

# KNOW YOUR PLACE

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Korach

## Know Your Place

## By Shlomo Katz

Volume 23, No. 34  
5 Tammuz 5769  
June 27, 2009

Sponsored by  
Dr. and Mrs. Irving Katz  
on the yahrzeit of mother Sarah Katz  
(Sarah bat Yitzchak Hakohen a"h)

Today's Learning:  
Ohalot 1:8-2:1  
O.C. 316:7-9  
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 63  
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Bava Batra 15

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (25:6-7), "Do not glorify yourself in the presence of a king, and do not stand in the place of the great, for it is better that it should be said to you, 'Come up here,' than that you be demoted before the prince, as your eyes have seen [happen to others]." R' Yehoshua ibn Shuiv z"l (Spain; 14th century) writes: King Shlomo's intention is to teach us that a person should not glorify himself or show off in front of a king in any way, for that king was chosen to reign. Even if one thinks that he is more fit for that post, any aspiration - even one that is good in the abstract - is bad if it is expressed at the wrong time. It goes without saying that someone who would not make a better leader should not attempt to glorify himself.

R' ibn Shuiv continues: Many people err in this regard, saying: Are we not all the sons of one man? I

am as good as he is! Why should he be elevated above me? This, writes R' ibn Shuiv, is utter foolishness, for just as Hashem has chosen the human race above all other creations, so He has chosen one nation from among the others, one tribe (Yehuda) from that nation, one family (the family of King David) from that tribe, and one person from that family.

This was Korach's error, states R' ibn Shuiv. When it came to the priesthood, Hashem chose the tribe of Levi, the family of Kehat, and the person of Aharon. Our Sages say, "The Heavenly royal court is like a human royal court." Just as a human king (or president or prime minister) has different advisers who are granted different levels of access, so does Hashem. (Derashot R"Y ibn Shuiv)

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

Rashi z"l writes that Korach took his cohorts and attired them in robes of pure techelet wool (i.e., the color found in tzitzit according to Torah law). They then came and stood before Moshe and said to him, "Is a garment that is entirely of techelet subject to the law of tzitzit, or is it exempt?" Moshe replied to them, "It is subject to that law." Upon hearing this, Korach and his cohorts began to jeer at him, "Is this possible? On a robe of any different colored material, one thread of techelet attached to it exempts it. Should not this robe made entirely of techelet exempt itself from the law of tzitzit?"

R' David Hanania Pinto shlita (a contemporary French rabbi) observes that Korach's troubles started when he attempted to delve into the logic of the mitzvot. Indeed, his name "Korach" the same Hebrew letters as the word "choker" / "philosopher." Korach could not accept the fact that some mitzvot are decrees. Thus, the first word of the parashah-"Va'yikach"-has the same Hebrew letters as the expression "Vay chok" / "Woe to us from a decree."

What was Korach's end? He caused "machloket" / "dissension" which has the same Hebrew letters as "lakach mavvet" / "He took death." (Pachad David)

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"As for Aharon, what is he that you protest against him?" (16:11)

R' Yehuda He'chassid z"l (Germany; died 1217) writes: Just as a person must be humble in the face of those who insult him, so he should cause his family members, friends and students to not answer his detractors in a harsh manner. How so? If someone is being cursed or insulted and his family members, his friends, or his students want to answer in kind or to hit those who are making the verbal attacks, he should not permit it. To the contrary, he should prevent it. Thus we read (Iyov 31:31), "Or, if the people of my household did not say, 'If only we could get his flesh, we would never be sated'." Iyov is saying that he is blameless, for he never let his family members exact retribution against his detractors.] We read likewise (Shmuel II 16:11), "David then said to Avishai and all his servants, '... Let him be; let him curse, for Hashem has told him to'."

At the same time, those who hear [insults against another], should feel pained and should answer [gently] if they are able to. Thus we read (in our verse), "As for Aharon, what is he that you protest against him?"

