

THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Ostensibly, the thrust of Korach-and-his-men's dispute with Moshe and Aaron was a challenge for the leadership of the fledgling Jewish nation. While Moshe's position itself was perhaps beyond debate - the entire nation having witnessed his unique relationship with Hashem during the Revelation at Sinai - his choice of his brother Aaron as Kohen Gadol (High Priest) was, it seems, open to dispute. Was the selection of Aaron truly the will of G-d, or was it a case of proteksia and brotherly-bias?

A test was devised: Korach and his 250 confederates would each bring a pan-full of Ketores (incense), as would Aaron. To bring Ketores unbidden, Moshe explained, is punishable by death. Only the true "chosen one" would survive the test. Yet, and Rashi raises this question, weren't the Korach group inexcusably foolish to accept such a test? After all, even if they were right, only one of them would survive! Why agree to a test which was sure to bring calamity to the vast majority of their assembly?

Parshas Yisro begins (Shemos/Exodus 18:1), "And Yisro heard..." Rashi asks: What exactly did Yisro, father-in-law of Moshe, hear that caused him to decide to leave the comforts of home and come to join the Jews in the desert? He heard, says Rashi, about the splitting of the Red Sea, and about the war the Jews had fought with Amalek in the desert. The victory over Amalek, while amazing and perhaps even miraculous, was nonetheless a military accomplishment, dwarfed in comparison to the many miracles the Jews experienced during the Exodus and in the desert. What was it about the war with Amalek that ultimately stimulated Yisro to journey into the desert?

Commentators (see Ma'yana shel Torah quoting Sichos Tzaddikim) explain that in fact, Yisro had already come to his own understanding and recognition of Hashem before he came to join Moshe. He had experimented with other forms of religion and pagan worship, and found them empty (see Rashi Shemos/Exodus 18:11). Indeed, Yisro was so convinced of his belief in the concept of one G-d that he felt his faith was unshakable. Hearing of the great miracles of the Exodus, especially the splitting of the sea, during which our Sages say "all the waters of the world also split" (see Rashi Shmuel-2 22:16), only served to further strengthen and reinforce his faith. He felt no need for the formality of religion - he would serve G-d on his own.

After hearing, however, of Amalek's attack on Israel, Yisro's was shaken. How is it possible, he asked himself, that Amalek could be so foolish as to start up with a nation that had witnessed such

miracles? That he did so forced Yisro to realize and acknowledge that even the most self-evident truths can be disputed and discarded. Perhaps, he wondered, my belief too will one day begin to waver. Whereas he had once been convinced that his faith was immune to corruption, Yisro now concluded that in order to remain strong in one's convictions one must have a leader - someone who could guide him to the path of truth, and alert him if he began to stray. This prompted Yisro's journey into the desert to join Moshe.

Upon closer examination, it seems that perhaps Korach's challenge was not simply a lobby for leadership - it was a challenge of the very concept of authority. "For this entire assembly - all of them are holy - so why do you presume to elevate yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?!" We, the Children of Israel, are not an unsophisticated bunch of simpletons, who will blindly follow your dictatorial leadership like sheep to the slaughter. Each of us is more than capable of making our own decisions, and forging our own paths, thank-you very much. To them, Moshe's contention that only one of their offerings would be accepted was just further proof of his short-sighted authoritarian viewpoint. Who's to say that only one person could offer Ketores before G-d? Why couldn't everyone offer his very own, personalized Ketores? Needless to say, they were wrong, and suffered the consequences.

The unwillingness to accept leadership and authority is a major reason for the state of decay in which we find ourselves today. The open-minded hyper-cynical value system that permeates democratic society has presented us with a generation that no longer respects its elders, teachers, or parents. Little wonder. While it would be nice to delude ourselves into believing that the pinnacle of moral decency and enlightenment will be reached when each person is free to make his own choices and formulate his own value system, the state of chaos and corruption in which we find ourselves today belies such a notion. While in our schools and yeshivos students do not yet (baruch Hashem) come equipped with the latest weaponry, and in our homes children do not yet threaten to turn their parents over to the police for a well deserved spanking, the lack of acceptance of authority and leadership is nonetheless pronounced and undebatable. May the Almighty protect us.

The Talmud says (Avos 1:6), "Make for yourselves a teacher." The attack of Amalek and the uprising of Korach are proof enough that a generation without accepted leadership is destined to turn into a de-generation.

Have a good Shabbos.

This week's publication was sponsored by R' Zalman Deutsch, in honour of the great Tzaddikim, Rabbeinu Shlomo Halberstam of Bobov, and Rabbeinu Klonimus Kalman Epstein of Cracow, author of Ma'or Ve- Shamesh. And in honour of the marriage of the daughter of R' Shmiel Lemel. May the zivug be "oleh yafeh."

Text Copyright © 2000 [Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann](#) and **[Project Genesis, Inc.](#)**
