**Parshat Korach and the Breakdown of Civil Discourse**

**במדבר פרק טז**

(א) **ויקח** קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן:

(ב) ויקמו לפני משה ואנשים מבני ישראל חמשים ומאתים נשיאי עדה קראי מועד אנשי שם:

**(ג) ויקהלו על משה ועל אהרן ויאמרו אלהם רב לכם כי כל העדה כלם קדשים ובתוכם יקוק ומדוע תתנשאו על קהל יקוק:**

(ד) וישמע משה ויפל על פניו:

(ה) וידבר אל קרח ואל כל עדתו לאמר בקר וידע יקוק את אשר לו ואת הקדוש והקריב אליו ואת אשר יבחר בו יקריב אליו:

(ו) זאת עשו קחו לכם מחתות קרח וכל עדתו:

(ז) ותנו בהן אש ושימו עליהן קטרת לפני יקוק מחר והיה האיש אשר יבחר יקוק הוא הקדוש רב לכם בני לוי:

(ח) ויאמר משה אל קרח שמעו נא בני לוי:

**(ט) המעט מכם כי הבדיל אלהי ישראל אתכם מעדת ישראל להקריב אתכם אליו לעבד את עבדת משכן יקוק ולעמד לפני העדה לשרתם:**

**(י) ויקרב אתך ואת כל אחיך בני לוי אתך ובקשתם גם כהנה:**

**(יא) לכן אתה וכל עדתך הנעדים על יקוק ואהרן מה הוא כי תלינו עליו:**

(יב) וישלח משה לקרא לדתן ולאבירם בני אליאב ויאמרו לא נעלה:

**(יג) המעט כי העליתנו מארץ זבת חלב ודבש להמיתנו במדבר כי תשתרר עלינו גם השתרר:**

**(יד) אף לא אל ארץ זבת חלב ודבש הביאתנו ותתן לנו נחלת שדה וכרם העיני האנשים ההם תנקר לא נעלה:**

(טו) ויחר למשה מאד ויאמר אל יקוק אל תפן אל מנחתם לא חמור אחד מהם נשאתי ולא הרעתי את אחד מהם:

(טז) ויאמר משה אל קרח אתה וכל עדתך היו לפני יקוק אתה והם ואהרן מחר:

(יז) וקחו איש מחתתו ונתתם עליהם קטרת והקרבתם לפני יקוק איש מחתתו חמשים ומאתים מחתת ואתה ואהרן איש מחתתו:

(יח) ויקחו איש מחתתו ויתנו עליהם אש וישימו עליהם קטרת ויעמדו פתח אהל מועד ומשה ואהרן:

(יט) ויקהל עליהם קרח את כל העדה אל פתח אהל מועד וירא כבוד יקוק אל כל העדה: פ

**רש"י במדבר פרשת קרח פרק טז פסוק א**

ויקח קרח - לקח את עצמו לצד אחד להיות נחלק מתוך העדה לעורר על הכהונה, וזהו שתרגם אונקלוס ואתפלג נחלק משאר העדה להחזיק במחלוקת, וכן (איוב טו, יב) מה יקחך לבך, לוקח אותך להפליגך משאר בני אדם

ומה ראה קרח לחלוק עם משה, נתקנא על נשיאותו של אליצפן בן עוזיאל שמינהו משה נשיא על בני קהת על פי הדבור. אמר קרח, אחי אבא ארבעה היו, שנאמר (שמות ו, יח) ובני קהת וגו'. עמרם הבכור נטלו שני בניו גדולה, אחד מלך ואחד כהן גדול, מי ראוי ליטול את השניה, לא אני שאני בן יצהר שהוא שני לעמרם, והוא מנה נשיא את בן אחיו הקטן מכולם, הריני חולק עליו ומבטל את דבריו.

**רשב"ם במדבר פרשת קרח פרק טז פסוק א**

(א) ויקח קרח - כמו ויקח [אברם] את שרה אשתו ואת לוט, אף כאן **ויקח קרח ודתן ואבירם אנשים הרבה**, עד שקמו עמהם לפני משה חמשים ומאתים:

**רמב"ן במדבר פרק טז**

והנכון בדרש, שכעס קרח על נשיאות אלצפן כמאמר רבותינו (תנחומא קרח א), וקנא גם באהרן כמו שנאמר ובקשתם גם כהונה..

