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With an Interpolated English Translation and Commentary Based on the Works of The Lubavitcher Rebbe
Overview

This parashah is named after its central character, Korach, Moses’ first cousin. Not long after the events of the previous parashah, the episode of the spies and its aftermath, Korach led a rebellion against Moses’ leadership. This parashah is devoted entirely to narrating this rebellion and God’s reaction to it.

One of the curious aspects of this revolt is its timing. After all, Moses led the people out of Egypt over a year earlier. Certainly, if Korach and the other instigators of this mutiny had grievances against Moses there was ample time to voice them before this. Furthermore, God had just unquestionably endorsed Moses’ leadership by supporting him against the arguments of the spies and refusing to aid any attempt at conquering the land without Moses’ involvement. Now, of all times, would seem the least opportune to try to foment a rebellion against Moses.

In fact, however, it was not despite the events of the previous parashah that Korach chose to rebel now, but precisely because of them.

In essence, Korach disagreed with Moses’ and Aaron’s definition of the relationship between the layman and the priest, between the mundane and the holy aspects of creation. In Korach’s view, the man on the street who spends the majority of his day in the mundane activities of life is just as holy as the priest whose entire day is spent in the Holy Temple.

Korach noted God’s reaction to the spies’ desire to remain in the desert. In the desert, the Jews lived a purely spiritual lifestyle, protected by the clouds of glory and nourished by the manna and the well. The spies did not wish to enter “a land that consumes its inhabitants” with its earthly distractions. Moses then made it clear that it was God’s will that the Israelites should enter the land and make it holy. God wanted them to enter the mundane realities of a natural human existence even at the expense of losing the spiritual clarity and vision they enjoyed in the desert. To uplift the mundane was in fact the purpose of all of creation.

If so, argued Korach—and this is where he erred—why must the layman look up to the priest? Why must he look upon the portion of his produce that he sets aside for the priest as the apex of his labor? Why must he look upon the few hours during his day that he spends in priest-like activity—study and prayer—as the highlight of his day? Should they not be considered equal and separate activities, neither one better or holier than the other?
If anything, the simple Jew and his consecrated mundane life are holier than the priest and his, since it is he that fulfills God’s purpose in creation.

The different roles of priest and layman, Korach insisted, are separate but equal. God desires them both, and who is to say that the priest’s role is any holier than the layman’s, that the layman needs spiritual nourishment from the priest?

Hence, Korach, who decried Aaron’s “raising himself” above the congregation, wanted to become high priest himself in order to set things right. He wanted to redefine the status of high priest as being only different than the rest of the people, not better. “All of the congregation is holy, God is within them—so why do you raise yourselves above God’s congregation?” And furthermore, why must the congregation “raise” itself and yearn to be like you even while involved in their mundane activities?

To this Moses answered: “In the morning, God will make known....” True, when the layman fulfills God’s commandments in the most mundane aspects of life, he consummates God’s desire for creation, a desire that the lofty activities of the priest cannot achieve. But even though he is told to enter the land and work it, he is also told to keep his eyes on the priest, on transcendence, on the perceptibly holy moments of his day, so that his life will be filled with light like the “morning,” so that in performing God’s commandments he enhances his awareness of God in his heart and mind.

So, from the spies we learn that God’s goal for creation can only be realized when we enter the land, when Judaism is more than an intellectual or emotional affair and finds expressions in action. And from Korach we learn that the emphasis on deed should not translate into a dry and mechanical Judaism. Physical performance of the commandments energized by awareness and love of God shines with the light of morning.

After the rebellion had been quelled, God re-endorsed the distinction of the tribe of Levi and the priestly caste by summarizing the priests’ and Levites’ responsibilities toward the laymen and the laymen’s dues they must give the Levites and priests. Although the thematic connection between this ratification and Korach’s rebellion is clear, it still seems strange that it is placed in a parashah named after the person who challenged the justice of this distinction most vocally.

In light of what we have said, however, the inclusion of these marks of distinction under the title “Korach” is in fact appropriate. For all along, Korach yearned to be the high priest himself, to experience transcendence and the feeling of closeness to God. In this we must emulate Korach. Indeed, this is the central message of the parashah—to yearn for transcendence even while immersed in the mundane.¹

¹ Likutei Sichot, vol. 4, pp. 1048 ff; vol. 8, pp. 114 ff.
the world has no need to aspire to moments of “re-
connection” to spirituality. This is reflected in the
chet of his name.

Continuing this line of thought, he reasoned that
since fulfilling God’s purpose by bringing Divine
consciousness into the physical world has its own
intrinsic value and need not be refreshed by purely
spiritual moments, it follows that if we are involved
in this mission, there are no limits to how much of
our lives and what aspects of our lives we engage in
this pursuit. This is reflected in the kaf of his name.

When Moses told him that this is not the case, that
spiritual pursuits and the Divine consciousness
they provide are superior to the performance of the
commandments—because the renewed inspiration
they provide ensure that we remain true to our ide-
als—Korach countered, “if so, then let there be no
need for fulfilling the commandments altogether.”
This is reflected in the reish of his name.

These three conclusions were expressed in the three
arguments he presented to Moses:

• Chet: “You take too much upon yourselves”—he
argued against the exclusivity of the high priest-
hood, since he felt that the there is no need for a
spiritual elite that affords the common man an
opportunity to renew his inspiration.

• Kaf: A robe dyed with blue dye (techelet) does not
require tassels. The talit signifies the command-
ments, and the techelet signifies self-effacement in
Divine consciousness. If a person’s performance
of the commandments is already suffused with
Divine consciousness, what need is there of time
off to renew this Divine consciousness?

• Reish: Korach also argued that a house full of To-
rah scrolls should be exempt from a mezuzah. If
Torah study is superior and a person is full of
Torah, what need is there of commandments?9

And On, the son of Pelet: Korach, besides being a
member of one of the Jewish people’s most distin-
guished families, was also learned, wise, wealthy,
and among the inner circle of Moses’ and Aaron’s
closest confidants.

The Rebellion

16:1 After the episode of the spies, Korach figuratively betook himself aside, breaking away from Moses’ authority. Korach’s lineage was impressive: he was Moses’ first cousin, the eldest son of Yitzhar, who was the second son of Kehat (after Amram), who was in turn the second son of Levi.1 His lineage back to Jacob is not mentioned here because Jacob prophetically saw that this rebellion would occur and prayed that his name not be mentioned in it.2 Korach felt that since the two sons of Amram (Moses and Aaron) assumed the highest offices of the people (leader and high priest), he should be the next in line for honor, since he was the son of Amram’s next brother in line, Yitzhar. When Moses, acting on God’s orders, appointed a son of Uziel, Amram’s youngest brother, to the position of prince of the Kehat clan,3 Korach was incensed. He led his rebellion with his own sons,4 together with his neighbors Dathan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav,5 and On the son of Pelet. The latter three were all descendants of Reuben, who camped south of the Tabernacle,6 next to the clan of Kehat, who also camped south of the Tabernacle.7

They confronted Moses together with 250 men from the Israelites. The group included the 12 princes of the congregation, summoned for the assembly, but it was made up chiefly of the heads of the courts, men of repute, most of whom were from the tribe of Reuben.

