

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd he (Moshe) spoke to Korach and to the group he had gathered” (Bamidbar 16:5). There were actually three sub-groups whom Korach had convinced to band together with the claim that Moshe had done things on his own (to which G-d had acquiesced) rather than having been commanded to do so by G-d. Korach himself wanted to be the Kohain Gadol (High Priest) instead of Moshe's brother, Aharon, and persuaded his fellow Levi'im that they should have been Kohanim - performing the actual service in the Temple - and not "just" Levi'im, whose role was greater than the rest of the nation (i.e. singing during the service) but not as directly involved with the Temple service as the Kohanim. He persuaded the Tribe of Reuvain that they should be considered the "firstborn Tribe," entitled to a double portion in the Land of Israel, rather than Yosef, who had been split into Ephraim and Menashe, suggesting that Moshe only kept things as they were because his main disciple, Yehoshua, was from Yosef. And he convinced the first-born that it was Moshe's idea to take the service away from them and give it to his own Tribe, the Levi'im.

Nevertheless, from the context of the "speech" Moshe gave to Korach's group, it is evident that he was only addressing two of these groups. "This is what you shall do: take for yourselves fire pans - Korach and his group - and put fire in them and place incense on them before G-d" (16:6-7). No one from the Tribe of Reuvain claimed that they should perform the service in the Temple, so bringing the incense and seeing whether G-d accepted it (or struck them down for bringing it) was not an appropriate or relevant way of determining whether their claim had any merit. The other groups, though, were claiming that they should be performing the service (which the firstborn had originally done until either Mt. Sinai or the Mishkan, see Zevachim 115b), so having them offer incense would be pertinent to their claim. It was these two groups - the Levi'im that wanted even more and the first-born that wanted to regain their earlier status - to whom Moshe presented the "incense" challenge.

It's puzzling, then, that Moshe ended this challenge with the admonition that "you Levi'im have enough" (16:7), since the firstborn from the other 11 Tribes were also being addressed! Why would Moshe

only address one of the two groups - but not the other - in his conclusion? Especially since he would, in the very next verse, begin a new address specifically to the Levi'im, taking them to task for not appreciating the status they had already been given.

If we examine Korach's claim that he should be the Kohain Gadol instead of Aharon, his selfishness becomes readily apparent. After the Mishkan was built, G-d's presence didn't rest on it until after Aharon started performing the service. Even if Korach thought that the same thing would have occurred had he been the Kohain Gadol, the end result would have been the same - G-d showing the nation that He had forgiven them for the "golden calf." What could possibly be gained by having Korach be the Kohain Gadol instead of Aharon? Nothing - for the nation, or for anybody - except for Korach's own status. Since his whole position was based on the notion that the entire nation - each individual member - was holy, and that Moshe and Aharon were no closer to G-d than he, or they, were, he couldn't even claim that his desire to be the Kohain Gadol stemmed from a desire to become closer to G-d! Korach was fighting for something that would produce no positive results for anybody!

The Levi'im, who joined Korach in the hopes that they would become Kohanim, were asking for a similar no-net-gain change. The Kohanim were performing the service in the Mishkan without any backlog due to a labor shortage. The Levi'im were personally involved in helping things run smoothly, but wanted to be involved on a higher level. But what, besides their personal status, would have been gained if they were? G-d's presence was already there, and all the necessary services were being performed! Although not as obviously selfish as Korach, those Levi'im that sided with him shared in their desire to become Kohanim even if doing so wouldn't add any additional spirituality to the world.

