

# Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Korach

3 Tammuz 5772/June 23, 2012

Vol.3 Num. 36

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## Cynicism

Hillel Horovitz

Our parshah tells us of Korach's attempt to rouse rebellion against Moshe, claiming (Bamidbar 16:3), "The entire nation is holy," such that Moshe and Aharon do not deserve all of the privileges of leadership.

The opening words, "And Korach took," catalyze the question: What, exactly, did Korach "take"? One of the better-known explanations is found in a midrash (Tanchuma Korach 2) cited by Rashi on the spot: "He drew the heads of the courts with his words."

Another midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Korach 750) presents this account of Korach's words: "What did he do? He gathered the entire nation, as the Torah says, 'And Korach gathered upon them the entire nation,' and he began to speak words of mockery. He said: A widow in my neighbourhood had two daughters, and one field. She came to plow, and Moshe told her, 'You shall not plow with ox and donkey together.' She came to seed, and Moshe told her, 'You shall not plant mixed seeds.' She came to harvest and form a pile of grain, and he told her to leave the *leket* and *shichichah* gleanings and the corner of the field. So they do to this poor woman, and they blame it on G-d."

The midrash lays out Korach's claims, and when we examine his story we find that he speaks only truth. His tale could indeed have happened; what draws the people's attention is not the story, but the demagoguery with which it is presented. The heads of courts are familiar with the mitzvot mentioned in

Korach's story, but in connecting them with a widow and two orphan girls who possess naught but that field, and in portraying Aharon and Moshe as heartlessly taking all they possess, the perspective of those listeners changes, and they join Korach's battle.

An identical approach may be seen in the response of Datan and Aviram to Moshe's summons: "We will not go. Is it a small thing, that you brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, but you will now also reign over us? You have not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, you have not given us a portion of fields and vineyards! Even were you to put our eyes out, we would not go." (Bamidbar 16:12-14) Datan and Aviram offer no logical argument; like Korach, they simply describe reality in the style of demagoguery. They portray Egypt accurately as a land flowing with milk and honey and Moshe as someone who brought them from Egypt to execute them in the wilderness.

In their dispute with Moshe, Korach, Datan and Aviram articulate their message via an especially powerful and dangerous tool: Cynicism. Cynicism is more than skepticism; as even a glance at a dictionary shows, cynicism involves contempt, and bitter, sneering distrust. Korach, Datan and Aviram convey the truth in a style which communicates mockery and scorn, introducing emotion into the debate. Moshe is frustrated; logical charges may be refuted or addressed, but what can Moshe do against mockery and scorn?

Rabbeinu Yonah noted the same challenge of combating cynicism. In his Shaarei Teshuvah (3:176), Rabbeinu Yonah describes forms of mockery, writing, "One is led to this when he is wise in his own eyes, and this attribute so dominates his personality that he mocks the views of others. This is a hopeless attribute."

Rabbi Yehoshua Weitzman of Maalot sees this challenge in Amalek's attack against the Jews, too. All were afraid to attack the Jews when they left Egypt, due to the might of the Divine demolition of Egypt. Then Amalek attacked, without hope for victory but with the goal of undermining the sense of Jewish might; Rashi (Devarim 25:18) says, playing on the biblical description of Amalek's attack as "*asher karcha*", that Amalek cooled off the red-hot Jewish people with their assault, making light of the halo of Divine protection which had surrounded them. As Rabbi Weitzman explains, Amalek's attack was a cynical mockery of the might of G-d which had protected the Jews, and even a military victory was not sufficient to dispel their disrespect and restore the Jews' aura of invincibility. Cynicism, once unleashed, overwhelms attempts to squelch it.

Moshe understands the problem he faces, and so he seeks a creative substitute for his usual approach. Unlike the Moshe who perennially defends the nation of Israel and seeks to rescue them from harm, here Moshe seeks to eliminate the problem; for this breed of cynicism and mockery there can be no safe haven. Moshe's sanctity has no common language with this foe, not even an entrée into conversation. All that remains is to turn to G-d to open up the earth, identifying the true place for cynicism in this world and the way in which we must respond to those who employ it. Korach, Datan and Aviram must be swallowed up; may all who come afterward learn from their end.

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***Thank you for joining us at our  
June 19<sup>th</sup> Dessert Reception  
honouring Eli and Renee Rubinstein  
and Rabbi Dovid and Ariella Zirkind***

***Thank you for making our event such a success!***

## Blessing our Children on Friday Night

Yair Manas

There is a common practice of blessing our children on Friday night with two blessings. The first is for the males to be like Ephraim and Menasheh and for the females to be like Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, and Leah. The second blessing is Birkat Kohanim: "May G-d bless you and guard you. May G-d's Face shine on you and show you favour. May G-d lift His 'face' to you and establish peace for you." (Bamidbar 6:24-26)

The Talmud (Ketubot 24b) actually teaches that a non-kohen is forbidden from reciting Birkat Kohanim as a blessing. Accordingly, how may we utilize the text of Birkat Kohanim to bless our children?

Elsewhere, the Talmud (Shabbat 118b) teaches that Rabbi Yosi pronounced Birkat Kohanim, even though he was not a Kohen. How did Rabbi Yosi recite this blessing, in light of the Talmud's explicit prohibition? Answers to this question will shed light on the practice of blessing our children with Birkat Kohanim on Friday night.

1) The Torah Temimah (Naso 131) writes that he heard from a reliable source that the Vilna Gaon gave the blessing of Birkat Kohanim to Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (the Noda BiYehudah) at the latter's wedding, but the Vilna Gaon only placed one hand on his head. When asked, the Vilna Gaon answered that only Kohanim may use two hands. Evidently, the Vilna Gaon thought that saying the text of Birkat Kohanim is not problematic - the issue is only when one uses his hands as part of the blessing. Rabbi Yosi must not have used both hands when saying Birkat

Kohanim, so he did not violate the prohibition. Similarly, we do not violate the prohibition of saying Birkat Kohanim when we bless our children with one hand on Friday night.

2) The Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 128:1) suggests that the problem with having a non-Kohen recite Birkat Kohanim is that the preceding blessing will be in vain. Rabbi Yosi did not recite a blessing in advance of the Birkat Kohanim, so he did not make a blessing in vain. Based on this, we can argue that the practice of reciting Birkat Kohanim for our children is appropriate because do not make a formal blessing, and therefore we may even use two hands.

3) The Mishneh Berurah (Orach Chaim 128:3), quoting the Magen Giborim, argues that Birkat Kohanim is forbidden only when one intends to fulfill the technical mitzvah of Birkat Kohanim. Rabbi Yosi did not intend to fulfill the mitzvah, so he did not violate any prohibition. On Friday night, we, too, do not intend to fulfill the mitzvah, so we may say Birkat Kohanim, even while using two hands.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef (Yechaveh Daat 5:14) questions the Torah Temimah's understanding of what happened between the Noda BiYehudah and the Vilna Gaon, and quotes from Rabbi Yaakov Emden that we **must** use two hands. He concludes that a person may bless his child with one or both hands on Friday night, without violating the prohibition against invoking Birkat Kohanim.

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## 613 Mitzvot: #170-171

### Taking a Time-Out

R' Mordechai Torczyner

The Torah describes an odd skin affliction called *tzaraat*, often mis-translated as leprosy or vitiligo, which causes marks to appear on a person's skin, clothing or home. We are taught that one of the major causes of *tzaraat* is *lashon hara*, evil speech about one's self or others. (Talmud, Erchin 15b)

A *metzora* - a person who manifests signs of *tzaraat* - is to function as a quasi-mourner, tearing his clothing and letting his hair grow long (#171). People who were impure engaged in similar practices to warn other people

away; the person who has spoken *lashon hara* now must warn others to stay away, too. (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzaraat 10:8)

The *metzora* is not allowed to remove the marks of his *tzaraat* (#170). He does not attempt to artificially terminate his sentence; instead, he endures his period of punishment, using the time for reflection on his sin and its results and, hopefully, emerging on the other side as a better person.

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## Hitoriri:

### Jewish Spirituality

## The Power of Blossoming

R' Ezra Goldschmiedt

When Moshe's authority is challenged by Korach and his followers, he requests G-d's help. Not long after, "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them." (Bamidbar 16:32) G-d showed in no uncertain terms where He stood on this debate. Surprisingly, however, this clear message does not end the dispute. In response to these miracles, the people accuse Moshe and Aharon of killing the rebels! G-d's independent action mattered little to them; for those who were on the fence, the force of authority, even Divine, miraculous authority, accomplished nothing.

What then, can successfully resolve such a debate? The next miracle shows us: Staffs representing each tribe were taken to the Mishkan, and after only a day, Aharon's staff, to the exclusion of the others, blossomed and produced almonds. Aharon's role and Moshe's integrity were ultimately accepted by the people through this process; we would do well to understand why.

