

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

KORAH

Haftarah: Shemuel I 11:14-12:22

JUNE 16, 2018 3 TAMUZ 5778

DEDICATION: In memory of Moshe Ben Esther

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EDITORS NOTES

Late night, my uncle Jack called to let me know that my Uncle Morris Bibi, my father's older brother was not doing well. I was surprised as in the family chat earlier, we were told he had been doing well. We spoke again later and finally late last night my uncle Jack called to tell me that Moshe ben Sarah had passed from this world to the Olam HaEmet. The misvah would be today Rosh Hodesh in New Jersey.

Its always a bit strange to have a funeral on Rosh Hodesh when our custom is not to eulogize. I thought of my dad's funeral on Tu Bishvat when we also don't eulogize. The rabbis explain that there is a purpose in bechi, tears and hesped, eulogies. There are gates between earth and heaven that the niftar, the one who passed away, must pass through. These gates are often locked but our tears and tributes below serve as keys to unlock those gates allowing the soul to rise from level to level. And that is why the first days are set aside for us to do our work below. On certain days of the year including Rosh Hodesh, those gates are left open for the niftar to pass through. No keys are necessary and in fact trying to use a key in an unlocked door often has the reverse effect and therefore no matter how strange or difficult for us below, in service to the niftar, we must refrain from bechi ve'hessed.

Our custom is to speak words of Torah, words of ethical teachings and words of encouragement to the congregation in the merit of the departed one and to bring an Aliyah to his neshamah.

Many of the vivid memories in our lives often come from childhood. They are the videos ingrained into us which we play again and again in our minds. But I have a more recent memory which I hold very dear and pull out from time to time and should probably pull out more often. About ten years ago while visiting my parents in Florida, my dad invited Jonah and me to play golf with uncle Moe. I had never been on a

golf course before. So we went. It was a beautiful day and we really didn't worry about strokes or swings or even getting the ball into the hole. We mimicked Jackie Gleason addressing the ball, "Hello Ball". We kicked a few. We completely missed a few. We lost a few. And we even managed to get a few into the hole. But more than anything, we laughed; not just smile laughs but belly laughs. We had a good time. I stood back a moment so happy that my son could play with his grandfather but was struck by the fact that here were two men, already in their eighties, but they were enjoying themselves, play and laughing as though they were eight. It was truly amazing. We all have a child within us, but how many of us know how to pull that child out? How many of us are brave enough to pull that child out. Here were two well respected and important men who together transformed themselves, each other and my son and me. In a world where people have every luxury imaginable and still suffer terrible depression, I saw what the world was lacking. I was envious that "Moe and Joe" could do that so easily. They buried the pretense and the expectations and simply took some time to have fun. I mentally recorded that moment of Joie de Vivre; of enjoying the simple pleasure in life and sometimes draw on it to raise my own spirit. I invite you to share that vision, draw on your own memory or make a memory. I guarantee it will be very helpful.

We read this week of Korach. Korach was a very important man, capable of fixing the world and the cosmos, but he messed up. He was from the tribe of Levi, one of those who answered Moses call of Mi LaHashem, who is with G-d, after the incident of the golden calf. Korach was the grandson of the greatest of Levi's sons, Kehat who was grandfather to Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Elisafan and others. Kehat named Korach's father Yitzhar meaning oil, because Yitzhar like oil, would rise to the top. Yitzhar like oil would give light. And yizhar like oil would be silent representing the world of sod or secret. Korach was a genius; he was honored to carry the holy ark which in essence carried those who attached themselves to it. Korach was also the wealthiest of Benai Yisrael and perhaps in the world at the time having discovered a part of Joseph's treasure. We are told that hundreds of donkeys were needed to simply carry the keys to his safes.

But when Korach learned that his younger cousin Elisafan was appointed head of the tribe, he became angry that he the son of Yitzhar was passed over. I imagine him coming home that day and complaining to his wife. Mrs Korach as all spouses faced with their counterparts anger could have fixed everything. Remember of the man is the head, the wife is the neck and she could have redirected that exploding head. "Don't worry hone, you are Korach, you are the wealthiest, you carry the ark, everyone comes to you for advice, what's in a title, poor Elisafan has nothing, give him a bone. Instead she egged him on, enraging him worse and leading to rebellion. She is the symbol of a terrible wife.

