

Message from the Parsha

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Korach's Rebellion and Finding Light in Crisis

The Jewish people face a crisis in this week's parsha. After years of Moshe and Aharon leading the people uncontested, Korach and 250 followers call into question the authority of these two leaders and the power structure they've built. In order to demonstrate the Divine approval backing their leadership, Moshe constructs a test, whereby both Aharon and Korach's co-conspirators will offer incense in the Mishkan, and the side with Divine approbation will have their incense accepted. Unsurprisingly, it is Aharon's offering that is accepted by God, while the two hundred and fifty men representing Korach were all consumed by a heavenly fire, leaving nothing behind but the scrap metal of their firepans.

Yet what is most perplexing in the story is what happens to these firepans, used in an act of rebellion against Moshe and Aharon, God's chosen representatives to lead the Jewish people. One would have expected that these firepans would be consumed along with those who used them, or at the very least decommissioned. It is logical to think they should have been destroyed as they were spiritually radioactive. But instead, God commands Moshe to instruct Elazar the Kohen to take these firepans and

hammer them into sheets of bronze to be used as plating for the holy Altar (Bamidbar 17:1-3). These very firepans that were used in rebellion are now to be used in service of God!

This turn of events contains a powerful message for each and every one of us. First, that every Jew, even those who have rebelled against God and His appointed leaders, is holy. Those 250 men made the most tragic of mistakes in their rebellion against Moshe and Aharon, which at its core was a rebellion against God. Yet they were not fundamentally mistaken in their insistence that "all the congregation is holy" (16:3), and the firepans they used retain a spark of sanctity, requiring that they remain in use in the Mishkan.

Furthermore, this action reminds us as a people that in moments of darkness, in times of crisis, we can find redemption and light. When we go through challenges - including the difficult ordeals we are going through now - we are not to forget and discard them, but to find the light and the redeeming aspects within.

The copper plating of the altar was intended as a "sign for the Jewish people" (17:3) - a sign, the Netziv writes, that even sinfulness, tragedy, and crisis hold within them the opportunity to grow into holiness (Haamek Davar, ad. loc.). As we continue to navigate this ongoing, months-long time of crisis for the Jewish people, we are reminded of the growth that has emerged from the

challenge, and the responsibility to take these difficult moments and to incorporate them into the Altar - the ultimate symbol of sacrifice and commitment.

We have lost so many; yet at the same time we have seen the heroism of soldiers and their families, the nobility of our youth, renewed partnership between Diaspora Jewry and Israel, and the support of righteous gentiles. We've been able to prioritize between what in life is important and what is trivial.

Through this narrative of Korach and the firepans, God is modeling for all of us how one deals with crisis. Our duty is not to run away, but to find the light in the darkness, and to use that light to live more joyful, productive, and engaging lives.