



Covenant & Conversation



Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

KORACH · קורח

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צ7

COVENANT & CONVERSATION SUMMARY

Power versus Influence

• The full essay written by Rabbi Sacks is available [on our website](#) ↗.

The Korach rebellion was an unholy alliance of individuals and groups united by their grievances with Moshe’s leadership. There were 250 firstborn men who felt aggrieved that, after the sin of the Golden Calf, leadership had passed from the firstborn to the tribe of Levi. Datan and Aviram similarly resented the leadership of the Levites. Korach was a Levite, but felt overlooked. It is an all too familiar tale of frustrated ambition and petty jealousy – what the Sages called “an argument *not* for the sake of heaven.”

What is most extraordinary, however, is Moshe’s reaction. For the first and only time, he invokes a miracle to prove the authenticity of his mission, declaring that if the ground opens and swallows Korach and his followers, the people will know that they have provoked God.

This seems very different from Moshe’s response just a few chapters earlier. When Eldad and Medad began prophesying in the camp, Yehoshua saw this as a threat and said, “*Moshe, my lord, stop them!*” Moshe replied:

“Are you jealous for me? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them all!”

Why was Moshe willing to share prophecy but not tolerate Korach’s challenge? **The answer lies in a distinction between two forms of leadership: power and influence.**

We often confuse the two, but they are very different. Imagine you have power and share it with nine others. You now have less than before. Power operates by division. Now imagine instead that you have influence and share it with nine others. You do not have less influence; you have more. Influence operates by multiplication.

The Torah assigns these two forms of leadership to different roles. Kings had power. They could levy taxes, raise armies, and make laws. Prophets had no power at all. They

commanded no armies and collected no taxes. All they had was influence – yet what influence! The words of Yishayahu, Amos, and Eliyahu still inspire people today, while the kings of their age are largely forgotten.

Moshe held both roles. He had power as the leader of the nation, but he was also the greatest of the prophets.

This explains a later episode when God tells Moshe to appoint Yehoshua as his successor. Moshe is commanded both to “lay his hand” on Yehoshua and to give him some of his “splendour.” He shares his influence with Yehoshua, and is not diminished by this act. The sages explained the difference between transferring influence, and transferring power.

Sharing your influence is like lighting a candle. The first flame is not diminished, and the light only expands as it is shared. Whereas sharing power is visualised by the pouring of liquid from one vessel to another. The more you give away, the less remains.

Now we understand the difference between Eldad and Medad and Korach. Eldad and Medad shared in Moshe’s prophetic spirit. They achieved influence, not power. That was no threat. The more influence is shared, the greater it becomes. As long as it is used for good, it does good.

Korach, however, sought power. Power cannot be shared indefinitely. “Can two kings share a single crown?” asked the Sages. Had Moshe not acted decisively, Korach would have undermined the leadership entrusted to him. People today often contend for power. If only they realised the risks. **The use of power diminishes others; the exercise of influence enlarges them. That is one of Judaism’s most humanising truths. Not all of us have power, but we are all capable of being an influence for good.**

Around the Shabbat Table



1. Think of the person who has had the most influence on you. Would you consider yourself their student?
2. Can you articulate the ways that Moses has influenced your own life?
3. How would you like to influence the world for good? Do you need to harness power in order to do this?

A Takeaway Thought

The difference between power and influence: Power divides, for the more we share, the less we have. Influence multiplies, meaning the more we share, the more we can do.



Exploring the Parsha

WITH SARA LAMM

BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS 7"צז

THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTION



The Parsha in a Nutshell

Moshe and Aharon's leadership is challenged by Korach, together with Datan, Aviram, and 250 prominent men. They dispute who the rightful leaders of the people should be, questioning why Moshe should lead the nation, and why Aharon and his sons alone should hold the priesthood.

God demonstrates that Moshe and Aharon were chosen for their roles, and the rebellion ends in dramatic fashion: the ground opens up and swallows the main rebels, while all the

men who brought incense to challenge Moshe and Aharon are consumed by fire. When the people continue to complain, a plague breaks out, but Aharon stops it by bringing incense before God. Aharon's position is then confirmed when his staff alone blossoms and produces almonds.

The parsha also outlines gifts that the Israelites must give to the Kohanim and Leviim, including portions of produce, firstborn animals, and other sacred offerings.



Parsha Activity

Making Waves

Everyone holds hands. Each person is invited to name a person who influenced them and one way they have since passed that influence on to someone else. As you mention an influence, or how you have passed on something to someone else, everyone does "the wave". The idea is to act out the idea of influence, how one person can make all the difference, by making waves, and setting others in motion.

A STORY FOR THE AGES



On the Same Page

In August 1923, a young man named Meir Shapiro stood up at a rabbis' conference in Vienna and shared an idea. He suggested that every Jew in the world, wherever they lived, could begin a new study routine, starting the first page of a Gemara on the same day, and from there learning one page of Talmud, every single day, all on the same schedule, until they had completed all of Shas (every book of Gemara) together. A plumber in Manchester and a scholar in Tel Aviv would be learning the same words on the same morning. A Jewish *zeide*, shopkeeper, and soldier could exchange ideas if they met on any street corner in the world. He called this idea *Daf Yomi*, a page a day.

People were sceptical. It's rare for even three Jews to agree on something, even within the same shul or school,

and this initiative would be encouraging everyone around the world to follow the same routine, agreeing to the same plan. Moreover, the Talmud contains over 2,700 double-sided pages. It would take seven-and-a-half years to complete one cycle. A huge undertaking, and a long time for people to stick to the learning cycle.

Rabbi Shapiro had no money, no team, no way to enforce anything. He simply shared the idea and trusted that it would take root. He died in 1933, aged just 46. The first cycle had been successfully completed by a few thousand people, and the next day they began all over again, eager to learn more.

Today, *Daf Yomi* is one of the most remarkable phenomena in the Jewish world. Millions of people around the globe learn the same page every single



day. When each seven-and-a-half-year cycle ends, tens of thousands of people gather in massive sports stadiums in New York, Jerusalem, and cities across the world to celebrate together. The *Siyum HaShas*, completed in 2020, filled MetLife Stadium in New Jersey with over 90,000 people.

Rabbi Shapiro shared one idea freely, with no conditions and no copyright. That single idea, offered openly to anyone who wanted it, has lit up the Jewish world in a way that no single person, however brilliant, could ever have achieved alone.



Cards & Conversation

“... you and all your company have assembled to defy the Lord. Aharon – who is he that you should have grievances against him?” - Bamidbar 16:11-12

A rebellion breaks out – not over facts, but over power.

QUESTION: In your own life, would you rather be right and in control, or work toward truth, and compromise?

Rabbi Sacks' commentary explains: “In an argument for the sake of truth, if you win, you win, but if you lose, you also win, because being defeated by truth is the only defeat that is also a victory.

“In an argument for the sake of victory, if you lose, you lose, but if you win, you also lose, for by diminishing your opponents, you also diminish yourself. Great leaders seek not power but truth, not victory but healing.”

Cards & Conversation: Chumash Edition - Each card holds an interesting question to think about and discuss, based on the Torah portion. Flip it over to discover an idea from Rabbi Sacks that shines a new light on the parsha. Find out more by visiting rabbisacks.org/cards-and-conversation



Parsha in Practice

Mitzva of the Week Supporting the Leviim

Kohanim and Leviim have no land inheritance in Israel, so all the people must support them with gifts - tithes, such as *terumah*. In the Torah's society, those who dedicate their lives to spiritual leadership and teaching do not have the power of wealth or land. Their role is entirely based on influence. By supporting them, the community ensures that spiritual guidance remains central to Jewish life. Here we value spiritual guidance just as much as economic power. We share our physical wealth, and they share blessings.

“Always choose influence rather than power. It helps change people into people who can change the world.”
- Rabbi Sacks

Practically Speaking What do we share, today?

This is a lovely idea, but when we begin to accumulate money, property, and possessions, it is easy to get caught up in other things, like wanting control or recognition.

