

Shiur L'Yom Sheni¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Korach:*** Numbers 16:1-25
 Haftarah: I Samuel 11:14-15
 B'rit Chadasha: Romans 12:9 - 13:1

The Holy One will show who belongs to him and who is holy.
[Numbers 16:5]

Today's Meditation is Proverbs 23:1-3;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is *Petition #10, Tzedakim [Men Who Do the Holy One's Will]*

Vayikach Korach ben-Yitzhar ben-K'hat ben-Levi – and then *Korach, son of Yitzhar, son of K'hat, son of Levi, took ... v'Datan va'Aviram b'nei Eli'av ... Datan and Aviram, sons of Eliav ... v'On ben-Pelet* – and *On, son of Pelet ... b'nei Re'uven* – of the sons of Reuven Numbers 16:1.

As we discussed in the introductory study, *Korach* constitutes part of a unit of 'Wilderness Testing' parshot designed to reveal the consequences of indulging in the *fleshly distractions, the negativity of thought and opinion, the attitudinal predispositions, the self-centered complaints, the self-righteous criticisms, the self-promoting accusations, and the divisive diatribe* that run rampant in this season each year. The toxicity stew will come to a boil this very week - in the parsha of *dying to the flesh and the critical spirit*.

The Unflattering Revelations of the 'Flesh' Trilogy

Two parshot ago, the Holy One began to pull back the curtain on some of the toxic things that lie beneath the veneer of piety with which we clothe ourselves. It all started innocently enough, with just a few folks complaining about the discomforts of the journey. The desert was suddenly too hot, too dry, and too dusty for our liking. It was too much trouble to stay in cadence and formation. We straggled. We fell behind. We chose to do it our way, in our timing. And the joy of the Holy One's Presence and the infatuation with His Word that we had felt at Sinai faded as the distance between us and the Cloud of His Presence grew. See **Numbers 11:1-3**.

A warning was given from Heaven – tongues of fire were released around the outskirts of the camp. The message was clear – ***death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.*** Proverbs 18:21. ***He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.*** Proverbs 13:3. The warning was not heeded. Instead the snowball of

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toxic thought and speech that had begun to take shape in just a few stragglers rolled through the Camp, picking up steam as it went. A new stage in the downward trend came when a few of us started to complain that the same glorious manna we had been receiving from Heaven with wide-eyed wonder and thanksgiving for almost a year suddenly seemed the most boring and unsatisfying thing our taste buds could endure. See **Numbers 11:4-34**. Another serious warning was issued, this time in the form of a plague. Those who let blasphemous talk about the Holy One's gift of manna issue from their lips and let their fleshly appetites for worldly foods from pagan lands get the better of them fell physically ill. *Whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls.* Proverbs 25:28. But *whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.* Proverbs 21:23. Again, however, the warning was ignored – even by some of the most spiritual among us. Miryam and Aharon, of all people, started spouting criticism and self-righteous judgment about their brother Moshe. They made both their dislike of his wife and their dissatisfaction with Moshe's leadership of the Camp very, very public. **Numbers 12**.

Yet another warning was sent our way – Miryam's *tzara'at*. The message of this sign was also clear: *“He who has a deceitful heart finds no good, and he who has a perverse tongue falls into evil.”* Proverbs 17:20. Alas, yet again the warning fell on cold hearts, blind eyes, and deaf ears.

The process continued and intensified last week in *Shelach Lecha*. Ten of the spies Moshe sent out into Kena'an came back with a report that they had seen giants in the Land of Promise. This sent the entire camp into panic-mode. With a few notable exceptions every person over 20 years of age cried out that they be allowed to die in the desert rather than go into the Promised Land and face giants. **Numbers 13-14**. The Holy One replied: *As I live ... just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. Except for Kaleb the son of Yefunneh and Y'hoshua the son of Nun, you will by no means enter the land that I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised.*

Did this judgment stop the rolling snowball of toxic thought and speech? It did not even slow it down. In the aftermath of *chet ha-meraglim* a flood of anger, frustration and self-righteousness was released – mostly directed at Moshe and Aharon. The initial source of the new onslaught of negativity was one of Moshe's own kinsmen – a Levi named Korach. But the toxic snowball quickly caught up others in its spiraling descent. Indeed, the entire camp wound up careening off

mission. Everyone was suddenly embroiled in interpersonal and/or theological controversy.

