

(Dvar Torah continued from the front page...)

law - or, perhaps, any challenge to the leadership of Moses - is off the table. However, this does not appear to be true. Argument is part of the lifeblood of Judaism. If you open the complicated pages of the Talmud, you will be met with layers and layers of dispute and disagreement. If you roll through the Torah, you will even find people arguing with God - and sometimes winning those arguments. If it's acceptable for a person to challenge even God, then *kal va-homer* - all the more so - it must be acceptable for a person to challenge Moses.

Two points of comparison are helpful in understanding which challenges to authority are legitimate and which are not. The first is found in Parashat Pinchas: the five daughters of Tzeloḥad approach Moses and the Israelite leadership and point out a gap in the inheritance laws. The original Torah laws of inheritance don't account for situations like theirs, in which there are no sons to inherit their father's property. In this case, Moses realises that the five women have a point, and seeks clarification from God. God then alters the law so that in such cases, daughters can inherit. This is a public challenge to the justice of the law, and it is taken seriously first by Moses (who takes the question to God), and then by God (who shifts the law to account for their case).

The other potential point of comparison with Korah is brought explicitly in Pirkei Avot 5:17, in which a comparison is made between the *maḥloket* (the disagreement) of Korah and the *maḥloket* of Hillel and Shammai. Hillel and Shammai are early sages renowned for their disagreements, and whose schools of students continued that tradition of disagreement for generations. According to Pirkei Avot, the dispute of Hillel and Shammai was *maḥloket l'shem shamayim*, dispute for the sake of Heaven, which Korah's dispute was decidedly not. When Hillel and Shammai argued, their primary purpose was to find truth. Korah, on the other hand, was not interested in truth; he was interested in power. The question about holiness and equality was a tool that he used - and ironically, it was a tool that he used in order to gain the very power to which he disputed Moses having access.

The problem with argument is not its very existence; the problem is the cause of argument and what types of arguments we bring to the table. If we argue with one another for power, no matter how prettily we dress it up, the Torah teaches us that it will end in destruction. But if our disagreements come from a place of truth-seeking (like Hillel and Shammai) or justice-seeking (like the daughters of Tzeloḥad), then we have the opportunity to build a just society together instead of tearing one another, and ourselves, down.

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## Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center Conservative Yeshiva

# TORAH SPARKS Korach

June 27, 2020 | Tamuz 5 5780

Annual |(Numbers 16:1-18:32)) Etz Hayyim, p. 860

Triennial |(Numbers 16:1-17:15)) Etz Hayyim, p. 860

Haftarah | (Joshua 2:1-23) Etz Hayyim, p. 877

### Parashat Korah - For Heaven's Sake!

**Rabbi Natasha Mann**

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This week we read of a dramatic political challenge - hopefully only in the Torah, and not also in the newspapers. Parashat Korah begins with the challenge of Korah and his company to the leadership of our teacher Moses. Korah and his company approach Moses with a challenge rooted in Torah itself: if the whole congregation is holy and therefore who is Moses to put himself above the community?

Korah might have a point. There is an interesting conversation to be had about the nature of power and leadership. Nonetheless, the narrative does not move in the direction of addressing Korah's question - instead, we see Korah and his company issued a test, which concludes by way of violent divine intervention.

If you never read another page of Torah, or never opened the founding books of rabbinic literature, you might come to think that any challenge to the

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## D'var Haftarah: Seeking Intimacy with God

*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, From the Archives*

Samuel is deeply ambivalent about the monarchy. In the opening verses of this week's haftarah (11:13-4), he shares in the rejoicing over the anointment of Saul as Israel's first king. In the very next verse, at the beginning of a new chapter, he exhibits extremely bitter feelings over the establishment of the monarchy. What has raised Samuel ire? He seems to have viewed the establishment of the monarchy as a betrayal of his leadership over the people and more significantly as a betrayal of God, the only "real" king.

This animosity was deeply felt and Samuel was not short on expressing it. He took the people to task for seemingly implying in their decision that his behavior somehow led to this decision and had them confirm that his hands were indeed "clean". But utmost in his mind, despite his affirmation of the monarchy, was the sense that the people had betrayed God in their decision to appoint a king that they were brazenly choosing a human being as their leader over God. There also seem to be strains in his contempt over the people's opting for local deities instead of God even though God had provided for their wellbeing.

In this very strained situation, Samuel was not acting exclusively as his own advocate. He was acting as God's representative in his role as a prophet, warning the people of Israel that they had gone astray. His message, however, was twofold and this is perhaps why his message is so significant. He not only chastised the people for their betrayal, he also presented them with an option for restoring their relationship with God: "But Samuel said to the people: 'Have no fear. You have, indeed, done all of those wicked things. Do not, however, turn away from the Lord God, but serve the Lord with all your heart. Do not turn away to serve worthless things, which can neither profit nor save but are worthless. For the sake of His great name, the Lord will never abandon His people, seeing that the Lord undertook to make you His people.'" (12:20-22)

God, in contrast to the false deities which sometimes attract people, does not abandon people. He is always there for those who seek His closeness. There is no dead end in one's relationship with God. This, in itself, is an important recognition. Still, it is up to us to seek this intimacy. It is up to us to nurture our relationship. God is always there for this to happen.

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## All Are Equal, But Some are More Equal?

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva, Faculty*

Text: Bamidbar 16:1-3, 9-14

*(1) And Korah son of Izhar...son of Levi and Dathan and Abiram... (3) assembled against Moshe and Aaron and said to them, "you have too much! For all the community, they are all holy, and in their midst is the LORD, and why should you raise yourself up over the LORD's assembly?" (8) And Moshe said to Korah, (9) "listen sons of Levi: Is it too little for you that the God of Israel divided you from the community... to bring you close to Him (10)... And you will seek priesthood as well?! (12) And Moshe sent to Dathan and Abiram and they said, "(13)Is it too little that you brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to kill in the wilderness that you should also lord over us?! (14)Nor have you brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey ...*

- What seem to be the goals of Korah, Datan and Abiram? Are they the same? Whose interests are they looking out for?
- Vs.. 9-10: What is Moshe pointing out to the Levites in the group? How does it fit Korah's argument in v.3? Why do you think that a person who already receives privileges feels entitled to more? Is he interested in the rest of the people receiving the same privileges? Why?

Commentary: Samson Raphael Hirsch on Bamidbar 16:8

*Since Moshe approaches Korach and Datan and Aviram separately, it seems that the revolt was composed of two groups with two different goals... Korah, the Levite, stood up for the rights of his tribe which were supposedly trampled by the supremacy given to Aaron. Korah, the supposed "knight" of equality for all, found great pleasure in the extra privileges that were granted to him and his tribe. Would he have been consistent in his approach he would have given them up. But he did not make do with those, and under the guise of equal rights for all, he demanded also the honor of priesthood... Datan and Aviram... were upset about Moshe's stately position, and they joined Korach assuming that when the people will lose faith in the Godly origin of Moshe's position, his standing among the people will be ruined...*

- What type of issues brought about the revolt, according to Hirsch? Are any of these causes that would bring about an uprising today?
- Suggesting various issues points to a general mood rather than a single, focused cause that brought about the revolt. What do you think made the revolt possible at this point?