

Leadership Lessons

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To those who follow the news and have been following politics since the 2020 election, President Biden's performance at last week's debate came as no surprise. The confused man who wasn't able to formulate coherent thoughts and seemed lost at times is the same man who was plucked from his fifth place finish in the New Hampshire Democrat primary and declared the official party candidate for president. He barely campaigned or left his Delaware home. While his campaign attributed the basement strategy to Covid, many suspected that the people who selected him as their candidate feared that if voters would be exposed to Joe Biden, they wouldn't be able to vote for him. The gambit worked and Biden was sworn into office on Jan. 20, 2021.

As president, he basically remained detached from the people. He has held very few press conferences, and when he does, they are rehearsed and scripted, down to him calling on pre-selected reporters, whose names and photographs are clearly printed out for him on cards. There haven't been interviews with national or local publications that may ask serious questions. He rarely, if ever, speaks off the cuff. Everything he says is either on a teleprompter or a card, and should he ever go off script, he gets in trouble for saying incorrect and silly things.

Every cabinet secretary and every government official who has come into contact with Joe Biden knows that he doesn't have the mind necessary to make decisions and lead the country and the free world. Every time one of his emissaries went to Israel and said that the president said this or the president said that, it was a lie, because the president was plainly shown on Thursday night to be unable to think through an issue or present a coherent plan or statement unless it is placed in front of him by assistants.

The president's performance in the debate was so bad that all the king's horses and all the king's men feared that they would never again be able to portray Joe Biden as an effective, strong, and respected leader. They panicked that the truth was out and the jig was up. The people had seen the truth about Biden's abilities and would never vote for him again. The marionettes would have to pull Biden from the race and find someone who could defeat former President Trump in the November election.

Twenty-four hours later, they had thought it through, and word came down from on high that "we are sticking with Biden and doing what we have done until now. If everyone sticks together, we will be able to pull this off and get Joe Biden reelected. We will project Joe as a resolute, strong leader who had one bad debate performance, and we'll get the leading Democrats to line up behind him with expressions of support and portray Trump as a liar and convicted felon. We can make it work."

The question is: How can the leaders of a major political party, which represents fewer than half of Americans, support keeping an ineffective president in office? How could people who saw the

same thing as everyone else who was watching deny the obvious fact and work to keep a weak and feeble person in the most important position in the world?

An examination of this week's parsha will help us understand their mindset. We study the archetypical machlokes, which Chazal point to when describing a machlokes shelo lesheim Shomayim. We learn how Korach, a cousin of Moshe Rabbeinu, led a revolution against his leadership. Although he had been considered a righteous person, Korach acted as a politician, using cunning to spin the people against Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Hakohein. Using demagoguery, he portrayed Moshe as heartless and cruel to the poor, forcing people to do silly things, such as putting tzitzis and techeiles on a tallis shekulo techeiles. With deceit and sleight of mouth, he was able to gather around him serious leaders of the Jewish people and present a serious challenge to Moshe's leadership.

That Dason and Avirom rallied to Korach's side should have given away that something had happened to Korach that affected his judgment. Still, the 250 nesi'ei ha'eidah were convinced to go against everything they had stood for until then and join the revolution to topple Moshe.

How can people be so foolish? How can people who saw how the Jewish people were Divinely freed from Mitzri servitude through Moshe forget what they had seen and experienced? How could people who stood at the foot of Har Sinai as Moshe went up to Heaven and returned with the Luchos turn their back on him?

Rav Moshe Mordechai Shulsinger, in his sefer Peninei Avi Ezri, quotes a letter that the Steipler Gaon wrote him. In it, he says, "Because Korach was insulted that he wasn't chosen to be a nosi, he became angry at Moshe, and to get even with Moshe and topple him, he became a kofer, a scoffer, and began to find things to complain about."

How did this happen? Because, explains the Steipler, when the bad middos of a person are in control, his intelligence and ability to think clearly are compromised, and then negios set in.

Korach was blinded and hindered by his negios. His desire for personal advancement grew out of his jealousy of Moshe and Aharon. He was able to convince the great men of Klal Yisroel to join him in his rebellion, for it wasn't only Korach who was subsumed by jealousy; the others were as well. They all wanted the "big job." Their jealousy of Moshe and Aharon so clouded their understanding that they forgot what they had just been through with the meraglim, as well as everything that Moshe had done for them and the many times Hashem addressed the Bnei Yisroel through Moshe and Aharon. Their mental acuity was compromised, overtaken by their lust for power.

When people don't learn mussar, they lose their hold on their middos, which become progressively worse. Bad middos lead a person to think highly of himself and pursue kavod, honor. He becomes overwhelmed by his desire for kavod and his jealousy of others who people honor and respect. His desire becomes a need, and his jealousy becomes outright hatred of others. His bad middos take him over and destroy him. That is what happened to Korach.

Motivated by his desire for honor, prestige, and power, Korach was able to mislead his many followers by peddling empty, disingenuous arguments. His follower, Ohn Ben Peles, was saved from the fate of Adas Korach by his wife. When he informed his wife that he had joined Korach's revolution against Moshe, she did not engage in a debate with him. As he told her of Korach's arguments against Moshe, she sat silently and did not respond to anything he said. She quickly understood Korach's motivation for his revolution and why her husband joined with him. She promptly got to work to save her husband from the mess that she knew would result from battling Moshe.

She said to Ohn, "What will you gain by getting involved in this machlokes and following Korach? You won't gain anything! You'll be the same simple person with the same job and low position in life whether Moshe wins or Korach wins. Why are you jeopardizing your life and everything else for Korach?" She won the day and saved her husband's life.

Now, if the dispute was over the issues that Korach had presented, of what use was her argument? Ohn should have responded to his wife and admonished her for what she told him. "How could you tell me to drop out of the campaign for Korach? Moshe is corrupt. He did so many things wrong. The laws he presents don't make any sense. We are engaged in a serious battle over ideology. You are undermining the revolution."

But Oin's wife was a wise woman. She knew that the root of Korach's insurgency was neither halacha nor hashkofah. Nor was it about fairness and integrity. It was about his negia, about jealousy. Everyone in Korach's eidah, including her husband, was motivated by their negia, their jealousy over other people's attainments and their desire to achieve power. Therefore, she addressed his negia and not his intellectual arguments.

Rav Elozor Menachem Man Shach would explain that the power of daas Torah is that those who possess it are free of negios. They have no personal investment in what they are called to rule upon. Their only negia is to the truth. They study Torah, and Torah overtakes them and transforms them. All their decisions and actions are guided by Torah, not by their middos. They are possessed by a love of Torah and Am Yisroel.

The appetite for leadership positions is an outgrowth of insufficient humility coupled with a lack of belief in Hashem. One who is immersed in Torah and maasim tovim, and reinforces himself with mussar study, doesn't crave attention and praise from the masses, for he knows that mortal praise and adulation are fleeting and meaningless. The eternal accolades are those that he aims for. Hashem has the ability to reward him for his actions and to properly respect him and his actions.

So many of our gedolim shunned recognition and publicity until Hashem thrust them into leadership positions.

The Chazon Ish studied alone and interacted with few people. When he settled in Bnei Brak, there were few Torah Jews living there. As the post-Holocaust Olam HaTorah grew, the Chazon Ish would have to assume a leadership role, which he did, becoming a prime mover behind the establishment of the Israeli Torah community as we now know it.

Rav Elozor Menachem Man Shach was known as a person with no interest outside of learning and teaching Torah, and the welfare of his talmidim. When the passing of numerous Torah leaders left a leadership void, the man who knew only Torah stepped out of his zone of comfort and, in his older years, led the generation to unprecedented heights.

When Rav Shach felt his strength ebbing, he turned to another person with no outside interests, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, whose life revolved strictly around his learning, and literally forced upon him the mantle of leadership.

Lehavdil, the Democrats are the exact opposite. They knew that President Biden was diminished and incapable of leading the country, but he was their ticket to power, so they lied about him to the people and pushed him over the finish line. They hid him from the people and manipulated the strings of power. All of them, from Dr. Jill on down, don't care about the people, or the country, or the world. They care only about themselves.

They say that their campaign is about democracy, but instead of going after him the democratic way, they have been doing everything in their considerable power to make sure that Donald Trump doesn't return to the White House. Not because they care about democracy, but because they are motivated by their need for power, and if he returns, they will all lose their power.

Their need for power causes them to perceive everything in a twisted fashion, and they collude with the media to convince more than half the country that they represent leadership and decency and honor, and that their opponent is just the opposite.

Their desire for honor and power led them to attempt to destroy Trump through many different ways, from alleging that he colluded with Russia to impeaching him twice, and lately seeking to tie him up in court with charges never previously brought against a former president. Their needs prevent them from seeing the incongruity.

They selected Biden to be their man and propped him up as a leader. They hid him from the people and have had the media portray him as forceful and precise when he is anything but.

It's easy to learn the parsha and then look at the hapless Democrats and mock them, but it is a lot more important and a lot harder to learn the parsha and then look at ourselves and examine how we act and what motivates us.

Each week, when we learn the parsha, we should seek out the lessons it contains for us in our day. When we learn Parshas Korach, it should prompt us to keep our middos in check and ensure that our motivations for what we do are proper. We should be reminded that humility is

the most important middah. The more humble we are and the less we seek power, attention, and recognition, the safer we will be and the more we will accomplish.

By following the Torah and Moshe, without getting involved with the arguments and attacks of people who have strayed from the truth, we will earn benefit for ourselves and the world, helping prepare us all for the coming of Moshiach.