



"If you search for it like silver, and seek it like buried treasures, then will you comprehend knowledge of God, and the fear of God will you find."

King Solomon, Proverbs 2:4-5

ESTD
1997

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

JewishTimes

Volume I, No. 19...June 14, 2002

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES.PDF

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

AARON SEIZING ANGEL OF DEATH	I, 2
KORACH	I, 3
ENEMIES OF HAPPINESS	I
PREDICTING FUTURE	2
SEXUAL DRIVES	2

SUGGESTED READINGS:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS
MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:
www.mesora.org/13principles.html

God's Existence Belief or Proof?

www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html

Aaron Seizing the Angel of Death

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In parsha Korach, (Numbers, 17:13) Rashi states an amazing story of how "Aaron seized the Angel of Death against its will." In order to understand this metaphor, we must first understand the events immediately prior.

God had wiped out Korach and his rebellion. The Jewish people on the morrow said the following (Numbers, 17:6) , "you (Moses and Aaron) have killed the people of God", referring to Korach and his assembly. Evidently, the Jews could not make such a statement the same day as God's destruction of the Korach assembly, perhaps because the

(continued on page 2)

Korach

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

The Torah devotes much attention to the dispute between Korach and Moses. However, an analysis of the text does not give us a good deal of insight into the real basis of their argument. From the verses it seems that Korach was simply complaining that Moses and Aaron had usurped too much power. However, this conclusion raises several bothersome questions. Firstly Moses retort to Korach seems inappropriate. Moses sarcastically questions Korach asking him if he also desires the priesthood. Furthermore, the famous Medrash quoted by Rashi when Korach assembles 250 of the congregation leaders and together they confront Moses seem irrelevant to the argument. Korach in the leader's presence questions Moses; "Does a garment which is totally blue require fringes?" Moses responds in the affirmative and is ridiculed by Korach since one fringe of blue obviates a four cornered garment of fringes. Korach also questions him on whether a house filled with Sefarim requires a Mezuzah. Moses again responded in the affirmative. Korach again ridicules him because the obvious purpose of Mezuzah is to raise a person's cognition of the creator; and surely an individual with a house filled with Sefarim has such an appreciation. This confrontation seems to be unnecessary and irrelevant if the basis of the argument was merely a power struggle.

In order to comprehend the basis of the argument it is necessary to analyze the cause of the conflict and the personalities of the combatants. The beginning of the Parsha states that "vayikach Korach", and Korach took, took being a transitive Verb. Rashi rightfully questions "whom did he take"? and quotes the Onkelos to demonstrate that the language of taking really connotes a conflict. It means, that he took himself aside and separates

(continued on page 3)



ASK YOUR CHILDREN:

"What's good about sharing? Peoples' feelings? Or agreeing that God wants others to be happy?"
Have your children email us with their answers: questions@mesora.org

Enemies of Our Own Happiness

RIVKA OLENICK

"The Almighty created man straightforward, but they invented many calculations." Koheles 7:29. What does it mean: "The Almighty created man straightforward God created mankind to live the best existence with everything necessary given in the greatest abundance, e.g. air, water, food, etc. All of these things take very little effort to acquire yet they are always taken for granted. What if there wasn't enough air, then we would die. But the air is plentiful. What if we had to search for water? We don't, it is also plentiful and fortunately, we don't have to search for food either. We were given the strength, capacity and motivation to pursue our livelihood to provide for oneself and our families. In addition to providing us with the basics of life, we were given a guide that teaches us how to live the kind of intelligent life most appropriate for human beings. This guide, called Torah, was given so that we could live our lives based on truth, acquiring this truth through knowledge. This is the only reason we were created - to seek and obtain knowledge. Living an existence permeated with truth is what makes a person truly happy. This is the meaning of "straightforward." Living a simple, contented life in the middle path, and which is in line with God's will for His created beings. A life that can produce great happiness and satisfaction. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth." Psalms 25:10

The Rambam says: "Most of the evils to which individual persons are exposed, are due to the defects existing in the persons themselves. We complain and seek relief from our own faults; we suffer from the evils which we, by our own free will, inflict on ourselves and ascribe them to God, who is far from being connected with them!" Guide For the Perplexed pg. 268. What are the underlying ideas in: "but they invented many calculations?" It seems that "but" implies a change that we insist on making. We force ourselves in a different direction that is contrary to straightforward. People "create" deviations or different ways not to proceed straightforward in life, by spending entire life times pursuing unlimited and clever ways not to live a straightforward life. The Rambam's statement above fits perfectly. We constantly involve ourselves in things that are unnecessary. Things that are unnecessary usually have no limit, meaning that we fall into the habit of desiring those things that aren't needed to preserve our life, many endless possessions. Most of these desires become endless because we need the approval of others. The only way to have the approval of others is by having more, and better. Unfortunately this way of life produces endless envy, jealousy and pain because, there will always be others who have "more and better." These are the traps or the "calculations" that people invent. There are those who make their life's career out of this. Of course, all of these "calculations" that we inflict on ourselves we foolishly blame on God. We say: "Why has God done this to me?" No, God has not done this to you. We refuse to examine our lives so that our free will should be used appropriately. We leave "thought and knowledge" in understanding life and the world to chance by making these calculations our "priority." We then complain and then blame God because He hasn't brought us relief from our own faults and misuse of our free will, even though God has already created us "straightforward." "The many calculations are the enemies of our happiness." Samson Raphael Hirsch from The Wisdom of Mishle pg. 160

Aaron Seizing the Angel of Death

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

Jews were much too frightened at the Earth's opening and swallowing up of the Korachian rebels. But as their emotional state waned by morning, they mustered the courage to speak their true feelings.

What they said were actually two accusations, 1) You, Moses and Aaron are murderers, and 2) those murdered are God's people. The Jews made two errors, and God addressed both.

The method God used to correct their second error was to demonstrate through miracle (a detached rod blossomed almonds) that Aaron in fact was following God, and Korach's people were not. By Aaron's rod blossoming, this showed who God favored, and who He related to - even via a miracle. Now the Jew's opinion that Korach was following God was cured, as it was Aaron's staff which God selected.

But how did Moses correct the people's false opinion that he and Aaron were murderers? How did the incense which Moses instructed Aaron to bring correct the problem, and stay off the plague which God sent to kill the Jews? What Moses commanded Aaron to do was to take the incense, and stand between the living and the dead during the plague, which only temporarily stopped the plague, as it was not until Aaron returned back to Moses that God completely halted the plague. So what does Aaron standing there accomplish, that it stopped the plague temporarily? Additionally, what does his return to Moses and God at the Tent of Meeting do?

This is where the Rashi comes in.

Rashi reads as follows, "Aaron seized the angel (of death) against its will. The angel said, 'leave me to do my mission'. Aaron said, 'Moses commanded me to prevent you'. The angel said, 'I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses'. Aaron said, 'Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask'."

I believe the interpretation is the following: Moses knew that the people accused him and Aaron of murder. The Jews saw Moses and God in opposition, i.e., Moses was not working in sync with God. The statement, "you have killed the people of God" displays the people's belief that God was correct to follow, but Moses opposed God's will. Moses now attempted to correct the Jews, and show

that in fact, he and Aaron were not murderers opposing God. Moses sent Aaron to make atonement for the Jews. The Jews saw Aaron with this atonement standing at the place where the last Jew dropped down in death, (they must have been falling like dominoes or similarly). And the Jews further saw that no more Jews were dropping down dead. They were now perplexed. On the one hand, they viewed Aaron as a messenger of Moses, but now, Aaron was healing, and not killing as they previously assumed. This perplexity is what Rashi described metaphorically as "Aaron seizing the Angel of Death", i.e., Aaron was now correcting the opinion of the people which made them deserving of death. As they were now questioning, but not completely abandoning this false view of Aaron and Moses, the plague stopped temporarily. Aaron was "seizing the Angel of Death", meaning, he was halting the deadly plague. But the people were still bothered. They felt Aaron is Moses' messenger, and the plague was clearly from God, so how could Aaron and Moses out-power God? This is what Rashi means by "I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses". The Angel in this metaphor personified the opinions of the people, i.e., the people felt death was from God and Aaron could have no power over it, as he was only a messenger of Moses, not of God. The Angel talking in this metaphor really represents the Jewish people's corrupt opinion - which in fact causes death. (Sometimes, false views can be so wrong that the follower of such a view deserves death.)

So now the people were confused, were Aaron and Moses in line with God or not? Rashi continues, "Aaron said to the Angel of Death (the peoples' death-deserving opinion) Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask". At this point, the plague was temporarily stopped, as the Jews were entertaining the idea that Moses and Aaron were not murderers, as Aaron was atoning, trying to keep them alive. Their perplexity whether Aaron and Moses were following God had to be removed if they were to live. This is what is meant that when Aaron returned to the tent of meeting (Numbers , 17:15) the plague was terminated. As the Jews witnessed Aaron, Moses, and God altogether, they now understood that Moses and Aaron were in fact followers of God.

The metaphor really means to depict Aaron as 'seizing' the views of the people, allegorized by seizing an "Angel". In this story, the Angel of death represents the peoples' false notions which lead to death. □

Predicting the Future

Reader: Could you tell me what is the Jewish opinion and belief of Nostradamus and his writings?

Mesora: If you ask, what is Judaism's view on man's ability to predict the future, the response is as follows: Man's mind is limited, primarily to the functions of comprehension, memory, comparison, analysis, induction, deduction, reason, intuition and imagination. Man cannot function outside of his limitations. Just as man cannot fly, as flight is outside our range of physical ability, so too is knowledge of the future outside the range of our mental ability. Without God informing us of the future, it is impossible for us to know it.

The reasons why predictions are impossible are three;

1) Foreknowledge: Our minds can only work with knowledge, and knowledge is always about something which already exists. The future does not exist, so we cannot know it with our minds' design. 2) Cause and Effect: We reason based on cause and effect relationships, and our minds cannot grasp the vast number of factors contributing to future events. 3) The Freewill Factor: The future of Earth is most certainly centered around man, who functions outside of cause and effect, as we each have freewill. This precludes our cause and effect reasoning from arriving at any accuracy of prediction. □

Sexual Drives

Reader: Why is it all sex-related behavior and thought are completely prohibited outside of marriage? Isn't it dangerous to practice repression in such an absolutist fashion? Won't the pent up energies manifest themselves in some other negative way? I mean, look at the whole Church scandal -- that certainly resulted from sexual repression, and while the Torah doesn't require life-long chastity, it does prohibit all sexual behavior and thought for at least an eight year period (between puberty and the usual earliest age of marriage). Is it because we men are so prone to sexual indulgence, that we can't be trusted to

even think about sex without the danger of actually transgressing? Or is it because the thoughts themselves are harmful in some way? Thank you for your time.

Mesora: The instincts are strong for the reason that God wishes man to procreate. When procreation is not feasible, repression is not the answer, as you have shown with your example of the priests who become sexual offenders. Repression does not satisfy the emotions, and emotional energies do not subside. It is against nature and reason to use repression, attempting to squelch that which keeps surging. However, reason dictates and nature demands that the emotions find satisfaction. God's intent is that these strong emotions route themselves towards wisdom where much energy is required. Wisdom is the one area where man can successfully satisfy his tremendous energies. As one progresses in his learning, his energies redirect from the instincts, to the intellect.

It would be best if people married at young ages, as the Talmud states about one person who married at age 15, "If I were married at 14, I would have spit the Satan in the eye" meaning, younger is better precisely for the reasons quoted. If a thought poses itself to us, this is not something for which the Torah holds one accountable. This is a case of "oh-nase", coercion. What's damaging is purposeful imagination, or gazing at that which is prohibited. This Torah reprimands one who gazes at even the small toe of a woman lustfully. Here, man is missing his chance to engage his intellect, but unfortunately, engages the emotions. The Rabbis also said, "there is a small limb in man, if man satisfies it, it becomes hungry, if he starves it, it becomes full." This means that if man feeds the sexual drive, his lusts will increase, but if he controls them, they will decrease. This is how the desires function by design.

Man can control himself, we don't have to act. We can divert our thoughts, and once we engage in learning, our energies remove from the sexual. Sometimes it is more difficult than others. But with time, we condition ourselves, and we even forget those thoughts that at times preoccupied us. □



USAIsrael.org

NEWS: Israeli firms are invited to create web pages with your own web address - both services are FREE.

Korach

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

(continued from page 1)

himself from the congregation. Generally an argument becomes vehement when it is enraged by passions and exacerbated by emotions. However, after the moment passes, the vehemence recedes and the conflict is short lived. The combatants then communicate, and their identification with one another smolders the flames of the dispute. However, the language of vayikach (he took), is teaching us a different idea. Korach's anger consumed his essence and he was incapable of identifying with others and thus separated himself from the congregation of Israel. This was not a typical altercation, but rather this dispute overwhelmed the man to the extent that it embroiled his very being.

This anger was characteristic of the anger that Korach's ancestor, Levi, possessed. Jacob's name is not mentioned when Korach's lineage is traced, because Jacob chastised Levi for expressing his anger when he destroyed the city of Shechem. Jacob specifically admonished Shimon and Levi, and warned that he does not want to be counted in their gatherings and he is therefore excluded with reference to Korach. Jacob had the foresight to appreciate human nature and recognized that a person's characteristics are either inherited or are a product of his environment. He thereby disassociates himself from Levi's combative temperament to show that Levi did not inherit nor learn such characteristics from him. This demonstrates that the anger which obsessed Korach was unique to him and not attributable to Jacob.

Rashi explains at the very outset of the parsha the factor that precipitated Korach's wrath. Korach was angered at the appointment of his cousin Elitzofon Ben Uziel as prince of the children of Kahas. Moses and Aaron took the kingship and priesthood for themselves. They were the children of Amram, the eldest of four brothers. Korach believed that the determining factor for leadership was by birthright and thereby reasoned that he should be appointed prince inasmuch as he was the son of Yitzhar, the second eldest of the four brothers. However, Moses pursuant to Hashem's instructions appointed Elitzofon, the son of the youngest of the four brothers. This enraged Korach as it thwarted his quest for power.

