



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

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### Unhealthy Conflict

*Rabbi Dr. Mordechai Schiffman*

**C**onflict is ubiquitous in so many areas of life and there are numerous fields of research that study this fiery topic as it manifests in these different contexts. Industrial and organizational psychologists investigate conflict in the workplace, marriage and family therapists look at conflict between relatives, political psychologists work to understand conflict on a more global scale, and social psychologists study conflict on a more general level. While naturally there is some conflict amongst the research findings about conflict, there are generally agreed upon trends as to what causes conflicts and the best ways to try and resolve them.

Jewish tradition is also heavily concerned with conflict resolution and the pursuit of peace. Rabbi Dr. Howard Kaminsky recently published a book called *Fundamentals of Jewish Conflict Resolution: Traditional Jewish Perspective on Resolving Interpersonal Conflicts*, where he systematically gathers and summarizes ideas found in Biblical and Rabbinic literature, comparing those sources with modern approaches to conflict resolution. What follows is a brief summary his main points as they relate to Parshat Korach.

The Sages (Sanhedrin 110a) articulate an actual prohibition of perpetuating a quarrel, based on the pasuk that states “Do not be like Korach and his congregation” (Bemidbar 17:5). Rabbi Yehonatan mi-Lunil argues that even though Moshe was in the right and was unjustly attacked, if he didn’t try to stop the dispute, he would have violated the prohibition. Rabbi Natan Tzvi Finkel suggests further that we can learn from Moshe’s continual attempts to resolve the conflict, that the prohibition even applies after the other party rejects earlier attempts at reconciliation.

The Mishna in Avot (5:17) distinguishes between the disputes of Hillel and Shammai, which are considered for the sake of Heaven, and the dispute between Korach and his followers, which are not. We are just given paradigms,

without delineation of any particular criteria for identifying a dispute for the sake of Heaven. It is up to the commentators to fill in the gaps, and many use the nuances of the narrative reported in Parshat Korach to elucidate the parameters.

Summarizing and organizing the commentaries, Rabbi Dr. Kaminsky presents three criteria that indicate that a dispute is not for the sake of Heaven. One is that the party demonstrates a lack of intellectual integrity. They are uninterested in engaging in any clarifying and compromising dialogue. They are right and nothing anyone can say will change their minds. A second criterion is the content and tone of the argument. If it is clear that they are condemning and insulting the other party, with a backdrop of animosity, then the dispute is not for the sake of Heaven. The final criterion relates to the motivation of the dispute. If the provocation is rooted in anything but the pursuit of truth and peace, that is a strong clue that it is not for the sake of Heaven. As various midrashim indicate with Korach, his true motivation was rooted in arrogance, jealousy and hurt, not a more noble internal impulse.

The difficulty, as Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschutz poignantly adds, is that most people aren’t always aware of these ulterior motives and subconscious motivations within themselves. Most people can rationalize away their participation in any dispute as being for the sake of Heaven, even if it is not. If we truly want to follow Moshe’s paradigm and avoid Korach’s example, we would be wise to reflect before any dispute and engage in an honest introspection. Are we listening to the other party and really concerned with intellectual integrity? Are we being overcome with hostility and other unhealthy negative emotions towards the other party? Can we honestly say—knowing that it is so easy to delude ourselves—that we are not being driven by ulterior motives? If we aren’t confident that we pass these criteria, we would generally do well to avoid conflict as much as possible.

# The Holy Censers

Rabbi Dr. Dvir Ginsberg

The tragic rebellion led by Korach and his followers dominates the weekly Torah portion, their actions culminating with the horrific deaths of the participants. While Korach was swallowed by the ground, those who brought the fire pans of incense were consumed by flame. After those who brought the censers were killed, the Torah records the following commandment (Bamidbar 17:1-2):

*“The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Say to Eleazar the son of Aaron the kohen that he should pick up the censers from the burned area (but throw the fire away), because they have become sanctified (ki kadeishu)”*

What stands out from this command is the standing given to these censers. Why would they be considered sanctified? Those bringing the incense were challenging the system of Torah law as given from God, the supremacy of Moshe’s leadership, and the exclusive position of the kohanim. It would be reasonable to assume that the fire pans used should have been destroyed, considered to be the result of a colossal ideological distortion.

