

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

...AND SOME HAVE GREATNESS
THRUST UPON 'EM

“And Korach took...” (16:1)

Greatness is not for the taking. The Bard of Avon once wrote, “Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon ‘em.”

I beg to differ. No one is born great. “Rabbeinu” was not Moshe’s surname. He wasn’t born with that title. Moshe became the teacher of all Israel for all generations because he made himself the humblest of men. The saintly *Chafetz Chaim* started off life as little Yisrael Meir Kagen. Only a lifetime of toiling in Torah and good character traits made him into the *Chafetz Chaim*.

The only thing that makes you great is the hard work of improving your character.

And even then, you could be great without the world knowing about it. You can’t “achieve greatness” – greatness in the eyes of the world – by your own efforts alone. That kind of greatness is bestowed from on high. If you try and grab greatness for yourself, as Korach did - “And Korach took” - the result will always be disaster.

For that kind of greatness has to be “thrust upon” you.

Sources: The Pshike Rav, (I’havdil) W. Shakespeare “Twelfth Night”

SERVICE AND CELEBRITY

“...they are all holy...” (16:3)

In a similar vein, Korach made a fundamental mistake about the nature of holiness. He claimed that “...they are all holy...” — that the Jewish People have within them their own power to achieve holiness. This isn’t true. Holiness, being close to G-d, is a gift from G-d. And it is only G-d who defines its parameters. Judaism is not a democracy. The *Kohen* is inherently holier than the *Levi*, who in turn is holier than the *Yisrael*. That’s the way G-d made the world.

The *Kohen* is the perfect receiver of holiness. Just as the ultimate CD machine reproduces every sound with the utmost fidelity, so too Aharon the *Kohen* relayed holiness with the utmost fidelity. That’s what the Torah means when it says that “*Aharon didn’t change.*”

So really, Korach’s jealousy was totally misplaced. The essence of a *kohen* is to be quite literally a “nobody,” to be no more than a vehicle for the transmission of holiness from Above. The more of a “somebody” one is, the less room there is to receive that holiness. Korach thought that to be a *kohen* was to be the ultimate “somebody.”

He mistook service for celebrity.

Sources: based on the Sefat Emet

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Korach, 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. G-d’s “anger” is manifest by a plague that 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 G-d 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.

WHY COALITIONS FAIL

“Every disagreement which is not for the sake of Heaven will not endure — the example is that of Korach and his entire company.”

This historic perspective provided by the Talmudic Sages in *Pirkei Avot (5:17)* refers to what this week’s Torah portion tells of the rebellion of Korach and his cohorts against the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu which ended up with their being swallowed up alive by an opening in the earth.

What is puzzling about the text of this statement is the term “Korach and his company”. In the contrasting statement about a disagreement which is for the sake of Heaven, the example given is that of the halachic disputes between the Sages Hillel and Shammai, whose differences arose from their genuine wish to serve G-d by determining exactly what His Torah taught us, a Torah dialogue that is still studied by Jews to this very day. If the parties to this praiseworthy disagreement are identified as Hillel and Shammai, shouldn’t the protagonists in the rebellion be identified as Korach and

Moshe rather than “Korach and his company”?

The answer provided by the commentaries is that in the coalition that Korach formed to challenge Moshe there was no real unity, only a common interest to replace the Heaven-appointed leader of the nation. While Korach’s claim for leadership was based on his status as a Levite, the members of the Tribe of Reuven who joined him felt that they had priority because their ancestor was the firstborn of Yaakov’s sons. The 250 distinguished men who rounded out this coalition were populists who felt that leadership belonged to men of talent rather than genealogy. So while they were all lined up against Moshe their disagreement was with each other as well and their coalition could therefore not endure.

Here we have a penetrating analysis of the fragility of coalitions formed out of self-interest, one that explains the history of coalition governments in Israel. Only a coalition formed for Heaven’s sake can endure and truly lead Israel along a secure and fulfilling path.

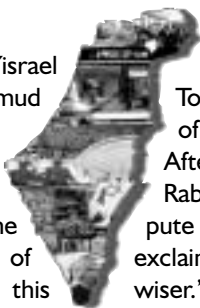
LOVE OF THE LAND - THE PEOPLE

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

THE WISER SAGES

The special quality of learning Torah in Eretz Yisrael finds expression in a number of places in Talmud and Midrash.

“The gold of that land is good” writes the Torah about Eretz Yisrael in its description of the area surrounding one of the rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden. This gold refers to the words of Torah which are more precious than gold, and this



description teaches us that there is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisrael, and no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisrael.

After arriving in Eretz Yisrael after many years in Babylon, Rabbi Zeira reconsidered a position he had in a legal dispute with a colleague. “This is conclusive proof,” he exclaimed, “that the very air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wiser.”

THE HUMAN SIDE OF THE STORY

SAVED BY THE MISHNA

“I leaned down into my bag to take out my Mishna – I think that’s what saved my life – and then the blast occurred, sending my glasses flying across the bus.”

Thus spoke Major Ya’akov Engelberg from his bed in Jerusalem’s Sha’are Zedek Hospital where he was taken from the scene of a suicide bombing.

Engelberg was one of the victims of an explosion on a No.

6 Egged bus at Jerusalem’s French Hill intersection on May 18 caused by a Palestinian terrorist. Seven passengers were killed and twenty wounded, four of them seriously, when a 19-year old Hamas activist from Hebron, disguised as a religious Jew with *kippa* and *tallit*, blew himself up. Thanks to his move for his *Mishnayot* volume Engelberg got away with only light wounds.

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THE HOLY FLOOR

In order to properly perform the sacred service in the Beit Hamikdash a *kohen* had to have his feet on the floor that had been sanctified to serve as the platform for this service. There could not be anything between his feet and the floor, not even the foot of another *kohen*.

Who sanctified the floor of the Beit Hamikdash?

Our natural inclination would be to suggest that the same King Shlomo who built the Beit Hamikdash did this. Our *gemara*, however, clearly identifies his father David as the one who invested this sanctity in the Beit Hamikdash floor.

Although G-d did not allow him to build the Beit Hamikdash, we do find that David was intensely involved in preparing its construction by his son. It was David, together with the Prophet Shmuel, who determined the exact location where the Beit Hamikdash was to be built (*Zevachim 54b*). It was he who purchased that site from Aravnah the Jebusite in order to establish there an altar and offer sacrifices, which brought an end to the plague which had afflicted the land (*Shmuel II 24:18-25*), and it was he who dug the ducts that carried the libations to the very foundations of the universe.

The Midrash (*Pesikta Rabba 43*) relates that when David went to establish this altar he found the altar upon which Adam and Noach had offered sacrifices and upon which Avraham had prepared to sacrifice Yitzchak. Upon finding it he began to measure distances from it, determining exactly where the *Azarah* Courtyard would be, where the sacrificial services would be performed and where the Holy and Holy of Holies sections would be.

It may be that it was during this measuring that David sanctified the floor of the Beit Hamikdash that his son Shlomo would build. According to Rashi, this was achieved with two thanksgiving sacrifices, and according to Tosefot with the remnants of the flour offering.

• *Zevachim 24a*

ALL OR NOTHING AT ALL

How much of the *kohen* must be inside the Beit Hamikdash courtyard when he performs the slaughtering of the animal as a sacrifice or receives its blood?

This question was posed to Rabbi Zeira by Rabbi Yirmiyah who asked if it mattered that only the hair of the *kohen* was not within this sacred area designated for all of the sacrificial services.

Rabbi Zeira's response was a reference to the passage (*Shmot 28:43*) which speaks of the need for *kohanim* to be dressed in their priestly garments "upon entering" the

Sanctuary. This term is interpreted as indicating a need for a "total entry", including even the hair of the *kohen*.

The commentaries draw a parallel between this interpretation of the term "upon entering" with a similar phrase used by the Torah in regard to the *mitzvah* of separating *challa* from dough and giving it to a *kohen*. This obligation by Torah Law was limited to the grain of Eretz Yisrael and it was incumbent on Jews "upon your entering into the land" (*Bamidbar 15:18*). Although this meant that the obligation began even before they finished conquering and dividing the land, it also indicated that it depended on the entry of the entire people, not just a few advance scouts (*Mesechta Ketubot 25a*). Once again we see the term "upon entering" understood as total with no reservation.

