

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe understood (the ramifications of Korach's rebellion), and he fell on his face” (Bamidbar 16:4). Several explanations are given for “fell on his face,” including being an expression of prayer (Rashbam) and of preparation for prophecy (Rav Sadya Gaon). Rashi, however, based on the Midrash Tanchuma (4) and Bamidbar Rabbah (18:6), says that it means that Moshe fainted. (This could explain why only Moshe “fell on his face,” while elsewhere both Moshe and Aharon “fell on their faces.”)

What caused Moshe to become so weak that he fell? “Because this was the nation's fourth incident” (the “golden calf,” the “complainers” and the “spies” being the first three). Moshe had interceded on their behalf on those occasions, but felt “weakened” by the fourth time. A parable is then given of “a prince that behaved badly, whose friend defended him to the king once, twice, and even a third time, [but] by the fourth incident the friend became weakened (felt unable to help), saying “for how long can I bother the king before he stops listening to me.” In other words, Moshe felt that his prayers could no longer save the nation from G-d's wrath, and, realizing this, collapsed.

Nonetheless, we find not just once, but twice more in our Parasha that Moshe does in fact intercede on their behalf—successfully I might add. When warned to separate from the “congregation” so that G-d can destroy them (16:21), Moshe is able to limit the destruction to only Korach and his followers. Whether G-d's original intent was to destroy the entire nation (Midrash Hagadol and Ramban) or to only destroy Korach (et al), with Moshe having thought that G-d wanted to destroy all of them (implied by the Midrash Lekach Tov and the Midrashim that learn from here that “10” constitutes a “congregation”, and said explicitly by Rabbeinu Chananel), the bottom line is that Moshe thought that G-d wanted to destroy them all and therefore interceded. But if he was able to intercede, why did he collapse in the first place? And if he was correct in assuming that he could not, what changed that now he could?

Similarly, after Korach and his followers were destroyed, the nation complained that Moshe had caused them to die (17:6), which led to G-d threatening to destroy them (17:10). Once again Moshe

took the initiative, and told Aharon to bring an incense offering to stop the plague. So we see that Moshe was able to help the ever-sinful nation, despite his previous concern that they had used up their “quota.” How did Moshe summon up the strength to help them if he thought that they were beyond help?

The Oznayim Letorah asks why Rashi (and, by extension, the Midrashim) uses a parable to explain Moshe's concern, rather than an explicit verse (Amos 2:6) that says that G-d can (completely) forgive the first three of Israel's sins, but not the fourth. However, a closer look at the wording of the parable would indicate that Moshe's concern was not with the amount of times the nation sinned, but the amount of times he had to intervene on their behalf, as it speaks of the amount of times the friend could persuade the king to lay off the prince, not the amount of times the prince got into trouble. This becomes clearer from the Midrash Rabbah, which, after giving the parable, concludes that “the same is true of Moshe.” Not “the same is true of Israel,” which would mean that they had gotten into trouble too many times, but “the same is true of Moshe,” that he too was concerned that he would no longer be effective at thwarting the punishment. This would explain why the parable is used rather than a proof-text, as the verse refers to the amount of times the nation sinned, while the parable reflects Moshe's concern about his continued effectiveness as the nation's “defense attorney.”

Following the golden calf, when G-d threatened to wipe out the entire nation, Moshe successfully prevented this, successfully brought the Shechinah (back) to the nation (via the Mishkan), and was able to attain an ever-higher awareness of G-d (seeing His “glory”). When they complained (11:1), the fire didn't recede before killing some of them, perhaps even the leaders (see Rashi). Although the complaint about their lack of food (11:4) was answered by G-d supplying food (11:32), many died while still eating it (11:33). G-d wanted to wipe out the nation again after they believed the “spies,” but Moshe was only able to delay their deaths, and the entire generation died before reaching the Promised Land. Moshe may have therefore seen that his attempts at defending the nation were yielding increasingly diminished returns, and was concerned that he, like the “friend” in the parable, could no longer convince the King to forgive His nation of princes. It was for this reason that when Moshe heard Korach's

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complaint, and understood its ramifications, he felt weakened, and collapsed.

But this had occurred when Moshe first comprehended the gravity of the situation, before G-d had actually threatened to destroy them-and therefore before Moshe would have had to try to intercede on their behalf. However, once the need arose, Moshe did what he could to at least try to help-despite fearing that he would not succeed. And, lo and behold, he was successful (yet again) at minimizing the damage that could have been wrought by the sin(s) of the nation.

