

The World's Greatest Mutiny

YadAvNow.com Weekly Video Series: Korach

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

And Korach Took

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The Physical is Intermingled with the Spiritual

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What it Takes to be a Leader

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Moshe's Prophecies were a Direct Communication to the Neshama

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The Wealthy Strata Incites A Mutiny

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1. Dasan and *Aviram* were key players in the mutiny against *Moshe*.
2. *Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh*: *Korach* attempted to usurp *Moshe*'s authority; *Dasan* and *Aviram* instigated the rebellion.
3. Four Fifths of the Jews died in the plague of darkness in Egypt; they were classified as evil.
4. *Dason* and *Aviram* continued their evil until they were destroyed with *Korach*.
5. They were the ones who informed that *Moshe* killed the Egyptian.
6. Their wealth enabled them to do so.
7. *Moshe* could return to Egypt as redeemer when they lost their wealth and no longer had relationships within government circles.
8. The Jews who perished during the days of darkness were the ones who had no interest in leaving.
9. *Dasan* and *Aviram* wanted to leave to go to a land flowing with milk & honey and the unlimited wealth they'd take out of Egypt.
10. As a result of the sin of the spies, it was decreed that they perish in the desert.
11. *Dasan* and *Aviram*'s dream of renewed wealth & power was realized.
12. The intensity of hate for *Moshe* drove the mutiny and attempt to discredit him.

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A Flash of Clarity Secures A Dynasty

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1. *Chazal*: How did *Korach*, renowned as wise, act so foolishly?
2. *Moshe* told *Korach* & his assembly of 250 to take firepans with incense to burn.
3. The one chosen to be High Priest would live, the others would die.
4. *Korach's* holy vision: *Shmuel HaNavi*, equal to *Moshe*, *Aharon* & 24 groups of *Leviim*, would descend from him.
5. This made it evidently clear he'd be the one to survive.
6. Actually, his sons would repent, thus being spared from destruction.
7. *Midrash*: Before the destruction of *Korach* and community, *Moshe* entered the tent of *Dasan* and *Aviram*; his sons sat alongside him.
8. His sons' quandary: If they stand for *Moshe* they'd disgrace their father; if not, they'd be violating the commandment to acknowledge a *Torah Sage*.
9. They chose to stand.
10. Because they stood for *Moshe* they had stirrings of repentance and repented.
11. In the merit of acknowledging *Moshe* they extricated themselves from evil.

What Appears Iniquitous Is In Fact Just

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1. *Moshe* attempted to defuse the opposition by approaching *Dasan* & *Aviram* to address the issues.
2. They rejected his overtures of concern.
3. *Moshe* realized there was no hope for reconciliation.
4. He supplicated G-d that their share in the communal offering that will be brought should be rejected.
5. He was concerned that the merit of the sacrifice would protect them from G-d's wrath, which they deserved.
6. *Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh*: If a person is truly evil, the devoutly righteous can decree that the small degree of merit that is on record should be revoked & annulled.
7. *Moshe's* evaluation of *Korach* and his community was truly evil therefore whatever good deeds they may have should be revoked.
8. King *David's* greatest antagonist was *Doeg*, whose envy of *Dovid* was all consuming.
9. His actions and ill speech brought havoc and great tragedy upon *Dovid* personally, King *Saul* and his family, and *Nov* the city of *Kohanim*.
10. He asked of G-d that the *Torah* of *Doeg* shouldn't be studied by Jews after he passes away so no merit should accrue to him.
11. *Doeg* shouldn't merit descendants who are *Torah* scholars.
12. *Dovid's* assessment of *Doeg* was that he epitomized evil therefore he can deny him all opportunities of *mitzvah*.

