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Home Weekly Parsha KORACH

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) is of the general opinion that events, as recorded in the Torah, occurred in a linear timeline. This is in spite of the maxim that there is no late or early in the Torah. He limits that rule to certain halachic instances as they appear in the Talmud. Thus the story of Korach and his contest against Moshe that forms the central part of this week's parsha occurred after the tragedy of the spies and their negative report about the Land of Israel.

As I have commented before, the negative report of the spies was motivated, according to rabbinic opinion, by personal interests having no objective value as to the issue of the Land of Israel itself. So too, this uprising against Moshe led by Korach is also not an issue of justice or objective benefit to the people, but rather it is motivated purely by the personal issues and jealousies of Korach and his followers.

Both Korach and the spies masked their own personal drives for power and position with high-sounding principles of public good, social justice and great concern for the future of the people of Israel. The very shrillness of their concern for the good of society itself calls attention to their true motives – they protested too much!

Pious disclaimers of any self-interest seem to always accompany those that clamor for social betterment and a more just society. But it is often personal ambition and the drive to acquire power over others that is the true face of these movements and individuals. All of the dictators of the past and present centuries promised great improvements for their peoples and countries and yet all, without exception, eventually only pursued their own personal gain and power. Always beware of those who speak in the name of the people. Most of the time they are only imitations of Korach.

This is perhaps an insight as to why Moshe took such a strong stand against Korach and demanded an exemplary punishment from Heaven. It is extremely difficult for humans to judge the true motives of others in their declarations and policies. Only Heaven, so to speak, can do so. Moshe's plea to Heaven is directed not only against the current Korach that he faces, but it is also against the constant recurrences of other Korachs throughout Jewish and world history.

Only a shocking miracle of the earth swallowing Korach and his followers and of a fire consuming those who dared to offer incense in place of Aharon, would impress the

historical psyche of Israel, as to be wary of Korach's imitators through the ages.

There is an adage in Jewish life that one should always respect others but also be wary of their true motives. Only regarding Moshe does the Torah testify that as the true servant of God, he is above criticism and suspicion. But ordinary mortals have ordinary failings and self-interest is one of those failings. Moshe is true and his Torah is true. After that, no matter how fetching the slogan or how glorious the promise, caution and wariness about the person and cause being advocated are the proper attitudes to embrace.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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Parshas Korach

A Perception of Uncaring Leadership Fueled Korach's Rebellion

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1298 – The Shul That Did Not Say Tachanun By Mistake; Now What? and Other Tachanun Issues. Good Shabbos!

There is a dispute among the Rishonim as to when exactly the story of Korach transpired. The Torah places it after Parshas Shelach, immediately following the gezeyra (heavenly decree) that Bnei Yisrael must wander in the desert for forty years as a punishment for the incident of the meraglim (spies). The Ibn Ezra holds that this parsha is not placed in its correct sequential order, and the story of Korach actually happened prior to the incident of the meraglim.

There is a certain logic behind the Ibn Ezra's theory. Chazal say that Korach was motivated to start his rebellion by jealousy over the appointment of Elitzafon ben Uziel as the nasi of Shevet Levi. Korach resented a perceived slight on the part of Moshe Rabbeinu. Korach figured that there were four sons of Levi. Amram (the father of Moshe and Aharon) was the oldest. Yitzhar (the father of Korach) was the second son. Chevron was the third son. Uziel (the father of Elitzafon) was the youngest of the four brothers.

Rashi notes that Korach was willing to accept that Moshe was the "king" and Aharon was the "Kohen Gadol" (High Priest), because they were both sons of Levi's eldest son. However, Korach, who did not recognize that the appointment of Elitzafon as nasi was by the word of Hashem, felt that he deserved the next honorific appointment, owing to the fact that he was the next oldest cousin in the family! This is what irked Korach and prompted him to lead his rebellion against Moshe and Aharon.

Based on the fact that Elitzafon's appointment happened at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, it makes a lot of sense to suggest that Korach's rebellion occurred prior to the story in Parshas Shelach. Why would Korach suddenly start his rebellion now after Parshas Shelach?

There is a very important Ramban that addresses this question. The Ramban writes that up until this point, Moshe Rabbeinu was able to ride out any crises that developed in leading the nation. Even after the aveira (sin) of the Eigel Hazahav (Golden Calf), Moshe was able to pray for the nation and acquire Divine forgiveness. He writes that Moshe achieved extreme popularity amongst the people and they would not countenance any challenge to his leadership. The people loved Moshe Rabbeinu and would stone any person who attempted to question their beloved leader.

According to the Ramban, Korach suffered in silence while Moshe's popularity was at its peak. Korach "kept his powder dry" so to speak. However, when they arrived at Midbar Paran, things started falling apart. People were burned by fire at Taveirah and there were many deaths at Kivros haTa'avah. After the aveira of the meraglim, Moshe did not even pray for forgiveness and was unable to cancel the Heavenly Decree. At this point, the people's spirit plunged and they had complaints about their leader. Korach felt that this was the time to make his move. He thought that now the people would listen to his message of rebellion.

This Ramban sheds light on another Rashi. Rashi comments that Korach was a pikayach (clever person). Where do we see that Korach was so clever? I believe we see it because a fool "rushes in." A fool has no patience. An idea pops into his head and he immediately wants to implement it, whether the time is ripe or not. The ability for a person to bide his time and pick the right moment and the right spot to make a move requires wisdom and cleverness. However, it is surprising that this Ramban writes that Moshe Rabbeinu did not pray for the people after the decree of death in the wilderness for the generation that accepted the evil report of the meraglim. This statement seems to be refuted by explicit pesukim in Parshas Shelach (Bamidbar 14:13-19). In fact, Hashem responded to Moshe: "...I have forgiven according to your words." (Bamidbar 14:20). So what does the Ramban mean that Moshe did not pray for them after the sin of the meraglim? The Ramban clarifies his intention: Moshe Rabbeinu was, in effect, able to get the punishment decree for the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav nullified. "...On the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them." (Shemos 32:34). While the Ribono shel Olam did, in effect, leave that aveira on the back burner, His original threat of total annihilation was withdrawn. However, by the aveira of the meraglim, the Ramban writes: "Perhaps Moshe knew that the decree was stretched out against them and would never be rescinded." Moshe understood that the best he

could accomplish was to mitigate Hashem's decree of wiping out the entire nation right then, followed by rebuilding Klal Yisrael just from Moshe Rabbeinu and his descendants. Moshe did accomplish getting rescinded the decree for the nation to be wiped out immediately. It took forty years for that generation to die out, but at least the following generation was permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael.

The people, however, did not realize all this. They thought that Moshe Rabbeinu had supreme powers of prayer, and that if he would have only davened intensely enough, the entire decree would have been nullified. It must be, they concluded, that Moshe did not daven for them at all. It was this erroneous sentiment that Korach was able to stoke among the discontented in the nation and get them to conclude: If Moshe Rabbeinu won't daven for us, then who needs Moshe Rabbeinu?

There is a great irony here. The people loved Moshe Rabbeinu and had the greatest respect for him. They had so much confidence in him they felt that if he would only have davened, he could have nullified the decree. Therefore, since the decree was not nullified, they concluded he was not using his powers to defend them, and consequently they were ready to depose him from his leadership role.

We can make two observations about this scenario advanced by the Ramban:

First, what happened to hakaras hatov? Moshe Rabbeinu has been with the Jewish people through all their trials and tribulations. He took them out of Mitzraim, brought them across the Yam Suf (Red Sea), and saved them from the aveira of the Eigel Hazahav. And now, because he can't totally gain Divine forgiveness for their grievous aveira, they toss him overboard?

Many years ago, General Motors had a commercial advertisement, which began: "It is uniquely American to ask, 'What have you done for me lately?'" This always bothered me. This attitude may be uniquely American but it is totally an anathema to the fundamental attitudes of Klal Yisrael. When someone has a long track record of service and accomplishment, he should not be instantly tossed for one error, particularly by those who do not understand the full picture of what has transpired.

The second observation: Why did the people turn against Moshe? It is because they came to the conclusion that he did not daven for them, and if he did not daven for them, it must be because he did not care about their fate. They were wrong about Moshe not caring, but they were right that it is a cardinal crime for a Jewish leader not to care about the people. A leader who doesn't care cannot be my leader!

President Theodore Roosevelt once expressed a very important maxim: "People do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care." This is a very powerful rule, basic advice for any rebbi, any rav, for any teacher, and for any person in any educational position. The people, unfortunately, came to the erroneous

conclusion that Moshe Rabbeinu did not care for them anymore. If he doesn't care anymore then he can't be our leader. Therefore, when Korach came and told them it is time for a new leader, they were ready to agree with him.

Egalitarianism Leads to Baseless Hatred

The following observation comes from the Be'er Moshe, the Ozharover Rebbe.

Korach came up with a complaint that has currency in every generation: "For the entire community is holy; so why do you elevate yourselves over the Congregation of Hashem?" (Bamidbar 16:3) The egalitarian refrain "Why are you any better than us" echoes throughout the history of leadership.

The Gemara says (Shabbos 119b) that Yerushalayim was destroyed only because they equated the katan (small) with the gadol (great). The Gemara marshals a pasuk "And the nation will be like the Kohen..." (Yeshayahu 24:2) The Be'er Moshe asks that this Talmudic statement seems to contradict another statement in the Gemara (Yoma 9b) that Yerushalayim was destroyed (in the time of the second Bais Hamikdash) because of baseless hatred (sinas chinam). If the prevailing attitude was that everyone was the same (gadol = katan), then on what basis did they have mutual resentment and hatred?