Rashi offers the simplest explanation. He writes that the censers were “forbidden from benefit (hanaa)”. Why? Through being used in the method of Tabernacle service, they acquired the status of being sanctified.

Ramban contests this interpretation, as it seems difficult to understand that the censers were deemed as sanctified if the incense being brought was considered “alien”. Furthermore, if a layman brings a sacrifice, the vessels he uses do not become sanctified.

He then attempts to explain Rashi:

*“However, it is possible to say that “because they did so at the command of Moshe, [the vessels] became holy, because they sanctified them for [the sake of] Heaven, since they thought that God would answer them by [sending down] a fire from Heaven and these fire pans would [therefore] be service utensils in the Tent of Meeting forever.”*

Ramban is suggesting that since their intentions were a hope of an appropriate response from God, there was a clear rationale for why the censers sanctified. Why should we care that their “hearts were in the right place”? The motivation for this worship of God was fueled by a terrible distorted viewpoint. Just because they were convinced what they were doing was correct should not register as

being of any importance at all.

Ramban offers another interpretation:

*“But what is sound in my view is that Scripture is saying: ‘for they offered them before Hashem, so they have become holy [to be] for a sign to the Children of Israel’; this means to say: I have made them holy from the moment they offered them before Me so that they shall be a sign to the Children of Israel.”*

This explanation, which is echoed by other commentators such as Abarbanel, indicates that the hallowed status of the fire pans was the desired objective of God. The concept of sanctification in this context was the role of the censers as being a “sign”. This refers to these fire pans being hammered out and added to the overlay of the altar. Thus, they would be a part of Temple service forever.

While this explanation avoids the problem with the censers acquiring the designation of being sanctified, it deviates from the simple understanding of “ki kadeshu”. What idea is Ramban bringing forth here?

The crux of the debate may rest on how to view this act of worship by the followers of Korach. Moshe understood that the challenge to the position of the kohanim was of the utmost seriousness. Those rebelling saw the exclusivity of service to God as being unjust; equality of Tabernacle access was the driving theme of their attitude. Engaging in the act of bringing incense would, in their minds, bring an agreement from the Divine and proof of their position. Their deaths demonstrated that their path was the wrong one. In truth, the fire pans were the product of a failed rebellion and a horrific ideological distortion; destruction of these vessels made perfect sense. Yet if this occurred, the people could point to a mistake in the service itself that led to their deaths. The service was set up to follow the exact, step-by-step process used by the Kohen. In doing so, it was critical that whatever happened to those bringing the incense would not be the result of an error or misdirection in the service. One possible expression of the service being completed incorrectly would be the destruction of the fire pans used. The Jewish people could then point to the demise of those vessels as proof that the punishment was the result of a problem in the service, and not in the people performing it. The alternative was to give the fire pans the status of being sanctified, no different than any vessel used in the Temple service. In doing so, the people would see

that it was purely due to the incorrect ideology of those bringing the incense that they met their downfall. Moshe thus removed any possible attachment of blame to the performance of the service, ensuring the focus was on the individuals themselves.

The other possibility offered by Ramban sees the status of the censers the result of God's overall plan. As noted above, the challenge to God and Moshe was quite serious. One concern was how to respond to the accusers and the message it would send to the nation as a whole. Another concern was how the Jewish people related to worship of God through the Tabernacle (and future Temple). The rebellion brought forth a host of underlying emotions among the Jewish people, as they identified with the idea of an "unfair" and "unequal" treatment by the system of halacha. There needed to be a fundamental altering of the approach the Jewish people took towards their role in Temple service. Thus, God creates this new, solitary avenue of worship for those rebelling, with the objective solely to demonstrate that the entire approach being

taken is incorrect. This was a one-time act of worship by those not qualified. The overall objective of any service in the Tabernacle and Temple was always connected to sanctifying the name of God in some way. The result would be present here as well, by setting aside the fire pans and using them as part of the altar. The important lessons of the rebellion would be consecrated into the very system of worship, a demonstration to all forever the correct approach to serving God.