We need to work on having a Moshe attitude. Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, but Moshe was unthreatened. He hoped that all the people could be prophets. He understood that spiritual wealth is like lighting one candle from another. The original flame is never diminished. When we stop competing for control and start focusing on how we can positively influence others, we step out of Korach's mindset and into true leadership. Supporting the Leviim is a practical mitzva that has similar themes of sharing.



Try it out

YOUNG STUDENTS:

Imagine you have a box of cookies. If you share them with your friends, you have fewer biscuits for yourself. That is how power works. Now imagine you know a really funny joke. If you tell it to your friends, you still know the joke, but now everyone else is laughing too. That is how influence works. Moshe knew this. He understood that good things like love and wisdom only grow when we share them with others.

ADVANCING STUDENTS:

This week, try to focus entirely on influence instead of power. Teach someone a skill you have, share advice that helped you study, or a tip for better health. Notice how giving away your knowledge or your kindness does not leave you with less, but actually makes you feel much richer and more fulfilled.



Learning in Layers

Guiding you through Torah step by step, with insights from the [Koren Sacks Humash with translation and commentary by Rabbi Sacks](#). Each step takes us a little deeper and invites 'Torah as Conversation,' just as Rabbi Sacks taught.



Hope - and Almond - Blossoms

LAYER 1: FIND THE TORAH TEXT: BAMIDBAR 17:23

"...וַיִּגְמַל שְׂקָדִים. וַיְהִינָה פֶרֶחַ מִטֵּה-אַהֲרֹן..."

LAYER 2: READ RABBI SACKS' TRANSLATION

"...and Aharon's staff... had budded, produced blossoms, and was now bearing almonds"

LAYER 3: THINK ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS

Korach's defeat has not closed the chapter. Now God commands each tribe to place its staff in the Mishkan overnight. In the morning, only Aharon's staff has come to life, sprouting blossoms and bearing almonds. Why would God choose this particular sign, and why did it end the dispute? What is it about a blossoming almond branch that speaks to the people at this moment?

LAYER 4: LEARN FROM RABBI SACKS' COMMENTARY

"What ends this conflict is not the miracle of the ground opening up and swallowing Moshe's opponents, but ... the visible symbol that Aharon is the chosen vehicle of the God of life... In the Near East, the almond is the first tree to blossom, its white flowers signalling the end of winter and the emergence of new life. The almond flowers also recall the gold flowers on the candelabrum, lit daily by Aharon in the Sanctuary..."

"The sprouting almond branch is therefore more than a sign. It is a multi-faceted symbol of life, light, holiness, and the watchful presence of God. After the episode of the spies, Moshe faces an almost impossible task. How do you lead a people when they know they will not reach their destination in their lifetime? In the end, what stills the rebellion is the sight of Aharon's staff, a piece of dry wood coming to life again, bearing flowers and fruit. Having thought of themselves as condemned to die in the desert, they now realise that they too have borne fruit, their children, and that those children will complete the journey their parents began."

LAYER 5: REFLECT AND RESPOND

Aharon's blossoming staff is a message of hope to a people who felt their lives had been wasted, saying they were not failures. Like the almond tree, they had produced new life. Their children would carry their story forward. True influence, like a branch, simply needs to be able to bear fruit, to live on, and give hope.

1. Why do you think God chose a living, blossoming branch rather than a dramatic miracle to settle the dispute?
2. What does it mean to "bear fruit" in your own life, even when you cannot see the final result?
3. How does this image of the almond branch connect to the essay's idea that influence outlasts power?

- Find out more about the [Koren Sacks Humash](#) at rabbisacks.org/books/the-koren-sacks-humash

Jonathan Sacks
THE RABBI SACKS LEGACY

The Rabbi Sacks Legacy perpetuates the timeless and universal wisdom of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks as a teacher of Torah, a leader of leaders, and a moral voice.

Explore the digital archive, containing much of Rabbi Sacks' writings, broadcasts, and speeches, or support the Legacy's work, at www.RabbiSacks.org, and follow The Rabbi Sacks Legacy on social media @RabbiSacks.

With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel