

Weekly Teaching

June 15, 2018

The Torah records that a man named Korach led an unjust rebellion against Moses' leadership.

Moses confronts the rebels by proposing a test: "offer incense before God, and see if God will accept your offering."

God rejects their offering, and the earth splits open and consumes Korach and his followers.

Jewish tradition perceives Korach as the paradigm of demagogues; individuals who seek power for its own sake, and don't really care about the people they are supposed to serve.

What is somewhat startling is that the children of Korach don't seemingly carry any demerit because of their father's sins.

Instead, the children of Korach receive the honor of having 11 of the 150 psalms in the Hebrew Scriptures attributed to their authorship.

A few examples of well-known Psalmist lines:

- "As the deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God."
- "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble..."
- "How lovely is your dwelling place, O God."

That the children don't "carry" the sins of their father is a powerful message.

We are poignantly reminded that every individual carries upon themselves their own responsibilities. We own our words and actions, and what we do or do not do in any particular situation.

A midrash is told that highlights this lesson for us:

The rabbinic legend (midrash) describes how the children of Korach were sitting by their father as Moses was walking by them.

Each of Korach's children knew how their father felt about the leader of the Jewish People, and each had to confront their own conscience as to whether to stand (as custom dictated) for their leader, or remain seated as their father most certainly was going to do.

Each child understood that their father would be insulted if they physically stood up for Moses. He would perceive their actions as a violation of the 5th commandment (to honor one's parents). If they rose in Moses' presence, they would be dishonoring their father.

But, the sons of Korach understood that "standing up" for something—when it's the right thing to do—is more important than the feelings of an individual who believed in something that was wrong.

So, without conversations, each child stood up on their own for Moses.

Psalm 45 records this action when it opens with the verse: "Their hearts led them the right way."

To love God with "all of our heart" means being willing to do, or not do, because it's the right action to take, and not because it's an easier choice to make.

Historically, Jews survive and thrive because we are willing to truly love God with “all of our heart”.

No matter the convenience of immoral options, we remain loyal to the teachings of our ethical monotheism. This is the belief in one God that teaches us right from wrong, and commands us to do what is right.

Do what is right, no matter what, was a lesson that Korach’s children embraced.

God’s “Book of Life” still remains open. Each of us exist on our own page.

Do we “stand-up” for what’s right, even when others put pressure on us to remain seated?

The children of Korach succeeded in this Divine challenge. How are we doing?

Shabbat Shalom,

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