

relentless ‘politics of personal destruction’ attacks are getting under his skin big time. Korach, who slandered and mocked and accused his way into the role of spokesman for the discontentment crowd, has shouted his incendiary ‘*Rav lachem* – i.e. *Enough of you!*’ - slogan so loudly and so often that he has turned large segments of the community of the redeemed into a raging lynch mob. In a frenzy of raw emotion, hundreds of people who once followed Moshe wide-eyed through the Sea of Reeds and up the ascent of Sinai to meet with the Creator of the Universe are suddenly ready, at Korach’s word, to chunk it all, and tear down everything and destroy everyone in their path ... all in the name of what Korach has deceived them into thinking constitutes ‘equity’, ‘fairness’, and ‘social justice’.

What is Moshe – a man well-known to have an easily-triggered temper and a rap sheet to go with it supposed to do? How would you expect him to respond? For that matter, how would you, yourself respond if you and a close member of your family were getting attacked in such a vile manner? The last time Moshe got all up in his emotions this badly he handled it pretty well. He went immediately to the place of prayer and worked through the toxicity with the Holy One. See **Numbers 11:10-15**. But not this time. This time Moshe is not about to *wait upon the Holy One and be of good courage*. This time he wants to give it back to Korach and his cohorts *tit for tat*. This time his offended heart is set on vengeance. He is not about to wait around for the Holy One’s counsel or directive this time. This time he is going to do things his way. This time he wants to repay ‘*evil*’ in kind. Two can play at this politics of personal destruction game, you know! In the words made famous by American Country and Western balladeer Willy Nelson:

*Don't cross him, don't boss him, he's wild in his sorrow!
He's ridin' and hidin' his pain.
Don't fight him, don't spite him – just wait til tomorrow,
and maybe he'll ride on again!*⁴

Moshe has had all his flesh and pseudo-intellect can take. His patience is exhausted. His *shalom* has slipped away, his *simchah* is nowhere to be seen, and his face – well ... let’s just say his face is definitely not shining with the glory of the Manifest Presence of the Holy One anymore! The whining and ranting of the ‘*Rav Lachem*’ movement led by his close kinsman Korach has finally pierced his spiritual armor and triggered his sense of outrage. He is now officially all up into his fleshly emotions. He is completely caught up in the drama of the moment. Because this has gotten personal to him, his anger is boiling. It is Levite against Levite, and brother against brother – no holds barred. His flesh is itching to go all *vigilante* on Korach and his company the way he did with the taskmaster back in Egypt. He is aching to defend his honor, to fight fire with fire, and to return evil for

⁴ This is the chorus to the ballad ‘The Red Headed Stranger’, which was written by Arthur ‘Guitar Boogie’ Smith in 1954, and later performed by Willy Nelson on an album named after the tune.

evil. He hasn't *been this out-of-control with anger* since ... well, since the bloody aftermath of the golden calf debacle! Hmmm. I am not getting a particularly pleasant feeling about where this might be leading – how about you?

Didn't the Holy One just tell Moshe to take a 'time out', and separate himself from the Community – and let Him deal with it [in Hebrew the verb the Holy One used to describe what He was going to do once Moshe separated himself from the situation was *kalah*, meaning 'bring to completion'⁵]? See **Numbers 16:21**. So why didn't Moshe do what the Holy One said? Did the prophet really think that he had become more intelligent than the One Who called and trained him? Did he think he had become more righteous? More just? More understanding and wise? More compassionate and kind? More honorable? If not, then why, when the Holy One told Moshe to have everyone go AWAY [literally, up from] the tents of Datan and Aviram, did Moshe do the exact opposite? Why did he take a delegation of elders and make a beeline directly TOWARD those tents? What is going on in Moshe's head and heart? Hmmm. Perhaps actually living out this '*sh'ma* lifestyle' to which we are called in real time, in the face of real challenges, is as much a challenge for Moshe as it is for the rest of us!

Okay – So ... Have It Your Way!

Welcome to another day of Wilderness testing! Welcome to the next level of difficulty in our '*Yish'mael's World*' virtual reality game! Gird up your loins, because the test that is coming will be the toughest one yet. Something dark and sinister has been happening to us in this strange land – and today it is going to come to a head. The plague of negativity that is running rampant in our camp is going to be dealt with - in an eye-popping, jaw-dropping manner. The negativity pouring forth from our hearts, our minds, our countenances, and our mouths, and that is having a subversive effect upon our identity, our mission, and our destiny, is going to bear its inevitable fruit - and get harvested. And when the smoke clears ... well, let's not get ahead of ourselves, shall we?

Far away are the days at Sinai when "*according to all that the Holy One had commanded Moshe so the children of Israel did all the work. Then Moshe looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the Holy One had commanded, just so they had done it. And Moshe blessed them. Exodus 39:42-43*". The glorious days of hungering and thirsting after the Will of the Holy One – and offering our hearts, hands, talents and energies to the common goal of making our Camp the point-of-the sword beachhead for His Heavenly Kingdom's invasion of earth – have faded into a swirling vortex of dissatisfaction, complaint, criticism, offense,

⁵ For the illustrative 'first usage' of the verb *kalah* see Genesis 2:1-2, where it is used to describe what the Holy One did to the Heavens and the earth, and everything in them, during the course of the six days of Creation Week.

division, calamity and despair. Without realizing it we have let our hearts grow hard. Without intending to we have let our necks grow stiff. Day by day, negative thought by negative thought, self-centered complaint by self-centered complaint, we have let our love for the Holy One – as well as our love for the people He has placed in our sphere of influence – grow cold. We have let our mouths spew toxic streams of criticism and negativity instead of gentle fountains of blessing. We have let our light grow dim. Our salt has lost its flavor. Our oil has not run out – it has just grown stale and turned rancid.

The sweet fragrance of worship we used to exude has turned into a foul stench of self-righteousness. Our pool of healing water has turned into a cesspool of toxic waste. As a result these are not golden days of joy, hope, life, love, and fruitfulness such as we experienced at Sinai. These are, instead, the long, hot days of summer. Our glorious mission to be a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation has been forgotten. It is all about ideology now. Everybody suddenly has their own idea of ‘social justice’. Everybody now seems to be spouting the bullet points of this or that political, economic, and/or environmental theory. Everybody is suddenly convinced that his or her pet religious doctrine is the only one that has any validity. As a result, it is now *every man for himself*. *Selah*, Dear One – welcome to the brave new world in which we find ourselves!

