



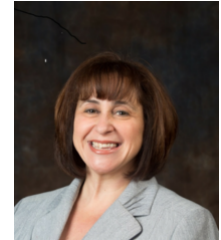
# Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies

OF AMERICAN JEWISH UNIVERSITY

## Today's Torah

*Jews have always been a community drawn together by virtue of Torah. No matter where you may be, we welcome you to the Ziegler community through Today's Torah e-mail.*

**Shabbat Parashat Korah**  
**June 16, 2018 – 3 Tamuz 5778**



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### Heavenly Disagreement

Torah Reading: Numbers 16:1 - 18:32

Haftarah Reading: Samuel I 11:14 - 12:22

Have you ever found yourself in the middle of a political, theological, legal or interpersonal disagreement with someone? Don't feel too bad – the rest of us have as well. Whether it's with a friend, a co-worker, a family member, or an acquaintance, each of us can think of times when we have gotten into heated arguments or debates.

The Rabbis of the Talmud called such a disagreement a *makhloket*– a separation.

This week's Torah portion, Korach, tells a story of another kind of *makhloket*: Korach, along with Datan and

Abiram, and 250 Israelites who were chosen from the tribes for their reputations and fame, challenge Moses and Aaron, saying “*Rav lachem*- You have gone too far! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the Lord is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the Lord’s congregation?” Korach accuses Moses and Aaron of being “holier than thou”, and attempts to arouse a challenge to Moses’ leadership.

Moses responds to Korach, using the same words “*Rav Lachem*– you have gone too far.” He accuses Korach of trying to achieve power and take over the Priesthood. And, says Moses, you and your company are really rising against God. And, only verses later, the Torah tells us that Korach and his followers were swallowed by the earth. Are we to understand from this that it is forbidden to disagree and that whenever we find ourselves in a disagreement we, too, deserve to be punished as was Korach and his followers?

Korach’s mistake was not because he dared to disagree, but in the manner in which he disagreed. Pirke Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), one of the sections of the Mishnah that includes ethical teachings of the Rabbis teaches:

*A controversy for heaven’s sake will have lasting value,*

*But a controversy not for heaven’s sake will not endure*

*What is an example of a controversy for heaven’s sake?*

*The debates of Hillel and Shammai.*

*What is an example of a controversy not for heaven’s sake?*

*The rebellion of Korach and his associates.*

Clearly, the Rabbis felt that Korach’s *makhloket* was not for the sake of heaven and was therefore NOT worthwhile. So what was the difference? Throughout the Talmud, the debates of Hillel and Shammai abound. Each one helps determine the outcome of Jewish law and of the customs of the people. Unlike Korach, in as much as we read them, these debates focus on the issues and not on the people. Through our understanding of the debates of Hillel and Shammai, we are able to come closer to Divine will. At the same time, elsewhere in the Talmud, in the section of Sanhedrin 110a, it suggests that: This teaches that one must not “cling” to a quarrel; for Rav said: He who is unyielding in a dispute violates a negative command, as it is written, “And let him not be like Korach and his associates.”

The Hofetz Hayim, a famous Hasidic commentator of the late 19th and early 20th century, explains the problem of “clinging” to a quarrel. He says: one who holds onto a “quarrel” or disagreement is in danger of being led towards other transgressions: unwarranted hatred, *lashon hara* (gossip), talebearing, anger, insults, humiliating words, revenge, grudges, curses, and even *hillul Hashem* (the desecration of God’s name).

Korach, in his attempt to debate Moses’ position, does not argue issues or abilities. Instead, he takes potshots at Moses’ character and, according to the Midrash, falsely accuses Moses of illicit activity. Like the Hofetz Hayim warns, Korach is led to the transgressions of slander, anger, jealousy and envy, and it consumes him.

The lesson of Korach is a challenge to each of us to be conscious of how we handle ourselves in times of debate or disagreement. Because we are all human, there are times when we lose our temper, when we say things we shouldn’t have, or when we blow things out of proportion. When we do this we become like Korach and we run the danger of sinking even further. We can certainly identify with Korach, but we must also fight against his ways and try to respect each other for our commonalities and our differences.

Shabbat Shalom!

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