

There were several episodes prior to the Korach event where the people complained spontaneously in reaction to challenging situations. The encounter with Amalek, drought, the wilderness itself, were catalysts for the people to complain. These complaints could be understood in the context of the primitive needs of people challenged by stressful situations. They reacted out of fear and cried out when they saw Egypt pursuing them. צעקה is a response to danger and stress. They cried out again when they could not drink from the bitter waters of Marah. The people complained to Moses about the loss of the fleshpots of Egypt. In *Rfidim* they again quarreled with Moses over the lack of water. These were not political or ideological controversies, nor were these rebellions, but complaints by former slaves confronted with difficult situations they were simply unprepared for. Even the golden calf episode was precipitated by the primitive perception of terror that grips the lost sheep in the desert motivated by the loss of their leader Moses. These episodes portray a mob mentality that is easily excited but quickly regains equilibrium after the episode. Even with the episode of the spies, there was no pre-meditated conspiracy among the people. It was a spontaneous reaction to their fear of failure to conquer the Land of Israel, motivated by the spies.

The Korach rebellion was of a totally different character. It was not precipitated by physical desires such as food and water. The Korach Rebellion was not precipitated by a mob experiencing physical discomfort. The people in general did not participate in the Korach Controversy. The Korach Conspiracy was a well-planned rebellion that involved some 250 individuals, mostly of the intellectual aristocracy. It was a premeditated rebellion.

What prompted Korach to rebel? According to Ramban, Korach's hatred of Moses began when Aaron was selected as High Priest while the rest of the Levites were designated to serve in the Tabernacle. Korach felt Moses and Aaron usurped the prized positions, depriving him of a more significant role. Aaron's selection coincided with the Tabernacle consecration, prior to sending the spies. Korach realized the people were very devoted to Moses and would resist any attempt to unseat him. Korach decided to wait patiently for an opportunity to undermine Moses' authority and popularity.

Korach's moment arrived sooner than he anticipated with the incident of the spies. The decree that the current generation would not enter the land was a severe blow to Moses' prestige in the eyes of the people. Moses promised, on behalf of Gd, that those who felt the lash of their Egyptian taskmasters would inherit the promised land of milk and honey a short while after they departed from Egypt. Moses told Yitro they were about to march into the land after 2 years in the desert. They were

prepared to invade from the south. Suddenly their sojourn in the wilderness was extended 38 years. After they sent the spies, their reality became a 38 year nightmare in the desert. All their hopes and dreams were shattered. No land of milk and honey, no promise of **והבאתי**. Many more difficult years would pass before they would enter the Promised Land. They asked each other "what of Moses' promise?" How could they endure the desert for another 38 years? The people complained spontaneously. Moses' popularity plummeted.

Korach realized his opportunity to reveal his plot against Moses arrived. Until Korach's Rebellion, no one dared challenge Moses' authority. They stood in awe of Moses, despite all the hardships. Korach was the first to argue with Moses and separate himself from the community that revered and loved Moses. He recruited others, frustrated like himself, to join him in challenging Moses.

Rashi interpreted **ויקה קרח** 2 ways. He "separated himself" from the community to one side with the intention of arguing over the priesthood. He was the first to separate himself in such a challenge to Moses' leadership. **ויקה** implies he dedicated himself completely, with a singular focus, to unseating Moses and undermining his exalted position among the people. Korach pursued a personal vendetta. Initially he kept his contempt of Moses to himself. Once the 40 year sojourn in the wilderness was decreed, Korach revealed his plans to Dathan and Aviram and other aggrieved individuals. Rashi says that Korach was a neighbor of the tribe of Reuven and the proximity of wicked people to each other facilitated their conspiracy. **אוי לרשע ואוי לשכנו**. According to Ramban, the Reuvenites felt slighted by Jacob stripping the birthright from Reuven and granting it to Joseph. They were angry that the monarchy was given to Judah and the high priesthood to Levi and Aaron. Jacob was no longer extant, so they transferred their enmity to Moses.

Rashi's second interpretation is he attracted the heads of the Sanhedrin with enticing words. Chazal describe Korach as a clever man who presented cogent arguments and successfully convinced the heads of the courts to support him. He now openly criticized and ridiculed Moses. With some, he played the role of the persecuted, with others he was the champion of justice and equality. He understood his audience and attracted a following.

