

KORACH'S PERSONAL OPINION AND GOD'S WILL

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The litany of disappointments and failures, of the generation of Jews that left Egyptian bondage, continues in this week's parsha. Except, this parsha relates to us not so much in describing a direct confrontation with God and His express wishes, so to speak, but rather tells of a challenge to Moshe and his authority to lead the Jewish people. Korach essentially engages in a coup, a power-grabbing attempt to replace Moshe from his leadership role and Aharon from his position as the High Priest of Israel.

Throughout the ages, the Torah scholars and commentators of the Jewish people have attempted to appreciate and understand what Korach's true motivations were, to engage in such a clearly suicidal attempt. After all, Korach was also aware that Moshe's countenance radiated Heavenly light that forced him to mask that countenance when dealing with human beings.

Korach was also undoubtedly aware that the High Priesthood and its incense offerings could be deadly to those not entitled to serve in that public role. Again, he saw his relatives, Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon struck down by a heavenly fire, for overstepping their proper bounds in the ritual service of the Mishkan.

So what drove Korach to knowingly risk his life in this doomed and completely unnecessary confrontation with Moshe and Aharon? In the words of Rashi in this week's parsha: "What did Korach see or think that drove him to commit such a foolish act?" That question has puzzled all of Jewish scholarship for millennia.

It would be brazen of me to say that I somehow have the answer to this deeply troubling question. Nevertheless, I do wish to contribute an insight into the narrative as it appears in the parsha. Like many ideologues, Korach is convinced that God agrees with him - that God also has realized that Moshe is too autocratic and given to nepotism in his rule of the people. He saw that even Aharon and Miriam were willing to criticize Moshe, and even though Miriam was punished, the precedent of being able to criticize Moshe was set and established.

Korach may have thought that Miriam was punished because, in essence, she and Aharon were interfering in Moshe's private personal life. But Korach believed that he was embarking on a national crusade to break the power of autocratic rule over the Jewish people. On such a vital national issue,

one where he believed himself to be morally and practically undoubtedly correct, he convinced himself that God was also in agreement, so to speak, with him.

And, when one is convinced that his own thinking represents God's opinion on any given matter or issue then there can be no holding back in pursuing one's goals. The one main cause for all religious strife, wars, bans and exclusivity of opinion and actions, is the belief that God also follows that given opinion or belief. Naturally, Korach's personal ambitions and agenda helped convince him that God was on his side in the dispute with Moshe. One should always be wary not to confuse personal wishes and opinions with God's will.

Shabat shalom,

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