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<http://www.torahmusings.com/2016/07/vort-rav-korach/>

Vort from the Rav

Korach

Posted by: Arnold Lustiger

Bamidbar 18:15

את בכור הָאָדָם ... תִּפְדֶּה

You shall redeem the firstborn of man.

The ceremonial of redemption of the first born son re-enacts the drama of Abraham offering Isaac to the Lord, of the knight of faith (using Kierkegaard's term) giving unreservedly away his son to G-d.

Children are the greatest and most precious charge G-d has entrusted to man's custody without granting any property rights to them. Man, willy-nilly, must acknowledge this irrevocable though bitter truth; he must be ready to lose everything, if losing is what G-d demands. He must always answer the call summoning him to perform heroically the movement of withdrawal from the most tightly knit and natural community on earth – that of father and son, to retreat from positions, which psychologically speaking, man lacks the courage to abandon because a departure from these positions would mean to the ordinary, unredeemed person self-displacement and existential uprootedness.

The offering of Isaac is exemplary of this type of sacrificial service of G-d. Our midrashic scholars maintained that G-d, when he commanded Abraham to take his son and offer him on one of the mountains, did not will him to bring a physical sacrifice consisting of blood, burnt flesh and fat. All He willed Abraham to do is relinquish his son whom he showered with love that tore down all barriers separating two individual beings and united them both into one Torah, all pretense of possessiveness, all claims of unity and identity, all hopes of self-perpetuation and immortalization through Isaac and return him to Whom he belongs. This sacrifice was to express itself not in extinction of the physical Isaac, not in separation of the child from his parents nor in actual consecration of Isaac to the Lord within a framework of a temple service in the manner foreshadowing Hannah lending Samuel to the Lord, but in the spiritual retreat of the father from his son for a short period of time. Abraham had to disengage himself for a while from his emotional involvement with his heir and son. Abraham made this movement of

withdrawal and Isaac was returned to him. A new gift was bestowed upon Abraham or, to be more exact, a new charge was placed in his trust on the Mt. Moriah.

The presentation of the child to the kohen is symbolic of Abrahams performance when he bound Isaac and placed him on the altar. The father of today, as Abraham of old, acknowledges the absolute ownership of the child by G-d. He renounces all his illusory rights and urgent claims to this child; he makes the movement of withdrawal from the most important position in man's life – his relatedness to posterity. He retreats from an existential structure in which all – father, mother and child – are indissolubly united. It is an [act] of paradoxical self-transcendence, of knocking out the bottom of one's own existence, of revoking the irrevocable, and of making the leap into the realm of the absurd. G-d wills the consecration of the first-born son because the emotional involvement of the parent with his first born is of the most intricate and intimate nature and the closer the relation and the more deep-rooted the commitment of the father to the child, the more sublime and hallowed is the sacrifice. When the kohen returns the child to the father and accepts the five shekels, he presents him on behalf of G-d with a new child; something precious is re-entrusted to him. The dialectical drama of Mt. Moriah consisting in losing and finding a son is re-staged in all its magnificence. After receiving the child from the kohen, the father must always remain aware that it was only through G-d's infinite grace that this infant was returned to him in sacred trust. (Community, Covenant and Commitment, pp. 300-302).

Rabbi Yisroel Reisman – Parshas Korach 5774

This week I would like to share with you a Ramban on this week's Parsha. The Ramban is on 16:21. It is a Yesodosdika Ramban for Limud of the Neviim Rishonim and although it only comes in incidentally to the Parsha we will speak it out here because that is where the Ramban placed it. The Ramban here makes a very powerful point that perhaps we, especially in our generation do not realize. The point is that the Mishkan Hashem, the Aron, the Menorah, the Shulchan, the Mizbaich, did not reside in Yerushalayim or in the Bais Hamikdash for most of the period of its existence. Even more powerfully, for most of the history of Klal Yisrael, Yidden did not know where the Bais Hamikdash would be or as a matter of fact, the location of Yerushalayim. This year we learned Yehoshua Perek Yud (in the Navi Shiur) where Yerushalayim is mentioned for the first time incidentally along with other cities. The Ramban makes the point that until the time of Dovid Hamelech, that is over 400 years from when Klal Yisrael left Mitzrayim, Yidden knew that there would be a special place, there would be a place that Hashem would designate in the future but they didn't know where the place was or in which city it would be as it says in Devarim 12:5 (לִשְׁכֵנו תִּדְרָשׁוּ, וּבֵאתָ שָׁמָּה) there would be a place of Shichno of HKB"Y's residing. B'makom Asher Evchar (כִּי אִם-אֶל-הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-יִבְחַר) it says in Chumash, the place I will choose. But incredibly, for four centuries Klal Yisrael is in Eretz Yisrael, the Aron was in different tent like homes. Even in Shiloh, Shiloh was a place of Yerios. When Dovid Hamelech finally comes 400 years later, he says to the Navi which can be found in Shmuel II 7:2 (וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ, אֶל-נָתָן הַנָּבִיא, רָאֵה נָא, אֲנֹכִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּבֵית אֲרָזִים; וְאַרְזוֹ, הָאֲלָרִים, יֹשֵׁב, בְּתוֹךְ) (הַהֲרִיבָה). I am sitting in a comfortable palace and the Aron Hashem is in a tent. This had gone on for many centuries. Which means to say that for most of the existence of Klal Yisrael, certainly at that point for the entire existence, Yerushalayim was not known as a special place. Chazal tell us that with great Mesiras Nefesh, Dovid met up with Shmuel during the time that he was running away from Shaul and with Lomdus from the Pesukim in Torah he Darshuned where the Bais Hamikdash should be. The Ramban makes a powerful point. He says (ואלו היו ישראל חפצים בדבר) (וּנְתַעֲרָרוּ בּוֹ מִתְחַלְלָה הִיא נְעִשָׂה בִימֵי אֶחָד מֵהַשּׁוֹפְטִים) Had Klal Yisrael desired Yerushalayim properly, had they had the proper Teshukah for Yerushalayim

then it would have happened earlier that the Bais Hamikdash would have been built in Yerushalayim. As it was, Jews lived for centuries teaching their children, their grandchildren, and their great grandchildren that there will someday be a Bais Hamikdash, there will someday be a Yerushalayim. The way we talk about Yemos Hamoshiach, there will someday be a Yemos Hamoshiach. They dreamt of Yerushalayim until Dovid came along and again the Ramban's language (ועל כן נתאחר הבניין כל ימי דוד בפשיעת ישראל). Klal Yisrael failed in wanting Yerushalayim enough. There was a Teshuka and that desire had to be completely strong and powerful enough and then Yerushalayim could happen.

What we add as a point of understanding to the Ramban is that for most of the history of Klal Yisrael since then, Klal Yisrael as a whole have not had access to Yerushalayim. The Bais Hamikdash was built and for a little under 40 years all of Klal Yisrael had access. Then the Aseres Hashevatom broke away and most of Klal Yisrael once again could not go to Yerushalayim. Yerovom Ben Nevat set guards at the border and aside from those 40 years most Jews did not have access not for the rest of Bayis Rishon and even in the Bayis Sheini most Jews remained in Bavel and could not routinely visit Yerushalayim. Certainly during the 2,000 years of our Churban Jews dreamt of Yerushalayim. Your Grandparents, your Great-Grandparents, they told their children there is a place called Yerushalayim, there is a Kosel Hamaravi. It was a dream. It was like telling ones children about Yemos Hamashiach. For centuries all the Gedolei Yisrael were able to dream of Yerushalayim. The Vilna Gaon dreamt of it, the Chofetz Chaim dreamt of it but were never there. Even in our own century, in 1948 Yerushalayim was accessible, the Kosel was not accessible. From 1948 until 1967 Jews told their children there is a Kosel in an alleyway somewhere in the old city, there is a remnant of the Bais Hamikdash. It was a dream, it was like talking about Yemos Hamashiach. In 1967 Birachamei Hashem things changed. In our lifetime, we again have access to Yerushalayim, we have access to the Kosel, we still await the Geulah and the Binyan Bais Hamikdash. But the Ramban's point about the Teshuka, the desire (לשקנו תהרהשי), there has to be a desire for Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash. That is a perspective that Jews always had.

In our generation we are getting accustomed to it. It has become a Derech Agav, something that is also a fact of life. I met a friend of mine who visited Eretz Yisrael briefly and did not even go to the Kosel, did not even go! Imagine, Jews since the beginning of our existence have been dreaming about going to the Makom Hamikdash and we have gotten so used to it. What a Mussar the Ramban has, a realization that these 50 years Kain Yirbu are special, they are unique. They are unique in our history that Jews the world over have the ability to go to visit Yerushalayim and Daven at the Kosel. We need to appreciate it.

<http://www.torahmusings.com/2016/07/audio-roundup-r-reisman-special-edition-5/>
Audio Roundup: **R' Reisman** Special Edition

Posted by: Joel Rich in Audio Roundup

By Joel Rich Hat tip to Counselor K for providing the CD's with his usual grace and aplomb. They call him mellow yellow quite rightly (as he has a natural mellow akin to the level attained by smoking banana skins)! These shiurim are available for \$ at navishiur.org

J-159 Mommy's Lower East Side Amalek represents choosing pleasure today (immediate gratification as in sha na na na live for today – cue The Grass Roots) vs. investing in the future. Judaism believes in the opposite. The Lower East Side experience is an example of a story of religious growth but what is our trajectory today? Interesting story of how R' Reisman didn't want to show his baby pictures to his children because of the dress of his family which later became more in line with today's standards. While he now realizes it is a story of growth, I wonder how many people in a similar position would be concerned for shidduchim?