והנה ישראל בהיותם במדבר סיני לא אירע להם שום רעה, כי גם בדבר העגל שהיה החטא גדול ומפורסם היו המתים מועטים, ונצלו בתפלתו של משה שהתנפל עליהם ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה. והנה היו אוהבים אותו כנפשם ושומעים אליו, ואלו היה אדם מורד על משה בזמן ההוא היה העם סוקלים אותו, ולכן סבל קרח גדולת אהרן וסבלו הבכורים מעלת הלוים וכל מעשיו של משה. אבל בבואם אל מדבר פארן ונשרפו באש תבערה ומתו בקברות התאוה רבים, וכאשר חטאו במרגלים לא התפלל משה עליהם ולא בטלה הגזרה מהם, ומתו נשיאי כל השבטים במגפה לפני ה', ונגזר על כל העם שיתמו במדבר ושם ימותו, **אז היתה נפש כל העם מרה והיו אומרים בלבם כי יבואו להם בדברי משה תקלות, ואז מצא קרח מקום לחלוק על מעשיו וחשב כי ישמעו אליו העם**. וזה טעם "להמיתנו במדבר", אמרו הנה הבאת אותנו אל המקום הזה ולא קיימת בנו מה שנדרת לתת לנו ארץ זבת חלב ודבש כי לא נתת לנו נחלה כלל, אבל נמות במדבר ונהיה כלים שם, כי גם זרענו לא יצאו מן המדבר לעולם, ויבטל מן הבנים מה שנדרת להם כאשר נתבטל מן האבות. וזה טעם תלונתם הנה במקום הזה אחר גזרת המרגלים מיד. והקרוב, כי היו אלה הנקהלים כולם בכורות כי על כן חרה להם על הכהונה, ולכך אמר להם משה שיקחו מחתות כמנהגם הראשון ויתגלה הדבר אם יבחר השם בהם או בכהנים:

(ד) ויפול על פניו - ולא ויפלו, כי אהרן במוסרו ובקדושתו לא ענה דבר בכל המחלוקת הזו, ויהי כמחריש וכמודה שמעלת קרח גדולה ממעלתו, אבל הוא עושה כדבר משה ומקיים גזירת מלך:

**משנה מסכת אבות פרק ה**

משנה יז

כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים ושאינה לשם שמים אין סופה להתקיים איזו היא מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי ושאינה לשם שמים זו מחלוקת קרח וכל עדתו:

**ר' עובדיה מברטנורא מסכת אבות פרק ה משנה יז**

כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים - כלומר שאנשי המחלוקת ההיא מתקיימים ואינם אובדין, כמחלוקת הלל ושמאי שלא אבדו לא תלמידי בית שמאי ולא תלמידי בית הלל. אבל קורח ועדתו אבדו. **ואני שמעתי, פירוש סופה, תכליתה והמבוקש מענינה**.

1. והמחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, התכלית והסוף המבוקש מאותה מחלוקת להשיג האמת, וזה מתקיים, כמו שאמרו מתוך הויכוח יתברר האמת, וכמו שנתברר במחלוקת הלל ושמאי שהלכה כבית הלל.
2. ומחלוקת שאינה לשם שמים, תכלית הנרצה בה היא בקשת השררה ואהבת הניצוח, וזה הסוף אינו מתקיים, כמו שמצינו במחלוקת קורח ועדתו שתכלית וסוף כוונתם היתה בקשת הכבוד והשררה והיו להיפך:

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת פסחים דף כב עמוד ב**

ואידך: את לא דריש. כדתניא: שמעון העמסוני, ואמרי לה נחמיה העמסוני, היה דורש כל אתים שבתורה. כיון שהגיע לאת ה' אלהיך תירא - פירש. אמרו לו תלמידיו: רבי, כל אתים שדרשת מה תהא עליהן? - אמר להם: כשם שקבלתי שכר על הדרישה, כך אני מקבל שכר על הפרישה. עד שבא רבי עקיבא ודרש: את ה' אלהיך תירא - לרבות תלמידי חכמים.

