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Korach 5783

The Makings of a Man

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered June 17, 1961)

This morning I wish to take exception to the tenor of sermons customarily delivered on the Sabbath we read of Korah and his insurrection. The pulpit, on this day, usually expounds on the vice of rebelliousness, and regards the Rebel as an absolutely evil person. I do not want to plead in his defense. But I do believe the accusation should be modified. The Rebel is sometimes but not always a rogue. Rebelliousness is not necessarily at all times an unmitigated evil.

Actually, there are two strains of personality that are opposed to each other, and that characterize most human behavior. They are: conformity and rebelliousness. Every human being has both tendencies within him. Some of us express more one quality than the other. There are some people who are almost completely the Conformist, others completely the Rebel.

The Conformist is the dedicated bourgeois. He submits to the majority, the popular, and finds security in being part of the nameless mass and the faceless crowd. He has suppressed whatever independence of judgment he might have possessed. He is a self-righteous person who has largely ceased to think for himself.

The Rebel is the Bohemian, the anarchist, the outsider. He worships at the shrine of protest. He proclaims the holiness of defiance. School, family, religion, society – all forms of authority are considered by him The Enemy and he is dedicated to overthrow them.

Which of these two is the better man? Which is the midah, the attribute of character or personality that Judaism prefers and recommends to us? Shall we be the Conformist or the Rebel?

The answer is that the spiritually and psychologically mature personality must have elements of both, never only one. The authentic Jew must be neither “square” nor “beat,” neither reactionary nor radical. He is, however, to have

the capacity and the experience of both. For either one, by itself, is odious. When combined in one person, each has much to contribute to the growth of his character, to the makings of a true man.

Rebellion is a necessary ingredient of personality, an essential dimension of life. Rebellion implies the protest against stagnation, the promise of discovery, the quest for something new and more wholesome. Without the element of rebelliousness the soul ceases to speak, the spirit is somber and silent as a cemetery. Abraham was a rebel, an iconoclast. He broke his father's idols and revolted against the obscene, smug paganism of his world. Moses led a rebellion against Pharaoh and was a lonely outsider even within Israel. Without the French Revolution the Western World might have no democracy today. Only recently Justice Douglas pleaded for a renewal of the spirit of the American Revolution in the world, for rebellion can be healthy indeed. The State of Israel was created in the seething cauldron of revolution and protest against established authority.

Yet rebelliousness as such, alone and by itself, can smash to smithereens all that has been constructed since man emerged on earth. The man who can only protest, who is always and without reason a dissenter, who resents any and every authority, is an eternal adolescent who has no rightful place in civilized society. The rebelliousness of Southern demagogues who riot in Alabama or in Mississippi is not a good thing. It is a kind of Gastroitis. In our Torah the archetype of the Rebel who, in his viciousness, is destructive, is – Korah. He knew no discipline, he was unscrupulous in his means, and he aimed at the overthrow of the authority of Moses, of Torah, of G-d Himself as it were. His rebellion was sinister. In punishment he was swallowed up by the earth, a sign that with rebelliousness alone life on this earth is impossible.

The same can be said for the opposite characteristic,

Conformism. This too is a vital element of mankind. It is an attempt to turn chaos into order, uncertainty into stability. Without conformism there can be no love, for in love the two lovers must conform to each other's wishes, needs, demands. The Conformist, by restraining his will, allows law to operate and order to prevail. Without conformism there can be neither society nor government, neither Halakhah nor traffic regulation.

And yet conformity by itself can stifle the human spirit and utterly destroy it. In our day and age it is not necessary for me to elaborate on its dangers. The Conformist is The Organization Man, the robot of Huxley's Brave New World, the human machine of Orwell's 1984. The Conformist is a coward whose weakness has caused his spine to crumble, his blood to turn to water, his spirit to wither away. He is smug, bland, insipid, lifeless.

In our Torah it is no less a personage than Joshua who stands indirectly accused of conformity, of too great an emphasis on uniformity. Recall the portion of two weeks ago, when we read of the *ruach ha-kodesh*, the holy spirit, devolving upon the seventy elders gathered in the Ohel Moed. After a while they stopped prophesying. But Eldad and Medad kept on their prophesying even afterwards, and Joshua, the loyal disciple of Moses was enraged and pleaded with his master: *Adoni Mosheh kela'em*, "my master Moses, lock them up!" Why was he so upset? Because, our tradition tells us, the others prophesied in the Ohel Moed, whereas they remained *ba-machaneh*, in the camp. They refused to follow the others. They retained independence in this respect. They abhorred uniformity, which Joshua adored. Under the impress of the overwhelming, towering personality of Moses, Joshua had become rigid. It was a small, insignificant detail in which Eldad and Medad veered from the popular, the norm, the majority; yet Joshua was upset. Therefore Moses rebuked Joshua: it is not uniformity that G-d seeks, it is prophecy and holiness. *Mi yiten kol am ha-Shem neviim* – would that all Israel became prophets, wherever they are.

What is important to know, therefore, is that either of these extremes exclusively is dangerous. A mature Jewish personality must possess the ability both to rebel and to conform, to affirm and to protest, to be *ja-zager* and *nein-zager*. In the personality of the ben Torah there must be a dialectic between the two. In the study of Torah itself, rebelliousness tells us not to have implicit faith in any authority whether a Rashi or a Rambam, but to question, probe, check on any all authorities. All the Talmud is a

testament to this free human spirit. And conformity tells the ben Torah that after all the dissension and dispute, the argument and the controversy, there is only one mode of practice, one Halakhah, one Shulchan Aruch which all accept and follow. In all of life is this true: through conformity we learn how not to be beasts; through rebelliousness, how not to be animals.

But in addition to possessing both character traits, what is most crucial is to know that neither conformity nor rebellion should be an end in itself. Only a coward will conform for the sake of conforming, only an eternal adolescent will rebel for the sake of rebelling. The critical question is: conform to what, rebel against that? To know how to direct these two powerful human forces is the essence of wisdom. It is because Korah did not use his rebelliousness properly, but was used by it, that our Rabbis referred to him not as a *chakham*, a wise man, but as *pikeach*, merely a shrewd fellow who was trapped by his own cleverness.

Certainly, it is the goal and the cause that make either the Conformist or the Rebel good or bad, worthy or unworthy. The Bohemian's anti-social flaunting of authority and convention is meaningless. Genuine democratic uprising against tyranny is an act of enduring praise. To conform in Nazi Germany is not the same as conforming in the company of angels.

Our Rabbis, in Pirkei Avot speak of a good kind of dissent and a bad kind. *Machloket le'shem shamayim*, protest "for the sake of Heaven," *sofah le'hitkayem*, will endure forever, while *machloket* which is not for the sake of Heaven will not endure. Rebellion with a good cause in back of it is worthy of great sacrifice. Its protest will be a contribution to the history of man's spiritual growth. But rebellion without a cause, simply for the sake of dissension and power – that is of no value, it is destructive. And our Sages give an example of each kind of defiance or *machloket*. The *machloket she'enah le'shem shamayim*, the purposeless dissension, is that of *Korach ve'khol adato*, Korah and his followers. The enduring kind is that of Hillel and Shammai, the great disputants who together transmitted the word of G-d as the Halakhah of Judaism.

One commentator asked: why in the case of Korah do we mention only one side of the dispute – Korah and his group – and omit the opposition, Moses, while in the case of the worthy *machloket* we mention both disputants, Hillel and Shammai? He answered: because Korah did not really dispute any ideal of Moses; his rebellion was for its own sake, uninformed by higher purpose. Hillel and

Shammai, however, did not argue for the sake of arguing or disagree for the sake of being disagreeable. They protested specific ideas presented by the other. They stood for something. There was a cause to which they conformed, another against which they rebelled. Each protested the legal decision of the other – as Rebels: both swore allegiance to the same G-d, the same Torah, the same Halakhah – as Conformists.

