

Weekly Parsha KORACH 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah teaches us in this week's reading that one should never underestimate the power and influence that ego and arrogance can play within the lives of people who are otherwise seen as wise, capable, and even moral. Throughout the ages, the commentators have asked themselves the famous question, quoted by Rashi and based on midrash: "What drove Korach to commit such a foolish act?"

Rashi points out that Korach understood that his descendants in future generations would be prominent people of great leadership. He could not imagine that they would achieve such a status of power and recognition when he himself was not able to boast of such an achievement. While this explanation certainly cast some light on the issue, it does not fully resolve the problem.

There are many instances in life and history when later generations of a certain family rose to power and influence, even though their origins were humble. Most commentators fall back on the idea that it was the great wealth that Korach possessed that drove him to this folly of behavior.

We are aware that wealth and money many times do strange things to otherwise normal people. The Talmud always pictured money – coins – as being made of fire. They can warm and illuminate or burn and destroy. That certainly is true of the nature of money and how it affects individuals, especially those who have become wealthy over a short period of time. Our world is full of examples of wealthy people who suddenly become experts in all sorts of disciplines in life, whereas before they were wealthy, did not claim such expertise.

It is interesting to note that the Torah sought to limit the potential for any of the Levite families from becoming exceedingly wealthy. Levites in the land of Israel were subject to public service. Their income was based upon the goodwill of their Israelite neighbors, who would grant them their share of the food ordained by the Torah. I imagine that no matter how much of the tithe any given Levite would have received, the feeling of being wealthy – certainly, exceedingly wealthy – would not ever be experienced.

People who are dependent upon the goodwill of others never feel themselves as secure as those who possess great wealth. The truth is that no one is secure, and that even great wealth can disappear in an unknowing and unpredictable fashion. Nevertheless, when a person knows that he or she does not possess great wealth, that person is more careful and circumspect in advancing opinions and demanding honor. The combination of the natural ego that exist within all of us, and especially those like Korach who have aristocratic bloodlines combined with the largess of great wealth, can oftentimes be a lethal mix that leads to disaster. That certainly was the case regarding Korach and his group of followers.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Servant Leadership (Korach 5781)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

"You have gone too far! The whole community are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above God's congregation?" (Num. 16:3).

What exactly was wrong in what Korach and his motley band of fellow agitators said? We know that Korach was a demagogue, not a democrat. He wanted power for himself, not for the people. We know also that the protestors were disingenuous. Each had their own reasons to feel resentful toward Moses or Aaron or fate. Set these considerations aside for a moment and ask: was what they said true or false?

They were surely right to say, "All the congregation are holy." That, after all, is what God asked the people to be: a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, meaning, a kingdom all of whose members are (in some sense) priests, and a nation all of whose citizens are holy.[1]

They were equally right to say, "God is with them." That was the point of the making of the Tabernacle: "Have them make My Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8). Exodus ends with these words: "So the Cloud of the Lord was over the Tabernacle by day, and fire was in the Cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels" (Ex. 40:38). The Divine Presence was visibly with the people wherever they went.

What was wrong was their last remark: "Why then do you set yourselves above God's congregation?" This was not a small mistake. It was a fundamental one. Moses represents the birth of a new kind of leadership. That is what Korach and his followers did not understand. Many of us do not understand it still.

The most famous buildings in the ancient world were the Mesopotamian ziggurats and Egyptian pyramids. These were more than just buildings. They were statements in stone of a hierarchical social order. They were wide at the base and narrow at the top. At the top was the King or Pharaoh – at the point, so it was believed, where heaven and earth met. Beneath was a series of elites, and beneath them the labouring masses.

This was believed to be not just one way of organising a society but the only way. The very universe was organised on this principle, as was the rest of life. The sun ruled the heavens. The lion ruled the animal kingdom. The king ruled the nation. That is how it was in nature. That is how it must always be. Some are born to rule, others to be ruled.[2]

Judaism is a protest against this kind of hierarchy. Every human being, not just the king, is in the image and likeness of God. Therefore no one is entitled to rule over any other without their assent. There is still a need for leadership, because without a conductor an orchestra would lapse into discord. Without a captain a team might have brilliant players and yet not be a team. Without generals, an army would be a mob. Without government, a nation would lapse into anarchy. "In those days there was no King in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25).

In a social order in which everyone has equal dignity in the eyes of Heaven, a leader does not stand above the people. They serve the people, and they serve God. The great symbol of biblical Israel, the menorah, is an inverted pyramid or ziggurat, broad at the top, narrow at the base. The greatest leader is therefore the most humble. "Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). The name given to this is servant leadership,[3] and its origin is in the Torah. The highest accolade given to Moses is that he was "the servant of the Lord" (Deut. 34:5). Moses is given this title eighteen times in Tanach. Only one other leader merits the same description: Joshua, who is described this way twice.

No less fascinating is the fact that only one person in the Torah is commanded to be humble, namely the King:

When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical Priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites. (Deut. 17:18-20)

This is how Maimonides describes the proper conduct of a King:

Just as the Torah has granted him the great honour and obligated everyone to revere him, so too it has commanded him to be lowly and empty at heart, as it says: 'My heart is a void within me' (Pa. 109:22). Nor should he treat Israel with overbearing haughtiness, as it says, 'he should not consider himself better than his fellows' (Deut. 17:20).

He should be gracious and merciful to the small and the great, involving himself in their good and welfare. He should protect the honour of even the humblest of people.

When he speaks to the people as a community, he should speak gently, as in 'Listen my brothers and my people...' (King David's words in I Chronicles 28:2). Similarly, I Kings 12:7 states, 'If today you will be a servant to these people...'

He should always conduct himself with great humility. There is none greater than Moses, our teacher. Yet, he said: 'What are we? Your complaints are not against us' (Ex. 16:8). He should bear the nation's difficulties, burdens, complaints and anger as a nurse carries an infant.[4]

The same applies to all positions of leadership. Maimonides lists among those who have no share in the world to come, someone who "imposes a rule of fear on the community, not for the sake of Heaven." Such a person "rules over a community by force, so that people are greatly afraid and terrified of him," doing so "for his own glory and personal interests." Maimonides adds to this last phrase: "like heathen kings." [5] The polemical intent is clear. It is not that no one behaves this way. It is that this is not a Jewish way to behave.

When Rabban Gamliel acted in what his colleagues saw as a high-handed manner, he was deposed as Nasi, head of the community, until he acknowledged his fault and apologized.[6] Rabban Gamliel learned the lesson. He later said to two people who declined his offer to accept positions of leadership: 'Do you think I am giving you a position of honour [serarah]? I am giving you the chance to serve [avdut].'[7] As Martin Luther King once said "Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve." [8]

C. S. Lewis rightly defined humility not as thinking less of yourself but as thinking of yourself less. The great leaders respect others. They honour them, lift them, inspire them to reach heights they might never have done otherwise. They are motivated by ideals, not by personal ambition. They do not succumb to the arrogance of power.

Sometimes the worst mistakes we make are when we project our feelings onto others. Korach was an ambitious man, so he saw Moses and Aaron as two people driven by ambition, "setting themselves above God's congregation." He did not understand that in Judaism to lead is to serve. Those who serve do not lift themselves high. They lift other people high.

Parshat Korach (Numbers 16:1 – 18:32)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "...for the entire congregation are all holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God's assembly?" [Num. 16:3].

Where did Korach err in his rebellion against Moses and Aaron? On the surface, his argument appears to be both logical and just: "You [Moses and Aaron] have gone too far. The entire congregation is holy, and God is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God's assembly?" Indeed, did not the Torah command the nation, "You shall be holy" (Lev. 19:2)?

According to Korach, if, in fact, everyone is equally holy, leadership becomes a mere function of opportunity. The era of the old guard rule (Moses' family) must come to an end; Korach's family must be given its chance to express its inherent holiness!

Granted, so goes this argument, God revealed Himself to Moses at the Burning Bush, and spoke directly only to him; but perhaps, if Korach had been raised in the palace of the pharaohs, and if he had had the opportunity as a free man of princely background to slay the Egyptian taskmasters, undoubtedly God would have spoken to him, as well. After all, we are all holy! It's just that some have received more special opportunities than others! On the surface, Korach's words contain a glib truth.

In reality, however, Korach and Moses represent two different philosophies of life. At Mount Sinai, God did not declare everyone to be holy. Rather, He placed into the world the possibility of achieving holiness. "You shall be holy" is a command, not a promise or a declaration of an existing fact. It represents a potential, attainable by means of the commitment to a lifestyle of 613 commandments.

When Korach argues that everyone is holy, that he, too, could have achieved what Moses achieved had he only had the proper opportunity, he is, in fact, uprooting holiness, not defending it. After all, if everyone and everything is holy, then the word "holy" loses its meaning. By arguing for holiness in the way that he does, Korach actually argues

against holiness. In his view, we need not strive to achieve holiness. We are already holy!

Perhaps this is why the Midrash pictures Korach as taunting Moses about the commandments of tzitzit (ritual fringes) and mezuzah. Does a garment which is wholly tekhelet still require a thread of tekhelet in its ritual fringes? Does a house filled with Torah scrolls still require a mezuzah (which holds only a small portion of a Torah scroll) on its doorpost? And when Moses replies in the affirmative, Korach laughs at the apparent lack of logic in Moses' teaching!

But Korach misses the point. Moses teaches that the human being must constantly strive to improve, to become more holy than he was before. Humans must never dare rest on their laurels, because evil is always lying in wait to ensnare, even at the mouth of the grave. Hence, even a house filled with Torah scrolls still requires a mezuzah at the front door, and even a garment that is wholly tekhelet still requires ritual fringes. Never be complacent. There is never sufficient holiness; we must always strive for more!

