



# Carnegie Shul Chatter

June 10, 2021



## Korach in a Nutshell

**Numbers 16:1–18:32**

Korach incites a mutiny challenging Moses' leadership and the granting of the kehunah (priesthood) to Aaron. He is accompanied by Moses' inveterate foes, Dathan and Abiram. Joining them are 250 distinguished members of the community, who offer the sacrosanct ketoret (incense) to prove their worthiness for the priesthood. The earth opens up and swallows the mutineers, and a fire consumes the ketoret-offerers.



### What Makes a Leader?

It is hard being the leader of a nation. Moses learns yet again in this week's parshah just how hard that can be. Not everyone is happy with their leader, no matter how good a job he or she does. And, over time, people may want to change their leader. And often the leader does not want to give up his leadership, and trouble may develop.

The United States has been a country that has always prided itself on its peaceful and usually seamless leadership changes every four or eight years. This year, change did not occur as seamlessly as has been the norm, yet still, we did it better than most countries.

Change in leadership in Israel has also been a difficult proposition over the recent past. In March, the country had its fourth national election in the past two years. And for a while it looked like there might need to be a fifth. But now it appears that a new government, led by Yamina's Naftali Bennett and Yesh Atid's Yair Lapid, will be sworn in on Sunday.

Every week we say a prayer for the welfare of the State of Israel. Let us pray this week that the transition of power in Israel goes peacefully and without major incident.

A subsequent plague is stopped by Aaron's offering of ketoret. Aaron's staff miraculously blossoms and brings forth almonds, to prove that his designation as high priest is divinely ordained.

G-d commands that a terumah ("uplifting") from each crop of grain, wine and oil, as well as all firstborn sheep and cattle, and other specified gifts, be given to the kohanim (priests).

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*A few weeks ago we read about the Children of Israel's dissatisfaction with the manna that they received from heaven. Last week, ten of the twelve spies came back to Moses with lies about their scouting expedition to the Promised Land. And now, this week, we read about Korach and his insurrection against the leadership of Moses.*

*I think if I were Moses I would have packed my bags and gone off to find a new gig.*

*But, thankfully, I am not Moses, and Moses continued to follow God's instructions and lead the people through the wilderness.*

*Here is an interesting article about Korach from [sdjewishworld.com](http://sdjewishworld.com):*

## **Korach Thought Only of Himself; Are Others Like Him Today?**

*By Michael R. Mantell, Ph.D.*



In this week's parasha, a troubling one on the surface, we encounter a full-fledged political rebellion. Political? Hmm. Perhaps more psychologically provocative and personal than simply political.

Someone once observed, "When we judge or criticize another person, it says nothing about that person; it merely says something about our own need to be critical." Indeed, the world has plenty of critics. We'd benefit from having more encouragers in the world. But apparently Korach didn't get that.

What was Korach openly displaying about himself when he was criticizing Moshe and Aaron? I believe he was saying, "It's all about me." He demonstrated what self-absorption and evil are all about. Korach could have been a vehicle of Hashem's words. But he certainly was not.

The parasha begins with "Vayikach Korach," and Korach took. He was a taker, not a giver. Just what did he take? Rashi tells us that he took himself "to a different side" than his cousins. The Ramban says he took evil counsel into his heart, "eytzah." The Ibn Ezra tells us that Korach

took “other people.” The Sforno tells us that he took 250 princes of Israel into his conflict with Moses. Korach took counsel and created division according to the Targum Yerushalyim and the Onkelos. Entitlement, taking power for himself, a lust for power. It all leads to disaster.

Korach demonstrates that, despite privilege, one can disturb oneself with continued envy, and not live peacefully. He was an unhappy taker. The psychology of envy is such that it prevents one from enjoying what she or he has. While our main goal is to bring pleasure to Hashem, we can also assure that we can enjoy the achievements and attainments of others free of envy.

Rav Avraham Twerski zt”l, teaches from the Talmud, “One who seeks to disqualify another, projects his own defects upon him.” (Kiddushin 70a). He explains, “When we become involved in a dispute, when we become angry, we lose all sense of logic and strike out against others indiscriminately.”

The founder of Chassidism, Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer, the Baal Shem Tov, brought the analogy of a mirror. The world, he observed, is like a mirror. When we behave critically towards others, we are simply seeing our own reflections. And the Chofetz Chaim, who elucidated the laws of loshon hara, teaches that we learn from Moses’ behavior that we are obligated to avoid disputes, even if we believe we are justified. Can you imagine what our world would look like if we actually behaved this way and not just talked about this? This is what we mean by the idea that everything should be done l’shem shamayim, “for the sake of heaven.”

Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, zt”l, in Kol Dodi on the Torah teaches that, “Hashem entrusted Korach with great wealth to use for Hashem’s service, but Korach made the mistake of thinking he earned it himself. By contrast, a wealthy person who acknowledges that his wealth really belongs to Hashem and regards himself as nothing more than the administrator of a trust fund will find his wealth to be a true blessing. If he diligently and faithfully oversees the fund in accordance with the wishes of Hashem, its true Owner, he can be assured a handsome return in this world and the world-to-come.”

Pirket Avot teaches, “Any dispute where the disputants are arguing toward the name of heaven, these are the disputes that will endure. Any dispute where the disputants are not arguing toward the name of heaven, these disputes will not endure. What is an example of a dispute where the disputants argue toward the name of heaven? Hillel and Shammai. What is an example of disputes where the disputants do not argue toward the name of heaven? Korach and his minions.”

Korach and his 250 grumbling followers teach us how easy it is to criticize leaders, especially with a seemingly innocuous argument, “You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Eternal is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the Eternal’s congregation?” But it’s not an argument l’shem shamayim. Next time we are about



to speak out, which at times may seem fully appropriate, let's ask ourselves which standard we meet in order to create more peace in the world. And we might also consider learning from the response of Moses.

You see, the Baal HaTanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, teaches that Moses "first fell on his face for self-reflection, to see if in truth he had any arrogance. After he thoroughly checked himself, and found no trace of pride, he understood that Korach was not a messenger from On High, but was a divider [of people], and so he answered as he did."

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, was once asked about taking sides in an issue going on in a shul. Can you imagine people on different sides of an issue in a shul? Rabbi Feinstein answered that his getting involved in providing an answer could place lives in harm's way, even leading to death, and he would be required to consult with the Sanhedrin's 71 elders, the only ones allowed to answer such a dire question. Since that was not possible, Rabbi Feinstein held that it was not wise to get involved in the issue. Disagreements, from Korach to family matters, to a shul board, are better handled with great care and genuinely deep sensitivity.

Many have a piece of Korach within them, within us. Through Social Media, many seek self-aggrandizement, self-glorification, and self-promotion. Indeed, becoming "influencers," seeking "likes," glory at the expense of others, are all too common in our current instant online world. When we do so, we erroneously believe we "are better than others." Instead we actually lower ourselves...and cause harm to others. By following the example of Moses, once again, seeking to understand another before responding, being willing to fall on our faces so to speak, we might just be hearing the words of Hashem.

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