

1. Numbers 17

(א) וידבר ה' אל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (ב) אִמֹר אֶל־אֶלְעָזָר בְּרֵאֵהוֹן הַכֹּהֵן וְיִרְם אֶת־הַמַּחֲתֹת מִבֵּין הַשְּׂרֵפָה וְאֶת־הָאֵשׁ זֶרֶה־הָלְאָה כִּי קִדְּשׁוּ: (ג) אֵת מַחֲתֹת הַחֹטָאִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּנִפְשָׁתָם וְעָשׂוּ אֹתָם רִקְעֵי פָחִים צָפוּי לְמִזְבֵּחַ כִּי־הִקְרִיבֻם לִפְנֵי־ה' וְיִקְדְּשׁוּ וַיְהִי לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (ד) וַיִּקַּח אֶלְעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת מַחֲתֹת הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיבו הַשְּׂרֵפִים וַיִּרְקְעוּם צָפוּי לְמִזְבֵּחַ: (ה) זָכְרוֹן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִקְרַב אִישׁ זָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזְרַע אֲהָרֹן הוּא לְהִקְטִיר קֹטֶרֶת לִפְנֵי ה' וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה כְּקִרְחַו וְכַעֲדָתוֹ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה לוֹ: (ו) וַיִּלְנוּ כְּלֵעֵדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמַּחֲתֹת עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר אֲתֵם הַמֵּתִים אֲתֵעֵם ה' (ז) וַיְהִי בְּהִקְהַל הָעֵדָה עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אֲהָרֹן וַיִּפְנוּ אֶל־אֲהָל מוֹעֵד וְהָיָה כִּסְהוּ הָעֵנָן וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד ה' (ח) וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאֲהָרֹן אֶל־פְּנֵי אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: (ט) (ט) וַיִּדְבֶּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (י) הֲלוֹמוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאָכְלָה אֹתָם כְּרָגַע וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם: (יא) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אֲהָרֹן קַח אֶת־הַמַּחֲתֹת וְתוֹדַעְלֶיָה אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשִׂים קֹטֶרֶת וְהוֹלֵךְ מֵהָרָה אֶל־הָעֵדָה וְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם כִּי־צָא הַקָּצָף מִלִּפְנֵי ה' הַחֵל הַנֶּגֶף: (יב) וַיִּקַּח אֲהָרֹן כְּאֲשֶׁר אָמַר דָּבָר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּרֶץ אֶל־תּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל וְהָיָה הַחֵל הַנֶּגֶף בְּעַם וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַקֹּטֶרֶת וַיִּכְפֹּר עֲלֵיהֶם: (יג) וַיַּעֲמֵד בְּיַד־הַמַּחֲתֹת וּבֵין הַחַיִּים וַתַּעֲצֹר הַמִּגֶּפֶה: (יד) וַיְהִי הַמֵּתִים בְּמִגְפָה אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר אֶלֶף וַיִּשְׁבַּע מֵאוֹת מִלְּבַד הַמֵּתִים עַל־דַּבְרֵי־קִרְחַו: (טו) וַיָּשֵׁב אֲהָרֹן אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְהַמִּגְפָה נִעְצְרָה: (טז) (טז) וַיִּדְבֶּר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: (יז) דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְקַח מֵאֹתָם מִטָּה מִטָּה לְבֵית אָב מֵאֵת כָּל־נְשֵׂיהֶם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר מֵאוֹת אִישׁ אֶת־שְׁמוֹ תִּכְתֹּב עַל־מִטָּהּ: (יח) וְאֵת שֵׁם אֲהָרֹן תִּכְתֹּב עַל־מִטָּה לְוִי כִּי מִטָּה אֶחָד לְרֵאשִׁית בֵּית אֲבוֹתָם: (יט) וְהִנַּחְתֶּם בָּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אוֹעֵד לְכֶם שְׁמָה: (כ) וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אֲבַחֲרֻבוּ מִטָּהוּ יִפְרַח וְהִשְׁכַּחְתִּי מֵעַל־אֶת־תְּלִנּוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵם מְלִינִם עָלֵיכֶם: (כא) וַיִּדְבֶּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתְּנוּ אֵלָיו כָּל־נְשֵׂיהֶם מִטָּה לְנִשְׂיָא אֶחָד לְנִשְׂיָא אֶבְתָּם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר מֵאוֹת וַיִּמְטָה אֲהָרֹן בְּתוֹךְ מִטוֹתָם: (כב) וַיִּנַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמִּטָּה לִּפְנֵי ה' בְּאֹהֶל הָעֵדוּת: (כג) וַיְהִי מִמַּחֲתֹת וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אֲהָל הָעֵדוּת וְהָיָה פֶּרַח מִטָּה־אֲהָרֹן לְבֵית לְוִי וַיֵּצֵא פֶּרַח לְוִי וַיֵּצֵא צִיֵּץ וַיִּגְמַל שְׁקָדִים: (כד) וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־כָּל־הַמִּטָּה מִלִּפְנֵי ה' אֶל־כָּל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּרָאוּ וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִטָּהּ: (כה) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֲשֵׁב אֶת־מִטָּה אֲהָרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת לְמַשְׁמַרְת לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי־יִמְרִי וְתִכַּל תְּלוּנָתָם מֵעַל־וְלֹא מִתּוֹ: (כו) וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ כֹּן עָשָׂה: (כז) וַיֹּאמְרוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר הֲנֹ גִּוְעָנוּ אֲבָדְנוּ כָּלְנוּ אֲבָדְנוּ: (כח) כָּל הַקָּרֵב אֶל הַקָּרֵב אֶל־מִשְׁכַּן ה' יָמוּת הָאֵם תִּמְנוּ לְגוֹעִי: (כט)

