

## Healthy and Unhealthy Controversy

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The Pirkei Avot describes the controversy of Korach and his cohorts to have been “not for the sake of Heaven.” Their goal was to overthrow the leadership of Moses and Aaron, in the hope of seizing political power for themselves. They did not offer a positive agenda; rather, they preyed on the fears and frustrations of the public.

When controversies are “not for the sake of Heaven”—but rather for the sake of personal gain and egotistical gratification—they are resolved by a show of power. The side which is stronger defeats the opponent; the controversy is over; history continues. These controversies are a zero sum game. One side wins, one side loses.

The Pirkei Avot contrasts the Korach model of controversy with that of the debates between Hillel and Shammai. Those disputes were “for the sake of Heaven.” Neither Hillel nor Shammai was seeking personal power or glory. Each was presenting his interpretation of the Torah and his application of halakha. Each had cogent arguments to support his view. Although they disagreed strongly on various issues, they were not opponents

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## Dutch Lawmakers on Kosher Slaughter Ban

June 23, 2011, JTA

The Dutch Parliament has offered a compromise on a bill that would ban kosher slaughter.

Under the compromise hammered out June 22, ritual slaughter will not be included in a bill that would ban the slaughter of animals in the Netherlands without first stunning them if it can be proved that the ritual method of slaughter does not cause additional suffering.

Under the laws of shechitah, or Jewish ritual slaughter, animals may not be rendered unconscious before slaughter. Muslim law has a similar proscription.

The compromise means that the Jewish and Muslim communities can “go and investigate what is possible instead of just telling them what they can’t do,” lawmaker Stientje van Veldhoven of centrist D66 party said.

The Jewish community has rejected this line of reasoning, saying the

ban and the new amendment demonstrate a lack of religious freedom for Dutch Jews. As many as 50,000 Jews and approximately 1 million Muslims are living in the Netherlands, according to reports.

The Dutch parliament will vote on the proposed ban, with the amendment, next week. If the legislation passes, it would make Holland the first European Union country to ban shechitah.

Shechitah is permissible under European law and to ban it goes against the E.U. Charter of Fundamental Rights, which clearly states there is freedom of religious practice.

A controversial ban on kosher slaughter put in place by New Zealand’s agriculture minister was partially reversed last November amid allegations that the decision was taken to appease Muslim countries that have lucrative trade relations with New Zealand. The ban on kosher slaughter of poultry was suspended; the ban on beef remains.

## Prayer Schedule

### SHABBAT

#### PARASHAT KORACH

Friday, June 24th, 2011

Shaharit 6:30 am

Minhah & Arbit 6:30 pm

Candle Lighting 7:50 pm

Saturday, June 25th, 2011

Shaharit 8:30 am

Tehillim 6:00 pm

Class w/R. Batzri 6:15 pm

Minhah & Arbit 7:00 pm

Motzei Shabbat 8:53 pm

### WEEKDAYS

Sunday, June 26th

Shaharit 7:30 am

Monday-Friday

Shaharit 6:30 am

### EREV SHABBAT & ROSH HODESH TAMMUZ

#### PARASHAT CHUKKAT

Friday, July 1st, 2011

Shaharit 6:30 am

Minhah & Arbit 6:30 pm

Candle Lighting 7:50 pm

## 2011 GRADUATES

E-mail your name, your school, & a digital pic to [dafna@kahaljoseph.org](mailto:dafna@kahaljoseph.org) or call 310-474-0559 and we will include you in our tribute to the Class of 2011!

## Torah Readings

Parasha 639-648

Haftara 649-651

## NOTICE TO PARENTS

1. Children under 5 years old must be supervised by a parent when using our KIDS ZONE upstairs.
2. No child is allowed to remain in the synagogue lobby without the constant supervision of a parent/guardian.
3. We are not responsible for children walking out the front door.

out to destroy each other but were colleagues in search of truth. The Talmud reflects this idea when it states that both of their views “were the words of the living God.” In such debates, a ruling must be reached so that people will know what the law requires. Yet, the “losing” side has not really lost. His opinion is still quoted, still taken seriously. While it did not prevail then, it might prevail at another time or in another context.

Hillel and Shammai ultimately were on the same side—on the side of truth, on the side of Heaven. Their controversies reflected honest and well-reasoned differences of opinion. What they shared in common far outweighed their relatively few differences of opinion.

Just as in antiquity, we have our share of controversies today. Some are clearly in the category of Korach controversies—not for the sake of Heaven. People fight for power, seek to destroy their opponents, give vent to their egotistical ambitions in cruel and ruthless ways. These controversies are resolved through power struggle. The stronger side will win; the weaker side will be wiped out or forced to back down or surrender completely.

We also have controversies that are more akin to those of Hillel and Shammai. As long as the disputants realize they are ultimately on the same side, these controversies can be healthy aspects of our intellectual and cultural lives. We can weigh both sides calmly and reasonably. We can disagree on various points of theology or philosophy, and still remain respectful and friendly to each other.

A problem arises, though, when theological and philosophical debates transform themselves into battles for power that call for the total defeat of opponents. On the surface, these controversies may seem to be “for the sake of Heaven”; yet, they are in fact fueled by egotism and the desire to crush opposition. Disputants in such controversies do not see the opinions of their opponents as being “words of the living God,” but as blasphemies that cannot be tolerated. When theological and philosophical disagreements slip into the category of Korach-controversies, this leads to violence and terrorism. Instead of being reflections of a search for truth, they become vehicles for oppression, fueling the overwhelming urge to crush those who dissent.

In his essay, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” Sir Isaiah Berlin dealt with the question of how we deal with theological and philosophical disagreements. He rejected “relativism” which posits that all arguments have equal weight, that everything is a matter of personal choice and preference. No, the categories of truth and falsehood exist. Not every viewpoint has equal legitimacy. Yet, Berlin favored what he called “pluralism”, an acceptance that different people might come to legitimate differences of opinion without seeing each other as mortal enemies or opponents. In his view, this pluralism is “the conception that there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathizing and deriving light from each other.” In other words, I may be convinced that I have the real truth, but I may still see that others—who do not share my understanding of truth—are good, sincere and thoughtful people trying to do their best. I can learn from them, respect them, and be friendly with them. We are disputants—not enemies.

In distinguishing between the Korach-type controversies and the Hillel-Shammai-type, the Pirkei Avot was providing insight on the nature of human conflict. By juxtaposing them, it may have been alluding to the thin line between these two types of controversies. Power struggles can dress themselves up as religious debates; theological and philosophical disputes can be mere camouflages for egotistical and unsavory oppression of opponents.

Perhaps if we can learn to see our conflicts with others in the Hillel-Shammai model, we can develop a more harmonious religious and social discourse. This does not call on us to surrender our notion of truth; but only to recognize that other good, honest and fine people have the right to see things differently than we do. And perhaps if the public at large would adopt the Hillel-Shammai model, this might impact on the politicians, warriors, terrorists and oppressors who follow the Korach-model and who strew so much grief and bloodshed on our world.

Healthy controversy reflects an honest search for truth. Unhealthy controversy reflects the desire for power and ego gratification. Let us be sure that all of our own controversies are for the sake of Heaven. **Shabbat Shalom**

## In Memoriam

It is customary to light a memorial candle and to donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend prayer services in honor of loved ones.

### Shabbat / 23 Sivan

Lulu bat Toba

Salim ben Ezra Kamara

### Sunday / 24 Sivan

Sara bat David\*

Yosef ben Meir Hakimpour\*

Esther bat Chana\*

### Tuesday / 26 Sivan

Daniel Rojhani

Khadoory Hai ben Ezra

### Wednesday / 27 Sivan

Abdallah Faraj Yoseph Isaac

Maurice Moshe ben Avraham

### Thursday / 28 Sivan

Aziz ben Daniel Pourati\*

### Friday / 29 Sivan

Ezra ben Yaacov Jonah\*

Abraham ben Yehezkel Mashaal\*

### Shabbat / 30 Sivan

Ester bat Sofi

*To update, please call the office at 310.474.0559.*

### Refuah Shlemah

Yonatan ben Alizah • Mazal Tov bat Sulha Mitana • Matilda

Louisa • Yaheskel ben Regina •

Ayala bat Naomi • Khayah Noa

bat Sara • Haim ben Mordechai •

Prina bat Esther • Yosi ben

Esther • Ramah Regina bat

Farha • Aziza bat Sara Judith bat

Malka • Ofek ben Yochai •

Efrayim Zev ben Fayga • Sulha

Matana bat Mozelle • Gershon

ben David • Farangis Miriam bat

Touran • David ben Leah • Avra-

ham Haim ben Miryam • Yaakov

ben Freda • Rachel bat Mazal

Tov • Avraham ben Rabbie • Ma-

zal Sigalit bat Rivkah • Orit bat

Tikvah • Yaakov ben Aliyah •

Chana Leah bat Reiza • Avra-

ham Moshe ben Miriam Morde-

cai Haim ben Hanna • Rahel bat

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