

# O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT KORACH · 30 SIVAN 5764 · JUNE 19, 2004 · VOL. 11 NO. 35

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE GIFT OF WISDOM

*“And Korach took...” (16:1)*

**W**isdom is a gift of G-d. No less than physical beauty, it is a gift. And it is a gift that we can forfeit if we don't deserve it.

What causes a person to lose his wisdom?

In this week's Torah portion, we witness the demise of a great, wealthy and wise man because of two reasons: lust for status and envy of others.

Korach was of noble birth, the descendent of Kehat, the “first family” of the Levi'im. He was a first cousin to Moshe and Aharon. He had been chosen as one of the carriers of the Holy Ark, an extremely prestigious position. He was extremely intelligent and learned, and he had a measure of prophecy to see that amongst his descendents would be the prophet Shmuel. He was very wealthy, having discovered a part of the treasure that Yosef had sequestered in Pharaoh's royal coffers.

Yet all of this did not help him one iota when his desire for glory and envy was kindled by seeing those whom he considered his equals outrank him.

Korach's envy burned in his heart for a long time. He would frequently mull over his “grievances” with his wife, who was presumably a match for his position in the Jewish

People.

Once a conversation took place after he returned home from the purification ceremony of the Levi'im. Part of the process of purification involved removing all hair. When Korach's wife saw him devoid of his hair, his beard, and even his eyebrows, she said, “I hardly recognize you. Who disfigured you like this?” “Moshe did this to me,” replied Korach. “Not only this, but first Moshe and Aharon lifted me up and waved me up and down. I felt such disgrace. Then Moshe pronounced me pure because I underwent the purification process of the Levi'im.”

Interestingly we see from these remarks a demonstration that the Torah can be either the elixir of life or a deadly poison. Korach mocked the purification ceremony because rather than making him feel more pure, it intensified his desire to rebel and blaspheme against the commandments.

Korach's wife said, “You see how much Moshe hates you. He invented this whole idea of shaving just to make you look ridiculous.” Even Korach balked at that claim. “You can't say that,” he said, “because, Moshe did the same thing afterwards to his own sons.” With the impeccable logic of hate, Korach's wife replied, “What does he care, as long as he can degrade you?”

Wisdom is a gift of G-d. It can be given and it can be taken away.

## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**K**orach, Datan and Aviram, and 250 leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed by the earth. Many resent their death, and blame Moshe. Hashem's “anger” is manifest by a plague which besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people: He instructs Aharon to atone for them and the plague stops. Then Hashem commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the Mishkan. In the morning

the staff of Levi, bearing Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that Levi's Tribe is chosen for Priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as kohen gadol, High Priest. The specific duties of the levi'im and kohanim are stated. The kohanim were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week's Parsha are laws of the first fruits, redemption of the firstborn, and other offerings.

## A TIMELY WARNING

“That there not be like Korach and his assembly” (*Bamidbar 17:5*). This warning against dissension and dispute mentioned in this week’s Torah reading came after the archetypical dissenter, Korach, and his entire family and cohorts were swallowed up by the earth for challenging the Divinely appointed authority of Moshe. The fire-pans of the 250 allies of Korach who had been consumed by a Heavenly flame were transformed into a covering for the Altar as a permanent reminder to those who are not the offspring of Aaron not to dare offering unauthorized incense.

The purpose of this was to ensure that Korach’s tragic mistake should not be repeated. There is, however, an interesting insight that can be detected in this passage, one that is attributed to the Chafetz Chayim.

The dispute between Korach and Moshe was a contest of black and white, with Moshe representing the unquestionable truth and Korach’s challenge a total lie. There will never again be disputes between ordinary people where it is so clear-cut who is right.

It may be added that this is true when it comes to neighborly disputes or political differences between Left and Right, liberal and conservative. Each platform has a degree of right in it. But when it comes to the efforts of a modern-day Korach to challenge the authority the Torah grants in regard to education and religious affairs, it is a repetition of the black and white situation with no question as to who is right and who is wrong.

It is to such dissenters that the Torah issues a warning not to make Korach’s mistake, a warning for Israel forever.

