

The Sacred Voices of the Disenfranchised

A nation is struggling with social unrest, distrust, eminent danger, divisions, protests and rebellions. No, that is not a statement torn from the current headlines. Rather, throughout the Torah we find episodes concerning the difficulties our ancestors experienced as they made their way through the wilderness.

Throughout much of the Torah, the Israelites expressed their dissatisfaction against Moses. In this week's Torah portion, *Behaalotekha* (Numbers 8:1-12:16) Aaron and Miriam challenged their own brother, Moses, for leadership (Num. 12:1-15). Elsewhere in the Torah, there were other attempts to overthrow Moses (Num 16:1 ff), acts of apostasy (Exodus 32 ff), revolts over the lack of water and the lack of progress (Num 20:1 ff), and, in this week's Torah portion, anger over the simple and monotonous food (*manna*) they had to eat (Num. 11:1 ff).

While Moses certainly stood strong and firm against mutiny and revolution, he welcomed potential new leaders. In a few weeks we'll see that Moses dealt harshly with Korach and his band of revolutionaries.

But, in this week's reading, Moses has a totally different reaction to the sudden appearance of different voices of leadership. Here's the text:

²⁴ Moses went out and reported the words of the Eternal to the people. He gathered seventy of the people's elders and stationed them around the Tent. ²⁵ Then the Eternal came down in a cloud and spoke to him; He drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy, but did not continue. ²⁶ Two men, one named Eldad and the other Medad, had remained in camp; yet the spirit rested upon them -- they were among those recorded, but they had not gone out to the Tent -- and they spoke in ecstasy in the camp. ²⁷ A youth ran out and told Moses, saying, "Eldad and Medad are acting the prophet in the camp!"

²⁸ And Joshua son of Nun, Moses' attendant from his youth, spoke up and said, "My lord Moses, restrain them!"

²⁹ But Moses said to him, "Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all the Eternal's people were prophets, that the Eternal put His spirit upon them!"

Instead of feeling threatened by the prophesizing of Eldad and Medad, Moses welcomed their teachings. In fact, he hoped that every person would feel the spirit of wisdom because the nation is strengthened and better served when it is blessed by more voices inspired to teach and demonstrate justice and compassion.

There is something else that is quite compelling about Moses's acceptance of Eldad and Medad. They were the two who originally were not selected to join with Moses for a prophetic experience. They were the unelected, the disenfranchised, yet they found a way to express their unique teaching--- and Moses was delighted.

In the midst of this nation's social and civic upheaval, we are naturally leery of those who give vent to violent impulses by wreaking havoc and destruction. But we should be ever mindful, respectful and attentive to new voices who have something to teach us. Like Moses, we should note that those who have been unfortunately under-represented and even disenfranchised have sacred voices that are vital for the future welfare of all: our loved ones, our neighbors, our nation and the world.

B'vrakhah, With Blessings

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