While of course the acts of Korach and his followers were heinous, there were important and fundamental ideas that helped re-chart the proper course forward for the Jewish people. The tenuous thread connecting the nation to the system of worship was under attack, and the sanctifying of these fire pans played a pivotal road in correcting the flaws that were present. While we may not currently have the Temple, we must be always be aware of the tremendous challenges that are often present when it comes to the worship of God.

## Controversy Versus Conflict

*Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald*

**T**his week's parasha, parashat Korach, tells of the ill-fated controversy between Korach and Moses, that concludes with the earth swallowing Korach and his followers.

The Mishna in Avot 5:20, prominently mentions Korach's rebellion: "Every controversy which is for the sake of Heaven will endure in the end, and every one which is not for the sake of Heaven will in the end not endure. Which is the controversy for the sake of Heaven? Such was the conflict of Hillel and Shammai. Which is not for the sake of Heaven? Such was the conflict of Korach and his entire assemblage."

From a superficial perspective, one might easily conclude that all controversies are bad. What difference is there between the controversy of rabbis or the controversy of rebels? The Mishna in Avot argues that there is a profound difference. Although the controversies between Hillel and Shammai were significant and, undoubtedly, heated, both Hillel and Shammai, ultimately, submitted to the majority opinion, even if they were totally opposed to those conclusions. Despite the fact that Hillel was known to be lenient and Shammai more severe, both Hillel and

Shammai had one objective—to help the People of Israel grow in their observance of Torah. They only differed in the details.

As we all know, controversy has been part of Jewish life from time immemorial. In fact, most of the rabbis of the Talmud had would-be "sparring partners," who would frequently provide opposing opinions to their own. These opposing opinions, even though they were rejected, are considered so valuable, that they are recorded in the Talmud, and are studied to this very day.

In the 2nd half of the 16th century, Rama/Rema had begun to write, what he hoped would be, a definitive legal code for both Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews. When he learned that Rabbi Joseph Caro was just about to complete his Code of Jewish Law, the Shulchan Aruch, rather than publish his own magnum opus, Rabbi Isserles chose instead to author an Ashkenazic gloss/commentary to Rabbi Caro's Shulchan Aruch.

The name that Rabbi Caro gave to his code of law was Shulchan Aruch, which means a fully arrayed table. It was Rabbi Caro's hope to prepare an easy way for all Jews to learn Jewish law, with everything openly arranged

on a table. Rabbi Isserles' commentary is cleverly called HaMapa, "The Tablecloth," and although it is only a gloss on the Code of Jewish Law for Ashkenazic Jews, Rabbi Isserles' stature did not suffer, but rather increased as a result of his decision to forgo his own self-aggrandizement. This is, perhaps, what the Mishna means when it says: סֵפֶר הַדִּבְרֵי הַלְוִיִּם—“Sofa l’hit’kayaim,” controversial opinions which are for the sake of Heaven will endure.

Those familiar with Jewish law know that Jews rigorously maintain and study not only the mainstream Jewish legal opinions, but the minority opinions as well. These so-called “minority opinions,” often form the basis of new and novel legal decisions that are introduced by scholars in later generations. They do not die, but rather endure, as if their authors were still alive and arguing with one another.

And, yet, we know that Korach had his gripes, some of which appear to be quite legitimate. Korach was a Levite, who felt that he did not receive adequate recognition. But, was his motivation to rebel for the sake of the betterment of the community, or for his own self-aggrandizement?