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

### THE SILENT APPEAL

The Vishnitzer Rebbe of blessed memory was in the habit of taking a short evening stroll for his health in the company of some of his followers. One evening he stopped in front of the luxurious home of the Jewish head of a local bank and informed his escorts that he was going inside for a visit. This raised some eyebrows for this banker was not a particularly observant Jew and certainly not one of the rabbi’s followers.

The banker was even more surprised as he invited the rabbi to sit down. To his even greater surprise the rabbi took a seat but uttered not a word. His continued silence so rattled the nerves of his host that he finally asked him the purpose of his visit.

“I came to fulfill a mitzvah,” explained the rabbi. “Our Sages rule that just as it is a mitzvah to admonish someone who will heed your reproof, it is a mitzvah to refrain from saying something which will not be heeded. I am convinced that what I want to say to you will be ignored but if I stay home and refrain from saying it I will not really be ful-

filling that mitzvah. I therefore came here where I have the opportunity to say it and refrain from doing so because it will be counterproductive in making your guilt greater by ignoring the reproof.”

The banker’s curiosity was aroused and he repeatedly begged the rabbi to reveal the nature of this secret message. The rabbi then told him that the bank he heads was about to foreclose its mortgage on the home of a widow in the community and he wanted him to show special consideration for her. The banker countered by pointing out the large sum of money involved and the fact that he was only the manager and not the owner of the bank.

“You see,” said the rabbi as he rose to leave, “I told you that I didn’t want to say anything because I knew you wouldn’t listen.”

The banker’s conscience, however, was so touched that a few days later he took money from his own pocket to save the widow’s home.

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did Datan and Aviram join Korach?
2. Why is Yaakov's name not mentioned in Korach's genealogy?
3. What motivated Korach to rebel?
4. What did Korach and company do when Moshe said that a *techelet* garment needs *tzizit*?
5. What warning did Moshe give the rebels regarding the offering of the incense?
6. Did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol*?
7. What event did Korach not foresee?
8. What does the phrase *rav lachem* mean in this week's Parsha? (Give two answers.)
9. What lands are described in this week's Parsha as "flowing with milk and honey"?
10. When did Moshe have the right to take a donkey from the Jewish community?
11. What did Korach do the night before the final confrontation?
12. What sin did Datan and Aviram have in common specifically with Goliath?
13. Before what age is a person not punished by the Heavenly Court for his sins?
14. What happens to one who rebels against the institution of *kehuna*? Who suffered such a fate?
15. Why *specifically* was incense used to stop the plague?
16. Why was Aharon's staff placed in the middle of the other 11 staffs?
17. Aharon's staff was kept as a sign. What did it signify?
18. Why are the 24 gifts for the *kohanim* taught in this week's Parsha?
19. Who may eat the *kodshei kodashim* (most holy sacrifices) and where must they be eaten?
20. Why is G-d's covenant with the *kohanim* called "a covenant of salt"?

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to This Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

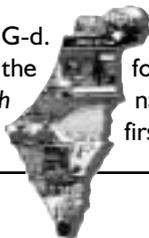
1. 16:1 - Because they were his neighbors.
2. 16:1 - Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion (*Bereishet* 49:6).
3. 16:1 - Korach was jealous that Elizafan ben Uziel was appointed as leader of the family of Kehat instead of himself.
4. 16:1 - They laughed.
5. 16:6 - Only one person would survive.
6. 16:6 - Yes.
7. 16:7 - That his sons would repent.
8. 16:7,3 - *Rav lachem* appears twice in this week's Parsha. It means "much more than enough greatness have you taken for yourself (16:3)" and "It is a great thing I have said to you (16:17)."
9. 16:12 - Egypt and Canaan.
10. 16:15 - When he traveled from Midian to Egypt.
11. 16:19 - Korach went from tribe to tribe in order to rally support for himself.
12. 16:27 - They all blasphemed.
13. 16:27 - Twenty years old.
14. 17:5 - He is stricken with *tzara'at*, as was King Uziyahu (*Divrei HaYamim* II 26:16-19).
15. 17:13 - Because the people were deprecating the incense offering, saying that it caused the death of two of Aharon's sons and also the death of 250 of Korach's followers. Therefore G-d demonstrated that the incense offering was able to avert death, and it is sin, not incense, which causes death.
16. 17:21 - So people would not say that Aharon's staff bloomed because Moshe placed it closer to the *Shechina*.
17. 17:25 - That only Aharon and his children were selected for the *kehuna*.
18. 18:8 - Since Korach claimed the *kehuna*, the Torah emphasizes Aharon's and his descendants' rights to *kehuna* by recording the gifts given to them.
19. 18:10 - Male *kohanim* may eat them and only in the *azara* (forecourt of the *Beit Hamikdash*).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

