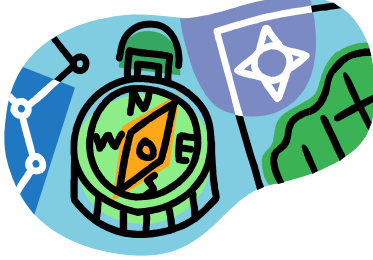


## A Year of Encompassing Torah



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### Parashat Korach

June 28, 2008  
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This is how we shall accrue our mitzvah points:

**Barukh atah Adonai,  
Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam,  
Asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei torah...**

**Praised are You Adonai, our God,  
The Sovereign of all worlds,  
Who has made us holy with your mitzvot,  
And commanded us to engage ourselves  
with words of torah.**

***To be fully engaged with Torah  
Is to wrestle with Torah –  
To challenge our tradition while loving it,  
To question it while celebrating it.***

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### **An Added Blessing For Spiritual Direction**

*"Yihyu l'ratzon imrey fi v'higion libi  
lifaneycha Hashem Tzuri v'Go'ali*

May the expressions of my mouth  
and **the thoughts of my heart**  
find favor before You, G-d,  
my Rock and my Redeemer."

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### **Parashat Korach 5768 Looking For A Hero**

America and the world is fascinated by a plethora of reality based television programs that seek out the best in their business. Each week contestants pit their skills against one another in competition to claim that they are the start for that year. Each week the world views their performances to determine who is the best chef, or who is the top model, or who is the brightest executive, or who will be the next American Idol. Even Israel has its own versions of these programs.

One competition that I enjoy watching as it unfolds is Kochav Nolad which has begun its sixth season. Last year's winner had the privilege of representing Israel at Eurovision Song Festival in May. What a pleasure it is for me to listen to the breadth of Israeli music as it encompasses all of the various genres of musical interpretation. Not all of it is sad in nature. Many of the songs celebrate love and the celebration of life, despite the constant pressures that living each day with danger so close at hand can present. What is even more encouraging is that there is no shortage of talent among the youth of Israel and the wish to share their emotions through song. How difficult it was for me to see certain individuals leave the competition towards the end, when any one of them would have succeeded in being the best in representing Israel.

Another program was designed to produce the one person who would market Israel to an American audience who was becoming disenchanted with the war-torn image of Israel as it was being portrayed in the press, oppressing poor Palestinian refugees. At a speech given on Shabbat Zachor, the New England Consul General of Israel commented that the greatest difficulty that Israel faces in coming years is not a growing global anti-

semitism, nor the threat of war with her Arab neighbors. The battle that they fear losing is the one that includes the image of Israel that is portrayed in the press and then imprinted in the eyes of Americans who are unaware of the true images of Israel.

In part, Hollywood has helped to create some of those images in previous generations. Our children may not have read Leon Uris's book *Exodus*, but many adults may recall seeing Otto Preminger's portrayal of Israel's fight for independence when it was released in 1960. Hollywood may not have gotten it right in terms of the true Israeli, however, who could argue with a sandy haired, blue eyed Israeli from the shtetl, Ari Ben-Canaan, who emerges as one of the country's first military heroes. Even though Paul Newman helped us to romanticize about Israel's pioneers, his lack of Israeli speech, and dress, and looks were of no concern to an American audience that cared little for accuracy in these areas.

Over the years, Israelis were portrayed in many ways that were more or less accurate, in the attempt to have us identify with the people of a country an ocean away, whose troubles were as distant from our American experience. Cast as a Giant Shadow in 1966 and again in *Raid on Entebbe* in 1986 left us with similar images of the swaggering Israeli soldier and the romanticism of physical danger with a tinge of spiritual Zionism.

Then along comes an Israeli agent that no one wants to mess with. No, it is not special agent Ziva David who was on loan to NCIS because of her special training as a Mossad Agent. Accent aside, she presents an oppressive resume as well as amazing array of skills. Despite her dexterity with English, she has a difficult time with English idioms.

Now there is another Mossad agent in town – in New York City, specifically. This time around we are told that no one messes with the Zohan, who is portrayed by Adam Sandler. What more is there to be said about this parody of the modern Israeli soldier and his family and future friends! In the opening minutes we learn about the toll that his role as hero has taken on his psyche and the mis-belief that Israelis party with such reckless abandon because life is so short when facing danger of death from moment to moment.

