

6-8-13 Message to Beit Adonai Yisrael

Torah Portion: Korach (Bald) Numbers 16-18 (B'midbar)

Haftarah: Num. 16:1-18:32, 1 Sam. 11:14-12:22,

Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: Acts 5:1-11

Shabbat/Rosh Chodesh, Isa. 66:1-24, 23

and 1 Pet. 2:4-5, 10; Machar Chodesh,

add 1 Sam. 20:18, 42)

Being a Humble Servant, Even as a Follower

Central question of this message: Sometimes a challenge to a spiritual leader is appropriate, but how do we avoid murmuring and backbiting, which are sinful?

Today is also Rosh Chodesh Tammuz. It is traditional to read special portions of Scripture, being the Hallel Psalms (113-118), and the Yaaley V'yavo prayer is added to Mussaf.

Also from the Shabbes following Pesach until the Shabbes before Rosh Hashanah, some study a chapter of the Talmud's "Ethics of the Fathers". This week, the study would be chapter 4.

That chapter contains some very nice commentary from sages which deals directly with the subject I will speak on today.

This portion is called Korach. Korach means “bald”. We have already discussed the customs of the Egyptians, how they would cut off all their hair.

By this time G-d has already told the people that he didn't wish for them to follow this Egyptian custom. Does this hint at maybe some rebellious spirit in the heart of Korach?

To understand what is going on, let's back up a little. In Numbers 11, Moses takes the 70 elders (later to become the Sanhedrin) with him to the Mishkan. The Spirit fell upon them there, and they prophesied.

But two men had remained in the camp, Eldad and Medad.

Num 11:26-30

26 But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. 27 So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and

Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, answered and said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them." 29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!" 30 Then Moses returned to the camp, both he and the elders of Israel.

See how Moses seems to elevate the entire people in his statement? But rather than be a statement that the people used to see Moses as more humble than anyone, some saw it as a statement elevating them. Our sages say that this very statement is what Korach seized upon as part of his challenge to Moses.

There had already been considerable grumbling in the camp, associated with the report of the spies. You remember the “we were like grasshoppers to them” report.

Num 14:1-4

14 Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the

*whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! **Or would that we had died in this wilderness!** 3 "And why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."*

As an aside – G-d said “Your terms are acceptable” to their “... that we had died in this wilderness.” Statement.

So, that was the attitude in the camp, Korach apparently became jealous of Aaron’s position as High Priest, and he thought he could take it by a cunning trick.

Korach was going through the camp, trying to gather an alliance so that he could be High Priest rather than Aaron.

Num 16:1-3

*Now Korah the son of Izhar, the **son of Kohath**, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took action, 2 and*

*they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, **two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown.***

***3 And they assembled together against Moses and Aaron,** and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"*

Korach wasn't just leading a lynchmob, a rabble, he had lobbied 250 famous leaders in the congregation to come oppose Moses.

Our sages have recorded a supposed event in which Korach issued a challenge to Moses, much as did the religious men of a later generation would do to Yeshua.

The Midrash Tanhuma, gives us a commentary on Korach's scheme. It says that Korach gathered the supporters, and then asked Moses a difficult halakhic question.

As the story goes, Korach put upon each of the select men cloaks made entirely of blue wool. They came and stood before Moses

and asked him, "Does a cloak made entirely of blue wool require tzitzit, or is it exempt?"

Moses is said to have replied, "It does require [tzitzit]." They began laughing at him, trying to challenge him with what seemed to be an opposite ruling. "Is it possible that a cloak of another material, one string of blue wool exempts it [from the obligation of techeles], and this one, which is made entirely of blue wool, should not exempt itself?" (Tanhuma, Korach 4; Rashi to Num. 16:1)

You will remember the commandment regarding the tzitzit from last week's parashah, and the requirement that it contain a techeles – the cord of special blue.

Disregard the superficial point of the requirement of the tzitzit on a garment made entirely of techeles. You will get lost in the minutiae.

See ahead, and see the next step in Korach's argument.

Is there a need for leadership in "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation"?

Korach's argument is that everyone is like a priest. Everyone is holy. Everyone is equal in dignity before God.

If the garment made up entirely of techeles represents Israel – being “all holy” – then why would they need someone to appoint himself over them as “super holy”?

So, Moses' response that even that garment requires tzitzit, refutes the higher argument of Korach.

Do you see where Korach made his error? It is found at Num 16:3

*"You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so **why do you exalt yourselves** above the assembly of the Lord?"*

Korach, and all those who followed him misunderstood a fundamental truth of spiritual leadership.

