

KORACH (NUMBERS 16:1-18:32)

Dead Wrong?

2006 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Some people are just exasperating. They take positions that are totally devoid of logic.

We, on the other hand, are paragons of correctness, totally removed from error. Right?

Moses was confronted by an angry mob of 250. They had been led astray by a malcontent named Korach. His jealousy of a cousin so corrupted his logic that he lost all contact with reality. He fabricated complaints against Moses (See "True Blue") and fomented a rebellion.

Korach's hatred for Moses was so all-encompassing that he insisted on fighting to the bitter reprehensible end. Faced with the threat of certain death, Korach and his gang stood by their guns and were buried alive in a miraculous earthquake.

The Torah exhorts us to avoid Korach's divisive ways:

"... *and he should not be like Korach and his assembly ...*" (Numbers, 17:5) (See "There's More to Being Right than Just Not Being Wrong")

Don't act that way, says the Torah. Don't lock yourself into illogical positions. Don't be stubborn and argumentative. Don't cling to ideas that are obviously wrong. Don't argue just for the sake of arguing.

This is difficult to understand. Korach was totally out of control. His behavior was outrageous. Does the Torah really have to tell us not to follow his example?

You and I are much smarter than Korach, right? We, of course, would never hold steadfastly to a position that is obviously wrong. We would only argue to the end without compromise when our position is incontrovertible. (Isn't it a shame that more people aren't as smart and intellectually honest as we are? :-))

Korach, that stubborn, pig-headed, trouble-maker, only saw things his way. He refused to consider the other side. Would we really make the mistake of emulating Korach had the Torah not warned us not to?

Let us look again at what the Torah tells us:

"... and *he should not be like Korach and his assembly ...*"

The Torah says, "...*v'lo yihyeh -- and he should not be -- like Korach ...*"

There is another way to translate it: "...*v'lo yihyeh -- and there will not be -- like Korach ...*"

I once heard an explanation from Rabbi Yissochar Frand. What the Torah is telling us is, "... *there will never again be an argument like that of Korach and his assembly.*"

The debate of Korach vs. Moses is unique in all the annals of history. The Torah is telling us that there will never again be an argument like the one between Korach and Moses -- where one side was 100 % right and one side was 100% wrong.

There was no merit whatsoever to Korach's side; there was no flaw whatsoever to Moses' side.

Perhaps the other fellow isn't as wrong as I think he is. Shouldn't I be open-minded and honestly try to see things from his perspective? Perhaps my own position isn't as well thought out as I think it is. And even if I'm right, am I going about it in the right way?

The Torah is telling us not to be so sure of ourselves, and not to be so quick to dismiss the other guy's opinion. The other guy is no Korach, and I am certainly no Moses!!

Remembering this may help to prevent bringing out that little bit of Korach that resides in all of us.

Have a great Shabbos.

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