

# Jewish Logic

# Korach and friends to Moshe

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וְעַל-אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב-לְכֶם כִּי כָל-הָעֵדָה כֹּהִים כְּלָמָּה קָדְשִׁים וּבְתוֹכָם יְהוָה וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל-קְהַל יְהוָה׃

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?"

# Rashi from Midrash

He took 250 men... and he attired them in robes of pure purple wool. They then came and stood before Moses and said to him, “Is a garment that is entirely of purple subject to the law of Zizith or is it exempt”? He replied to them: “It is subject to that law”. Whereupon they began to jeer at him: “Is this possible? A robe of any different coloured material, one thread of purple attached to it exempts it, and this that is entirely of purple should it not exempt itself (i.e. ipso facto be exempt) from the law of “Zizith”? (Midrash Tanchuma, Korach 2).

and..

Likewise, the Midrash tells us of another provocation. "Does a house which is filled with Torah scrolls still require a *mezuzah* on its doorpost?" Korah asked. Moses replied in the affirmative. Korah retorted: "If one brief section of the Torah placed inside the *mezuzah* [*the Shema* and *vehayah im shamo'af*] satisfies the *mitzvah* requirement, most certainly a multitude of scrolls which contain many portions should! Such halakhic decisions do not emanate from God but are fabrications" (Num. R. 18). Korah insisted that to require a *mezuzah* under such circumstances violated elementary logic.

# The Rav, quoted by KTM article

The Rav elaborates on both of these points in his article The “Common-Sense” Rebellion Against Torah Authority. Korach thought that mitzvot were based on common sense. Why would wearing an entire garment of tcheilet not fulfill the mitzvah if a pair of tzizit with just one tcheilet strand does? Since Korach perceived mitzvot as being based on common sense, he therefore declared that all rational people have the right to interpret Jewish law according to their best understanding. There’s no need for gedolim or Torah authorities, since we could all be our own authority by just using common sense. Korach’s approach is problematic, for it fails to understand the relationship between Hokhma, knowledge, and Da’at, intelligence, in Judaism. The Rav writes that:

“Korach’s appeal to common sense in Judaism was basically a claim that only da’at, and not hokhmah, is involved in the application of Halakhah... The halakhic legal system, as a hokhmah, has its own methodology, mode of analysis, conceptualized rationale, even as do mathematics and physics... the Oral Law has its own epistemological approach, which can be understood only by a lamdan who has mastered its methodology and its abundant material. Just as mathematics is more than a group of equations, and physics is more than a collection of natural laws, so, too, the Halakhah is more than a compilation of religious laws. It has its own logos and method of thinking and is an autonomous self-integrated system. The Halakhah need not make common sense any more than mathematics and scientific conceptualized systems need to accommodate themselves to common sense.”

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# The Rav

Korach was an intelligent man, pike'ah hayah (Rashi, ibid. v. 7). He would certainly concede that there were specialized fields in which only experts who have studied extensively over many years are entitled to be recognized as authorities. The intrusion of common-sense judgments in these areas by unlearned laymen would be both presumptuous and misleading. Korach would not have dared to interfere with Bezalel's architectural and engineering expertise in the construction of the Tabernacle, the Mishkan, because construction skills were dearly beyond his competence. Today, reasonable people concede the authority of mathematicians, physicists, and physicians in their areas of expertise, and would not think of challenging them merely on the basis of common sense. Why, then, are so many well intentioned people ready to question the authority of the Torah scholar, the lamdan, in his area of specialized knowledge?b

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**ibid.**

Korach argued, using the mitzvah of tzitzit as an illustration of his point of view, that the blue thread of the tzitzit was meant to make us think of distant horizons, of infinity, and of the mysterious link between the blue sea and the blue sky. The mezuzah, he argued, is intended to increase our awareness of God and to invoke His protection over our homes. Why, then, is it necessary to limit this symbolism to one thread or to the doorpost? Why not extend it to the whole garment and to the entire house? If blue, in the case of tzitzit, is able to evoke feelings of Godliness, then total blueness of the garment should certainly be able to do so. The same reasoning applies to the mezuzah. The mitzvah is thus reduced to the level of an inspirational means and not an end in itself. From the standpoint of religious subjectivism [which means that religion is only about what experience an individual, the subject, has] and common sense, Korach's argument seems quite cogent [convincing]. In response to Korach, we feel it necessary to reaffirm the traditional Jewish position that there are two levels in religious observance, the objective outer mitzvah and the subjective inner experience that accompanies it. Both the deed and the feeling constitute the total religious experience.



## Kal vachomer

**From where** is it derived that one is obligated to recite blessings **before** eating? **You said** that it can be derived through **an *a fortiori* inference**: **When one is satisfied, he** is obligated to **recite a blessing** and thank God for food; **when he is hungry, all the more so** that he should recite a blessing to offer thanks for the food he will eat.

# Gezera shava

דִּבְרוּ בְּמַיִם, וְהִסְדּוּמִים שֶׁנִּדְּוָנוּ בְּאֵשׁ, מִיָּיִן לֵיתֵן אֶת הָאֲמוּר בְּזָה בְּזָה, תִּלְמוּד לֹאֲמַר רַבָּה, רַבָּה לְגִזְרָה שְׁוֵהָ

Flood

Sedom and Gemorah

Their bad things were rabbah

their sins were rabbah, big

Water

Fire

Internal logic to decide Jewish law

Mechaber: R. Yosef karo  
Rif, Rambam and Rosh

Ramah:  
Most rishonim

Maharshal

What makes sense in the Gemara

Mishnah Berurah  
Most acharonim

# Aruch Hashulchan

## The minhag



Rav Schcachter  
The accepted line of pesak

Deference to the Behag etc.