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#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

“**A**nd Korah... took (sides)... and Dotan and Aviram and they gathered against Moses and Aaron; they said to them 'It is enough for you, since the entire congregation are all completely holy and in their midst is the Lord. Why do you lift yourselves up above the assemblage of the Lord?' (Numbers 16:2,3)

Most of the Biblical commentaries understand Korah's challenge as being a personal one against the leadership of Moses and Aaron; Korah was waging a rebellion because he himself was desirous of being the leader. However, if that were indeed the only substantive issue he was offering-a change in leadership-it seems incomprehensible that not even one single Israelite steps up to stand on the side of Moses.

After all, memories of the miraculous plagues produced by Moses against the Egyptian enslavers and of the splitting of the Reed Sea which brought the Israelites to safety while causing the Egyptian cavalry to drown, were still fresh in their minds-since these wonders had transpired only two years prior to Korah's rebellion. Moses was the greatest liberator in world history, dwarfing the liberation activities of Abraham Lincoln for the American blacks and Nelson Mandela for the South African blacks combined. Does not logic dictate that many Israelites would still defend Moses as their father figure and protector? It would seem to me that Korah must be presenting some kind of alternate plan, and one which would universally speak to the

hearts and minds of the Israelites specifically after the report of the Scouts, of which we read last week.

The classical commentary of Rashi (R. Shlomo b. Yitzhak, 1040-1105), in addition to describing all of the rebels as perennial anti-kehuna malcontents (either because they were Levites who were overlooked for the priesthood or because they were Reubenites who never had Grandfather Jacob's favor or because they were first-born sons who had forfeited their initial leadership position by worshipping the golden calf), goes on to cite a Midrash which provides a curious logical underpinning to Korah's argument, at the same time linking it to last week's Biblical reading commanding the ritual fringes:

"(Korah) stood up and gathered together 250 heads of District Courts, mostly from the tribe of Reuven and its neighboring tribes,... and garbed them in robes which were wholly royal blue (tchelet). They came and stood up before Moses, saying, 'Is a robe entirely made of tehelet will not automatically be freed (of further obligation)?!'" (Rashi to Numbers 16:1).

The Netziv, nineteenth century Yeshiva Head of the Volozhin Academy, explains the commandment of ritual fringes in a novel and profound fashion, which sheds much light on Rashi's explanation of Korah's argument. In his Commentary known as HaAmeK Davar, he suggests that the essence of Judaism is to be found in the ritual of the fringes. The usual material and color of garments worn in Biblical times was wool-white, since the white wool of the sheep provided ancient people with their garments. Hence, the woolen, white fringes represent the more physical and animalistic side of the human being, who obviously shares many instinctive characteristics (drive for food and sex) with the bestial, animal world.

The blue of the tchelet, on the other hand, is reminiscent of the more ethereal and spiritual realm of the heavens, as the Bible teaches in the incident following the Divine Revelation at Sinai:

"And Moses and Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy elders of Israel ascended (atop the mountain) and saw the G-d of Israel; under His feet was the likeness of the (blue) sapphire stone, like the essence of the heavens for purity" (Exodus 24:10).

The Netziv suggests that Judaism is teaching the importance of unifying all aspects of our personality and our world, of bringing together the material and the spiritual, the physical and the sacred, in Israel's mission of sanctifying a profane universe and perfecting (completing) an imperfect society. We must build the ladder which will connect heaven and earth; we must create the Sanctuary which will enable the Divine Presence to dwell within, and completely suffuse with the sacred, every aspect of our earthly existence.

This mission is to be realized in the Land of Israel, in which our Holy Temple will be built and from which peace and redemption will come to all nations.

Such a mission requires military battles and ideological debates, back-breaking labor of land reclamation and the dangerous activity of clearing swamps of their infected and unpotable liquids. There is no pure garment of tchelet in the world as it has been created; we must find the spiritual potential even in the white wool of the animal, and sanctify the sapphire blue of our heavenly Torah.

Datan and Aviram never wanted to leave the fleshpots of materialistic Egypt, not even when Moses initially slayed the Egyptian taskmaster. They join Korah's rebellion, and charge Moses with having "taking (the Israelites) out of the land of milk and honey (sic Egypt!) to die in the desert" (Numbers 16:13). Many of Korah's men are apparently in favor of going back to Egypt with a different leader-and so they applaud Korah's words (Numbers 14:4).

Korah himself may very well have been desirous of remaining in the desert- which appeared to be "wholly tehelet". Completely sacred. The Desert Israelites subsisted on manna, moved their camp in accordance with Divine direction, and-freed of the necessity of manual labor or military battles-could devote themselves solely to the study of Torah. They were living in a perennial kollel, freed of all responsibility and decision making. This may well have been precisely what Korah had in mind when he said, "The entire congregation are all completely holy and in their midst is the Lord. Why do you lift yourselves up above the assemblage of the Lord" and insist on conquering Israel? It is more "sacred" to remain in the desert, directly under G-d!

But this was not the Divine wish. G-d never gave us "tchelet" on a golden platter. Then-and now-G-d expects us to join together the techelet with the wool and sanctify the land and the world, understanding that this requires hard work, tough decision making and high risks. Nevertheless, that's what it means to ultimately strive to become "a holy nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers" for the world. © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI LABEL LAM**

### **Dvar Torah**

“**A**nd Korach took...” (Bamidbar 16:1)  
 "Find the motive-and you've got the motive." (Groucho Marx-On crime detecting)  
 What had Korach done to deserve infamy? What was his tragic flaw? According to our sages he made many uplifting and true claims about the worthiness of the Jewish People. He stated that all Jews are holy since we had all heard The Almighty speak on Sinai. He only questioned the need for Moshe and Aaron to be the King and the Kohen? It sounds like a legit question. Why should he be swallowed alive into the earth for asking basic questions?

Apparently, his appeal was so attractive that he induced 250 heads of the Sanhedrin to join forces with him. This was no foolish bunch of thugs. The best and the brightest followed him to the grave. Where was he wrong and how did they fail to detect it?

A man enters a bakery hurriedly and asks the attendant how long it would take to make a brand new cake. He was told to return in one hour. An hour later he's back in the store and he looks disappointedly at the cake. "Maybe I didn't make myself clear. I would like the cake in the shape of the letter "K"!" "Come back in a half hour!" He's told! He promptly returns a half hour later and looks critically at the results. "I wanted it to be covered with bright pink icing and fancy flowers!" He is advised to wait a few more minutes. After a short while he is shown the finished product made according to his specs. Sensing his approval, the relieved attendant then asks as he does routinely, "Shall I put it in a box like this?" "No!" he replies, "I'll eat it here!"

Korach's tragic flaw is sadly reflected in this silly joke. Sure he spoke of lofty matters, and many good people were persuaded by his seductive rhetoric but fundamentally he was gravely mistaken. How so? The Torah doesn't delay a word in telling us where the fault line lies. "Vayikach Korach"- "And Korach took..." He was a taker. His motive in creating malcontent amongst the people was for his own hidden agenda. He wanted a title like "Kohen Gadol" for himself. All those convincing speeches he delivered with all their subtle profundity were ultimately self-serving. He wanted for himself a slice of the Kovod, the great glory. He baked that big fancy cake and it was for him to eat in the here and now! He was "taking" albeit under the pretense of a "fairness doctrine".

Rabbi Dessler posits the thesis that at any given moment a person is either a giver or a taker. One is either motivated by some transcendental tendency to care and share or he is animated by an animal urge that centers on the self. The outer actions may not clearly betray the underlying motive, though. One may need a mind reader or a real prophet to truly tell even about himself.

One of the perks of being on the road a lot is that I get to see lots of different bumper stickers. The one I like the most and honk with approval at describes the essence of Torah Living: "Think global! Act local!" Seeing that we are each, in a nutshell, a microcosm of the universe, our moral imperative is to be an actor here and now for the sake of everywhere else. Korach was thinking local but acting globally! He was talking up a game of concern for the spiritual welfare of the entire nation but his interest in doing so was as local as local could ever be. He was effectively campaigning for his own Kovod!

Korach wasn't just a mover and a shaker. He was fundamentally a taker. When he was suddenly taken from the world he took many decent people down

with him obviating the need for an undertaker. Tragically and whimsically this turned out to be with a capital "K" his final undertaking! © 2006 Rabbi L. Lam & Project Genesis

**RABBI LEVI COOPER**

## Hidden Truth

**T**ruth - with a capital T - is a certainty we crave. At times we may feel that we have achieved this elusive ideal, only to sober up to the fact that any Truth we identify is at most truth as viewed through our own subjective eyes.

