

Korach the Demagogue

Source Sheet by Rabbi Carl Perkins

Parashat Korach, June 24, 2017, Temple Aliyah, Needham, MA

(with thanks to Rabbi Josh Feigelson)

Numbers 16:1-3

(1) Now Korah, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, **took** ... (2) and arose against Moses, ... (3) They combined against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the LORD is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the LORD's congregation?"

Bemidbar Rabbah 18:1-4

1. *And Korach ben Yitzhar ben Kehat took...* 2. **He took soft (smooth, persuasive) words**, by means of which the leaders of Israel were drawn after him. ... "*And he took*" means that with soft words he drew their minds and hearts [toward him].

3. *And Korah took* ... What is written right before this matter? "*And they shall make for themselves fringes (tzitzit).*" (Numbers 15) Korah jumped on this and said to Moses: Consider a *tallit* that is made entirely of *tekhelet* (i.e., purple threads) -- Is it exempt from *tzitzit*? Moses said to him: No. It requires *tzitzit*. Korach said to him: A *tallit* that is made entirely of *tekhelet* is not exempt - but four threads of *tekhelet* exempt it?! Consider a house full of sacred books - Does it need a mezuzah?! Moses said to him: It needs a mezuzah. Korach said to him: The entire Torah, consisting of 275

במדבר ט"ז:א'-ג'

(א) ויקח קרח ... (ב) ויקמו לפני משה ...
(ג) ויקהלו על-משה ועל-אהרן ויאמרו
אלהם רב-לכם כי כל-העדה כלם קדושים
ובתוכם ה' ומדוע תתנשאו על-קהל ה':

במדבר רבה י"ח:א'-ד'

(א) ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת וגו' -
(ב) אין ויקח, אלא משיכת הדברים
רכים, שנמשכו כל גדולי ישראל
והסנהדראות אחריו , ויקח קרח,
שבדברים רכים משך לבם.

(ג) ויקח קרח - מה כתיב למעלה מן
העניין? (במדבר טו) ועשו להם ציצית.
קפץ קרח ואמר למשה: טלית שכולה
תכלת מהו שתהא פטורה מן הציצית?
א"ל: חייבת בציצית. א"ל קרח: טלית
שכולה תכלת אין פוטרת עצמה, ארבע
חוטין פוטרות אותה?! בית מלא ספרים
מהו שיהא פטור מן המזוזה?! אמר לו:
חייב במזוזה! א"ל כל התורה כולה רע"ה
פרשיות, אינה פוטרת את הבית, פרשה
אחת שבמזוזה פוטרת את הבית?! אמר

sections, does not exempt a house, but one section does?! Korach continued: You were not commanded concerning these matters; you made these rulings up yourself!

לו: דברים אלו לא נצטוית עליהן ומלבך
אתה בודאן, ...

dem·a·gogue

'deməˌɡəɡ/

noun

1. a political leader who seeks support by appealing to popular desires and prejudices rather than by using rational argument.
synonyms: **rabble-rouser**, **agitator**, political agitator, soapbox orator, **firebrand**, fomentor, provocateur
"he was drawn into a circle of campus demagogues"
- (in ancient Greece and Rome) a leader or orator who espoused the cause of the common people.

(Google Search)

A **demagogue** /'deməɡɒɡ/ (from Greek δῆμαγωγός, a popular leader, a leader of a mob, from δῆμος, people, populace, the commons + ἄγωγός leading, leader) or **rabble-rouser** is a leader in a **democracy** who gains popularity by exploiting **prejudice** and **ignorance** among the **common people**, whipping up the passions of the crowd and shutting down reasoned **deliberation**. Demagogues overturn established customs of political conduct, or promise or threaten to do so.

Demagogues have appeared in democracies since ancient **Athens**. They exploit a fundamental weakness in democracy: because ultimate power is held by the people, it is possible for the people to give that power to someone who appeals to the lowest common denominator of a large segment of the population. Demagogues have usually advocated immediate, forceful action to address a national crisis while accusing moderate and thoughtful opponents of weakness or disloyalty.

(Wikipedia)

Pirkei Avot 5:17

(17) Every argument that is [for the sake of] heaven's name, it is destined to endure. But if it is not [for the sake of] heaven's name -- it is not destined to endure. What [is an example of an argument [for the sake of] heaven's name? The argument of

משנה אבות ה':י"ז

(יז) כָּל מַחְלֻקַּת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. וְשֶׁאִינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, אֵין סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. אִיזוֹ הִיא מַחְלֻקַּת שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, זוֹ מַחְלֻקַּת הַלֵּל וְשִׁמְאִי. וְשֶׁאִינָהּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, זוֹ מַחְלֻקַּת קֶרֶחַ וְכָל עֲדָתוֹ:

Hillel and Shammai. What [is an example of an argument not for the sake of] heaven's name? The argument of Korach and all of his followers.

Tosafot Yom Tov on Pirkei Avot 5:17:2

(2) Korach, etc. : The text does not mention the *second* side [that *opposed* Korach], namely Moses and Aaron, as it mentioned the two sides (Hillel and Shammai) in the first disagreement. This is because they [the two disagreements] are not equivalent. For Moses and Aharon, their intention was for the sake of heaven. And they did not have any aspect within them that was not for the sake of heaven. Rather, [their intentions were entirely] for the sake of peace.