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת עירובין דף יג עמוד ב**

אמר רבי אבא אמר שמואל: שלש שנים נחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל, הללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו. יצאה בת קול ואמרה: **אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן, והלכה כבית הלל.**

**Professor Chaim Saiman, Modern Orthodoxy’s Moment**

The needs of the hour present a unique challenge, but perhaps also an opportunity for Modern Orthodoxy. America is in desperate need of healing, and with some hopeful optimism, there are several reasons to think that Modern Orthodox Jews are well-positioned to show leadership in this process.

First, *Modern Orthodoxy already lives between the two Americas*. From a demographic perspective, we seem “blue”: we tend to live in or near large, coastal cities, have high rates of college and graduate-school education at elite schools, and are well represented in the learned professions. At the same time, we also have much in common with “red” America. We are religious believers who value faith and faith communities; believe in strong, traditional families; and support Israel and its specifically Jewish identity.

Second, *we are a divided community*,which in this context, is beneficial. Much of the post-election analyses showed that America’s polarization is caused by the fact that we increasingly live, work, and socialize among those we identify with politically. Add in media fragmentation, and red and blue Americans simply live in ecosystems. In many ways, this applies to American Judaism as a whole, but Modern Orthodoxy is a particularly tight community that divides more evenly between liberals, moderates, and conservatives. Most Modern Orthodox Jews can identify someone who they not only know, but respect from a moral, religious, and intellectual perspective, who voted for the other candidate. And it is precisely because of this mutual respect that we can disagree without impugning the good faith and reasonableness of our interlocutors and without sacrificing admiration, friendship, and trust. In the current climate, this is both rare and valuable.

For instance, I have close family and friends who I learn with, who I went to yeshiva with, who I daven with—who voted for a different candidate than I did. The cultural tide encourages me to discount their views as either extremists or as simply mirroring the talking points of preferred media outlets. But the healthier approach, is to build on our shared reservoir of trust and common religious language to engage in a real conversation between friends. True, sometimes this will accomplish no more than heated debates on social media. But other times, points are conceded and positions refashioned and re-evaluated in light of contrary evidence and arguments**. Our shared religious and communal life pulls us together, providing an opening for a less polarized form of politics.**

….We are divided, and it does no good to pretend otherwise. But to help revive the conditions that made America great—and great for the Jews—we will need to draw upon our covenantal and communal bonds and view Jews on the other side of the aisle not as traitors to our religious values, but as an important moderating force against the worst impulses of our political culture. **The Modern Orthodox community, which has succeeded in preserving admiration, respect, and solidarity despite sharp political disagreement, can lead the way on this front.**

**Finally and most importantly, *it is in our spiritual DNA*. Our greatest teachers, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, were rarely fans or fanatics, but almost always strove to embrace opposing principles that seemed in conflict. Modern Orthodoxy is characterized by its commitment to dualities such as Torah and science, yeshiva and military service, wisdom and piety, particularism and universalism, worshipping God and acting on behalf of man, individual and society, and so on. Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Lichtenstein taught that at the fundamental level, each side expresses a true and compelling value. It is only at a second stage, when these come into conflict, that we must employ local and contextual factors to mediate between them. From the philosophical perspective however, we aim to live both rather than vindicate one at the expense of the other.**

**While these great rabbis initially formulated their approach in the context of Talmud study and then extended it to religious thought, I have come to see its relevance in the political realm as well. Serious discussions about politics involve balancing values. Environmental policy, for example, centers on tradeoffs between our long-term ability to survive on the planet and the more immediate needs of jobs and fueling economic growth. In consumer finance, the core tradeoff is between offering cheap yet potentially harmful products that can land consumers in inescapable cycles of debt, versus fewer but safer products that may lock some out of credit markets entirely. Almost any policy debate can be similarly discussed in terms of the costs and benefits of competing values.**

But unlike our current political culture, which demands that one pick a side and then defend it to the end of the earth, a dialectal analysis does not assume one side is always right and the other wrong. Rather, each side reflects a truth about the world, and we should always seek the optimal balance in light of the evidence and arguments in the individual case.

Moreover, Rabbi Lichtenstein often taught that to the degree that we balance the interests in one way on issue A, we should strive for counterbalance on issue B. This is not only for pragmatic reasons, but because, spiritually and existentially, we cannot assess a matter honestly unless we identify with each of the competing values.

