



Korach 5776

July 8, 2016

A Taste of Torah

It's All About Me

By Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

In today's world, it's very important for a politician to convince everyone that he or she is working for the benefit of the people. More often than not, that claim is laughable. To that end, our Sages (Pirkei Avos 2:3) tell us to be wary of government officials, for they may seem very friendly when they stand to gain from the relationship, but they will abandon you when you are no longer useful.

About fifteen years ago, when I was studying in yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael, I was a guest at a Shabbos meal along with a British chap who was looking to convert to Judaism. (His own personal Brexit, I suppose.) I don't know what became of him, but he shared what inspired him to look into Judaism. He told us that he wanted to make a difference in the world, so he went into politics, figuring that would be a great place to change things for the better. As he slowly made his way up the ladder, he was pushed off of it by those dedicated to advancing themselves, not the needs of their constituents. So much for change. Their backstabbing, after he had invested so much to do good, left him rather disillusioned regarding mankind's ability to fix things without Divine guidance.

In this week's parsha, Korach organizes a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon. He claims that Moshe has made some enactments based on his own whim, including appointing his brother, Aharon, as the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest). All Jews are holy, announces Korach, and everyone ought to be allowed to bring *ketores* (incense offering) before G-d if they so desire.

G-d is incensed by Korach and his followers, but Moshe proposes a test for the rebels: All those who would like to offer incense may do so. If they are entitled to bring *ketores*, all will be fine, but if they are not authorized, they will suffer dire consequences. Additionally, says Moshe, if all of my enactments are of Divine origin, let the earth open its mouth and swallow Korach and his followers.

You know the rest of the story. 250 Jews bring pans with incense, and a Divine fire consumes them. Korach and his two sidekicks, Dasan and Aviram, are swallowed, along with their families and possessions, by the earth.

Why were two different punishments necessary? To make this question even more perplexing, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 110a) records an opinion that Korach himself suffered both forms of retribution: Not only was he swallowed, he was also burned by the Divine fire. What is the significance of his being subjected to both punishments?

The Shelah (Rabbi Yeshaya Horowitz; c. 1565-1630) explains that there were two different agendas among Korach's followers. Most weren't that interested in challenging Moshe's integrity; they simply wanted the opportunity to perform that most coveted of the Tabernacle services, the offering of *ketores*, and thus draw closer to G-d. Some, though, were attempting a leadership change; they wanted Moshe and Aharon to step down.

Those who brought the *ketores* were consumed by a fire, much like what occurred to Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu, when they brought an unauthorized *ketores* offering. The other part of the rebellion was looking to pick a fight, and the punishment for creating the *machlokes* (dispute) was to be swallowed alive. Dasan and Aviram, who were long a thorn in Moshe's side and didn't accept his leadership, went under for their attempted coup.

Korach was guilty of both offenses. According to the aforementioned opinion in the Talmud, Korach himself brought *ketores*, as he also desired that special relationship with G-d. His demand of equal service for all, though, was disingenuous. Korach wanted Moshe and Aharon out, for he had his eyes on a much bigger prize, the High Priesthood. Though Korach never expressed his desire outright, Moshe saw through Korach's stated aim of egalitarianism when he

Continued on back side

Stories For The Soul

A Friendly Argument

During the late 1800's, there was a sharp debate between several prominent Torah leaders regarding a particular issue. The disagreement was quite heated, each side strongly advocating its position as the correct approach.

Two of the leading Torah authorities of the time, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik (1853-1918) and Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926) were at the forefront of the controversy, and each one spoke strongly for his outlook while vehemently disagreeing with the other view.

At one point, there was a meeting of *rabbonim* in the European city of Vitebsk. Rav Chaim and Rav Meir Simcha both attended the meeting. Before departing, Rav Chaim went to visit Rav Meir Simcha and to bid him goodbye.

Rav Chaim's attendant was quite surprised. "How could you visit Rav Meir Simcha if you disagree so strongly with him?" he asked.

"It's true that we don't see eye-to-eye," explained Rav Chaim. "But does that mean I should disregard the fact that he's the *gadol hador* (greatest man of the generation)!!"