In contrast, Korach maintains that the status quo is holy – because nothing need change, grow, or develop. This is, in fact, the meaning of Korach's name: the Hebrew root k-r-ch can either mean "bald" – no hair grows on a bald head – or "ice" – no vegetation developed during the Ice Age. "As is his name, so is he." Korach rejects the command to become holy, the command of meritocracy, because he is cynically scornful of one's ability to grow and develop and change and inspire. This mistaken worldview is the core flaw of Korach's rebellion.

Moses' (and God's) approach is fundamentally different. When Moses announces to the rebels the means by which God will determine who is holy to Him, he orders Korach and his men bring fire in the fire pans and offer incense. Why?

At its best, fire symbolizes the possibility of change. By means of extreme heat, the hardest materials can be made to bend and melt, can be transformed from solid to liquid and to many states in between. Likewise, incense improves its surroundings: the sweet-smelling fragrance can remove the rancid odor of death and decay, and can transform the slaughtered carcasses of the animal sacrifices into an experience of commitment to God that can perfect the world.

Moses' vision is one of optimistic faith, the rising flames that draw forth the fragrance of the incense and soar heavenward. Material objects, humanity, the very world can be changed, elevated, and sanctified. All that is required is our merit, commitment, and achievement.

Shabbat Shalom!

Insights Parshas Korach - Tammuz 5781

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Avraham Yonah ben Nachum HaCohen. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

The King's Prerogative

The entire congregation of Bnei Yisroel complained the next day against Moshe and Aharon, saying, 'You put to death the nation of Hashem!' (Bamidbar 17:6)

On the day after the earth miraculously swallowed up Korach and his followers, a most astounding confrontation took place: The rest of Bnei Yisrael accused Moshe and Aharon of causing the deaths of their fellow Jews. This is difficult to understand in light of the fact that the deaths of the rebels were clearly the result of a divinely ordained miracle. Moshe and Aharon had not been the ones to kill them; it was Hashem Himself who had done so in a miraculous fashion! How could Bnei Yisroel level such an accusation?

Before the final confrontation in which the rebellious people were killed, Moshe announced, "With this you will know that Hashem has sent me to do all these deeds, for it was not from my heart. If these people die like all men, and the fate of all men befalls them, then Hashem has not sent me. But if Hashem creates a new creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that they have, and they descend to the grave alive, then you will know that these people angered Hashem" (Bamidbar 16:28-30). Thus, Moshe announced that only a miracle would substantiate his claim to be a legitimate agent of Hashem. If that miracle

did not occur, the validity of the entire Torah would be called into question.

Shockingly, Moshe was thus risking the entire Jewish nation's belief in the Torah on the basis that Hashem would perform a miracle for him. This is problematic; the Chechenover Rebbe points out, the conspirators could have spared themselves by doing teshuvah. How could Moshe take the risk that they might repent and avert the miracle he had promised, thereby jeopardizing the entire nation's faith?

The answer is that in this case teshuvah would not have worked to save them from death. Moshe was not predicting that Hashem would perform a miracle in order to demonstrate who was correct. Rather, he was invoking his authority as the king of Bnei Yisroel to have those who rebelled against his authority put to death. The Torah gives a king that right, and Moshe exercised that right by asking Hashem to carry out the sentence through a miracle. The sentence of death itself, though, was based on his royal prerogative.

In the Torah's judicial system, no sinner can save himself by repenting from a punishment imposed by man. In fact, we are required to urge every person who is about to be executed to engage in teshuvah, even though the execution will not be cancelled as a result. Clearly, the purpose of the teshuvah is to have a beneficial effect on his soul in the World to Come, even though the Beis Din is still required to carry out the sentence of death. Likewise, Korach and his cohorts were unable to save themselves by repenting, because their deaths were the result of Moshe's decree, not a divinely imposed punishment. Moshe simply asked Hashem to carry out that decree for him.

This explains the basis of the people's complaint; while a king has the right to have a rebel against his authority put to death, he is not required to do so. They therefore accused Moshe of unnecessarily causing the rebels' deaths, since he could have disregarded their crimes and refrained from calling for them to be killed. Even though the death sentence was ultimately carried out by Hashem Himself, it was Moshe's prerogative to waive it.

Your Wish is My Command

This week's parsha recounts the events surrounding the uprising instigated by Korach against Moshe Rabbeinu regarding Moshe's appointment of Aharon as Kohen Gadol. Essentially, Korach argued that Moshe was not commanded by Hashem to appoint his brother as Kohen Gadol; Moshe had done so of his own discretion. Thus, Korach seems to be insinuating that Moshe had fabricated the Divine command for Aharon's appointment.

This is shocking; if Korach could imply that Moshe had not actually received a command from Hashem that he claimed to have been given, then the veracity of the entire Torah, by extension, could be called into question. In other words, who's to say what Hashem commanded and what Moshe made up on his own? If the people could believe that Moshe had fabricated one Divine commandment for his own benefit, then they could also believe that he had fabricated the entire Torah as well.

Korach was a remarkable talmid chacham and hailed from one of the most prestigious and influential families. How is it possible that one of the greatest leaders of the Jewish nation could question such a fundamental underpinning of the faith, especially when doing so would essentially subvert the entire experience of Har Sinai and call into question the authenticity of Judaism itself?

After the Torah was given at Har Sinai, Hashem told Moshe that the entire Jewish people should "return to their tents," but He added a different command to Moshe himself: "And you, stay here with Me." The Gemara (Shabbos 87a) explains that the rest of the nation had been enjoined to abstain from marital relations while the Torah was given, but they were now freed to resume their normal family lives. Moshe, on the other hand, was told to separate permanently from his wife. The Gemara relates that this idea actually originated with Moshe himself: Since he was at a high level of prophecy, he wanted to make himself constantly available to receive prophetic messages.

Tosafos (ad loc) explains that the Gemara infers this from the fact that Aharon and Miriam later questioned the propriety of Moshe's decision.

Since they suggested that it was improper, it is clear that the idea must have come from Moshe, for they would never have made such a statement about an idea that originated with Hashem.

This points to an astounding concept: It is possible that Hashem may make a statement to a person not because it is His wish, but rather because the person desires it. In this case, Moshe felt that it was correct to separate from his wife. Aharon and Miriam disagreed with his decision, even though Hashem Himself had confirmed it, as it were, by directing Moshe to do so. Clearly, they felt that Hashem's command could be interpreted as a mere "rubber stamp" for Moshe's decision; it did not indicate Hashem's approval of it at all.

Parents often face similar dilemmas with their children. Many times parents disagree with their children's decisions; they may feel that their children are choosing a career that is not suitable for them, passing up an opportunity that they should not forego, or otherwise making imprudent choices. In these situations, the natural inclination of a parent is to attempt to control his child's decisions or pressure the child to make the choice that he deems correct. This, however, is a major mistake. Of course, it should go without saying, that if a child makes a decision that harms himself or someone else, his parents should intervene to stop him. However, in most situations parents must support decisions made by their children. This is exactly what Korach claimed to have happened. According to Korach, Moshe wanted to appoint his brother and Hashem merely supported it, just as He did when Moshe decided that it was proper to separate from his wife. This should not be mistaken as a commandment from Hashem. Korach wasn't calling into question the veracity of the Torah, merely the appointment of Moshe's brother as Kohen Gadol.

Did You Know...

This week we read about Moshe's first cousin (Korach), the rebellion he started, and how it ultimately led to his demise and that of his cohorts. However, how much do we really know about him, other than his relation to Moshe? Here are some interesting facts about Korach.

1. Korach was extremely wealthy, he had 300 donkeys just to carry the keys to his storehouses. He seemingly had found one of three hidden storehouses of Yosef's wealth (he had amassed almost all the money in the world from the famine) (Sanhedrin 110a).
2. According to Midrash, Korach was one of Pharaoh's officials (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:1).
3. There are opinions that Korach's rebellion took place before the story with the spies (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:1; Rabbeinu Bachye).
4. There are other opinions that say this portion in the Torah is chronologically correct and that the rebellion happened because of the spies and the decree that they were going to die in the desert (Abarbanel 16:14).
5. Korach's wife was the one who convinced him to stand up to Moshe in the first place (Sanhedrin 110a). He probably wouldn't have done it otherwise, because as we are constantly reminded, behind all great men...
6. The crevice that literally swallowed Korach was one of the ten things Hashem created on the eve of the first Shabbos Bein Hashmashos (Pirkei Avos 5:6).
7. On the way down to Gehennom, a place of refuge was made for them, where they sang to Hashem (Sanhedrin 110a).

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Ask Rav Aviner: toratravaviner@yahoo.com

Ha-Rav answers hundreds of text message questions a day. Here's a sample:

Traveling to Space

Q: Is it permissible to travel to space?

A: One should not leave Eretz Yisrael

Making Change from Tzedekah Box

Q: Is it permissible to make change from a Tzedekah box?

A: It is permissible. Some are strict to give a little Tzedakah at the time (The Brisker Rav was strict not to do so. His son, Ha-Rav Meir Ha-Levi Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshivat Brisk in Yerushalayim, explains that even if two people have the same exact watch, they would not want to switch since each watch belongs to the owner. And so too regarding the money in the Tzedakah box, since it is not the same money. In the book *De-Chazitei Le-Rebbe Meir'* Volume 1, p. 307. Although perhaps one can

explain that there is a difference between an object which always remains with a person and money, which frequently changes hands).

Reserve Duty in Tzahal

Q: I was exempt from reserve duty because of a wound. If they allow me to return, should I do so?

A: Certainly. It is a great Mitzvah.

Working

Q: Is there an ethical value to working?

A: Yes. 1. To earn a livelihood with respect. 2. To help build the world. Corona Miracle

Q: Should we say Hallel regarding the miracle in the State of Israel that Corona has disappeared within a year when other countries are still in the midst of the pandemic?

A: No. Rather: 1. Repent. 2. Pray. 3. Give Tzedakah. 4. Give thanks to the Prime Minister. 5. Give thanks to the doctors.

Separation Wall as Eruv

Q: Is Yehudah and Shomron considered today as one place with regards to an Eruv since there is the Separation Wall?

A: No. The wall does not encompass the entire area, it is not like a fence around a Yishuv, the area is huge and includes fields, and many other reasons. Incidentally, the way, the Separation Wall is part of the Eruv in Yerushalayim.

Soldier who Jumps on Hand Grenade

Q: Why isn't a soldier who jumps on a hand grenade to save his fellow soldiers consider a suicide?

A: It is self-sacrifice for the sake of others. All of Tzahal is based on self-sacrifice.

We are Pregnant

Q: How should I say it: My wife is pregnant or "we" are pregnant?

A: It does not matter.

Amen for Non-Jew's Blessing?

Q: Should one say Amen over a non-Jew's blessing over food?

A: No. It is an Amen said in vain.

Learning Rav Kook

Q: Why is it so important to learn Rav Kook's works?

A: He is the special Divine agent for building the National and individual soul during the time of our National revival.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

For the week ending 12 June 2021 / 2 Tamuz 5781

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Korach

Parashat

A "Shayne Gelechte"

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

One of the few maxims in my sparse Yiddish lexicon is "a shayne gelechte." Literally translated, it means "A fine laugh," but idiomatically we would translate it something like, "If it didn't make you cry, you'd have to laugh."

The Israeli political scene is a shayne gelechte. I've never been political, and my indifference — and sometimes hostility — to politics and politicians has been borne by a political system where we are either about to have the fifth election in two years or a coalition government so broadly-based that if you were to stand at the left-hand side of it, you'd need a telescope to see the right. And in between there's a vast floppy underbelly waiting to crash down on a hapless electorate.

By rights, this Holy Land should be ruled by those who are the least selfish, the least power-hungry, the most noble and the most honest.

We love democracy, but, presumably, the democratization of our lives has its limits: I'm not sure how many of us would submit to extensive invasive surgery based on a straw-poll taken on Twitter or Facebook. The idea that if you ask enough people a question, you're bound to come up with the right answer, is inimical to Torah thought. The spiritual Masters teach that "The wisdom of the Torah is the opposite of the man in the street."

Our esteemed Rosh HaYeshiva, HaRav Nota Schiller, shlita, once observed: "The Torah is a democracy of opportunity and an aristocracy

of opinion." Anyone can open a Talmud and start to learn. However, for your opinion to be significant, it must pass a self-policing system of peer approval that validates only the most expert.

And who are the most expert? To me, there is no perceptible difference between Mount Everest and K2, but K2 knows that Everest is taller than it. And thus it is with our Gedolei HaDor. When it comes to the great ones of the generation, each one knows who is more outstanding and in which areas he excels.

I suppose you could translate the phrase shayne gelechte with the English word "farce" — and that about sums up the state of the Israeli political system.

In 1887, Hon. John Dalberg-Acton wrote: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority, still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it."

Our great Torah Sages sanctify the positions they hold, and not the reverse.

Possibly one of the most egregious power-grabs in history is revealed in this week's Torah portion. Korach, posing as a champion of the masses with consummate political skill, engineers a rebellion purely for his own ends, and manages to convince, among others, two hundred and fifty of the most august and important leaders of the people.

Joseph Goebbels (y"sh) said, "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus, by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State."

If that isn't a shayne gelechte, I don't know what is.

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Can Everybody Be Somebody?

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

The Jewish community in the United States of America is pleased and proud to live in a democracy. What is a democracy? It is often described as a society in which all are equal. But this description falls short of the mark. Because obviously we all are not equal. Some of us are stronger, some wiser, some wealthier than others. We are not equally endowed with talents at birth, nor do we all partake in equal sets of circumstances as we grow and develop.

A more precise and useful definition is this one from the Webster's dictionary: "Democracy is the principle of equality of rights, opportunity, and treatment, or the practice of this principle." The dictionary makes it quite clear. We are not equal, but we are entitled to equal treatment and to equal opportunities. Whether we take advantage of these opportunities is a matter of personal will, and not a reflection of the justice or injustice of the society at large.

The above definition helps us understand that while we are all equally entitled to be members of a democratic society, we are not all equally qualified to fill all of the roles necessary for that society to function. We are not all qualified to be leaders, we are not all qualified to be teachers, we are not even all qualified to be soldiers.

In the Torah portions which we have been reading the past several weeks, we have been observing a society in the making. Not a democratic society in the contemporary sense, but one which was designed to be fair and equitable and to allow for the fullest possible spiritual expression of every individual within it.

In this week's Torah portion, Korach, we learn of the first challenge to this society in formation. Korach, a close relative of Moses and Aaron, challenges their roles as leader and high priest. He also advocates what might be mistaken for a democracy, if we are to understand democracy in the fashion outlined in the first few sentences of this essay.

This is Korach's understanding of the nature of the Jewish community in the desert: "All of the congregation is holy, and God is in their midst." Korach is, in the eyes of some, the arch democrat. He sees all in the community as being holy. All are equal in holiness, and all are equal in the eyes of God.

He is thus protesting the hierarchy represented by a tribe of priests, a tribe of Levites, a group of elders. He is calling for radical equality, for utter sameness.

There is a line from Gilbert and Sullivan's "The Gondoliers" which is never far from my mind and lips. It reads:

"When everyone is somebodee, Then no one's anybody!"

Korach is advocating a society in which everybody is somebody. Can that work?

I will not even attempt to answer that question in terms of political philosophy. But I will venture to speculate about the possibility of a society in which all are equally spiritual, in which everyone is a spiritual somebody.

For you see, much earlier in the Torah, such a society was indeed foreseen. Back in the Torah portion of Kedoshim (Leviticus 19:2), the entire nation was told, "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." We were enjoined to be a "kingdom of priests". Is Korach so far off, then, with his claim that all of the congregation is holy?

It is as an answer to this question that the dictionary definition of democracy is so helpful. We are not all equal; we are certainly not all holy. But we all have the opportunity, the equal opportunity, to become holy through our actions and the way we live our lives.

Sociologists draw a distinction between two types of status, "ascribed" and "achieved". Ascribed status comes with birth. Achieved status must be earned. There is no doubt that ascribed status plays a role in the biblical community, if not in a modern democracy.

Let us translate the biblical term "kedusha", usually rendered "holiness", as "spirituality", often a more apt definition and certainly a more acceptable one to the contemporary reader. Then, we must argue that "kedusha" must be "achieved", not merely "ascribed".

The "kingdom of priests" ideal is to be the product of our spiritual endeavors; not a hereditary honor. No person, in this sense, is born "spiritual". We are not equally holy from birth. But we all have the equal opportunity to dedicate our lives to the achievement of holiness, to the attainment of spirituality.

Korach is wrong when he proclaims that the entire community is holy. He would have been correct to say that we all can achieve holiness.

Judaism teaches us that although we are all equally endowed with the capacity for holiness, with the potential for spirituality, the achievement of those objectives is not easy. Spirituality is not obtained by a moment on a mountaintop, or by fleeting inspirational experiences. Spirituality, Jewish spirituality, can only be attained by hard work and painful self-sacrifice.

The leadership positions of Moses and Aaron were earned by the virtue of their life-long dedication to the Jewish people. Korach is indeed wrong when he says that we are all equally capable of supplanting Moses and Aaron. We are all potentially leaders, we all have the opportunity to develop leadership skills, but we are not automatically leaders just because we are part of the community.

The mitzvah back in Parshat Kedoshim does not imply, as Korach does, that we all are kedoshim. Rather, it calls upon us to do what we can to become kedoshim.

And so, this week's Torah portion teaches us an important personal lesson; one of special relevance to those of us who have absorbed a deep belief in democracy. We are not all spiritually equal. There are those of us who are more spiritual, and those who are less so. But we all have equal opportunities and equal possibilities to develop the levels of spirituality, which God himself foresaw when He asked us to become a "kingdom of priests."

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message Korach 5781-2021

"The Origin of the 'Big Lie'"

(updated and revised from Korach 5762-2002)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's Torah portion, parashat Korach, we read of Korach and his rebellion against G-d, Moses and Aaron.

Although Korach was himself a member of the noble tribe of Levi, he persuades Dathan, and Abiram and On, of the tribe of Reuven, and 250 leaders of the people of Israel to join in his rebellion. They confronted Moses and Aaron and demanded (Numbers 16:3): "You, [Moses and Aaron], have taken too much for yourselves! After all, the entire congregation is holy;" "and why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of G-d?"

Our rabbis suggest many reasons for Korach's rebellion. In order to explain the juxtaposition between the end of the previous Torah portion, Shelach, which deals with the theme of tzitzit, and this week's Torah portion, the rabbis propose that Korach, the ultimate rationalist, could not abide by the fact that Jewish law requires that a talit, a prayer shawl, that was entirely made of blue threads, must have tzitzit fringes attached. Others suggest that Korach felt that he was treated with disrespect when a younger cousin, Elitzaphan, the son of Uziel, was chosen to serve as the Prince of the tribe of Levi.

Whatever his reason, Korach was a brilliant provocateur who was able to stir up the passions of the masses, convincing the hordes to believe that he was rebelling for the sake of the common people, instead of for his own personal benefit.

Parashat Korach is particularly abundant in Midrashim, and many legends enhance the already dramatic narrative. However, one particular legend is extraordinarily revealing and prescient.

The Midrash relates that Korach attempted to incite the people to join his rebellion against Moses, by railing against the gifts and tributes that were given to the priests, who were of course from the family of Aaron and Moses. According to the Midrash, Korach went from house to house telling the Israelites the story that he had invented of the "oppressed widow."

There lived in my vicinity a widow with two orphan daughters, who owned a field, whose yield was just sufficient for them to barely keep body and soul together. When this woman set out to plow her field, Moses appeared and said: 'Thou shalt not plow with an ox and donkey together.' When she began to sow, Moses appeared and said: 'Thou shalt not plant diverse seeds.' When the first fruits showed in the poor widow's field, Moses appeared and bade her bring the fruits to the priests, for to them are due 'the first of all the fruit of the earth.' And when at length, the time came for her to cut the produce down, Moses appeared and ordered her 'not to wholly reap the corners of the field, nor to gather the gleanings of the harvest, but to leave them for the poor.' When she had done all that Moses had bidden, and was about to thrash the grain, Moses appeared once more and said: 'Give me the heave offering, and the first and the second tithes that all belong to the priests.' After the deduction of all the tributes that Moses had imposed upon her, when at last the poor woman became aware of the fact that she could not now possibly maintain herself from the yield of the field, she sold the field, and with the proceeds purchased ewes, in the hope that she might now, undisturbed, have the benefit of the wool as well as of the younglings of the sheep. She was, however, mistaken. When the first youngling of the sheep was born, Aaron appeared and demanded it, for the first-born belonged to the priest. She had a similar experience with the wool. At shearing time, Aaron reappeared and demanded 'the first of the fleece of the sheep,' which, according to Moses' law, was his. But, not content with this, he reappeared later and demanded one sheep out of every ten as a tithe, to which again, according to the law, he had claim.

This, however, was again too much for the long-suffering woman, and she slaughtered the sheep, assuming that finally she might now feel herself secure, in full possession of the meat. But, she was mistaken! Aaron appeared, and basing his claim on the Torah, demanded the shoulder, the two cheeks, and the maw. 'Alas!' exclaimed the woman, 'the slaughtering of the sheep did not deliver me out of your hands! Let the meat then be consecrated to the sanctuary.' Aaron said, 'Everything devoted to G-d is mine. It shall then be all mine.' He departed taking

with him the meat of the sheep and leaving behind the widow and her daughters weeping bitterly. Such men,” said Korach, concluding his tale, “are Moses and Aaron who pass their cruel measures as divine law.” (Based on Legends of the Jews, by Louis Ginzberg)

It was with these words, and with this heart-rending story, that Korach managed to seduce thousands of Israelites to join in his rebellion.

Eventually, through the use of holy incense, Moses proves that only Moses is truly G-d's chosen. As the earth opens and swallows Korach and his immediate followers, fire bursts forth and devours the 250 men who sacrificed the counterfeit incense.

Like many enemies of Israel, including the Hamas terrorists of today, Korach was a genius at public relations and marketing. His lies were extraordinary, but always based on some truth. In fact, everything that Korach said about the priestly gifts and the tithes were absolutely true, but reported in such a distorted manner, that it resulted in dramatic incitement and rebellion.

According to the Torah, when Moses ultimately confronted Korach before the people, he said (Numbers 16:29-30): If these people [Korach and his cohorts] die a natural death, then G-d did not send me. But, if G-d creates a special creation and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them up, then you will know that these people have indeed provoked G-d.

The Midrash elaborates, reporting, that just as Moses was speaking, a wondrous image appeared before the People of Israel, and behold the nation was dwelling in the land that G-d had promised them, working the fields. The Levites, the converts, the orphaned children, the widows, the poor, and all those who languished, were coming to the fields to eat and be satiated. Whoever possessed a field or a vineyard, would come out to greet all those who were hungry and all those lacking bread, calling out to them: “Come my brother, come to me and I’ll feed you, and give you to drink, and we will rejoice together in the bounty that G-d has given us.” In fact, the more that the nation of Israel increased its tithes and left the corners of the fields and the fallen stalks for the poor and the strangers, and its heave offerings and tithes and the first shearing of the sheep to the priest, the more G-d opened His treasure trove of goodness, the heavens, to give the people rain in its proper time and to bless all the works of their hands.

In this truthful image that appeared before the nation of Israel, the earth brought forth its bounty, and the trees bore their fruit, the harvest season extended into the planting season, and the planting season into the harvest season. And, the wine vats were full with wine, and the oil storage overflowed, unable to contain all that had been produced.

The Midrash says that when Korach and his rebellious cohorts beheld the utopian vision that had appeared before them, they heard G-d's voice saying, (Psalms 145:20), G-d will protect all who love Him, (who do acts of loving-kindness and justice) and will destroy all evildoers.

At that very moment, the earth opened its mouth as holes appeared all over the ground. Korach and all the rebels were swallowed by the earth and were gathered to one place. As they tumbled into oblivion, they cried out in a resounding voice, מִשֶּׁה אֱמֶת וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת, “Moses is true and his Torah is true!” The earth then covered them, and they were lost forever.

Many of our enemies, and even a few of our misguided Jewish brothers and sisters, employ these tactics, the tactic of the “Big Lie,” to attack our people, Israel. They either harp on a single individual's misdeeds, implying that all Jews are corrupt, or they simply fabricate lies about Jews. Our Jewish brothers and sisters who are, most often, ignorant of tradition, frequently find an obtuse verse or obscure rabbinic saying onto which they latch in order to justify their apostasy and faithlessness, making little effort to see the beauty that often resides in the very elements that they criticize.

The critics of the State of Israel conveniently forget that Israel accepted the original UN resolution allowing for the establishment of the State of Israel, but that the fledgling state was immediately attacked by five invading Arab armies. They forget that the “West Bank” was under complete control of the Jordanians for 17 years, but no Palestinian State was established, and that Israel Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered

Yassir Arafat 98% of the West Bank land and a capital in Jerusalem, but the offer was rejected.

Even in the recent battle with Hamas in Gaza, the media constantly reports the “disproportionate” numbers of Palestinian casualties (254 Palestinian civilians vs 12 Israeli), even though Hamas itself has admitted that 80 of the dead were “militants.” Israel claims that 200 of those “civilians” were terrorists, and that many other Palestinian civilians, women and children were killed by Hamas' own errant rockets, but Israel's statistics are never reported by the media. Never is it mentioned that Hamas's “marketing” strategy is to purposely use civilians and children as human shields! Instead of building bomb shelters to protect its civilians, Hamas cynically spent billions that it collected from international donors to build hundreds of kilometers of underground tunnels where its “courageous” fighters could hide while the numerous dead women and children served as their “victims” for the photographers and the international press.

Is there any country in the world that would have allowed over 4,000 deadly missiles aimed at civilians to rain down on its major population centers without a response? Israel always makes extraordinary efforts to prevent civilian casualties. Most other countries at war make no effort at all, resulting in thousands of civilian victims, but only Israel is condemned! Only Israel is forbidden to defend itself! Only Israel is constantly denounced as a most horrendous, unethical country, frequently accused of committing war crimes and Nazi-like atrocities.

To counter this misinformation, Jews need to be knowledgeable in our responses to these untoward attacks. We must educate ourselves sufficiently to make certain that we are in a position to show our enemies, and our Jewish brothers and sisters, the true picture of G-d, and of our extraordinary religion, so that, hopefully, before the earth opens to swallow them, the entire world will cry out, מִשֶּׁה אֱמֶת וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת, “Moses is true and his Torah is true,” and, thereby, spare the world much unnecessary pain and suffering.

May you be blessed.

Drasha Parshas Korach - Blind Ambition ***Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky***

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Love is blind. So is hate and any principle that begins to shade the intellect with emotion. This week, in what appears to be the worst ideological division of the Jewish people after the Exodus, a litmus test of human nature proved that the great divide bordered more on ego than on principle.

Korach, a cousin of Moshe and a brilliant man in his own right, began a rebellion that challenged the leadership and divine appointment of both Moshe and Ahron. In addition to his own family, Korach's iconoclastic actions inspired 250 Jewish leaders to denounce publicly the leadership of Moshe and Ahron. Foremost among the self-appointed detractors were two men with a history of vindictive activities toward Moshe – Dassan and Aviram. Back in Egypt, when Moshe killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating an innocent Jew, these men threatened to inform the Egyptian authorities.

But Moshe wanted to deal with them. As leader of two million people, he could have laughed at the complaints of a minute fraction of the population, but he didn't. He reached out to Dassan and Aviram and asked them to come and discuss their qualms with him. His request was met with a barrage of insults.

“Even if you gouge out our eyes – we shall not meet!” they responded (Numbers 16:14)

I was always amazed at this most arrogant response. Why did these men, who obviously were stubborn, arrogant, and supercilious, respond in a self-deprecating manner? Why did they suggest the horrific infliction of eye-gouging upon themselves? Would it not be enough to respond, even to the worst of enemies, “we will not come?” What connection does the loss of vision have with their refusal?

Reb Gimpel, a travelling salesman, developed an illness in a small village far from his home and was prescribed with a cure that entailed eating of non-kosher food. A foreigner in that town, he decided to ask the local rabbi if he was permitted to eat the medicine.

The gentile doctor did not know where the rabbi lived and suggested that Reb Gimpel ask the local butcher. Reb Gimpel went into the butcher shop. "Excuse me," he asked the burly meat vendor, "do you know where I can find your rabbi?" "The rabbi!" sneered the butcher, "why would a respectable-looking man like yourself need our rabbi?" The man was puzzled but continued to explain. "I'd like to ask him something. "Ask him something!" mocked the butcher. "Our rabbi doesn't know the difference between a horse and a cow! You're wasting your time! Ask the chazzan where he lives, I have no reason to tell you." The shocked man went to the chazzan's home. "Excuse me," he asked. Do you know where the rabbi lives?"

"The rabbi?" asked the cantor in horror. "Why in the world would you want to meet that ignoramus? Surely you don't want to ask him a question! I wouldn't want to be party to your misfortune. Better ask the mohel."