Still I wonder, how could Korach go so far? Look what anger, pride and jealousy can do to a person. My mother, may hashem bless her with health and happiness, would put the blame on the parents. When a child does wrong, it often means he wasn't given the proper training and tools she would tell us.

And when a child does right, we say that apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

I remember my grandfather Reuben Bibi's funeral. I was 18 years old and remember standing outside by 67th street. I remember crying. I had a claim against my grandfather. Any of my cousins will recall that when we ate by grandma, our grandfather often excused himself quickly from the table and moved inside the den to learn. His companion and best friend appeared to be the Zohar HaKadosh. He would spend endless hours poring over the words of the Zohar, the Gemarah and Shulchan Aruch. He was a cistern filled with unimaginable knowledge and my claim against him was that he didn't share it. I spent many Shabbats learning with my great uncle Dave who would question me endlessly on my studies, but this never happened with grandpa. I often wondered why.

But what we did get from our grandparents was proper midot. We were taught to be good, to be kind, to be compassionate, to be humble and to serve both Hashem and the community. My grandfather undoubtedly lived a part of his life on a celestial plane and perhaps he was given a choice upstairs to either teach us mystical secrets or teach us ethics. He undoubtedly made the right choice in teaching us ethics and responsibility.

If you are a Bibi or a descendant of a Bibi, it comes with a price. The price is the willingness to serve, to do for Hashem and do for others, the responsibility to always have a smile, to always do good and to do it with humility.

My cousin Joey Tawil wrote in the family chat of how special uncle Moe's soul was. He treated everyone as an equal with tremendous respect, even little children. He wrote how he always felt important around uncle Moe. My cousin Alice Gemal wrote of uncle Moe's kindness, generosity, honest and humility. Shelly called him an amazing man. My son Jonah recalled our golf game, our visits to Florida where they often shared a laugh and how although uncle Moe knew his name, he insisted on calling him Joey out of respect to my dad.

Uncle Moe certainly took on the midot that his parents taught all their children and grandchildren. And perhaps this was why he was bless with chen. How does one translate chen, we sometimes say it's grace. Perhaps a better explanation is that its when everyone who simply looks at you likes you. Your soul comes through your eyes and your face and you draw everyone near. My mother often said that this was Moe's gift. Everyone liked him. Everyone was attracted to him. She would say, he had such appeal to people, that customers would buy anything from him. He could sell ice to eskimos in winter.

When Uncle Moe joined the army during world war two he was asked what he did. He explained that he manufactured chandeliers. They told him that since he obviously knew electricity he would be sent to become an engineer responsible for demining – that is deactivating land mines – pretty much the most dangerous job out there. (As an aside when my dad went for his interview, learning from the experience of his brother he told them he could type and basically sat out the war playing Radar O'Rily and running things at Fort Dix).

Let me close with a story he told us. Uncle Moe was part of the invading allied forces in June of 1944 – That's 74 years ago last week. American, British and Canadian troops landed under heavy fire from gun emplacements overlooking the beaches, and the shore was mined and covered with obstacles such as wooden stakes, metal tripods, and barbed wire, making the work of the beach-clearing teams difficult and dangerous. And that was his job. Furthermore casualties were heaviest at Omaha Beach, with its high cliffs. Under attack from above, the soldiers sought cover where they could. At one point while they were resting up, Moe and another soldier were asked to join a small minyan so someone could say Kaddish. They dashed away to join the others for a few moments to pray. Moving away saved their lives as the area they were in came under attack. At 21 years old, Moe learned something that all of us need to know. He learned that every day was a gift and

perhaps that's why he lived all of his 95 years with a smile.

Let us all remember to find that eight year old within each of us, and learn to let him out as uncle Moe did. Let us all remember to smile and laugh. Let us live life as grandma and grandpa taught, serving Hashem and each other with joy and kindness; with dedication and humility. Tehi Nfsho Serurah BeSror HaChayim

Shabbat Shalom
David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

In this week's parasha Korach and his group rebel against Moshe. We learn the ground opened up and swallowed up Korach and his group and a fire went out from Hashem and consumed the 250 people who were with Korach. A lesser known part of this story is that the next day the people came to Moshe and complained that Moshe had all these men killed. As a result of the complaints Hashem brings a plague killing those who complained against Moshe. The pasook says those who died in the plague totaled 14,700 people (aside from those who died as part of Korach's rebellion (Perek 17, Passok 14).

Korach - Korach starts a rebellion against Moshe (year 2 in the midbar)

- 1- Korach and his assembly complain and rebel against Moshe
- 2- Moshe resolves that Aharon and Korach's assembly bring ketoret to see whose Hashem accepts
- 3- The ground opens up and swallows Korach and his assembly after they bring the ketoret
- 4- Hashem brings a plague. Aharon brings ketoret and the plague is ended.
- 5- The test of the sticks. Aharon's stick blossoms with almonds proving that his tribe was chosen for the kehuna service
- 6- Hashem calms Benei Israel's fears of entering the mishkan by mistake and being killed. Hashem tells Aharon the 24 rewards of the Kohanim.
- 7- Ma'aser (the reward for the Leviim) and Terumat ma'aser.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

“And Korah took” (Bemidbar 16:1)

Wouldn't it be lovely if we could discuss the main theme of Parashat Korah as an esoteric concept that we study on a theoretical level? Unfortunately, the reality is that mahloket (disputes) raging in our communities and families is far more

prevalent, and therefore far more relevant than we would care to admit.

We tend to think of mahloket in shuls and other public places in our nation. However the most prevalent cases are in our families. Shuls and other institutions will survive, but not the individual family. For the most part, family feuds revolve around money. Business disputes and inheritance disputes tear the family apart. Siblings don't talk for decades and don't sit shiva together. All the money in the world is less important than family. The power of family is truly awesome. See the following story.

The Minhat Elazar, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Spira zt"l, was once travelling on a train, where the man sitting opposite him was eating a pork sandwich.

Suddenly the Rabbi called out, “Jew, it is forbidden to eat meat of a pig!”

The passenger looked at the Rabbi in bewilderment. “I'm not a Jew,” the man said simply. “I am permitted to eat this meat!”

The Rabbi responded, “Listen, Jew. Don't eat the meat of a chazir!”

Again the man insisted that he's not a Jew and there was no issue with him eating whatever he wanted. The Rabbi didn't back down. A third time, he admonished the man, telling him that a Jew may not consume pig meat.

This time the man turned toward the window of the train car and tossed his sandwich out. He then faced the saintly saddik seated across from him and said, “How did you know that I am a Jew?”

The Rabbi smiled warmly. “I was watching you as you ate,” he said. “But still,” said the man, “I have met many people, and not one of them identified me as a Jew, yet you did. How did you know?”

“You ate like a Jew!” the Rabbi explained. “It says in Shulhan Aruch (170:10) that one should not bite off a piece of food and then place the remaining food back on the table. The reason is because this is repulsive to others. A Jew cuts off a piece and places it into his mouth, and the rest remains clean. I saw that you were careful to eat in this fashion. You surely saw this practice in the home of your parents.

The man was speechless and confirmed that indeed it was all true. Despite that he ate teref meat, he followed this practice, not because of halachah, but because it was the training that he received from his father and mother. It became part of what he was.

The man ultimately did teshubah and returned to the ways of his parents, embracing a life of Torah and misvot. The lesson is an astoundingly powerful one. We see the life-changing impact of the family. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“There shall not be like Korah and his congregation” (Bemidbar 17:5)

Some explain this pasuk to be saying that there will not be another dispute like the one between Moshe and Korah. In this incident, Moshe was totally correct, while Korah and his followers were completely wrong. In most other matters of dispute, neither side is one hundred percent right. Rather, each side has some level of guilt or liability.

This is an important point to remember when we interact with others. It is inevitable that from time to time we will be involved in a disagreement. Our natural tendency is to automatically focus on how the other person is wrong, and to give reasons why he should give in. But this will usually not help to resolve the dispute, because the other person is also doing the same thing, convinced that we should be the one to concede. It is far more productive and beneficial for us to reflect on how we may have caused the situation to escalate, possibly with an inconsiderate comment or an unpleasant facial expression. We need to remember that our goal should not be to win the argument, but rather to maintain the peace.

This is especially important in family relationships, where we are more informal and are more likely to say or do something which might offend another person. The people with whom we are the closest are often the most sensitive to our mindless words or actions, and when provoked, will often respond accordingly. By acknowledging that we are at least a little bit at fault instead of just blaming the other person, we will help diffuse the situation and work out a peaceful solution. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Insult, No Injury

One of the more emotionally upsetting situations a person must deal with is being insulted. Somehow, for some reason, someone makes an offensive comment. The subject – or victim – of the remark may react with anger, a red face, or tears. In all cases, insults hurt – to the point that a bruised ego is perceived as similar to a broken bone or a cut finger. But it doesn't have to be that way.