Our Sages teach that a dispute that is carried on for the sake of Heaven will last, while one not for the sake of Heaven will crumble. Great people can disagree on ideas, even quite vehemently, but still maintain mutual respect for each other. Small people quickly descend into petty personal attacks.

Kollel Happenings

SUMMER NIGHT SEDER FOR BACHURIM

Attention boys entering 7th grade and older! The Kollel is once again holding its Summer Night Seder for Bachurim at the Kollel West Side Bais Medrash. Sunday-Thursday, mincha 7:45 pm, followed by learning. Ma'ariv at 9:10 pm. Stipends available for boys who maintain the schedule. For info or sponsorship opportunities, please contact rmf@denverkollel.org.

RABBANIT MIZRACHI ON JULY 31ST

The Women's Division of the Denver Community Kolliland Aish Denver present a video for women, *Leading up to Tisha B'Av*. Sunday, July 31st at 8 pm at Aish Denver. Rabbanit Yemima is one of the most in-demand speakers today, attracting hundreds of women to her lectures, where she presents deep messages with a sense of humor. Sponsorship available. No charge, suggested donation of \$5 to help cover costs of future video presentations.

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: How can two friends eat the same food, prepared in the exact same manner, at the same time, and yet be required to recite different *brachos* (blessings) on them according to all contemporary opinions? (They did not eat or drink anything else in close proximity to the above-mentioned item.)

A: The halacha is that if a fruit or vegetable is generally eaten in only one form (raw or cooked), one who eats it in the nonstandard fashion recites *shehakol* instead of the usual blessing. For example, onions are generally not eaten in their raw form, except as part of a salad or sandwich. Therefore, if someone bites into a slice of raw onion, even if he finds it enjoyable, he would only recite

shehakol, not *ha'adama*. This rule is subject to the custom of the locale. Therefore, if two friends living in different areas eat, for example, a vegetable which is customarily eaten only raw (or only cooked) in one place, but in the other location is consumed both raw and cooked, the first person would make *shehakol*, while the second makes *ha'adama*. (Source: Sefer V'sain B'racha page 400; an example given there is raw string beans, which are eaten raw at times in the US, but not in Eretz Yisrael.)

This week's question: Can you think of a similar case, where one friend is required to say the proper blessing on the item while the other isn't required to say any blessing at all?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Rambam Part VIII

Another major, and extremely controversial, work of the Rambam was *Moreh Nevuchim* (Guide for the Perplexed). Originally written in Arabic as a letter to his disciple, Rabbi Yosef ben Yehuda of Cueta, *Moreh Nevuchim* is a philosophical work that discusses many areas of Judaism such as prophecy, the anthropomorphic descriptions of G-d in the Torah and Books of the Prophets, and reasoning behind the mitzvos, among numerous other Judaic subjects. It must be understood that the Rambam lived in a time and place where the

study of philosophy, particularly Aristotelian philosophy, was popular among the intellectual elite, Jews included. Great Torah scholars and leaders studied secular philosophy, and this sometimes led to much confusion regarding the Torah outlook on issues. The Rambam wrote *Moreh Nevuchim* for these Jews who required guidance to resolve their questions and doubts. The work was intended for the intellectual elite who were immersed in philosophy, not for the average person with little experience in these areas.

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Continued from front side

chastised him (Korach 16:10), "And you seek priesthood, as well!" For his efforts, Korach received a double-whammy.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Korach was a great person, but his ambitions blinded him to the true nature of his motives, and, ultimately, drove him straight into the ground. He claimed to be standing up for the entire community, when, in fact, he was focused on self-aggrandizement. And today, we are plagued by people who would claim to have the interests of the community, of the country, of the world, at the forefront of their agenda - when, in fact, the only thing on their agenda (or personal email server) is numero uno.

What can we do to change it, besides exercising due diligence when dealing with such people? I believe that most of us, at various junctures, have opportunities to make choices or engage in activities that affect others, be it within a family, a synagogue we belong to, or a community. When we are faced with a decision or take on a responsibility, we should do some careful soul-searching: What are my priorities? Do I have any vested interests? Will my ego get in the way of doing what is best for those affected by my actions? Korach was convinced he had everyone else's best interests at heart, but the greatest prophet of all time, Moshe, knew better. What would Moshe tell us?