

IT'S THAT IMPORTANT

by Shlomo Katz

BS"D
Volume 30, No. 35
3 Tammuz 5776
July 9, 2016

Sponsored by
Nathan and Rikki Lewin
on the yahrzeit of his grandfather
Harav Aharon ben Harav Nosson 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

Today's Learning:
Nach: Tehilim 119 (peh & tzadi)
Mishnah: Kilayim 3:4-5
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 39

R' Yitzchak Arama z"l (Spain; died 1494) writes that, as a foundation of our faith, the account of Korach's rebellion is equal in importance to the account of the Giving of the Torah. He explains:

The more important something is, the more protection it requires. Thus, for example, the greater a general is, the more officers and soldiers he has protecting him. And, the more important an organ of the body is, the better protected it is; for example, the heart is in the center of the body surrounded by bones and flesh.

Similarly, the more important a concept is to our faith, the more it must be defended vigorously against challenges. Nowhere is this true more than when the validity of prophecy is challenged. At Har Sinai, all of Bnei Yisrael experienced prophecy, and, thus, three fundamental principles were established. The first fundamental principle is that Hashem pays attention to mankind's deeds. This is demonstrated by the fact that, because of His love for the Patriarchs, Hashem chose their descendants to elevate them above all other nations and He gave those descendants the Torah amidst great fanfare. The second principle demonstrated at Har Sinai is that G-d speaks to man and

gives him directions for conducting his life. The third principle established is that Moshe's Torah is the true Torah, and that he is greater than all other prophets.

These are the very truths that Korach called into question when he challenged Moshe. The ultimate proof of these truths, supplementing the Revelation at Sinai, was the definitive disproof of Korach's challenges. (Akeidat Yitzchak)

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

Midrash Rabbah comments: "Korach was very intelligent and was one of those who carried the Aron / Holy Ark."

R' Aharon Lewin z"l Hy"d (the Reisher Rav; killed in the Holocaust in 1941) explains: The Gemara (Sotah 35b) teaches that the Aron "carried those who carried it." [Not only it was weightless, those who carried it did not have to exert any of their own energy to move.] This, R' Lewin writes, symbolizes a fundamental tenet of our faith. Except for the Torah, all legal systems in the world are man-made. Accordingly, they must be adapted and improved over time to fit mankind's changed circumstances. About them it can be said that man must bear the burden of carrying them, for without man's continuous support, they would collapse. In contrast, the Divine Torah never requires updating or correcting. It is we who must adapt ourselves to it, not the other way around. Thus, the Torah does not need us to support it. To the contrary, its spirit supports us.

It follows, R' Lewin continues, that those who carried the Aron, one of whom was Korach, knew better than anyone else that the Torah is eternal. And, from there it follows that they had to recognize that Moshe was the greatest of all prophets and it is not possible that another prophet will come along and change anything that Moshe taught. [If that were possible, the Torah would not be eternal.] Thus, the fact that "Korach was very intelligent and was one of those who carried the Aron," as the midrash teaches, is very relevant to understanding the gravity of his sin in rebelling against Moshe Rabbeinu. (Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun)

Midrash Rabbah teaches that Korach was led astray because he had seen prophetically the distinguished descendants that would come from him, including the prophet Shmuel. R' Nosson Sternhartz z"l (1780-1845; foremost student of R' Nachman of Breslov z"l) explains: It is fitting that a tzaddik who reveals Hashem's da'at (literally, "knowledge") to the world should be honored, just as the da'at he disseminates is worthy of honor. Moreover, if a tzaddik is honored, his words will be listened to. However, such a tzaddik must be exceedingly humble, like Moshe Rabbeinu, so that he flees from honor and, when he receives honor, he accepts it solely for the sake of honoring Hashem. Korach lacked that humility. Also, he mistakenly thought that Torah leadership is hereditary. If his descendant Shmuel would be honored as a custodian of Hashem's da'at, then, Korach reasoned, he too must receive such honor. And, Korach thought, he must already possess true da'at. In reality, however, Torah leadership is not hereditary. Rather, it awaits whomever comes to claim it through

his toil in Torah, accompanied by humility. (Likutei Halachot: O.C. Hil. Netilat Yadayim 6:67)

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

Rashi writes: "The verse does not 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.

R' Kletzkin 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)

"Aharon returned to Moshe at the entrance to the Ohel Mo'ed, and the plague had been checked." (17:15)

The midrash Pesikta Zutrita comments: "Aharon returned to Moshe"--to tell him the news [that the plague had stopped].

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) explains what the midrash is adding to our understanding of the verse. We read in verse 13, "[Aharon] stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked." Why is this repeated in verse 15 ("the plague had been checked")? R' Kluger answers: If we had only verse 13, we might have thought that the plague remained in check only as long as Aharon stood between the dead and the living. Perhaps after Aharon left, the plague resumed. Therefore, verse 15 teaches that the plague was stopped permanently.

However--and this, writes R' Kluger, is what was bothering the author of the midrash--how did Aharon know that it was safe for him to leave his position between the dead and the living? Maybe, in fact, the plague would resume once he left! The answer lies in the halachah that a person who travels from Place A to Place B but plans to return to Place A remains, in part, a citizen of his original place. For example, someone from outside Yerushalayim who goes to Yerushalayim for Purim must read Megillat Esther on the 15th of Adar (Shushan Purim) because he is in Yerushalayim, but also on the 14th day of Adar as if he were in his hometown.

On the verse, "Aharon returned to Moshe," the midrash comments: "To tell him the news." The

midrash is explaining that Aharon's intention was to tell Moshe the news and then resume his position between the dead and the living. Since that was his intention, it is as if he never left, which made him confident that the plague would not resume. (Chochmat Ha'Torah: Korach p.416)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Daniel Frisch z"l (1935-2005), author of the Zohar commentary Matok Mi'dvash and other works. To fully appreciate this letter, the reader must be aware that R' Frisch lost his mother as a young child, survived several concentration camps, and suffered for much of his life from extreme poverty and crippling arthritis.

After inquiring about your welfare . . .

I was happy to read that, thank G-d, you are now happy and feeling healthy. I have lately been reflecting on our Sages' teaching (Sanhedrin 37a): "One is obligated to say, 'The world was created for me'." I thought to myself: There are people who are full of worries and preoccupations and who are therefore incapable of thinking about the welfare of others. Their own worries are the most they can handle. Hashem, in contrast, never tires and is never overwhelmed. Everything in the world is nothing before Him. Therefore, He has the presence of mind to focus on my needs exclusively, as if I am the only person in the world and there is no one else; as if everything was created just for me. Hashem is capable of keeping track of every one of my thoughts, words, and deeds. If I behave well, I will receive unimaginable reward; the mind cannot grasp how great that reward is. Take, for example, what our Sages taught at the end of Tractate Uktzin: "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, 'In the future, Hashem will give each and every tzaddik 310 worlds'." The commentary Bartenura explains: If one could imagine that a person controlled the entire world, owned all of the gold, silver, money and royal treasures that exist, could do whatever he wants with no worries or concerns, could rejoice in any way he wants and enjoy all forms of pleasure--if could wrap his mind around such a picture and then multiply it by 310, then one could begin to imagine the reward that awaits the righteous. . . Think about it! Is it worth worrying in this world, which is not your real place? Will worrying accomplish anything? . . . I bring heaven and earth to testify that I have worried about many things in my lifetime, and it never helped me one bit. Sometimes it had the opposite effect. . . May Hashem forgive me! In contrast, when I was happy, I gained materially and spiritually . . . (Quoted in Ba'al Matok Mi'dvash p.193-194)