Now let's look at the firstborn. Until the Kohanim took over, the spiritual leaders were part of each Tribe, and many families (whichever ones had a firstborn son) had a leader from their own household. Sure, by switching the spiritual leadership to just one Tribe (Levi), dedicated solely to spiritual growth, they were able to reach levels that lone members of a family could not reach. Especially if those that performed the actual service were from the same family (Aharon's). And by implementing a mandatory support system (terumah, ma'aser, matnos kehunah) they were able to

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grow without becoming distracted by having to work the land for food. The first-born, however, even if dedicated to growing spiritually, would have the family property to worry about, as well as being in an environment where his family did not consist only of similarly-dedicated individuals. Nevertheless, it could be argued that the family would be better off (spiritually) if a member was one of the nation's spiritual mentors. In hindsight, we may realize that there is so much more to be gained by having one Tribe, and one family, dedicated to spiritual growth - that each family gains more from their contact (when they brought offerings) with the even-holier Kohain than they would have gotten from their not-as-holy first-born had he been the "Kohain." But at the time this was implemented, it was probably not as obvious. Therefore, when the firstborn asked to once again be the "Kohanim," it wasn't (just) to regain their lost status, but because they thought that their Tribe, and their family, could better serve G-d if they had a family member "in the business."

We know they were wrong, and those that brought an incense offering got burned alive. But the discussion didn't end until Aharon's staff blossomed while none of the other staffs did - proving that G-d chose one Tribe for His service over parts of each of the Tribes. They shouldn't have questioned Moshe, but Korach and his fellow Levi'im were far worse, as they wanted something even though there was nothing to be gained from it spiritually.

Perhaps this is why Moshe singled them out as he finished describing the challenge. The Bechor Shor explains the words not as "you Levi'im have enough," but as "your sin is greater than the others." The Sefornu similarly understands them as "G-d will be angrier with you." The Levi'im and the firstborn made similar claims, but the motivation behind them was not the same. The Levi'im may not have realized that their request was worse, so Moshe tried to help them realize it.

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DR. AVIGDOR BONCHER

What's Bothering Rashi?

“If Hashem will create a creation and the earth will open its mouth and swallow them and all that is theirs and they will descend alive to the grave and

you will know that these men have blasphemed Hashem." (Numbers 16:30)

"But if a creation"-RASHI: "A new one. 'Hashem will create' to slay them by the kind of death by which no man has until now died. And what is this creation? 'And the earth will open wide its mouth' and swallow them. Then 'you shall know that' they 'have provoked' the Holy One, blessed be He, and that I have spoken with the Almighty's authority. Our Rabbis interpret this 'If the mouth of the earth was created during the six days of Creation, fine, but if not. Let Hashem create it [now].'"

A few words of background will help place our verse in its context.

Korach had confronted Moses and Aaron, claiming that they had exploited their power for personal gain. Moses had appointed Aaron, his brother, to become the High Priest and Elitzaphan, son of Uziel, to be the Prince of the Kehat family, passing over Korach who was also a family member. This latter appointment in particular hurt him, since he was sure that this post was coming to him.

Moses was understandably upset by the rebellion against him and his authority. So he decided to make a test to determine, for all to see, ("with this you shall know") whether his decisions were based on G-d's instructions ("that Hashem has sent me") or whether, on the other hand, he had acted on his own ("from my own heart"). The test would be: "If these men die a common death of all men or if they be visited by a visitation of all men, then Hashem has not sent me." Then comes our verse which presents the other side of the equation: If a miracle happens, this would be a sign that Moses acted according to G-d's will ("these men have provoked Hashem").

Now let us look at Rashi's comment. Actually, Rashi himself asks his question openly. What is it?

Rashi asks: "What is the new creation?"

What would you ask about Rashi's question?

A Question: Why does Rashi have to ask this question? Does not the Torah itself say "The earth will open its mouth wide"? This is obviously the new creation.

What is bothering him about this obvious answer?

An Answer: Rashi could not accept that the earth's opening its mouth was the new creation, because the earth had opened its mouth once before. This phenomenon was not a new creation. See Genesis 4:11: "Therefore you are cursed from the ground which opened its mouth wide to receive your brother's blood from your hand." Since Rashi realized that the earth opening its mouth wide alone was not the newly created phenomenon, he had to explain the meaning in a different way.

What was the creation according to Rashi?

An Answer: Rashi says "And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them."

The death by earth-swallowing was the creation that G-d was to create, for no one had ever died this way before.

Notice that Rashi adds the word "az" before the word "viy'datem" meaning "then you will know."