Thus, our spiritual heritage guides us away from extremes and towards moderate approaches willing to see the value of each position. This is not because we lack clear convictions. Quite the opposite, because we passionately believe in so many of them, we strive to live them all out.

**At present, Modern Orthodox Jews are assimilating into American culture by folding their Jewish identity into a political one**. I have tried to argue that this runs counter to our sociological identity, which shares commonalities with both “red” and “blue” value systems; counter to our demographic reality as a politically divided community; counter to our self-interest, in that polarization fosters extremism, and anti-Semitism tends to flourish at the extremes; and counter to our spiritual DNA, which guides us to embrace plural, opposing values.

I am not naïve. Within our community, and certainly amongst the American public, political differences will remain acute and acrimonious for the foreseeable future. And yet, what happens next is not predetermined. It will be based on decisions we make individually and how they aggregate.

Small as it may be, Modern Orthodoxy is poised to exemplify behavior that can bring us together and maybe point a way forward. We are well positioned to play a leading role in this effort. It is our time to become an *or la-goyim*, a beacon of light for the United States of America.

**Hands Across the Ocean: A Review of Rabbi Aharon Feldman’s The Eye of the Storm**

**R AHARON LICHTENSTEIN**

The brunt of the attack is borne by Zionism, and, understandably so, inasmuch as, on the one hand, it is described as “the most successful of all modern movements” (p. 2), and yet, on the other hand, it is perceived as wholly devoid of Jewish significance or commitment. Hence, the reality of its status as nevertheless “enjoying the unstinting support of the vast majority of religious Jewry” (p. 3) seems enigmatic. This anomaly is both befuddling and threatening, as it raises the specter of mass apostasy and the prospect of resultant retribution, variously described in Tanach. Hence, we are told that in order to ward off potential calamity, it was essential to reject the Zionist ethos in toto. “It is out of love for the Jewish People that I found it necessary to expose the vacuity of Zionist ideology” (p. 3).

And yet, I remain befuddled. Let me state flatly and clearly, that, on this front as on several others, I share Rabbi Feldman’s vision and his priorities. Fundamentally, we grew up with similar values and have both retained and intensified our commitment to Torah values and their place within personal and communal life. Still–or perhaps, therefore–I ask: At one end of the spectrum, is it indeed desirable– or even possible–to engage in a foray of utter denial of Jewish worth to what the Zionist enterprise, albeit regarded as a monolithic behemoth, hath wrought? Must we, may we, be so radically judgmental as we deplore certain lapses in religious motivation and result? Is the reclamation of Eretz Yisrael, accompanied by gradual progress towards rov yoshvehah alehah, Jewishly neutral? Can we blandly overlook the infant country’s commitment to kelitah, arguably the most monumental initiative of post- Biblical chesed, as if only atheists and Christians valued caritas?....

This volume and many of its components were written with considerable gusto; indeed, with no small modicum of anger.

Finally, a note regarding both tone and substance, I presume that I am not the only reader who would have preferred a more balanced and judicious critique to the rancor that, at times, fills pages with total denigration of Zionism. Something to the effect that Zionism and the State it had established had contributed much to the character of Jewish life, but that much of its vision and reality remains woefully deficient, so that Torah Jewry needs to strive creatively, and, if necessary, to fight vigorously, in order to restore our full commitment to our national heritage. Some recognition of Religious Zionist claims regarding Divine assistance would be far too much to expect, and for this purpose, not crucial. What I have suggested, substantively and not just tactically, would still be quite meaningful, however. I believe that this formulation approaches the views of the Ponevehzher Rav, as I knew him. I also recall that when a rosh yeshivah from a prominent anti-Zionist Torah family was taken to tour Yamit, he remarked, with intuitive admiration– and perhaps with flashes of memories of Eastern Europe–“Zay vos Yidden haben da oyfgeboyt!” (“Just see what Jews have accomplished here!”) And I hope that an analogous response could continue to fill a capacious Torah heart today.