Bartenura on Pirkei Avot 5:17:1

(1) "Every controversy that is for the sake of Heaven's name, it is destined to endure." That is to say that the people of controversy are destined to endure and not be destroyed, as with the controversy between Hillel and Shammai, for neither they (Hillel and Shammai) nor their students were destroyed. But Korach and his party perished.

Eruvin 13b

Rabbi Abba said in the name of Shmuel: For three years, the House of Hillel and the House of Shammai argued. One said, 'The halakha is like us,' and the other said, 'The halakha is like us.' A heavenly voice spoke: 'These and these are the words of the living God, and the halakha is like the House of Hillel.' A question was raised: Since the heavenly voice declared: "Both these and

תוספות יום טוב על משנה אבות

ה'י"ז:ב'

(ב) קרח כו'. לא הזכיר צד השני שהם משה ואהרן כמו שזכר בחלוקה ראשונה ב' הצדדים. לפי שבכאן אינם שווים שמשה ואהרן כוונתם לשמים היתה. ולא היתה בהם שום בחינה שלא לשם שמים.

ברטנורא על משנה אבות ה'י"ז:א'

(א) כל מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים סופה להתקיים

כלומר שאנשי המחלוקת ההיא מתקיימים ואינם אובדן, כמחלוקת הלל ושמאי שלא אבדו לא תלמידי בית שמאי ולא תלמידי בית הלל. אבל קורח ועדתו אבדו.

עירובין י"ג ב

א"ר אבא אמר שמואל שלש שנים נחלקו ב"ש וב"ה הללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו יצאה בת קול ואמרה אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן והלכה כב"ה וכי מאחר שאלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים מפני מה זכו ב"ה לקבוע הלכה כמותן מפני שנחזין ועלובין היו ושונין דבריהן ודברי ב"ש ולא עוד אלא שמקדימין דברי ב"ש לדבריהן.

those are the words of the Living God," why was the halacha established to follow the opinion of Hillel? It is because the students of Hillel were kind and gracious. They taught their own ideas as well as the ideas from the students of Shammai. Not only for this reason, but they went so far as to teach Shammai's opinions first.

Leonard Bernstein
April 6, 1962

Carnegie Hall

Don't be frightened. Mr. Gould is here. He will appear in a moment. I'm not, um, as you know, in the habit of speaking on any concert except the Thursday night previews, but a curious situation has arisen, which merits, I think, a word or two. You are about to hear a rather, shall we say, unorthodox performance of the Brahms D Minor Concerto, a performance distinctly different from any I've ever heard, or even dreamt of for that matter, in its remarkably broad tempi and its frequent departures from Brahms' dynamic indications. I cannot say I am in total agreement with Mr. Gould's conception and this raises the interesting question: "What am I doing conducting it?" I'm conducting it because Mr. Gould is so valid and serious an artist that I must take seriously anything he conceives in good faith and his conception is interesting enough so that I feel you should hear it, too. But the age old question still remains: "In a concerto, who is the boss; the soloist or the conductor?" The answer is, of course, sometimes one, sometimes the other, depending on the people involved. But almost always, the two manage to get together by persuasion or charm or even threats to achieve a unified performance. I have only once before in my life had to submit to a soloist's wholly new and incompatible concept and that was the last time I accompanied Mr. Gould. But, but this time the discrepancies between our views are so great that I feel I must make this small disclaimer. Then why, to repeat the question, am I conducting it? Why do I not make a minor scandal — get a substitute soloist, or let an assistant conduct? Because I am fascinated, glad to have the chance for a new look at this much-played work; Because, what's more, there are moments in Mr. Gould's performance that emerge with astonishing freshness and conviction. Thirdly, because we can all learn something from this extraordinary artist, who is a thinking performer, and finally because there is in music what Dimitri Mitropoulos used to call "the sportive element", that factor of curiosity, adventure, experiment, and I can assure you that it has been an adventure this week collaborating with Mr. Gould on this Brahms concerto and it's in this spirit of adventure that we now present it to you.

Danielle S. Allen, *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education* (University of Chicago Press, 2004)

Of all the rituals relevant to democracy, sacrifice is preeminent. No democratic citizen, adult or child, escapes the necessity of losing out at some point in a public decision. "It is our fate as human beings," [Ralph] Ellison writes, "always to give up some good things for other good things, to throw off certain bad circumstances only to create others." But sacrifice is a special sort of problem in a democracy. Democracies are supposed to rest on consent and open access to happiness for their citizens. In the dreamscape of democracy, for instance a la Rousseau, every citizen consents to every policy with glad enthusiasm. No one ever leaves the public arena at odds with the communal choice; no one must accept political loss or suffer the imposition of laws to which she has not consented. But that is a dream. An honest account of collective democratic action must begin by acknowledging that communal decisions inevitably benefit some citizens at the expense of others, even when the whole community generally benefits. Since democracy claims to secure the good of all citizens, those people who benefit less than others from particular political decisions, but nonetheless accede to those decisions, preserve the stability of political institutions. Their sacrifice makes collective democratic action possible. Democracy is not a static end state that achieves the common good by assuring the same benefits or the same level of benefits to everyone, but rather a political practice by which the diverse negative effects of collective political action, and even of just decisions, can be distributed equally, and constantly redistributed over time, on the basis of consensual interactions. The hard truth of democracy is that some citizens are always giving things up for others. Only vigorous forms of citizenship can give a polity the resources to deal with the inevitable problem of sacrifice. (28-29)



Made with the Sefaria Source Sheet Builder
www.sefaria.org/sheets
