

Introduction to Parsha # 38: Korach¹

READINGS: ***Torah Korach:*** Numbers 16:1 - 18:32
Haftarah: I Samuel 11:14 - 12:22
B'rit Chadasha: Romans 13:1-7



The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up.

[Numbers 16:32]

This Week's Amidah prayer is Petition No. 10: *Tzadikim* [Men Who Do the Will of the Holy One]

Vayikach Korach ben-Yitzhar ben-K'hat ben-Levi – and then Korach, son of Yitzhar, son of K'hat, son of Levi, took Numbers 16:1

All are called to participate in the Creator's Grand Plan; most, however, want nothing to do with either the Plan or the Planner. Though content to receive precious gifts like breath, heartbeat, brain waves, potential – and perhaps even great miracles of deliverance - from the Creator's Hand, they are too self-absorbed and flesh-driven to catch the Bridegroom King's glorious vision. They have no stomach for a mission (or a Kingdom) that requires humility, faithful stewardship, selfless service, and willing sacrifice on their part. That is why the 'tribe' thins dramatically every time the advance of the Kingdom meets resistance – or the summer heat sets in, whichever happens first.

Look around you, Beloved. Many - indeed most - of the people who meet with, study with, and 'worship' with you will 'tap out' when troubles come and times get tough. Will you do the same? Or will you be like Kalev and Yehoshua, and love the King and His Will, Words, and Ways enough to actually invest blood, sweat, and tears in the King's Glorious Mission, and to live only for His Will.

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Why Is the Tribe Thinning? Why Are So Many Suddenly ‘Tapping Out’?

As we begin our studies in Parsha Korach, we find that the entire generation of the Exodus - sans Kalev and Yehoshua - have given up on the Kingdom Vision and ‘tapped out’. Disheartened by stories of ‘giants in the land’, thousands have gnashed their teeth and loudly ‘bailed’ on the Holy One’s Great Nation/Am Segulah calling. As soon as the going threatened to get tough the thin veneer of spirituality with which most of those who had been delivered out of bondage bedecked themselves melted like the frosting from a cake left too long in the sun. They never seemed to grasp the concept of ‘reasonable service’. Nothing they did, it turns out, was for love of the King – but out of childish expectation of on-demand blessings for themselves. They neither understood the definition of discipleship nor considered its cost. They totally eschewed discipline. They apparently never bargained for resistance. They apparently never expected to have to deal with obstacles. They stiffened their necks, hardened their hearts, and bailed out on the Great Kingdom vision. And, of course, they chose to justify their failure by finding someone else to blame for it all. While the blame-slime was first aimed at Moshe and Aharon, that was just a shallow subterfuge. Their negative emotion and lashon hara were really directed at the Holy One Himself.

Sowing and Reaping

Do not take offense on the Holy One’s behalf. He knows that however many ‘called’ ones bail on Him in the Wilderness, He will never be left without at least two or three faithful witnesses in the world. He knows that all that is really going on is that the law of sowing and reaping is having its natural effect. He knows that millions of precious souls, each chock full of Divine Potential to be a blessing to the world, have chosen another path instead – opting to leave a legacy of complaint, offense, and despair instead of life, health, and peace. Instead of *sh’ma*-ing the Voice of the Creator and walking in His ways of life, health, and peace, they have chosen to indulge their basest fleshly instincts, overstimulate their pseudo-intellecets with cynicism, sarcasm, paranoia, and every other form of negativity they could think of, and embrace that which is *tamei* [KJV ‘unclean’]. Allowing dark energy emotions to enslave them, they have forfeited their true identity as *B’nei Yisrael*, profaned their calling, abandoned their posts, laid stumbling blocks of sabotage all along the desert floor, and thereby caused the redemptive plan of the Holy One for their bloodline to be put on hold for another generation. Alas, that is exactly why it is said: ***many are called, but few are chosen.***

***Those Who Walk in the Flesh and Pseudo-Intellect Have No
Tolerance for, and Therefore Choose to Separate Themselves From,
Voices of Life, Health, and Peace***

It started with great promise – flags flying, banners waving, and the shout of “*Let the Holy One arise, and let His enemies be scattered!*”. But that enthusiasm began to wane quickly in the heat of the desert. Now, a few weeks into our Destiny March toward the land of promise, the only shouts being voiced are cries of outrage and calls for rebellion. Once the first member of *ha-am* – the redeemed people/nation of the Holy One - chose to embrace fleshly negativity and voice complaint, there was no going back. A new narrative of discontent quickly developed, replete with a serpentine vocabulary of complaint, blame-casting, fearmongering, and despair. Now no one wants to hear any other perspective. No one wants to do justly, love mercy, or walk humbly with their God. No one wants to humble themselves and pray, and seek the Holy One’s Face, and turn from their wicked ways. Triggered by heat, relative hard times, and ridiculously harsh rhetoric, the masses now just see what they want to see, hear only what they want to hear, believe only what their demagogues and their own self-righteous pseudo-intellect want them to believe – and rant at and/or threaten to stone anyone who challenges their narrative by suggesting a return to the Holy One, His Ways, and His Plan. The masses have plopped down in the seat of the scornful, taken their stand in the way of sinners, and chosen to walk – if they walk at all - in the counsel of the ungodly. The only voices they sh’ma are those belonging to complainers, fear-mongerers, hate-mongerers, accusers of the brethren, outrage-instigators, vengeance-agitators, mockers, cynics, sycophants, and so-called ‘experts’. No one wanted to take an ounce of responsibility. No one wants to embrace the King’s yoke of humility, patience, gentleness, and self-control. They sell the sweet shalom of the Kingdom for a penny’s worth of moral outrage. They barter away the Covenant’s springs of eternal joy for the momentary adrenalin-rush of a profane rant. They take to public forum and scream outrageous slogans and over-simplistic half-truths. They whine and rant, act-out and smart-off - like a bunch of spoiled children. They snarl and bare their fangs like rabid dogs. They slander. They slime. They fill the whole world with noisy, nasty, negativity. They riot to make absolutely certain that the full extent of their narcissistic rage – and the sense of victimization/entitlement that it rides in on - is also felt. They pick up sticks and stones and tell the few forward-looking, Covenant-keeping visionaries in the camp to keep their counsel to themselves. They despise mercy. They offer no understanding, no forgiveness, no reconciliation, and no quarter. They eschew the high road of redemption and restoration that the Holy One mapped out for them, and choose instead the ‘low, long and winding’ road of self-will. Binging on the fruit of the tree of knowledge, every man does what seems right in his own eyes,

and thereby sentences himself - and those all who follow him down the wormhole of discontent - to a slow, miserable death.

We Have Met The Enemy ... And He is Us!

Alas, in seasons like this, no weapon needs to form against us, and no nation needs to attack us – because we prove quite effective at being our own worst enemy!

The Holy One is omniscient – and He therefore knows that, with just a couple of exceptions the entire witness throng that followed Moshe out of Egypt, sang *Ashirah!* at the Sea of Reeds, and heard His Voice booming from Sinai have *quit on Him* – and given up on the dream – after getting somewhere around halfway home. He knows that we have maxed out – and have, as a result, followed the dark energy of our *fleshly urges, appetites, and pseudo-intellectual opinions* across an invisible barrier of no return. He knows we do not have a clue what loving Him - or indeed, really caring about anyone but ourselves – even looks like, much less consists of. He knows we have zero passion for serving Him, zero stomach for trusting Him, and zero interest in walking with Him in any meaningful way. He knows that we will never, ever even give serious consideration to denying ourselves and *sh'ma-ing* His Voice at any crossroads at which the voice of another, or even our own pseudo-intellect, offers even the most ridiculous alternative. He knows we do not understand – indeed, have given up all curiosity concerning – the intended environmental impact of the Covenant lifestyle to which He has called us. He knows we have dug in our heels, and are not going to change our minds. So, He has honored our choice. He knows His Plan will have to wait for another generation. So be it – He will never drag us into the Land of Promise against our will. He knows that a murmuring and complaining, kicking and screaming entrance is neither the style of entrance the most Beautiful Land on the face of the earth deserves nor the kind of redemption story the lost and dying among the nations need to witness.

