

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Korach

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

SURROUNDED BY GIVERS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Korach took..." (16:1)

Parshas Korach begins by describing Korach and two hundred and fifty people's claims for more authority and power. The very first word used is "And he [Korach] took," yet the Torah never explicitly mentions what it is that Korach actually took. Two questions can be asked: Why start with a verb that's never followed by its object, and how is being swallowed by the ground (16:31-33) an appropriate punishment?

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin explains that there are two different types of disputes. One dispute is for the sake of learning and appreciating other perspectives, such as the disputes between Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel. Another type of dispute is done for the sake of standing out and creating a divide, such as the dispute of Korach. This could help us answer our questions: Korach took for the sake of taking and argued for the sake of argument. The punishment and cure for such behavior was to be swallowed by the earth below, transforming from a taker of power into a giver of nutrients as he became part of the soil that supports all that grows from it.

We learn here that the cure for taking is to be surrounded by giving. Just like arguing can be done in a constructive way, so too can we tackle our own limitations or conflicts by surrounding ourselves and our families with positive, supportive, and giving environments.

CLEAR DISTINCTION

Reb Meir Shapiro of Lublin

"And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took..." (16:1)

Right at the beginning of the Sidra we notice the difference between Moshe and Korach. Korach did not have any good qualities of his own. He had to depend upon his ancestry, which is why the verse states: "Son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, son of Levi." The ancestry of Moshe is not mentioned; he was able to stand on his own merits.

HAUGHTINESS LEADS TO STRIFE

Rebbe Nachman

"And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took..." (16:1)

Korach was a heretic. (Bamidbar Rabbah 18)

He was haughty, which is concomitant with idolatry. (Sotah 4b)

The antidote for haughtiness is to attach oneself to a tzaddik, showing that one accepts that there is someone greater, wiser, and more accomplished than himself. But Korach led a rebellion against Moshe's authority instead. (See Likutey Moharan I, 10:5, 9)

"Korach took" - he took himself away from the community. (Rashi)

All strife derives from the strife of Korach against Aharon. Korach wanted to be like Aharon. They were separate entities, each with his own unique qualities. But Korach rebelled against being who he was and thus made strife his way of being. A person must be himself. He must create unity and peace between opposing sides. That is what mitigates Divine decrees. (See Likutey Moharan I, 46:3)

IF HE ONLY KNEW

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took..." (16:1)

Everyone has a particular job in this world. A simple person who fulfills his specific tefikid (role) is as great as the Kohen Gadol as he does his avodah (service).

Rav Dovid Lelover zy"ta taught: If only Korach would have understood that it is possible to serve Hashem from a place of absolute simplicity and lowliness, and that service is as important as the service of the Kohen Gadol as he enters the Kodosh HaKedoshim (Holy of Holies), he never would have begun his dispute with Moshe Rabbeinu.

SELFISH SERVICE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"Korach... took" (16:1)

Some tzaddikim serve G-d only in order to please Him. For such a tzaddik, it makes no difference whether it is he who pleases G-d or it is some other righteous person. However, those who wish to receive reward for their Divine service desire to be the ones to please G-d. This is the deeper meaning of the phrase "Korach took." He wanted to be the one to take the credit and reap the reward, and not someone else.

In this light, we can understand the remarks of Rashi (Sanhedrin 109b), who explains the Talmud's statement that "he made a bad purchase for himself" as meaning that "he decided to argue" and to enter into a dispute with Moshe, and that he desired to be the Kohen Gadol. Had he served G-d only to give Him pleasure, then certainly he would not have taken issue over the matter of who was appointed Kohen Gadol.

NEED FOR RECOGNITION

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took..." (16:1)

Many of the commentators wonder why the pasuk doesn't specify what exactly Korach took.

The Kedushas Levi explains that there are some people who have only pure intentions when they serve Hashem. They are never concerned about getting recognized for their accomplishments in the realm of spirituality. These people don't need fanfare and are happy for others to get the attention as long as Hashem's name is exalted.

However, there is another group of people who serve Hashem but also want to get credit for that which they have done. They are not willing to hand off opportunities to others or allow others to represent them, because they want to be the ones to do it.

Korach was consumed by the desire to be recognized. This is what the Torah means when it states, "Vayikach Korach - And Korach took." Korach's sole motivation, in his claims against Moshe and Aharon, was to assert himself in order to "take" credit and receive reward in the service of Hashem; he did not want anyone else to merit recognition.

In life, we are often focused on who will notice us and whether we will get applauded for what we have done. We need to remind ourselves that there is only One Being Who we should be concerned with. Hashem sees and hears everything and will take notice of our accomplishments.

If we have this mindset, we will accomplish more without worrying about accolades or awards. We will live happier and more satisfied lives, filled with the knowledge that we will ultimately be recognized by the One Who really counts.

FOG OF CONFLICT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Korach - son of Yitzhar, son of Levi, took Dasan and Aviram - sons of Eliav and Oin ben Peles, from the offspring of Reuven." (16:1)

We see from this verse that Oin ben Peles was one of the principal protagonists in the uprising against Moshe, yet we do not find his name mentioned ever again. The Gemara explains that this is because Oin ben Peles took no further part in the uprising, thanks to his wife, who saved his life by preventing him from joining Korach and his cohorts the following day. How did she try to convince him that his part in the rebellion was foolish? She said, "What difference does it make to you if the one [Moshe] remains master and you are a disciple or if the other one [Korach] becomes master and you are a disciple." Put simply, Oin's wife was saying to her husband, "Why are you getting involved in this fight when you stand nothing to gain and everything to lose?!" For this argument, the Gemara applies the verse (Mishlei 14:1), "The wisest of women, each one built her house."

Rav Chaim Shmuelevits asks why Oin's wife is called "the wisest of women," after all, she did nothing more than point out how ridiculous it was for her husband to risk everything for no possible gain. This advice is simple and straightforward; why did it justify Oin's wife to be called "the wisest of women"? (Related by Rav Yissacher Frand)

The answer, explains Rav Chaim, is that when it comes to machlokes and strife, just to think sensibly demonstrates immense wisdom and maturity. For, when we are engaged in an argument or a pursuit of honor or recognition, we lose all sense of logic and rational. Therefore, by stating the obvious, Oin's wife truly demonstrated her great wisdom.

Rav Yosef Tendler was someone who lived by this message; and even when a leader he greatly respected asked him to become involved in a dispute, Rav Tendler refused. In order to demonstrate the verity of the case, this person sent Rav Tendler a package proving beyond doubt that one side was totally correct. Yet, without even opening the package, Rav Tendler placed it in the trash. When his son saw who had sent it and what his father was doing, he protested, reminding his father of the stature of the person who was asking him to involve himself. Rav Tendler just looked at him and said, "I don't care who he is. If he is spreading machlokes then I certainly don't need to follow his direction!"

Machlokes can cloud the minds of great people and spin completely out of control. Therefore, before getting involved in any argument or machlokes, even when we think we are acting purely for Hashem's sake and are undeniably in the right, we must rethink our involvement and reevaluate our ability to make non-biased decisions. For, we see from Korach and his cohorts - all great men - how wrong we can possibly be. Instead, let us learn from Rav Tendler who viewed machlokes as fire and knew to stay far away.

TRUST IN THE TZADDIK

Rabbi Yaakov Klein

“Korach took...” (16:1)

One of the central tenets of Chassidic philosophy is the role the Tzaddik plays in our spiritual development. “And they believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant” - just as one must cultivate emunah in Hashem, so must a Jew foster faith in the presence of tzaddikim and their ability to illuminate the pleasant ways of the Torah so that we can engage them in a healthy manner.

The Torah was given to all of am Yisrael - via Moshe Rabbeinu, who Chazal refer to as a “סרסור”, Hashem’s messenger to His people. It is this spirit of Moshe Rabbeinu that is embodied within the leaders of each generational era, enabling them to bring down further revelations of the Torah to Am Yisrael and share specific tools and advice that will enable our nation to grow close to Hashem and perceive His presence. Indeed, Chazal teach that one who seeks to cleave to Hashem should bind himself to a talmid chacham, as the tzaddik serves as a channel for Hashem’s Gravity - we are drawn to the tzaddik and through him - by way of his guidance, teachings, melodies, stories, advice, wisdom, and shining countenance, all devoid of ego - into the embrace of our Father in heaven.

This tzaddik, whose ego-nullification and deep awareness of and connection with Hashem has allowed him to bridge the gap between heaven and earth, is the channel through which all blessing flows down to our world. His teachings guide Am Yisrael on how they, too, can transform their engagement with physicality into a heavenly experience, filling every aspect of their daily schedule with life, meaning, and vitality.