Rejecting The Irrefutable When Ego Calls

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1. *Korach* attempted to usurp *Moshe's* authority.
2. *Amrom*, *Moshe's* father, was the eldest of *Kahas' 4* sons.
3. *Korach's* father was the 2nd to the eldest.
4. Laws of Inheritance: The firstborn receives a double portion.
5. *Moshe* assumed the position of king, and *Aharon* as High Priest.
6. *Korach* felt he should receive the 3rd appointment.
7. *Moshe*, by Divine dictate, appointed *Elitzaphon* as Prince (family of *Kahas*).
8. *Korach's* claim: If appointment is based on inheritance he should be Prince; if on qualification—he should be High Priest.
9. *Rambam*: The authenticity of *Moshe's* prophecy is that every Jew at *Sinai* witnessed G-d speaking to *Moshe*.
10. After *Sinai*, *Moshe's* prophecy will not be questioned.
11. *Korach* and his cohorts were at *Sinai*, yet questioned his word.
12. Because of one's conflict of interest, one may reject something that is irrefutable.

Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Korach

A photograph of a rocky, mountainous landscape under a dramatic, cloudy sky. The rocks are grey and jagged, with some sparse vegetation. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, creating a somber and intense atmosphere.

The World's Greatest Mutiny

The Power of the Influence of the Community

Torah: Korach attempted to usurp the authority of Moshe Rabbeinu. He contested the authenticity of the Torah, which was transmitted through Moshe to the Jewish People. Korach professed that the Torah was “Moshe’s creation and not G-d’s Torah.” Korach nearly undermined the Klal Yisroel for the sake of his own glory because he believed that the next official appointment should have been given to him rather than his cousin (Elitzafon Ben Uziel) in accordance with the law of inheritance. The question is – regardless of Korach’s grievance against Moshe how could he have come to the point, which caused him to contest the authority of Moshe?

Torah: “Vayikach Korach Ben Yitzahar (Korach son of Yitzahar took)...”

Rashi citing Chazal: “Vayikach Korach (Korach took)” means that Korach took himself outside of the

community in order to establish himself apart from Moshe. Only after Korach removed himself from the community was he able to confront and attack Moshe. Why did Korach need to remove himself from the community in order to bring his grievance against Moshe? If Korach believed that his grievance had a legitimate basis he could have approached Moshe without removing himself from community. However, since the Torah tells us that only after removing himself from the community did he contest and question the validity of Moshe’s transmission, it is evident that Korach was only able to bring about this confrontation because he removed himself from the community. How do we understand this?

Often when one asks a person who was once part of a particular observant community why he is no longer observant to that degree, the answer usually is, “I am no longer part of that world (community).” Why does he need to respond in that manner? He could have simply said, “I am still part of that community,

but I disagree with their level of observance.” We find that a person has to first dissociate himself from the community with a particular ideology in order for him to reject that ideology.

However, if the person would still identify with his community and choose to behave differently than his peer group then he would perceive himself as different or even “less” than the rest of the community. The only way that community would have no bearing on his self image is by removing himself and establishing himself as part of another one, which is not in agreement with his previous peer group. *Moshe* was the teacher and leader of the Jewish people. *Korach*, being part of *Moshe’s* community, could not have had the audacity to pit himself against *Moshe* while being part of the community. *Korach* therefore had to first remove himself from the *Klal Yisroel* to establish his own community. Thus he was no longer subject to *Moshe’s* authority or the *Torah*, which *Moshe* was transmitting.

Torah: The *Baal Paor* was an idol whose method of worship involved defecating on the idol.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt’l: Pagan society at large believed that idol worship entails being reverent and respectful behavior to the deity that is being worshiped. Defecating on the *Baal Paor* allowed them to establish a completely different framework of worship. Thus the community of the *Baal Paor* was able to establish themselves as a society with their own value system that could be contrary to the morals and ethics of the world.

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: In *Sodom* the victim was required to pay the victimizer. *Eliezer* was accosted and beaten in *Sodom* and then went before a Judge in order to bring a claim against his assailant. The Judge ruled that he should pay damages to his assailant because this was justice in *Sodom*. Hearing this ruling, *Eliezer* raised the weapon with which he was accosted and beat the Judge and demanded that based on this standard of justice the judge should pay damages to *Eliezer’s* victimizers.

The question is, how absurd could one become? How could this be justice? The answer is, when an individual or a community remove themselves and establish their own ethical and moral system, then anything can be rationalized and justified. Once *Korach* extricated himself from *Moshe’s* community, he had no difficulty to approach *Moshe* as a peer and attempt to usurp his

authority. If *Korach* identified as a member of *Moshe’s* community and as his disciple, he could not have been able to attack him because the very act of questioning the veracity of *Moshe’s* word would reflect negatively on himself.