***Welcome to the Tents of the Easily Outraged,
and to the Seat of the Self-Righteously Scornful***

Today’s installment of the great civil war drama begins outside the tents of Korach’s friends Datan and Aviram. These two brothers from the tribe of Reuven have joined Korach in spewing harsh words of *lashon hara* against Moshe and his brother Aharon. Moshe has summoned them like schoolboys to ‘his turf’ – the Mish’kan - to give an account. When Datan and Aviram refused to be summoned in this way, Moshe was not happy. Not content to wait for instructions from or an intervention of the Holy One, he decided to push the confrontation envelope even further. If they would not come to his tent, he would take the conflict to theirs. Please note, however, that Moshe did not go alone, or try to work out the matters in conflict privately. He chose to make a public show of force. He assembled the elders of each tribe and marched like an army to the area where Datan and Aviram were camped. This heavy-handed leadership approach just seemed to prove Korach’s point. There was no way Datan and Aviram were going to back down in the face of this bullying. They stepped out of their tents and took a stand. Their wives, their sons, and each of their grandchildren then come to their aide, taking up defensive positions alongside them. After all, a man’s tent is his castle. Moshe had pushed them in a ‘last stand’ corner, first by publicly disrespecting them, and now by bringing a mob of historically stone-happy vigilantes [see Numbers 14:10] to their

tents so as to put their wives and children in danger as well. Is *this* who we have become? Is *this* what we were called out of bondage, rescued from Pharaoh's army's assault, and entrusted with the Torah to do? How did Moshe – or the elders – or anyone - think this was a good idea? How did anyone think this was going to end well?

What a mess! What an embarrassment! Which is worse – lawlessness or lovelessness? Tweedledum ... and Tweedledee. And what was it all over? Just WORDS! That, Beloved, is the power of *lashon hara*. That is the kind of havoc wrought by political, ideological, philosophical, moralistic, and religious rhetoric. That is the power of public criticism, of culture-canceling, of virtue-signalizing, of sign-waving, and of slogan-chanting. Heaven help us! Heaven help us indeed!

Playing the blame game at such a time as this is the ultimate folly. Perhaps you believe that Datan and Aviram were at fault; perhaps you think Korach was to blame; perhaps you are wondering if part of the responsibility, at least for the immediate crisis, might rest with Moshe's hot temper and his proven tendency to over-react. But look yonder – fists are raised. Jaws are set. Blame is irrelevant now. The camp of the Redeemed is poised precariously on the brink of civil war. One side consists of circling wolves; the other of growling dogs. Shalom is shattered. All that matters now is the law of the jungle. Adrenalin is flowing. Fists are clenching. Hackles are rising. Skin is crawling. Kinsman and kinsmen stand nose to nose, eye to eye. Everyone involved wants it to be known that there will, on their part, be no backing down, no diplomacy, no negotiation, and no compromise. There is no middle ground. They want to hear nothing more from each other – and they have nothing left to say either. Brute force will determine who will live – and who will die.

The inflammatory rhetoric of Korach – and the flaring up of their own stubborn pride - have caused everyone present to forget that they have far more in common, that binds them together, than they have differences that tear them apart. Communion has given way to controversy. Community has devolved into confrontation. Divine calling has degenerated into name-calling. Love has disintegrated over labels. Shared mission has blown up over who should get to do what in the camp. Here we go again. Kayin – where is your brother? Sons of Ya'akov – here comes *that dreamer!* But before you speak one more insult or accusation, or take one more step toward confrontation, please remember and consider the implications of this teaching by the Rabbi of all rabbis: ***Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand.*** Matthew 12:25.

So ... where do we go from here? Something is going to have to be done about the anti-shalom flood of rampant discontent and raging dissension in the camp. But *what?* At *whose word?* According to *whose will?* Pursuant to *whose plan* and *agenda?*

***Differences of Opinion on Political Theory, Ideology, and Theology?
This Too is a Critical Test!***

The people we are reading about in Torah are not fictional characters – they are real men. They have mothers, fathers, and near kinsmen. They have wives. They have children. There are *lives* – and *generations* – indeed entire *bloodlines* - at stake. Imagine you were Moshe. Imagine the Holy One had not advised you what to do in regard to Datan and Aviram – not yet anyway - but that He had, long ago, clothed your words with the weight of His glory. Imagine that He had entrusted to you the power to bind and loose things upon the earth. Imagine that life and death were in the power of *your* tongue. What would you do? Would you *bring Heaven* to bear on the situation – or would you wreak havoc on those you perceive to be giving aid to your *theological enemies?*

Before you answer, take a quick look around. Datan and Aviram have not taken up arms. There have been words, insults, and epithets passing back and forth, but no physical injuries have occurred - yet. There have been no actual assaults - yet. Not a single rock has been tossed - yet. Not a single punch has been thrown - yet. So ... what exactly is the big deal? Consider what exactly Datan and Aviram *have* and *have not* actually done. First let's consider what they *HAVE* done. They have *thought vain and foolish thoughts*. But ... haven't we all? They have openly *associated with a trash-talking demagogue*. But trash-talking demagogues are what makes the political world go around – it is called 'mobilizing' or 'rallying' the base'. Think about some of the negative things you have said – or listened with relish to others say – about people in power ... and let whoever is without sin among us cast the first stone! But back to Datan and Aviram. Like 99.99% of the people in the camp, these men have *murmured* and *complained*. Have you? Datan and Aviram appear to have bought into some – it is not clear how much - of Korach's egalitarian mantra *all the witness throng is holy, every one of them, and the Holy One is among them*.⁶ But then again, in a slightly different context, *has not Moshe* – who is you in this exercise, remember – said a lot of the same things? See Numbers 11:29, where Moshe said to Y'hoshua: *Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the Holy One's people were prophets and that the Holy One would put His Spirit upon them!*

Neither Datan and Aviram – or their wives and children, who are now at risk of

⁶ See Numbers 16:3.

mob violence – have not killed anyone. To our knowledge, they have not even violated the Sabbath or eaten *treif* – much less raped, assaulted, or kidnapped anyone. They have not taken up arms against anyone, nor encouraged anyone else to do so. They have not shed a single drop of innocent blood – human or animal. They have not taken hostages. They have not made any demands. They have not engaged in any ostensible form of idolatry. They have not committed fornication or adultery. They have not dishonored their father or mother – at least in any direct and obvious way. They have not stolen – or even coveted, as far as we can tell - any one’s material possessions. They have not sworn falsely. They have not mispronounced the Divine Name – or substituted for that Name in conversation a title used in the pagan world. They have not erected a pagan symbol in their tent. Everything they have done could be described as just standing up for what they believe, right? This could be considered just a little peaceful political protest, couldn’t it? What ever happened to free speech, freedom of belief, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association, anyway? What has our camp become – a totalitarian regime? Do not people have rights of dissent anymore? Who is in *the right* here, and who is in *the wrong*? Do not these things matter?

But wait – is it possible that there is something more important for people of the Kingdom – who are called to be a Kingdom of Priests and Light to the Nations - than who is ‘right’ and who ‘wrong’? Is there something more important in the Community of the Redeemed than an individual’s right to believe – and say – what he thinks and how he feels? Oh my! Could it be that all this opinion and attitude and ‘individual rights’ stuff we hold so dear is really just a component of the flesh that is supposed to die this week? Keep the counsel of the Bible’s wise men in mind as you read further in the Korach narrative:

*A soft answer turns away wrath;
but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

[Proverbs 15:1]

*The wisdom of a man makes him slow to anger;
and his glory is to overlook a transgression.*

[Proverbs 19:11]

Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry; for anger resides in the bosom of fools.

[Ecclesiastes 7:9]

*Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor,
and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice;
and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another,
even as God in Messiah forgave you.*

[Ephesians 4:31-32]

and

*Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;
for the anger of mortal men cannot produce the righteousness of God.*

[James 1:19-20]

There are, of course, many other passages that reinforce – and even broaden - this mandate. But I think you get the idea!

How Did the Holy One Instruct Moshe To Handle This Controversy? Was it With a Show of Force? Was it With a Trial by Fire?

How about Moshe – is he *sh'ma*-ing the Holy One's instructions? Or is he doing it 'his way' – *i.e.* as he deems right in his own eyes? Let's read a little further into the narrative: After Moshe does the opposite of what the Holy One told him to do, and marches down to the tents of the rebel leaders anyway, Torah tells us:

*... Datan and Aviram came out and stood at the door of their tents with their wives,
and their sons, and their little children.*

*And Moshe said: **By this you will know that the Holy One has sent me
to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will.***

***If these men die naturally like all men,
or if they are visited by the common fate of all men, then the Holy One has not sent me.***

***But if the Holy One creates a new thing, and the earth opens its mouth
and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the pit,
then you will understand that these men have rejected the Holy One.***

[Numbers 16:28-30]

Hmmmmn. Where did all that come from? No 'soft answer' to turn away wrath anywhere in sight! Moshe has not spoken *shalom*. He has not offered either an olive branch or an opportunity of *t'shuvah*. He has instead issued a *dire warning*. What is even more appalling is that he has issued that warning in the Name of the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. Moshe's words cause our minds eye to see graphic images of earthquakes and sinkholes and whole families of people with whom we walked through the Red Sea dry shod - and who worked right alongside us to build the *Mish'kan* - being *swallowed up by the earth* and *buried alive*.

Did the Holy One really tell Moshe to say these things, this way – or was he reacting in his wounded flesh to the source of his offence and lashing out in raw emotion at those by whom he was disrespected and threatened? All the text of Torah tells us the Holy One has said is to get away from these men's tents, so He could handle the situation His way.

What's Up With That, Moshe?

The narrative of Torah tells us plainly that Moshe's response to the actions of Datan and Aviram was to get *angry*. Indeed, the text tells us he was not just a little irritated or frustrated, but was 'very angry'. Let's see – who else has Torah told us was 'very angry'? First there was *Kayin*. See **Genesis 4:5**. That did not turn out well. Next came Levi, Sh'mon and Ya'akov's other sons, who became 'very angry' after Dinah was abducted by Shechem. **Genesis 34:7**. That did not turn out too well either.

Later, Shaul [Saul] will be ‘very angry’ when he hears the women in Israel singing how *Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands*. **I Samuel 18:8**. But now it is Moshe that is ‘very angry’. This does not bode well. This is *lo tov*. We have, after all, seen Moshe angry before. And it really did not end well for anyone – including him. Truly, *let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man cannot produce the righteousness of God*. **James 1:19-20**.

As the result of what Moshe is going to do in anger the Covenant Community is about to experience eight straight hours of *Holy terror*. No enemy army is going to attack us. No pharaoh’s chariots will threaten us. No Amalekite arrows or Amorite javelins or Midyanite swords will assail us. Hordes of demons will not be what strikes fear into our hearts and causes our strength to fail. What is going to happen is that at Moshe’s word unspeakable plagues are going to be released on real people in the camp of the Redeemed⁷. We will be thrown back into the ultimate default of Holy Writ – that no matter what men do, in His Name or in their own, *God works all things together for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose*. At least there is always that. It takes some working out. It requires some extremely painful processing. It sometimes – especially in this case – involves an unthinkable quantity of weeping and gnashing of teeth – mostly by innocent women and children and fathers and mothers. But it eventually works out for the good – if we can wait that long, and if the rage and guilt does not add us and our households to the list of casualties in the meantime. Perhaps that is why, at Sinai, at the heart of the *Kedusha Discourse*, the Holy One said, with the emphasis of His Name:

*You are not to go about as a talebearer among your people;
nor are you to take a stand against the life of your neighbor:
I am the Holy One. You are not to hate your brother in your heart.
You are to approach and try to reconcile with your neighbor,
and you are not to bear sin because of him.
You are not to take vengeance,
nor are you to take up or carry any grudge against the children of your people,
but you are to love your neighbor as you yourself [have been and are loved]:
I am the Holy One.
[Leviticus 19:16-18]*

Offenses of the flesh cannot be allowed to rule the day. The authority to bind and loose should not be exercised in anger. Mouths that have been anointed to speak words that carry the weight of the Holy One’s glory should not speak curses and judgments upon their own enemies. The stakes are too high.