The pain you feel as a result of an insulting comment is a matter of perspective. It is your attitude towards the barb that will determine its effect. Words are merely sounds, without inherent power over people, but your reaction to them is crucial.

An insult can be perceived as a wake-up call. Perhaps the person is exaggerating; but where there is smoke, there is usually fire. Do a self-evaluation and work on the shortcoming that has been pointed out. Another approach is to accept the criticism, but focus on your strengths rather than dwell on the weakness you

adversary so rudely highlighted. Alternatively, you might think of another insult that once hurt you. You will realize that not only was it meaningless in the big picture of your life, but the moment of pain was actually quite short-lived.

An insult can change your day – maybe even your life. But an insult is like any other word; your reaction to it will determine its effect. Defuse the pain and make use of the warning, and an insult can improve your future. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

Evolvement - “A human being begins his life as an embryo. As cells develop, the embryo begins to congeal and become solid in the form of flesh and then bones. Every smallest detail of the growth of the embryo is evidence that Hashem leaves nothing to chance. It is all for the benefit of the person who is going to emerge”.

Throughout our lives we are constantly evolving and growing. We must thank Hashem for the daily opportunities to renew ourselves each day. (Norman D. Levy, Based on Rabbi Miller's, Duties of the Mind)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Testing Our Strengths

The Torah in Parashat Korah describes the revolt waged by Korah and his followers against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. Korah and his group posed to Moshe the question, “Madu'a Titnas'u Al Kehal Hashem” – “Why do you elevate yourselves over the congregation of G-d?” Korah accused Moshe of asserting his authority and exerting power for personal, egotistical interests, for prestige and glory.

Just two weeks ago, in Parashat Behaalotecha, we read the Torah's description of Moshe Rabbenu as “exceedingly humble, more so than any person on the face of the earth.” G-d Himself testified to the fact that Moshe was the precise opposite of how Korah portrayed him. Korah charged him of asserting himself out of a desire for honor and power, whereas in truth, Moshe was more humble than any other person in the world.

This incident teaches an important lesson about the way we are tested during life. Namely, our patience is tested specifically in our areas of strength. If a person pokes fun at us for something regarding which we profess no skill or

expertise, it doesn't bother us. But it is when we are challenged in the area in which we feel accomplished that our patience and forbearance are tested. As a Rabbi, I could easily ignore an insult about my talents as a softball player. I do not play softball, I never put much effort into honing my skills in the sport, and I never thought of myself as much as a softball player. So if a person would come along and make fun of me for being a lousy player, it would not affect me too much, or at all. But if somebody would come along and challenge my ability to deliver Torah lectures, which is precisely the field in which I have invested much time and effort, that is when I will be tested. This is when I might be naturally inclined to feel offended and get angry, and must find the inner strength to ignore the insult. Moshe was challenged specifically in the area of his greatest achievement – humility – and he passed the test with flying colors, ignoring the insult and proposing a way to prove that the leadership appointments were made by Hashem, and not by him.

Our areas of success and achievement are often our source of personal pride, and it is thus specifically regarding those areas that we are emotionally vulnerable. Since they provide us with a sense of satisfaction, challenges to our success in those areas tend to hurt. We should learn from Moshe's example to keep our emotions at bay, and to have the strength to ignore insults and retain our dignity in the face of unwarranted criticism and scorn.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
TRAVEL INSURANCE**

I am planning to travel this summer for 10 days to Russia on a tour sponsored by my Destiny Foundation. Long experience in traveling has taught me to always purchase adequate travel insurance before embarking on such a trip. We are prone to all sorts of mishaps that are completely unforeseen in regular daily life, in our homes and on the street. Traveling and being in a foreign country only intensifies the dangers that may God forbid lurk when being away from home.

So, I have regularly purchased travel insurance to cover myself for any untoward occurrences that may God forbid take place. However, like everything else in life, purchasing travel insurance today has become more complicated than it once was. I remember being able just to call up on the phone, update my information and the insurance company accepted my word that I was in good health.