While the sole ramification for sacrifices of this insistence on totality was the need for the *kohen* to be completely inside the Sanctuary, the ramifications of the phrase for *challa* is relevant even today. Since the Torah made the obligation conditional on all Jews being in Eretz Yisrael, this is not the case today, nor was it even when Ezra led the return to the land from Babylonian exile. Our obligation to separate *challa* ever since our ancestors went into exile is only of rabbinic nature. It is interesting to note that in regard to *challa* there is also a rabbinic requirement to perform the *mitzvah* outside of Eretz Yisrael. Our Sages saw a need to institute this decree so that the *mitzvah* of *challa* would not be forgotten, since every Jewish household is involved, in contrast with the need for tithing *terumot* and *ma'asrot* which involved only agriculturists.

• *Zevachim 26a*

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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* (fore-court of the *Beit Hamikdash*).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

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PASSING ON MERIT

From: Marsha in Ann Arbor, MI

Dear Rabbi,
I'm familiar with the idea that our good deeds can benefit the souls of the deceased, especially those of our close relatives. The question is how does it work?

Dear Marsha,

Our Sages taught "A son can accrue merit for his (deceased) father", and "A son is like the leg of his (deceased) father". While the rabbis referred generically to a father-son relationship, what they meant is by no means limited to that. As is well known, anyone may benefit any particular soul, and certainly a daughter's good deeds also accrue merit for her parents. This is referred to as being like a leg of the deceased because one who does good deeds to merit the deceased extends the soul into this world, enabling it, so to speak, to "perform" *mitzvot* which it otherwise would be unable to do.

Early commentaries explain that this transferring or sharing of merit occurs in a way similar to the relationship between Issachar and Zebulun. The verse, "Zebulun, succeed in your excursions, and Issachar in your tents" (*Deut. 33:18, Rashi*), refers to a unique partnership in which Zebulun engaged in commerce and supported Issachar's Torah study, while Issachar in turn shared the merit of his Torah study with Zebulun. In a comparable manner, they explain, we are able to share the merit of our good deeds with the deceased.

However, the comparison is difficult to understand. Issachar and Zebulun had a two-way relationship in which both contributed an active role, whereas doing good deeds for the benefit of the deceased seems only a one-way deal. The Rokeach (Rabbi Elazar of Worms, Germany 1160-1237) reconciles this by saying that G-d "knows the intention of the living and of the dead". This means that if during the deceased person's lifetime he or she sought to perform acts of kindness, charity, and other *mitzvot*, particularly regarding close family, then G-d reciprocates the merit of our good deeds to them.

Actually, not only do we benefit the souls of the deceased, they benefit us. When Joseph went to visit his father Jacob on his deathbed, Jacob recalled how he buried Rachel just

outside of Beit Lechem (*Genesis 48:7*). The Midrash says that Joseph was very upset that his mother would not be buried together with Jacob. He asked his father permission to bury her now in Hebron, to which Jacob replied that he too wanted to bury her there but it was G-d's will that she be buried "on the way" so that she could help her children. When the Temple was destroyed, the Jewish people were taken to exile on the road past Beit Lechem and Rachel wept and pleaded to G-d on their behalf: "Rachel weeps for her children...your work will be rewarded, says G-d, and your children will return" (*Jeremiah 31:14-16*).

Another example of the deceased benefiting the living occurred when Rabbi Yechiel, the father of the Rosh, once appeared to his wife saying that there would be a massacre the next day. He urged the Jews to leave town immediately, and only those who left that night lived to tell the story. However, the Zohar says that not only the souls of the righteous pray and strive for our well-being, but even the souls of ordinary Jews, including our deceased relatives, are also aware of our trials and tribulations, and plead to G-d in our favor. This is particularly so, according to the Zohar, on Rosh Hashana, the Day of Judgment.

In conclusion, I'd like to share the following true story that illustrates the connection between the living and the dead: The deceased husband of a woman in my family appeared to his wife in a dream. He was in a dark room and was shouting "I can't see, I'm shrouded in darkness. Give me light, I can't see". The woman, who woke up very upset, told her son about the dream but neither could figure out what it meant. Several days later, the son happened to visit the synagogue to which years earlier they donated the *ner tamid* (eternal light) in memory of the deceased. The synagogue was under repair and the lamp had been disconnected. The son fixed the lamp and after a few days the husband reappeared in a dream, only this time his was smiling and basking in light.