To a religious mind, Truth is associated with the indefinable Almighty. The pursuit of Truth, therefore, is the quest for knowledge of the Divine.

Emet (truth) is the word that opens the passage recited immediately following the twice-daily Shema prayer. Our sages instruct against interruption or even pause between the conclusion of Shema and the beginning of the next paragraph, explaining this position with reference to the scriptural verse where Jeremiah juxtaposed a reference to G-d - as in the final two words of Shema - with the word emet: "But the Lord is the true G-d" (Jeremiah 10:10; M. Berachot 2:2; B. Berachot 14a-b).

Thus the word emet in this prayer serves a dual function: it concludes the recitation of Shema and simultaneously launches the following passage. This twofold purpose led to an uncertainty: Is a single recitation of the word emet sufficient or should the word be uttered twice - once for each role. The talmudic sages are divided on this issue.

Insisting on a repetition of the word emet is an understandable position, as each recitation serves a different passage of prayer. This opinion, however, is not accepted as the halachic rule (Shulhan Aruch OH 66:6). It is somewhat more difficult to fathom the normative single recitation for a dual meaning.

Some commentators explain that duplicating the word emet is akin to repeating other key words in the service that might indicate a belief in dualism - the doctrine that reality consists, or is the outcome, of two ultimate principles.

Our tradition resolutely rejected dualism, and hence a prayer leader who implied dualistic empathy was swiftly silenced. The sages called for the ejection of a leader who says "modim, modim" (we give thanks, we give thanks) instead of just saying the word once, and this rule is applied to one who opens the Shema by saying "shema, shema" (hear, hear) or repeats the first verse (M. Berachot 5:3; B. Berachot 33b).

Similarly, duplicating the word emet may insinuate a belief in two Truths and hence two deities. Thus a single recitation is encouraged (Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh da Modena, 16th-17th centuries, Venice and others).

A careful comparison, however, reveals a striking distinction between the two repetitions. While repetition of modim or shema leads to the hushing of the leader, no such sanction is advocated for duplicating emet. What's more, one sage even promotes repeating the word.

Indeed, the Talmud relates the tale of a characterless prayer leader who dared to repeat the word emet in the presence of Rabba, the proponent of the single-recitation-dual-use position. Instead of summarily gagging the leader, Rabba tolerantly and somewhat cryptically responded: "This person was seized by emet."

Thus it appears that the duplication of the word emet is not of the same valence as the repetition of other significant words in the service.

The discussion regarding the word emet and its repetition may reflect a fundamental question: Is there indeed a single, absolute Truth? Jewish scholars over the generations have pondered this key matter, and its ancillary query: If there is indeed such an ultimate Truth, what is our duty and accountability vis- -vis this reality?

According to the Maharal of Prague (16th-17th centuries), Truth is the only genuine unity in this physical world. The Maharal identifies this singular, unchanging Truth with G-d. Following on from this definitive stance, we may have a new understanding of the hesitation in duplicating the word emet: such a repetition might smack of manifold truths and hence imply multiple deities.

Despite the Maharal's clarity in confirming the existence of a single Divine Truth, we are still bereft of a means of accessing this lofty target.

The poet-scholar Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (12th century, Spain) claims that we can rest assured that rabbinic leadership - with endowed and earned wisdom, piety, safety in numbers and Divine assistance - will reach the coveted objective of absolute Truth.

Skeptics may be confounded by such a suggestion that provides a guarantee that can never be proven nor tested. Moreover, the prevalence of arguments among the sages appears to call this notion into question.

A creative approach to the Truth conundrum is suggested by one halachist - Rabbi Aryeh Leib Hacohen Heller (18th-19th centuries, Galicia) - who in the introduction to his work, *Ketzot HaHoshen*, champions the existence of an absolute Truth, but denies our obligation to align ourselves with this distinguished entity. The legal system, he argues, is entrusted in our human, fallible hands and we are charged with operating this system with integrity; any correlation between our mortal conclusions and Divine Truth are fortunate and valuable, but cannot be substantiated. Hence absolute Truth is not essential to

our existence; we are obligated by the earthly perception of truth, and not by the exalted Divine Truth.