⁷ See I Peter 4:17: “... *the time [has come] for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*”

Now, Dear Ones, perhaps you can see why the flesh of redeemed men and women absolutely must die. Opinions and beliefs generated by men's fallen minds and spoken through unclean lips cannot be considered a sufficient reason for hating, attacking, or hurting those who think and speak them. Men's belief systems and doctrinal statements are all so thoroughly permeate with folly that there is nothing to be gained by even arguing over them. – much less throwing around curses, accusations, or punches over them. When will we understand that our mission on earth is not to correct other people's doctrine? Our mission is to *stay at shalom and rest in the Holy One, stay true to the Covenant* – and thereby to become to every person, every household, and every family the Holy One brings within our sphere of influence. an inspiration, a model of the Bridegroom-King's attributes, and a fountain of blessing.

Has anyone asked if, before marching out to them with a virtual army, Moshe has previously gone to each of these men privately? Has he, in *sh'ma* response to the Holy One's directions in Leviticus 19, tried to resolve this controversy with Datan and Aviram peacefully? Has he made a legitimate attempt to sit down with them, one-on-one, and resolve the offenses that have arisen between them? Is his first approach to Datan and Aviram really being made in full-on open-confrontational mode, with an army of seventy elders of Israel at his side? And by the way, while we are at it ... where are *the two or three witnesses* the Holy One has said must be present and actively engaged in any prosecution before the assembly?

This is a tense situation indeed. It does not look like it is going to end well at all. Oh that Torah's narrative of this dramatic event would at this point be interrupted by the familiar phrase '*Vayadaber Adonai el-Moshe l'emor ... [and the Holy One spoke to Moshe, saying]* Oh, that the Holy One would step out from His cloak of invisibility and say something - something *wise*, something *inspirational*, something *healing*! Oh, that Aharon, or Kalev, or Y'hoshua, or Miryam – or ANYONE, for that matter - would step forth and speak a word of *shalom*. ***Blessed are the peacemakers*** [more literally, *shalom builders*] Messiah will say, ***for they will be called sons of God***⁸. Oh, that Medad or Eldad or someone on whom the Spirit has fallen and who has no personal stake in this controversy would get and release a prophetic word straight from the mouth of the Bridegroom-King. Oh, that someone would step forward and say, as Sh'lomo will later teach his sons: ***A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger***⁹. Oh, that someone would stop ranting, raving, posturing, nursing offense, and talking long enough to ... well ... PRAY – and actually listen for the Holy One's instructions with a mind to follow them! Shouldn't someone pray for wisdom from Heaven –

⁸ Matthew 5:9.

⁹ Proverbs 15:1.

you know, the kind that is *first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, accommodating, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere.*¹⁰” Shouldn’t someone pray for mercy? Shouldn’t someone try to bargain for men’s souls the way Avraham did over the souls of S’dom and Amarah? Shouldn’t someone – anyone - at least stop ranting, raging, blaming, and over-reacting for a moment and ... *see what the Holy One and the counsel of Torah have to say?*

Heaven Help Us! Heaven Help Us All!

Fortunately, even though Moshe is too caught up in his own fleshly emotions to understand it, the Holy One has no intention of abandoning His Covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya’akov. He is not easily offended. He does not over-react, fly off the handle, lose His *shalom*, and throw a wall-eyed fit like a spoiled child. He is nowhere near ready to toss out a Grand Eternal Plan because of a few harsh words and bad attitudes. He has known that this nonsense – and worse - was coming since long before He called Avram out of Paddan-Aram. He knew it was coming before He delivered Korach, Datan, Aviram and On from Egyptian bondage right along with everyone else. He knew it was coming before He spoke the Ten Words – and then all the rest of Torah – on Mount Sinai. With the Holy One, there is *no shadow of turning*. He has the redemption of mankind as a species and the restoration of Creation to its intended state of beauty, fruitfulness, and *shalom* as His goals, and He knows that His Grand Eternal plan – which involves B’nei Yisrael, in all its generations, serving as His emissaries to the rest of the planet – will inevitably bring those goals to pass. He does not intend for the Redeemed Community to perish. And He is not even considering violating His covenant with Avram, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov and ‘offing them’ over a petty little backlash like Korach’s little *Rav Lachem* movement! Not on your life! Moshe’s uncontrolled fleshly rage appears to have once again caused him to project malice and malevolence onto the Holy One. Mortals do things like that all the time. And a lot of heartache always comes about as a result. But in the end, the Holy One’s goodness always redeems even this folly – and He works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. **Romans 8:28.**

How Can We Make Sense of – and Explain to our Children and to the Scoffing Nations - What is About to Happen In the Camp?

What is about to happen in our camp – though stunning in effect – is going to be used by the Holy One our God for a glorious *redemptive purpose*. The whining, complaining, and political one-upsmanship is going to stop. The flesh outbreak is going to die down. The focus of the Camp of the Redeemed is going to be turned back to its essential purpose and assigned mission. As always with the Holy One

¹⁰ James 3:17.

there will be mercy, grace, and lovingkindness galore – as He limits the destruction wrought according to the word of Moshe to the absolute least possible amount necessary. He will make sure that the ultimate result of this – as every – episode of calamity wrought by the mouth of man will actually be to purify and inspire to the reverent fear of Heaven, not to cruelly punish wrongdoers.

Unfortunately, souls are going to be lost in the process. In fact, there will be more human lives snuffed out in these next two days than were on the day the Egyptian army perished in the Sea of Reeds. This time it will not be hate-filled Egyptian soldiers bent on holocaust whose lives are snuffed out. This time the ones who forfeit the breath of life will be members of the Community of the Redeemed.