Despite his love for Israel, Zohan comes to a point where he feels that he needs to leave Israel to seek his fortune elsewhere. He can no longer tolerate the politics of his country's leaders who capture terrorists and then set them free with the next agreement for peace.

Although many of Israel's youth may have similar sentiments, how many of them actually leave their country to become hair designers with a passion to make women "silky smooth"! Zohan confesses to a couple of shaggy dogs in the cargo hold of the plane that takes them to America, "I love my country, but the fighting, it never ends."

If there is any accuracy to this film and its portrayal of Israeli society in all of its messiness, it is this singular thought, that people young and old are tired of fighting for peace. If humus, the Israeli cuisine, can be used as a hair gel and as a fire retardant as well as a tasty dish that flavors everything and anything dipped in it, then the satire that comes from the Zohan's philosophy and experiences in life can be accepted as noble.

One movie commentator thanks God that the Zohan does not do violence to the history of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians in the same way as he ties up his enemies in knots. Stereotypes aside, are Palestinians and Israelis similar in their desire to bring about peace because they are wearied by war. In the real world a peace agreement was signed last week, and the first missiles were launched days later into Sderot, breaking the fragile peace that was days long.

What all this seems to emphasize is our ongoing obsession for a leader who will titillate our senses, and not necessarily our sensibilities. What is true for American society is just as true if not more so for Israeli society. The scandals that we hear about in the daily news from Jerusalem, war aside, are indeed no different than the ones that we read in our local newspapers. Someone in power is always seeking more power, whether it be sexual in nature or monetary. Such leaders have their human frailties, despite what we may think otherwise. So, our political heroes are open and vulnerable to the men and women who make their living satirizing their actions on a nightly basis.

As we read about Korach in this week's Torah reading, it is with this critical eye that I begin to wonder, is Korach another Zohan whom we should fear for his extraordinary might and insight as he tries to challenge the status quo brought about by Moses and Aaron. Ultimately, we know differently when he and his men are punished by God. However, is there merit to their cause in the same way that Adam Sandler directs our eyes to the complicated issue of peace between brothers who have been feuding for centuries?

May this coming week be one in which the issues become ever more clear as offer our blessings upon the leaders of all countries to act with patience and wisdom, and may our prayers go out to the families of those Israeli soldiers who remain missing on this the second anniversary of their disappearance.

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### **A Look Back: Sermon Parashat Korach 5767**

What is it that Korach has done that invites out wrath upon him and his followers?

Are we not allowed to criticize our leaders when we feel as though they no longer represent what is in the best interest of those whom they represent?

Despite his many flaws, was not Moses doing an effective job in leading the Israelite nation through a difficult time as well as a difficult place?

It appears as though this parashah raises far more questions about leadership than it answers. Even our ancestors could not come to a consensus of what happened in the wilderness

following the return of the spies and their report to the nation, considering that various opinions expressed in the midrashim that address themselves to this particular chapter in Israelite history.

According to one story, the sages claim that Moses was a leader who needed to be denounced for his policies of religious and secular law for they impoverished the very people whom were to be supported by these laws. We learn in the Torah that even the poor were subject to paying the various tithes and priestly gifts that those who were more wealthy paid, in order to respect their dignity. However, in doing so, by paying attention to the religious duties outlined by Moses, Aaron and the priests, the widow and the orphaned alike were left with very little for themselves. In contrast, Korach and his 250 followers saw themselves as champions of the people in their protest against Moses and his bankrupt regulations.

In a second *midrash*, Korach and his colleagues dress themselves in *tallitot* of pure blue, the color of *techeilet*. However, the garments they wear are missing the *tzitzit* that required to validate such garments, as mentioned in the last paragraph from the Torah reading of the week before. *Techeilet*, we are told by the sages represent many things related to God's role as "King." Perhaps, here, the *tallitot* represent something more than just a garment for holding the *tzitzit*. Since blue is the symbol of royalty, all those who wear a garment of this color are to be treated – with dignity and respect -- as royalty, despite their social position of birth. Surely a garment of blue is better than a garment that contains one thread of blue, for is not all or Israel a nation of priests!?! With this language Korach catapulted himself amongst those who were disgruntled and were looking for a democratic change in leadership with greater equality.

