

B”H

Parsha Korach

WE NOT ME

In this week’s parsha, Korach and his followers lead a revolt against Moshe and Aaron’s leadership by declaring: ‘ everyone is holy’ . Korach’s motivation is jealousy of Moshe and a lust for power. Coming after the incident of the spies, Moshe becomes overwhelmed falls on his face in both prayer and despair. Moshe instructs Korach and his followers to bring flat pans w/ incense to the Ohel Moed. “The man whom Hashem chooses he shall be the holy one.” Moshe would prefer to avert further conflict and approaches Datan and Aviram, two followers of Korach. They refuse telling Moshe “We will not go up”. Not only will we not cooperate but we have no interest in elevating ourselves spiritually to avert a conflict! Hashem commands both Moshe and Korach and his followers to bring incense pans as offerings. “Tomorrow in the morning Hashem will disclose who is His, and who is holy and bring him near to Him.” Korach and his followers lose and the earth swallows him and his followers. The lesson: Arguments that are filled with hatred and finger pointing never end well.

Machloket or arguments seem to be a way of life for most of us. Parsha Korach, someone said, will be learned for eternity since there are always arguments among Jews (and everyone else). Pirkei Avot, which we read during the summer months, teaches us Hillel and Shammai had arguments for the sake of heaven but Korach did not. Hillel we are told wanted to hear the opinion of others while Korach only listened to himself. Yakov Nagen in his book “Be Become Bless” writes that when we think only we have THE TRUTH, we can be sure our words will fall on deaf ears.

Aviva Zornberg, describes two types of arguments. One is when we are open and willing to hear the other person . The other one is when we are closed within one’s perfect and narrow circle. We can’t listen to others and sadly sometimes even ourselves.

Where does the arguing come from? Rashi comments on Korach “His thoughts took him to a different side away from the community.” Those thoughts usually include lots of ego, self- righteousness, jealousy anger and defensiveness. When we impose our views on others we will usually wind up in our own secluded bottomless pit. The modern Hasidic Teacher Rabbi Dovber Pinson writes; “When desire is aroused so is its companion, Jealousy. When a person’s eyes see what does not belong to him his heart may nonetheless desire it. When people can not receive or achieve what they desire, they can become jealous, envious or full of rage.”

We can be alert to only ourselves or see ourselves as one small light among many others. Early in my marriage, my wife offered me a bit of advice: It’s about WE not Me! I am still trying to figure that one out!!

What happens after we argue? There is really no winner. After Korach and his followers are swallowed into the earth the Israelites cry out: “You have killed Hashem’s people”. The Israelites have lost respect for Moshe just like our spouses, children and friends may lose respect for us after a heated argument.

I personally experienced the type of Korach passion before I retired as a Social Worker. I worked with many abused, drug addicted, homeless and mentally ill people. I had the same kind of passionate self-righteousness he may have had. I argued with managers many times about MY TRUTH regarding how others should see the situation MY WAY. Many times, I wound up in the same kind of pit Korach found himself in.

Korach challenged Moshe by saying "We are all holy". A nice way of saying I am Holy without the needed effort. We all need to be Holy beings. This is what HaKodesh Barchu asks of us every day. When we live a Holy life, a good life, we are less prone to be Masters of Arguments. But Holiness takes effort and awareness. Holiness means starting over every minute, every second. Am I listening to the other or am I planning my rebuttal? Am I listening to myself when I confront the other? Holiness is not static. Sometimes we fail and like Moshe we may need to fall on our faces and cry out in prayer. "What is being asked of me in this moment?" Please Hashem guide me on the proper way to speak with others!

What I say and HOW I say things matter a lot. The way we treat each other means a lot. It is not a stretch to say that in relationships and communities and even in our nation speech and communication are in exile. Discourse has been replaced by yelling, talking over the other party and finger pointing at others as to how wrong others are. It's a game of ME not We.

The choice we face today is to begin to listen with open hearts and souls and embrace Holiness or descend into a bottomless pit. Which path will you choose?