So, about the time we reach rock bottom in regard to the areas of faith, hope, and love, and are oozing discontent, restlessness, and rebellion like *tzara'at* ... along came *Korach*. This, too, is a test - and it is not solely a historical one, either.

Introducing the Prototypical Deceiver – Korach! His Prototypical Strategy of Deception, and His Prototypical Methodology of Luring Others into His Net of 'Falling Away'

In the Garden, we met and learned the tactics of the serpent. After the Flood we read about, and learned critical lessons about what NOT to do, from men like Nimrod and Cham. More recently we have slaved under – and had the Holy One

deliver us from – the dark magic of men like Laban and Pharaoh. We had a crash course in the tricks of Amalek and the clever flesh distractions that characterize the deception of Yitro. We now bear scars from each of these villains. But each of these came from outside our Covenant Community; rarely have we been wounded by our own brethren - in the house of friends. Indeed, not since the story of Yosef and his brothers have we had even one – much less several – of our own rise up against us in abject hatred. But all that is about to change. And it is going to start with a Levite – a son of K’hat – named Korach. Say hello to the prototypical deceiver of Torah. Take note of his prototypical strategy of deception. And pay close attention to his prototypical methodology of luring others into his net of ‘falling away’. There just might be a test on this subject matter in what some call the ‘latter days’. [*Let the reader understand!*]

Let’s take a closer look at this arch-villain of Torah – shall we? *Korach* was a descendant of Levi, of the clan of the *K’hatim* [Kohathites]. **Numbers 16:1**. When Korach was born into suffering, right alongside us, in Egyptian bondage he was undoubtedly his Hebrew *'imma's* beloved son and blessed hope. As mothers are wont to do, Korach's mother probably loved her precious son like life itself. She doubtlessly had high hopes for him. She surely wanted great things for him. She knew - as did his father, aunts, uncles and cousins - that he had been born at a very important time for a very important reason. His mother, at least, knew that young Korach was *a child of the Avrahamic Covenant* – and that as such he had been endowed by his Creator with everything he would ever need to be a blessing to the world.

Oh, that we could read the glorious, glowing narrative that the Holy One desired to write about young Korach’s life! But we cannot. Korach chose a different narrative. He came to the crossroads of the pathway that leads to greatness and that which leads to ignominy – and he chose the latter. Instead of fulfilling the Holy One’s highest and best plan for his life, he took the wrong fork in the road - and became instead *the most infamous Hebrew-born villain in the narrative of Torah*. A great calling and a great gifting – but Korach threw it all away for a song: ***Deep calls unto deep at the noise of Your waterfalls; all Your waves and billows have gone over me.*** Psalm 42:7 - a Psalm of the sons of Korach.

The Truly Great – and the Infamous – Among the Generations

Torah records for us the story of seven pivotal generations of Biblical history – i.e. the generation of *Noach*; the generation of *Avraham*; the generation of *Yitzchak* and *Yish'mael*; the generation of *Ya'akov/Esav*, the generation of *Yosef, his sister Dinah, and his brothers*; the generation of *Moshe, Miryam, Aharon, Korach* and *Bila'am*; and the generation of *Kalev, Yehoshua, Pinechas, Rachab, and the*

*Daughters of Tzelofechad*². The story of each of these great generations has been recorded for us in Torah and is diligently studied by us annually because each dealt with a separate set of challenges that the Holy One knew would be encountered by all men, in every generation. Torah is not just ‘their’ story; it is the story of every man.

Each of the seven pivotal generations chronicled in the Torah experienced a great *foreboding state of darkness, a dramatic calling forth to serve as a light for the nations, and a great prophetic journey that was strategically designed to release on earth another element of the Grand Redemptive Plan of Heaven*. Each of the seven chronicled generations involved an earthly Covenant Partner of the Creator of the Universe walking with Him through great trials – sometimes experiencing great triumphs, but sometimes experiencing terrible seasons of loss of Covenant identity, loss of Kingdom focus, and deviation from the redemptive mission, resulting in a great personal, familial, and/or national tragedy. Through it all, however, the Covenant endured – and the Grand Redemptive Plan continued to advance, being carried forward powerfully into the next generation.

For weeks now in our studies Torah has been focusing our attention on the sixth great generation of Torah. This was the generation of Moshe/Miryam/Aharon *et al* – and it is primarily known as *the generation of the Exodus*. Its story started with enslavement in Egypt, culminating in the Exodus. But that was just the beginning of the journey. Off into the ‘first wilderness’ they went – the great wilderness between Rameses and Sinai. The story of this part of *the journey* was chronicled for us in a ‘*former days wilderness testing*’ trilogy of parshot. This trilogy was found in *Sefer Sh’mot*, and consisted of parshot *B’shelach, Yitro, and Ki Tisa*. In that trilogy of parshot we faced the tests of the Sea of Reeds, of Marah, of the deprivation of the Wilderness of Sin, of Refidim, of Amalek, of the visit of Yitro, of Matan Torah, and of the Golden Calf. These three parshot detailed the greatest tests the prototypical Community of the Redeemed faced between leaving Egypt and the beginning of the sweet season of co-laboring to construct the *Mish’kan*. Each of these ‘former days’ tests represents a prototype for the tests that all generations of newly redeemed, reawakened, and/or engrafted souls will ever experience in the early days of their walking in covenant with the Holy One.

But the former days trilogy of wilderness testing was just the beginning. Once they left Sinai the generation of the Exodus entered another, even more intense, season

² There are, of course, other generations referenced in the Torah – including of course the initial generation of Adam and Chava, and their children, Hevel, Kayin, and Shet, as well as the generation of Noach’s sons, Cham, Shem, and Yafet. But the seven generations referenced above in the text are the ones who receive the majority of the attention of Torah’s Author.

of prototypical testing. Torah presents the story of this second season of testing in a 'latter days' trilogy of parshot consisting of *B'ha'alotcha*, *Shelach Lecha*, which we have already studied, and *Korach*, which we will study this week. This second trilogy of *parshot* chronicles the tests the prototypical Community of the Redeemed faced between departing from Sinai and either *dying in the desert* or *moving forward with the Holy One toward our destiny*. Each of the tests of this latter trilogy is prophetic of the tests that all generations of redeemed, reawakened and engrafted souls will experience in the latter part of their time of walking with the Holy One.

B'ha'alotcha focused primarily on the test of *dislocation, disorientation, discomfort and resulting discontent*. The second parsha of the trilogy focused primarily on the test of *coming face to face with our deepest, most ingrained fears*. Parsha *Korach* will deal primarily with *the test of perceived inequities and injustices*. This is the week when some mortal man, woman or politico among us always finds – or manufactures - a reason to get totally outraged about some abstract idea or concept. He then starts pontificating to everyone who will listen about how evil and inhumane whoever in charge is. He then insists - or at least strongly implies - he or she should be running the household, the business, the community, the nation, and/or the world instead.

This week you will probably hear demagogues stirring up, then mercilessly exploiting, dissatisfaction in the ranks. The tools of exploitation we most frequently encounter during the week of *Korach* are *ad hominem* attacks against whoever is in leadership, under the thin cover of some divisive social issue - especially an issue related to race, class, ethnicity, ideology, region, political affiliation, weaponized popular science, morality, or religious belief. The demagogue picks some emotionally charged issue or event to be his platform. He then lifts the platform issue or event out of its larger context and zeroes in on only the part of it that suits his narrative. He then uses this 'spun platform' to manufacture a sense of moral outrage amongst his 'base' of closest political/ideological allies. He then teams up with those allies to mount an intense propaganda campaign to stir the already raw emotions of the common people to a boil-over point – and beyond.

Alas, so many of us just keep falling for it, year after year. The answer to injustice and inequity is not ranting and revolting against people in charge. The answer is showing kindness directly to the individuals within our sphere of influence who are actual victims of the injustice, caring for and giving a helping hand to those who are adversely affected by the inequity, and trusting the Holy One to process the people on what appears to be the 'wrong side' of the injustice or inequality through

the sowing and reaping cycle in ways that heal souls and bloodlines rather than cripple them.

I hope you are ready to get past all the drama and the trauma of the season and move on with your life and calling. This is the appointed time, you see, for all *sh'ma* people of the Bridegroom-King to finally embrace the call to *humility, meekness, faithfulness, and the fear of Heaven* – for it is these qualities that will be essential for us to finish the course that is set before us in a way that bring honor and glory to our King. I have therefore come to call the week we study this particular section of Holy Writ *the prophetic week of finally dying to the flesh and overcoming the critical spirit.*

The Reign of the Flesh – And the Critical Spirit – Is Coming to an End – But Will Not Go Gently Into That Good Night

The Holy One has a plan to end the reign of the flesh – and to silence the critical spirit that inevitably emanates from flesh-obsessed people. The first phase of the Holy One's plan involves bringing out the absolute worst of the flesh through an intense series of physical and emotionally challenging tests. That is why He led us on a three-day forced march into the wilderness of Paran in the hottest season of the year. How did our flesh respond? First it responded with grumbling and complaining. Then it erupted with *intense narcissistic cravings*, even as the critical spirit that served as the flesh-demi-god's false prophet were spewing out putrid streams of sarcasm, cynicism, pessimism, and accusation. Score one for the Holy One. His first objective was accomplished. The flesh that we foolishly thought we had brought under the enlightened dominion of the new creation nature the Holy One had birthed in us through the creative, prophetic power of the *aseret ha-dibrot* and the *Mishpatim, Mish'kan, Kedusha, and 'Final Preparation for Departure' Discourses* was exposed to be still very much in command.

The second phase of the Holy One's plan to end the reign of the flesh and of the critical spirit involved clearly exposing the toxic, tyrannical, oppressive, and murderous nature of flesh-rule. This the Bridegroom-King accomplished by contrasting the ways of the awakened and incensed flesh of man with His kind, gentle and Ways of life, health, and *shalom*. He responded to our outcry for meat to eat to supplement our daily diet of manna – and we behaved like savage animals instead of men. Moshe ranted and raved and despaired of his life, so the Holy One gave him seventy elders with whom to share the burden of the nation – and the companionship and empowerment of His Spirit. The majority of the spies called the very same land they confirmed to be a land of milk and honey a land that 'devours its inhabitants'; Kalev calmly said, ***“Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.”*** Under the reign of the flesh and the critical

spirit, the community picked up stones to murder Kalev. Score another one for the Holy One. Second objective accomplished. It is very, very clear now that the flesh is a cruel tyrant, that the critical spirit is a pompous fool, and that the reign of those two together brings only destruction and oppression.

The third and final phase of the Holy One's plan to end the reign of the flesh and the critical spirit in His People will involve putting the flesh to death and silencing the voice of the critical spirit. Alas, neither of these will go gently into the good night that the Holy One has in store for them. Welcome to parsha *Korach* – Torah's prophetic chronicle of the final struggle of the flesh against the Divine decree of death and the final, futile railings of the critical spirit against the Divine sentence of silence. Just remember now – this is not about THEM, and THEIR Flesh, and THEIR critical spirit. It is about US, and about OURS.

Sic Semper Tyrannis – Thus Shall It Always Be to Tyrants!

Korach is like a hawker on a carnival midway. He will do whatever it takes to get your attention, tickle your ears, and fire up your negative emotions, self-interest, sense of entitlement, and illusion of moral, ethical, ethnic, political, and intellectual superiority. The parsha of Torah that introduces us to *Korach* is designed to do the exact opposite – its role is to make us face our worst selves and our worst fears and return in humility and sincere passion to the Presence, the Throne, the Will, the Ways, and the Plan of our Creator. By Divine design we always study this parsha in the throes of a season when everything seems to become intense. First come the intense *weather* patterns. Waves of intense heat hit the Northern Hemisphere. Blustery cold blasts the Southern Hemisphere. Then, inevitably as the weather patterns around us intensify, our flesh starts to grumble and complain – just as our ancestors did when the heat hit them in the Wilderness of Paran. Suddenly we find ourselves experiencing *intense narcissistic³ cravings and temptations*. The *law of our members* and the *law of our mind* conspire with each other to yield to fleshly cravings for everything from *comfort food* to *attention* to *self-expression* to *romance* to *power*. Anything that offers a rush of either *adrenalin⁴* or *melatonin⁵*,

³ The English adjective *narcissistic* refers to self-centeredness, reflected in one's mood, one's attitude, one's stream of thought, one's speech, one's reactions to people and situations, and one's patterns of behavior. To be narcissistic means to have an exaggerated view of one's own importance, usually associated with a craving for what one perceives as the level of respect, admiration, influence, and impact – or in some cases loathing and judgment - that one's self-obsession causes one to think one deserves.

⁴ *Adrenaline* is a chemical/ hormone produced by the human body to prepare a person for exertion, confrontation, or any intense activity. This hormone is especially designed by the Creator to help us deal with both perceived threats and perceived pleasures, hence it is the hormone primarily responsible for triggering the fight or flight response. A rush of adrenaline produces increased supplies of both oxygen and blood by increasing the activity of our heart, dilating our blood vessels. This gives a quick boost in the supply of oxygen and glucose to our brain and our muscles, while simultaneously suppressing bodily functions that are of lower priority than physical exertion – e.g. digestion - and enhancing whatever emotions we happen to be experiencing.

we suddenly crave it. If, as, when, and to the extent we yield to these cravings, however, we find ourselves experiencing *intense episodes of interpersonal drama*. We get *over stimulated*. We get *hypersensitive*. We start to *over-react* to minor things – especially in the realm of irritation and titillation - with intense emotion. The slightest incitement sets us off. We become addicts of outrage. We pick up, embrace, carry and begin to export offenses. Our thin veneer of civility disappears, as the slightest stimulus can suddenly trigger jealousy, argumentativeness, self-righteousness, lust, greed, gluttony and a host of other toxic flesh reactions. This evidences *our foolish under-valuation of the Holy One's gift of shalom* and the associated *calling to be a blessing*.

We find ourselves compulsively indulging negative thoughts – especially of deprivation and dissatisfaction. We nurse and coddle feelings of disappointment. Our communication degenerates into ever-darker layers of *murmur* and *complaint*. This evidences *our drastic under-appreciation of the Holy One's gift of joy and the associated calling to thanksgiving, testimony, and praise*. We start to enjoy listening to, speaking, and repeating accusations of fault and blameworthiness aimed at other people - especially if what our fallen, self-righteous minds diagnose and label as excess, unfairness, immorality, injustice, or impropriety happen to be involved. This evidences our complete *disdain of the Holy One's gift of, and calling to, love*. Adopting these attitudes and behaviors always makes us toxic to human interaction. As we wound and maim others with our negativity, they respond by either seizing upon our discontent and lack of sense of purpose and stepping in to control us, or they keep us at arms length. Either way, we feel ourselves losing 'control', and it just exacerbates the negative feelings we have indulged. We feel like the good things of this life are evading us. We feel the world is passing us by. We spend our time thinking morbid thoughts. We make 'bucket lists'. We gradually cave in to fear and intimidation. This leads to despair – evidencing our *forfeiture of the Holy One's precious gift of, and calling to, hope*. And when our flesh hits 'rock bottom', and our critical spirit destroys all our relationships and brings deep division to all our families, the Holy One calls us awaken, to arise, and to grow up. He knows we cannot have the impact upon the world that He envisions for us if we continue to be slaves to *fleshly distractions, negativity of thought and opinion, self-centered complaints, self-righteous criticism, and self-promoting accusations*. In this season of the year, therefore, the Holy One shows His love for and commitment to us by allowing our fleshly appetites, fears, doctrinal biases, and self-righteousness to rise up and have one last fling. He knows that when this happens, for a season – until all the negativity and narcissism play themselves out - our relationship with Him will grow stale, and our

⁵ *Melatonin* is a chemical/hormone produced by the body to prepare a person for a period of rest or sleep by making him feel calm, mellow, relaxed, and drowsy. It performs the opposite function of *adrenaline*.

interactions with our fellow man will grow critical, irritable, and noxious. The latter phenomenon is, of course, always a predictable natural consequence of the former. *Staleness of relationship with the Holy One always lies at the root of every conflict a redeemed person has with other human beings.*

The emphasis of overcoming this week should therefore always be on restoring the passion and favor to our relationship with the Holy One. This is *'the good fight'*. Indeed, it is the *only* fight that matters. Right relationship with man will always flow naturally outward from the restoration of intimacy with our Bridegroom-King.

Welcome to the 38th parsha of the annual cycle – ***Korach***. This pivotal parsha constitutes the final installment in Torah's *Second Prophetic Trilogy of Wilderness Testing*.

Welcome to Wilderness Testing – the Sequel!

This week is the Holy One's appointed time for us to relive and relearn the harsh lessons of the most famous rebellion in Biblical history – the so-called *Rebellion of Korach*. Basically what happened is that Korach, one of the members of Moshe and Aharon's own clan of Levites, conspired with some of the leaders of the tribe of Reuven to wrest control of the camp away from Moshe and Aharon. Through murmuring, complaining and demagoguery they induced 250 respected leaders of the various tribes to join the rebellion. Adopting the mantle of piety and justice, and pretending to be champions of his people, Korach and his co-conspirators accused Moshe and Aharon of imposing themselves and their opinions upon the community. Their battle cry was *'you take too much upon yourselves, Moshe and Aharon, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Holy One is in their midst. So why do raise yourselves above the Holy One's assembly?'* Numbers 16:3. Note the extreme negativity. Note the self-righteous, inflammatory, and accusatory tone. Note the rewriting of history. Note the employment of irrelevant truisms of theory and rhetoric for self-justification. Welcome to the season of demagoguery, Dear One. Welcome to the era of populism, the age of socialism, and the outraged war cry of self-serving libertarianism. Welcome to the *"I Want it My Way"* revolution in its darkest manifestation. Can you keep your head – and keep your focus – and keep receiving and emitting Divine Light – while the world around you is thinking, speaking and taking up arms to fight over high-sounding but spiritually-bankrupt concepts?

The story of Korach's populist rebellion does not make for pleasant reading. It is not supposed to. It is supposed to *absolutely break our heart*. The Author of Torah designed it - and strategically placed it in His *Precious Book of Instructions on Living the Overcoming Life* - to do just that, every year at this strategic time. We

are not called to be crusaders. We are not called to propagate a new form of darkness. We are not called to join any political or ideological movement. We are not called to overcome either the tyranny in others or the rebellion within our own ranks with either the sharp tongues of political, ideological, or theological rhetoric or the sharp swords of carnal warfare. We are not called to take sides or take up arms over ideas of the human mind; we are called to *take heart, take counsel from Heaven, and stay as close to the Holy One and as far away from the human combatants as possible*. We are called to *overcome all evil* – external to us or arising from our own fallen nature - *with good*.

How Did We Go From the Song of the Sea and the Vows of Sinai to This?

The question of the week will be this: *How in the world did a community of redeemed souls fall so far so fast?* Put another way, it is: *“What on earth caused us to plunge from the amazing heights of the encounters we experienced with our Bridegroom-King at the Sea of Reeds and at Sinai to the sickening cesspool of the events about which we read in parsha Korach?”* It is a lesson we all need to learn. The shocking reality is that it could happen to anyone – and will happen to most. The horrible truth is that it is probably happening to us – or to someone dear to us - right now. The dark actuality is that the seeds of it are probably present and trying to sprout in every single one of us at this very instant.

The *good fight of faith* is not a fight we wage against the Devil, against demons, nor against the unrighteous or even the ungodly in the earth. The enemies in the good fight of faith are *the perversion in our own flesh, the twisted logic that emanates from our fallen minds, the self-deception that colors our attitudes, the outrageous folly that forges our opinions, and the sinister self-obsession that contaminates our moods*. The deadliest enemies we face in the good fight of faith are the *poison in our own mouths, the corruption in our own minds, and the darkness in our own hearts*.

We can never allow ourselves to get overconfident. We never have any justification to get self-righteous. All our confidence is to be in the Holy One – not in our flesh. Or else we *fight as one who beats the air*.

Hello Darkness, My Old Friend

The ***Korach*** debacle is not a historical narrative of a problem that happened to a bunch of inferior people who lived a long time ago and long way away. This is your story - and this is mine – *unless* Unless what, you ask? Well, that is why we study this parsha every year. We will discover *the secret of the unless* in due time. Let us start the week, however, with this word of warning: Every rebellion

begins with *seemingly harmless whispers of discontent*. A little complaint about *nothing significant* here; a little *letting off steam* there. A little *tidbit of sarcasm* aimed at no one in particular, followed by a *little outburst of negativity* about somebody in whose shoes we have never walked. Then comes a little griping about a situation we are doing nothing to improve, followed by a little 'misery-loves-company' pity party - all followed in turn by a little incident blown completely out of proportion by a drama-queen or little lord Fauntleroy. And before you know it, everybody's talking about it.

It is that time again. Hello *Korach*. Hello *Datan*. Hello *Aviram*. Hello *On*. Hello again, *Yish'mael*. Hello again *Esav*. Hello again *Cham*, and hello again *Kayin*. Hello again dear reader. And hello again you harmless, innocent-looking man grinning winsomely at me from the recesses of my mirror. And while we are in the mode of greeting all our old comrades of rebellion, well ... let's just say it: Hello again, you resilient, wily, trouble-making little Serpent you!

As you will recall Korach's clan, the *K'hatim*, was one of three clans descended from Ya'akov's fourth son Levi. Earlier in the Book of Numbers we read how the Holy One assigned the men of that clan a very important duty – namely the responsibility of carrying on their shoulders the ark of the covenant and the other articles of furniture from the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle].⁶ But Korach was not satisfied with this. So in the aftermath of *chet ha-meraglim* Korach decided now was as good a time as any to challenge Moshe and Aharon for leadership of the Camp. Korach enlisted some high-powered allies in this coup attempt - he won over not only three influential men from the tribe of Ya'akov's firstborn, Reuben, but a whopping 250 members of the ruling counsel of the nation. He apparently went from tribe to tribe, spreading his slander of Moshe – and found a sympathetic ear in every part of the Camp. The fact that over 250 of the highest-level leaders of the community – including an influential leader of Moshe's own clan - joined in and supported the coup attempt made it *a major crisis of leadership*. This was *not just a few malcontents and troublemakers spouting off*. So let us look at the camp with the eyes of the *Ruach HaQodesh* [Holy Spirit] and see what was going on - why so many people were dissatisfied enough to risk their lives and their places of leadership in the camp to “set things right” as they saw it.

A Tough Week Ahead?

The week of ***Korach*** always seems to be a tough week. It shouldn't be, of course. We who have been blessed to encounter the Creator of the Universe through Messiah Yeshua should have so much joy, so much peace, so much hope, so much life, so much thankfulness for all the Holy One *has done* and *is actively in the*

⁶ See Numbers 4 for details.

process of doing for us that we literally cause whatever desert in which we find ourselves to burst into bloom and become a fruitful plain. But unfortunately, our selfish, ungrateful, putrid flesh, the unrenewed, cynical, diseased part of our minds, and the self-righteous, elitist, narcissistic attitudes we love to indulge always seem to get in the way.

Every year about this time many seem to quit meditating on the Torah and seeking the Kingdom of Heaven and His righteousness, and instead start looking around for something to complain about, someone to blame for it, and some way to make our life – and the lives of everyone we know - miserable. I call it *Les Miserables Syndrome*. Gird up your loins. Do yourself – and your family and world – a big favor, and resolve not to give in to it this year. Fight the good fight.

Do you know what to watch for? Do you know the early warning signs?

The Early Warning Signs of Les Miserables Syndrome

The symptoms of *Les Miserables Syndrome* tend to start with slacking off on Torah study, thanksgiving, and prayer, and starting to focus instead on self-gratification. This is quickly followed by a shifting of the center of gravity of thought life and speech away from matters of mission, purpose, and destiny and toward personal likes and dislikes, physical comforts and discomforts, and pining after the supposed pleasures of this world. And that is where the whispers of discontent really start to rumble. Your sense of awe, astonishment, wonder and amazement at the goodness of the Holy One wanes. The *awareness of His Majesty* eludes you. You cease to *tremble at His Word*. His Name falls from your lips like a shrew's curse instead of a *bride's reverent whisper*.

As the syndrome progresses you your passion for your *glorious mission as an ambassador of the Bridegroom-King* to the nations and peoples of the world begins to fade into cynicism. As the *Les Miserables* experience intensifies your exuberant *testimony of the Radical Kindness* with which He captured your heart turns into the repetition of cold *clichés* of religion, tinged with sarcasm, culminating in criticism. Before you know it you are seeking out – and walking daily in - *the counsel of the ungodly*. It is not far from that to standing in *the way of sinners*. And pretty soon people around you begin to notice that you have set up shop and are taking all your meals in and receiving all your visitors from your comfortable perch in *the seat of the scornful*.

