



“And who knows the spirit of man that goes up high, and the spirit of the beast that goes down to Earth.” (Eccl. 3:21)
 Rashi states that one, who understands, does not act as an instinctual beast, ignoring our final judgment. Maharsha applies this verse to Calev, who followed his “other” spirit – intellect – and was thereby saved from caving into emotions, and the lethal fate of his fellow spies.

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

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Weekly Parsha

Korach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Say to Elazar, the son of Aharon, the Kohen, that he should pick up the censers from the burned area and throw the fire away, because they have become sanctified – the censers of these who

(continued on next page)



Parshas Korach

Your Own Worst Enemy

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This week’s Parsha discusses Korach’s rebellion. We can’t help but notice the many obvious lessons.

Korach was jealous of the prince status Moses granted to Elitzafe. According to Rashi, Korach’s corrupt assessment was this: since he (Korach) descended from an older sibling than Elitzafe, Korach felt more entitled to be prince: elders, he thought, have seniority. Korach accused Moses of nepotism. But in truth, Moses operated based on God’s direction, not on his own: this being Korach’s fatal mistake. Korach then lodges arguments basing his position on the premise that it was Moses’ decision to appoint Elitzafe, not God. Reading the verses, we learn much about how man can distort reality and destroy himself. Let us review Korach’s error, and then apply it to us today.

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“The third class of evils comprises those which every one causes to himself by his own action. This is the largest class, and is far more numerous than the second class. It is especially of these evils that all men complain, only few men are found that do not sin against themselves by this kind of evil.”
Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, chap. XII

(Korach cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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sinned at the cost of their lives. And they shall make them into flattened out plates as an overlay for the altar, for they brought them before Hashem and have become sanctified. And they shall be a sign for Bnai Yisrael. And Elazar the Kohen took the copper censers which the fire victims had brought, and they hammered them out as an overlay for the altar, as a reminder for Bnai Yisrael, so that no outsider, who is not a descendant of Aharon shall approach to burn incense before Hashem. And one should not be like Korach and his company, as Hashem spoke regarding him through Moshe.” (BeMidbar 17:1-5)

Parshat Korach describes the rebellion of Korach, Datan, Aviram and their followers against Moshe.

This group challenged Moshe's leadership. The specific issues upon which the rebellion focused are not described in detail. However, it is apparent that Korach and his followers opposed the appointment of a specific family to serve as Kohanim. They believed that the entire nation was endowed with sanctity and that all members of Bnai Yisrael should be equal in their right to serve Hashem in His Mishcan. Moshe's contention was that his appointment of Aharon and his descendents to serve as Kohanim did not represent a personal decision. Moshe followed the commandment of Hashem.

Moshe attempted to resolve the issue through discussion. However, he suggested that if Korach and his followers absolutely insisted on challenging Aharon's appointment, then the issue should be decided through a simple test. Aharon and the other aspirants for the priesthood should each take a censer and offer incense in the courtyard of the Mishcan. Hashem will demonstrate through His response which of these individuals is His chosen Kohen Gadol.

Korach and his followers accepted this challenge. They brought their censers to the Mishcan's courtyard, added coals to their censers, and placed incense of the coals. Aharon's offering was accepted. But a flame descended from the heavens and consumed the pretenders.

Our passages deal with the aftermath of these events. Hashem commands Moshe to communi-

cate a set of instructions to Elazar – Aharon's son. There are two elements to these instructions. Elazar is to proceed to the area of the conflagration. The first element is that he is to dispose of the contents of the pretenders' censers. He to empty the contents to the ground. Second, Hashem tells Moshe that the censers used by Aharon's opponents have been sanctified. Elazar is to take the censers and create from them a covering for the altar. This covering will be a reminder to Bnai Yisrael that no person who is not a descendant of Aharon is authorized to offer incense – or other sacrifices – to Hashem.

On the surface these instructions are easily understood. Elazar is to create a permanent reminder of these events. The censers are perfect



for this function. They can be beat into flat sheets and fashioned into a covering for the altar situated in the courtyard of the Mishcan. Bnai Yisrael will see this covering each time they looked upon the altar. The covering will remind them that the service performed through the altar – the offering of sacrifices – is preserved for Aharon and the Kohanim.

However, a closer analysis of these instructions suggests a number of problems. First, Moshe is to instruct Elazar to fling the contents of the censers to the ground. Why is this instruction needed? Apparently, Hashem is communicating to Moshe that the

ashes of the offering do not require any special treatment. What is this special treatment? Why would Moshe think that special treatment is required? Why is this treatment not required?

Before considering any further problems, let us answer this question. Each day, sacrifices were offered on the altar. These offerings generated ashes. The ashes had sanctity. This sanctity dictated that the ashes receive special treatment. They were removed from the altar and placed in a predetermined place. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains that Hashem was communicating to Moshe that the ashes of the offerings of the pretenders have no sanctity. They do not require the special treatment afforded to the remnants of sacrifices. Instead, they should be unceremoniously flung to the ground.[1]

This explanation responds to the first question but it creates a second problem. Hashem

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explained to Moshe that the censers of Aharon's opponents were sanctified. These were formed into a covering for the altar. This is paradoxical. The offerings of the pretenders had no sanctity and were treated disdainfully. But the censers were sanctified and were used to create a covering for the altar!

In order to resolve this paradox it is important to understand it more fully. Moshe was told that the remnants of the offerings of the pretenders did not have sanctity. This implies that their offerings were not regarded as legitimate acts of avodah – service to Hashem. This status was a result of the very nature of the test. All of the contenders offered incense. Only Aharon's offering was accepted. This demonstrated that his offering was regarded by Hashem as a legitimate act of avodah. The other offerings were rejected. The status of avodah was not conferred upon them. Therefore, the ashes of the offerings of the pretenders had no sanctity. They were the ashes from an activity of pseudo-avodah. However, according to this analysis, it follows that the censers the pretenders selected to use for their offerings should also not have sanctity. They selected these censers for an activity that was not truly avodah. They should not have any special status. However, this is not the case. Hashem instructed Moshe that these censers did have sanctity and should be used to fashion a covering for the altar.

Sforno suggests a response to this paradox. He concedes that the selection of these censers for use in this offering did not confer any sanctity upon them. However, he suggests that since these censers did have sanctity, we must conclude that the pretenders had dedicated them for other service in the Mishkan in addition to this offering. The use of the censers in this offering did not confer upon them sanctity. However, the dedication of the censers for more general use in the Mishkan was effective in conferring upon them sanctity.[2] It must be acknowledged that it seems odd that these pretenders designated their censers for other service in the Mishkan and not simply for this specific occasion. It seems that Sforno is forced to this conclusion. He reasons that if the censers were only used in the Mishkan on this single occasion and they had not been designated for any other service, they could not have become sanctified. Therefore, it must be deduced that the censers had been designated for other service in the Mishkan.

Rashi does not seem to be bothered by our problem. He seems to indicate that the censers received their sanctity from this offering.[3] This is Nachmanides' understanding of Rashi's position. Nachmanides asks the obvious question on this position. The offering was rejected. This means that the only offering for which censers

were designated was an invalid offering. This should not confer sanctity on the censers. Nachmanides provides a response on Rashi's behalf. He explains that although the offering was rejected, the pretenders were responding to Moshe's challenge. They were participating in a challenge commanded by Moshe. They believed that their offerings would be accepted. Therefore, the designation of the censers for use in the challenge imposed by Moshe conferred sanctity upon them.[4]

Ultimately, Nachmanides rejects this explanation and proposes an alternative. He argues that Hashem is not telling Moshe that the censers acquired sanctity through the designation of Aharon's opponents. Instead, Hashem is telling Moshe that He has conferred sanctity upon them in order that they may become a reminder to Bnai Yisrael of the authority of Aharon and his descendants.[5] In other words, any designation that these opponents may have given to the censers was misguided and did not confer sanctity. However, Hashem designated these censers as a memorial. This conferred sanctity upon them.

We can understand Sforno's and Nachmanides' resolution of the paradox. According to both of these opinions, the offerings of the pretenders were not actual avodah. Therefore, the ashes from these offerings had no sanctity and the use of the censers in these offerings did not confer any sanctity upon them. Their sanctity was derived from some other source. Sforno and Nachmanides suggest alternative possibilities for this source. However, even with Nachmanides' clarification, Rashi's resolution of the paradox is not evident. The censers acquired their sanctity when they were selected and designated for use in this contest imposed by Moshe. But if the censers acquired sanctity in this manner, why were the ashes of the offerings not also sanctified?

It seems that Rashi differs from Sforno and Nachmanides in his basic understanding of the challenge imposed by Moshe. Sforno and Nachmanides seem to propose a straightforward and obvious interpretation. Aharon's opponents believed that their authority of offer sacrifices was no less than his own. Moshe suggested that this thesis be put to a test. Let them present their own offerings. If their offerings are accepted, then their thesis will be proven. If their offerings are rejected, their thesis will be disproved. Their offerings were rejected. This disproved their claims and indicated that their offerings were not avodah.

Rashi rejects this understanding. His understanding of the test is somewhat more abstract and requires an illustration: A drug manufacturer wishes to test a new medication for some disease. He assembles a group of volunteers to participate

in a test of the drug's efficacy. All members of the group suffer from the complaint the drug is designed to treat. Some members of the group receive the medication. Other members of the group receive a placebo. The members of the group that receive the placebo experience some minor improvement in their conditions. However, the members of the group that receive the medication experience marked improvement in their conditions. Which members of this group participated in the test of the new medication? It would be incorrect to say that only the individuals who received the proposed medication participated. Even those who received the placebo participated. Without the administration of the placebo the test would be meaningless.

Rashi seems to propose a similar interpretation for Moshe's challenge. The challenge was designed to affirm Aharon's unique position and authority. This could not be accomplished through Aharon alone offering a sacrifice. In order for the demonstration to have meaning, Aharon's offering needed to be accompanied by the offerings of other individuals. If Aharon's offering would be accepted and theirs rejected, then Aharon's claim to the priesthood would be established.

According to this understanding of the test, all of the individuals who offered incense participated in Aharon's offering. Their participation affirmed the unique status of Aharon and his offering. Certainly, this was only accomplished through the rejection of their incense. However, the designation of their censers for use in this test was effective in conferring sanctity. These censers were designated for use in a single sacrificial service designed to affirm Aharon's status.

In other words, according to Sforno and Nachmanides, each person who participated in the test offered his own sacrifice. Of all of these sacrifices, one was accepted – Aharon's – and the remainders were rejected. According to Rashi, all of these individuals participated in a single service. Aharon's service was only significant because of, and through, the participation of the others. Therefore, their censers which they designated for use in this service were sanctified through this designation. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, 17:2.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, 17:3.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 17:2.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 17:2.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 17:2.