The Be'er Moshe answers that this question is based on a mistaken premise: It is not true that when you believe everyone is the same that there will not be baseless hatred. To the contrary: When there is a prevailing mindset that everyone is the same, that is when there will be sinas chinam. If everyone is the same "So, why are YOU the leader?"

Sinas chinam and egalitarianism are two sides of the same coin. Why are you the boss, the manhig, the rav, etc? I am as good as you are! The Be'er Moshe brings an example: A person has a body. Every part of the body is important. But not all body parts are the same. Given a choice between losing a pinky and losing one's heart, what would a person choose? The pinky, the finger, and even a leg are not limbs without which life cannot be sustained. However, a person cannot live without a heart or without a brain. We are all one body, and all body parts are working with one goal – to keep the person alive. But there are differences. There is a hierarchy of priority, of importance.

The same is true in Klal Yisrael. Klal Yisrael works because there are levels or categories. Someone who recognizes that there are levels and that there are people who are supposed to lead, realizes that there is a category called talmidei chachomim and there is a category called Kohanim. Not everyone is on the same level and therefore not everyone can be a leader. That is what the Gemara means in Shabbos 119b. The fact that they equated the katan with the gadol generated baseless hatred in Klal Yisrael.

The proof of the matter is the rallying cry of Korach's rebellion: "For the entire nation is holy!" What happened

because of that? There was machlokes. When people are willing to accept the idea that there are leaders and there are followers; people who are supposed to make the decisions and people who are supposed to accept the decisions, then society can function. Otherwise, the outcome is Parshas Korach.

Wisdom Is Required To See the Obvious in Times of Passion

The pasuk lists Korach's co-conspirators: Dassan, Aviram, and Ohn ben Peles of Shevet Reuven. We know what happened to Korach and we know what happened to Dasan and Aviram. But what ever happened to "Ohn ben Peles"? The famous Gemara in Sanhedrin (110a) states that Ohn was saved by his wife. She told him that he had nothing to gain from the fight. Either Moshe would end up remaining as the leader or Korach would become the leader. Either way, Ohn would remain a powerless and uninfluential follower.

Ohn accepted her logic but was hesitant to abandon his promise to join the rebellion. According to the famous Gemara, Mrs. Ohn gave her husband wine to drink, causing him to sleep through the whole "call to battle." The Korach mob came to Ohn's door to summon him to take part in their rebellion. Mrs. Ohn sat in front of the house with her hair uncovered. The mob didn't want to intrude on her privacy, they left and, consequently, she is credited with having saved her husband.

The Talmud relates this incident to the pasuk in Mishlei (14:1) "The wisdom of women built her house..." But, isn't this Gemara being overly generous with the praise it lavishes on the wife of Ohn ben Peles? What type of outstanding "wisdom" did she demonstrate here? She basically just told it to her husband like it is: "It is either Korach or Moshe. You have absolutely nothing to gain in this fight." Where is the great wisdom here?

The answer is that to keep cool and think straight in the time of machlokes, when passions are elevated, requires wisdom. In a time of machlokes, everybody loses it. In argumentative times, everyone becomes emotional. When people are emotional, they don't think straight. A logical thinker with a cool mind, who can overcome the passion of the moment, has great wisdom. Ohn's wife could see the truth in the context of the mob's passion. That is the "Chachmas nashim bansa beisa."

Taking It Personally

KORACH

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

When we read the story of Korach, our attention tends to be focused on the rebels. We don't give as much reflection as we might to the response of Moses. Was it right? Was it wrong? It's a complex story. As the Ramban explains, it is no accident that the Korach rebellion happened in the aftermath of the story of the spies. So long as the people

expected to enter the Promised Land, they stood to lose more than they could gain by challenging Moses' leadership. He had successfully negotiated all obstacles in the past. He was their best hope. But now a whole generation was condemned to die in the wilderness. Now they had nothing to lose. When people have nothing to lose, rebellions happen.

Next, let us examine the constitution of rebels themselves. It's clear from the narrative that they were not a uniform or unified group. The Malbim explains that there were three different groups, each with their own grievance and agenda. First was Korach himself, a cousin to Moses. Moses was the child of Kehat's eldest son, Amram. As the child of Kehat's second son, Yitzhar, Korach felt entitled to the second leadership role, that of High Priest.

Second were Datan and Aviram, who felt that they were entitled to leadership positions as descendants of Reuben, Jacob's firstborn.

Third were the 250 others, described by the Torah as "Princes of the Assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown." Either they felt that they had earned the right to be leaders on meritocratic grounds, or – Ibn Ezra's suggestion – they were firstborns who resented the fact that the role of ministering to God was taken from the firstborn sons and given to the Levites after the sin of the Golden Calf. A coalition of the differently discontented: that is how rebellions tend to start.

What was Moses' reaction to their rebellion? His first response is to propose a simple, decisive test: Let everyone bring an offering of incense, and then let God decide whose to accept. But the derisive, insolent response of Datan and Aviram seems to unnerve him. He turns to God and says:

"Do not accept their offering. I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them."

Num. 16:15

But they had not said that he had. That is the first discordant note.

God then threatens to punish the whole congregation. Moses and Aaron intercede on their behalf. God tells Moses to separate the community from the rebels so that they will not be caught up in the punishment, which Moses does. But he then does something unprecedented. He says:

"This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and suffer the fate of all humankind, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the realm of the dead, then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt."

Num. 16:28-30

This was the only time Moses asked God to punish someone, and the only time he challenged Him to perform a miracle.

God does as Moses asks. Naturally we expect that this will end the rebellion: God has sent an unmistakable sign that Moses was right, the rebels wrong. But it doesn't. Far from ending the rebellion, things now escalate:

The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "You have killed the Lord's people," they said.

Num. 17:6

The people gather around Moses and Aaron as if about to attack them. God starts smiting the people with a plague. Moses tells Aaron to make atonement, and eventually the plague stops. But some 14,700 people have died. Not until a quite different demonstration takes place – when Moses takes twelve rods representing the twelve tribes, and Aaron's buds and blossoms and bears fruit – does the rebellion finally end.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Moses' intervention, challenging God to make the earth swallow his opponents, was a tragic mistake. If so, what kind of mistake was it?

The Harvard leadership expert, Ronald Heifetz, makes the point that it is essential for a leader to distinguish between role and self. A role is a position we hold. The self is who we are. Leadership is a role. It is not an identity. It is not who we are. Therefore a leader should never take an attack on their leadership personally:

It's a common ploy to personalise the debate over issues as a strategy for taking you out of action . . . You want to respond when you are attacked . . . You want to leap into the fray when you are mischaracterised . . . When people attack you personally, the reflexive reaction is to take it personally . . . But being criticised by people you care about is almost always a part of exercising leadership . . . When you take personal attacks personally, you unwittingly conspire in one of the common ways you can be taken out of action – you make yourself the issue.

Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, Harvard Business School Press, 2002, pp. 130, 190-191.

Moses twice takes the rebellion personally. First, he defends himself to God after being insulted by Datan and Aviram. Second, he asks God miraculously and decisively to show that he – Moses – is God's chosen leader. But Moses was not the issue. He had already taken the right course of action in proposing the test of the incense offering. That would have resolved the question. As for the underlying reason that the rebellion was possible at all – the fact that the people were devastated by the knowledge that they would not live to enter the Promised Land – there was nothing Moses could do.

Moses allowed himself to be provoked by Korach's claim, "Why do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?" and by Datan and Aviram's offensive remark, "And now you want to lord it over us!" These were deeply personal attacks, but by taking them as such, Moses allowed his opponents to define the terms of engagement. As a result, the conflict was intensified instead of defused.

It is hard not to see this as the first sign of the failing that would eventually cost Moses his chance of leading the people into the land. When, almost forty years later, he says to the people who complain about the lack of drink, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” (Num. 20:10), he shows the same tendency to personalise the issue (“must we bring you water?”) – but it never was about “we” but about God.

The Torah is devastatingly honest about Moses, as it is about all its heroes. Humans are only human. Even the greatest makes mistakes. In the case of Moses, his greatest strength was also his greatest weakness. His anger at injustice singled him out as a leader in the first place. But he allowed himself to be provoked to anger by the people he led, and it was this, according to Rambam (Eight Chapters, ch. 4), that eventually caused him to forfeit his chance of entering the Land of Israel.

Heifetz writes:

“Receiving anger. . . is a sacred task . . . Taking the heat with grace communicates respect for the pains of change.”

Ibid. pp. 142-146.

After the episode of the spies, Moses faced an almost impossible task. How do you lead a people when they know they will not reach their destination in their lifetime? In the end what stilled the rebellion was the sight of Aaron’s rod, a piece of dry wood, coming to life again, bearing flowers and fruit. Perhaps this was not just about Aaron but about the Israelites themselves. Having thought of themselves as condemned to die in the desert, perhaps they now realised that they too had borne fruit – their children – and it would be they who completed the journey their parents had begun. That, in the end, was their consolation.

Of all the challenges of leadership, not taking criticism personally and staying calm when the people you lead are angry with you, may be the hardest of all. That may be why the Torah says what it does about Moses, the greatest leader who ever lived. It is a way of warning future generations: if at times you are pained by people’s anger, take comfort. So did Moses. But remember the price Moses paid, and stay calm.

Though it may seem otherwise, the anger you face has nothing to do with you as a person and everything to do with what you stand for and represent. Depersonalising attacks is the best way to deal with them. People get angry when leaders cannot magically make harsh reality disappear. Leaders in such circumstances are called on to accept that anger with grace. That truly is a sacred task.

