

A Taste of Torah Self-Service

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

What were they thinking?

No, we're not talking about your thoughts as you admire the new interior design your children have just imposed upon your walls, courtesy of Crayola. This is Rashi's question on the actions of Korach's followers in this week's Parsha (Korach 16:7).

Two hundred and fifty of Korach's followers burned with a desire to offer *ketores*, the incense, to Hashem. Moshe warned them that Hashem selects only one person to offer the *ketores*, and whoever else does so would die.

And get burned they did. All two hundred and fifty were consumed by a Divine fire.

As Russian roulette was not really in vogue among the Jewish people in the desert, Rashi is left wondering: What were they thinking?

And now, to Rashi's answer, and I quote, "They sinned with their souls." This statement is almost as enigmatic as the actions of Korach's followers. What does Rashi mean?

The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (1817-1893), famed Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin Yeshiva, comments that the motive of these 250 men was not to attain power or glory; rather, they were looking to draw close to Hashem.

In their eyes, offering the *ketores* was a wonderful way to attach themselves to Him, a way which had heretofore been off-limits. Now that they had an opportunity to bring the *ketores*, they disregarded the imminent danger to their lives.

"They sinned with their souls" - that is to say, their sin stemmed from the spiritual longing of their souls.

Every person has his or her own unique path in the service of Hashem. However, every person must serve Hashem based on the guidelines set down by Hashem in the Torah.

Korach's followers tried to serve Hashem on their own terms. Inasmuch as their intentions were for the sake of Heaven, this did not save them.

Serving Hashem and performing His mitzvos must be on His terms, not our own.

Ask the Rabbi The Braided Bunch

From: Alison

Dear Rabbi,

Every Friday I make Challah for Shabbos. When asked why I braid them, I had no answer! What is the historical/traditional significance to braiding Challah?

From: Roi Levine Garcia

Dear Rabbi,

In the Torah we read about the Challah, the bread of Shabbos. What is the significance of the intertwining of the bread to make it Challah?

Dear Alison & Roi Levine Garcia,

Stories For The Soul

Finding G-d at West Point

In 1974, Rabbi Asher Wade, a US Army chaplain, befriended a Jewish American officer named Stuart. One day, Rabbi Wade was surprised to find Stuart wearing a yarmulke. Stuart told Rabbi Wade the story.

As part of their first year studies, cadets were enrolled in a course called "History of Military Tactics & Field Strategies," which surveyed all the major battles in history. At the end of the course, Cadet Stuart asked the general who taught the class why they didn't survey the battles fought by the Jews. The general ordered Stuart to see him in his office after class.

"Do not think that the staff here at West Point has left the Jewish wars unnoticed," began the general. "We do not teach them at West Point. According to military strategy and textbook tactics, the Jews should have lost them. You should have been swept into the dustbin of history long ago.

"This past year, we hired a new junior instructor," the general continued. "During a private staff meeting and discussion, the Arab-Israeli wars came under discussion. We puzzled at how you won those wars. Suddenly, this junior instructor jokingly said, 'Honorable gentlemen, it seems to be quite obvious how they are winning their wars: G-d is winning their wars!' Nobody laughed.

"The reason is, soldier, that it seems to be an unwritten rule around here at West Point that G-d is winning your wars, but G-d does not fit into military textbooks!" said the general.

Stuart told Rabbi Wade that he

Kollel Happenings

FATHERS-AND-SONS PROGRAM SUN., JUNE 26 AT EDOS

The next Fathers-and-Sons learning program will be held on June 26 at EDOS. Breakfast begins at 9 a.m. with learning following. For information, contact Rabbi Amsel at 303-820-2855 or email rya@denverkollel.org



CHERRY CREEK MUNCH AND LEARN, MON., JUNE 27

The next Cherry Creek Munch and Learn for men, led by Rabbi Yehuda Amsel, will be held on Mon., June 27, at 12:30 p.m. at Colorado Capital Bank, 55 Madison Ave. The class focuses on Pirkei Avos. For information, contact Rabbi Amsel at 303-820-2855 or at rya@denverkollel.org



'FIREWORKS WITH THE KOLLEL' MEN'S LEARNING ON JULY 4

Inject some spirituality into your July 4th! Join us on Monday, July 4, for "Fireworks at the Kollel," a men's legal holiday learning program. The event will be held at Congregation Zera Avraham, with Shacharis at 8 a.m., followed by breakfast, and a shiur by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. \$125 sponsorship is available. For information, contact Rabbi Erlanger at 303-820-2855 or at rye@denverkollel.org or Rabbi Fleisher at rmf@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Returning Stolen Property Part IX

One who stole and is unable to locate the owner or owners, should give money equivalent to the value of the stolen goods to a community need that would benefit the victim or victims of the theft. This money should not be given to a charity fund, but to a

community fund. The money should be given quietly and anonymously, without recognition for the donation.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

Continued from front

I have heard several reasons for braiding Challos for Shabbos: The three braids are symbolic of the commands to observe Shabbos that appear in the Ten Commandments. One braid represents the word "Zachor" - "Remember." A second braid represents the word "Shamor" - "Guard." The third braid is for "b'Dibbur Echad" - that these commands of "Remember" and "Guard" were said by G-d simultaneously and as one unit.

Another reason is that Shabbos signifies and reminds us of three different concepts: The Creation of the World, the Exodus from Egypt and the Messianic Era. This is also the reason for three distinct separate Amidot - Silent Prayers - on Shabbos, as opposed to the weekday Amida, which is of identical wording three times a day. (The theme of the fourth prayer of Shabbos, Mussaf, "additional," is said for the additional

Temple sacrifice for Shabbos, and also applies on Festivals.) This idea also provides an understanding for the three meals eaten on Shabbos.

By the way, the "Challah" mentioned in the Torah is not referring to the Challah that we eat on Shabbos and Yom Tov. It refers to the command to separate a small amount of the dough that one kneads when baking bread.

In Temple times this portion of dough (called "Challah" by the Torah) was given to Kohanim, the priestly tribe, who were responsible for the Temple service. Today there is a rabbinical command to separate "Challah" from the dough and burn it, since in order to eat it there is a requirement for the Kohanim and the Challah to be ritually pure - a state that does not presently exist.

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Stories for the Soul

Continued from front

felt humiliated and couldn't believe that he would have to come to West Point to "find out how great my G-d is from a Presbyterian three-star general."

He went back to his room and dug out his yarmulke and said to himself, "This thing is going on my head, because I found, in essence, who I was and where I came from."

In Parshas Korach, we see the important lesson that G-d runs the world and it is not for us to deride or complain. In fact, we should be happy that G-d is running the world because He is always protecting us, the Jewish people.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.