

O H R N E T

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

BLUE HEAVEN

“And Korach took...” (16:1)

Nothing is more desired or desirable in this world than peace. And yet nothing seems more elusive. All people want peace. Everyone wants to sit under his fig tree, secure that no one will come and take away his family, his house or his possessions. And yet almost since the beginning of time, peace has been the most elusive dream of mankind. Why is world peace such a difficult, a seemingly impossible, thing to achieve?

If there’s one Hebrew word that everyone knows, it’s *shalom* — peace. However, *shalom* has another function in Hebrew: It is also the Jewish (and Arab) form of greeting.

The Talmud tells us that *Shalom* is one of G-d’s names, and thus it is forbidden to wish someone “*Shalom*” in a bathhouse. Why should we greet each other with “*Shalom*,” which is one of G-d’s names? Why don’t we just say “Hi!”

*Shalom* means “perfection,” “completion.” This world is a creation which is inherently lacking. That’s the way it’s meant to be. The whole purpose of this world is to be a place which strives to arrive beyond itself.

The word for “earth” in Hebrew is *aretz* which comes from the root *rutz* — “to run.” This world is always running, moving towards its completion — but it can never complete itself. Its completion can only come from outside itself. It can only come from Above. The word for “Heaven” in Hebrew is *shamayim*. This can also be pronounced *shamim* — the plural of the word “there.” This

world is always “running” to “there” — outside and beyond itself.

This world contains many wonderful things — truth, kindness, love, mercy — but perfection isn’t one of them. And that is why Hashem’s name is *Shalom*, Perfection. Hashem is the Perfection of all the lacking of this world. Only Hashem can bring this world to its ultimate “there.”

It should be clear then that those wish to bring the world to perfection from within themselves make a grave and fundamental error. History is littered with the victims of those millennial and utopian movements that seek to replace G-d with Man.

What does this all have to do with this week’s Torah portion?

The Midrash tells of a bizarre encounter between Moshe and Korach:

Korach took 250 Jewish leaders and dressed them in four-cornered garments colored all in *techelet* blue. They stood in front of Moshe and asked: “Does a four-cornered garment all of *techelet* blue require *tzitzit*-fringes, or is it exempt?” Moshe replied “It requires *tzitzit*.” They began to laugh at him. “If one thread of *techelet* can exempt a four-cornered garment of any other color, surely a garment which is totally *techelet* blue should be able to exempt itself!

What does this strange sartorial encounter teach us?

Take a look out the window. If the sky is clear, look as far as you can into the distance. What do you see when you look to the farthest “there” that can be? Endless blue.

In Hebrew, that color is called *Techelet*. *Techelet* is the

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In Honor of the Bar Mitzvah of

ELI LAUFFER

Parshat Korach

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

**K**orach, 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.

## HAFTARA

**T**his *haftara* contains Shmuel's chastisement, "Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken..." (12:3-4), echoing Moshe's words in this week's *parsha*, "Not one donkey have I taken from them." (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 rainstorm begins.

## THUNDERSTORM

**T**o 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 rainstorm, as rain is a blessing only when it falls in season; but not in the middle of the harvest.

## I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

**K**orach'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

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ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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color we see when we look at the world without any outside interruption, without any object interposed between our eyes and infinite distance. *Techelet* is the color of “there.”

*Techelet* is related to another Hebrew word with an almost identical spelling. That word is *tachlit* which means “end” and “purpose.” *Techelet* is the end of sight, of all perception. *Techelet* is seeing all. And it is also its purpose — its *tachlit*.

## A THREAD OF BLUE

**T**he Torah commands that when wearing a four-cornered garment we attach four threads to each corner. These threads are called *tzitzit*. The word *tzitzit* is connected to the Hebrew word meaning “to peek” (*l’hatzitz*). At what are we

peeking when we look at the *tzitzit*?

Three of the threads of the *tzitzit* are white, the fourth is supposed to be the color of *techelet*. The *mitzva* of *tzitzit* is a *mitzva* of sight. We have to see them. When we look at the blue of the *tzitzit*, we see a reflection of the blue of the Heavens, the blue of *Shamayim*, the place of all the “theres.”

## THE BLUE AND THE WHITE

**O**nly one of the strands of the *tzitzit*, however, is blue; the other three are white.

If the end of all sight is the color blue, the beginning of all sight is white. Take the three primary colors, red, green and blue, and paint them on a wheel. Spin the wheel and what

will you see? White. White is the root of all color, where seeing begins.

White is the beginning of sight; *techelet* is the end, the purpose, of sight.

The world view of Korach was: “We have the technology” within ourselves to perfect the world. We don’t need to run anywhere. This world can be *Shamayim*; here can be there.

Korach was the first to make the utopian mistake of thinking that within humanity is all that is needed to perfect the world.

Perfection, however, can come only from G-d. Only He who makes peace in the heights can bring peace to us and all Israel.