Please understand however that by the time you can actually hear the rumbling of whispers of discontent the floodwaters of rebellion have already begun to swell and are rushing toward you. Find the high ground. Do not let yourself get caught

up in either listening to, generating or repeating even those first whispers of discontent! If you do not nip it in the bud at the ‘whispers of discontent’ stage the downward spiral will quickly progress to open accusation. Then before you know it a toxic combination of *political philosophies, moralizing ideologies, elitist scientific, sociological, and/or psychological theories, meaningless theological debates* and various and sundry other *vain imaginations* dreamed up in the diseased mind of fallen man, will gradually begin to take the place of the sweet, gentle flow of Divine Revelation in which we are called to *live, to take delight, and to bear fruit*. At the height of *Les Miserables Syndrome* we awake to find that abstract ideas, concepts and labels have become far more important to us than having meaningful, beneficial interactions with real people in real time, and that scoring technical points in esoteric debates over belief, creed, and *halakah* become more important than knowing, following, worshipping, and serving our Glorious Bridegroom-King.

Do Not Allow Les Miserables Syndrome to Spread to You!

Don’t let it happen to you this year, Beloved. Remember Whom it is before you stand – and tremble in wonder and humble awe at His Majesty, His Beauty, His Favor, and His boundless Mercy. Ask Him to teach you His Ways, and show you His Glory. Ask Him to overwhelm your heart with His Love for mankind – even for the rebellious, lawless, and deceived – and then ask Him to flood your thoughts, conversations, and human interactions with peaceable, practical Wisdom from His Brilliant Mind. Focus your attention on the revelation of Torah and the testimony of Y’shua - and do not let your intellect or sense of 'fairness' - the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - lead you astray!

If you let political philosophies/ideologies and your fallen flesh’s sense of ‘right and wrong’, ‘good and evil’, ‘fair and unfair’, and ‘moral and immoral’ have their way ... well, Dear Reader, if you do that I can only tell you that you and everyone in your household are in for an ugly ride. Ask Korach, Datan, and Aviram. Better yet, ask their wives and children. Maybe at least a great sinkhole will not open up and consume your house like it did Korach’s tent. But even if it doesn’t when all is said and done you will find out that all you have accomplished is wasting some of the best days and relationships of your life on nothing but a sly old Serpent’s song.

Choose Your Cocktail:

***Will You Drink From the Cup Poured for You by the Bridegroom of Heaven,
Or Will You Choose Instead the Toxic One Offered to Us
by Our Old Nemesis the Serpent - and His Servants Yish’mael, Laban,
Pharaoh, Amalek, Yitro, and Korach?***

Who do you want to fill your cup/goblet/glass – and with what do you want it filled? Do you want the Holy One to pour for you the cup of ‘*salvation*’,

deliverance, rescue, healing, and restoration [Hebrew, *kos yeshuat*; see **Psalm 116:13** – or do you want to take a few shots from the cup of the *wine of fury/anger/outrage* [Hebrew, *kos-yayin ha-chemah* – see **Jeremiah 25:15**]?

Which cup – and which cocktail - you choose to drink in the intense ‘proving ground’ seasons will determine the impact your life has on your loved ones, your bloodline, your social circle, your nation, your generation, and Creation. We were created to fill the earth with sounds of thanksgiving, praise, and worship. We have been given the gift of life and breath at such a time as this to release on earth the sweet refrains of the songs of deliverance that are even now being sung in Heaven. From our lips should constantly pour forth exuberant testimonies of His Beautiful Persona, His Marvelous Works, His Glorious Plan of Redemption for All His Creation, and His Wise and Wonderful Ways. We have been gloriously redeemed from houses of bondage to saturate the atmosphere with the fragrance of our Redeemer’s Presence. We have, through no merit of our own, been called out of the world’s thickest darkness to reflect the Light of our Joyful Bridegroom-King’s Countenance throughout the world. We have been called forth in such a time as this to demonstrate wisdom, love, peace, humility, faith, dedication, and self-denial as we faithfully follow our Bridegroom-King’s lead in performing specially designed and beautifully choreographed acts of kindness to demonstrate the goodness of our God to the peoples of the earth in tangible ways in *real time*. And we are supposed to do this in every environment and situation – even right smack in the middle of *Yish ’mael’s world*.

Our Bridegroom-King will empower us. He will go before us and lead us and show us how to do these things. But we will have to respond to His Voice like a Child, and to His Movements like a Bride. We will have to co-labor with Him like a Kingdom of Priests. Do we have it in us? Or have we drunk the wrong cocktail, and become carriers of *Les Miserables Syndrome*?

Guard your heart and your tongue this week. Interpersonal controversy and messy forms of interpersonal drama are bound to play out within your sphere of influence over the next few days in ways that will make both the *lashon hara outpouring* of *B’ha’alotcha* and the *outrage and offense rampage* of *Shelach Lecha* pale in comparison. As it all begins to unfold around you, remember who you are and why you are here on earth at such a time as this. It is not to take sides in wars of words, nor serve as pawns in the power struggles of either elites or ethnicities. You are called to a higher mission. You are called to serve as an *ambassador of the Kingdom of Heaven* to ALL SIDES, all POWER BASES, and ALL ETHNICITIES. Do not allow your mission on earth to be compromised by initiating, participating as a gladiator in or a cheerleader for, or even being a willing spectator in relation to, any earthly controversy or the drama.

Putting the Korach Narrative In Context

Let us explore the context of Korach's ill-fated rebellion in the context in which Torah presents it. Remember that our ancestors, the children of Israel⁷, have just experienced the "sin of the spies". Upon the return of the twelve men sent by Moshe to "spy out" the Land which the Holy One had promised the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, the entire redeemed community (save *Y'hoshua* [Joshua] and *Kalev* [Caleb]) heeded the majority report, rejected the promised inheritance laid up for them by the Holy One, and wished/prayed to die in the desert (or go back to Egypt, which was not an option the Holy One was willing to consider).

Remember that the Holy One issued a decree that not one of those who had rejected His promised inheritance would ever see it and that the rejecting generation would all die in the desert – *exactly as we ourselves had requested*. Perhaps the best way to 'climb in' to the context and get an understanding for the background of the rebellion of Korach is to read an imaginary diary of one of the people alive at that time. Permit me to open the pages of such a diary for you.

Dear Desert Diary ...

Well, we asked for it – and I guess the Holy One is granting our request. Each and every one of us who is 20 years of age or older is destined to die out here in the desert of Paran. It is just a matter of time. All we know is that sometime within the next 40 years or so it is going to happen to each one of us. We are all on "death row", waiting for the executioner. Each day we watch our friends, brothers, and contemporaries die - sometimes one by one, and sometimes in large groups. Sometimes we wonder - *who will be the next one called?* Will it be *me*? Will it be *my wife*? My brother? My sister? We never know when or how or where it will happen. Death just comes.

The realization has now set in that *we will never go to the land of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov*. We know as well that we will also never return to Egypt. Indeed, we are trapped in Yish'mael's world - the desert of Paran. We are fed, clothed and "free", it is true – but we are *getting nowhere and going nowhere*. And it turns out that this *dying in the desert* thing - which we had only recently deemed preferable to entering the land of promise and facing the *Kena'anim* [Canaanites] - is not at all what we had thought it would be. It is *slow, miserable death*.

⁷ In Hebrew, the term is *b'nei Yisrael*. Some of us are natural descendants of Ya'akov/Yisrael by bloodline; others have been engrafted into Israel and become associated with B'nei Yisrael through the redemptive work of Messiah.

We looked to Moshe and Aharon for guidance, counsel and deliverance at first. We quickly found however that those two are now focusing all their attention on the younger generation - those less than 20 years of age at the time of the *chet ha-meraglim*. All Moshe's time and energy is now spent in passing on to this new generation words of promise and instruction that because of the decree that we will all die in the desert mean nothing to us adults.