## LOVE OF THE LAND - THE NAMES

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

### THE FIRST LAND

**E**retz Yisrael was the first land to be created by G-d. *Bereishet*, the first word of the Torah describing the beginning of the world, is explained in the *midrash* as meaning that for the sake of *reishet* – a title for the



Jewish People –was the entire world created. It then follows that the Land, which was to be the home of the nation for whom the world was created, should be the first to be created.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In recording the defensive war of our ancestors against the vicious Amalekites who attacked them on their way out of Egypt, the Torah notes that “Amalek came and made war against Israel in Rephidim” (*Shmot 17:8*).

Is Rephidim merely a geographical designation or is there a message conveyed as to why this battle took place?

In contrast to Rabbi Elazar who viewed it as just the name of the battle site, Rabbi Yehoshua saw this name as a combination of two words – *rephu* and *yadaim* – which mean that our ancestors were guilty of “weakening their hands” in their grip on Torah and thus invited the Amalekite attack.

This is certainly a powerful lesson for all generations about the historical link between Torah observance and national security. The question arises, however, in regard to that particular time. Our ancestors had not yet reached Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah when this attack took place, so how can our Sages accuse them of weakening their hold on Torah?

The answer supplied by Maharsha is based on an earlier passage (*ibid. 15:25*), which tells us that in a place called Marah they were given “statutes and laws” which is interpreted as including the laws of Shabbat observance. Since Shabbat observance is considered as being equal in its importance to the entire Torah, their weakening their grip on such observance is described as weakening their hold on Torah and inviting the grave consequences.

• *Bechorot 5b*

## STRANGE CREATURES

The Torah is most explicit in detailing which animals are “pure” and therefore kosher for consumption and which are “impure” and forbidden. What is the status of an animal completely resembling a donkey but which was born from a cow? Do we consider it an impure animal because of its features or a pure one because a pure animal gave birth to it?

Two clues are to be found in the words of the Torah that everything depends on the mother.

One is the passage (*Vayikra 11:4*) which states “But these are the animals which you may not eat” as it introduces the disqualification of those animals which lack one of the two features required for being kosher – chewing its cud and having split hooves. The term “but” used by the Torah is generally interpreted as referring to an exception to the rule. In this case the exception is that an animal that has both of these features of kashrut is still forbidden because it was born of an impure animal.

The other clue to determining the status according to the mother is found in that same passage and deals with the opposite situation of an impure animal being born of a pure one. In disqualifying the camel for consumption because its hooves are not split, the Torah stresses that “it is impure for you.” The stress on *it* is interpreted as communicating that only a camel born of a camel is not kosher, and not a kosher animal born of a camel.

These two clues lead to the conclusion about these strange creatures that everything depends on the mother.

• *Bechorot 6a*

# The Weekly Daf

by RABBI MENDEL WEINBACH

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## THE RED STRING OF PROTECTION

From: Debra

Dear Rabbi,

Is it true that according to Kabbala or possibly the Zohar that a person who wears a red string will be protected from the evil eye or evil forces? When did all of this begin? What is the meaning of wearing a red string? What kind of a red string are they talking about? Why would the red string protect us from the evil eye? Is there any truth in this? Thank you.

Dear Debra,

There is no written mention in the Torah, Halacha or Kabbala about tying a red string around the wrist. However, it seems to be a custom that has been around for some time, and may be based on Torah or Kabbalistic ideas. If there is any validity to the custom, it would be considered a “segula” or protective type of act.

There are sources for such special properties of *segulot*. The Torah states, “The Lord your God has chosen you to be His *Am Segula* (treasured people) out of all the peoples upon the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6). Why are the Jewish people called G-d’s *segula*? Rabbi Chaim of Voloshzin says it’s on account of the Torah and mitzvot that have a miraculous effect on them, enabling their prayers to be answered in a special way. In fact, the mitzvot themselves are protective: Charity protects from natural death, sanctifying the new moon protects from unnatural death, the succah protects from exile, and so on.

