

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT KORACH · VOL. 7 NO. 39

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

MODEM DOWN

“And Korach took...” (16:1)

“\$500 for a pair of *tefillin*! You must be joking! 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!”

“Open up your computer. What would happen if I took an X-acto razor 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 regarding *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 Torah scrolls still needs a *mezuzah* on the doorframe. “Yes,” said Moshe. Korach started to mock him by saying, “If a single *mezuzah* scroll affixed to the doorframe of a house is enough to remind us of Hashem, surely a house full of Torah scrolls will do the job!”

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.” According to Korach, the *mitzvot* are only symbolic, devoid of absolute performance parameters. Moshe’s answer was that the Torah’s *mitzvot* 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...

AN ARGUMENT FULL OF HOLIES

“Because the entire congregation is holy” (16:3)

Korach’s rebellion is the first movement in the history of our people to attempt to reform the Torah of Moshe. Korach and his followers did not deny that the Torah was Divine. How could they?! They also had stood at Sinai! Instead, they tried to cripple Moshe’s author-

ity by claiming that “since the entire nation heard Hashem speak at Sinai, we are all holy and capable of interpreting the Torah ourselves.” Korach’s view that each individual has the ability to determine how the Torah should apply to him became the precedent for attack by many groups that deviated from the Torah throughout history.

This is a grave error. We need to follow the path of Torah as transmitted from Sage to Sage in each generation. The Torah is so complex that those who are not fully immersed in its teachings can easily distort it. We must always rely on the Sages in each generation to explain and apply the Torah in our era.

DEEPLY HUMBLE

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

“You know our Rabbi? Boy, does he love to talk! He talks and talks! Talk! Talk! Talk! He must’ve been vaccinated with a phonograph needle. Why, he’d rather talk than eat! He loves hearing the sound of his voice. If he says something once, he’ll say it again. He repeats himself over and...Are you listening to me? I said, he repeats himself...”

Ironically, when criticizing a *tzadik* (righteous person), his enemies will pick on the area of the *tzadik*’s greatest perfection, and the area in which they themselves are the most lacking. Thus, Korach accuses Moshe: “Why do you exalt yourselves,” even though the Torah testifies that Moshe was “the humblest of all people on the face of the earth.”

Moshe’s humility was genuine, emanating from his very essence. Thus, he made no attempt to *appear* humble, and in fact did not appear to be particularly humble.

Korach, however, whose whole essence was based on external appearance, seemed to the people to be tremendously righteous, while in fact he was the one who sought greatness for himself.

Sources:

Modem Down - Midrash, Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

An Argument Full of Holies - Adapted from Rav Moshe Feinstein

Deeply Humble - Sfat Emet and The Pschiske Rav

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. 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.

HAFTARAH

This *haftara* contains Shmuel's chastisement, "Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken..." (12:3-4), echoing Moshe's words in *parshat Korach*, "Not one donkey have I taken from them." (*Bamidbar* 16:15)

Another connection between this *haftara* and the *parsha* is Shmuel's lineage: Shmuel was a scion from the house of Korach, and his prominence was compared to both that of Moshe and Aharon (*Tractate Rosh Hashana* 25b).

The *haftara* begins with the nation's gathering at Gilgal to anoint King Saul and proclaim him King. However, Shmuel chastises the people for requesting a king, as it might indicate deterioration of the unique spiritual level of the nation that needed no king to live in harmony. His rebuke ends with a miracle where he calls out to G-d for rain in a mid-summer day, and a rain-storm begins.

THUNDERSTORM

To demonstrate G-d's "displeasure" at their desire for a king, Shmuel performs a miracle, bringing a thunderstorm in the middle of the wheat harvest. Why this particular sign?

The people didn't see anything wrong in requesting a king, as the

SHMUEL I 11:14 - 12:22

Torah itself commands the appointing of a monarch (*Deuteronomy* 17:15). Yet, the Torah commands appointing a king because a king has power to enforce law and order and to maintain observance of Jewish law. Shmuel reproached them as they were then on a very high spiritual plane, and thus they didn't need a king. On the contrary, appointing a king now might bring the secular influence of neighboring nations, as it would change Israel's unique legislative and social structure to be like that of any regular nation in the land. Appointing a king should be put off until Torah observance is lax and needs enforcement; then it is acceptable despite its negative ramifications. Shmuel demonstrated this by the rain-storm, as rain is a blessing only when it falls in season; but not in the middle of the harvest.

