Korach 2017

1.

Why did Korach decide to argue specifically now?

Why did Korach specifically rebel and argue at this point? The Ramban rejects the Ibn Ezra's answer of אין מוקדם ומאוחר בתורה (the Torah isn't completely chronological) because we only apply that Gemara (Pesachim 6b) if necessary. The Ramban answers that Korach got upset because Elisafun became the Nasi (leader). Elisafun is the son of Uziel, who is Korach's father's brother. Korach had four uncles (Shemos 6, 18). Kohath had four sons: Amram, Yetzar, Chevron and Uziel. Amram bore Aaron and Moshe. Aaron was a Kohen and Moshe became the leader of the Jewish people. Korach was a direct descendant of Yetzar. Korach claimed that since he was a descendant of Yetzar who was second to oldest, he should therefore be second in line. He questioned why Elisafun who is the son of the youngest brother, Uziel got appointed as leader instead of him. This was one of Korach's claims.

Dason and Aviram decided to join Korach. They weren't bothered by Korach not being appointed as leader; rather they were concerned about dying in the desert. When the Jews were in the desert everything was going well. Their food and other physical needs were provided for. They were very pleased with Moshe. They were destined to die after they sinned with the golden calf. However, since Moshe intervened and prayed for them, they were spared. They thus owed Moshe a lot of gratitude. At that point they would kill anyone who would rebel against Moshe. Korach knew that it wasn't a good time to rebel. However, **once the spies sinned, Korach then realized that it was a good time to rebel.** Moshe knew that they weren't going to be forgiven for their negative report about Israel because Hashem acted with strict justice (midas hadin). Moshe just wanted Hashem to have erech apiyim (slow anger) and not immediately kill them. Moshe therefore only partially davened for them. The decree that they weren't going to go into Israel and would die in the desert was still binding. This is why even Naseim died from the plague (14, 37). Korach then decided that this was the opportune moment to rebel against Moshe. (See also Ramban 14, 17.) **Some of the Jews then began to blame Moshe for the spy's sins. They blamed Moshe rather than admitting that their own sins caused this. Korach then realized that this was a perfect time to rebel against Moshe.** This is also why Dason and Aviram joined Korach as mentioned above. Many firstborns joined Korach as well. It used to be that the firstborn was the Kohen who would perform the avoda in the Beis Hamikdash. However, this changed. All of the firstborns were therefore understandably upset. Moshe therefore tested by means of the firepans and incense who was correct.

Rabbi Eli Mansour (Petach Eliyahu) adds the following. This progression of events, as the Ramban describes, presents a very powerful lesson, a profound insight into human nature. The Jews were the ones who initiated the idea of sending spies. Moshe told them that there was no need for spies, as God had already promised them a special land. But they insisted, and when the spies returned with a negative report, they rebelled against God. **The tragedy of the spies was very clearly the fault of the people, not Moshe. Rather than accepting responsibility for their actions, acknowledging their own mistakes and failings, they pointed an accusing finger at Moshe Rabbenu and held him accountable for this disaster. In modern society, people do not take personal responsibility for their mistakes.** Criminal defense lawyers will

defend a serial killer by casting the blame for his crimes on a parent or teacher who mistreated him as a child. Therapists tell their patients that they are not to blame; their mistakes are the result of the way their father or mother treated them. After being convicted of embezzlement CEO's stand up at press conferences and announce, 'mistakes were made.' They would never confess to having made mistakes themselves; the mistakes were made by some anonymous culprit. **Judaism teaches that one must not make excuses for his mistakes; he must accept the blame and confess his wrongdoing.** Viduy (confession) is a central feature of Judaism. We spend a major part of Yom Kippur day confessing, declaring, 'chatasi, avisi, pashasi' (I have sinned, I have acted wrongly, and I have transgressed). If people in today's society would recite viduy, they would say 'My father had sinned, my mother had sinned, my friend had sinned...' They would absolve themselves of guilt by passing it on to someone else, just as the Jews passed accountability for the disaster of the spies onto Moshe. Although we are undoubtedly influenced by our past experiences and by what we see around us, ultimately we have free will to act as we choose. **We must therefore take full, personal responsibility for our mistakes, and never try absolving ourselves by casting the blame elsewhere.**

2.

What are the real mitzvah reminders?

"Korach took etc." (16, 1)

"ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן."

The Bamidbar Raba (18, 3) asks; what did Korach take when the pasuk says Korach took? Onkelos learns that Korach separated himself. The Medrash teaches that he took a tallis that was the color of techales. He asked if the strings are still obligated to be the color of techales as well. Korach also asked if a house full of sefarim needs to have a mezuzah. The answer to both questions is yes. The strings would still be obligated to be the color of techales and the house filled with sefarim would still be obligated to have a mezuzah. The Keli Yakar explains that parshas Shelach (16, 37-41) ended by discussing tzitzis. It therefore makes sense that Korach is asking a question regarding tzitzis. But why is Korach questioning mezuzah? It is based on a pasuk. The pasuk (3, 27) says that Dason and Aviram left from the opening of their tents. Why did the pasuk need to specify that they left from the opening of the tents? They made fun of their mezuzahs that were affixed by the opening of their tents. Dason and Aviram decided to add to Korach's argument about tzitzis by arguing about mezuzahs as well. They claimed that Moshe made these mitzvos up himself. What is the connection between the two? They are all the same argument. The Rabbeinu Bechia explains that logically a tallis that is the color of techales would not be obligated to have tzitzis that are the color of techales. The same logic would apply to a house that is filled with sefarim; it wouldn't be required to have a mezuzah. Korach also claimed that since everyone was holy they didn't need a leader (16, 3). Korach knew the halacha. He knew that the tzitzis strings would still be obligated to be the color of techales and that the house full of sefarim would still be obligated to have a mezuzah. Rather, this was all a tactic used in order to build up to the question of why they needed a leader.
Another similarity between these two mitzvos is as follows. They both remind us of all of the mitzvos. The pasuk (16, 39) explains that when we see the tzitzis we will remember the mitzvos. The mezuzah also helps us remember the mitzvos and Hashem. The Recantei (Devarim 6)

explains that when we enter and leave a room we will remember Hashem. Korach questioned why we need such mitzvos since we are all holy and remember Hashem and the mitzvos. Korach claimed that the mitzvos of mezuzah and tzitzis were unnecessary. This is why one who isn't careful with tzitzis and mezuzah will lose his children as stated in Shabbos (32b). Since these mitzvos help us remember other mitzvos, therefore one who doesn't perform these mitzvos won't remember the other mitzvos as well. Mida keneged mida, Hashem won't remember us and our children (see Hoshea (4, 6)). Furthermore, children are an extension of their parents. The tzitzis strings are an extension of the garment.

The Rambam (hilchos tefillin and mezuzah 6, 13) says that we are obligated to be careful with the mitzvah of mezuzah. Every time that we enter or exit a room we meet the oneness of Hashem; we must remind ourselves of the love we have towards Hashem. We must awaken from our sleep and folly. We should realize that only Hashem is eternal. We will then return to the proper path. Chazal says that anyone who has tefillin on his head and arm, and who wears tzitzis, and who has a mezuzah affixed to his door, is guaranteed that he won't sin. He has so many reminders. They are the angels who protect him from sinning.

The Gemara in Menachos (44a) relates a story of an individual who was very careful with the mitzvah of tzitzis. He heard that there was an attractive prostitute across the seas who charged 400 gold coins. He prepaid and sent her the money and agreed upon a time. The time arrived and he traveled to her and waited by her door. When she was ready he entered. There were seven beds that were spread. Six of them were made out of silver and the seventh was made out of gold. Between each bed there was a silver ladder. The top ladder was made out of gold. They sat on the top unclothed. He was about to sin, but then, his tzitzis strings suddenly smacked his face. He slipped away and sat on the ground. She also sat on the ground. She then became self-conscious and asked 'what blemish did I have that disgusted you?' He replied that this was not the reason he decided not to continue. On the contrary, he explained that she was very beautiful. Rather the reason was because of the mitzvah of tzitzis. She then asked for his name, where he lives and where he learns Torah. He answered her. She then donated her money. One third of her money went to the king (in order that she would be allowed to convert); another third went to poor people and the last third she took. She went to the Yeshiva and said that she wanted to convert. After Rebbi Chiya decided that she wanted to sincerely convert without any ulterior motives, she was allowed to convert. After she converted she married that individual who refrained from sinning with her.