Reb Noson of Breslov zy”a teaches that the episode of קרח ועדתו is the archetypal portrait of what happens when a Jew denies the centrality of tzaddikim and their teachings to his avodas Hashem. “The entire community is holy, and Hashem is in their midst. Why, then do you raise yourself above Hashem’s congregation?” This claim of Korach has echoed throughout the generations, in ever-resounding tones by those who sought to challenge the tzaddik’s role.

What was Korach’s punishment? ירדו חיים שאולה, they were swallowed alive by the earth. Reb Noson explains that, in truth, this wasn’t a punishment per se, but rather a natural effect of their rebellion against the tzaddik. Disconnected from Moshe’s heavenly channel, their life was not a life at all, but a meaningless experience of obsession with physicality and drowning in the mire of a world seemingly devoid of Hashem. When a person lives life or serves Hashem without connection to tzaddikim, he is similarly “swallowed alive” by the earthliness of the human condition, lacking access to the light, warmth, vitality, and heavenly clarity afforded in the tzaddik’s revelations. May we merit to search for and discover the tzaddikim that can help us grow close to the Master of the world.

DOING IT FOR HASHEM

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“Korach took...” (16:1)

Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev offers an additional insight into Reish Lakish’s understanding of the first pasuk of Parshas Korach, that “לקח מקח רע לעצמו” - He made a bad acquisition for himself.”

There are those, Rav Levi Yitzchak observes, who serve Hashem sincerely, out of genuine love and devotion to Him. But there are others who serve Hashem with their own interests in mind. The difference between these two groups of people is manifest when a job could be done by somebody else. For the sincerely-driven servant of G-d, it makes no difference whether he davens for the amud, reads the Torah, runs the program, delivers the drasha, etc., or if somebody else does. As long as the job is completed satisfactorily, as Hashem wants, this עבד ה' is pleased, knowing that Hashem has received נחת רוח (gratification). The other type of person, however, insists on doing the job himself. If somebody is driven by ego, then even though he might say that his intentions are purely for Hashem’s sake, in truth, it’s about him, not G-d. He has to lead the davening; he needs to give the speech or the shiur; he needs to take the spotlight; and he needs to get the credit.

This was the difference between Aharon, the chosen kohen gadol, and Korach, who coveted this position. Chazal teach us that Aharon was initially reluctant to assume the role. He did not feel he needed to serve in this capacity, and would have been just as pleased if somebody else had received the appointment. His focus was on fulfilling Hashem’s will, and so it did not matter to him one iota whether he executed the responsibilities of the kohen gadol or if somebody else did. For Korach, however, it was all about him. He was driven not by love of Hashem, but by ego. He needed to get the position; he wanted the job for himself.

I recall Rav Avraham Rivlin, the mashgiach in Yeshivas Kerem Be’Yavneh, making the observation that nobody complains about not receiving an aliya on Sunday, or on Tuesday, Wednesday or Friday. These are days when the Torah isn’t read, and thus nobody receives an aliya. Since nobody is called to the Torah, nobody feels upset about not having been called. People complain only on Monday, Thursday and Shabbos, when others receive aliyos and they don’t. This proves that what irks them is not that they aren’t called for an aliya, but rather that other people are...

If we are concerned with Hashem’s honor, then we aren’t bothered by other people receiving an aliya or other kibbudim (honors) in shul. If we are bothered, this is because our concern is not with Hashem’s honor, but with our own honor.

Rav Levi Yitzchak explains לקח מקח רע לעצמו to mean that when a person focuses on לעצמו, himself, when it’s all about him, his honor and prestige, then it’s a מקח רע.

We turn the beautiful Torah - “כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם,” into a “bad acquisition,” when we use it not for Hashem’s honor, but for our own self-promotion.

Jim Collins, author of Good to Great, describes five different levels of leadership, the highest of which - level 5 - is when it’s not about you, but about the cause. The greatest leaders care more about the project, the company or the institution, than about keeping their position. They are capable of succession planning, of laying the groundwork for others to take over to advance the cause. They don’t get in the way of the project’s success, because their priority is the project, and not their pride and prestige.

This concept was lost on Korach. In his eyes, it was all about him, not about Hashem. His downfall provides us with a perfect example of how ego destroys everything. Ego is our Kryptonite, that ruins shalom bayis, other family relationships, careers, institutions, and lives. When we learn to ignore our personal pride, we can then do our job and allow and encourage others to do theirs, and this is how we ensure success in everything we take part in.

UNITY THROUGH FAITH

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“Korach took...” (16:1)

The Torah begins the story of Korach’s brazen revolt against Moshe Rabbeinu with the words ויקח קורח - “Korach took.” As discussed by many commentators, the Torah does not tell us what it is that Korach “took,” and we find a number of different approaches to explain the precise meaning of this pasuk.

The Gemara in Maseches Sanhedrin (109b) cites Reish Lakish as interpreting the words ויקח קורח to mean לקח רע לעצמו - “he made for himself a bad acquisition.” According to Reish Lakish, the word ויקח here denotes a “purchase,” teaching us that Korach made a bad purchase.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe, in Imros Tehoros, offers a profound insight to explain Reish Lakish’s understanding of this pasuk. The Gemara in Maseches Makkos (24a) comments that the prophet Chabakuk condensed all 613 mitzvos into a single precept, when he proclaimed, וצדיק באמונתו יחיה - “and a righteous person shall live in his faith” (Chabakuk 2:4). All taryag (613) mitzvos, the Gemara here teaches, can be encapsulated by the single mitzvah of emuna, having faith in Hashem. Of course, each and every one of the 613 mitzvos is binding, and nobody can excuse himself from any of the mitzvos simply by having faith in Hashem. What the Gemara means, the Rachmastrivka Rebbe explains, is that we need emuna in order to be considered to fulfill all taryag mitzvos. Practically speaking, it is impossible for any individual to observe all 613 mitzvos. Some mitzvos apply only to Kohanim, some to Leviim, and some to Yisraelim. Some apply to men, some to women. Some apply only in Eretz Yisrael, and some apply only under very specific

circumstances. The only way to observe all the mitzvos, the Rachmastrivka Rebbe writes, is through unity. When we bond together into a single, indivisible entity, then every mitzvah any Jew performs is performed on behalf of the collective unit of Am Yisrael. If we all act for ourselves, as individuals, then no one can ever fulfill all 613 mitzvos. It is only through unity, by merging together into one nation, such that every mitzvah is, in effect, credited to all Am Yisrael, that we collectively observe all the Torah’s commands. Through unity, we all become limbs of a single body, such that every mitzvah performed by an individual Jew is considered as having been performed by the entire nation.

The Rachmastrivka Rebbe writes that achdus (unity) is not possible without emuna. When we live with emuna, we see all our fellow Jews as Hashem’s children, and we accept everything that happens as Hashem’s will. With faith, we don’t see our fellow as our competitor, as our adversary, or as our nemesis, but rather as part of Hashem’s family. We aren’t angered when somebody aggrieves us, because we understand that everything happens for a purpose. We aren’t jealous or resentful of other people, because we firmly believe that Hashem gives every person precisely what he or she is meant to have. Emuna saves us from hard feelings such as anger, anxiety and envy, thus enabling us to live peacefully with the people in our lives.

This, the Rebbe explains, is the meaning of the Gemara’s teaching, בא חבקוק והעמידן על אחת - that Chabakuk encapsulated the entire Torah. In order to fulfill all 613 mitzvos, we require achdus, and we attain achdus through emuna.

Korach did just the opposite. He was consumed by jealousy, and instigated a fight, opposing Aharon and the kohanim. He lost his ability to fulfill all 613 mitzvos by breaking away from his fellow Jews. The famous pasuk in Mishlei (4:2) states, כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם - that Torah is a “good acquisition.” Korach, through instigating machlokes (strife), forfeited his opportunity to fulfill the entire Torah, and was thus left with a “bad purchase.” Rather than take advantage of the “good acquisition,” the beautiful, perfect Torah that he - and all of us - have been given, by accepting his role and bonding together with the rest of the nation, he decided instead to break away, such that he was left with a “bad purchase.”

FOR HEAVEN’S SAKE

Midrash Shmuel

“Korach took...” (16:1)

Which controversy was for the sake of Heaven? The controversy between Hillel and Shammai. And which one was not for the sake of Heaven? The controversy of Korach and all his company. (Pirkei Avos 5:20)

Why doesn't the pasuk read “the controversy between Korach and Moshe,” paralleling “the controversy between Hillel and Shammai”?

Because Moshe was guided solely by honorable motivations. Only the intentions of Korach and his company definitely were not “for the sake of Heaven.”

(Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman adds: How do we know that the controversy of Korach was not for the sake of Heaven? Because Korach's controversy was directed against his teacher (Moshe).