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General Editor:

Rabbi Moshe Newman

Editorial & Web Advisor:

Rabbi Reuven Laufer

Associate Editor:

Rabbi Reuven Subar

Contributing Writers:

Weekly Daf, Love of the Land:

Rav Mendel Weinbach

Insights, Overview:

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Web Production: **Michael Treblow**

Produced and Designed by the Office of Communications
Rabbi Eliezer Shapiro, Director

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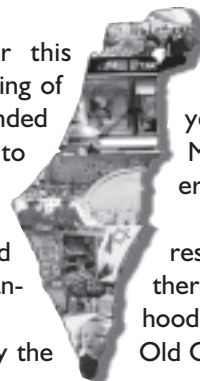
LOVE OF THE LAND

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

MISHKENOT SHA'ANANIM

The name chosen for this neighborhood, "Dwelling of Tranquility," was intended to convey a sense of security to the brave souls prepared to move outside the walls of the Old City of Jerusalem and face the danger of Arab bandits.

It was founded in 1860 by the



English Jewish philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, thirteen years before the building of Meah Shearim, and had few takers for its free apartments.

Its pioneering produced results, however, and by 1888 there were ten Jewish neighborhoods west and northwest of the Old City of Jerusalem.

WHEN SELF-INCRIMINATION WORKS

If orphans of a creditor wish to collect their debt from the orphans of the borrower on the basis of a note recording the loan, they must take an oath that their father never told them that the loan was paid and that they found nothing amongst their father's records indicating that it had been paid. Regarding this ruling of the *mishna*, Rabbi Zerika cited the qualification made by Rabbi Yehuda: The need for such an oath only arises when the borrower's heirs claim that their father already paid; should they claim, however, that he *never borrowed*, the creditor's heirs can collect without an oath.

This is so, explains the *gemara*, because anyone who claims he never borrowed is essentially admitting that he never paid. Since the debtor's heirs' claim of never having borrowed is refuted by the debt note presented by the creditor's heirs, it is now considered as if they have admitted non-payment, and there is no longer a need for the oath.

A person's admission of debt is sufficient to obligate him. Although regarding issues of corporal or capital punishment a person is *not* believed to incriminate himself, in respect to monetary obligations the rule is that "a person is believed regarding himself more than a hundred witnesses."

An interesting application of how he is believed *more* than witnesses is provided by the Sage Rava (*Mesechta Shavuot 41b*) in the case of a man who denied ever having borrowed from the creditor making a claim against him. Witnesses came to testify that he had indeed borrowed but had *repaid* the loan. Rava ruled that the borrower must pay, since his claim of never having borrowed is equivalent to an admission of non-payment, and this admission has *more* power than the testimony of witnesses who say that he *did* pay.

This *gemara* is cited by Rabbi Aryeh Leib Hakohen (*Ketzot Hachoshen 34:4*) as a challenge to the approach of the Mahari Even Lev in explaining why a person is believed to obligate himself although he is considered a relative to himself and therefore disqualified as a witness. His explanation is that we do not actually *believe* his self-incriminating testimony, but rather view his admission as a self-imposed obligation to make a *gift* to the claimant. This might apply, argues the Ketzot, when one actually admits owing something. But when one claims that he never borrowed, he shows no indication of an interest in making a gift. His own conclusion is that there is a special Torah law requiring us to believe a person's self-incriminating testimony in monetary matters even more than that of many witnesses.

• Ketubot 88a

PRE-TEEN MARRIAGE

One side of a major halachic debate on the issue of pre-teen marriage receives an indirect support from the final *mishna* of the ninth *perek* of Ketubot.

The debate is over whether it is proper for a father to marry off his son before he is of Bar Mitzvah age. It revolves around a *gemara* (*Mesechta Sanhedrin 76b*) which recommends marrying off sons and daughters "close to their period of adulthood." While we are well aware that the Torah empowered a father to marry off his daughter at even the youngest age, he has no such power regarding his son. Rambam therefore concludes that the age referred to here is above the age of Bar Mitzvah, age 13. Below that age, he writes, such a marriage is considered the equivalent of promiscuity.

