

FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS THINK AND BRIBE

by Rabbi Dovid Green

"Do not take a bribe, because a bribe blinds the sighted and perverts the words of the just." (Exodus 23:8)

"Bribery kills the intellectual and moral force of the one who receives it. Bribery blinds the eye of one who otherwise sees clearly, and unconsciously prejudices his way of looking at the case."
(Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch)

When Korach challenged the authority of Moshe, many of his arguments made sense. Many other high spirited people were caught in the wave of his diatribe against Moshe. The Talmud tells us the Korach was truly a great man, but he fell from his stature due to a common tragic flaw.

How is it that Korach could make so much sense and still be wrong?

There are two important people who can never be a part of a certain decision- making body. The Jewish King and the High Priest were forbidden from determining whether a given year would be a leap year or not.

Before the Jewish calendar was fixed, a committee would convene yearly after the Holiday of Succos (in the fall) and would decide according the several variables whether or not an extra month of Adar (the month preceding the month Passover fell in) would be added. The lunar calendar is 354 days because approximately every 29 1/2 days the first sliver of the moon reappears after it has waxed completely. Since the solar calendar is approximately 365 days, Pesach reverts 11 days backwards yearly on the solar calendar and would eventually end in a winter zone. Passover is the "spring holiday" and therefore needs to be subject to infrequent adjustments to coordinate the two systems.

The Talmud wants to know why these two great men are forbidden from participating on that committee.

The answer: The king collected taxes once a year, and paid his soldiers and civil servants once a month. If the king would be party to deciding whether or not to extend the year, he would have a built-in incentive not to. He would need to cut an extra check that year leaving less cash in his personal discretionary account.

When the High Priest would perform the special Yom Kippur service he would be required to change his clothing and immerse in a ritual bath five times.

The High Priest never wore shoes and the floor of the Temple was made of stone. The bath could be

warmed, but upon emerging from the water, his feet would come in contact with the cold stone floor. If a new month would be added, then Yom Kippur would fall a month later. The slight difference in temperature would be a dis-incentive for him to favor a leap year. This decision is being made months prior to the expected chilly contact.

Are we saying that the King would rise to his feet at the meeting and speak of his impoverished treasury? Do we believe that the High Priest would make an appeal for his cold big toe?

The Talmud understands that we are not logical creatures sometimes, as much as we are psychological beings. The King and the High Priest would weave wonderfully elaborate theses that would ring of truth and fairness. They would appeal to the finest senses of the noblest emotions in man. Everyone would be bedazzled by their elocution and logic. Yet, in truth, subconsciously, it's the wallet speaking aloud and the cold toe driving the mouth.

Korach too made sense. He was mistaken only in the depths of his true motive. He wanted to be High Priest. He was bitten by a deadly bug called jealousy. Lead by ambition and driven by his Lady Macbeth, he created a revolutionary thesis that would place him as the new vanguard of personal truth. He inspired the masses with his fiery rhetoric and brought them so articulately by the valley of proper sentiment to the path of good intentions, and eventually down to the pit of extinction.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto explains that more dangerous than a person who cannot see, is the one who thinks he can see. A drunk driver is worse than a sleeping fool. So remember, friends don't let friends think and bribe.

Good Shabbos!

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