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**Orthodox Lawmakers Defy NYC Mayor, Cutting Chains Off a Brooklyn Playground**

**By Shira Hanau/JTA**

[](https://static.timesofisrael.com/jewishstanddev/uploads/2020/06/200616_Parks_21835-1-2160x1200-1.jpg)

*From left, City Councilman Kalman Yeger, New York State Assemblyman Simcha Eichenstein and State Sen. Simcha Felder open up Kolbert Playground in Brooklyn, June 16, 2020. (Photo by Benjamin Kanter)*

In the space of just 48 hours, Orthodox lawmakers in New York have gone from calling on the city’s mayor to open playgrounds, to threatening to open the parks themselves, to actually cutting the chains off a Brooklyn playground.

State Assemblyman Simcha Eichenstein, City Councilman Kalman Yeger and State Sen. Simcha Felder joined local radio personality Heshy Tischler on Tuesday morning to cut the chains off a Brooklyn playground gate. The previous night, videos circulated on social media showing Tischler cutting the chains of a playground to cheers from a crowd of adults and children.

Tuesday morning’s action was the latest in an evolving battle over the reopening of city playgrounds as Orthodox families face a long summer in crowded apartments without sleepaway camps for their children.

While New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has allowed local governments to open playgrounds as they see fit with the state moving toward reopening, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio has declined to open them, citing his fears that playgrounds could serve as vectors of disease as the city battles the coronavirus pandemic.

The mayor’s decision set up a battle that quickly brewed into a war. The three Orthodox lawmakers headlined a protest Sunday calling on de Blasio to reopen the playgrounds. By Monday evening, Tischler had cut the chains on one playground and Felder issued a threat: If the mayor did not reverse his decision, he and his fellow Orthodox lawmakers would take matters into their own hands.

By Tuesday morning, they did just that.

At his daily media briefing, de Blasio was asked about Monday evening’s chain cuttings.

“We’re not going to allow people to take the law into their own hands,” he said, though he was not asked and did not comment on the fact that elected officials had participated in the chain cutting themselves.

Speaking by phone later Tuesday morning, Yeger told JTA that police officers arrived on the scene after the chains were removed and asked who had cut them. He cautioned the group against answering the question. “I think there’s enough going on in this city to keep police officers busy than what’s going on in a park,” Yeger said. No arrests were made.

Several notable Republicans weighed in on Twitter Monday night with statements of support for Tischler and the protesters.

“Bravo,” Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas tweeted.

“Total double standard → New York’s mayor appears to be discriminating against Jewish funerals, schools, and playgrounds in enforcing his coronavirus shutdown,” Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California, the House minority leader, posted.

And this from Scott Walker, the former governor of Wisconsin: “I love it. Since it was a protest, it must be okay …”

*Reprinted from the June 16, 2020 dispatch of the JTA (Jewish Telegraphic Agency)*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Parshat Korach**



There are always differences within a team regarding the role and efficacy of leadership and leaders. All leaders are subject to criticism and second guessing. It comes with the job and there is no escaping it. Nevertheless, when the criticism descends to the level of personal abuse, and when it is obviously motivated by jealousy and other susceptible causes, then the criticism crosses the line of acceptability and becomes almost slander.

We see in the Torah reading of this week that Korach had criticism of Moses and Aaron regarding their leadership roles. This criticism, as the Torah indicates to us very clearly, stems from personal motives of jealousy, and because Korach was convinced that he and his family were entitled to many more privileges of leadership than they were given.

**A Personal Vendetta**

So, it became a personal vendetta. But no one likes to mount a personal vendetta without having some sort of ulterior super-cause by which to justify it. It was not possible for Korach to say, "I want more power, therefore, give it to me." Instead, he says that Moses and Aaron are lording it over the Jewish people unnecessarily. They have no mandate to do so. All people are holy, and, therefore, everyone is entitled to their say and their share of the privileges of leadership.

**Simply a Power Grab**

This is a populist demand. It is common throughout all human history that the road to obtaining power is to cloak it in some great moral cause. In human history, there have been instances when the moral cause was present. All those rebellions and revolutions were justified and necessary. However, I believe in many instances in human history, it was simply a power grab.

People felt they were entitled, and they resented that others had the power. And, for them to gain that power, they would resort to any means possible. We can see that this plays out in our current world as well. During political election campaigns, especially on the national level, it is no longer simply a question of ideas or policies. It has deteriorated into being a question of personalities and the hunger - the insatiable hunger - for power.