However, insurance companies earn their profits by not paying claims made against them. To obtain viable travel insurance today first one must visit a physician to obtain a medical opinion as to one's well-being. Then, having successfully obtained that document, the insurance company will inform the potential customer whether a policy will be issued and what the cost and conditions of such a policy will be.

All of this, upon reflection, is very reasonable even if time-consuming and requiring a great deal of personal effort on the part of the potential customer. Having received my approval, the policy was sent to me by email and now my only problem is how to get my computer and printer to cooperate in printing it out. I will persevere though and eventually will have the actual policy in hand.

The concept of commercial insurance is one of the most fascinating ideas in the development of business, a fundamental concept which operates in the world's financial market structure. Travel insurance gained wide market value when air travel became the norm for getting around the globe. Even though statistically it has been proven that air travel is the safest mode of travel available, people still feel somewhat queasy about getting on an airplane.

Because of this and to protect families in case of rare but not impossible unforeseen occurrences, travel insurance boomed over the past century. It serves as a solace in the dreaded cases of lost luggage, canceled flights and other headaches and mishaps while traveling. People always feel reassured when they have that insurance policy, though many times it is not that easy to obtain one's rights under that policy. In any event, everyone feels that the best thing about insurance is never having to use it or make claims upon it. I think that this is doubly true when travel insurance is involved.

When the Jewish people traveled for 40 years in the desert of Sinai on the way to the land of Israel they lacked human travel insurance. Instead, Heaven was meant to provide all the necessary insurance that they would need. It provided them with protection from all mishaps, enabled them to have food on the

road and to be protected from enemies. However, this type of travel insurance was not deemed to be permanent and was subject to cancellation and readjustment depending upon the nature and behavior of the Jewish people in the desert.

Just as today's travel insurance policies exclude coverage for certain activities or destinations deemed to be excessively dangerous, so did this Divine form of travel insurance allow for exclusions, changing circumstances and forbidden behavior and actions. There is no type of insurance that is so all-encompassing as to obviate the behavior of the insured customer.

And this Divine form of travel insurance, like its human counterpart, contains conditions that must be met by the insured for the policy to have any validity. And that basically is the story of the Jewish people during their 40-year sojourn in the desert of Sinai. If one violates the conditions of the policy, then obviously the policy itself will be called into question and become invalid.

Rabbi Yosef Farhi CHASING SPARKS

One of the greatest challenges for the spiritual Jew is that after we get inspired, we try to live according to our inspiration for a day or two, but then nothing changes. When bringing up children, when inspiring our students, we face the same dilemma. We get them inspired to grow, but not long after, we see that nothing has really changed. In a world where success is measured only by results, this can be defeating, depressing and discouraging.

It seems that all we are doing is just chasing sparks. Why then is inspiration so important?

In Parashat Pinhas, the Torah tells us that the sons of Korah did not die. Originally, they had advised their father to dispute Moshe's authority; during the rebellion, however, they had "thoughts of Teshuva in their hearts". (They stood up for Moshe, despite the dispute. Yalkut Shimoni 752) So, G-d made them a "high place" in Gehinom, a place where they were able to safely stay. (Rashi 26;11)

This is interesting. King David compiled the Sefer Tehillim from the prayers of ten great personages: Adam Harishon. Malki Tzedek. Avraham. Moshe. Heyman. Yedutun. And the three sons of Korah. (Bava Batra 14b) How did King David know what the sons of Korah said if they were in Gehinom, underground? Who ever heard them?

Rashi explains that Asir, Elkanah, and Aviasaf, the sons of Korah, did not die; but rather, they said Shira there, and that is where they made their Mizmorim. Then, Korah's sons went up from Gehinom, and Ruach Hakodesh was bestowed on them. (Rashi Tehillim 42)

Why is it that just thoughts of teshuva were powerful enough to save them from the harsh punishment they deserved?

This is a fundamental principle of Judaism, that a single thought of Teshuva can turn a Rasha into a Tzaddik, even if the Rasha did not go through the cleansing process of Teshuva. לע יל תשדוקמ תא ירה (Kiddushin 49b) If someone just says that he is a tzaddik, even if he is, in fact, a Rasha, it can make him into a tzaddik. How does that make sense? The person has not yet gone through the process of Teshuva!? All he did was have a thought to be better!? Because a single thought is the first part of the process of connection with G-d, of becoming a Tzaddik. Allow me to explain.

There are two parts to Teshuva. There is the relationship part of it. Then, there is the cleansing part. There is rekindling the relationship, and there is wiping away the sins. The two are not interdependent. And this is the reason why, before being judged on Rosh Hashana, before blowing the Shofar, we recite the Psalm of the Shofar blowing, that is attributed to the sons of Korah. רומז חרק ינבל חצנמל (Tehillim 47). From them we learn the power of a single thought of spiritual inspiration, at a time that we need it most. That just a thought, alone, of wanting to be a Tzaddik, is enough to save a person from the worst punishments he deserves, even without going through the whole cleansing process!

How can we understand this concept, that just a thought alone can make you into a Tzaddik? This sounds so foreign to judgmental thinking!

Here is how the Zohar begins its very first words. Rabbi Chezkiah said: "It is written: כְּשׁוֹשְׁנָה בֵּין הַחוֹזִים 'As a rose among the thorns, so is my beloved amongst the daughters'. (Song of Songs 2:2) Who is the rose? This refers to 'Knesset Yisrael' ... Just as a rose has in it thirteen petals, so, too, Knesset Yisrael has within her thirteen paths of mercy which surround her from all sides. (Zohar I, Intro. pg. 1)

What does this mean, that we, the Jewish Nation, are compared to roses?

למנצח על-ששנים לבני-קרח... רחש לבי דבר טוב
LaMenatzeach on roses to the sons of Korah... My heart whispered a good thing...(Tehillim 45) The Yalkut Shimoni asks why the sons of Korah were likened to a rose. Weren't they more like thorns, and did they not deserve to be burned like the rest of the thorns that they were a part of in their dispute with Moshe!? ... The sons of Korah wanted to give G-d from the golden pans full of incense. But G-d said, I do not need your gold and silver. I do not want your incense of abomination. Instead, I want roses! The sons of Korah said, We are the roses! To which G-d answered, "You have won over me! (ינתחצנ) This is the meaning of חרק ינבל מינוש לע חצנמל (Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 747).

What does a rose exemplify? Universally, it relays the message, "I thought about you." In the big world, results, bottom line, dollars and cents are what counts. It does not make a difference how you think, because everything is based on technical considerations. In relationships, though, thoughts are what make the relationship or break the relationship. There is a golden rule in relationships. People do not remember what you do for them. People only remember how you make them feel. You make people feel better by thinking about them, and showing that you thought about them.

Roses are used to improve relationships, because relationships are dependent on what place the relationship has in your thoughts. G-d told the sons of Korah, I do not need anything from My Children. All I want is that you will be thinking about Me! All I want is roses!

The comparison of Klal Yisrael to a rose conveys the idea that even if we are surrounded by thorns, or evil deeds, in the darkest moments of our lives, we find a way to think about G-d, we look for inspiration. Why are the Jews compared to roses? The rose is unique in that no matter how fiercely the wind blows, no matter how much it is pricked by thorns, it always finds a way to be facing upwards; so, too, the Jewish people. No matter what type of exile we go through, or what situation we find ourselves in, our hearts are always in line with our Father in Heaven. (Vayikra Rabba Acharei M. 23)

Sometimes, we are just chasing sparks of inspiration, but that's fine. Because that is precisely what makes Klal Yisrael the roses we ultimately are.

KEY TO SUCCESS

Korah was a wise man. What did he see that led him to do such foolishness, to argue with Moshe? His eye confused him. He saw great descendants going forth from him. Shmuel, who was considered of equal importance to that of Moshe and Aharon, as it says in Tehillim, "Moshe and Aharon, in his Priesthood, and Shmuel, upon calling His Name". Etc. Twenty-four families of Kohanim, all of whom prophesized with Ruach Hakodesh. He said, Is it possible that this greatness will come forth from me, and I will remain silent? (Midrash; Rashi)

Why does the Midrash use the words ותעה וניע, his eye tricked him. Why not simply say, he made a mistake? And why is it in singular form, וניע, his eye, and not ויניע, his eyes?

I believe the answer is the following. When someone is able to see with one eye, he cannot recognize a clear depth of vision. His sight can be only two-dimensional. G-d created us with two eyes, so that we can see 3D, that we can recognize depth. When a driver can see only from one eye, he needs to be careful to properly calculate distances in his field of vision. (Try it. Close one eye, and hold two items as far away from you as you can, one slightly closer than the other. Are you sure you can tell which is closer?) Korach's eye tricked him, keeping him from recognizing how long he needed to wait to go up to the next level of spirituality. He miscalculated how far he was from his spiritual dream.