When men choose leaders, that leadership is flawed – even with the best leaders. When G-d chooses leaders, that leadership is best, even with flawed people. Because G-d guides the heart.

G-d chooses humble people for leaders. For a humble heart will follow Him, and not seek after power and material things.

We seem to choose haughty people for leaders. People who have sought after great power and influence. Our leaders don't turn us toward G-d.

With the Jewish understanding, leadership is not about popularity. In tractate Ketubot 105b we read "If a scholar is loved by the people of his town, it is not because he is gifted but because he fails to rebuke them in matters of heaven"

Two hundred fifty influential men in the congregation chose Korach. How did that turn out?

Num 16:31-35

31 Then it came about as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground that was under them split open; 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah, with their possessions. 33 So they and all that

belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. 34 And all Israel who were around them fled at their outcry, for they said, "The earth may swallow us up!" 35 Fire also came forth from the Lord and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.

What was going on in the camp that gave Korach the opportunity to do what he did? In Hebrew we call it *tilunu* – murmuring.

The root of murmuring is the flesh, not the Spirit. It is watered by strife, jealousy, disputes, dissensions, factions, envy.

Paul faced this problem in his time, and wrote about it to the Galatians.

Gal 5:16-26

16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the

flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the [death penalty of the] Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who I belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another.

In fact, his letter to the Corinthians summed-up the murmuring in the desert, and how G-d kept judging it.

1 Cor 10:8-12

8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them I did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Did Korach believe he had a problem with Moses and Aaron?
Yes.

That wasn't the sin.

So, how do we, in this present age, deal with problems we have with one another – especially with leaders – and not sin?

How do we stand and not fall?

First of all, let's realize several important truths.

First: Leaders are people. They have flaws. My heart's desire is to bless you. But you hang out around me long enough and I will disappoint you.

Secondly: Leaders are under authority. No believer is without an authority over him.

Thirdly: On an issue important to the congregation, you *may* hear from G-d... but long before then, your leaders will have already heard from G-d on that matter.

The Spirit deals with the leaders first.

But what if you have an issue with your leadership, and you don't see a turn of heart?

Here is the practical procedure:

First, determine if the issue is a "child is in the street" issue or not.

If not, spend some time in prayer, and in the Word.

Get the log out of your own eye.

Once you can approach the other person with tears in your eyes – not for your offense, but for his failure – then you might be ready to go.

Exercise forgiveness. This keeps an offense from eating you like a cancer. Once forgiveness is granted, love can come bubbling back to the surface.

Know that you don't have all knowledge. A few important facts lacking in the analysis can make the opposite conclusion seem true.

Be sure that you are being called to speak. If a leader is really falling, the Spirit will send the right person to him. That might not be you.

Follow Mat 18.

Go first in person and speak your heart. Here is where you will get more facts.

Take a couple of other witnesses to the next meeting, if no resolution.

If your leader is truly humble, you will never need to go that far.

The point is unity. For Satan flourishes in an atmosphere of disunity and strife.

Eph 4:1-3

4 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Rabbi Bachaye said that Korach aspired to a lofty position for which he was unfit. Therefore, he was punished by being swallowed up by the ground and sent down to the lowest level of Gehinnom.

It is said that Moses considered himself to be nothing more than dust. So, for the L-rd to punish Korach for his haughtiness, and place him below Moses, Korach was brought lower than the dust.

I have told you that it is customary for us to read from the Ethics of the Fathers during these days. In Chapter 4 – this week’s chapter – we find this good advice to leaders:

Rabbi Eliezer the son of Shamua would say: The dignity of your student should be as precious to you as your own; the dignity of your colleague, as your awe of your master; and your awe of your master as your awe of Heaven.

What does this tell us?

We are all under authority, and in authority. Each one of us fits into a hierarchy. We are each a leader to someone.

So, we are to give honor and dignity not only to those under us, but to those over us, as if we are doing so unto G-d.

To each of us is directed the following wisdom:

Prov 19:20-21

*20 Listen to counsel and accept discipline,
That you may be wise the rest of your days.*

*21 Many are the plans in a man's heart,
But the counsel of the Lord, it will stand.*

Let's walk circumspectly, and in love, for we are all followers, and we are all leaders.

Verses for Parashah Korach Message

Num 11:26-30

Num 14:1-4

Num 16:16-19

Num 16:31-35

Gal 5:16-26

1 Cor 10:8-12

Eph 4:1-3

Prov 19:20-21