These Are the Fringes

At the end of *Shelach Lecha* we were introduced to the *mitzvah* of wearing *tzit-tzit* on the corners of our garments. Do you remember why the Holy One told us He wanted us to wear them? It was rather shocking. The Holy One said:

***You are to have the tzitzit that you may look upon Him,
and remember all the commandments of the Holy One and do them,
and that you not follow after the harlotry
to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined***

[Numbers 15:39]

Did you realize that in the aftermath of the Fall both your heart and your eyes are actually *inclined to harlotry*? It is the universal condition of man. That means that every one of our natural hearts are *actually genetically predisposed to feel lustful and idolatrous desires* and that every one of our natural eyes is *genetically predisposed to voyeurism*. In other words both our natural heart and natural eyes are like *brute beasts*; either we fight the *good fight* and *subdue them* – as the Holy One instructs and has fully empowered us to do - or they will *destroy us* and wreak havoc upon absolutely everything – and absolutely everyone – close to us.

Fortunately, the Holy One has in His Kindness given us an easy antidote for the harlotry-poisoned heart – we are to train our hearts to displace the spirit of harlotry in three ways: 1. we are to *love the Holy One our God with all our hearts*; 2. we are to *set the words with which He instructs us – i.e. His Torah – upon our hearts*; and 3. *we are to circumcise the foreskin of our hearts*. **Deuteronomy 6:5-6, 10:16**. And He has also given us a healing salve for our voyeuristically inclined eyes. He has instructed us to occupy our eyes with constant gazing upon Him to remind us of all the *mitzvot* of Torah [Numbers 15:39], and He has instructed us to bind the *mitzvot* of Torah as frontlets before our eyes [Deuteronomy 6:8]. In other words, we are to so occupy our eyes with reading, studying, and walking out the *mitzvot* of Torah that we will have no time, no energy, and no passion for looking at things that would titillate our flesh.

At Sinai, at least after the golden calf incident, we managed to do these things. But in the heat of the desert ... well, we have quit taking our medicine. And the old harlotrous inclination has reared its ugly head again. Our hearts are suddenly back to longing for things that our Bridegroom knows will kill us. Our eyes are suddenly back to looking at everything and everybody from a totally fleshly and voyeuristic viewpoint of *what they can do for us*.

In the aftermath of *chet ha-egel* we are suddenly having serious heart troubles

again. And we are all suffering some pretty bad vision problems as well. We have quit reading, talking about, and meditating on the *mitzvot* of Torah we received at Mount Sinai. And the poison of the heart and the eyes has spread to our mouths and ears as well. Our mouths are suddenly full of criticism, sarcasm, accusation, depression, and negativity. Our ears are suddenly itching to hear the latest juicy slander, the latest character assassination, the latest tabloid expose'. And the seeds of negativity we are spitting out of our unclean lips and nurturing in our itching ears are maturing in our hearts as a fertile field of *anarchist rebellion*.

Enter an opportunistic Levite named *Korach*, who is intent upon reaping the harvest. In the opening aliyah of the parsha that bears his name *Korach* will rise up along with a number of influential men and attempt a very public coup designed to wrest the leadership of the camp away from Moshe, Aharon and – most importantly – from the Holy One. Korach will be the lightning rod for the new – and final - onslaught of negativity. But the toxic snowball will catch up many, many others in its downward path. Indeed, the entire camp will wind up careening wildly off mission, getting embroiled in political controversy, and drowning in complaint, criticism, controversy, and calamity.

Gird up your loins, Dear Reader. Interpersonal controversy and messy forms of interpersonal drama are bound to play out within your sphere of influence over the next few days. Guard your heart and your tongue this week. Remember - you are an *ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven*. Do not allow your mission on earth to be compromised by initiating, participating in, or even being a willing spectator in relation to the controversy or the drama.

The Six Sonic Booms of Parsha Korach

As I have alluded to earlier, there is a lot going on in parsha Korach. Men like Moshe, Aharon, Korach, Datan, Aviram, and On do a lot of the talking - and are the most visible actors in the drama. But make no mistake - the Holy One is really the Main Character. Don't fixate on Korach. Don't obsess over Moshe. Don't put your confidence in Aharon - keep your eyes on the Main Character, and what He does and says - and note what He DOESN'T DO and what He DOESN'T SAY!

Where - and why - does the Holy One break through the 'finity barrier' and involve Himself in this week's story? There are going to be six spiritual 'sonic booms' [when the Voice of the Holy One is heard] in this parsha. Here are the citations:

1. Numbers 16:20-24;
2. Numbers 16:35 -17:3;
3. Numbers 17:9-10;
4. Numbers 17:16-20;

- 5. Numbers 18:1-24; and
- 6. Numbers 18:25-32

If you love the Voice of the Shepherd, you will want to soak in - and meditate on - these six sonic booms. In the meantime, however the voice of ‘another’ is beckoning to us, demanding our attention! The *parsha ha-shavua* begins as follows:

Vayikach Korach ben-Yitzhar ben-K’hat ben-Levi

Then Korach, son of Yitzhar, a K’hati, descendant of Levi, took ...