J-160 I Think... We can only cognitively actively focus on one thing at a time. This is the nature of the mitzvah of zechira and explains why hatraah (warning) must be given for punishments within a very short time of sin. It also explains the nature of tzniut where one does a heroic action and then never actively focuses on it or expects

reward. In life everyone has challenges but the real challenge is to remain focused on the positive.

J-161 The Kli Yakar's last Hurrah It's always darkest before the dawn. The power of evil flares up right before its final defeat so that last minute is the most fraught with danger but once overcome victory is achieved.

J-162 Hilchos Treifos Controversies Discusses three cases regarding hilchos treifot where kannai positions were taken: *Chicken without a heart *treifa that lived more than twelve months *Can treifot be healed? Then some discussion of current chicken questions(breaks)

J-163 In His Image Key message is not to react and be able to look away when necessary. There is a connection between the ruchni (spiritual) and gashmi (physical) and that is the lesson of anthropomorphism. Always seize the opportunity.

J-164 Pesach Gems Three insights: Dew is a hidden blessing, we need to be more appreciative of every day hidden blessings. There were two elements to leaving Egypt; freedom from slavery and not being in a foreign land. The latter is not fully appreciated by those who don't realize that acculturation takes place without conscious realization. We need to appreciate HKB"H's chesed and mishpat.

J-165-Wills of Gedolei Yisrael The Gemara has a din of chayshinan lmitah (we are concerned about the possibility of death) Gdolei Yisrael had mixed opinions on the appropriateness of eulogies but they all made sure to live lives that were eulogizable and were very concerned about financial integrity. A little exaggeration may be OK but in general one should try to be accurate. It is dangerous to the departed to eulogize on a day where eulogies are prohibited. The gedolim also asked that learning be done in their memory as the best way to memorialize them.

J-166 Coffee Coffee presents some interesting halachic issues including: *What are the proper pre and post brachot and why? *Should you make a bracha on smelling coffee? *Can it be used for bsamim? *Can you drink it before morning prayer? The key issue is to realize that everything is given to us to be used appropriately to serve HKBH

J-167 A Tale of Two Roots Parents and rabbeim are both important roots. How does one know when you should maintain family practices and when to change them. Is it a personal chumrah? Is it an individual issue or a community one? I was very surprised at what I understood as R' Reisman's practice of davening with a minyan on an airplane and continuing even when all passengers are asked to return to their seat by the crew.

J-168 The Most Common Bracha of All Is asher yatzar a bracha of shevach(praise) or nehenin(benefit)? A number of halachic issues may turn on this issue! Shevach is about the creation, nehenin is more personal. In any event it's important to appreciate all the good the HKBH does for us.

J-169 Science Friction HKBH created both time and space, scientists have only recently understood this (Einstein). The whole multiverse thing was only invented in order to explain the existence of our world which is a very low probability event. Then a discussion of the importance of kidushat(holiness) makom(place) and zman (time) and how to set aside some holy time. Money quote- space science is out to disprove the borei olam.

J-170 Birchas Kohanim Birchat kohanim is an unconditional blessing and according to some commentaries is a mitzva on Yisraelim as well. It must be given with joy and you must believe in it for it to work. Why don't Ashkenazic say it all the time? The question is better than the answer. Interesting story that when R' Shteinman was in the US he went to a sfardic minyan so as to hear birchat kohanim. I suppose this shows that davening ones's own nusach is less important than getting the Bracha?

From: Rabbi Shlomo Appel - In the article of R. Gil Student last week [www.torahmusings.com/2015/06/shabbos-guides-2/] referencing [Rabbi Gersion Appel] my father Z"L's sefer on Hilchos Shabbat. Thank you for that. I would like to call your attention to the fact that where Gil references a work in progress, the work has actually been completed and the sefer is now available from the OU press at <https://www.ou.org/oupress/product/the-concise-code-of-jewish-law-a-guide-to-the-observance-of-shabbat/>

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> date: Thu, Jul 7, 2016 at 4:43 PM

Hierarchy and Politics: The Never-Ending Story
Britain's Former Chief **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

It was a classic struggle for power. The only thing that made it different from the usual dramas of royal courts, parliamentary meetings or corridors of

power was that it took place in Burgers' Zoo in Arnhem, Holland, and the key characters were male chimpanzees.

Frans de Waal's study, *Chimpanzee Politics*,¹ has rightly become a classic. In it he describes how the alpha male, Yeroen, having been the dominant force for some time, found himself increasingly challenged by a young pretender, Luit. Luit could not depose Yeroen on his own, so he formed an alliance with another young contender, Nikkie. Eventually Luit succeeded and Yeroen was deposed.

Luit was good at his job. He was skilled at peacekeeping within the group. He stood up for the underdog and as a result was widely respected. The females recognised his leadership qualities and were always ready to groom him and let him play with their children. Yeroen had nothing to gain by opposing him. He was already too old to become alpha male again. Nonetheless, Yeroen decided to join forces with the young Nikkie. One night they caught Luit unawares and killed him. The deposed alpha male had his revenge.

Reading the story I thought of the story of Hillel in Pirkei Avot (2:6): "He saw a skull floating upon the water, and said: Because you drowned others, you were drowned; and those who drowned you, will themselves be drowned." In fact, so humanlike were power-struggles among the chimpanzees that in 1995, Newt Gingrich, Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, included de Waal's work among the twenty-five books he recommended young congressional Republicans to read.²

Korach was a graduate of the same Machiavellian school of politics. He understood the three ground rules. First you have to be a populist. Play on people's discontents and make it seem as if you are on their side against the current leader. "You have gone too far!" he said to Moses and Aaron. "The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?"

Second, assemble allies. Korach himself was a Levite. His grievance was that Moses had appointed his brother Aaron as high priest. Evidently he felt that as Moses' cousin – son of Yitzhar, the brother of Moses' and Aaron's father Amram – he felt that the position should have gone to him. He thought it unfair that both leadership roles should have gone to a single family within the clan.

Korach could hardly expect much support from within his own tribe. The other Levites had nothing to gain by deposing Aaron. Instead he found allies among two other disaffected groups: the Reubenites, Dathan and Aviram, and "250 Israelites who were men of rank within the community, representatives at the assembly, and famous." The Reubenites were aggrieved that as descendants of Jacob's firstborn, they had no special leadership roles. According to Ibn Ezra, the 250 "men of rank" were upset that, after the sin of the Golden Calf, leadership had passed from the firstborn within each tribe to the single tribe of Levi.

The revolt was bound eventually to fail since their grievances were different and could not all be satisfied. But that has never stopped unholy alliances. People with a grudge are more intent on deposing the current leader than on any constructive plan of action of their own. "Hate defeats rationality," said the sages.³ Injured pride, the feeling that honour should have gone to you, not him, has led to destructive and self-destructive action for as long as humans have existed on earth.

Third, choose the moment when the person you seek to depose is vulnerable. Ramban notes that the Korach revolt took place immediately after the episode of the spies and the ensuing verdict that the people would not enter the land until the next generation. So long as the Israelites, whatever their complaints, felt that they were moving toward their destination, there was no realistic chance of rousing the people in revolt. Only when they realised that they would not live to cross the Jordan was rebellion possible. The people seemingly had nothing to lose.

The comparison between human and chimpanzee politics is not meant lightly. Judaism has long understood that *Homo sapiens* is a mix of what the Zohar calls *nefesh ha-behamit* and *nefesh ha-Elokit*, the animal soul and the

Godly soul. We are not disembodied minds. We have physical desires and these are encoded in our genes. Scientists speak today about three systems: the 'reptile' brain that produces the most primal fight-or-flight responses, the 'monkey' brain that is social, emotional and sensitive to hierarchy, and the human brain, the prefrontal cortex, that is slow, reflective and capable of thinking through consequences of alternative courses of action. This confirms what Jews and others, Plato and Aristotle among them, have long known. It is in the tension and interplay between these systems that the drama of human freedom is played out.

In his most recent book, Frans de Waal notes that "among chimpanzees, hierarchy permeates everything." Among the females this is taken for granted and does not lead to conflict. But among males, "power is always up for grabs." It "has to be fought for and jealously guarded against contenders." Male chimpanzees are "schmoozing and scheming Machiavellians."⁴ The question is: Are we?

This is not a minor question. It may even be the most important of all if humanity is to have a future. Anthropologists are generally agreed that the earliest humans, the hunter-gatherers, were generally egalitarian. Everyone had his or her part to play in the group. Their main tasks were to stay alive, find food, and avoid predators. There was no such thing as accumulated wealth. It was only with the development of agriculture, cities and trade that hierarchy came to dominate human societies. There was usually an absolute leader, a governing (literate) class, and the masses, used as labour in monumental building schemes and as troops for the imperial army. Judaism enters the world as a protest against this kind of structure.

We see this in the opening chapter of the Torah in which G-d creates the human person in His image and likeness, meaning that we are all equally fragments of the Divine. Why, asked the sages, was man created singly? "So that no one could say, My ancestors were greater than yours." Something of this egalitarianism can be heard in Moses' remark to Joshua, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that He would rest his spirit on them."

However, like many of the Torah's ideals – among them vegetarianism, the abolition of slavery and the institution of monogamy – egalitarianism could not happen overnight. It would take centuries, millennia, and in many respects has not yet been fully achieved.

