

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel Tov to our President and First Lady, Kenny and Marla Friedman, on Yossi's Bar Mitzva this Shabbos. Mazel Tov to Yossi's grandparents, Etta Friedman and Norman and Cheryl Gras. May they have much continued nachas from all their children and grandchildren. Although Yossi's paternal grandfather, our long time member, Norman Friedman, ז"ל, was niftar almost exactly 4 months ago and will not be physically present at Yossi's Bar Mitzva, the Zohar reminds us that he will be there in spirit. He has a lot to be proud of and will surely enjoy seeing his grandson become a Bar Mitzva. The Gemara says that children and grandchildren continue to accrue merit for the deceased, and I am sure Mr. Friedman's neshama will have a real aliya this Shabbos.

Thank you to the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Barry and Barbara Bass, in observance of the 57th yahrtzeit of Barry's sister, Rochelle Bass.
- Rachel Frankel, in memory of her husband, Gershon Frankel.
- Adele and Mervyn Myers, in memory of Adele's father, Shabtai ben Efraim Edel (Solly Bellon), whose yahrtzeit is 6 Tammuz.
- Yosef and Devorah Wolf, in memory of Esther Yablok Wolf, Yosef's mother, whose yahrtzeit is this Shabbos, 5 Tammuz.

Thank you for your sponsorships and may all the neshamos have an aliya.

הודו לה' כי טוב. שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה!

Baruch Hashem, with a mix of genuine excitement and continued caution, this past Monday, Rosh Chodesh Tamuz, we moved back into our beloved shul. To do it safely, we are not resuming everything at once. We were able to offer limited minyanim, but it was a great start. I thank everyone who came for adhering to all the safety rules. And for those who have not yet returned, we are thinking of you, and looking forward to the day when it will be safe and possible for everyone to return. As we can see from the second wave in Florida, California, Texas, and other states, this pandemic is far from over. Therefore, we must continue to be vigilant with all social distancing measures and wearing masks when indoors, and when interacting with big crowds outdoors. We daven for the day when this will truly be behind us.

Before I begin the drasha, I want to describe my emotions on Monday morning. After great anticipation, and very little sleep the night before, I came in to shul at around 5:30 a.m. and disarmed the building, unlocked the doors and took down the imposing signs that said "The Shul is Closed. Do Not Enter." It was a tremendous relief to return "home," and I found myself wiping away a few tears, as I watched a small, but determined, masked group of our members begin to enter for the first minyan in more than 3 months. I want to thank those who spent many hours getting the shul ready—Kenny Friedman, Itzi Barr, Rabbi Bennett, Binyomin Berger, Natan Berry, Dan Green, and Simcha Siff. We look forward to the next stage of reopening—with more minyanim, some of our shiurim and the return of our night Kollel to our Beis Medrash! Please do not forget to sign up to reserve a spot at one of the minyanim next week. May Hakadosh Baruch Hu keep us safe and send a refuah shleima l'cholei Yisrael...amen.

Parshas Korach details a rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. Thus far in the Jewish people's journey in the Midbar, there had certainly been bumps in the road, there had been insubordination and complaining. But this was an all-out rebellion, a riot, led by Korach, a distinguished and honored individual, who happened to be Moshe Rabbeinu's cousin. Korach was joined by hundreds of very distinguished people, and his claim against Moshe seemed quite reasonable—everyone is holy! Why shouldn't everyone have a chance to lead? And this claim resonated with the people.

The question I want us to think about this morning is—if we had been there, whose side would we have been on?

You may ask me--what kind of question is that? Obviously, we would have stood strong with Moshe! Reading the story, it seems obvious that Moshe was correct and Korach was wrong. Moshe was the incumbent leader. Moshe had been chosen by Hashem and communicated directly with Hashem. And we, the reader, also know the end of the story--Korach lost. He was swallowed up by the ground and punished severely. Indeed, Korach's confrontation is now the classic example cited in Pirkei Avos as a מהלוקת שלא לשם שמים. The prime example of pride and jealousy leading a person to lose everything.

But I was struck by an interesting anecdote in **Rav Yaakov Galinsky's** sefer, *Vehigadta*, p. 223. After the war, Rav Galinsky was in a DP camp with the Klausenberger Rebbe. The Klausenberger told Rav Galinsky that his holy grandfather told him that he remembered himself in a previous incarnation (a gilgul) experiencing Yetzias Mitzrayim. He said he had vivid images of the beatings he received by Egyptian taskmasters. He said the images were so vivid he would recognize their faces if he met them today, even in a crowd of a thousand faces. He said he also remembered krias yam suf. When the Klausenberger asked his grandfather if he remembered Korach's rebellion, he responded, "Of course." When he asked him "Which side were you on?" his grandfather responded, "It took every ounce of resolve and fortitude to resist Korach!"

