

## The Controversy Between Korah and Moshe

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The late Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Zt"l, discussed various aspects of the controversy between Korah and Moshe. I will concentrate on one of the aspects, it's not the main one. Korah argued: "You have gone too far for the whole community is holy, and God in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the congregation of God?" All Jews are equal because all have the same sanctity inherited from our forefathers. There is no difference between Moshe and the woodcutter or water-carrier, they both have intrinsic holiness, and hence Moshe has no right to lead and rule over them. The sanctity of the Jewish people is not personal nor intimate, but universal, community rooted, and community nourished. Accordingly, the individual sanctity of each Jew is derived from the community, and hence, all are equal, and Moshe is no different from Korah or the woodcutter. This was Korah's main argument to subvert Moshe's leadership.

What Korah did not understand was besides the sanctity inherited from our forefather, each individual has his own sanctity. This sanctity derives from the inner recesses of an individual's personality and is singular to him. It is a result of his personal endowments, efforts and achievements. When one deals with this personal sanctity the woodcutter is no longer equal to Moshe. The individual rises to leadership based upon his personal sanctity, his merits, and accomplishments. To this one must add that one can enhance his personal sanctity by engaging in Torah study. The more one studied Torah, both the written and especially the Oral Law, he develops his own personal sanctity. This point was missed by Korah.

Hence, Korah misunderstood the Jewish philosophy of power and leadership. He identified power with kingship, and leadership with political authority, which implies some suppression. Korah claimed that the democratic sanctity derived from the forefathers precluded the right of any individual to such power. However, he failed to realize that there is an individual sanctity especially derived from the study of Torah, the comprehension of the Torah, and the mastery over its intricate details. The Torah community is not just socio-political one, but a covenantal and teaching community whose leader is not the king, but the teacher. Moshe is not known as Moshe *ha-Melech*, but as Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Moshe, our teacher. Thus, his accomplishments in the world of Torah is what made the greatest of prophets and the singular leader of the Jewish People.

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