There were two hierarchical structures in biblical Israel. There were kings and there were priests, among them the High Priest. Both were introduced after a crisis: monarchy after the failure of the rule of the 'judges', the Levitical and Aaronide priesthood after the sin of the Golden Calf. Both led, inevitably, to tension and division.

Biblical Israel survived as a united kingdom for only three generations of kings and then split in two. The priesthood became a major source of division in the late Second Temple period, leading to sectarian divisions between Sadducees, Boethusians and the rest. The story of Korach explains why. Where there is hierarchy, there will be competition as to who is the alpha male.

Is hierarchy an inevitable feature of all advanced civilisations? Maimonides seems to say Yes. For him, monarchy was a positive institution, not a mere concession. Abarbanel seems to say No. There are passages in his writing that suggest he was a utopian anarchist who believed that in an ideal world no one would rule over anyone. We would each acknowledge only the sovereignty of G-d.

Putting together the story of Korach and Frans de Waal's chimpanzee version of House of Cards, the conclusion seems to follow that where there is hierarchy, there will be struggles to be alpha male. The result is what Thomas Hobbes called "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."

That is why the rabbis focused their attention not on the hierarchical crowns of kingship or priesthood but on the non-hierarchical crown of Torah, which is open to all who seek it. Here competition leads not to conflict but to an increase of wisdom,⁶ and where Heaven itself, seeing sages disagree, says, "These and those are the words of the living G-d."⁷

The Korach story repeats itself in every generation. The antidote is daily immersion in the alternative world of Torah-study that seeks truth not power, and values all equally as voices in a sacred conversation.

1 Frans de Waal, Chimpanzee Politics, London, Cape, 1982. 2 This essay was written in the days following the Brexit vote in Britain, when a struggle was taking place over the leadership of both main political parties. I leave it to the reader to draw any comparisons, either with primate politics or the story of Korach. 3 Bereishit Rabbah 55:8. 4 Frans de Waal, Are we smart enough to know how smart animals are? New York, Norton, 2016, 168. 5 Following the Brexit vote, the question is being asked in Britain as to whether the United Kingdom will remain a united kingdom. 6 Baba Batra 21a. 7 Eruvin 13b; Gittin 6b.

from: **Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein** <ravadlerstein@torah.org> to: mchochmah@torah.org date: Thu, Jul 7, 2016 at 5:26 PM subject: **Meshech Chochmah - Born To Be Different**

Speak to the Bnei Yisrael and take from them one staff for each father's house...

Meshech Chochmah: What was the point? By this time, the Korach rebellion had been quashed, thoroughly and totally. Not one, but three different dramatic forms of death had been dealt to the participants. Some were swallowed up by the earth. Others met death through a fire that burnt them internally. Huge numbers died in a fast-moving plague. You would think that by now, people would have gotten the message. All the conspirators, representing different kinds of claims against Moshe, had been hung out to dry. Moshe and Aharon 3, rebels 0. What need was there for further confirmation of their authority? What were staffs that sprouted almonds going to prove to them that they did not already know?

The sprouting staffs provided the Bnei Yisrael with a dramatization of how they had fallen prey to Korach-and-company's argument through a fundamental error. They had seriously misunderstood the nature of the kehunah. They believed that the priestly role was given to those who most deserved it. At the time, those from the shevet of Levi could lay claim to spiritual achievement above and beyond other tribes. The balance of spiritual power, they concluded, could change with time. If other groups would rise in spiritual stature, they would supplant the kohanim from the tribe of Levi.

Hashem's choice of shevet Levi, however, was not conditioned upon its spiritual superiority. Rather, the kohanim shared some sort of property – whether discernable or not – that related them organically to the position of masters of the avodah. The kohanim were rather like the Jewish people as a whole, in a fixed position of specialness, even when seemingly undeserving of distinction.

Twelve staffs were selected. Their very selection pointed to a relationship that was innate, rather than earned. The “natural” first-born – Reuven – had lost his prominence because of his mercurial temperament. His distinction was carted off by Yosef, whose two sons – Ephraim and Menasheh – split the trophy, with each elevated to the position of a quasi-shevet. Yet in the selection of the staffs, Ephraim and Menasheh were treated as one group, not two. Reuven, in turn, was back on an equal footing with all his brothers. It was as if Hashem had turned back the clock, and treated them according to their “natural” qualities, rather than according to how they had used their talents.

With the staffs of the shevatim thus arrayed according to their “natural” qualities, it was Aharon's which sprouted fruit. Aharon emerged as the victor not only at that moment, but his selection quieted all complaints “for all time.”[2] In the “timeless” hierarchy of the people, Ephraim and Menasheh became one again, as they will be in the future.[3] (Chazal[4] have this in mind when they teach that Aharon's covenant was greater than Dovid's. Aharon would have righteous and evil offspring – but they would all be kohanim. Dovid, however, was told that his descendants would hold on to the throne only when they remained true to their commission.)

The people learned that any hope of the kehunah passing to others on the basis of merit was ill-founded. Aharon's selection was a Divine statement

about an inalienable quality in Aharon and his descendants – one that would be a permanent fixture for all time.

1 Based on Meshech Chochmah, Bamidbar 17:17 ? 2 Bamidbar 17:25 ? 3 See Rashbam and Tosafos to Bava Basra 122A ? 4 Sifrei Bamidbar 119 ?

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from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org> to: weeklydt@torahweb.org date: Tue, Jul 5, 2016

We are happy to present this first dvar Torah from our new contributor – **Rabbi Daniel Stein.**

Almonds Not Earthquakes

Even after the Earth itself opened its mouth and devoured Korach and his family (Bamidbar 16), the nation was not entirely convinced that Moshe and Aharon were their true leaders. It wasn't until a second miracle occurred (Bamidbar 17), when the staff of Aharon was the only staff to blossom and produce almonds, that everyone became confident that Korach was indeed wrong. Rav Leibel Eiger (Toras Emes) asks, why was the second miracle, which was blatantly less dramatic and extreme than the first, so much more compelling and persuasive? He explains that what is most effective in influencing and inspiring people to improve is not when they are intimidated by the looming threat of terrifying punishments, but rather when they see the fruits and the benefits that lay in store, when they see the almonds. It is only when they recognize that it is in their own best interests to listen and to change, when they see that they are the ones who have something to gain, that people are most likely to act.

Perhaps this idea was in fact first taught to us at the time of the creation of the world, when Hashem declared to his ministering angels "let us create man" (Breishit 1:26). Rashi explains that the pasuk is in the plural, "let us", because Hakadosh Baruch Hu included the angels in the decision making process before creating man. This is not because Hashem needed the permission or assistance of the angels, chas v'shalom, but rather it was in order to instruct us to consult with our subordinates before making decisions instead of unilaterally imposing edicts upon them. Rav Wolbe (Shiurei Chumash) explains that this is not only proper derech erez and middas anavah, but it is also the most effective tool in rallying the support of others. Only when one includes others in the decision making process can they have the ability to understand why a certain course of action was chosen, and why that course of action is ultimately for the greater good. That in turn is the best way to secure their support and collaboration moving forward.

The Nesivos Sholom claims that this is critical when disciplining young talmidim in the classroom as well. He compares the process of maintaining classroom decorum to a lumberjack attempting to clear a forest. He can begin chopping one tree at a time, but by the time he is done cutting down one tree, three more will have sprouted in its place. The better strategy would be to light a fire in the forest and burn down the trees of the forest all at once. Similarly, a rebbe or teacher can discipline each individual child, but they risk abandoning the other students in the process and the classroom can precipitously spiral out of control. However, if the rebbe can successfully light a "fire" of excitement within the talmidim and genuinely "ignite" their interest in what they are learning, the classroom can be more easily controlled. At that point the talmidim will behave and pay attention not because they are being told to do so, but because they want to, because they have come to realize that they are the ones who have something to gain.

This perspective defines our very relationship with avodas Hashem and shmiras hamitzvos in general. At the end of Parshas Shelach (Bamidbar 15:40) the Torah juxtaposes the mitzvah oftzitzis with the prohibition of avodah zara and the mitzvah of Shabbos. Rashi explains that this is because, just as chilul shabbos and worshipping avodah zarah are tantamount to violating the entire Torah, so too, one who performs the mitzvah of tzitzis is considered as if he has fulfilled all of the mitzvos of the Torah. This is further reflected by the fact that the gematria of tzitzis is 600, which together

with the 8 strings and 5 knots on each corner, adds up to 613. However, if wearing tzitzis is in fact so central and fundamental, why is one only obligated in the mitzvah of tzitzis if he first chooses to wear a four cornered garment? Why is wearing a four cornered garment in the first place not mandatory (see Menachos 41a)? Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) explains that since the mitzvah of tzitzis corresponds to all of the mitzvos of the Torah, in a certain sense it represents our entire relationship with Hashem. Having a relationship with Hashem can't be compulsory or forced, it has to be something that we chose, that we want, because we recognize that it is we who stand to benefit from that relationship the most.

The gemara (Shabbos 88a) tells us that when Klal Yisrael proclaimed "naaseh ve'nishmah - we will do and then we will hear", at the time of kabbalas haTorah, a heavenly voice responded and exclaimed, "mi gila le'banai roz zeh - who has revealed this secret to my children?" The gemara does not elaborate any further on the nature of the secret of "naaseh ve'nishmah", or justify why it is a secret in the first place. The Me'or Vashemesh explains in light of the only "secret" mentioned by the Rambam in all of his Mishnah Torah: the Rambam writes (Hilchos Teshuvah 10:5) that when first initiating a child to Torah and mitzvos, they should be motivated to perform the mitzvos out of fear of punishment and the prospect of reward. However, as they mature and develop, slowly and cautiously, "megalim lahem roz zeh - we reveal to them this secret." Namely, that the ideal form of worshiping Hashem is when it is done out of love not fear, because we want to not because we have to. Similarly, the manner of avodas Hashem implied by "naaseh ve'nishmah", performance before command, is a commitment spawned out of love not fear. However, since universal adherence to the Torah and mitzvos must be uncompromising and unwavering, this notion can't be shared prematurely and indiscriminately. Nonetheless, to have a mature, healthy, and enduring relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu, we must at some point and on some level learn to perform the mitzvos out of love. Not just because we have to but because we want to, because we recognize that is for our own benefit and that we are the ones who stand to gain.

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<http://www.torahmusings.com/2016/07/calling-blind-man-torah/> Responsa Jul 8, 16
Calling a Blind Man to the Torah
 by R. Gidon Rothstein

3 Tammuz: Masat Binyamin on a Blind Man Being Called to the Torah

Not that I need more ways to be reminded of how little I know, but reading responsa literature repeatedly brings to mind authorities I have encountered less often than their impact on halachic thought deserves. For Masat Binyamin (that's how the Bar-Ilan project writes it; I thought it was Maset), a book of responsa by R. Benjamin Aaron b. R. Avrohom Salnik, his having put a date on a responsum gives us a chance to "meet" him again. Born around the middle of the sixteenth century (in the non-Jewish calendar; would it help if I said he was born early in the third century of this millennium in the Jewish calendar?), he was a student of Rema and Maharshal, a contemporary of such luminaries as Maharam Lublin, Levush, and the author of SeMA, an important commentary on Shulchan Aruch. For all the company he had, he was considered one of the greatest Torah scholars of his generation.

[Editor CS note: See Rabbi Nisson E. Shulman, Authority and Community: Polish Jewry in the 16th Century, [Responsa of Rabbi Benjamin Aaron ben Abraham Slonik] <http://tinyurl.com/znz8oox>]

Let's see what he has to say about a blind man being called to the Torah. In Responsum 62, dated the third of Tammuz, 5370 (1610), he starts by noting there has been much discussion of the issue, culminating in R. Yosef Karo's collecting the views in Beit Yosef, and concluding that it was prohibited [Orach Chayyim 139:3 ruled that a blind man cannot be called to the Torah; Rema added that Maharil said nowadays, since someone else reads anyway, it is allowed. Masat Binyamin seems to be working off of Beit Yosef to Tur rather than the Shulchan Aruch itself]. He wants to share his thoughts, nonetheless, especially since, with old age, his own eyesight has left him, and R. Yosef Karo's ruling would render him unable to get an aliyah [the implication, incidentally, is that he's writing this either from memory or had a sort of secretary to find the necessary sefarim and read them to him].

Those Who Prohibit His first step is to summarize the major views, starting with those who said it was not allowed. Rosh, at the beginning of the third chapter of Megillah, asserted that a ba'al keriah, a Torah reader, was instituted to avoid the fights that came with people insisting they knew how to read when they didn't. [He means knowing the notes as well as the words, a source for the idea I've heard in the name of R. Soloveitchik, z"l, that Torah reading requires getting both right]. That would mean either the community would have to bear an unacceptable reading or would have to fight those who were delusional about their Torah-reading capabilities. To avoid that fighting, Rosh says, the ba'al keriah was instituted. Enlightening as that is [and what it implies about our times, when even some ba'alei keriah don't know how to read with the right grammar or notes!], his next point is about the oleh. Rosh held that the person called up still must read along with the ba'al keriah, otherwise his blessing is a berachah levatalah, has no purpose. Rosh explicitly rejects the possibility that it could be a blessing over the ba'al keriah's reading. [That means that a blind person, who can't read along, also can't get an aliyah, since he has no action to bless]. For proof, he notes a Tosefta that says that where only one man knows how to read, he should get all seven aliyot, sitting down and standing up for each. Back then, there was only one beracha before the Torah reading and one at the end, so sitting and rising was the way to distinguish among aliyot; today, the separate berachot on each aliyah would do it. The Tosefta's not allowing those who did not know how to read showed Rosh that they could not be called, since otherwise, why not call them, and have the knowledgeable man read for them? The farthest Rosh was willing to go was to allow an unlearned man to get an aliyah if he could follow the ba'al keriah well enough that he could read along; that wouldn't help a blind man, who physically cannot read along. Tur accepted his father's view. Rivash felt that the person called up had to also be able to understand what he was reading. Avudraham supported this view with a Tanchuma that spoke of the necessity of reviewing carefully before reading or speaking about Torah in public. He held that it was obligatory to object if someone got up to read who was unready to do so, and quoted R. Sa'adyah Gaon to the effect that even if there was only one kohen or Levi, he could only read if he could at least take direction from someone else "feeding" him the proper reading.

Those Who Allow a Blind Man to Get an Aliyah Turning to those who permitted a blind man to get an aliyah, Sefer HaAgudah discards the berachah levatalah objection, since all Jews make birchot haTorah in the morning—this berachah, apparently, has another purpose, and even a blind person can make it [this doesn't quite answer Rosh's claim, since the seeing person's berachah is on an act he's able to do]. HaAgudah also knew of those who said that the blind person cannot read because we are not allowed to recite the Written Torah by heart [this will come up in my ou.org podcast, "A Responsum a Day", on the 19th of Tammuz]. Now that there's a chazzan (we call him a ba'al keriah or, more colloquially, a ba'al korei), that's not an issue. Others, too, allowed ignorant or blind men to get aliyot when a ba'al korei would read for them, such as Maharil in the name of Mahari Segal, Shu"t Binyamin Ze'ev, and Shiltei Gibborim.

Masat Binyamin's View That's the state of the discussion up to Masat Binyamin's time. To explain how he decides how to act in practice, he says that halachic decisions require explicit textual proof from the Talmud or Geonim, agreement of the majority of decisors, or the consensus of the latest authorities. By all three standards, he says, a blind man should be allowed to receive an aliyah. First, he disputes the proof of the case of the man who got up and sat down seven times; for Masat Binyamin, that Tosefta was showing one way to handle the situation, not the only way. a possibility, not the only way to handle the situation. As for berachah levatalah, the Gemara tells us that R. Sheshet and R. Yosef (who could not see) said the Haggadah for their families. So, too, our oleh is participating in this mitzvah of public reading and it's therefore not levatalah [we might wonder whether the two are the same—the berachot in the Haggadah aren't about reading from a written text, as they are for a public Torah reading]. He finds more support in the fact that no one who gets an aliyah, once we have a ba'al keriah, is supposed to read all that loud, because the Gemara says people can't hear two readings at once. (In fact, Beit Yosef cited a Zohar that said the second person shouldn't read at all. That makes the blind man no different than anyone else). If so, the beracha is being made on the ba'al keriah's reading, not his own [although Rosh explicitly disagreed], which the blind man (and an ignorant one, who doesn't know the reading) can make as well as a seeing one. That's as far as textual proof takes us. Counting up authorities, with some on each side, Masat Binyamin thinks a majority allow it, and approvingly notes Beit Yosef's comment that we follow the Zohar wherever its ruling is not explicitly contradicted by the Gemara—even against a majority of other decisors, let alone where the Zohar is in line with that majority. Last, the authorities who allowed it, Mahari Molin, Binyamin Ze'ev, Shiltei Gibborim, and Maharil were the more recent, and Maharil is the source of most of the customs of Ashkenazic Jewry. In all the ways of reaching halachic conclusions, then, Masat Binyamin sees the process as pointing to giving blind men aliyot.

A Closing Cri de Couer He finishes by expressing his surprise at the more stringent authorities' deciding to "remove the yoke of Heaven" from people, especially from such a great and public mitzvah as this one. Even were it only questionable to allow it, he implies, we should do so for the sake of keeping blind men close to mitzvot. That's the lesson he takes from two examples in Eruvin 96a, Michal bat Shaul wearing tefillin without the rabbis of the time protesting (despite his own certainty that, by pure halachah, women should not wear tefillin) and the prophet Yonah's wife going to the Beit HaMikdash on holidays, bringing a voluntary sacrifice that might look to others like it was obligatory. Similarly, R. Yehudah, who held that blind people were not obligated in mitzvot, thought Chazal had instituted such an obligation, to keep them part of the Jewish people. Masat Binyamin applies that to being able to be called up to the Torah; denying a blind man that right, he writes, is akin to excluding him from being able to declare his acceptance of Hashem's rule, and is tantamount to kicking him out of the Jewish people. [The emotion in this last paragraph says a great deal about how he experienced getting an aliyah; some of that is true today for others. Without meaning to question his perspective, his reasoning would take us in directions I believe would have made him uncomfortable. Would he have agreed to giving any Jew an aliyah? Non-believers? Women? What about women and tefillin? I instinctively doubt he would have been comfortable with large numbers of women of his time following Michal bat Shaul, but it's not clear how he would object, given what he writes. He's not here to tell us, but it's a moment to notice when a great authority makes a statement that seems expandable, even as it seems equally clear he would not have accepted that expansion. It seems to me that, in such situations, the person making the statement hadn't always thought it all the way through to its possible conclusions; what we do with that is a question for another time]. As I noted at the start, he does not mention Shulchan Aruch, including that Rema accepts Maharil's view. It suggests he had not yet seen Rema's glosses, because if he had, he could have just followed that, the Ashkenazic practice of allowing blind people to receive aliyot, without needing to write a whole responsum (and its emotional coda) defending his view.

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: Peninim <peninim@shemayisrael.com> date: Thu, Jul 7, 2016 at 5:38 PM
Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Korach
Korach took/separated himself. (16:1)

Korach had it all, but it was not enough for him. If someone else had something that he did not have, it angered him to the point of obsession. He, too, had to have it. When Elitzaphan ben Uziel was placed in charge of the family of Kehas, Korach became irrational. Why should his cousin have a role that placed him in the position of Korach's superior? Korach was a rodef achar ha'kavod, one who pursued honor, craved recognition, was obsessed with being in the limelight. This is the most corrosive desire that one can have. Ramchal (Mesillas Yesharim, end of Perek II) writes: "More potent than (the desire of wealth) is the craving for honor. Indeed, it would be possible for a person to conquer his yetzer hora, evil inclination, concerning wealth and other forms of gratification, but the craving for honor is what persistently drives him, as it is impossible for him to tolerate seeing himself stationed lower than his fellows".

Ramchal goes on to cite the downfalls of Yaravam ben Nevat and Korach as examples of great people who stumbled and were destroyed due to their obsession with glory. Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, observes that redifas ha'kavod, the pursuit/craving of honor, remains with a person his entire life. While other taavos, cravings/desires, wane with age, his desire for honor becomes more acute. One would think that as a person ages and his mortality becomes more realistic, he would realize the futility of man. He would acknowledge that life is one long dream with no lasting reality to it. The only real kavod, honor, is the honor one receives for yedias haTorah, knowledge of Torah. One who really learns becomes acutely aware of how much more he must learn, thus the kavod he receives does not go to his head. Any other form of honor is simply worthless honor, meaningless glory, which quickly dissipates and is forgotten with time. Korach was driven by a craving for glory, an intense desire to preserve and glorify his ego. It did not matter how old he was, how wealthy he had become, how much success he had achieved; his ego fueled and propelled him for more - and even greater status and recognition. The need for kavod, acclaim, is insatiable; it is relentless in

its demands of the person. Such a person is ultra-sensitive, taking everything as a slight to his self-imagined honor. Indeed, one cannot satisfy such a person's ego. Whatever place he is given at an affair, if he perceives someone of equal or lesser stature (than what he has conceived in his subjective mind) sitting elsewhere, in a place which he (once again in his deluded mind) considers upper class/station in comparison to where he was placed, he will throw a tantrum -- either overtly, or covertly harbor resentment which will be the beginning of discord.

Rabbi Dr. Twersky observes the disparity which exists between our logical perception of others and the direct opposite when it pertains to us. It is interesting that, upon seeing someone else exerting himself to be noticed, to receive honor, we realize how ridiculous he is, how he is making an utter fool of himself. Yet, when we are the ones doing the same idiocy, we do not seem to have the same perspective. The desire for glory bribes us, thereby blinding our ability to see the truth in its stark reality. By desensitizing ourselves to public acclaim, we become so unmoved by applause and public veneration that they have no effect on us.

I must add that, at first blush, this seems totally unrealistic. After all, it is a taavah, craving, just like any other taavah. Desires are quite difficult to overcome. When we consider the frightening ramifications that result from our delusion with honor, it pays to introspect and ask ourselves: "Is it really worth it?" Furthermore, if we would know how many people laugh behind our backs as we run to the mizrach vont, eastern wall, to sit among the distinguished, some of whom share the same disease, we would perhaps make an attempt at desensitizing ourselves from honor.

Horav Shmelke, zl, m'Nikolsburg once arrived in a town where he was greeted by a large throng of his followers and admirers. Prior to meeting the crowd, he asked for a few moments of solitude. He entered a small room and secluded himself there. As it would be, one of his chassidim was curious to know what was taking place in this room, so he put his ear to the door and listened. He heard the Rebbe declare, "Welcome our esteemed leader; welcome holy Rebbe. It is such an honor that his eminence has come to our community. His presence in our town is a blessing". There were other accolades which simply did not make sense. The Rebbe was talking to himself! Gathering up his courage, the chasid conceded to his eavesdropping and asked for an explanation for what seemed to be strange behavior.

Rav Shmelke said, "I knew what my chassidim were going to say. I have heard all the accolades. While they pain me to hear them, because I am undeserving of such praise, I know only too well how easy it is to fall into the trap of arrogance. I fear becoming a victim of the terrible trait of vanity. When one says such praises to himself, they sound utterly foolish, thereby reflecting no vanity whatsoever. I, therefore, said them to myself enough times for me to realize how nonsensical they are; how silly they sound. Thus, when my followers said the same thing to me, they had no impact".

Yes, it takes training -- and even a strong dose of seichel-- but I feel that the greatest deterrent to vanity is to imagine that the people who are rendering the accolades are insincere and really laughing at him. Who has not been privy to the fellow who lives under the pretense of false humility - until he does not receive (what in his mind should be) his due? He wears the garb; he talks the talk; he even walks the walk, but, is it real? If he pursues kavod it is not real. Korach and Yaravam proved that for us. The Chida was one of the greatest leaders of Sephardic Jewry. An unusual talmid chacham, Torah scholar, he authored over seventy volumes of Torah commentary. As a shlucha d'Rachamana, agent on behalf of the Jewish community in the Holy Land, he had the unique opportunity to come in contact with Jews throughout the Diaspora. The kavod, honor, accorded to this extraordinary scholar was without peer. Despite all of these "superlatives," the Chida remained a paragon of humility, whose lifelong goal was the spiritual and physical betterment of his people.

The Chida once visited France. Understandably, hosting such a distinguished scholar for the Shabbos meals was the envy of the community, and the wealthiest members vied for the honor. It was thus decided by the

community's leaders that the honor would go to the individual who was willing to part with the largest contribution on behalf of aniyei Eretz Yisrael, the poor of the Holy Land. The Turkish/Ottoman government, under whose rule the Holy Land was subjected, was relentless in levying stiff taxes against its Jewish citizens. Hunger was a common occurrence. Indeed, the Jews of the Holy Land lived in a constant state of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, relying on such individuals as the Chida, who traveled the world in search of funds on their behalf.

One of the town's wealthiest men paid for the opportunity to host the Chida. The meals proved to be an enormous spiritual experience, well worth the contribution the man had made for the merit of participating with the Chida in a Shabbos meal. At the end of the meal, the host walked the sage to the home, which he had arranged to be his office/sleeping quarters. It was a miserable night - freezing cold, with a howling wind, which was blowing snow all over. Yet, it was a z'chus, merit, to accompany such a holy man. The Chida bid the man good night and sat down to learn for most of the evening, as was his practice.

A few hours elapsed, and the Chida searched in his coat for his snuffbox. Apparently, tobacco cleared the senses, allowing the Chida to remain awake and astute longer. Unable to locate his snuffbox, the Chida figured that he must have left it at his host's home. He put on his coat and braved the elements, returning to his host's home to retrieve his snuffbox. Being that it was a few hours after the meal, everyone had already retired for the night. When he heard a knock at the door the host came running, to discover the snow-covered Chida standing there. "Honored Rav, is something wrong?" the host asked.

"No, no," replied the Chida. "I seem to have misplaced my snuff box. Perhaps I left it here?" A few moments later, the Chida was reunited with his snuffbox and on his way home, accompanied by the driving snow and cold. When the Chida returned home, he turned ashen as he realized that for a shmek tabak, a snuff of tobacco, he had woken up an entire household, a family already exhausted from a week's work. How devoid of sensitivity towards a fellow Jew; how low had he descended in order to satisfy a physical craving! The Chida was beside himself in shame. He refused to take that snuff, and he immediately went to bed. Unable to sleep, he tossed and turned the entire night (or what was left of it).

The following morning, the Chida asked the gabbai, sexton, of the shul to announce throughout the town that he would speak after the conclusion of the Torah reading. His reputation as a powerful and inspirational orator had preceded him, and by the time that he was to ascend to the lectern, nary a vacant seat was in the shul.

"My friends," the Chida began, "I was always aware of my low, shameful character. Only now, after something I did last night when I fell prey to my desire, do I realize how truly debased I am". The people became very silent, holding their collective breath for fear of what the illustrious Chida might have done. Imagine, the Chida publicly declaring his shame!

"Last night, to satisfy my craving for snuff, I woke up an entire family. O Hashem, forgive me! My friends, I am no longer deserving of your honor. Please do not punish the Holy Land's poor because of the wretched agent, which they have dispatched to you. They are noble, virtuous and holy Jews, who are in dire need of your support. I am a sinner. Please, do not allow them to suffer because of me!"

The people all broke down in bitter weeping together with this saintly man. He cried because of his "sin". They cried, because they had just witnessed greatness at its apex.

"I accept upon myself from herein never to snuff tobacco. May the Almighty forgive me for what I have done!"

We now have an idea of the meaning of "running from honor".

By Michael Chighel

"My first visit to his court lasted almost an entire night," writes Elie Wiesel in his Memoirs, regarding how he came to Brooklyn, sometime in the early 1960s,¹ in order to make the acquaintance of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Rebbe had read some of my works in French and asked me to explain why I was angry with G-d. "Because I loved Him too much," I replied. "And now?" he asked. "Now too. And because I love Him, I am angry with Him."

The Rebbe disagreed: "To love G-d is to accept that you do not understand Him."

I asked whether one could love G-d without having faith. He told me faith had to precede all the rest. "Rebbe," I asked, "how can you believe in G-d after Auschwitz?" He looked at me in silence for a long moment, his hands resting on the table. The he replied, in a soft, barely audible voice, "How can you not believe in G-d after Auschwitz?"²

That initial, protracted yechidus with the Rebbe, climaxing with the Rebbe's rhetorical question, made a permanent impression on Wiesel and an indelible effect on his writing. Wiesel would later go so far as to speak of it as a crisis, a pivotal moment in his literary career: "That was a turning point in my writing, that simple dialogue."³

In 1964, Wiesel published his second novel, *The Gates of the Forest*, a story divided into four seasons, the last of which, "Winter," is a vivid, detailed account of that meeting in the Rebbe's quarters.⁴ The account is grueling, heart-breaking, painfully vulnerable, and, at some points, just shocking. Auschwitz is the pivotal question of the conversation. "How can you believe in G-d after Auschwitz?" But as the conversation shifts from emotion to emotion, from argument to counter-argument, the Rebbe keeps pushing his visitor to reveal why he is really there, his deepest motivation for the visit. "What do you expect of me?" asks the Rebbe. To which the knee-jerk response is: "Nothing, absolutely nothing." But the Rebbe is patient. By the end of the visit, the visitor will know why he came.

In the meantime, the room is mostly filled with the sound of fury. Wiesel is not afraid of G-d. And therefore he is not afraid of the Rebbe. He speaks to the Rebbe as a plaintiff with a case against G-d, addressing G-d's defense attorney. He expects the Rebbe to work at defending G-d for the crime of Auschwitz, and it would seem that the satisfaction he seeks is to see the Rebbe fail in that task.

But the Rebbe leaves him unsatisfied. Wiesel is utterly unprepared for the Rebbe's counter-proposal. Instead of playing the part of G-d's defense attorney, the Rebbe proposes to act as prosecutor, on Wiesel's behalf. In Wiesel's own account, this startling shift is marked by a controlled explosion of indignation on the Rebbe's part: "Do you think that I don't know it? That I have no eyes to see, no ears to hear? That my heart doesn't revolt?"

It is in this moment of Wiesel's narrative that we sense a certain degree of oversimplification carried out for the sake of fiction. A novel is no place for detailed philosophical arguments. Fortunately, we have a long letter that the Rebbe wrote to Wiesel less than a year after *The Gates of the Forest* appeared in print, in which the Rebbe articulates his proposed prosecution of G-d in great detail and with sharp force.⁵

I agree with you that the complaint 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do justice?' [Gen. 18:25] can be authentic and can have its proper force only when it breaks forth from the pain-filled heart of a deep believer. Moreover we find that indeed the first one who ever expressed this complaint was Abraham our father, the greatest believer and the father of 'believers, sons of believers' [Shabbat 97a]. We are also told by the Sages that the first to have posed the question of 'the righteous one who suffers, the wicked one who prospers' was none other than our teacher Moses [Berachot 7a], the same one who explicated to the Jews, and to the entire world, the idea of 'I am the L-rd your G-d' and 'you shall have no other gods' [Exod. 20:2], where the category of 'other gods' includes the human intellect and understanding when one makes these into idols and supreme authorities.

For this reason I was surprised that you did not see the course of thought through to the end and bring out its conclusion. After all—as you know—the

<http://5tjt.com/when-elie-wiesel-met-the-rebbe/>

When Elie Wiesel Met The Rebbe

answer to the complaint of Moses our teacher—according to the account of our Sages, of blessed memory when shown how Rabbi Akiva’s flesh was ripped off with iron combs etc., Moses our teacher burst out: ‘This is Torah, and this is its reward?!’—the answer to this was: ‘Silence! Thus it arises in the supernal Mind!’? . . .

Nevertheless this did not weaken the faith of Moses our teacher, nor that of other authentic questioners and men. On the contrary, this only served to strengthen their faith, something to be found explicitly in the case of Job; likewise in the case of Abraham our father who not only stood fast by his faith but was also able to withstand every test, and likewise the other ‘rebels’ who maintained a deep faith until the last day of their lives.

I think you will agree with me that it is no mere coincidence that all authentic questioners retained their trust in G-d. Rather, it could in no way be otherwise. So long as the question is asked with integrity, it is logical that such a deep feeling can only come from the conviction that true justice is the justice that stems from a super-human source, that is, from something higher than both human intellect and human feeling. It is for this reason precisely that the question unsettles not only a person’s emotion and intellect but also his interiority and the essence of his being.

But after the initial tempestuous assault, he has to realize that the entire approach on which the question is based, and of wishing to understand with the intellect that which is higher than the intellect, is something that cannot take place. Moreover, he must—after a rattling outrage and a thorough grieving—ultimately come to the conclusion: Nevertheless I believe [ani ma’amin]! On the contrary—even more strongly.

This is the subtext, the full content, of the Rebbe’s rhetorical response, “How can you not believe in G-d after Auschwitz?”

One must read it over a few times, especially the last line, to appreciate the radical and revolutionary character of the Rebbe’s response to the question of Auschwitz. Whereas various writers on Holocaust theology have suggested in various ways that a Jew must continue to believe in G-d despite Auschwitz, not a single voice has had the temerity, or the radical logic, to suggest that a Jew must continue to believe in G-d because of Auschwitz. For the Rebbe, Auschwitz is not something that should weaken one’s belief and trust in G-d. On the contrary, says the Rebbe, Auschwitz should bring one to place one’s faith in G-d “even more strongly”!

The radical logic, the logic of holy chutzpah,⁶ seems to run as follows. Yes, we must “prosecute” G-d for Auschwitz. Yes, we must demand from G-d that He give us an explanation. (After all, we cannot explain it with our human intellect.) But in order to “prosecute” G-d we must believe that G-d is there, and that G-d is inherently benevolent. Without those two fundamental assumptions the question cannot be asked at all. In the very demand for an explanation we affirm our trust in G-d and in His goodness. What the Rebbe wished to impress upon Wiesel was the already operative reality of the emunah, the faith and trust, upon which Wiesel’s own fury was premised in all his arguments against G-d.

In light of this extraordinary epistle, those who are familiar with Wiesel’s writings can see how that long night in the Rebbe’s quarters in Brooklyn was indeed, as Wiesel says, a turning point in his writing. Wiesel not only went on to write many books on biblical, midrashic, Talmudic, and chassidic themes; in retrospect, he came to appreciate his entire corpus as an expression, albeit gnarled and broken, of emunah. As he states in his *Memoirs*:

I have never renounced my faith in G-d. I have risen against His justice, protested His silence and sometimes His absence, but my anger rises up within faith and not outside it. I admit that this is hardly an original position. It is part of Jewish tradition. . . . Abraham and Moses, Jeremiah and Rebbe Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev teach us that it is permissible for man to accuse G-d, provided it be done in the name of faith in G-d. If that hurts, so be it. Sometimes we must accept the pain of faith so as not to lose it.⁷

By the end of the long soul-searching session with the Rebbe, Wiesel came to confess, or rather to discover, why he really came to see the Rebbe. “You

asked me what I expect of you, and I said I expect nothing. I was mistaken. Make me able to cry.”

In the original Yiddish version of the book that came to be called *Night*, Wiesel recalls how the death of his father in Buchenwald had traumatized his capacity for tears. The light of his world was extinguished, he writes. “But I did not cry, and this is what causes me the most grief: this inability to cry. The heart had petrified, the fountainhead of tears had dried up.”⁸ When Wiesel pleads with the Rebbe, “Make me able to cry!” we understand that this is not some incidental request blurted out during that yechidus, or some flourish added to a fictional novel for dramatic effect. The request is nothing less than Wiesel’s secret reason for coming to the Rebbe. He did not come expecting the Rebbe to change the past. And if he came in order to challenge the Rebbe and to hear him fail to defend G-d, he was disappointed in this, as we have seen. Wiesel came to the Rebbe for the same reason that anyone ever went to Rebbe: he went to discover his true request. And so the face-to-face with the Rebbe, being seen by the Rebbe, allowed him to see his true self, and to articulate his deep-felt need to become transparent to himself. “Make me able to cry!”

And the Rebbe’s response? Did the Rebbe put his arms around the broken man and allow him to experience his long-awaited catharsis? Did he come forth with his famous paternal love and allow Wiesel to weep on his shoulder and mourn for the father lost in Buchenwald?

Again the Rebbe responded in an unexpected manner. Yes, he did encourage Wiesel to find the needed catharsis for his grief. But not in weeping. Because weeping is not an adequate form of catharsis for the colossal suffering of Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

The Rebbe shook his head.

“That’s not enough. I shall teach you to sing.”

“Grown people don’t cry; beggars don’t cry.” The Rebbe added, “Crying is for children. Are you still a child, and is your life a child’s dream? No, crying is no use. You must sing.”⁹

In 1973, Wiesel composed a cantata titled *Ani Maamin: a Song Lost and Found Again*. The song concludes with the following verses:

I believe in you, Even against your will. Even if you punish me For believing in you. Blessed are the fools Who shout their faith. Blessed are the fools Who go on laughing. Who mock the man who mocks the Jew, Who help their brothers Singing, over and over and over: I believe. I believe in the coming of the Messiah, And though he tarries, I wait daily for his coming. I believe.