Why does he do this? What does this add to our understanding?

An Answer: By adding the word "then" before the words "you shall know" Rashi shows us that this is a separate and final clause; it is the consequence of Moses passing the test, so to speak. Without Rashi explicitly adding the word "then," I might have read it this way:

"If Hashem will create a creation, (then) these people will be swallowed up, and you will know that they have provoked Hashem." Such an interpretation would mean that the important consequence will be that they will be swallowed up and only secondarily that the people will know that they have provoked G-d. Rashi reads the verse differently. The creation constitutes both the earth opening its mouth as well as the people being swallowed by it.

"Then" comes the ultimate consequence of this miracle—that the people will know that Hashem has been provoked by Korach and his congregation.

What is the significant difference between these two readings? Can you see any difference?

An Answer: The first way of reading the verse places the punishment of the sinners as the primary event; the second way of reading the verse, which is Rashi's way, places the people's knowledge of G-d's being provoked as the main outcome.

It is crucial to notice that Moses places G-d's interest before his own. Moses was personally attacked and affronted by this rebellion. If there would be a dramatic punishment of his enemies by a clearly Divinely directed death, this would emphatically show that Moses was in the right. It certainly would have given him much justified satisfaction. Nevertheless, Moses' main concern was to uphold G-d's glory "then you will know that these men provoked Hashem."

Do you see that Moses doesn't even mention that this miracle would be irrefutable proof that he was sent by G-d? Notice the subtlety of his "death, then Hashem did not send me." But when he presents the other possibility, that there will be a new creation and a miraculous death for the sinners, he does not say "you will know that Hashem sent me." Rather he says "you will know that these men have provoked G-d." Clearly Moses was concerned less about his "correctness" than he was about the honor of G-d. See that Rashi adds "that I have spoken with the Almighty's authority" to Moses' explicit words. Moses didn't actually say these words. Rashi had to add them to remind us of the point that Moses was in fact divinely authorized to act as he did. Moses' modesty prevented him from being so blunt.

This is quite characteristic of Moses' acknowledged modesty and his absolute subservience

to G-d's will. His behavior highlights the great difference between himself and Korach. His behavior is the complete antithesis that of Korach, who thought first and foremost of his own glory. (See Chizkuni, Mizrahi)

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Korah took....” (Numbers: 16:1) Is controversy a positive or a negative occurrence? 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. However, the Mishnah 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 Korah 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 Mishnah refers to one type of controversy as that of Hillel and Shammai, the two antagonists, and the other as that of Korah and his cohorts, rather than Korah and Moses, a parallel structure 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, mahloket: does it mean to divide, (lehalek) or to distinguish (la'asot hiluk), 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 of both positions together!

With this understanding, the initial comment of Rashi on the opening words of this week's Torah portion, "And Korah took," becomes indubitably clear:

"He took himself to the other side to become separated out from the midst of the congregation." Since Korah made a great divide between himself and Moses, the Mishnah in Avot defines his controversy as that of Korah 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 (B.T. Eruvin 13b) describes the disputes between Hillel and Shammai, it decides that "Those and those (both schools) are the words of the living G-d. If so, then why is the normative 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."

According to this view, that "those and those (conflicting opinions) are the words of the living G-d", 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 Mishnah in Eduyot teaches that the reason why our oral tradition records the minority as well as the majority opinion is because a later Sanhedrin (Great Jewish 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 had been 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 (Mishnah, Eduyot 1,5, Rambam and Raavad ad loc). In the world of halakhah, 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. The Talmud likewise powerfully and poignantly confirms the importance of dissenting views in order to challenge and help clarify the alternate opinion. R. Yohanan 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. Yohanan was left distraught and bereft. R. Elazar b. Pedat, a great scholar, tried to comfort R. Yohanan by substituting for Resh Lakish as his learning companion. "Every opinion that R. Yohanan would offer, R. Elazar would confirm with a Tannaitic source. R. Yohanan lashed out, "You are like the son of Lakish? Previously, whenever I would give an opinion, the son of Lakish would ask 24 questions and I would answer him with 24 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. Yohanan 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. Yohanan died" (B.T. Baba Metzia 84a).

This fundamental respect for the challenge of alternative opinions-so basic to the Talmudic mind-is rooted in another Mishnah (B.T. Sanhedrin, Chapter 4, 37a), which sees the greatness of G-d 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 human forms differ, so do human ideas differ." It is precisely in everyone's uniqueness that we see the greatness of the Creator.

And this was one of the great teachings of Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook: "only through a multiplicity of ideas and views can we eventually reach the one great truth which encompasses them all".© 2005 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah shares with us a significant perspective about a Jewish government in Eretz Yisroel. The Jewish people had recently approached the prophet Shmuel requesting the appointment of a king. The prophet acquiesced in their request and transferred the mantle of leadership to the most worthy candidate in Israel, Shaul. Shmuel then proceeded to convey strong words of reprimand to the Jewish people for their request. He reviewed with them his personal service both as judge and prophet and challenged them to find any fault in his faithful service. After they attested to Shmuel's perfect record of leadership he reminded them of Hashem's constant favors securing them with perfect leadership at all times.

Shmuel then said "And now here is the king you requested; behold Hashem has given you a king. If you revere Hashem, serve Him and follow His voice without rebelling you and your king will merit the guidance of Hashem. And if you don't adhere..."(12:14). Malbim understands these passages to convey the following message. If the Jewish people follow closely the path of Torah, Hashem will, in effect, be their leader. But if they don't they will not merit His guidance and will ultimately be severely punished for their wrongdoings.

The prophet continued and stated, "Is it not the harvest season today? I'll call upon Hashem and He will bring heavy rain. You will see and know the great offense you have committed by requesting a king for yourself." (12:17) Shmuel seems to have admonished the Jewish people merely for requesting a king. Why would a request of this nature be considered so wrong? After all, the Torah does allow for a monarch system and dedicates a full section in Parshas Shoftim to the regulations of a Jewish commonwealth? Malbim explains that at the appropriate moment the notion of a Jewish king is certainly acceptable. However, during the lifetime of Shmuel Hanavi a request of this nature was considered a rejection of both himself and the Torah he represented. Shmuel had faithfully served and judged his people with all the perfect standards of the Torah. In Shmuel's eyes, therefore the Jewish people's request represented a rejection of the Torah's perfect judicial system. In addition it reflected a strong desire for the people to establish their own control over the land. Malbim deduces this intent from the marked words of their initial request. They asked,"Now bestow upon us a king to judge us like all the nations." (8:5) He explains that the Jewish people desired to establish their own

judicial system whereby they could have total control over the development of their country. They yearned to be like all other nations whose control over their destiny was per se in their own hands. They no longer wished to subjugate themselves to the dictates of the Torah and be led by secret revelations of Hashem told to His prophets.

Malbim concludes that, in truth, timing was the key factor in this request. Had they waited until the passing of their faithful prophet and judge, Shmuel, their request would have been in line. With his passing a sincere need for direction and leadership would have arisen and the request for a king would have been forthcoming. However, while remaining under the devout leadership of Shmuel their request was sinful and completely unacceptable. It reflected a new direction for the Jewish people and a sincere interest to be released from the tight control of Hashem. Shmuel responded by asking Hashem to display fierce thunderstorms. It was customary during the summer months to spread the fruits of the land on the open fields to dry. During this process rain was certainly untimely and unfavorable. Although rain, in general is definitely a blessing, during certain moments it can be a sign of Hashem's rejection and displeasure. In fact, Chazal teach us that rain during the Sukkos festival is viewed as a sign of rejection. (see Tractate Sukkah 28b) Through this untimely rain and its reflection of rejection, Shmuel informed them that their untimely request for a king was likewise a true sign of rejection.