This indeed spells out for us the manner in which we are to express the dual capacities we ought to have. G-d has given us the Torah: the blueprint for the kind of life to which we are to conform, and for which we are to rebel against the forces of evil and G-dlessness and tyranny. The genuine Jew is one who knows when to use these traits, his rebelliousness as well as his conformity. And his rebellion against a Torah-less Jewry and a G-dless society is undertaken by him not out of unqualified hate and bitter protest, but out of love for the cause of Torah, of decency, of reverence for the Divine Image of man. He will be a rebel with a cause. “The Rebel,” wrote the late French author Albert Camus, “is a man who cares. Rebellion is an act of love and a confirmation that existence is worth fighting for ... Rebellion is not an act of hating unless it is also an act of loving.” Indeed, the Jewish Rebel will only hate the evil he battles; he will do it out of love of G-d, *le’shem shemayim*.

At the beginning of our talk, we mentioned two people, each of them an archetype: Korah the Rebel and Joshua the Conformist. We know that Korah, the rebel without a cause, was destroyed. What happened to Joshua?

Joshua was cured of his sickness by Moses. The rebuke of the master healed the disciple. Joshua’s passion for uniformity hardened into a dedication to principle which could be expressed in dissent and rebellion if necessary. Shortly after the episode we mentioned, Joshua was sent along with Kaleb and ten princes of Israel as the *meraglim* to spy out Canaan for the Israelites. The great majority

of them brought back a diffident, discouraging report. The old Joshua, Joshua the Conformist, might have gone along with the majority. He might have submitted to the opinions of those older than he, those he considered wiser. He might have swallowed his pride, his freedom of will, his independence of judgment. But Joshua was no longer the conformist. He now knew the essence of being a rebel with a cause where necessary – *machloket le’shem shamayim* – and so, without fear or trepidation, without hesitation or equivocation, Joshua and Kaleb defied the majority and submitted a strong, stinging minority report. The majority was wrong and perished. Joshua, in the minority, having newly discovered the virtue of proper rebellion, survived and became one of the immortals of the human race.

It is Joshua – who ultimately combined both features and knew when to call on each for the lofty purposes to which he was dedicated – who is our model. That is why, when Moses pleads with G-d for a worthy successor, he says: *yifkod ha-Shem Elokei ha-ruchot le’khol bassar ish al ha-edah*, “Let the Lord the G-d of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation,” and G-d responds by offering Joshua, *ish asher ruach bo*, “a man who has the spirit in him.” Moses wanted a man capable of *ruchot*, of both spirits of both conformity and rebelliousness. G-d granted him that man – Joshua, who sometimes would display the *ruach* of the Rebel, sometimes the *ruach* of the Conformist, as the occasion and the cause demanded it. He was truly an *ish*, a man, in the full, human sense.

It is his example we must adopt for ourselves. To be capable of both “spirits,” to use each as needed and as His sacred causes demand – that is what makes a man worthy of leading the congregation of Israel as successor to Moses.

Let each of us strive to become that kind of *ish*, even as Joshua became an *ish* under the tutelage of Moses, himself an *ish* – *ish ha-Elokim*, the “Man of G-d.”

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When What You Have Is Not Enough

Dr. Erica Brown

You’re not the boss of me!”

This was a regular part of our sibling banter as kids, and now, I have the great fortune of hearing my grandchildren say it to each other. It’s a way that children indicate independence and control, especially in their absence, as if to say, I don’t need to listen to you. I can determine my own direction. Thank you very much. Leave

me alone.

In Tanakh, we also have a “you’re-not-the-boss-of-me” moment. It occurs in the beginning of this week’s Torah reading, Korah. Korah, a Levite, gathered together a number of elders and 250 leaders to challenge Moses and Aaron’s leadership. It was a dramatic, high-stakes rebellion with a very painful and shocking denouement.

They accused the brothers of aggregating too much power and not sufficiently democratizing the governance of the Israelites: “They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far (*rav lakhem*)! For all the community are holy, all of them, and God is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above God’s congregation?” (Num. 16:3).

There are many serious charges in this one verse. The rebels suggested that Moses and Aaron appointed themselves, abused their authority, and regarded themselves as superior to everyone else when the entire community was holy. This is the way that Rashi on 16:3 interprets the events: “Much more than is proper have you taken for yourselves in the way of high office.” They also hinted, with their generalized complaint, at some greater sedition that was left unnamed.

Their claim – summed up in the two words *rav lakhem*, you have gone too far or have taken too much – was matched when Moses used the same criticism of them. He threw their words back at them: “You have gone too far, sons of Levi!” (Num. 16:7). We do not have access to the murmurings that precipitated this confrontation, but it is clear that this ground-swelling mutiny was the result of accumulated tension. They were not happy with the authority vested in their office; they wanted power. In The Great Partnership, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks offers us a warning about such desire: “Power is a fundamental assault on human dignity. When I exercise power over you, I deny your freedom, and that is dangerous for both of us.”

Moses made his charge first and then his case: “Hear me, sons of Levi. Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the community of Israel and given you direct access to perform the duties of God’s Tabernacle and to minister to the community and serve them? Now that [God] has advanced you and all your fellow Levites with you, do you seek the priesthood too?” (Num. 16:8-10). All those who approached Moses and Aaron had titles and status already. But it was not enough. Ironically, for Moses, it was too much. He never wanted the position in the first place and protested his appointment several times. A few chapters earlier, Moses wanted to quit. He did not want more. He wanted less.

There are two times when Moses was told it was too much. The first occurred early in the wilderness, when Moses was solely adjudicating cases of Jewish law, and Yitro, his father-in-law, advised him to appoint other judges: “Next day, Moses sat as magistrate among the

people, while the people stood about Moses from morning until evening. But when Moses’ father-in-law saw how much he had to do for the people, he said, “What is this thing that you are doing to the people? Why do you act alone, while all the people stand about you from morning until evening?” (Ex. 18:13-14). In his failure to delegate, Moses had taken too much upon himself and this burdened the people, who had to wait all day to speak with him.

The second time Moses was told he overstepped was in his last plea to cross the Jordan River into Canaan. In his review or revision of the journey, Moses tells the people that it is their fault he could not cross over. “But God was wrathful with me on your account and would not listen to me. God said to me, ‘Enough! (*rav lakh*). Never speak to Me of this matter again!’” (Deut. 3:26). A decree is a decree. A punishment is a punishment. Enough protest, God said to Moses. It was time for Moses to accept his fate fully and acknowledge that a leadership transition was soon to take place.

In their article, “To Be a Better Leader, Give Up Authority” (*Harvard Business Review*, Dec. 2009), A.D. Amar, Carsten Hentrich, and Vlatka Hlupic claim that leaders, especially in times of crisis, “strive for greater efficiency by tightening control.” This inevitably fails in the long-term because without independence, people lose their intrinsic motivation. “...the truth is that relinquishing authority and giving employees considerable autonomy can boost innovation and success at knowledge firms, even during crises.” They call this type of shared governance, “mutualism.” Employees are evaluated not by revenue or other numbers but “against qualitative values such as trust, responsibility, and innovation. And it implies that leaders don’t dictate vision or strategy; instead, they enable employees to create a common vision.”

But for this to work, these experts claim that individuals must be self-driven and committed to a common vision of shared success: “If abdication of authority is to yield value for the corporation, however, individuals must be self-motivated.” Such a theory would never have worked for Korach and his followers because they wanted to grab power, not share it. Moses tried to show them the authority they already have; it was a holy authority rooted in service to God and to their followers. Yet it was not enough.

Every Passover, we sing the song *Dayenu* – it is enough. With each successive stanza, we confirm that had only this event or development happened, it would have been

enough, even though we needed all of it to happen in the process of redemption. Leaders need the perspective to sometimes say, “I have enough. I am enough.”

The poet David Whyte, in his poem “Enough,” makes the sentiment even more granular:

We Can Work it Out

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z”l

This week’s parsha records the rebellion of Korach and his followers against the leadership of Moshe, including his choice of his brother Aharon to serve as kohein gadol, and the demise of these rebels. As a test of who is right, Moshe tells the two hundred fifty people who joined Korach to take firepans and place ketores, or incense, in them, to see if their offering would be accepted by God. They did so, and, after Korach himself is swallowed up by the earth together with his family and Dasan and Aviram, a fire comes from heaven and consumes the two hundred fifty people. God then tells to command Aharon’s son Elazar to take the firepans of these men and make them into thinned-out sheets to serve as a covering for the altar. This covering the Torah tells us, will serve as a reminder for non-Kohanim, to refrain from bringing the incense so “and he shall not be as Korach and his company” (Bamidbar 16:5). The author of the Halochos Gedolos actually counts this as a Torah prohibition, not to get involved in machlokes, or disputes, in the manner in which Korach and his company did. Although disputes, in certain contexts, such as Torah learning, can be exhilarating and productive, the dispute of Korach and his company is considered, by the Torah, as the kind of dispute that is forbidden. We need to understand, then, why the firepans used for the test of the ketores were chosen to symbolize forbidden disputes. What is it about the ketores that reminds one of the wrong way to approach a disagreement with somebody?