It is written that “he who initiates a controversy against his teacher is regarded as if he had initiated a controversy against the Holy Presence Itself.” Obviously, then, Korach's controversy could not have been “for the sake of Heaven.”)

WOMEN'S INFLUENCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took...” (16:1)

Korach was a member of one of the Jewish people's most distinguished families, and also learned, wise, wealthy, and among the inner circle of Moshe's and Aharon's closest confidants. In contrast, his fellow conspirator Oin son of Peles was quite ordinary, both in terms of his intellectual capabilities and his lineage. Yet Korach came to a tragic end, dragging hundreds of other people down with him, whereas Oin was the only one of Korach's entire assembly who emerged completely unscathed.

The difference in the fates of these two conspirators was due to the behavior of their wives. Whereas Korach's wife encouraged him to rebel, Oin's wife prevented him from participating in Korach's mutiny. (Sanhedrin 109b; Bamidbar Rabbah 18:20)

This demonstrates the great responsibility of women - particularly those who are wives, and especially those who are also mothers. Women should never underestimate their ability to influence their own destinies as well as those of their community, their husbands, and their families. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 689-690) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

LITMUS TEST

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And Korach - son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, took Dasan and Aviram - sons of Elia, and Oin - son of Peles, from the offspring of Reuven. And they arose before Moshe with two hundred and fifty men from the Children of Israel, leaders of the congregation and dignitaries of the assembly - men of repute.” (16:1-2)

The Sifsei Kohen questions the peculiar order of this verse. Why does it say that Korach took Dasan, Aviram and Oin, and only after they stood before Moshe, we are told that there were two hundred and fifty men who joined them? The verse should have said that Korach took Dasan, Aviram and Oin, together with two hundred and fifty men - who then all went and stood before Moshe?

Based on this verse's peculiar order, the Sifsei Kohen recreates what must have occurred on that day. He explains that Korach, Dasan, Aviram and Oin were the ring leaders who enticed everyone to join them in the revolt against Moshe and Aharon. However, the two hundred and fifty men whom they recruited were too embarrassed to stand against Moshe until the ring leaders came and confronted him first. Only when the two hundred and fifty men saw that their leaders were there, they found the “confidence” to join them - and this explains the order of the verse perfectly.

The message here is that we are often faced with dilemmas on how to act. If we are not willing to take responsibility for our actions at every juncture, perhaps we should rethink whether we are acting appropriately in the first place, because if we truly believe in something, why are we hesitant to stand up and act?

POINT OF INSPIRATION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And they arose before Moshe...” (16:2)

Korach mistakenly concluded from the incident of the spies that the study of the Torah is not intrinsically superior to the performance of the commandments. Therefore, he reasoned, a person who works for a living has no need to aspire to moments of “reconnection” to spirituality. As such, he further concluded that there is no need for an elite class of individuals - the tribe of Levi, the priests, and the high priest in particular - who would be devoted exclusively to the spiritual life in order to inspire the rest of us.

Moshe responded to Korach's claims by telling him that a clergy devoted exclusively to the service of G-d is indeed necessary, in order to inspire those involved in the mundane world and instruct them as to what is permitted and what is prohibited. Without such inspiration and guidance, it is too easy to lose sight of our ideals and end up as slaves to materiality rather than its masters. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 8, p. 108) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

BEYOND COMPREHENSION

Reb Noson of Breslov

“And they arose before Moshe with two hundred and fifty men from the Children of Israel, leaders of the congregation...” (16:2)

Korach asked Moshe, “If a tallit is made completely out of tekheilet threads, does it require tzitzit? Since a single strand of tekheilet on the tzitzit is sufficient for the mitzvah, shouldn't an entire garment made of tekheilet be exempt from tzitzit?” He asked further, “If a house is filled with holy writings, does it require a mezuzah? Since a mezuzah that contains just two Torah passages fulfills the requirement for the mitzvah, shouldn't an entire house filled with Torah passages fulfill the requirement for a mezuzah?”

He asked yet another question: "The minimum area of a leprous mark to be deemed impure is about one square centimeter. However, if the leprous mark spreads to the entire body, it is a sign of purity. How can this be?" (Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:3)

The main blemish of Korach was his denial of Divine Providence. He simply could not believe that G-d could be One, yet at the same time, "G-d, the Torah and Israel are one" (Zohar III, 73a). Therefore, Korach looked for some kind of fault in the Torah and, using sophistry, propounded mitzvot about the tzitzit that is entirely tekheilet, a house full of books that exempt it from the mitzvah of mezuzah, and so on, may G-d save us. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 6a)

Korach's questions were based on his assumption that the intentions behind the mitzvot are more important than the performance of the mitzvot themselves. But Moshe gave us a Torah which teaches that the actual performance of the mitzvot, according to G-d's dictates, is paramount. No matter how many tekheilet threads a person weaves into his tallit, the tallit is worthless without tzitzit. At their source, the mitzvot are extremely lofty and no one - not the great tzaddik Moshe, nor average people, nor even sinners - can draw from the sanctity of tzitzit according to their level because no one understands G-d's intentions. The same applies to a house filled with Torah passages.

Korach's question about the leprous mark takes a different approach. How can something considered to be impure become pure when it spreads? Here, too, human intellect cannot comprehend the Divine. There are times when a person sins and reaches a very low level. Yet it is precisely when he reaches his lowest ebb that he begins his return to G-d. Korach's effort to place human limitations on G-d led him astray and caused him to rebel.

SENSELESS ACCUSATIONS

Kotzker Rebbe

"And why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?" (16:3)

When people look for controversy and wish to find fault with a tzaddik, they look for points that are the opposite of his character. That becomes obvious in Korach's condemnation of Moshe: They accused him of being haughty, but the Torah is very clear in declaring Moshe the most humble individual.

HAUGHTY VS HUMBLE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?" (16:3)

Korach blemished humility. He desired a position for himself and opposed Aharon's appointment as the Kohen Gadol.

Aharon represents humility, for even though he was older than Moshe and an accomplished leader in his own right, he submitted to Moshe's authority.

IRONY OF CONFLICT

Kotzker Rebbe

"And why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?" (16:3)

It is interesting to note that those who engage in a disagreement with someone righteous will attribute to themselves the righteous traits that are opposite of their true character.

This is what happened in Moshe's case, of whom the Torah states was "very humble, above all the men who were on the face of the earth." His detractors - seeking to find fault with him - used arrogance, of all things, as the failing for which to attack their leader.

MONETARY COERCION

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"It is too much for you! For the entire assembly is holy, and Hashem is among them; and why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?" (16:3)

The most amazing aspect of the rebellion of Korach - more than the brazenness of his words, the audacity of his arguments, and that he, his wife and his henchmen were swallowed up alive - is quite possibly the fact that Korach managed to convince some of the greatest leaders of our people to follow him! The Nesiim - princes who stood higher up on Har Sinai than the rest of Klal Yisrael and heard the Ten Commandments emanate directly from Hashem Himself were those that were swayed by Korach's specious arguments. How is this possible?

When the Satmar Rav, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum zt'l, visited Yerushalayim in the 1950's, he instituted his clear policy of not accepting any money or favors from the Israeli government even if the government asked for nothing in return. Rav Yoel would forcefully intone the words of Shlomo HaMelech: "Money is the answer for everything" (Koheles 10:10). The purpose of spreading wealth around without asking anything in return is to attain control over the minds and hearts of the recipients. Once a person accepts funds from a person, organization or government, he is now "bought" to a certain extent, and in time, he will find himself beholden to the will, and more dangerously, to the agenda of the donor.

Thus, Rashi quotes the Gemara (Sanhedrin 52b): "Once the people derived benefit from Korach's money, he was able to convince them to become involved in his quarrel, and [ultimately] to rebel against Hashem." Korach understood the power of money. By spreading his wealth around, he was able to control the will of its recipients, even if they happened to be the Nesiim and most respected members of Klal Yisrael!

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?” (16:3)

Chazal tell us that the underlying theme that fueled Korach's rebellion was his lack of respect for the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu and the office of the Kohen Gadol, held by Aharon HaKohen. Korach, who himself was a well-respected leader in Klal Yisrael, was not satisfied with his stature. He desired even more power. Hashem brought about his downfall dramatically to demonstrate the importance of kavod haTorah - respecting Torah (scholars and leaders), and the severity of the punishment for disrespect.

The saintly Vilna Gaon, Reb Eliyahu zt'l, held no official position in the city of Vilna. All halachic questions were directed to Reb Shmuel zt'l, the Rav of the city.

