

WHERE THE HUMBLE STAND

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Korach

Where The Humble Stand

By Shlomo Katz

Volume XVII, No. 38

25 Sivan 5765

July 2, 2005

Sponsored by
The Vogel and Braver families
on the yahrzeit of Rabbi Joseph Braver
(R' Yosef Leib ben Harav Yehuda a"h)

The Sabrin family in memory of father
Shlomo ben Chaim a"h (Sol Sabrin)

Today's Learning:
Ma'aser Sheni 5:9-10
O.C.368:2-4
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Shabbat 61
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Sanhedrin 35

Korach's rebellion, the focus of this week's parashah, is different in several respects from the other mutinies that occurred in the desert. Firstly, it was the only one that was directed at Moshe personally rather than at some aspect of Bnei Yisrael's desert experience (e.g., the food). Secondly, Korach's rebellion elicited a response from Moshe Rabbeinu like no other mutiny described in the Torah. In every case in which Bnei Yisrael sinned, Moshe pleaded with Hashem in their defense. Not so in Korach's case; to the contrary, Moshe called out to Bnei Yisrael: "Turn away now from near the tents of these wicked men and do not touch anything of theirs, lest you perish because of all of their sins." Then, Moshe called upon G-d to bring about the deaths of Korach and his leading cohorts

through an unusual means.

At first glance, Moshe's response is shocking. After all, the Torah teaches that Moshe was the humblest of all men. Why, in the one case in which he was attacked personally, did Moshe react so forcefully?

R' Ben Zion Rabinowitz shlita (the "Biala Rebbe") explains that Moshe had the halachic status of a king. According to halachah, a king may never forgo or forgive the honor due him. Moshe was humble, but he, too, was bound by halachah. If he showed any mercy to Korach, he would, in effect, be abdicating his throne.

There is a practical lesson in this for every Jew, adds R' Rabinowitz. Every Jew is a king in his own way. And, kabbalists teach that every Jewish soul has a spark of Moshe Rabbeinu within it. Thus, while every Jew is enjoined to be humble, that same Jew must stand up for his dignity like a king when the yetzer hara attacks. (Mevaser Tov, Yeshuat Avraham p. 344)

"Korach son of Yitzhar son of Kehat son of Levi . . ." (16:1)

Rashi writes: "It does not, however, mention Levi's being 'the son of Yaakov,' because Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's quarrels, as it is written (Bereishit 49:6), 'With their assembly, may my glory not be united'."

It is told that two litigants once came before R' Eliyahu Kletzkin z"l, the 19th century rabbi of Lublin, for a din Torah. One of the litigants began his presentation by relating his yichus / pedigree to the rabbi.

The rabbi replied: Rashi writes that Yaakov prayed for himself so that he would not be mentioned together with Korach. Why? Shouldn't Yaakov have prayed that Korach's yichus would save him from punishment?

The answer, said R' Kletzkin, is that when a person has yichus and he nevertheless behaves improperly, his punishment is even greater.

(Quoted in Ve'karata La'Shabbat Oneg)

"Korach son of Yitzhar son of Kehat son of Levi separated himself, with Datan and Aviram, sons of Eliav, and On son of Pelet, the offspring of Reuben." (16:1)

Pirkei Avot (5:17) teaches: "What dispute was for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Hillel and Shammai. What dispute was not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his congregation. A dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will last. A dispute that is not for the sake of

Heaven will not last."

Several points about this Mishnah require explanation. First, why does the Mishnah refer to the dispute of "Korach and his congregation" rather than to the dispute of "Korach and Moshe"? Second, the Mishnah implies that it is good if a dispute lasts, for it says that a dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will last, while a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven will not last. What does this mean?

R' Eliyahu z"l (1720-1797; the Vilna Gaon) is quoted as answering these questions as follows: When a group gathers together to instigate a fight that is not for the sake of Heaven, it is inevitable that they will fight amongst themselves. Therefore, Korach's dispute with Moshe is called the dispute of "Korach and his congregation," i.e., Korach and his congregation fought amongst themselves.

Also, when someone instigates a fight that is not for the sake of Heaven, it is inevitable that the original basis for the fight will be forgotten. This is what the Mishnah means when it says that a dispute that is not for the sake of Heaven will not last. Rather, it will quickly degenerate into a different dispute. On the other hand, a dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will last, i.e., it will stay focused on the original point of contention.