Therefore a custom that is based on Torah ideas or mitzvot may also have special *segula* properties on a smaller scale. Regarding the red string, the custom is to tie a long red thread around the burial site of Rachel, the wife of Jacob. Rachel selflessly agreed that her sister marry Jacob first, in order to spare Leah shame and embarrassment. Later, Rachel willingly returned her soul to G-d on the lonely way to Beit Lechem, in order to pray there for the desperate Jews that would pass by on their way to exile and captivity. Often, one acquires the red string when giving charity.

Perhaps for these reasons the red thread is considered a protective *segula*. It recalls the great merit of our Matriarch Rachel, reminding us to emulate her modest ways of consideration, compassion, and selflessness for the benefit of others, while simultaneously giving charity to the poor and needy. It follows that this internal reflection that inspires good deeds, more than the string itself, would protect one from evil and harm.

One man I know jokingly said he keeps the red thread on as a *segula* against having to give money to the people selling red threads. However, a woman I know said she went to Rachel’s tomb and took upon herself to wear the red thread until she would find her soul-mate. On the day she met her husband, the thread miraculously fell off her wrist. Another woman said she took upon herself to wear the string until she would get married. It fell off a few years later before going to the *mikve* in preparation for her *chuppa*.

Sources:

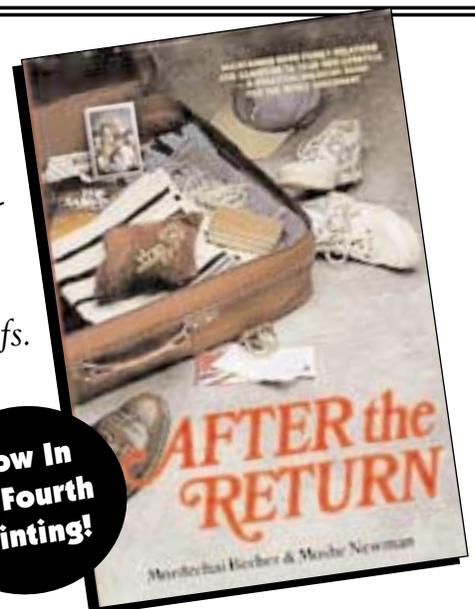
- *Nefesh HaChaim*
- *Sefer HaBrit* 4:82

*An old friend’s wedding, an uncle’s funeral, Passover at the family homestead — these are but a few of the challenging real-life events that are fraught with conflict and anxiety for the newly observant. After returning to the faith of their ancestors, many re-enter the secular world without the tools to respond to the inevitable challenges to their newly adopted set of beliefs.*

### *After the Return*

BY RABBI MORDECHAI BECHER AND RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN  
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## SETTING AN EXAMPLE

**Question:** A young man of my acquaintance started off his marriage on the wrong foot. The truth is that he and his wife are a compatible couple and the trouble is that he doesn't know how to properly treat her. What is the right thing to do in order to restore harmony to this home?

**Answer:** The same challenge once faced the saintly Torah scholar Rabbi Moshe Kliers, head of the Tiberias community. A young newlywed Jerusalemite left his wife after a blowout and made his way to Tiberias to get away from it all. The rabbi saw him in the synagogue and invited him to stay at his tiny home which consisted of one spacious room divided in two, with his family sleeping in one half and guests in the other. At daybreak this guest saw his host straining to set up a kerosene stove and preparing a cup of tea for his wife.

When this scene repeated itself the next day the guest concluded that the rabbi's wife must be ill in bed and insisted on moving out to a hotel so as not to impose on his host and family.

The rabbi's reaction was to firmly deny that his wife was ill and that the cup of tea he brought her each morning was his way of demonstrating how much he respected her and cared for her. The Jerusalemite got the message and returned home a changed husband.

Take a cue from Rabbi Kliers for your own situation and invite your young man to spend some time with you so that he can learn from you how to treat his wife. This experience will be more effective than a thousand sermons.

And who knows, it may even have an indirect effect on you as well!

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