Korach realized that a legitimate revolution, could not be based on his



own personal agenda for power. Korach shrewdly recognized that an attack against the authority of Moses and Aaron would require great cunning. Korach also recognized that other people resented the power of Moses and Aaron and were hostile to what seemed to be an aristocracy of the children of Amram. Therefore, Korach embraced the principles of democracy, appealing to the masses' sentiments of equality. Korach mobilized the people by claiming that Moses and Aaron were megalomaniacs who were merely interested in controlling the people. In truth, Korach himself was power hungry and personally endorsed the principles of aristocracy. He was an egomaniac and was originally very comfortable when his cousins, Moses and Aaron, were appointed leaders. After all, he felt important belonging to such an honorable family. It wasn't until he was denied the principship that, feeling slighted, he contested the authority of Moses and Aaron.

The Torah tells us that Korach therefore enlisted Dason and Avirom, renowned demagogues, as his first supporters in his protest against Moses and Aaron. He had seen countless times that they were the leading rabble-rousers amongst the children of Israel. Korach, a good judge of character, also recognized that his advancement of the democratic principles would have a special appeal to them. Specifically, earlier in the Torah we are told of Moses's first encounter with Dason and Avirom. Moses, upon observing the Egyptian taskmaster cruelly whipping a fellow Israelite, was propelled into action by his sense of Justice. He smote the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. Later, Dason and Avirom confronted him and complained, "Who placed you as a prince and Judge over

us? Are you going to kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" At this very incipient stage of their exodus, Dason and Avirom exhibited their disdain for authority. They had emerged as the progenitors of Jewish liberalism. Moses had killed the brutal Egyptian that was unduly torturing a fellow Israelite but they were concerned that Moses unfairly killed the Egyptian. Korach recognized that Dason and Avirom would be the leading advocates of his ostensible quest for democracy.

Korach's plan was slowly unfolding but he recognized that his movement required credibility which could not be gained by the endorsement of Dason and Avirom and it is here that Korach's ingenuity becomes apparent. In order for him to attack the leadership of Moses and Aaron, he had to assert that their appointment was not a directive from Hashem. He therefore argues that Moses was acting on his own initiative with respect to many issues. It is agreed upon that Moses had received the Torah, the written law, directly from Hashem. However, Korach questioned Moses assertion that the oral law was also G-d given and argued that Moses had fabricated the oral tradition. Korach further argued that G-d was only concerned with the philosophy and spirit of the written Torah and that the oral law was merely subject to interpretation based upon the spirit of the written law. He rejected the notion of Halacha as a separate and unique body of knowledge that functions in its own orbit, irrespective of the philosophy of the Mitzvah and asserted that the oral tradition is based upon a person's common sense thereby attacking the authenticity of the oral tradition as being divinely inspired. With this in mind Korach assembled the leaders of the Sanhedrin and questioned

Moses about the mezuzah and Fringes. Korach's questions were shrewdly phrased to appeal to man's common sense propting the idea that G-d is only concerned with what man feels, just the basic philosophy of the Mitzvah, not the onerous details of halacha. Korach argued that it does not make sense that if someone has a home full of sefarim that a mezuzah should be required. A true halachist who appreciates the beauty of a G-d given halachic system, based upon the intellectual breadth and creativity of its principles which functions under its own guidelines, must recognize the absurdity of Korach's assertions. The argument, although nonsensical to a halachist who has the benefit of the tutelage of the great chain of scholars, our baalei mesora, was a cogent argument to many of Korach's contemporaries. Unfortunately we see the appeal of Korach's argument in our times. Many uneducated Jews today fall prey to the philosophy of Conservative and Reform Judaism, and they too are blind to the amazing intellectual depth and creative beauty of a divinely inspired halachic system. Rather they are concerned with the universal principles of justice espoused by Judaism. G-d, they claim, is only concerned with a good heart not, the burdensome and meticulous details of an antiquated halachic system. Korach's ingenuity is attested to by the success of this argument even in our day. By attacking the credibility of the Oral Tradition as G-d given, it also afforded him the opportunity to impeach Moses's and Aaron's appointment as merely personal discretionary exercises of power, not directives of G-d. Moses's response to Korach also attests to Moses understanding of what really bothered Korach. Korach, upon making all these claims, advocating the principles of democracy and denying the authenticity of the Oral Tradition, impugned Moses claim to power. Moses did not even address the substance of Korach's arguments, but simply responded "do you also want the priesthood?" Moses recognized and attempted to demonstrate that Korach was merely interested in power and not an enlightened egalitarian espousing the concerns of the masses. Therefore the only possible response was a determination by G-d demonstrating that Moses and Aaron were the leaders of Israel and that their method of serving G-d was the only acceptable method.

Thus Korach and his congregation were ultimately destroyed by G-d. The authenticity of halacha and the Oral Tradition was affirmed by G-d's actions.