# PUBLIC DOMAIN

Comments, quibbles and reactions concerning previous “Ohrnet” features

### Re: Mother’s day (Ohrnet Shelach):

A student once asked Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, *zatzal*, whether it was proper to observe Mother’s (or Father’s Day) Day. Rabbi Weinberg responded that the issue is whether dedicating one day of the year for giving special honor to one’s mother detracts from the rest of the year’s honor. Do children say to themselves that they’ve exempted themselves for the whole year now or not? Rabbi Weinberg felt that in a society where honor for parents is at a low point, Mother’s Day is a nice idea. But for observant Jews, Rabbi Weinberg felt (although he wasn’t sure) that it may have a detrimental effect in lessening their honor the rest of year.

• Baruch Leff

I heard from a mashgiach of a well-known yeshiva that he endorses a *shmiras halashon* program in which the participants accept upon themselves to refrain from speaking *lashon hara* (forbidden speech) for certain hours of the day;

the argument that this minimizes the importance of the prohibition during the other hours is rejected. Perhaps the same would apply to mother’s day.

• Name Withheld

### Re: Absolute Love of Cartoon History:

I absolutely love your cartoon-history:

<http://ohr.edu/judaism/concern/concer00.htm>

This wonderful characterization is just so easy to look at and understand. I hope I find more sites like Ohr.edu. May you be blessed in your fine work.

• Lillian

### More Absolute Love:

Your “Ask the Rabbi” email is the first one I read each time it is posted. I am only sorry that it is not posted more frequently. I absolutely love it!

• Brenda Bronstein

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## NO AGENT FOR SINNING

If a man appoints an agent to perform an act of *kiddushin* (marriage) or *gerushin* (divorce) on his behalf, we consider the agent's action as that of his sender. The concept of agency extends as well to transactions and even to certain *mitzvot*.

When it comes to committing sin, however, the general rule is that "one cannot be an agent for sin." Rather, it is the agent, and not his sender, who bears responsibility for the sin because we challenge him with the charge "should one listen to the words of the master (Hashem) or to the words of the disciple (the sender)?"

One of the two exceptions to this rule is the penalty which the Torah imposed on a thief who slaughtered the ox or sheep that he stole. The usual penalty of double compensation for a stolen item is increased to four for a sheep and five for an ox if the thief magnified his guilt by selling or slaughtering the stolen animal. If this slaughtering was done by the thief's agent, the thief nevertheless bears responsibility for his act and must pay the greater penalty.

What if the thief slaughtered the animal on Shabbat?

The *gemara* (*Mesechta Bava Kama 74b*) states that a thief who slaughters a stolen ox on Shabbat is exempt from the extra monetary penalty because he has simultaneously committed a sin carrying the death penalty and we apply only the more severe penalty.

But what if his agent slaughtered the animal on Shabbat for him?

In such a case, the thief has not committed the sin of Shabbat violation carrying a death penalty, so he is held responsible for the slaughtering which he commissioned and must pay the extra penalty.

In codifying this last ruling, Rambam (*Laws of theft 3:6*) writes that the agent was commissioned to slaughter the animal and the agent did so on Shabbat. Mishneh Lamelech, one of the leading commentaries on Rambam, infers from his language that the thief is only held responsible if he did not commission that the animal be slaughtered specifically on Shabbat. The Shabbat violation then does not relate to him and has no impact on his financial obligation. Should the thief, however, commission the agent to slaughter on Shabbat specifically, we can no longer consider the agent as acting on the thief's behalf because of the aforementioned general rule that one cannot be an agent where sin is involved. In such a case he will not be considered an agent even in regard to the slaughtering penalty.

• *Kiddushin 43a*

## FOR BETTER OR WORSE

A man proposes *kiddushin* to a woman and informs her that he is giving her a silver coin which she subsequently discovers is really gold. Or he informs her that he is a poor man and she subsequently discovers that he is wealthy.

Rabbi Shimon's position is that if the opposite were the case and she received less than she was promised, the *kiddushin* would be invalid. But where she received a more precious metal or a more prosperous husband, we do not consider her to have been duped to her detriment and the *kiddushin* is valid.

The other sages, however, disagree. They contend that any deviation from his presentation renders the *kiddushin* invalid. Their approach, which is the one established as halacha, begs an explanation. Why should a woman be disappointed in receiving gold instead of silver, or a rich husband instead of a poor one?

In regard to the first question of precious metals, Tosefot already points out that the woman may have an ornament of silver which requires some silver to complete it, and she may therefore prefer silver to gold despite the higher commercial value of the latter. From the *gemara* it appears that even Rabbi Shimon considers gold to silver to be a deviation for this reason.

But what about wealth for poverty?

Rambam, in his commentary on our *mishna*, offers a general explanation for the position of the Sages by suggesting that perhaps she prefers the lesser thing or situation for some reason. Since he does not speculate as to what those reasons might be, he leaves us to use our imagination as to why a woman might rather marry a poor man than a rich one.

On a purely human level, she might be wary of a radical change in her lifestyle as a result of "marrying money." On a religious level, the great teachers of ethics have pointed out that wealth, and the pride which usually accompanies it, is a greater danger to spiritual security than poverty, so that a woman who consented to marry a poor man may not want a rich one.

• *Kiddushin 48b*

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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 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.edu](mailto:kasha@ohr.edu) with your questions on any Parsha!

## PRAYER IN THE TWILIGHT ZONE

**From: Michelle in Los Angeles**

Dear Rabbi,

Why do we say prayers from a prayer book? Why can't each person just say their own prayers?

Dear Michelle,

Great question! I'd like to reply by sending you an essay written by a friend, Doron Kornbluth .

The television screen zooms in on an old man. The narrator tells us that he is an unhappy individual who would love nothing more in life than to sit and read. Unfortunately for him, he has a nasty wife who berates him constantly. His boss yells at him. People honk at him. He has been so crushed by the years of abuse that, at this point, even the slamming of a door makes him cringe. The stress is too much. The noise is too much. No one will leave him alone. Finally, he can't take it anymore. "Can't everyone just go away?" he exclaims angrily, "just go away!"

This man is an employee of the Library of Congress. One day, when he is working in the deepest vaults of the library, many floors below ground level, he somehow gets locked inside the vault and falls asleep. When he wakes up and manages to extricate himself from the vault and return to the main office, he notices that he is alone. Moving into the large reading room, he notices the same thing. He walks out into the street and again not a soul is to be found. With time, he realizes that he is the sole survivor of a nuclear war in which the rest of the humanity has been "vaporized."

Disturbed? Bewildered? Scared? Actually, the man is happy: He realizes that his prayers have been answered. He now has all the time in world, with absolutely no distractions and no one to bother him. He can sit and read...and read...and read. With the energy and enthusiasm of a child, he peruses the book stacks of the greatest library in the world and makes large piles of what will happily occupy the rest of his life. When he takes the first book down in order to open it and begin reading, a small smile forms on his face. His dream has come true — he can spend his remaining years alone, reading.

As he turns to find a place to sit, the camera slowly zooms in on his face. Within moments, his glasses accidentally slide off his face, fall to the ground and smash into a thousand pieces. The narrator tells us that without them, he is blind. It dawns on him and us that our protagonist will never be able to see — or read — again. He is stuck in the Library of Congress, helpless and completely alone.

In a very different venue than the remarkable 1960's Twilight Zone episode I've just described, picture the following. A woman confides to her therapist that although she married the exact man she wanted to, he was the wrong man. Noticing the confused look on the therapist's face, she

explains:

"I wanted nice and I got it. I wanted fun and I got it. I wanted a sense of humor and I got it. I wanted good-looking and I got it. I wanted a guy with a good job and I got it. I wanted outgoing and he is definitely outgoing."

"So what is the problem?" the therapist asks.

"Fun, outgoing, a good job, and even 'nice' simply aren't what I really need. I was young — I didn't know what to look for. I need someone who wants to grow. I need someone I can talk to. I need someone deep. I need someone who will inspire me. I thought I knew what I wanted, but I didn't know what I needed."

The truth is that often we really don't know what is good for us. In both stories above, the characters involved wished for something, got what they wanted, and yet ended up considerably unhappier than they had originally been!

Let us consider our wants for a moment. Most of us want more money, but perhaps it will sow the seeds of materialism and envy. We want a promotion, but maybe it will end up taking away family time and harm our kids. We want to get married, but perhaps we're simply not ready.

What should we really want? The difficulty in answering that question may explain something about Jewish prayer. Those new to Judaism are sometimes put off by the traditional standardized prayers. "Why can't I just pray to G-d in my own words?" they ask.

The answer is that we can and should pray to G-d directly, in our own words, beseeching the Almighty for what we deeply desire. One rabbi I know often mentions that his mother prayed throughout the day: "Please, G-d, let me get to work on time," "Please, G-d, keep my children healthy," "Please, G-d, let my challahs come out well..." Even within the traditional prayers themselves, there are places for individuals to insert their private petitions. Such from-the-heart prayer gives expression to our fears and longings, and, perhaps more importantly, helps create a personal connection to G-d, which is the basis of all true spiritual growth.

But we don't always know what we need. Perhaps this is why, about 2500 years ago, the Jewish sages instituted formalized prayer. While the Matriarchs and Patriarchs had the greatness and clarity to form their own prayers, later generations needed help focussing on what is really important. If left to my own devices, my prayers might end up sounding more like a loan application than the pleas of a Jew speaking with his Creator to gain meaning and purpose. Without the structure of traditional prayers, would I regularly ask for peace, wisdom, or brotherhood — all cornerstones of Jewish life and religion?

It is crucial to pray to G-d personally in order to deepen our private connections to G-d, and feel His presence in our struggles, victories and failures. And yet, with modern lives often lacking clarity, the traditional prayers are vital as well, because they help us realize what we *should* want.

Doron Kornbluth edited *Jewish Matters* and co-edited (with his wife Sarah Tikvah) *Jewish Women Speak*. ([www.jewishmatters.com](http://www.jewishmatters.com))