

The Symphony of Life by Rabbi Yehudah Black

The Sedrah of Korach begins with the story of Korach Ben Yitzhar who came from the Tribe of Levy. Not only does he complain against Moshe, but he goes one step further, he challenges the authority and leadership of Moshe and Aharon.

To quote his words. “All the community are holy and G-d is in their midst, why do you raise yourselves up above the congregation of G-d?”

At first glance his complaint seems to be bona fide. Why Moshe and Aharon do you have to take up all the leadership positions and give all the jobs to “the boys” the Cohanim and Leviim- yet the rest of us are left out of the running?

Moshe on hearing this complaint of Korach’s together with the 250 followers’ falls down on his face...this is now the fourth major offence of Am Yisrael against G-d. Moshe tells them “In the morning, G-d will make known who are his, and who is holy and He will draw them near to Him”

We all know too well what happened to Korach and his followers. They arrive in the morning with their pans full with incense. Moshe offers a small prayer; the ground opens up beneath their feet, and swallows up Korach and his motley crew.

The question posed by the commentators. Why in his initial reaction does Moses tell them to wait till the morning to bring the incense? Korach was organised, he knew what he was doing why play for extra time?

Rashi explains in the name of the Tanchuma that Moshe was giving them the extra time in order to give them a chance to think again. In the morning they will wake up a little sobered up, see the folly of their ways and turn back to G-d, and the whole event would

be forgotten about. Indeed the Medrash relates that On Ben Pelet goes home to his wife who tells him to come to his senses and, listening to her advice he does not turn up for the show down in the morning.

The second interpretation of Rashi gives a deeper meaning to Moshe's response. Quoting again from the Medrash Tanchuma he says that Moshe was doing more than just postponing the event and giving them an opportunity to do teshuvah. Moshe is saying to Korach. Wait till tomorrow morning...G-d has assigned demarcation lines and boundaries in His creation. Night cannot be changed to day. So too G-d has assigned specific roles to the Kohanim and Leviim. And just as night cannot be changed to day so too each person has their own specific role assigned to them. This reaction of Moshe therefore addresses the whole question of Korach's rebellion.

I mentioned earlier that at first glance Korach had a good complaint against Moshe and Aaron. Why should you be the leaders of Am Yisrael why not other people? Moshe responds that we have to be careful not to blur our boundaries, if we do; we end up questioning creation itself. Everything has its unique function in the mosaic of creation. Life is a symphony and each human being plays his or her own part in the orchestra, generating harmony in creation.

The statement of the Medrash is timeless. One of the most beautiful ceremonies that we recite at the conclusion of Shabbat is Havdallah. In it we bless the Almighty who makes distinction, demarcation and division between holy and profane, Israel and the nations of the world, light and darkness, between the Shabbat and the other six days of the week.

What the Blessing is saying is that there are boundaries in Judaism that have been appointed by G-d and we celebrate those distinctions.

Moshe is saying to Korach and his henchmen that the future of the Jewish people lies in the fact that we know where our lines of demarcation lie. If we break the limits, get a bit fuzzy around the edges and blur the distinctions between that which is Kosher or Treif, and we break down the uniqueness and holiness of Shabbat itself, and by doing so we think we are aiding and abetting Jewish continuity by being so modern and pluralistic that we don't see distinctions at all- Then we have another thing coming.....