Putting It In Perspective

Over the two-day period we read about today nearly five times the number of men who died in the aftermath of the calf-sin are destined to perish. Within a mere 48 hours the lifeless bodies of almost 15,000 of our brothers will litter the ground in the Camp of the Redeemed. Three waves will hit our Camp. First *the earth will split* wide open right before our eyes and devour whole families. Then, even as the screams of those being smothered and crushed beneath the desert sand pierce our ears, *vast walls of fire will be released from Heaven* like guided missiles. Tongues of flame will seek out specific predetermined human targets, find them, and then *burn them alive right before our eyes*. As if these first two waves of destruction were not enough, *a plague will then be loosed* that will engulf the camp like a flood, leaving lifeless Hebrew corpses everywhere. And when the smoke clears we will discover that almost 15, 000 people are either dead or missing. And there will be no one for us to blame. No one, that is, but ... *MOSHE AND AHARON ... and the Holy One*.

Why Do Some Suddenly Hate Moshe and Aharon So?

Why do so many people in the Camp suddenly hate Moshe and Aharon so? What did they ever do to us? Nothing really. Oh, some of us if asked that question might tear up a little, assume a self-righteous, victimized expression and whine “... *because Moshe YELLED at us!*” But that, of course, is just an excuse, not a real reason. After all, we were yelled at by Pharaoh and his taskmasters a whole lot more violently and threateningly than we were yelled at by Moshe - and yet we are still ready to go back to them and grovel at their feet. So the yelling isn’t really the issue, is it? No - it is just a *convenient excuse*. The *real truth* is that it is not because of anything Moshe or Aharon did to us that makes us hate them. The truth is that we hate Moshe and Aharon simply because *we are not happy*, and like Mt. Everest, *they ... are there*.

The real truth is that we hate Moshe and Aharon simply because *unhappy human*

beings always end up despising people that love them and resenting those who give unselfishly to and on behalf of them. We resent the fact that we needed them in Egypt. We resent the fact that we needed them at Sinai. And we resent the fact that we still need them even now. We resent that they are empowered to speak on behalf of the Holy One words that place moral, ethical and spiritual restraints on our free will. We resent the fact that they would have us live by sh'ma-ing the words of the Holy One, and by doing only what He is doing, and only when He says to do it – rather than doing what seems right in our own eyes, according to our own logic, and at a pace that makes us feel comfortable and ‘in control’. We resent that they never let us forget we have a destiny and purpose in life much greater than we are fulfilling. We resent the fact that they love us too much to leave us the way we are – and because we know they always will.

An Imaginary Diary - Continued¹¹

Once again, you will understand better how we feel, if you read about it from an [imaginary] diary of one of our people. **PLEASE REMEMBER AS YOU READ THROUGH THE NEXT FEW PAGES OF THIS LESSON THAT WHAT IS BEING PRESENTED IS ONLY AN IMAGINARY DIARY OF SOMEONE IN THE CAMP OF THE REDEEMED WHO HAS FALLEN UNDER THE ‘SPELL’ CAST BY KORACH, AND WHICH THEREFORE DOES NOT IN ANY WAY REFLECT THE OPINION OF THIS AUTHOR!!!!!!**

Diary entry for the day the Earth swallowed Korach and his family:

We are finding out more and more every day what a mistake it was to proclaim to Moshe that we wanted to die in this desert rather than enter the Promised Land. As it turns out, though, dying in this desert is a very, very slow, very, very miserable experience. Out of the devastation came forth a *new leader* - a man named Korach. He was a *Levi* [Levite] – *i.e.* one of the “carriers of the glory” [*K’hat’im*]. He spoke “seeker-friendly” words to us. He explained to us that it is really the poor leadership of Moshe and Aharon - not our failure to sh'ma the Voice and directions of, and cherish our Covenant relationship with, the Holy One – that lies at the root of all our problems. He tells us all we need to do is to appoint him as our leader, and the death in the desert will stop. He told us that we can have PRIVILEGE without RESPONSIBILITY. We liked him a lot. News about him started spreading through the camp - like *wildfire*.

Wildfire Coming!

What started as whispered philosophizing about our problems between Korach the

¹¹ For the first installment of this particular imaginary diary see the *Rabbi's son's* introduction to parsha *Korach*. This ‘imaginary diary’ is, of course, merely a literary device. Any similarity, real or imagined, of the characters and situations described in this diary to any person or situation in existence today is unintentional and is purely coincidental.

Levi and his neighbors, *Datan*, *Aviram*, and *On* the Reuveni [Ruebenite] quickly spread through the camp like wildfire. We had now garnered enough support to embolden us. We decided to confront the troublemakers – Moshe and Aharon - and take back control of our own destiny. With 250 of our tribal leaders, we gathered together against the murderer, Moshe, and his misfit brother, Aharon, and confronted them in the courts of the *Mish'kan*.

How did the two troublemakers respond to our challenge? Their response was *so typical*. First they played humble and assumed a posture of prayer – like we were supposed to think they were holy or humble or something. Then they showed their true colors by stubbornly refusing to acknowledge their sins and admit that this whole death-in-the-desert fiasco is *their fault*. They even had the *chutzpah* to challenge Korach and our 250 tribal leaders to a “priesthood ordeal”. Winner take all. Well ... *so be it*. Today we will see who is holy ... and who is not!

Trial By Ordeal

Our 250 tribal leaders gathered at the *Mish'kan*, censors in hand – except for Datan and Aviram, that is, who refused to be bullied by Moshe. They said they had nothing to prove, and that this was just another one of Moshe and Aharon’s ‘tricks’. We will see.

Coals were taken off the altar in the Tent of Meeting. 250 fire pans were filled. The smell of burning incense filled the desert. If Moshe and Aharon were right, and only they and Aharon’s sons are permitted to approach the *Mish'kan*, people should be falling dead right about now. Nothing happened. It looked like we are finally going to prove Moshe to be the fraud we always suspected he was.

