

This Week In Torah *Korach*

Oy! Poor Moses--- he is dealing with a lot in our Torah portion. The last few weeks, the growing *kvetching* of the Israelites has been weighing heavily on his soul. Look what he had to deal with since the building of the golden calf--- they were not trusting God by desiring to turn back, they were unwilling to commit to go forward after the spies' report back.... And now a downright insurrection led by the tribe of Reuben with support from under-utilized Levites. No wonder that Moses "fell on his face"!

How did the Israelites get into this predicament? Sense of self and having security directly relates to how we see the world. Talmudic logic is that everything is in the hands of God except the faith in God. Fear motivates people more than anything else; it even whittles away at the faith that can sustain and propel people forward with confidence. 13th century sage Nachmonides wrote that the spies' negative report shook the foundation of the faith--- the grumbling and near-panic it inspired led to the direct challenge to Moses' leadership. It is a type of transference—they can't attack God directly, but they can attack God's appointed leaders. 11th century scholar RaSHI believed that there were 4 such incidents that were examples of the Israelites shaky faithfulness: golden calf, wanting to return to Egypt, fearing going forward, and revolting as they stood still. Regardless, the sages agree that Korach's revolt was not an isolated incident; things fueled the discontent, and the human ego filled the void as a power grab to usurp the reigns of leadership.

How did Moses and Aaron respond? Many sages saw this revolt more as an attack on Aaron than on Moses. Aaron was silent; he did not engage. Nachmonides showed this as a strength of character and a complete understanding of the sacred role he was performing. He was the essence of ritual that provided the connection to God; he was not going to submit to the political theater that was being played out. Moses, on the other hand, had no choice but to respond--- and the text states that he fell on his face. The 13th century Rabbi known as Chuzkani stated that this act created a pause for Moses to regain authority as well as composure. [worthless trivia time—it was like President John Kennedy's verbal trick to buy an extra second when answering, he had a habit of

saying: “Let me say this about that...”—a technique that let him organize his thoughts in his mind as he spoke] 12th century scholar Ibn Ezra believed that this act was an act of supplication as Moses awaited prophecy to descend. That is why the text stated that Moses ordered the 250+ men of repute to do as they awaited God’s judgment.

What do we glean from all this? We learn that revolt and confrontation are like a pot of water boiling on a stove. It has a slow simmering set of incidents that boiled up into such confrontation. But Moses showed true leadership; by taking a sacred pause and mapping out a process to give his opponents a chance to back down, he asserted his position as one appointed by God to lead.

Understanding how situations arise and having the wisdom to pause in order to gain control are essential tools in leading--- leading a people forward or living one’s own life with integrity.