However Shmuel's response didn't end there. He continued in admonition, "And if you don't adhere to the voice of Hashem but rebel against Him the hand of Hashem will be upon you and your ancestors." Chazal explain this peculiar notion of Hashem's plaguing our ancestors. They profoundly state, "Through the sin of the living the deceased are desecrated." (Yevomos 63b) This means that the sinfulness of an inappropriate government in Eretz Yisroel is so severe that it provokes the desecration of the deceased. Mahral (Chidushei Agados ad loc.) enlightens us about the association of the desecration of the deceased and an inappropriate government in Eretz Yisroel. He explains that from the Torah perspective the desecration of the deceased is regarded as total disorder. After one departs from this world he is entitled to a peaceful and undisturbed rest and the desecration of his remains violates his basic human rights. In this same vein the most basic and appropriate setting for government in Israel is to be governed by the principles of Hashem. After all shouldn't Hashem's will be the law of His land!? It follows that any violation of this and, more specifically, control of the land divorced from His principles is nothing other than total disorder. We now realize that desecration of the deceased, their total disorder is but a natural consequence of a secular, non-religious government in Israel, our total disorder.

At present, the governmental structure in Israel displays some level of respect for the principles of Torah. Let it be the will of Hashem that they be fully recognized in His land and that all disorders amongst the deceased and the living be corrected and perfected speedily in our days. © 2005 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

One of the complaints of Korach's group was because Aharon was chosen for the role of the priesthood. Moshe proposes a way to decide who is right. "Take pans for you, Korach and all his community, put a flame on them, and place incense on them tomorrow. And the one that G-d picks is the holy one." [Bamidbar 16:6-7]. And so, Aharon and Korach's group each came forward with their pans in their hands. The choice was clear. "A flame came from G-d and devoured the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense" [16:35]. However, in view of this clear choice, what happens afterwards, choosing a tribe, seems superfluous. Once again, a miraculous test is performed with the objective of proving who is "the man I will choose" [17:20]. This again ends with the choice of Aharon. "Behold, the staff which grew flowers was that of Aharon, from the tribe of Levi. It grew a blossom, brought forth a bud, and almonds grew on it." [17:23]. Why was it necessary to have two miracles? Wasn't the test of the pans enough to prove that Aharon was chosen by G-d?

Evidently, the two events were different in nature. The affair of the pans showed less about Aharon's greatness than it did about the defective nature of Korach's community. When Moshe introduced the test, at the start of the passage, he did not even mention Aharon. Rather, what he said was, "The one that G-d will pick is the holy one." Only later in the passage Moshe notes that Aharon will also join the test. "Let you and your entire community come before G-d, you and they, and Aharon, tomorrow" [16:16]. Thus, the choice of Aharon is in effect a process of elimination. Aharon's pan is not even mentioned, and evidently nothing at all happened to it. Two hundred and fifty people who offered incense were devoured by a Divine flame, and the fact that Aharon was not harmed showed that he was the chosen one.

However, a choice of this type has an inherent defect. It might emphasize the sin of the others and show that Aharon did not join them, but it does not publicly show that Aharon was picked because of his elevated status. And that is the reason for the second test, using the staff representing each tribe. In this case, it is the other staffs which do not participate in the miracle, while Aharon's staff undergoes a change in essence, a change for the better. It blossoms and fruit grows on it.

This dual nature can be seen symbolically in Aharon's staff, the physical object which was used for the test. Up to that point, the staff was mainly used as a means of punishment, for example, in the plagues in Egypt. It might have been possible to think that the staff can only be an instrument of harm. Now it could be seen that the staff can also be an expression of flowering and growth. The owner of the staff, who is capable of having "a flower bud ('vayatzetz tzitz')" [17:23], is worthy of being the one who represents the nation of Yisrael and asks for mercy for them. "And you shall make a headband ('tzitz') of pure gold... And it will be on Aharon's forehead, and Aharon will atone for the sins of the holy sacrifices that Bnei Yisrael offer, for all their sacred donations. Let it be on his head always, according to the will of G-d" [Shemot 28:36-38].