The Midrash relates that it was Korach's wife, who incited her husband to rebel. Apparently, after Korach underwent the ritual of purification required of all the 22,272 Levites, Korach's wife wouldn't let him live down, what she considered, a demeaning ritual—shaving off all the hair of his body and being carried around as a dedication to G-d. Although the Midrash cites Korach as saying that Moses had performed the same ritual on his own sons, Mrs. Korach responded: “Who cares about that! He demeaned you, didn't he?”

The famed Chasidic master, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, points out, insightfully, that there is a way to

## Seeking Peace for the Sake of Truth

*Mrs. Michal Horowitz*

In this week's parsha, Parshas Korach, Korach - a first cousin to Moshe and Aharon (see Rashi to Bamidbar 16:1) - spearheads a rebellion against the leadership of Moshe and the kehunah (priesthood) of Aharon.

Feeling slighted by a perceived lack of kavod (honor) that Korach believes should rightly be his, he convinces a handful of men from the tribe of Reuven, along with two hundred and fifty leaders of the people, to join his rebellion.

determine whether an argument is for the sake of Heaven or not. Examine the group that is stirring up controversy, he suggests. Are they harmonious? Are they bound to one another in an unselfish manner?

It is regarding this particular point that the Mishna in Avot is most revealing. When the Mishna talks of the conflict between Hillel and Shammai, it simply mentions the names of the two sages who argued with each other. However, when the Mishna mentions the controversy that is not for the sake of Heaven, it cites: the conflict of “Korach and his entire assemblage.” The Mishna should have stated: Such was the controversy of Korach and his assemblage with Moses. This subtlety of language indicates that there was no harmony between Korach and the men who joined him in rebellion. They were all out for themselves; they were all on their own personal ego trips. They were not even minutely concerned with the betterment of the community.

When Albert Einstein was deported by the Nazis from Germany, in addition to being expelled, his ideas were derided. One hundred Nazi “experts” published a book denying the value of any of his discoveries. One great scientist responded to this insult by saying: “If my theories were wrong, it would take only one professor to prove them wrong. If you require one hundred, it's a sign that it's truthful.”

Had Korach approached Moses and debated the issues that troubled him in pursuit of the truth, he might have been remembered forever as a great sage, an innovator, and one who sought to improve Jewish life, even if his views were not accepted. How sad it is that he is remembered instead as a destroyer, who sought to undermine Jewish life.

Ultimately, after much drama (see Bamidbar 16), Korach's attempted rebellion and coup fail, as the ground opens up and swallows Korach and his men, their families and their possessions.

G-d has proven to the doubters that Moshe and Aharon are the Divinely chosen and Divinely appointed rulers of the nation.

R' Soloveitchik zt'l teaches, “The Korach controversy was a rebellion, not a quarrel due to ungratified physical

desires. Moreover, the masses were not involved at all. The am, the people who demanded water at Rephidim, the am that told Aharon to build a god (at the incident of the golden calf), did not participate in the anti-Moshe campaign of Korach. The leadership of the rebellion consisted of a few individuals, and the followers were several hundred at most ... It was a conspiracy, premeditated and carefully thought out.

“The Ramban explains that Korach’s enmity was incurred when Aharon was elevated to the position of Kohen Gadol (High Priest). However, in spite of his anger, Korach did not attempt to come out publicly against Moshe. He understood very well that the people, notwithstanding minor incidents, were devoted and loyal to their great leader, and that any attempt to unseat Moshe would be met with anger and derision. Korach waited patiently for an opportunity that would somehow undermine Moshe’s position and popularity.

“The opportune moment arrived sooner than Korach anticipated. It was the incident of the spies, perhaps the most tragic incident in Moshe’s life. The Almighty’s decree that all the adults would die in the desert was a hard blow to Moshe’s prestige. For a short while, he lost his influence over the crowds. Before the Israelites had left Egypt, while they were still busy building fortresses for Pharaoh, Moshe had promised those slaves that a short time after their departure from Egypt they would enter into the Promised Land, a long flowing with milk and honey... Suddenly, all their hopes and dreams were dissipated and shattered. No land, no conquest, no rivers of milk and honey, no realizations of the promise were in sight - only many bleak and dreary years before Israel would set foot on the soil of Canaan” (Chumash Masores HaRav, Bamidbar, p.129).

Korach grabbed onto the moment of Moshe’s perceived weakness, after the disaster of the spies in Parshas Shelach, and staged his (unsuccessful) rebellion.

Of all the lessons we learn from Korach and his men, and their *מחלוקת שאינה לשם שמים* (quarrel not for the sake of Heaven - see Avos 5:20), one of the most enduring and powerful lessons is to stay far, far away from quarrel and strife. In fact, the Sages teach (see Sanhedrin 110a) that anyone who becomes embroiled in *מחלוקת* (quarrel and strife) transgresses a *lav d’Oraisa* - prohibitive biblical command - not to be like Korach and his assembly!

Those who disagree *l’Shem Shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven) seek the truth of Torah; those who disagree

not *l’Shem Shomayim* (not for the sake of Heaven) seek nothing but their own honor and glory.

“Pride is concerned with who is right; humility is concerned with what is right” (author unknown).

Recalls R’ Yehudah Kravitz, who headed OU Kosher’s meat industry supervision for 10 years as the *rav hamachshir* (supervising rabbi) recalls, “Rav Belsky’s (R’ Chaim Yisroel Belsky, 1938-2016, *zt’l*) genius in learning and *psak halacha* was surpassed by his greatness in *middos*. He was the *anav mikol adam*, the most humble of men. I saw evidence of this in many instances. I saw how visiting *rabbanim* would insult him and he would not react. He never said a bad word about them, not in their presence and not after they had left. His only interest was in clarifying the *halacha l’amito* (truth of Jewish law). When other distinguished *poskim* disagreed with his *psak*, he was ready and eager to discuss the issues with them, and was prepared to retract his *psak* if he could be proven wrong. It was not ‘my *psak*.’ It was what he deemed to be the Torah’s viewpoint, and if it could be shown that this was not the case, then so be it.

“Whether or not his *psak* was popular meant nothing to him. Whether he received honor or insults was irrelevant. He was interested solely in the truth - nothing more, nothing less.

“I never saw him display a trace of anger, and there were instances when he had every reason to become angry. Once, a visiting rabbi was being disrespectful and was becoming angrier by the minute. When it became clear that it would be impossible to carry on a reasonable discussion with this man, R’ Belsky got up and left the room, rather than respond. I saw this happen only once. All other times, he did not react at all to insults. It was as if they were speaking about someone else.

“I personally witnessed how R’ Belsky accorded honor and spoke pleasantly to *rabbanim* who had acted toward him with disrespect. When he met them, it was as if nothing at all had happened” (Rav Belsky, *Artscroll*, p.49-50).

As we enter the month of Tammuz, the beginning of the end of the destruction of our Holy Temple, let us learn from Korach and his assembly what not to do. Perhaps if we strive for peace like we mean it, we will be worthy to see our destroyed places rebuilt, as we return to Yerushalayim, the city of Shalom. May it be immediate and in our days, amen.

# Shaatnez in the Garden of Eden and the Fire-Pans in the Desert

Rabbi Elly Krimsky

**T**he Midrash Yalkut Reuveni, basing itself on the chachmei hakaballah, the great mystics, declares that the confrontation between Korach and Moshe had played itself out in a previous era in history. They claim that not only is the duel parallel to that of Kayin and Hevel, but that Kayin's soul transmigrated into Korach, and Moshe Rabbeinu was the corporal carrier for Hevel's spiritual DNA. There are certainly logical connections between Korach and Kayin. Korach was swallowed up in the earth as a tikun (correction) for the earth which accepted the blood of Kayin's brother whom he murdered. They both used the means of sacrifice to demonstrate their prominence.

