however, rule that *plag* is actually 1 ¼ halachic hours before *nightfall*.³ Thus, one who *davens* at a contemporary *plag minyan* might be reciting *Maariv*—and worse, the blessings over the *Shema*—too early.⁴ While the common practice certainly has a strong halachic basis,¹⁰ one could argue that *davening Maariv* a bit later than the accepted *plag*—thereby making more likely that one will recite it in the correct timeframe—trumps the concern of *tartei de-satrei*.¹¹ There is also an ancillary benefit to services scheduled later than the normative *plag ha-mincha*. While a basic reading of the Talmud indicates that one may recite Kiddush any time after *plag ha-mincha*,¹² a minority opinion exists—held by some very early and weighty authorities—that one should wait until after sunset to do so,¹³ or at least until shortly before sunset.¹⁴ When one *davens* at a fixed-time *minyan*, one will generally arrive home later than if one prays at *plag* and will thus be in a better position to accommodate these opinions. In a similar vein, many *poskim* recommend eating some of the Friday night meal after *nightfall*,¹⁵ and one is more likely to wind up doing so if one begins the *se’udah* after having attended a fixed-time *minyan*.¹⁶ A practical downside of the *plag minyan* is the hardship it involves for those who live alone. *Plag ha-mincha*’s earliest time one can light Shabbat candles.¹⁷ Thus, people without someone at home to light on their behalf would need to come to shul for *Mincha* (before *plag*), run home to light, then speed back to shul for *Maariv*. It would obviously be much easier if these individuals could light right after *plag* and then come to *Mincha*.¹⁸ Both the *plag minyan* and the fixed-time *minyan* involve halachic tradeoffs. Each rabbi should choose the approach he finds more compelling and schedule services at his shul accordingly; the same applies to someone deciding which *minyan* in his neighborhood to attend. It should be noted that one can circumvent (almost) all halachic difficulties by praying at a *Mincha minyan* early in the afternoon and then *davening Maariv* at a fixed-time *minyan*, but this solution is impractical for most people.¹⁹

1. See, e.g., Mishnah Berurah 267:3 and R. Mordechai Willig, Am Mordechai, Berachot 17:4.
 2. Berachot 4:1. 3. Berachot 27a. 4. Rishonim differ on how to interpret this ruling. Some say that one must choose to follow either R. Yehuda or the Sages consistently every single day—i.e., one may never daven Maariv before “evening” if one ever davens Mincha after plag ha-mincha (e.g., Rashba, Berachot 27a). Others rule that one must only be consistent within a single day (e.g., Meiri ad loc.). 5. As explained in the previous footnote, some authorities rule that one who sometimes wishes to daven Maariv early, even if only occasionally on a Friday evening, must always daven Mincha before plag. At present, virtually no one is careful to daven Mincha before plag daily. Thus, some *poskim* forbid making “early Shabbat” nowadays (Tur Orach Chayim 293, in the name of R. Yitzchak Ibn Ghayyat; this was also the opinion of the Vilna Gaon as recorded in Ma’aseh Rav 65 and 115). However, the accepted opinion is that one may daven early on Friday evening because of the mitzvah of tosefet Shabbat (adding time to Shabbat), even if one normally waits until “evening” to recite Maariv (Mishnah Berurah 267:3). This is also the clear implication of a line in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachot 4:1). 6. Even on weekdays. See Tosafot, Berachot 2a, s.v. “me’eimatai.” 7. Berachot 4:1. See Aruch ha-Shulchan, Orach Chayim 235:2. (Creatively, the Aruch ha-Shulchan claims that the Talmud Bavli agrees, but such a reading contradicts the Rishonim. It should also be noted that in 267:4 he rules that one must pray Mincha on Friday before plag if one wishes to make early Shabbat.) See also R. Yehoshua Buch’s commentary on the Yerushalmi, Or La-Yesharim, p. 343. The Rambam’s presentation of the issue seems to echo the Yerushalmi (Hilchot Tefillah 3:7). 8. This is part of the general disagreement as to whether one calculates the halachic hours (sha’ot zemaniyot) from

sunrise to sunset or from dawn to dusk. See a summary of the discussion in R. Chaim P. Benish, Ha-Zemanim Ba-Halacha, chap. 13. Calculating the hours from dawn until dusk is correlated with the opinion of Rabbenu Tam regarding the time of halachic nightfall. According to the common understanding, Rabbenu Tam holds that what we call “sunset,” the disappearance of the orb of the sun below the horizon, is only the beginning of the halachic process of sunset (techilat sheki’a). Nightfall (tzeit ha-kochavim) is 72 minutes thereafter. If this understanding is correct, the later version of plag ha-mincha (75 halachic minutes before nightfall) would be quite close to sunset—obviating any benefit to praying later than the conventional plag but before sunset. However, as I explained in a previous article, it is much more reasonable to interpret Rabbenu Tam as agreeing that tzeit ha-kochavim is the time that three stars actually appear. Rabbenu Tam means that techilat sheki’a is 72 minutes before the appearance of stars—not that nightfall is 72 minutes after sunset. Techilat sheki’a, as well as the closely related dawn-to-dusk plag ha-mincha, would thus take place well before sunset, when the sun’s bright rays start to dim. An analysis of precisely how to calculate the dawn-to-dusk plag is beyond the scope of this article, but it is probably at least 45 minutes before sunset (in New York in the summer). In any event, a fixed-time minyan is certainly much more likely to comply with the later plag ha-mincha than is a minyan that straddles the sunrise-to-sunset plag—even if a lengthy Kabbalat Shabbat delays the start of Maariv proper. 9. Many Rishonim hold that when one davens Maariv early, one recites the Amidah only and waits to say the blessings on the Shema until after nightfall (see R. M.M. Karp, Hilchot Shabbat be-Shabbat, chap. 6 n. 12). Contemporary practice is to recite the berachot on Kri’at Shema even when one davens after the sunrise-to-sunset plag ha-mincha (of course, one must repeat the Shema without its blessings after tzeit ha-kochavim). This practice is somewhat difficult since the blessings reference darkness; at the conventional plag, it is still quite sunny out. The later version of plag, though, is connected to Rabbenu Tam’s techilat sheki’a, when the sun’s light begins to dim. It is therefore likely that it is really only those who accept the later version of plag ha-mincha who also allow reciting the blessings on the Shema at that time. See Mishmeret Shabbat (printed in the back of Hilchot Shabbat be-Shabbat vol. 4), pp. 192-3. Cf. the previous footnote. 10. The fact that the standard chronometric device in the ancient world was a sundial, which obviously works only from sunrise to sunset, would seem to be an exceedingly strong support for the common practice. See J. Jean Ajdlar, “Talmudic Metrology VI: Sabbath’s Limits and the Jewish Time Reckoning,” BDD 24 (March 2011), section B. 11. In theory, one could schedule early Shabbat services straddling the later plag ha-mincha, but it is somewhat difficult to determine this time with exactitude (see above, note 8). In any event, this would not solve the problem of tartei de-satrei for those who maintain that plag is earlier. 12. Berachot 27b, codified in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 267:2. Of course, it is preferable to wait until after the dawn-to-dusk plag ha-mincha to recite Kiddush even if one prays at a minyan that straddles sunrise-to-sunset plag (Hilchot Shabbat be-Shabbat chap. 7 n. 3.). This is usually not such an imposition; at least in places that are not very far north, it will generally be after the later plag by the time services conclude and one is ready to begin the meal. 13. Rav Hai Gaon categorically forbids reciting Kiddush until “kadeish yoma”—when Shabbat officially begins (Otzar ha-Geonim, Berachot p. 63,65). Halachot Gedolot holds that one may only recite Kiddush early if one will not have wine available once Shabbat begins (Hilchot Kiddush ve-Havdalah; see Responsa Pri Yitzchak 9). See also Pri Megadim, Mishbetzot Zahav 299:1, but see Tzlach, Pesachim 105a. It should be noted that everyone agrees that one may recite Kiddush during bein ha-shemashot (the transitional period between day and night); no one requires waiting until tzeit ha-kochavim (nightfall). Nevertheless, there is a strong possibility that bein ha-shemashot actually begins a bit later than what we call “sunset.” See here. In practice, however, it seems that even those who wish to be stringent may recite Kiddush right after sunset since refraining from reciting Kiddush immediately after plag ha-mincha is already quite a chumra (heard from R. M.M. Karp). Furthermore, one could perhaps argue that since universal practice nowadays is to begin Shabbat at sunset, sunset is now considered the official beginning of Shabbat and even Rav Hai Gaon would allow Kiddush thereafter. Further analysis of Rav Hai’s opinion is required. 14. This is the implication of Rambam, Hilchot Shabbat 29:11. 15. Mishnah Berurah 267:5. 16. One potential problem with davening at a fixed-time minyan is running afoul of the prohibition to begin a meal within the half-hour before tzeit ha-kochavim, due to a concern of neglecting the recitation of the nighttime Shema at its proper time. However, there are reasons to allow beginning the Shabbat meal until tzeit ha-kochavim (at which point one must certainly recite Shema before commencing). See Mishnah Berurah 235:19 and 267:6. 17. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 263:4. But see Responsa Eretz Tzvi 113. It should be noted that there is room to be stringent not to light candles before the later version of plag, but in a case of necessity one may rely on the earlier version (Shemirat Shabbat ke-Hichatah chap. 42 n. 63). Cf. n. 10 above. 18. In my shul, the normal time for Friday night services in the summer is 7:00 p.m. But on weeks when plag ha-mincha is very late—it gets as late as 6:58 in New York—we delay the start of Mincha to allow those who live alone to light before services (an additional advantage of this is that it delays Kiddush and the meal a bit when sunset is at its latest). Allowing for lighting before coming to shul is also the reason Mincha at KAJ (Breuer’s) is at 7:10 all summer long instead of 7:00. 19. There is also an entirely different method of making “early Shabbat,” which is to recite Kiddush and eat the Friday evening meal after plag ha-mincha and

