

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Korach

In this week's Parsha, Moses is called to task by his cousin, Korach. Korach challenged the appointment of Aaron as the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest. He claimed that Moses had turned Jewish leadership into a family business, rather than giving jobs to those who deserved them most. In response to this challenge, Moses proposed a test to determine whom G-d would choose as *Kohen Gadol*. All who wished, could come along with Aaron to the Tabernacle, and present an incense offering to G-d. G-d would choose His man, and the rest of the people would be killed. Korach, along with two hundred and fifty of his supporters, accepted this challenge. Ultimately they were all killed by G-d, and only Aaron remained.

When analyzing this story there is a very difficult question that presents itself. What was Korach thinking? He just spent the past year watching Moses perform miracles - from the ten plagues, to the splitting of the Red Sea, to the war with the Amalekites, to the manna and the water that was miraculously supplied to the Jewish people in the desert. Furthermore, he had heard the words of G-d, Himself, on Mount Sinai, through the mouth of Moses, validating Moses as a Prophet. How could Korach turn around and doubt Moses and his prophecy? Why did he wager his life against this proven leader? Moreover, all the men knew that only one of them would survive. What made each of them so confident that they would be chosen, when the odds were stacked so heavily against them?

The Medrash Tanchuma provides some background to the event, which gives clarity to Korach's true motive. The Midrash explains that Korach's complaints were a result of Moses's appointment of the *Nasi*, the leader, of the tribe of the Levites. Korach reasoned that he was deserving of that position. Kohath, son of Levi, had four sons. The oldest, Amram had two sons: Moses and Aaron. One became the leader, and the other the High Priest. The next highest position should be given to Korach who was the oldest son of Izhar, Kohath's next son. Moses, however, gave the position to Elizaphan, the son of Kohath's youngest son, Uzziel. Korach became jealous of his younger cousin, which led him to challenge the authenticity of all of Moses's leadership.

With this in mind we can begin to understand the actions of Korach and his followers. This rebellion was not a well thought-out, logical opposition based on hard facts. This was a passionate, emotionally driven mutiny by a group of disgruntled citizens. Blinded by their jealousy, they were unable to see the flaws in their logic, and the absurdity of their claims. Even when faced with sure death, they were unwilling to back down.



JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

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What a powerful lesson about the dangers of jealousy. Jealousy can take over the mind, and distort logic. It can drive one to do things that neither make sense, nor are at all helpful. How careful one must be to stay away from this bad trait.

The Mishna in Avot (4:28) states, Rabbi Elazar HaKappar says: Jealousy, lust and glory remove a man from this world. The deeper meaning of this statement is as follows. These emotions reflect traits which do not allow a person to live normally in this world. These feelings have the power to influence the way a person acts and how he thinks, to the point where they are living his life for him. The feeling of jealousy will take complete control over a person's mind and actions, leaving no room for what a person really wants, and what he knows is true.

Although this seems like a mere natural consequence to this evil feeling, in truth, it is actually a great gift from G-d. Jealousy, in its very essence, is an evil trait. It demonstrates a basic lack in one's interpersonal relationships. A person who cares for and loves his fellow man the way he should, would feel only happiness and joy for the good fortune of another, not jealousy. Furthermore, jealousy indicates a lack of faith in G-d. A person is only jealous of something he can relate to. A pauper would not be jealous of a king. A non-athletic person will not be jealous of the records set by people who have perfected their physical bodies. A person who had total faith in G-d would also never be jealous. If G-d gave something to another, be it a job, an opportunity, or a good break in life, a believer understands that that is something which is only relevant to the that person, and had nothing to do with him/her. If G-d did not give it to someone else, that person has absolutely no connection to it and no possibility of receiving it. It is only when a person believes that they, and not G-d, are in control, that they can be jealous of another.

To ensure that people would stay away from this jealousy, G-d created the nature of man to react negatively to it. This will help a person realize the evilness of this trait and give an extra incentive to stay away from it. If a person can recognize the negativity of jealousy, both in its essence, and the negative effect that it has on him or her, he/she will be able to refrain from it. This will allow for the strengthening of interpersonal relationships, faith in G-d, and ensure that one lives his/her life the way he/she really wants to, uninfluenced by wayward thoughts.

Shabbat Shalom!