Let's take a look at the battle between Kayin and Hevel which led to the murder of one quarter of the world's population. Allow me to express it with a beautiful interpretation by Harav Avigdor Nebenzahl (Sichos l'Sefer Bereshis, pp. 34-35).

Kayin was really the first human being to desire to bring a korban, an offering, to God. The Ramban writes (Bereshis 8:20) that Kayin understood the secrets of korbanos and how a korban aroused the upper worlds. Add to this the fact that Kayin also comprehended that the venue for sacrifice is also important, as he offered his sacrifice on Har Hamoriah, Mount Moriah, today known as the Temple Mount (see Meshech Chochma in the beginning of Vayikra, based upon Pirkei d'Rebbe Eliezer chapter 31). The Torah records that Hevel ALSO brought a sacrifice; he followed in his brother's footsteps, not the other way around. Why, therefore, did HASHEM accept Hevel's offering, and not that of its initiator and innovator Kayin?

What was the source of Kayin and Hevel's battle? According to the Kuzari, they were dividing up the world and each one wanted Eretz Yisrael under his jurisdiction (some things never change). Since they had not yet invented the notion of flipping coins or the game "rock, paper scissors," they each decided to bring an offering and the one whose sacrifice HASHEM preferred would emerge victorious. Kayin did not understand that a korban, which is a means of expressing one's gratitude to the Almighty, needed to be beautiful. Hevel understood this and for this reason his offering was accepted.

We can now understand how our sages saw Korach's soul as a later version of Kayin's. Korach's argument was based

on logic. Rabbi Soloveitchik delivered a famous shiur where he identified Korach's attempted coup as a 'common sense rebellion.' After all, why should a room filled with Torah scrolls need a mezuzah on its door? Everything written in the mezuzah is contained in each Sefer Torah in the room! Common sense, no? Why should Moshe and Aaron have greater authority than the rest of their Levite cousins? Why not share? Everyone is holy!! Kayin did not understand why Hevel's sacrifice, which was costlier and more valuable, was accepted. Both were offerings to God; what is the difference between stalks and flax and firstlings of one's flock?

I have mentioned in the past that the rabbis describe Korach as bald. The Hebrew word for bald is keyreyach, the same letters as Korach. In my mind I always visually identify Korach as the famous Soviet revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, a man identified by his bare scalp. Korach's argument, 'all the nation is holy,' was the spiritual progenitor of Lenin's communism.

The Arizal quoting the Zohar declares that Moshe Rabbeinu was the reincarnation of Hevel. The Torah records that Moshe was a shepherd; Rabbeinu B'chaye understands it literally in the past tense, that his soul served as a shepherd when it inhabited the body of Hevel. Others point out that the word Moshe is an acronym for Moshe, Shes (Seth, the son born to Adam and Chava after Hevel's death) and Hevel, all of whom shared a soul. Hevel's abilities were cut off when he was murdered and this great soul was then given to Moshe Rabbeinu, who actualized Hevel's potential. Others note that Hevel's blood called out from the ground, as he was unable to defend himself. Moshe buried in the same earth the cruel Egyptian whom he killed; as such he did not initiate the plagues upon the earth and gave that task to Aaron. Moshe survived because he was more active than the seemingly passive Hevel.

Rabbi Norman Lamm (in a sermon delivered at the Jewish Center on June 22, 1963) identifies three traits that both Korach and Kayin had in common: jealousy, desire, and honor. Both Kayin and Korach wanted to outdo his rival, each possessed much material wealth but it was not enough (our sages taught that Korach was one of the wealthiest men of history) and each yearned for homage. Kayin saw himself as the elder brother and Korach saw himself as superior to Moshe in terms of lineage. Rabbi

Eliezer Hakafar (Avos 4:28) warns us of the consequences of these three ugly traits:

”רבי אליעזר הקפר אומר: הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאין את האדם מן העולם”

“Says Rabbi Eliezer Hakafar: jealousy, desire and honor remove one from the world.”

Kayin was forced into exile and Korach was swallowed up into the earth.