PARSHAS KORACH

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

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

In order to comprehend the basis of the argument it is necessary to analyze the cause of the conflict and the personalities of the combatants. The beginning of the Parsha states that "vayikach Korach", and Korach took, took being

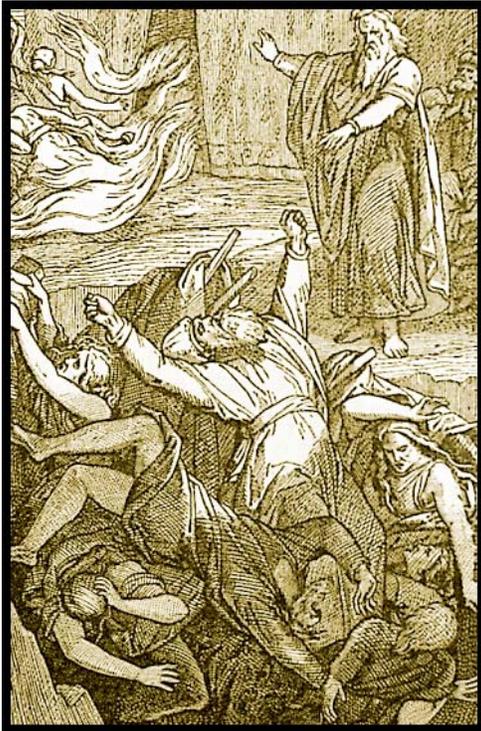
a transitive Verb. Rashi rightfully questions "whom did he take"? and quotes the Onkelos to demonstrate that the language of taking really connotes a conflict. It means, that he took himself aside and separates himself from the congregation. Generally an argument becomes vehement when it is enraged by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

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

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

Korach realized that a legitimate revolution could not be based on his own personal agenda for power. Korach shrewdly recognized that an attack

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Weekly Parsha

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

The Torah tells us that Korach therefore enlisted Dason and Avirom, renowned demagogues, as his first supporters in his protest against Moses and Aaron. He had seen countless times that they were the leading rabble-rousers amongst the children of Israel. Korach, a good judge of character, also recognized that his advancement of the democratic principles would have a special appeal to them. Specifically, earlier in the Torah we are told of Moses's first encounter with Dason and Avirom. Moses, upon observing the Egyptian taskmaster cruelly whipping a fellow Israelite, was propelled into action by his sense of Justice. He smote the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. Later, Dason and Avirom confronted him and complained, "Who placed you as a prince and Judge over us? Are you going to kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" At this very incipient stage of their exodus, Dason and Avirom exhibited their disdain for authority. They had emerged as the progenitors of Jewish liberalism. Moses had killed the brutal Egyptian that was unduly torturing a fellow Israelite but they were concerned that Moses unfairly killed the Egyptian. Korach recognized that Dason and Avirom would be the leading advocates of his ostensible quest for democracy.

Korach's plan was slowly unfolding but he recognized that his movement required credibility which could not be gained by the endorsement of Dason and Avirom and it is here that Korach's ingenuity becomes apparent. In order for him to attack the leadership of Moses and Aaron, he had to assert that their appointment was not a directive from Hashem. He therefore argues that Moses was acting on his own initiative with respect to many issues. It is agreed upon that Moses had received the Torah, the written law, directly from Hashem. However, Korach questioned Moses

assertion that the oral law was also G-d given and argued that Moses had fabricated the oral tradition. Korach further argued that G-d was only concerned with the philosophy and spirit of the written Torah and that the oral law was merely subject to interpretation based upon the spirit of the written law. He rejected the notion of Halacha as a separate and unique body of knowledge that functions in its own orbit, irrespective of the philosophy of the Mitzvah and asserted that the oral tradition is based upon a person's common sense thereby attacking the authenticity of the oral tradition as being divinely inspired. With this in mind Korach assembled the leaders of the Sanhedrin and questioned Moses about the mezuzah and Fringes. Korach's questions were shrewdly phrased to appeal to man's common sense prompting the idea that G-d is only concerned with what man feels, just the basic philosophy of the Mitzvah, not the onerous details of halacha. Korach argued that it does not make sense that if someone has a home full of sefarim that a mezuzah should be required. A true halachist who appreciates the beauty of a G-d given halachic system, based upon the intellectual breadth and creativity of it's principles which functions under its own guidelines, must recognize the absurdity of Korach's assertions. The argument, although nonsensical to a halachist who has the benefit of the tutelage of the great chain of scholars, our baalei mesora, was a cogent argument to many of Korach's contemporaries. Unfortunately we see the appeal of Korach's argument in our times. Many uneducated Jews today fall prey to the philosophy of Conservative and Reform Judaism,

and they too are blind to the amazing intellectual depth and creative beauty of a divinely inspired halachic system. Rather they are concerned with the universal principles of justice espoused by Judaism. G-d, they claim, is only concerned with a good heart not, the burdensome and meticulous details of an antiquated halachic system. Korach's ingenuity is attested to by the success of this argument even in our day. By attacking the credibility of the Oral Tradition as G-d given, it also afforded him the opportunity to impeach Moses's and Aaron's appointment as merely personal discretionary exercises of power, not directives of G-d. Moses' response to Korach also attests to Moses understanding of what really bothered Korach. Korach, upon making all these claims, advocating the principles of democracy and denying the authenticity of the Oral Tradition, impugned Moses claim to power. Moses did not even address the substance of Korach's arguments, but simply responded, "do you also want the priesthood?" Moses recognized and attempted to demonstrate that Korach was merely interested in power and not an enlightened egalitarian espousing the concerns of the masses. Therefore the only possible response was a determination by G-d demonstrating that Moses and Aaron were the leaders of Israel and that their method of serving G-d was the only acceptable method.

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



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“And they stood before Moses, and men of the children of Israel, 250 princes of the congregation, summoned for meeting, men of renown.”

Korach could not approach Moses independently: he was insecure in his argument. Therefore, he gathered others who would be inclined to agree with him.

“And they assembled against Moses and Aaron and they said to them, ‘Enough for you, for the entire congregation is entirely holy, and God is in their midst; why then have you raised yourselves above God’s congregation?’”

