

Korach 5771 Beth Shalom, Seattle, WA 6-25-2011

(Numbers 16-18)

This week's Torah portion about Korach is an exciting "Mutiny on the Bounty" story of jealousy, desire and mistrust. We learn about two rebellions, with the first being led by Korach, a Levite who was passed over for the leadership of his tribe, and then challenges Moses over the position of *Kohen Gadol* or High Priest. Korach was no ordinary rabble rouser. He was a leading member of Kehatites, the most prestigious of the Levite families. Joining him in his mutiny against Moses and Aaron were "two hundred and fifty men of Israel, leaders of the community, of those regularly called to assembly, these are holy men of renown, prominence and leadership." Korach's difference with Moses was an ideological one, driven by the way in which he understood Israel's relationship with G-d and by the manner in which he, Korach, felt the nation ought to be structured. Even though Korach sought to take power from Moses, he never denied that Moses had taken them out of Egypt, had split the Red Sea, had brought down the tablets, and that he was a great prophet. These facts were common knowledge at the time and were impossible to deny. Korach's only claim was that not everything Moses had said or done came directly from G-D

The story continues with Korach convincing the 250 men that they can stand up for a matter of principle and that each and every one of them has the right to the office of High Priest. After trying to appease Korach and his men to no avail, Moses challenged them to a "spiritual duel." He presented an opportunity for them to fulfill their desire and become High Priests. They would bring incense in their fire pans to the Tabernacle, as would Aaron. Whoever's incense G-d accepted would be chosen. All 250 followers of Korach accept Moses's incense challenge offering to see who G-d will choose.

Were Korach and his men ready to risk their lives...challenging g-d to become "High Priest"?

Moses announces that if the earth splits and swallows up the rebels it is a sign that he (Moses) is acting on G-d's authority. You know the story, the earth split and the 250 were consumed.

The very next day the Israelite community rises in a second rebellion complaining to Moses, "You have killed G-d's people!" so G-d sends a plague killing 14,700 people which only stops when Aaron offers an incense offering.

To settle the question once and for all, the uniqueness of Aaron was proven in a peaceful manner. Moses commanded every tribal head to write his name on his staff and submit it to him. The tribe of Levi was represented by the staff of Aaron. Moses placed all the staffs in the Holy of Holies, with the staff of Aaron in the center. The next morning, Aaron's staff sprouted almond blossoms for all to see. Every tribal head then took back his staff, and it was established for all times that G-D, had chosen Aaron and his descendants as the priests of Israel.

Rashi explains that the key reason for Korach's rebellion was his envy of his cousin, Elizaphan the son of Uziel, who was appointed prince of the tribe of Levy. Moses's father was the first of four brothers and his sons were the leader of the Jewish people and the High Priest; Korach figured that since he himself was the firstborn of the second son, that he should have been appointed the Prince of the Tribe of Levy.

In this week's Parscha, a lot of good people were swept away to join Korach in his unjust rebellion against Moses and had to pay a heavy price. Moses warned Korach and all of the followers of the consequences of their rebellion but they did not listen. we learn that The Torah wants us think independently and speak our own minds - not just follow the crowd.

So here are my questions;

1. Why didn't Korach believe Moses as he had done during the Exodus?
Everything Moses previously conveyed from G-d came true. So why didn't Korach believe Moses was speaking for G-d?
2. Did Korach think G-d chose Aaron because Aaron was a better Jew? and what defines a good Jew?

3. What if.....now listen to this one, what if ...Korach knew what G-d's punishment to his rebellions would be..., if he knew ahead of time, that no matter what he says or does,..... no matter what road he would take..... if he raised this rebellion he would ultimately be devoured along with his followers If he knew all this..... would he still have acted the same?... would he become more religious or more righteous? Would he have accepted G-d's will and shared his new knowledge as a teacher or would he do nothing and just believe that things like that... "only happen to the other guy?"

If Korach really knew he was going to die, what might he have done differently?

I've been asking myself..., and G-d..... the same question.

Let me tell you a story.

11 months ago.... I was fine; I was putting Shabbat books away at lightning speed.

10 months ago I had my some strange symptoms,

6 months I was diagnosed with ALS.

4 months ago I was walking...

3 ½ months ago I was using a cane....

2 months ago I started to use this walker.... And I voluntarily gave up driving but i was still able to put in a wireless network here called "not on shabbat"

2 weeks ago i took a family trip and could only use a wheelchair

Next week I get my red new 4 wheel drive power scooter so "watch your toes" when you see me next.

ALS, is an acronym for a-myotrophic-lateral sclerosis, commonly known as Lou Gehrig's disease and is characterized by a progressive degeneration of motor nerve cells in the brain (upper motor neurons) and spinal cord (lower motor neurons). Sadly, when the body's motor neurons no longer send impulses to the

muscles, the muscles begin to waste away, causing increased continuous muscle weakness till it progresses to a debilitating and fatal conclusion.

Although medical science does not know how, when, where or who ALS will affect, what they do know is that once a person develops ALS, their condition will never improve and will only get worse. The average lifespan for a person with ALS is....., well let me say "sooner rather than later".

Yes, I have ALS, but hear me now, I will not allow myself to become..... A L S.

So, now I know..... I am going to die.

And knowing death is imminent, I also realize that I must appreciate, hear and recognize G-D 's voice during my life, today,..... not to correct what I think I did WRONG, but to transcend my life to what I know is right. Korach must have known that his rebellions could lead to his death, and if he trusted Moses as he did during the exodus, he could have taken a different path. but I believe korach believed in G-d, but didn't believe Moses spoke for G-d so it really didn't matter.

Although my mind is still going faster than my body, I have discovered i am rapidly moving closer to G-d both physically and spirituality. I am experiencing what Viktor Frankl Terms in "Man's Search For Meaning", "Existential Frustration" Searching for the meaning of our physical existence. Had Korach read Frankl's book he might have realized and better understood G-d's meaning.

yes, ALS is robbing my body of its physical abilities but as Frankl also experienced in the concentration camps, you may lose control of the life around you,,, you may lose control and physical freedom but you will never, ever, lose control of your spiritual being. Frankl and his fellow Jews, and now me, can "retreat from terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom".

our solace is in our soul.

Over the last few months I have learned the necessity of asking for help. From my wife helping me get here today, to my daughters helping me get up from a chair to pushing me in a wheelchair, to my son and friends lifting my feet into the car or just helping me go wherever I need to go.

As a person who always gave help to others to someone who must now ask for help, I can tell you that this transition, for me..... began as disheartening, demeaning acts. But I have since learned that I shouldn't be afraid to ask for help, from others, or from G-d.

For others it can be their mitzvah; for me, it's spiritual tzadakah.

When I asked to do this D'var, Rabbi Borodin asked me "why?"

you should know that The why relates to what I have discovered as the ALS PROGRESSES? and here is what I learned. I knew and accepted where I was going but my real fear, my constant moments of anxiety was elevated to not knowing whether I would be welcomed in G-d's tent.....

Would I, Boruch Leib "Chaim" ben Meyer,..... be worthy of his place or had I committed a sin or acted contrary to G-d's commandments. let me tell you, I was worried. I immediately recounted and accumulated all of the things I thought I did wrong and tried to create a balance sheet of my spiritual life. Honestly, It wasn't looking good. Not that I had committed sins, which I haven't,,,, OK there was this one time (I'll tell you later)

But I truly visualized in my mind that maybe I hadn't done enough of the right mitzvahs... to balance my righteousness to my non-righteousness. I'm not going to kid you, knowing you're going to meet G-d makes you really think.... not just of placing your earthly house in order but your spiritual house as well.

In confronting my fears about whether or not I am a good Jew, a very good friend of mine – you know who you are - has reintroduced me to Psalms. I have found the 15th Psalm, , to clearly articulate to me.

Please, I would like to share it with you.

Mizmor la David

"Who may dwell in Your tent, Adonai? Who may reside at Your holy mountain?"

One who walks with integrity and acts with righteousness and speaks truth in his heart.

One who does not slander with his tongue or do evil to another or bring shame to any member of his family.

One who holds the depraved in contempt, one who shows honor to those who fear Adonai, and who never reneges on an oath, even when it turns out contrary to ones own best interest.

One who never charges interest when lending money or takes a bribe concerning the innocent.

Whoever does these things will not totter."

Psalm 15 has taken me past my opening gates of fear, but achieving this plateau cannot be done alone. for me, It is accomplished with the love, strength, prayers and guidance of family, friends, and congregation.

I know where I am on my journey,

I know where I need to be, and will be,

I know better where I am with adonai.

There is a Yiddish saying, "Gott handelt mit mir", "G-d is with me", and he is.

and I say to you,

Thank you

Shabbat Shalom