

SHABBAT LASHEM

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Silence remains, inescapably, a form of speech.

— SUSAN SONTAG

Parashat Korach

London In: 21:05 Out: 22:26 | Manchester In: 21:21 Out: 22:30 | Leeds In: 21:20 Out: 22:29
Oxford In: 21:07 Out: 22:15 | Cambridge In: 21:05 Out: 22:13 | Bristol In: 21:11 Out: 22:19
Birmingham In: 21:14 Out: 22:22 | Jerusalem In: 19:06 Out: 20:36

“For the Entire Nation is Holy”

Rav Aharon Herskovitz | Rav Shaliach

This week's parsha centres on the story of Korach and his following, containing their initial and secondary complaints (Bamidbar 16:1-19), Hashem's response and punishment (16:20-35), and the aftermath (17:1-18:7). What was the thrust of their complaint? Both the pesukim and Chazal point to various complaints that they had, relating to Moshe and Aharon's leadership, the sojourn in the desert and more.

However, I'd like to focus on one specific aspect of their complaint, specifically with regards to how it is phrased, as it is their first statement recorded (16:3): "And they gathered upon Moshe and Aharon and they said to them "It is too much for you, for the entire congregation is holy, and Hashem is in their midst, and why have you raised yourselves up over the congregation of Hashem?" At first glance, we might think that their complaint has merit. After all, Hashem appeared not just to Moshe and Aharon at the sea and Har Sinai, but to Bnei Yisrael in their entirety:

A maidservant saw by the sea what Yechezkel [the prophet] did not see (Mechilta BiShalach).

Face to face did Hashem speak to you on the mountain from the fire (Devarim 5:5).

Additionally, it would seem as though the status Korach and his followers were claiming for themselves was one intended by Hashem: And you shall be for Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation (Shemot 19:7).

Given all this, what was incorrect about

Korach and the nation's claims against Moshe and Aharon? It seems as though it was part of Hashem's plan that the entire nation be holy! Why was it appropriate for Moshe and Aharon to be leaders?

The answer to Korach's complaint lies in the fact that the holiness attributed to the nation does not necessitate that there be a total equality amongst all parts of the nation. Bnei Yisrael can attain great heights without this meaning that this status precludes them from having a leader, one who is "above" them in a sense.

"These distinctions are still central to our religious experience: recognition of individual and national differences are integral to understanding the unique relationship that the Jewish people have with the Master of the universe"

I believe that the lesson we can learn from the story of Korach is relevant to our times as well. Part of the claim of Korach is that the Divine spark found in Bnei Yisrael precludes any possibility to distinguish between them. In an article entitled "Formulating Responses in an Egalitarian Age: An Overview", Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l

expands upon the idea that "Halakhah does not regard every inequality as an inequity." One of the tenets of modern egalitarianism that he highlights is the belief that the universality of human experience precludes any true differences between people: any existing differences are merely a matter of secondary, often social, factors. While the halachic system recognises (and can highlight) the uniqueness of humanity, and the ability (and often desire) for humans to connect with each other despite differences between them, these distinctions are still central to our religious experience: recognition of individual and national differences are integral to understanding the unique

relationship that the Jewish people have with the Master of the universe. Together with a belief in the universality of humanity's connection to Hashem, we also stress the particular vision and mission of our nation.

Belief systems that have at their basis the interconnectedness between people and the similarities between them can help us heighten our sensitivity to other people, and ensure that we are able to both accurately assess and properly value their personal welfare. However, as Jews committed to our tradition, this is not the be all and end all of our value system: we must be guided by our ideal of furthering service of Hashem through commitment to His Torah. This

balance is difficult to strike and maintain, and as Rav Lichtenstein points out, may require different emphasis on the sides in different communities. I will conclude with a quote from his article:

"With respect to both venues, however, we should be careful to embrace both values, even as the educational and tactical nuances shift; and we should not compromise authenticity in the quest for acceptability. The maintenance of standards should take precedence over enhancement of rating."

Shabbat Shalom!

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Dvar Halacha: Weekly Question

Have a question? Please email rav@bauk.org or call/message Rav Aharon at 07976642135.

QUESTION from Daniel on the Bogrim Q&A Whatsapp group with Rav Aharon):

Can you give a gift on Shabbat? Both in the context of giving your host a thank you gift, and on and Shabbat Ha'Irgun when many Svivot give thank you gifts to the Madrichim, Senior Tzevet etc.