Courtesy of Chabad.org

NOTES: 1 Since *The Gates of the Forest* (*Les portes de la forêt*), Wiesel’s initial quasi-fictional account of this meeting, appeared in print in August of 1964, the visit must have taken place before that, and probably after September 1962, the publication date of *The Town Beyond the Wall* (*La ville de la chance*), this being the clearest sample of a work in French in which the author is “angry with G-d.” 2 Elie Wiesel, *Memoirs: All the Rivers Run to the Sea* (New York, 1995) pp. 402–3. 3 *Against Silence*, ed. Irving Abrahamson, Vol. 3 (New York, 1985), p. 63. Cf. Wiesel, *Memoirs*, pp. 402ff. 4 Wiesel, *Gates of the Forest* (New York, 1966), pp. 189–204. 5 This is a more or less free translation of the Rebbe’s Yiddish letter dated 24 Nissán 5725 (April 26, 1965). It is printed in R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Lekutei Sichot*, Vol. 33 (New York: Kehot, 1962–2001), pp. 255–60. 6 *Chutzpah dikdusha* is a concept in chassidic teachings that parallels *shtus dikdusha*, “holy folly.” 7 Wiesel, *Memoirs*, p. 84. 8 Eliezer Wiesel, *Un di velt hot geshvigen* (Buenos Aires: Union Central Israelita Polaca en la Argentina, 1956), p. 238. This text was heavily reworked and truncated, with Jérôme Lindon, to produce *La nuit* (Paris: Minuit, 1958). 9 *Ib id.*, p. 200. Wiesel laments, in another context, how Buchenwald has erected a wall between his childhood masters in Sighet who taught him Torah and song and the present. “I have betrayed them: I no longer know how to sing.” Wiesel, *Legends of Our Time* (New York, 1982), pp. 13ff.

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A Wounded Faith and Loyal Hasid

My unexpected encounter with **Prof. Elie Wiesel** gave me a glimpse into his regal soul.

by **Rabbi Jay Yaacov Schwartz**

I didn't meet Prof. Wiesel, as he liked to be called, until well into my fourth decade of life. Until then, I viewed him as a moral witness to the Holocaust, prolific writer, secular Jew and a poetic soul. His message seemed to speak to the common denominator of our creation in the image of o-d, and how the Holocaust both betrayed and imposed unending wounds on the collective spirituality of mankind.

However upon meeting Prof. Wiesel, I encountered an individual that was quite different of what I had anticipated. In the Fall of 2005, I accompanied leaders and benefactors of the Hasidic communities of Tzfat to Prof. Wiesel's private office near Park Avenue. We were electrified by his regal bearing. He emerged from behind his desk, surrounded by what seemed like thousands of volumes of writing, research and Jewish seforim, books.

We presented him with a gift of an ArtScroll volume of the Jerusalem Talmud. As he cradled it in his arms, he told us that he studied Talmud each and every day and would not allow a day to pass without immersing his mind in the holy words of the Talmudic Sages.

Our goal was to convince him to accept an honorary award from the Tzfat Fund, associated with the Breslov community, with whom he had shared a special relationship. Although in that meeting he identified himself as a Vishnitzer Hasid, having grown up in the Carpathian village of Sighet, his love and fascination for Rebbe Nachman as a historical figure, storyteller and writer enchanted him. He wrote wistfully about the private moment that he and his family shared when he visited the gravesite of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, a man with whom he greatly resonated.

He accepted the invitation to attend the dinner. But it wasn't just an appearance to accept an award. We designed an evening that would present a dialogue between Prof. Wiesel and Rabbi Efrayim Koenig of Tzfat, on the issues of faith after the Holocaust, Hasidism and the perseverance of the State of Israel in the face of ongoing suffering and persecution.

My role was to facilitate a dialogue by translating into Hebrew, Prof. Wiesel's comments, so that Rabbi Koenig could understand them and respond in his native Hebrew, and then to translate Rabbi Koenig's remarks from Hebrew to English so that the sophisticated New York audience, could hear and understand. On that night he answered the question of how he identifies himself as a Jew.

One of the themes discussed was Rabbi Koenig's view of a complete and simple faith in the face of the horror and atrocity of the Holocaust without question, vs. what Prof. Wiesel described as a "wounded faith," a Jeremiah-like lament or kina, that bemoaned, in G-d's presence, the tragedy and destruction that had befallen His chosen People. Regarding the world today he said that evening, "We are all on a train racing to the precipice, the abyss. The only thing we can do is pull the alarm-and we must pull the alarm."

He also told the audience that he identified himself as a hasidic Jew devoted to Torah study. "What saved my life was Torah study. After the war, the moment I arrived at an orphanage in France, the first thing I asked for was a masechet, a Talmudic tractate I had brought with me when I entered the camps. I would not be who I am today without the influence of Rava and Abaye, Rabbi Akiva, Rebbe Yishmael and actually, the Baal Shemtov. I have never given up learning... I learn Torah every day because that is who I am. So I am a Hasid in the best sense of the word, despite the fact that I don't look like it. Perhaps if there had been no war, I would be wearing a shtreimel today - and I say this with nostalgia."

Especially in his later years, Prof. Wiesel chose to reaffirm his childhood identity as a young Vizhnitzer hasid. I am told that he relished the opportunity to lead the prayer services at the modern Orthodox Fifth Avenue Synagogue using the hasidic nusach and nigun that he remembered from his youth. He transported the amud in Manhattan to a shtibel somewhere in the village of Sighet, Romania. The sounds were identical, and so were his feelings.

I came to understand that Prof. Wiesel's regal way, the honor that he received from world leaders across the globe, was intrinsically bound to the shining presence of his unique Hasidic soul, His essence to them reflected a small spark of the glory from our most royal Jewish ancestors. In the eyes of world leaders he was graced with cheyn (charm) akin to Joseph in the eyes of Pharaoh. In his moral writings they saw reflection of the universally lauded wisdom of Solomon, and in his emotional and poetic eloquence they heard an echo of the Psalms of King David.

Prof. Wiesel's legacy is more than the Holocaust. It is a demonstration of how a Jewish soul, tormented by the pains and the suffering of his People, can shine a reflection of G-d's holy, hidden light – the light that lifts our human depravity from darkness and inspires us to live moral, honorable, decent lives; to protect and defend the helpless and respect the traditions and wisdom that G-d implanted into His holy Torah and to the souls of His People, Israel.

The Jewish People's role is to be light unto the nations, we all aspire to it. Prof. Wiesel, the Vizhnitzer Hasid from Sighet, embodied it. May his memory be a blessing. Published: July 4, 2016

Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>

Parshas Korach

A Tale Of Two Evil Character Traits: Jealousy & Machlokes These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #950 – Pidyon

Habein: Not Your Regular Cases. Good Shabbos!

A Tale Of Two Evil Character Traits: Part One: Jealousy

This week's parsha – Parshas Korach – highlights the evil of two terrible character traits: Jealousy and Argumentativeness. The first destructive character trait we encounter is that of jealousy. Rashi spells out Korach's motivation for starting his rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu: He was jealous that a younger cousin became the prince of the descendants of Korach.

"What was it that Korach saw that led him to dispute with Moshe? He was jealous of the princely position of Elizaphan son of Uziel, for Moshe had appointed him prince over the sons of Kehus by the word of G-d. Korach said: Father's brothers (including Father) were four, as it says 'The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uziel'. Amram, the firstborn, his two sons assumed greatness: One is king and one is Kohen Gadol. Who is fit to take the second (i.e. – to fill the next position of greatness, that of the Kohathite prince)? Is it not I, for I am the son of Izhar who is second to Amram? Yet he (Moshe) appointed as prince the son of his brother who is the youngest of all, Behold, I will dispute with him and nullify his words." [Rashi to Bamidbar 16:1]

Despite the fact that Chazal say that Korach was a clever and wise person, he lost control of himself over his jealousy of the appointment of Elizaphan son of Uziel to position of prince. Any person who is an observer of life can see how jealousy can drive a person to crazy extremes. Just as the insatiable desire that people have for honor (kavod) can cause a person to do foolish and even wicked things, so too a person must master his tendency to become jealous lest he be driven to self-destructive behavior. Chazal say in Avos [4:21]: Jealousy, lust, and pursuit of honor drive one from this world. This is not just referring to the "world to come". Jealousy, lust, and pursuit of honor can destroy a person's "Olam Haze" ["this world"] as well. This is the story of what happened to Korach.

The Gemara [Shabbos 152b] expounds the pasuk "...envy brings rotting of the bones" [Mishlei 14:30]. The fate of a jealous person is that his bones decompose; conversely, one who is free of jealousy will not have his bones decompose. Under normal situations, when a person dies, the body decomposes but the bones do not decompose. That is why there is such a thing as a skeleton. Normally, long after the skin and flesh have decomposed, the bones remain intact. However, the Talmud expounds from this pasuk in Mishlei that in the case of a person who was jealous during his lifetime, even his bones will fall apart after death.

Perhaps the "measure for measure" calculation in this Divine punishment is the following idea. If there is anything that represents the essence (atzmuis) of a person, it is his bones (atzamos). The Hebrew word etzem means both 'bone' and 'essence'. Thus, a person's bones represent his essence. When jealousy consumes a person, he does not want to be himself. He wants to be somebody else. A person who wants another person's job or house or wife or power or money – fundamentally indicates he is not happy with who he is and what he possesses. Kinah [jealousy] represents a serious lack of Emunah [fundamentals of faith]. A jealous person fails to understand that the Almighty wants him to have this house and this money and this job and these children and this power, etc. Jealousy of someone else represents denial of one's essence (one's atzmuis). Therefore, the Talmud teaches

(based on the verse in Mishlei) that the appropriate measure for measure punishment for a jealous person is for his bones to rot.

I saw an ingenious application of this idea in the name of the Maharal Diskin: The Gemara [Nazir 45a] says on the pasuk “And Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him” (Vayikach Moshe es atzmos Yosef imo) [Shmos 13:19] – “what does ‘with him’ connote – it means with him in his confines (imo – b’ mechitzaso).