This story made me rethink the confrontation. Maybe it was not as simple and clear as we would like to imagine. Go back to the scene. Imagine you were there. And on one side is Moshe Rabbeinu. He had been our indefatigable leader. He had done so much for the Jewish people. But as things in the Midbar are dragging on after the Meraglim...impatience ensues.

And on the other side is a group of 250 distinguished individuals. You look around—they are very important people--princes, with great reputations נשיאי עדה קראי מועד אנשי שם

And they are making a reasonable claim. There are calls for sweeping change and for returning power to the people. There is excitement and passion on the side of Korach!

They are a large group, and people are joining in large numbers.

On an emotional level, this is very affecting for us--21st century Americans, brought up on democracy—one person, one vote. Everyone's opinions should be heard...majority rule. We also know the famous Pasuk in Mishpatim אחר רבים להטות—follow the majority...

So, going back to Korach: Shouldn't they take a vote? Shouldn't they see what the people think? Shouldn't we always follow the majority? Especially when the masses include many important people!

Let us go back to Shelach and we can ask a similar question.

Moshe Rabbeinu sent 12 spies, who were identified as--כולם אנשים-- great individuals—**Rashi** writes that they were important, prestigious individuals. כל אנשים שבמקרא לשון השיבות.

We are told that, when they returned, ten of them expressed one opinion, and two of them--Kalev and Yehoshua--dissented. You would think that, following the rule אחר רבים להטות the Jewish people should follow the majority. So why did they get punished? Can you fault the people for following the majority?

Rav Elchanan Wasserman brings the following story in his Kovetz Hearos on Yevamos. The great 18th century Gaon, **Rav Yehonasan Eibeshutz** was once approached by a Christian theologian with the following question: "You are the smallest of all nations and we (Christians) are the overwhelming majority. Does your Torah not command you to: 'go according to the? Does this not mean that you should accept our faith?"

R' Yehonasan Eibeshutz responded that the principle of "majority rules" does not apply here. It is not a rule that no matter what—we always look to what “most people” are doing. אחר רבים להטות means we follow the majority only when we are in doubt. For example, if I find a piece of meat and do not know whether it came from a kosher or non-kosher butcher store, one of the underlying factors in determining its status is what the majority of stores in that area sell. If, however, I can ascertain the status of that piece of meat, then it makes no difference how many kosher or non-kosher stores are on that block.

Thus, when there is no doubt, one does not apply this principle. And said Rav Yehonasan Eibeshutz, regarding our faith there is absolutely no doubt at all! We know that the Torah is truth and that Hashem is One! This knowledge is based on our experience of Yetzias Mitzrayim and Mattan Torah.

Rav Avigdor Nevenzahl, Rav of the Old City of Jerusalem, gave the following mashal to explain this idea: If I were visiting a new city and wished to know how to arrive at a particular destination, I would ask the local residents. If some people direct me to the number 1 bus line, while others direct me to the 37, a safe bet would be to follow the opinion of the majority. What if their disagreement centered on my own address? If 100 people were to tell me that I live on Rechov Ben Yehuda or Rechov Yafo, should I then also follow the majority? I know very well where I live and even if 100 people were to tell me otherwise, I would give no credence to their opinion! So explained R' Yonatan Eibeshutz to the priest: We have no doubt that Hashem and His Torah are the truth and that there is only one G-d, not three. If so, the "join the majority" rule is not applicable and there is no reason for us to adopt your religion!

Rav Elchanan Wasserman, writes regarding the response of R' Yonatan Eibeshutz: "emes ubarur" [that is true and clear]. He then offers an additional clarification on the limits of following the majority. He says not everyone gets a vote. Should 70 judges vote to acquit the defendant while one lone judge favors a conviction, logic would dictate that he is in fact not guilty and the judge who voted to convict is mistaken. What if it were discovered that the 70 judges voting in the defendant's favor were all bribed? Clearly, we would give no weight to their opinion. A majority of bribed judges does not constitute a majority. And we can take this a step further—when there is a court case being decided by judges—not everyone in the room gets a vote. To become a judge requires training and discipline, and character refinement.

Sometimes greater weight is given to the minority. Those who study halacha are familiar that pesak is not simply about counting up every opinion and seeing where the majority lies. Mesora gives different weight in the halachic process to certain Poskim. It takes significant Poskim, more than numbers, to outweigh the Magen Avraham, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and the Vilna Gaon.