From this we can appreciate the need to be associated with a proper community that has a laudable value system and adherence to *Torah*. If a person identifies with the proper *Torah* community, then that association will act as a safeguard from transgression. On the other hand, if one identifies himself with a community that does not adhere to *Torah* principles then he can rationalize any type of behavior (regardless of how severe it may be) despite it being contrary to the *Torah*.

The Blinding Effects of Conflict of Interest

Torah: *Korach* attempted to usurp *Moshe’s* authority claiming that it was nepotism for *Moshe* to choose his brother *Aaron* as the High Priest. *Korach* claimed that all the Jewish people were “holy” and therefore would qualify for the position of High Priest. After witnessing the splitting of the Sea, which was a new dimension of miracle, the Jewish people did not doubt *Moshe* to any degree. “The Jewish people believed in *Hashem* and *Moshe* His Servant.”

Rambam in the Laws of *Yisodei HaTorah*: Other than the Sinai experience, this was the highest level of *emunah* (belief) which the Jewish people reached in the history of *Klal Yisroel*. At Sinai every Jew heard *Hashem* communicate with *Moshe*. Because of witnessing this level of relationship, *Rambam* cites the verse in the Book of Exodus, “They (the Jews) will believe in you (*Moshe*) forever.” Meaning that the authenticity of *Moshe’s* word will never be contested. *Korach* and his group of dissidents (two hundred and fifty of the most astute *Torah* sages from the tribe of *Reuven*, who were each qualified to be the head of the *Sanhedrin Gedola* – the High Court) were part of the generation that witnessed the splitting of the Sea, stood at Sinai and witnessed *Hashem* telling *Moshe*, “Go tell the Jews such and such (the *Torah*).”

After experiencing the Sinai event, how could they contest *Moshe’s* authority? How could they have possibly claimed that the *Torah* was *Moshe’s* own creation and not the Word of G-d? *Moshe* had a special relationship with *Hashem*. When the Jewish

people sinned with the Golden Calf, *Hashem* wanted to destroy them. *Moshe* prayed that *Hashem* should not destroy them and that He should forgive them-*Hashem* listened to *Moshe*.

After the incident of the *meraglim* (the spies), *Hashem* again wanted to destroy the Jewish people, but He once again listened to *Moshe's* plea not to destroy the Jews. In each case, *Hashem* wanted to eliminate the Jewish people and to start again with *Moshe* as the progenitor of a new people. However *Moshe* refused to have this role. *Korach* and his followers understood *Moshe's* special relationship with *Hashem*. They believed that *Hashem* would support any request or decision made by *Moshe*.

The point of contention that *Korach* had with *Moshe* was based on the origin of the decision to choose *Aaron* as the High Priest. Was *Aaron* selected by *Hashem* to be the High Priest and this decision was communicated and executed by *Moshe*? Or did *Moshe* decide that *Aaron* should receive the position as High Priest and *Hashem* subsequently approved it? *Korach's* claim against *Moshe* was based on the fact that all the Jews were "holy" and *Moshe* could have selected anyone to be the High Priest. If so – why did he choose his brother? This is why *Korach* had taken the position that the *Torah* was the word of *Moshe* and it was only approved by G-d.

What one must understand is even according to *Korach's* own conflicted and distorted perception of reality, the fact is *Aaron* was chosen by G-d to be the High Priest regardless if the basis of the decision was *Moshe's* or G-d's. If this is the case, how do we understand *Korach's* claim that we are all holy and therefore qualified to be the High Priest?

Rashi citing *Chazal*: *Korach's* "eye mislead him." *Korach* had foreseen that *Shmuel* the Prophet, who was the equivalent of *Moshe* and *Aaron*, was going to be one of his descendants and that many families who would officiate in the Temple as Levites would arise from *Shmuel*. *Korach* believed that he would be saved in the merit of *Shmuel* the Prophet. Despite the fact that *Korach* was usurping *Moshe's* authority and going against the Word of *Hashem*, he believed that because of the special role of *Shmuel* he would be protected.

