

Attachment #5

Peulat Shabbat Korach

Korach 16:1-3

"Now Korach Son of Ishar son of Kohach son of Levi betook himself along with Datan and Aviram sons of Eliav and On, son of Pelet, decedents of Reuven to rise up against Moses, together with 250 Israelites, chieftains of the community, chosen in the assembly, men of repute. They joined together against Moses and Aaron and said to them 'you have gone too far for the community is holy, all of them and the lord is in their midst. Why do you raise yourselves above the lord's congregation.'"

Korach questions Moses and Aaron, claiming that they have separated themselves and stood above the rest of the community. For rising up against the community Korach and his followers are punished with death.

1. Pirkei Avot 1:14

If I am not for me, who will be?
If I am not for myself alone, what am I?
And if not now, when?

2. There were two men on a boat traveling across the Mediterranean Sea. One man was a furrier, and the other a carpenter.

The furrier decided to dry his skins on the deck of the boat. The skins were quite foul smelling, and quickly the smell spread throughout.

The carpenter said to the furrier, "What are you doing? Your skins are stinking up the entire boat and ruining my journey."

The furrier replied, saying, "What I do in my section is my business, and what you do in your section is your business. I do not interfere with your actions, and you do not interfere with mine."

The carpenter thought this through, and then took out a drill and began to drill a hole beneath his seat.

The furrier got scared, and shouted hysterically, "What are you doing? You're going to sink the boat!"

The carpenter calmly replied, "What I do in my section is my business, and what you do in your section is your business."

(Midrash Vayikra (Leviticus) Rabbah 4:6)

Attachment

Discussion Questions

One camper should be appointed as representative of the small group and will give a brief summary of the ideas discussed at the summary Eidah meeting.

One camper should read source #1 out loud.

2. What does the first source from Pirkei Avot seem to say about the interaction between the individual and the group?

it would seem the focus is on the individual rather than the group. The author suggests that self-definition is the most important thing.

3. What are your reactions to this interpretation? Can you share an experience from your life when you choose to focus on yourself before focusing on others? In looking back on the event, what would you say about the choice you made? Was it the right thing or wrong thing to do at the time? Can you tell us why you act the way you did?

4. This quote seems to present a rather selfish viewpoint, in which others especially a group are secondary. Is this a sort of self-centered approach?

Yes and no. It's not selfish if done in moderation. Ask for examples from in which the campers acted for themselves and at the same time there was no real harm to others.

5. What does the Midrash (Source #2) seem to say about the interaction between the individual and others?

In the story, the focus seems to be on whether one should be worried more about the welfare of the group or just for the individual. But the Midrash wants to remind us that the individual is merely a part of the greater whole where everyone shares in the responsibility for his/her actions especially when they impact on others.

Group comments?

When in our experience at home, school or at camp, anywhere else, have we chosen to act in the best interest of the group rather than act for ourselves as individuals? In looking back, on the event, what would you say about the choice you made? Was it a good decision, or should you have chosen differently?

Some may say that acting in the best interest of the group can deny an individual's need to take care of him/herself and his/her need? What do you think?

Sometimes, "taking one for the team" is the right thing to do. There is a need for both group and self-definition.

Are the sources mutually exclusive, or is it possible to support both viewpoints?

An opinion question, but steer them towards the thought that there is a position in which both the individual's needs can be met and supported and the strength of the larger group maintained. For example, the camp setting is an environment where there is room for meeting both individual needs and group needs by contributing to strong Eidah unity and bonding. (Try to get the campers to suggest examples of this dual approach.)

Do you think there is a connection between those people who are effective at taking care of their own needs and those who are Effective at taking care of the needs of the community? Or are people who care about the community solely focused on the community and disregard their own needs?

Perhaps those who are most effective at helping the community are aware of the fact that they first must take care of their own needs

10. How do you choose when to focus on your own needs and when to focus on the needs of the group?

Additional Questions if needed:

11. Now looking ahead to the rest of the summer, how can we try to tie in what we have talked about with some of the goals discussed in the Shabbat evening discussions?

12. How can we balance our personal goals with the goals of the Eidah? Is it possible that someone's personal goals may have to be set aside for the benefit of the Eidah? When should the goals of the Eidah be set aside for the benefit of a few individuals?

Conclusion—Read to your group

Recalling our discussion of Korach: In verse three it says "you've gone too far for all the community is holy, why then do you raise yourselves above the lord's congregation" Yishayahu Leibowitz comments: The community as a holy entity is a future goal rather than a present boast. People who desire to better themselves will naturally rise to positions of leadership, while those who view their current status as holy enough are as close to G-d as they'll ever be. Therefore we learn from this parasha that the individuals who achieve the highest levels of holiness do so by seeking to better themselves first.