According to a second midrash, however, the thread of blue was not at all a statement of rank in royalty, but was meant to be understood for its theological symbolism. The blue thread was supposed to be a reminder to those who wore it of the blue that composes the sea – the sea of the firmament and the firmament of the Throne of Glory! By wearing an entire garment of this color, the 250 followers of Korach were making a statement that they had already attained the highest level of consciousness that a single

thread alluded to, proclaiming their readiness to encircle themselves in the spirituality that surrounds God's glory. Although this may be true, the sages are quick to warn us of the problems inherent in this position. The Talmud teaches us a story about a person who chose to take the shorter path to God, only to discover that the longer path was the better choice because the person who takes this journey meets with fewer complications to impede his or her progress.

In a third midrash, the sages speak about Korach entering a house that was filled with many books of sacred learning. Despite all of the volumes of religious instruction on how to reach an enlightened state with the presence of God, it was clear to all who entered this house that a mezuzah was missing at the threshold. The owner of such a house had violated the instructions of God, making a mockery of Moses and his list of halachic instructions to the people of Israel. Even though the owner of this house celebrated a life of learning, and education, and scholarship, and erudition – the fact that the mezuzah was missing symbolized for others that despite all of the knowledge that he possessed, the mitzvot themselves meant little to him. Yet, we all know that the first thing a person does when they move into a new home is to make sure that a mezuzah is placed upon the front entrance of the house, declaring God's presence in this place, and ensuring the safety of all those who reside inside of it.

As simple a mitzvah as it may be, placing a mezuzah on the threshold of a home represents the framework by which we live and breathe Torah. It symbolizes for its owner a certain way in which they read the Torah and understand God's words of instruction to us. The words that it contains transforms any home into a Jewish one, one that is guided by principles and values of a living faith.

As Rabbi Yehonathan Chipman concludes in his d'var torah for this week, we all can agree that "we live in an age of great yearning for religious truth." Although leaders will come and go, some who are as charismatic as Korach or who are more practical like Moses, we who follow in their footsteps must not be swayed from our own paths of understanding when it comes to having a relationship with God. The *tzitzit* and the *mezuzah* are both reminders of that religious truth.

In celebrating our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Jewish community in Beverly, there has been a conscious choice by the leadership of this congregation to mark the transition in time to a second century of Jewish life and vitality to mark the threshold with a commemorative mezuzah that is unique to our community. The artist, Aimee Golant, has been endowed with a special gift and talent that is reminiscent of that of Betzalel who was commissioned to fashion the utensils that were a part of the priestly position caring for God's presence within the Mishkan's confines. In talking to Aimee about her creative activities one immediately becomes enraptured in her spiritual connection to God and the things that she fashions, both *mezuzot* and jewelry, that enhance the spirituality of those who adorn their homes and themselves with her creations.

In recent weeks a flyer was sent inviting the TBA community to purchase a *mezuzah* that resembles the one that will grace our front doors in rededication to serving the Jewish population of Beverly and her surrounding communities. I hope that you will respond with enthusiasm by purchasing a *mezuzah* for your own home, connecting yourself to all those who embrace the Torah for the many lessons that it teaches us, endowing us with our own sense of spirituality as we study its words and examine how they inspire us in our own personal journeys to cross the thresholds that punctuate our lives.

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#### Follow Up...

***Mezuzot are still available for purchase through the synagogue. Please contact the Rabbi for details.***

***In addition, each of our b'nei mitzvah will receive a mezuzah as our gift to them so that they can continue to connect to their TBA home wherever they choose to cross a new threshold in this world, knowing that they will always be connected to their spiritual home in Beverly.***

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### Dvar Torah Parashat Korach 5767

Rabbi Bradley Artson begins a d'var torah on this week's Torah portion with the following remarks: "There is a place beyond which words cannot go. Try as we might, words can only allude to our deeply felt emotions: wonder, marvel, awe. Designed to help us communicate about ideas, facts, and values, words lose their power when it comes to the depths of human feelings, to an almost mystical connection to other living things and to life itself. Words get us to the shore, but to move to the depths we have to discard our words for other modes of expression..."

For the past several months I have attempted to teach a class that I have entitled "*Surfin' Thru the Siddur*" which was meant to be more of a wade through the prayer book. Each class we take up a prayer from the *siddur* and exam it from several different angles in an attempt to understand not only the words but also its placement in the service. I call the class "surfing" because of the way the morning prayer service is structured. If the *Sh'ma* and the Amida are the central parts of the service, at a point where we are supposed to be standing, and the action that takes place prior to this is just a prelude to our standing and cruising along, then preparing ourselves with the right "*kavannah*" or "*intentionality*" is very much like learning to stand on a board while riding a wave of water.

Just this past week we began to look at the morning blessings that appear at the beginning of the prayer book -- the ones that were meant to be recited as we wake up each morning before coming to the synagogue. Although each *berakhah* or blessing is accompanied by another action in our morning routine, what is most

interesting to look at are the words that are repeated, that are a part of every *berakhah*. In our initial discussion we looked at the first word -- *barukh* -- for some of its hidden meanings. For example, just as the Torah begins with the letter "*beit*," meaning "house," the word for blessing begins with a house, a receptacle for God's Divine Providence to be held in one place. The letter also has the numerical reference to "two" which represents the relationship that is to take place between each one of us and God. Both "*reish*" (=200) and "*ka*" (=20) are exponential derivatives of this magical and potent number of "2."

In other sources the sages explain that the word for blessing is related to the Hebrew word for "knee" -- "*berekh*". Prayer is composed of words that express the emotion of what it means to be brought to one's knees -- whether it be of sheer excitement or extreme distraught. Overcome by emotion, we drop to our knees in humility before Adonai, our God.

In yet another source the sages describe for us "blessings" as they relate to going to a "well" -- a "beraikhah" -- a place where water is collected. In teaching about prayer I invite others to join me for a quick dive into this pool and to experience how invigorating it can be to be surrounded by the cool water, and how frightening it can be to run out of breath if one should go too deep and forget how much effort it can take to return to the surface, and how grateful we are to take that first gulp of air upon reaching this place. Just as Rabbi Artson has described how inadequate words can be to express our gratitude, words are just as insufficient and imperfect as they may be at describing an experience such as this one effectively. Yet, we find a way to bless God, nonetheless for all of our emotional attachments to life and its many surprises, both good and bad.

In the course of the Torah reading for this week, we come across a rather unique way of expressing God's name in relation to the myriad of other ways we have come to know God in both the Bible and in our prayers. We rely on the diversity of names to express who God is because no single way describes fully our individual experiences with God. God is called "the Merciful", "the Sovereign of the Universe", "the Holy One", "Rock and My Redeemer", "Lord of Heavenly Hosts", etc... Each one helps us to

have a handle on God's personality, but each limits our understanding of God in tremendous ways. This week, Numbers 16 we learn that God is presented to us as "Eil Elohei haRuchot," which translates to "God, Source of the Breath of All Life."

Wow! What a powerful metaphor to see as God – especially as summer rolls around and we find ourselves taking deep breaths every time we dive deep into the water. What does it take for us to recognize God as the source of that breath that our lives depend upon so much!?! I think of all the people in the hospital and the nursing homes that I visit and how much of their energy is expounded on each breath of air that they take, and that I take when my lungs go into spasm with my asthma. How appreciative we ought to be when we inhale a new breath of fresh air to fill those lungs with oxygen so that our blood can circulate properly. For this, too, there is a blessing in the morning!

How we breathe affects our emotional as well as our physical state. When we begin to hyperventilate with short breathes, we express our fear. By expanding those breaths we introduce calm. Breathing becomes an expression of our well-being. The last psalm of King David expresses our gratitude most succinctly – *kol haneshama tehalleh Yah.* Each person who breathes (or is it "with each breath") we praise Yah, God. Just as our breath is incapable of being seen unless it is a cold day and the vapors from our mouth condense upon impact with the outside temperatures, what we learn from our experiences is that God is never far away than the next breath; nor is God less reliable than the air that we breathe and often take for granted. Just ask the family that watches over their loved ones as their souls depart and the family hangs on one more inhalation to follow the last exhalation. By taking in and breathing out, we share a common bond with all of God's creatures who have been blessed with the gift of breath.

The spiritual challenge this week is to become more conscious of the *berachot* in our lives, the blessings that enhance the breath of life that is a part of our lives. How do we begin to express our gratitude for living despite how bad life may seem. Teach us, O God, how to dive deep and to return to the surface gasping for a renewed sense of living, and adventure.

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## SURFIN' THRU THE SIDUR

**If you are interested in becoming more familiar with the siddur and its myriad of prayers, please contact the rabbi for details. Previous experience in the waters of worship is not required!**