(continued from page 1)



Korach sought to establish a “movement”, so he mustered up 250 men. People typically feel that with numbers, there is greater truth. Of course, numbers are meaningless, if the position of those numbers is wrong. But Korach new human psychology, and felt with numbers, he will increase support. His error however is that this was not subject to a vote: God appointed princes, not man. With two expressions – amassing “numbers” and referring to the “congregation” as being wronged – Korach displayed that he did not feel his “position alone” was correct. He sought support for his weak claim. (Note this lesson: Korach knew he was wrong, yet did not veer from his crooked path.) Korach also sought to negate Moses’ authority by attacking Moses personally, asking Moses trick questions, and then laughing at Moses’ response. (Rashi) This is a third action that continues to display Korach’s need for external momentum. Mocking Moses publicly – Korach felt – would increase Korach’s popularity. Again, Korach played by political rules, not God’s rules.

Korach then makes a bold move stating twice that “God is in their midst”, and that Moses violated “God’s congregation”. So as to say, Moses is now going against God. Korach’s new argument is to show that God is on his side. This would certainly have appeal for anyone left questioning Korach’s position.

The only response now, was that God would openly display whom He selected. Korach and his gang would have to present themselves with incense before God, and risk God’s rejection. Surprisingly, even though Korach new he was not selected by God, he went along with Moses command. Moses furthers this point, openly telling Korach that “you struggle with God, and not Aaron” (Numb. 16:11)...but they do not desist. Moses even gives Korach advanced warning of his certain, unnatural death...and still Korach is defiant. Amazing.

We know Korach’s fate, being swallowed by the Earth in an unparalleled display of Divine Providence, thereby defending Moses’ honor and position.

The Korach Inside Us

Take this to heart: Korach was not designed any differently than you or I. All humans share one design: we all possess complex psyches, including egos, as did Korach. We all possess the capacity to indulge our ego to the same quantity – even more – than displayed by Korach. We must now apply this lesson to ourselves. Torah is not archaic or outdated.

Korach operated from a subjective worldview: what he desired was not subject to self-criticism or compromise. His fate teaches the disastrous end one might find following his path. Even in the face of death when Moses told him he would die, he still remained obstinate, juts like another well known Torah figure...Pharaoh. One major lesson of Pharaoh is that man can sin so much, that he loses his opportunity to repent. Korach teaches another lesson: man can deny what he knows is true, and avoid damaging his ego, even at the cost of his life.

Each one of us is no different: we too can steep so such a level, since we share the same human design as Korach. The Sages attested to the risk we all suffer, as they requested from God to never lose sense of what is right. The Sages knew far better than any one of us how human beings operate. They knew the risks of losing our sense of truth, and of right and wrong. Have you lost your sense of what is right and wrong; of what is true and false? Can you determine 100% which is absolutely so? Is there something in your life you wish you could fix?

The Remedy

But there is a remedy: we must be brutally honest with ourselves, and we must always seek God’s help. But Korach was too self absorbed to do so.

But you may ask: “Doesn’t each person have his and her own unique personality...isn’t that what separates us? Isn’t that unchangeable?”

In chapter one of his Laws of Personalities (Hilchos Dayos) Maimonides teaches that one can alter his or her personality traits. By embodying a miserly attitude for a short time, one who is too much a spendthrift can loosen his spending behavior. If one is too shy, one can, with even less effort, change his or her trait to a more open personality by embodying expressiveness to a high degree, until he or she finds the balance equidistant from the two poles. And one, who is quick to anger, can become more patient by embodying a controlled and more humble lifestyle temporarily, until he too finds the middle ground. Personalities may have tendencies from birth, but they are malleable.

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Parshas Korach Your Own Worst Enemy

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Lost Art of Reflection

No one wishes to admit flaws about themselves...but that trait must be changed!

First and foremost, we must pay attention to ourselves. The art of reflection is a lost art, but vital for our happiness and our life's objective. Our traits have much to do with our ability to learn about God:

"An embarrassed-type person cannot learn" (Ethics 2:6): precisely because he cannot task his questions, he remains ignorant. Such a person must force himself to risk ridicule, and learn by asking. With repeated behavior, he will change his personality, becoming less embarrassed, and more secure.

"The fear of God is the beginning of knowledge; wisdom and moral discipline are despised by fools" (Proverbs 1:7): for if we feel we know it all, we won't seek knowledge or self-improvement. But if we work on our egos, and embody humility, over time, we can attain increased humility, which in turn will enable us to hear the opinions of others, whereas now, we outright justify our position and reject all others. Ego can be quite damaging.

None of us are born perfect, and all of us have flaws. Some flaws are more damaging to our happiness, health and success than are others. Maimonides teaches that we can correct our traits. But first, we must engage in regular reflection.

The Unconscious

Maimonides also teaches that if one cannot overcome certain emotions – or worse, cannot even detect how he or she harms himself or herself – that individual should then seek counsel from the wise men that understand psychology, i.e., psychologists. It would be self-destructive to remain in a lifestyle that does not progress. But perhaps even "self-destructiveness" is what the person wishes for. This is a sad but true reality. But even that self-punishing or self-pitying need can be exposed, and removed.

If one sees his or her life is not improving even after reflection, then the issues may be unconscious, or unknown to our waking state of mind. Freud pioneered this uncharted territory of human nature, the unconscious, and unveiled remarkable truths about how we operate. We may quickly reject Maimonides and Freud simply because – you got it – our egos are at stake. So I repeat: forget about self-image, since your life is more important.



Me vs. Me

Work, relationships, and our personal decisions are fraught with doubt, tensions, and discomforts. We are not stuck with who we are: we can change to comply with what our minds tell us will improve our lives. Hmm...our "minds". Let's stop here.

Up until now, we are discussing how we operate based on "emotions". We have our own unique set. But recall the lesson noted earlier: Korach knew he was wrong, yet did not veer from his crooked path. He "knew" he was wrong. That is why he lodged so many arguments, including attacking Moses' personally: he knew his position was wrong, so he resorted to other tactics.

On the other hand, our minds see a totally different picture than what our emotions desire and falsely project onto reality...yet both are working side by side. The question is which one do we follow: intelligence or ego? For example, while we can see "intellectually" that apologizing to our spouse can create harmony, our egos won't give in. We end up sustaining discord, all for our ego. But honestly, what does your ego give you other than an imagined stature? So why give in to your ego merely for an "imagined" status, while your "real" life is in turmoil?! The fact is that no one else knows that you deny reality to favor ego, except you and God. So the ego is purely your own, with no risk of public embarrassment if you admit you are wrong. An even more salient point is this: we must eventually answer to God. So why delay the inevitable? "Now" is when we can fix

our lives. And now, is when we can remove the need to answer to God later. Additionally, the time we have to spend swallowing our pride are mere moments; compared to the rest of our lives that we can be happy. And even if we have to admit to others that we were wrong...that too passes. Soon, we find we can live a great life, because we were wise enough to suffer temporal humility, so as to achieve enduring happiness and success.

This lesson of Korach applies to each and every area of our lives. People lose jobs because they can't say, "I'm wrong" They lose loved ones. They lose their health. And Korach lost his life.

Moving Ahead

The first step that we all must immediately take is to stop and recognize this: we are operating at all times on two tracks, "Me vs. Me", intellect vs. emotion. We must constantly be on guard to detect whether our actions are emotional reactions, or intelligent calculations. Most of the time – like Korach – we simply wish to push forth our emotional agendas, "For the inclination of man is sinful from his youth". (Gen. 8:21) If we do so, if we deny the reality our minds desperately try to show us, we will doom ourselves. We become our own worst enemy. This other path of being honest with ourselves, facing ourselves, swallowing our pride, and braving the search for what we might find...is vital to our happiness, and what God created us to do. And why should we live to gain the applause of others anyway? This must be of no value, for we have only one life, and only we can live for ourselves. So don't waste it seeking accolades from man, but instead, seek God's approval.

Follow your intelligence, or seek wise people who can help you do so. God constructed each of us to be happiest only when following a discerning, Torah lifestyle, not when we cater to emotional and infantile impulses.

Like Korach, we too can find many arguments that "sound" good, so as to defend any change we might have to face. But only honesty can reveal truth, so don't lose your real life to your imaginary ego gratification. Learn the timeless lesson of the Torah in this week's Parshas Korach. Follow those brilliant minds light-years ahead of us, like King Solomon, Freud, Maimonides and Moses. If they addressed this issue, we are completely foolish and self-destructive to ignore them. Most of all...follow God's lesson of Korach. He did not place it in the Torah for history's sake. ■

King Solomon & Pig Won't

MATT SCHNEEWEISS

"The lazy one buries his hand in the dish; he will not even return it to his mouth" (Mishlei 19:24)

To understand this verse, we need to consider two ideas: the sense of reality, and the story of Pig Will and Pig Won't.

Everyone has a sense of reality, but some have a more developed sense of reality than others. Rabbi Moskowitz always uses the example of looking both ways before crossing the street. A child looks both ways because his mother told him to, or out of fear of punishment - not because he perceives the reality of getting hit by a car. To the adult, on the other hand, the prospect of getting hit by a car is a reality, and that reality is what makes him look both ways.

One of my favorite childhood books was Pig Will and Pig Won't. The story is about two brothers named (you guessed it) Pig Will and Pig Won't. One morning Mother Pig asks, "Who will help me plow the field?" Pig Will says, "I will!" and Pig Won't says, "I won't." The next day she asks, "Who will help me plant the corn?" Pig Will says, "I will!" and Pig Won't says, "I won't." The story continues in the same pattern: Mother Pig and Pig Will water the field, harvest the corn, shuck the corn, and cook the corn - all while Pig Won't sits in the corner and sulks (see picture).

After all of the hard work, Mother Pig finally asks, "Who will help me eat the corn?" This time, both Pig Will and Pig Won't say, "I will!" But Mother Pig shakes her head, points an accusing finger at Pig Won't, and says, "You didn't help us plow the field, you didn't help us plant the corn, you didn't help us water the corn . . . and you certainly won't help us eat the corn!" Dejected, Pig Won't engages in some serious introspection, does teshuvah, and becomes a good pig.

Assuming that Pig Will was a chacham (a wise pig - not one of those pigs who blindly obeys his superego) and Pig Won't was an atzeil (a lazy pig), we must ask: what is the essential difference between them?

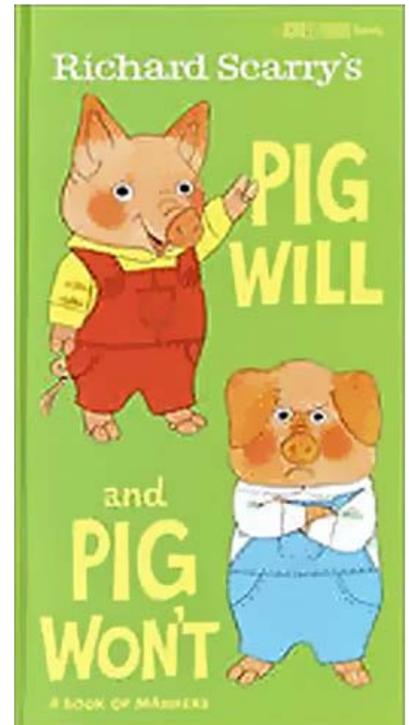
The answer lies in the reality of processes. Corn is the outcome of a long process involving many steps. The difference between Pig Will and Pig Won't can be expressed in the following question: which part of the process is real: the individual, intermediate steps, or the process as a whole, including its outcome?

To Pig Won't, the only reality is the immediate. Plowing, planting, watering . . . these are all difficult tasks which require a lot of work. As an atzeil, Pig Won't wants to avoid pain and effort at all costs. All he sees is the immediate; the

process as a whole, and the ultimate product, are simply not real to him, and do not motivate him.

Pig Will, on the other hand, recognizes that all of these activities are part of a process with a desirable outcome. To him, the process as a whole is a reality. Instead of seeing plowing, planting, watering, etc. as separate acts of toil, he realizes that they are all part of the process of getting corn. The reality of that process motivates him to "power through" the necessary steps.

King Solomon presents the same idea in our verse Eating is a three-part process: reaching into the dish, retrieving the food, and ingestion. The atzeil can't perceive the reality of the process as a whole, and instead is deterred by the toil involved in the intermediate step. The chacham sees the intermediate step for what it is: a necessary part of a process with a beneficial outcome. By using hyperbole to present the idea, King Solomon highlights the folly of the atzeil. ■



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Praying to the Dead

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

*The Rabbis' words
aren't all they
seem...*

*...many times they
write in homily or
metaphor.*

*One needs much
training to
determine when.*

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and there is not left any reward for their memory is forgotten”. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

Rashi comments on this verse:

“Would it be that the wicked would place on their hearts the day of death, and they would repent from their ways. But after they die, they know nothing and there is no longer reward for actions they could do from death and onward. But in truth, one who prepares for Sabbath eats on Sabbath”. (ibid)

Rashi understands King Solomon literally: the dead know nothing. And since they are now dead, they can also do no more to earn reward. Therefore, they are wise to repent from their ways: “Just as only the one who prepares for Sabbath will eat on Sabbath”, the wicked that prepare (repent) for afterlife will enjoy it.

I mention all this, since the issue of praying to the dead came up in last week’s Parsha, and also since there exists a popular activity that Jews visit graves of the righteous in Israel and other cities. The visiting per se is not a concern, and is even a good custom as it reminds us of our mortality. It moves us to repent, as Rashi suggested. But the problem arises when Jews “pray” to the dead. Despite its popularity, does God allow this, or prohibit this?

Deuteronomy 18:11 prohibits consulting the dead. This prohibition makes sense, since “the dead know nothing”. Of what use is it to ask anything of someone who is not listening? And why not ask God directly? Additionally, King Saul was in violation when he sought to speak to the dead Samuel. So everything tells us that seeking out the dead is wrong.

Our powerful question is this: How did Calev have any right to travel to Hebron and pray to the patriarchs to be saved from the counsel of the spies? And we do not see any word in the Talmud condemning Calev! Yet, he apparently prayed to the dead patriarchs. Talmud Sotah (34b) cites this verse: “They ascended in the south and he came to Hebron”. (Num. 13:22) The Talmud says:

“It should have said ‘they’ came to Hebron, and not ‘he’ came. Rava said this teaches that Calev separated himself from the counsel of the spies, and he traveled [alone to Hebron] and stretched himself out on the graves of the forefathers. He said to them, ‘My fathers, seek out mercy for me that I am saved from the counsel of the spies’.”

So we are faced with a question on Calev’s behavior. Again, in the Talmud (and the sources I researched) no condemnation is mentioned about Calev’s action. In fact, God praises him for having followed “his other spirit”...meaning his intelligence, and did not succumb to the counsel of the spies. I would like to suggest the following answer.

The fact that Calev alone traveled to Hebron is a “derivation”, as Rava learns this out from an apparently incorrect pronoun, “he” came to Hebron, and not “they” came. Rava did not have any historical transmission about Calev’s travels and activities. If he did, no derivation would be necessary. So no one transmitted to Rava what Calev did...it is all Rava’s own derivation from a single word. How then can Rava say what exactly Calev was doing at the patriarch’s graves?

This is explained as a “drash”, a homiletic lesson not to be taken literally. Rava was stating that Calev must have traveled to Hebron, and no

other place, for good cause. And he knew it was Calev who went there, since the other spies were of evil intent. Rava knew the patriarchs and matriarchs are buried there. His question was why Calev went there at this time. Rava realized Calev’s predicament: he sought defense from the powerfully persuasive counsel of the spies. Out of their own fears, the spies sought pretense not to wage war in the land. Calev knew God’s promise to the patriarchs that Israel was to be theirs, and he was confident in God’s ability to win the war. However, Calev was honest with his emotions, and wished to bolster his emotions to shield him from succumbing to the spies. By visiting the patriarch’s graves, his emotions would become more attached to what his mind already told him was true.

Rava wasn’t there, but homiletically phrased as a prayer what Calev was only thinking. Rava wouldn’t dare ascribe praying to the dead, to a man like Calev, who God loved. So in fact, Calev did not pray to the dead patriarchs, as this is a corrupt activity, and all prayers should be to God alone. Rava merely spoke in homily, as he believed would be understood. Rava and all Talmudic sages would always seek to prod our thought, by only hinting to a matter or suggesting impossibilities. Such an approach disguises truths from those not ready, and discloses them to sharpen the minds of those who are ready. Homilies and metaphors also preserve truths for succeeding generations, as startling stories always capture the imagination, and are easily retained in memory. And the very fact that this Talmudic portion does not even mention the prohibition to consult the dead in connection with Calev is support for the fact that Rava’s homily is in fact not literal.

Tosfos is of the opinion that Calev did in fact pray, but he prayed “to God”, and God related his prayer to the dead patriarchs. But no opinion suggests that Calev prayed to the dead: an outright Torah prohibition.

We too must not pray to any being aside from God, regardless of the popularity of this practice of praying to the dead. This prohibition forms one of the 613 commands. Man – whether alive, and certainly when dead – is not as powerful as God. When alive, we have only our brute strength and technology. And when dead, “we know nothing”. So there exists no reason for a man to pray to another man. This is the exact ways of Christianity, where man becomes the object of prayer, and we are commanded not to follow the other religions.

Other Talmudic cases that appear to suggest that living man interacted with the dead, must also be taken metaphorically. ■



SHATNEZ

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Intellect vs. Emotions: The Great Divide

Last year my close friend Adam mentioned that he and his mother Jean were discussing the Torah law concerning Shatnez. Jean had asked what the idea is behind this law. This is an important question, as the Rabbis state, “Our own instincts and the idolaters target Shatnez with accusations against Judaism.” As if to say, “This law seems so bizarre. What can possibly be corrupt about wearing these two materials? Judaism is unfounded.” Ramban states that the masses do not understand Shatnez, although they agree that crossbreeding has a purpose. But Ramban adds that although a “statute” (commonly misunderstood as bereft of reason), “every word of God’s is tried”. (Proverbs, 30:5) This means that all of God’s commands contain reasons, including “chukim” or statutes.

“Shatnez” refers to the Torah law prohibiting the wearing of wool and linen together. There are many parameters: prohibitions relating to a single garment woven of both wool and linen; wearing wool garments over linen garments and vice versa; what material finishing processes qualify to violate this law; and many other issues. For brevity’s sake, we will simply refer to “Shatnez” as all prohibited forms, without going into the Halachik distinctions.

We must note, that this law is not its own category. In the Torah, we find Shatnez mentioned twice, together with two other prohibitions: crossbreeding animals, and crossbreeding plants. Let us review the Torah’s words on these three laws.

Lev. 19:19: “My statutes you shall guard; your animals you shall not crossbreed mixed species; your field you shall not plant intermixed species; and a mixed garment Shatnez, do not wear.”

Deut. 22:9-11: “You shall not plant your vineyard with a mixture, lest the growth of the seed which you plant and the produce of the vineyard become forbidden. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. You shall not wear Shatnez, wool and linen together.”

We learn from their repetition that these three laws are not joined coincidentally, and certainly from the Torah’s joining all three laws in a single verse: they share a common thread. (We have a tradition from the Rabbis that individual verses contain related ideas. All concepts found in a single, Torah verses are joined somehow, thereby, explaining why they

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Perfection

are found together in one verse.) It is not hard to suggest how these three laws are related: in all three cases, one is prohibited from intermingling various species. However, I understand that I cannot crossbreed living things, as this is where reproduction of new species may occur. But regarding Shatnez, this case is the mixing of lifeless substances: the wool and linen are no longer attached to their life source. Why then must I not mix that which cannot regenerate new, crossbred species? Furthermore, where do we see that animal and vegetable can be interbred, even while living? (We will address Shatnez shortly)

Crossbreeding: Two Categories

From this general observation, we arrive at our first insight: the prohibition to crossbreed can take place in but two areas: animal and vegetable. This is because there are no other existences, which “reproduce”. Ramban also points to this categorization. Ramban cites many reasons, which justify this prohibition. For one, crossbreeding destroys the pure species, creating a new one, which is Divinely unintended. Additionally, the new species’ offspring cannot beget others. This is seen in the case of a mule; a species that is the result of crossbreeding, and cannot reproduce with other mules. This is also the case with vegetation. I suggest that perhaps this result of infertility is actually part of God’s design of nature: He designed reproductive species in a way, that when crossbred, the offspring cannot reproduce, thereby underlining man’s error. Had crossbred species’ offspring been fertile, nothing in nature would indicate a flaw in crossbreeding. However, as the offspring cannot reproduce, this infertility points back to the original sin. Thus, God’s system is not simply perfect in its normal function, but when abused, nature is designed to deliver a message to man regarding his precise abuse. Infertility of crossbred species teaches man that the Designer of nature does not wish crossbreeding: the act of intermingling in the fertilization process is signaled as an error, in the area of infertile offspring. I find this profound.

Ramban states that one who crossbreeds also violates God’s will that only certain species exists. God said in Genesis that each species should bring forth “liminayhu”, “according to their own kind”. This is a grave corruption, as man assumes he knows better than God. We understand the gravity Ramban places on violators.



Ramban also quotes Rabbis Simon and Chanina, who suggest a reason for the term “My statutes you shall guard”, as referring to the very natural laws which govern life. These Rabbis state that “Chukos”, “laws”, refer to natural law. These laws are the actual causes, which continue to govern all species in their reproduction of similar offspring. The maple tree, for example, does not reproduce maple trees, of its own. There is a law guiding this phenomenon, non-existent in the substance of ‘maple tree’. A law is of the metaphysical realm, which governs the latter. Similarly, what keeps rocks “solid” substances are God’s, created laws. We learned in chemistry that the very same molecules found in liquids, might be found in solids: lava is a perfect example. However, the Master of the universe has decided when a molecule should form part of each. His laws determine this. We tend to view the physical world as the be all and end all of creation. But as we learn in the first two chapters of Genesis, God describes two aspects of Creation. The first act refers to the substance, while the second “creation” refers to the laws governing those creations. Crossbreeding, then, violates and corrupts these very natural laws. Therefore, there is sound reasoning why God includes in the laws of crossbreeding the introductory, and rarely used phrase, “My statutes you shall guard.” For one who crossbreeds not only corrupts the physical species, but also creates new species, thereby, convoluting the laws of nature. (An example is the infertility of mules.) How does Shatnez fit into this? Shatnez doesn’t lend itself to interbreeding. Why is it prohibited?

What is “Shatnez”?

Quoting Rashi, and disagreeing with him, Ramban identifies three words from which the conjunctive term “SHaTNeZ” is derived. Spelled in Hebrew, Shatnez is “SH”, “T”, and “NZ”. “SH” refers to the word “Shua” – combed, “T” refers to the word “Tavui” – spun, and “NZ” refers to “NuZ” – twisted. Therefore, Shatnez refers to that which is combed, spun and twisted, meaning threads in a completed form. Ramban critiques Rashi, for according to him, only when all three processes are found, is there a prohibition. However, the Rabbis taught that if one does not complete all three processes, yet, the prohibition remains, as in a case where one takes two ropes, each one consisting exclusively of one material, tying them together. Ramban concludes: the three

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processes are “Scripturally” prohibited, but even in the case where all three are not found, a “Rabbinic” prohibition still exists.

Ramban offers the reasoning that Shatnez guards us from the other two prohibitions. It is a “fence” of sorts. By complying with the laws of Shatnez, we will be safeguarded. As we accustom ourselves to guard against mingling in clothing, and we will thereby be more sensitive to the mingling of species. Ramban then quotes Maimonides’ reasoning as being sourced in idolatry. I will quote Maimonides here (“Guide to the Perplexed”, Book III, Chap. 37):

“We have explained in our large work that it is prohibited to round the corners of the head, and to mar the corners of the beard, because it was the custom of idolatrous priests. For the same reason, the wearing of garments made of linen and wool is prohibited: the heathen priests adorned themselves with garments containing vegetable and animal material, whilst they held in their hand a seal made of a mineral. This you find written in their books.”

We may ask why those idolaters developed the practice of mixing animal and vegetable, while also seizing minerals. Perhaps they too recognized these categories, including animal and vegetable, substances we cannot live without, and sought in their foolishness to manipulate them, so as to better procure them. Although violating God’s will, idolatry has rhyme and reason, as it is caused by the human psyche, which follows precise behavioral patterns. However, these behavioral patterns are deviant ones.

Shatnez: Recalling Man’s Nature

On the subject of the psyche, a Rabbi once taught a remarkable idea on Shatnez, based on the words of Ibn Ezra. Ibn Ezra taught that Shatnez is a “remembrance” law, as are other laws, such as the Sabbath, which is a “remembrance of the Egyptian Exodus.” (Our freedom for Sabbath rest is due to God’s redemption of the Jews.) Ibn Ezra states that Shatnez is a remembrance to those statutes “planted in the heart”. This Rabbi asked, “What is planted in the heart, for which, we must have a remembrance via Shatnez? What is similar between Shatnez, and those things ‘planted in the heart’?” He explained; “What are planted in man’s heart are the intellect, and the

emotions”. “Heart” refers to both. We are commanded to “Love thy God with ‘all’ of your heart.” This refers to the command that man must devote himself to God with all his heart, or “both” parts, i.e., the intellect and the emotions. I understand that the heart refers to both faculties, but where does Shatnez come in? The Rabbi said that Shatnez is a law prohibiting the mixture of two, diverse species, hinting to our need to prevent the mixture of our intellect and our emotions. This means to say, that man must be guided by intelligence, undiluted by his emotional desires. His choices in life must stem from rational thinking, not emotional impulses. Shatnez, then, is a command, which reminds man to keep his intellect free from his emotions. This is what Ibn Ezra hinted to by his own words, “and here I will hint to you a fundamental” which is “planted in the heart.”

Ibn Ezra’s words about those things “planted in the heart” are found in his commentary on Abraham’s perfections, that he adhered to God’s “guards, commands, statutes and Torah.” In that commentary (Gen. 26:5) Ibn Ezra says “statutes” refers to Shatnez. Now, as Abraham had no Torah as we do, his act of keeping God’s “statutes”, means that he possessed this perfection of guiding his life by intelligence, and not emotions, in contrast to the idolaters. In his other commentary, (Lev. 19:19) Ibn Ezra says an enigmatic statement, “Know; that which is complete, is very complete, therefore it is said regarding Abraham, ‘and he guards My guards, My commands, My statutes and My Torah.’” Rabbi Reuven Mann expounded, “That which is very ‘complete’ is one who is completely in line with his intelligence. He does not dilute his intelligence with his emotions.” We now understand the teaching of Ibn Ezra.

Hints

Perhaps this is why Ibn Ezra made use of a subtle teaching, a “hint”, as opposed to spelling out his idea: he wished to convey that Shatnez is essentially a “hinting” type of command. Thus, Ibn Ezra used the teaching mode of “hinting”, which embellishes on the nature of Shatnez: it hints to something.

We may ask why must God give laws of such a nature, which only “hint” to an idea. Many others, like Mezuzah, are clearly understood, so their practice is clearly stated: we must

contemplate God’s existence and His oneness. Where is the need in the Torah system for laws, which “hint”?

I suggest as follows: a “hint” implies that the matter hinted to, is obscure. Most individuals do not readily see it. Otherwise, it can be taught outright, like Mezuzah. Shatnez hints to that which is obscure: man’s nature. Freud once lectured on psychology, opening his discourse by admitting that his “subject”, the human psyche, may not be laid out as a cadaver, concretely. He anticipated and sought to defend his attendees’ critique on his “un-evidenced” theories. The study of psychology has this one, great hurdle: it is not as “empirical” as is biology, for example. We may visually examine the human body, but the human psyche has no visuals – it is greatly abstract. This is the case with regards to Shatnez: it refers to man’s “unseen” nature, and therefore must be alluded to, by ways of hints. The nature of man is not a matter readily ‘seen’, so Shatnez, the laws concerning it, allude to its obscurity by their very “hinting” nature.

The Exception

Why are Tzitzis and the Priest’s garments not governed by the law of Shatnez? In these two areas, one may combine wool and linen. My theory is that since one is involved in God’s will when fulfilling these two commands, Shatnez is superfluous. His very act of wearing Tzitzis or priestly garb is itself a manner of following his intellect, i.e., God’s will. Shatnez in these cases would serve no purpose.

We understand according to Ramban, Maimonides and Ibn Ezra that crossbreeding has many flaws. We also understand that crossbreeding may only apply in the two categories of existences, which are living, i.e., animal and vegetable. I suggest that these two commands not to crossbreed animals or plants function on one level: addressing the intermingling within a single category, either animal with animal, or vegetable with vegetable. But Shatnez is a case where one may not mix these very, basic categories of animal with vegetable. Perhaps this supports the Rabbi I mentioned earlier: Shatnez’s basic categories parallel two other basic categories which are greatly distant: intellect and emotion. ■

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