(1) The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: (2) Order Eleazar son of Aaron the priest to remove the fire pans—for they have become sacred—from among the charred remains; and scatter the coals abroad. (3) [Remove] the fire pans of those who have sinned at the cost of their lives, and let them be made into hammered sheets as plating for the altar—for once they have been used for offering to the LORD, they have become sacred—and let them serve as a warning to the people of Israel. (4) Eleazar the priest took the copper fire pans which had been used for offering by those who died in the fire; and they were hammered into plating for the altar, (5) as the LORD had ordered him through Moses. It was to be a reminder to the Israelites, so that no outsider—one not of Aaron's offspring—should presume to offer incense before the LORD and suffer the fate of Korah and his band. (6) Next day the whole Israelite community railed against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You two have brought death upon the LORD's people!” (7) But as the community gathered against them, Moses and Aaron turned toward the Tent of Meeting; the cloud had covered it and the Presence of the LORD appeared. (8) When Moses and Aaron reached the Tent of Meeting, (9) the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, (10) “Remove yourselves from this community, that I may annihilate them in an instant.” They fell on their faces. (11) Then Moses said to Aaron, “Take the fire pan, and put on it fire from the altar. Add incense and take it quickly to the community and make expiation for them. For wrath has gone forth from the LORD: the plague has begun!” (12) Aaron took it, as Moses had ordered, and ran to the midst of the congregation, where the plague had begun among the people. He put on the incense and made expiation for the people; (13) he stood between the dead and the living until the plague was checked. (14) Those who died of the plague came to fourteen thousand and seven hundred, aside from those who died on account of Korah. (15) Aaron then returned to Moses at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, since the plague was checked. (16) The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: (17) Speak to the Israelite people and take from them—from the chieftains of their ancestral houses—one staff for each chieftain of an ancestral house: twelve staffs in all. Inscribe each man's name on his staff, (18) there being one staff for each head of an ancestral house; also inscribe Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. (19) Deposit them in the Tent of Meeting before the Pact, where I meet with you. (20) The staff of the man whom I choose shall sprout, and I will rid Myself of the incessant mutterings of the Israelites against you. (21) Moses spoke thus to the Israelites. Their chieftains gave him a staff for each chieftain of an ancestral house, twelve staffs in all; among these staffs was that of Aaron. (22) Moses deposited the staffs before the LORD, in the Tent of the Pact. (23) The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Pact, and there the staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had sprouted: it had brought forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and borne almonds. (24) Moses then brought out all the staffs from before the LORD to all the Israelites; each identified and recovered his staff. (25) The LORD said to Moses, “Put Aaron's staff back before the Pact, to be kept as a lesson to rebels, so that their mutterings against Me may cease, lest they die.” (26) This Moses did; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did. (27) But the Israelites said to Moses, “Lo, we perish! We are lost, all of us lost! (28) Everyone who so much as ventures near the LORD's Tabernacle must die. Alas, we are doomed to perish!”

2. Exodus 32:1-4

(א) וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי־בִשַׁשׁ מֹשֶׁה לָרַדַּת מִדְּבַר הַיְהוָה וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל־אֲהָרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּם | עֲשֵׂה־לָנוּ אֱלֹקִים אֲשֶׁר יִלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ כִּי־זָה | מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מֵהִיָּה לּוֹ: (ב) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲהָרֹן פְּרוּקוּ נִזְמֵי הַזֶּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵי נְשֵׁיכֶם בְּנִיכֶם וּבְנֹתֵיכֶם וְהִבִּיאוּ אֵלָי: (ג) וַתִּפְרְקוּ כָּל־הָעָם אֶת־נִזְמֵי הַזֶּהָב אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיָּבִיאוּ אֶל־אֲהָרֹן: (ד) וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיִּצַר אֹתוֹ בַּחֶרֶט וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ עֵגֶל מִסַּכָּה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָה אֱלֹקֵינוּ | יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

(1) When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him.” (2) Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” (3) And all the people took off the gold rings that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. (4) This he took from them and cast in a mold, and made it into a molten calf. And they exclaimed, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

Note parallels to Korach unit:

3. Numbers 16:3-4

(ג) וַיִּקְהֲלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵיכֶם רַבְלְכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה' וּמִדּוֹעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל־קֹהֵל יְהוָה: (ד) וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל עַל־פָּנָיו:

(3) They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, “You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the LORD is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the LORD’s congregation?” (4) When Moses heard this, he fell on his face.

Numbers 16:21

(כא) הַבִּדְלוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶכְלֶה אֹתָם כְּרִגְעָה:

(21) “Stand back from this community that I may annihilate them in an instant!”

Prof. Yoni Grossman

Now we are able to answer the third question. Why was it only after the second test – the blossoming of Aharon's staff, involving no death – that the people fear to approach the mishkan? As mentioned, this fear would have seemed more appropriate following the first test, when more than 250 people lost their lives. But in light of our discussion, it is only in the wake of the second test that it becomes clear to the nation that the 250 indeed lost their lives because they offered incense without being permitted to do so. At first, the nation suspected Moshe and Aharon of having put "G-d's nation" to death, and so they had no reason to fear approaching the kodesh. It was only after Aharon's selection was clearly and openly displayed that they understood that their second claim simply had no substance, and that the kodesh itself consumed those who entered without authorization. Now the nation experiences the full awe and fear of approaching the kodesh, which brings death to those who are not permitted to be there.

In truth, there is ambiguity about the extent to which prophets have independence. This is true in ending of Makkot, punishment in Korach, Yehoshua and sun, Shmuel by rain, Eliyahu and his miracles, Elisha and his miracles, etc. Sumamry: http://alhatorah.org/Prophetic_Actions_Without_Explicit_Divine_Sanction

4. Rashi on Numbers 17:13

(א) וַיַּעֲמֹד בֵּין הַמֵּתִים וְגו'. אחז את המלאך והעמידו על כרחו אמר לו המלאך הנח לי לעשות שליחותי אמר לו משה צוני לעכב על ירך אמר לו אני שלוחו של מקום ואתה שלוחו של משה אמר לו אין משה אומר כלום מלבו אלא מפי הגבורה אם אין אתה מאמין הרי הקב"ה ומשה אל פתח אהל מועד בא עמי ושאל וזה שנאמר וישב אהרן אל משה (מכילתא. תנחומא תצוה טו). דבר אחר למה בקטרת לפי שהיו ישראל מליזין ומרננים אחר הקטרת לומר סם המות הוא על ידו מתו נדב ואביהוא על ידו נשרפו חמשים ומאתים איש אמר הקב"ה תראו שעוצר מגפה הוא והחטא הוא הממית (מכילתא ויסע פרשה ו. ברכות לג, א):

(1) וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין הַמֵּתִים וְגו' AND HE STOOD BETWEEN THE DEAD [AND THE LIVING] — He (Aaron) seized the Angel of Death and stopped him despite himself. The angel said to him, “Let me be, so that I may carry out my commission!” He (Aaron) answered him, “Moses has bidden me prevent you”. The angel replied, “I am the messenger of the Omnipresent whilst you are but the messenger of Moses!” Aaron retorted, “Moses does not say anything out of his own mind, but only at the command of the Almighty. If you do not believe me, behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, and Moses are at the entrance of the appointed tent; come with me and ask them!” This is the meaning of what is stated (v. 15): And Aaron returned unto Moses (i.e. returned together with the Angel of Death) (cf. Midrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 15 at end of תצוה). Another explanation is: Wherefore was the plague stayed by means of the incense? Because the Israelites were traducing and speaking ill of the incense, saying, “It is a deadly poison: through it Nadab and Abihu died; through it the two hundred and fifty men were burnt!” therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, said, You will see that it is also a means for restraining the plague, and it is only sin that brings death” (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 17:5:3 on Exodus 17:5).