Debate and rational discourse cannot resolve everything, and this is certainly the case when, like Korach's rebels, one group refuses to engage in any dialogue at all (see Bamidbar 16:12). In such stalemates, the only way to determine the correct approach is to allow each view to play its course and see which one ultimately "blossoms." Instead of attempting to force dissenters into submission, the simple pursuit of one's own goals, together with G-d's help, will ultimately win them over.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (Chamesh Drashot, page 23) remarks that although halachah has its own system of reaching practical rulings, the more philosophical, large-scale matters that effect the entire Jewish nation are ultimately "paskened" by G-d through the course of history. For example: The significance of a modern state of Israel was challenged by some Torah authorities, but its impressive growth has demonstrated G-d's approval. Among ideological "staffs", Zionism may be said to have "blossomed".

In our age, differing approaches exist concerning how to live a proper Torah lifestyle. Many completely deny the validity of approaches besides their own, effectively closing off dialogue that would educate all sides. To this, one can only respond by living a life in accordance with his own ideals, and ultimately pray that G-d approves and allows for those ideals to blossom.

## Torah in Translation

12<sup>th</sup> Century Weddings

## R' Elazar of Worms

Sefer haRokeiach 353-355

Translated by R' Dovid Zirkind

Where does the custom originate of giving a groom a tallit to wear on the day of his wedding? Because the Torah states, "You shall make fringes for yourself..." beside, "When a man takes a wife..." I have seen in the Agudah that the grooms fast until sheva brachot [the chuppah] because this mitzvah is dear to them, just as the early Chassidim would fast before performing a dear mitzvah like lulav...

I have heard the following from my teacher: On the Monday following a wedding it is customary to eat fish, and he was asked whether a mourner may eat with them. He replied that when [the blessing of] 'That joy is in His place' [*shehasimchah b'm'ono*] is no longer recited, it is not considered a celebratory meal. Normally [a mourner] is forbidden from partaking of all sociable meals; however, here they were reciting *Hasimcha B'miono* and are no longer saying it, so this will not be called a joyous meal.

*Customs of a groom* – After reciting the blessing of *Eirusin* a second cup is poured and the blessing of *Nisuin* is recited. One of the witnesses takes the corner of his garment and places it in the hand of groom because the witness stands in place of the bride, and acquisitions are performed with the property of the one who is acquiring. [Then] the groom transfers to her all the stipulations of the ketubah.

The witnesses must examine the ketubah to read the stipulations. If there is not enough time, they ask the groom and he tells them and transacts with them and then they sign the ketubah. The custom is to begin the wedding feast on the Thursday evening and to recite 'That joy is in His place' beginning then. Once, in Mainz, a ketubah was written before Shabbat and signed after Shabbat. Before Shabbat they recited the blessing of *Eirusin* and after Shabbat they recited the blessing of *Nisuin*. Then the bride received the ketubah document.

Once two kohanim married in the week of Parshat Ki Tetze. The Rabbis debated what should be done: One said that one of the grooms and his party should daven elsewhere, another said one party should daven early and the other said one party should wait outside while kohen and Levi are called and then the second party should enter (Maaseh Geonim 91).

Rabbi Elazar of Worms, one of the early Rishonim, was born in Mainz, Germany in 1160 CE. He received his early Torah education from his father as well as Rabbi Eliezer ben Shmuel of Metz, known as the Yereim. For a number of years, Rabbi Elazar lived in the home of Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid, a family relative, where he was educated in Jewish mysticism. That experience shaped many of his later writings.

Eventually, Rabbi Elazar settled in Worms, where he established a successful yeshiva which produced many of the leading scholars of his generation. Rabbi Yitzchak of Vienna, author of the Or Zarua, was among his most famous pupils. Rabbi Elazar is commonly known as the Rokeach, which is also the name of his magnum opus, a collection of both halachah and minhag, offering the reader a window into the practices of the Jewish community in Germany during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century (see translation). The popularity of this text is highlighted by the fact that it was one of the first Jewish works reproduced during the era of the printing press (originally in 1505). In addition to the Rokeach, Rabbi Elazar authored a series of works on Torah, Midrash and the Siddur. He composed piyyutim as well.

Rabbi Elazar lost his wife and children during the Crusades, and he and many of his students were badly wounded. R. Elazar died in Worms in 1230 CE, and he was buried there. His study hall still stands today, and is known as "Rashi's Beit Midrash".

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In Mainz there were was a groom present for "Vayosha" (Parshat Beshalach) and they recited the regular haftarah rather than the "Sos Asis" haftarah usually recited for a groom.

Traditionally, the groom breaks a glass, as happened in Berachot 31a, because of "Rejoice in trepidation. (Tehillim 2:11)"

The custom is not to marry between Peach and Shavuot because these are days of danger, when a plague struck the students of Rabbi Akiva. In some places they marry until Rosh Chodesh Iyar and from then on they do not.

When there is a groom who is a kohen on Shabbat, he receives the first aliyah, based on the verse, "You shall honour him [the kohen]" - for all matters of sanctity, just like other kohanim.

ניצנים הוא קיבוץ בתחומי המועצה האזורית חוף אשקלון, והוא נמצא בין אשדוד לאשקלון, על חוף הים. גרעין ניצנים הוקם מאיחוד של מספר קבוצות של יוצאי רומניה ופולין. בשנת 1943 הוצעו לחברי הקבוצה, שמנתה כ-70 חברים, שלוש נקודות התיישבות. חברי הקבוצה בחרו בניצנים בגלל שהייתה זמינה להתיישבות מדינית, והייתה קרובה לים, ממנו קיוו להתפרנס מדיג ולהביא מעפילים.

במלחמת העצמאות פלש הצבא המצרי למדינה העברית החדשה. תחילה נכבשה יד מרדכי ואז המשויכו המצרים להתקדם צפונה כשהם עוקפים את ניצנים ונעדרים בגשר עד הלום. לאחר שראו כי אינם יכולים להתקדם עוד, התפנו המצרים לתקוף את ניצנים. לעומת הצבא המצרי, שהיה מצויד בטנקים ובארטילריה, ושנהנה מסייע אווירי, עמדו חברי הקיבוץ, ותגבורת שנשלחה אליהם, כשהם מצוידים בנשק דל. ב-7 ביוני 1948, לאחר שרבים מלוחמי ניצנים נהרגו בקרב וכמעט כל השאר נפצעו, התחמושת אזלה, ונסיונות המילוט נכשלו, החליט המפקד במקום להכנע. המפקד והקשרית יצאו, עם ממחטה לבנה וידיים מורמות, אל המצרים. בהגיעם אל אחד הקצינים המצרים, זה הוציא את אקדחו וירה במפקד. האלחוטנית ירתה באקדחה בקצין והרגה אותו. קצינים מצרים נוספים שעמדו בסמוך ירו בה והיא נפלה ומתה על יד מפקדה. בעת הכניעה חוסלו ארבעה מגינים נוספים, ארבעה הצליחו להיחלץ. יתר 105 המגינים, חלקם פצועים, הובלו בתהלוכת ניצחון ברחובות מגידל בדרכם לשבי במצרים.

על כניעת המגינים נמתחה ביקורת נוקבת על ידי אבא קובנר, שהיה באותו הזמן קצין החטיבה האחראית על הקיבוץ. בין השאר כתב קובנר, שהיה בעצמו מפקדי הלוחמים בגטו וילנה – " לצאת לשבי הפולש - חרפה ומוות". לאחר המלחמה חזר בו הצבא מן ההאשמה הכבדה, מתוך הכרה במצבם הקשה של המגינים באותה השעה.

בדצמבר 1948, כבש צה"ל מחדש את איזור ניצנים, ולאחר המלחמה שבו השבויים לישראל. היישוב ניצנים הוקם מחדש כשלושה קילומטרים מזרחה למקומו הקודם.

כיום, בקיבוץ 450 חברים, המתפרנסים, בין השאר, ממפעל לייצור ושיווק כסאות - "פלטכניקה", רפת, פרדס של כ-1000 דונם, בית אריזה, גידולי שדה ויחידת מחשוב.

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## Why is Yaakov not mentioned as an ancestor of Korach? (Bamidbar 16:1)

**Rashi** reminds us that Yaakov had earlier prayed not to be mentioned at the time of this dispute, in his blessing to Shimon and Levi (Bereishit 49:6).

**Ohr Hachaim** wonders why this request had to be in the form of a prayer, and not a standard request. Using esoteric kabbalistic terminology, he expands the metaphor of a family tree. Yaakov was the root and trunk of the tree, with twelve branches emerging from him. From Levi, another three branches emerged, and from Kehat another four emerged. Finally, Korach was one branch emerging from Yitzhar. When Korach caused his branch to become diseased, it traveled back to its source – through Yitzhar, Kehat and Levi. Yaakov prayed, and not merely requested, to ensure that this "disease" would not reach the trunk, the source of sanctity of the Nation of Israel.

**Kli Yakar** explains that Korach's complaint was two-fold: he was not only upset that the priesthood was given to Aharon in his time, but he also protested the decision of his great-great-grandfather, Yaakov, to give a double portion to Yosef instead of Reuven. Since Korach rejected actions taken by this illustrious ancestor, it was not fitting to mention Yaakov in Korach's genealogy.

## How do we understand Dathan and Aviram's statement of "we will not go up?" (Bamidbar 16:12)

**Rashi** relates that this phrase actually predicted their downfall – they would "not go up" as they would descend to the abyss.

**Rashbam** and **Chizkuni** elucidate that the language of "go up" is used elsewhere to describe approaching a judge. They declared that they would not approach Moshe for judgment.

**Ibn Ezra**, on the other hand, proposes that the *ohel mo'ed*, the Tent of Meeting, was in fact at a point of higher elevation than the rest of the encampment. Therefore, their statement was literal.

**Ohr HaChaim** shares that Moshe attempted to meet with Datan and Aviram behind closed doors, away from the rest of the assembly. They rejected this special treatment by declaring "we will not go up", that is, "We will not allow you to treat us on a higher level than the others."

Similarly, **Kli Yakar** explains that Moshe wanted to meet with them privately. However, being the leaders, Datan and Aviram thought Moshe wanted to bribe them with a position of power and authority over the nation. They declared, "We will not go up", that is, "We will not accept a higher position of power".

## Why did Aharon's staff sprout almonds? (Bamidbar 17:23)

**Rashi** compares almonds to punishment: Almonds sprout quickly, and the punishment of those who complain about the priesthood will come quickly.

**Ohr Hachaim** explains what was bothering Rashi. When one performs miracles, especially before those who have challenged his worthiness, one would be expected to perform the most difficult miracle, not the easiest. Since causing the fastest sprouting fruits to sprout appears simple, there necessarily must have been a deeper meaning behind the almonds.

**Ibn Ezra** associates this miracle with Yirmiyahu's first prophecy, of a millenium later. Yirmiyahu saw a staff of an almond tree. Hashem explains the metaphor to Yirmiyahu, saying, "For I watch (*shoked*) over My word". This is the message here as well: Hashem watches over His word, and over those whom He appoints.

Similarly, **Chizkuni** describes the metaphor as relating to the future: just as the staff blossomed (*parach*), so too would Aharon have priestly descendants, dubbed "*pirchei kehunah*" in the language of the Sages. Further, just as the staff brought forth almonds (*shaked*), so too would Aharon have descendants who would watch over (*shoked*) and be careful in their service.

## Highlights for June 23 - 29 / 3 - 9 Tammuz

*Many of our shiurim are now on summer hiatus, but opportunities remain!*

### Shabbat, June 23

**7:45 AM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Rav Kook, Or Chaim

**10:20 AM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Parshah, Clanton Park

**After Hashkama** Hillel Horovitz, Hebrew Shiur, Bnai Torah

**1 hour before minchah** Yair Manas: Gemara Sukkah, Mizraichi Bayit *not this week*

**75 minutes before minchah** R' Mordechai Torczyner,

Daf Yomi: Niddah 33, BAYT

**After minchah** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Dama ben

Netinah: Gemara Avodah Zarah, BAYT

### Sunday, June 24

**9:15 AM** Hillel Horovitz, Parshah, Zichron Yisroel, Hebrew

**6:00 PM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Halachic considerations in actual questions in Israel: The Refugee Crisis,

Hebrew, 4 Tillingham Keep

**40 Min Before Minchah** R' Baruch Weintraub, Halachic considerations in actual questions in Israel: The Refugee Crisis, Hebrew, Clanton Park, *men*

### Monday, June 25

**8:30 PM** Hillel Horovitz, Siddur: In-Depth, Clanton Park

### Tuesday, June 26

**1:30 PM** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Trei Asar, Shaarei Shomayim, *summer hiatus begins*

**6:30 PM** R' Ezra Goldschmiedt, Ramban on the Parshah, BAYT *not this week*

**8:00 PM** Hillel Horovitz, Book of Joshua, Week 1, Bnai Torah

### Wednesday, June 27

**8:00 PM** Yair Manas, Responsa, Clanton Park, *men*

**8:00 PM** R' Dovid Zirkind, Gemara Beitza 2nd Perek, Shaarei Shomayim

**8:30 PM** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Living Midrash: Truth in Creation, BAYT, *women*

**8:30 PM** R' Baruch Weintraub, Hilchot Melachim: Royal Courts?, Shomrei Shabbos, *men*

### Thursday, June 28

**10:15 AM** R' Mordechai Torczyner, Practical Shabbat, BAYT, *collegiate women*

### Friday, June 29

**8 AM** R' Dovid Zirkind, Friday Parshah Preview, Village Shul