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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>
date: Jun 25, 2020, 8:31 PM
subject: Stopping Disrespect; Virtual Community Showcase; The Site of Korach's Demise?

How Not to Argue Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Korach was swallowed up by the ground, but his spirit is still alive and well, and in the unlikelyst of places – British and American universities. Korach was the embodiment of what the Sages called, argument not for the sake of heaven. They contrasted this with the schools of Hillel and Shammai, who argued for the sake of heaven.[1] The difference between them, according to Bartenura, is that argument for the sake of heaven is argument for the sake of truth. Argument not for the sake of heaven is argument for the sake of victory and power, and they are two very different things. Korach and his followers came from three different groups. Korach was from the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram came from the tribe of Reuben. And there were 250 leaders from different tribes. Each had a specific grievance.[2] The 250 leaders resented the fact that leadership roles had been taken from them after the sin of the Golden Calf and given instead to the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram felt aggrieved that their tribe – descendants of Jacob's firstborn – had been given no special status. Moses' reply to Korach – "Now you are trying to get the priesthood too ... Who is Aaron that you should grumble against him?" – makes it clear that Korach wanted to be a Kohen, and probably wanted to be Kohen Gadol, High Priest, in place of Aaron.

The three groups had nothing in common except this, that they wanted to be leaders. Each of them wanted a more senior or prestigious position than they currently held. In a word, they wanted power. This was an argument not for the sake of heaven.

The text gives us a clear picture of how the rebels understood leadership. Their claim against Moses and Aaron was "Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" Later, Datan and Aviram said to Moses, "And now you also want to lord it over us!"

As a general rule: if you want to understand resentments, listen to what people accuse others of, and you will then know what they themselves want. So for example, for many centuries various empires accused Jews of wanting to dominate the world. Jews have never wanted to dominate the world. Unlike almost any other long-standing civilisation, they never created or sought to create an empire. But the people who levelled this accusation against Jews belonged to empires which were beginning to crumble. They wanted to dominate the world but knew they could not, so they attributed their desire to Jews (in the psychological process known as splitting-and-projection, the single most important phenomenon in understanding antisemitism).[3] That is when they created antisemitic myths, the classic case being the protocols of the Elders of Zion, invented by writers or propagandists in Czarist Russia during the last stages of its decline. What the rebels wanted was what they attributed to Moses and Aaron, a form of leadership unknown in the Torah and radically incompatible with the value Moses embodied, namely humility. They wanted to "set themselves above" the Lord's assembly and "lord it over" the people. They wanted power.

What then do you do when you seek not truth but power? You attack not the message but the messenger. You attempt to destroy the standing and credibility of those you oppose. You attempt to de-voice your opponents. That is what Korach and his fellow rebels tried to do. The explicit way in which they did so was to accuse Moses of setting himself above the congregation, of turning leadership into lordship. They made other claims, as we can infer from Moses' response. He said, "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them," implying that they had accused him of abusing his position for personal gain, misappropriating people's property. He said, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea," implying that they had accused him of making up certain instructions or commands, attributing them to God when they were in fact his own idea.

The most egregious instance is the accusation levelled by Datan and Aviram: "Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness?" This is a forerunner of those concepts of our time: fake news, alternative facts, and post-truth. These were obvious lies, but they knew that if they said them often enough at the right time, someone would believe them.

There was not the slightest attempt to set out the real issues: a leadership structure that left simmering discontent among the Levites, Reubenites and other tribal chiefs; a generation that had lost all hope of reaching the promised land; and whatever else was troubling the people. There were real problems, but the rebels were not interested in truth. They wanted power. Their aim, as far as we can judge from the text, was to discredit Moses, damage his credibility, raise doubts among the people as to whether he really was receiving his instructions from God, and so besmirch his character that he would be unable to lead in the future, or at least be forced to capitulate to the rebels' demands. When you are arguing for the sake of power, truth doesn't come into it at all.

Argument not for the sake of heaven has resurfaced in our time in the form of the "cancel!" or "call-out" culture that uses social media to turn people into non-persons when they are deemed to have committed some wrong – sometimes genuinely so (sexual harassment for example), sometimes merely for going against the moral fashion of the moment. Particularly disturbing has been the growing practice of denying or withdrawing a platform at university to someone whose views are deemed to be offensive to some (often minority) group.

So in March 2020, just before universities were shut down because of the Coronavirus crisis, Oxford University Professor Selina Todd was "no-platformed" by the Oxford International Women's Festival, at which she had been due to speak. A leading scholar of women's lives she had been deemed "transphobic," a charge that she denies. At around the same time the UN

Women Oxford UK Society cancelled a talk by former Home Secretary Amber Rudd, an hour before it was due to take place.

In 2019 Cambridge University Divinity School rescinded its offer of a visiting fellowship to Canadian Professor of psychology Jordan Peterson. The Cambridge University Students Union commented, "His work and views are not representative of the student body and as such we do not see his visit as a valuable contribution to the University, but one that works in opposition to the principles of the University." In other words, we don't like what he has to say. All three of these, and other such cases in recent years, are shameful and a betrayal of the principles of the University.

They are contemporary instances of arguments not for the sake of heaven. They are about abandoning the search for truth in favour of the pursuit of victory and power. They are about discrediting and devoicing – "cancelling" – an individual. A university is, or should be, the home of argument for the sake of heaven. It is where we go to participate in the collaborative pursuit of truth. We listen to views opposed to our own. We learn to defend our beliefs. Our understanding deepens, and intellectually, we grow. We learn what it means to care for truth. The pursuit of power has its place, but not where knowledge has its home.

That is why the Sages contrasted Korach and his fellow rebels with the schools of Hillel and Shammai:

For three years there was a dispute between the schools of Shammai and Hillel. The former claimed, 'The law is in agreement with our views,' and the latter insisted, 'The law is in agreement with our views.' Then a Voice from heaven (bat kol) announced, 'These and those are the words of the living God, but the law is in accordance with the school of Hillel.'

Since both 'these and those are the words of the living God', why was the school of Hillel entitled to have the law determined in accordance with their rulings? Because they were kind and modest, they studied both their own rulings and those of the school of Shammai, and they were even so humble as to mention the teachings of the school of Shammai before their own.[4] This is a beautiful portrait of the rabbinic ideal: we learn by listening to the views of our opponents, at times even before our own. I believe that what is happening at universities, turning the pursuit of truth into the pursuit of power, demonising and no-platforming those with whom people disagree, is the Korach phenomenon of our time, and very dangerous indeed. An old Latin motto says that to secure justice, audi alteram partem, "Listen to the other side." It is through listening to the other side that we walk the path to truth.

[1] Mishnah Avot 5:17.

[2] This is a composite of the views of Ibn Ezra and Ramban.

[3] See Vamik Volkan, *The Need to have Enemies and Allies* (1988).

[4] Babylonian Talmud: Eruvin 13b.

Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, pleas... Show more

<http://torahweb.org/torah/docs/rsch/RavSchachter-Corona-31-May-21-2020.pdf>

Rav Hershel Schachter's Piskei Halacha on Coronavirus Shaylas

Husband & Wife Accepting Shabbos at Different Times (2020)

In recent weeks, many individuals who are confined to their homes have begun to accept Shabbos much earlier than the standard candle lighting time, even though they rarely did so in the past. In some situations, the husband accepts Shabbos before the wife has completed her Shabbos preparations. A wife does not have to follow the customs of a husband that are based on

individual practices or stringencies. This is in contrast with a custom that is associated with a community (e.g. kitniyos or gebrochts), in which case the wife must follow the custom of the husband. This is because it is not proper for the husband to be considered a member of one community while the wife associates with a different community, as a married couple ought to be part of the same community. Bringing in Shabbos at a specific early time is a personal acceptance, not a communal custom. Accordingly, if the husband accepts Shabbos before the wife does, then the wife can continue to do melacha until she accepts Shabbos. In addition, she may even do melacha that will benefit the husband during this time. There is, however, a concept of communal tosefes Shabbos. If the community already accepted Shabbos it would be binding on all the individual members of the community.

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Separation Between Men and Women During Tefillah (2020)

<http://torahweb.org/torah/docs/rsch/RavSchachter-Corona-34-May-21-2020.pdf> Davening creates a place of kedushah where the Shechina rests. It is considered a lack of sanctity if men and women daven in the same location. Therefore, when davening outdoors, if the women would like to participate as well, and a mechitzah is not available, there must be a separation of four amos between where the men and the women are standing. Similarly, even when one is davening in their home alone, the men and the women should be four amos apart. This would obviously not be sufficient to satisfy the requirement to have a mechitzah in the shul which demands a bona fide partition.

from: Daily Halacha <return@email.dailyhalacha.com> via

torahlearningresources.org

reply-to: mail@dailyhalacha.com

date: Jun 25, 2020, 3:02 AM

subject: Does Someone Count for a Minyan If He is in a Different Room?

The Rabbi Jacob S. Kassin Memorial Halacha Series

Authored by Rabbi Eli J. Mansour (6/25/2020)

Description: Does Someone Count for a Minyan If He is in a Different Room?

The Shulhan Aruch rules (Orah Haim 55) that ten people form a Halachic Minyan only if they are present together in one room. If nine people are in a room and a tenth is outside in the hallway, or even in the women's section, then they do not form a Minyan, even if the tenth person can see the other nine. The Mishna Berura (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, 1839-1933) rules more leniently, allowing one to count for a Minyan even if he is in a different room, as long as he can see the others. However, we follow the stringent ruling of the Shulhan Aruch, that the ten people must be present in the same room. Ten men in one room form a Minyan even if they cannot see one another.

This Halacha refers only to the question of forming a Minyan, requiring that ten people are present in the same room. If, however, there already are ten men in one room, then people situated outside that room – such as in the hallway, or in the ladies' section – are allowed to answer "Amen" to the Berachot of the Hazzan's repetition of the Amida, and they may respond to Kaddish, Nakdishach and Barechu. Even if one cannot see the Minyan, as long as he hears the Beracha, Kaddish, Nakdishach or Barechu, he may respond. For that matter, if one's home is situated next to a synagogue, and he hears the prayers, he may answer. In fact, according to Hacham David Yosef (in Halacha Berura), even if one hears a live recording of a Minyan, he may answer to all the Berachot and all the prayers. Indeed, there are ill patients who are unable to attend the prayers in the synagogue but listen to the prayers through a live feed, or via telephone, and are then able to answer "Amen" and respond to all the prayers.

It is questionable, however, whether one is credited with Tefila Be'sibur – praying with a Minyan – if he can hear the Minyan but cannot see them. It appears from a responsum of the Radbaz (Rav David Ben Zimra, Egypt, 1479-1573) that he maintained that one is considered to have prayed with a

Minyan in such a manner, whereas others disagree, and require one to see the Minyan in order to be considered to have prayed with them.

Summary: Ten men form a Minyan only if they are all in the same room, in which case they can form a Minyan even if they cannot all see each other. But if even just one of the ten is in a different room, then even if he can see the others, the group cannot form a Minyan. Once ten men are together in one room and form a Minyan, anyone who hears Kaddish, Nakdishach, Barechu or the repetition of the Amida may respond, no matter where he is or whether he can see the Minyan, even if he hears the prayers or Berachot via live feed or telephone. It is uncertain, however, whether one is credited with praying with a Minyan if he cannot see the Minyan.

from: torahweb@torahweb.org

to: weeklydt@torahweb.org

date: Jun 24, 2020, 10:46 AM

subject: **Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Korach: Corruption of the Spiritual**
Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

Korach: Corruption of the Spiritual

At first glance, Korach could be written off as just another troublemaker, a minor politician clamoring for an underserved office. And yet, the use of the Divine service - and especially the ketores - as the tool to rid ourselves of him, and the extraordinary miracles associated with his undoing, clearly point to a much greater assault on Yiddishkeit than merely another disgruntled office-seeker.

The Rambam (in Peirush Hamishnayos- hakdama to perek Chelek) indicates that Korach's assault was on the veracity of the Torah transmission of Moshe. He insinuated that the directive to appoint Aharon to be the kohein gadol was Moshe's own design, not Hashem's directive. This therefore made the entire Torah suspect and as such could potentially destroy all of Torah and Yiddishkeit.

Taking a closer look at Chazal, we find that Korach is guilty of another fundamentally flawed perception of the spiritual world of Torah, which is in effect a total eradication of our understanding of Torah and Mitzvos. Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 18, 3) tell us that Korach mocked Moshe, asking him, "does a garment that is completely techeiles need tzitzis?", to which Moshe of course replied in the affirmative. Korach then mocked, "if a solitary thread of techeiles is enough to fulfill the mitzvah, isn't an entire garment of techeiles enough?" Korach continued, "does a house filled with sifrei Torah need a mezuzah?", to which Moshe replied, "of course." Once again Korach mocked him, "if two paragraphs of Torah are enough to fulfill the obligation of mezuzah, surely an entire house of seforim is good enough!?"

These arguments are powerful. They fall under the category of "reductio ad absurdum", reducing your opponent's argument to a place of ridicule. What, then, was Moshe's counterpoint? The answer is that Korach's position and argumentation was based on a perception of the spiritual world that was severely flawed. He understood the spiritual world as a finite set of "good" that could be totally obtained by one's efforts. Thus once the "garment" is all techeiles and the house is full of seforim, there is no point in doing anything else, just as a person who works hard exclusively in order to afford a home would find it pointless to work further once he has acquired that home.

But that is a very crass perception of the spiritual world, which sees it as one in which one acquires "things", similar to the physical world. The reality, however, is that the spiritual world is a road leading a person to Hashem. Just as Hashem is infinite, so is the road leading to Him, so to speak. The spiritual is not a specific finite acquisition or set of acquisitions, but a road that continuously leading a person towards Hashem. As soon as a person has progressed down the road, another segment of the road opens up, and then still another segment, and so on ad infinitum. Thus each mitzvah is but a "thread" that leads the person to the beyond; a gateway that opens to another palace, and when one has woven an entire garment of this techeiles, and filled an entire room with seforim, there is a thread that leads him still further, and a door that opens to another room, and so on.

This misconception about the spiritual world is what led Korach to dispute the kehunah in the first place. Chazal say that the reason why it is not common for talmedei chachomim to have children who are talmedei chachomim is in order that people not feel that "Torah" is inherited. For physical entities are always inherited; they are "things" and become the owner's eternally. Not so the world of the spirit. One can have an affinity for ruchniyos but it never becomes anyone's personal possession. Thus Korach's very demand that the kehunah is his disqualified him from that position!

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Rav Kook Torah

Korach: Inclusion and Selection

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

While the Midrash appears to belittle Korach's dispute as foolish, the argument that Korach put forth - "All of the congregation is holy, and God is in their midst" (Num. 16:3) - does not seem silly at all. Is not Korach simply restating what God told the entire nation, "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2)? What was so wrong with his claim? Why did Moses insist that only Aaron and his descendants could serve as priests? Korach's mistake is rooted in the dialectic between two distinct forms of divine providence: inclusion (kirvah), and selection (bechirah). During certain periods, the service of God was inclusive, available to all. At other times, God chose certain persons or places to bear a higher level of sanctity, in order to elevate the rest of the world through them.

The Temple and the Bamot

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

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

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

For the service in the Tabernacle and the Temple, on the other hand, only the descendants of Aaron were allowed to serve. When Shiloh and later Jerusalem were chosen to host the Holy Ark, the divine service was limited to the boundaries of those cities and their holy structures. Unlike the bamot, which were accessible to all, the Tabernacle and the Temple were enclosed buildings, set apart by walls and barriers. The various levels of holiness were spatially restricted. Thus the Talmud (Yoma 54a) teaches that the Shechinah was confined to the space between the two poles of the Holy Ark.

Pillar Service

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

Abraham, who tried to spread the concept of monotheism throughout the world.

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

Prophecy Only in Israel

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

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

Korach's Vision

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

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

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

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Korach - Grinding the Point

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The sojourn in the desert was no walk in the park. True, it was a period of time in which miracles were the norm and the level of spirituality soared, but life next to G-d required a perfect commitment. The actions of the Jewish nation were scrutinized, the eyes of Hashem peering as a strict teacher, correcting and adjusting every wrong move with immediate censure and swift action. We suffered for our mistakes. The Jews wandered for 40 years because of the erroneous reports of the spies. And the many rebellions and uprisings concerning the manna and other matters, including the ever-resounding desire to return to Egypt, were met with swift, decisive retribution.

This week, however, the rebels are rebuked in three totally different ways, each a miracle unto itself. Korach organized a rebellion against Moshe and Ahron. Claiming nepotistic inconsistency, Korach said that Ahron did not deserve the position of Kohen Gadol. After all, he claimed "the entire congregation is holy, (they were all at Sinai). "Why, then," he argued with Moshe, "do you raise yourselves higher than the rest of the congregation of the Lord?" (Numbers 16:3)

But this time the punishment is not the ordinary plague. First, in a display of absolute power and sovereignty, Hashem opens the earth and swallows Korach and the immediate family of rabble-rousers whole and alive!

Then his 250 co-conspirators are consumed by fire as they attempt to offer a ktore (incense) sacrifice. And afterwards, to quell more grumbling, another miracle occurs. Each tribal leader is commanded to place a stick in the ground and miraculously only Ahron's stick begins to bud before their eyes. It grew leaves, flowers, and almonds — a heavenly sign that only Ahron merits the exalted position of Kohen Gadol.

It always bothered me. The opening of the earth is no little feat. Earthquakes of that magnitude did not occur at a moment's notice! Wasn't that event powerful enough to make the point? Why was there a need to quell the whining and punish the perpetrators with such powerful punishments and magnificent miracles? Shouldn't a heavenly warning have been enough? Rabbi Meshulm Igra of Pressburg was one of Europe's leading scholars in the latter part of the 18th century. As a young man, he was engaged to the daughter of a prominent community leader in the city of Butzatz. A few months before the wedding the young chosson ate a meal at the home of his future father-in-law. Dessert was served together with a hot treat a delicacy that the impoverished Reb Meshulam had never heard of — coffee.

The servant brought out a cup of brewed coffee together with sugar and milk. The prospective father-in-law directed his son in law to partake. The young scholar looked quizzically at each of the entities and began to ponder. There were two liquids and sugar. The Talmud teaches that eating precedes drinking. He took a spoon of sugar and ate it. Then he was unsure what to drink first the milk or the black brew. Noting that darkness in the Torah comes before day, he drank the black coffee. Noticing the grinds at the bottom of the cup, he took his spoon and began to eat them. Not wanting to embarrass his soon-to-be father-in-law who had served such a difficult-to-eat dessert, he slowly chewed and swallowed the grinds. His prospective bride stood in shock.

"Father," she cried "I cannot marry a man who does not know how to drink a cup of coffee. He is a total klutz!" The engagement was broken.

Years later this same community leader visited the home of Rav Yeshaya Pick the prominent Rav of Breslow. Upon entering the study he noticed the rav engrossed in a letter. He looked totally concerned and distraught. When the man asked what problem was, Rabbi Pick told him that he just received a letter that is filled with the deepest insights. "I have to be totally immersed in Torah thought to begin to comprehend the level of this man's brilliance. In fact," he continued, "I do not think a man of this caliber has emerged in the last fifty years! And," he added, "besides the brilliance, one can note his amazing humility and fine character throughout every word he writes."

Then he looked up at the man. "You come from Butzatz. Have you ever heard of a man called Meshulam Igra?"

The man didn't emit a verbal response. He fainted.

When he came to, he recounted the entire story of the engagement and its dissolution, how Rabbi Igra was meant to be his son-in-law but the match was broken over coffee grounds. Rabbi Pick looked up at him and shook his head sadly. "Is that so?" he exclaimed. "You gave up the opportunity for this great man because he did not know how to drink a cup of coffee?"

Then he looked at the man and simply declared, "Faint again!"

Perhaps the greatest undoing of our nation throughout its history is the non-appreciation of its great leaders. Among our midst exists diamonds, but they are often treated like raw coal. There is a most popular song, sung in the Yeshiva world on all holidays, "Moshe emes v'Toraso emes. Moshe is true and his Torah is true." The inseparability of the Torah and its teachers, the appreciation of the two as inseparable in their validity is a fundamental in throughout the writings of Maimonides and all the philosophies of Torah Judaism. Without recognizing the greatness of our leaders, we would be lost. Hashem did not the rebellion against Moshe to subside with just one action. It took three very different miracles, the splitting of the earth, the fire that consumed, and the budding of the dry sticks, to reiterate the most important point that sustains us until today. Because if we do not realize from where our strength comes, Hashem will remind us. And He will tell us to faint again! Good Shabbos

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Insights Parshas Korach - Tammuz 5780

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated l'zecher nishmat my dear father-in-law Avraham Yonah ben Nachum HaCohen. Sponsored by Howard Glowinsky. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Might Not Always Right

...then the man whom Hashem will choose, he is the holy one... (16:7)

This week's parsha chronicles Korach's infamous rebellion on the authority of Moshe. Korach, driven by jealousy, was upset that he was passed over for the position of head of the family of Kehas in favor of a younger cousin whom Moshe appointed (see Rashi 16:1). Obviously, Korach couldn't merely complain that he disliked Moshe's appointment to the head of the Kehas family; that would be too transparently self-serving. Instead, he decided to discredit Moshe's authority and show that Moshe had an inappropriate bias. He came with an entire entourage to confront Moshe and Aharon, and charged them with the conspiracy of nepotism. In other words, they claimed that Moshe had decided on his own to appoint his brother Aharon as Kohen Gadol and that this was unfair as many others were just as worthy.

Moshe became very distressed when he heard this. He responded to this charge by devising a test to see who would be worthy of bringing the ketores (incense offering offered by the Kohen Gadol), as this would prove who should rightfully be appointed to the office of the priesthood. Long story short: good guys won, bad guys lost (i.e. Korach and his mutinous cronies die a gruesome death and Aharon retained the title).

Rashi (16:7), rather bluntly, asks a very pointed question: What caused Korach, who was a very clever person, to engage in such a stupidity? Meaning, Korach knew the veracity of Moshe's claim that Aharon had been appointed by Hashem, he knew that he was wrong and that he was putting his life at risk by challenging Moshe. How could Korach, who was actually a very wise man, engage in such folly?

Rashi answers that Korach saw that Shmuel HaNavi would be one of his descendants. According to the Gemara (Ta'anis 5b), Shmuel HaNavi was, in some sense, equal in greatness to both Moshe and Aharon. In addition, he saw that he would have descendants that would serve in the Beis Hamikdosh, all of them having a level of divine prophecy. Bottom line, many great people descended from him. When Moshe said that only one of the people who brought the incense would survive, Korach automatically assumed that it would be him. Alas, he was mistaken; he didn't realize that his children would repent and actually live - it was from them that these great people later emerged.

Rashi ends his comment with a curious remark; "but Moshe did see properly." That is to say, even though Moshe also saw the greatness that would eventually descend from Korach, he knew that it would come from Korach's children. What could Rashi possibly mean to say? Rashi cannot be explaining why Moshe wasn't afraid for Aharon's life; Moshe was confident in the life or death test he devised because he knew that Hashem had asked him to appoint Aharon and that he wasn't guilty of nepotism. What difference does it make that "Moshe did see properly"?

Rashi is telling us that even though Moshe knew that Korach was in the wrong and that he deserved to die for his terrible insubordination and challenge to Moshe's authority, the only reason Moshe felt comfortable in pursuing this course of action was because he knew that Korach's future descendants would be unaffected by Korach's untimely death.

This teaches us an incredible lesson regarding conflict and its consequences: Even when you know you're right and you have the power to enforce your

vision of what you deem to be right, you have to take a long and hard look at the consequences of your actions. Being in the right doesn't give you carte blanche to impose that position. Every possible eventuality must be considered before implementing an agenda, even when it's a righteous one. Whether a person is a hard line conservative, or a far left liberal, no agenda should ever be implemented until all the action's consequences are fully considered. After all, Moshe wouldn't execute someone who absolutely deserved to die unless he saw that the future would remain unchanged (see also Shemos 2:12 and Rashi ad loc).

Bikur Cholim

If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem that has sent me (16:30).

A little known fact about this week's parsha is that the Gemara (Nedarim 39b) uses the above statement by Moshe ("and the destiny of all men is visited upon them") as a source for the obligation of bikur cholim - visiting the sick.

Moshe had intended to say that if the mutinous group that challenged his authority should die a natural death (i.e. die on their deathbeds in a natural manner) then they are right and he is wrong; but, if they should die in an unusual manner (e.g. the earth swallows them up) then he is right and they are wrong. However, the Talmud derives from the seemingly superfluous comment "and the destiny of all men is visited upon them" a source for the obligation of bikur cholim.

In other words, Moshe was adding to the test of their "natural death" whether or not people would come to visit them while they lay on their deathbeds. From this, the Gemara derives the obligation of visiting the ill.

This teaching, extrapolated from the text, is difficult to understand; what possible reason could Moshe have to add this as a critical component of what constitutes a natural death? What does visiting the sick have to do with this conflict? Additionally, we find a different Gemara (Sotah 14a) that derives the obligation of bikur cholim from the fact that Hashem visited Avraham Avinu on the third day after his circumcision. As the Gemara (ad loc) points out, we are obligated to follow in the path that Hashem has laid out for us; just as Hashem visited the sick so must we. What possible reason do we need to add yet another source for bikur cholim?

There are two types of visits to the sick, each with its own responsibility. The first type is similar to when Hashem went to visit with Avraham Avinu and was there to help support him while Avraham was in pain recovering from his bris. There is an element to visiting the ill to help them recover, whether in easing the burden of their suffering or, as the Talmud (Nedarim 39b) states, that a person who visits removes one sixtieth of the illness. This was the type of bikur cholim that Hashem engaged in when visiting Avraham Avinu and that we are obligated to emulate: Helping to relieve an ill person's pain and easing their recovery.

However, there is another kind of affliction, the kind that one does not recover from. A patient who is terminally ill requires a totally different type of bikur cholim. Their suffering transcends physical pain; they suffer the pain of nonexistence. One who is terminally ill is painfully aware that he is not going to recover and will shortly leave this world. Most people spend their entire lives blissfully ignoring the fact that at some point they will no longer be on this earth. A person who is terminally ill begins to confront this reality in a very real way.

The only way to really begin to ease their pain is to give meaning to their life. A person who is dying needs to know that their life made a difference. In other words, they need to know that their existence made an impact and that there is something remaining even after they're gone. The responsibility of this bikur cholim is to convey to the ailing that your own life has been changed by their existence. The way to do this is to give them a feeling of how much you feel connected to them and appreciate them, and even though they will soon pass from this world, their existence mattered in a very real way.

This second type of bikur cholim is what Moshe is referring to in this week's parsha. Korach intended to create a division within the Jewish people. In fact, the first Rashi in this week's parsha clearly states that Korach wished to separate himself off to one side. This division, or machlokes, becomes the quintessential machlokes that is not for the sake of heaven (Avos 5:20). This is why Moshe had so precisely added the criteria of being visited on their deathbeds to those collaborating with Korach. Meaning, if people would go to visit with them and express how connected they felt to them before they passed, then Moshe was obviously wrong because in that case their cause had been just and not caused a permanent rift or machlokes....
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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Korach 5780-2020
Achieving the Good Life by Picking the Right Mate
(updated and revised from parashat Korach 5761-2001)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this coming week's parasha, parashat Korach, we read of Korach's great rebellion against Moses. Korach, who is a first cousin to Moses and Aaron, and a fellow Levite, accuses Moses and Aaron of usurping authority that does not belong to them, and of not sharing the power of leadership with other members of the People of Israel.

In Numbers 16:1, the Torah records the start of the rebellion: וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח... וַיִּבְרָחֵם בְּנֵי אֱלִיָּאב, וְאוֹרֹן בֶּן פִּלֵּת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן Korach, gathered together with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliav, and On the son of Pelet, the descendants of Reuben, and stood before Moses with 250 men of the children of Israel, leaders of the assembly...men of renown.

Confronting Moses and Aaron, they said to them (Numbers 16:3): רַב לָכֶם, כִּי? It is too much for you (Moses and Aaron)! After all, the entire assembly is holy, and G-d is among them. So, why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of G-d? Moses tries to reason with Korach, to no avail. He challenges Korach and his supporters to a Divine test, instructing them to bring censurers full of k'toret, incense, and that tomorrow G-d will show the People of Israel whom He chooses. Moses tries to forestall the rebellion by approaching Dathan and Abiram for reconciliation, but they refuse even to meet with him. Numbers 16:14, records the response of Dathan and Abiram: הֲעֵינֵי הָאָנָשִׁים הֵּהֶם? "Do you expect to gouge out the eyes of those men?" There's nothing to talk about!

Eventually, the earth opens and swallows Korach, Dathan and Abiram, and fire comes out of heaven and devours the 250 men who brought the improper incense offering.

When reviewing the narrative concerning the deaths of Korach and his cohorts, the rabbis ask, "What happened to On, the son of Pelet? Why is his name not mentioned among the rebellious victims who were killed?"

The rabbis of the Midrash point out that two women played key roles in the rebellion of Korach—one played a destructive role, the other a constructive role. The Midrash maintains that Mrs. Korach egged her husband on, saying to him: "How long are you going to allow your cousin Moses to ridicule you, and remain silent? He's consolidating all the power and wealth for himself, and you're a nothing!" After hearing her laments over and over, Korach resolves to do something. He eventually confronts Moses, which leads to the terrible rebellion, and concludes with Korach's horrifying demise.

To balance this not very "politically correct" description of Mrs. Korach, the rabbis maintain that On the son of Pelet is saved by his wife. Apparently, Mrs. On had overheard Korach cajoling her husband into rebelling and trying to persuade On to join the ranks of the disenchanting. After all, said

Korach, "You On, are a member of the tribe of Reuben, the first born of Jacob. You are entitled to power and glory as well." According to the Midrash, when Mrs. On hears this, she tells her husband: "On, darling, what will you gain from this rebellion against Moses? Should Moses emerge victorious, you'll still be a nothing. If Korach emerges victorious you'll be subservient to Korach. You're in a Catch 22. Stay out of it!"

On eventually agrees with his wife, but was concerned that Korach and his cohorts would come to drag him to the rebellion. Mrs. On tells her husband not to fear; she would handle the matter.

When Mrs. On saw the emissaries of Korach approaching her home to collect her husband, she quickly gave On some wine to drink, and he fell asleep. Mrs. On positioned herself at the door of the tent, her hair immodestly uncovered, coiffing herself in public. When Korach and his assembly saw Mrs. On in her immodest state, they turned away, leaving On alone.

According to a further Midrashic tradition, when the earth opened to swallow Korach's cohorts, the bed on which On slept began to tremble, and the earth began to open to swallow On. On's wife pleaded with G-d saying, "O Lord of the Universe, my husband made a solemn vow to never again take part in dissensions. You Who lives and endures for all eternity can punish him hereafter if ever he proves false to his vow." G-d heeds her plea, and On is saved. Eventually, On receives personal forgiveness from Moses. From then on the Midrash tells us that On is called "On the Penitent, the son of Pelet" which means miracle. An interesting tradition has it that On was actually the brother of Dathan and Abiram.

How fascinating that the Torah underscores that a person's fate is often determined by the mate he or she chooses.

The parasha also warns how the friends one chooses can also determine a person's fate. Rashi notes on Numbers 16:1 how Dathan and Abiram were pulled in to Korach's rebellion because they were Korach's neighbors. The noteworthy words of the Midrash Rabbah bear repetition: אִי לְרֵשָׁע אִי לְשָׂכְנוֹ—Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbor.

In the early stages of courting, it's so difficult to predict the ultimate ideals and the intimate perspectives a potential spouse may have. Try as we may to determine what those intimate values are, it is often impossible to confirm. Even after marriage, husbands and wives, at times, find themselves pulling in different directions. One may be more spiritual, while the other more material. One may be more cerebral, while the other more athletic. One may be more outgoing, the other more shy. But, it is inevitable that after years of living together, husbands and wives influence one another. The ultimate question is, which of the traits and values will dominate? Sometimes only the negative traits dominate, while at other times the positive values prevail. Obviously, marriages need דְּשִׁמְיָא דְּשִׁמְיָא, much Divine intervention and blessings from Above.

The verse in the Book of Psalms, 34:15 made famous by the Chofetz Chaim is instructive: סוּר מִרָע וּנְעֹשֶׂה טוֹב, Turn from evil and do good. Some people lack the strength or the fortitude to confront evil. Perhaps that's what happened to On the son of Pelet and his wife. Instead, they chose subterfuge merely to avoid evil, with favorable results—salvation for them and their progeny.

Clearly, much of life depends on mazal, (good luck and fortune). Nevertheless, people are often in a position to determine and insure their own good fortune. Choose friends and mates carefully. Avoid situations that are going to result in ethical compromise. Have faith in G-d, and always strive to be the best you can be.

May you be blessed.

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Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Korach

פרשת קרח תש"פ
כי כל העדה כלם קדושים

For the entire congregation – all of them – are holy. (16:3)

Korach crossed the line when he debated Moshe *Rabbeinu*. One does not impugn the integrity of the *gadol/gedolim*, Torah giants, of their generation. His statement, “The entire congregation, all of them, are holy,” is the basic argument of those who reject the Torah leaders, claiming that they are as well-versed in Torah as the *gedolim*. They do not require a teacher or a leader. *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl* (who was the *posek ha'dor*, undisputed *halachic* arbiter of his generation), explains that without the *mesorah*, tradition, of the great men of the generation, one can easily err – just as Korach erred – concerning the laws of *tzitzis* and *mezuzah*. Likewise, we observe the apostasy of Eliezer ben Poirah, who maintained that *Sefer Torah munachas b'keren zaviis*, “the *Sefer Torah* is lying in a corner, and whoever chooses to learn may come and learn” (*Kiddushin* 66a).

The *Tzadukim* took this position when they denied the Torah's Divine Authorship. *Rav Moshe* asserts that one who believes that the Torah is “lying in a corner” and anyone who wishes to learn from it (or any volume of *Talmud* and its commentators) without the direction and guidance of Torah authorities, is a *kofer*, apostate. Sadly, various forms of apostasy exist. Those who have studied “little,” find support for their fallacious views in some rabbinic maxim, which, consistent with their limited knowledge, they have misunderstood. Indeed, even the generation of the wilderness, a generation that heard the first two *Dibros*, Commandments, of the Ten Commandments, required Moshe and Aharon and all of the Elders to teach, explain and guide them.

Regrettably, many individuals who have defamed the term Orthodoxy (which really should be called Torah Judaism), suggesting that it is not monolithic, thus allowing for diverse opinions concerning the *halachah*. It might be true that in the Orthodox camp people maintain various approaches to manners of service, but all adhere to the *Shulchan Aruch* and are guided by the words of the *gedolei Yisrael*. To suggest that *halachic* decisions for a particular community is the sole domain of its *rav*, the local authority, regardless of the *p'sak* of the *gadol ha'dor*, borders on apostasy. They do not ascribe to the time-honored *halachic* rubric of *daas Torah*, the wisdom of the Torah, as expounded by the sages whose lives represent Torah dictate at its most stringent level. Diversity does not exist in *halachah* if an approach is antithetical to the *Shulchan Aruch*. I could go on to chronicle the flawed, misinformed opinions of those who have decided that *halachah* is insufficient for living an ideal life. I will sum up, however, with one quote from their thesis on modernity in Judaism: “For *Chareidi* Orthodoxy, the *halachah* dictates the ethic, rather than the other way around.” They view *halachah* as being the product of their perception of what they consider to be ethical. They have no place for Hashem in their definition of an ideal life.

We have blamed Korach for being the progenitor of *machlokes*, controversy, *she'lo l'shem Shomayim*, not for the sake of Heaven. After all is said and done, however, Korach was an unabashed *kofer*, apostate. He did not believe in Hashem, and he sought to impugn the integrity of Moshe and Aharon's leadership in order to promote his self-serving purpose. *Machlokes*; sowing the seeds of hatred; fomenting feelings of dissent; manipulating Jewish pride for personal gain, were all part of his gambit to tarnish Judaism. Korach lost; his followers in each ensuing generation have also lost because ultimately, they have contended, not with Jewish leadership, but with Hashem.

The *Yalkut Shemoni* relates Moshe *Rabbeinu's* reaction to Korach's apostasy. Korach claimed, “Moshe is not a prophet; Aharon is not *Kohen Gadol*; the Torah was not given from Heaven.” When Moshe heard this heresy emanating from Korach's mouth, he said to Hashem, “I (might) be *mevater*, concede/ overlook/ defer concerning my humiliation and that of (my brother) Aharon, but on the *bizayon*, denigration of the Torah, I will not be *mevater*.” With these words, Korach's fate was sealed. One is not permitted to accept the Torah's disgrace at the hands of such a renegade.

To give the reader an idea of the meaning of *kavod haTorah*, the honor (that should be) given to the Torah of *Gedolei hador*, the Torah giants of a generation, I will relate a few vignettes. The venerable *Netziv, zl*, once fell to the ground as he was carrying a *Sefer Torah*. *Horav Yitzchak Volozhiner, zl*, immediately told those standing there, “Pick up the *Netziv* first!” *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, upon quoting this story, remarked concerning the powerful lesson regarding *kavod haTorah* that we derive from it. The *Talmud* (*Makkos* 22b) declares, “How foolish are the Babylonians who rise up for a Torah scroll, but fail to do so for a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar.” This is why *Rav Yitzchak Volozhiner* instructed the students to first pick up the *Netziv*, the *gadol hador*, and only then to pick up the *Sefer Torah*.

Horav Eliezer Ben David, Shlita, supplements this with an explanation. A *Sefer Torah* is written on parchment derived from the skin/hide of an animal. Thus, it becomes sanctified when the *sofer*, scribe, has the proper *kavanos*, intentions, while he is writing on it. A *talmid chacham's* Torah is inscribed upon his body, so that his entire body becomes holy. Perhaps we might add that a Torah scroll's letters are written on the parchment. A *talmid chacham's* Torah permeates his entire essence, literally making him a *shtik*, the essence of, Torah.

When *Horav Mordechai Benet, zl*, visited the city of Pressburg, Hungary, where the *Chasam Sofer* was *Rav*, he went into the *shul* at night to learn. While he was studying Torah, he fell asleep from physical exhaustion. After a while, he rolled off the bench and slept on the floor. The following morning, the worshippers entered the sanctuary to find *Rav Mordechai Benet* sleeping on the floor. The *Chasam Sofer* immediately decreed a fast day on the community consistent with the *halachah* that requires the community to fast when a *Sefer Torah, chas v'shalom*, falls to the ground.

Horav Avraham Tzvi Ungar, zl, author of the *Machne Avraham*, was *Rav* in Kapu-Var, Hungary, a city whose Jewish community primarily consisted of observant Jews. Some secular Jews, whose self-loathing manifest itself in extreme animus towards their observant brothers, also lived there. One secular Jew in particular vilified Orthodoxy beyond a level of which one would believe a Jew capable. He owned a fabric store, situated in the central part of town which served all members of the community. He had a loathsome habit of opening his store on *Shabbos*, specifically when the observant Jews were leaving *shul*. To add insult to injury, he stood in the doorway of his store, smoking a cigarette, and when the worshippers passed his store, he would smile and offer them a loud, “*Gutt Shabbos!*”

On the first day of *Pesach*, when the worshippers left *shul* accompanied by their *Rav*, he called out, with derision, “Ungar! Come here!” The *Rav* was startled, but not wanting to create a scene, he turned his head toward the man. How shocked he was to see this man standing in his storefront holding a sandwich consisting of two slices of bread with a piece of *matzah* between them. Seeing this, the *Rav* almost passed out. This was beyond *chutzpah*. He was not denigrating the *Rav*, he was disgracing G-d! The *Rav* just stared at him. Suddenly, the man gave a scream and fell to the ground, the victim of a sudden stroke.

That year, the first day of *Pesach* had fallen on Thursday. Thus, the deceased could not be buried until Sunday. For three days he lay on the floor of his house. The community was shaken. For those three days, they could speak about nothing other than the man's *chillul Hashem*, disgracing Hashem's Name, and the swift Heavenly punishment that was meted out. Indeed, as a result of this clear, Heavenly response, Hashem's Name was publicly sanctified in an unprecedented manner that would forever alter the lax attitude towards *Shabbos* observance.

To the surprise of the members of the community, the *Rav* participated in the funeral. Furthermore, he ascended to the podium to render a eulogy. He later explained his actions. While the man had led a lifestyle that was antithetical to Torah, in the end, his sudden passing catalyzed an extraordinary *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*, inspiring an entire community suddenly to come to terms with the reality that Hashem guides the world and

that no action (good or bad) will go unrequited. As such, this man had become a vehicle for *Kiddush Hashem*. He deserved to be eulogized.

Just because a person publicly acts in a manner which is perceived as *kefirah*, apostasy, it does not necessarily bespeak his true feelings. Many an apostate is filled with self-loathing, which he expresses in negative terms towards Judaism. Is he really a *kofer*? *Horav Nachman Bulman, zl*, was an extraordinary *Rav*, a *talmid chacham* whose devotion to Torah and its dissemination, through both the oral and written word, not only earned him the respect, admiration and love of thousands, but he also succeeded in altering the spiritual panorama of America, and later *Eretz Yisrael*. In the 1950's, it was difficult to find a truly Orthodox *shul* outside of the tri-state area. As a young rabbi, *Rav Bulman* was fortunate to find such a position in Danville, Virginia. While the community was not exactly Orthodox, they elected to maintain the *shul* on a level which they thought was Orthodox. It took time, but, with tenacity and perseverance, *Rav Bulman* succeeded in transforming the community.

Rav Bulman put up with stubborn synagogue heads and disgruntled members, a phenomenon that was not uncommon on the slowly emerging Orthodox landscape. Danville had one "in-house" *apikores*, self-proclaimed heretic, who even had a Ph.D. in philosophy. He made it a point to interject constantly into *Rav Bulman's* Sunday morning Torah class with his usual dose of *kefirah*. *Shul on Shabbos*, prayer at any time, was an anathema to him, or so he claimed.

This man, like so many like him, suffered from ambivalent stirrings concerning the religion of his youth. He would come to *shul* for *Neilah*, the closing prayer of the *Yom Kippur* service, and make a public spectacle of reading a newspaper (in *shul*, rather than take a *machzor*, prayer book, and *daven*). He did not have the paper, however, for reading purposes, but to block the tears that were flowing down his face! To "save face," he would say to *Rav Bulman*, on his way out of *shul*, "The old-fashioned *davening* is so tear-jerking. I believe they have something similar to this by the gentiles." This goes to show that not all *kofrim*, apostates, are created equal, and not all are the way they present themselves.

ואני הנה נתתי לך את משמרת תרומתי לכל קדשי בני ישראל

And I – behold! I have given you the safeguard of My heave-offer was of all the sanctities of *Bnei Yisrael*. (18:8)

The offerings *Korach* controversy had concluded (veritably, it never ends; a new one will unfortunately rear its ugly head to replace the former debacle), and the Torah now lists the twenty-four various gifts, *matnos Kehunah*, that were allotted to the *Kohanim*. In *Pirkei Avos* (6:6), we are taught that the Priesthood is acquired through twenty-four procedures. *Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*, observes that this is no coincidence. A corollary must exist between these two "twenty-fours." He quotes the *Chovos HaLevavos*, who teaches that everything which Hashem grants us comes with an obligation for reciprocity. Hashem shows His kindness to us. We are obliged to reciprocate in kind, by adding joy and fervor to our continued service.

Rav Wolbe derives from here an important lesson for all of us. First and foremost, we must never lose sight of the fact that Hashem created us and the world that we are in. When we bear this in mind, we realize that everything is a gift from Hashem; thus, we cannot take anything for granted. We can have no entitlement. Life, health, intellect, family, and material possessions are all gifts which Hashem, in His infinite kindness, bestows upon us. At any time, He can decide to withhold a gift, and we will not function in the manner that we took for granted.

I write this in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, when the entire world has come to the stark realization that Hashem owes us nothing, and He can demonstrate this at any time. An entire world has been brought to its feet. Furthermore, not only were our material and physical activities halted; our ability to function on a spiritual plane was put to a test unlike anything ever before. No one knows the reason why Hashem does what He does. One thing is for certain: Hashem is holding the cards; He is manipulating the strings.

Hashem does not dole out gifts without a reason. Everything that He gives us has a purpose. The gifts that He gives us are to enable us to serve Him better – with wisdom, strength and material bounty. Nothing one receives from Hashem is automatic, because He owes us nothing. Additionally, everything that we are granted is for the purpose of furthering our knowledge of Hashem and enabling us to serve Him better. The *Kohanim* merited twenty-four gifts, which (in turn) obligated them to perform the twenty-four varied services in the *Bais HaMikdash*. We, too, have a *quid pro quo* to perform Hashem's service with every gift in our inventory.

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Erasing on Shabbos

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question: Erasing off my hand

On Friday, I wrote a short reminder on my hand. May I rub it off on Shabbos?

Introduction:

In a previous article, we analyzed the prohibition of writing on Shabbos. We discovered that this melacha was performed in the process of building the mishkan – either when they marked the boards, to make sure that they were placed in the proper location, or, according to another opinion, when they kept records. This does not explain why the activity of erasing, mocheik, is a melacha. Rashi (73a) explains that erasing is a melacha because sometimes the person doing the marking made an error that required correction. Thus, the erasing was in order to write the correct numbering. This leads directly to our next point:

Erasing in order to write

When the Mishnah lists the various melachos of Shabbos, it states, "There are 39 categories of melacha: Someone who plants, or plows, or reaps, or gathers, or threshes, or winnows, or selects, or grinds, or sifts, or kneads, or bakes. Someone who shears wools, or launders it, or cards it, or dyes it, or spins... someone who traps a deer, or slaughters it, or skins it... or tans the hide, or smooths it, or cuts it to size, or writes two letters, or erases with the intent of writing two letters, or builds, or razes, or extinguishes, or someone who kindles." The amount of detail for the melacha of erasing, relative to the other melachos, stands out; most of the melachos are described in Hebrew by one word, without referencing another melacha or a quantity. Yet, when mentioning the melacha of mocheik, erasing, the Mishnah limits the melacha to someone who "erases with the intent of writing two letters." To explain why the Mishnah uses this unusual way of describing mocheik requires some introduction:

1. When discussing the laws of Shabbos, Chazal were careful to use two terms: chayov, culpable, and patur, exempt. Chayov means that, when the Sanhedrin was fully functional, these acts were punishable, and, when performed negligently, require the offering of a korban chatos.

2. A principle germane to all the laws of Shabbos is that someone violates Shabbos min haTorah only when the action has a direct, positive result. If the act appears to be unconstructive, it is prohibited only because of a rabbinic injunction and not min haTorah. For example, digging a hole because of a need for fill dirt to cover a spill or the exposed roots of a plant is exempt min haTorah from violating the melacha of choreish, plowing. This is because creating this hole in the ground is not a positive act. Digging a hole is a Torah violation only when it is either part of an act of plowing – in order to plant or otherwise benefit a plant – in which case it constitutes the melacha of choreish; or when it is part of a construction, in which case it constitutes the melacha of boneh, building. In both of these instances, the hole is itself beneficial.

Erasing does not, in and of itself, provide benefit. It is considered beneficial when (1) you are interested in writing on the paper and to do so you need to erase something, or (2) when there is a mistake on the paper that you need to correct by erasure. When the erasing itself does not provide benefit, the act violates Shabbos only because of a rabbinic injunction. This is why the Mishnah states that erasing is chayov when it is performed in order to write. This type of erasing is a positive act and, therefore, a Torah violation.

–When the erasure is “positive,” but you do not intend to write anything – as in the second case mentioned above – is that chayov for the melacha of erasing? That is a dispute among poskim that we will discuss shortly.

Why two letters?

The Mishnah states that violating the melacha of erasing requires the intention to write two letters on the erasure. As the Mishnah states, someone is chayov for violating the melacha of koseiv only when he writes two letters. Writing less than two letters is not substantive enough for a person to be culpable. Since erasing alone is not considered a constructive act, the person is liable only when the erasure clears enough area to write two letters.

Note that it does not state in the Mishnah how many letters must be erased to violate the melacha. It states how much space must be erased – enough space to write two letters. What is the halacha if someone erased just one letter, but it was large enough to write two letters in its place? Is the person who performed this act guilty of violating the melacha? The Mishnah implies that this act would be chayov.

This question is raised by the Tosefta, which states that, indeed, someone who erased a letter large enough to write two letters, is culpable for violating the melacha when his intention is to write two letters in its place. The Tosefta (Shabbos 12:7, quoted by the Gemara) notes that this results in an anomalous conclusion: “Someone who writes one large letter, even though it is as big as two letters, is exempt from having committed a transgression on Shabbos, whereas someone who erases one letter that is as big as two letters desecrates Shabbos. Rabbi Menachem berabbi Yosi said: This is a stringency of erasing that does not exist with writing.”

Erasing stricter than writing?!

The Tosefta is emphasizing that although, in general, there are more ways of violating the melacha of writing than there are of violating the melacha of erasing, this is an instance in which someone could be chayov for erasing, whereas a parallel act of writing would not be chayov.

Erasing scribble

Actually, there are at least two other instances when erasing is treated more strictly than writing. One situation is that of someone who erased scribble in order to write in its place. Since the goal of the melacha of erasing is to write, it makes no difference whether someone erased letters or scribble – in both instances he is chayov for violating the Torah’s melacha (Rosh, Shabbos 7:9; Tur, Orach Chayim 340). On the other hand, someone who scribbles does not violate the melacha of writing min haTorah, since he did not write any form of communication.

Left-handed erasing

Here is yet another case in which erasing is treated more strictly than writing. Although we learned in a previous article that someone who writes with his non-dominant hand has not violated the Torah prohibition of writing, since this is not the usual way to write, this rule applies only to melacha activities that require dexterity. According to most authorities, erasing is not considered a melacha that requires such dexterity, and, therefore, someone who erases with his non-dominant hand violates the melacha min haTorah, assuming that he is erasing for the purpose of writing two letters (Chayei Odom 9:2; Mishnah Berurah 340:22; Shu”t Avnei Neizer, Orach Chayim 209:9). We should note that one early acharon, the Elyah Rabbah (340:11), appears to disagree, suggesting that there is no difference between writing and erasing in this regard.

Permanence

Germane to writing, the Mishnah (Shabbos 104b) teaches: “Someone who writes two letters... is chayov, whether he writes with ink, with a paint pigment, with sikra [a red dye], with tree-exudate gum, with ferrous sulfate, or with anything else that makes a permanent impression.”

This requirement – that one is chayov for the melacha only if performed with, or on, an item that results in permanent writing – holds true both for the melacha of writing and for the melacha of erasing. In other words, someone who erased writing that is temporary, or that was written on material that is not lasting, does not violate the melacha of erasing min haTorah. For example, if someone erases writing on a leaf that soon will dry up, he violates a rabbinic injunction but is not chayov (see Tosefta, Shabbos 12:7).

There is a halachic curiosity here: Since the melacha of erasing is for the purpose of writing, or alternatively, when the erasing itself creates something positive, why is this melacha violated only when erasing permanent writing? Erasing temporary writing is also necessary, sometimes, to accomplish a positive result, whether it is to write in its place or for a different positive purpose.

I have not found this question asked by the traditional authorities. It seems to me that the answer is that erasing something temporary is not significant enough to constitute a violation of a Torah law.

Erasing one letter

I mentioned above that the Mishnah implies, and the Tosefta states explicitly, that someone who erases one letter that is large enough to write two letters in its place, with

the intent of writing two letters there, is liable for erasing on Shabbos. The Sefas Emes (Shabbos 75b) queries whether someone who erased a space large enough to write two letters, but his intention is to write only one letter, is chayov or not. He does not reach a definite conclusion.

Correction fluid

Using correction fluid (often called “Wite-Out,” which is the brand name of one such product), when done to enable rewriting, is prohibited min haTorah.

Coating white

The Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav 340:1) rules that if someone takes a dark piece of wood or other material and whitewashes its surface so that he can write on it, he violates mocheik min haTorah – because this act is equivalent halachically to erasing a dark surface for the purpose of writing on it.

Erasing a tattoo

One acharon discusses whether erasing a tattoo on Shabbos violates the melacha of mocheik. He rules that to do this on a Jew is a violation of Shabbos min haTorah – according to the authorities who hold that an erasure for a positive benefit other than writing is chayov. However, erasing a non-Jew’s tattoo is not a violation of mocheik, according to the Minchas Chinuch. (I am unsure how a tattoo can be erased. I have been told that there are several methods, such as using lasers to break down the ink, or rubbing salt or lemon juice and then applying some ointment.)

Ink on sikra

The Gemara (Gittin 19a) teaches that someone who writes with dark ink on top of writing that was red violates two melachos: erasing and writing. His act is considered to have erased the original red writing and then to have written in dark ink on top of the erasure.

Ches and two zayins

In the Ashkenazi script used for sifrei Torah, the letter ches is written as two zayins with a tiny cap (similar to an upside-down “v”) connecting them. The Gemara rules that someone who removes this “cap,” thereby creating two zayins, is chayov. The Bavli (104b) rules that he violated one melacha, whereas the Yerushalmi (7:2) rules that he violated both koseiv and mocheik in doing this. Similarly, the Yerushalmi holds that someone who scraped off the corner of a dalet, thereby making it into a reish, violated both melachos, koseiv and mocheik.

Crying over spilled ink

Someone spilled ink intentionally onto a written passage so that it can no longer be read. Does this constitute the melacha of erasing min haTorah? It would appear that it violates the melacha only as a rabbinic injunction, since no improvement resulted from his action (Shu”t Maharshag 2:41).

Erasing wet ink

The authorities disagree as to whether erasing ink or other pigment that has not yet dried violates the melacha of erasing min haTorah. Some contend that this is not chayov, because the writing is not yet permanent; at this stage, it can easily smear and become illegible (Minchas Chinuch, Koseiv #10; Shu”t Har Tzvi, Orach Chayim 1:65).

Erasing on Yom Tov

Writing and erasing are both prohibited on Yom Tov, although kindling a fire for warmth or cooking is permitted. This has an interesting application: Is it permitted to use newspaper to kindle a fire on Yom Tov? Is burning the writing on the paper considered erasing? Certainly, this does not constitute erasing min haTorah, since you will not have any paper to write on when you are finished, and therefore the results are not considered positive, as explained above. Despite that fact, the Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav 511:2) prohibits burning paper that has lettering on it on Yom Tov, because it is considered mocheik miderabbanan. Although cooking and related food preparatory melachos are permitted on Yom Tov, erasing for a non-food purpose is not. Only in order to write?

Above, I quoted a statement of the Tosefta that erasing a large letter so that you can write two letters in its place is chayov. As a rule, erasing violates Shabbos min haTorah because it is a preparatory melacha to writing. Is this a concept unique to the melacha of erasing, or is it part of the general rule that a melacha must have a positive result to be chayov, and erasing does not usually have, in and of itself, a positive result?

This question appears to be the subject of a dispute between major authorities.

Here is an example of a case that is affected by this dispute. Someone has a mezuzah, sefer Torah or Tefillin in which an extra letter is written. As is, it cannot be used until the extra letter is erased, but once the letter is removed, it is perfectly kosher. Thus, erasing the letter is not for the purpose of writing, but renders a tikun, a positive result. The Pri Megadim (Eishel Avraham 340:7), suggests that erasing the letter is prohibited min haTorah, whereas, according to Tosafos, as explained by Rabbi Akiva Eiger (Gilyon Hashas, Shabbos 73b s.v. Vetzarich), it is not. Tosafos appears to understand that since the melacha of mocheik in the mishkan was in order to rewrite, that is the only category of erasing that is prohibited min haTorah; the Pri Megadim assumes that any erasing that produces a positive result is included in the Torah violation.

Evidence to the Pri Megadim's position can be rallied from a passage of Gemara (Shabbos 149a) which prohibits reading a list of guests that you intend to invite on Shabbos or a list of courses that you intend to serve. This prohibition is because of a rabbinic concern that the host may realize that he invited too many guests (or have too many courses) and decide to erase a name from the list, so that the butler does not go to invite that guest. (Apparently, invitations were neither printed nor delivered before Shabbos, but were delivered orally via courier on Shabbos itself.)

The Gemara's statement implies that the erasing would be prohibited min haTorah because it produces a positive result. If not, and the erasing is prohibited only midrabbanan, we would not make a gezeirah in this instance since the concern is only that someone will violate a rabbinic prohibition (Chazon Yechezkel 12:7; see there that he endeavors to answer the question).

Wiping ink off your hands

Is wiping ink off your hands prohibited because of mocheik?

There is a dispute among late poskim whether wiping writing or even smudges off your hands is prohibited because of mocheik. The Chayei Odom (Hilchos Netilas Yadayim 40:8) rules that if your hands are smudged on Shabbos, say, from pots, and there is a concern that washing netilas yadayim upon arising in the morning or prior to eating bread might remove the stains, it is still permitted to wash them since you are not trying to remove the smudges and it is not definite that they will be erased. (This is referred to in halachic parlance as *eino miskavein* without a *pesik reisha*.) The Chayei Odom forbids scrubbing your hands clean, because this constitutes mocheik – although he agrees that this does not violate mocheik min haTorah, but only midrabbanan, because you are not wiping off the smudge in order to write on your hands. (Indeed, if you were wiping your hands clean in order to write on them, this scrubbing would be prohibited min haTorah as mocheik.)

In a similar vein, the Minchas Shabbos (80:199) rules that on Friday you should be careful not to use ink or dyes that will remain on your hands on Shabbos. If you did use such ink or dye, and it is still on your hand on Shabbos, and you are embarrassed by it, he permits you to remove it on Shabbos because of *kavod haberiyos*, the basic dignity to which human beings are entitled. He quotes other authorities who prohibit removing the ink from your hands and even prohibit washing the stained parts of your hands under these circumstances, ruling that you should wrap the writing in cloth or bandages. (From a netilas yadayim perspective, this is permitted when you have an injury that you want to keep clean. It is a *chiddush* to apply that law to this case.)

However, the Maharsham (Kuntrus Ahavas Shalom, end of Minchas Shabbos #4) disagrees with both the Chayei Odom and the Minchas Shabbos, contending that although it is prohibited midrabbanan to erase any ink or smudges, even when you have no intent to write on that place, the rabbinic prohibition applies only to removing ink or dye, but not to removing dirt, which would usually be considered cleaning and not erasing.

Conclusion

The Torah commanded us concerning the halachos of Shabbos by giving us the basic categories that are prohibited. Shabbos is a day on which we refrain from altering the world for our own purposes; instead, the rule of Hashem becomes the focus of all of creation. We contribute to this by refraining from any activity that implies that we have control over the universe (Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch's Commentary to Shemos 20:10).

By demonstrating Hashem's rule even over non-exertive activities, such as erasing, we demonstrate and acknowledge the true Creator of the world and all it contains.