Rabbi Lamm identifies another tactic that both Korach and Kayin employed. They both tried to veil their true intentions. Chazal teach that the two original brothers agreed to split the world as follows: Hevel would own the moveable items while Kayin would possess the land. Therefore, Kayin would consistently inform his brother that he was trespassing. While technically and legally he was correct, he was not conducting himself properly. To quote Rabbi Lamm, Kayin’s jealousy, desire and honor “were all wrapped up in the cloak of legalism, piety and righteousness.” Korach too hid his true intentions, making his claim based on justice and logic. He showed himself as the great savior and defender of the proletariat who will battle the bourgeoisie. We know what his true intentions were.

For this reason, argues Rabbi Lamm, the text in each passage presents itself very ambiguously: with a verb without an object.

In the story of Kayin and Hevel we find the following:

”ויאמר קין אל הבל אחיו, ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם קין אל הבל אחיו ויהרגהו” (בראשית ד:ח)

“Kayin spoke with his brother Hevel. And it happened when they were in the field that Kayin rose up against his brother Hevel and killed him” ( Bereshis 4:8).

The beginning of our parsha states:

”ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת קן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן” (במדבר ט”ז:א)

“And Korach took, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Ke’has, the son of Levi with Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav, and On the son of Peles, the sons of Reuven” (Bamidbar 16:1).

What did Kayin say to Hevel in the verse above? What did Korach take? The basic meaning of the verses leave these questions unanswered and they are grammatically anomalous. Rabbi Lamm concluded:

“Perhaps what the Torah means to tell us with these unusual constructions is that the reasons Kayin and Korach gave, what they said, the ‘front’ they presented, the excuses they offered – were all empty, meaningless and of no concern to us. What Kayin said was totally irrelevant; he never said what he really meant. That fact is that he was fraudulent and hypocritical.

What Korach said or whom he took along with him was equally inconsequential; the important thing is that in order to satisfy his own desire for power he deceived and almost destroyed his entire people. It is the action, the deeper motive, unspoken and unarticulated, but disguised in the cloak of piety, that is so terribly and unspeakably evil. It is that which really counts. The rest is unworthy of being recorded in Scripture.”

Let us not forget that Aharon was also a player in the drama between Moshe and Korach. Ultimately it was his staff that grew the almonds. We find a mystical connection between the battle of Kayin & Hevel and the role of Aharon.

The Zohar (3:86-87) advances that halacha has established a remembrance of the battle between Kayin and Hevel; the source for the prohibition of shaatnez – of wearing a mixture of wool and linen – stems from the fact that Kayin’s offering was from linen and Hevel brought wool (sheep). The mixture of these two powers brought a negative spirit to the world manifested by wearing the two together. It was then established that the service in the Temple would atone for this negative spirit. Both the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) and the Kohen Hedyot (regular kohen) were mandated to wear shaatnez as part of their ritual garments. Both the belt of the Kohen Hedyot and the breastplate of the Kohen Gadol contained shaatnez. Since Kayin was careless about the appearance and contents of his korban, the bigdei k’hunah (priestly garments) come and atone for his mistake, for they are worn ‘*l’chavod ul’sifares*’ to honor and glorify (Shmos 28:2).

We will always be confronted by demagogues who make rational arguments only seeking pleasure for their egos and arrogant aggrandizement for their physical needs. They will guise their true intentions in altruistic ones; they will often hide behind their protection of the little man, merely seeking to yield power for themselves. These people will all be the same and will always be present. Moshe Rabbeinu helped us identify them.

We can either perpetuate the battle between Kayin and Hevel – between just and unjust – or learn how to overcome it. Moshe Rabbeinu was able to defeat Korach because he learned that one cannot sit by idly as (seemingly) Hevel did. Part and parcel of Moshe’s leadership (and much of Sefer Bamidbar chronicles his maturation as a leader) is the sometimes uncomfortable responsibility to stand up, risk it all, and defend the integrity of God’s system. There will also be times when one must ignore minor dissent if it is based upon people’s needs for power, desire and honor. May we continue to

have the wisdom to follow great altruistic leaders, to elect those infused with yiras Shamayim (reverence for Heaven)

and love of their fellow man and an absolute idealistic dedication to their various causes.

## Genuine Equality

Rabbi Alex Hecht

Where in the Torah do we find an allusion to the mitzvah of bikur cholim [visiting the sick]?" asks the Talmud. Reish Lakish proposes that the scriptural source can be found in our parshah.

Moshe told the nation that Hashem would prove his legitimacy as a leader through supernatural means: "If [Korach and his followers] die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me. But if Hashem will create a phenomenon, and the ground will open its mouth and swallow them and all that is theirs, and they will descend alive into the pit - then you shall know that these men have provoked Hashem." (Bamidbar 16:29-30, Artscroll translation) Rava explains that dying "like the death of all men" alludes to the reality that death is usually preceded by illness, and that it is expected that the sick will receive visitors. (Nedarim 39b)

On the surface, the connection between Moshe's wager and the mitzvah of bikur cholim seems to be derived from an incidental word: a term associated with visiting [pekidah] appears in Moshe's language. (Ran to Nedarim 39b) But can we find a deeper connection between Korach's dispute with Moshe, and the mitzvah of bikur cholim?

### Bikur Cholim: Empathy

Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (Ben Yehoyada, Commentary to Nedarim 39b) explains that Moshe wanted to unmask Korach's guise of an advocate for unity. Korach argued, "For the entire assembly - all of them - are holy and Hashem is among them; why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem?" (Bamidbar 16:3, Artscroll translation) Rabbi Yosef Chaim references the Talmud's statement that when one visits a sick person, he accepts upon himself one-sixtieth of the patient's suffering (ibid.) Thus, bikur cholim demonstrates profound empathy for one's fellow Jew, to the extent that one is willing to share in the pain of another. Moshe's wager was as follows:

- If Korach was genuinely seeking to cultivate unity among the entire nation, he would merit to see it actualized, and benefit from visitors in his old age.
- However, if Korach's true intentions were to sow

discord and undermine the status quo, he and his followers would die immediately and not have the opportunity to perform and benefit from this great mitzvah, since its fulfillment is predicated on genuine feelings of unity and empathy.

### Bikur Cholim: Equality

Furthermore, the laws of bikur cholim demonstrate that Korach was wrong, and the Torah does recognize the innate holiness of every member of the community. A b'raita states, "Visiting the sick has no limit." Abbaye understands this to mean that even a person of high stature must visit a person of lesser stature who is sick. (Nedarim 39b) Rabbi Bezalel Ashkenazi explains that this means that a great person should not say, "How can I visit a person of lesser stature than me?" The most distinguished member of the community must visit the lowliest of the low - and even one hundred times per day! If G-d Himself "visited" Avraham when he was recovering from circumcision (Rashi to Bereishit 18:1, citing Bava Metzia 86b), no person can claim that it is beneath his dignity to visit another person who is ill. Granted, there are mitzvot which preserve a hierarchy; regarding the mitzvah of returning lost objects, one may decline to retrieve an object which is so far beneath his dignity that he would not retrieve it for himself. However, bikur cholim supports the Torah's respect for each individual. (Shitah Mekubetzet, Nedarim 39b)

The mitzvah of bikur cholim represents a defeat of Korach's uprising. In order to maximize the effect of this mitzvah, one has to be willing to share in the suffering of another. Unity is not cultivated by empty catchphrases and populism, but by sacrifice and selflessness, in which Korach and his followers were proven lacking. Furthermore, a hierarchy and designation of roles within the Jewish people does not contradict the fact that every person is equally valuable. No one is exempt from bikur cholim and no one is unworthy of being visited, because, precisely as Korach argued, "the entire assembly - all of them - are holy, and Hashem is among them". (Bamidbar 16:3, Artscroll translation)