Rashi and Tosefot, however, both define the period mentioned in the *gemara* as before the age of Bar Mitzvah (Rashi writes a half-year or year before). One of the supports Tosefot cites for his view is a *mishna* which discusses the status of a *ketubah* which was written for the marriage of a boy before Bar Mitzvah age. Whether Tosefot's intention was to sanction the marriage of a boy only within the year preceding Bar Mitzvah or even earlier is a matter of debate between the later halachic authorities, with some contending that, while the *mitzvah* mentioned in *Mesechta Sanhedrin* is limited only to that last year of childhood, the *right* to marry off a boy so that it not be considered promiscuity applies to an even earlier age.

It should also be pointed out that no mention is made in halachic literature as to the frequency of pre-teen marriages for boys. In regard to girls, however, Tosefot (*Mesechta Kiddushin 41a*) notes that even though the *gemara* discourages a father from exercising his right to marry off his daughter until she reaches adulthood (*Bat Mitzvah*) and is mature enough to give her consent, it was customary in their days to arrange such childhood marriages. The reason was that the perilous economic situation of Jews in exile made it urgent to marry off a daughter when the father could afford a dowry, and not to postpone an opportunity that might not recur.

• Ketubot 90a

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

Korach's followers attacked Moshe with their mouths, making fun and provoking rebellion. Their sin was compounded by their lowly spiritual stature compared to that of Moshe. They were punished measure for measure: The ground — the "lowly of lowlies" — opened its "mouth" and swallowed them.

• Abarbanel

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 Hashem'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, Hashem 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.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

How would you answer this question on the Parsha?

Farrel Werner <fwernieone@aol.com> asked:

Dear Rabbi,

What did the people mean when they told Moshe, "You killed Hashem's People?" (17:6) Obviously, Moshe didn't kill them. Korach's followers died by Divine decree: The ground swallowed some and fire from Heaven killed the others?

Dear Farrel Werner,

Those who complained reasoned as follows: Although the first-born lost their rights as *kohanim* (priests), they should retain the right to serve as *levi'im*. Thus, they felt the test Moshe had proposed, that his detractors offer incense, was unfair. The incense offering was designated specifically for *kohanim*, so it wasn't a true test for those who deserved at least to serve in the lesser capacity of *levi*.

• Based on Ramban

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.org.il with your questions on any Parsha!

ASTRO NOT?

From Irene in Arlington, Virginia
<ibleiwei@fcc.gov>

Dear Rabbi,

My 5 year old son dreams of becoming an astronaut someday, and I'd like to encourage him that Jewish children can grow up to be what they want to be. But how will he keep Shabbat in space? For example, how does one determine the start and end of Shabbat in space? If the space program is unable to give Jewish astronauts a complete "day off" on Shabbat, what type of activities will he be able to perform? Are fewer activities considered forbidden because, in space, so much more needs to be done just to maintain one's safety?

Dear Irene,

When I was five years old and people asked me what I want to do when I grow up, I replied that I want to work in a zoo. People laughed at me, and pointed out that nice Jewish boys are doctors, lawyers, and accountants, not zookeepers. Besides, they said, it's not feasible to work in a zoo if you're Jewish, because you would need to work on Shabbat; the animals need looking after on Shabbat, too.

Well, lo and behold, I now work part-time in a zoo, albeit not as a zookeeper. Instead, my job is to teach about Torah perspectives on the animal kingdom, which happens to be more fulfilling than cleaning out paddocks. Since I am working in education, Shabbat isn't a problem. The message that I take from this is that you should never crush a child's dreams; they can come true in ways that you don't expect.

Shabbat in space wouldn't necessarily be a problem — many space programs are only a few days long, and could operate during the week. And maybe things will be different twenty or thirty years from now, and robots will be able to

operate the spacecraft on Shabbat.

Regarding when Shabbat would be observed in space, one opinion is that Shabbat in space is observed according to the times in the place of "blast off," e.g., Cape Kennedy. Most of the laws for Shabbat in space haven't been ruled upon yet, as the questions have not yet been asked. Maybe your son can become the first "Space Rabbi!"

• Thanks to Rabbi Nosson Slifkin for preparation of this answer (www.zootorah.com)

POP'S MUSIC

From: "Dancing With the Jews"
Email@Withheld

Dear Rabbi,

I should probably be ashamed for not knowing this, but what is the literal translation of the popular Jewish wedding song, "Hava Nagilah?" Come to think of it, they play this song at every wedding, Jewish or not. So what does "Hava Nagilah" mean?

Dear "Dancing With the Jews,"

Don't worry the real meaning is really deeper than it seems, even if you understand the words! "Hava nagilah" — Come! Let's rejoice; "V'nismicha" — and be happy; "Hava N'ranana" — Come! Let's celebrate; "Uru Achim" — Arise, Brothers! "B'lev Somayach" — with a happy heart!"

