

Korach - Finding balance

Sharon Havis

Shabbat shalom

I would like to share with you some words about our Torah portion.

We have just learned of the mutiny by Korach against Moshe. Korach wanted a position of Kohen Gadol and since he was not chosen, he decided to challenge Moshe's authority.

Let's discuss some background on who exactly is Korach. He is of the same heritage as Moshe, he is his first cousin, they're fathers were brothers. He is of the tribe of Levi and the family of Kehat. This is the family that was chosen to carry the Aron, which is a very prestigious position. Being of the tribe of Levi, we know Korach was not a slave in Egypt, he actually worked in Pharaoh's treasury, according to the midrash. So he was a wealthy man, a man of privilege, of entitlement, motivated by money and ego. He did not want to leave Egypt, however, there was not much going on there after the plagues, so he left with everyone else. He was consumed with desire for glory and envied those he thought of as equals yet had higher ranks than he. He rebelled because he sought honor.

So why does Korach challenge Moshe? What is he going after? There is also a part of Korach that is righteous, learned. He saw with Ruach HaKodesh, which means Divine inspiration, that his descendants would include the prophet Shmuel, as well as fourteen groups of levi'im who would also prophesize with Ruach HaKodesh, so he felt entitled. He felt it was his innate right to become Kohen Gadol. It was through his sons, that had almost followed in his footsteps, however, they made teshuva, that this came about.

He had spiritual ambitions. He wanted the experience of the Kohen Gadol, the lofty experience of the closeness to HaShem that he thinks only Moshe and Aaron and his sons are capable of experiencing. So Korach confronts Moshe and asks him to prove that indeed the lineage of the Kohen Gadol is from HaShem's word and not Moshe's. So HaShem instructs Moshe to conduct a test. Offering the incense was a part of the Tabernacle service reserved for priests only and only at designated times. However, Korach and company would not be deterred, even though they knew it would cause

their death, they still took up the challenge. This desire to get close to HaShem would be their undoing.

It's the choices we make, the values we hold dear and the character we develop following the guidelines of Torah that motivates us. Korach questioned this, he thought Moshe was making up the mitzvot, the rules and laws and he did not like it. So Korach sought his own path, and while his intentions might have been pure, to get close to HaShem, his method in achieving that was mistaken. Korach and his followers thought they knew better than Moshe. They should have learned a lesson from Nadav and Avihu, both righteous individuals, who brought an unauthorized fire to HaShem and died instantaneously. But they did not learn from this. It seems absurd to me to disregard this lesson, going against HaShem's will in order to get close to Him. . This is the lesson that Korach missed. His desire to get close to HaShem, even though he knew it was a suicide mission, outweighed the good he could have done finding that balance in his everyday life. Finding this balance between our spiritual essence and our physical mission is what he missed.

In truth, aren't we all capable of experiencing that closeness to HaShem? Weren't we told at Sinai that we are a nation of priests, a holy people? What does it mean to experience closeness to HaShem? Does it mean we must physically give up our lives, as Korach did? Or can we have an experience of closeness by bringing G-dliness into our mundane lives? The purpose of life is to live within mundane reality revealing the G-dliness concealed within it. Only by entering the material world can HaShem's essence be found, through fulfilling His commandments on the physical plane. We are both physical and spiritual beings. By learning Torah and living lives filled with meaning, by increasing our level of observance, praying on a daily basis, talking to HaShem in our own words, saying the blessings before and after we eat, lighting Shabbat candles, saying the blessing when we wash, living lives of loving kindness and strength, grace, and understanding, compassion, humility, forgiveness do we bring the Divine into the ordinary, the Holy into the mundane.

In order to remain true to our Divine mission while leading material lives we need to believe this is possible. Avoda itself, which is our spiritual work, our devotion is transforming the physical into a vehicle for G-dliness. Our lives need to balance

the desire to rise above the world, to live a completely spiritual life and the devotion to descend into it in order to refine and elevate it.

I encourage each of us to find this balance, the spiritual and the physical, the Divine in our daily lives so that we can become close to HaShem and not disregard our mission on the planet.

Shabbat shalom.