However, the one who was insulted should not allow anyone to become angry on his behalf. No one should take any action until consulting with a person who does not lose his temper. (Sefer Chassidim \*\* 650-651)

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"Do not be like Korach and his congregation." (17:5)

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 110a) states that this is one of the negative commandments, i.e., a prohibition on being involved in machloket / unjustified disputes.

R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz z"l (1878-1953; the Chazon Ish) writes that people involved in machloket often are well-meaning, but they transgress this prohibition because they are ignorant of the halachah that governs the disputed matter. Often this happens because people focus on the study of mussar / ethics to the exclusion of studying halachah.

For example, while halachah limits, in certain situations, a person's right to go into business in competition with an existing establishment, halachah states that unlimited competition is permitted in the field of Torah education. Thus, a melamed / teacher or yeshiva that was in a city first has no right to object to the opening of another cheder or yeshiva. [Ed. note: Rashi to Bava Batra 21b explains that this ensures that teachers will continuously improve.]

Imagine that a new melamed comes to town and draws all the children away from the existing school. (The Chazon Ish writes that this happens because it is human nature to want whatever is newest.) People who are ignorant of the halachah that permits unlimited competition in the field of Torah education, will call the new teacher a "rodef" / "pursuer" since he seemingly has taken the livelihood of the existing teacher. The friends of the existing teacher will do everything possible to make the new teacher's life miserable. But who is the real "pursuer" in this case? It is the well-meaning people who have elevated what "feels just" over the halachah.

The Chazon Ish acknowledges an obvious question: Both a melamed and a craftsman need to earn a livelihood. Is it just that the latter is permitted to defend his livelihood against a newcomer while the former is not? He explains:

The melamed will not starve if that is not G-d's will. While man is obligated to attempt, within the bounds of halachah, to earn a livelihood, his sustenance actually is in Hashem's control. It follows that a melamed who exerts himself to the greatest extent permitted by halachah for those in his profession is in exactly the same position as a craftsman who exerts himself to the greatest extent permitted by halachah for those in his profession. The melamed is not at a disadvantage at all compared to the craftsman, for both will find no more and no less sustenance than G-d wishes.

## (Emunah U'vitachon ch.3)

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"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. 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)

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### This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

5 Tammuz: On this date, approximately eleven years before the destruction of the First Temple, King Yehoyakim was exiled to Bavel (Babylon).

When this date falls on a weekday, it is a fast day for descendants of R' Yom Tov Lipman Heller z"l (author of the Mishnah commentary, Tosfot Yom Tov) because, on this date in 5389 (1629), R' Heller learned that he had been sentenced to imprisonment on the false charge that he had insulted Christianity (Luach Davar B'ito p.1127). Later, R' Heller recorded his misfortune in the memoir Megillat Eivah.

7 Tammuz: Today is "Purim Ostraha" because, on this day in 5552 (1792), the Jewish community of Ostraha (Ostrog), Poland was saved from danger during the Russo-Polish War of that year.

Today is the yahrzeit of R' Simcha Bunim Alter z"l (died 5752/1992), fifth Gerrer Rebbe and innovator of the study of Daf Yomi in the Talmud Yerushalmi. (The better known Daf Yomi instituted by R' Meir Shapiro z"l in 1923 studies Talmud Bavli.)

9 Tammuz: On this date--according to the prophet Yirmiyah, who experienced the event--Nevuchadnezar breached the walls of Yerushalayim, one month before he destroyed the First Temple. The Talmud Yerushalmi states that this event actually occurred on the 17th of the month, but the Jews of Yerushalayim were confused about the date because of their suffering. (In any event, we fast on the 17th of Tammuz because on that date the Romans breached the walls of Yerushalayim prior to destroying the Second Temple. Some have the custom to fast on the 9th also.)

10 Tammuz: On this date in 5594 (1834), the Jewish community of Tzefat was miraculously saved from Arab murderers. It is customary for the Chevra Kadisha in Tzefat to sponsor a public

thanksgiving feast on this day. (Luach Davar B'ito p. 1136)

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