

⚠️ EARLY SUMMER BREAK The Kollel is on recess from midday Sunday, June 18 till Monday night, June 26.

DELVING DEEPER

Divine Checkmate

RABBI DOVID SPETNER



FOR ALMOST THIRTY YEARS, I HAVE BEEN troubled by a very difficult question. Just this week, I've finally found a satisfactory answer.

Let's start with the problem.

One of the most fundamental points in Judaism, making it different than any other belief, is that we as a people experienced a Revelation from Hashem Himself and heard Him appoint Moshe as His prophet. Hashem told Moshe:

Behold, I will come to you in the thickness of cloud, in order that the nation shall hear when I speak to you, and they will also believe in you forever. (Sh'mos 19:9)

The Rambam (Maimonides, *Yesodei haTorah* 8:1) explains that this is the only basis on which we believe in Moshe and the Torah that he gave us, because miracles can always be explained away. Prophecy, in which Hashem speaks to a person directly, as happened to the Jewish people, cannot be explained away.

All of the miracles that Moshe performed, continues the Rambam, were performed only for practical necessity. The people were being pursued by the Egyptians, so Moshe split the sea. They needed food, so Moshe brought down the *man*. Korach questioned Moshe's authority, so Moshe had him swallowed up by the earth.

However, look at Moshe's words in this week's Torah portion.

With this you shall know that Hashem sent me to do all these deeds, that it was not from my own

heart. If these men die as all men die, and the fate of all men will be visited upon them, then Hashem has not sent me. But if Hashem creates a Creation, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they descend alive into the grave, you will know that these men have provoked Hashem. (16:28–30)

Korach was challenging Moshe's very authority as Hashem's conduit for the laws of the Torah, as the appointment of Aharon was part of Torah law. Yet Moshe wanted to disprove Korach merely by performing a miracle! The Rambam, as we saw before, cites this very miracle as serving a practical need and not being any kind of basis of faith!

Meshech Chochma, without even asking our question, provides us with the answer. He writes that when Moshe said that if Hashem wouldn't perform this miracle, "Hashem has not sent me," Moshe was putting the entire Torah on the line—and there was great danger that he might undermine our entire belief!

To understand more clearly what Moshe was doing, *Meshech Chochma* directs us to what Midrash Tanchuma (par. 8) writes about Moshe's ultimatum. The midrash compares the situation to the marriage of a princess. The king has appointed a trustee for his daughter, who has in his possession proof of the bride's fidelity during her engagement. During the wedding meal,

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THIS WEEK IN JEWISH HISTORY

RABBI MOSHE TZVI CRYSTAL

On 27 Sivan, 5762 (1912), Ellis Island opened a kosher kitchen, where Jewish immigrants could access free food while being processed. The kosher kitchen project was spearheaded by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS). Ellis Island officially began processing immigrants on January 1, 1892, and 12 million people would eventually pass through on their way to America. The peak years of admittance were between 1900 and 1914, when 5,000–10,000 people were admitted every day; the highest annual number was 1,004,756 immigrants, in 1907. From 1880 to 1924, over 2 million Jews were admitted to the U.S., and most of them passed through Ellis Island, with 484,000 admitted in 1910 alone. 🥂

Kollel Women's Learning

Shabbos Afternoon Series

on alternating weeks
all summer. 5–6 PM

Shabbos, June 24: Rabbi Yitzchok Preis

What Dossan & Aviram Teach Us About Shalom



at the Travis residence, 6820 Elbrook Avenue
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Divine Checkmate CONTINUED


One of the guests stood up in front of [the king] and cursed the trustee. He said to him, "The princess [has been disloyal to her betrothed]!"

The trustee rose before the king and told him, "If you don't remove this man for public execution, I will declare that there is [in fact, no proof of her fidelity]!"

The king immediately said, "It's best that I kill this guy, so the trustee won't cast aspersions on my daughter!"

Despite Korach's claims that he was defending the honor of the people, and that "all the congregation are holy," Moshe knew that Korach was aware that, logically, Moshe's decision to appoint his brother Aharon was unassailable. Korach was simply determined to rebel, wickedly, against Hashem himself.

Moshe decided, therefore, to "checkmate" Hashem, as it were. The only person on earth who could undo the indisputability of the Revelation was Moshe himself. He had been empowered by Hashem with the right to assert that everything he said was the expression of Hashem's will—even if he were to say that Hashem at some point had undone His appointment of Moshe as His prophet!

The miraculous way in which the earth swallowed Korach was not itself proof that Moshe was Hashem's true emissary. In the end, it is only the Revelation at Sinai that forms the basis of our belief in the Torah, as delivered the hands of Moshe. Killing Korach was, as the Rambam writes, just a necessary, practical miracle, to quell an irrational rebellion against Hashem. 

A RIDDLE FOR YOU


Over the course of a calendar year, in most shuls, what one verse in the Torah is read the most times?

The answer will appear next week..

LAST WEEK'S RIDDLE:

Q When would a person be **Rabbinically** forbidden to do something if his intention is to fulfill a Torah commandment, but allowed to do the very same act if he did not intend to fulfill any mitzvah?

A It is Rabbinically forbidden to put on *t'fillin* on Shabbos, if one intends to fulfill the mitzvah. However if a person were to put them on in private, without any intention of fulfilling a mitzvah, it would be permitted.

(See *Mishnah B'rurah* 301:7 and *Aruch haShulchan* 30. This is aside from the possibility of transgressing *Bal Tosif*, the prohibition against adding a mitzvah.) 

At the Kollel

EVERY DAY

EVERY WEEK

"Dirshu" Gemara Shiur (Maseches Y'vamos)

Rabbi Yitzchok Preis.....
Sunday 7:15–8:15 AM
Monday–Friday 5:50–6:45 AM

Kollel Yisgaber K'ari (amud-a-day of Mishnah B'rurah)

Rabbi Chaim Heinemann.....
Monday–Friday 6:55–7:20 AM

Daf Yomi

Rabbi Meir Minster.....
Sunday–Thursday 8–8:45 PM
Shabbos (at CZE) 1:00 pre-mincha

Night Seder Chabura

in the Annex Library
(Maseches Avodah Zara)
led by Rabbi Tzvi Fishman
Sunday–Thursday 9–9:55 PM
followed by Ma'ariv at 9:55


KEY:  Beginners  Intermediate  Advanced  for men and women

Chavrusos are available for private and group learning—

speak to Rabbi Chaim Heinemann! weekdays noon–1 PM • Sun.–Thurs. 8–9:45 PM

DAVENING TIMES CAN BE FOUND AT CINCYKOLLEL.ORG/MINYAN-SCHEDULE/

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See Rabbi Crystal or Rabbi Heinemann, or e-mail parasha@cincynkollel.org. 

GREAT ACTS OF ORDINARY PEOPLE

THEY HAD RECEIVED WORD RIGHT BEFORE PASS-over, giving Barry and Jen Konig hardly any time to process the fact that Barry had been diagnosed with a cancerous tumor. Barry and Jen finally shared the news with their children as they finished packing up the Pesach dishes: The prognosis was favorable, but Barry would need at least a year of treatment.

Slowly, community members found out what was going on. Jen began fielding several phone calls each day, as concerned friends

asked what they could do. Unable to think straight, Jen would simply say, "Nothing right now, but thanks for asking."

It was on a Thursday, three weeks into Barry's treatment, that Jen felt particularly overwhelmed. She choked on the realization that Barry's painful condition would last at least a year, and Shabbos preparations loomed large.

Then there was knock on the door. A friend stood there, holding in her arms a full Shabbos meal, from fish to dessert—even paper goods. "Good afternoon. I don't mean to intrude, but if you can't use it, freeze it."

Jen's impulse was to give it right back, but she was too late; her friend had left.

The woman's gesture—the effort, caring, and warmth—moved Jen's spirit. Her friend hadn't asked if she could do anything; she had just done it.

Later that night, Jen remarked to Barry that she was going to call all those friends who had offered to help, and take them up on it—for a grocery run, a carpool, a trip to the butcher.

Each person was thrilled to receive the call. And Jen realized that, in a small way, taking was a form of giving, too. 