

A TIME FOR FAITH

by Shlomo Katz

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Sponsored by Nathan and Rikki Lewin on the yahrzeit of his grandfather Harav Aharon ben Harav Nossan Lewin z"l Hy"d (the Reisher Rav)

Dr. and Mrs. Irving Katz on the yahrzeit of his mother Sarah bat Yitzchak Hakohen a"h

In this week's parashah, we read of Korach's rebellion. What was Korach, who our Sages say was a wise man, thinking, and what brought about his downfall?

R' Yitzchak Leib Kirzner z"l (1951-1992; mashgiach ruchani of Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef in Edison, N.J.) explains: We were taught as children--indeed, midrashim state--that Korach made a mockery of various laws. He argued, for example, that a techeilet-colored garment should not need tzitzit for, if one string of techeilet is sufficient for an otherwise white garment, certainly a garment that is entirely techeilet should not need tzitzit! He also argued that a house full of sifrei Torah should not need a mezuzah for, if one small scroll is sufficient for a house with no Torah scrolls in it, certainly a house full of sifrei Torah should not need a mezuzah!

However, writes R' Kirzner, we should not fool ourselves. The generation that received the Torah is referred to by our Sages as the "dor de'ah" / "the Generation of Knowledge," and it is not conceivable that mere mockery would have won anyone over to Korach's cause. Rather, Korach must have been preaching a philosophy in which his mockery played only a supporting role.

R' Kirzner explains: Korach preached that one must understand everything that he does. He argued that Hashem gave us the Torah to teach us to differentiate between good and bad, and that a mitzvah that seems illogical does not help us accomplish that goal. Therefore, Korach argued, such a mitzvah is not binding. Korach was partially correct, insofar as there is nothing wrong with wanting to understand. However, one cannot always understand what he wants to understand. Korach's downfall came from his lack of emunah peshutah / simple faith to sustain him when his intellect failed him. (Ma'oz La'tam, Vol.2, p.163)

"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 one 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 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)

"They fell on their faces and said, 'O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and You will be angry with the entire assembly?'" (16:22)

Rashi quotes the Midrash Tanchuma: "Whereupon G-d replied, 'You have spoken well! I know and shall make known who has sinned and who has not sinned'."

What does this mean? asks R' David Halevi z"l (known as the "Taz" after his work Turei Zahav ; 1586-1667). Did Moshe best G-d in an argument and change G-d's mind?

No! he explains. Rather, Rashi's comment should be understood as follows: The Mishnah (Avot 4:5) teaches, "Rabbi Yochanan ben Beroka said, 'If one desecrates the Name of Heaven in secret - the Heavenly Court will exact punishment from him in public. Unintentional and intentional - both are alike regarding the desecration of the Name'." What does this mean? Does G-d really punish for an unintentional sin just like an intentional sin?

The Taz explains: The second half of the Mishnah is answering a question one might ask on the first half of the Mishnah. If one who desecrated G-d's Name in secret is punished in public, won't that cause a further desecration of G-d's Name, for it will appear that an innocent man has been punished? Therefore, if one desecrates G-d's Name in private, G-d forces him to commit the same "sin" again in public - except that it is not really a sin because it was not voluntary. Then, G-d punishes the sinner for the first sin (the private one) while everyone assumes, wrongly, that he is being punished for the second sin (the public one).

Returning to our verse and Rashi's comment, the Taz explains: Hashem knew that thousands of Bnei

Yisrael had supported Korach in their hearts. But no one else knew that, and if Hashem had punished those silent sympathizers, the rest of the nation would have said, "Shall one man sin, and You will be angry with the entire assembly?" When Moshe pointed out this potential desecration of G-d's Name, Hashem answered, "You have spoken well! There will be no desecration of G-d's Name, for I know who sinned, and it is My way to make known who has sinned and who has not sinned."

