

Dear Chavraya,

Life is not fair, but, as the tee shirt says, "Life is Good." It can be hard to hold both of these realities. It can be so hard to look through tears and see, even to embrace the good and goodness in spite of all that would block it from our heart's view. Pursuing good and affirming goodness in the way we live, finding meaning in the still and the small, becomes an antidote, a life line to guide us away from the edge, from drowning in a sea of sorrow and disappointment. And some times it is not enough.

This is not where I imagined my thoughts would go as I read *Parashat Korach* this week, as I encountered Korach and his discontents. But then the torah of life intervened with all of its twisting, tumultuous teaching, offering its own lens to the text. It is all there, the Torah itself as *Torat Chayim/Torah of Life*, text and context blurring through the tear drop lens of a given moment in time. The call came of a suicide, one we knew and loved. The shock overwhelms, the desperate groping for answers that are not there. Her discontents were so different than those of Korach, but she too was swallowed up, splitting open the earth with her own hand as God cried out in horror, the only witness in the hidden place where she died. As Korach felt blocked in his aspiration to acquire, to take more than his due, she felt blocked in seeking her own place, only what was due, a place in which to breathe and be herself, just to be.

Korach is a difficult character, someone we never really get to know, whose own voice we never really hear. We are told that *Korach took/vayikach Korach*, and that becomes the basis for the entire understanding of Korach's revolt, a quest for power and influence, an effort to usurp the roles of Moses and Aaron. Suddenly I wonder why Korach's own voice never emerges in the Torah portion that bears his name. As the presumed leader of the revolt, his name is joined with those who hurl the challenge at Moses and Aaron, *you take too much upon yourselves...*, but we actually never hear him speaking alone in the first person. Is there torment underneath that we have not discerned? The challenge is nasty; the breach is deep and heavy with the possibility of violence. Is there an element, though, in Korach of someone unable to find his voice, of someone struggling to give expression to noble yearning but who crumbles under the weight of misdirected means, who destroys himself and drags so many others down into the abyss? Eventually, the ground opens up and swallows Korach. We all return to dust, but this is not the way it is meant to be, one cataclysmic act swallowing all that was and might have been, if only....

Of Korach's misdirected striving, the Ha'emek Davar, Rabbi Naftoli Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, offers a rare expression of compassion, *u'vikesheh davar she'ga'vo'hah me'arko/he sought something that was beyond his ability to acquire*. The challenge is to know the meaning of one's own life, to see one's own value, which is what *arko* actually means, and then to know the way through which to fulfill the meaning and value of our own infinite worth. Korach was silent, as was she, only the deed left to fill the void. But there were other deeds that speak louder than the final one, surely for her and even as there must have been for Korach.

Telling of beauty or of abiding meaning and good sounds hollow in the moment of suffering. But that is what we need to speak of, to know and believe all along the way to help us on. So too, it would have been cold comfort to Korach in the moment of his feeling aggrieved to hear the teaching of the rabbis, *Who is rich? One who rejoices in their portion/ha'sa'me'ach b'chelko*. As much as Moses fought against his calling and begged for release, so much later come the words we prayerfully say in the *Amida* on Shabbos morning, *yismach Moshe b'matnat chelko/Moses rejoiced in the gift of his portion*. Though translated in the past tense, attributing such joy to Moses in the time of his struggles, it is actually written in future tense, *Moses shall rejoice*. As we say the words, we are meant to hear them as addressed to us. That is the gift to Moses, to know that his children shall strive to find meaning in the portion of their lives, then he shall rejoice in his portion, when we rejoice in ours. If only Korach could have seen what he had, to perceive the opportunity to do good that was already his.

Sometimes it is so hard to see the good, when the tee shirt that proclaims, "Life is Good" seems a mockery. And yet that is all there is to affirm. It is a life long process, nurturing the ability to see the good in spite of all that would deny it, creating a lifeline to help us through the bleak times. Every act of goodness, however small, is an affirmation that life is indeed good, that it has meaning. When crushed and heartbroken, may we still know beyond words or even conscious awareness that there is good and beauty within ourselves and in the world all around. at least knowing it is there, offering a hand to each other along the path of life. May her memory be a blessing.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor