

MAN-MADE FAITH

by Rabbi Berel Wein

Moshe, who is known as a person of limitless patience and tolerance, forgiving to all and the most humble of all humans, reacts apparently in an uncharacteristic manner to Korach's attack against his leadership of the Jewish people.

Moshe's aggressive stance against the rebels reveals a different motive for the attack than mere office-seeking on the part of the rebels. After all, it was Moshe himself who declared, "Would that all of the people of Israel become prophets." He tells Yehoshua not to be zealous in defense of his personal honor.

And yet with Korach and his followers, Moshe adopts a hard line and uncompromising stance. The Torah always notes when the behavior of great people appears on the surface to be uncharacteristic of their nature and past performance. Part of the reason for the Torah's doing so is to alert us to a deeper, underlying issue. We must not be satisfied with the superficial and surface statement of facts.

The deeper issue here is that Korach wishes to convert Torah and Judaism to a man-made "democratic" faith, not its original and true source as a faith revealed to humans from on high, a faith and life system ordained in Heaven and revealed to humans. Therefore, it is not Moshe and his leadership that are the core issues in this dispute but the basic definition of Judaism - is it revealed and Godly or man-made and invented?

On that basic core issue of Judaism, Moshe sees no room for compromise or tolerance. It is not Moshe's status that is at stake here. It is the understanding and true meaning of Judaism. Its very future is now at risk.

Even though the Talmud teaches us that the dispute of Korach against Moshe is not one that was destined to last eternally, in the sense that I have described above, it has lasted until our very day. The struggle to maintain Judaism as a Godly revealed religion is an ongoing one. There are many forces within and without the Jewish world that have attempted and still attempt to remove the Godly revealed part from Judaism.

Even though all of Jewish history indicates the abject failure of such an approach, it still persists in our time. It is not an attack on the Orthodox establishment - Moshe, so to speak, as is presented here - though on the surface it may be seen as such. At the root of the dispute is the view that Judaism is given from Heaven to earth and not merely a clever invention and artifice of ancient rabbis and

scholars.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch once characterized the difference between Judaism and other faiths. Judaism, he said, is a religion given by God to define man, while the other faiths were created by man to define God. God is beyond our meager abilities to define or understand. Therefore, He gave us a Torah, the Torah of Moshe, in order to aid us to live as proper human beings and as His devoted servants.

Shabat shalom.

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Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com