A maverick position that leaves room for the possibility of multiple Divine Truths is proposed by the Spanish Talmudist Ritva (13th-14th centuries) in the name of unidentified French scholars. Building on the oft-quoted rabbinic adage - "These and these are the words of the living G-d" (B. Eruvin 13b), Ritva suggests that there is no concept of a mistaken halachic position in the eyes of the Almighty. The gamut of possible outcomes is all divinely legitimate, and the only concept of truth is an earthly notion of normative practice. Therefore, any ruling arrived at by legitimate authority reflects Truth, albeit one Truth of many possible Truths.

As we conclude the Shema with the declaration that G-d is True, it is uncertain whether the quest for absolute Truth bears us tangible fruits. Nevertheless, the longing for a greater understanding of the Divine and our consequent place and role in this world is certainly valuable, as we continue to strive to find meaning in our existence. © 2006 Rabbi L. Cooper. Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**T**here are many similarities between the events related to Korach and his followers and the sins of Nadav and Avihu. First of all, compare the descriptions of what they did. With respect to Korach, "And each man took his pan, and they put fire on them, and they placed incense on them" [Bamidbar 16:18]. This is very similar to the actions of the two sons of Aharon, "And Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, each took his pan, and they placed a flame on them and they put incense on them" [Vayikra 10:1]. In this week's Torah portion, G-d's glory appears before Korach and his followers are punished: "And G-d's glory was revealed to the entire community" [Bamidbar 16:19]. There is a similar verse with respect to Nadav and Avihu: "And the glory of G-d was revealed to the entire nation" [Vayikra 9:23]. In both cases, similar language is used to note the relationship between a sin of an individual and punishment for the entire community. In this week's portion, Moshe and Aharon say, "If one man sins, will you be angry with the entire community?" [Bamidbar 16:22], while with respect to Nadav and Avihu it is written, "And Moshe said to Aharon, and to his sons Elazar and Itamar: Do not leave your hair unkempt and do not unravel your clothing so that you will not die, and He will be angry with the entire community" [Vayikra 10:6].

The punishments in the two cases are also described in similar ways. In this week's portion it is written, "And a flame came from G-d and devoured the two hundred and fifty men who had sacrificed the incense" [Bamidbar 16:35], while with respect to Nadav and Avihu, it is written, "A flame came from before G-d and it devoured them, and they died before G-d" [Vayikra 10:2]. After the flames, the remains are removed in both cases. In this week's portion, "Tell Elazar Ben Aharon, the Priest, to pick up the pans from among the fire, and throw away the flame, because they have become sanctified" [Bamidbar 17:2]. In Shemini, Moshe tells Mishael and Eltzafan, "Approach, and lift up your brothers from out of the holy site, to the outside of the camp" [Vayikra 10:4]. These two affairs are the only cases that are immediately followed by a special command given directly to Aharon: "and G-d said to Aharon, You, and your sons, and your father's house, will all bear the sins of the holy site" [Bamidbar 18:1]; "And G-d spoke to Aharon, to say, Do not drink wine or liquor" [Vayikra 10:8-9]. It is also very difficult to ignore the play on words, when G-d says to tell Elazar, "throw away the flame" [Vayikra 17:2]. The word used, "zerai", is spelled the same as the word used to describe the flame that Nadav and Avihu brought, "eish zara"- a strange flame [Vayikra 10:1].

What is the significance of these many similarities? Evidently the point is to emphasize the common roots of the two events, something that becomes very clear in this week's Torah portion. In both cases, it may be said that the sinners had good intentions, out of a desire to participate fully in the service of G-d. Nadav and Avihu wanted to be full partners in the rituals of the day that the Tabernacle was dedicated, and Korach and his followers wanted to be appointed as leaders and as Kohanim. This week's Torah portion reveals that Korach and his men really acted in accordance with their own personal interests, which caused them to speak slander against Moshe and to hide their real desire under an ideological cloak, with a claim that Bnei Yisrael did not really need a leader at all (note that this did not prevent them from trying out for the task of leader when they were given the opportunity). This implies that with respect to Nadav and Avihu there were similar considerations, in that they worried too much about their personal status on the day when their father Aharon performed all the rituals, and that they did not have purely holy motives.

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**T**he Midrash goes to great lengths to extol the virtues, greatness and importance of Korach. It naturally does so in order to place into juxtaposition the foolishness and meanness of his behavior towards Moshe and Aharon, behavior that leads to his destruction. Yet, in describing the

greatness of Korach - a leader of the tribe of Levi, one of the bearers of the holy Ark, the wealthiest man in Israel, a close relative of Moshe and Aharon - the Midrash is probing to discover the great fault and flaw in his character that eventually dooms him to destruction.