Moshe shook his head, but said nothing for a few moments. Then he walked right out of the *Mish'kan*. *Where did he think he’s going?* We followed Moshe, jeering him all the way. He surprised us by heading directly toward the tents of Datan and Aviram, in the camp of the Reuveni, the descendants of Ya’akov’s firstborn. We wondered what he would rant about this time. But when he spoke, he did not address Datan or Aviram. He spoke to *us*. He said:

*“Depart, I beg you, from the tents **ha-anashim ha-resha'im** [of these wicked men],
and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins.*

*By this you will know that the Holy One has sent me to do all these works;
for [I have] not [done them] of my own mind.”
If these men die the common death of all men,
or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the Holy One hasn't sent me.
But ... if the Holy One make a new thing,
and the ground open its mouth, and swallow them up,
with all that appertain to them, and they go down alive into She'ol.*

Then you will understand that these men have despised the Holy One.

[Numbers 16:26, 28-30]

We would recognize that tone of voice in Moshe anywhere. We will never forget it - that's the exact tone of voice he used to use back in Egypt when he was warning Pharaoh that a *plague* was about to start! Maybe – just maybe - we were ... well ... a little *hasty*. Just to be safe, we began to edge backwards – backing away, ever so slowly - from the tents of Datan and Aviram. And just in time! As Moshe spoke these words, there came a sound like the earth bursting apart. The ground on which we stood just a few moments ago began to tremble violently. We watched in horror and disbelief - as the earth split completely apart, right at the location of the tents of Datan and Aviram. We saw the earth swallow¹² them up. Datan, Aviram, their wives and children, and even all their belongings, disappeared right before our eyes! They were gone in an instant ... but where?

V'yereidu hem

They fell into the depths

v'chol-asher lahem chayim she'olah

along with all that was theirs.

[Numbers 16:33(a)]

We heard cries of torment, screams of sheer terror from *beneath the earth*. And then, we watched in awe as the earth closed up over the place where the Reuvenites had previously pitched their tents¹³.

Vatc'has aleihem ha-aretz v'yovdu mitoch ha-k'hal

The earth then covered them over, and they were lost to the community.

[Numbers 16:33(b)]

We are running now. Awe – or is it terror - grips our hearts. Oh, if we had not opened our minds to the negativity. Oh, if we had not opened our mouths to the complaints. Oh, if we had not so willingly lent our ears to the accusations about the Holy One, about Moshe, and about Aharon we knew in our hearts were not productive, and inconsistent with our calling as sons and daughters of Avraham. Then, just when we thought it could not get any worse ... it did! The *chol* fire initiated by man on earth drew the *kadosh* fire of the Holy One into the Camp.

V'esh yatze'ah me'et Adonai ...

Fire then came down from the Holy One ...

[Numbers 16:35(a)]

¹² The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as “swallow” is *beit*, *lamed*, *ayin*, Strong's Hebrew word # 1104, transliterated as *bala*, pronounced *baw-lah'*, and meaning to *devour*, *cover*, *bury*, *consume*. It's first usage in Torah is in Genesis 41:7, to describe what the sickly ears of grain in Pharaoh's dream did to the full ears of grain.

¹³ It is interesting that the Holy One caused the land in the desert to do exactly what the spies accused the Land of Kena'an of doing to its inhabitants - devouring people.

A massive explosion issued forth from heaven, sending lighting bolts screaming straight toward us. There was a deafening roar, and it became impossible to breathe. Fingers of white-hot flame encircled all 250 of the tribal leaders who joined Korach in his challenge of Moshe and Aharon.

V'tochal et ha-chamishim umatayim ish makrivei ha-ketoret

... and it consumed the 250 men who were presenting the incense.

It was the Nadav and Avihu story all over again. One after another, every one of the 250 men who ventured forth presumptively to offer up strange fire with incense to prove Moshe wrong screamed in *stark panic* ... then in *horrible pain* ... as the flames of real, holy fire from Heaven engulfed him. One by one, their bodies *dissolved into thin air* in the supernatural heat. When we looked again, nothing was left where they stood - nothing at all – except, that is, the charred bronze remains of the censers in which they offered incense. The sweet scent that permeated the air just a few moments ago was now long forgotten. Now the sickening stench of burned human flesh filled the camp, burned our nostrils, and made us nauseous. Extended family members of those who were missing wandered about hysterically, searching in vain for any trace of their loved ones. It was horrible - too horrible for words.

Diary entry for the day after the earth swallowed Korach and his family:

Yesterday we were stunned, traumatized. Today, we wake up resolute.

V'yilonu kol-adat b'nei-Yisra'el mimachorat

... on the next day all the congregation of the children of Yisra'el murmured

al-Moshe v'al-Aharon l'emor atem ha-mitem et-am Adonai

against Moshe and Aharon, saying, "You have brought death to the Holy One's people"

[Numbers 16:41]

*Never again, we vow. Enough dying, we declared. Rav lachem! Enough of Moshe's sorcery, we proclaimed. Rav lachem! Everything about Moshe now spoke to us of death. Rav lachem! He killed the Egyptian taskmaster in his youth. He brought about the death of Egypt's firstborn just a few months ago. He caused all Pharaoh's army – fathers and sons who were just doing their duty – to perish in the Sea of Reeds. He led his relatives in the slaughter of 3,000 to cover up his brother's sin with the golden calf. And now, as we saw it, he had brought his ministry of death into our camp *for the last time*. Now he had really gone too far! We decided we had to rid ourselves of this man – and his curse of death - forever. Rav lachem! Rav lachem! Rav lachem! Rav Lachem!*

The Glory of the Holy One

Even as these words left our lips however something even more terrifying than yesterday's earthquake and firestorm occurred.

... vayera k'vod Adonai

and then the Holy One's glory became visible.

At our right hand and at our left men and women began to fall dead for no apparent reason. They died in droves and clusters. An invisible killer was in our midst – like the invisible killer that stuck the firstborn on the night we left Egypt. A wail is heard:

... yatza ha-ketzef milifnei Adonai

A breaking forth is coming forth from the Holy One.

hechel ha-nagef

The plague has begun!