When did Hashem make known who the Korach-sympathizers were? In the verse (17:6), "The entire assembly of Bnei Yisrael complained on the morrow against Moshe and Aharon, saying, 'You have killed the people of Hashem!'" (Divrei David)

"Aharon took [a pan with coals and incense] as Moshe had spoken and ran to the midst of the congregation, and behold! the plague had begun among the people. He placed the incense and provided atonement for the people. He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked." (17:12-13)

Why did the offering of ketoret / incense stop the plague? R' Moshe Isserles z"l (1520-1572; Krakow, Poland; known as "Rema") explains:

The ketoret consisted of eleven spices, of which four are mentioned in the Torah, and three other ingredients, for a total of 14. The number four represents the four camps of Bnei Yisrael. Eleven represents all of the tribes except Levi and Yehuda, both of whom had a special status. Fourteen represents the eleven tribes plus kohanim, levi'im and the tribe of Yehuda. When the ketoret was burnt on the altar, a miracle occurred and the smoke did not disperse. Instead, it rose straight up, which represents the good deeds of Bnei Yisrael rising Heavenward and also represents the unity of the Jewish People. Along these lines, our Sages say that the ketoret contained one foul-smelling herb, symbolizing that the Jewish People are not a complete unit unless even the sinners are included.

The Gemara teaches that the kohanim would talk while crushing the spices for the ketoret because "kol" / sound improves the spices. This cannot be taken literally, Rema writes. Rather, the crushing of the spices represents the suffering of Bnei Yisrael in exile, which strengthens the "kol Yaakov" / the sound of Torah.

In light of all this, we can understand why the ketoret would cause the plague to end, i.e., because ketoret represents all that is good about the Jewish People--their unity, their good deeds, and their adherence to Torah and Torah study, even in the midst of exile. We also can see why Aharon, of all people, was the one to check the progress of the plague, since he was the one who constantly pursued unity between friends, between spouses, and among the Jewish People in general. Korach and his cohorts pursued the opposite and therefore were punished through ketoret. (Torat Ha'olah, II ch. 36)

Letters from our Sages

The letter below was written by R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (born 1879; killed in the Holocaust 6 Tammuz 5701/1941), rabbi of Rzeszow / Reisha, Poland and a member of the Polish Sejm / parliament.

Regarding the question from a community that always had an official chazzan and now the position is vacant, and the position of shochet also is vacant--they have found a shochet who knows how to sing, and the leaders of the community want to merge the two positions so that the shochet also will be the chazzan. However, some people object and don't want the two positions to be held by one person.

My entire life, I have lived among Torah scholars, and I have never heard anyone question this practice [of the two positions being held by one person]. To the contrary, go see what the populace is doing; in the overwhelming majority of small towns, which cannot afford a chazzan, the shochet is also the chazzan, and no one objects. However, now that I have dwelt on it, I see that one can find some support for their objection in the Zohar (Parashat Nasso [124a]): "He shall slaughter the bull before Hashem' [Vaykira 1:5] - Someone else, and not the kohen. The kohen should not awaken the Attribute of Justice in order not to damage the place [the Attribute of Kindness] to which he is connected." This implies that a kohen is not permitted to slaughter a sacrificial offering. Similarly, the chazzan should not be a shochet, for the chazzan is in place of a kohen, just as prayer is in place of the daily sacrificial offerings. This is why a chazzan is called a "karov" [related to korban] and the poems he recites are called "kerovot." Therefore, just as a kohen should not be the one who slaughters the sacrifice, so it is with the chazzan who stands in his place. . .

However, after further analysis, it appears that one should not worry about this. First, our Talmud does not hold like this Zohar, for the Gemara merely says that a non-kohen is permitted to slaughter a sacrifice, but a kohen also is allowed to do so. . . From the Gemara (Yoma 25b) it seems that only occasionally did a non-kohen slaughter the korban, but usually it was a kohen. . . The latter is in fact preferable. Furthermore, even according to the Zohar, the comparison of a chazzan to a kohen is not to be taken literally, for then we would require a chazzan to have all of the qualifications of a kohen, which obviously is not the case. . .

Therefore, regarding our question, there is no doubt that a shochet may be the official chazzan of the town. Even so, it would be pleasing and a glorification to have separate individuals in these positions, just as the Temple service was divided among as many people as possible, for that is an honor to Heaven . . . But, if for some reason, the heads of the community wish to combine the two positions, and to fill them with one person, there is no basis to stop them--this seems clear and plain to me. (Avnei Cheifetz, ch.4)

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.

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