

# HYPOCRISY

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

Tragedy follows tragedy in the book of Bamidbar. The unwarranted complaints of the people regarding the food in the desert and the false report regarding the Land of Israel that was discussed in last week's parsha end in plague, punishment and disaster. This week's parsha describes the rebellion of Korach and his cohorts against Moshe and the supremacy of Torah within Jewish society.

It seems that there is a latent death wish that lurks within Jewish society that does not allow it to free itself from repeating terrible mistakes over and over again. The generation of the desert saw miracles, even God's presence, so to speak, on a regular basis and nevertheless constantly escalates its defiance and rebellion against its special role in human civilization.

It really is a form of regret on the part of many Jews in the desert to having accepted the Torah carte blanche at Sinai. This group did not intend to be a chosen people. The plaintive cry of "let us just return to Egypt" is really a cry that "we wish to be just like all other peoples!" And it is a situation that repeats itself in almost every generation of Jewish life.

The struggle within Jews and Jewish society in all ages is whether to accept its God-given role as a "treasure amongst all nations" or to somehow renounce all pretense of being a special people. The choices are not really portrayed as being that stark. Rather, it reflects itself in a continuum of Jewish observance, adherence to Jewish values and the willingness to remain proudly Jewish in a world that is hostile to Jews, a Jewish state and Judaism itself.

Korach wraps his personal animosity towards Moshe and his frustration of not achieving the recognition that he feels is due him within a cloak of holiness and altruism. Hypocrisy always abounds, especially amongst those that judge others. The self-righteous give righteousness itself a bad name.

The claims of Korach which he speaks in the name of democracy, that all the people are holy and worthy of leadership, resound in classical correctness. They are hard to argue against and certainly have great public resonance and appeal. The problem with Korach's appeal and words is that they are basically fraudulent.

Moshe's stature is determined by God and has been vindicated throughout the ages of Jewish history. There are no truly unbiased people in the world. But there are those that, at the very least, recognize their bias and attempt to deal with it honestly and intelligently. Hypocrisy is the attempt to

cover up the bias with false nobility of purpose and affected altruism.

It is a reprehensible character trait, far greater in potential destructiveness than is open enmity itself. This is what made Korach so dangerous and why Moshe's determination to publicly expose and punish him so strident and insistent. The tragedy of Korach lies not only his own personal downfall but rather in the havoc and confusion that it created in the Jewish society. It is a situation that repeats itself today as well.

Shabat shalom,  
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