[Numbers 16:46]

A plague like the plague of the firstborn of Egypt had indeed come upon us. Before it was over, 14,700 people were dead – making yesterday, when less than a thousand perished, look like a picnic. Pray, oh please, please, please pray – or we will all be destroyed! *[END OF THE 'IMAGINARY DIARY ENTRY']*

***Remember Our Covenant! Remember Our Destiny!
Remember How Badly We Need Mercy!***

Did the imaginary 'diary' entry above help you to understand what happened in the camp? Has the horror of the Holy One's wrath and judgment begun to sink in on you now, the way it has begun to sink in on me? Do you now see why I said in yesterday's shiur that *we and our children need much, much more than a 'new, improved' form of religion* in these critical days? Have you read the 38th chapter of Ezekiel lately? Or Isaiah 63:1-6? Or Revelation 19:11-21? Blessed is he who is not offended at the Bridegroom whose wedding garment is stained with blood.

Dear Reader, we have all seen – and marveled at - the *mercy* of the Holy One toward those who seek Him. We have all experienced and enjoyed – indeed have *basked* and sometimes *frolicked* in - His *blessing*, His *covenant faithfulness*, and His *longsuffering lovingkindness* usward. We have known well the Glorious One Whom Torah describes as:

***The Holy One! The Holy One!
A merciful and gracious God, slow to anger,
and abundant in lovingkindness and truth,
keeping lovingkindness for thousands,
forgiving iniquity and disobedience and sin ...***

[Exodus 34:6-7(a)]

Remember, however, that there is whole lot more to the Holy One than that. In today's aliyah we saw again (as we saw in connection with the Flood, the plagues of Egypt, and the destruction at the Sea of Reeds) *the horrifying power of the judgment of the Holy*

One against those who not only stubbornly and repeatedly reject and oppose Him, but who by their words, their attitudes, and their conduct are constantly *inciting others to do the same*. To be kind to those who do such things would be to be cruel to those who stand next in line to be victimized by them. So, to the intractable and unrepentant inciters of disdain for the ways of the Bridegroom, the Holy One describes Himself as:

... [He] *that will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the children's children, on the third and on the fourth generation.*
[Exodus 34:7(b)]

Because He is a Faithful Bridegroom to the vulnerable and a Fearless Kinsman-Redeemer of the hopeless He absolutely must at some point, after all offers and opportunities of mercy have been rebuffed, judge of the irredeemably arrogant oppressor and the irredeemably cruel deceiver. Ask Pharaoh. So ... which side of the Divine Bridegroom's personality are you presently seeing in your life, Beloved? Which side of the Divine Bridegroom's personality are you presently sensing is dominant in *your city*? In *your nation*? In *the world*? In any of those areas are you seeing Him sitting in judgment with terrible wrath? If so, hear these words, and take heart:

... *The Holy One has called you as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, says your God.*
For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. In overflowing wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting lovingkindness will I have mercy on you, says the Holy One your Redeemer.
[Isaiah 54:6-8]

And remember as well the words of Habakkuk: *O Holy One, I have heard of your fame. I stand in awe of your deeds, O Holy One. Renew your work in our day, in this season. In the midst of the years make it known. In wrath ... remember mercy!*
Habakkuk 3:2.

May we be wiser than those mentioned in today's aliyah. Let us allow the Holy One to *discipline us as children*, and teach us to *fear* Him as well as *love* Him. Let us not only claim the *promises*, but also adhere to the *conditions*, of His covenant. Let us, the living, the remnant who remains, commit ourselves to *live humbly* before Him, and *tremble at His Word*, and *teach our children His ways*. Let us not harden our hearts to the Holy One's discipline, insisting on blaming "the devil", or the kings and rulers of the earth – or the prophets and priests He sends us - for the things that go wrong in our lives.

Keep this truth ever in mind: *neither Ha-Satan nor any earthly (or spiritual) leader or ruler, however wicked or diabolical, has the power to do anything to us that the*

Holy One has not permitted. In times of judgment as well as in times of mercy, what the Holy One wants to teach us is to fear Him, to stay with Him, cling to Him, and engage Him in intercession – just the way our father Avraham did. See **Genesis 18:16ff.**

At Last the Intercessor Steps Forth

But here is the ‘good news’ from today’s aliyah: the release of the wrath of Heaven upon the Camp of the Redeemed is strategically precise, and is delivered in precise measure to accomplish the Holy One’s purpose and set the stage for a season of redemption and restoration to come forth. It does not do an ounce more damage than is absolutely necessary for the good of the Redeemed. It does not strike indiscriminately. And it does not last one milli-second longer than the Redemptive Plan of the Omniscient One requires. In fact, the instant judgment begins in the Household of God Our High Priest gets the incense burning to make for us a shade into which we can run for safety. Our text speaks of Aharon, of course. Aharon is, after all, the ‘*friend of the Bride*’ in the great passion play of Divine Romance that we call Torah. But remember that everything Torah says of Aharon’s activity in the *Mish’kan* really refers to Messiah’s activity in the Courts of Heaven.

Our text describes the work of the great intercessor in the following language:

Vaya'amod beyn ha-metim uveyn ha-chayim

He stood between the dead and the living,

vate'atzar ha-magefah

and the plague was checked.

[Numbers 16:48]

Aharon is merely a ‘type’ and shadow of a greater High Priest – a High Priest who does in Heaven what Aharon does on earth. It is not by any means Aharon’s intercession that stops the plague, you see – it is *the intercession of His counterpart in Heaven*. Get as close to *that* High Priest as you can, Beloved. He can be found standing between the dead and the living - *even now*. Run to Him. Enter His Presence humbly, according to Kingdom Protocol. *Sh’ma* His words. Burrow into the Wisdom and Safety of His Covenant. Do what He tells you ... and nothing else. Absolutely everything else, you see, is *wildfire*.

Questions For Today’s Study

1. Moshe gave the people a warning as he approached the tents of Datan and Aviram to confront them about their rebellion. This warning had two parts.

[A] What did Moshe warn the people to do concerning Datan and Aviram’s tents?

[B] What did Moshe warn the people not to do concerning things that belonged or pertained to Datan and Aviram?

[C] How did Moshe indicate to the assembly that they would know if The Holy One had “sent” [Hebrew *shelach*] him?