However in order for any rebellion to succeed, regardless its motivation, it must develop an ideology, a philosophy, a motto. Korach developed a philosophy of the rebellion. The Torah distinguishes between Moses' and Korach's approaches. Korach provoked a debate that attracted a curious crowd to watch the spectacle.

ויקהלו על משה ועל אהרן ויאמרו כי כל העדה כולם קדושים ומדוע תתנשאו על קהל ד'. He challenged Moses' authority with a simple yet powerful argument: why should Moses and Aaron usurp illegitimately all authority for themselves? Korach's populist message appealed to the people. All the members of the congregation are holy and imbued with spirituality, there was no difference between Moses and the wood chopper as far as the inherent sanctity of a Jew. Therefore what right do Moses and Aaron have to elevate themselves above all others? It was the age old conflict of the equality of men versus selection and election of an individual.

Korach ignored or was unaware of the dual character of Jewish Sanctity, קדושת ישראל. Rashi comments that the Torah formulates a dual sanctity: כי עם קדוש אתה refers to sanctity derived from the patriarchs. In addition, Gd chose you to be a cherished people unto Him. The first sanctity derives from the Jewish Community, כנסת ישראל, as a living personality (see Ramban in Chayei Sarah). There is a genetic code of sanctity transmitted from our patriarchs via the soul of the Jew. A baby born to a Jewish mother inherits her קדושת ישראל. The individual who wishes to lay claim to the collective sanctity must draw it from his association with the community as the holy entity. If the community is holy, then the parts that comprise that entity are holy as well. The people derive sanctity by being together as a unit (*Am* derives from with). This sanctity is not individual, personal or separate; it is a shared communal sanctity granted to children of parents who inherited it from their forefathers.

Korach focused exclusively on the communal sanctity, אלוקים, כי עם קדוש אתה לד'. He disagreed with Jeffersonian philosophy regarding the primacy of the individual over community. Korach believed community was primary over the individual. Individual sanctity derives from community sanctity. *Korachism* predated Marxism. Hence according to him, Moses' inherent sanctity is equivalent to that of the wood chopper.

However Judaism was not satisfied with communal sanctity alone. Community as sole source of sanctity would deny individuality, creativity and potential for greatness. The outstanding person cannot develop into a great leader if community sanctity posits that he is no greater than anyone else. The second sanctity of בך בחר ד' is exclusive, personal and unique to each individual. To paraphrase *Chazal*, just like the faces of people differ, their level of individual sanctity differs as well. קדושת העם, the sanctity of the nation, is based on the integrated and accumulated individual sanctity of the people. The Torah says that you are a component of a

great holy community. However at the same time, Gd chose you as an individual to be a source of sanctity.

Prior to Gd conferring personal sanctity, community sanctity was favored over individual sanctity. Now that Gd has chosen you communally **and** individually, the individual is charged with creating his own sanctity proportionate with his dedication to achieving the ideals of sanctity prescribed by the Torah. Korach's thesis that the entire community shares equivalent sanctity is shattered once we introduce the concept of individual sanctity. The argument that Moses, the greatest prophet and individual who ever lived, and the common wood chopper were equivalent, was now absurd.

Moses responded to Korach in the morning, בקר, Gd will specify which individual is endowed with sanctity and should be brought close. This selection is not predicated by the community sanctity championed by Korach. Rather, Gd will select the leader by considering the individual's sanctity. בקר derives from the root word to discriminate, to differentiate. בקר means the period of clarity when one can distinguish. Korach's concept of sanctity was ערב, a time of uniformity, monotony, when individuals merges into a single obscured and amorphous mass. Moses countered that בקר connotes sanctity, as the period when the world starts to appreciate sanctity attained by the individual.

The Conversion Process, with its required acts of circumcision, מילה, and immersion in a Mikva, טבילה, represents the community and individual aspects of sanctity. Circumcision unites the convert with the identity of the people allowing him to draw on and contribute to the communal sanctity. Immersion refers to the individual sanctity, the personal commitment of the convert to follow Gd's commandments. Individual sanctity can only be attained when the convert retreats from the community for a short time and hides as an individual in the Mikva water and accepts his individual responsibility.