(Quoted in Ha'maor Ha'gadol)

R' Yoel Teitelbaum z"l (the Satmar Rav; died 1979) answers the above question as follows: If one holds a position for the sake of Heaven, compromise is not possible. Thus, if a dispute does not endure, it is a sign that it was never engaged in for the sake of Heaven.

"Hashem said to Aharon, 'In their Land you shall have no heritage, and a share shall you not have among them; I am your share and your heritage among Bnei Yisrael.'" (18:20)

R' Moshe Sofer z"l (the Chatam Sofer; Hungary; died 1840) comments: It is well known that it is difficult to keep one's thoughts attached to Hashem at the same time that one is actively involved with people. For one who wants to cleave to Hashem, hitbodedut / solitude is the prescription.

Aharon Hakohen, however, was able to accomplish both simultaneously. He was always involved with people--always trying to resolve conflicts and strengthen marriages (see below). Even so, he never left his lofty and holy position. This is what the verse means when it says, "I [Hashem] am your share and your heritage [even] among Bnei Yisrael."

(Torat Moshe)

The Talmudic-era work Avot De'Rabbi Natan (chapter 12) describes Aharon's activities among the Jewish people as follows:

He was a lover of peace. How so? One should desire that there be peace between every two Jews just as Aharon loved peace between every two Jews. Thus it is written (Malachi 2:6), "The teaching of truth was in his mouth and no injustice was found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and fairness, and he turned many away from sin."

Rabbi Meir says: What is meant by "he turned many away from sin"? When he would walk on the road and he would meet a wicked man, Aharon would greet him. The next day, when the sinner would go to sin, he would say, "If I commit this sin, how will I hold my head up when I see Aharon? I will be so ashamed!"

[How did Aharon pursue peace?] If he saw two people who were involved in a dispute, he would sit down next to one and say, "My son, have you seen how your friend's is beating his chest and ripping his clothes and saying, 'How will I face my friend? I am so embarrassed that I have sinned against him!'" Aharon would sit with the first person until all jealousy had been removed from his heart. Then Aharon would go to the second person and say the same thing about the first person. Then, when they would see each other, they would hug each other. Thus it is written after Aharon's death (Bemidbar 20:29), "All the house of Israel cried for Aharon for thirty days."

Why must our Sages teach us to love peace? Could one think that he should not love peace? R' Rachamim Yitzchak Falagi z"l (19th century Turkey) explains: One might think that he is obligated to engage in peace-making only when he is not busy with Torah study or other important activities. To counteract this mistaken notion, Avot De'Rabbi Natan tells us to love peace, and it quotes the verse: "The teaching of truth [i.e., the Torah] was in his mouth and [nevertheless] he walked with Me in peace . . ."

(Quoted in Meorei Ohr)

[The Talmudic sage] R' Nachman said: "I was once walking in the desert and an Arab said, 'Come! I will show you where Korach's gang was swallowed up.' I saw two cracks in the ground and smoke rose from between them. He took a woolen cloth, dipped it in water, stuck it on the end of a spear and threw it into the smoke. When he took it out, the cloth was burnt. He said to me, 'Listen to what they are saying.' I put my ear to the ground and heard, 'Moshe is true and his Torah is true, and we are liars'."

(Gemara Bava Batra 74a)

R' Yaakov Lorberbaum of Lissa z"l (early 19th century; author of Netivot Hamishpat) explains as follows: Korach was not a fool. His dispute with Moshe occurred because, like so many philosophers, his profound, but wrong, thoughts led him astray. Specifically, the two cracks in the earth represent the two foundations of Judaism which Korach and other philosophers denied: (1) The principle of prophecy; and (2) that Moshe was the teacher of Torah par excellence. The blinding smoke which

came from between the cracks represents the fact that Korach was blinded by his own logic.

The white cloth represents a mind which is a clean slate, and dipping it in water represents teaching it Torah. When this cloth-- i.e., the mind--was hurled with force into the smoke, it was burnt. This happens because if a Torah scholar rushes into debate with a philosopher, the Torah scholar may lose. Rather, the arguments of a Korach (or any philosopher) must be thought through and refuted calmly and patiently. If you take the time to put your ear to the ground and listen very closely, then you can hear Korach saying, "Moshe is true and his Torah is true, and we are liars."

(Emet Le'Yaakov)

Copyright © 2005 by [Shlomo Katz](#) and **Torah.org**.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

Hamaayan needs your support! Please consider sponsoring Hamaayan in honor of a happy occasion or in memory of a loved one. Did you know that the low cost of sponsorship - only \$18 - has not changed in seventeen years? Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.