The mishneh tells us, “Any dispute that is for the sake of heaven will have a constructive outcome, but a dispute that is not for the sake of heaven will not have a constructive outcome. Which dispute was for the sake of heaven? The dispute of Hillel and Shammai. And which was not for the sake of heaven? The dispute of Korach and his company.” (Avos 5:20). The mishneh does not seem to explain the difference between the two types of disputes it mentions. Why was one considered as being for the sake of heaven and not the other? Rabbi Shimon Schwab zt”l found a

“Enough. These few words are enough.
If not these words, this breath.”

What do you have enough of in your leadership and what would you like more of?

hint to the difference in the mishneh itself. In contrast to the dispute between Hillel and Shammai, in which both sides are mentioned, in connection with Korach, the mishneh refers to the dispute as being that of Korach and his company, rather than that of Korach and Moshe. Rabbi Schwab explained that both Hillel and Shammai were interested in the truth, and, thus, each was willing to listen to the other side. Korach and his company, however, were not interested in what the other side had to say, and therefore, Moshe’s side is not mentioned in the mishneh. A dispute that is for the sake of heaven in which the truth is sought, takes into consideration all possible sides of an issue, in an effort to uncover the truth. A dispute that is not for the sake of heaven is not a quest for truth, but rather for personal advancement. That is why the dispute of Korach and his company is taken as a paradigm of a dispute that the Torah forbids.

Actually, if one looks at Moshe’s reaction to the arguments of Korach, he can discern that Moshe himself was, in fact, interested in determining the truth in respect to this dispute. The Torah tells us that Moshe’s initial reaction was to fall on his face (Bamidbar 16:3). R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the Tanya, explained that Moshe, in his humility, did not dismiss Korach’s complaints outright. He considered the possibility that he was, in fact, at fault, and for that reason prostrated himself and engaged in some serious soul-searching. Rav Yerucham Levovitz, mashgiach ruchani, or spiritual guidance counselor, of the Mir Yeshivah in Europe before the second World War, pointed out that it was for this reason that Moshe told God that had not taken a single donkey of any one of them (Bamidbar 15:16). Moshe advanced this argument because the accusations of Dasan and Aviram that he was interested in his own power caused him to engage in self-introspection, and he felt a need to demonstrate that the charges were not true. On a different level, perhaps Moshe was trying to show his disputant that the proper way to handle a dispute is to consider

both sides of the case. Although Dasan and Aviram were not interested in conducting their dispute in this way, the Torah, by recording Moshe's argument, is teaching us that, in a dispute, all sides must be brought out.

The need to bring out all aspects of a dispute is especially important when it comes to Torah study. Rav Avrohom Yitzchok haKohein Kook explains that this is why the Talmud tells us that Torah scholars bring peace to the world (Berachos 64a). Even though they are constantly arguing with each other, they emerge as friends, because true peace comes about only when all sides of a dispute are brought out, and the truth among all the various arguments is filtered out. Perhaps that is why Moshe, the greatest Torah teacher,

who is often referred to as Moshe Rabbeinu, or Moshe our teacher, felt it necessary to consider all sides when it came to the dispute against him carried out by Korach and his followers. In this context, we can understand the imagery of the ketores. The ketores was made of eleven different spices, including one, the chelbanah, which had a bad smell. All of these elements had to be brought together in order to produce the ketores. In the same way, in a genuine dispute, engaged in for the sake of heaven, all sides must be considered in order for a constructive outcome to emerge. Korach and his co-conspirators were not interested in engaging in this kind of dispute, and therefore suffered the fate described in the Torah.

Torah, Torah Everywhere

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted from a shiur given at the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim, on June 14, 2018)

At the beginning of this week's Parsha, Rashi quotes the famous Medrash that connects the opening of Parshas Korach to the end of Parshas Shlach—explaining the juxtaposition of Korach and Tzitzis. So we know that Korach and his two hundred and fifty friends made talisim that were kulo techeiles. They asked Moshe: Do you need to put techeiles strings on these? And Moshe said: Yes, of course. And they laughed, saying that this would be foolish. If the whole thing is techeiles, why do you need a string of techeiles? They also asked: If a house is full of seforim, does this house need a Mezuzah? Again, Moshe said: Yes. And they again responded: Oh, that's foolish. And that is how they instigated a rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu.

There is a lot to say about the nature of Korach's rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. But leaving that aside, they seem to have an excellent point. If the whole house is full of seforim, why do you need a Mezuzah on the door? We know that the Mezuzah reminds us of HaShem, etc. So I understand if the house is full of manufacturing equipment, but a house full of seforim should not need a Mezuzah. If the talis is entirely techeiles, why do you need an extra string of techeiles?

So, obviously, on one level, the answer is that this is the halachah—and we don't decide on our own what makes sense and what doesn't. But on the level of remez, I saw an answer in a sefer named Minchas Yitzchak, written by Rav Yitzchak Stollman. He suggests that a bayis full of seforim

has a tremendous kedusha. That house is like a Beis Medrash—it's kulo kadosh. So why do we need a Mezuzah on the door? And he answers that it's very nice to have a house that is all kedusha, but you can't live your whole life in a home that's kulo seforim. What about the world out there? What about the world of chol, work, and interaction with all kinds of other people? That's Mezuzah. Every time you go by through the door, it reminds you—even when you go out into the world which is the opposite of kulo seforim, that you can take the message of the Mezuzah with you—the achdus of HaShem. Remember *ve'avavta es HaShem Elokecha be-chol levavecha u-ve-chol nafshecha u-ve-chol me'odecha—HaShem Elokeinu, HaShem Echad*. Take that into the world. And when you enter your home which is not only full of seforim—a home where you do business, a house with a kitchen and kids, math homework, and whatever else. You bring in the Mezuzah on the way—you bring Hashem in with you. And likewise, the *begeg kulo techeiles* which is *domeh le-kisei ha-kavod*. You can say: My whole begeg, everything about me, is kadosh! Wherever I go, everything is super-holy, like the Kohen Gadol in the Beis ha-Mikdash! That's very nice, but this is not the mitzvah in the Torah. Mitzvos are not only for someone like Kohen Gadol, who wears a *me'il she-kulo techeiles*. It's for someone with normal clothing—he wears a suit, a shirt, pants, and whatever it may be. But, on that clothing, take one string of Kisei ha-Kavod with you, to remind you what life is all about. And that's the ko'ach of Tzitzis—*u-reisem*

oso—that wherever you are, and whatever million things you may be involved in, just take one string to remember HaShem. And wherever you go, HaShem will be with you, and you can do everything you do *al pi kedusha* and the values of the Torah. It's very nice to have a residence that's all seforim—a Beis ha-Medrash, a Beis ha-Knesses, and a Beis Ha-Mikdash. But you can also have offices and factories—everything in the world. And with the Mezuzah on your door, you have the power of the achdus HaShem and Ahavas HaShem—*be-tzeischa u-vo'echa*—and bring that with you wherever you go. That's why Korach and his friends totally missed the boat. They didn't realize the koach of the Torah. And that's why (not that he needs our stamp of approval) Moshe was right, and Korach was wrong. Because no matter what kind of house it is, what type of beged, or where in life you are, you can bring the Torah with you if you just remember HaShem.

You know, when the Rav came to America, it wasn't like Bnei Brak (of today) or Yerushalayim. It wasn't even like

the America of nowadays. When he came to America, it was mamash a spiritual wasteland (for the Jews). And he was one of the few people in the world who thought you can have Torah in America. And when he came, he said we are going to open a school in this wasteland, where they will teach Chumash with Rashi, Sidur, Gemora—and we will open a heichal of Rav Chaim ha-Levi to teach them lamdus as we did back in Brisk. The Rav famously said that if it was up to him to make up a fourteenth ikar emuna (he knew that it wasn't), he would say (and maybe it's included in other ikarim anyway) that the Torah is relevant in every country, in every generation, in every place and time, even though it seems to be completely the opposite of what we remember from the *alter heim*. The Torah is just as relevant here and now (in America) as it was in Europe, Bavel, Eretz Yisroel, and Midbar Sinai. And that's the message of the talis that's not kulo techeiles, or the bayis that is not malei seforim—and yet it is full of our recognition of the presence of Hashem. Shabbat Shalom.

