

Shabbat Parashat Korah-Shabbat Rosh Hodesh
Responding to Rebellion

In this week's *parasha*, Korah challenges the legitimacy of the leadership of Moses and Aaron over the Israelites. He comes to Moses and asks why it is that he and Aaron have been elevated over the rest of the nation, for God has taught that "the entire people is a holy nation." Two hundred and fifty people gather behind Korah, Datan and Aviram in this rebellion against God's chosen leaders for the Children of Israel. Certainly, this is an extremely bold move made by Korah and his followers and one must consider what we can learn from both the source of his anger and the method by which God and Moses handle the situation.

Rashi, the pre-eminent commentator on the Bible, notes that Korah's rebellion is not necessarily a complete act of hubris and selfishness. He reminds us that when the Torah first speaks about Korah in this *parasha*, his entire lineage is given. This is done so that we are aware that Korah is, in fact, a first cousin to Moses and Aaron, one with a very legitimate claim to a high office of leadership among the people since he is the oldest son of one of four brothers in the tribe of Levi, Moses' and Aaron's father being the oldest of the four, Korah's father being the second oldest. Therefore, Korah's questioning of the appointment of Elitzaphan, the son of the fourth brother, as the chief of the family tribe instead of him, does have merit. What we must take away from this, perhaps, new understanding of Korah's rebellion is that when individuals present what are or appear to be rebellious challenges and questions to us, there is a very good chance that there are good reasons behind them. We may not agree with them or the reasons may make sense only to those who are coming to us, but we must be mindful of them. Keeping this in mind will help us to be able to deal effectively with the "rebellion" which has been raised, no matter how big or small.

In response to the Korah-led rebellion, God, Moses, and Aaron create a "contest," which they present to Korah which will determine the rightful leadership group of the people. The rebels, Moses, and Aaron will each lay out their incense-burning fire pans at the entrance to *Mishkan*/the Tabernacle and God's presence would then communicate to the entire gathered nation who the rightful leaders are. This message coming directly from God would let the entire nation know that leaders have been chosen and appointed by God and were not a result of self-appointment by Moses and Aaron themselves. Korah accepts the offer, God chooses Moses and Aaron, and the ground opens up and swallows all the rebels, their families, and their property as a consequence for their rebellious lack of faith. While this act of divine punishment could be the foundation for a lengthy and interesting discussion, it is important to emphasize the first phase of God, Moses, and Aaron's response to Korah, Datan, and Aviram. They did not immediately put themselves on the defensive and create an argument with Korah and his followers. Rather, they listened to what they had to say, acknowledged it, and found a calm and peaceful way to settle the matter (at least at the outset before God gets angry and decides completely to eradicate them). The anger of the rebels is met with easiness and grace, diffusing the situation and preventing a destructive battle. This is a very important lesson for us all on how to react to others who have "gotten in our faces."

These lessons regarding how to approach and respond to rebellion can be very useful for us in many ways, particularly with how we react to our own children. Kids are always challenging and testing the rules that adults put before them, for a variety of reasons. They get angry at the grown-up figures in their lives and often are not able to present their feelings in ways that are most productive. If we respond to their anger with anger, we will only intensify the situation and create battlegrounds. We must, instead, diffuse anger by acknowledging our kids' feelings and by creating a sense of calm in which matters can be reasonably discussed with options presented to them to help them to understand the situation and to grow from it. Rebelling against norms is a natural part of growing up, especially during adolescence, and we must learn the lessons from this week's *parasha* well in order to make the rebellions productive instead of destructive.

Shabbat Shalom!
Happy Summer!