On the surface at least, there is little that separates him from Moshe and Aharon. His claim to leadership apparently has enough merit to it that hundreds of leading Jews join him in his complaint against Moshe's rule. His populist slogan, that all of the people are holy and worthy and Moshe has no right to rule over them in a single-handed fashion, resonates amongst the Jews. If all of this is the case then what is Korach's problem? Why does his seemingly justified stance lead to such an abysmal downfall? What trait of Jewish leadership is he so lacking that its absence negates all of the positive qualities that seem to surround him?

The simple answer to this question is provided in rabbinic writings, especially in the works of the great Chasidic masters as well as in the teachings of the men of Mussar. And that answer is that Korach is destroyed by his own hubris. He never doubts his holiness, he is smug in his righteousness, and he sees himself as being almost infallible. He is confident that G-d will follow Korach's plans, for how can it be otherwise? He is so convinced of his rectitude that he actually believes the inner voice that propels his quest for power and station is, so to speak, G-d's voice instructing him to rise up against Moshe's rule.

The Torah taught us a few weeks ago that Moshe was the most humble and modest human being on earth. Moshe's refrain, even in this crisis with Korach, is that he and Aharon are nothing. Moshe has no opinion of his own - he is only the faithful servant of G-d. Jewish leaders require self-confidence. But they should never confuse this confidence with infallibility. Even after decisions have been made and policies actually executed, the leader must review his plans and ideas. He must always ask what does G-d want of me rather than what do I want of G-d. The essential difference between Korach and Moshe is reflected in their approach to this matter.

The rabbis in Avot warned us not to trust ourselves in our holiness and piety even to the last day of our lives. Self-righteousness breeds arrogance and hubris, which in turn spell disaster for the individual and the community. Modesty and humility can temper hasty and ill-advised policies and decisions. All of the Jewish people may be, in the words of Korach and his supporters, holy people. But unfortunately not all of them are blessed with the quality of modesty and true self-analysis that alone can save otherwise great people from unforeseen disaster. © 2006 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more

information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**F**rom the time that Moshe (Moses) comes on the scene, he is under attack. As he breaks up a fight between Jews while still in Egypt, one turns to him and says, "who made you a ruler and judge over us." (Exodus 2:14) And when it appears to the people that Moshe descends from Sinai a bit late, they rebel and build the golden calf. (Exodus 32:1) All this comes to a head in this week's portion when Korach and his cohorts challenge Moshe's rule. In their words "you (Moshe) take too much upon yourself." (Numbers 16:3)

Important lessons emerge: First Moshe teaches that it is critical for religious leaders to become involved in social action. After all, time and time again Moshe not only teaches purely religious principles, but also how the Jewish people must function as a people, a nation with laws, government and showing concern for all.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha Kohen Kook, the first chief Rabbi of Israel, argued that there is no such thing as the unholy; there is only the holy and the not yet holy. From this perspective, every day life-the way one eats, works, and, yes, engages in politics-is as holy as prayer, Torah study and meditation. For Rav Kook, speaking out for Am Yisrael is, in its purest form, the deepest expression of Jewish spirituality. This is precisely what Moshe teaches. That rabbis, people of the spirit, are especially trained to infuse all aspects of life with spirituality.

There is another lesson that can be learned. Inevitably, when one becomes involved in leadership, they will incur the wrath of some. A wise, elderly man taught me this lesson. On the day I left my first pulpit in St. Louis, he approached me and said, "Rabbi, I bless you that you should have many enemies." I looked at him startled. "We've been close, why such a harsh lesson?" "My words are meant as a blessing," he responded. "Remember, if you do nothing, you have no enemies. A sign that you're doing, that you're taking stands is that you have enemies."

Even Moshe, who contributed more than anyone to the Jewish people, is not loved by everyone. Korach rebels against him. That's the price of strong leadership.

Too many rabbinic leaders shy away from taking strong political positions, fearful that they will alienate their boards and congregants. They forget the warning of the holy Ba'al Shem Tov, that a rabbi who lacks strong convictions is a failing rabbi. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**Haftorah**

**T**his 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 wrong doings.

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. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Politically Incorrect

**K**orach, the scoundrel of this week's portion, gathered 250 leaders of Israel and told them the following yarn. Once upon a time lived an old Jewish widow. She had a small farm. When she tried to plow, Moshe warned her: "Not with an ox and donkey together!" When she tried to sow, Moshe commanded: "Though shall not sow two different species together." She went to reap the grain and Moshe chided her: "Remember to leave the tithes for the Levites and the Kohen and leave a corner for the poor!" Ultimately, she couldn't take it any more. She sold the field and bought two sheep. As soon as the firstborn lamb arrived, Aaron was there claiming, "The firstborn belongs to the Kohen!" She gave him the baby lamb and went to shear the wool from the mother, when all of a sudden Aaron exclaimed, "I get the first of the shearing too!" She decided the only way to salvage her investment was to eat the poor thing. She had it slaughtered, and then, once again comes the Kohen, like a schnorrer, demanding his share!

It sounds like something from a synagogue board meeting. "That Rabbi, today he asks us for UJA, tomorrow some yeshiva, next week some orphanage! Can't he ever let us alone?." Unfortunately Korach was not your typical synagogue chairperson. And this story wasn't prattled in the confines of the synagogue social hall. This tale was told to a gathering of the foremost leaders of Israel by one of the greatest Jewish minds in his generation. Korach was one of those who merited to carry the Holy Ark that contained the Ten Commandments. Yet, the tale he spun was one of the many battle cries that sparked a major rebellion against Moshe and Aaron and the word of Hashem.

Korach, a cousin of Aaron and Moshe, was jealous. He knew how capable he was and wanted to be the High Priest or King. If he didn't merit it-no one else deserved it. He would topple Moshe, Aaron and turn the entire Torah into a mockery. He was almost successful. His career ended when the earth miraculously opened it's mouth and swallowed him along with his entire contingent of 250 revolutionaries. Forever, they held their peace. Life settles back to normalcy, Moshe and Aaron retain their power, and the Parsha continues.

The next event in the portion is a listing of 24 gifts-to the Kohen and the Levi. You heard correctly-gifts. The Kohen has the right to take 24 different items from poor widows who have tiny lambs and paltry farms. These laws are taught, again, immediately after the rebellion that was sparked by Korach's Bubbah Maaseh about the poor widow and the schnorrer Kohen! Shouldn't the Torah have put these laws in a

more suitable setting? Couldn't Hashem have waited a few weeks till things calmed down?

Rabbi Rafael HaCohen was appointed the chief rabbi of Hamburg at a young age. The day he arrived on the job, there was a desperate knocking at his door. A bedraggled woman implored that she has an urgent matter to discuss. "Can't it wait until tomorrow?" "No!" she exclaimed I have a legitimate gripe against Reb Dov, the Parnes,(town president) and I want him brought to justice now!" Reb Dov, one of the city's wealthiest men, was a prime proponent of the new Rabbi's appointment. Yet, realizing his charge, the Rabbi sent his shammos (sexton) to call the wealthy man to court Reb Dov scoffed. "You tell the young Rabbi that I'm quite busy, but in about three weeks I'll hear the gripe." Rav Rafael did not accept this assault on the Rabbinate and demanded an immediate appearance. The shammos returned to the ranting of Reb Dov. "Go back and tell this new Rabbi of ours that I am one of the wealthiest, most influential and philanthropic members of his new community. If he knows what is good for him he should not begin his career with petty complaints from discourteous women." The rabbi responded once again. He told the shammos, "Tell Dov, 'you may be the philanthropist of Hamburg, but I am it's Rabbi. If you will not appear today, I, with the power vested in me, will excommunicate you just as I would anyone, who abuses the position of the Rav.' " A few minutes later, in an elegant horse-drawn coach, Reb Dov arrived at Rav Rafael's home. The bedraggled women, who had disappeared in the interim, re-entered looking like a princess. Together they marched in smiling. "Rebbe, Mazel Tov! You are the type of Rabbi we all need-one who will never kowtow to the threats of the mighty or ignore the pleas of the destitute. You have passed the true test of the Rabbinate." Reb Dov continued, "the poor woman here was none other than my own daughter. Sorry for the inconvenience, but too many Rabbis nod their head in fear of reprisal. Hamburg deserves true leadership."

Hashem doesn't watch polls. He didn't give Torah dependent on our moods. If a mockery of the laws of tithing was a factor in a rebellion, his handlers won't say, "G-d, I think you should wait a month or two before we let this rest of legislation out of the bag." Torah is Emes (truth) and truth has no time frame. We must always be ready to speak the truth-even if it is politically incorrect. Good Shabbos! (c)1995 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1995 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis



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