Moses is taken aback by the ferocity of the attack against him. Moses, who is the most humble of all human beings, who shirked power and begged the Lord to allow someone else to lead the Jewish people, this Moses is deeply wounded and aggrieved by the slanderous accusations against him. He feels that these accusations must be refuted. If Korach, so to speak, escapes unscathed from this incident of an open personal power grab, then he will set a precedent for others in the future.

**Subjected to Vendettas and Personal Acrimony**

And then Jewish leaders will always be subjected to such vendettas and personal acrimony. So Moses responds, not in order to justify himself, even though he's upset as well. "I have not taken anything from anybody, Moses says, I have not lived at the public troughs, I am not guilty of any corruption, I have been as selfless as I can."

But that is not the issue. The issue is whether an individual can mount an attack on the leadership of the nation based solely on personal desire and political arrogance. And that, Moses feels, must be rejected and refuted in a miraculous and painful way.  He asks the Lord to create what had already been created in the six days of creation, the mouth of the earth that would swallow up Korach and his cohorts,  and prove once and for all that a person has to be careful to separate noble causes from personal greed and avarice.

This is reinforced when the staff of Aaron blossoms in the tabernacle while the other staffs remain dead wood. Again, Aaron is the last person that can be accused of wanting power or privilege. He is the lover of peace, the gentle arbiter between families and communities. He is the symbol of G-dly service and of concern for his fellow human beings. The attack on him is doubly unjustified. It is abundantly clear that Korach is acting out of personal motives. This is a power grab, which has no place in Jewish life, and the Lord, so to speak, performs miracles that prevent it from happening. It should remain a lesson and paradigm for all future generations as well.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Parshas Korach**

**The Darkness of Physicality**

By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier

Founder of TheSmuz.com



*“And Korach, son of Yizhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, and Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav, together with Ohn, son of Peles, sons of Reuvain.”* – *Bamidbar* 16:1

Korach was not chosen for a position as head of his *shevet*. He felt entitled to it, and his jealousy drove him to rebel against Moshe and HASHEM. Recognizing that he couldn’t stand alone, he gathered two hundred and fifty leaders of the nation, and they swore their allegiance to Korach and his cause. The plan was to depose Moshe as leader of the Jewish people, and in his stead appoint Korach. In the end, their rebellion failed, and every man, woman, and child was swallowed by the ground.

Of this group, only one man survived: Ohn, son of Peles. The *Medrash* explains that it was his wife who saved him. She said to him, “What do you gain from all of this? If Moshe wins, you are but a lackey. And if Korach wins you are still but a lackey.”

Her logic penetrated his heart. “You are right,” he said, “but what can I do? I took an oath to remain loyal to the group. They will come tomorrow to get me, and I will be forced to join them.”

His wife said, “Listen to my advice. I will stand outside our tent and uncover my hair. These are all holy men. When they see a woman not properly attired, they will run away.”

She then gave him enough wine to drink till he fell asleep drunk, and she tied him to the bed. Early the next morning, she went outside, uncovered her hair, and waited. When the first members of Korach’s party came to bring Ohn to the demonstration, they saw a woman with her hair uncovered outside his tent. They immediately walked away.

She remained there throughout the day. No man dared come to the tent. Then the time came for the standoff. When Korach’s men were standing together, they were swallowed up alive, but Ohn was not amongst them. This is a fulfillment of the verse, “A wise woman builds her house…” (*Dos Zakainim*)

**How Could They Have Been So Foolish?**

This *Dos Zakainim* is very difficult to understand. Korach’s group were men of great piety. The Torah calls them “leaders of the nation, men of reputation.” And here we see an example of how careful they were in regards to *mitzvah* observance. Even though Ohn played a pivotal role in their cause, the mere sight of a woman with her hair uncovered made them run away. So how could these great people do something so egregious as to rebel against HASHEM and His chosen representative?

The answer to this question can best be understood when we focus on the impossibility of free will.

When HASHEM took the *neshama* and put it into this world, it was to give man the opportunity to make himself into what he will be for eternity. The essence of our purpose here is to choose what is right and proper and to turn away from what is wrong and evil.

The problem, however, is that those options are set far apart and leave little choice. No thinking person would deliberately choose for himself a path of destruction. Every *mitzvah* helps us grow. Every sin damages us. HASHEM warned us to do this and not to do that because it is good for us and will benefit us for eternity. So how does man have free will? He will choose good and only good — because it’s so clearly in his best interest.

