

All For One: And One For All

written by Ozer Bergman
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“You arrogate too much for yourselves, for the entire community—each of them—is holy” (Numbers 16:3).

“All who toil on behalf of the community should toil with them for the sake of Heaven” (Avot 2:2).

Who are you going to believe? This is not a theoretical question. This is literally, as Korach & Company showed us, a life-and-death question. And it’s an old question. When considering a path in life, a set of values and practices to live by, people have to make choices between the likes of Avraham/Nimrod, Yitzchak/Yishmael, Yaakov/ Esav.

Notice the progression. Avraham Avinu (our Patriarch) and the evil emperor Nimrod were people with clearly different backgrounds and histories. Yitzchak Avinu and Yishmael were half-brothers, sharing the same fatherly example. Yaakov Avinu and Esav shared the same home and even the same womb. As the candidates and the choices become more and more alike, the confusion grows and it becomes more and more difficult to discern: Where’s the truth?

What happens when the confusion creeps into the Jewish people? This, too, is not a theoretical question. We all know that Rebbe Nachman emphasized over and over the absolute necessity of affiliating oneself with a tzaddik. In the Rebbe’s

teachings, one's affiliation has the most powerful impact on one's eternal destiny. Finding and maintaining the connection to the right tzaddik is always on one's A-list of things to pray for. (Reb Noson, in his collection of prayers, is constantly praying to find the tzaddik. Why? Though you may know who the tzaddik is, you don't really yet know who the tzaddik *is!*)

The Rebbe tells us that he is not the only one who is aware of how crucial it is to choose the right tzaddik as a guide. Our constant companion, the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), also knows this. And he's going to do anything he can to keep us away from connecting with the right tzaddik. Near the end of *Likutey Moharan* II, 78, the Rebbe teaches:

Presently, the Evil Inclination has made this his mission, to confuse the world, because the Jewish people are now very close to the End. The Jews now have great longing and yearning for God, the likes of which never existed in earlier times. Each individual has great yearning for God. The Evil Inclination therefore roused, and instigated conflict among the tzaddikim. He established many false leaders in the world and also instigated great conflict among the true tzaddikim, such that no one knows where the truth is. Therefore, we have to plead a great deal with God to be worthy of drawing near to the true tzaddik.

While we're pleading to draw near to the true tzaddik, we have to remember to use our God-given intelligence* to eliminate some of the more obvious "runners-up." At the beginning of his rebellion, Korach famously declares himself a populist: "The entire community—each of them—is holy. Why do you raise yourselves above the congregation?" (Numbers 16:3).

Beware of rabbis—and anyone else!—making political statements. The Maharal of Prague writes that someone whose work for the community is motivated by a desire for self-promotion or fame is not working for the community, even though the community

benefits (*Derekh Chaim* on *Avot* 2:2). Serving the community means taking care of what it needs *because* it is a society, not merely “a lot of people,” an aggregate of individuals.

The essence of a Jewish community is so great that God is automatically attached to it and work done for it is for the sake of Heaven. This is why it is permitted on Shabbat to hold a public forum to discuss community concerns (*Shabbat* 150a)—community projects are Heaven’s concern. But politicians, because of their importance and esteem, hold themselves aloof from the rest of us and are not part of the community. They do not work for the sake of Heaven.

* “Don’t pray and bother your Creator when you can do it yourself” (*The Aleph-Bet Book, Tzaddik* A:71). “Don’t bother God when you can be helped in some other way” (*ibid.*, A:106).

a gutn Shabbos!

Shabbat Shalom!

—Based on *Likutey Halakhot*,

Birkhot HaShachar 3:8–9