One Friday afternoon, the Gaon received a kashrus question from his neighbor regarding his Shabbos food. Since it was close to Shabbos, it made more sense for the neighbor to ask the question to the Gaon, rather than going all the way to R' Shmuel's house with it. Reb Eliyahu ruled that the food was treif - unkosher, and not to be eaten.

The neighbor's wife, however, unaware that her husband had sent the question to the Gaon, had already sent a child to the home of Reb Shmuel with the same question, and Reb Shmuel ruled that the food was kosher! The family was in a quandary. What were they to do? On the one hand, the local Rav had rendered his official ruling. Yet, who was willing to go against the ruling of the great Vilna Gaon?

Upon hearing the conflicting rulings, R' Shmuel immediately went to see the Gaon. “You are the greatest Torah authority in the world,” R' Shmuel said humbly. “Still, I am the recognized halachic authority in this community, and it is not proper to have my rulings undermined. I therefore beg you to accompany me to your neighbor's home and partake of the food that I declared to be kosher, although you paskened that it is treif. This will establish unquestionable respect for Torah authority.”

The Gaon deferred to R' Shmuel and agreed to eat of the food that he himself ruled unfit. (In the end, though, eating it wasn't necessary. As the housewife was serving the two Rabbanim, a candle fell into the food, making it inedible!)

ALWAYS A CRITIC

Reb Naftali of Ropshitz

“And why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?” (16:3)

They were also jealous of Moshe in the camp, and of Aharon, the holy one of Hashem. (Tehillim 106:16)

This is the way of all who initiate controversies and incite rebellion. Whatever the righteous may do, fault will be found.

If the righteous withdraw from the world and devote all their time to study and Divine service, it will be said that the world derives no benefit from them. If they take an active part in communal life and speak their mind on issues affecting the community, they will be attacked for meddling in politics instead of sticking to their Gemara.

“They were also jealous of Moshe in the camp” - Moshe spent all his time studying within his tent, which had been pitched outside the camp. As a result, Korach and his company criticized him for not being within the camp and taking an interest in issues of public concern.

“And of Aharon, the holy one of Hashem” - As opposed to Moshe, Aharon mingled with the others, made peace among others and took an active interest in everyone around him. But Korach and his company protested that Aharon, who was “sanctified to G-d,” had no business meddling in communal affairs but should remain secluded in the house of study.

It has been this way throughout history. When pious Jews refrain from active participation in communal affairs, they are criticized for keeping aloof from the rest of the community. But as soon as they begin to assume an active role in the community, the others shout: “What business do you have in politics? Go back to your shteibel.” Such is the way of Dasan and Aviram and their ilk.

CLOUDED VISION

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And they gathered against Moshe and against Aharon, and said to them, ‘It is too much for you! For the entire assembly is holy, and Hashem is among them; and why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?’” (16:3)

Rav Simcha Bunim of Peshischa wonders how Korach could have made such a preposterous claim. Was he not aware that the Torah testifies to the fact that Moshe was the most humble of men?

Why would Korach choose to accuse Moshe of wrongdoing regarding the very character trait that Moshe had in fact excelled in?

Rav Simcha Bunim explains that when a person is arrogant and is only focused on him or herself, they can't see clearly. Their vision becomes distorted and warped; they are left with a cloudy lens producing faulty perspectives. This explains Korach's faulty accusation of Moshe.

Rav Simcha Bunim is reminding us of how important it is to remain grounded and humble. We can't allow our personal agendas and ulterior motives to cloud our thinking. We must constantly be mindful of Hashem, Who runs the world and knows what is best for us. With this in mind, we will see the world clearly and be able to make the best choices for our families and ourselves.

WHERE'S YOUR YID?

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"It is too much for you! For the entire assembly is holy, and Hashem is among them; and why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?" (16:3)

Korach attacks Moshe with a strong claim - "the entire Jewish People experienced a direct connection with Hashem at Sinai, so why do we need you?" It seems from this argument that Korach's sole concern was for the good of the Jewish People. However, the Ibn Ezra learns that Korach's revolt took place directly after Aharon and his sons were appointed to replace the firstborns, who had lost their right to the Priesthood as a result of their involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf. The Ibn Ezra explains that the reason why Korach rose up against Moshe was because he was a firstborn (Shemos 6:21), as were the two hundred and fifty men who joined him, and although they disguised their arguments in honorable terms, in reality it was their own thirst for power that drove them to enter into a fight with Moshe and Aharon.

From here we see that an outwardly righteous appearance does not necessarily mean the presence of righteousness, and although it is undoubtedly important to appear to be righteous, to actually be righteous is life's goal! Our outward actions help us do this, as the Sefer HaChinuch writes, "One's personality is molded by his external actions," but we can never think that looking righteous is the goal, it is only the means to the goal.

The following story helps to emphasize this point.

In his home, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rebbe, once honored Rav Elimelech Gavriel "Mike" Tress, the Administrative President of Agudas Yisrael of America; the man responsible for saving thousands of Jews during the Holocaust as well as having a major input in the Torah establishing its roots in America. Upon hearing of the visit, some young students approached the Rebbe and brazenly asked him how he could honor a man who did not have a beard. "Surely the Rebbe knows the importance of having a beard," they said. The Samar Rebbe looked them in the eyes and said, "You're right. When that man leaves this world, the Heavenly Court will say 'Yid, Yid, where was your beard?' But when you leave this world, they will say 'Beard, Beard, where was your Yid?!'"

WARPED THINKING

Baal Shem Tov

"And why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?" (16:3)

Moshe was entirely humble, but as a Jewish king tasked with training his nation to serve G-d, he demonstrated strength of leadership. Despite Korach's brilliance and Divine inspiration, he failed to appreciate this balance, arguing: Why do you raise yourselves above G-d's community? Rashi explains: "You took far more than enough greatness for yourselves!"

In other words, at the outset of a mitzvah, a measure of self-promotion is permitted if it is indispensable to motivating us. However, once we are successfully engaged in the mitzvah, and certainly after completing it, we must shed every trace of pride.

Korach consented that since Moshe hesitated to become the leader as G-d commanded, he required a boost from self-promotion, but only just enough to get going. He considered Moshe's continued strength of command "far more than enough."

Korach harbored a trace of jealousy that stemmed from arrogance, which led him to an incorrect assumption: He projected his own blemish onto Moshe, assuming that Moshe's conduct was the result of arrogance and not strictly according to G-d's command. He considered himself humble, seeking leadership solely for G-d's sake, in the spirit of, "His heart was uplifted in the ways of G-d" (II Divrei HaYamim 17:6). His jealousy led him to confuse good and bad.

Moshe responded (16:7), "It is enough for you, sons of Levi!" You consider your self-promotion Divine, and mine, evil. Rav lachem (it is enough for you) can be read as rav, the greatness you seek, lachem, is for you, for your sakes, not for G-d's sake.

PROJECTION VS SELF INTROSPECTION

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And why do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?" (16:3)

It seems quite absurd for Korach to accuse Moshe Rabbeinu, the exceptionally tolerant and loving leader of Klal Yisrael and the humblest man who ever lived, of taking all the glory of leadership for himself. How could Korach entertain the notion that Moshe would grab a high position for his own honor? The Gemara explains what happened with the following statement: A person who constantly sees defects in others, really has the same defects himself (Kiddushin 70a). Korach had a distorted perception of Moshe, because he was simply casting his own bad middos onto him!

This is called "projection," explains Rav Yissocher Frand shlit'a. Understanding this aspect of human nature can benefit our relationships with others in two ways. First, as parents, when you find yourself constantly pointing out a negative trait to your child that annoys you terribly, stop for a minute and search inside yourself. Are you really seeing your own negative trait? Fix yourself up first and don't badger the child! Second, when you become the object of a ridiculous accusation, don't get upset. Understand that the person likely has this issue and is projecting it onto you. Remain calm and collected and the person might just end up realizing that the root of his problem is really himself!

The Ba'al Shem Tov zt'l takes this concept a step further and explains how the world around us acts as a mirror.

What we see in others is usually a reflection of what is really inside ourselves. Once, the Ba'al Shem Tov saw someone violating Shabbos. After a thorough soul searching, he realized that he had not sufficiently respected a Torah scholar. Since a Torah scholar is compared to Shabbos, he understood that he was shown a negative deed so that he could repent for the negative act that he did.

Rather than judge others unfavorably, or condemn and slander others when we see their bad middos or negative behavior, we would be wise to seek out the good in others and look inward to fix up any flaws in ourselves.

The greatest benefit of having an ayin tov, a positive view of every Jew, is that Hashem will look upon us with mercy and help us to learn to improve ourselves from the defects of others.

FALLING IN AWE

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

"When Moshe heard, he fell on his face..." (16:4)

On none of the other occasions when the Jews rebelled had Moshe ever fallen on his face. What made him do so at this time?