Hava Nagilah was composed by Klausenberg *chassidim*. Initially it signified attainment of the attribute of *simcha*, happiness. Everyone wants to be happy, but many times we just can't seem to escape our everyday difficulties to stay that way for very long. To counter this, the *chassidim* stress preparing oneself to rise above these difficulties and keep one's spirits high. Later, the young Zionist movement adopted the song *Hava Nagilah*, and it eventually spread to signify celebration for Jews all over the world.

PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous "Ohrnet" features

Re: Ohrnet Shavuot/Naso:

You recently wrote about the "messianic" significance of the number 666. I had a thought a while ago; let me share it with you: The *gematria*-value of six (each Hebrew letter has a numeric value) is the letter "vav." "Vav" is transliterated as "w" (think of the word "Washington," for example, spelled in Hebrew). So "666," or "vav vav vav," could be transliterated as "www" — the WorldWide Web! Can the Web or Internet be said to possess any messianic potential? Better sign me... "Anonymous!"

• Name@Withheld

Ohrnet responds:

There's only **Won Word Which** describes your comment: **Wow!** And, to answer your question, yes, one would expect the web to be harnessed for the good in the messianic times.

In Kings I (10:14) we see how King Solomon received 666 talents of gold annually.

• Frank Ringsmuthm, Waite Park, Minnesota <fringsmuth@astound.net>

Set Your Sights on Our Site:

The Ohr Somayach Website is very interesting...I hope to learn from this...it shows me how little I know of my own heritage....

• Ruth Foon, Birmingham, Michigan <devra1234@aol.com>

Assume that others are noble, and try to understand their actions in that light. Otherwise, you may end up feeling like a big...

DUMBO

“She looks like an elephant! She is...she is an elephant!” The little girl could hardly believe her ears. Had the blaring noise of the wedding band skewed her hearing? Or were two nearby ladies engaged in the most animated ridicule of a young woman sitting a few tables away?

“Just look at her nose,” said the one well-dressed wedding guest to the other. “She’s an elephant, if I ever saw

one.” The other woman nodded.

The young eavesdropper turned red. She quickly rose from the table and walked over to her mother’s table.

“Momma,” she said, “see that girl sitting over there? She looks like a very nice girl, doesn’t she?”

“Why, yes,” said the mother. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I heard some ladies talking about her...they said such not nice things...they said she’s an elephant!”

The mother’s face lit up in a smile. “Dear, I know that girl, and those women aren’t making fun of her. That’s her name. Her name is Elifant, Rhonda Elifant!”

• Submitted by “Sheindle Freida”

YIDDLE RIDDLE

WHO KNOWS 20?

In the song at the end of the Pesach Seder we describe the significance of the numbers from one to 13 as they relate to Jewish life and thought: “Three are the fathers, Four are the Mothers...12 are the Tribes of Israel...” What about the next 13 numbers? And after those? What significance do they have in Jewish tradition? This week, we challenge you:

“Who knows 20?” Write to info@ohr.org.il

Reader responses to previous numbers:

Who knows 17? The Menorah in the Temple was 17 handbreadths high, corresponding to the 17 words of the first verse of Bamidbar.

• Rosalie E. Moriah

“Shmoneh Esrei L’Chupah,” lit. 18 years (and then) to the marriage canopy. Keep up the great work you do!

• Mrs. T. Ansh, Jerusalem

18 is life/chai.

• R. Feiner <rebeccafeiner@hotmail.com>

Who knows 18? 18 rings in one’s backbone, 18 laws of *treife* were taught to Moshe. Who knows 19? 19 brachos (blessings) in the *Shemonei Esrei* (silent *amida* prayer). 19 days in the year that *Hallel* is recited

• Ephraim B. Bryks <reb95@juno.com>

Who knows 18? I do! 18 is the last number of the “Who knows” questions (please).

• JDnR144@aol.com

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

RAMBAN

16:21 The Sin of the Congregation
16:29 The Sin of Datan and Aviram
16:30 A New Creation
18:7 The Gifts of the *Kehuna*
18:20 Inheritance of the *Kehuna*

SEFER HACHINUCH

389 Defined Roles
394 Service of the *Levi'im*
395 *Ma'aser Rishon* (The First Tithe)

SFORNO

16:15 Nullifying Atonement
16:32 Why Also Their Possessions