

LESSONS TO BE LEARNT FROM PARSHAS KORACH

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

- 1.** The power of one to do either good or bad is only limited by personal ambition. (Moshe vs. Korach)
- 2.** Do not underestimate the efficacy of the minority to sway the majority. (Miraglim and Korach)
- 3.** Humility is the only viable foundation for truth and accomplishment. (Moshe and Aharon)
- 4.** Arrogance must result in falsehood and destruction. (Korach)
- 5.** Falsehood like truth will seek out its own. (Korach and his assembly)
- 6.** Good people are often influenced by evil so don't be surprised. (Korach's assembly)
- 7.** Always be compassionate and understanding, but do not be a fool. (Moshe's approach to Datan and Aviram)
- 8.** Assume the best in others, believe in miracles, but protect yourself. (Moshe's approach to Datan and Aviram)
- 9.** Within the good, majority should rule; however, in general do not trust the majority. (The manner in which the nation could be influenced by the Miraglim and Korach)
- 10.** You do not have to defend G-d; you only have to listen to Him. Kalev vs. Miraglim and Moshe vs. Korach)
- 11.** There comes a time when absolutes must rule. Not everything can be negotiated. Moshe vs. Korach, his assembly, and Datan and Aviram)
- 12.** Be very certain of your absolutes and assume that others will still not agree. Your absolute is another's negotiation. (Aftermath of Korach 17:6)
- 13.** Compromise for the sake of peace but never make peace with compromise. (The entire story)

Starting with the end of Parshas B'Haloscha the Torah addressed the uniqueness of the individual to effect changes in the world. By focusing on Moshe in contrast with Aharon and Miriam the Torah established that personal decisions are often misunderstood by others, even those who love and trust you the most. Nevertheless, the individual must do what he knows to be true, regardless of any other person.

The strength to stand-alone and effect changes in the world is founded upon having faith in G-d. If a

person believes that he is doing the will of G-d, and if his belief is predicated on more than personal feelings and desires, then he should have the courage to confront all adversaries. He should approach the conflict knowing that "G-d will do battle for you." True belief in G-d should render the individual fearless in the face of all challenges.

When my Grandfather Zt'l first came to America he was known to be a young Gadol (exceptional Torah leader) with extraordinary talent in Halacha (Jewish law). At the time there were older more established Rabbis and Poskim (experts in the application of Torah law to everyday situations) in America who wanted to help launch Rav Moshe Zt'l's reputation as a Posek and Gadol. When an opportunity arose to adjudicate a high profile Din Torah (adjudication), the Rabbis recommended to the parties involved that they ask Rav Moshe to judge the case as a "court of one" (rather than three). It was then recommended to Rav Moshe that the merits of the case suggested ruling in favor of one party over the other. Furthermore, the high political profile of the case supported the same outcome and if judged accordingly would considerably advance Rav Moshe's reputation as a rising star in the Torah world.

Rav Moshe accepted the case and against the better judgment of the others involved ruled in favor of the other party and against the strong recommendations to the contrary. Others, peripherally involved in the case, approached Rav Moshe to reconsider his ruling and change the outcome. They expressed concern that his decision against the majority and politically safer opinion would destroy any possibility of his being recognized as the talent he was. Rav Moshe refused to change his judgment stating that his ruling was Torahs Emes - the truth - and his personal outcome was in the hands of G-d. His job was to always present the truth; everything else was up to G-d.

As history records and as world Judaism recognizes, the outcome of that fateful Din Torah propelled Rav Moshe Ztl's reputation within the Jewish world of the late Thirties to a level impossible to have predicted. Instead of his stubborn stance backfiring and ending his yet to develop career as the leading Posek of the generation, his refusal to back down in the face of political pressure established him as a rabbi of impeccable integrity and fearless leadership. Instead of ending his career it catapulted it beyond all expectations.

His integrity and fearlessness were founded upon a belief that if he did his best to ascertain what was and wasn't G-d's will he could depend upon G-d to do the rest. It was not for him to protect G-d or the Torah. His job was to apply the Torah as he best understood. Integrity and fearlessness remained my Grandfather's life long signature.

In this Sefer Bamidbar (book of Numbers) we once again see Moshe Rabbeinu fearlessness. As the "most humble and trusted in G-d's home," Moshe approached life with utter confidence in G-d's commandments. He feared no one except G-d.

At the start of this week's Parsha the Jews were recovering from the devastating punishment of the Miraglim. Consigned to die in the desert, Moshe not only had to be king and teacher to the people,

Moshe also had to model for them trust in G-d and His ultimate, unquestionable love and kindness.

Until the episode of the Miraglim the generation of the Exodus were the fulfillment of G-d's promise to the Avos, "To your children will I give this land." In one tragic moment of lost faith the generation had to accept that they would not be that fulfillment. Instead, they would be the generation that would raise the generation that would realize the promise. Their loss of faith could only be atoned for by living the remainder of their lives with unquestioning faith in a future they would not live to see. The proof of their Tikun (repentance and rehabilitation) could only be proven in how well they would raise that next generation. If they themselves believed in G-d and His ability to do everything He had promised, they would successfully transmit that faith to their children. If they themselves still questioned G-d's ability to deliver on His promises the lack of faith would be magnified in their children.

As an extraordinary intellect with Yichus (ancestry) akin to Moshe and Aharon, Korach questioned the divinity of their appointment and in doing so questioned the entire foundation of the nation's faith. The nation's faith was a product of Moshe's leadership and presence, "...And they believed in G-d and His servant Moshe;" therefore, he attacked Moshe with an accusation of nepotism, and then attacked Moshe's assumption as the sole teacher of G-d's commandments. In both instances Korach's rebellion challenged the faith of the nation.

Korach's downfall was his arrogance. Bolstered by his desire for recognition and power, Korach enticed the support of otherwise great men in confronting Moshe. A true seeker of truth would have challenged Moshe in private; however, Korach was seeking personal power and not the truth. Falsehood always requires others to support and sustain it.

On the other hand, Moshe was the product of pure humility. His response was to place the confrontation in G-d's court. "Let G-d decide. It is not for me to defend G-d. He can do that much better than I." "Moshe fell upon his face." (See Rav Hirsch)

Moshe then threw down the gauntlet. "Go for it! You want Aharon's job? You question my ability to explain G-d's law? Take fire pans and offer the exclusive Ketores (incense) offering of the Kohain Gadol. (The same offering that resulted in the deaths of Nadav and Avihu.) If you are right, if everyone is equally holy as Korach claims, if my teaching of G-d's commandments is not 100% accurate and authentic and you trust your own intellect to ascertain the truth more so than trusting me, go for it and let's see what will happen!"

Moshe then turned his attention to Datan and Aviram. Despite their many years of distrust for Moshe, Moshe still attempted to reach their better side. "Why now? Why engage in a conflict that has nothing to do with you? Until now you have approached our differences and your lack of trust in me as seekers of truth. Until now the conflict has been private. Why do you wish to go public and chance the possibility of undermining the faith of the nation?" Datan and Aviram rebuffed Moshe's attempt at saving their lives from inevitable disaster; instead, they denied all the good that G-d had

done for the Jews.

Had they agreed to leave Korach's rebellion and continue their private questioning of Moshe's leadership, they and their families would have lived to realize the fulfillment of G-d's promises and the proof of Moshe's own Divine appointment. Their personal compromise in remaining private would have been for the sake of maintaining the faith of the nation and keeping peace within the nation. Their personal animosity toward Moshe could have continued along with their lack of trust in him. Unfortunately, their response was to deny G-d's goodness and not just Moshe's appointment.

Moshe could not live with that kind of compromise within the hierarchy of the nation. It was a position that had to be challenged and disproved no matter what the outcome. Had he elected to "let it go" it would have been perceived as a personal fear of Datan and Avirum rather than as an act of compassion and mercy. It would have been tantamount to denying his absolute trust in G-d. Moshe had no cause to accept such a fundamental compromise. He feared no one except G-d, and faith and recognition of G- d's ever-present benevolence are absolutes that cannot be negotiated. Instead, Moshe humbly and fearlessly opened his integrity to the scrutiny of G-d's absolute justice. "G-d, You know that I have done nothing for myself. Everything I have done has been at Your command and for the sake of the nation. Do what You have to do to establish Your sovereignty before the eyes of the nation. "

G-d accepted Moshe's offer to judge him against the others. The others were found wanting.

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