***Always Beware the ‘Taker’ – The Secret ‘Human Trafficker’
That Lurks Within Us All***

The verb at the beginning of this short verse – *i.e. vayikach* - describes Korach’s personality to a tee. Who was Korach? He was a Levi, of the K’hat clan – *and he TOOK*². Korach was, first and foremost, a *TAKER*. I assume you have known a ‘taker’ or two in your lifetime, Beloved. If you have not known one yet, I suspect you soon will.

What did Korach *take*? He *took the hearts of men*. How did he *take* them? He did not take them with sword nor sling. He took them with words - words of *frustration* and *accusation* couched in “*political correctness*”. Thus, Torah tells us:

V’yikahalu al-Moshe v’al-Aharon

And they called out to Moshe and Aharon,

vayomeiru aleihem Rav-lachem

and declared to them, “You have gone too far/taken too much upon yourselves!”

Ki chol ha-edah kulam k’doshim

All the people in the community are holy,

uvetocham Adonai

and the Holy One is with them.

umadua titnase’u al-k’hal Adonai

Why are you setting yourselves above the Holy One’s called-out ones?”

[Numbers 16:3]

It was *only words* of course – but words were all he needed to take our hearts away. The emotionally charged slogan Korach used to build his base of support was the accusatory cry ‘*Rav lachem, Moshe and Aharon!*’ - meaning ‘*you have gone too far/taken upon yourself too much!*’ Korach knew how to manipulate the dissatisfaction within the camp over Moshe’s recent declaration that the generation of the Exodus were all *doomed to die in the desert* – allowed neither to enter the promised Land nor return to Egypt. Rather than go to Moshe one-on-one and try to

² The Hebrew word translated here as ‘took’ can also mean to SEDUCE.

reach a mutual understanding – as the Holy One instructed those with offenses to do in the *Great Holiness Discourse* at Sinai [see especially Leviticus 19:17] – he instead went around behind Moshe’s back and started talking trash about him.

Building upon the opportunity provided by the growing discontent in the camp, Korach *threw together a few lines of lofty-sounding rhetoric* and *seized the moment*. In the heat of the moment it appears no one thought to take an honest look at how Moshe and Aharon had become the camp’s leaders in the first place. In the passion of the fray no one paused for a second to compare what Korach said to the words the Holy One had spoken in Egypt, at Marah, and at Sinai.

When Korach spoke it seemed none of those things mattered. The miracles performed and the revelations received in Egypt, at Marah, and at Sinai were all just a hazy, distant memory now anyway. The community was now in Yish’mael’s world – in the desert of Paran. And things were presently not going well at all. So the message put out by Korach’s ‘spin machine’ was basically a negative one: “Who do *Moshe and Aharon think they are – they have no right to direct the affairs of our camp!*” The rallying cry was “*Rav lachem!*” – meaning: “*Moshe and Aharon – you have gone too far and taken too much upon yourselves!*”

The hastily contrived rhetoric used by Korach to back up this negative attack was: “*There is no difference, and should be no discrimination or divisions, between the tribes or the clans - they are of equal importance and innate value and should not be segregated the way they are*”. The underlying assumptions were, of course: “*Why do we need either a Prophet or a High Priest to lead us - let each man can be his own priest and prophet, and – most importantly - let each man do what is right in his own eyes.*”

Have You Been ‘Taken In’?

Korach is truly 'the great *taker*'. He just takes, and takes, and takes, and takes. Taking is just what he does. He takes men's KINGDOM IDENTITIES. He takes men's LOVE STORIES. He takes men's HALLELU-YAHs. But he can only take what someone will bow their knee and let him have.

Be honest now - has Korach - or someone like him - taken YOU? Has he taken YOUR KINGDOM FOCUS? Has he taken - because you laid down and were not using - your EMUNAH? Has he taken - have you let him drain you of - your JOY? Has he taken - have you sold to him - the sweet SHALOM of the Covenant, for a penny's worth of offense and outrage? Have you let him take your LOVE OF MERCY? Have you let him take the GOOD NEWS out of your mouth? Have you let him take the Word of Your Testimony out of your conversations? Have you let

him take THE BLESSING YOU WERE CREATED AND REDEEMED TO SPEAK over the world at such a time as this out of play?

Be very careful around the Korachs of this world. They never give you anything. They just take, and take, and take, until there is nothing left of value to the world.

Welcome to the Politics and Humanistic Spin of Yishma'el's World!

Do not forget that 'the Korach Obstacle Course' is just an essential part of the proving ground of *Yish'mael's world*. Keep in mind that the prevailing anti-Kingdom spirit in this region is that of 'a donkey of a man', an irreverent scoffer, whose hand is against every man. *Here in Yish'mael's world everybody has an opinion. Everybody has a perspective. Everybody has a beef.* Some can make what sound like some pretty good points if you listen to them spew their poison long enough. But don't be fooled. Remember what Rod Stewart taught us long ago when he said: "*If I listened long enough to you, I'd find a way to believe that it's all true.*"

Considering the environment Korach's message, though radical in substance, *sounded somewhat moderate*. And that *moderate-sounding spin* is what enabled him to attract so many followers. Welcome to the politics of Yish'mael's world – to the realm where one thing is said but another thing is meant.

Korach's message was full of dark energy, and was thus ingratiating and appealing. His rhetoric even had a tantalizing *ring of fairness* to it. The things he said *sounded like* a good basis for a new, *enlightened social compact*, a bright new foundation upon which to *build a better nation*, and *change the world*. Such is the fallacy of human reasoning. And such is the trap we fall in when we let someone manipulate our fallible, imperfectly informed sense of 'right and wrong' in such a way as to distract us from mission and embroil us in fruitless arguments and controversies.

The Korachian message is always tantalizing to the pseudo-intellect. It is a message filled with hate, for haters, aimed at instigating not reform but cruel vengeance; but it is clothed in a shallow veneer of verbiage that looks and sounds like 'enlightenment'. But please note that Korach's divisive, incendiary rhetoric never has a plan to make things better, just an accusation, a slogan, and a lot of raw emotion. It is not wisdom – it is *bitter-root stimulation*. It includes no process or protocol of healing and restoration, or even real, meaningful reform; just vigilante vengeance against the authority figures, the socio-economic groups, the public figures, and especially the ethnic groups – that we inwardly resent and love to blame for all our problems.

To a group of people stunned by Moshe's recent declaration that they were all

granted their wish to die in the desert rather than enter the Promised Land, Korach's incendiary half-truth slogans sounded like pure truth. His cries of 'equality' (which always, in the mouth of a demagogue, really means *supremacy of my kind/side*) and 'special privilege' (a serpentine mischaracterization of *Divine favor*), Korach's message was just what their offended, self-righteous flesh wanted to hear. It was a 'fist raised in the air' message – a dark energy rallying cry that they could use to justify just about anything – any act acting-out, any angry chant or rant, any violent outburst, any bloodletting, any 'taking' (the litmus test of Korachian rhetoric) or damaging of other people's property, any destruction of monuments, etc. Since Moshe is not perfect like us, he and all reminders of his ilk need to be confronted, humiliated, and bullied/battered into submission – or killed in lawless anger - NOW! That is the dark secret underlying the message of Korach, of course – and is the only reason a shallow charlatan like him, shouting his shallow half-truth slogans, can ever actually 'take' anything from anybody, ever.

Please note however that Korach's words could even be supported by a subtle twisting of Scripture - after all, had not the Holy One once said, of all the Redeemed Community, ***you will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation***? In other words, did not the Holy One thus call all His people to be "k'doshim" [holy ones]?

Korach's message sounds pretty good so far, Moshe! This new kid in town suddenly seems like THE BOMB! So ... what's your *response*, Moshe?

Looking Behind the Spiritual-Sounding Facade

This highlights the problem of taking a Scripture out of its context. The Holy One had indeed invited Israel, as part of His covenant at Sinai, to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, His peculiar treasure. He had indeed invited all Israel, from the least to the greatest, to meet with Him and become intimate with Him on the mountain, under His "Chuppah" [wedding canopy], at Sinai. But – when He made this proposal, the people (including Korach and all his followers) had *refused the invitation* – and had rejected the Holy One's offer out of hand. They had said to Moshe: ***Speak to us yourself and we will listen - but do not have God speak to us or we will die.*** Exodus 20:18-21.

Having rejected the condition the Holy One placed upon His promise, Korach sought to invoke the promise anyway - when and how it served his purpose. And the people "bought" it. They almost always will. It brings in *the crowd*. It appeals to *itching ears*. It is *the exact opposite of the ways of our Divine Bridegroom*.

The message of Korach was really not about the status or calling of the individual – that was just the rhetoric employed as a 'smokescreen'. What Korach's rebellion

was really all about was ‘*ditch Moshe and Aharon at all costs*’ – and elect ME! Like Yish’mael – in whose world [the desert of Paran] he came to the forefront - Korach channeled all his energy into *negativity*. Korach was not a man of vision. Korach did not even have a plan – much less any revelation. He just hoped to hype up, and play on, and ride to victory - the sense of hopelessness that the people adopted after the Holy One’s judgment on their generation was announced.

Seeing Right Through the Spin

Note that Moshe cuts right through the deception. He says, ***It is against the Holy One that you and all your followers have banded together.*** You see, it was not really Moshe’s leadership - or Aharon’s for that matter - that was the *real problem* of those that joined Korach’s rebellion. The real problem of these people was a lack of any real relationship with the Holy One. They were the same people who had chosen to “remain at a distance” from the Holy One at Sinai, and who had, in consistent manner, chosen to reject the Land which the Holy One had ordained as their inheritance at Kadesh-Barnea. They had thus rejected intimate relationship with the Holy One and the Holy One’s plan for their lives.

So what was Moshe to do? Confronted with false accusations against him, faced with betrayal by his own brethren, how was he to respond to such provocation? How would you have responded? Be careful how you answer that question, Beloved! There are far more important issues in play than your fleshly feelings. Lives and destinies hang in the balance. And the validity of your testimony about the amazing goodness of the Holy One and the wonderful changes He has wrought in your life is in the crucible of testing right along with you.

Weighing All the Options

Before the burning bush experience, we can assume, Moshe would have reacted to Korach’s provocation by *going postal* on him. After all, you do remember the incident with the Egyptian overseer, don’t you? See **Exodus 2:11**. But that was then and this is now. Now Moshe has met the Holy One, has spoken with Him face to Face as a man speaks with a Friend, and responded to the Holy One’s call to a *much higher level of conduct*. Engaging in violent physical assault upon someone who makes false accusations against him is simply no longer a viable option.

Before the Cleft in the Rock experience, we can assume, Moshe would have let his inner rage [he would have mislabeled it ‘righteous anger’] boil over, would have indulged himself in an epic temper tantrum replete with throwing and breaking things, and would have capped it all off by calling any Levites who would still take sides with him to draw their swords and take vengeance in their own hands. After all, you do remember the incident with the first set of tablets of Torah, don’t you? **Exodus 32:19, 27**. But that was before the Glorious Bridegroom-King of Heaven made His

Manifest Presence dwell in midst of us, and called and inspired us all to *be holy as He is Holy*. Now flesh-outs, temper tantrums and holy wars are simply out of the question. Well ... they are out of the question, aren't they? Of course they are.

Before seeing first-hand what happened to his own sister Miryam when she made the mistake of exchanging the glorious privilege of prophetic vision and joyful praise for an attitude of negativity, we can assume, Moshe would have retorted to Korach's provocation with some pretty juicy slanderous if not scandalous accusations of his own about his detractors' personal lives. See **Numbers 12:1-2, 10, 14-15**. But now the Creator of the Universe has revealed His plan to fill the entire earth with His Glory – and actually use Moshe's voice and words to facilitate this Grand Plan of World Redemption. So now mud slinging, name-calling, gossiping, and character assassination by accusation are off the table – aren't they?

Going dark is no longer an option. Vengeance is no longer an option. Waxing negative is no longer an option. Nursing offense is no longer an option. Seeking sympathy and/or vindication from others is no longer an option. Trying to defend himself and his authority by responding in kind, point by point, to the accusations made against him is no longer an option.

The aforesaid options are really all off the table, are they not? Moshe would not even think of going back to his former ways, would he? Moshe does realize – and you do too, don't you – that once a person has walked in intimate fellowship with the Creator of the Universe, and surrendered his or her life to the Bridegroom-King's service, that the words of his or her mouth carry a dangerous level of weight in Heaven and on Earth?

Moshe does understand – and you do too, don't you, dear reader – that for people in Covenant with the Holy One, life and death are in the power of our tongue? Moshe is aware – and you are as well, aren't you – that there is not one ounce of wisdom – much less any hope of redemption– in Ambassadors of the Glorious King engaging in any form of physical aggression, indulging feelings of anger, going on the attack, seeking vengeance or vindication, or responding to the verbal negativity of fools in kind?

We will see if Moshe has learned these lessons. We will see if you and I have. Moshe starts off well. Torah tells us *Vayish'ma Moshe v'yipol* - *When Moshe heard this he threw himself on his face*. **Numbers 16:5**.

Hmmm. This would be a good time for a passage beginning *Vayomer Adonai el Moshe l'emor* [And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, and said ..."]. This would be an ideal time to know for sure that what came next was *the Holy One's idea*. But there is,

alas, not a *Vayomer the Holy One el Moshe l'emor* [And the Holy One spoke to Moshe, and said ..."] to be found in the Hebrew text at this pivotal point. We are not told that the Holy One spoke to Moshe at all at this critical moment. We are thus not told by Torah that what Moshe did next was even 'God-inspired', much less God-directed.

When we do not see or hear a direct instruction from Heaven – from the Torah or in the course of prayer – about how we are supposed to handle a situation, we should do nothing. We should wait upon the Holy One's counsel. After all, we are called to be *sh'ma* people – people who do not act on their own initiative, as independent agents, but who instead do only what we see our Bridegroom-King doing, and speaking only what we hear our Bridegroom-King saying.

Remember this, Beloved: the closer our walk with the Holy One becomes, the more good we can bring to the world as we abide in His shalom and shadow and speak and act in unity with Him - BUT the more danger the slightest level of deviation from His Plan and His Ways on our part poses to the people around us.

Do Not Under Any Circumstances Try This At Home!

Moshe cannot – or at least does not – wait to hear from the Holy One. He has come a long way since the Overseer incident, but it appears that he, like all of us, is still learning. Alas, the lesson Moshe is about to learn is going to be an extremely painful one for all concerned. What we are told by Torah that Moshe did after getting up from his 'facetime' is, quite frankly, *shocking*. Somehow Moshe came up from his prayer time spoiling for a fight. He 'went off' on Korach and his followers, throwing their most stinging words [*Rav Lachem*, meaning loosely '*you take too much on yourself*'] right back in their faces. And then it got really serious. He proposed a trial by ordeal which he should have known, by reason of his familiarity with the events that led up to the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, could not turn out well for anyone. Below are the words with which Moshe challenged Korach and his disenchanted followers. Just remember, these words are *al-pi Moshe* [from the mouth of Moshe] – not *al-pi Adonai* [from the mouth of the Holy One!]

Boker veyoda Adonai et-asher-lo

In the morning the Holy One will show who are his,

v'et ha-kadosh v'hikriv elav

and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to him:

v'et asher yivchar-bo yakriv elav

even him whom he shall choose will he cause to come near to him.

Zot asu kechu-lachem machtot Korach v'chol-adato
This do: take for yourself censers, Korach, and all his company;

Uteinu vahan esh
and put fire in them,

v'simu aleyhen ketoret lifnei Adonai machar
and put incense on them before the Holy One tomorrow:

v'hayah ha-ish asher-yivchar Adonai
and it shall be that the man whom the Holy One does choose,

hu ha-kadosh
he [shall be] holy.

rav-lachem b'nei Levi
You take too much on you, you sons of Levi.

[Numbers 16:5-9]

Moshe had to know that Korach and his followers would be big losers in this trial by ordeal – after all, he had personally witnessed what had happened to his nephews, *Nadav* [Nadab] and *Avihu* [Abihu], when they tried a similar thing. Moshe knew also what would bring upon Korach and his followers a quick end to life on “death row” in Yish’mael’s world. And it would all happen *AT HIS WORD, ON HIS WATCH*. Korach was now backed up in a corner. He did not have the level of revelation Moshe had. He had not walked with the Holy One the way Moshe had. He had been backed into a corner. He felt he had to either ‘put up or shut up’. So he responded to Moshe’s challenge, without prayer, without humility, and without wisdom. As Torah records it: ***And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of Divine Appointment with Moshe and Aharon. Korach gathered all the witness throng against them [i.e. Moshe and Aharon] at the door of the tabernacle of meeting.*** Numbers 16:18-19a.

This is not going to end well, Dear Reader. Operating in the flesh, through eyes of critical judgment and offense, never does.

When the Creator of the Universe Breaks the ‘Finity Barrier’, and Speaks – Who Will Sh’ma?

Oh, that we could know that what is done is our Beautiful, Merciful, Longsuffering Bridegroom-King’s perfect will – instead of a *knee-jerk reaction of hypersensitive and over stimulated human flesh*. Oh, that when this is over Miryam will get inspired to pick up her tambourine and lead the camp in a fresh refrain of ***Ashirah l’Adonai, ki ga’oh ga’ah!*** Alas, it is not to be. As Moshe approaches Datan and Aviram, Heaven speaks stunning words. The Holy One did not tell them to confront Datan and Aviram, but now that they are here, and the confrontation is ‘on’, and something has to be done. When the Holy One finally breaks the 'finitude

barrier' and speaks, however, He sometimes has trouble finding anyone who will LISTEN! In this case the Holy One instructs Moshe and Aharon very clearly what He wants them to do:

Hibadeilu mitoch ha-edah hazot

Separate from this witness throng/people

v'achaleh otam keraga

and I will kallah (bring to completion) them this moment.