Rectifying the Sin of the Spies

Revivim - Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Achieving stable peace will only be possible if the State of Israel clarifies that when it wins, it will change borders in its favor * We cannot achieve peace and prosperity through

agreements * Returning to the vision of Redemption and settling the Land is also the best way to achieve security and peace * In the first stage, Gaza must be conquered, and full military rule imposed * This should also be the policy in Judea and Samaria: to apply Israeli sovereignty over all Jewish settlements and uninhabited areas

Israel has been dealing with two great challenges from its earliest days, until today: adherence to one God, and its full manifestation in the Land. The ‘Sin of the Golden Calf’ and the ‘Sin of the Spies’. Heaven and earth. When we complete these two challenges, we will merit complete Redemption. This Shabbat, it is appropriate to address the continued rectification of the ‘Sin of the Spies’.

Asymmetry

Our difficult problem is the asymmetry between us and our surrounding enemies. If the Muslims win, God forbid, they will destroy the state, kill many, and enslave the rest. If we win, we will strive to reach a peace agreement with them. In such a situation, the continuation of the war is guaranteed, as it is always worthwhile for them to try to fight, for even if they lose, we will not defeat them – we will not nullify their political existence, we will not expel them, and we will not impose our position and values on them. If they win, they will achieve all their murderous desires.

The only possibility for correcting the asymmetry and achieving stable peace, is for the State of Israel to clarify that when it wins, it will change the internal regime of those who fight against it, change borders in its favor, and as needed – continue to impose its position by force of arms. This applies to Judea and Samaria, Gaza and southern Lebanon, and if necessary – all of Lebanon. This will not be done at once, rather gradually, but we must declare that this is what we will strive for.

The Problem

The problem is that the majority of the Jewish public still hopes it can achieve a peace agreement with the enemy. Another problem – many believe it is immoral for the State of Israel to rule over a hostile population. These two reasons have caused the army and government to lack a plan on how to defeat the enemy, and preserve the fruits of victory.

However, in practice, there is no choice – we cannot achieve peace and prosperity through agreements. Even from a moral standpoint, it is not moral to make agreements with murderous enemies. It is not moral towards us, and not moral towards many Arabs who were willing to live with us in peace, and under the cover of agreements we made with terrorist leaders, became enslaved to cruel rulers.

Learning from World Experience

In World War II, the United States waged an all-out war against Japan. It dropped atomic bombs on it, until the Japanese understood that if they continued to fight, their country would be destroyed, and entire populations would

be exterminated. When they realized this, they surrendered unconditionally. After that, the United States demanded that Japan cancel the previous regime, dictated a democratic constitution to them, and by force of arms, forced them to uphold the constitution, and to this day, there are American military bases in Japan to enforce the surrender agreements. Since then, the United States and Japan have been good friends. Not only that, since then, Japan has achieved economic and social prosperity, and has become one of the leading countries in the world. This is how ideological and value-based positions can be completely changed, and stable peace can be achieved for generations, leading to the prosperity of both sides.

There are additional examples of nations that defeated the vanquished, and were content with not allowing them to strengthen, for example, in Eastern European countries that surrendered to the Soviet Union. This method proved to be less successful, because it did not provide a horizon for the conquered. It did ensure peace, but not prosperity and freedom. As such, the Soviet Union was constantly forced to continue to powerfully impose its influence, and when it disintegrated, the old resentment returned to its place.

The Enemy Can Be Defeated

When the vast majority of the public understands that we must conquer all the territories in which the enemy has established itself and rule them forever, we will see that this is possible, and even easier than managing a conflict without resolution. Then it will become clear that returning to the vision of Redemption, and settling the Land, is also the best way to achieve security and peace.

In the first stage should be to conquer Gaza and impose full military rule. The sparsely populated areas should be expropriated, and full Israeli sovereignty applied to them. At the same time, densely populated areas should be fully controlled in order to eliminate any influence of remnants of the previous regime, fundamentally change educational programs, prohibit all religious incitement, and nurture peace-seeking religious leadership. In the second stage, civilian rule can be transferred to population representatives who will be loyal to the State of Israel.

This should also be the policy in Judea and Samaria, namely, to apply Israeli sovereignty over all Jewish settlements and uninhabited areas. To abolish the Palestinian Authority that incites the entire world against us, and nurtures terrorism economically and ideologically, in order to destroy the State of Israel in the following stage. In its place, impose military rule that will initially manage civilian life as well, in order to change educational programs, and expel all inciters. Afterwards, find positive forces in each area willing to cooperate with our values, and assist them, instead of assisting enemies like the PLO and Hamas. Over the past decades, the State of Israel has assisted the PLO and Hamas with tens of billions of shekels, granted them international status, and enlisted additional countries to assist them. Instead, we should

assist positive forces who are willing to live in civilian autonomy, under our control.

Only during the stage of defeat and establishment, will large military forces need to hold the territory; but following this, it will be possible to continue ruling with small forces, provided they are backed by a firm decision that, from now on, the State of Israel will rule over all territories of the Land of Israel.

The Moral Examination

Even from a moral standpoint, this is much better than what is happening today. A partial example of this can be brought from the Arab population living in the State of Israel. Economically, and in terms of human rights, their situation is superior to that of all Arabs in Arab countries. Most of the problems with them stem from the fact that, unfortunately, we did not demand that they be loyal citizens, with full rights conditional on full obligations, as is demanded, for example, of all Jews in all countries of the world. As a result, among Arab citizens of Israel, there are inciters who exploit our humane position, interpret it as weakness, and succeed in inciting not a few Arabs against us. The weakness of our position towards them is also bad for them. The crime rampant in Arab society is a result of disloyal citizenship. Instead of being grateful to the State of Israel, those inciters prefer to behave like their brothers in neighboring countries, who through an evil interpretation of religious values, manage family and social life with murderous violence, and block positive forces from developing in education, economic, and social initiatives.

The Educational Mission

Unfortunately, Israeli society is not yet ready for this. We must learn a lesson from the bitter experience of decades, and encourage the groups and leaders who advocate these positions, until with God's help, they become the property of the majority, and we can reach a stable, state of peace.

This is a stage in the process of Redemption, in which we need to be redeemed from the consciousness of the 'persecuted minority' in exile, to the consciousness of a majority that aspires to arrange its sovereign life in the most successful way, both in terms of stability, and morality.

We must be redeemed from the consciousness of "we were in our own eyes as grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes," to the consciousness of a sovereign people who strives to liberate its Land, and be sovereign in it. A people that offers the enemy three options: Those who want to make peace – will make peace, and fully accept Israeli sovereignty, with all its values and laws. Those who want to fight – will fight, and know that we will wage an all-out war against them. And those who want to emigrate – will emigrate. And we must not agree to a fourth option – that they remain in the Land as enemies, to be a snare and a trap (Jerusalem Talmud, Sheviit 6:1).

In order for the State of Israel to be able to adopt the correct policy, a large majority of the public needs to be

convinced. In the meantime, we must continue to fight on the front lines to guard our people and our Land, and devote ourselves more to educational and public work. The debate between right and left is tragic – each side thinks the other’s way is disastrous, and nevertheless, we must continue to conduct ourselves together in our war against the enemy. Therefore, value and educational clarifications need to take place, with respect for those with different opinions. However, it can be assumed that, in the end, logic and truth will prevail, and the people of Israel will be able to move on to the next stage of sovereignty and stability in our Land.

Even among the Spies, there were only two who chose correctly, Joshua and Caleb, and because of the majority position, Redemption was delayed. However, after forty years, the people of Israel went with Joshua and Caleb, conquered the Land, and settled in it.

Our Holy Heroic Soldiers

We must draw strength from the heroism of our soldiers. In a complex reality, with severe restrictions, they continue to fight the enemy, and win. Unfortunately, in the streets of Tel Aviv, divisive voices have resurfaced, but in the army, among regular and reserve soldiers, the unity of Israel and mutual responsibility are revealed in an awe-inspiring manner. From all the wonderful stories of self-sacrifice, one can understand that the Divine Presence dwells in the soldiers’ camps, as it is said: “For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp, to deliver you, and to give up your enemies before you” (Deuteronomy 23:15). And the continuation is praise and commandment: “Therefore, shall your camp be holy.” Since they sacrifice their lives to defend God’s people, it is a holy camp.

We will strive to sanctify the camp as much as possible from any moral flaw, from dispute and slander, from vulgarity and mockery, and out of this, we will pray for all our soldiers to return home whole in body and soul, and to merit establishing glorious families in Israel with joy and love, and the many who have already merited establishing families, may they merit to maintain them with joy and happiness, and may they derive pleasure for many days and years.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Parshat Korach: Good and Bad Controversies

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founder and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

“And Korach took...” (Numbers 16:1)

Is controversy a positive or a negative phenomenon? Since the ideal of peace is so fundamental to the Jewish ideal – to such an extent that we even greet and bid farewell to each other with the Hebrew word shalom, peace – I would expect that controversy would be universally condemned by our classical sources. But apparently there is a way to argue and a way not to argue. The Mishna in Avot (Ethics

of the Fathers 5:20) distinguishes between two types of controversy: “A controversy which is for the sake of heaven, like that of Hillel and Shammai, will ultimately continue to exist; a controversy which is not for the sake of heaven, like that of Korach and his cohorts, will not continue to exist.”