Bedrock of Faith

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Korach led a rebellion against Moshe. According to the tradition of our Sages, Korach was a great man—a wealthy talmid chocham with great *yichus*, coming from the finest family of Levi, the same family as Moshe himself. He had a prestigious job, carrying the aron when the Jews traveled in the desert. According to Rashi, he even had *ruach hakodesh*, just short of prophecy. How could such a great Jew foment a rebellion against Moshe, the person whom God had chosen to bring the Torah to the Jews?

Korach stated his arguments so strongly that he seems to have denied the very prophecy of Moshe. Together with his co-conspirators Dasan and Aviram, they denied the fact that Moshe was God's messenger to bring the Jews out of Egypt. Korach and his followers seem to express significant elements of *kefira*, denial of the fundamental elements of the Torah. They denied the very truth of the Torah and Moshe as the giver of the Torah, that *Moshe emes v'soraso emes*.

This is very hard to understand. These people were eyewitnesses to the events involving Moshe. They themselves experienced the exodus from Egypt and the ten plagues. They themselves marched out of Mitzrayim into the Red Sea and saw the Egyptians drown. They

themselves stood at Har Sinai and heard Hashem speak to Moshe telling him to convey the Ten Commandments to the people. How could they deny the truth of these events?

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 99a) says that an atheist or someone who denies the truth of Moshe's prophecy loses his share in the world to come. He will not experience the messianic redemption and revival of the dead. If, in fact, Korach and his followers did deny these fundamentals of belief, why does the Gemara elsewhere (Sanhedrin 109) record an opinion that Korach and his followers have a share in the world to come?

Puzzles

The Shem Mishmuel quotes a Midrash that says that Korach lost the honor that had been his before the rebellion. But Korach lost much more than his honor—he lost his life! Why do Chazal emphasize the loss of his honor?

Another Midrash, cited by Rashi (Bamidbar 16:1), relates that in order to delegitimize Moshe's authority, Korach and his followers came dressed in a tallis that was completely techeiles and asked Moshe, "Does this kind of tallis require techeiles strings in the tzitzis?" A regular tallis with four corners needs to have white and techeiles strings. The techeiles string seems to be the most important of

the strings; it is the unique one. If you have a tallis that is completely techeiles, shouldn't it be exempt from a single string of blue? They asked another question, too. "Does a house full of holy books need a mezuzah, a tiny scroll on the doorpost?" Moshe responded "Yes" to both questions. They countered, "The tallis is made totally of techeiles—what could one blue string add? Similarly, the house is full of books! The whole point of the mezuzah is to remind us of Hashem. But if the house is full of holy books that discuss Hashem, or if a person who lives in the house is a scholar and studies God's words, why should the house need a mezuzah?"

Through these analogies, they meant to say that all Jews are equally holy. "We all heard God speak to us at Har Sinai. Since the whole nation is holy, who needs Moshe? We don't need him to interpret the law for us, just like a house full of books doesn't need a mezuzah."

Why did Korach choose these two analogies of techeiles and mezuzah?

Physical Flip Flop

The Shem Mishmuel quotes a Midrash that discusses Moshe's first encounter with Hashem at the burning bush. Hashem told Moshe that he was the only person who could redeem the Jewish People. Essentially, Moshe's mission was to lead them to Sinai to get the Torah. God told him as much, "When you take the people out from Mitzrayim, you will serve Hashem on this mountain" (Shemos 3:12).

The Midrash understands that no one before or after Moshe had the ability to bring the Torah down from heaven and deliver it to the Jewish People. What was Moshe's uniqueness? What special quality did he have that made him the only person capable of being the conduit between Hashem and the Jewish People?

We know that human beings are a combination of physical and spiritual/intellectual elements of the body and the soul. There is a tremendous conflict between the physical and the spiritual. The physical side of the person is subject to radical changes, similar to the physical world, which is full of radical changes. Water turns into vapor and clouds, which then transform into rain that falls into rivers, which then evaporates and start the cycle all over again. A clear, hot, sunny day with a clear blue sky can quickly change into dark gray and black, and suddenly a thunderstorm crashes.

Due to our physical side, humans are also subject to such radical changes, particularly regarding their personality.

If uncontrolled, these changes can be very destructive. A person can be a loyal spouse for years and then suddenly betray that loyalty. A person can have a job for years and, one morning, wake up and quit to go to do something else.

The Egyptians of old were prone to this instability. When Moshe went to Pharaoh and brought plague after plague, the Torah describes an unusual phenomenon. After each plague, Pharaoh and his advisors were shaken. Pharaoh ran to Moshe several times and begged him to remove the plague, promising to release the people. This happened, for example, after the plague of frogs. Moshe davened to Hashem and removed the plague. Immediately, Pharaoh changed his mind and said he would not release the people. He changed his attitude radically from enslavement to freedom and back to slavery. It took ten plagues for Pharaoh to finally stick to his decision to free Israel.

Pharaoh and his people were completely antithetical to the Torah. They were a physical society. They valued physical success: conquest, building huge pyramids, and even in their relationships they overemphasized the physical. Physicality and the personality it breeds are unstable. The Torah, in contrast, teaches a stable system of values. It primarily addresses the Jewish soul, which can be stable. It comes from God's breath, as it were. "*Vayipach b'apav nishmas chaim*. God blew a spirit of life into Adam's nose" (Bereishis 2:7). Since God is unchanging, so is the human soul. If the human soul can succeed in insulating itself from the changes that involve the physical body in which it lives, then it can also retain its natural stability.

The Flashing Sword and the Tree of Life

The Shem Mishmuel teaches a beautiful interpretation of an intriguing pasuk in Bereishis. After Adam was driven out of Gan Eden, the Torah says that Hashem placed the "*lahat hacherev hamis'hapeches lishmor es derech Eitz Hachaim*. He placed a fiery revolving sword to guard the road to the Tree of Life" (Bereishis 3:24). We know that the Tree of Life is really the Torah, as the pasuk says, "*Eitz chaim hi lamachazikim bah*. It (the Torah) is a tree of life for those who cling to it" (Mishlei 3:18). Life here means eternal life. This is the ultimate stability.

On the other hand, the revolving sword is instability. The Zohar explains the nature of the flashes of light that this revolving sword generates. They are the switches from good to evil and from evil to good, from mercy to judgement, and from peace to war.

We encounter so many paradoxical forces that oppose

each other. Our own lives also switch back and forth. This is the test. Can people go through life and find a way to resolve these paradoxical impulses with which we live? Can we attain the stability of the *derech Eitz Hachaim*, of a Torah life? Without Torah, we are unstable. Torah gives us the anchor of stability.

The Instability of Our World

We live in a world where most people are living without Torah. Unfortunately, our society is, to a great extent, godless. We see so much instability and insanity. Things that were almost completely prohibited by our society have turned rather quickly into accepted and even lauded values. For example, same-gender relationships used to be completely shunned by our society, and now they are accepted and even appreciated as a positive and heroic value. We live in an unstable world. The values of our society are constantly changing. There was a time not so long ago when people valued making a contribution to society. Today, many people live only for themselves.

Not so long ago, even most non-religious Jews accepted the concept of the State of Israel as important for the Jewish People. Today, many Jews have abandoned the idea of a Jewish state. Even Jews who lived in Israel their whole lives have begun to question this. This instability stems from a lack of Torah. The Torah is the only anchor that we have to keep our Jewish values and society stable.

This revolving sword and its fire are destructive. It is the destructiveness of an unstable lifestyle and unstable values. Our goal is to reach the *Eitz Hachaim*, the tree of eternal life, to live forever with stable, real, and correct values. This is a difficult road to travel.