then pray Maariv after sunset or nightfall. This method avoids the problems inherent with davening Maariv early, but is less convenient for most people and controversial for other reasons. See Ma'aseh Rav 117, Pe'ulat Sachir ad loc., and Hilchot Shabbat be-Shabbat ch. 7 n. 3*. Cf. n. 12 above.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: **Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff** <ymkaganoff@gmail.com> to: kaganoff-a@googlegroups.com Taking Care of the Ill -- **The Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim** By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff
Question #1: Not a doctor "If the mitzvah of bikur cholim is to see that the patient's needs are taken care of, what am I accomplishing by visiting him in the hospital? I am not a physician, and my inquiring about the patient's medical care is probably intrusive and counter-productive." Question #2: Is there a rabbi in the house? "Why do people ask tzaddikim to pray on behalf of someone who is ill?" Question #3: Visiting alone "I was told not to visit a sick person by myself. Is there a halachic basis for this practice?"

Introduction The Gemara (Sotah 14a) teaches that we have a mitzvah to follow in Hashem's ways, and that this mitzvah includes the requirement to take care of the needs of the ill. "Rabbi Chama the son of Rabbi Chanina said, 'How are we to understand the words of the Torah: "You should follow Hashem, your G-d." How is it possible for a human being to follow the Holy One, blessed is He, when the verse states that 'Hashem, your G-d, is a consuming fire?' Rather, it means that we are to emulate Hashem's attributes – just as he dresses the naked... takes care of the sick... consoles the mourners, and buries the dead, so should we.

Based on a pasuk in parshas Korach, the Gemara (Nedarim 39b) teaches: "There is an allusion to the mitzvah of bikur cholim in the Torah: When Moshe declares 'If these people (Korach's party) will die like most people do, and the destiny of most people will happen to them, then Hashem did not send me.' How do we see an allusion to the mitzvah of bikur cholim in the pasuk? Moshe declared: If these people will die like most people do – if they will become ill and bedridden and people will come to inquire about their needs – the people will say 'Hashem did not send me.'" Thus, the Gemara cites this week's parsha as one of the direct sources in the Torah for the mitzvah of bikur cholim.

Last week, our article was on the topic of bikur cholim and discussed many of its basic halachos. This article includes a review of some of the basic laws and concepts of this very special mitzvah, but will primarily cover details that were not discussed in the previous article.

Every community should have an organization devoted to the needs of the sick, and it is a tremendous merit to be involved in organizing and participating in such a wonderful chesed project (Ahavas Chesed 3:3).