[Numbers 16:21]

Any time you are reading about a God-encounter in Torah, be sure to watch closely in the narrative to see if the person/people the Holy One speaks to follow His instructions - or, caught up in the drama and emotion of the moment, just go right on and do whatever seems right to them in their own eyes anyway?

Will Moshe do as told? Will Aharon *sh'ma* the Voice of the Almighty? Hardly. Moshe and Aharon are lost in their own heads. They have their own ideas about what the 'rebels' deserve – and they, perhaps without realizing it, project those ideas onto the Holy One. They retort to the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth:

El Elohei haruchot l'chol-basar

God - Omnipotent God of all flesh:

ha-ish echad yecheita v'al kol-ha-edah tiktzof

Though one man has sinned, will You angrily attack the entire witness throng?'

[Numbers 16:22]

Note the different Hebrew verbs used by the Holy One and by Moshe in their retort – and note that they are nowhere close to the verb the Holy One had used in His declaration of intent. The Holy One had spoken of *kallah*-ing – *i.e.* bringing to a final state of fullness or completion. See Genesis 2:1-2, where what the Holy One did with the Heavens and the Earth during the six days of Creation Week is described as what His kind of '*kallah*'-ing looks like. Moshe apparently didn't hear – or want to hear – this verb. He changed the operative verb to *qatzaf* – *i.e.* to *break forth in wrath and attack in anger*. Why did Moshe reinterpret the Holy One's words? What is going on? Oh Moshe – the Holy One's thoughts are much higher than your thoughts, His Ways are far, far better than your ways, and His verbs are much better than your verbs! David will learn – and teach us the lesson – of psalmist prayer, in which a man full of fleshly emotion presents himself to the Holy One and lets the Presence and Goodness of the Holy One change that emotion into Divine Wisdom, Understanding, and strategy. See Psalm 2, 3, 28, etc. But, alas, the time for that kind of attitude and approach transforming prayer has not yet come. So, Moshe walks away from his time of prayer no more at shalom, or less angry, than he walked into it. And oh, how I pity the fool who gets in his – or any other prophet who hasn't learned to pray like David did's - way!

Perhaps Moshe suddenly feared that the fate of entire community – not just Datan and Aviram, their wives, their children, and their bloodlines – was affected by his words and his emotions. He realized that, because of what he had, in anger, set in motion, this relatively minor disagreement between him and Aharon on the one side, and Korach, Datan, and Aviram on the other, had morphed into a full-blown Covenant-Community crisis. Perhaps he realized that someone was going to live, and someone was going to die today – on his watch - because of *his actions*. He, after all, was the one with the authority to bind and loose. It was his words to which the Holy One has given the full weight of His glory. Creation responds to his directions – whether he speaks in wisdom and love or out of self-interest, presumption, self-righteousness, folly, and anger.

Whew - this *authority to bind and loose mantle* can be very heavy, can't it

Questions for Today's Study

1. There were three men who aided Korach in his “rebellion”, and there were 250 more influential “leaders” of the people who took a stand with him.

[A] What were the names of the three men who aided Korach, and what does each name mean?

[B] From what tribe did these three men come?

[C] Why would this particular tribe have reason - according to human reasoning - to be disgruntled at the way the camp was run?

[D] List the five “planks” of Korach’s political “platform” - the five things he said to Moshe and Aharon in verse 3.

[E] Describe the “trial by ordeal” to which Moshe challenged Korach and his followers.

[F] Did the Holy One tell Moshe to challenge Korach and his followers in this manner?

[G] Did Moshe intercede for Korach and his followers? What was his prayer concerning them?

[H] What did *Datan* [KJV Dathan] and *Aviram* [KJV Abiram] do and say that made Moshe so angry?

[I] When the trial by ordeal is ready to begin, what does the Holy One tell Moshe?

2. The haftarah for parsha *Korach* is the Biblical account of the events surrounding the coronation of Israel’s first king – Shaul the Benyamini [Benjaminite]. Before the events we will read about in this haftarah, Israel had no king. Each tribe had “judges” who administered Torah law on their own, with no central government. When - as they were wont to do – they did not walk according to Torah, the Holy One allowed the heathen nations around them to oppress them.

Whenever they made *t'shuvah*, and cried out to the Holy One for deliverance, the Holy One would raise up some unlikely man or woman to serve as their deliverer. The book of “Judges” describes the ups and downs of this period of time.

In today’s reading from the Haftarah the prophet Samuel – who “*just happens*” to be the great, great grandson of Korach - is getting ready to confirm the appointment of *Shaul* [Saul] as Israel’s first king. He had previously warned Israel that having a king was a dangerous thing, and represented a deliberate rebellion against the Holy One - for by seeking out a king, they sought deliverance from a man and his “ministry” of deliverance, thereby rejecting intimacy and covenant directly with, and deliverance and protection directly from, the Holy One. [See **I Samuel 10:17-19**]. Now he prepares to address the people at the formal coronation ceremony.