Hearing the statement of Korach and his company that the entire Jewish nation was holy and that every single Jew was therefore holy in his own right, Moshe immediately fell on his face in awe, for no one knew better than he how difficult it is to achieve holiness.

WEIGHED DOWN

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"You are the ones who have taken on too much, sons of Levi!" (16:7)

Rashi asks: "Korach was an intelligent person, so what led him to [persist in] this foolishness?"

Seemingly, Korach's actions were much more wicked than foolish; why does Rashi look at what he did as "foolishness?"

Also, the medrash relates that Korach was incited to rebellion by his wife. She argued, "Why did Moshe appoint his brother as Kohen Gadol and leave you to carry the heavy Aron?" Yet, this medrash is difficult to understand, since Chazal teach us that the holy Aron in the Mishkan was weightless; in fact, it maintained the characteristic of "nosei es nosav," carrying its carriers, and they expended no energy when walking! What, then, were Korach and his wife complaining about?

Reb Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg zt'l explains. The ease or difficulty of any endeavor is dependent on one's attitude. If one believes in the Torah's power to carry a person, it will do so. If one views the Torah as a burden, it will feel like one...

Certainly, Korach's actions were wicked. However, he could never have stooped so low and caused such a terrible rebellion had he not been foolish enough to confuse his privileged position with labor. To him, the Torah was a heavy burden; the Aron certainly did not "carry" him. Thus, at the root of his discontent was foolishness. He couldn't see his station for what it was; the right to be borne by the Torah.

HASHEM'S PLAN ALWAYS PREVAILS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Tomorrow, put fire upon them and place incense on them before G-d. Then the man that G-d will choose, he is the holy one. You are the ones who have taken on too much, sons of Levi!" (16:7)

Korach was a clever man. Why did he resort to such foolishness? He foresaw that his descendants were destined for greatness. (Rashi)

Korach thought that because his descendants would be tzaddikim, he would be able to survive his revolt against Moshe. But G-d's thoughts are much deeper. In the end, Korach perished and his sons repented, leading to the birth of great descendants such as the Shmuel HaNavi.

Even if a man tries to disturb or upset G-d's Will, G-d's plan will prevail, and the rebellious one will suffer terribly for his errors and sins, as did Korach. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 64a)

THEIR WORDS WILL BE HEARD

Rav Mordechai Yosef Silberberg of Warsaw

"Tomorrow, put fire upon them and place incense on them before G-d. Then the man that G-d will choose, he is the holy one. You are the ones who have taken on too much, sons of Levi!" (16:7)

Korach - who was surely smart - what was his reason for committing this folly? His mind's eye misled him. He saw by prophetic vision a long line of brilliant men descending from him, among them several prophets - including Shmuel - who were equal in importance to Moshe and Aharon together... and he said to himself: "On his (Shmuel's) account I shall escape punishment." However, he had not seen correctly, for his sons repented of their rebellious attitude... but Moshe foresaw this. (Rashi)

A similar view was taken by Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen in his interpretation of the statement: "The words of any person who fears G-d will be heard, for it is written (Berachos 6): 'In the final analysis everything will be heard, G-d shall you fear.'"

At first glance, this statement seems difficult to accept because we often witness people of astonishing righteousness reprove a person and the person still does not mend his or her ways.

What Rabbi Tzadok HaKohen means is that, in the end, a righteous person's words will be heard. Even if they make no impression when they are first uttered, they are sure to eventually take effect. Either the person to whom they were originally addressed will remember them and repent, or the rebuked person may recount them to someone else who will then repent. At any rate, a righteous person's words will leave their mark, somehow, somewhere.

For this reason, the Sages deduce from the words "In the final analysis, everything will be heard" that "in the end, the word of a G-d-fearing person will be heard."

WALK WITH PRIDE

Reb Yechezkel Abramsky

"Is it not enough for you that Hashem has separated you from the congregation of Israel to be holy to Him?" (16:9)

Moshe Rabbeinu told Korach: "Is it not enough for you that Hashem has separated you from the congregation of Israel to be holy to Him?" The same dictum applies to every ben Torah: Why must you seek honor and kavod for your lifestyle; is it not enough that you spend your days in the House of Hashem, in the pursuit of His Torah?

UNITED DIVISIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d told Moshe,] 'Remove yourselves from this congregation.'" (16:10)

Korach called for abolishing the distinctions between different groups of Jews. Ironically, he became the classic example of argument and division.

Just as it is damaging to create arbitrary or artificial divisions, it is equally damaging to ignore the divisions that G-d has established in nature or legislated in the Torah. True unity is possible only when each component of a group is fulfilling its designated role. Only then can all the components combine to constitute a well-functioning unit.

Abolishing boundaries does not always produce unity; in fact, it can produce exactly the opposite. It is possible to unite fire and water (by heating the water with the fire) only if they are separated by a pot. So, too, respecting the Torah's divisions between different groups of people allows for the truest expression of unity and harmony among them. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 18, pp. 204-211) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PEACE AT ALL COSTS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"Therefore, you and your entire congregation who are gathered against Hashem; and what is Aharon that you rail against him?" (16:11)

Mashal: A Yemenite couple once asked Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l to officiate as mesader kiddushin at their wedding. Minutes before they were about to start the chuppah, someone informed the rav that one of the men chosen to be an eid kiddushin (a witness to the wedding) was an adherent of a certain group known as Darda'im - heretics who did not believe in the Zohar or Kabbalah.

R' Shlomo Zalman was in a quandary. The chuppah was standing, the chassan and kallah were about to make their entrance, and the wedding had to go on, but this man was unfit to be a witness!

A lover and pursuer of peace, R' Shlomo Zalman came up with a unique resolution that only someone of his stature could facilitate. He approached the man and said, "I have a favor to request of you. All my life, I've always wanted to be an eid kiddushin, but what can I do when people are always asking me to be mesader kiddushin? Would you mind if we switched places - I will be the witness and you will do the officiating?"

At first, the man was hesitant, but at the persistent urging of R' Shlomo Zalman, it all worked out perfectly.

Nimshal: R' Shlomo Zalman had a serious dilemma, but he came up with a solution that preserved the peace, even though he forfeited the honor of being mesader kiddushin.

In Parshas Korach, the humility of Moshe Rabbeinu and his constant attempts at making peace with Korach, Dasan and Aviram, are readily apparent. He urged Korach to reconsider and reform the error of his ways. He spoke softly, in a conciliatory tone. He even overlooked his own honor and came to the sinners' tents in order to make peace. From here we see that a dispute should never be maintained. The most important thing is peace at all costs.

POWER OF PERSPECTIVE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"We shall not go up! Is it not enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the wilderness...?" (16:13)

Dasan and Aviram irrationally claimed that G-d took the people out of a land flowing with milk and honey to murder them in the desert. To make matters worse, they then insist that G-d has not brought us to His land nor given the land as an inheritance (16:14). How could they make such outrageous claims and shamelessly think that they are correct?

Oznayim LaTorah proposes that this entire episode was caused by divergent perspectives. While Korach, Dasan, Aviram, and the other rebels had differing agendas, they all shared a negative, completely warped view of their situation. The rebels reality became altogether opposite from the truth; in their minds, the land that enslaved them became flowing with milk and honey.

This episode highlights not only how negative perspectives can turn positive realities into negative ones but also how positive perspectives can light the way and shine brightly on our lives, perspectives, and futures.

PROPER USAGE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You have not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards...” (16:14)

When the spies reported back to the people after scouting out the Land of Israel, the first thing they said was that it was “flowing with milk and honey” (Bamidbar 13:27). While this was true, their intent was to imply that it was impossible to conquer the land. Showing the people the abnormally large fruit that they had brought back with them, they said, “Just like the fruit of the land is huge, so are its inhabitants huge and mighty, and we can never overcome them.”

Allegorically, the spies were implying that because there is so much material abundance and luxury readily available in the Land of Israel, it is impossible to maintain a spiritual perspective on life, let alone spread Divine consciousness in this environment.

In our own lives, too, the drive toward material success and the draw of material luxury can be formidable obstacles to a spiritual life. We must therefore realize that G-d gives us lives “flowing with milk and honey” in order to utilize these gifts for holy purposes, transforming the “land” into His true home. With this in mind, we can indeed conquer materiality, maintaining and disseminating Divine consciousness. (Igrot Kodesh, vol. 1, pp. 295-296) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

UPLIFTING AND ATTACHED TO ALL

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“I have not taken a donkey from a single one of them, and I have not harmed a single one of them.” (16:15)

The underlying principle here is as follows: Moshe was concerned with the elevation of all the Jewish people. He was continually attached to all Jews. This is the allegorical meaning of this verse: “I have not taken (נשאתי) a donkey from a single one of them,” implying: “I did not uplift (נשאתי) just a single Jewish body; rather, I have uplifted the entire Jewish people.”