So many men have fallen short of becoming great simply for not having had the strength to wait, for having mistakenly calculated how much patience they need. But the key to everything great is patience. Patience is bitter, but its fruits are sweet. You get the chicken by waiting for the egg to hatch, not by smashing it open.

...

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The First Populist

The story of Korach has much to teach us about one of the most disturbing phenomena of our time: the rise of populism in contemporary politics. Korach was a populist, one of the first in recorded history – and populism has re-emerged in the West, as it did in the 1930s, posing great danger to the future of freedom.

Populism is the politics of anger.[1] It makes its appearance when there is widespread discontent with political leaders, when people feel that heads of institutions are working in their own interest rather than that of the general public, when there is a widespread loss of trust and a breakdown of the sense of the common good.

People come to feel that the distribution of rewards is unfair: a few gain disproportionately and the many stay static or lose. There is also a feeling that the country they once knew has been taken away from them, whether because of the undermining of traditional values or because of large scale immigration.

Discontent takes the form of the rejection of current political and cultural elites. Populist politicians claim that they, and they alone, are the true voice of the people. The others, the existing leaders, are sharing out the rewards among themselves, indifferent to the suffering of the masses. Populists stir up resentment against the establishment. They are deliberately divisive and confrontational. They promise strong leadership that will give the people back what has been taken from them.

In 2017, support for populist parties throughout Europe was running at around 35 per cent, the highest level since the late 1930s. Parties of the Far Right gained power in Poland and Hungary, and made a strong showing in Austria, France and Holland. In Southern Europe, in countries like Spain and Greece, populism tends to be of the Left. Regardless of what form it takes, when populism is on the rise, tyranny is around the corner.[2] Human rights are dispensed with. The public grants the strong leader exceptional powers: so it was in the 1930s with Franco, Hitler and Mussolini. People are willing to sacrifice their freedom for the promised utopia, and to tolerate great evils against whichever scapegoat the leader chooses to blame for the nation's problems.

The Korach rebellion was a populist movement, and Korach himself an archetypal populist leader. Listen carefully to what he said about Moses and Aaron: "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3).

These are classic populist claims. First, implies Korach, the establishment (Moses and Aaron) is corrupt. Moses has been guilty of nepotism in appointing his own brother as High Priest. He has kept the leadership roles within his immediate family instead of sharing them out more widely. Second, Korach presents himself as the people's champion. The whole community, he says, is holy. There is nothing special about you, Moses and Aaron. We have all seen God's miracles and heard His voice. We all helped build His Sanctuary. Korach is posing as the democrat so that he can become the autocrat.

Next, he and his fellow rebels mount an impressive campaign of fake news – anticipating events of our own time. We can infer this indirectly. When Moses says to God, "I have not taken so much as a donkey from them, nor have I wronged any of them" (Num. 16:15), it is clear that he has been accused of just that: exploiting his office for personal gain. When he says, "This is how you will know that the Lord has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my own idea" (Num. 16:28) it is equally clear that he has been accused of representing his own decisions as the will and word of God.

Most blatant is the post-truth claim of Dathan and Aviram: "Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness? And now you want to lord it over us!" (Num. 16:13). This is the most callous speech in the Torah. It combines false nostalgia for Egypt (a "land flowing with milk and honey"!), blaming Moses for the report of the spies, and accusing him of holding on to leadership for his own personal prestige – all three, outrageous lies.

Ramban was undoubtedly correct[3] when he says that such a challenge to Moses' leadership would have been impossible at any earlier point. Only in the aftermath of the episode of the spies, when the people realised that they would not see the Promised Land in their lifetime, could discontent be stirred by Korach and his assorted fellow-travellers. They felt they had nothing to lose. Populism is the politics of disappointment, resentment and fear.

For once in his life, Moses acted autocratically, putting God, as it were, to the test: "This is how you shall know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works; it has not been of my own accord: If these people die a natural death, or if a natural fate comes on them, then the Lord has not sent me. But if the Lord creates something new, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up, with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol, then you shall know that these men have despised the Lord." (Num. 16:28-30). This dramatic effort at conflict resolution by the use of force (in this case, a miracle) failed completely. The ground did indeed open up and swallow Korach and his fellow rebels, but the people, despite their terror, were unimpressed. "On the next day, however, the whole congregation of the Israelites rebelled against Moses and against Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the Lord'" (Num. 17:6). Jews have always resisted autocratic leaders.