*Then said Shemu'el to the people “Come, and let us go to Gilgal,
and renew the kingdom there.”*

*All the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Sha'ul king before the Holy One in Gilgal;
and there they approached the Holy One through korbanot shlamim³;
and there Sha'ul and all the men of Yisra'el rejoiced greatly.*

[I Samuel 11:14-15]

[A] In order to get the most out of this week’s haftarah it will be helpful to understand some Biblical history. Get out your Bible Dictionary, or other historical reference book. Look up the articles about Samuel and about Saul. Then, write a one-to-two-page essay on the life of each of these men, describing, with regard to each, [a] their *families and background*, [b] their *callings/spiritual giftings*, and [c] a summary of the *major events of their lives*.

[B] Where did the coronation of Shaul take place?

[C] What other things in Israel’s history had taken place at this location?

[D] What were the people celebrating in verse 15?

3. In this week’s reading from the *B’rit Chadasha*, Shaul of Tarsus [the Apostle Paul] writes to believers in Rome - the seat of government of the Caesars, the pagan rulers who frequently oppressed and viciously persecuted both Jews (like Shaul) and believers in Yeshua - on the rather touchy subject of *how they should behave toward their pagan persecutors*. Before addressing this difficult subject, however, Shaul reminded his audience of the basic principles of the Torah lifestyle. He takes the Torah, and summarizes its most basic mitzvot.

Let’s see how Shaul interprets the Torah-submissive life. He says:

*Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor that which is evil. Cling to that which is good.
In love of the brothers be tenderly affectionate one to another;*

³ For a discussion of the meaning of *korbanot shlamim* [usually translated “peace offerings” by Greek-thinking English translators], see Wednesday’s Study from parsha *Vayikra*.

*in honor preferring one another;
not lagging in diligence; fervent in spirit; serving the Holy One;
rejoicing in hope; enduring in troubles; continuing steadfastly in prayer;
contributing to the needs of the **k'doshim**; and given to hospitality.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless, and don't curse.
Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.
Be of the same mind one toward another.*

Don't set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.

Don't be wise in your own conceits.

Repay no one evil for evil. Respect what is honorable in the sight of all men.

If it is possible, as much as it is up to you, be at shalom with all men.

Don't seek revenge yourselves, beloved,

but give place/space/opportunity to the Holy One's wrath.

*For it is written, "**Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay**, says the Holy One."*

Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink.

For in doing so, you will heap coals of fire on his head."

Don't be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[Romans 12:9-21]

With these basic Torah principles in mind Shaul proceeds to his main subject – how to relate to the Godless, cruel, capricious, and dangerous Roman government. He speaks words the readers do not particularly want to hear. The words he speaks are not spoken in reference to, and have no applicability to “pastors” or “rabbis”. They are about *political and governmental* rulers – men who hold over you the power of *life and death*.

Recognizing that all Rome’s emperors and governors were not only pagan, but openly corrupt, and both engaged in and promoted every kind of evil, Shaul *still* did not counsel rebellion against them or *l’shon ha-ra* about them. He took the position that *we get the quality of government – and the quality of leaders - we deserve*. He focused attention on what WE do and how WE respond to evil – not on how bad the politicians or the governors are.

The only way to change the government of Rome [or America, or England, or South Africa for that matter], Shaul counseled, was to BE WHO WE WERE CREATED TO BE – and live a Torah lifestyle to its fullest, dying for it if necessary. He therefore taught us:

*Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities,
for there is no authority except from the Holy One
and those who exist are ordained by the Holy One.*

[Romans 13:1]

[A] List the specific elements of the lifestyle Shaul says that those who live their lives in fervent pursuit of the Holy One, offering their bodies as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), will live. [See Romans 12:9-21].

[B] We often think that wicked rulers, who persecute and abuse us, are set in

place by Ha-Satan (the adversary). We have a hard time accepting the right of someone like a Pharaoh to *rule over* us. However, according to Shaul who is it that establishes the authority of all governmental rulers?

[C] How do you explain Shaul's statement that we are to "submit" to rulers, however unGodly, and however cruel and violent their rule, rather than take up arms [or *lashon ha ra*] against them?

May the peace of the Holy One rule your heart this day, and may Messiah to you as King.

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Proverbs 23:1-3

***When you sit to eat with a ruler,
consider diligently what is before you;
Put a knife to your throat if you are a man given to appetite.
Don't be desirous of his dainties,
seeing they are deceitful food.***