Similarly, the continuation of this verse can be interpreted to mean, “and I am not attached to only a single Jew, but to all of them.” Thus, the entire verse can be read, “I have not uplifted just a single Jewish body; rather, I uplifted them all. And I am not attached to only a single Jew, but to all of them.” This interpretation is based on the fact that the word for “I have not harmed” (הרעתי) also means “attachment,” as in the verse (Tehillim 122:8) “My brothers and my friends (ורעי).”

ACCEPTING ALL PRAYERS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And Moshe was greatly distressed and said to Hashem, ‘Do not accept their offering...’” (16:15)

When confronted with a rebellion by those who rejected his leadership, Moshe was exceedingly worried that Hashem would accept their offerings and prayers (Ramban). Could it really be that Hashem would accept the supplications of those who were trying to challenge Moshe and Aharon? After all, Moshe, as the greatest of all Prophets, knew without a doubt that he was the rightful leader of the Jewish People. (Hashem Himself testifies to His unique relationship with Moshe (Bamidbar 12:6-8) whom the Rambam refers to as the “Father of all Prophets” (the seventh of the Thirteen Principles of Faith).) If so, why was he so concerned that Hashem would accept their prayers?

The answer, as we see from Moshe's reaction, is that indeed, Hashem accepts the prayers of everyone who turns to Him - even those in the midst of sin. As such, Moshe knew that he had to intervene and pray that Hashem not accept their entreaties.

Hashem's yearning for a relationship, even with the worst of transgressors, is what the Gemara (Berachos 63a) refers to as the fundamental principle of Torah! (The Ein Yaakov includes in the Gemara's text that people used to say about this principle that Hashem calls out to a thief even as he is approaching the location he plans to loot.) As such, it is crucial to remember that however distant we feel from Hashem, even in our darkest moments He is there waiting for us to call out to Him.

One example of such a prayer, often recounted by Rav Noach Weinberg, was made by Jeff - an adamant atheist who found himself in front of the Kosel stones feeling “something heavy.” A bright student at Harvard, Jeff prided himself on his intellectual honesty, and therefore, as he was feeling something spiritual, he looked up at the stones and said:

“G-d, I don't believe in You. As far as I know, You don't exist. But I do feel something. So if I'm making a mistake, I want You to know, G-d, I have no quarrel against You. It's just that I don't know that You exist. But G-d, just in case You're really there, and I'm making a mistake, get me an introduction.”

Just as Jeff finished his “prayer” he received a tap on the shoulder. Startled, he turned around to see Rav Meir Schuster who did not even introduce himself, he just said the words, “Would you like to learn about G-d?” Shocked at the providence, Jeff agreed and followed Rav Meir to Rav Noach's office which led to him enrolling in Aish HaTorah which ultimately led to a steadfast commitment to a religious life.

Wherever we are in life and whatever we have done, it is never too late to follow Jeff's lead and “get an introduction” with Hashem. He's always waiting!

BINDING SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Each man took his fire-pan. They put fire upon them and placed incense on them. Then they stood at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting together with Moshe and Aharon.” (16:18)

Korach wanted to separate between the physical and the spiritual. He denied that it was possible to unite all the worlds by performing the mitzvot.

He directed his argument against Moshe, since Moshe was able to reveal G-dliness. One of Korach's arguments concerned the tekheilet strings of the tzitzit. When we put the tekheilet strings together with the white strings, we bind the physical and spiritual worlds. Korach sought to separate them. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 30a)

To counter Korach's desire to separate between spiritual and physical, Moshe ordered a test that involved the ketoret. Ketoret (קטרט, incense-offering) is similar to Katar (קטר, Aramaic for “bind”), for the ketoret binds and attaches the lowest levels to the realm of holiness.

HOLY VS UNHOLY CONFLICT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Korach assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire assembly.” (16:19)

There is positive, holy conflict and negative, unholy conflict. Holy conflict is the spirited and sincere debate over the proper interpretation of the Torah. Since all parties are humbly seeking the truth, their conflict leads to greater friendship and mutual love (see Kiddushin 30b). In contrast, unholy conflict results from selfish concerns and the search for personal gratification. Since everyone's selfish concerns are different, any confederation based on selfishness will be rife with conflicting interests.

Korach and his faction were the prime example of unholy strife and conflict (Avos 5:17). Moshe and his supporters did not quarrel with them; we are only told how “they gathered together against Moshe and Aharon” (Bamidbar 16:3) Rather, Korach's controversy raged between himself and the members of his own faction.

Thus, we need not shun differences of opinion or arguments per se; it is only unholy conflict, stemming from self-interest, that we should seek to avoid. On the contrary, healthy and respectful conflict, motivated out of a sincere, humble search for truth, is a positive force toward individual and communal spiritual growth. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, pp. 1316-1318; *ibid.*, vol. 13, pp. 203-204) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

STRIVING FOR PEACE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Moshe arose and went to Dasan and Aviram.” (16:25)

After Korach, Dasan, and Aviram challenge Moshe and Aharon on their authority, Moshe is unsuccessful in his attempt to discuss their grievances with him (16:12). G-d then instructs Moshe to advise the congregation to withdraw from the rebels (16:24). The elders of Israel follow Moshe as he walks to Dasan and Aviram and urges everyone to distance themselves from the dissenters.

If Moshe's directive from G-d is to caution the people against the rebels, why does the Torah tell us that Moshe walked to Dasan and Aviram?

Oznayim LaTorah suggests that despite the disrespect Dasan and Aviram showed Moshe by not honoring his request for a conversation, Moshe still led the elders toward the rebels with the hope of a peaceful resolution. Although it did not culminate in a peaceful conclusion, the intent was nevertheless noble and exemplary.

We may, from time to time, find ourselves or others spiraling toward a negative outcome; all it can take to get us back on track is someone with good intentions walking toward us.

DON'T GIVE UP ON ANYONE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Moshe arose and went to Dasan and Aviram.” (16:25)

(There were 250 people who offered up incense. Besides these, there was a large crowd of people whom Korach had won over to his side, with the help of two members of the tribe of Reuven, the brothers Dasan and Aviram. Moshe tried to convince these other rebels to abandon Korach's mutiny.)

Dasan and Aviram had openly demonstrated their animosity toward Moshe, accusing him of being a despot and an impostor. Moreover, G-d Himself had already sealed their punishment, instructing Moshe only to save the other rebels from Dasan and Aviram's impending fate. Still, Moshe did not give up hope that his “enemies” would repent, doing everything in his power to influence them to reconsider.

We learn from Moshe to always do whatever we can to bring our brethren back to G-d and His Torah - even when it seems that all hope is lost. This is true even when they are ignoring their faith intentionally, and all the more so when they are acting out of ignorance. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 28, pp. 102-103)v

HOPE FOR PEACE

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

“Moshe arose and went to Dasan and Aviram.” (16:25)

When Moshe Rabbeinu disregarded his own dignity and went up to the tent of the rebels, Dasan and Aviram, in an attempt to end the ongoing conflict, he was fulfilling the dictum: *Ein machazikin b'machlokes* - “One should not perpetuate strife” (Sanhedrin 110a).

The word *machazikin* comes from the term *chazakah* (presumption). Thus, we may learn from this Chazal that one should not make any presumptions in a quarrel. In other words, one should not presume that the quarrel will never cease. A person should make every attempt to reconcile the quarreling parties, no matter how many fruitless attempts were already tried, because there is always hope for peace.

DRAWING OTHERS NEAR

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“But if G-d creates a creation - that the earth opens its mouth, swallows them and all that is theirs, and they descend alive into the grave - you will know that these men have provoked G-d.” (16:30)

Moshe knew that all that he had done was in full accordance with G-d's will, and that Korach's arguments were faulty and misguided.

Moshe could have therefore chosen not to react to Korach, opting instead to let events unfold as they might, confident that in the end Korach would be proven wrong and his plot would fail.

But instead, Moshe tried to convince Korach of his error, and when that failed, he devised a test whereby Korach's error could be demonstrated. Moshe knew that when people are mistaken everything possible must be done to correct them.

G-d has promised us that He will eventually bring everyone back to observance of the Torah's commandments, no matter how far they have strayed. Nonetheless, we must, as did Moshe, do all that we can to ensure that everyone manifest their relationship with G-d now, rather than rely on G-d's promise and allow them to be estranged from Him (consciously or not) for even one extra moment. (Hitva'aduyot 5730, vol. 4, pp. 84-85)

BENEFIT OF DOUBT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“The earth beneath them split open.” (16:31)

G-d did not punish Korach and his supporters until they had acted on their beliefs. Even when Korach convinced the rest of the people to side with him, G-d did not punish the offenders until He had duly warned them not to commit their crime and they nonetheless did so.