Frustrated the poor man went to the home of the mohel where once again he was accosted with a barrage of insults and put-downs. Finally, however, the mohel acquiesced and directed the man to the rabbi's home. The man entered the threshold and before he even shook the rabbi's hand he exclaimed, "Listen, I don't know you, and you don't me. I came here to ask one question, but I will ask you something totally different. Why are you the rabbi here? The butcher thinks you're a thief, the chazzan thinks you're an ignoramus, and the mohel loathes you. Why in the world do you remain the rabbi of this town?"

The rabbi looked up from his bifocals and smiled. "Ah! The insults, the abuse and the criticism. But you know what: for a little honor it's all worth it!"

As the proverbial rabble-rousers of all time, Dassan and Aviram were preaching profound insight into the laws of arrogance. When one is set on a self-fulfilling mission of squabbling, as corrupt and perverted as his judgement is, so is his vision. He is blind to the critics, blind to the world, and worst of all, blind to his own self. Once a man is blind, you can gouge his eyes and he will not notice. Only those with a pure sense of mission, cherish the vision that lets them see a situation from every angle. Even if it is not their own. While Moshe, the leader of the entire nation asks to meet his worst enemies and discuss their gripes, they refuse and would rather be blind to any criticism.

Good Shabbos

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Korach: Premeditated ritual entrapment?

Ben-Tzion Spitz

It is a revenge the devil sometimes takes upon the virtuous, that he entraps them by the force of the very passion they have suppressed and think themselves superior to. George Santayana

Korach, together with accomplices Datan and Aviram, instigate a rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, the sons of Amram. They encourage 250 distinguished leaders of Israel to protest against the seeming nepotism of Moses, the de facto leader, and his brother Aaron, the High Priest.

Moses offers an unusual solution to their protest. He suggests that the 250 rebels come in front of the Tabernacle, each with his own fire pan with burning incense on it. Aaron will also come with his, and God will decide directly who is worthy of the designation of High Priest.

The 250 leaders come the next morning with their fire pans filled with burning incense. Aaron also arrives. Besides holes miraculously opening up in the ground and swallowing up Datan, Aviram, and their entourage, God sends a fire that kills each of the 250 rebellious leaders holding their incense burning fire pans. Aaron, Moses, and all other non-participants are unharmed.

However, the people of Israel are furious with Moses and Aaron and accuse them of murder. The Bechor Shor on Numbers 17:6 takes the accusation seriously and tries to understand what's behind the murder accusation.

He explains that the accusers felt that Moses knew incense burning was a dangerous act. Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, had died by the hand of God for offering unauthorized incense. The rebel leaders had trusted Moses when he told them to bring their incense, but the accusers surmised that Moses must have known it would lead to their death, that handling incense was a death sentence to those who came in contact with it, except for Aaron who must have had some immunity.

God is not amused by the constant challenging of the leadership He chose. Having lost patience, He strikes the nation of Israel with an insanely fast-hitting plague. Moses, realizing God had struck, sends Aaron with incense in his ladle right into the middle of where the plague had started. Aaron rushes in and stops the plague, standing right in between the dead and the living; giving a very palpable demonstration that incense, correctly used, is not only not dangerous, but can save lives. In a matter of moments, 14,700 had died from the plague. Aaron and his incense were the only things that stood between the dead and the survivors.

May we realize the value of rituals as well as the value of good deeds.

Dedication - On the marriage of our niece Leora Spitz to Sammy Landesman. Mazal Tov!

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Korach 5781 - The Boundaries of Holiness

Moses was horrified by the rebellion since its essence was not only against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, but was also a rebellion against the leadership of G-d. Time after time, the nation had seen that all of Moses' actions were commanded by G-d and that he was chosen by Divine choice to lead the Jewish nation. Furthermore, Moses was appalled by the rebels since this leadership did not carry any special privileges. He had not so much as requested a donkey to ride on. On the contrary, Moses, as leader, carried the burden of leadership, worried about the nation's needs, and mediated their complaints with G-d.

Moses wanted to solve the dispute in a divine manner. He invited the rebels to come the following day to the Mishkan and bring an incense offering, ketoret, before G-d, along with Aaron. Whoever's ketoret would be accepted by G-d would be proven to be the priest, the kohen, G-d wanted. The group of rebels, despite knowing the severity of offering unwanted ketoret in the Mishkan, arrived to offer it anyway. The rebellion ended tragically: those who offered the ketoret were burned in fire, the ground opened under the tents of Korach and the other rebellion leaders, swallowing them.

In the parasha, we read some of the claims of Korach and his people:

They assembled against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" (Numbers 16, 3)

Korach and his companions challenged the religious and leadership hierarchy, claiming that the entire nation is holy and G-d resides in their midst, so therefore there is no reason for authority to be held by one person, and there is no reason to limit the work in the Mishkan to one family. Rather, the entire nation can serve as kohanim.

In the midrash, our sages reveal another claim raised by Korach and his people. This claim is hinted at by the proximity of the rebellion's description to the commandment of tzitzit and techelet at the end of the previous parasha, Shelach.

What is written above the matter? "Speak unto the Children of Israel and tell them to make tassels (tzitzit) for themselves." Korah quickly said to Moses, "In the case of a prayer shawl (tallit) which is all blue, what is the rule about it being exempt from [having] the tassel?" Moses said to him, "[Such a prayer shawl] is required to have the tassels." Korah said to him, "Would not a prayer shawl which is all blue exempt itself, when four [blue] threads exempt it? In the case of a house which is full of [scriptural] books, what is the rule about it being exempt if from [having] the mezuzah?" [Moses] said to him, "[Such a house] is

required to have the mezuzah.” [Korah] said to him, “Since the whole Torah has two hundred and seventy-five parashiot in it, and they do not exempt the house [from having the mezuzah], would the one parasha which is in the mezuzah exempt the house?” [He also] said to him, “These are things about which you have not been commanded. Rather you are inventing them [by taking them] out of your own heart.” (Numbers Rabbah 18, 3)

In Parashat Shelach, we are commanded to tie fringes to the corners of clothing, some of which should be techelet, a shade of blue. According to the sages of the midrash, Korach argued with Moses regarding a tallit which is all blue: Korach thought it should be exempt from the commandment of techelet, since it is entirely blue anyway, but Moses thought it still needed to have techelet strings tied to it. A similar argument ensued regarding the commandment of the mezuzah, writing two parashiot from the Torah and affixing it to the door frame. Korach claimed that if there is a house full of Torah scrolls, there is no point in affixing a mezuzah to the doorframe, while Moses thought that even in a home like that, we are still commanded to put up a mezuzah.

We should delve deeper to understand the crux of the argument between Moses and Korach: What is Korach’s basic claim and why did the sages of the midrash see it as the foundation of his rebellion against Moses’ leadership and Aaron’s priesthood?

It seems that Korach’s claim in this argument about the mezuzah is similar to his claim mentioned in the Torah that “the entire congregation are all holy.” According to Korach, G-d’s greatness fills and rules over the entire earthly space, and therefore, holiness can not be restricted to specific people or to a specific space. Based on Korach’s concept, an item of clothing that is entirely blue – representing the heavens – expresses godliness in the world much better than a few threads tied to its corners. And a home filled with Torah scrolls does not need one small mezuzah affixed to its doorframe.

However, G-d’s will is completely different. G-d wants the world to be the kingdom of humans, as we say in Hallel: “The heavens are heavens of the Lord, but the earth He gave to the children of men” (Psalms 115, 16). But even within the kingdom of humans, G-d wants there to be special people whose job it is to worship G-d and express His presence: the kohanim in the ancient world, and religious authorities today; as well as touches of G-d’s presence with every person: at the entrances of their homes, on the corners of their clothes, in the Mishkan, in synagogues, and in moral interactions between people.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Chanan Morrison

Solomon’s Predicament

After King Solomon finished building the Temple in Jerusalem, there was an unforeseen complication. Everything was done; the structure and all of its vessels were complete. All that remained was the final act of placing the ancient Ark of the Covenant into the Holy of Holies.

It should have been simple. Except that the Temple gates were closed shut and refused to open.

Solomon pleaded to God with twenty-four supplications, and the Temple gates finally opened. From this incident, the Sages learned that in times of great need — such as on days of fasting during a severe drought — our prayers should contain not eighteen but twenty-four blessings, like Solomon’s prayer.

What is the significance of the number twenty-four? And why was placing the Ark inside the Holy of Holies such an important event?

Twenty-Four Blessings

The Temple and the Ark correspond to two major themes in Judaism. The holy Temple is the focus of Israel’s avodah, service of God. The Ark, on the other hand, containing the stone tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments, represents the Torah and its revelation to the Jewish people.

The final act of completing the Temple was to place the Ark inside the Holy of Holies. This was a highly significant act, for it combined two

primary values: Torah and Divine service. More to the point: it teaches that without the Ark, the Temple is incomplete.

This is not just about the Temple service. It is a fundamental principle about all forms of Divine service. Without Torah, without being informed by Divine revelation, it is impossible to know the proper way to serve God. We cannot fulfill our moral obligations, nor can we realize our spiritual aspirations, only on the basis of intellect and logic. Why is this?

It may be possible to deduce major moral principles using our powers of reason. But without Torah, it is impossible to know how to serve God and follow an ethical path in all of the diverse circumstances of life.

This is the significance of the number twenty-four. There are twenty-four hours in the day, so twenty-four represents the various situations that we find ourselves in: waking up, at work, at home, and so on. Each hour finds us in a different situation, requiring its own special rules of conduct. These varied circumstances underline the need for detailed Divine instruction — i.e., Torah.

Thus, when placing the Torah ark inside the Temple, King Solomon prayed with twenty-four supplications. He understood that without the Torah’s guidance in all aspects of life, it is impossible to attain a true service of God.

Appropriate Piety

If so, perhaps this type of prayer, a prayer with twenty-four blessings, is relevant for all days of the year. Why only on fast days?