Korach thought that Moses and Aaron were hungry for political power and the desire to elevate themselves above the people. He said to Moses why do you raise yourselves above the people, למה תתנשא, in the reflexive form? He did not recognize that the covenantal community has no use for a strictly political leader. The covenantal community is first and foremost a teaching community. The teacher, not the warrior, high priest or king, has always been the central figure. The people in the covenantal community are not political subjects or servants, they are disciples.

The equation of leader as king and relationship between leader and those led is incorrect. Where the political community cannot exist without violence or sanctions, the covenantal community is not connected with either. It eschews a political leader who rules by might and violence. The covenantal community is characterized by a complete willingness to submit to a teacher, without coercion. The leader who is the great teacher is the holy man. The teacher is selected by Gd to be closer to Him and thus his level of sanctity transcends that of his disciples. There is equation between sanctity and teaching. The disciple can terminate his relationship with his teacher whenever he wants. On the other hand it is very difficult to terminate a political relationship.

Judaism has disapproved generally of all forms of human government. There are definite streaks of political anarchism in Judaism's reluctance to recognize man as king. Judaism never trusted the political leader. Instead, it always emphasized the role of teacher. At best, man is a pauper king, מלך אביון. On Rosh Hashanah we contrast מלך אביון and מלך עליון and condemn מלך אביון as a day dreamer, a bluffer. מלך אביון is a contradiction in terms. Gd alone governs and no one else may usurp His authority. The only structure recognized by Halacha is the teacher - disciple relationship within the teaching covenantal community. Spiritual leadership is more powerful and intimate than political.

While Moses was considered a king, ויהי בישורון מלך, and great warrior, to us he is first and foremost the greatest of all teachers and father of all prophets. Aaron was not simply a high priest. He was also the teacher par excellence. כי שפתי כהן ישמרו ובאת אל הכהן אשר יהי-ה. דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו. The priests were teachers, as it says. The disciples loved their master, listened to his teachings and willingly obeyed his orders. The community instinctively elevated Moses out of recognition of his pedagogical, not his political, skills. In contradiction to Korach's insinuation, Moses did not have to force the people to raise him as primary political leader. The reflexive form of למה תתנשא was incorrect and out of context. He was not מתנשא but נשוא, raised spontaneously and willingly by his disciples.

Korach's second argument is not mentioned explicitly in the Torah. Rashi quotes the seemingly humorous stories from Tanchuma that Korach dressed the heads of the Sanhedrin in clothes woven completely of Blue/Purple, תכלת and asked Moses if such a garment is subject to the law of Fringes, ציצית, or exempt. Moses said that it was subject to ציצית. They jeered him based on the logic that if a single thread of תכלת renders a garment acceptable then one that is completely of תכלת should not require it at all!

Next, Korach asked if a house filled with Torah scrolls requires a Mezuzah, מזוזה? Moses answered yes and again they jeered him based on logic. If two chapters from the Torah are sufficient in a מזוזה then of course a room that contains many complete Torah scrolls should be absolved of the obligation of מזוזה. What is the Midrash telling us with these apparently humorous stories?

Korach developed an ideology and sought to not only supplant Moses as king and leader but also as teacher. He rebelled against and challenged Moses' halachic authority by showing the people and the 250 scholars that Moses is incapable of interpreting the law. He wanted to replace Moses as the teacher, perhaps to be referred to as Korach Rabeinu, our teacher. Based on their logical interpretation of these two questions, the 250 scholars decided that Moses was wrong and they jeered him.

Korach argued that the study of the law and its interpretation are exoteric, democratic acts which every intelligent person may lay claim to. Moses' claim to be the sole authority and interpreter of the law was unfounded. The consequence of such a democratic philosophy is disastrous. It is the same argument that is advanced today by groups, including in the Orthodox community, that common sense should be the instrument through which to interpret Torah law. These groups seek to legitimize themselves as valid interpreters of the law, offering viewpoints based on subjective reasoning without investing the time and effort required to fully understand the law.

We find that the term דעת indicates intelligence. חכמה and בינה refer to specialized knowledge, a trained intellect that is exposed to the exacting and critical method of study. Korach and his group argued that דעת, common sense alone, was sufficient license for each Jew to interpret the law as he understands it. Modern examples of such thinking are ritual committees in Orthodox and non-Orthodox synagogues that incorrectly use common sense to determine halachic decisions. All reform movements have argued that common sense should be used to interpret the law. For example, the Gemara (בבא בתרא קטו:) notes that according to the Pharisees, any litigation regarding the estate of a father between his daughter and daughter of his son should be judged in favor of the granddaughter. The Sadducees argued that it goes to the daughter. From a common sense perspective, the argument of the Sadducees makes sense. Yet it is not acceptable according to the Halacha.

Korach argued why should a garment require ציצית with a thread of תכלת if it is completely made of תכלת? Common sense dictates that it should not require a strand of תכלת. However, תורה שבעל פה cannot be identified simply with דעת, common sense. It has its own methods of conceptualization and abstraction that go

beyond the common sense approach. Halacha works like the mathematician. תורה שבעל פה is not necessarily the study of reality. It is the application of abstract principles to reality.

Aristotelian physics failed miserably because its foundation was common sense, empirical human intelligence working with common ideas. It lacked precision and measurement. Galileo's and Newton's great accomplishment is they replaced common sense or lay logos or thought with the conceptual and precise scientific logos. They arrived at concrete and precise mathematical formulae to explain reality. Scientific logos conceptualizes reality where the lay or common sense logos takes reality at face value. Had we been satisfied with Aristotelian physics, mankind's great achievements would have been impossible. Should the Halacha be discriminated against and denied a precise approach methodology like science?

תורה שבעל פה is not simply a corpus of laws. It is a method of logical thinking and categorization. It is available to the human mind willing to discipline itself. It takes great dedication and effort to attain that level of discipline.

Women's liberation movements argue that the Torah discriminates against women, pointing out places where Halacha distinguishes between men and women. They are mistaken, as the Torah teaches that man and woman were created by Gd. As both are created in the image of Gd, we can't say one is superior to the other. They are of equal importance. For example, women may not bear witness. According to Aristotelian logic this would be a problem. According to Judaic thought this is not discrimination against women. Others are also disqualified, A king, even the Messiah, David, Moses himself or two brothers jointly may not be a witness. Even though they are all intelligent people, the Torah has decreed that they are unacceptable witnesses. Is David inferior to an ignorant Jew? Subjectively you would say no. Yet, the Halacha says that he is unacceptable and he may not bear witness. We don't count women for a prayer quorum, Minyan. Does it mean woman is inferior? Absolutely not. Indeed, without Chana we could not pray. She was greatest teacher regarding prayer. Yet she could not join a Minyan. Is she inferior to a man? In common sense perspective, yes, she is inferior. But the Halacha says these two things have nothing in common. Chana's greatness in prayer is independent of her ability to participate in a Minyan. It takes great effort to become a Torah Scholar and because of that hardship many are ready to exchange true scholarship for common sense categories and approach.

Adherents of common sense Halacha are misled by a philosophical doctrine containing half-truths and platitudes. They expound upon Korach's theory of religious subjectivism that prima fascia is hard to refute, just like it was hard to

refute Korach's argument that the entire community is holy, because the argument contains a kernel of truth. Religious Existentialism says that the Commandments are supposed to reflect the inner experience felt by the Jew. The Commandments have an external correlate or action that corresponds to the mood that they are supposed to express. Hence the Commandments must avail themselves of the medium of expression best suited to reflect the inner experience. Korach said to Moses that there is a subjective meaning associated with the Commandments. If the blue thread is intended to make us think of the infinity of Gd, why limit this symbolism to a single thread? If our intention is to provoke a religious experience in the Jew, an entire garment of תכלת might have a more profound impact on the individual. From a common sense perspective Korach is right.

Judaism has 2 parallel religious orders, objective and subjective. Judaism consists of divine disciplines (Shulchan Aruch) and the great romance between finitude and infinity, Gd and man (expressed in Shir Hashirim). Both experiences are connected. An act that has only one of these aspects is incomplete. Actions and deeds must be combined with an inner love for Gd. The Halacha is cognizant of this dual mode. Indeed, certain Commandments are experiential. The daily obligation of Shema is strictly identified with the mechanical recitation of a section in the Torah, yet the fulfillment of the obligation, קיום המצוה, is internal, בלב, similar to prayer (תפלה), mourning (אבלות), enjoyment of the festivals (שמחת יום טוב). The formal, abstract Halacha recognizes the importance of the inner, religious experience. However, no matter how great the experience is to man, Halacha fixes the point of departure to the objective external act. It does not express or interpret the experience.

Korach thought that the experience defines the act and is therefore superior to the act. The religious emotion is volatile. Each individual experiences Gd uniquely in the religious world. If the religious experience defined the Mitzvah then there it would be impossible to speak of a common religious act for all. What I consider a religious experience may not be acceptable to someone else. What is acceptable today as religious practice would be scoffed at and rejected tomorrow. We could not have a single religious community.

Moses answered Korach that we have One Gd, one High Priest, and 1 form of worship as opposed to the non-Jew who has many of each. Monistic worship is constant and not subject to the vicissitudes of change. Otherwise it would be idolatrous. We can never determine what constitutes religious experience as opposed to hedonic, mundane emotion. We know that hedonic emotions are powerful and at first glance redemptive. It is easy to replace religious emotion with secular emotion. The Torah wanted to ensure we do not emulate pagan idolatry and



worship by confusing the aesthetic experience with religious experience. Some use an organ in a religious service to prepare a mood, to allow a religious experience to take hold. However the music is a secular not religious experience. Dancing is similar. You expect that it will pave the way for a religious experience, but it will never happen. It is idolatrous to allow the secular notions of love to pave the way for religious experience. Judaism wanted the religious experience to evolve on its own without any outside influence.

Gothic cathedrals were designed to generate an aesthetic experience intended to provoke a religious one, where the art was intended to arouse a feeling of infinity in the human personality and a quest to soar to the heavens. It may provoke such a quest, but it is an artistic quest not a religious one. It is idolatrous to substitute the secular for religious. The Synagogue was always intended to be a simple home. It was never intended to be aesthetically beautiful to attract people in order to stimulate an artistic, aesthetic experience in the hopes of stimulating a religious one. The religious experience must be free flowing. It must follow the objective act, not precede it. It is acceptable to dance after prayer. However it is futile to dance in order to pray. Judaism expected the religious experience to follow the religious act.

Moses says that if one objectively fulfills the commandment of ציצית then a glance at the תכלת thread might provoke a subjective thought of infinity and connection with Gd. However if one fails to conform to Halacha, and avails himself of a common sense approach, subjectively looking at the תכלת will not provoke an objective religious act. Subjective experience and appreciation of תכלת that follows the objective fulfillment of the Commandment is a great experience. Without the objective fulfillment, it is a vulgar, idolatrous experience.

When people talk of unfreezing the Halacha, to make it meaningful in modern times, they are following Korach in applying a common sense approach to Torah. They rebel against the institution of Torah Scholarship without exerting the effort required to master it. They want to make Torah and Halacha a shallow discipline, like Aristotelian Physics. Moses defeated Korach as he and his group admitted משה אמת ותורתו אמת והם בדאים, Moses is the true teacher of the law and his approach is true while we are nothing more than liars (Tanchuma). The Mesorah and method of Halacha study given to us by Moses will continue forever.

The Torah says that Aaron shall burn incense, קטורת, in the morning and evening together with the lighting of the Menorah, מנורה. There is a separate fulfillment of combining them at the same time. The מנורה represents clarity of concept and depth of Torah understanding, the clear deed and performance with intelligent depth of

halachic analysis. Incense represents the hidden and intimate *Mysterium Magnum* of creation and *Mysterium Tremendum* of divine presence in creation and beyond. The cloud of incense that covered the ark tells us great story of human questing for Gd, for the origin of all. It tells us the marvelous yet tragic story of human waiting for ecstatic unity with the Almighty, as symbol of the colorful religious experience trying to unite with Gd. The Menorah symbolizes the objective, clear deed and religious understanding based on the Halacha. Torah admonishes us to coordinate both קטורת and מנורה. Both are necessary; the mystery of feeling with clarity of thinking and acting. Excitement and passionate craving joined with serenity and peace of halachic comprehension and implementation. There is a parallel order of romance and deed. קטורת cannot be separated from מנורה. The subjective must never be isolated from the objective. וראיתם אותו וזכרתם cannot be separated from פתיל תכלת. Halachic precision is necessary to attain the great colorful religious experience.

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