We must learn from G-d's example here, and wherever possible give those who offend us or disobey G-d's laws the benefit of the doubt, patiently and lovingly encouraging them to better themselves. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 28, p. 6) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

NOWHERE ELSE TO GO

Rev Zev Wolf of Strikov

“The earth beneath them split open.” (16:31)

Why were Korach and his followers punished by being swallowed up by the earth? Because Korach and his congregation fought against Moshe, who, as the pasuk describes, was “more humble than anyone on the face of the earth.” If so, there was no other place for Korach and his followers to descend other than underground!

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

Reb Simcha Bunim of Pshischa

“The earth beneath them split open.” (16:31)

What was the Midah Keneged Midah (measure for measure) of the punishment of Korach and his cohorts? Since Korach and his assembly could not wait patiently to be crowned as the future leaders of the people, so too, the ground did not wait patiently for the natural time when people are laid to rest within her bowels - after 120 years of life. Thus, they sunk down “alive within the pit.”

RESPECT THE LEADERS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korach, along with their wealth.” (16:32)

The Slonimer Rebbe (Nesivos Shalom) asks why Hashem reacted in the way that He did. Why was it necessary to punish Korach so quickly and so harshly with a supernatural miracle?

The Slonimer Rebbe explains based on the Gemara in Kesubos (111b), which states that the commandment to cling to Hashem refers to talmidei chachamim. Since we certainly can't hold onto Hashem physically, the obligation to cling to Hashem is fulfilled by drawing close to the leaders who are responsible for transmitting our mesorah.

The Slonimer Rebbe suggests that Korach and his followers were attempting to undermine Moshe who served as the primary arbiter and transmitter of our traditions. Therefore, Hashem had to respond in a very public and prominent way. Hashem had to make clear that if a person attempts to disrupt and hamper the leaders, they would be removed instantly. Hashem does not tolerate that type of behavior.

The Slonimer Rebbe is highlighting a critical lesson. We need to be vigilant in how we speak about, talk to and respect our Torah leaders. We must model for our children what emunas chachamim and kavod harav is all about so that we can successfully transmit our Torah's values and principles to the next generation.

DESPITE ALL ODDS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Moshe said to Aharon, ‘Take the fire-pan and put on it fire from upon the Altar and place incense...’” (17:11)

In this week's parshah, Korach and his horde argue for more power, expose themselves as selfish and evil, and are subsequently punished. When the Jewish people complain about the recent deaths the next day, G-d asks Moshe and Aharon to step aside from the congregation as He kills them and sends a plague to complete His will (17:10).

Not only did Moshe and Aharon immediately fall on their faces in prayer instead of moving away, but Moshe also sends Aharon to stand with incense amid the assembly in order to stop the plague.

How were Moshe and Aharon able to disobey a direct order from G-d to move away? How did Aharon have the power to stop a plague with incense that just a day earlier caused the death of Korach and his two hundred and fifty followers?

Rabbi David Forman points out that when G-d tells Moshe and Aharon to stand aside, it wasn't a command so much as a prerequisite: if Moshe and Aharon step aside, G-d will destroy the people and start over. If they don't step away, then it can't happen. In fact, it was so clear to them that it was their choice that once the plague had begun killing people, Moshe instinctively sent Aharon to stop it with the very incense that was used to validate Moshe's righteousness a day before.

Despite what seemed to be overwhelming odds, Moshe and Aharon conveyed their continued faith in the Jewish people through prayer and action. We, too, can use prayer and action to manifest what we value and cherish in the world.

BEARER OF GOOD NEWS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“He stood between the dead and between the living and the plague was halted... Aharon returned to Moshe... the plague was halted.” (17:13,15)

The plague that was unleashed upon Bnei Yisrael wreaked death and destruction at a feverish pace. The pasuk tells us that Moshe ordered Aharon to take a pan filled with burning incense into the midst of the conflagration, and when he did so, “The plague was halted.” Moshe knew the secret of ketores - incense, and how it can halt deadly epidemics. He told it to Aharon in order to save the people. Two pesukim later, however, we find that Aharon returned to Moshe Rabbeinu at the entrance of the Ohel Moed and again, “The plague was halted.” Why does the Torah reiterate the fact that the plague had been stopped, and why was it necessary for Aharon to return to Moshe?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky shlit'a cites the Medrash Lekach Tov which states that after Aharon had brought about the cessation of the deadly epidemic, he went back to report the good news to Moshe Rabbeinu. Aharon understood that just as it was necessary to inform Moshe about the plague in order that he should intercede before Hashem on behalf of the people, it was equally important to report back and deliver the good news that the disease had ended.

On many occasions, people are forced to ask a tzaddik to pray on their behalf, so that the great man's tefillos should reach Heaven and help them achieve their necessary salvation. But after the deed is done, it is incumbent that one reports back to the tzaddik to share the good news and gladden his heart.

END UNTO ITSELF

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“Aharon's staff - for the house of Levi - had blossomed; it gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds.” (17:23)

Hashem instructed Moshe Rabbeinu to collect twelve wooden rods, one from the nasi of each shevet, and place them inside the Mishkan overnight. In the morning, a miracle occurred and the rod of Aharon, representing Shevet Levi, had blossomed and bore almonds.

This was meant to be a clear indication that Hashem had truly chosen Aharon HaKohen as His kohen gadol, thereby putting an end to any speculation or attempt by others to claim that position. The rod was left in the Mishkan as a reminder to all against future rebellion. Later, in the times of King Yoshiyahu, it was hidden away together with other important and holy artifacts.

It is interesting to note that unlike a normal almond tree which first buds, then blossoms, and then produces full-grown almonds, in the case of the rod of Aharon HaKohen, even after the almonds ripened the buds remained fully attached in their blossomed state for all eternity. What is the significance of this unusual miracle?

Rav Simchah HaKohen Sheps zt'l explains that the buds on the rod of Aharon allude to the Torah, which is referred to as Eitz HaChaim (Tree of Life). Unlike other intellectual pursuits where the many equations and steps only serve the purpose of determining the final answer, in the case of Torah learning every moment of Torah study is an end unto itself.

Each question, answer, proof and contradiction is, in itself, Torah study and pure, unadulterated avodas Hashem. Thus, with Torah study, the “bud” (i.e. the process of study) is equally as important as the “ripened almond” (the final conclusion). For this reason, the rod of Aharon was covered with blossoms and almonds.

NEED FOR SPEED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Aharon's staff - for the house of Levi - had blossomed; it gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds.” (17:23)

(In order to demonstrate conclusively that the tribe of Levi (the priests and the Levites) had been set apart from the rest of the Jewish people for their respective tasks by G-d Himself, G-d commanded Moshe to take the staffs of the princes of each of the 12 tribes and place them next to the Ark in the Holy of Holies, the inner chamber of the Tabernacle. Moshe did so, and Aharon's staff miraculously sprouted almonds overnight, whereas the other staffs remained unchanged.)

Of all fruits, almonds are the quickest to blossom, ripen, and be ready for human consumption. This attribute of speed characterized the priests' function in the Tabernacle in two ways:

- The priests blessed the people every morning. The purpose of their blessings was to enable G-d's goodness to reach the Jewish people speedily and directly.
- The priests performed their duties quickly and with liveliness.

Inasmuch as the Jewish people are “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” we should learn from the priests' quickness to fulfill their duties. We should not relate to our Divine mission in life halfheartedly or resignedly. Rather, we must respond to every opportunity quickly, energetically, and wholeheartedly. When we do so, we are assured that G-d's blessings and the success of our efforts will not delay in coming. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, pp. 1318-1320) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MIRACULOUSLY NATURAL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Aharon's staff - for the house of Levi - had blossomed; it gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds.” (17:23)

Even though the fact that Aharon's staff produced almonds overnight was an overt miracle, the natural process of flowering and fruiting was followed. This is because a miracle is more miraculous when it permeates the non-miraculous processes of nature.

A lesson here for us is that in performing our own “miracles,” i.e., in fulfilling our mission of revealing the Divine purpose behind creation, we should indeed act with the greatest alacrity just as Aharon's staff produced fruit miraculously quickly, but at the same time take care to follow the natural steps involved in achieving our goal. This will ensure that we reveal Divinity in all aspects of mundane life, even those that appear to function “by themselves,” i.e., according to the orderly processes of nature. (Hitva'aduyot 5751, vol. 3, pp. 389-391) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

EMBRACING THE JOURNEY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“Aharon's staff - for the house of Levi - had blossomed; it gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds.” (17:23)

To demonstrate that Aharon was G-d's choice for Kohen Gadol, G-d instructs Moshe to place twelve staffs inside the Kodesh HaKodashim, each inscribed with the name of the tribe chieftain. The next day Aharon's staff grows almond blossoms and almonds.