Moshe, according to the Maharal, was a person who was blessed not to have this struggle. He was taken out of the water by Pharaoh's daughter. She called him Moshe, meaning "pulled out" of the water. This represents that he was pulled out of the physical side of the world, out of the instability of the physical experience.

Moshe possessed the ultimate stability. His commitments were absolute and solid. Since the purpose of Torah is to bring stability, it had to be delivered by someone who was completely at peace with his beliefs and had no possibility of self-doubt. Even as a child Moshe displayed this gift of the stability and steadfastness of a Torah personality. Many of us struggle our whole life to be firm and reliable no matter what challenges and tests we go through. Moshe did not struggle with this at all.

This explains why Hashem told Moshe that no one other than him could give the Torah. There is a revolving fiery sword that every Jew has to confront in his or her life. There are many confusing moments for all of us. We need to have an anchor. "Moshe," Hashem was saying, "you are the one who has the power to be this anchor for the Jewish people. You are the only one who can be My messenger to give the Torah."

Moshe's Familiar, Stable Soul

The *Shem Mishmuel* explains the Chassidic concept of the merging of souls. A great soul such as that of Moshe can, according to Kabbala, touch and become part of other souls. Every Jew, especially if he studies Torah, has a little bit of Moshe inside of him. As we study Torah, the spirit of Moshe goes into us. It grants us stability and strength of commitment. It helps us attain a knowledge of Hashem and the essence of this world. We can only get these through Moshe. In this sense, Moshe still lives. Without Moshe's power within us, we could not achieve the goal of having the Torah be the anchor of our lives, the *Eitz Hachaim*.

The Ramban explains that a time will come in days of *Mashiach* when people will feel this stability. People will not feel the emotional, psychological, and intellectual conflicts that are part of our current daily existence. The *pasuk* says that, eventually, Hashem will implant in our hearts "*L'hava es Hashem Elokecha v'laleches bidrachav kol hayamim*. To love Hashem and to walk in His ways all of the days" (Devarim 19:9). The Ramban says that this *pasuk* refers to the time of *Mashiach*. Everyone will walk in God's ways. We will not need a support system. People's personalities will become inherently stable.

Until then, in this world, we are unstable. We have ups and downs, good and bad times. We need a support system to help us through the instability. This is nothing to be ashamed of, since we are all human beings. This is part of our condition. We are not perfect nor absolutely stable like Moshe. We should draw our support from the Torah, from Moshe's teachings, to help us with the constant changes of daily living.

The Jewish People who study Torah know that the power of the Torah is what gives us this stability. When we were about to receive the Torah, Hashem told us, "*V'atem tihyu li mamleches kohanim v'goy kadosh*. You will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Shemos 19:6). The concept of priests is also a concept of stability. Aharon does not change, as Rashi writes (Bamidbar 8:3) that

Aharon was “*Lo shina*, he did not deviate.” Moshe led the Jewish People on an intellectual level, and Aharon led on the emotional level. But they both represent stability and withstanding the challenges of daily life.

Dependable Defense

In the Shabbos morning Shemoneh Esrei, we describe Moshe as “*eved ne’eman*,” the trustworthy servant of Hashem whom He could count on no matter what was happening. Moshe lived through dramatic episodes. Consider the story of the eigel. Moshe was told suddenly by Hashem that the people were worshipping a golden calf just a few days after the climactic experience of Har Sinai. A normal human being would have broken down and collapsed. Moshe, though, remained completely in control. He knew he had to defend the Jewish People, and that is what he did.

When the meraglim returned with their demoralizing report, a normal person would have been stunned by the spies’ abandonment of the values of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. The spies had totally betrayed Moshe, who had sent them on this mission. At this moment of crisis, though, Moshe stayed loyal to the Jewish People’s mission and to his own mission as their leader. He prayed to Hashem not to destroy the people and to allow them to enter the land. Even though Moshe himself would not be allowed to enter the land, he maintained his loyalty, no matter how much the people of Israel had betrayed him and Hashem.

We can take an amazing lesson from these words of the Shem Mishmuel. When we make commitments to other people—be it our spouses, children, family, or to other Jews—we have to stick to them. In the desert, Bnei Yisrael betrayed Moshe in the worst ways. Nevertheless, Moshe never abandoned his total commitment to the Jewish People. We have to follow his model and maintain our commitments to other Jews no matter what they do. We must have faith that all Jews deserve our deepest commitment. Even when we deal with Jews who are sinners, we must know that, deep down, they are good.

The Shem Mishmuel notes that we specifically mention this concept of Moshe as an *eved ne’eman* on Shabbos, which is itself a day of stability. The six days of the week are like the *cherev hamis’hapeches*, the fiery sword turning every which way, filled with paradoxes, contradictions, and opposing pressures. Shabbos is a day of peaceful stability and spirituality. Shabbos is like the Eitz Hachaim.

Korach’s Mistake

Korach thought that he and his tribe were different than the rest of the Jews. After all, the rest of the Jews had sinned at the golden calf. They were unstable. But he and the rest of Levi had not sinned. They had maintained their stability and commitment to Hashem. Korach believed that just as Moshe could be the source of stability for the Torah of Hashem, other people could become sources of stability.

Moshe was given this gift at birth and stood above the paradoxes of daily life. Korach, though, thought that the tribe of Levi had attained the same standing. Levi originally had sinned in the time of Yaakov. Against the wishes of his father, he and Shimon wiped out the city Shechem. After being berated by his father, though, Levi did teshuva and became the great leader of his brothers. His family then produced great people like Moshe and Aharon. Korach came from this exalted family as well. Korach thought that he was better than Moshe and Aharon because he had developed his greatness on his own. Moshe received this personality as a gift, but Korach worked on it. And so, Korach thought, “I deserve to be the leader of the Jews!”

The Ari Hakadosh explains that Korach picked up a piece of the soul of Kayin, the son of Adam. Kayin committed the first murder in history when he killed Hevel. Kayin was driven by *ga’ava*. His name is similar to *kinyan*, ownership—he felt he owned the world.

Truly, Korach did achieve a lot. But he let his achievements lead him to too much pride. He congratulated himself too much. He was subject to the blindness that pride causes and denied that God had chosen Moshe to the exclusion of all others. Just as Kayin couldn’t imagine that Hashem chose Hevel over him, Korach couldn’t understand why Hashem would choose Moshe instead of him.

Here is an important point. No matter our achievements, we have no claims on God. He will give us our just reward, but we have no right to demand A, B, and C from Hashem. Korach certainly deserved a reward from Hashem for his great accomplishments. But Korach demanded to be the leader. God, in His infinite wisdom, had chosen Moshe to be the leader. Hashem saw something in Moshe that Korach didn’t see, and perhaps Moshe himself didn’t see it either. Hashem wanted Moshe, not Korach, to be the one to teach Torah to Am Yisrael.

Due to his excessive pride and false expectations, Korach started a rebellion against Moshe. Korach meant well. He wanted to show the people that they could achieve

great things on their own, that they shouldn't just rely on the greatness of Moshe. But he made a mistake, because he questioned Hashem's justice. His pride blinded him to the truth that Hashem had chosen Moshe instead of him. We have to understand that Hashem prescribes a certain path, and our job is to humbly follow His ultimate decisions.

Korach's Extra Emotion

This will help us understand what Korach meant with the argument of the blue and white strings. White, according to Kabbala, is the color of love. Blue, *techeiles*, is the color of *din*. Korach said that we don't need any one person to be the rock, the standard of justice, commitment, and stability for us, like the *techeiles* string.

It is enough to have just the white strings, the love of every Jew for Hashem. Every Jew can do it on his own without the strictness of Moshe, because every Jew can achieve the stability of Moshe. The *mezuzah*, too, is a certain kind of *din*. It is a scroll of Torah written according to strict rules. It has a fixed text, and every Jew must write the exact same text in every *mezuzah*. Korach said every Jew can build a house of love on his own. Every Jew can express his love without the control and judgment of Moshe.