To allow for free will, HASHEM put the brilliant *neshama* into a body that clouds its vision and darkens its sight. The desires and inclinations of the body don’t remain separate from me. They are mixed into my very essence and play out in my conscious mind. When I open my eyes in the morning, it isn’t my body that wants to just lie there unmoving – I am lazy.

At lunch, it isn’t my stomach that cries out for food – I am hungry. I am both the brilliant *neshama* and the base animal instinct. And so, I want to live a life of meaning, and I want to live completely for the moment. I want to be good, proper and noble, and I just don’t care. I want this and I want that. Which one is the real me? The answer is both. And I am constantly changing, constantly in flux. Because these desires come from within me, they also distort my vision. When I desire something, my vision can become so blinded that I can hotly pursue something damaging to me, and not only fail to see the danger involved, but even begin to see it as an ultimate good.

**The Darkness of Physicality**

The *Mesillos Yesharim* (*Perek* 4) explains this with a parable.

Imagine a man walking at night on an unlit country road. Because of the darkness, he is danger of tripping. There are, however, two types of hazards he faces. The first is that he won’t see the pit in front of him, and he will fall in without even realizing the peril.

The second danger, however, is more severe. The darkness can fool him so that he sees an object, but mistakes it for something else. He may look at a pillar in the distance and see it as a man. Or he might see a man and mistake him for a pillar. This menace is more severe because even if he were to alert to the risk, he would ignore the warning signs because he sees with his own eyes that there is no danger.

Physicality is like the darkness of night. It blinds a person and doesn’t allow him to see the danger in front of him. There are two types of mistakes that it causes. The first is that it doesn’t allow him to see the hazard. He will continue on a path of life that is self-destructive, and he won’t even recognize where he is headed until he is too far down the road to change course.

The second mistake, however, is far more dangerous. It is when man is so fooled by the darkness of physicality that he sees the good as if it were bad and the bad as if it were good. At this point, warning a man about the danger is useless. He sees it, but views it as something virtuous. And so, he will clutch to evil against all warnings and against all wisdom because in his blindness, it appears as good.

**Korach and His Congregation**

This seems to be the answer to Korach and his people. They were Torah scholars, and they were holy Jews. And yet, they were blind. Korach was blinded by jealousy. He then presented arguments and proofs to the two hundred and fifty men that Moshe was making up his own set of rules. He was dynamic and convincing.

Once the group accepted Korach’s version of reality, they held fast to it. And then even the threat of a gruesome death didn’t faze them. It wasn’t that they didn’t see the danger. They did. But they saw it as scare tactic, a way of getting them to abandon that which they knew was right. So it didn’t matter how pious they were; they were now on a new holy mission to depose the power-hungry Moshe. And sometimes the truth is even worth dying for. The problem was that they had accepted falsehood as truth.

This concept is very applicable to us as we too are human, and we too must be ever aware of the danger of ideologies that justify that which is evil and self-destructive. The difficulty is that when we are caught up in them, we don’t recognize them for what they are.

A person’s convictions can drive him to greatness or bring him to the abyss — the only distinction being whether or not those convictions are correct. HASHEM wants us to succeed, and in every generation He provides Torah leaders to guide us. The only way that a person can know whether his ideologies are right is by consulting with the accepted Torah leaders of his time. When a person puts away his agenda and his bias and asks guidance on the Torah approach, HASHEM directs him to the truth.

*Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [Shmuz on the Parsha book](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).*

**Reflecting on the “Kohen” that**

**Resides in Every Jewish Soul**

From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l



Everything in this week's Torah portion, Korach, seems to be centered around the concept of priesthood.

The portion begins with the challenge of Korach against Aaron the High Priest. It concludes with the gifts the Jewish people are obligated to give to the kohanim (priests).

Priesthood, it appears, is an important element in our service of G-d, with Korach symbolizing those negative forces that seek to impede our spiritual progress.

Kohanim are distinguished by their total devotion to G-d; indeed, the Torah tells us that "G-d is their portion."

Therefore, when a Jew gives the kohanim the special offerings enumerated in the Torah he is, in effect, making that offering to G-d.

These gifts express the willingness of every Jew to dedicate himself to the service of the Creator, according to the principle, "All the best parts belong to G-d."

A Jew must reserve for G-d only the very best of whatever he possesses -- even if this goes against his nature.

Although without the Holy Temple (may it be immediately rebuilt) we cannot fulfill these mitzvot in the literal sense, the principle of utilizing only our very best for holy purposes applies in every place and in all circumstances.

The best portion of our material and spiritual wealth (time and energy) are to be reserved for the "kohen" that exists within -- the holy Jewish soul -- to G-d and to His Torah.