[D] In the judgment that followed, Datan and Aviram and all their “houses” were swallowed, along with Korach, his men, and all their “goods”. In Strong’s and Gesenius, look up the Hebrew words translated as “houses” and “goods”. Write the Hebrew words and describe the Hebrew word pictures that those words incorporate.

[E] Why do you think the judgment for the Reubenites (Datan and Aviram) was different from the judgment upon the Levi’im (Korach and his men)?

[F] What do you think happened with regard to On, son of Pelet, the third man from among the Reubenites who was mentioned in verse 1 (but not in any subsequent verses) as being a part of the coup? Why do you think he is not mentioned as being among those who were swallowed up by the wrath of The Holy One?

[G] Did the people who witnessed the judgment of the Holy One on Datan, Aviram, and Korach acknowledge that the Holy One had been the agent of that judgment?

[H] To what source(s) did the people attribute the deaths of Datan, Aviram, (and their families) and Korach?

2. Even as the chasm which swallowed Datan, Aviram, and Korach closed back up fire came forth from the Holy One and consumed the 250 men who offered the incense as a part of Moshe’s “trial by ordeal”. As you will recall, Moshe had challenged all the leaders of the people who agreed with Korach that no priest was needed (despite having specifically asked for one at Sinai) to appear before the Holy One with a censor, and offer incense to the Holy One. Perhaps Moshe thought that the people would remember what happened to Nadav and Avihu, and repent. Each one however accepted Moshe’s challenge. They stubbornly refused to acknowledge that the Aharonic priesthood had been established because of their sinfulness, in order that there might be *an atonement procedure prophetic of the atonement Messiah would bring*. Thus *they rejected not Aharon nor Moshe, but the atonement procedure itself* - because they would not acknowledge either their sin or their need for atonement.

[A] What happened to the 250 men who offered incense at Moshe’s challenge?

[B] What did Elazar do with the censors these men had used?

[C] Did the people who witnessed the deaths of the 250 men who offered incense acknowledge that the deaths of those men were part of a judgment from the Holy One? To what source did they attribute these deaths?

[D] What was it that caused the Holy One to send forth the plague that killed 14,700 people in the camp?

[E] Why do you think the Holy One stopped the plague when Aharon stood between the living and the dead?

[F] Where do you think those who died in the supernatural judgments described in today's aliyah went to Heaven, to Hell, or to Sheol? Whatever your opinion, explain your reasoning.

3. In today's Haftarah the prophet *Sh'muel* [Samuel] – whom the sages identify as the great, great grandson of Korach - begins the address that will culminate in the official coronation of Shaul [Saul] as the first king of Israel. In so doing he is officially stepping down from his position as the last of the “judges” of Israel, which have served - not as part of a dynasty but merely as and when the Holy One directed - since Y'hoshua led the sons of Israel into the Land. Here is how the TaNaKh describes the event:

*Sh'muel said to all Yisra'el, “Behold, I have listened to your voice
in all that you said to me, and have made a king over you.*

Now, behold, the king walks before you;

and I am old and gray-headed; and, behold, my sons are with you:

and I have walked before you from my youth to this day.

Here I am: witness against me before the Holy One, and before his anointed:

whose ox have I taken? or whose donkey have I taken?

or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed?

or of whose hand have I taken a ransom to blind my eyes therewith?

and I will restore it you.”

They said, You have not defrauded us, nor oppressed us,

neither have you taken anything of any man's hand. He said to them,

“The Holy One is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day,

that you have not found anything in my hand.” They said, “He is witness.”

[I Samuel 12:1-5]

[A] What is the explanation Samuel gives for anointing Shaul as king?

[B] How does Samuel describe himself?

[C] Samuel stands before the people and before Shaul and asks five questions. What five questions does he ask?

[D] Why do you think Samuel asked these questions?

[E] Note that there is no reference in this passage to the involvement – or even the existence – or any ‘priest’ of Israel. What do you think had happened to the priesthood of Aharon at this time? [Hint: see I Samuel 4 and I Samuel 7:1-10.]

4. In today's reading from the B'rit Chadasha Shaul speaks again of how new creations in Messiah are to relate to the unGodly rulers of the world who have, often despite their moral depravity, been established in authority by the Holy One.

Therefore he who resists¹⁴ the authority¹⁵, withstands¹⁶ the ordinance of the Holy One;

¹⁴ The Greek word our English Bibles translate as “resists” is Strong's Greek word # 498 *antitassomai* [pronounced *an-tee-tas'-som-ah-ee-aye*]. It is generally translated as “oppose” or “resist”. It is the verb found

*and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgment*¹⁷.

[Romans 13:2]

[A] According to Shaul, if one rebels against a civil authority (however wicked), against whom is he or she really rebelling?

[B] What do you think Shaul means?

[C] What does Shaul say will happen to those who rebel against their government?

[D] What should true sons and daughters of the Holy One do when the governing officials are corrupt or wicked?

*May you see the Holy One's hand in all the events of history
and in all the circumstances of your life.
And may His atonement suffice and avail for you.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 24:21-22

My son, fear both the Holy One and the king.

Don't join those who are rebellious.

***For calamity can come on such persons so suddenly
that no one knows whether their destruction was from the Holy One
or from the king.***

in the Greek versions of the first letter of Kefa [Peter] to describe how the Holy One relates to persons who are proud: “*for God resists [antitossamai] the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.*” See also **James 4:6**. These declarations can be traced to Psalm 18:27 and to Proverbs 3:34.

¹⁵ The Greek word our English Bibles translate as “authority” is Strong’s Greek word #1849 *exousia* [pronounced *ex-oo-SEE'-ah*].

¹⁶ The Greek word our English Bibles translate as “withstands” is Strong’s Greek word # 436 *anthistemi* [pronounced *anth-is'-tay-mee*]. This is the word Yeshua is quoted in Greek as having used: ***But I say unto you, Do not resist [anthistemi] evil: but if someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also.*** Matthew 5:39.

¹⁷ The Greek word our English Bibles translate as “judgment” is Strong’s Greek word #2917 *krima*. Yeshua said; “*... with whatever judgment [krima] you judge, you will be judged.*” **Matthew 7:2.**