His initial argument with Moshe was not about the truth of Moshe's prophecy; it was more about Moshe's role. He didn't see Moshe playing a pivotal role in Judaism. "Now that we have accepted and grown from the Torah," Korach argued, "we don't need Moshe anymore." But once Moshe rejected Korach's thesis, Korach's emotions carried him away. So, he adopted the argument denying the truth of Moshe's prophecy and actions. This led to other heretical statements. His punishment, though, was not as severe as a regular heretic. Korach had a saving grace. His original argument did not include heresy, and only his emotions pulled him to heretical statements. Korach was

Empty Words, Empty Minds

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Throughout the initial years of our desert travels, Moshe's levelheaded and steady leadership stabilized the state of our Jewish nation. Our legendary leader had defied Pharo's tyrannical regime, liberated us from the slave houses of Egypt, quieted a riotous ocean, delivered divine tablets, and heroically, had fasted for forty days while spearheading our national penitence. Throughout all this tumult Moshe remained

not a true heretic, and that is why the Gemara says that he still receives a share in the world to come. A regular heretic who denies Moshe's Torah does not get to the world to come, but Korach does.

We Need Our Teacher

Korach had a good point, but he was wrong. Despite the achievements of individual Jews, we cannot lose our connection to Moshe. We still call him *Moshe Rabbeinu*, our living teacher. *Moshe emes v'soraso emes*; we call it the Torah of Moshe, and Moshe as our anchor is a fundamental part of the Torah. Perhaps when *Mashiach* comes, the *Shem Mishmuel* hints, we all will be able to stand on our own without being so dependent on the model of Moshe.

Now, however, despite our achievements, we are still very unstable. As we experience the vicissitudes of daily life, and especially as the Jewish People, we need to have the anchor that Moshe provides.

We see in our times that some of our fellow Jews have tried to replace the teachings of Moshe with other concepts, such as communism and humanism. They have fallen victim to the changes and instability that affect the rest of the world that doesn't have the Torah.

A hundred years ago, most of our parents were living on a different continent. Now, Europe is a huge Jewish graveyard, and there are millions of Jews living in America and millions in Israel. Who knows what will be in another fifty years? Moshe himself went through a tumultuous personal life, from *Mitzrayim* to *Midyan* to the desert and the great events that happened there, including the Ten Commandments, the *eigel*, and the *mergalim*. Moshe was always the rock, the *eved ne'eman*, the true and trusting servant of Hashem. He is our model. We are privileged that part of his great soul touches every person who is loyal and dedicated to Torah.

loyal and steadfast to our people and to our destiny. He was the solid ground upon which our wobbly nation teetered.

Astonishingly, Korach fomented a national insurrection against Moshe's authority, accusing our fabled leader of authoritarianism and cronyism. Inciting a mob against such a celebrated leader was a daunting task requiring vindictive hatred and skillful demagoguery. Korach possessed each.

His speeches were laced with inflammatory rhetoric,

populist claims, and empty mottos, completely unanchored from the facts. His malicious campaign scapegoated Moshe for our extended delay in settling the magical land of milk and honey. Preying on public disillusionment in the aftermath of the scandal of the spies, Korach stoked irrational fears about the upcoming desert voyage, noisily drowning out any reasonable conversation about who or what was to blame for the detour. Presenting himself as a champion of the common man in an epic battle against the political and religious elite, he promised everything to everybody, blustering about the entire nation being holy and assuring his naïve followers that all would receive their fair share of power.

Rejecting Moshe's sincere attempts at reconciliation, Korach's partners, Datan and Aviram, evaded any serious conversation, choosing, instead, to accuse Moshe of self-interest and antagonism. In a shocking display of fear-mongering, they portrayed Moshe as poking out the eyes of the lower class.

Korach and his co-insurrectionists were expert orators who built their popularity by whipping up populist hysteria, exploiting national anxieties, and manipulating the angry mob for their own selfish agendas. They provided a master class in Demagoguery 101.

Sadly, failing democracies and growing public disillusionment have empowered modern demagogues to portray themselves as champions of the underclass and to subvert established aristocracies and public institutions. Marshalling modern technologies such as social media, their psychological manipulation and aggressive tirades have poisoned our social and political discourse. Even after these cheap demagogues are exposed and fade from the public arena, their noxious impact causes lasting damage to the social fabric.

Empty Sloganeering

In Israel, over the past few months we have all suffered the draining effects of hollow sloganeering. Opponents of judicial reforms have falsely labeled the proposed changes as anti-democratic, parroting unreasonable claims that this process is upending our democratic republic. In truth, the current coalition is employing democratically licensed legislative tools to, in their view, better calibrate our democracy and make it less prejudicial. Durable democracies depend upon a carefully balanced division of powers and judicial reformers aim to improve the current balance. Disagreement with these policies or with their

manner of implementation is legitimate, but labeling them anti-democratic is intellectually foolish and dishonest, rouses mass hysteria, and foments public outcry.

Similarly, the protesters who accuse the government of Fascism, are also generating unhealthy emotional frenzy. The past century demonstrated the horrors of actual Fascism, as nations violently discriminated against outliers and mobilized their citizenry toward war, either literal, cultural, or ethnic. Thankfully, there are no fascists in Israel who are forming ethnic hierarchies nor are our personal liberties being sacrificed for the perceived greater good of our nation state. We are far from a fascist regime, but smart people say very silly things when their judgement is tainted by ideological passion. Empty mottos and exaggerated truths quickly follow in the wake of unrestrained political fanaticism.

Protesters, not anarchists By the same token, supporters of reforms who tag protesters as rioters or even as anarchists, are also peddling empty slogans. Anarchists are people who lose faith in social and political institutions and seek to violently eliminate social hierarchies or any other conventions of political coercion. Israeli protesters against government reform are working within the democratic system by expressing their legitimate right to protest, and they are certainly not actively or intentionally dismantling any institutions. Ironically, the protesters who are being falsely dubbed as anarchists are desperately trying to maintain conventional social and political hierarchies which, in their opinion, are currently under siege. It could be rightly reasoned that opponents of judicial reform are the furthest thing from anarchists. Protests often inconvenience us, sometimes disrupt the public order, and always frustrate those who don't endorse the protests. However, that is the price we pay for democracy and for freedom. Freedom isn't free.

Dishonoring Holocaust Victims

Uninhibited and empty sloganeering also leads to grotesque misrepresentations. Applying the term "Nazi" to anyone other than the genocidal criminals of the past century or their wannabee Neo-Nazi successors is a horrific crime which disrespects Holocaust victims. It is difficult to imagine a more despicable and historically revolting offense than referring to another Jew as a Nazi. This perversion of the term "Nazi" should serve as a "conversation-ender": calling any Jew a Nazi is such a grave moral offense that, out of respect to actual Holocaust victims, the conversation

must be immediately halted. Nothing is as important as maintaining moral clarity and clearly demarcating between the ghastly crimes of the Nazis and dissenting opinions of political, ideological, or even religious adversaries. Hearing one Jew call another Jew a Nazi is horrifying, and immediately discontinuing the conversation is the best way to demonstrate the gravity of this distortion.

Polarized Truth

Empty sloganeering unleashes polarizing terminology which paints our adversaries in extreme and fanatical terms. Exaggerated slogans create false polarities between ourselves and those who differ with us, causing us to deny merit in any opposing viewpoint. By vilifying our opponents rather than simply disagreeing with them, we mindlessly affirm our own positions, acquitting ourselves from any introspection or self-examination. Stupefied by the delusion that we, alone, possess absolute truth, we lazily adopt simplistic and imbalanced positions. Truth is never as binary as polarized politics suggests, and supreme confidence in our own exclusive truth locks us into the intellectual darkness of our own narrow positions.

Cheap and Shallow

Slogans also cheapen our experience and hollow out our identity. Just as emojis are cheap replacements for deeper emotional expressions, empty slogans are shallow

The Greatest Segula for Parnasa

Rabbi Efram Goldberg

The 17th-century work Sheivet Mussar writes that there was something unique about the day of Korach's revolt, when he and his followers challenged Moshe. Unlike any other day that Benei Yisrael spent in the wilderness, they all went hungry. All 2 million or so people had nothing to eat. Because on that day, the manna didn't fall.

On the day of חטא העגל, when Benei Yisrael betrayed God and worshipped a graven image, the manna fell. The Chida, in his work Yosef Tehilos, writes that this is the meaning of the pasuk in Tehillim (136:25), נותן לחם, לכול בשר כי לעולם חסדו – *“He gives bread to all flesh, for His kindness is everlasting.”* Hashem continues showering His kindness upon us even when we fail, when we make mistakes, when we betray Him. Even at the time of the greatest betrayal, when Benei Yisrael bowed to a golden calf, Hashem still lovingly provided them their sustenance

substitutes for nuanced beliefs and for complex ideas. Too much sloganeering, and our lives become driven by shallow catchphrases, rather than by values and identity. How often have you heard people utter mindless phrases such as “turning over a new leaf” or “sealing the deal”, rather than carefully describing their experiences or intentions? Words clothe our thoughts and expressing ideas through shallow slogans rather than through actual feelings or sentiments causes us to become superficial one-dimensional silhouettes. Tragically we have become cardboard cutouts of ourselves.

Slogans or Truth

Empty slogans and simplistic labels also obscure truth, and, gradually, we lose the ability to discern the inner truth about our own personal lives. Without a compass for truth, we become lost in a fog of uncertainty and apathy about our own lives and our own values.

We also lose the trail of Hashem. In a false word of half-truths the only absolute truth is Hashem himself. People who lead lives of truth are close to Him, while those who veer from truth cannot stand in His presence. As Dovid Hamelech: who ascends the mountain of Hashem and who stands in His holy presence? Only those clean of hand and true of heart. The worst fallout of empty sloganeering is that we lose truth, and without truth we lose Hashem.

by bringing the manna.

But on the day of Korach's revolt, the manna did not fall. Fighting and strife are so destructive, so sinful, and so pernicious, that it causes Hashem to withhold parnasa.

The Shelah Ha'kadosh (Yoma, 197) teaches: מחלוקת מאה פרנסות – *“A single fight keeps away one hundred livelihoods.”* As Korach's uprising teaches us, nothing is so detrimental to our sustenance – not even worshipping a graven image – than machlokes.

People are always looking for “segulos” for earning a comfortable livelihood. If only they realized that the most important such “segula” is peaceful relations with others, avoiding strife and fighting, which requires us to yield, to forgive, to be flexible, and to humbly accept differences of opinion. If we are looking for a “segula” for parnasa, this is it – avoiding machlokes.

The unique severity of machlokes is noted also by Rashi

(16:27). Citing the Midrash Tanchuma, Rashi comments that when the ground opened and devoured Korah, Dasan and Aviram, the three leaders of the revolt, it devoured even the young children. Normally, of course, children are not punished for wrongdoing. Rashi writes that Beis Din does not punish youngsters before bar mitzva age, and Hashem's Heavenly Court does not punish those under the age of 20. Machlokes, however, has the ability to bring death upon even small children. Fighting is so toxic that nobody is spared from its devastating consequences.

Those of us who are parents (and may all those who want to have children be blessed very soon with the ability to do so) know that there are many things we can tolerate from our children, many things that are excusable and forgivable. But fighting with one another is something we

Death by Jealousy

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's sedra (in Chutz la'Aretz) we read of the machlokes (strife) and rebellion that was instigated by Korach, a first cousin to Moshe and Aharon (their fathers, Yitzhar and Amram, respectively, were brothers). Korach was jealous over their positions as melech (Moshe) and kohen gadol (Aharon), as well as the appointment of Eltzafan ben Uziel, another first cousin (his father, Uziel, was the youngest uncle, and Korach felt he himself should have been promoted), as the nasi (prince) over the tribe of Levi (Bamidbar 16:1-2 w/ Rashi there).

Rather than living as an *ashir ha'samayach b'chelko* - one who is satisfied with his portion and content with his lot in life (Avos 4:1) - Korach cast his aspirations onto the lives of others. Though he claimed that the nation did not need leaders at all, as the entire assembly is holy, and there G-d dwells - *וּמְדוּעַ הַיְהוָה וּבְתוֹכֵם הוֹדָה* (Bamidbar 16:3), what Korach really wanted was *gedula*, leadership, for himself.

With feelings of jealousy, haughtiness and anger, Korach gathered a group of men to join his rebellion, and he instigated the machlokes against Moshe and Aharon. Ultimately, the fires of strife destroyed Korach and his assembly, when the ground opened up and swallowed them alive (and the 250 men were burned in a Divine fire) (Bamidbar 16).

The Sages (Avos 5:17) teach us that Korach's rebellion was one that was not *l'shem Shomayim* (it was not for the sake of Heaven), and such quarrels will never endure.

have no patience for. The children can disagree; they don't have to see eye-to-eye or conform to one another, but they cannot have conflict. Fighting among our children breaks our heart, and hurts our soul. The same is true of Hashem and His children. He can tolerate our mistakes and failures - even the worship of the golden calf!!! - but not our fighting.

It is time for us to let go of whatever we are holding on to. There are so many people who hate us, so many who threaten us; we shouldn't be hating one another. There are so many just causes to fight for - let's not fight with each other. If we want *parnasa*, prosperity for us and our families, we need to stay as far away as possible from machlokes.

Rabbi Zev Leff shlita explains that an argument for the sake of Heaven (like that of Hillel and Shammai, *ibid*) is one that seeks to uncover and reveal the truth. This means that neither party wants to be 'right' for the sake of being 'right.' Rather, they each want to know the truth of Torah, and when that truth is revealed, both parties win, and everyone is satisfied. Neither side has a need to be 'right,' for their quest is only to uncover the truth. However, in an argument that is not for the sake of Heaven, the quarreling party only wants to be right. The truth is irrelevant, as long as the winner is 'right,' for the sake of being 'right.' Not only will such a machlokes destroy the instigator, it will take down everyone else as well (see Bamidbar 16:27 w/ Rashi).

Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski z'l teaches, in the name of Rav Chaim Shmulevitz zt'l (Sichos Mussar), quoting the Mishnah, "Envy, lust and pursuit of honor remove a person from the world" (Avos 4:21), "The expression 'remove a person from the world' is rather strange. R' Chaim Shmulevitz explains that the usual deviation from proper behavior is a very gradual one. The Sages teach that the tactic of the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, is to seduce a person to commit a very minor infraction, then lead him on to progressively more serious transgressions (Shabbos 108b). That is the nature and order of the world. The *yetzer hara* will not entice a person into doing something patently absurd, for the evil inclination knows with such tactics, it will not succeed.

“However, if a person is overtaken by envy, one escapes the natural order of the world. One is no longer bound by logic. The passion of envy can be so great that it can overwhelm all rational thought, and leave one vulnerable to the seduction of the yetzer hara, causing a person to behave in the most irrational manner. Envy indeed removes a person from the natural order of the world. That is what happened with Korach. As Moshe understood this, he delayed the trial until the next day (see Rashi to Bamidbar 16:5).

“The Korach episode conveys a most important teaching. We are all vulnerable to envy, and envy is not a difficult emotion to identify. If you feel yourself being envious, do nothing for a while. Envy can suspend all logical thinking and make one do things that one will regret. If you feel envious, ventilate your feelings to a friend or write them down. Read one of the ethical works about envy. This will help you realize that envy is a futile and destructive feeling. Before doing anything foolish that may be a reaction to your envy, seek counsel, take time, and simply wait. You may avoid making serious mistakes” (<https://aish.com/envy-and-foolishness/>).

Rav Yaakov Bender shlita writes, “The headquarters for any conversation about machlokes is in this parashah, where we read of Korach’s desire for leadership, and his self-destructive campaign against Moshe Rabbeinu. The Medrash teaches, ‘What did Korach, who was a wise person, see to commit this absurdity? *Mah ra’ah la’shtus zeh?*’ (see Rashi to 16:7). In the choice of language, Chazal are hinting at the answer to their question.

“To overcome the desire to fight, a person has to see past the moment. Why do people fight? Why is there

Korach’s Error

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

The ideological battle between Moshe and Korach is one of the best known conflicts in all of Judaism. While our first introduction to Korach is his telling Moshe Rabbeinu that all of Israel is holy and therefore he and Aharon should not be exalted above them, a midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 18:2) clarifies that this was not their first bout. The end of last week’s parshah, which discussed the mitzvah of tzitzit, was actually also interrupted by Korach. He asked Moshe if a tallit that was entirely techelet still needed to have tzitzit.

