

## Parashat Korach: Sometimes Our Plans Do Work Out

Dear Friends,

So much has been written about Parashat Korach, about the first Hebrew rebellion and its strange and cruel conclusion, as the earth opened up and swallowed Korach and his followers.

The modern reader finds it difficult to understand what Korach's sin was. Why did he "deserve" one of the most severe and original punishments in the Torah, a punishment that was "tailored" to Korach and his followers.

In light of our present era of modern democracy, Korach's complaints against Moshe and Aharon seem very pertinent: We are all holy, he said, not only you! We were all created in God's image; who are you to "lord" over us? And, speaking of democracy, who elected you anyway?

Furthermore, Parashat Korach comes immediately following the story of the twelve scouts and the failure to enter the Promised Land. The people are in despair. Korach understandably wonders: why did you take us out of Egypt? We followed you because you promised us a land flowing with milk and honey. Now what? We left a land of abundance, and now we are doomed to die in the desert. You leaders have failed, and you must pay the price for your failure!

Korach and his followers are undoubtedly right. The big exodus plan and the journey to the Promised Land has been disastrously derailed. The Torah blames the people for this failure, but surely a leader is ultimately responsible? A leader who sets goals for himself and for his followers must stand behind his plan. If the goal is not met for whatever reason, the leader has failed, not the followers. The followers are a given, as Moshe himself says to God. They are not replaceable. A good leader, therefore, should know not to liberate people who are not yet ready to handle freedom!

If an operation or a military maneuver or any other project fails, the leader at that time must pay the price. Golda Meir had to resign after the Yom Kippur War. Begin

resigned after and because of the first Lebanon War. Ehud Barak paid the price for pulling out of Lebanon - something we all wanted - and for the second Intifadah. None of them were truly responsible on a personal level for the failures, but these failures were attributed to them in the pages of history, and they were held accountable.

All of this is true on the political, economic, and military level.

It is definitely NOT true in life!

Life NEVER happens as planned. People make many plans - small and big - and most of them don't work out the way we envision them. It happens on a daily basis. When I look back on my life I am somewhat shocked (mostly for the good, but not only). This is not how I imagined myself and my life 20, 30, or 40 years ago. Absolutely not! And I often wonder, how I got from A to B to C, and so forth.

True, while it was happening I was unaware of a significant twist and turn in my life's journey. At the time the change seemed natural and appeared to be my choice. But it is just our brain that is tricking us into thinking that we wanted the change, or even generated it; perhaps we even dreamed of it. Even when looking back, we can all give detailed explanations for the twists and turns on the way, but still... this is a retrospective rationalization. We have a need to create a coherent, consistent sense of reality, come up with a "narrative", that puts our thoughts into some kind of order. Otherwise, how can we look at ourselves in the mirror? How can we explain ourselves to ourselves, not to mention to others?

John Lennon wrote these immortal words to his infant son Sean in "Beautiful Boy":  
"Before you cross the street  
Take my hand  
Life is what happens to you  
While you're busy making other plans"

Sean learned the cruel reality the hard way. In December 1980 his father indeed went out to the street, probably planning many things for the day and for his life, but he was shot and killed, which was definitely not on his to-do list for that day!

We make plans... and then life happens. It is not at all clear how much our planning directs our lives, and how much something else entirely lives our lives and simply gives us the permission to think that we are in control.

The Torah is a story about life. It is not a military manual or an economic plan. The story of the Exodus from Egypt and the long and winding journey in the wilderness is

a metaphor for the lives of each and every one of us. It is the story of people who are born, mature, make plans, dream dreams, have hopes, head out on the journey of their lives, and discover that life and reality have plans of their own which are entirely different from their own.

And unlike a military operation, when the plans we make do not come to fruition, we do not have the right to quit. There is no one to fire. We have to keep going. We have no choice! We keep going because deep inside we know that we never really had control to begin with.

“Mann Tracht, Un Gott Lacht” is an old Yiddish adage meaning, “Man Plans, and God Laughs.”

At best, when things go absolutely as planned - and this is rare - our plans seem to express our deepest desires. More commonly, however, the plans we make reflect the workings of our ego, and it may be a good thing that they remain unmanifested.

Furthermore, human grasp of reality is so limited that we truly have no idea who or what determines which plans get to materialize, and which do not, and who decides.

This is the pit Korach and his followers fall into, literally and figuratively. They actually fall twice. The first is when they refuse to accept the notion that life has its own plans, plans that may be far more clever than we are. The second is when they seek whom to blame - Moshe and Aharon.

We all fall into this “pit” sometimes. We mistakenly think we have control over our lives, and that life should meet our expectations and the plans we make (whenever the word “should” appears in the sentence, know that we’re duped). And then, when this doesn’t happen (and it usually doesn’t), we look for whom to blame.

This approach will one day bury us deep under!

Undoubtedly, it is important that we make plans - what to study, what profession to pursue, save money for various things, choose a partner, create a family, build a satisfying career - because we have no choice. We have to try to navigate... But this does not mean that our plans necessarily work out. Sometimes they do! Sometimes they even resemble what we imagined. But it is very important to know - just to know - that at the end of the day, life is what happens when we are busy making other plans, as we are navigating the great wilderness of life on our way to a land that was once promised to us.

And also, it is important to laugh! God - aka reality - finds our plans very amusing. When He/it laughs we may be insulted, angry, bitter, look to place blame and demand to fire our parents, our partners, our children, even ourselves. But perhaps it would be better, instead, to laugh at our own foolishness a little, at our misguided thoughts. Together with God we can really have a blast!

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha