

DANGEROUS NEIGHBORHOOD

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

Korah had a gripe. He felt that in the scheme of things he should have been appointed to one of the positions of honor- (Kohen or Nasi). As his jealousy and desire for honor grew he organized a rebellion against the entire hierarchy established by Moshe as instructed by G-d. Moshe, in response to Korah's verbal attacks, suggested a life and death competition. Aharon and those who challenged his position would all offer Ketoret-holy incense. Everyone knew that only one would succeed and all the others would suffer certain death.

Korah had a lot to gain and even more to lose, but when we consider his jealousy and his overpowering desire for honor, his acceptance of the risky test is somewhat understandable. In fact the Midrash tells us that with his holy spirit, Korah saw great descendants coming from him, which led him to believe that he would be successful in the Ketoret test. The question is what drove Datan and Aviram and the tribe of Reuben to join in the fatal contest. Even if their offering were accepted by G-d, they could not serve as Kohanim. What prompted them to enter the valley of death?

Our Sages teach, "Woe is to the wicked one, woe is to his neighbor." The tribe of Reuben were neighbors to the Levite family of Kehat--Korah's camp. Of all the tribes of Israel, Reuben was most vulnerable to the influence of Korah and his wicked cohorts. Living in that "neighborhood" influenced the people of Reuben negatively to the point where they too, with nothing really to gain, joined the rebellion against Moshe. One woman, the wife of On Ben Pelt, saw clearly. She told her husband, "What do you have to gain? If Moshe and Aharon are victorious, you are an underling to them and if Korah is the winner you are an underling to him?" But even her clear thinking logical approach was not enough to get her husband to drop out of the crowd who were attacking the Torah leaders. She had to give her spouse food and drink to put him to sleep and then sat outside their tent to dissuade the others who came to fetch her husband for a demonstration against Moshe. Take note of the awesome power of peer pressure!

Maimonides says that a person must move away from negative societal influences. He outlines a step- by- step process of insulation from those who might bring a person "down" spiritually. He even goes so far as to rule that if the people are insistent and will not accept the righteous person's self-inflicted isolation from their society, he must move out of society and live in the desert or in caves. The approach of the Rambam [Maimonides] may sound a little drastic, but we must respect it of because of where it comes from, -- one of the greatest Judaic teachers and philosophers of all time.

How can we apply this age-old lesson to the 21st century? It's important to understand that although

science advances and technology increases, human nature stays basically the same throughout the generations. "Woe is to the wicked one, woe is to his neighbor," means that we must choose the healthiest spiritual environment that we can for ourselves and for our families. Where we go for entertainment, what business we choose for earning a living, what media we allow to enter our homes and most importantly who we choose to socialize and be friendly with day to day, are decisions that must be confronted with an eye towards spiritual health. May Hashem give us all the wisdom to make the right choices for our selves and our children.

Shabbat Shalom

DID YOU KNOW THAT

If a little water spilled on a table or chair on Shabbat, that you may place paper towels on the spill to absorb the water. One should be careful, however, not to squeeze the towel.

If there is a lot of water then you are NOT permitted to dry up the spill. [Source Yalkut Yosef siman 60 Halacha 24]

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