While commentaries explain that almonds grow quickly and thus are the fruit of choice for this Divine proclamation, what is the purpose of conveying the seemingly superfluous fact that almond blossoms and buds grew along with the almonds?

Rav Moshe Feinstein suggests that this was an additional message that G-d was sending to those involved and to us. Just like part of the growth of almonds includes blossoms, buds, and the ripe fruit, becoming a Kohen Gadol does not just happen overnight but is a gradual process. Perhaps the flower of the almond is symbolic of the beauty of the blossom above that of the fruit itself.

Life is not about finding the shortcuts to reach greatness but rather about embracing the process of improvement. If life is a journey, embrace every challenge and enjoy the ride

HELPING US BLOSSOM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Moshe took out all the staffs from before G-d...” (17:24)

Allegorically, we are all given a “staff” taken from G-d's Tabernacle, i.e., Divine support that we can rely upon as we fulfill our Divine mission. We receive this “staff” from Moshe, i.e., by studying the Torah that Moshe gave us and by following its teachings.

The fact that Aharon's staff blossomed and bore fruit teaches us that G-d assists us in making everything in the world flower into a beautiful component of His earthly home. This is true even of “dead wood” - elements of creation that are seemingly deadened to spirituality.

The fact that Aharon's staff blossomed quickly teaches us that G-d also assists us in making these beautiful things bear fruit quickly, quickly increasing Divine consciousness in the world. (Hitva'aduyot 5743, vol. 3, pp. 1671-1673) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

GIFTED CONNECTION

Baal HaTanya

“I have given your priesthood as a gift of service.” (18:7)

We see here that there is a level of relationship with G-d that we cannot achieve on our own; it can only be given to us by G-d as a gift.

This wondrous state is referred to in the Shir HaShirim (Shlomo HaMelech's poetic description of the love between G-d and the Jewish people) as "a love of delights," and is likened by the Talmudic sages to the pleasure of G-dly revelation that awaits us in the afterlife.

This ecstatic love of G-d was felt by the priests regularly, but inasmuch as the entire Jewish people is "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation," we can all aspire to this rapturous love of G-d, at least occasionally. (Tanya, Chapter 14)

IN THE BURNING HEART

Reb Noson of Breslov

"G-d told Aharon, 'Behold! I have given you responsibility for My elevated-gifts from all the holy offerings of the Jewish people...'" (18:8)

There are two types of "burning heart." One is a heart burning with materialistic desires that distance a person from G-d. The second is a heart burning with a desire for G-d that is beyond the person's ability to fulfill.

The latter individual might give up when he sees he can't become an "instant tzaddik." But through Torah study, he can learn to regulate the burning desire, keeping the flame alight while maintaining its heat, so that he grows in his devotions rather than giving up entirely.

The Kohen represents Torah study, as it is written, "They will teach Your laws" (Devarim 33:10). We give the terumah to the Kohen in order to draw Torah to ourselves. The letters of the word Terumah (תרומה, elevated-gift) can be rearranged to spell Torah Mem (תורה מ); the letter mem (מ), which has the numerical value of 40, indicates that the Torah was given to Moshe after forty days. Mem also represents a beneficial eye when giving tithes (Terumos 4:3). Terumah (תרומה) also resembles Trei mi'meah (תרי ממאה, two out of a hundred), for our Sages teach that the average gift of terumah is one-fiftieth (ibid.). This alludes to the two powers of terumah: one to stop the burning desire for material lust, the other to control the burning desire for G-d.

In addition, we must also know our limitations, how far we can go with our burning desires. This corresponds to the tithe to the Levite, who represents gevurot (judgments and constrictions). These constrictions keep us within our boundaries so that we can progress in our devotions with as much blessing as possible - much as our crops are now permitted to us because we have taken tithes. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 251a-253a)

A DASH OF SALT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"I have given all the separated portions of the sanctified [animals] that the Israelites set aside for G-d to you and your sons and daughters with you, as an eternal portion.

It is an eternal covenant of salt before G-d for you and your descendants with you." (18:19)

Israelites set aside for G-d to you and your sons and daughters with you, as an eternal portion. It is an eternal covenant of salt before G-d for you and your descendants with you." (18:19)

The Torah's outer dimension is the knowledge of how G-d wants us to live our lives in the context of our physical world. This knowledge is contained in the Talmud and its associated legal texts.

The Torah's inner dimension is the knowledge of the inner life of the soul and its spiritual relationship to G-d; this knowledge is contained in the texts of Jewish mysticism (Kabbalah) and in the vast corpus of Chasidic teachings.

Allegorically, the Torah's outer dimension is compared to bread and meat, the staples of a healthy diet, since we must study this dimension of the Torah in order to lead a healthy spiritual life.

In contrast, the inner dimension of the Torah is compared to salt, which enhances the taste of the food it touches.

Including the study of the inner dimension of the Torah in our spiritual "diet" reveals the intrinsic sweetness of the Torah's outer dimension. (Likutei Torah 2:5c) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

OUR INNER MOSHE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The Levites shall perform the service of the Tent of Meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; an eternal decree for your generations; and among the Children of Israel they shall not inherit an heritage." (18:23)

Korach had argued that inasmuch as all Jews are holy, there is no need to recognize any differences between them.

This outlook leads to the mistaken notion that there is no need to encourage others to enhance their spiritual wellbeing or their connection to G-d, and that doing so is an insult to their intrinsic holiness.

The truth, of course, is the exact opposite: Our love for others leads us to devote ourselves to bettering their spiritual life and lot.

Our inner Korach is the temptation to ignore Moshe's call to care for the spiritual needs of others in order to focus on our own spiritual self-fulfillment. Rather than listen to our inner Korach, let us respond to our inner Moshe wholeheartedly.

As for our own spiritual well-being, G-d assures us that if we champion His cause, devoting ourselves to our fellow human beings, He will treat us like spiritual Levites, drawing us close to Him and providing for all our needs, spiritual and material. (Hitva'aduyot 5744, vol. 3, pp. 2025-2029) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

DOING OUR PART

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“The Levites shall perform the service of the Tent of Meeting.” (18:23)

The Torah describes that the tribe of Levi did not receive a portion in the land of Israel but instead received a tithe from everyone (18:21). Then the Torah tells us that “the Levi [singular] shall perform the service...” (18:23). After describing what the tribe as a whole received, why does the Torah shift the perspective to the singular service of each Levi?

Oznayim LaTorah suggests that the wording used to instruct individual Leviim is to inspire each Levi to go above and beyond the call of duty and to strive to do as much as possible.

Rather than passively being content with completing the work that one is given, and worse, thinking that the work will get done by another fellow Levi, one should look to actively maximize their individual contribution to the whole. This is a valuable lesson to not only do our part but that doing is a fundamental part of who we are.

ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When you take the tithe from the Israelites... you must set aside from it a portion for G-d...” (18:26)

Although the physical priesthood was reserved for the descendants of Aharon, the spiritual priesthood is accessible to all Jews. G-d calls the entire Jewish people “a kingdom of priests.” As Rabbi Moshe Maimonides explains (Mishneh Torah, Shemittah v’Yovel 13:13), “Any human being whose spirit moves him - and whose intellect has motivated him - to distinguish himself by standing before G-d, serving Him, and knowing Him... has become sanctified like the Holy of Holies... and will be granted all of his physical needs, just as they were provided for the priests and Levites.”

In other words, when we recognize the purpose of our lives - to serve G-d - and dedicate ourselves to accomplishing it, we are assured of the best of everything, material and spiritual, at all times. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 2, pp. 690-691) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

GIVING IT OUR BEST

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Say to them, ‘When you set aside its choicest part, [the rest will be considered for the Levites as produce from the threshing floor and as produce from the vat.]’” (18:30)

The Levites were the Jewish people's professional clergy; their job was to assist the priests in the Temple and both instruct and inspire the common people in G-d's ways. They did not work the land; they were supported by obligatory contributions from the people. Yet, they had to give a portion - indeed, the best portion - of what they received to the priests.

Similarly, even when we have made a certain amount of progress in the process of our spiritual growth, having attained some level of Divine consciousness, we should never fall into the trap of complacency or relying on our past progress. We must still take care to “feed” our inner “priest” - to devote the best of our resources to holiness - prayer, study of the Torah, and the performance of G-d's commandments.

Since G-d is infinite, the opportunity for spiritual growth always beckons us, and we are therefore constantly obligated to pursue it. (Sefer HaSichot 5747, vol. 2, p. 436)

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