A fast day is a time dedicated to contemplation and refining one’s traits and deeds. At such times, it is especially important that our spiritual growth be rooted in the counsel of Torah, and not solely on our intellect. On a fast day, one may be inclined to accept new obligations - obligations that are not in accord with the Torah’s teachings. Extra piety is not always a good thing; it may also lead to undesirable results. For this reason, there is an ancient custom to read from the Torah on fast days, indicating that our spiritual efforts should be enlightened by Torah guidance.

Our Feet Will Not Stumble

This is what the psalmist taught,

תִּנְרַת אֶ-לֵהָיו בְּלִבּוֹ לֹא תִמְעַד אֲשַׁרְיוֹ

“The Torah of His God is in his heart; his feet will not stumble.” (Psalm 37:31)

The two parts of the verse, Rav Kook explained, are cause and effect. It is because the “Torah is in our hearts” — because we base our moral decisions on the Torah’s teachings — that our “feet will not stumble.”

One who is firmly rooted in Torah values will avoid the errors of those who rely solely on their intellect and powers of reasoning.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, on Berachot 29, IV:45)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Korach

פְּרִשַׁת קֹרַח תְּשַׁפֵּ"א

אוּן בֶּן פֶּלֶה

And Ohn ben Peles. (16:1)

Two women: One catalyzed her husband’s downfall, while the other saved her husband from destruction and eternal infamy. Korach and his henchmen, Dasan, Aviram and Ohn ben Peles, together with the support of the 250 heads of the *Sanhedrin*, were bent on usurping the leadership of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Chazal (*Sanhedrin* 109b) teach that Ohn was saved by his wife. She asked him, “What difference does it make to you which man (Moshe or Korach) leads the nation? At the end of the day, you will still remain a lackey – not someone who is in charge.” She then gave him enough wine to drink to make him sufficiently sleepy. When the men came to pick him up, she knew that they would insist on waking him. Therefore, she sat by the doorway of her tent and loosened the braids of her hair. Religious men would not gaze upon the uncovered hair of a married woman. (These same men had no problem with slander and heresy.) Since these men were careful about modesty, they retreated when they saw her sitting there.

Korach also had a wife. Her plans for her husband were quite different. Indeed, she egged him on, claiming that Moshe demonstrated

no respect for him, as he took every honor either for himself or for his family. She imbued her husband with a venomous hatred for what Moshe was doing, thereby catalyzing him to dispute our quintessential leader, a grave error which cost him his physical and eternal life.

Two influential women – one incited downfall; the other rescued her husband. Ohn's wife questioned her husband: "What difference does it make who is on top – Moshe or Korach? In any event you are second fiddle." Her remark suggested that he deserved better. He was an honorable man who had leadership qualities. It was not worth disputing Moshe if he had nothing to benefit from it. Let him go back to the *bais hamedrash* and learn until an opportunity for a decent position would avail itself.

Korach's wife took a negative approach by beating up on her husband, putting him down, claiming that Moshe had taken everything from him. He deserved more and better. The only way was to take on Moshe and dispute his leadership. Did she really care about her husband, or did she care only about herself? Korach's wife always looked for the negative, focusing on how everything Moshe did demeaned her husband. Ohn's wife was practical. She cared about her husband. Korach's wife, however, cared only about herself.

While Ohn's wife was a good woman who cared deeply about her husband and his esteem, we are unaware of her personal qualities in imbuing him to achieve greatness. [This is not meant to imply that a woman who looks out for her husband and ensures his respectable treatment by others is not manifesting a remarkable trait.] At the end of the day, Ohn's wife did not effect a positive change in her husband. Without her last minute intervention, he, too, would have joined the 250 heads of the *Sanhedrin* in their premature demise. We do, however, find another woman in the Torah who had a positive influence on her husband, imbuing him with the strength of character to decide on his own that what others were doing was evil.

The Torah relates that prior to Moshe sending off the *meraglim*, spies, he prayed for Yehoshua. Why did he not pray for Kalev, who was left to go alone to Chevron to pray for himself at the graves of the Patriarchs? Surely, Moshe was not playing favorites. *Targum Yonasan* explains that Moshe feared for Yehoshua due to the latter's humility. He was concerned that his humility might cause him to question himself and assume that he was wrong, thus buckling under the weight of the majority of the spies. *Kalev ruach acheres imo*; "A different spirit was with him" (*Bamidbar* 14:24). The commentators say this alludes to his wife, whose attitude and spirit influenced his personality. Kalev's wife was none other than Miriam *HaNeviyah*, sister of Moshe and Aharon.

As a member of *Klal Yisrael's* leadership triumvirate, she was no stranger to bold action and resisting external pressure. She would not fall sway to the harmful diatribe of the spies. As a young girl, she risked her life to protect her baby brother. As a midwife, she defied Pharaoh. When she felt her father, Amram, had rendered a *halachic* decision that undermined *Klal Yisrael's* future, she spoke up. On the other hand, as Moshe and Aharon's sister, she combined their exemplary humility and love of the Jewish People, demonstrating firm, decisive action. She fought for the people to survive after the sin of the Golden Calf, but was quick to excoriate Korach for fomenting dissension. *Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, feels that Moshe relied on the influence of his sister rubbing off of Kalev. Thus, he did not feel that it was necessary to *daven* for him. Kalev had a great mentor.

We derive from here that the right wife does not have to take up "arms" to protect her husband. The right wife influences and – in the ideal situation – changes and makes him into a better man.

When the women left Egypt they came prepared, knowing that Hashem would make miracles for the Jews. Following the splitting of the Red Sea the men sang *Shirah*, praising Hashem for saving them. The women, led by Miriam, also sang. Understandably, the men knew that *yetzias Mitzrayim* was the precursor for the Giving of the Torah. Thus, they had much to sing about. What motivated the women's song? *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, explains that Miriam sang *Suss v'rochovo ramah bayam*; "The horse and rider were hurled into the sea" (*Shemos*

15:21). What did the horses do to deserve being drowned? The riders were Egyptian slave masters who participated in making life miserable for the Jews. They received their due. The horses were not simple bystanders – they assisted their masters. It was because of them that the Egyptians were able to move about freely in order to beat the Jewish slaves. Thus, the women who assisted their husbands by encouraging their faith in Hashem, had every right to sing *Shirah*.

David *Hamelech* says (*Tehillim* 119:165), *Shalom rav l'ohavei sorasecha v'ein lamo michshol*, "Great peace have those who love You, and nothing causes them to stumble." *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, comments: There are *lomdei Torah*, those who study Torah; and *ohavei Torah*, those who love the Torah. *Lomdei Torah* is a reference to men who are enjoined to study Torah. Unfortunately, among them are those who waste their time and do not study Torah. They bring upon themselves a grave sin. *Ohavei Torah* refers to women who are devoted to *harbotzas Torah*, dissemination of Torah engendered by their husbands. They share in their husband's *avodas hakodesh*, holy service. Concerning them it says: "Nothing causes them to stumble." Women love the Torah and fulfill their obligation toward it. Since there is no imperative of *limud HaTorah* for them, no *michshol*, stumbling block, can be in their way.

ויקהל עליהם קרח את כל העדה

Korach gathered the entire assembly. (16:19)

Without a doubt, Korach was as powerful as he was charismatic. Nonetheless, he was going up against Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen, Klal Yisrael's* leaders, who certainly were greater than he. He succeeded in gathering a group of distinguished followers, heads of the *Sanhedrin*, men of erudition and discernment. He did not go to a bar and preach to ne'er-do-wells. He went to the elite of *Klal Yisrael* and succeeded in swaying them to support him. For this, they paid dearly. How did Korach pull this off? *Leitzanus*, cynicism, sarcasm, scorn, whatever name we call it; the result is the same: it degrades the subject and belittles the one who is the focus of their scorn.

Leitzanus achas docheh meah tochachos, one bit of sarcasm voiced by a cynic can undo (literally push away) one hundred rebukes. How? Imagine a prolific orator speaks passionately to a crowd. The people sit on the edge of their seats to listen to him, absorb and digest every word that he articulates. They are mesmerized, moved like never before. They are prepared to alter their life's trajectory, until one person, a *leitz*, cynic, makes a crack about the speaker. He does not malign him. He only belittles his stature, "Who is he to speak to us in such a manner?" He makes a joke about his appearance, the organization he represents, his *yeshivah*, etc. It is over! The entire speech had become meaningless. The cynic has just destroyed everyone's mood. Is it any wonder that *leitzanim* are not allowed to see the *Shechinah*, Divine Presence?

What sin did he commit? He was fully observant, righteous, honest, charitable, studied Torah. Yet, he is not granted entry into *Gan Eden*. Why? He belittled people, made them feel insignificant, and, in some instances, worthless.

Amalek did that to us. We left Egypt liberated, excited, infused with a new spirit, challenged with the opportunity to turn our backs on 210 years of slavery and looking forward to a bright future of serving Hashem in the Promised Land. Every nation of the world feared us. After all, we survived Pharaoh and watched as Hashem dealt with the Egyptians. We miraculously passed through the Red Sea and watched our enemies drown. We were one with Hashem. Suddenly, out of the blue, comes Amalek, bent on destroying us. While he could not triumph, he succeeded in dispelling our self-confidence. Everything that we believed in was placed on hold because Amalek put us in our place. Our visions, aspirations, and self-esteem were yanked from under us. Our passion, our very positive emotion, was soured by this nothing whose animus toward Hashem and His chosen people was the legacy he received from his ancestor, Eisav, which he bequeathed to his future biological and ideological offspring.

Rarely does the cynic's first salvo begin maliciously. It is usually offhand and thoughtless – but mean-spirited, as if he just does

not care who you are or what you represent. You mean nothing to him. The initial remark might be insignificant, but give it some time and it will domino into a violent firestorm that destroys everything in its wake. Cynicism invites others to join and incites comments and actions that go beyond the harmless and insignificant. A parent can make a remark at home about a *rebbe*/teacher, student, family, and within a few days, it has passed hands from their child to another, to another, back to their respective homes; and, before one realizes it, an innocuous remark has destroyed a person and a family.

