

THE DANGERS OF EXTREMISM

KORAH LIVES TODAY!

by HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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According to the Angel of Heaven who revealed the Divine Secrets to Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of the Shulkhan Arukh, (as recorded in Sefer Magid Mesharim), the sin of Korah was that he tried to create a breach between Heaven and Earth. His argument was that we should follow one path or the other. We should either follow the way of Heaven entirely or the way of Earth entirely. In his eyes, the two are separate and cannot be and should not be intermingled. This separation which Korah sought, was needless to say, not what G-d wanted; not then and certainly not now!

Heaven and Earth, the spiritual and the physical, are two sides of the same coin. One cannot exist without the other. This is why the first verse of Torah states, that "In the beginning G-d created the Heavens and the Earth." They are both equal creations that act in harmony with one another. In Kabbalistic language they are often metaphorically referred to as Male and Female and Husband and Wife. When G-d created Adam, Torah teaches that Adam was created male and female; that only the two together are called Adam. So, technically speaking every male and female human being is part of composite Man. Thus when our Sages teach us to stand up and be a Man, this is a lesson of equal value to all male and female human beings. Only together are we Man. In a similar way, Heaven and Earth, the spiritual and physical together are called Creation.

The sin of Korah is seen repeated today in the forms of extremist elements on both the right and left. One extremist side says that all secularism is wrong and evil and must be shunned in its entirety. This extremist so-called religious mentality embraces an imaginary picture of life in ever-growing denial of practical everyday needs and further disconnection from practical Earthly realities, such as making a living and addressing normal everyday human problems. Many of these imbalanced souls seek to escape normal daily troubles by using religion as an escape mechanism and embrace the fantasy that if they ignore life's real problems then somehow said problems will just go away. It is not hard to recognize the psychological imbalance and serious instability in this way of thinking and in the lives of those who embrace it.

On the other side of the social divide we have the equally extremist secularist, who in like mind similar to their religious counterparts seek every version of polarization. The extremist secularist goes to every extreme to deny the existence of anything spiritual. They go so far as to deny not only the existence of G-d, but they also deny the existence of their own souls. For them, life is one physical hedonistic pleasure after another and that there is nothing more to life than the pleasing of oneself. The psychological imbalance in this is as clear as it is in their religious counter-extremist.

Not for naught did the great medieval Sage, RaMBaM (Maimonides) sternly warn us to avoid all kinds of extremism and that the right path of Torah was to walk the center path, not being extreme to any one side. Interestingly, but parallel to RaMBaM, the Kabbalists, especially those of the prophetic/meditative school taught this exact same message. Balance and harmony is the way of Torah. Extremism lead to all types of aberrations, be it in one's actions as well as in one's psychology.

Korah's challenge to Moshe Rabbeynu was simple. He said, let us chose to live by either natural law as secularists or by spiritual law and be, what for him meant to be fully religious. Korah could not and would not understand the Torah that G-d had given to Moshe Rabbeynu and therefore challenged its fundamental principle, that of unifying Heaven and Earth. Korah's arrogance and extremism was based upon his inability to face life honestly and accurately. We see his sin alive today in extremists of all kinds, both in the Jewish camp and in the world at large.

Heaven and Earth, like male and female exist within each and every one of us. We are composite beings made up of both body and soul. Each have their needs; each has their purpose. Each must be addressed, respected and honored. Nowhere more than in the laws of Torah itself do we see this so clearly defined.

How unfortunate that many who claim to be embracing Torah are in fact rejecting it. Whereas at the same time, many who are secular still live by high moral standards and a proper code of conduct. How strangely reversed it is that today we have many religious people who are not really religious and many secular people who are not really secular. Like the old saying goes, "you can't judge a book by its cover."

The world today faces so many different crises. Most of them revolve around social and cultural issues. Our differences are being exasperated and stretched by the extremists in all camps. Rather than building bridges towards unity, extremists would rather burn those bridges and burn everything else as well. This violent expression seeking destruction is expressed externally upon those perceived as different and viewed as the enemy. But in truth the cultures of violence and extremism are based upon individual psychological states of the persons so infected. Their violence is psychological and is only expressed externally as a projection and transference of their personal inner imbalanced states.

Unfortunately, extremists of all kinds are oblivious to their internal psychological reality. They cannot see that their inner compulsion towards violence and hatred is also internally directed against themselves. This is why these individuals and the groups they create always end up destroying themselves and whomever they can drag down with them. This is how it was with Korah and as we see today, like Solomon said, "there is nothing new under the sun." The same spirit lives on causing imbalanced minds to make the same grievous errors that will materialize the same devastating results. And on and on the cycle goes, all the while that we chose not to learn and live by the lessons of the center path of Torah.

We must learn how to properly unite Heaven and Earth within ourselves. We do this by balancing our respective physical and spiritual needs. To accomplish this we have the Torah as our guide. Torah laws teach us how to best live in this world and at the same time how to properly honor Heaven. Our Sages summed this up when they described the laws of Torah as being divided up into two basic categories; the laws Beyn Adam L'havero (that direct human interactions) and the laws Beyn Adam L'shamayim (religious/spiritual rituals). Both are equally important; both are equally Torah.

One cannot act improperly towards another human being and call oneself religious, even and especially when one culturally identifies oneself as being religious. Religion is more than what is on the surface or it is not religion at all. On the other hand, just because one does not perform the mitzvot Beyn Adam L'shamayim does not mean such a person has no redeeming values. We often see many so-called secularists who act with higher moral standards than some so-called religious. We must be honest and give credit, where credit is due.

So, rather than embrace extremes and run to condemn everyone different from ourselves, we should learn to be more like Moshe Rabbeynu and not like Korah. Let us learn how to build bridges and not burn them. In this way we can unite the nation. And only when the nation is so united will we be able to again reunite fully with the Land. For the Nation and the Land are like Heaven and Earth, like Male and Female. The two are one and only together can be called Yisrael.

May G-d bless us with the courage to confront our modern day Korahs of extremism and to cast them out from us even as was done in the days of Moshe Rabbeynu. While we will not wait for the Earth to open and swallow them up alive; we can in turn neutralize the power of the extremist by not given them any credence, acceptance or influence. We can strip them of the power we invest in them and this would serve the same function as if they were swallowed up by the Earth.

In order for us to accomplish this grand and necessary national goal, we must have courage, resolve and above all, national loyalty to the ideal of creating, becoming and living as One Nation, under G-d, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. True, these are American words, but they are Torah ideals. Let us work to put them into action and to create this reality.

When we are united below, then Heaven will again reunite with us from Above. Amen, so may it be His Will.

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