Sources:

- *Succat Shalom, Ch. 2*
- *Sanhedrin 104a, Eruvin 70b*
- *Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 621*
- *Rashi and Ramban on Genesis 48:7*
- *Chida, Seder HaDorot, entry on R. Yechiel father of the Rosh*
- *Zohar, Lech Lecha 81a, Teruma 142a*

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

...tens of thousands of Jews in North America have participated in the special seminars (Yom Iyun and Rediscovery) run by Ohr Somayach in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Chicago, Los Angeles, Toronto and upstate New York.

...thousands of Russian boys and girls have encountered Judaism for the first time in the schools that Ohr Somayach founded in the Ukrainian city of Odessa.

FALLING ASLEEP ON THE SPEAKER

Question: I am frequently invited to attend fundraising dinners and other public affairs at which I find myself a captive audience to some speakers who literally put me to sleep either because of the late hour or their uninteresting content. What is the right thing to do in such a situation?

Answer: Your question recalls an old joke about a Jew whom the cruel Romans had cast into the coliseum arena to be devoured by a hungry lion. As the bloodthirsty crowd looked on in wonder the condemned Jew whispered something into the lion's ear and the ferocious beast surprisingly ran out of the arena. When the survivor was asked what charm he had used to frighten the lion he replied: "I told him to remember that after the dinner come the speeches!"

Seriously speaking, speaking is a serious business. Some speeches are more interesting to hear than others, but all of them have a purpose, whether it is to introduce the audience to the fine work of the dinner organizers or to honor

the individuals who are generous supporters of it. By attending such an affair you are contributing more than just a donation to the cause. You are publicly expressing your identification with it. Just as you are prepared to do so with your time and money you must be prepared to make a strenuous effort to avoid the dozing off which is interpreted by those around you as an expression of apathy.

If this is true in regard to the dinner organizers it is doubly true in regard to the speaker. Falling asleep sends a signal to the speaker looking at you that you have a very low regard for what he has to say and this is terribly discouraging. It also communicates to the people around you a low opinion of the speaker even though this was not your intention.

It may be a good idea to take a short nap before going to an affair in which you will hear speeches so that you can stay awake. Remember, insensitively dozing off may turn you into the lion who is unwittingly devouring the after-dinner speaker.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Re: Cellphone Ethics (Ohrnet Shlach)

After having read Cellphone Manners in Ohrnet's Business Ethics column, I submit my personal views on the issue.

I suffer from CPP (Cellular Phone Phobia). Truth is, I hate the things. But being a reasonable person I admit that there are times when they are very useful like when you are stuck in traffic and will be late for an appointment, or when, G-d forbid, there is a terrorist attack in the vicinity.

What I object to is the non-essential conversations that try the patience of captive listeners. I was recently witness to the Mother of All Cell Phone Conversations. This record-breaker was already in progress when I boarded a #6 bus in Jerusalem at 7:25 p.m. and was still going strong when I got off at my stop 40 minutes later.

The prize for the weirdest confabulation goes to the 20-something bus passenger who, within earshot of at least 30 strangers, loudly held forth on the details of her latest session with her psychiatrist, divulging even the price.

For years, my children asked me to get a cell phone, but I refused. Finally, for security reasons I agreed to tote a phone around with the understanding that it would be used only in case of emergency.

For weeks it lay dormant in my handbag, to the point that

I virtually forgot about it. Then, one evening, in the bus on my way home from work, I made a snap decision to pay a visit to an old friend, a shut-in who lives with her Filipina caretaker. But how could I let her know I was planning to come over? My cell phone!

Expecting the caretaker, who knows me, to answer as she always has, I dialed my friend's number. But instead I heard a strange voice on the other end of the line. The phone was passed to my friend, who is hard of hearing. "Who is this?" she asked. Thereupon ensued a nightmarish conversation of the kind I had always abhorred. Not having heard my name clearly, my friend repeated the question over and over. Each time the pitch of my voice rose dramatically until I was screeching my name at the top of my lungs. Finally she heard it, but not before everyone in the crowded bus had turned in my direction, some amused, some annoyed. My face growing redder and redder, I had no choice but to continue: "I'M... COMING... OVER!" Mercifully, she heard me on only the third try.

After this embarrassing incident I have become a bit more tolerant of other cell phone users, but still remember with nostalgia the blessed silence of pre-cell phone days.

Rosalie E. Moriah
Jerusalem