What is even more striking is the way the sages framed the conflict. Instead of seeing it as a black-

and-white contrast between rebellion and obedience, they insisted on the validity of argument in the public domain. They said that what was wrong with Korach and his fellows was not that they argued with Moses and Aaron, but that they did so "not for the sake of Heaven." The schools of Hillel and Shammai, however, argued for the sake of Heaven, and thus their argument had enduring value.[4] Judaism, as I argued in Covenant and Conversation Shemot this year, is unique in the fact that virtually all of its canonical texts are anthologies of arguments.

What matters in Judaism is why the argument was undertaken and how it was conducted. An argument not for the sake of Heaven is one that is undertaken for the sake of victory. An argument for the sake of Heaven is undertaken for the sake of truth. When the aim is victory, as it was in the case of Korach, both sides are diminished. Korach died, and Moses' authority was tarnished. But when the aim is truth, both sides gain. To be defeated by the truth is the only defeat that is also a victory. As R. Shimon ha-Amsoni said: "Just as I received reward for the exposition, so I will receive reward for the retraction." [5]

In his excellent short book, *What is Populism?*, Jan-Werner Muller argues that the best indicator of populist politics is its delegitimation of other voices. Populists claim that "they and they alone represent the people." Anyone who disagrees with them is "essentially illegitimate." Once in power, they silence dissent. That is why the silencing of unpopular views in university campuses today, in the form of "safe space," "trigger warnings," and "micro-aggressions," is so dangerous. When academic freedom dies, the death of other freedoms follows.

Hence the power of Judaism's defence against populism in the form of its insistence on the legitimacy of "argument for the sake of Heaven." Judaism does not silence dissent: to the contrary, it dignifies it. This was institutionalised in the biblical era in the form of the prophets who spoke truth to power. In the rabbinic era it lived in the culture of argument evident on every page of the Mishnah, Gemara and their commentaries. In the contemporary State of Israel, argumentativeness is part of the very texture of its democratic freedom, in the strongest possible contrast to much of the rest of the Middle East.

Hence the life-changing idea: If you seek to learn, grow, pursue truth and find freedom, seek places that welcome argument and respect dissenting views. Stay far from people, places and political parties that

don't. Though they claim to be friends of the people, they are in fact the enemies of freedom.

[1] The best recent treatment is Jan-Werner Muller's short book, *What is Populism?*, Penguin, 2017. See also the important paper, *Populism: The Phenomenon*, Bridgewater associates, 22 March 2017.

[2] See James Snyder, *On Tyranny: 20 Lessons from the 20th Century*, Bodley Head, 2017.

[3] Ramban, Commentary to Num. 16:1.

[4] Mishneh Avot 5:20.

[5] Pesachim 22b.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And Moshe was very wroth and he said to Hashem: Do not turn to their offering". (16:15)

This seems to be an entirely unnecessary request. Why would Hashem honor the offering of those that rebelled against Moshe the servant of Hashem? But we must note that the usual 'Vayiktsof' ("And he was angry"-Shemot 16:20, Vayikra 10:16, Bemidbar 31:14) is not used. Because 'Vayiktsof' expresses a superficial anger which Moshe displayed externally. However, 'Vayichar' expresses genuine distress and wrath because these opponents were men of worth and good deeds. Moshe actually feared lest Hashem might respect their offering.

We see that Korach and his party were sterling personalities. And here we learn an invaluable lesson.

Not as generally thought by most men, that if they would be convinced of the truth by open miracles, they would surely be perfectly righteous men. But here we see that even more than the test of belief in Hashem and in His management of men's lives, there is still a more difficult test of overcoming one's own character traits such as jealousy and the desire for glory.

Korach saw all the miracles. He stood on the shore of the Sea as it was split and sang together with the entire Nation. At Har Sinai he heard the Voice of Hashem and had shouted "We shall do and we shall listen!" together with all Israel.

Belief was no obstacle. But the test of Envy and the desire for Glory, this was overpowering.

Quoted from "Journey Into Greatness" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller Z'TL