Cynicism need be neither true nor accurate. A simple remark that has no basis, if it is “well-placed” and “well-timed,” will mushroom and destroy. It is difficult to overcome. The *Mesillas Yesharim* compares the destructive force of cynicism/mockery to a leather shield smeared with oil that deflects and repels arrows from upon it – not allowing them to strike the body of the individual it is protecting. Likewise, with one cynical remark, a person repels from himself enormous amounts of inspiration, which would have otherwise influenced him.

In the opening *pasuk* of *Sefer Tehillim*, David *Hamelech* says: *Ashrei ha'Ish*; “Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked; or taken the path of the sinners, *u'v'moshav leitzim lo yashav*, or joined/sat in the session of scorners.” The order of verbs seems to emphasize the increasing order of strength with regard to the deleterious behavior of these individuals. Thus, “Happy is the man who has not followed the counsel of the wicked”; who has carefully avoided even a passing or temporary connection with people who wantonly and intentionally do evil. This person is on the lowest level (so to speak) of sinful behavior. He simply follows – does not stop to talk. The next level is he who takes the path/stands in the path of sinners. His contact is more lingering. He has a *shmuess*, conversation, with the sinner. Last, is what appears to be the most egregious of the three, he who sits with scorners. This implies that he has settled down for a considerable amount of time. He has an entire session with the scorners, whereby he chose to listen and impart his own “wisdom” to the conversation. This is a *moshav leitzim*.

Chazal (*Pirkei Avos* 3:3) describe this ignominious gathering as what we might construe to be a simple gathering of friends to *shmuess* about anything and everything, with no malice intended. Over time, however, remarks are made, statements spoken, and images conjured. In fact, it is even more innocuous that *Chazal* speak about two men that sit together and Torah is not spoken between them. These men have the time and opportunity to study or speak Torah, yet choose to ignore it. They are scorners, because they indicate by their behavior that the Torah means very little to them. They would rather talk about something foolish than share a Torah thought. This attitude disgraces and belittles the Torah and is a classic example of a *moshav leitzim*.

The idea goes one step further. It is not only about belittling the Torah. *V'ain beineihem divrei Torah*, “No words of Torah are spoken between them.” Quite possibly, both men are engrossed in their studies – one is sitting on one side of the *bais hamedrash*, while the other one is sitting across the room. No Torah is passing between them. Neither one considers the other one worthy, or he is just not interested in sharing his thoughts with the other fellow. He probably does not consider him his equal in learning. He looks down on him. Such learning is the antithesis of what learning Torah is all about. *Derech eretz kadmah laTorah*, human decency, proper manners, respect precedes Torah study. One who studies Torah and does not become a *mentch* has not benefited from his study.

Some people are compelled to navigate the sea of life in rough waters, and, as a result, are very much alone – not even in a crowd. Sadly, as if these sorry individuals are not sufficiently suffering, we – either by ignoring them, or by making crude, unconscionable remarks to them (for no reason other than self-assertiveness) – make their lives more miserable. When we measure the greatness of man, his scholarship and G-d-fearing observances aside, his attitude toward those who deal with challenges, who are less fortunate, whose portion in this world is not as full or nice as ours, who are alone, should be factored in. One person whose sensitivity toward the broken-hearted was in a league of

his own was *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, Mashgiach Kamineitz Yerushalayim*.

His acts of kindness were more than mere acts; they defined his essence. He truly felt that he was no better than the next person. An elderly, childless man, alone in the world, did receive much kind treatment from many people. He once commented, “Everyone speaks kindly to me, because they pity me. Only one person enjoys speaking with me – *Rav Moshe Aharon*.”

He addressed everyone with respect – adding the prefix “*reb*” to everyone’s name. He would listen to their *chiddushim*, novellae, regardless of their quality. If it made a person feel good; if it elevated his self-esteem – he listened, questioned, added and repeated it to others. He felt a sense of humility before every man. He had a special “guest” every *Shabbos*. A dejected, unbalanced woman, who more than once would disrupt the meal, demanding that all the children leave the table. *Rav Moshe Aharon* could have overruled her, but, in her unhinged state, it might provoke her unnecessarily and engender a not so welcome reaction. He just moved his children to a different table.

One would think that when they moved to the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood, he would leave no forwarding address. *Rav Moshe Aharon* remembered on Friday night after *davening* that he had forgotten to give the new address to the woman. She would not know where to go for her meal. He immediately ran to her apartment and invited her to join them – which she did, for several years.

In summation, *leitzanus* is often silent, appears innocuous, but is actually far from benign. It is painful, insidious and has the power to destroy people’s lives. What makes it so lethal is its benign nature. The word *leitz*, *lamed*, *tzadik*, backwards is *tzeil*, shadow. I think this is essentially what the *leitz* accomplishes. He undermines and compromises an issue, a statement, a rebuke – a person, by casting a shadow of ambiguity and aspersion. As I said, a silent saboteur.

**אם כמות כל האדם ימתן אלה ופקודת כל האדם יפקד עליהם
If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them. (16:29)**

This was not the first time that someone usurped the authority of *Moshe Rabbeinu*. His reaction this time was atypical. He asked Hashem that this group be meted with a punishment which was both unusual and stark. It was important for all the people to know that *Moshe* was Hashem’s chosen leader and that he made every decision under His direction. The heresy expounded by *Korach* must be put to rest in a manner such that it would be recorded in the hearts and minds of *Klal Yisrael* that *Moshe*’s prophecy may not be denied.

Chazal (*Nedarim* 39b) derive from here that *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, is alluded to in the Torah. “If these men die like all men, (whereby they become ill and are visited after the visit of all men) then Hashem has not sent me.” *Moshe* indicated (according to *Chazal*’s interpretation) that most people become ill, are visited during their illness prior to their succumbing to the illness. *Chazal* interpret the word *yipakeid*, is visited (upon them), that an ill person is visited during his illness. Apparently, the phrase *u'fekudas kol adam yipakekeid aleihem* is somehow related to visiting the ill. *Horav Chaim Toito, Shlita*, relates a story from which he gleans a deeper understanding of the relationship of *pekidah* (*yipakeid u'fekudas*) with visiting the ill.

Chacham Sulamon Mutzafi, zl, was one of the premier *kabbalists* in *Yerushalayim* during the early twentieth century. For the duration of an entire year, he would visit one of *Yerushalayim*’s distinguished *rabbanim* who had become seriously ill and was confined to bed. Every Friday night, following *davening*, he would stop by the *Rav*’s house to spend an hour discussing issues confronting the Jewish community and asking the *Rav* for his sage advice. All this was carried out prior to *Rav Sulamon*’s going home. Considering the extra time it took to walk to the *Rav*’s house and the duration of the time spent there, the *Sulamon* family (and his students) waited an hour and a half longer than other families. No one complained, but the students (who always valued the opportunity for learning) wanted to know why he spent so much time visiting the *Rav*.

The *Chacham* explained, “The *Rav* whom I visit every Friday night is a great scholar, who would ordinarily leave the *shul* on Friday night accompanied by a throng of followers, all thirsting for knowledge, who peppered him with questions on *halachah*, or to glean his sage advice. Now that he is ill and bedridden, in addition to the pain generated by his illness, he is also dispirited over being alone. Therefore, even though subjecting them to wait for me places a burden on my family, I am during this hour performing the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, in accordance with *halachah*.”

This vignette underscores the meaning of visiting the sick. It is not about walking in, greeting, talking a few moments and leaving. The *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* is about filling the bedridden person’s needs. We must ask ourselves: “What is he/she missing most? What does he/she need?” Visiting the ill should not be about assuaging the visitor’s guilt feelings, but about filling the void in the life of the *choleh*.

This is why the Torah chose the word *pekidah*, which is synonymous with *chisaron*, deprivation, deficiency, something missing. *V’lo nifkad mimenu ish*; “And not a man of us is missing” (*Bamidbar* 31:49). We are enjoined to make the difference in the *choleh*’s life by filling what is absent, lacking in his present condition.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, reverently known as the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, devoted his life to the pursuit of all things *chesed* – especially in the areas from which others shied away. In prisons, leper colonies, mental health wards, he focused on the forgotten and ignored. He sought to fill the void that most of these lonely people needed most: friendship. They knew that in him they had someone who truly cared. For example: (this could go on for many pages, but I only selected one instance): *Rav Aryeh* would visit the mental wards where individuals who had suffered serious emotional challenges were treated until they were able to return to society. (These were the lucky ones who knew they had a problem and were willing to do something about it.)

One day, he saw a poor soul who was covered with black and blue welts and bruises. Needless to say, *Rav Aryeh* became interested in this man’s welfare. He asked what had happened to him. The other patients explained, “We are all ill, strung out beyond our emotions ability to cope. We are here for treatment. There are difficult moments when we lose it and become wild. The orderlies must restrain us forcibly, and, at times, it gets out of hand. They even have to subject us to corporal beatings in order to control us. We all have family and relatives with whom the orderlies do not want to hassle. Therefore, the beatings are not injurious. That man, however, has no family. So the orderlies expend all their frustration on him. Whenever they have a difficult day, they release their frustrations on him.”

When *Rav Aryeh* heard this, he walked over to the orderlies and informed them that the man/patient was his relative. He would check on him and see to his continued welfare. From then on, he visited the man every *Rosh Chodesh* and always brought along a little gift. He realized what the man had been lacking: a relative. *Rav Aryeh* filled the void and became his relative.

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prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Can there be Smoke Without a Fire?

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

In parshas Korach, 250 men burnt ketores and paid with their lives.

Question #1: Frankfurters on the Blech

May I place cold frankfurters on top of a hot pot to warm them on Shabbos?”

Question #2: Cheese Dogs

“May one derive benefit from a cheese dog, which is a grilled hot dog with added cheese and chili sauce?”