The Ramban, in his commentary on the portion of tzitzit, wrote that seeing the techelet on our tzitzit is meant

machlokes? Because when someone feels hurt or offended, it feels good to unload, to let that anger out. The ways of the RS”O are shalom (see Shabbos 10b) and that’s what He expects from us. All it takes is the ability to step back and see the bigger picture... Korach was not a fool. He understood the nature of machlokes. He knew that if he would overlook the perceived slight, he would gain so much more... and yet, *Mah ra’ah la’shtus zeh?* What was it that distracted him from seeing the truth?

“Machlokes has to do with perception and vision, and by seeing past the cause of aggravation or frustration and focusing on the bigger picture - this is your wife, or your parent, or your child, do you really want to live a life in which they don’t have a meaningful role to play? One who can do this - take a step back and contemplate - will end up so much happier... See bigger. See past the moment. Don’t get lost in the desire of that moment to win, and both sides will flourish and succeed. If you can see big, you will be big. Korach saw something else and it pulled him away from the truth, and so, he remained small for eternity” (Rav Yaakov Bender on Chumash, v.2, p.221-223).

Miriam’s sin reminds us of the dangers of lashon harah; the slander of the Meraglim reminds us to always cherish E”Y; and Korach’s rebellion reminds us that the path to success, and the path of life (and eternal life), is that of shalom. We must not only learn these fundamental lessons of Sefer Bamidbar, we must have the courage to implement them into our lives, *דְּרָכֶיהָ דְּרָכֵי-נְעָם וְכָל-נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שְׁלֹמִים*, her (the Torah’s) ways are ways of pleasantness and all her paths are peace (Mishlei 3:17).

to remind us not to follow the desires of our hearts and eyes. Therefore, Korach argued that a garment that is already made of techelet would have no need for tzitzit! Moshe responded, however, that such a garment still, in fact, required tzitzit, much to Korach’s annoyance.

Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner, the Ishbitzer Rebbe, explains (Mei HaShiloach, Korach 2) that the core of Korach’s question was much deeper than a halachic technicality. According to Rabbi Leiner:

Techelet teaches of the fear of God, and Korach asserted that the fear of God was something completely revealed to him at all

times. He understood that everything comes from God, even the fear of God. If so, how could anyone ever do anything against God's will? Since all will and all action come from Him, may He be blessed, how could anyone do something not according to His will? (Betsalel Edwards tr.)

In other words, Korach believed that if everything that anyone ever does is ultimately a part of the Divine will, then we should be able to just do whatever we want, with no regard for Torah! Rabbi Leiner, however, notes that Korach cannot be correct. It is a fact, after all, that God created the world such that we have our own perception of it, so that we are able to choose to fulfill His will.

A similar idea was expressed by Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler (Michtav Me'Eliyahu 3:2:6), who wrote that although the fundamental truth of reality is that God controls everything, the world of free will and worship "is

The Power of Strife

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Korach, we learn of the frightful rebellion of Korach and his followers. Whatever Korach's differences were with Moses and Aaron, the issues ultimately prove to be unresolvable. Despite Moses' numerous attempts to reconcile with the rebels, they were unwilling to listen, and eventually, the earth opens and swallows Korach and his cohorts.

Among the well-known protagonists in this rebellion are the familiar names of Datan and Abiram, who have been thorns in Moses' side since before the exodus from Egypt. As noted in a previous parasha study (Emor 5764-2004), the Midrash maintains that Datan was the man whose life Moses had saved from the Egyptian who was beating him, and it was this very Datan who told Pharaoh that Moses had killed an Egyptian, causing Moses to flee to Midian for many years.

How did Datan and Abiram become involved in the rebellion of Korach? According to the commentators, the tribe of Reuben, Datan and Abiram's tribe, were encamped on the southern side of the Tabernacle next to the camp of Korach. Our rabbis exclaim, (Midrash Rabbah, Bamidbar, 18:5): *אוי לרשע ואוי לרשעו*, "Woe to the wicked one, and woe to his neighbor," implying that Datan and Abiram became embroiled in the rebellion of Korach because of the friendship they developed living side-by-side with each other.

Other commentators suggest that all the members

of the tribe of Reuben were unhappy since Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob, and they felt shortchanged by not having been given significant leadership roles. So, the Reubenites rebelled along with Korach, who also felt shortchanged that he had not been chosen to be a leader of his Levite family.

Regardless of reality from God's perspective, our perspective necessitates recognizing that our actions are our own, and have consequences. One might say that this serves as a critique against too heavy a focus on philosophy over action. If we spend too much time thinking and not enough time doing, then we lose out on opportunities to make the world a better place. We need to think not only about the big picture, but also about each piece of the puzzle. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote in Not in God's Name, "Peace can be agreed around the conference table, but unless it grows in ordinary hearts and minds, it does not last. It may not even begin."

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Korach, Datan, Abiram, and On, the son of Pelet, together with 250 leaders of the children of Israel, gathered together to confront Moses and Aaron, insisting that the two leaders had taken too much authority for themselves. The rebels said to them, Numbers 16:3: *רב לכם פי כל העדה*, "It is too much for you, Moses and Aaron, for the entire assembly, all of them are holy, and G-d is among them. So why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of G-d?"

Moses suggests a Divine test. The unhappy tribesman must take a fire-pan, and in the morning, G-d will choose whether to ignite their fire-pans or Aaron's fire-pan. He then pleads with Korach (Numbers 16:9): "Is it not enough that G-d has chosen you from among all Israel to be near to Him, by performing the service of the Tabernacle, to stand before the assembly to minister to them?"

Scripture thus indicates that Moses made a special plea to Datan and Abiram calling on them personally to reconcile, but they answer brazenly (Numbers 16:12-14): *לא נעלה*! "We will not go up!" There is nothing to talk about!

“Isn’t it enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey (sic!) to cause us to die in the wilderness? Yet, you seek to dominate us, even to dominate further. Moreover, you did not bring us to a land flowing with milk and honey, nor did you give us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you think that you can blind the eyes of those men? We shall not go up!”

Rashi, citing the Midrash Tanchumah, says that by virtue of the fact that the great Moses tried tirelessly to reconcile with Datan and Abiram, the Torah teaches how improper it is to maintain a dispute.

The man Moses had done so much for the people of Israel, and yet the people are totally ungrateful. He had done so much, particularly for Datan and Abiram, but there was no way to convince them that everything that Moses did was for the benefit of the people.

Moses humbly beseeches Datan and Abiram to separate from Korach, but his words fall on deaf ears. And yet, to the very last minute, Moses persists in his efforts.

One of the most beautiful prayers that is recited at the conclusion of each Amidah (Shemoneh Esreh) is the meditation known as אֲלֵלֵקֵי נְצוּר. We pray to G-d that He guard our tongues from speaking evil and our lips from uttering falsehood. Let our souls be silent to those who curse us. Let our souls be as lowly as the dust to all things.

Moses reduced himself to be like the dust of the earth. ‘Whatever your grievances, Datan and Abiram, I will listen! If I have wronged you, I will apologize! I will drag myself to you, wherever you may be, no matter the distance, so that we can reconcile!’ But Datan and Aviram could not, or would not, hear. They only heard in Moses’ words his summons to appear in front of him as one who comes before a judge. And, therefore, they vehemently responded, “Who do you think you are to command us? We will not come up before you.”

The Talmud in tractate Chullin, 89a, offers a very insightful interpretation of the beautiful expression that is found in the book of Job 26:7: עַל בְּלִימָה אָרְזָה, הִלְלָהּ—He, [G-d], hangs the world on nothingness. Rabbi Il’a says: The world exists only in the merit of those who stifle themselves (סֹבְלִים—so’leim-become nothing) in a time of quarrel.

It’s a tall order to control oneself when tempers become heated.

But our sages say that we have the G-d given ability to control ourselves and to save the whole world. Korach was unable to conquer his rage. In his wrath, he succeeded to stir up hundreds of people. Consequently, the world ended

for Korach and his cohorts, and now there’s nothing left of them. Had he been willing to get together and discuss his differences with Moses, there might have been a reconciliation.

And so, when Datan and Abiram said: לֹא נֵעָלֶה, “We shall not go up!” They actually prophesied, that not only would they not go up to see Moses, but that they would actually go down, and be swallowed up alive into the bowels of the earth.

How powerful is the force of jealousy. How mighty is strife. How potent is hatred.

May we all develop the ability to rise above our vanity, and to spare no effort to resolve our differences in a civil and peaceful manner.