1 Korach: The three Hebrew letters that spell Korach are similar to the letter hei, but each in a slightly different way. The hei (ה) is composed of three strokes: one to the right, another on top, and a shorter one to the left that is disconnected from the other two. In the first letter of Korach (kuf, ק), the left stroke is drawn further down, continuing past the bottom of the line. In the second letter (reish, ר), there is no stroke on the left at all. In the third letter (chet, ח), the left stroke is equal to the other two, leaving no space between it and the top stroke. These three deviations from the letter hei in the name Korach are a reflection of his mistakes. As explained in the overview, Korach did not appreciate the proper balance and synthesis that is supposed to exist between the physical and the spiritual. This balance and synthesis is alluded to by the form of the hei; Korach’s distorted approach to this balance is reflected in the three distortions of the hei that make up his name.

We are taught that the three strokes of the hei allude to our three means of expression: the top stroke alludes to thought, the right stroke to speech, and the left stroke to action.8 In terms of our relationship with God, these three modes of expression are (1) thinking about the ideas of the Torah, (2) articulating them, and (3) actively performing the Torah’s commandments. The fact that the left stroke of the hei is present altogether alludes to the necessity of action; the fact that it does not descend below the line indicates that active involvement in the physical world must not extend into realms not mandated by the Torah; and the fact that it is disconnected from the other two strokes indicates that when we are engaged in action, we must realize we are thereby disconnected from the world of Torah study and must yearn to return to it.

The extended left stroke of the kuf, in contrast, expresses the sentiment that action has its own, independent merits, and can therefore venture into realms of life the Torah would define as off-limits. On the other hand, the absence of the left stroke in the reish expresses a disdain for action altogether. The connection of the left stroke to the other two in the chet expresses the feeling that involvement in the world of action does not adversely affect our consciousness, and that we therefore need not entertain any desire to refresh our inspiration with pauses for Torah study.

As stated above, Korach inferred from the incident of the spies—in which God affirmed that the purpose of creation is for us to make a home for Him in this world of physical action—that there is no intrinsic superiority of Torah study over the performance of the commandments, and that a person to whom Providence assigns the task of working in

Sinai. Furthermore, God had promised Moses that “they will believe in you forever!” (Only Moses, in his immense humility, assumed that their rebellion stemmed from their lack of belief in him.)

But although they trusted that Moses spoke the word of God, they believed that certain aspects of God’s instructions were subject to change. They had seen God “change His mind” when Moses prayed and thought that changes could be made regarding Aaron’s status, especially since, unlike the Levites, they felt that changes could be made regarding the priesthood itself had originally been the domain of the firstborn and was later transferred to the descendants of Aaron. Hence, they felt that changes could be made regarding Aaron’s status, especially since, unlike the Levites, Aaron had been involved in the sin of the Golden Calf.

Against Moses and Aaron: The sages labeled Korach and his faction as the archetype of strife and conflict. “What is a controversy…that is not for the sake of Heaven? It is [one like] the controversy of Korach and his whole faction.”

The sages here do not describe this controversy as one between Korach and Moses. Indeed, Moses did not quarrel with them; “they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.” The sages rather imply that the controversy raged between “Korach and his whole faction,” that is, between themselves. An endeavor against God (or Moses) always becomes strife-ridden, for it attacks the essence of unity and seeks selfish concerns and personal gratification.

Korach felt that it is enough to acquire spirituality. Once all the books are sitting on our shelves and we have become knowledgeable and well-read, there is no need for anything more. The mezuzah is no longer necessary.

Moses insisted, however, that a mezuzah is still needed. The mezuzah contains the first two passages of the Shema. The first passage describes the requirement to constantly remember, wherever one may be, that everything is God’s—that God is always in control. The second describes the result of the first: a complete adherence to all of God’s commandments and directions.

We affix the mezuzah in the doorway between the home and the street. In this way, the teachings of the Torah are not confined to the dusty bookshelf. Our declaration of devotion to the Torah’s teachings accompanies us out into the world and becomes a part of our everyday lives.

It is not enough to be filled with holy books, ideas, and thoughts. We must affix a mezuzah upon the “gates” of our minds and hearts, reminding us to live up to our ideals, motivated by the threefold love of God, the Torah, and our fellow Jew. This love must permeate all that we do, so that it is immediately noticeable that we are people with mezuzah’s on our “doors.” When this mezuzah is in place, we are assured of the blessings contained further in that same passage: i.e., that God will provide all our physical and spiritual needs.

So why do you raise yourselves above God’s community? Although every society has leaders who assume more responsibility and have more privileges than the rest of the people, Korach claimed that the generation of the desert, the “generation of knowledge,” was different. Having all witnessed God’s miracles and the revelation at Mount Sinai, they were all of a very lofty spiritual nature, above the need for a leader like Moses. In this, Korach erred.
They all assembled against Moses and Aaron, dressed in wool robes dyed with 
*techelet* and asked if such a garment requires tassels. Moses answered in the affir-
mative. They mocked this answer, saying that if attaching a tassel with a single 
thread of *techelet* to a garment not dyed with *techelet* makes the garment permis-
sible, shouldn’t a garment made itself of wool dyed with *techelet* be permitted to 
be worn without a tassel? By this, they meant to imply that since all the people 
are holy, there is no need for special leaders. They said to Moses and Aaron, “You 
take too much honor upon yourselves, for the entire congregation is all holy, as 
evidenced by the fact that they all heard God’s voice at Mount Sinai, and God is in 
their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above God’s community?”

When Moses heard this, he fell on his face. When the people committed the sins 
of the Golden Calf and the spies’ rebellion, God had threatened to wipe the people 
out and Moses had interceded successfully on their behalf. When they complained 
at Taveirah, God had actually started to burn up the people in order to prevent 
the rebellion from spreading, but the offenders quickly repented and Moses could 
then pray to God to halt the flames. Now, however, Moses was afraid that Korach’s 
rebellion would spread and God would threaten to wipe out the people, or that 
God would punish the offenders in order to prevent the rebellion from spreading. 
But this time, he was at a loss as to how to convince God to forgive them. At the 
sins of the Golden Calf and the spies, he had argued that wiping out the whole 
people would lead to God’s disrepute, but here, Korach’s rebellion had not yet 
spread to the whole people. At Taveirah, the offenders had repented, so Moses 
could pray for them, but here, they had not. God, however, told Moses that in this 
case, it was possible to conduct a test that would demonstrate the error of Korach 
and his followers and to punish only them.

On, the son of Pelet, by contrast, was not at all ex-
ceptional. His appearance here is the only time he 
is mentioned in Jewish history. Both his intellectual 
capabilities and his lineage were quite ordinary.

Yet, both their fates took an unexpected turn, each 
leading to just the opposite of where logic would 
have predicted. Korach came to a bad end and 
dragged hundreds of other people down with him. 
On, on the other hand, was the only one of Korach’s 
entire assembly who was saved and emerged com-
pletely unscathed.

What was the difference? The behavior of their 
wives!

We are told in the Midrash that On’s wife at-
ttempted to dissuade him. “What are you getting 
involved for?” she asked. “What difference does it 
make to you? If Aaron is the high priest you will 
be a student, and if Korach becomes the high priest 
you will still be a student.” Since her arguments did 
not dissuade him, she gave him wine until he was 
drunk, and put him to bed. Then she sat, together 
with her daughter, at the opening of their tent with 
her hair uncovered. When Korach and his friends 
came to call On, they saw her and turned away, and 
so On was saved.

So On’s wife saved him and their entire family, al-
beit only in the final hours. Korach’s wife, on the 
other hand, encouraged him in his rebellion and 
thus led to the downfall of her husband and all of 
his followers.

This demonstrates the great responsibility of the 
wife and mother in every home. Her own destiny, 
husband’s, and her entire family’s is entirely in 
hers hands.

And Aaron: It appears that Korach himself wished 
to replace Aaron as high priest, while his followers 
wished to be high priests in addition to Aaron.

They did not doubt that all that Moses had in-
structed came from God. After all, they had seen 
with their own eyes that God spoke to him at Mt.
7. **First Reading**

8. **Rashi**

9. **Onkelos**

10. **Chasidic Insights**

Pur service in the Holy of Holies.23 Even with the knowledge that their predecessors had died, they were impelled by their great desire to become high priests in order to experience the sublime.

Where did this yearning come from? The answer can be found in Korach’s original words: “for the entire congregation are all holy, as evidenced by the fact that they all heard God’s voice at Mt. Sinai. So why do raise yourselves above God’s community?”

At Mount Sinai, God gave all the people the title of “kingdom of priests”,24 at that moment, every one of them was on the level of the high priest.25 It was there that they acquired a taste of that sublimity and learned to crave such a state. Indeed, every soul that was present at Sinai should crave to relive those moments.26

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So Moses stood up and spoke to Korach and to all his company, saying, “Right now, everyone is too excited. God has instructed me to conduct a test, which we will perform in the morning, and through this test God will make it known who are to act as the Levites, His servants, and who He has made holy enough to act as priests, and He will draw these two groups near to Him. He will allow only the one He chooses, the priests, to sacrifice to Him.” Moses put off the trial until the morning hoping that Korach and his people would reconsider in the meantime. He also hinted to them that God’s division between the Levites, the priesthood, and the laity was as fixed as His division between day and night, and they had as little chance of obliterating the former as they had of obliterating the latter.

Moses declared, “It is very noble to want to be a high priest; I would also like to be a high priest. But this cannot be, for unlike the pagans, who recognize many forces at work in the world and designate many priests, rites, and temples to serve them, our nation serves the one God as one body, and therefore requires only one high priest. Therefore, perform the following test, as God has instructed me. Do this, Korach and company: go and play the part of priests. Take for yourselves censers,

place fire into them, and put incense upon them before God tomorrow. Although the incense is the most sublime of the Temple rites, it is also potentially lethal—Nadav and Avihu were in fact killed by unauthorized use of it—so I am therefore warning you: since you are in error, you may expect the same fate. The man whom God will choose is Aaron, who is already the holy one, and he will remain alive, not you. I have given you a serious warning, sons of Levi, and you have taken too great a responsibility upon yourselves.” But despite Moses’ established credibility, the rebels did not heed his warning. Korach thought he would survive no matter what, because he saw prophetically that he would have illustrious descendants. This prophecy was indeed correct, but only because his sons, who at that point were on his side, subsequently repented and thus preserved his line.

Moses therefore tried to reason with Korach, addressing him in a conciliatory manner. He said to Korach, “Please listen,” but Korach refused to listen, so before the rebellion spread any further, Moses addressed the entire tribe of Levi. He said, “Listen, sons of Levi!

Is it not enough that the God of Israel has distinguished you from the congregation of Israel to draw you near to Him, to perform the service in the Tabernacle of God, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them by singing while the sacrifices are being offered?”

Then the man whom God chooses, he shall be the holy one: but the rest would die, since unauthorized use of the incense would cause death, as the Israelites had seen in the case of the two sons of Aaron. Still, Korach’s band took up the challenge—not because they thought they would live, but because they wished to experience the lofty service of the high priest even at the cost of their own lives. This phenomenon reoccurred during the era of the second Temple. Dozens of unworthy individuals lost their lives because they bought off the office of the high priest and performed the Yom Kip-
16 In this spirit, Moses said to Korach, “You and your entire congregation should present yourselves before God—you, they, and Aaron, tomorrow.

17 Let each man in your party take his censer and place incense upon it, and let each man present his censer before God, all 250 censers, and let you and Aaron each take his censer.”
10 Addressing Korach, he said, “He drew you near, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi with you, to the distinction from which He excluded the rest of the people,” and addressing the entire tribe, he continued, “shall you all now seek the priesthood as well?”

11 Speaking again to Korach, Moses concluded, “Therefore, for all these reasons, you and your entire company who are assembled with you are rebelling not against me but against God, for it is by His word that I have given the priesthood to Aaron and his descendants. What is Aaron, that you should complain against him?”

12 Having addressed Korach, Moses sent to call Dathan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, to conciliate them. (On, the son of Pelet, although one of the original instigators, had by now repented.) But Dathan and Aviram said, “We will not go up.” Unwittingly, they prophesied their own doom, for indeed, as shall be described further on, they died by falling into the depths of the earth.

13 They continued, “Is it not enough that you promised to bring us into a land flowing with milk and honey, but in fact have brought us out of a land flowing with milk and honey, i.e., Egypt, to kill us in the desert, that you should also exercise authority over us?

Second Reading 14 Not only have you taken us out of a luxurious land, you have also not brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards, as you promised. Even if you send someone to gouge out the eyes of those men [—euphemistically meaning, ‘our eyes’—] we will not go up.”

15 After these discussions, it became clear to Moses that the 250 rebels were not merely aspiring to the high priesthood, as he originally thought, but that they were rebelling, like Korach, against Moses’ leadership and Aaron’s appointment. Had they been merely aspiring to the high priesthood, the incense test would have been enough to silence their arguments. But now that it became clear that they were contesting Moses’ leadership and Aaron’s appointment as high priest, Moses became exceedingly distressed, and he said to God, “Do not regard the offering they are going to offer tomorrow morning at all—do not consider it a sacrificial rite, and therefore do not punish them for offering it. They are not simply aspiring to the high priesthood: they are rebelling against Your directives in general. Therefore, do not even consume their portion in the daily communal sacrifices. Punish them in a way that will demonstrate that they are being punished for rebelling against the authority You have vested in me. How can they accuse me of abusing my office? I have not taken a donkey from a single one of them, not even reimbursement for the donkey I used for my wife and children when I returned to Egypt on behalf of the people. And I have not harmed a single one of them.”

God agreed to Moses’ request not to consider the rebels’ incense a sacrificial rite that would make them liable to the death penalty. It would only serve as a test that would demonstrate who indeed is a true priest and who is not.27

He took an impressive entourage with him... hoping this would encourage them to defer: Da- than and Aviram had openly demonstrated their animosity toward Moses, charging him with being a despot and an imposter. Moreover, God Himself had already sealed their punishment, instructing Moses only to save the others from their impending fate. Still, Moses did not give up hope that his “enemies” would repent, and did whatever he could to influence them to reconsider.

We must learn from Moses’ attitude and always do whatever we can save our brethren’s lives and bring them back to the fold—even when it seems that all hope is lost. This applies even when our brethren are acting as if they are our “enemies,” and all the more so when they are acting simply out of ignorance.

So, the following morning, each man took his censer, and they put fire upon it and placed incense upon it, and they stood at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting with Moses and Aaron.

Korach assembled all the congregation against them at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, for the whole night he had circulated among the people, convincing them that he was acting on their behalf, as well. Korach and the 250 men offered their incense, and Aaron offered his. As Moses had requested, God did not respond now to this unauthorized offering. At some point during the rebellion, Korach’s sons regretted their involvement, but nonetheless continued to participate in it. At this point, the glory of God appeared before the entire congregation in the form of a pillar of cloud.

◆ Third Reading

Since Korach had enticed the entire people to take his side, God spoke to Moses and Aaron saying,

“Dissociate yourselves from this congregation, and I will consume them in an instant.”

They fell on their faces and said, “O God, the God who knows the spirits of all flesh, and can probe everyone’s thoughts: if one man sins, shall You be angry with the whole congregation? A mortal king has to punish all his subjects if he does not know which of them sinned against him. You, however, know exactly which of Your subjects sinned—Korach, who instigated all this—and which ones were merely swept along by the spirit of the moment—everyone else. Why should you wipe out everyone?”

God accepted this argument. He spoke to Moses, saying,

“You are right that those who were swept up by the instigators’ rhetoric should not suffer as severe a punishment as the instigator himself should. But you are wrong in thinking that only Korach was an instigator. Speak to the congregation saying, ‘Withdraw from the dwellings of all three instigators: Korach, Dathan, and Aviram.’”

After the cloud departed, the crowd dispersed and everyone went back to their tents. Moses, following God’s instructions, went to Korach’s tent, which was in the Levite camp, not far from the Tent of Meeting, and told everyone nearby to withdraw. He then arose and went to the tents of Dathan and Aviram, which were much further away, in the camp of Reuben, in order to warn everyone near them to withdraw from their vicinity, as well. He took an impressive entourage with him—the elders of Israel followed him—hoping this would encourage Dathan and Aviram to defer.

But Dathan and Aviram remained adamant, so Moses spoke to the congregation saying, “Please get away from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything of theirs, lest you perish in the debacle that is about to befall them because of all their sins.”

So most of the people withdrew from around the dwellings of Korach, Dathan, and Aviram, indicating that they had abandoned Korach and returned to follow Moses. But Dathan and Aviram came out of their tents, standing defiantly upright at the entrance of their tents, together with their wives, their children, and their infants.

sons drags down their inherently uplifting vitality into the depths of mundane reality and earthly existence. When the focus is reoriented from God above to the individual below, the Torah of life descends to the depths.

Thus, although Korach and his cohorts were eminent Torah scholars and observant Jews, their self-orientation doomed them to descend to death together with their learning and piety.39 To the depths alive: Similarly, it is possible for a person to be “in the depths,” in a state of spiritual decadence, and still be so oblivious to his predicament that he feels “alive.” However, there is a blessing hidden in this seemingly lost state. If a person feels alive, he can change for the better.

This is why Korach’s sons did not die. Because they were allegorically “alive”—that is, open-minded enough to change, to repent—they remained literally alive as well, and indeed returned to the community later.40

Numbers 16:28-17:1

28 Moses said, “With this you shall know that God sent me to do all these deeds, appointing Aaron as the high priest, his sons as regular priests, and Elitzafan as the prince of the clan of Kehat, and that I did not devise this myself.

29 If these men die as all men die and the fate of all men be visited upon them, then God has not sent me.

30 But if God creates a new creation, namely, that the earth opens its mouth, swallows them and all that is theirs, and they descend alive into the grave, you will know that these men have provoked God, and that I have spoken only on His authority. If God created the earth with the potential to open its mouth, let this potential be manifest now. If He did not, let Him create it anew!”

31 As soon as he finished speaking all these words, the earth beneath them split open.

32 The earth beneath them opened its mouth and swallowed Korach, Dathan, and Aviram and their households, even their little children, and all the men who were with Korach — other than the 250 men who were offering incense — and all their property. (Thus we see how serious contention is, for although children are generally not punished for their errors, here they were punished and actually perished.)

33 They, and all they possessed, descended alive into the grave; the earth covered them up, and they were lost to the community. (Korach’s sons were also swallowed up, but because they had repented mentally they were not killed; God provided them with a place to live underground and allowed them to emerge 38 years later.)

34 All the Israelites who were around them fled from the sound of their cries, for they said, “Let us flee, lest the earth swallow us up, too!”

35 At the same time as Korach, Dathan, Aviram, and their supporters’ households were being swallowed by the earth, a fire came forth from God and consumed the 250 men who had offered up the incense. By punishing the 250 rebels together with Korach, God demonstrated that they were indeed guilty of his sin of general insurrection and not only of the error of aspiring to the high priesthood.

17:1 God spoke to Moses, saying:

\[\text{CHASIDIC INSIGHTS}\]

31 The earth beneath them split open: God did not punish Korach and his supporters until they had acted on their beliefs. Even when Korach convinced the rest of the people to side with him, God did not punish the offenders until He had duly warned them not to commit their crime and they nonetheless did so.

We must learn from God’s example here, and wherever possible give people who offend us or disobey God’s laws the benefit of the doubt, and patiently and lovingly encourage them to better themselves.

33 And they descend to the depths alive: Being truly “alive” is possible only by being connected to God through learning His Torah and performing His commandments. This is why the Torah is called “the Torah of life.” Nonetheless, learning Torah and performing the commandments for selfish rea-

47. Likutei Sichot, vol. 18, p. 204.

The opposite. It is possible to unite fire and water (by heating the water with the fire) only if they are separated by a pot. So, too, it is often the imposition of boundaries that allows for the truest expression of unity and harmony amongst people.
“Even though I agreed not to consider the rebels’ incense a sacrificial rite that would make them liable to the death penalty, their incense was still offered to Me. Therefore, say to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest that he should pick up the censers from the burned area and throw the fire (i.e., coals) in them away, because they have become sanctified by having been used to offer incense to God and are therefore forbidden from now on for profane use.

These are the censers of those who sinned knowing that it would cost them their lives. The artisans shall make them into flattened-out plates as an overlay for the Outer Altar, for they brought them before God, and they have therefore become sanctified. They shall serve as a reminder of this rebellion for the Israelites.”

So Eleazar the priest took the copper censers which the fire victims had brought, and the artisans hammered them out as an overlay for the Altar,

as a reminder for the Israelites, so that no layman, who is not descended from Aaron, shall approach to burn incense before God, so as not to be like Korach and his company, as God spoke through Moses regarding Aaron.

The following day, the entire congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron saying, “You have killed the people of God. This incense is evidently a lethal potion. It killed Nadav and Avihu, and now the 250 judges.”

But while the congregation was assembled against Moses and Aaron, they turned to the Tent of Meeting, and behold, the cloud had covered it, and the glory of God appeared.

Moses and Aaron, understanding this as a sign that God wanted to address them, came to the front of the Tent of Meeting.

Fourth Reading

God spoke to Moses, saying:

“The fact that the people are complaining about the fate that befell Korach and his supporters—and still insinuating that all the people are equally holy, ‘the people of God’—indicates that they have, in fact, subscribed to his views. You can no longer argue that only Korach is guilty and they have merely been swept along by the spirit of the moment. Therefore, I have no choice: remove yourselves from this congregation, and I shall consume them in an instant.” Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, for they were now at a complete loss as to how to pray for the people.

As God has said would happen when the boundaries between the spiritual classes of the people are breached, the people began to perish from the plague. But fortunately, Moses remembered that when he was in heaven receiving the Torah, the Angel of Death had told him that incense wards off the plague. Moses now asked God if this is how he should stop the plague, and God concurred. So Moses said to Aaron, “Take the censer, put fire from the top of the Altar into it, and take it quickly to the congregation and atone for them, for the Angel of Death, the instrument of Divine wrath has gone forth from God, and the plague has begun.”

Do not be like Korach and his party: This verse serves as the source for the law to avoid involvement in divisive arguments and contentious disagreements. It is indeed ironic that the same Korach who called for abolishing the distinctions between different groups of Jews became the paradigm of division. Abolishing boundaries does not always produce unity; in fact, it can produce exactly
וְהַצָּרַעַת זָרְחָה בְּמִצְחוֹ הִנִּיחוֹ בָּאֶמְצַע, שֶׁלֹּא יֹאמְרוּ: "מִפְּנֵי וַיִּגָּמַל וּהֲווֹ דְּמִיתוּ בְּמוֹתָנָא בֵּין מִיתַיָּא וּבֵין חַיַּיָּא וְאִתְכְּלִי וְקָם וּנְסֵיב אַהֲרֹן כְּמָא דִי מַלֵּיל בַּר מִדְּמִיתוּ עַל פְּלֻגְתָּא דְּקֹרַח: תְּרֵי עֲשַׂר חֻטְרִין גְּבַר יָת שְׁמֵהּ מַלֵּל עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְסַב וּמַלֵּיל יְיָ עִם מֹשֶׁה לְמֵימָר: מַשְׁכַּן זִמְנָא וּמוֹתָנָא אִתְכְּלִי אֲבָהַתְהוֹן תְּרֵי עֲשַׂר חֻטְרִין וְחֻטְרָא וִיהֵי גַּבְרָא דְּאֶתְרְעֵי בֵהוּ חֻטְרֵהּ: סַהֲדוּתָא דִּי אֲזַמֵּן מֵימְרִי לְכוֹן תַּמָּן וְתַצְנְעֵנּוּן בְּמַשְׁכַּן זִמְנָא קֳדָם לְבֵית לֵוִי וְאַפֵּק לַבְלְבִין וַאֲנֵיץ נֵץ דְּסַהֲדוּתָא וְהָא נְעָא חֻטְרָא דְּאַהֲרֹן דְבַתְרוֹהִי וְעָל מֹשֶׁה לְמַשְׁכְּנָא |
12 Aaron took the censer, just as Moses had said, and he ran into the midst of the community, and indeed, the plague had begun among the people. He placed the incense on it and atoned for the people.

13 He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague ceased.

14 The number of dead in the plague was 14,700; this was besides those who died because of the matter of Korach.

15 But the Angel of Death protested that Aaron was preventing him from carrying out God’s command. Aaron replied that he was acting on Moses’ orders, and Moses only does what God tells him to. Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting together with the Angel of Death, and there they asked God who was right. God said that Aaron was right, and thus the plague was stopped. God thus demonstrated to the people that just as the incense can kill, it can also save from death, and that it is only sin that brings punishment.

◆ **Fifth Reading** 16 By having the earth swallow some of the rebels, God proved conclusively that He selected Moses to be His emissary; by burning the rebels who offered the incense, God proved that He wanted Aaron to be the high priest. But beyond this, God also wanted to demonstrate that Aaron deserved this distinction on his own merits—not because of Moses’ merits, and despite his role in the incident of the Golden Calf. Therefore, God spoke to Moses, saying:

17 “Speak to the Israelites and take from them a staff for each paternal house—that is, one from each of their tribal princes according to their fathers’ houses, a total of 12 staffs—and inscribe each man’s name on his staff.

18 In addition, take Aaron’s staff and inscribe Aaron’s name on the staff of Levi, for even though the tribe of Levi is divided into priests and Levites, there is nonetheless only one staff for the head of their fathers’ house.

19 You shall place these 13 staffs in the Tent of Meeting before the Ark of the Testimony where I commune with you.

20 The staff of the man whom I will choose will blossom, and I will thus calm the Israelites’ complaints that they complain against you, ridding Myself of them.”

21 Moses spoke to the Israelites, and each of their princes gave him a staff, one for each prince according to their fathers’ houses, a total of 12 staffs, and together with them, Moses put Aaron’s staff amidst their staffs in the middle, so they could not say that it blossomed because it was closer to the ark.

22 Moses placed the staffs before God in the Tent of Meeting, which housed the Ark of the Testimony.

23 On the following day, Moses came to the Tent of the Testimony, and behold, Aaron’s staff for the house of Levi had blossomed. Specifically, it gave forth blossoms, these flowers dropped off, and the staff sprouted buds, and then produced ripe almonds. This signified that just as almonds ripen quickly, so will someone who opposes the selection of the priesthood be punished quickly.

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**CHASIDIC INSIGHTS**

23 **Ripe almonds**: Almonds are the quickest fruit to blossom, ripen, and be ready for human consumption. Among the connections between that alacrity and the priesthood:

2 Enlist also your brethren, the tribe of Levi... and they shall join you and minister to you: The name Levi means “accompany,” in the sense of sharing a close relationship, implying that the Levites’ status gives them a direct connection with God. In fact, however, the role of the Levites in the Temple was not to serve or approach God directly, but only to assist the priests in their Godly service.

Furthermore, as we will see, all the Jewish people are granted a portion on the Land of Israel except the tribe of Levi. On the other hand, God tells the priests that although they will receive no portion of the land, “God is their portion and inheritance.”

Thus, the regular Levites (those that are not priests) are left out of both the physical inheritance of the land and the spiritual inheritance given specifically to the priests.

It is precisely this subservience and “homelessness” that propels the tribe of Levi to such great spiritual heights. Their secondary role keeps them humble and unimpressed with their own station on life, and this humility brings them so close to God.

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24 Moses took out all the staffs from before God and showed them to the Israelites, together with the flowers that fell off Aaron’s staff before it sprouted almonds. They saw, and each man took his staff. By showing them the fallen flowers as well as the sprouted staff, Moses showed them that God had miraculously made the staff flower and produce fruit, but did so following a plant’s natural progression of growth. This indicated that God had chosen Aaron for the priesthood of His own volition, but that the priesthood thereby had become Aaron’s own nature, and he was therefore suited for the priesthood by virtue of his own, intrinsic merits.51

♦ Sixth Reading 25 To further indicate that Aaron’s priesthood was intrinsic,52 God said to Moses, “Put Aaron’s staff back in front of the Ark of the Testimony as a remembrance and a sign for rebellious ones that I have chosen Aaron’s descendants to be priests, and that this decision will never be revoked. This will put an end to their complaints against Me. I will then not have to punish them and they will not have to die.”

26 Moses did so. He did just as God had commanded him.

27 The lay Israelites finally accepted the distinction between themselves and the priests, but they still spoke to Moses, saying, “Behold, because of this distinction we are in constant danger of dying, we will perish, we are all lost!

28 We are freely allowed into the courtyard of the Tabernacle, but whoever comes too close and even mistakenly enters the Tabernacle of God will die! Have we been consigned to being constantly afraid that we might perish in this way?”

18:1 God therefore reiterated His commands to the tribe of Levi to guard the Sanctuary precincts from encroachment by the laity, this time making the Levites accountable if they fail to prevent it. God said to Moses to tell Aaron, “You, your sons—that is, the priests—and your paternal house—that is, the Levite clan of Kohath—shall bear the iniquity associated with the Sanctuary. You will be punished if any layperson inadvertently touches what is entrusted to you—the furnishings of the Tabernacle and their utensils53—so keep watch that they stay away from them. In addition, you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood, that is, you will be punished if any Levite tries to do anything only a priest may do, so make sure they do not try to.

2 Enlist also your other brethren from the tribe of Levi, your fathers’ tribe—i.e., the clans of Gershon and Merari—and they shall join you in guarding the Sanctuary precincts from encroachment by the laity by preventing laypeople from touching what is entrusted to their clans, and they shall also minister to you by serving as entrance guards, treasurers, and supervisors. But again, only you and your sons with you may serve as priests before the Tent of Testimony.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ☞ —

• One of the main functions of the priest is to bless the people.54 But his blessings are not only fulfilled; they are granted speedily and without difficulty.55

• The priests by nature fulfill their duties in the Temple with alacrity and liveliness.56

These two attributes combine to provide a lesson to us all. Our approach to our Divine mission in life cannot be attempted halfheartedly or resignedly. We must respond to every opportunity with energy and alacrity. When we do so, we are assured that God’s blessings and the success of our efforts will not delay in coming.57

The gift of service I have given you as your priesthood:
The “gift of service” denotes the level of love for God called “the love of delights.”
This is a state where a person experiences a wondrous pleasure of Godly revelation akin to that of the World to Come. It is referred to as a “gift” since it is impossible to reach this degree of love through our own effort; it can only be given as a present from Above.
3 The Levites shall keep your charge and the charge of the Tent of Meeting, but they shall not approach the holy vessels or the Altar, so that neither they nor you will die.

4 They shall join you, and they shall keep the charge of the Tent of Meeting for all the service of the Tent, taking care that no layperson come near you when you are performing your duties.

5 You shall keep the charge of the Sanctuary and the charge of the Altar, so that there be no more Divine wrath directed against the Israelites, as there was after the people complained that Moses and Aaron killed God’s people.\(^6\)

6 I have therefore taken your brethren, the Levites, from among the Israelites; they are given to you as a gift for use in the service given to God, that is, to perform the service of the Tent of Meeting, serving as entrance guards, treasurers, and supervisors.

7 And you and your sons shall guard your priesthood in all matters concerning anyone else touching the Altar outside the Tent of Meeting, and concerning anyone else touching what is within the veil at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and you must make sure that only you serve as priests. I have given your priesthood to you as a gift of service, and you will bear the responsibility for any layperson who approaches inadvertently; but any layperson who approaches on purpose shall die.’’

**Donations to be Given to the Priests**

8 God now listed the donations the people must give Him and that are to be given to the priests in exchange for their responsibilities (See Figure 1, p. 114). We would have expected these laws to have been given in the Book of Leviticus, in the context of the other laws pertaining to the priesthood, but God gave them here in order to indicate the irrevocability of Aaron’s appointment—even beyond that which was indicated by having Aaron’s staff blossom and give fruit. The fact that some of these gifts are given to the priests even outside the context of their Temple service proves that the priesthood is theirs even when they are not serving as priests.\(^6\)

God told Aaron, “Behold, I have joyfully given you the charge of safeguarding My raised-offerings from defilement. By giving you this responsibility I have thus given you all the holy things that the Israelites give to Me. I give them to you as a sign of eminence and as an eternal portion for your descendants.

9 Specifically, these shall be yours from the sacrifices classed as holiest of the holy, from the time the fire begins to consume the portions of them placed on the Altar: the flesh of all the Israelites’ communal peace-offerings (i.e., the two lambs that accompany the two loaves offered on Shavuot),\(^6\) their grain-offerings,\(^6\) the flesh of their sin-offerings,\(^6\) the flesh of their guilt-offerings,\(^6\) and goods that were robbed from an heirless convert who has since died, which they return to Me because there is no one else to return them to.\(^6\) The sacrifices just mentioned shall be treated as holiest of the holy by you and by your sons:

\(^{62}\) Above, 17:11. \(^{63}\) Likutei Sichot, vol. 23, pp. 123-132. See also below, on v. 19. \(^{64}\) Leviticus 23:17-20. \(^{65}\) Leviticus 2:3,10, 6:9-11. \(^{66}\) Ibid. 6:19. \(^{67}\) Ibid. 7:6-7. \(^{68}\) See above, 5:8.
An eternal covenant of salt: The revealed aspects of the Torah are compared to bread and meat, the staples of a healthy diet. The inner dimension of the Torah, Kabbalah and Chasidic teachings, is compared to salt. Just as salt enhances the taste of the food it touches, so, too, the learning of the inner meaning of the Torah reveals the sweetest aspects of the revealed Torah.
10 you shall eat it only in the place where the holiest of the holy sacrifices may be eaten, the courtyard of the Tabernacle. Any male priest may eat of it; this is how it shall be treated as holy by you.

11 This shall also be yours: what is separated as the Israelite’s gifts to Me from all their wave-offerings—i.e., one from each of the three sets of 10 loaves accompanying thanksgiving-offerings;71 the breast and right thigh of personal peace-offerings;72 and the breast, right thigh, and foreleg of the peace-offering of the Nazirite and two of its 20 accompanying loaves.73 These offerings are classed as less holy, so I have given them not only to you and to your sons but also to your daughters with you, as an eternal portion. Any ritually clean member of your household—including your wives—may eat it anywhere in the camp.

12 The choice portion of the olive oil and the choice portions of the wine and grain, the first of which the Israelites must give to God—74—I have given them to you.

13 The first fruit of all that grows in their land, which they must bring to God—75—it shall be yours; any ritually clean member of your household may eat of it.

14 Any dedicated entity76 in Israel shall be yours.

15 Every first issue of the womb of any creature whose first issue they are required to present to God,77 whether of human or beast, shall be yours. However, you must have the firstborn son of a human redeemed, and you may have the firstborn male of the unclean animal to which this law applies—the donkey78—redeemed.

16 The redemption of the firstborn male human shall be performed from the age of a month, according to the endowment stated elsewhere,79 i.e., five shekels of silver according to the Sanctuary shekel, which is 20 gerah.80

17 However, you shall not have a firstborn ox or a firstborn sheep or a firstborn goat redeemed, for they are to be treated as holy sacrifices: their blood shall be sprinkled on the Altar and their fats shall be burned as a fire-offering to please God,

18 but their flesh shall be yours. It is classed as less holy, just like the waved breast and the right thigh of personal peace-offerings, and therefore it shall be yours to be eaten by yourselves, your wives, your children, and your households, during the two days and intervening night after it is slaughtered.

19 In summary: I have given all the separated portions of the animals sanctified as offerings that the Israelites set aside for God to you and to your sons and daughters with you, as an eternal portion. Finally, in order to indicate that the priesthood will remain with Aaron’s descendants even after the Temple is destroyed, when they cannot serve actively as priests at all,81 God said that “it is an eternal covenant before God similar to the one He made with salt, that not only never decays but even acts as a preservative, for you and your descendants with you. You will retain the priesthood forever, and by guarding the Sanctuary you will preserve the lives of your fellow Jews.”
משה אמר: "לא אכדב דברין ויב الخي ההלופת בני ישראל לא הלו אפיון...

שלח הפקה בתקופה אָסִיאְרָה עָבְרָהָה אָחָרָה מִשָּׁם. מִי: 22.

וַיִּנִּיחַ אֶל הָעָם וַיְעָשֶׂה עָלָיו עֹלָם לְיָמָיו מֵאִיתָם בְּנַחֲלַתָם וַיִּרְמָה לָכֶם בְּתוֹכָם אַף אֶת הַמִּעֲשֵׂר שֶׁלָּכֶם אָנִי חֶלְקְךָ וְנַחֲלָתְכָּה בְּתֹכָם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל אַהֲרֹן בְּאַרְצָם לֹא תִנְחַל וְחֵלֶק לא יִהְיֶה לְךָ בְּתוֹכָם אָנִי חֶלְקְךָ וְנַחֲלָתְכָּה בְּתֹכָם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל. 20.

וַיִּנְחַל אֶל הָעָם וַיְעָשֶׂה עָלָיו עֹלָם לְיָמָיו מֵאִיתָם בְּנַחֲלַתָם וַיִּרְמָה לָכֶם בְּתוֹכָם אַף אֶת הַמִּעֲשֵׂר שֶׁלָּכֶם אָנִי חֶלְקְךָ וְנַחֲלָתְכָּה בְּתֹכָם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל אַהֲרֹן בְּאַרְצָם לֹא תִנְחַל וְחֵלֶק לא יִהְיֶה לְךָ בְּתוֹכָם אָנִי חֶלְקְךָ וְנַחֲלָתְכָּה בְּתֹכָם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
20 God said to Aaron, “I have given you all these gifts in order to relieve you from the burden of farming the land in order to make a living, so that you can devote yourselves to My service on behalf of the people. Therefore, you shall not inherit any portion of their land, and you shall have no portion among them in the spoils of war. I am your inheritance and portion among the Israelites.

### Donations to be Given to the Levites

**Seventh Reading**

21 “And to the Levites I have given all agricultural tithes of Israel as an inheritance, in exchange for their service which they perform—the service of the Tent of Meeting.

22 The Levites must ensure that the lay Israelites no longer approach the Tent of Meeting, lest they become guilty of sin and die.

23 The Levites shall perform the service of the Tent of Meeting on behalf of the people, and they will bear the guilt of the people’s iniquity if they enter the Tent; this is an eternal rule for all generations. Like the priests, they shall have no land-inheritance among the Israelites,

24 for I have given the tithes of the Israelites to the Levites as an inheritance. These tithes are not holy (and may be eaten anywhere and in any state of purity), but until the Levites separate the priests’ portion (as will be described), this tithe is considered as holy as any other elevation-offering that any Israelite sets aside for God by virtue of the priests’ portion still within it, and the Levites may not eat it. This is why I have said to them that they shall have no land-inheritance among the lay Israelites.”

### The Levites’ Donations to the Priests

25 God thus finished addressing Aaron regarding the gifts given to the priests and Levites in exchange for their responsibilities. God now spoke to Moses regarding the Levites’ obligation to give a portion of their gifts to the priests, saying:

26 “Speak to the Levites and tell them, ‘When you take the tithe from the Israelites which I have given you from them as your inheritance, you shall set aside from it a gift for God, a tithe of the tithe.

27 Your gift shall be considered for you as holy as the priestly portions that the laity separate from their agricultural produce, the grain from the threshing-floor and the produce of the vat—that is, wine and olive oil—and all the laws that apply to their priestly portion apply to yours.

28 So shall you too set aside a gift for God from all your food supply, which in your case is the tithes you take from the Israelites, and you shall give therefrom God’s gift to Aaron the priest.

29 If you receive your tithe from the layperson before he has set aside the priest’s portion from his produce, then from all such gifts, you must set aside all the gifts due to God, i.e., both the priest’s portion he has to set aside and the 10 percent of what you have received from him. The priest’s portion, that part of it which is to be consecrated, must be set aside from its choicest portion.’

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83. Leviticus 27:30-31. 84. See above, 3:8.
## Gift Cross References

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Maftir 30 Say further to them, regarding the priest’s portion they must set aside from their tithes: ‘After you set aside its choicest part, the remainder shall be considered for the Levites as non-holy produce from the threshing-floor and as produce from the vat.

31 You and your household may eat it anywhere, for it is your wage in exchange for your service in the Tent of Meeting.

32 After you separate the choicest part from it for the priest, you shall not be guilty of any sin on account of eating or defiling the rest of it. But before that, you will incur guilt by eating or defiling it; you will have stolen the property of the priests, and you will have to pay for it. Similarly, you shall not profane the sanctified produce of the Israelites—their tithes that they have given you but from which you have not yet set aside the priests’ portion—by eating them, so that you shall not die.’”

The Haftarah for parashat Korach may be found on p. 241.
The Haftarah for Rosh Chodesh may be found on p. 263.

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Figure 1: The Twenty-four Priestly Gifts

30 The Priestly Gifts: Although the physical priesthood in the Temple was reserved for the descendants of Aaron, the spiritual priesthood is open to all. God called the Jewish people as a whole “a kingdom of priests.” As Maimonides explains, “Anybody who dedicates himself and understands the intellectual imperative to separate himself—to stand before God and serve Him, and to know God—has become sanctified like the Holy of Holies...and will be granted all of his physical needs, just as they were provided for the priests and Levites.”

In other words, if we recognize the purpose of our creation, which is to serve God, and dedicate ourselves to accomplishing that purpose, we are assured of the best of everything at all times.
Korach

Haftarot
Haftarah for Korach
1 Samuel 11:14–12:22

In parashat Korach, the people challenge Moses’ authority, which God then defends dramatically. This demonstrates the Moses’ authority is derived solely from his subjection to God. In the haftarah, Samuel anoints Saul, the people’s first king, but reminds them that his authority, too, is legitimate only insofar as it is derived from his subjection to God.

11:14 After being governed by the judges, the Jewish people asked for a king. Although the Torah provided for the institution of kingship, the people’s motivation was not totally pure. Nonetheless, God told the prophet Samuel to anoint Saul as the first king of the Jewish people. Samuel did so, but it was only after the people were united in their support of Saul that Samuel said to the people, “Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew there the kingdom publicly.”

12:1 All the people went to Gilgal, and they made Saul king there before God in Gilgal, and they slaughtered peace-offerings there before God, and Saul and all the people rejoiced greatly.

12:2 Samuel then said to all Israel, “Behold, I have hearkened to your voice, to everything which you have said to me, and I have made a king to reign over you.

12:3 Now, behold the king is walking before you. As for me, although I am only fifty, I have aged prematurely and become old and hoary, and my sons are here with you to take over for me after I die. I have walked before you, leading you from my youth and until this day. Now, here I am. Bear witness against me before God and before His anointed king: Whose ox did I take to perform my personal work? Whose donkey did I take to travel from town to town when serving you? Although I should have purchased a donkey for this purpose from public funds, I used my own personal donkey. Whom did I rob? Whom did I oppress? From whose hand did I take a ransom in order that I hide my eyes from the truth when passing judgment? If I did any of these things, tell me, and I shall restore to you.”

4 They said, “You did not rob us, nor did you oppress us, neither did you take anything from anyone’s hand.”

5 He said to them, “God is a witness against you, and His anointed king is witness this day, that you have not found anything untoward in my hand.” A voice issued from heaven, and it said, “I bear witness.”

Samuel said to the people, “It is God who prepared Moses and Aaron for their mission, and who brought your forefathers up from the Land of Egypt. Now, stand and I shall reason with you before God, concerning all the righteous acts which He did to you and to your forefathers. 

When Jacob came to Egypt, and your forefathers cried out to God, God sent Moses and Aaron, and they brought your forefathers out of Egypt, and they settled them in this place. But your forefathers forgot God, their God, and He delivered them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Chatzor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they waged war with them. They cried out to God, and said, ‘We have sinned, for we have forsaken God, and have served Baal-idols and Ashtarot-idols. Now, save us from the hand of our enemies, and we shall serve You.’

God sent Gideon, also known as Yerubaal; Samson, also known as Bedan, for he was from the tribe of Dan; Yiftach; and myself, Samuel, and through these judges He saved you from the hand of your enemies round about, and you dwelt in safety.

When you saw that Nachash, the king of Ammon, came upon you, you said to me, ‘No, judges and prophets are not enough. Rather, a king shall rule over us.’ But God, your God, is your king. So now, behold the king whom you have chosen, whom you have requested. Behold, God has appointed a king over you. If you will fear God, serve Him, listen to His voice, and not rebel against the commandments of God, both you and the king who reigns over you will be granted long lives to follow God, your God. But if you will not listen to the voice of God and rebel against the commandments of God, God’s hand will be against you as it was against your fathers. And your fathers will have to suffer the disgrace of their graves being dug up.

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16 Even now, stand and see this great thing which God will do before your eyes. 17 Is it not today the summer, the season of the wheat harvest? Nonetheless, I shall call to God, and He will send thunder and rain, notwithstanding that rain at this time of year is a bad sign and God does not punish people for no reason. Thus, you shall know and see that God answers me, and it was therefore unnecessary to ask God for a king. Therefore, the evil that you have done in the eyes of God is great, namely, to request a king for yourselves.” 18 Samuel then called to God, and God sent thunder and rain on that day, and all the people greatly feared God and Samuel. 19 All the people said to Samuel, “Pray for your servants to God, your God, and let us not die. For we have added evil to all our sins, namely, to request a king for ourselves.” 20 Samuel said to the people, “Fear not. You have done all this evil, but do not turn aside from following God, and serve God with all your heart. 21 Do not turn aside, for then you will go after vain things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are vain. 22 Do not worry, for God will not forsake His people for His great name’s sake; to do so would tarnish His reputation amongst the nations of the earth. For God has sworn to make you a people for Himself.”
Dedicated in honor of our children

Nathan, Yitzchok, Moshe Lev, and Gilana

May you continue to grow in the ways of our holy Torah

Yuri and Deana Pikover