

Holiness demands ethical behavior

Portion of the Week

**RABBI DANIEL KRIPPER,
ADAT SHALOM**

*Parshat Korach, Numbers 16:1-18:32; Maftir,
Numbers 28:9-15; Haftarah, Isaiah 66:1-24*

This sedra gives a clear example of a situation that has repeated itself many times in world history: the rebellion of Korach, who says that Moses and Aaron were putting themselves above the people. The rebels used this sensitive issue to stir up trouble from which they hoped to benefit. Let's listen to their words:

"You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation, all of them, are holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do you exalt yourselves over the congregation of the Lord?"

At first glance, Korach's words seem positively modern and democratic. He apparently sets the will of the people over the will of the leadership, and yet a careful reading of the text reveals this is merely a demagogic stratagem on his part to gain the support of the people.

The biblical commentator Sforno tells us that when Korach says "all of them" he meant "every one of them," while Rashi and Ibn Ezra agree that Korach was arguing that the very presence of the people at the revela-

tion on Mount Sinai was enough to make each individual Israelite holy.

But, seductive though this view is, it is patently untenable because holiness is not an automatic attribute which arises because of one's presence at an event, or simply because of one's heredity.

Holiness may be achieved mainly by ethical and religious action, through self-discipline and self-transcendence. The Torah does not teach that the people are holy, but that "you shall become holy." (Lev. 19:2)

As Yeshayahu Leibowitz said, the holiness of the people as mentioned by Moses is not a fact, but a demand. Moses' mitzvot make demands — Korach offers indulgences.

In other words, Korach's doctrine would spell the end of the striving after personal and communal perfection that the Torah demands.

Korach's rebellion, therefore, strikes not only at the leadership of Moses and his brother Aaron, but also at the very heart of the colossal enterprise upon which they, and the people, were embarked.

Moses clearly understood this when he accused the rebels of gathering together "against the Lord."

Moses' message is still relevant to our time, in its insistence of following Torah's teachings, that source of blessing so bitterly opposed by idolaters and tyrants in every generation.

Let us therefore strive to reach beyond ourselves, to become ever more sanctified, with the help of the eternal,

timeless Torat Moshe.

(This column is a service of the Greater Pittsburgh Rabbinic Association.)

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A dancer's leap of faith



**SUSAN
JACOBS**

Nearly every little girl gets a taste of ballet class at some point in her life. Even with a dizzying array of other extracurricular activities from which to choose, most girls, at one time or another, still go through the paces of learning the five positions of the feet and arms and how to do a grande plie.

After that, a small minority stick with ballet's strict regimen and go on to learn the intricacies of entrechat quatre and pas de chat, among other graceful and complex steps. Others go on to modern dance or hip-hop, or abandon dance entirely for sports or music and other pursuits. A demanding art form, ballet is certainly not suited for everyone.

Friends of mine are sometimes surprised that I still go to regular ballet classes, twice a week. Officially, my explanation is that I am terribly undisciplined about putting myself on an exercise schedule. Ballet class begins and ends at prescribed times, which makes it easier for me to find the time to be there, and the classes themselves build strength, flexibility and endurance, offering a well-rounded workout. (Anyone who thinks ballet is for sissies has obviously not met my teacher, Maria, who compares herself to a drill sergeant.)

But the other reason I take ballet is that a big part of me still aspires to perform the graceful leaps and turns that I have loved since I first saw a televised ballet as a child. I may be naturally clumsy, but deep inside, I was born to dance.

My physical limitations and religious

priorities kept me from ever considering life as a dancer. With rules of modesty and restrictions that make Shabbat performances verboten, Orthodox Judaism and ballet are an uneasy mix.

However, some time ago it occurred to me that the two disciplines really have quite a bit in common.

Both demand dedication, sacrifice and passion. Both have their own terminologies and rituals. Both are appreciated by devoted followers, and are easily misunderstood by outsiders. Both are learned best from teachers who mix firmness with compassion, and who understand how to transmit love for their field of study.

On a sadder note, ballet and Orthodox Judaism both have legions of disillusioned former students, sometimes because of the influence of shortsighted or overly strict teachers or a general aversion to the demands of regimen.

Another challenge of both disciplines is that many people see the rules and restrictions and never see the beauty that results from years of study.

For example, a newcomer to ballet class may find it frustrating that three-quarters of class may be spent at the barre, instead of leaping across the room. Similarly, one who drops into an Orthodox service may hear lots of Hebrew recitations without ever feeling a connection to God.

However, a veteran of either discipline will tell you that without a solid plie, a dancer will never soar, and that by delving into centuries-old prayers and texts, one will eventually learn how to connect to the Almighty.

There are certainly other paths to artistic beauty and other ways of finding God, but I have found that these time-tested and intricate methods work best for me.

(Susan Jacobs can be reached at sjacobs@pittchron.com.)