Whether we are *leaders* or peasants we now find that it is *not getting any better*, is not going to get any better - and it seems like there is *nothing we can do about it*. It suddenly seems *as if we do not exist* - in the eyes of Moshe, Aharon, or the Holy One - and more and more in the eyes and attitudes of the younger generation. We have become a generation of *rejects, cast-offs, misfits*. Yet we still have to wake up each morning and find some way to occupy ourselves the entire day. We still have to prepare for bed each night not knowing if the death angel will come while we are sleeping, taking a spouse or friend or brother and leaving us more alone and hopeless even than we already are. We wonder such things as:

“What are we supposed to do we do with the rest of our lives?”

“What is the point of staying here in this camp?”

and

*“Why should we do this meaningless religious “stuff”
Moshe always talks about anymore?”*

We have begun to question whether we have ever really known the Holy One, whether we really heard His voice thundering from Sinai, and whether our eyes really saw the miracles He performed. We have begun to ask each other (although deep in our hearts we know better) whether Moshe perhaps just “made up” all the stuff he had told us in order to build his own little empire here in the desert. We do not understand why we are supposed to support Moshe's brother - a man with a “checked history” to say the least - with offerings of our herds and flocks. What we need is a *new revelation*. What we need is someone who *understands our pain*. What we need is someone who *makes us feel important* again. What we need is someone who *can give voice to the cry within our hearts that we not become mere footnotes in the religious history of the world*.

Enter Korach – A Charismatic “Man of the People”

Into this morass of discontent steps ... *Korach*. Who could not like this guy? Korachs are always *charismatic* and *energetic* and *brimming with self-confidence*. Their resumes never seem to be long on noteworthy accomplishments, but they *spoke eloquently* – and they *move with savoir-faire!* Now consider Moshe. Moshe provides the ultimate contrast. Even in his youth he was slow-of-speech and thick-of-tongue. Now he is old and cranky and usually quite frankly looks like he wished

he was somewhere else – back on Sinai perhaps, or up on some mountain in Kena'an that because of us he will never see. The contrast in styles between a Korach and a Moshe are dramatic. What is more a Moshe's message always seems to call forth covenant responsibility, covenant faithfulness, and things like perseverance and patience, and *yada, yada, yada*. Not so a Korach. No self-denying, or Holy One revering, or Torah lifestyle stuff for a Korach! Korachs only *say what people want to hear*. Korachs *stimulate the darker areas of the fallen human mind*. Korachs *always play to – and activate - the stubborn, self-obsessed will*. Korachs *inflate egos*. Korachs *appeal simultaneously to the idealism and the perversion of the flesh*.

The Korach of history made a cast-off generation *feel important again*. So it will be in the latter days. The Korach of Paran presented hope that ordinary, narcissistic, flesh-obsessed people could *do something to improve their own circumstances*. Yes, his end-times counterpart will do the same thing. The Korach figure of Torah's narrative implied – indeed *openly declared* - that *the whirlwind of calamity men reap from sowing to the flesh is not fair, just, or appropriate*. You might want to prepare to hear that message repeated a lot in the latter days as well.

The Korachs of this world always cater to our desire to lay *the fault and blame for all our problems at the feet of ... well, at the feet of whoever the closest representatives of the Holy One happen to be!* The Korachs of this world always lead us to believe – because we so desperately *want to believe* - that with new leadership (which of course means his Korachian leadership, of course) *everything will somehow just suddenly change for the better*.

Of course, if in the case of the historic Korach we had paid a little more attention we might have noticed that the tools Korach used to convince us of these things bore a significant resemblance to the Serpent's tools of *l'shon ha-ra* [negative speech about others, in the form of criticism, gossip and accusation], *flattery*, and *demagoguery*. But we were just too unhappy with the Holy One and His Ways – and too impressed with the strength of Korach's personality and the hypnotic quality of his voice - to notice a little detail like that. That is how the Korachs of the world can deceive even the elect.

One of the things people tend to like most about Korachs is that when Korachs talk they take our minds *off of the Torah, off of the responsibility side of the Avrahamic Covenant*, and off of the high level of accountability that comes with being called to co-labor with the Creator of the Universe. After all, the Torah requires subjugation of fleshly appetites, urges, and desires - as well as all our self-righteous attitudes, opinions, and *offenses* - to the priorities of *Covenant*

Relationship, Mission, and Purpose. The Covenant calls us to a higher level of *purity, humility, and accountability* – and the truth is, our flesh wants NONE of any of those things. All our flesh ever really wants is freedom from enslavement to the Pharaohs of this world. And sometimes, in truth, our flesh does not even really want that.

How Did/Will Korach Do It?

Korach will win men over to his rebellion against the Holy One primarily by making us *forget* how we had committed adultery against our Divine Bridegroom while at Sinai, and how after He forgave us for that and restored us to covenant we nevertheless flatly rejected His bridal chamber at Kadesh-Barnea. Korach's rhetoric will *gloss over Sinai, ignore Kadesh-Barnea ...* and make all that 'covenant' stuff seem unimportant, old-fashioned, and passé'. Korach's public relations-gurus will do a tremendous job of re-packaging *the logic of Babel* in a new and exciting way. Korach and his spin-masters will rewrite our national history as they please, to suit their dark and sinister purposes. They will declare Torah, and indeed all of Sinaitic revelation, to be obsolete – a failed experiment for another day. Getting to think ourselves spiritually superior to others without having any responsibility to reflect the holiness of God, that is the Korachian message. Korach's message makes spirituality all about **US** and whatever our flesh wants to indulge itself in in the name of 'freedom from the law'. Korachian theology allows us to redefine our relationship with our Creator on terms that actually made Him OUR SERVANT – instead of the other way around.

How could we not see a man like Korach as our *new hero*, the one who *would surely deliver us*? How could we not think he was the one who could *change everything*, and create for us the utopian dream that offered us life without responsibility. How could we not come to see him as *our hope* for a positive change – and see his takeover of the camp as our ticket to a better and brighter future? That, of course, was where we made our tragic mistake. The truth we did not see was that Korach could **not** be our hope - any more than Moshe or Aharon were our hope back in Egypt. Korach was no better nor worse than any other man we might have chosen to exalt, put on a pedestal and worship. Men – however charismatic and gifted they may be - just don't belong on pedestals. What we really needed therefore was not a new charismatic leader, a new hero, or a new deliverer - what we really needed was *a fresh new encounter with the Holy One*, and *a fresh new revelation of His plan of redemption for mankind*. What we really needed was to run **to** the Holy One, not *away from* Him. What we really needed was to face up to our breaches of covenant, deal with the consequences of the choices we had made, and trust the Holy One to bring good out of what looked, felt, tasted and smelled to our shell-shocked human senses like *unmitigated disaster*.

The message we really needed was the timeless message later placed in writing for all generations by *Ha-navi Hoshea* [the prophet Hosea]:

Come, let us return unto the Holy One. He has torn us to pieces, but He will heal us; He has injured us, but He will bind up our wounds.

After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will restore us, that we may live in His Presence. Let us know the Holy One; let us press on to know Him.

Oh, that such had been Korach's message. Oh that it would be ours!

False Hope?

Would such a message, had it been delivered, have been a *false prophecy*, holding out *false hope* to a generation under the wrath of the Holy One? No Beloved. There is no false hope presented. The Holy One disciplines, and if His discipline is not heeded, and He is left no viable 'mercy alternative' to judgment, the resulting judgment can be very severe - particularly when He gives us exactly what we think we want. His judgment is in some instances completely irreversible. Other times, however, with sincere repentance ... well, with the Holy One all things are possible, aren't they? ***Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him?*** Joel 2:14 [a]. So ... Where Do We Go From Here? As I see it we - unlike the generation of Korach's rebellion - have *three choices*.

1. Choice #1: Go Back to "Egypt"

We can of course do what Korach's generation wanted to but could not do. We can - and many do - simply 'go back to Egypt'. What do I mean by that? I mean we can - and many do - *just walk out* on the betrothal covenant. We can - and many do - *simply give up* the dream of Sinai. We can - and many do - cite 'irreconcilable differences'. And we can - and many do - instead of walking with the Holy One as the *k'doshim* He called us to be, just surrender to our society's values. We can accept even its sickest perversions as merely 'alternative lifestyles'. We can immerse ourselves in '*whatever gets us through the night*'⁸. We can '*get by with a little help from our friends*.'⁹ After all, the Egypts of today definitely have their attractions. In them we can numb our consciences with *leeks, onions, and flesh* [there is an abundance available - just turn on your television, go watch a movie, or walk through your local shopping mall].

⁸ The reference is to the popular secular song written by former Beatle John Lennon, now deceased. The 'hook' line of the song was '*Whatever gets you through the night - 'salright, salright*'. The song's message so epitomized Lennon's life that author Paul De Noyer chose the title "*John Lennon: Whatever Gets You Through the Night*" for his 1999 Lennon biography.

⁹ The reference is to the popular song "*With A Little Help From My Friends*" written collaboratively by John Lennon and Paul McCartney in 1967. The 'hook' line of the song was '*I get by with a little help from my friends, Mm, I get high with a little help from my friends, Mm I'm gonna try with a little help from my friends.*' The 'friends' mentioned were reputed to be mind-altering drugs.

We can, if we choose, *look* just like the pagans around us, *think* just like the pagans around us, *talk* just like the pagans around us, *eat and drink* just like the pagans around us, *process through our society's educational systems and vocations* just like the pagans around us, *date and marry* just like the pagans around us, *wax philosophical* about life just like the pagans around us, *buy and sell* just like the pagans around us, *go through mid-life crises and get divorced* just like the pagans around us ... and *die* just like the pagans around us. There is of course no meaning to such a life. But *who needs meaning*, anyway? Such a life is, of course, totally inconsistent with the calling of our Bridegroom. But if we crank up the music loud enough, or yell loudly enough at the ballgame, the board meeting, the political rally, or the church/synagogue service – well, who can hear the Bridegroom calling anyway?

Choice #2: Elect A Captain

Our second option is to '*elect a captain*'. What do I mean by that? I mean we can shirk our responsibility by passing it off to someone else. I mean that instead of teaching the Holy One's *mitzvot* to our children, and speaking of them as we sit in our homes and as we walk by the way, and training our children to be *k'doshim*, we can just *elect* – or *nominate* – or *hire - someone else to do the 'God-stuff' for us*. I mean we can check our infants and toddlers into nurseries and *go do whatever we want to do*. I mean we can ask volunteers to entertain our 'K-6's' and teach them a few Bible stories so we can fool ourselves into believing they are being 'trained up in the way they should go'. I mean we can hire some charismatic, energetic young former football or basketball player or rock musician to form a 'youth group'. At least, we can tell ourselves, our kids are not out 'on the street' with the Egyptian kids. And as for us? Well, we are free. We can mindlessly, cluelessly soak ourselves in *sermonettes* prepared by whatever 'captain' we elect. Once or twice a week we can dress up in nice clothes, put on religious masks, and go look at, talk to, and 'fellowship with' other Egyptians-in-denial doing the exact same thing. We can sing a few hymns or praise choruses, and throw in a few spiritual sounding public prayers – or readings from the *siddur* - for good measure. We can wear out the cushions of the pews or chairs in our favorite rows. We can make ourselves feel like we've done our 'spiritual duty' by reading along with whatever passage from the Bible – or even the *parsha ha-shavua*¹⁰ – which our captain decides to read to us. We can invest as much energy as we can muster up into our chosen captain's particular program of religious activities, and throw as much or as little time and money as we can justify into our chosen captain's particular program of 'ministries'. It's the least we can do. After all, he's our captain. He's the professional. We pay him good money to make us feel good about ourselves – good enough, at least, to look down our noses upon the poor

¹⁰ This is a Hebrew phrase meaning '*Parsha (section of Torah) of the Week*'.

Egyptians around us who don't have a captain like – or as entertaining as - ours. Of course, captains are fallible human beings But surely *our* captain will not lead *us* astray.

It is quite easy to just 'elect a captain'. It seems in fact to be the most popular way to go. Good people have done it for generations. It all started with a man named Korach, I believe¹¹. It didn't turn out so well for him, for his family, or for his followers, though, as I recall. Surely there is *another – more excellent - way!*

Choice #3: Make T'shuvah, Return to the Holy One and His Covenant – and Really Be Who We Were Created To Be

Indeed there is, I would suggest, another way. I know it is going to sound radical. I know it is not the 'party line'. I know it is not going to win me any friends. But here it is: We can *make T'shuvah, return to the Holy One and the Torah lifestyle to which He has called us, and actually be who we were created to be.* Wow – what a *bombshell!* We can actually *do it.* We can *surrender with all our heart, soul, and strength to the Holy One's plan* – as set forth in Torah – to gradually transform us into *k'doshim*, to enable us to walk in the footsteps of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, as 'friends of God'. Instead of just endlessly talking about it we can *become the light to the nations we were created and prophetically empowered to be.* We can *quit looking for shortcuts, excuses, and free passes.* We can pour all our energy and passion and resources into *our relationship with the Holy One, and into teaching the truths of His Torah to our children, and to our children's children.* We can let our Bridegroom-King teach us – and ask Him to show us - how to really do it. With His help we – we who are going to be held most accountable for what happens to ourselves and our families in these difficult and eternally significant times¹² – we average Joes and Janes – *we* can really do it. In our homes, as we interact with our family members and friends; around the Shabbat table; in our prayer lives; as we walk by the way and do whatever we do in the marketplaces of our Egypts; as we lie down and as we rise up – where it matters, and the rubber meets the road – we can *press in to know the Holy One, and whatever He says we can do.* Isn't that what Avraham Avinu did? Wasn't that the lifestyle He led? And *was not that why the Holy One considered him a 'friend of God'?* Like Avraham Avinu, let us *live out that level of truth we have received,* and let us at the same time *pursue with passionate zeal that truth and that eternal reality which He has not yet seen fit to reveal to us.* Let our confidence be in *the Holy One* - not in fallible men or ministries or doctrines fallible men design and

¹¹ Or maybe it was Nimrod of Babel, who wanted to make for *a name* himself.

¹² For an understanding of the prophetic significance of the times in which we are privileged to live please read and meditate on Hebrews 11:32 – 12:28 with special emphasis on 11:40. See also Romans 1:18-32 and II Timothy 3:1-7, 3:12-15, and 4:3-4 for a fuller understanding of the times in which we live and the challenge which we and our children are called to face.

administrate ... and always eventually start to rule with an iron fist. Let our devotion and admiration be affixed to *the throne room of our eternal King* - rather than to any earthly religious or political structure or form. Let us make haste, with our families by our side, to return unto the Holy One. The Holy One is, after all, *our only hope*. No political, ideological, or religious leader, however charismatic, or however smooth his “line”, is going to help us out of the fragmented society we live in, or the mess we have made for ourselves and the generations to come ... any more than Korach helped Israel out of its situation.

It is Time

It is not time to “*appoint a captain*”, nor is it time to “*go back to Egypt*” [cf. Numbers 14:4]. The time is *too short*. And the stakes are *too high*. It is also not time to *point fingers at each other* regarding who is more spiritual, whose doctrine is more pure, whose anointing is more powerful, or whose fault it is we are in this mess. What time is it, then? It is time to *throw away all our religious masks*. It is time to get as close as we can to His mercy seat (the real one - the one in Heaven, at the foot of His Throne) and stay there until He says it is time for us to leave. It is time to acknowledge the Holy One’s *Messiah* as the sole source of our salvation, and to return to the ancient ways of the Holy One’s *Torah*. It is time for men of the community – ordinary men, with jobs and with human faults like you and me - to *cease squabbling over and competing for leadership positions and titles in religious organizations*. It is time for fathers to stand up and take responsibility for studying with our children, and for living out in front of our wives and children, the wonderful Torah of the Holy One. It is time to be Who the Holy One created us to be. It is *time*, Beloved. Whatever it costs, whoever it offends - *it is TIME!*

Truth and Consequences

The type of real life, home-based, Messiah-focused study of and adherence to Torah as a lifestyle for which the time has come will offend many. Extended family, church/synagogue leaders, and acquaintances we presently think of as friends will turn on us – sometimes with a vengeance. We will be accused, among other things, of having done such things as ‘*forsaken the assembling*’ and ‘*gone back under the law*’¹³. We will be accused of shirking our civic duty, and acquiescing in societal evil. That is understandable. That is what those have an

¹³ For people who know only institutionalized religion – and particularly as institutionalized religion is practiced in the 21st Century - to accuse others of such things would be like me walking up to someone I do not know on the street and accusing them of ‘desecrating the host’. I have heard the term, but I have no real or meaningful understanding of exactly what it means. Likewise, I have no concept of what the person I have walked up to is or is not doing - only a mental image I have conjured up in my own mind. Similarly, practitioners of institutionalized religion – whatever its label – are unable to understand what the Greek phrases – in books written by Hebrew speakers and thinkers – which our English Bibles translate as ‘*forsaking the assembling*’ and ‘*going back under the law*’ mean.

ideology, a theology, a political theory and/or a theology - but not the wisdom and the ways of the Holy One - have been taught. That is, alas, all they know. Love them; do not hate them. Pity them; do not condemn them. Reach out to them; do not turn your back on them. But do not, under any circumstance, let them stop you. Do not agonize for a second over whether you are going to be called a “modern-day Korach” by persons desiring to perpetuate man-made political and religious organizations and systems. You *probably will*. It *will not kill you*. And be not concerned that the earth is going to open up and swallow your children. It *won't*. Just love the Holy One with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might, love your neighbor as yourself, stay humble, eschew demagoguery and lashon hara, and live to the fullest extent you know how the lifestyle described in Torah and modeled by Messiah. Do it moment by moment, day by day, Shabbat by Shabbat, *Mo'ed* by *mo'ed*, and year by year. The rest really doesn't matter. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to take the pathway to abundant and eternal life. That path leads not through political parties, platforms or movements. It does not lead through governmental policies or programs. It does not lead through religious shrines and ministry organizations. It leads through the wilderness. It follows the narrow path of *the Torah lifestyle as it was modeled by Messiah* and as it is taught us day-by-day, week-by-week, year-by-year by the *Ruach haQodesh*. That is why when the Holy One gave the Torah to our fathers He said:

This mitzvah that I command you this day, it is not too hard for you.

Neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say,

Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?

Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, and make us to hear it, that we may do it?

But the word is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.

[Deuteronomy 30:11-14]

But what about *community*, you say? What about ‘assembling ourselves together’. Relax. Participating in Biblical Community and attending regular meetings of organized religion are *two vastly different things*. Trust the Holy One instead of pretending that true community and assembly are occurring simply because you attend regularly scheduled religious meetings in a particular location or in the loose company of a particular group of people. If you will just focus your energies on being who you were created to be the Holy One will, slowly but surely, build of people like you a *real, substantive, viable* community – a kind of community far, far better than any you have ever known or even imagined. He will, you see, build for you a kind of community that is *centered totally on Him*, not programs, services, organizations, budgets, meetings, and captains. If you will truly do what He has called you to do and be who He has called you to be, you will not by any means remain alone for long.

A Note of Hope for the Future

Oh - one more thing! You remember *Samuel*, the prophet who anointed the first and second kings of Israel, who more than any other man established the earthly kingdom of David. According to the genealogical records of the Jewish Talmud do you know who the prophet Samuel's great, great-grandfather was? It was Korach, of the tribe of Levi, of the clan of the *K'hatim* – *the very man whose rebellion we will be discussing this week*. The *Ruach HaQodesh* wants us to know that the Holy One, in His mercy, allowed at least one of Korach's relatives to escape and bear children. It was through the seed of Korach the rebel, you see, that the Holy One raised up *Sh'muel* [Samuel], to anoint as king a "man after the Holy One's own heart" – David, the forerunner and prototype of the Messiah who is our only hope.

Introducing the Haftarah

I Samuel 11:14 - 12:22

The traditional haftarah for parsha *Korach* is the Biblical account of the events surrounding the coronation of Israel's first king – Shaul the Benjaminite. Keep in mind as you are reading the haftarah that before the events we will read about, Israel had no king. Instead, each tribe had "judges" who administered Torah law on their own, with no central government. The book of "Judges" describes the ups and downs of this period of time. When - as they were wont to do – the tribes and their judges did not walk according to Torah, the Holy One actually *allowed the heathen nations around them to oppress them*. Of course, the Divine Bridegroom's purpose in doing so was *not retributive*, but *redemptive*. The carefully measured allowance of oppression was designed as a 'wake-up call', a call to prayer, and stir up a passion in the Prodigal to return to the 'Father's House'. Hence whenever the people made *t'shuvah* and cried out to the Holy One for deliverance from the oppression of their enemies, the Holy One would respond. Time and time again He would raise up some unlikely and often seemingly totally unqualified man or woman to serve the entire nation, for a short period of time, as *a very fallible human instrument of Divine deliverance*. In this week's haftarah however the system of Divine deliverance through 'judges' will come to an end. As we begin our reading, *Sh'muel* [Samuel] – who, as aforesaid "*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.

Samuel has, of course, previously warned Israel that seeking a king was a dangerous thing. He even said that clamoring for *a king like those of the other nations* represented a deliberate rebellion against the Holy One - for by seeking out *a king like the other nations around them* had, they were seeking deliverance through a man and his "ministry" of deliverance instead of through the Holy One Himself. They were thereby rejecting intimacy and covenant directly with, and

deliverance and protection directly from, the Holy One. But Sh'muel – and all of us – are required by the events of this week's haftarah to come to grips with the reality that we will indeed have a king. Sometimes it will be *good*. Sometimes it will be *terrible*. But a king we *wanted* ... and a king we *will have*.

The Apostolic Message for the Week

Romans 13:1-7

In the reading I have selected this week from the apostolic writings, Shaul of Tarsus [known to the modern Western world as *the Apostle Paul*], a Hebrew from the Tribe of Benjamin¹⁴, 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 Y'shua - on the rather touchy subject of *how they should behave toward their pagan persecutors*. Before addressing this difficult subject, however, Shaul took some time in Romans 12:9-21 to remind his audience of the basic principles of the Torah lifestyle. He goes back and reiterates the most basic of Torah's *mitzvot*, and paints for us a beautiful Hebraic word picture of what he considers to be a true picture of a Torah-submissive life in Messiah. With these basic Torah principles reiterated for emphasis Shaul proceeds to his *main subject* – how to relate to a Godless, cruel, capricious, and dangerous worldly government. He speaks words that his readers – then and now - do not particularly like to hear. Recognizing that Rome's emperors, and their governors, were practicing pagans, 'sold' justice for bribes, and engaged in, and promoted, every kind of sensual perversion, as well as outrageously cruelty, Shaul *still* did not counsel rebellion against them or *l'shon ha-ra* about them.

Please note that the words Shaul speaks in this passage are not spoken in reference to, and have no applicability to, "pastors" or "rabbis". Shaul is not speaking about church or synagogue governance. He is speaking how we are to deal with *earthly kings and their appointed officials and governors*. His comments relate exclusively to *political and governmental* rulers – men who hold over us the power of *life and death*. Instead Shaul took the position that *we get the quality of government – and the kind 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, for that matter], Shaul counsels, is to BE WHO WE WERE CREATED TO BE – to live a Torah lifestyle to its fullest – and to die for it if necessary.

Blessed be the Name of the Holy One, the Only True and Just King, who works all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His eternal purpose.

¹⁴ As was his namesake, the first king of Israel.

The Rabbi's son

Amidah Prayer Focus for The Week

Petition #10: Tzadikim [Men Who Walk in the Ways and Do the Will of the Holy One]

Al ha-tzadikim v'al ha-chasidim

Toward those who walk in your will, and toward the loving, covenant faithful ones,

v'al ziknei ameicha beit Yisrael

and toward the elders of your people, the House of Israel,

v'al p'leitat beit sof'reihem v'al geirei ha-tzedek

and toward the remnant of their sages, and toward foreigners who seek righteousness

v'aleinu yeheimu na rachameicha Adonai Eloheinu

and toward our own selves as well may Your compassions be aroused, O Holy One our God.

v'tein sachar tov l'chol ha-bot'chim b'shimcha b'emet

Grant a good reward to all who truly trust in Your name

v'sim chelkeinu imahem

and establish our lot with them

ul'olam lo neivosh ki v'cha batachnu

May those who trust in You never be ashamed.

Baruch atah Adonai mishan umivtach la-tzadikim

Blessed are You, O Holy One, support and confidence of the righteous ones.