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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **KORACH** - 5769

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**Rabbi Mordechai Willig -
Polar Opposites**

"Dasan and Aviram went out erect (nitzavim)' with erect bearing to insult and vilify" (Rashi, Bamidbar 16:27).

They were standing opposite Moshe and Aharon (Shemos 5:20). Whenever the Torah says "nitzim – fighting" (see Bamidbar 26:4) or "nitzavim – standing" anonymously, it refers to Dasan and Aviram (Rashi). They were the two Hebrews who quarreled (Rashi Shemos 2:13). When Moshe rebuked them, they responded by rejecting his right to rebuke them and by informing against him to Pharaoh (Rashi 15).

One who stands erect and defiant, who can not accept the wisdom or rebuke of another, is doomed to a life of constant conflict. Dasan and Aviram rejected all authority, fought constantly with Moshe and Aharon, and even with each other.

Before we pray for peace at the very end of Shemoneh Esrei, we bow and take three steps back. Chassidic masters explain that in order to achieve peace and avoid fights, one must bow in deference to another and step back from the confrontation. Dasan and Aviram, who stood erect and defiant, represent the opposite of peace.

II

"The earth opened and swallowed Dasan, and covered over the assembly of Aviram" (Tehillim 106:17). Bnai Yisroel decided to appoint Dasan in place of Moshe and Aviram in place of Aharon, as it says (Bamidbar 14:4), "let us appoint a leader and let us return to Egypt" (Yalkut Shimoni).

"Dasan, who violated the law (das). Aviram, who strengthened himself to avoid doing teshuva" (Sanhedrin 109b). Dasan, Moshe's usurper, violated the laws of Moshe. Aviram, who aspired to replace Aharon, rejected teshuva, the process promoted successfully by Aharon and his descendants (Malachi 2:6)

Dasan was swallowed alone, since others did not follow his lead in violating the law. Aviram represents stubbornness, refusing to recognize one's mistake. This universal human condition leads to untold suffering and iniquity (see "Mistakes Were Made, But Not By Me", by C, Travis and E. Aronson). Unfortunately, Am Yisroel is a stiff-necked people (Shemos 34:9), enabling Aviram to attract an entire assembly, who all perished with him,

III

In order to avoid the tragic fate of Dasan and Aviram, we must learn from their mistakes, and from the example of their polar opposites, Moshe and Aharon (see Gevuros Hashem 19).

After being insulted and accused of adultery (Sanhedrin 110a) Moshe nevertheless did not keep up the dispute, but sent to Dasan and Aviram with words of peace (Rashi Bamidbar 16:12). Despite his great distress at their insolent reply (13 – 15), the subsequent escalation (16 – 19), and Hashem's offer to destroy the assembly (20, 21), Moshe prayed for them (22), and attempted to end the dispute at the last moment (25, see Sanhedrin 110a).

Aharon, with his mussar and sanctity, did not say anything during this entire dispute. This silence was like an admission that Korach was greater than he. He served as Kohen Gadol only upon Moshe's request to fulfill the command of Hashem (Ramban 16:4)

Moshe did not respond insultingly, and Aharon did not respond at all. When they accepted their positions Hashem said "My children are stubborn, angry and burdensome. You accept on the condition that they may curse you or threaten to stone you (Shemos Rabbah 7:3). Many great Jewish leaders ever since have been insulted and/or slandered. Their mild response, or their silence, is a measure of their acceptance of the responsibility of leadership and of their greatness.

IV

The arrogant and confrontational Dasan and Aviram rejected the rebuke, wisdom and authority of others, and stubbornly refused to admit any mistakes. By contrast, Moshe, the humblest of men (Bamidbar 12:3), accepted the wisdom of others (Vayikra 10:19,20). He admitted to his mistake and was not ashamed (Rashi). After all, everyone makes mistakes.

Aharon made an altar with the best of intentions (Rashi Shemos 32:5). Even after he was granted atonement (Rashi Vayikra 9:2), he attributed the lack of Shechina in the Mishkan to his earlier mistake (Rashi 9:23). Aharon was embarrassed and afraid to approach the altar. Moshe said to him, for this you were selected (Rashi 9:7), namely for this service. The Baal Shem Tov interpreted this passage differently, and said that Moshe told Aharon that he was selected precisely because he was embarrassed and humble. All members of Am Yisroel must attempt to avoid the insolent and argumentative nature of Dasan and Aviram. We should all emulate the interpersonal righteousness of Moshe and Aharon.

"Whoever keeps up a dispute violates a negative commandment as it says (Bamidbar 17:5), he shall not be like Korach and his assembly" (Sanhedrin 110a). If we all adhere to this admonition, we will eliminate baseless hatred and hasten the ultimate redemption.

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Rabbi Frand on Parshas Korach

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Rabbi Frand on Parshas Korach

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 642 Different Minhagim for Saying Kedusha. Good Shabbos!

Look Who's Calling Moshe An Honor Seeker!

Korach challenged the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu. He charged: "You have assumed too much power (rav lachem) for the whole congregation is entirely holy and why do you raise yourself over the congregation of the L-rd." [Bamidbar 16:3] Rashi comments on the words "rav lachem" – "way too much honor have you taken for yourself".

This is the most ludicrous charge that one could have leveled against Moshe Rabbeinu. Of all things, who could call the humble Moshe a seeker of honor? Just two parshios ago, the pasuk [verse] said: "For the man Moshe was the most humble man on the face of the earth." [Bamidbar 12:3] Moshe had an amazing array of positive attributes. He was the master Rabbi of the Jewish people. He was the master teacher. He was the master prophet. He had so many positive traits. But of all these traits, the one

attribute the Torah singles out for praising Moshe was the fact that he was the most modest person to ever live. Humility was his greatest trait. Now if one wants to mount a rebellion against a leader and wants to be a rabble rouser and incite the crowd against their leader, logic would dictate that one should seek out a character weakness of the leader and make an issue about it. No one is perfect. What would be a logical "complaint" against Moshe Rabbeinu? Let Korach complain that Moshe Rabbeinu was not a good speaker. We often hear that about rabbis – "He's not a good speaker." Certainly, there are other complaints they could have come up with. But the most ridiculous thing to complain about was to say that Moshe was an honor seeker! That is patently ludicrous.

Three pasukim later Moshe throws this phrase back at Korach. Moshe basically challenges Korach to a duel: "Do this: Take for yourselves fire-pans – Korach and his entire assembly – and put fire in them and place incense upon them before Hashem tomorrow. Then the man whom Hashem will choose, he is the holy one. You have taken too much upon yourselves (rav lachem), sons of Levi." [Bamidbar 16:6-7]

Is this not striking and ironic? They complain to Moshe "rav lachem" [too much for you] and Moshe complained back to them "rav lachem". In line with Rashi's earlier interpretation of rav lachem, Moshe was responding "No. You are the ones who are seeking honor."

Now we can understand why, out of all the things in the world to complain about Moshe Rabbeinu, Korach picked the charge that he was an honor seeker. The reason is because of something the Talmud teaches about the nature of human beings [Kiddushin 70a]. "Kol haposel, b'mumo posel." When a person invalidates another (kol haposel), he invalidates him with his own shortcoming (b'mumo posel). A person who labels everyone as a slave or a mamzer must be suspected of having that very blemish in his own lineage.

Modern psychology has termed this behavior 'projection'. Someone who always goes around complaining about a specific characteristic of other people most likely has that shortcoming himself. What Peter says about Paul says more about Peter than about Paul. L'havdil, what Korach says about Moshe says more about Korach than it does about Moshe.

This explains why, of all things, Korach chose the ludicrous charge that Moshe was an honor seeker. It is precisely because it was Korach himself who was seeking honor that he projected this personality fault onto his leader.

After Moshe heard the charges of Korach and his assembled mob, the Torah says: "And Moshe heard and he fell upon his face" [Bamidbar 16:4] The Talmud [Sanhedrin 110a] elaborates on "And Moshe heard." What did he hear? He heard that they accused him of adultery. What kind of crazy accusation is that? Why would the Talmud even tell us of such a ridiculous charge being made against Moshe?

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik participated in a Din Torah [judicial case] together with another great Rabbi. The litigants each picked a judge and the two judges picked a third judge to complete the court, as is standard procedure. During the Din Torah, one of the litigants opened his mouth and started accusing one of the judges of terrible disgusting behavior. The judge asked that the court be temporarily adjourned because he was so upset at the charges being leveled against him.

During the adjournment, the litigants left the court room and Rav Chaim said to the other judge "Don't let this faze you. This is all part of being a Jewish leader. The role of a Jewish leader includes being able to take abuse and keep on going." Rav Chaim noted that several months earlier, he was involved in another Din Torah and the litigant whom he ruled against asked Rav Chaim, "How much money did the other side pay you to rule this way?"

Rav Chaim said "I calmly told him that never in my life have I ever taken a penny to even SIT on a Beis Din, let alone consider any bribe." Fundamentally, a judge DOES have a right to be paid for his time, but on principle, Rav Chaim refused even to accept compensation. This losing litigant had the nerve to accuse Rav Chaim of taking a bribe! Rav Chaim

trained himself that such insults go with the territory of being a Jewish leader.

Rav Chaim explained that we learn that the leader has to take such embarrassment from the above quoted Gemara. The Torah merely says "Moshe heard and he fell on his face." It is the Gemara that fills in the detail that he heard that he was suspected of adultery. Rav Chaim asks: What is the purpose of the Gemara telling us this bit of information? Who has to know that? It is slanderous gossip. Why does the Gemara have to print this vile falsehood that some idiot came up with? Why does the Torah even need to record for posterity the fact that Moshe was abused to the extent that he had to fall on his face? Strike it from the record! Why do we need to know that?

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us the paradigm. The quintessential leader of the Jewish people is Moshe Rabbeinu. Chazal are describing the insults that Moshe had to endure and are telling us that nevertheless, Moshe went on and did not let it faze him. It did not stop him, shortly thereafter, from again pleading for Klal Yisrael.

Would he not have been justified in saying "I've had it! Enough with these guys already! I don't have to take this any more!?" No! The leader must accept the greatest insults and keep on going. This is what Rav Chaim told the other great Rabbi: "I've had it in my life. I've heard disgusting things. I've heard people accuse me of the worst things, but I'm of the same school as Moshe Rabbeinu. I just keep going." If you cannot have that attitude you cannot be a Jewish leader.

(Of course, this does not in any way, shape, or form, give license to people to act in this way or excuse people for doing so.)

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

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column for Parshas Korach

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 somebody, 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."

<http://www.rabbiwein.com/Weekly-Parsha/2009/06/368.html>
Weekly Parsha

KORACH

Friday, June 19, 2009

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Mishna teaches us that there is an opinion that the "mouth of the earth" that opened to swallow Korach and his group was created from the beginning of time. The idea here is that not only was this miracle built into nature itself to become operative at the right time and place but that the sin and rebellion that occasioned this disastrous phenomenon also is built into human nature from time immemorial.

Jealousy, the thrust for power at all costs, demagoguery and false piety are the stuff of our lives, certainly of our political and public lives. The rabbis stated that all humans feel "burned" by the honor, place and position afforded to others. This is, the rabbis teach us, even in the world to come! We resent the success of others especially if we feel that we are much more deserving of that honor and success.

Hitler was able to rouse the German people to terrible acts of war and bestial murder of innocents on the basis of jealousy, hatred and the feeling of deep resentment engendered in Germany by the results of World War I and the subsequent Versailles treaty. People feel cheated when they do not feel that they are receiving their just do even if they are wrong in what they feel entitled to.

That resentment can fester and lead to disastrous consequences as we see in this week's parsha. The rage that Korach feels at being slighted as not being chosen for the priesthood and other honors finally boils over in his attack against Moshe and Aharon. And in the midst of a complaining, despondent and rebellious people he finds ready allies for his confrontation with Moshe.

The key to avoiding this pitfall (no pun intended) is the avoidance of arrogance and hubris – in short, humility. Maimonides abhors extremism in anything in life yet he states that when it comes to humility extremism is permitted and in fact desired. Someone who trains one's self in humility can ignore slights and insults, intended or unintended, and develops a strong self-image that can easily discount the apparent unfairness of reward and punishment in this world.

Korach complains out of weakness of his character and not out of true strength and belief in himself or in his alleged cause. Korach attempts to lower Moshe to his own level and refuses to try to raise himself to Moshe's level. He willingly associates himself with known negative characters and troublemakers in order to buttress his own ego.

So the contest devolves into the struggle between Korach's arrogance and hubris against Moshe's abject unequaled humility. In such contests throughout human and Jewish history the unlikely victor is always humility and those who practice it. That is the meaning of the words of the rabbis that from the pit of Korach's demise emanates a sound that declares Moshe and his Torah to be true. Korach's tragedy is repeated in every generation. But we should not forget that so is Moshe's triumph.

Shabat shalom. Rabbi Berel Wein

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HaRav Avigdor Nebenzahl

The Dangers of Being Noge'a Badavar

Article Date: Thursday June 18, 2009

ALL FOR A PIECE OF CAKE

Chazal write that Korach succeeded in winning the two-hundred and fifty people over to his side by offering them each a delicious piece of cake.

We are speaking here of heads of the Sanhedrin who certainly were aware of all that Moshe Rabenu had done for the Jewish people, having led them out of Egypt and brought them the Torah. Chazal's words are frightening, one piece of cake was sufficient to cause these leaders of Klal Yisrael to forget all the gratitude they owed Moshe Rabenu. We see the power of shochad - bribery.

BRIBERY IS NOT LIMITED TO CAKE The Torah warns us that "the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise" (Devarim 16:19). Korach's sin in fact was a form of succumbing to bribery. Bribery is not limited to offering of money or other tangible rewards. We always assumed that Korach's sin was denying Moshe's leadership, but did he really completely deny it? Had this congregation truly denied Moshe's right as leader and prophet, why would they have had any desire for the kehuna? Does the kehuna not involve service in the mishkan, the edifice that was constructed based on the specifications given over by Moshe Rabenu. Was it not Moshe who informed the Jewish people that Hashem wished to reside in the mishkan? When Moshe cried out: "whoever is for Hashem join me!" (Shmot 32:26), was the response not: "all the Levites gathered around him" (ibid.)? Was Korach not among the Levites who gathered around Moshe? When the mishkan that was constructed in accordance with Moshe's specifications was dedicated, did a fire not descend from Heaven and "the entire people saw and sang glad song and fell upon their faces" (Vayikra 9:24) - Korach and the two hundred fifty people with him were among them - can they deny what they saw with their very eyes?

We are told that Moshe Rabenu suggested solving the dispute by means of an incense offering. Moshe warned that only one person will survive (see Rashi Bamidbar 16:6), and we see from Chazal that Korach believed Moshe. Chazal ask: "Now Korach who was prudent, what did he see in this nonsense?" (Rashi Bamidbar 16:7), to which they explain: "His eye deceived him; he saw a great chain issuing from him, Shmuel, who is weighed against Moshe and Aharon; Korach said: Because of him I shall be saved. And twenty-four 'watches' will arise from his son's sons, all of them prophesying through the Holy Spirit" (ibid.). Korach did not err in his vision, these great people did in fact descend from him, but he himself was not saved. Shmuel and the twenty-four 'watches' descended from his sons who repented and were thus saved. Chazal's questioning of Korach's motive and their response can only be based on their understanding that Korach acknowledged Moshe's rights as prophet, and believed Moshe that only one person was destined to survive. Korach, of course, felt that it was he who would be the lone survivor. (Based on this we see how evil Korach really was, for if he truly believed there was an upcoming danger and his Ruach haKodesh told him that only he will survive, should he not have warned his supporters rather than lead them to their deaths?).

MOSHE IS RIGHT IN ALL BUT ONE POINT

If Korach acknowledged Moshe's right as a prophet, what then was the dispute between Korach and Moshe? Korach did not believe that Hashem specifically appointed Aharon as the Kohen Gadol, rather that He left it up to Moshe to fill the position. Korach believed that it was Moshe himself who felt that Aharon was the man for the job. Korach, we see, believed that Moshe was a prophet, yet in this particular case questioned Moshe's understanding of what Hashem told him. To counter this claim, Moshe said: "Hashem sent me to perform all these acts, that it was not from my heart" (Bamidbar 16:28). It was not Moshe's own decision, but it was Hashem who told him to appoint Aharon as the Kohen Gadol (see Rashi ibid.). In this instance it seems that Korach believed in Moshe's prophecy in general and only disagreed on this one point. And it was to prove Moshe's justification on this one point that "the ground swallowed them".

We are often guilty of such an approach. We may refer to a particular Rav as a machmir, saying it is true he is a great Talmid Chacham, but this is his own personal chumra. He must be from Beit Shammai! There are indeed times when the Rav's conclusion is based on his own analysis which one may question. Often, however, his ruling is based on a specific passage in the Gemara, Ri"f, Rambam, or Shulchan Aruch. That's the way it is! At

times it is the halacha, not that particular Rav, that is stringent. By the same token, Korach felt that "the Rav was machmir", that Moshe misunderstood what Hashem had told him.

We must ask ourselves, was not Moshe right until now? The ten plagues, the splitting of the sea, the manna descending, the victory over Amalek, the Ten Commandments, all occurred according to Moshe's words. Why specifically with regard to the Kehuna Gedola did Korach suddenly think Moshe may have erred? Korach felt that Moshe had a negia, a bias, in appointing his brother as Kohen Gadol. When it comes to saving the Jewish people and giving them the Torah, Moshe can be relied upon. When it comes, however to the appointment of the Kohen Gadol, if it is between Aharon and another person, Moshe cannot be trusted, he is a noge-a badavar, he is prejudiced.

WHO HAS A PERSONAL BIAS?

Can we not turn this question around against Korach? Why is it that only now Korach chooses to dispute Moshe's authority while until this point he followed it? (Datan and Aviram at least were being consistent, whatever Moshe said they disputed!). Korach was one of those who ran towards Moshe in response to "whoever is for Hashem join me!" (Shmot 32:26) Why all of a sudden is Moshe disqualified? Perhaps Korach's desire for the Kehuna Gedola makes him himself a noge-a badavar. The answer is: "For the bribe will corrupt those who see" (Shmot 23:8), one who is biased cannot even see this glaring question! He has no trouble accusing Moshe of not being totally unprejudiced and thus misled, but cannot for a moment entertain the notion that perhaps this is what is motivating him! Someone as righteous and modest as Korach being led astray by a desire for personal gain? Impossible! It is Moshe who is being led astray!

NO ONE IS FREE FROM THE EFFECTS OF BEING NOGE-A BADAVAR The Shach was once involved in litigation. The other litigant asked if they could have their case tried in a Beit Din in another town where neither of them were known and they would therefore receive an impartial ruling. He claimed that everyone here knew of the Shach and would dare not rule against him. The Shach acquiesced. The Rav in the far away Beit Din ruled in favor of the other person using a very novel understanding of the issue. The Shach, quite surprised by the Rav's ruling, asked where he came up with such a unique approach to the halacha. The Rav opened his closet, took out a Shulchan Aruch, and read from the commentary of the Shach. This "novel" ruling was precisely what the Shach himself had ruled. At the time the Shach wrote his commentary, however, he was not a noge-a badavar, and thus had the ability to come up with this unique interpretation. Once he had a vested interest, not only was he unable to recall his own chiddush but was even surprised to hear it espoused by another. I am not sure if the story is accurate, but it is certainly possible, "for the bribe will blind the eyes of the wise" (Devarim 16:19). Even one of the level of the Shach was unable to see his own shortcomings. It is possible for a man to be a great lamdan, but the yetzer hara is always a greater lamdan.

THE WISDOM OF ON BEN PELET'S WIFE

Korach should have realized that there is no logic in the face of bribery or bias. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 109b) relates how the wife of On ben Pelet convinced her husband to leave Korach's congregation. How did she do so? She did not cite all the great miracles that Moshe performed for the Jewish people. At that moment On ben Pelet had a negia, a bias, all the logic in the world would not convince him. What she wisely did was to remove this negia, by pointing out to her husband that whether Korach or Aharon became Kohen Gadol, On ben Pelet would only play a subservient role. Of what difference is it to him who becomes Kohen Gadol? When he felt he stood to gain by aligning himself with Korach, he could not have been convinced of the truth. It was only when his wife managed to remove that negia that was he able to be convinced that indeed Moshe was in the right in this dispute.

WE MUST REALIZE THE DANGEROUS EFFECTS OF NEGIA We are quite often faced with our own decisions to make. As much as possible we should seek the counsel of our Torah sages. This, of course, is

not always possible. Chazal tell us "a judge should always view himself as if he had a sword resting between his thighs and Gehinom is open underneath him" (Sanhedrin 7a). R' Yisrael Salanter in his *Iggeret HaMussar* explains that Chazal were not only referring to a judge in court. Each and every one of us is his own judge. We often must make a halachic decision or decide how to relate to another person. When making these decisions, a person must view himself: "as if he had a sword resting between his thighs and Gehinom is open underneath him". This means that even a slight shift to the left or right can produce tragic results. Only by keeping this in mind can we rid ourselves of any and all negot. We must understand that even the slightest deviation from the truth can cause far more damage than any potential gain. If we understand this, not only will we rid ourselves of our prejudices, but we hopefully may have a new negia - the desire to err as little as possible. This can only work if we truly realize what it means that Gehinom is open beneath us, to understand the severity of the results of any mistakes. The Gr"a once went to visit a student of his who was ill. The student proceeded to blame the Gr"a for his troubles claiming that it was because the Rav taught him how severe the punishment in Gehinom is liable to be, that he became ill out of fear. The Gr"a responded that the potential punishment is in fact far worse than what the Gr"a had told him. His current illness pales in comparison.

The men Korach gathered were not ordinary people. They were the heads of the Sanhedrin: "leaders of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown" (Bamidbar 16:2), "people who had a name throughout the world" (Sanhedrin 110a). Each one felt he was worthy of being the Kohen Gadol. This means that for each person who claimed to be the one appropriate for the position, there were two hundred and forty-nine other great people who disagreed and felt that there was someone else more worthy. Why did not at least one of them negate his own opinion of himself in the face of the other two hundred and forty-nine? Each person was convinced that all the others were noge-a badavar and that is why they wished to disqualify him. Did anyone stop to think of himself as being noge-a badavar? The answer would be, yes, I am noge-a but I am not prejudiced by this bias. Imagine, two hundred and forty-nine gedolim can be prejudiced but you cannot. Me, biased? Impossible! It is like the Jew who once said: "Everyone in the world only thinks of himself, it is I alone who thinks of me!"

When one "thinks" something, he can be convinced that he is wrong by being shown a Gemara, Rashi, or Rambam that disproves his thesis. On the other hand, when one "wants" something all the Rashi's in the world will not convince him. He will accuse Rashi of having personal reasons for explaining as he did. If I love potatoes, how can you prove me wrong based on the fact that Rashi loved carrots? No questions can be asked on the opinion of one who "wants" a particular approach, one who "thinks" cognitively can be convinced otherwise. The Torah warned us against this: "and not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray" (Bamidbar 15:39), the heart and the eyes are filled with bias - only the mind can rule.

When we think based only on what "I want", we can reach mind-boggling conclusions. Last week we read about the report the spies brought back from Eretz Yisrael. The Jewish people reacted: "because of Hashem's hatred for us did He take us out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorite to destroy us" (Devarim 1:27). Is that why Hashem smote the Egyptians and showed us all these miracles and signs? In order to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites? Is this why Hashem sent ten plagues to the Egyptians, more at sea, gave us the manna - according to one opinion (Yoma 75b) this was bread that only angels were privileged to eat. Is this why Hashem gave us a double portion on Erev Shabbat, made us victorious in the war with Amalek, and gave us the Torah? "Has a people ever heard the voice of G-d speaking from the midst of the fire as you have heard, and survived?" (Devarim 4:33). It took far less for Manoach's wife to realize: "Had Hashem wanted to put us to death, He would not have accepted from our hand an elevation-offering and a meal-offering,

nor would He have shown us all this, nor would He let us hear such tidings at this time" (Shoftim 12:23). How can it be that the "generation of knowledge", the generation that received the Torah, the generation that merited reaching the incredible level of prophecy at the Great Gathering at Har Sinai, can make such a ridiculous accusation? This is beyond comprehension!

When there are negot, there is no logic. Once the people decide not to proceed onward to Israel, all of Manoach's wife's intuition is to no avail. Moshe attempts using logic: "yet in this matter you do not believe in Hashem, your G-d. Who goes before you on the way to seek out for you a place for you to encamp with fire by night to show you the road that you should travel and with a cloud by day" (Devarim 1:32-33). Would Hashem have escorted them with a cloud of fire in order to destroy them? It was the Egyptians who were destroyed by means of the fire and clouds (see Rashi Shmot 14:24). Do they not realize that Hashem only does what is good for His people? Did Moshe, the greatest man of all time, not instruct them to proceed towards the Land. The yetzer hara, however, is not searching for logic, it is searching for what it wants to search for. "One who removes himself to court lust, will be exposed in every Torah conclave" (Mishle 18:1). One who has "wants" and "desires", removes himself from everything.

TRYING TO RID OURSELVES OF NEGOT

How do we remedy this situation? We must work on making greater use of our minds and intellects. Immediately following the description of the sin of the spies, the Torah warns "and not explore after your heart and after your eyes after which you stray" (Bamidbar 15:39). The spies were sent to scout out the Land. It is true that they must use their eyes, their eyes however cannot be the poskim. It is the mind that must make the ultimate decision. We must train ourselves - to attempt to follow the dictates of our intellect and logic. We must strengthen our yirat Shamayim and understand what it means that Gehinom is open before us. We must not only fear retribution for sin, but understand the reward for performance of a Mitzvah as well. If we ever elect not to learn one day, we must realize what is lost by not learning and what could have been gained by learning: "weigh the loss incurred by a commandment against its reward, and the reward gained from a transgression against the loss it entails" (Avot 2:1), remember "and the study of Torah is equivalent to them all" (Shabbat 127a).

In addition to Talmud Torah, we must involve ourselves in acts of chesed as well. We must realize what we stand to lose by wasting an opportunity to perform any mitzvah, and what we stand to gain by having performed the mitzvah. Once we understand this, our negot will change, we will have a negiah to learn more, to involve ourselves in more acts of chesed". If we were to daven a shorter Shmoneh Esrei, we would manage to reach the end Oseh Shalom a moment sooner. So what? What have we gained? On the other hand, if we daven with more kavana, more heart, our prayer will be as it should. We must realize when we daven that we are given an incredible opportunity to have a private audience with the King of kings. With that in mind, we will view each extra minute spent in prayer as a gain. It is very difficult to gain audience with a king of flesh and blood. We have a private counsel with the King of kings free of charge! If we weigh the potential loss at not having performed a mitzvah against anything we may stand to gain instead, we will always opt for performing the mitzvah. With this in mind we will merit being blessed with goodness and with blessings and we will merit the days of the Moshiach and life in the Next World.

from **Rabbi Dovid Horwitz** <yutorah@yutorah.org>
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Parashat Korach: Aaron in the Midst of the Congregation
Rabbi Dovid Horwitz

Numbers 17:16-24 states the following: The L-RD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people and take from them- from the chieftains of their ancestral houses- one staff for each chieftain of an ancestral house: twelve staffs in all. Inscribe each man's name on his staff, there being one staff for each head of an ancestral house; also inscribe Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. Deposit them in the Tent of Meeting before the Pact, where I meet with you. The staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout, and I will rid Myself of the incessant mutterings of the Israelites against you. Moses spoke thus to the Israelites. Their chieftains gave him a staff for each chieftain of an ancestral house, twelve staffs in all; among these staffs was that of Aaron. Moses deposited the staffs before the L-RD, in the Tent of the Pact. The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Pact, and there the staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had sprouted, it had brought forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and borne almonds. Moses then brought out all the staffs from before the L-RD to all the Israelites; each identified and recovered his staff. What is the point of the phrase "among these staffs was that (the staff) of Aaron?" I heard Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, the Rabbi of the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills, give the following derashah based upon this phrase in 1975. The point was, he declared, that the staff of Aaron was not separate from that of the rest of the staffs. If it was in a separate, secluded place, it would have been easy for the leaders of the other tribes to exclaim, "Of course, davka the staff of Aaron sprouted! It was in a special, unique place that was more propitious for blooming. But we (and our staffs) are not in a special, secluded place! It is not possible to bloom in the place where our staffs are!" The musar haskel from this interpretation is obvious. As Jews, we possess an obligation to help our fellow Jews spiritually, as well as physically. If one studies Torah in one's own daled amot without reaching out to fellow Jews, if one is not "among the other staffs," one cannot impact on the other Jews who are in a different place. They will be left bereft of Torah, and use as an excuse the complaint that their place was not one suited for Torah and mitzvot. Yeshiva University's ideology is precisely one of "among the other staffs." We engage the world, hoping to demonstrate that one can attend university, become a member of the technologically advanced and scientifically superior Western civilization, and at the same time become a talmid hakham who can understand an Avnei Miluim and the Hiddushim of R. Akiva Eger and R. Chaim Ha-levi Soloveitchik. In Israel as well, the ideology of the hesder yeshivot is that of "among the other staffs." Young Yeshiva boys who combine their years of Torah study with a stint in the army demonstrate to the secular hiloni population of Israel that it is indeed possible to be a shomer Torah u-mitzvot, indeed, a talmid hakham, and a participant in Israeli life. I would add the following. There is a well known tale about a dispute between the Vilna Gaon and the Maggid of Dubno. According to this tale, the Maggid of Dubno gave the Vilna Gaon musar for learning his Torah in his own secluded kloyz, without having any influence upon others. The Vilna Gaon, of his part, purportedly responded that one does not have an obligation to produce magic tricks in order to become a talmid hakham. The more basic imperative for a Jew is to become a talmid hakham. And if the only way to accomplish this is to learn in seclusion, without having any effect upon others, so be it. But at the end of the day, the Yeshiva University ideology (and that of the Yeshivot hesder) is that of the Maggid of Dubno. Our responsibility is not only to ourselves. It is to the tzibbur, to kelal yisrael. We have an ahrayot to every single Jew. Therefore, one must plant one's staff among the other staffs. And we pray to God that our efforts will bear fruit.

To view more shiurim on Parshat Korach please click here, Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future, 500 W 185th St. New York, New York 10033

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Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Korach

PARSHAS KORACH And On ben Peles, offspring of Reuven. (16:1)
Although On ben Peles had originally been included among the leadership of the rebellion, he seems to have dropped out along the way. Chazal explain that his wise and righteous wife had persuaded him to withdraw from the ill-fated group. She was also successful in preventing his colleagues from convincing him to come along with them. She stated simply: "Regardless of who leads the nation, Moshe or Korach, you will still be nothing more than a subservient, insignificant follower. Why bother involving yourself in something from which you will not benefit?" She then proceeded to give her husband a bit too much wine, so that he fell asleep, then she sat by the doorway of their tent and loosened her hair from beneath its covering. When the great tzadikim came to fetch On, they refused to approach the tent where a woman was sitting immodestly attired. They left, and On was saved by the quick actions of his astute wife.

In the Talmud Sanhedrin 110A, Chazal apply the pasuk in Mishlei 14:1, "The wise among women, each builds her house" to the wife of On ben Peles. In connection with this, Horav Eliezer M. Shach, zl, would say, A kluger ken nisht zein kein schlechter, "One who is wise, cannot be evil." This was in addition to the idea that, Der Eibishter hot lieb kluge menchen, "The Almighty loves smart people." He would explain that a wise man knows how to placate the yetzer hora, evil inclination. He knows how to get around his blandishments. This statement coincides with a statement often quoted in the name of the Chofetz Chaim: Men darf nisht zein kein frumer; men darf zein a kluger. "It is not so much that we have to be observant as much as we have to be astute." What he meant was that common sense plays a crucial role in warding off the effects of the evil inclination. Sometimes we simply work out a "deal" and get it off our case, rather than fighting head to head with the yetzer hora. This is a battle which we usually lose. If we can circumvent the battle, we will have a greater chance of attaining success.

Korach...separated himself...They stood before Moshe with two hundred and fifty men from Bnei Yisrael, leaders of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown. (16:1, 2)

The fury of controversy has lamentably blazed, long and blistering, destroying individuals, families, relationships, even communities. Is it all bad? Chazal have established criteria for determining the integrity of a dispute. In Pirkei Avos, Chazal teach, "Every controversy which is l'shem Shomayim, in the name of Heaven, will, ultimately, endure, and every controversy which is not in the name of Heaven, will, ultimately, have temporary results. Which controversy was in the name of Heaven? The controversy between Hillel and Shammai. Which controversy was not in the name of Heaven? The controversy of Korach and his followers." It is characteristic of Jewish thought that when the term "Heaven" is mentioned, it is a reference to Hashem. The machlokes, dispute, of Korach and his henchmen is considered the paradigm of shelo l'shem Shomayim, not for the sake of Heaven. Korach was an ambitious usurper, who resented Moshe Rabbeinu's selflessness and Aharon HaKohen's dignity and love for each and every Jew, and he went around convincing his followers that their present leadership did not bode well for the nation.

Two aspects of the Mishnah require clarification, especially in light of the various areas of contention that have flared up in recent times. First, what is the meaning of sofah l'hiskayeim, "will ultimately endure"? Is endurance the mark of a good and kosher dispute? Second, how do we define l'shem Shomayim? Is that not what everyone contends is his motivation? Is anyone so foolish to declare that he is debating for personal reasons? They all use the l'shem Shomayim crutch.

In addressing the question of sofo l'hiskayeim, I cite the Baal HaAkeidah, Horav Yitzchak Arama, zl, who interprets the Mishnah from a practical point of view: "Any controversy conducted for G-d's sake is aimed at preservation, and any controversy that is not directed for G-d's sake, is not targeted for preservation." He feels the Mishnah is establishing a value system, a standard by which we can determine the morality of an issue, its

constructiveness and integrity, or the converse. When one enters a controversy--either to dispute an organization or to question the actions of an individual whom he believes is acting inappropriately--it may be meritorious on his part, but he must be clear in the understanding that he have a superior alternative in mind. Otherwise, he is just working to destroy, to undermine, and to create a rift. If one cannot create something new and better, then he is quibbling simply for the pleasure of destruction. That is certainly not acting in the best interests of Heaven. I might add that in the event the leadership of an organization--or even an individual--acts in a manner unbecoming a representative of Torah, he or they should be repudiated and removed - even if no viable substitute is in sight. No leadership is less beneficial than one which is alienated from Hashem and His Torah. Once again, this is the author's personal opinion.

Second, I have grappled concerning the definition of I'shem Shomayim. Since so many "supposed" acts of I'shem Shomayim are clearly not, one must establish criteria that are honorable. I came across a story by Jonathan Rosenblum the other day which I feel sheds light on the meaning of I'shem Shomayim. A couple in Bnei Brak was having a family dispute about a car. The wife had decided that she wanted to purchase a new luxury car, and the husband felt that such a luxury car might incur the neighbors envy and lead to an evil eye. Being Torah Jews, they understood that the way to resolve such a dispute is to seek the counsel of a Torah leader. They proceeded to Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita, to ask his opinion concerning the matter of their contention.

Rav Aharon Leib listened. Then he asked the husband what perek he was learning in Gemara. The husband seemed to have a difficult time remembering the perek he was learning - probably because it did not exist. When Rav Aharon Leib asked him if he had a chiddush, original thought, on the Gemara to share with him, he replied in the negative. Next, the Rav asked him whether he had some insight into the parshah. Once again, he stumbled for the right word to say no, and, in the end, he just remained silent.

Finally, Rav Aharon Leib told the husband in all innocence, "I do not understand your problem. You have nothing to say about the Gemara. You have nothing to say about the parshah. Why would anyone envy you? You can purchase any car that you please."

Rav Aharon Leib clearly lives a life to which many of us cannot relate. In his mind, he cannot fathom how anyone would envy someone's material success. In his weltenshaung, the essence of life is intense, with total involvement in Torah - nothing else. His idea of living I'shem Shomayim is to devote one's entire essence for Torah, with nothing else playing a role. A machlokes I'shem Shomayim, dispute conducted for the sake of Heaven, is exactly that. It revolves around Torah issues with no other motives attached. That was the dispute of Hillel and Shammai.

Furthermore, it is wrong to even include Moshe Rabbeinu as a party in Korach's controversy. It takes two to have a dispute. Otherwise, it is a one-sided contention. Horav Dovid Povarsky, zl, points out that the Mishnah refers to it as the dispute of Korach and his followers, but is that not only one side of the dispute? Why is Moshe's name not mentioned? Because he did not contend with Korach. Moshe remained passive throughout the entire debacle. He was not about to enter the ring with someone whose sole pursuit was self-aggrandizement motivated by envy and fueled by insecurity. How much we can learn from this. It can only be a fight when two people throw punches.

It seems that the more one struggles for unity, the harder Satan seeks to find ways to undermine his efforts. In 1888, an attempt to introduce to America the already accepted European concept of a chief rabbinate lasted but a few years and devastated the life of the candidate for Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Yaakov Yosef, zl. A talmid chacham, Torah scholar, of great renown, a brilliant and effective orator, he was the perfect candidate for the position. In pursuit of carrying out the demands of his mission, he was compelled to step on some toes, especially those involved in the kosher meat business. A few rabbanim also took umbrage with his position, feeling

that he was infringing upon their own domain. Suddenly, there were two chief rabbis with two rival kehillos - something totally unheard of in our day and age! This, however, was not sufficient. Rav Yosef's detractors set out to destroy him personally, much like Korach attempted to do to Moshe Rabbeinu. Rumors began to fly, allegations were leveled, stories were spread. Through all these attacks and tribulations, just as Moshe persevered, Rav Yosef attempted to maintain his dignity. He refused to allow his opponents to be attacked in the same base, vicious manner by which he was being assailed both orally and in the secularly controlled Anglo-Jewish press. The hate mongers did not stop their diatribe, and the more Rav Yosef maintained calm and dignity, the more they attempted to deny him his peace.

The final blow came in 1895 when the butchers, who had once been his greatest supporters, refused to pay his salary. The congregations followed suit and the chief rabbi was left penniless. Soon after, he suffered a stroke which left him bed-ridden for the rest of his life. He became a forgotten man who spent the rest of his days as a paralyzed invalid living in squalid misery. So ended another tragic outcome of machlokes. It happens all of the time. It seems like the Korachs are winning, but that depends upon one's definition of victory. Rav Yosef may have lost his position, his money, his health, but he did not stoop down to the level of his scurrilous detractors. He did not lose his dignity. They obviously never had any.

The question that one may ask is: Were these not frum, observant people? How did they face Hashem three times a day to daven, after they had performed such reprehensible acts of character assassination? Did they have a different definition for observance? While I may not know the answer to this question, these people had a precedent to follow. Chazal teach us that On ben Peles, who was one of Korach's original henchmen, was saved due to his smart wife. She told him that regardless of who would win - Moshe or Korach - he, On, was essentially going to remain a loser. It was only a question of whom he would follow. Regardless of the outcome, he was not going to be elevated to any leadership status. So, why bother? Realizing that his wife's astute argument made sense, On responded that it was too late. He had drawn the straw and was included in Korach's lot. The other rabble rousers were about to come fetch him for the great test between Korach and Aharon. He could not free himself from it. She said not to worry. She would take care of everything. When she saw the men coming "up the driveway" to pick up her husband, she stood by the window and loosened the strands of her hair that were originally covered, so that they would be exposed. When the men came to the door and saw her in such a state, they immediately left. Heaven forbid they should see a woman whose hair was uncovered. On's wife was acutely aware of the double standards that were so much a part of the religious observance of these men. They would not look at a woman whose hair was uncovered, but they had no problem undermining Moshe's leadership, even impugning his Divine mandate and denying the Divine authorship of the Torah. Why did they do this? Because it involved them. Suddenly, religious observance took on a new meaning. Things have not changed, as our generation is still plagued with the Korachs - and his henchmen - in various forms, sizes and shapes.

In the morning G-d will make known the one who is His own and the holy one, and He will draw him close to Himself. (16:5)

Rashi explains that by delaying Hashem's response until the morning, Moshe Rabbeinu was attempting to gain some time. Perhaps the mutineers would come to their senses and halt their foolish claims. The Midrash wonders why Moshe used the expression boker, morning, rather than the usual machar, tomorrow. They explain that Moshe was conveying an important message to Korach. He said, "G-d has set boundaries in His world. Can you undo the separation G-d has made between day and night? As He has separated day from night, so, too, has He separated Klal Yisrael in the midst of the nations. Similarly, G-d has sanctified Aharon from among the people. When you are able to undo the division that G-d has set between day and night, then you will also be able to abrogate this

separation." In this vein, with reference to the pasuk in the account of Creation, Vayehi erev, vayehi boker, "And there was evening, and there was morning, one day," (Bereishis 1:5) Moshe responded to them: "boker, morning."

In a homiletic rendering of the Midrash, Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl, first cites another Midrash. Vayehi erev, "And there was evening." This refers to the actions of the wicked. Vayehi boker, "And there was morning" refers to the actions of the righteous. Rav Breuer understands Chazal's reference to the slow, regressive relationship that the lawless have with the lawful. As day and night follow each other in the realm of natural phenomena, so, too, are lawlessness and law obedience daily occurrences in the lives of men. Day and night, although they are in sharp contrast with one another, have in common the fact that their development is gradual. It neither suddenly becomes day, nor does night appear in a flash. It is a progressive, carefully orchestrated process which inches towards its climax. From the darkest night day emerges, working its way towards noon. Erev, evening, also means mixture, alluding to a time when the shadows of the approaching night mix with the waning light of day. It is only after this that night slowly descends.

This idea applies equally to man's moral development. It is also gradual. A tzadik, righteous person, and a rasha, wicked person, are contrasts, such as day and night. However, one neither becomes a tzadik overnight, nor does he descend to the nadir of depravity in a twinkling. One who has stood at the summit of morality and virtue does not become an apostate all at once. He gradually weakens. The Shabbos observant Jew does not become an open violator overnight. First, he closes the store at the last minute, followed by allowing the gentile workers to come in and make up some time, until the owner's brief visit to the office ultimately becomes a weekly occurrence. It is like this in all aspects of observance, from kashrus to family purity. The slight deviations which signal erev, mixture, are the beginning of the downhill to complete alienation from religion.

As this is true for the individual Jewish life, it is equally true of organizations who present themselves as representing the paradigm of respectability, while simultaneously compromising their ideals in order to gain acceptance among those who have long ago deviated from Jewish practice. They do so carefully and with great diplomacy, never openly rebelling, but only subtly revealing their true malevolent intentions. Had Korach and his assembly come forward in open rebellion, proclaiming their open opposition to Hashem and His Divine mandate for Klal Yisrael's leadership, they would have been immediately repudiated and their evil scheme repulsed. They, however, cloaked their evil with a coating of erev, mixing it with piety and virtue, claiming that they had no desire to destroy, but rather to enhance, to rebuild and rejuvenate the community, making it stronger and more open to "suggestion." Why shouldn't everybody participate? Just because Hashem has chosen Aharon - is that proper? Why not accept everybody as holy? Moshe responded, "boker." You attempt to confuse the issues, veil your true intentions with a cloud of ambiguity. Boker, we will see as clear as day that everything you say is a sham.

This is how it has been throughout history. The Korachs of each generation clamor for change, for progressive, forward movement, for inclusion. What they really want is to destroy, not to repair. It is up to the Moshe Rabbeinus of each era to see through the fa?ade and expose it for what it really is.

Separate yourselves from amid this assembly, and I shall destroy them in an instant. (16:21)

In a small village near the town of Koznitz, a dispute erupted within the religious community. The issue was probably not life-threatening, but it nonetheless prompted a group of chassidic Jews to take upon themselves to establish a new shul, and basically split the community. This seems to be part of the growing pains of any Jewish community. When word of this controversy and its ensuing consequences reached Horav Yisroel, zl, m'Koznitz, the saintly Koznitzer Maggid, he immediately summoned the leaders of this splinter chassidic group to his home, in an attempt to

dissuade them from taking such foolhardy action. He did not succeed. The men were stubborn, respectfully refusing to change their position. They were moving forward with a new shul, regardless of the damage it would cause to the community. They felt this was the correct and proper thing to do.

When the Koznitzer saw that these men were recalcitrant and were refusing to budge, he said the following, "There are a number of serious sins recorded in the Torah, the most heinous being idol worship, murder and adultery. Indeed, the punishment for committing such sins is death. Interestingly, despite the loathsome nature of the sin and the severity of the punishment, we do not find that it is prohibited to associate with the sinner. In fact, the only instance in which the Torah instructs us to separate from a sinner is in the case of a baal machlokes, one who is embroiled in dispute. Only in the controversy initiated by Korach do we find Hashem commanding Moshe and Aharon to separate themselves. That is the deleterious effect of controversy. It is like an infectious disease, a plague which quickly becomes an epidemic. If one does not immediately remove himself from the altercation, he will soon be devoured by it."

Va'ani Tefillah

Hashem pokeach ivrim, Hashem zokeif kefufim אוהב לְאֹהֲבֵי צְדִיקִים Hashem ohev tzadikim Hashem gives sight to the blind; Hashem straightens the bent, Hashem loves the righteous.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl explains that Hashem does not simply make the blind see, but it also means that He grants sight to those that had heretofore been blind to the Kingdom of Hashem. He will enlighten a world that has been groping around in darkness. "He will straighten out the bent" is a reference to the physically crippled and to those who are bent down in despair, broken and depressed. He will give succor to those deeply disappointed people whose world is nothing but a vale of tears, whose lives seem hopeless. He will restore them with a meaningful, purposeful life. We will see that "Hashem really loves the righteous." The tzadik feels and understands that Hashem loves him, but the "world" around him sees only the suffering and pain which he experiences. They mistakenly think that Hashem does not really love the righteous. They will find out otherwise.

A chasid once asked the Kotzker Rebbe, zl, why David HaMelech included the tzadik among those who are physically challenged. Does he belong in this category? The Rebbe replied, "Where else should he be?" This means that, just as the one who is challenged realizes that he needs Hashem to help him, he cannot make it alone, so, too, the righteous person realizes that he needs Hashem at every juncture. The tzadik is acutely aware of his need for Hashem. That is the trait that renders him a tzadik.

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Why Would a Smart Person Act Foolishly?

The Torah portion (*Parsha*) entitled Korach describes the rebellion of Korach and his followers against the leadership of Moshe and Aharon. Rashi quotes the *Midrash Tanchuma Korach 5* and *Bamidbar Rabbah 18:8* that asks, "וְקִרַח שֶׁפָּקַח הָיָה מֵהַרְאֵה לְשִׁטּוֹת זֶה?" "And Korach, who was *clever*, why did he see fit to engage in this foolishness?" The *Midrash Tanchuma Korach 2* (a commentary on the *Five Books of the Torah* attributed to Rabbi Tanchuma ben Abba, who lived in the fourth century of the Common Era) also comments that Korach was חָכָם "very wise." How could a *very wise* and *clever* person rebel against the leader who miraculously took the Jews out of Egypt, and taught them the Torah at Mount Sinai? How could Korach lead a rebellion against Moshe, about whom the Torah says, וְלֹא קָם נְבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה, "And no other prophet like Moshe has arisen in Israel, who knew God face to face" (*Devarim 34:10*)? What led Korach to such שִׁטּוֹת (foolishness)?

Perhaps the first few words in *Parshas Korach* can help us to understand what motivated Korach. The first sentence in *Parshas Korach* begins "...וַיִּקַּח קִרְחָה" "And Korach took..." The Torah doesn't tell us what Korach took. Many of the great Torah commentators, including Rashi (1040-1105), Ramban (1194-1270), Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (c.1089-1164), and Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno (1470-1550) are bothered by this and offer explanations. *What did Korach take?*

Perhaps the Torah is teaching that the defining feature of Korach's personality is that he was a taker. He was interested in taking and not in giving. He was self-centered and interested in his own advancement. He was the opposite of Moshe, who was the most modest person "on the face of the earth" (*Bamidbar 12:3*), and who never took anything from the Jewish people - not even a donkey for transportation (*Bamidbar 16:15*). Korach's problem was "...וַיִּקַּח קִרְחָה" "And Korach took..." (*Bamidbar 16:1*).

It is interesting that even the name קִרְחָה (Korach) contains the letters קח which means "take." The letters קח and ר make up the name קִרְחָה (Korach) and may suggest "take evil" - קח means "take" and ר may hint at the word רע, which means "evil." Korach was a "taker" who could not control his ego. This led Korach to tremendous jealousy and a quest for honor. In his commentary on *Bamidbar 16:1*, Rashi explains, based on the *Midrash Tanchuma Korach 1*, that Korach rebelled against Moshe because Korach was jealous of Elitzafan, whom Moshe had appointed by the word of God to be the leader of Korach's tribe, the tribe of Kehos.

There is a fascinating *Gemora* in *Sanhedrin 38a* that also seems to be warning us not to be "takers." The *Gemora* offers several reasons why man was created on Friday, as the last of all creations. The *Gemora* explains: "If a person becomes arrogant, one can say to him [as a reminder so that he might repent], 'The mosquito preceded you in the [order of] the creation of the world.'"

Since man is the last creation, all animals and insects were created before man. Why then does the *Gemora* point out specifically that a mosquito was created before an arrogant person? Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger (contemporary scholar, teacher, and Rabbi of the shul in which I pray) explained that the *Gemora* specifically chose to point out to an arrogant person that a mosquito was created before him, because an arrogant person is a self-centered "taker" who is no better than a mosquito that is primarily interested in taking blood from other animals. This *Gemora* teaches that an arrogant person is no better than a mosquito, the example par excellence of a "taker." Korach was a "taker" whose primary interest was self-advancement.

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin (contemporary scholar, teacher, and communal leader) writes that Korach's selfishness led him to utilize even the principle of democracy for his own purposes (*Internet Parsha Sheet on Korach*, 5760). Korach and his followers told Moshe and Aharon, וְכִי... "כל העדה כולם קדשים וכתוכם יהוה ומדוע תתנשאו על קהל יהוה" "...For the entire assembly - all of them - are holy and God is among them; why do you [Moshe and Aharon] raise yourselves above the

congregation of God?" (*Bamidbar* 16:3) Based on this, it would seem that Korach preceded the Founding Fathers in stressing the importance of democracy and wanting to distribute power among all the people. However, the first sentence of *Parshas Korach* teaches that Korach was a "taker" whose primary interest was self-advancement. *Korach was an insincere democrat* who utilized the principle of democracy, which otherwise may have great value, for his own benefit. He used democracy to incite a rebellion, so that he could be the leader. Thus, through the example of Korach's rebellion, *our ancient Torah teaches a political lesson that is useful even in our modern era* - that democracy is potentially dangerous if it is used for an individual's self-advancement and not for the good of the community.

Even though, as the *Midrash* quoted above points out, Korach was *very wise* and *clever*, his jealousy and quest for honor led him to rationalize and misinterpret the *mitzvos* (commandments) of *tzitzis* and *mezuzah*. The *mitzva* of *tzitzis* refers to special strings that Jewish males are commanded to attach to each corner of a four-cornered garment. The Torah tells us, in *Bamidbar* 15:38, that one of the strings of each corner should be dyed with *תְּכֵלֶת* (*techeiles*). Rashi explains, based on the *Gemora* in *Menachos* 44a, that *techeiles* is "the turquoise dye of the *chilazon* (a type of marine creature)." The Torah also tells us to affix a *mezuzah* to our doorposts (*Devarim* 6:9).

The *Midrash Tanchuma* and *Bamidbar Rabbah* relate (also quoted, in part, by Rashi in his commentary on *Bamidbar* 16:1) that Korach attempted to logically challenge both of these commandments. Korach suggested that a garment made entirely from *techeiles* should not require an extra string of *techeiles* on each corner, and that a house that is full of Torah scrolls should not require a *mezuzah*.

Eiturei Torah is a magnificent collection of Torah insights by Rabbi Aharon Yaakov Greenberg, ז"ל, which was published posthumously in 1965. *Eiturei Torah* quotes the Chasam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer, ז"ל, 1762-1839), who said that his teacher, Rabbi Nassan Adler, ז"ל (1741-1800), explained that Korach advanced these ideas because it would then follow that since all Jews are holy, they shouldn't require Moshe and Aharon to lead them. *Korach was a "taker," motivated by egotistical jealousy to misinterpret and rationalize some of the Torah's commandments for his self-advancement.*

Rabbi Nissan Alpert, ז"ל, was a scholar, communal leader, and teacher. Rabbi Alpert passed away in 1986, just a few months after the passing of his *Rebbe*, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, ז"ל (1895-1986, Dean of Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim and one of the foremost scholars and leaders of his era). Rabbi Alpert explains that there have always been those who try to change the laws of the Torah. Rabbi Alpert suggests that these people are similar to Korach, because they are really motivated by their own interests. As a modern example, Rabbi Alpert points out that some people have suggested that the laws of *kashrus* shouldn't apply in our era when meat is prepared according to governmental sanitary guidelines, because they claim that the primary purpose of *kashrus* is to prevent one from eating unhealthy meat. Similarly, some people have suggested that pig meat should be permissible because screening is done to prevent selling pig meat infected with trichinosis. However, our Sages teach that the laws of the Torah are primarily *דְּבָרֵי* (decrees), and need to be observed just because God commanded them. *One must be careful not to rationalize and change laws, as Korach attempted, to advance one's own self-interest and desires.* Perhaps this is the major connection between *Parshas Korach* and the next Torah portion, *Parshas Chukas* (תְּחִלָּה), which emphasizes *דְּבָרֵי* (decrees) even more clearly.

Unfortunately, there have frequently been people who, similar to Korach, have attempted to modify the Torah according to the "times," rather than modifying the "times" according to the Torah. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, ז"ל (1808-1888, leader of German Orthodox Jewry and brilliant Biblical commentator), teaches, as quoted by Rabbi Yehoshua Kaufman in *Words of Torah* on *Parshas Bo*, that this concept is hinted at in the *Gemora Shabbos* 31a. The *Gemora* says that, after death, a person is asked several questions at the time of final judgment. One of these questions is "לְתוֹרָה: אֵתִים לְקַבְּעָהּ?" This is usually translated as "Did you establish fixed times [during your regular work schedule] for Torah study?" Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a magnificent alternative translation for "לְתוֹרָה: אֵתִים לְקַבְּעָהּ". Rabbi Hirsch translates, "Have you established your times according to the Torah?" - and not, God forbid, adjusted the Torah

according to the spirit of the times. Rabbi Hirsch is teaching that a Jew must utilize and arrange time according to the principles of the Torah, and that the Torah must not be adjusted, as Korach suggested, according to the spirit of the times.

Rashi quotes the *Midrash* that asks: "וְקָרַח שָׁפַקָה הָיָה מִה רָצָה לְשָׂטוּת זֶה?" "And Korach, who was clever, why did he see fit to engage in this foolishness?" As described above, Rashi explains, based on the *Midrash*, that Korach rebelled against Moshe because Korach was *jealous* of Elitzafan, whom Moshe had appointed to be the leader of Korach's tribe. The first sentence of *Parshas Korach* emphasizes that Korach was a "taker." *Korach's foolishness resulted from the jealousy that developed from his egotistical quest for honor and self-advancement.*

The *Mishna* in *Pirkei Avos (Ethics of the Fathers)* 4:28 teaches that Rabbi Elazar Hakappar taught: "הַקְנָאָה וְהַתְאָנָה וְהַכְבוֹד מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם" "Jealousy, lust, and [a quest for] honor *remove a man from this world.*" Rabbi Moshe Lieber, a contemporary scholar, in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*, quotes Rabbi Nachum Mordechai of Novaminsk and *Yaina Shel Torah*, who explain that the unusual expression "מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם" "... *remove a man from this world*" suggests that "Jealousy, lust, and [a quest for] honor..." not only lead to premature death, but also "... *remove a man from this world*" because a person "*loses touch with reality*" and "*becomes so egocentric that everyone around him ceases to exist.*" Korach's jealousy and quest for honor led to his premature physical removal from this world when the "earth opened its mouth and swallowed" him (*Bamidbar* 16:32), and also caused him to "*lose touch with reality.*" This led to his rationalizing God's commandments and to his *foolish* rebellion against Moshe, about whom God says, "בְּכֹל בֵּיתִי נֹאמָן הוּא. פֶּה אֶל פֶּה אֲדַבֵּר בּוֹ..." "...in My entire house he is the trusted one. Mouth to mouth do I speak to him..." (*Bamidbar* 12:7-8).