A Disagreement for an Unholy Reason

by Aviad Tavory, Shaliach of the Jewish Agency to Bnei Akiva, Great Britain

There is a familiar Mishna in Avot that describes the argument by Korach and his community as "a disagreement which is not in the name of heaven" [Avot 5:21]. Who are the people that were involved in this disagreement? We know that some of them were prominent in the nation, but what kind of people were they? Were they evil or were they righteous?

The Midrash tells how the wife of On Ben Pelet rescued him from Korach's supporters. "She sat at the entrance of her home with her hair scattered, and when the men came to call for On and saw her that way they turned back. She sat this way at the entrance, until her husband was saved and the others were swallowed up in the earth. When he woke up, they were all swallowed up and burned, and he had been rescued from both."

This Midrash implies that Korach's colleagues were indeed righteous. After all, they did not dare to enter a place if the woman of the house did not have her hair covered! It is interesting that their righteousness did not prevent these people from disagreeing with the greatest leader that Yisrael ever had, in an unholy argument. Evidently, the point of the Midrash is to emphasize that even great and righteous men may sin by participating in an unholy disagreement.

This brings to mind the words of the Chatam Sofer, who warned rabbis to be wary of those who want to start arguments by making false accusations. "You should know that I have encountered such people many times, and I warn you to be wary of them and to make the twisted approach into a straight one. When I tried to avoid their minor intrigues, I was trapped by greater ones. And this is true not only for simple folk and the majority of the people but also for Torah scholars and even rabbis. You should stay as far away as possible from anybody who does not speak the truth and who does not base his actions on integrity and righteousness."

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The story related in parshat Korach about the aborted rebellion against Moshe has great relevance in all generations and all societies. For it is not so much a story of an historical event that happened over three millennia ago as it is a story about human failings and personality faults. Korach is the paradigm for the ambitious, talented, self-confident and aggressive person who feels that the society does not appreciate his talents and abilities. He is slighted because his position in society, according to his own lights, is unworthy of his own true stature. Naturally, Korach cloaks his personal frustration in the mantle of lofty ideas and purposes. He becomes a populist, someone who is interested in bringing democracy to the people of Israel and freeing them from the autocratic rule of Moshe. As do all such ambitious, unscrupulous people, he gathers to himself all of the malcontents of the society, united only in their hatred and disrespect towards Moshe and his leadership. His slogan is "All the people are holy" but his real meaning is "How come I can't be the High Priest?" The torah warns us that many times high-sounding principles proclaimed for the general good of society only mask personal ambitions and agendas. It is regarding this frequent occurrence in human affairs that Rabbi Yisrael Salanter coined the ironic phrase: "One's actions on behalf of the sake of Heaven also must in themselves be for the sake of Heaven."

Demagoguery and simplistic populism have always posed a problem in Jewish society. Especially so, in a situation that cries out for solutions, with apparently none on the horizon. Korach is in essence a type of false messiah, someone who offers platitudes and panaceas to a generation that sees no bright future for itself. It is no mere coincidence that Korach appears on the scene and attempts his putsch against Moshe after Moshe has informed that generation of Jews that they are doomed to die in the desert and will not enter the Land of Israel. Seeing no way out of their problems, clutching at straws and illusions, there are many Jews of that generation who are willing to listen to and support Korach. Moshe offers them no easy solutions and does not raise their hopes and spirits. In such a situation, a charlatan such as Korach has a golden opportunity to ply his false wares.

Moshe's reaction to the rebellion of Korach is to demand that an exemplary punishment be visited from Heaven upon the rebels. It is not a measure of revenge - certainly not personal revenge - that motivates Moshe in this request. Rather, it is the realization that this situation of Korach will recur often in the long story of Israel and mankind generally and therefore something dramatic must happen to remind later generations of the dangers of being misled by false prophets and

scheming egotists. The final admission of the followers of Korach that 'Moshe is true and his Torah is true' rings down through the ages as a vital lesson that reality and faith, logic and thought, will always trump demagoguery and unbridled egotism. © 2005 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

I've often heard people say, "if only G-d would reveal Himself miraculously, Jews would believe today much like they did when G-d performed wonders in Egypt and in the desert."

