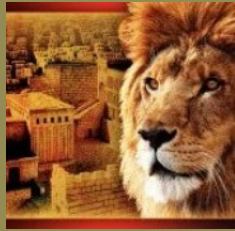


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To the Torah & the Testimony
If anyone does not speak according to these words
It is because they have no light in them.
Yesh'yahu (Isaiah) 8:20; Revelation 12:17; 14:12



Torah Thought of the Month

Studies of Eden Series

No. 4, Apr. 2017

“On Seeds of Doubt and Rebuking of Elders”

B'resheet (Genesis) 3:1-5

Often as humans we find it very natural to compare our own thoughts and values against the thoughts and values of others, and have a tendency to hold our own thoughts and values as superior to those whose positions differ from our own.

But is this lawful for us to do concerning those who are in authority over us? And if so, under what circumstances, and with what approach?

First of all, what is the basis of disagreement? It is a doubt, or distrust, of the validity of the other person's position or value. For example, in the beginning God commanded Adam to eat freely of every tree of the garden, and expressly forbade him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; **B'resheet (Genesis) 2:15-17**; and while trusting God and His instruction, Adam and Havah (Eve) were able and willing to carry out this instruction without doubt or fault.

However, later the serpent cast doubt on this commandment by implying that God was not being honest with them, saying, “you surely will not die”. Also, by implying that God was trying to withhold something desirable from them that could make them wise, he implied that God was somehow “unreasonable” or “over-protective”; **B'resheet (Genesis) 3:1-5**.

The result of this casting of doubt concerning God's character, wisdom, and motives, was to create doubt and discontent in Adam and Havah (Eve) which then empowered the serpent to draw Adam and Havah (Eve) away from God's protection and domain, into the serpent's domain.

We have a similar scenario with Lucifer who desired to be exalted and to be equal to God; **Yesh'yahu (Isaiah) 14:12-14**. Lucifer was, likewise, discontent and more trusting in self empowerment than in God; and with this attitude and approach before God was apparently able to influence one third of the angels to rebel against God; **Revelation 12:7-9**.

Then we have Korah and the 250 who contested the authority of Moshe (Moses) and Aaron, declaring, “You assume too much for yourselves, for all of the congregation is holy – every one of them, and Yehovah is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of Yehovah?”. But in casting doubt upon Moshe (Moses) and Aaron's authority, and in seeking to empower themselves, Korah caused all the people he drew away to be consumed alive by the earth;

B'midbar (Numbers) 16:1-33.

We have numerous other examples, such as when Miriam challenged Moshe (Moses) concerning his marriage to a foreign wife, and who was struck with leprosy for her efforts; **B'midbar (Numbers) 12:1-15**. And then with Absalom who tried to overthrow the authority of His father, King David, and was destroyed by God for His efforts; **2 Shemuel (2 Samuel) 16:15-18:33**. And also the religious leaders who attempted to overthrow Yeshua's authority, only to have their Temple and way of life destroyed for their efforts.

The Scriptures state, "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people"; **Shemot (Exodus) 22:28**. And again in the Brit Chadasha (New Testament) it is written, "Do not rebuke (correct in front of other people) an elderly man, but exhort (i.e. appeal to, or approach with compelling speech and mature example) him as a father; **I Timothy 5:1**.

And again, "Let elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine (those who are ordained to teach)..." and to Timothy (who was himself a leader) the Emissary Shaul (Apostle Paul) states, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses".

But is this the way people approach disagreements they have with leadership today? Or is it more common that people (particularly those in the zealotry of their youth), often, like Lucifer and the Serpent, just criticize elders and leadership at a distance (slandering them); or even rebuking them (openly attacking them in front of others) in the name of "correcting them"?

Granted, at times a person's observations can sometimes be correct; but we must understand that it is human nature to complain, and understand that if we were the ones in authority, that people would find fault with us as well. That even if we were to lead in perfect example, people, who walk after the example of Lucifer and the Serpent, would find fault with us.

For example, our Father in heaven is a perfect Father reigning in a perfect environment, yet one third of the angels found fault with Him and decided to go their own way with Lucifer. Then there is Yeshua, the only one in human form who never sinned, the very creator of this earth and of its inhabitants – the ultimate authority of this earth, but yet people also found fault with Him and crucified Him.

So do we want to be like the serpent and cast doubt on the leaders of our community in order to draw people out after our own position and view?

When we find fault with them, do we want to accuse our elders and leaders openly before others or slander them behind their backs to convince people of our own righteousness compared to the ones we are accusing, and strike at them to cast them down and turn others against them?

Is this a godly approach to disagreement or perceived sin in eldership, or is this the serpent's approach?

What is our motive? We can be like the arrogant child who defiantly challenges their parents in front of everybody to justify our own errant ways before others, or we can be like the child who humbly entreats their elders and leaders like fathers with wisely chosen words and compelling speech and example.

There is no doubt that some people should not be elders or pastors or teachers, because they do not fit the qualifications required of them as outlined in **Shemot (Exodus) 18:19-24**, and **I Timothy 2:11 – 3:13**. And because of this, churches often suffer the curse of assimilation and compromise.

There is also no prohibition against contesting doctrine or theology. As it is written, "prove all things,

and hold firmly to that which is good"; **I Thessalonians 5:21**. But what is our approach to what we perceive to be error? How do we approach disagreements with those whose views differ from our own?

Do we pray for them? For if Yeshua commands us to pray for those who spitefully use us and persecute us; **Mattit'yahu (Matthew) 5:44**, then how much more important is it then to pray for those who have the difficult and often thankless task of leading us?

In our approach are we respectful towards the older people and towards those in authority over us, or do we act like we are the ones in authority over them? Do we approach authority with a spirit of accusation, or with humility, wisdom of thought, and with compelling speech?

The Scriptures state to do all things with decorum and in an orderly manner; **I Corinthians 14:40**. They also teach us to be careful when correcting others, knowing that we ourselves are also subject to temptation; **Galatians 6:1**.

So let us not be like the serpent whose doubt and distrust was expressed through discontent and attack on authority; for it is no doubt these very temptations of the Wicked One's nature that we are being called to overcome.

It is God Himself who has ordained all rule and authority; **Romans 13:1-7**, so that not even the Accuser himself can act apart from God's will; **Yyob (Job) 1:6-2:7**. So how do we know that it was not God Himself who allowed a less than perfect individual into the leadership just to test us? Does it make us spiritually stronger to be content with God's sovereignty by being raised only under perfect authority, or make us stronger by being raised under imperfect authority?

As it is written, "...when you do good and suffer for it, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God..."; **I Kepha (I Peter) 2:18-21**.

We can already see that perfect authority did not prevent the angels from rebelling against God, and did not prevent religious leaders or even common people, from crucifying Yeshua. So requiring perfection in leadership before we honor them is not the solution for eliminating rebellion from a fallen world or from a sinful heart.

No, rather, the solution is to learn to be content in whatever situation we find ourselves in, trusting in God's word, and trusting in His ability to work all things out for good for all those who love Him; **Romans 8:28**, and do according to His will.

So if non-elders see an elder in a sin, slandering them by criticizing them behind their backs, or by rebuking (openly correcting) them before others will only cause judgment to fall upon our own heads. It is for those in equal or greater authority to them to correct or discipline them. So let those who are not in leadership approach correction of elders and leadership with humility and wisdom, and in a respectful, private manner, and not with arrogance, character assassination (slander), or with presumption of heart (assuming that if they were the elder, that no one would complain about them); **I Kepha (I Peter) 5:5,6**.

Leadership is not always perfect or sinless, but neither are congregants or those who accuse.

So let us take on the humility of Yeshua our Savior by seeking the approach in each situation that is likely to produce the most effective results for godly remorse and repentance, rather than in the arrogance of an accusatory nature that destroys, slanders, and diminishes the authority of those appointed to watch over us; for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble".

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