Maharal Diskin comments that the pasuk should really read “Vayikach Moshe es atzmos Yosef ito”. This is because Yosef’s instruction to the people (before he died) was “and you shall bring up my bones with you (itchem)”. Thus, the appropriate pronoun to indicate Moshe fulfilled Yosef’s instructions would be ito rather than imo [with him]. Maharal Diskin explains that the word “imo” always connotes “equals” whereas “ito” which also means “with him” does not necessarily indicate equality of rank. The Torah is thus hinting that Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him, as though they were equals. What does that mean?

Yosef told the Children of Israel “You shall bring up my bones with you” – meaning that my bones will not decompose! My bones will remain intact because despite what the brothers did to me, I never was jealous of them and I never hated them. The proof of this will be that whoever has jealousy suffers the fate that his bones decompose. “My bones will not decompose”, Yosef promised. Moshe Rabbeinu took that lesson with him (imo). In other words, Moshe Rabbeinu also had a rough sojourn with the Jewish people in the Wilderness. There were so many times that Klal Yisrael abused Moshe. The Medrash on this week’s Parsha even says that every man in Klal Yisrael warned their wives not to seclude themselves with Moshe Rabbeinu, implying that Moshe might commit adultery with them. It would only be logical that Moshe Rabbeinu would feel some jealousy or hatred towards the members of Klal Yisrael. However, “he took the bones of Yosef WITH HIM”. He took with him – as an equal partner – the lesson of Yosef not to allow the evil character traits of jealousy and hatred to consume you.

A Tale Of Two Evil Character Traits Part Two: The Destructive Power of Machlokes

The second negative character trait illustrated in our parsha is the destructive power of machlokes [argumentativeness]. This is no doubt the prime example of this destructive character trait in the entire Torah. People lost their lives, their possessions, and even their children because of machlokes. Rashi notes that machlokes is the only aveyra [sin] for which the Almighty punishes women, children, even innocent babies. Machlokes is like a fire – it consumes everything in its path – guilty or not. Fire does not discriminate – it burns everything in its path.

Just think how crazy these people were. Moshe Rabbeinu in effect challenged these people to a duel. The odds were 250:1 that any of them who offered the Ketores would not be chosen. Nobody plays with those kinds of odds. However, they did it anyway because machlokes consumed them.

I once read the following incident involving the Chofetz Chaim: A Jew once lived in a little village and was neighbors with the (Jewish) “Mayor” of the town. They got into a fight and as is the tendency with machlokes it grew and grew and grew until the point where they were at each other’s throats. The neighbor told the Mayor that he was going to go to the Russian authorities and squeal on him that he used his influence to get kids out of the Czarist draft. (Being drafted into the Czarist army was a virtual death sentence – certainly a spiritual death – and people tried all sorts of means – bribery and the like – to get out of being drafted). This Mayor had apparently illegally used his influence in the community to prevent certain boys from being drafted.

This neighbor told his wife what he was going to do. His wife said to him, “Are you crazy? One of the boys the Mayor illegally freed from the draft was our son! If you squeal on him to the authorities, our son might get drafted!” She told him that what he was contemplating doing was like

drilling a hole in a boat under the seat of a companion you dislike. The entire boat will sink with all passengers on board!

The man, in his anger against his neighbor, told his wife “I don’t care if they arrest my son, I don’t care if they arrest me. I don’t care if they arrest you – as long as they punish him!” Human beings always act in their own self-interest. The urge to survive is perhaps the most basic of human emotions. However, a person may be willing to sacrifice himself and sacrifice his own child just so that “I should win and defeat the other person”. This is the power of machlokes.

Parshas Shlach demonstrates what desire for Kavod [pursuit of honor] can do to a person. Parshas Korach demonstrates what Kinah [jealousy] and Machlokes [argumentativeness] can do to a person. This is why the Torah records these stories. They should make an impression on us. If we do not keep these evil character traits in check and fix them when we need to, then — Heaven Forbid — we will pay the price later on.

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org/> for further information.

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From Rabbi Chanan Morrison chanan@ravkooktorah.org

Rav Kook Torah

Jun 29 (9 days ago) to rav-kook-list

Korach: The Corruption of a Judge

What makes a judge dishonest? What are the cognitive stages in the corruption of a leader?

The Torah legislates support for the judges and teachers of Israel - the kohanim and Levites - through a system of tithes and gifts. This system provides them with a degree of financial independence, making them less susceptible to bribes and moneyed interests.

Biblical Scandal

Not every leader, however, maintains the standards of integrity that his public office demands. The Torah notes that the sons of the prophet Samuel did not follow in their father’s path of selfless public service. On the contrary, “they went after gain, took bribes and perverted justice” (I Sam. 8:3). What brought about their judicial corruption? What were the root causes?

The Sages offered several interpretations for the failings of Samuel’s sons. At first glance, this appears to be a litany of various forms of graft and abuse of power. Rav Kook, however, noted a pattern in their statements. A careful reading indicates a progression of increasingly serious offenses. The Sages were not disagreeing about the facts in the case; they were mapping out the moral decline of a leader, step by step, into the morass of deceit and corruption.

Here are the various opinions, as quoted in Shabbat 56a:

According to Rabbi Yonatan, Samuel’s sons were not, in fact, guilty of any true crime. Their fault was in their failure to replicate the exemplary public service of their father. Samuel would travel all over the country, providing judicial services for the people. His sons, on the other hand, stayed in their own court, and “increased the fees of their clerks and scribes.” Rabbi Meir said: they would openly demand their salaries. Rabbi Yehudah said: they compelled private individuals to conduct their business affairs. Rabbi Akiva said: they would forcibly take an extra measure of tithes. And Rabbi Yossi

said: they took gifts by force. What is the significance of all of these opinions? Let us follow the descent of the crooked politician, as he slides into the cesspool of graft and corruption. Down-to-Earth Leadership

We can learn much about public service from Samuel. Scripture praises him for traveling around the country and judging the people in their towns (I Sam. 7:16). Why was this so important?

A true leader considers himself to be literally a servant of the public. His dedication to the community is reflected in his sensitivity to their problems and dilemmas. He governs and advises them, not according to his own station in life, but as if he is standing in their shoes.

This is the significance of Samuel's custom of judging the people in their hometowns. Samuel was able to identify with their needs and issues. As a result, his rulings were appropriate and his guidance effective.

This type of leader is able to make a direct connection with the people. He does not need the trappings of officialdom. He doesn't surround himself with layers of bureaucrats and government officials.

Samuel's sons, however, failed to emulate this level of leadership. They would judge the people without leaving their city, without adjusting their mindset. In their eyes, they adjudicated properly. In addition, they required the assistance of a system of salaried clerks and scribes. As Rabbi Yonatan noted, this was not a crime; but it certainly falls short of the ideal of leadership as epitomized by their father.

1. Just a Job

The other scholars taught that Samuel's sons were in fact guilty of graft. They described the various steps down the path of political corruption. Like all moral failings, abuse of authority comes in stages. Its danger and severity is magnified, of course, according to the power and influence of the position.

The first failing may appear to be minor but it is indicative of a problematic attitude that is the root cause of more serious abuse. A community leader - and especially a spiritual leader - should recognize that public service is a great privilege. This recognition should be strong enough that one is willing to forgo financial remuneration. In fact, a true leader, aware of the importance of his work, may even feel a certain degree of impropriety in accepting payment.

Rabbi Meir described the fault of Samuel's sons as "openly demanding their salaries." They failed to value the importance of their public service. By demanding payment, they showed that they looked at their work as a job like any other - not a sacred calling that is its own reward.

2. Using Others

From this stage, it is but a small step to actual abuse of power. Once a leader is no longer altruistic in his attitude towards public service, he will begin to see it as a burden. He will have no scruples about forcing others to handle his personal affairs. Since I take care of their needs, he reasons, they should take care of mine. This is the offense identified by Rabbi Yehudah: "They compelled private individuals to conduct their business affairs."

3. Grabbing For More

From here it is another small step to the next level of corruption - both in quality and quantity. It is axiomatic, Rav Kook noted, that a person who fails to live up to the moral demands of his position will end up sinking even lower than the common level of ethical behavior.

Leading and judging should be an inspiring vocation. A leader should feel that he is helping build a better world. In the words of the Talmud (Shabbat 10a), an honest judge is "G-d's partner in creation." But flawed character traits, together with a failure to value his public work, will undermine his sense of propriety and justice. Instead of values based on a sense of justice, he is ensnared by the glitter of superficial honors.

His lack of integrity is expressed quantitatively - he takes "an extra portion of tithes" - as well as qualitatively - he obtains it forcibly.

4. Legal in Name Alone

As long as he retains some semblance of morality, such a leader will not try to seize that which he has no legal claim to. But his dishonesty may lead to the lowest level, when justice and propriety are empty shells, high-minded

words lacking any inner content. He views the judicial system as merely a tool to ensure social order. It has no connection to aspirations for an ethical society.

This is the level described by Rabbi Yossi: "They took gifts by force." If they were taken by force, how can they be called 'gifts'? This is a form of legal manipulation that is legal in name only. He may call them 'gifts' or 'contributions,' but in fact they were taken forcibly. Calling them 'gifts' only serves to silence what little is left of his conscience, allowing him to justify his crimes to himself.

These are the stages in the fall of a judge corrupted by the lure of superficial honors and financial gain - a leader who should have been organizing society according to the foundations of justice and morality. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne" (Psalms 97:2).

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. IV, pp. 52-54)