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

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

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

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

According to this view, “these and those [conflicting opinions] are the words of the living God,” the Almighty initially and purposefully left many issues of the Oral Tradition open-ended in order to allow for different opinions, each of which may well be correct when viewed from the perspective of the divine. Indeed, the Mishna in Eduyot teaches that the reason our Oral Tradition records the minority as well as the majority opinion is because a later Sanhedrin (Jewish supreme court) can overrule the decision of an earlier Sanhedrin, even though it is not greater than the earlier one in wisdom or in number, as long as there is a minority view recorded on which the later Sanhedrin may rely for its reversal of the earlier decision; and most halakhic decisions rely on a minority decision in cases of stress and emergency (Mishna Eduyot 1:5,

Maimonides and Ra'avad ad loc.). In the world of halakha, minority dissenting views are never nullified; these opinions are also part of the religio-legal landscape, and can become the normative law of the majority at another period in time or for a different and difficult individual situation within the same period.

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

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

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

This great truth was one of the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, who claimed that multiplicity of ideas is actually the key to understanding God's truth: "Scholars increase peace in the world." A multiplicity of peace means that all sides and all views must be considered; then it will be clarified how each one of them has its place, each one in accordance with its value, its place, and its specific issue.... Only through a collection of all parts and all details, all of those ideals which appear to be different, and all disparate professional opinions, only by means of these will the light of truth and righteousness be revealed, and the wisdom of the Lord, and His love, and the light of true Torah." (Ein Ayah, end of Berachot)

Shabbat Shalom

In honor of Shabbos Rosh Chodesh...

Ata Yatzarta – An Unusual Beracha

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: An Unusual Blessing

"Why does Shabbos Rosh Chodesh have a completely different middle beracha rather than simply having a Rosh Chodesh insert in the Shabbos davening, or a Shabbos insert in the Rosh Chodesh davening?"

Question #2: Missing My Chatas

"Why is no korban chatas offered on Shabbos?"

Question #3: Shortchanged Yom Tov

"Why is Rosh Chodesh the only special day mentioned in the Torah that is not a Yom Tov?"

Answer:

When a holiday falls on Shabbos, the tefillah that we recite is usually the regular prayer either of the holiday or of Shabbos, with an addition or additions to include mention of the other special day. For example, when the major Yomim Tovim (Sukkos, Pesach, Shevuos, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) fall on Shabbos, we recite the regular Yom Tov prayer, with added mention of Shabbos in the middle beracha. On the lesser holidays (Chol Hamoed, Rosh Chodesh, Chanukah and Purim), for most tefillos we recite the customary Shabbos prayer and add an extra paragraph, either Yaaleh Veyavo or Al Hanissim, at its appropriate place, to reflect the sanctity of the holiday. On Musaf of Shabbos Chol Hamoed, we recite the Musaf of Yom Tov with added mention of Shabbos in the middle beracha.

Ata Yatzarta -- A special prayer

The one exception to this rule is the Musaf that we recite when Rosh Chodesh falls on Shabbos. On Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, the middle beracha of the Musaf is an entirely new beracha that does not simply combine the elements of the Shabbos Musaf and that of the weekday Rosh Chodesh Musaf. Rather, it includes aspects of the Musaf of Yom Tov, and the prayer includes a unique introduction that appears in no other prayer. Thus, the sum is greater than its parts – the combination of Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh creates a greater kedusha than either has on its own. Explaining this phenomenon is the thrust of this week's essay, but first I need to explain certain themes more thoroughly.

A Review of Rosh Chodesh Musaf

Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and the Yomim Tovim are embellished with a tefillah called Musaf. While each of our three daily tefillos, Shacharis, Mincha, and Maariv corresponds to a part of the service that was performed daily in the Beis Hamikdash (Berachos 26b), Musaf corresponds to the special korbanos described in parshas Pinchas that were offered in the Beis Hamikdash on Shabbos, Rosh Chodesh and holidays.

With this background, we can now begin to examine the unique text of the Shabbos Rosh Chodesh Musaf. As I mentioned above, the central beracha of this tefillah is unusual; it contains aspects of four different themes. The beracha begins with a declaration, *Ata Yatzarta Olamcha Mikkedem*, “You fashioned Your world from the very beginning,” a declaration that certainly reflects the inherent concepts of both Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh; yet, this declaration appears in none of the four regular Shabbos tefillos, nor in the weekday Rosh Chodesh Musaf. This is highly unusual, particularly when we realize that, on all other occasions when Shabbos coincides with another special day, the wording of the prayers always reflects the exact text of either Shabbos or Yom Tov, and never a new version.

The special Musaf beracha then proceeds: *Ahavta osanu veratzisa banu*, “You loved us and desired us,” a text that appears in the Musaf of Yom Tov. Again, this is unusual, since this wording never appears either in the usual Shabbos or in the usual Rosh Chodesh prayers. How does a theme unique to Yom Tov find its way into Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, which is not a Yom Tov?

The next sentence, beginning with the words *Yehi ratzon*, is a text that is common to both the Shabbos and the Yom Tov Musaf prayers, and this passage then introduces the actual korbanos of both Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh. From this point onward, the prayer continues along predictable patterns, blending together the Musaf of a common Shabbos and a weekday Rosh Chodesh into one beracha commemorative of both occasions.

Yismechu Bemalchuscha

Included in the *Ata Yatzarta* prayer is the passage, *Yismechu bemalchuscha shomrei Shabbos*, “Those who observe the Shabbos shall celebrate Your kingship,” a special prayer that the Jewish people will enjoy their celebration of Shabbos as they recognize Hashem’s dominion and beneficence. In Nusach Ashkenaz, this prayer is recited every Shabbos Musaf, even when Shabbos coincides with Yom Tov or Rosh Chodesh. Nusach Sefard includes this passage also in Maariv and Shacharis of Shabbos. (The Avudraham records a custom in some communities not to recite *Yismechu bemalchuscha* in regular Shabbos Musaf and to recite it only on Shabbos Rosh Chodesh. The Avudraham himself disapproves of this practice, and I am unaware of any community that follows this custom today.)

Closing the beracha

Returning to *Ata Yatzarta*, we close this beracha with a text that is standard for the central beracha of all Shabbos and Yom Tov prayers. The conclusion of the middle beracha of Musaf always notes the special features of the day we are celebrating.

Why *Ata Yatzarta*?

At this point, let us address the original question we posed: “Why does Shabbos Rosh Chodesh merit its own special

Musaf prayer, rather than simply having a Rosh Chodesh insert in the Shabbos davening, or a Shabbos insert in the Rosh Chodesh davening?”

To explain why we recite the unique beracha of *Ata Yatzarta*, we need first to understand that each korban Musaf reflects something special about that day. An obvious example is the offering of bulls that is incorporated in the korbanos Musaf of the seven days of Sukkos. Over the seven days of Sukkos, we offer seventy bulls as part of the Musaf in a particular order, beginning with thirteen on the first day and decreasing by one each day until we offer seven on Hoshanah Rabbah, the last day of Sukkos. These seventy bulls correspond to the seventy nations of the Earth who descended from Noah. Thus, one theme of Sukkos is that our korbanos service is to benefit not only the Jewish People, but is for the sake of the world and its entire population.

One unusual goat

The vast majority of korbanos offered as part of the Musaf are korbanos olah, which, Rav Hirsch explains, are to assist in our developing greater alacrity in observing Hashem’s commandments (Commentary to Shemos 27:8). In addition to the many korbanos olah offered as part of the Musaf of Rosh Chodesh and of all Yomim Tovim, there is also always one goat offered as a korban chatas. A chatas is usually translated as a “sin offering” and, indeed, in most instances, its purpose is to atone for specific misdeeds. The offering of a korban chatas on every Yom Tov and Rosh Chodesh provides specific atonement on that day that we cannot accomplish on an ordinary weekday (see Mishnah, Shevuos 2a; also see Vayikra 17:10 and Rashi ad loc.).

The Shabbos Musaf

However, the Musaf offering for Shabbos contains no korban chatas. As a matter of fact, Shabbos is the only special day mentioned by the Torah on which a korban chatas is not offered. Clearly, the purpose of Shabbos is not to atone, but to commemorate the fact that Hashem created the entire world in the six days of Creation and then stepped back. Thus, observing Shabbos is our acknowledgement of Hashem as Creator of the Universe, but the discussion of sin and its atonement is not part of the role of Shabbos.

Uniqueness of Rosh Chodesh

The celebration and role of Rosh Chodesh in our calendar is different from Shabbos or any of the Yomim Tovim. The monthly waning and waxing of the moon that Rosh Chodesh commemorates symbolizes that people occasionally wane and wax in their service of Hashem (Rav Hirsch’s Commentary to Shemos 12:1-2). Although we sometimes falter or are not as devoted to serving Hashem as we should be, we always can and do return to serve Him. Rosh Chodesh is celebrated at the first glimmer after the disappearance of the moon, after one might lose all hope. The reappearance of the first sliver of the new moon brings hope that, just as the moon renews itself, so,

too, we can renew our relationship with Hashem. The chatas offering of Rosh Chodesh, therefore, allows atonement for our shortcomings of the past month, and, at the same time, reminds us to focus on our mission as Hashem's Chosen People.

Uniqueness of the Rosh Chodesh Korban Musaf

While the Musaf of each of the Yomim Tovim also includes a korban chatas, and each Yom Tov therefore includes a concept of judgment and atonement (Mishnah, Rosh Hashanah 16a; Mishnah, Shevuos 2a), the Torah's description of the korban chatas of Rosh Chodesh differs from its description of the korbanos chatas that is offered on the other Yomim Tovim. The chata'os of the other Yomim Tovim are always mentioned immediately after the other Musaf offerings of the day. However, when the Torah teaches about the Musaf of Rosh Chodesh, the Torah first lists the other Musaf offerings, then sums up with the statement, *Zos olas chodesh bechodsho lechodshei hashanah*, "these are the olah offerings of Rosh Chodesh for all the months of the year," as if it has completed the discussion of the Musaf for Rosh Chodesh. Only then does the Torah mention the chatas offering, implying that the chatas of Rosh Chodesh fulfills a unique purpose – almost as if it stands alone.

More significantly, the wording of the chatas of Rosh Chodesh is different from that of the other chatas offerings. Whereas in reference to all the chata'os of Yom Tov the Torah simply says that one should offer a chatas, on Rosh Chodesh the Torah says that one should offer a chatas to Hashem.

The Gemara itself notes this last question and provides a very anomalous answer: Hashem said, this goat is atonement for My decreasing the size of the moon (Shevuos 9a). From here, Chazal derive that the sun and moon were originally created equal in size, and that later Hashem decreased the size of the moon.

This statement sounds sacrilegious – how can one imply that something Hashem did requires atonement?

Indeed, I have seen commentaries say that the explanation of this Gemara is kabbalistic and should be left for those who understand these ideas. Others explain that the korban that the Jews offer on Rosh Chodesh appeases the moon for its stature being decreased (Ritva, Shevuos 9a). What does this mean?

Man's relationship with G-d

This could be understood in the following way: Rav Hirsch (Commentary to Bamidbar 28) explains that the "atonement for decreasing the moon" means that Hashem created man with the ability to sin, and thereby he can create evil and darkness. For, after all, sins committed by human beings are the only evil in the world. Thus, someone might "accuse" Hashem of creating evil, by creating man with the ability to sin. This can be called "decreasing the size of the moon," since the moon's

waning and waxing carries with it the meaning of the waning and waxing of the relationship of man to Hashem.

The message of the chatas of Rosh Chodesh, then, is that man can return to serve Hashem, and that, on the contrary, this was the entire purpose of Creation. In error, someone might have accused Hashem of having brought sin into the world, and therefore decreasing the moon. In reality, man's serving Hashem is the only true praise to Him. The offering of the korban chatas on Rosh Chodesh demonstrates this. Indeed, man is fallible, but when fallible man serves Hashem this demonstrates the truest praise in the world for Him.

Why Rosh Chodesh is not Yom Tov

According to a Midrash, prior to the debacle of the Jews worshipping the Golden Calf, the eigel hazahav, Rosh Chodesh was to have been made into a Yom Tov. Unfortunately, when the Jews worshipped the eigel hazahav, this Yom Tov was taken from them and presented exclusively to the women, who had not worshipped the eigel (Tur, Orach Chayim 417, and Mahalnach commentary ad loc.). The sin of the eigel hazahav demonstrates how low man can fall. This is symbolically represented by the decrease of the moon. As a result of this sin, Rosh Chodesh could not become a Yom Tov, but had to remain a workday.

However, when Shabbos and Rosh Chodesh coincide, no melacha is performed on Rosh Chodesh, so that it can now achieve what it would have accomplished as a Yom Tov. This is the goal of a Shabbos Rosh Chodesh, and for this reason, we include a Yom Tov aspect to our davening.

And not only does Shabbos increase the sanctity of Rosh Chodesh, but Rosh Chodesh increases the sanctity of Shabbos. The Gemara conveys this idea by declaring that the korban Musaf of Shabbos has more sanctity when Shabbos falls on Rosh Chodesh (Zevachim 91a).

The significance of this unusual beracha

Shabbos is our acknowledgement of Hashem as Creator of the Universe, whereas Rosh Chodesh demonstrates the role of mankind as the purpose of the Creation of this world. Since man is the only creation capable of sinning, he is the only one able to make a conscious choice to serve his Maker.

Based on this, we can understand why the coming of Shabbos, which demonstrates the Creation of the universe, together with Rosh Chodesh, which demonstrates man's role in Creation warrants a special beracha and a special declaration -- *Ata Yatzarta, You created the world.*

<https://theyeshiva.net/jewish/item/2486/essay-parshas-korach-where-others-saw-the-end-he-saw-the-beginning?print=1>

Rabbi YY Jacobson

Where Others Saw the End, He Saw the Beginning

In Tribute to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, for His 30th Yartzeit

Jason Bullard

Stop Pounding

Rabbi Sam Wolfson was giving his speech to the Jewish Federation about the "Tragedy of Jewish Assimilation."

Toward the end of his long speech, the Rabbi clapped his hands... waited 10 seconds... and clapped his hands again.

The Audience looked puzzled. The Rabbi then explained that every time he clapped his hands, some Jew married a non-Jew.

Immediately, Morris jumped up from his seat in the audience and shouted, "Nu... So Stop With Your Clapping!"

A Blossoming Staff

It is a baffling story. The portion of Korach tells of the "Test of the Staffs" conducted when people contested Aaron's appointment to the High Priesthood. G-d instructs Moses to take a staff from each tribe, each inscribed with the name of the tribe's leader; Aaron's name was written on the Levite Tribe's staff. The sticks were placed overnight in the Holy of Holies in the Sanctuary. When they were removed the following morning, the entire nation beheld that Aaron's staff had blossomed overnight and bore fruit, demonstrating that Aaron was G-d's choice for High Priest.

In the words of the Torah (Numbers 16):

"And on the following day, Moses came to the Tent of Testimony, and behold, Aaron's staff for the house of Levi had blossomed! It gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds. Moses took out all the staffs from before the Lord, to the children of Israel; they saw, and they took, each man his staff."

What was the meaning of this strange miracle? G-d could have chosen many ways to demonstrate the authenticity of Aaron's position.

What is more, three previous incidents have already proven this very truth: the swallowing of Korach and his fellow rebels who staged a revolt against Moses and Aaron; the burning of the 250 leaders who led the mutiny; and the epidemic that spread among those who accused Moses and Aaron of killing the nation. If these three miracles did not suffice, what would a fourth one possibly achieve? What, then, was the point and message of the blossoming stick?

One answer I heard from my teacher was this: The blossoming of the staff was meant not so much to prove who the high priest is (that was already established by three previous earth-shattering events), but rather to demonstrate what it takes to be chosen as a high priest of G-d, and to explain why it was Aaron was chosen to this position. What are the qualifications required to be a leader?

From Death to Life

Before being severed from the tree, this staff grew, produced leaves, and was full of vitality. But now, severed from its roots, it has become dry and lifeless.

The primary quality of a Kohen Gadol, of a High Priest, of a man of G-d, is his or her ability to transform lifeless sticks into living orchards. The real leader is the person who sees the possibility for growth and life, whereas others see stagnation and lifelessness. The Jewish leader perceives even in a dead stick the potential for rejuvenation.

Let There Be Life

How relevant this story is to our generation.

Following the greatest tragedy ever to have struck our people, the Holocaust, the Jewish world appeared like a lifeless staff. Mounds and mounds of ashes, the only remains of the six million, left a nation devastated to its core. An entire world went up in smoke.

What happened next will one day be told as one of the great acts of reconstruction in the history of mankind. Holocaust survivors and refugees set about rebuilding on new soil the world they had seen go up in the smoke of Auschwitz and Treblinka.

One of the remarkable individuals who spearheaded this revival was the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994), whose 30th yartzeit is this coming Tuesday, the third of Tammuz, July 9. The Rebbe, and other great Jewish sages and leaders from many diverse communities, refused to yield to despair. While others responded to the Holocaust by building memorials, endowing lectureships, convening conferences, and writing books – all vital and noble tributes to create memories of a tree which once lived but was now dead -- the Rebbe urged every person he could touch to bring the stick back to life: to marry and have lots of children, to rebuild Jewish life in every possible way. He built schools, communities, synagogues, Jewish centers, summer camps, and yeshivas, and encouraged and inspired countless Jews to do the same. He opened his heart to an orphaned generation, imbuing it with hope, vision, and determination. He became the most well-known address for scores of activists, rabbis, philanthropists, leaders, influential people, laymen and women from all walks of life – giving them the confidence to reconstruct a shattered universe. He sent out emissaries to virtually every Jewish community in the world to help rekindle the Jewish smile when a vast river of tears threatened to obliterate it.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe urged his beloved people to use the horrors of destruction as an impetus to generate the greatest Jewish renaissance and to create "re-Jew-venation." He gazed at a dead staff and saw in it the potential for new life. His new home, the United States, was a country that until then had dissolved Jewish identity. It was, as they used to say in those days, a "treifene medinah," a non-kosher land. Yet the Rebbe saw the possibility of using American culture as a medium for new forms of Jewish activity, using modern means to spread Yiddishkeit. The Rebbe realized that the secularity of the modern world concealed a deep yearning for spirituality, and he knew how to address

it. Where others saw the crisis of a dead staff, he saw an opportunity for a new wave of renewal and redemption.

Who was the Rebbe? One way to answer this question is this: He has that unique ability to see crisis as opportunity. Where others saw the end, he saw the beginning. Where others saw disintegration, he saw the potential for birthing. It remains one of the most empowering messages for each of us as an individual, and all of us as a collective.

The Phoenix

Rabbi Yehudah Krinsky, one of the Rebbe's secretaries, related the following episode.

"It was around 1973, when the widow of Jacques Lifschitz, the renowned sculptor, had come for a private audience with the Lubavitcher Rebbe, shortly after her husband's sudden passing.

"In the course of her meeting with the Rebbe, she mentioned that when her husband died, he was nearing completion of a massive sculpture of a phoenix in the abstract, a work commissioned by Hadassah Women's Organization for the Hadassah Hospital on Mt. Scopus, in Jerusalem.

"As an artist and sculptor in her own right, she said that she would have liked to complete her husband's work, but, she told the Rebbe, she had been advised by Jewish leaders that the phoenix is a non-Jewish symbol. It could never be placed in Jerusalem!

"I was standing near the door to the Rebbe's office that night, when he called for me and asked that I bring him the book of Job, from his bookshelf, which I did.

"The Rebbe turned to Chapter 29, verse 18, "I shall multiply my days like the Chole."

"And then the Rebbe proceeded to explain to Mrs. Lifschitz the Midrashic commentary on this verse which describes the Chole as a bird that lives for a thousand years, then dies, and is later resurrected from its ashes. Clearly then, a Jewish symbol."

"Mrs. Lifschitz was absolutely delighted. The project was completed soon thereafter."

In his own way, the Rebbe had brought new hope to this broken widow. And in the recurring theme of his life, he did the same for the spirit of the Jewish people, which he raised from the ashes of the Holocaust to a new, invigorated life. He attempted to reenact the "miracle of the blossoming staff" every day of his life with every person he came in contact with.

To Expel or Not to Expel?

Rabbi Berel Baumgarten (d. in 1978) was a Jewish educator in an orthodox religious yeshiva in Brooklyn, NY, before relocating to Buenos Aires. He once wrote a letter to the Rebbe asking for advice. Each Shabbos afternoon, when he would meet up with his students for a study session, one student would walk into the room smelling of cigarette smoke. Clearly, he was smoking on the Shabbos. "His influence may cause his religious class-mates to also cease keeping the Shabbos," Rabbi Baumgarten was

concerned. "Must I expel him from the school, even without clear evidence that he is violating the Shabbos?"

The Rebbe's answer was no more than a scholarly reference: "See Avos Derabi Noson chapter 12." That's it.

Avos Derabi Noson is a Talmudic tractate, an addendum to the Ethics of the Fathers, composed in the 4th century CE by a Talmudic sage known as Reb Nasan Habavli (hence the name Avos Derabi Noson.) I was curious to understand the Rebbe's response. Rabbi Baumgarten was looking for practical advice, and the Rebbe was sending him to an ancient text...

I opened an Avos Derabi Noson to that particular chapter and found a story about Aaron, our very own High Priest of Israel.

Aaron, the sages relate, brought back many Jews from a life of sin to a life of purity. He was the first one in Jewish history to make "baalei teshuvah," to inspire Jews to re-embrace their heritage, faith, and inner spiritual mission. But, unlike today, during Aaron's times to be a sinner you had to be a real no-goodnik. Because the Jews of his generation have seen G-d in His full glory; and to rebel against the Torah way of life was a sign of true betrayal and carelessness.

How then did Aaron do it? He would greet each person warmly. Even a grand sinner would be greeted by Aaron with tremendous grace and love. Aaron would embrace these so-called "Jewish sinners" with endless warmth and respect. The following day when this person would crave to sin, he would ask himself: How will I be able to look Aaron in the eyes after I commit such a serious sin? I am too ashamed. He holds me in such high moral esteem. How can I deceive him and let him down? And this person would abstain from immoral behavior.

He Gave Them Dignity

We come here full circle: Aaron was a leader, a High Priest, because even his staff blossomed. He never gave up on the dried-out sticks. He never looked at someone and said, "This person is a lost cause; he is completely cut off from his tree of any possibility of growth. He is dry, brittle, and lifeless." For Aaron, even dry sticks would blossom and produce fruit.

This is the story related in Avos Derabi Noson. This was the story the Lubavitcher Rebbe wanted Rabbi Berel Baumgarten to study and internalize. Should I expel the child from school was his question; he is, Jewishly speaking, a dried-out and one tough stick!

The response of an Aaron is this: Love him even more. Embrace him with every fiber of your being, open your heart to him, cherish him, and shower him with warmth and affection. Appreciate him, respect him and let him feel that you really care for him. See in him or her that which he or she may not be able to see in themselves at the moment. View him as a great human being, and you know what? He will become just that.

*) The nucleus of this idea was presented by the Lubavitcher Rebbe to a group of young Jewish girls—the graduates of Beis Rivkah High School and counselors of Camp Emunah in the Catskill Mountains, in NY, on Thursday, Parshas Korach, 28 Sivan, 5743, June 9, 1983. Credit to the late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks for his masterful elaboration.

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Korach

Internal Combustion

“Any quarrel,” says the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (5:20) “that is made for the sake of heaven shall, in conclusion, last. However, if the argument has selfish motivation it shall not last.” The Mishnah offers Hillel and Shamai as an example of heavenly opponents. Their arguments will last forever.

On the other hand, Korach and his congregation are the examples given for those whose debate stemmed from egotistical motivations. “Those types of disputes,” says the Mishnah, “are doomed to fail.”

The Mishnah, is of course referring to the episode in this week’s portion. Korach, a first cousin of Moshe, contested the priesthood. He gathered 250 followers, formed a congregation, and openly rebelled against Moshe and Ahron, claiming that Moshe and his brother underhandedly seized both temporal and spiritual leadership. Moshe, in his great humility, offered a solution in which divine intercession would point to the true leader. Korach and his followers were swallowed alive by a miraculous variation of an earthquake.

Yet two questions occur on the Mishnah. By using the expression that, “an argument for the sake of heaven will last,” it seems to show that an ongoing argument is a proof of its sanctity. Shouldn’t it be the opposite?

The other anomaly is that in referring to the kosher argument, the Mishnah refers to the combatants, Hillel and Shamai. Each was on one side of the debate. Yet, in reference to the argument that is labeled as egotistical, it defines the combatants as Korach and his congregation.

Weren’t the combatants Korach and Moshe? Why is the latter part of the Mishnah inconsistent with the former?

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

My first week, I was asked to bless the new month of Iyar, Mevarchim HaChodesh. Then the trouble began. Every Shabbos, a somber prayer, Av HaRachamim, which memorializes Jewish martyrs during the era of the crusades

is recited. On holidays or other festive occasions such as Shabbos Mevarchim, in deference to the spirit of celebration, the prayer is omitted. However, the month of Iyar is considered a sad time for Jews. 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva perished in that period. Many congregations recite Av HaRachamim on Shabbos Mevarchim for the month of Iyar. I assumed my new congregation did the same and began reciting, “Av HaRachamim.” Immediately I heard a shout, and an uproar began.

“We don’t say Av HaRachamim today. We just blessed the new month,” announced the President.

“We say it this month! It’s sefirah, a period of mourning,” yelled back the Vice-President.

” You know nothin’. We never ever say it when we bench (bless) Rosh Chodesh,” yelled the Treasurer.

“We always did!” asserted the Gabbai.

The argument was brewing for five minutes when they all began to smile and instructed me to say the prayer as I had planned. Before I continued the service I sauntered over to the old Shammash who was sitting quietly through the tumult and asked, “what is the minhag (custom) of this shul?”

He surveyed the scene and beamed. “This shul is 100 years old. This is our minhag.”

The Mishnah gives us a litmus test. How does one know when there is validity to an argument? Only when it is an argument that envelops eternity. The arguments of Shamai and Hillel last until today, in the halls and classrooms of Yeshivos and synagogues across the world. Each one’s view was not given for his own personal gain, it was argued for the sake of heaven. However, Korach’s battle with Moshe was one of personal gain. Moshe had no issue with them. It was a battle of Korach and his cohorts. Each with a completely different motivation — himself. It did not last. A battle with divine intent remains eternal. In a healthy environment there is room for healthy differences. And those differences will wax eternal.

Dedicated in honor of the anniversary of Joel & Robbie Martz by Mr. and Mrs. Perry Davis

Mordechai Kamenetzky – Yeshiva of South Shore

Good Shabbos

Parsha Insights

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Korach

Earth-Shattering Occurrences

This week we read the parsha of Korach. “Va’yikach Korach ben Yitzhar ben K’has... v’Dasan va’Aviram... v’On ben Peles... vayakumu lifnei Moshe (And Korach the son of Yitzhar the son of K’has took and Dasan and Aviram and On the son of Peles and they stood before Moshe) [16:1-2].” This first pasuk (verse) seems somewhat strange — it doesn’t tell us what he took!

Rashi explains the words “Va’yikach Korach” not to mean ‘and Korach took’ but rather, that ‘he took Korach’. Who took Korach? Korach did. He took himself. He removed himself from being part of the group of Klal Yisroel and he stood before Moshe to contend with him.

What was bothering Korach? He was jealous of the positions of honor that Moshe had given to others. In order to understand this, we need to have some family background. K’has, Korach’s grandfather was one of Levi’s three sons. He in turn had four sons of his own. Amram, his eldest, gave birth to Moshe and Aharon. Yitzhar, the second, was the father of Korach. His third and fourth sons were Chevron and Uziel.

Korach was jealous that the position of Kohen gadol (high Priest) had been given to Aharon and not to him. However, he couldn’t rightfully contest that appointment. Aharon’s father was Amram, the b’chor (firstborn). His father was Yitzhar, the second son. Aharon clearly had precedence over him. He bore this jealousy quietly until he felt that he had valid grounds to contest an appointment made by Moshe. At that point, he tried to contest all of the appointments that Moshe had made.

His opportunity came during our second year out of Mitzraim (Egypt). Moshe, as directed by Hashem, had appointed Elitzafon, the son of Uziel, K’has’ youngest son, to be the Nasi (leader) of the K’has family. At that point Korach exploded. “My father was one of four brothers. Amram, the eldest, his two sons took positions of leadership. Moshe, you are the king and your brother Aharon is the Kohen gadol. Who should be the Nasi? I, Korach, the son of the second son, Yitzhar. I deserve to be the Nasi. And you went and appointed Elitzafon, the son of the youngest brother, to be Nasi?! I don’t accept the validity of any of your appointments!”

We discussed last week how the lust for honor blinds a person’s perception. This week we see the disastrous effects of jealousy. As a single grain of sand shuts down the effectiveness of the whole eye, even a tinge of jealousy brings an intellectual blindness to the way we perceive a situation.

“Is it a small thing that Hashem has separated you from the rest of Yisroel to serve in the Mishkan (as Levites)? [16:9]”, Moshe said to them. Every person is unique, with unique contributions to make to this world. Each individual is given what is necessary in order to make those contributions. I have what I need and I need what I have. When the world is viewed in such a way, there is no place for jealousy.

My oldest son is graduating elementary school this year. I attended a meeting with the Rosh Yeshiva (dean) of a local Yeshiva high school. He discussed how he loathes when parents asks how their son is doing relative to the rest of the class. The question must be how the child is doing relative to himself...

People spend so much time and energy thinking ‘what will be if’, when that same time and energy would be much more effectively focused toward ‘what can I best do with what I have’. My wife and I are blessed with six children, first five boys and then a girl. At times when the house can get a bit hectic, we envisage how much quiet time we’ll have to spend together when the children all get older. We very quickly catch ourselves and remind each other that at that time, we’ll sit and reminisce how great and exciting it was with all of the kids around.

The Yeshiva where I teach just ended its academic year. Toward the end, many boys find it hard to apply themselves as they’re so excited about returning home after having been in Israel for the year. I try to remind them that when they’re back home, they’ll be reminiscing about how great it was being in Yeshiva and having all of the guys around. The time here is spent thinking about being there, and the time there is spent thinking about being here...

In the Mishna (Avos 2:17) Rabi Yosi teaches: the property of your friend should be as dear to you as your own. Besides the obvious message, there are those who learn an additional point. His property should be as dear to you as your own but not more dear! So often, when someone else has it, it seems so great. I must have the same thing. Once we do have it, it seems to lose its luster. His property should be as dear as our own and our own as dear as his. We must appreciate what we have and where we are.

The story is told of a stonecutter who would hew stones from the mountain. “Ping, ping”, was the sound of his pick against the hard stone. “Why must I break my back to feed myself and my family?”, he would bemoan his fate. “Others have such an easy life and for me it’s so hard.”

One day, as he was perched on the mountain, hammering his pick into its crevices, he heard a loud commotion coming from down below. The king and his entourage were passing by and a throng of people had gathered to see their king. The king looked so splendid in his royal robes, sitting in the royal coach drawn by elegant white horses.

“I wish I was the king”, mused the stonecutter, and ~~poof~~ he suddenly found himself sitting in the royal coach with crowds of admirers straining to get a look at him. “Ah, this is the life, I’m the king, the most powerful in all of the world!”, he thought.

After a while he started to feel very uncomfortable. The sun was beating down on him and his royal polyester outfit. Being king was starting to lose its luster. He realized that the king was not as powerful as he had thought. Even the king was powerless before the sun.

“I want to be the most powerful, I want to be the sun”, he thought, and ~~poof~~ he was radiating light and warmth to the entire world. “Ah, this is the life, I’m the sun, the most powerful in all of the world.”

He sat there majestically, directed his rays here and there at will. Suddenly, a group of clouds moved beneath him, obstructing his light. He focused his energy as hard as he

could, but he couldn't pierce the clouds. He realized that the sun was not as powerful as he had thought. Even the sun was powerless before the clouds.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be the clouds", he thought, and ~poof~ he was dumping rain wherever he wished, haughtily blocking the sun's rays. "Ah, this is the life, I'm the clouds, the most powerful in all of the world."

He floated about enjoying the view when suddenly, he found himself being blown by a strong gust of wind. He quickly realized that he was no longer in control and was at the mercy of the wind. The clouds were not as powerful as he had thought. Even the clouds were powerless before the winds.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be the wind", he thought, and ~poof~ he was churning waves in the ocean and blowing off hats in the city. "Ah, this is the life, I'm the wind, the most powerful in all of the world."

He flew and blew at will — nothing stood in his way — and felt his awesome power. Suddenly, he came across a mountain. Try as he might, he had to go around the mountain — it could not be moved. The wind was not as powerful as he had thought. Even the wind was powerless before the mountain.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be the mountain", he thought, and ~poof~ he stood majestically with his peak transcending the clouds. "Ah, this is the life, I'm the mountain, the most powerful in all of the world."

As he sat there in his splendor, he suddenly felt a sharp pain in his shoulder. "Ping, ping", was the sound of the stonemason's pick against his stone. The pain was unbearable. The mountain was not as powerful as he had thought. It stood powerless before the stonemason.

"I want to be the most powerful, I want to be a stonemason", he thought, and ~poof~ he was perched on the mountain, hammering his pick into its crevices...

Good Shabbos,
Yisroel Ciner

This is dedicated to the memory and z'chus (merit) of my sister, Devorah Pesel bas Asher Chaim, a"h, whose yahrtzeit was the thirtieth of Sivan. Though it is beyond our comprehension, she in her short lifetime accomplished what she needed to accomplish. At that exact moment, her neshama (soul) returned to its true place.

Blood libels, then and now

Medieval antisemites believed awful things about Jews and that gave them license to do awful things to Jews.

The same is true today.

Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz

Rabbi Chaim Steinmetz is the Senior Rabbi of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York.

This past Wednesday was the 20th of Sivan, which was once a fast day that commemorated the first violent blood

libel. (The Vaad Arba Aratzot later redesignated it to commemorate the Cossack massacres of 1648-1649.)

In 1144, 12-year-old William of Norwich was found murdered. In 1149, a Knight named Simon, on trial for murdering Eleazar, a wealthy Jew to whom he owed money, claimed in his defense that Eleazar and the Jewish community had murdered William as an act of ritual murder.

The defense won the case.

A local monk, Thomas of Monmouth, then published a book about the supposed "murder" of William of Norwich. He claimed that Jews engage in the ritual murder of Christian children in order to return to Israel. He wrote:

"As a proof of the truth and credibility of the matter we now adduce something which we have heard from the lips of Theobald, who was once a Jew and afterwards a monk. He verily told us that in the ancient writings of his fathers, it was written that the Jews, without the shedding of human blood, could neither obtain their freedom nor could they ever return to their fatherland. Hence it was laid down by them in ancient times that every year they must sacrifice a Christian in some part of the world to the Most High God in scorn and contempt of Christ so they might avenge their sufferings on Him; inasmuch as it was because of Christ's death that they had been shut out from their own country and were in exile as slaves in a foreign land."

Thomas of Monmouth's blood libel circulated through Europe for nearly two decades. Then, in 1171, it became deadly. In Blois, France, a Jew and a Christian brought their horses to drink from the river. The Jew dropped an untanned hide and the horse of the Christian jumped. The Christian then claimed that the Jew had dropped a murdered baby into the river.

Count Thibault, the local ruler (and brother-in-law of the French King Louis VII) claimed that the Jewish community had committed a ritual murder. The judicial proceedings, which were based on a bizarre trial by ordeal, found the Jews guilty, even without a body or an alleged victim.

And 32 Jews were burned at the stake.

Rabbeinu Yaakov Tam, the great rabbinic leader and grandson of Rashi, then declared the 20th of Sivan a fast day. (He was 71 at the time and died a few weeks later.)

Declaring a new fast for the murdered in Blois was a major statement. No fast had been declared for the First and Second Crusades, which resulted in thousands of deaths. Rabbeinu Tam himself nearly died in the Second Crusade, but he realized that what happened in Blois was even worse. He recognized that the blood libel was a lethal form of propaganda and would cause centuries of trouble. And he was right.

E.M. Rose wrote an exceptional book on this topic, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*. She explained that the blood libel was unique in several ways.

First, it was a theory that originated and was embraced among the educated elite, not just the unwashed masses. She wrote: “This supposed ‘irrational,’ ‘bizarre,’ ‘literary trope’ was the product of lucid, cogent arguments, thoughtfully and carefully debated in executive councils, judged in detail by sober men who were not reacting under pressure to thoughtless mob violence.”

The original blood libel started with the intelligentsia and became well-accepted.

A second element she points out is that the blood libel put every Jew on trial: “Jewish identity was on trial, rather than any single individual perpetrator.”

Every Jew was guilty until proven innocent.

The 20th of Sivan is sadly once again an important date in 2024. Once again, Israel is guilty until proven innocent. Even a hostage rescue is immediately treated as a wanton massacre of innocent civilians until Israel provides video evidence to the contrary.

Once again, leading the charge against Israel are some well-educated people—professors and students at elite universities who, in their hatred of Israel, are eager to support a group of fanatical, depraved murderers. And like Thomas of Monmouth, the testimony of individual Jews, no matter how tainted, is taken to support horrific falsehoods.

Korach One word says it all.

Chief Rabbi Mirvis

Every single word of our Torah is sacred, and they all impart such beautiful, enduring messages.

But, so very often, the very beginning of a Parsha, imparts to us a crucial lesson for life – and this is so true of Parshat Korach.

The opening word of Korach actually encapsulates the whole reason why everything went wrong.

What is that opening word? ‘Vayikach’ – ‘he (Korach) took’. What it means in that context is that Korach took himself aside, he separated himself from others and he contended with Moshe and Aharon, challenging their leadership.

This led to a split in the nation. It was horrific. It was tantamount to a brief civil war and as a result, Korach and his followers suffered an awful death. But what was at the root of this machloket, this conflict?

For Korach it wasn’t a ‘machloket L’shem Shamayim’ – it was not for the sake of heaven, it was for the sake of himself. ‘Vayikach’ – he wanted to take power, importance, yichus, significance, wealth.

It was all self-serving, not a single element of his leadership had the welfare or the future of the nation in mind. I think it happens quite often that leaders of all sorts have big egos.