"Best," as it applies to the hours of the day, is synonymous with "first."

As soon as the Jew opens his eyes in the morning he says "Modeh Ani," thanking G-d for restoring his soul. Then, before he begins his workday, he climbs the rungs of prayer and studies the Torah's Divine wisdom. Laying down this firm foundation is what guarantees the Jew success in his more mundane daily pursuits.

Korach's argument challenged this concept.

"Is a tallit that is entirely blue required to have tzitzit?" he and his followers demanded sarcastically of Moses. "Does a house full of holy books still need a mezuza on the door post?"

If every Jew is holy by virtue of his G-dly soul, Korach claimed, the Divine Presence already rests among the Jewish people -- and it is therefore unnecessary to dedicate the "best parts" for holy purposes.

Moses' answer, however, was clear and unequivocable.

A Jew must not content himself with the innate holiness with which he is born, but must always strive to attain higher and higher levels of spirituality.

Yes, the all-blue tallit does require tzitzit, and the room full of holy books still needs the extra measure of holiness of the mezuza.

May we speedily merit the fulfillment of "all the best parts belong to G-d," with the rebuilding of the Holy Temple.

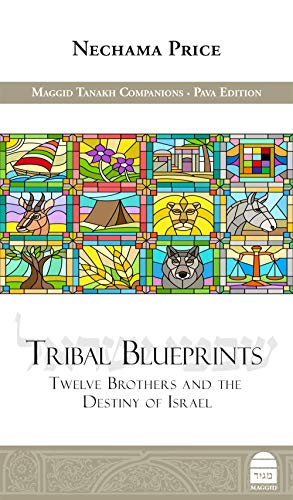
*Reprinted from the Parshat Korach 5755 edition of the Lubavitch Youth Organization. Adapted from Likutei Sichot of the Rebbe.*

**Jewish Spiritual Genealogy as**

**Interpreted by Nechama Price**

**By Daniel Keren**

(“Tribal Blueprints: Twelve Brothers and the Destiny of Israel” by Nechama Price, 288 pages, Maggid Books, Jerusalem, 2020)

During the last year, Israel had three Knesset (Parliamentary) elections to try and form a government. Just when it seemed that the third effort would fail, a “miracle” occurred and a coalition government was formed. This just goes to show how different and difficult Jews can be.

The old joke is told about two Jews shipwrecked on an isolated and deserted island. After the passage of a number of years they are finally found by a passing ship. The rescuers are perplexed to discover three shuls. One for each shipwrecked Yid and a third that neither “self-respecting” shipwrecked Jew would set foot in.

Mrs. Nechama Price has just published her first book and it examines why our ancestors, the Twelve Brothers (the Shiftei Kah) who established the Twelve Tribes of Israel may have evolved into the unique progenitors of today’s Jewish nation as we and the world have come to know and just how those spiritual genetics continue to influence their descendants thousands of years later.

Mrs. Price is a Senior Lecturer in Bible and Judaic Studies at Stern College for Women and is the Director of Yeshiva University’s Graduate Program in Advanced Studies (GPATS). She graduated from Stern College, GPATS and the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration. She lives in Bergenfield, NJ with her husband and their four children. Mrs. Price has lectured widely across America.

In her acknowledgements, Mrs. Price credits that the idea for her new book on the unique emotional and hence spiritual development of the Twelve Brothers were traced to her two post high school years at MMY (Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim) in Israel and her subsequent studies at Stern College and GPATS.

**Desires and Talents that Have Shaped**

**The Destinies of Jews to this Day**

In Mrs. Price’s introduction to “Tribal Blueprints,” she declares “When studying the narratives in the Book of Genesis, some of the most captivating stories appear in conjunction with the tribes of Israel. While these brothers often act together, and collectively beget what we know today as Benei Yisrael, it is clear that each of our patriarch Yaakov’s sons has a specific role within the family, as well as a distinct personality shaped by stories that describe his particular fears, desires and talents.” Obviously those fears, desires and talents have also shaped the destinies of their descendants thousands of years later.

While I tend to get nervous when reading books by professors of Judaica, especially at secular colleges where many of their students may be gentiles and they tend to try and justify themselves by quoting non-Jewish sources, I was struck by Mrs. Price’s consistent use of traditional Jewish opinions such as those of the Radak, the Sforno, the Ramban, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, Rashi, the Hizkuni, and the Abarbanel.

Many of Mrs. Price’s psychological interpretations make this reviewer admit he had never thought of the action of Yaakov, his wives Rachel and Leah and that of his sons in that particular light. On the other hand, some of the author’s reflections seem too much like trying to make a point that just doesn’t have that much validity in this reviewer’s opinion.

**A Respect for the Subjects of Her Analysis**

Either way, whether you accept some of the author’s interpretations, you will find that “Tribal Blueprints” will definitely affect the way you in the future read both the Chumash and the Tanach. Unlike many Judaica or Bible professors who are more interested in gaining points with their colleagues, Mrs. Price demonstrates a strong respect for the subjects of her analysis – the Twelve Brothers - the sons after the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and the Matriarchs (Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Leah), founders of the Jewish nation.

An important lesson to be derived from reading “Twelve Blueprints” is to recognize that each and every one of us is a carbon copy of our holy ancestors who as Mrs. Price shows in her book have had long lasting influences on subsequent generations of the Jewish people.

And with that in mind, we should certainly try and realize that our actions to our children or siblings and maybe even parents or neighbors have serious consequences. And we should act in a manner that would give positive encouragement to others and that would contribute to making this world a better place for our having walked on the planet that G-d created with the purpose that we like our forefathers, matriarchs and the Twelve Brothers bring down and make the Shechina (Divine Presence) more clear for all humanity to see and recognize that we are truly a holy nation of priests bringing enlightenment to all of the other nations in the world as we anticipate the coming of the Messianic era.

“Tribal Blueprints: Twelve Brothers and the Destiny of Israel” by Nechama Price is available in Jewish bookstores, select general bookstores and on various online websites or by contacting the publisher by clicking [www.maggidbooks.com](http://www.maggidbooks.com)

*Reprinted from the June 12, 2020 edition of The Jewish Connection.*

**Knowing Who I Want to Be**

**By Rabbi Joey Haber**



Parashat Shelah tells one of the most tragic stories in the entire Torah – the story of the spies.

*Beneh Yisrael* were about to enter the Land of Israel.  Moshe sent a team of spies to take a tour of the land and then tell the people what it’s like.  The idea was to get the people excited about *Eretz Yisrael*.  Instead, the exact opposite occurred.

The spies came back with a negative report, scaring the people by telling them about the powerful armies of the nations who live there, insisting that *Beneh Yisrael* wouldn’t stand a chance fighting against them.  They also said that in any event, the land is a bad place to live.

Hashem was angry at the people for not believing Him, and for rejecting the land that was promised to them and where they were destined to build their country.  He decreed that they would journey in the desert for 40 years, during which time that generation would die, and it would be their children who would enter the land.

In issuing this decree, Hashem announced that *Beneh Yisrael* יהיו**רועים** במדבר ארביעם שנה – “will be **grazing** in the desert for forty years” (14:33).

Why does Hashem speak of the people as **GRAZING** in the desert like sheep?  What does this even mean?

The commentators explain that a shepherd’s job is to bring the sheep to pasture so they properly grow and develop.  And this was Hashem’s intention when He decreed that *Beneh Yisrael* would spend 40 years in the desert.  They needed time **to grow, to transform, to become the people they needed to be**.

The fact that they did not want to go into *Eretz Yisrael* showed that they weren’t the people they needed to be.  They weren’t people who wanted to be Hashem’s nation.  They needed time to become the nation they were supposed to be.

They needed to “graze” – to develop, to grow, to ask themselves, “Who do we want to be?”

Many times, people find themselves confused and conflicted.  They’re not sure which parties they should be going to or not going to.  They’re not sure how they should be dressing.  They’re not sure how they should be spending their long Shabbat afternoons.  They’re not sure how to allocate their time between work, their spouse, their children, their friends, and Torah study.

All this becomes much easier once we decide WHO WE WANT TO BE.

Deciding “**who I want to be**” is much, much more important than deciding “**what I want to do**.”  Once I decide who I want to be, the other choices become clear and obvious.

Once we firmly decide that we want to be a devoted, attentive, kind spouse, it becomes much easier to be one.

Once we firmly decide that we want to be an engaged parent, it becomes much easier to make time for our kids.

Once we firmly decide we want to be serious Torah Jews, it becomes much easier to make the decisions that the Torah wants us to make.

In order to do this, we need to make the time to “**GRAZE**,” to think, to ask ourselves these very important questions.  Just like our ancestors needed to make the decision of what kind of nation they were going to be, we need to take the time to answer the critical question, **“Who do I want to be?”**

Once we answer that question, all other decisions become so much easier.

*Reprinted from this week’s iTorah.com website.*