**George Washington farewell address**

I have already intimated to you the danger of parties in the State, with particular reference to founding them on geographical discriminations. **Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you, in the most solemn manner, against the baneful effects of the spirit of party, generally.**

This spirit, unfortunately, is inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind. It exists under different shapes, in all governments, more or less stifled, controlled or repressed; but in those of the popular form, it is seen in its greatest rankness, and is truly their worst enemy.

The alternate dominion of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which, in different ages and countries, has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism; but this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries which result, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an Individual....

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, God Loves Those Who Argue**

I have become increasingly concerned about the assault on free speech taking place throughout the West, particularly in university campuses. [**1**](https://www.yeshiva.co/siteprojects/AngularApp/dist/en/#1b) This is being done in the name of "safe space," that is, space in which you are protected against hearing views which might cause you distress, "trigger warnings" [**2**](https://www.yeshiva.co/siteprojects/AngularApp/dist/en/#2b) and "micro-aggressions," that is, any remark that someone might find offensive even if no offence is meant.
….What is striking about Judaism, and we see this starkly in this week’s parsha, is that argument and the hearing of contrary views is of the essence of the religious life. Moses argues with God. That is one of the most striking things about him. He argues with Him on their first encounter at the burning bush. Four times he resists God’s call to lead the Israelites to freedom, until God finally gets angry with him (Ex. 3:1–4:7). More significantly, at the end of the parsha he says to God:"Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Why did You send me? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all." (Ex. 5: 22-23).

This is extraordinary language for a human being to use to God. But Moses was not the first to do so. The first was Abraham, who said, on hearing of God’s plan to destroy the cities of the plain, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18: 25)…

Equally striking is the fact that the sages continued the tradition and gave it a name: argument for the sake of heaven, [**7**](https://www.yeshiva.co/siteprojects/AngularApp/dist/en/#7b) defined as debate for the sake of truth as opposed to victory. [**8**](https://www.yeshiva.co/siteprojects/AngularApp/dist/en/#8b) **The result is that Judaism is, perhaps uniquely, a civilization all of whose canonical texts are anthologies of arguments. Midrash operates on the principle that there are "seventy faces" to Torah and thus that every verse is open to multiple interpretations. The Mishnah is full of paragraphs of the form, "Rabbi X says this while Rabbi Y says that." The Talmud says in the name of God himself, about the conflicting views of the schools of Hillel and Shammai, that "These and those are the words of the living God."** [**9**](https://www.yeshiva.co/siteprojects/AngularApp/dist/en/#9b)
A standard edition of Mikraot Gedolot consists of the biblical text surrounded by multiple commentaries and even commentaries on the commentaries. The standard edition of the Babylonian Talmud has the text surrounded by the often conflicting views of Rashi and the Tosafists. Moses Maimonides, writing his masterpiece of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah, took the almost unprecedented step of presenting only the halakhic conclusion without the accompanying arguments. The ironic but predictable result was that the Mishneh Torah was eventually surrounded by an endless array of commentaries and arguments. **In Judaism there is something holy about argument.**
Why so? First, because only God can see the totality of truth. For us, mere mortals who can see only fragments of the truth at any one time, there is an irreducible multiplicity of perspectives. We see reality now one way, now another. The Torah provides us with a dramatic example in its first two chapters, which give us two creation accounts, both true, from different vantage points. **The different voices of priest and prophet, Hillel and Shammai, philosopher and mystic, historian and poet, each capture something essential about the spiritual life. Even within a single genre, the sages noted that "No two prophets prophesy in the same style."** [**10**](https://www.yeshiva.co/siteprojects/AngularApp/dist/en/#10b) **Torah is a conversation scored for many voices.**



“Morality binds and blinds. It binds us into ideological teams that fight each other as though the fate of the world depended on our side winning each battle. It blinds us to the fact that each team is composed of good people who have something important to say.”

― Jonathan Haidt, The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion

**Wired Magazine**

Haidt's thesis is that we humans all have five foundations of morality – five sources of intuitions and emotions that drive everything we do:

Harm/Care

Fairness/Reciprocity

In-Group/Loyalty

Authority/Respect

Purity/Sanctity

Both conservatives and liberals all agree on the first two points; but the real trouble comes on the final three. As Haidt said in regard to those points, "We can say that liberals have a kind of a two-channel, or two-foundation morality. Conservatives have more of a five-foundation, or five-channel morality."