It shouldn’t really be the case, but even where there’s a big ego, one still needs to be in a position of authority and leadership, for the sake of those whom one is serving. In the event that there is a leader, who is in their position exclusively for their own sake – not only will the leader be in trouble, but the entire people will be. Shabbat Shalom.

Korach: Separating and Connecting

Rav Kook Torah

“The entire congregation is holy, and God is with them. Why do you raise yourselves over God’s community?” (Num. 16:3)

This was the battle cry of Korach’s rebellion — a complaint that, at first glance, seems perfectly justified. Did not the entire people hear God speak at Sinai? It would seem that Korach was only paraphrasing what God Himself told Moses: “Speak to the entire community of Israel and tell them: you shall be holy, for I, your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2).

Why indeed should only the Levites and the kohanim serve in the Temple? Why not open up the service of God to the entire nation?

Havdalah and Chibur

In our individual lives, and in society and the nation as a whole, we find two general principles at work. This first is havdalah, meaning ‘withdrawal’ or ‘separation.’ The second is chibur, meaning ‘connection’ or ‘belonging.’

These are contradictory traits, yet we need both. This is most evident on the individual level. In order to reflect on our thoughts and feelings, we need privacy. To develop and clarify ideas, we need solitude. To attain our spiritual aspirations, we need to withdraw within our inner selves.

Only by separating from society can we achieve these goals. The distracting company of others robs us of seclusion’s lofty gifts. It restricts and diminishes the creative flow from our inner wellspring of purity and joy.

This same principle applies to the nation as a whole. In order for the Jewish people to actualize their spiritual potential, they require havdalah from the other nations — as “a nation that dwells alone” (Num. 23:9).

Similarly, within the Jewish people it is necessary to separate the tribe of Levi — and within Levi, the kohanim — from the rest of the nation. These groups have special obligations and responsibilities, a reflection of their inner character and purpose.

Separation in Order to Connect

Yet separation is not a goal in and of itself. Within the depths of havdalah lies the hidden objective of chibur: being part of the whole and influencing it. The isolated forces will provide a positive impact on the whole, enabling a qualitative advance in holiness. These forces specialize in developing talents and ideas that, as they spread, become a source of blessing for all. As they

establish their unique traits and paths, life itself progresses and acquires purpose.

We find this theme of havdalah/chibur on many levels. The human race is separate from all other species of life. Through this havdalah, humanity is able to elevate itself and attain a comprehensive quality that encompasses the elevation of the entire world. The Jewish people are separate from the other nations; this separateness enables them to act as a catalyst to elevate all of humanity, to function as a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6).

The tribe of Levi is separated from the rest of the nation through their special responsibilities; this distinction ennobles the members of the tribe to fulfill their unique role. The Levites sanctify themselves and become a blessing for the entire nation. And the kohanim, with their special holiness, are elevated until they draw forth ruach hakodesh (prophetic inspiration) for the benefit of the entire nation, thus actualizing the nation’s highest spiritual abilities.

The Correct Order

Now we may understand the source of Korach’s error. The Zohar (Mishpatim 95a) teaches:

“The Sitra Achra [literally, the ‘Other Side’ — the forces of evil] begins with chibur [connection] and ends with pirud [division]. But the Sitra deKedushah (‘Side of Holiness’) begins with pirud and ends with chibur.”

The correct path, the path of holiness, follows the order of first separating and then connecting. In other words, the separation is for the sake of connection. But Korach’s philosophy (and similar ideologies, such as communism) took the opposite approach. He sought a simplistic inclusiveness of all, binding all people into one uniform group from the outset. He boastfully claimed to unite all together — “The entire congregation is holy.” This approach, however, replaces the splendor of diversity with dull uniformity. In the end, this totalitarian approach leads to disunity, as all parts yearn to break apart in order to express their unique individuality. “The Sitra Achra begins with chibur and ends with pirud.”

DON'T LET THEM SUFFER IN SILENCE: PTSD AND THE IDF

BY RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG

Visits to Israel used to be highlighted by sitting at the Kotel, going on tiyulim up north, shopping in the shuk, and eating shwarma throughout the country. For my past five visits since Simchas Torah, however, they have included something I had never done before: spending time at Tel HaShomer hospital visiting injured soldiers. Each time, we came to give chizuk, the bring good and positive energy, gifts, love, support, and boundless gratitude. Each time we left having in fact received the chizuk, in awe of young

men missing limbs, battling wounds, forming what will be everlasting scars.

On my trip to Israel this week I visited Tel HaShomer again, but this time to a unit I hadn’t been to previously and to visit soldiers with injuries that while certainly severe, are altogether different from what I had previously seen. Indeed, they are not visible at all.

In addition to IDF soldiers in my family and our community, I have developed a relationship with several heroic soldiers over our visits the last nine months. A reservist who was full of life, energy, love, tenacity and faith when I met him, someone I have sung and danced with on his base, called me to say he is suffering and struggling. For the last couple of months, he has been crying and sobbing uncontrollably, having panic attacks, and feels filled with uncharacteristic anger and rage. He hasn’t slept or eaten properly. He is struggling at work and in his personal life. At the bris of his son, as he held the baby, he was suddenly transported back to his duties at the very beginning of the war and was shaken by the feeling that he was holding a dead body rather than his living newborn son.

I visited him at Tel HaShomer where he had been admitted to the psychiatric ward with a diagnosis of PTSD. Once known as Shell Shock, Soldier’s Heart or Battle Fatigue, the condition we now know as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) affects countless veterans of war. When I saw him, he was a shell of himself, a shadow of the person I first met. He was in pain from his condition, but he was also suffering from deep shame and embarrassment. He hadn’t shared with others, including those with whom he is very close, where he was or why. The unit he is in is filled with soldiers suffering with PTSD, most of whom battle it with shame and embarrassment. Many have turned to alcohol or drugs to numb them from the pain and emptiness. PTSD impacts not only the one diagnosed with it but their spouse, children, and entire family.

I asked him, if you God forbid had an injury to a limb or organ, if in this war you were shot, or physically wounded, would you keep it to yourself? Would there be any shame or disgrace associated with your hospitalization or recovery? You would be a gibor, a hero of our people, deserving of endless support and boundless gratitude.

Why should it be any different just because your wounds are invisible to the naked eye? They are no more your fault, no more a source of shame, no less deserving of love, support, care, and recognition. Don’t feel obligated to share or tell others, I told him, but if you would benefit from love and support and the only reason you are keeping it to yourself is fear of stigma, I beg you to reconsider. He told me that unfortunately, it is simply not the way others see it for now and so he feels has no choice but to do it this way.

I called his wife, whom we have come to know as well. She is home caring for their young children by herself. I

begged, let me arrange with your community to provide meals, to help with childcare, to be a source of support during his recovery from an injury sustained while fighting in the Jewish people's war. Isn't that exactly what we would do if a heroic soldier was physically injured, recuperating in the hospital and the family needed help? She appreciated the concern but said that sadly, that isn't the way others see it and so she has no choice but to deal with this privately.

My heart broke not only from what they are going through in dealing with his trauma, injury, and wounds but how their pain and agony is compounded by the loneliness with which they are experiencing it.

My young friends are far from alone. In the two months following October 7, an alarming 8,000 soldiers reported experiencing trauma. Recently, researchers from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Columbia University, Shalvata Mental Health Center in Hod Hasharon, and the Effective Altruism organization, published a study that predicts that 520,000 — or 5.3 percent of the Israeli population — could develop PTSD as a result of October 7 and Israel's ongoing war.

Prof. Yair Bar-Haim, head of the National Center for Traumatic Stress and Resilience at Tel Aviv University, believes a more realistic number is 30,000 new cases of PTSD among Israelis as a result of the October 7 terror attacks and the war.

Historically, Israeli soldiers have much lower rates of PTSD than other countries. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 30 percent of Vietnam veterans have had PTSD at some point in their lifetime. As much as 20 percent of veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom or Enduring Freedom have PTSD. A variety of reasons have been suggested such as Israel having a civilian army, the whole country being exposed to terror, the visibility of soldiers in society regularly, and more.

Whatever the true number of PTSD cases in Israel as a result of October 7 and the war, it is startling and is going to need tremendous treatment and support. The Jewish

community responded swiftly and generously to help our heroic soldiers with equipment and supplies when the war began. But what will be needed next can't get packed in a duffle bag and doesn't get served at a barbecue.

In Israel and abroad we must recognize that invisible injuries are just as real as physical ones. We must work to eliminate the stigma of mental and emotional illness and to create a culture and condition in which there is no shame or embarrassment and in which the community responds with love and support.

My friend in Tel HaShomer shared with me: "A person like me suffering from PTSD doesn't want people to look at them and treat them with pity and doesn't want them asking all the time how I am and why I look upset or why I am not smiling. Just understand that they are going through a hard time and be there if they need."

Paid leave must be granted from work for those recovering from PTSD or mental illness, just as they would for those physically injured. Meals, childcare, financial help must be given for those with invisible wounds, just like they would for the family of a physically wounded soldier. Massive contributions must be collected to provide treatment and support for those recovering from PTSD. The names of soldiers and civilians struggling with PTSD or mental illness should without shame or stigma be included on Tehillim lists and added to MiShebeirachs. And people must be sensitive to this very real condition, and not minimize it by using the term to describe what it feels like when they were stuck in traffic or when Starbucks messed up their order.

As Israel is still fighting the longest war in its history, the risk of fatigue setting in is real and concerning. When it comes to the mental health and wellness of our soldiers and brothers and sisters, we may just be at the beginning. May my dear friend whom I truly love, together with all those needing physical, mental and emotional refuah shleimas, have a speedy, painless and complete recovery.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל