

For the entire congregation – all of them – are holy. (16:3)

Korach crossed the line when he debated Moshe *Rabbeinu*. One does not impugn the integrity of the *gadol/gedolim*, Torah giants, of their generation. His statement, “The entire congregation, all of them, are holy,” is the basic argument of those who reject the Torah leaders, claiming that they are as well-versed in Torah as the *gedolim*. They do not require a teacher or a leader. *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl* (who was the *posek ha’dor*, undisputed *halachic* arbiter of his generation), explains that without the *mesorah*, tradition, of the great men of the generation, one can easily err – just as Korach erred – concerning the laws of *tzitzis* and *mezuzah*. Likewise, we observe the apostasy of Eliezer ben Poirah, who maintained that *Sefer Torah munachas b’keren zaviis*, “the *Sefer Torah* is lying in a corner, and whoever chooses to learn may come and learn” (*Kiddushin* 66a).

The *Tzadukim* took this position when they denied the Torah’s Divine Authorship. *Rav Moshe* asserts that one who believes that the Torah is “lying in a corner” and anyone who wishes to learn from it (or any volume of *Talmud* and its commentators) without the direction and guidance of Torah authorities, is a *kofer*, apostate. Sadly, various forms of apostasy exist. Those who have studied “little,” find support for their fallacious views in some rabbinic maxim, which, consistent with their limited knowledge, they have misunderstood. Indeed, even the generation of the wilderness, a generation that heard the first two *Dibros*, Commandments, of the Ten Commandments, required Moshe and Aharon and all of the Elders to teach, explain and guide them.

Regrettably, many individuals who have defamed the term Orthodoxy (which really should be called Torah Judaism), suggesting that it is not monolithic, thus allowing for diverse opinions concerning the *halachah*. It might be true that in the Orthodox camp people maintain various approaches to manners of service, but all adhere to the *Shulchan Aruch* and are guided by the words of the *gedolei Yisrael*. To suggest that *halachic* decisions for a particular community is the sole domain of its *rav*, the local authority, regardless of the *p’sak* of the *gadol ha’dor*, borders on apostasy. They do not ascribe to the time-honored *halachic* rubric of *daas Torah*, the wisdom of the Torah, as expounded by the sages whose lives represent Torah dictate at its most stringent level. Diversity does not exist in *halachah* if an approach is antithetical to the *Shulchan Aruch*. I could go on to chronicle the flawed, misinformed opinions of those who have decided that *halachah* is insufficient for living an ideal life. I will sum up, however, with one quote from their thesis on modernity in Judaism: “For *Chareidi* Orthodoxy, the *halachah* dictates the ethic, rather than the other way around.” They view *halachah* as being the product of their perception of what they consider to be ethical. They have no place for Hashem in their definition of an ideal life.

We have blamed Korach for being the progenitor of *machlokes*, controversy, *she’lo l’shem Shomayim*, not for the sake of Heaven. After all is said and done, however, Korach was an unabashed *kofer*, apostate. He did not believe in Hashem, and he sought to impugn the integrity of Moshe and Aharon’s leadership in order to promote his self-serving purpose. *Machlokes*; sowing the seeds of hatred; fomenting feelings of dissent; manipulating Jewish pride for personal gain,

were all part of his gambit to tarnish Judaism. Korach lost; his followers in each ensuing generation have also lost because ultimately, they have contended, not with Jewish leadership, but with Hashem.

The *Yalkut Shemoni* relates Moshe *Rabbeinu's* reaction to Korach's apostasy. Korach claimed, "Moshe is not a prophet; Aharon is not *Kohen Gadol*; the Torah was not given from Heaven." When Moshe heard this heresy emanating from Korach's mouth, he said to Hashem, "I (might) be *mevater*, concede/ overlook/ defer concerning my humiliation and that of (my brother) Aharon, but on the *bizayon*, denigration of the Torah, I will not be *mevater*." With these words, Korach's fate was sealed. One is not permitted to accept the Torah's disgrace at the hands of such a renegade.

To give the reader an idea of the meaning of *kavod haTorah*, the honor (that should be) given to the Torah of *Gedolei hador*, the Torah giants of a generation, I will relate a few vignettes. The venerable *Netziv, zl*, once fell to the ground as he was carrying a *Sefer Torah*. *Horav Yitzchak Volozhiner, zl*, immediately told those standing there, "Pick up the *Netziv* first!" *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, upon quoting this story, remarked concerning the powerful lesson regarding *kavod haTorah* that we derive from it. The *Talmud (Makkos 22b)* declares, "How foolish are the Babylonians who rise up for a Torah scroll, but fail to do so for a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar." This is why *Rav Yitzchak Volozhiner* instructed the students to first pick up the *Netziv*, the *gadol hador*, and only then to pick up the *Sefer Torah*.

Horav Eliezer Ben David, Shlita, supplements this with an explanation. A *Sefer Torah* is written on parchment derived from the skin/hide of an animal. Thus, it becomes sanctified when the *sofer*, scribe, has the proper *kavanos*, intentions, while he is writing on it. A *talmid chacham's* Torah is inscribed upon his body, so that his entire body becomes holy. Perhaps we might add that a Torah scroll's letters are written on the parchment. A *talmid chacham's* Torah permeates his entire essence, literally making him a *shtik*, the essence of, Torah.

When *Horav Mordechai Benet, zl*, visited the city of Pressburg, Hungary, where the *Chasam Sofer* was *Rav*, he went into the *shul* at night to learn. While he was studying Torah, he fell asleep from physical exhaustion. After a while, he rolled off the bench and slept on the floor. The following morning, the worshippers entered the sanctuary to find *Rav Mordechai Benet* sleeping on the floor. The *Chasam Sofer* immediately decreed a fast day on the community consistent with the *halachah* that requires the community to fast when a *Sefer Torah, chas v'shalom*, falls to the ground.

Horav Avraham Tzvi Ungar, zl, author of the *Machne Avraham*, was *Rav* in Kapu-Var, Hungary, a city whose Jewish community primarily consisted of observant Jews. Some secular Jews, whose self-loathing manifest itself in extreme animus towards their observant brothers, also lived there. One secular Jew in particular vilified Orthodoxy beyond a level of which one would believe a Jew capable. He owned a fabric store, situated in the central part of town which served all members of the community. He had a loathsome habit of opening his store on *Shabbos*, specifically when the

observant Jews were leaving *shul*. To add insult to injury, he stood in the doorway of his store, smoking a cigarette, and when the worshippers passed his store, he would smile and offer them a loud, “*Gutt Shabbos!*”

On the first day of *Pesach*, when the worshippers left *shul* accompanied by their *Rav*, he called out, with derision, “Ungar! Come here!” The *Rav* was startled, but not wanting to create a scene, he turned his head toward the man. How shocked he was to see this man standing in his storefront holding a sandwich consisting of two slices of bread with a piece of *matzah* between them. Seeing this, the *Rav* almost passed out. This was beyond chutzpah. He was not denigrating the *Rav*, he was disgracing G-d! The *Rav* just stared at him. Suddenly, the man gave a scream and fell to the ground, the victim of a sudden stroke.

That year, the first day of *Pesach* had fallen on Thursday. Thus, the deceased could not be buried until Sunday. For three days he lay on the floor of his house. The community was shaken. For those three days, they could speak about nothing other than the man’s *chillul Hashem*, disgracing Hashem’s Name, and the swift Heavenly punishment that was meted out. Indeed, as a result of this clear, Heavenly response, Hashem’s Name was publicly sanctified in an unprecedented manner that would forever alter the lax attitude towards *Shabbos* observance.

To the surprise of the members of the community, the *Rav* participated in the funeral. Furthermore, he ascended to the podium to render a eulogy. He later explained his actions. While the man had led a lifestyle that was antithetical to Torah, in the end, his sudden passing catalyzed an extraordinary *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*, inspiring an entire community suddenly to come to terms with the reality that Hashem guides the world and that no action (good or bad) will go unrequited. As such, this man had become a vehicle for *Kiddush Hashem*. He deserved to be eulogized.

Just because a person publicly acts in a manner which is perceived as *kefirah*, apostasy, it does not necessarily bespeak his true feelings. Many an apostate is filled with self-loathing, which he expresses in negative terms towards Judaism. Is he really a *kofer*? *Horav Nachman Bulman, zl*, was an extraordinary *Rav*, a *talmid chacham* whose devotion to Torah and its dissemination, through both the oral and written word, not only earned him the respect, admiration and love of thousands, but he also succeeded in altering the spiritual panorama of America, and later *Eretz Yisrael*.

In the 1950’s, it was difficult to find a truly Orthodox *shul* outside of the tri-state area. As a young rabbi, *Rav Bulman* was fortunate to find such a position in Danville, Virginia. While the community was not exactly Orthodox, they elected to maintain the *shul* on a level which they thought was Orthodox. It took time, but, with tenacity and perseverance, *Rav Bulman* succeeded in transforming the community.

Rav Bulman put up with stubborn synagogue heads and disgruntled members, a phenomenon that was not uncommon on the slowly emerging Orthodox landscape. Danville had one “in-

house” *apikores*, self-proclaimed heretic, who even had a Ph.D. in philosophy. He made it a point to interject constantly into *Rav Bulman’s* Sunday morning Torah class with his usual dose of *kefirah*. *Shul* on *Shabbos*, prayer at any time, was an anathema to him, or so he claimed.

This man, like so many like him, suffered from ambivalent stirrings concerning the religion of his youth. He would come to *shul* for *Neilah*, the closing prayer of the *Yom Kippur* service, and make a public spectacle of reading a newspaper (in *shul*, rather than take a *machzor*, prayer book, and *daven*). He did not have the paper, however, for reading purposes, but to block the tears that were flowing down his face! To “save face,” he would say to *Rav Bulman*, on his way out of *shul*, “The old-fashioned *davening* is so tear-jerking. I believe they have something similar to this by the gentiles.” This goes to show that not all *kofrim*, apostates, are created equal, and not all are the way they present themselves.