But, surprisingly enough, from a Torah perspective, miracles have limited impact. If one claims to be a prophet by virtue of miracles he performs, the Torah states that it is not enough. Miracles do not authenticate one's prophetic mission. (Deuteronomy 13:2-6)

Our portion expands on this idea. As the earth opened up to swallow those rebelling against Moshe (Moses), the Jews seemed duly impressed. In the words of the Torah, "All Israel that were roundabout fled at the cry of them." (Numbers 16:34) Surely faith would follow such an impressive feat.

By the next day, however, the impact of the miracle had waned. The Jews complained to Moshe and Aharon (Aaron) saying, "you have killed the people of the Lord." (Numbers 17:6)

In fact, miracles in the Torah usually do not have lasting effects. Consider the following: Even after the miracles of the ten plagues in Egypt, the Midrash insists that most Jews still refused to leave. Not long after the splitting of the sea, the Jews complained to G-d that they didn't have enough to eat and drink. Finally, while revelation is considered by many to be the most powerful intervention of G-d in the world, in the end, the Jews rejected the Ten Declarations, building the golden calf just forty days later.

True, many people who believe pray for miracles to reoccur and believe that our Torah reinforces the idea that miracles are the essential conduits to faith. From the Torah a reverse lesson emerges -miracles are in fact, not enough to precipitate lasting belief.

Herein lies a fundamental difference between other faiths and ours. Christianity, for example, is based on miracles performed by their man-G-d. In our Torah miracles play a far less important role.

Our portion reinforces this idea. In the words of Nehama Leibowitz "miracles cannot change men's minds and hearts. They can always be explained away....Our sidra...teaches that miracles convince only

those who can and are prepared to see them. Lack of faith points to a lack of will."

As has been noted-for the non-believers, miracles won't help; for believers, miracles are unnecessary. © 2005 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

“**N**ow Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehat, the son of Levi, and Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and On, the son of Pelet, sons of Re'uven, took men; and they rose up before Moshe, with certain of the people of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, regularly summoned to the congregation, men of renown. And they gathered themselves together against Moshe and against Aharon, and said to them, You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you lift up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (Bemidbar 16:1-3)

There were different parties to Korach's rebellion. The sons of Re'uven were upset because they felt they should have the birthright, and how did the tribe of Levi come to get all the important positions? After Ya'akov's rebuke of Shim'on and Levi, how could it be that Levi assumed such positions of leadership?

Korach had a different claim, and seems to have won widespread sympathy, as we see from the fact that after G-d intervened and destroyed Korach and his cohorts, "All the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moshe and Aharon, saying: You have killed the people of the Lord" (17:6). Apparently, the sympathy for Korach's claim transcended his particular arguments.

What was Korach's claim? He speaks in very lofty terms: "Seeing that all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them, why then do you lift up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?" (16:3). His claim seems to be purely motivated, "le-shem shamayim, for the sake of Heaven." He asserts that the entire Jewish people has a share in relating to G-d directly. Unlike other religions, where only the prophet speaks to the G-d, G-d revealed Himself to all of the Jewish people.

Although the content of his claim seems to be "for the sake of Heaven," the Mishna (Avot 5:17) cites the dispute of Korach and his group as the paradigm of a dispute that is "NOT for the sake of Heaven." Is there any shortage of disputes not purely motivated? Why did the Mishna choose specifically this dispute, when it seems to be motivated "for the sake of Heaven"?

Apparently, the Mishna is teaching us that we need to be wary precisely when people make claims

that G-d is on their side. It is for this reason that the Mishna characterizes precisely this dispute as the prototype of the dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven, to emphasize that this type of superficial religiosity is problematic and unacceptable.

Along these lines, I would like to share three stories with you.

My wife had an uncle who was a dayyan (judge) on the Rabbinic Court of Yerushalayim. When that Beit Din was first founded, Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik zt"l, the Brisker Rav, came out very strongly against it, as he was concerned about reforms they would make. Accordingly, it was not so accepted at the time in the Charedi world.