Question #3: Lox for Eruv Tavshillin?

“I will be traveling overseas for Yom Tov and Shabbos, and it will be difficult for me to have cooked food ready for an eruv tavshillin. May I use lox as my eruv tavshillin?”

Foreword:

Our opening questions are germane to whether “smoking” qualifies as “cooking”, for halachic purposes. As we will see shortly, the Gemara and halachic authorities discuss several situations affected by this question, with ramifications for the laws of Shabbos, kashrus and eruv tavshillin. Let us begin by understanding some background information.

In general, we are familiar with two very common methods of preparing food using heat. In one instance, the food is cooked directly by the heat, without any medium. This is what we do when we barbecue, broil, or bake. The food is cooked or baked directly by the heat. On the other hand, when we boil or fry food, we cook it in a hot liquid -- when boiling, usually in water, and when frying, in oil.

There are also many methods of making raw food edible without heat, such as salting, pickling or marinating. Preparing food this way causes the flavors of the different ingredients to blend together, which halacha calls *beli’ah*. Therefore, should one ingredient be non-kosher, the entire food will become non-kosher. However, there are halachic ramifications to the fact that these methods of food preparation are not considered “cooking.” Even though salting and pickling food make it edible, the food is not considered cooked. Therefore, germane to the laws of Shabbos, one will not be able to heat up smoked food, using methods permitted to warm food on Shabbos. For example, although it is permitted to heat food that is already cooked by placing it atop a pot which is, itself, on top of a fire or blech, one may not heat up deli this way on Shabbos, when it has been pickled, but not cooked, which is usually the case.

Several types of smoking

In contemporary use, the term “smoked” may refer to several different ways of preparing food, with variant halachic ramifications. Here are three methods:

Hot smoke

Frankfurters and many other sausages are “cooked” in hot smoke, in an appliance sometimes called a smoker. Rather than being cooked directly by the fire, or by water that is heated by a fire, these foods are cooked by hot smoke. This is also the usual way in which raw salmon is made into lox. The question we will be discussing in our article is whether this is halachically equivalent to cooking in water, oil or other liquid. There are many halachic ramifications to the question. Unless specified otherwise, our article is discussing this type of smoking, in which smoke is doing the actual cooking (see Perisha, Yoreh Deah 87:9).

Cured food

In this type of “smoking,” wood is burned inside a sealed room, usually called a “smokehouse.” The food to be preserved and processed is placed inside the smokehouse for several days, or perhaps even weeks, while the smoke, now cool, cures and provides the food with a smoky flavor. Since the food production in this instance takes place in room temperature smoke, this process should not be considered either “cooking” or *beli’ah*. However, there is one late authority who considers this method of producing food to be similar to cooking (*Chadrei Deah*, quoted by *Badei Hashulchan*, *Biurim* 87:6 s.v. *Ha’me’ushan*). For the rest of this article, I will not take this opinion under consideration, since it is not within mainstream accepted halacha.

Regarding the laws of Shabbos, food smoked this way is certainly considered to be uncooked.

Smoke flavored

A third method of smoking is when food is prepared by steaming, cooking or broiling, and a natural or artificial ingredient called smoke flavor is added to provide smoke taste. If the food was prepared by being cooked or broiled, it is considered cooked for halachic purposes. If the food was prepared by being “steamed,” a process similar to the first method of smoking mentioned above, the halachic issue is more complicated. The halachic question is whether cooking in steam and cooking in smoke are identical, or, perhaps, cooking in steam is like cooking in water. I will leave that aspect of this topic for a future article. Smoking on Shabbos!

At this point, I will explain some of the halachic issues affected by the question as to whether smoking food is the same as cooking. One of the

39 melachos prohibited on Shabbos is mevasheil, cooking, or, in the words of the Mishnah (Shabbos 73a), ofeh, baking. This melacha involves preparing food with heat (Rambam, Hilchos Shabbos 9:1-5). One of the questions that the Gemara discusses is whether smoking food on Shabbos is considered a violation of the melacha of cooking on Shabbos min haTorah, and another issue is whether smoked food is considered cooked.

Here is one application of this issue: Once dry food has been completely cooked, such as baked or barbecued chicken or a kugel, there is no Torah violation in heating it on Shabbos. (There often may be rabbinic violations involved, but there are ways of warming cooked food on Shabbos that are permitted. We have discussed that topic in the past.) However, heating uncooked food on Shabbos usually involves a melacha min haTorah. The question we are raising is whether food that has been smoked, such as lox or hot dogs, is considered as cooked regarding the laws of warming food on Shabbos. If it is, then there are more options available to warm them on Shabbos.

Smoking meat and milk

A second area of halacha where this question – whether smoking constitutes cooking – is germane, is the prohibition of eating dairy and meat foods cooked together, basar becholov. Although we are prohibited from eating meat and milk together even when both are cold, or even from eating dairy after consuming meat, these prohibitions are only midrabbanan. The prohibition is violated min haTorah by cooking meat and dairy together or by eating meat and dairy that were previously cooked together. The question that we will tackle is whether smoking meat and dairy together is prohibited min haTorah or only midrabbanan.

There is a halachic difference that depends on whether preparing a meat and dairy mixture is prohibited midrabbanan or min haTorah. The prohibition against benefiting from meat and milk applies only when one violated the law min haTorah, but not when one violated it midrabbanan (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 87:3 and commentaries). Therefore, if meat and dairy were mixed together when cold, there is no prohibition in getting benefit from the resultant product, even though it may not be eaten. For this reason, selling pet food does not violate the law of benefiting from basar becholov, even when it contains both meat and dairy products, since the two are not cooked together, but blended together at room temperature.

The question germane to our discussion is whether a Jew may benefit from a meat and dairy product that was smoked together. For example, if someone smoked a raw frankfurter together with cheese, is it prohibited min haTorah, and for this reason one may not have benefit from it min haTorah, or not?

Bishul akum

Here is another kashrus application in which it will make a difference whether smoking is considered cooking or not. Chazal prohibited eating food cooked by a non-Jew, even when all the ingredients are kosher, unless the food is edible raw or would not be served on a royal table. Is smoking considered “cooking” germane to this prohibition, or not? This means that, if a non-Jew smoked food that is inedible raw, is it prohibited because of bishul akum? A practical difference is whether a hechsher on hot dogs must make sure that a Jew smoked the frankfurters; another is whether the smoking of lox must be done by a Jew. In both of these situations, the question is whether this food is considered cooked by a non-Jew, which might prohibit it as bishul akum, or whether it was prepared in a way that does not qualify as “cooking,” and therefore bishul akum is not a concern.

Eruv tavshillin

Here is yet another halachic application in which it will make a difference whether smoked food is considered “cooked” or not. Chazal

prohibited cooking on Yom Tov for Shabbos, unless one prepares an eruv tavshillin, a cooked item designated before Yom Tov that will remain until the Shabbos preparations are completed, and that thereby permits cooking for Shabbos on Yom Tov that falls on Friday. If smoked food is considered cooked, then it is acceptable to use a food that was prepared by smoking, such as a frankfurter or lox, as an eruv tavshillin. If smoked food is not considered cooked, then it is not.

The Yerushalmi

Now that we understand the background, we can examine the Talmudic discussion that concerns smoked food. We will begin by quoting a passage of Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedorim 6:1): “The rabbis of Kisrin asked: What is the law of smoked food in regard to the prohibition of bishul akum? In regard to cooking on Shabbos? What is its law regarding mixing meat and milk together?” The passage of Yerushalmi then changes the subject, without ruling on the three questions raised.

The issue the Yerushalmi seems to be asking is whether cooking food in smoke is halachically equivalent to cooking in liquid. In each of these instances, a hot medium is used to prepare the food. The first question of the Yerushalmi is whether food smoked by a non-Jew is prohibited, or whether the proscription of bishul akum is limited to food cooked via fire or liquid. If cooking in smoke is halachically considered the same as cooking in water or oil, then lox or frankfurters that were smoked by a non-Jew are prohibited because of bishul akum. On the other hand, if smoking is not treated as cooking, then there is no halachic problem with eating lox or hot dogs in which the actual smoking was performed by a non-Jew, provided that the ingredients are all kosher.

The second question of the Yerushalmi can be explained as follows: If a Jewish person placed raw frankfurters or salmon into a smoker on Shabbos, and the frankfurters or lox thereby became edible on Shabbos, did the person desecrate a melacha on Shabbos? If he did, then there are halachic ramifications germane to a product that was smoked on Shabbos in violation of the law.

The third question of the Yerushalmi concerns the laws of cooking meat and milk together. If smoking is considered cooking, min haTorah, then smoking a cheese dog violates basar becholov min haTorah, and it is prohibited to have any benefit from it.

As I noted above, the Yerushalmi that we quoted does not mention a conclusion regarding these three questions. Based on these unresolved questions, the Rambam (Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros 9:6) appears to conclude the following: when our issue is a halacha that is min haTorah, we rule stringently. However, when the issue is a rabbinic question, we will rule leniently and not consider this to be cooking.

As a result, it is certainly prohibited as a safek de'oraysa to smoke a cheese dog or to smoke food on Shabbos. It would be prohibited to have any benefit from a smoked cheese dog. However, someone who violated these prohibitions would not be punishable for his offense, even when such punishment was practiced and even had he fulfilled all the requirements to receive this punishment, because the Yerushalmi did not conclude definitively that it constitutes a violation. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 87:6) follows the same approach as the Rambam.

We will continue this topic at some point in the future.

Conclusion

In non-observant circles, a well-known non-Jewish criticism of Judaism is frequently levelled: “Does G-d care more about what goes into our mouths than he does about what comes out?” The criticism is, of course, in error, and its answer is that Hashem cares both about what goes in and what comes out, and it is the height of conceit for us to decide which is “more” important in His eyes. Being careful about what we eat and about what we say are both important steps in growing in our development as human beings.

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה