

## Torah Portion: **KORACH**

(Book of Numbers)

Conservative columnist and author George Will wrote, “The aim of politics. . .is a warm citizenship, approximating friendship, based on a sense of shared values and shared fate.”

Politics is how we move forward (and, at times, backward) as a society. There are the politics of rational argument and that of demagoguery. The former chief rabbi of Great Britain, Jonathan Sacks noted the three ground rules common to every demagogue: “First you have to be a populist. Play on people’s discontents and make it seem as if you are on their side against the current leader. . . . Second, assemble allies. . . Third, choose the moment when the person you seek to depose is vulnerable.” Rabbi Sacks is making reference to the *poster child* of demagoguery: Korach.

Korach sought to depose Moses and Aaron. Following the above-listed ground rules, Korach preyed on the Israelites complaints and discontent with life in the desert to assemble a ragtag group of malcontents. Then, following on the heels of the demoralizing report provided by the spies commissioned to check out the *Promised Land*, Korach gathered his supporters and publicly challenged the leadership of Moses. As with any demagogue, Korach had numerous complaints but offered no solutions. In the end, his rebellion failed, but not until he literally brought Moses, Aaron, and the governing leadership to their knees.

With the attempted coup by Korach, Moses’ leadership was compromised. Nothing would be the same. A new leadership under Joshua and a generation of Israelites born in the freedom of the desert would carry on the cause. In the annals of history, the likes of Korach would become a footnote in the building of the Jewish people. Moses, however, would forever be known as “our teacher” and our leader.

History has an uncanny way of repeating itself, with the results being the same. The good news is the march toward a messianic world of peace, prosperity, and good will for all may occasionally be impeded by demagoguery but it has not been stopped. . .then, or now!

- Rabbi Howard Siegel