After my wife's grandfather, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer zt"l, passed away, this uncle became a Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Etz Chaim. When this uncle passed away, the following story took place. Rav M.M. Shakh zt"l, whose wife was a cousin, came in to Yerushalayim to eulogize him, and about forty-five minutes before we were supposed to go to the Yeshiva for the funeral, the phone rang with a message that Rav Shakh's wife had suffered a heart attack and he should return to Bnei Brak immediately.

He was obviously shaken, but the family, after clarifying that the rebbetzin had been fine before he left, was convinced that it was probably a zealous student trying to prevent Rav Shakh from delivering the eulogy. In those days, there were about two phones in Bnei Brak, so it was difficult to ascertain what was really happening with the rebbetzin. A compromise was reached, whereby Rav Shakh delivered the first eulogy, spoke briefly, and immediately left for Bnei Brak to join his wife. Thank G-d, he found her in perfect health.

After looking into what happened, it was found that a zealously anti-Zionist kollel student had fabricated the horrible story, as the family had suspected. What could that man possibly have been thinking? Did he think for a second that he was greater than Rav Shakh, and should dictate to Rav Shakh what to do?

Presumably, he would have said that, of course, Rav Shakh was a great Torah scholar and leader, and he generally would have yielded to his judgment. However, Rav Shakh was biased toward his own family and was unable to properly judge their faults. Therefore, this man took upon himself to try to trick the rabbi, in order to prevent him from, Heaven forefend, eulogizing a Zionist relative.

That story happened on the week of Parashat Korach. Only after that story did I understand how Korach could have said such horrible things about Moshe Rabbeinu. Yes, of course, it is true that Moshe spoke to G-d "face to face" (Shemot 33:11, Devarim 34:11); nonetheless, he was unable to judge his own relatives in an unbiased manner, and gave the plum job to his brother Aharon. This trait, of undermining Moshe and impugning his judgment, is one of Korach's major shortcomings.

A second story is from my grandfather. He was a Torah scholar who lived in Yerushalayim at the end of his life, having moved here before the Shoah. After my parents and siblings were murdered by the Nazis, I merited to be reunited with my grandfather in Yerushalayim. He passed away a short time after bringing me to the chuppa, and I inherited many of his writings, including original Torah thoughts and sermons.

One time he wrote up a speech he planned to give at a siyyum, upon completing Massekhet Ta'anit with his Chevra Shas. He wrote of a certain Chasidic rebbe who was insulted by some Misnagdim in the town. When asked to excommunicate these men in order to preserve kavod ha-Torah, the Torah's honor, the rebbe at first consented, and then he reconsidered. When he asked why he retracted, the rebbe responded that he was not sure if his motivation was purely to defend the Torah's honor, or perhaps he also harbored some ulterior motive.

My grandfather did not end up telling this story, as apparently some event had transpired in his vicinity that made it imprudent. In any case, this story emphasizes a different aspect: the scrutiny to which one must subject himself before speaking out against another, particularly when speaking out against a great person.

Finally, I will share a personal story with you. I have said in the Yeshiva on more than one occasion that one should avoid disputes (perhaps specifically the aforementioned kind), and if one's job requires getting involved in some dispute, one should prefer to suffer the consequences than to get involved. Once I got a phone call from an alumnus of the Yeshiva, who asked me if I remembered the sicha I had given at Parshat Korach about ten years before. I told him that I did. He then told me that he had encountered precisely the scenario I had described, where he was asked to take part in just such a dispute.

He described the scenario, and he also made clear that he remembered what I had said at the time. Then he said to me, "But I have a wife and children; how can I take that chance?" I told him to take it anyway and he would be OK. It's not my word; the Torah teaches us to avoid this kind of dispute, regardless of the cost. I am happy to report that his situation did turn out well in the end.

Thus, Korach's dispute teaches important lessons about the ethics of dispute, and the need for special care in religious disputes. The Torah's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace. *[This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat, Parashat Korach 5762 (20.)]*