Midrash: *Avraham* our Patriarch refused to bow to the idol and was cast into the fire at *Kasdim* and emerged unharmed. One may think that since *Avraham* was

willing to give his life for *Hashem* he merited to be saved through a miracle because of his self-sacrifice.

Chazal: The reason *Avraham* was not consumed by the fire was because *Yaakov* our Patriarch (the father of the Jewish people) was destined to be born.

Midrash: In the merit of *Yaakov*, *Avraham* was saved from the fire at *Kasdim*. *Avraham* in his own right would have not survived the fiery kiln if not for *Yaakov*. *Korach* believed that just as *Avraham* was saved because the world needed to have *Yaakov* our Patriarch, so too did he believe that the world needed *Shmuel* the Prophet. Therefore, he would not perish. It is possible that a person, as a result of a conflict of interest, would not only justify his transgressions but also consider them a *mitzvah*.

Merit Comes to Those Who are Meritorious

Rashi citing *Chazal*: An alternative explanation to "*Vayikach Korach* (*Korach* took)" is that *Korach* persuaded the two hundred and fifty men who were qualified to be the heads of the *Sanhedrin* (the High Court of Israel). The term "*Vayikach*" which means, "to take," is used regarding inanimate objects or an unintelligent creature animal, which does not have free choice to come or not to come, and therefore it is "taken." However regarding a human being who has free choice to come or not to come – how is the term "*Vayikach*" as it applies to *Korach* to be understood?

Rashi: When the term "*Vayikach*" is used in this context (regarding *Korach*), it means that *Korach* had "taken" them through his power of persuasion. Although they were qualified to be the heads of the *Sanhedrin* and were astute *Torah* sages, *Korach* rendered them helpless through his power of persuasion. Choice is when one sees both sides of an equation and can choose between the two. However these individuals were persuaded to such a degree that they only could see the position of *Korach*.

Rashi citing another example in which the term "*Kach*" (to take) is used regarding a human being: *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, "*Kach es Aaron* (Take Aaron)" and persuade him to assume the position of the High priest. *Hashem* told *Moshe* that his words should be so convincing to *Aaron* that he would no longer have any choice other than to accept this appointment.

Rambam in the Laws of *Teshuvah*: It is only because we exercise our free choice to do the right thing that we deserve to receive reward for that deed. However if one did not have choice, but would rather be naturally compelled to do the good deed one would not deserve to receive any reward. The question to ask is – if a person is influenced and persuaded by the words of his *rebbe* (to the degree that *Aaron* was persuaded by *Moshe* to accept the High Priesthood) would that person receive reward for that deed?

If on the other hand, one is negatively influenced and persuaded to such a degree as *Korach* influenced his cohorts – would that person be held liable for punishment since their free choice was suspended as a result of this overwhelming persuasion? *Korach's* followers were completely taken by his words. If this is the case, why were they deserving of punishment?

Torah: “They were taken by *Korach*.” Why should they have any degree of liability?

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers): There is a principle, “One *mitzvah* brings another *mitzvah* and a transgression or misdeed encourages and brings other misdeeds.” If a person is deserving of good deeds because of a good deed he has done, *Hashem* will bring him the opportunity to perform other good deeds. Conversely, the principle states that if a person is undeserving because of past transgressions, then *Hashem* will bring to him situations where he is able to fail again. The question is – what makes a person deserving or undeserving?

From a spiritual perspective meritorious acts go to those who are worthy of merit. Based on this principle, if a person is positively affected by his *rebbe* to grow in *Torah*, then it must be that he merited that level of relationship with the *rebbe* because of a positive choice that he had made in the past. However, the two hundred and fifty members of the tribe of *Reuven* who were under *Korach's* influence evidently deserved to be subject to this influence. This was a reflection of who these people actually were.

Korach could have influenced anyone; however, it was specifically this group that was affected. There must have been something in their background that brought them to this situation. For example, *Dassan* and *Aviram* (*Korach's* compatriots) had already informed on *Moshe* in Egypt and were responsible for many other unconscionable acts.

Gemara: There were two great leaders who were similar to one another vis-à-vis their generation: *Shmuel* the Prophet (who was the equivalent of *Moshe* and *Aaron*) and *Yiftach*. Although there is almost no comparison between the level of greatness of *Shmuel* and *Yiftach*, they are both referred to as “leaders” in their generations.

Chazal: “*Yiftach* in his generation is as *Shmuel* is in his generation.”

Chasam Sofer z'tl: Why did one generation merit to have *Shmuel* and the other *Yiftach* when there is no comparison between their dimension of greatness? *Shmuel's* generation merited to have him as their leader because they were truly meritorious. However, the generation of *Yiftach*, which is not comparable to the generation of *Shmuel*, only merited having a leader such as *Yiftach*.

We are continuously subjected to many interactions and situations – some of them are positive and some of them are also negative. We must contemplate in each of these situations in order to understand what brought about the positive opportunity or the negative pitfall. Evidently, based on the principle mentioned in *Pirkei Avos* that one good deed encourages another and a misdeed encourages the same, there must be valid reason why these situations present themselves.

How One is able to Live his own Reality

Torah: When *Moshe* summoned *Dassan* and *Aviram* they responded by saying, “Is it not enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the Desert...” *Dassan* and *Aviram* complained that *Moshe* had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt (where they were in bondage for two hundred and ten years) to die in the desert.

Dassan and *Aviram*, who were in Egypt during the years of bondage and slavery, how could they claim that Egypt was a land flowing with milk and honey? To the Jew it was a land of continuous suffering, death, and persecution. How do we understand this? One way to understand this is that Egypt was in fact a land which flowed with milk and honey, compared to any other location. It was the most fertile and bountiful land with the exclusion of the Land of Canaan.

Dassan and Aviram complained – why did the Jewish people need to leave Egypt to die in the desert after we had broken the yolk of bondage? We could have remained in Egypt and benefited from that land which flowed with milk and honey. Another way to understand this is would be – when *Moshe* matured and went out from the palace of the Pharaoh, the *Torah* tells us that he “saw” the suffering of his brothers.

Rashi: Because *Moshe* made the effort to understand the plight of the Jews he therefore felt their pain. If *Moshe* had not focused on the predicament of the Jews, he would have not felt their pain.

Gemara in Tractate *Nidarim*: *Hashem* came to *Moshe* while he was hiding in *Midian* and told him that the people who had informed on him had died and that it was safe for him to return to Egypt. How could *Hashem* tell *Moshe* that the informers had died if in fact *Dassan* and *Aviram* were still alive and that it was safe for him to return to Egypt? *Dassan* and *Aviram* were initially very wealthy and had access to the upper echelons of the Egyptian court and therefore were able to inform on *Moshe*. However since then they had lost all of their wealth and no longer had that level of influence so they could no longer inform on *Moshe*.

Gemara: From here we see that a person who loses all of his wealth is considered as if he had died. *Dassan* and *Aviram* were initially part of the wealthy class in Egypt despite the fact they were Jews. To them, in fact Egypt was a land flowing with milk and honey. When they observed the Egyptian beating the Jew (whose wife he had raped) they were oblivious to the victimization of this Jew. They did not feel the plight and pain of this person. If they had they would not have been able to inform on *Moshe* for killing this Egyptian for behaving in this unforgivable manner.

The fact that *Dassan* and *Aviram* did inform on *Moshe* is only an indication that they were oblivious and did not relate to the position of the Jewish people because of their own station within Egyptian society. Their reality was in fact that Egypt was a land flowing with milk and honey. Being of such a nature, totally absorbed with themselves, *Dassan* and *Aviram* could destroy the Jewish people for the sake of their own glory. If a person’s objective is his own glory then he could justify any action for the sake of that purpose. Due to this perspective, this person is totally insensitive to the needs of his brothers despite their plight.

How to Understand Korach’s Mistake

We had asked – how could *Korach* have convinced two hundred and fifty men who were astute *Torah* sages to oppose *Moshe Rabbeinu*? They had all heard at Sinai that *Hashem* had designated *Moshe* as His spokesperson and therefore the word of *Moshe* is synonymous with the Word of *Hashem*. *Korach* and his followers claimed that the word of *Moshe* was in fact no the word of Gd. How do we understand this? What was the basis for *Korach* to contest *Moshe*’s authority?

Rashi citing the *Midrash*: *Moshe*’s grandfather had four sons – the eldest was *Amram* (the father of *Moshe* and *Aaron*), the second was *Yitzhar* (the father of *Korach*), and the fourth brother was *Elizafon* (the father of *Uziel*). Based on the laws of inheritance, the *Torah* states that the *bechor* (first born) takes a double portion of the inheritance. *Korach* understood that *Moshe* and *Aaron* (being the sons of the first born) deserved to receive the first two appointments – the king and the High Priest respectively.

According to the order of inheritance, *Korach* was the next in line to receive the next official position; however, the position of leader of the family of was given to *Elizafon Ben Uziel* (the son of the youngest brother) rather than *Korach* the son of *Yitzhar* (the second brother). As a result of his disappointment of not receiving what he believed was rightfully his *Korach* reacted to undermine and usurp *Moshe*’s authority. He had said that if the appointments were being distributed based on the order of inheritance I should have received the next appointment.

If the appointments were being given based on qualifications then I am more qualified than *Aaron* to be appointed as High Priest. Therefore *Korach* concluded that the basis for *Moshe*’s choice for the position of High Priest was nepotism. *Korach* believed that the only reason why *Aaron* was chosen was because *Moshe* wanted his own brother to occupy the second highest position. He did not believe that this was the word of *Hashem* but rather it was the word of *Moshe*.

Although, as we had explained earlier, *Korach* understood that the word of *Moshe* and the word of *Hashem* were synonymous. *Korach* knew that *Moshe* was special and *Hashem* would approve that whatever *Moshe* decided. *Korach* was resentful that *Moshe* rather than *Hashem* initiated the decision to appoint

Aaron as the High Priest. *Korach* was mistaken to think that the appointment originated from *Moshe* and was only approved by *Hashem*. *Moshe* was only carrying out the will of *Hashem* and everything in the *Torah* to the smallest detail is the Word of *Hashem* being transmitted through *Moshe*.

With this understanding of *Moshe's* special relationship with *Hashem*, we are able to understand why *Moshe* had to pass away and not enter into the Land of Israel because he struck the rock. *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, "Speak to the rock to give forth its water." *Moshe*, as a result of being upset with the Jewish people, said to them "Listen you rebellious people..." and struck the rock rather than speaking to it as *Hashem* had instructed. *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, "You will pass away in the desert and not enter into the Land because you had the opportunity to sanctify my name by speaking to the rock, but you chose to strike the rock."

Sforno: The nature and the seriousness of *Moshe's* failing – why is the speaking to the rock a sanctification of G-d's name while the striking is not? Physical involvement in bringing about a miracle minimizes the level of revelation because the result could be attributed to the person's actions and not to *Hashem*. If *Moshe* had spoken to the rock it would have been a higher degree of revelation than if he had stricken the

rock because it would have been clear that the miracle was a direct result of *Hashem* Willing the outcome.

The Jewish people questioned their relationship with *Hashem*. Did *Hashem* truly love them? Or was He only tolerating them? *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, "I want you to perform a miracle that will reveal My love for the Jewish people (which is the more advanced level of miracle without human intervention)." *Moshe* however chose to strike the rock to bring about a lesser level of miracle because he believed that the Jews were unworthy of the higher degree of revelation.

Hashem said to *Moshe*, "For not sanctifying My name you must die." The question is – why is *Hashem* being so harsh with *Moshe*? The answer is- that what *Moshe* had done regarding the rock was exactly what *Korach* claimed is the essence of the *Torah* (that it is the word of *Moshe* that is approved by G-d rather than the Word of G-d being transmitted through *Moshe*). *Hashem* said to *Moshe*, "Speak to the rock because I want to reveal My love for them." *Moshe* chose to do differently and he struck the rock. If *Moshe* would have not been punished to this degree, it would have been misunderstood that if *Moshe* decided to strike the rock rather than speaking to it and this was approved by *Hashem*, so too is the *Torah* the word of *Moshe* and approved by *Hashem*.