What does the word bikur mean? Although the word "bikur" means "visit" in modern Hebrew, the original meaning of "bikur" is not "visit" but "examine" or "check." The primary responsibility of the mitzvah of bikur cholim is to check and see what the ill person needs and to do whatever one can to meet those needs (Toras Ha'adam). Thus, a physician, nurse, nurse's aide, or medical clown performs the mitzvah of bikur cholim all day long. If they regularly have in mind that they are fulfilling what Hashem wants us to do, they are rewarded for each and every time that they stop in to inquire about the ill and assist in his care. Each time a person visits an ill person, he fulfills an additional act of the mitzvah of bikur cholim, provided that the ill person appreciates the visit. However, one who performs the same activities while looking at it exclusively as a job, but not as an opportunity to imitate Hashem's wondrous deeds, misses the opportunity to receive all this reward. In addition, constantly recognizing that I am acting like Hashem and fulfilling His mitzvos makes a tremendous impression on one's neshamah.

There are two main aspects of this mitzvah: I. Taking care of the physical and emotional needs of ill people. II. Praying for their recovery (Toras Ha'adam, based on Nedarim 40a).

Taking care of needs In addition to raising the sick person's spirits by showing one's concern, the visitor should also ascertain that the physical, financial, and medical needs are properly cared for, as well as other logistical concerns that may be troubling the patient. Often, well-meaning people make the effort to

visit the sick, but fail to fulfill the mitzvah of bikur cholim fully, because they fail to check if the choleh needs something (Gesher Hachayim).

Visiting a child The mitzvah of bikur cholim includes visiting a child who is ill (Yalkut Yosef, Volume 7, page 27). If the child is accompanied by a parent, one can accomplish all aspects of the mitzvah by visiting the parent and child in the hospital, seeing that their needs are being met and praying for the recovery of the child.

Praying The Beis Yosef (Yoreh Deah 335) writes, "It is a great mitzvah to visit the ill, since this causes the visitor to pray on the sick person's behalf, which revitalizes him. Furthermore, since the visitor sees the ill person, the visitor checks to see what the ill person needs." We see that the Beis Yosef considers praying for the ill an even greater part of the mitzvah than attending to his needs, since he first mentions praying and then refers to attending to the other needs as "furthermore."

The authorities note that someone who visits a sick person without praying for his recovery fails to fulfill all the requirements of the mitzvah (Toras Ha'adam; Rema, Yoreh Deah 335:4). Therefore, physicians, nurses, aides and medical clowns should accustom themselves to pray for their sick patients in order to fulfill the complete mitzvah of bikur cholim. A simple method of accomplishing this is to discreetly recite a quick prayer (such as "Hashem, please heal this person among the other ill Jewish people [besoch she'ar cholei Yisroel]") as one leaves the person's room. (A doctor in his office can recite the same quick prayer.) When wishing someone refuah sheleimah, what one is doing is praying on his behalf.

When praying for someone ill, always include a request that he get well together with the rest of the Jewish ill (Shabbos 12b).

Small illness The Gemara (Yerushalmi, Brochos 4:4) implies that one should pray for the healing of even a relatively minor illness. To quote: "We should assume that any illness carries with it the potential to become dangerous."

Just pray? At this point, let us look at the first of our opening questions: "If the mitzvah of bikur cholim is to see that the patient's needs are taken care of, what am I accomplishing by visiting him in the hospital? I am not a physician, and my inquiring about the patient's medical care is probably intrusive and counter-productive."

Aside from the advantage in cheering them up, which can certainly help in their medical care, visiting the patient and seeing him motivates one to daven harder for his recovery and that Hashem should give the medical personnel the wisdom to provide the proper treatment (Shu"t Yechaveh Daas 3:83).

Is there a rabbi in the house? At this point, let us address the second of our opening questions: "Why do people ask tzaddikim to pray on behalf of an ill person?"

Anyone can daven on behalf of an ill person, and should do so; of course, this includes the ill person himself. The Gemara teaches that King Chizkiyahu was healed exclusively in the merit of his own prayer.

Notwithstanding that everyone can and should pray for the sick, the prayers of a great tzaddik have additional merit and can accomplish what the prayers of others cannot. The Gemara (Bava Basra 116a) teaches this lesson in the following way: "Whoever has an ill person in his house should go to a wise man, so that he can pray for mercy on his behalf, as the verse states, 'The angels of death are the fury of the King, but a wise man will atone for it' (Mishlei 16:14)."

Ben gilo The Gemara (Nedarim 39b; Bava Metzia 30b) teaches that the most effective person to visit someone ill is one who qualifies as a ben gilo. The Gemara states that when a ben gilo visits someone ill he takes with him 1/60 of the illness. This means that the ill person is better, but the ben gilo may be affected. What is the definition of a ben gilo?

Among the authorities, I found three interpretations of the term.

(1) One approach I found is that a ben gilo shares a common mazel, meaning that he and the ill person were born under the same astrological sign (Rosh and Ran, Nedarim 39b; Taz, Yoreh Deah 335:2). (2) The Meforeish (Nedarim 39b) defines ben gilo as a young person visiting someone young, or an older person visiting someone in his age range. (3) The Meiri (Nedarim 39b) defines ben gilo as someone whose company the ill person enjoys. The company of someone the patient enjoys eases the illness, but it also affects the health of the friend seeing him so ill.

The probable source for the Meiri is a Midrash Rabbah (Vayikra 34:1), where it states the following: "Rav Huna said: 'Whoever visits the ill removes one sixtieth of his illness.' They then asked Rav Huna, 'Then let sixty people come and visit him, and he'll leave with them afterwards for the marketplace, completely cured!' To this Rav Huna answered: 'Sixty people can indeed accomplish this, but only if they love him as they love themselves!'"

Thus, we see the tremendous value of feeling empathy for the pain of the ill. (We should note that the Gemara supplies an answer to the question that was asked of Rav Huna that disputes the answer provided by the Midrash.)

Brocha for bikur cholim One of the interesting aspects of the mitzvah of bikur cholim is that we do not recite a brocha prior to performing it. Why not?

There are many approaches to answer this question. I will here share some approaches mentioned by the early commentaries.

Patient may not want 1. One recites a brocha only prior to fulfilling a mitzvah which one knows is within his ability to perform. The patient may not want someone to take care of matters for him, or may not want to be visited. If indeed, he does not want visitors, someone who visits him does not fulfill any mitzvah (Shu"t Harashba #18).

Let me explain this approach in a bit more detail. There is a mitzvah that the ill be treated medically and properly. This is included under the mitzvah of the Torah of venishmarta me'od lenafshoseichem, you should be very careful to take care of your lives (Devarim 4:15). One would perhaps think that, therefore, I should recite a brocha on visiting the sick, since my goal is to help cure the ill person, and he is required to seek a cure for his illness. However, this is not sufficient reason to recite a brocha, since the patient is under no obligation to accept my offer to help. He may seek his relief elsewhere.

Not uniquely Jewish 2. Some authorities explain why we do not recite a brocha because the text that we say for birchos hamitzvos is: Asher kideshanu bemitzvosav, that He sanctified us with His mitzvos. They contend that we recite a brocha only when a mitzvah is uniquely Jewish (see Rokei'ach, quoted in Encyclopedia Talmudis, Volume IV, column 525). However, non-Jews also take care of the ill, so this mitzvah does not reflect anything special about the relationship of Hashem to the Jewish people.

This answer is reinforced by the fact that when fulfilling a mitzvah that is uniquely theirs, the kohanim recite a brocha that begins with the words Asher kideshanu bikedushaso shel Aharon, that He sanctified us with the sanctity of Aharon. This demonstrates that the text of brochos for mitzvos is because of the unique ability we have to perform specific commandments that we, as Jewish people or part of the Jewish people, can perform.

3. Prefer not Yet another reason cited why we do not recite a brocha on bikur cholim is because reciting a brocha prior to observing this mitzvah sounds like we want the situation to exist (Raavad, quoted by Yalkut Yosef, page 24). We certainly would prefer that there be no ill people who require medical attention. This reason also explains why we do not recite a brocha on mitzvos such as nichum aveilim, consoling the mourners, and tearing keriyah upon hearing of the passing of a loved one.

4. Not time bound Some rishonim note that all mitzvos upon which we recite brochos are those bound by time – meaning that there are times when we are obligated to observe the mitzvah and times when no obligation exists (Or Zarua, Birchas Hamotzi #140). Obviously, the mitzvah of bikur cholim can be fulfilled at any time.

How to visit The Gemara states that the shechinah rests above the head of a sick person (Shabbos 12b; Nedarim 40a). For this reason, it states that someone who visits a sick person should not sit on a bed, a stool or a chair, but should wrap himself in his talis and sit on the floor. (The Gemara is referring to the time in history when a talis was the standard outer garment that a man wore. It does not mean to imply that one should put on a talis in order to fulfill the mitzvah of visiting the ill.) Alternatively, he can remain standing during his visit.

However, the Rema (Yoreh Deah 335:3) rules that when the Gemara prohibits sitting on a bed, a stool or a chair when visiting someone ill, it was referring to a situation where the patient is lying on the floor – in such a situation, one should not sit in a position higher than the shechinah. When the ill person is in a bed, one can sit on a chair that is no higher than the bed (see Yalkut Yosef, pg 28, quoting Rav Eliezer Yehudah Valdenberg).

Visiting alone At this point, let us address the last of our opening questions: "I was told not to visit a sick person by myself. Is there any halachic basis for this practice?"

Before answering this question, I will provide a bit of historical background. Most of the earlier halachic compendia we have date to the time of the rishonim, about 700-1000 years ago. However, one of the major halachic works dates back earlier, to the era of the geonim, who were the roshei yeshiva of the yeshivos in Bavel (Mesopotamia, in today's Iraq) and the poskim of all of klal Yisroel for a period of approximately 400 years prior to the times of the rishonim.

One of the geonim, Rav Acha'i, authored a halachic work, called the She'iltos, probably the earliest post-Talmudic halachic compendium. In one of his essays there, he discusses the mitzvah of bikur cholim as follows:

"The Jewish people are required to inquire about the wellbeing of the ill, as Rav Chanina said, 'How are we to understand the words of the Torah: "You should follow Hashem, your G-d." How is it possible for a human being to follow the Holy One, blessed is He, when the verse declares that Hashem, your G-d, is a consuming fire?'" Rav Acha'i continues: "Therefore, one is obligated to go and inquire about the needs of the ill. And when one goes, one should not go alone, but with someone else."

Thus, there is a halachic source for the practice not to visit the ill alone. Notwithstanding this ruling of the She'iltos, normative halachic practice does not follow the opinion of Rav Acha'i.

The Netziv, a Hebrew acronym of Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Volozhin Yeshiva in the late nineteenth century, at the time that it was the preeminent yeshiva in the world. He authored several monumental works, including highly original commentaries on the Torah, and on several halachic midrashim: the Sifrei, the Mechilta, and the Sifra. He also wrote what has become the standard commentary on the She'iltos of Rav Acha'i. There the Netziv writes that he is unaware of the source for the She'iltos ruling that one should not visit the ill by himself, and he is unaware of any other halachic authority who mentions this.

Among late compendia on the laws of bikur cholim, I found this question discussed in the Yalkut Yosef, written by the current Sefardic chief rabbi of Israel, Rav Yitzchak Yosef. Rav Yosef concludes that, since no other halachic authorities, including the Shulchan Aruch, mention a halacha that one should not go alone to visit the ill, one should observe it only when it will not prevent someone from fulfilling the mitzvah. In other words, if it will be inconvenient to visit the ill person with someone else, or the ill person would prefer to be visited by one individual at a time, or the only other person available may make the ill person uncomfortable, one should certainly not take along another person when visiting the sick.

Conclusion People who fulfill the mitzvah of bikur cholim are promised tremendous reward in Olam Haba, in addition to many rewards in this world (Shabbos 127a). In addition to all the obvious reasons for the mitzvah of bikur cholim, the Kli Yakar, in his commentary to this week's parsha (Bamidbar 16:29), offers an additional reason for fulfilling bikur cholim - to benefit the visitor. This influences the visitor to think of the importance of doing teshuvah. And this provides extra merit for the sick person, since he caused someone else to do teshuvah, even if it was unintentional. May Hashem send a speedy recovery to all the ill!