ANSWER: As part of the issur of engaging in commerce on Shabbat (which is a gezeirah to prevent one from writing), giving presents is forbidden as well (MB 306:33). However, there is a significant number of ways in which giving a present would be permitted halachically:

a) if the gift is for the use of Shabbat or Yom Tov (MB ibid). For example, if you are bringing a host something that will be eaten at a Shabbat meal, that would be fine.

b) if the gift is something that is needed for a mitzvah (MB as well). For this reason, one can give (and receive) a lulav and etrog to a friend on Yom Tov to enable them to fulfill their obligation. The above two leniences apply specifically with regards to gift-giving, but not to commerce.

c) additionally, poskim (see, for example Shmirat Shabbat KiHlichata 28:29) suggest that before Shabbat one may have someone else accept the gift for the benefit of the future recipient. This is based off of the principle of zachin leadam shelo bifanav - we may act as an agent for another person so that they will benefit (even without their knowledge). I would suggest also that for that same reason you may originally purchase the gift by having in mind that you are already purchasing it for the eventual recipient (thus eliminating the need to find another person to act as their representative). This would be the most practical situation regarding Shabbat Ha'Irgun.

d) if you were to RECEIVE a gift on Shabbat, the Mahari Asad (OC 83) suggests to have in mind to not have your ownership commence until after Shabbat. This would allow you to ensure no violation of the prohibition (while also not insulting the giver).

BOTTOM LINE: It is forbidden to give gifts on Shabbat or Yom Tov. However, when the gift is to be used on Shabbat or Yom Tov, or is for a mitzvah, it is permitted. Similarly, one may initiate the transfer through an agent before Shabbat. If you receive a gift, have in mind to not have the ownership take place until after Shabbat.

Have you seen our "Machane Love Stories" on our Facebook Page? Check it out and see who you know! Do you have your own Machane

Love Story - Let us know to be featured!



"When two machanot shared a site in Winter 5762, it wasn't just the ruach that had a little extra magic. For it was also where Haroeh madrich Trevor and Ma'apilim madricha Leah's paths were intertwined. More machanot were to follow...as Leah recalls, they took Gimmel Machane together that summer before they "finally started dating at the end of Winter Machane 2003, and got engaged 10 months later!" In true Bnei Akiva style, they are "now living the dream in Israel with their four children."

Bnei Akiva - Bringing people together since 1939 #yallamachane #summer5778"

Humility and the 'Other'

Jonah Cowen | Boger Dvar Torah

This week's parasha sees a power struggle among the Jewish people. Korach leads 250 men from the tribe of Reuven, who complain about the choice of the tribe of Levi to bring incense. Didn't God tell them at Mount Sinai that the entire nation was holy? **Why should Moshe and Aharon take the leadership for themselves? These complaints feel justified: why aren't the entire people equally capable of approaching God - they also want to be included!**

The end of the story is grisly - the 250 Reuvenites are burnt alive while trying to offer incense. Clearly God has rejected their demands, and they were apparently wrong to even ask!

But let us compare this story with a different episode, one which turns out quite differently. After the second ever celebration of Pesach, in the desert, another group of people make a very similar claim. "We were impure during Pesach and so we couldn't take part in the offering of the Pesach sacrifice. Why should we be left out? We also want to offer the Pesach sacrifice, and take part in this important national ceremony to remember the Exodus, along with everyone else!" Moshe consults with God, and He creates a whole new festival for them - Pesach Sheni, giving them a second opportunity to bring the sacrifice. The same thing occurs with the daughters of Tzelofchad - they complain that they are being denied a portion in the Land of Israel, and God agrees to their request.

So what did Korach and his followers do wrong? Why did God reject them, but accept the impure men who wanted to offer a Korban Pesach and the daughters of Tzelofchad?

When listing the people who have no share in the World to Come, the Rambam includes certain habits: "Someone who gives an

unpleasant nickname to his friend, someone who shames his friend publicly; someone who glorifies himself by disgracing his friend." What is so bad about these sins? The common theme in all these behaviours is that they involve elevating yourself at the cost of someone else. This shows an extreme disregard for other people, seeing others as mere tools and yourself as most important. The Rambam is teaching us that one of the most important moral attributes is humility, the ability to look beyond your own personal needs and desires to have concern for others.

This helps answer our question about Korach and his followers - why was their complaint not accepted? Let us look at what they said to Moshe and Aharon: "For the whole nation is all holy, and God is among them. So why do YOU raise yourself over the congregation of God?" Their complaint was a personal attack against the leadership - they had no real interest in honestly worshipping God, it was simply a bid for power at the cost of others. The people who wanted to offer a Korban Pesach were driven by honest religious motivation - they did not want to be left out of the collective, but they had no desire to take anything away from anyone else, they simply wanted to serve God equally.

True religious motivation, driven by an understanding of what God actually wants from us, can lead us to a humble recognition of how to behave.

We can learn from this the importance of questioning our own desires. Parashat Korach teaches us that we cannot always act in the way that we wish - sometimes our actions will negatively impact others, and putting ourselves up while putting others down is a dangerous thing to do. True religious motivation, driven by an understanding of what God actually wants from us, can lead us to a humble recognition of how to behave.

Shabbat Shalom!

Voices and Visions



Cover Image Discussion | Thinker: Susan Sontag

We have all sat in the awkward silence between words, when silence did the heavy lifting. It created a space for thought. It acknowledged that a quick answer is not always a right answer. It acknowledged the mystery that words not only describe but also limit our understanding of the universe. In a shiva house, no one is allowed to speak until the mourner opens the conversation. If the mourner chooses silence, we follow in the silence, understanding that silence can sometimes be the only honest response to complexities that don't offer easy answers: suffering, transcendence, joy, beauty.

About the Thinker:

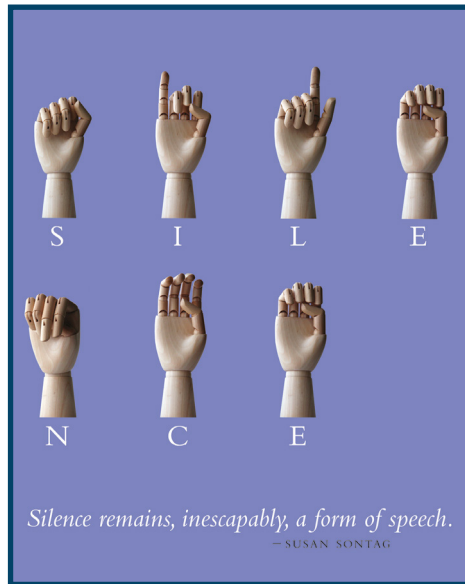
SUSAN SONTAG (1933–2004) was an American writer of depth and fierce courage, famously remembered for the racing stripe of white that ran through her otherwise dark hair. She once described herself as suffering from attention surplus disorder, such was her focus and concentration. Next to a photograph of her sitting at her writing desk, a large, wooden table covered with books and papers, she wrote, "The easiest thing in the world for me is to pay attention." Sontag also understood the power of silence. In her words, "Writing requires huge amounts of solitude." Once she started writing, she didn't want to do anything else. "I don't go out, much of the time I forget to eat, I sleep very little." In that silence, Sontag wrote words that live long after her to nurture the silence of others. We read in silence, yet that silence is filled

with words that help us escape, help us think, and challenge us to stretch beyond where we are to a place of possibility where we can become something else.

About the Artist:

London-born ARNOLD SCHWARTZMAN began his career as a graphic designer in television; he then became an advertising art director, and later joined the board of Conran Design Group. He was an illustrator for the London Sunday Times, and designer of two award-winning supplements. In 1978, he was appointed the design director for Saul Bass and Associates in Los Angeles, California. Schwartzman is the producer, director, screenwriter of a number of films, including his Oscar winning documentary feature film *Genocide* (1981). In 1982, he was appointed the director of design for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. He produced a number of exhibits for the Museum of Tolerance and the Skirball Cultural Center, Los Angeles.

Awards and distinctions include an Oscar® and other film and design awards, including three D&AD Silver awards. He was elected to the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) in 1974; appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2001; and conferred the distinction of Royal Designer for Industry (RDI) in 2006.



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Each image calls out to us to examine it, to note our thoughts and feelings, and relate these impressions to the quotation. Often clues in the artwork suggest meaning and invite interpretation. Designer Arnold Schwartzman uniquely illustrated the words of Sontag to add a further dimension to her quotation.

- 1) How does the image present the quotation? Was this how you interpreted the quotation without the image?
- 2) Why do you think the artist chose to represent the quotation with sign language? What other images might have been used to portray silence?
- 3) The hands on the poster are mechanical and artificial. What do you think the artist is trying to suggest about speech and silence by using a mannequin's hand?
- 4) Why might have Schwartzman broken up the word "silence"?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Sontag was a prolific writer, a social activist, and a cultural critic who understood the impact and potential of silence. The commentary cites the example of silence at a shiva house to illustrate how silence sometimes is a powerful response.

- 1) What does it mean to be silent? Is silence simply an absence of words or speech, or is it something else entirely?
- 2) What forms of communication exist without speech?
- 3) Silence can be powerful, but not all silences are the same. Think about a time when people remained silent and did not speak up against an injustice. What does their silence say?
- 4) What about the opposite case, such as 'a moment of silence'? In such a case, what does the silence convey?
- 5) When might silence be more appropriate than making noise? Can you think of Biblical moments when silence is a key part of the narrative?



Tefillah in Depth: The Amidah

Rabbanit Shira Herskovitz | Rabbanit Shlicha

The main component of the three daily prayers is the Shemoneh Esrei. **Consisting of 19 prayers, the Shemoneh Esrei takes us through a journey of praise, requests for vital matters such as health, knowledge, and forgiveness, and ends with words of thanks.**

We begin the prayer by praising God, which at first glance makes a lot of sense. When we want to request something of a friend we usually begin by complimenting them or making them feel appreciated. Humans are more likely to give if they feel the giving takes place as part of a positive relationship. God, on the other hand, does not need us to praise him in order for us to ask for what we need. Why then do we begin with words of praise?

One explanation helps us switch the focus: by praising God, we are able to understand who He really is. For communication to succeed, it is important to have a deep understanding of the person to whom you are speaking. Rav Kook expands this idea, by explaining that prayer as a whole, is intended to change us; the praise of God is a necessary foundation

we must lay in order to accomplish this change and become elevated: "One's tefilla must be clear of any ideas of seeking to change God's Will, which is a misplaced, erroneous belief [as God is the source of all eternity and is immutable]... as besides attempting to achieve one's desired outcome through tefilla, it is a means of elevating an individual, and completing his personality. **Therefore, every person immersed in prayer must know that tefilla is a miraculous principle which Hashem has established in God's world, to enable each one of us to perfect our soul,** and especially through moral perfection which stems from it, [and it is not because it regulates God]. Therefore, [when Moshe davened, he] began by citing Hashem's praises, to reveal openly the perspective of God's greatness one requires during tefilla... as it is proper to begin tefilla by elevating one's soul and properly appreciating what it truly means to speak to God."

Prayer is about changing us, and by properly realising our relationship with God and what it means to speak to him, we are able to begin the Shemoneh Esrei.

Community Updates

THIS WEEK the Rav and Rabbanit Shaliach hosted an Israeli Wine and Cheese tasting night, in partnership with the Jewish Agency. Bogrim were led by Orit Grinboim-Liron, a professionally trained wine connoisseur, on a magical experience by tasting four Israeli wines, accompanied by cheese, snacks and a light sushi dinner.

CONGRATULATIONS to all our Torani participants. The 35 participants wrapped up the Torani year this past week, concluding a year of intensive Torah study complimented with Bnei Akiva's programming. **Over the year participants have experienced a unique encounter with Israeli society and have discussed and debated the challenges and opportunities it faces.** They have received hands-on Hadracha and Leadership training and have contemplated broader issues such as what it means to be a Jew and a

Zionist in the 21st Century. All this within the Bnei Akiva framework where the Torani participants became a nucleus - even a family - focused on shaping the Jewish future today! Torani's closing Shabbat was held on Kibbutz Migdal Oz, in Gush Etzion, a site of rich biblical and contemporary history and an area that inspires the pioneering spirit. Over Shabbat they processed the experiences of the year, and concluded with the Mesibat Siyum. **We wish all our Hachshara participants success in the future and we look forward to see what they will contribute to Am Yisrael and Bnei Akiva!**

THIS SHABBAT afternoon (16th), as a summer surprise, our Northern Shlichim (Benaya and Maayan Cohen) will be coming to London! Join us for a fun-filled Seuda Shlishit with the Rav and Rabbanit Shaliach at the Herskovitz home in Edgware.