I heard from a talmid of **Rav Soloveitchik** that one year he wanted his shiur to study a particularly difficult Perek in Bava Metzia (fifth Perek—Hazahav) and his talmidim were resisting. The Rav said, “Let’s take a vote.” He asked “Who would not like to learn Perek Hazahav?” Every student raised his hand. He then asked, “Who would like to learn Perek Hazahav?” And the Rav alone raised his hand. The Rav concluded that “the ayes have it” and the vote goes in favor of learning Perek Hazahav. When it comes to education of the students, ultimately the teacher knows best. There is no doubt, and the students are not in a position to make that decision!

Going back to the Meraglim, Yehoshua and Kalev may have been in the minority, but there should have been no doubt regarding the Jewish people’s ability to conquer Eretz Canaan. Hashem had told them that the land was meant for them and that they would conquer it. In fact, the Meraglim had not even been asked to evaluate the merits of the land or see if they should conquer Eretz Canaan. The **Netziv** points out that the spies were sent ויתורו את ארץ כנען, which means that they were sent to explore the best path to conquer it. Nothing more. There is no room for majority rule on something that was never a question.

And the same is true with Korach's claim. Hashem had appointed Moshe as leader, so there was no doubt regarding who should be leader. There was no question, and thus no room for a vote.

But even more than that, the **Zohar** tells us that the ten Meraglim had negios—personal reasons that they desired a specific outcome. The **Sefas Emes** explains that in the Midbar they enjoyed a very close relationship with Hashem. They felt that this unique type of spiritual living was the ultimate existence. They feared that this miraculous mode of existence would be a thing of the past. Everything would change. In Eretz Yisrael, they would have to farm and work for a living. Subconsciously, this ulterior motive colored their perception of what they saw in Eretz Yisrael and what they reported back to Moshe and the rest of the people.

Korach had similar mixed motives. Although he said everyone is holy, he was not planning to share the power. Instead, Chazal teach that Korach was motivated by jealousy and a desire for honor. But beyond the fact that Hashem chose Moshe, Korach missed something fundamental, also because of his negios, personal motivations. His attitude negated the need for hard work and responsibility. And the people who joined him were blinded by the excitement of the new movement.

When an opinion is based on a faulty premise, when the judges are “bribed,” so to speak, there is no expectation to follow the majority.

But beyond that, Korach's worldview was very dangerous for the people, even if they did not realize it. What was the machlokes between Korach and Moshe—what is the core of their different worldviews? Korach said כִּי כָל הָעָם קְדוֹשִׁים—everyone is holy. Moshe said, “I agree that everyone is holy, but you cannot compare one who works to develop their holiness and takes responsibility for themselves and their community, to one who relies on his inherent holiness.”

This is why the Midrash pictures Korach as taunting Moses about the commandments of tzitzis and mezuzah. Does a garment which is wholly techeles still require a thread of techeles in its fringes? Does a house filled with Torah scrolls still require a mezuzah (which holds only a small portion of a Torah scroll) on its doorpost? And when Moshe replies in the affirmative, Korach laughs at the apparent lack of logic in Moshe's teaching!

But Korach misses the whole point of kedusha. Moshe was teaching that the human being must constantly strive to improve, to become more holy. Humans must never rest on their laurels, on their past accomplishments. Hence, even a garment that is wholly techeles still requires tzitzis and even a house filled with Sifrei Torah still requires a mezuzah on the door. Never be complacent. There is never sufficient holiness; we must always strive for more! And we need leaders and role models who live like that—because they push us beyond our perceived limitations.

We must work hard to get to a place where we have no question when it comes to following the will of Hashem. We must work on developing the faith that Rabbi Yehonasan Eibeshutz describes; a sense of certainty, about Hashem and His Torah, and our obligations as the Jewish people. And we must never rest on past accomplishments as individuals or a people. We must always strive to do more and be more.

We must work on getting to a place where there is an inherent knowledge of the difference between right and wrong—honesty and dishonesty...and whether or not the masses agree—we cannot waver in what we know is true, the authenticity of Torah, the eternal nature of the Jewish people, the respect each human being deserves, and our responsibility to fulfill our mission in the world, as individuals and a nation; to be an אור לגוים, a light unto the nations. May we merit to follow the guide of truth, always, and soon see the day when all mankind will live by that truth ביום ההוא יהיה ה' אחד ושמו אחד. May we merit to return to a rebuilt Yerushalayim, bimhera viyamenu...amen.