

# Torah Weekly



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## Parshas Korach

For the week ending 26 Sivan 5755(3 Tamuz 5755)\*

23 & 24 June 1995(30 June & 1 July 1995)\*

\*week ending dates for locations outside of Israel

### Summary

**K**orach, Dasan and Aviram, and 250 of the leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aaron. The rebellion

results in their being swallowed up by the earth. Many people of the nation resent the death of Korach and his followers, holding Moshe responsible. Hashem's 'anger' is manifested by a plague which besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people, instructs Aaron to make atonement for them, and the plague is halted. Hashem then commands

that a staff inscribed with the name of each Tribe be placed in the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle. In the morning, the staff of Levi, bearing Aaron's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that the Tribe of Levi is selected for the Priesthood, and also verifies Aaron's position as the *Kohen Gadol*, the 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 concerning the first fruits, the redemption of the firstborn, and other offerings.

### Commentaries

**"And Korach took..." (16:1).**

"\$500 for a pair of tefillin! You must be joking! \$500 for a couple of leather boxes with some Hebrew writing in them! Why, for a fraction of the price I could get something almost identical. If the whole point of *tefillin* is to be a reminder, what

do I need all this crazy quasi-scientific precision for? What does it matter if there's a hairline crack in one letter??? It's so small you can hardly see it! It's a typical example of the sort of nit-picking legalism that I hate in organized religion!"

"Open up your computer. What would happen if I took a very sharp x-acto blade and cut one of the wires here in the modem?"

"Well of course — it wouldn't work — the modem won't receive anything."

"It's exactly the same with tefillin — if there's the tiniest break in a letter, then the spiritual modem called tefillin won't receive anything."

*Korach asked Moshe if a house full of Sifrei Torah still needed a mezuzah on the doorframe. Said Moshe "Yes." Korach started to mock him saying "If a single mezuzah affixed to the doorframe of a house is enough to remind us of Hashem, surely a house full of Sifrei Torah will do the job!" (Midrash)*

In a way, Korach was the first proponent of 'Kosher Style Glatt Treif'. "As long as it looks Jewish from the outside it's fine". In other words according to Korach the *mitzvos* are only symbolic (Chas v'Shalom), devoid of absolute performance parameters. Moshe Rabeinu's answer was that the *mitzvos* of the Torah function within strict operational criteria: One mezuzah on the door is what the Torah requires, no more and no less, even if a house full of *Sifrei Torah* may look more Jewish...

(Based on a story heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman about Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l)

**“They gathered together against Moshe and against Aaron and said to them... ‘Why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of Hashem’” (16:3).**

Ironically, when criticizing a *tzadik*, his enemies will pick upon the area of the *tzadik*'s greatest perfection. Thus Korach accuses Moshe by saying “Why do you exalt yourselves...” Even though the Torah calls Moshe “the humblest of all men.” Moshe’s humility was genuine and emanated from his very essence, he made no attempt to appear humble, and in fact, did not appear to be particularly humble. However Korach, whose whole essence was based on external appearance, seemed to the people to be tremendously righteous, when his righteousness was no more than skin-deep.

(Sfas Emes and The Pschiske Rav)

**“...for the entire congregation, all of them, are holy” (16:3).**

“ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL EXCEPT FOR SOME ANIMALS WHO ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS” (*Animal Farm*)

Rav said: The wife of Ohn Ben Peles (one of Korach's co-conspirators) saved him. She said to him “What's the difference who's in charge, whether it's Moshe or Korach, either way — it won't be you!” (*Sanhedrin 109*)

The way of all autocratic tyranny is to start by preaching grass-roots equality. Only when the new regime has replaced the old, does it emerge that dictatorship has been replaced, not by democracy, but by a new, and infinitely more tyrannical, dictatorship.

On a lighter note...

**“The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them...” 16:32**

There once was a *magid*, a traveling speaker, with an extremely limited repertoire. In fact he only had *one drasha* — on Parshas Korach. However being an ingenious fellow he managed to use his one *drasha* to get by for the whole year round. The *magid* had a trained dog, and as the *magid* would mount the *bima* to begin speaking, he would signal undetectably to the dog, who would then leap up and scamper out of the shul, snapping and barking as he went. In a loud voice, the *magid* would castigate the dog theatrically: “May you vanish into the earth like Korach and all his minions!” — And then, as if a lightbulb had lit up in his head, he would announce to the congregation — “And speaking of Korach...”. The *magid* would thus segue into his one and only *drasha*, having impressed his audience with his exceptional versatility, being able to ‘change’ his *drasha* at the drop of a hat.



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## Haftorah: Shmuel 11:14-12:22

**“...from whose hand have I taken redemption-money that I close my eyes to him?” (12:3)**

**T**he Halacha states that someone who insults a *talmid chacham* is obliged to pay him a large sum of gold. This money is not really a fine, rather a ransom for his life, for the *talmid chacham* could rightfully have punished the transgressor with the gaze of his eyes instead — “and he turned his eyes on him and he was reduced to a pile of bones...” Thus the fine is really a redemption for the life of the insulter. Thus says Shmuel in our Haftorah “...from whose hand have I taken redemption-money...” I have taken no money in recompense for the insult that I have received, but nevertheless “I (have) close(d) my eyes to him” and not exacted the punishment that lawfully I could inflict by merely gazing at him.

(Ahavas Yonason)

Perek 4

# Pirkei Avos

## The Secret of Success

**“Every gathering which is convened for Heaven’s sake will end up with success; every gathering which is not convened for Heaven’s sake will not end up with success.”**

Rabbi Yochanan Hasandlar (*Avos 4:11*)

The criterion for success is not whether the gathering was for a sacred or secular cause but what motivation guides the conveners. Even if a gathering has no direct connection with a *mitzvah* it will be blessed with success if its organizers were motivated by a desire to serve Heaven through it. On the other hand, even if the gathering is convened for the purpose of a *mitzvah* it is doomed to failure if its organizers are motivated by a desire for honor or anything else not for Heaven’s sake.

Tosefos Yom Tov

Parshas Korach

For the week ending 26 Sivan 5755, 23 & 24 June 1995

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