

They gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon and said to them, "It is too much for you! For the entire assembly-all of them are holy." (16:3)

The *Torah* recounts a number of controversies that occurred during *Klal Yisrael's* forty year sojourn in the desert. They complained and complained. They complained about water and about meat. There were spies who slandered *Eretz Yisrael*. Yet, after all is said and done, the one dispute that has been recorded in history as the paradigm of *machlokes*, controversy, is the *machlokes* of Korach. Why? At least Korach's dispute had a spiritual dimension to it. They questioned the *Kehunah*. They sought to serve in the *Bais Hamikdash* and offer *korbanos*. They even made use of *lomdus*, logic, using a *Tallis* made completely of *techeilas* or a house filled with *seforim*, to prove their point. A holy congregation does not need spiritual leadership. They were wrong, but should we view this as the nadir of controversy? Is this behavior worse than complaining about a "lack of beef" or a shortage of drinking water?

Chazal view things from a different orientation, a clearer perspective than we do. They say that Korach's *I'shaim Shomayim*, his Heavenly intentions, were all a ruse, a total sham. His complaints were even more materialistic than asking for meat or water. They made it appear like they sought *frumkeit*, religiosity, but they only wanted *kavod*, honor. They covered up their basic desires with *frumkeit*. This is the work of the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. He dresses everything in Heavenly attire. He goes so far that at times the person himself does not realize what he is doing. Korach realized. He knew exactly what he wanted. He was a demagogue who sought to usurp the spiritual leadership of *Klal Yisrael* from Moshe. He used *frumkeit* as a smoke screen to conceal his true malevolent intentions. The *Torah* reveals his controversy for what it was - the worst and lowest form of *machlokes* in the *Torah*.

What made Korach go wrong? How did such a brilliant, successful individual destroy everything, his reputation, family and life? *Chazal* say "*eino hitaaso*," "his eyes mislead him." He saw that Shmuel *Hanavi*, who was equal to Moshe and Aharon, would descend from him. How could he have been wrong and still be the progenitor of such a distinguished descendant? He did not realize that his sons would repent, and Shmuel would descend from them. *Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl*, gives deeper insight into Korach's mistake. Korach's primary contention was, "It is too much for you! - For the entire assembly - All of them are holy." In other words, there is no need for leadership - We are all leaders! The entire system of a *Kohen Gadol* and a *Melech* is superfluous when each one of us is holy and could himself be that leader. Shmuel *Hanavi* responded similarly when the people came to him requesting a king. "Why would you need a human king when you have Hashem, the king of kings?" Can we fault Korach for his words? After all, did not his illustrious descendant make the same statement: "*Klal Yisrael* does not need leadership"?

There is, however, a difference. During Shmuel's tenure, the people wanted a king for all of the

wrong reasons. They desired to live like the surrounding nations. Their goal in seeking a king was primarily to restrict Hashem's reign over them. Shmuel reprimanded them. Why seek a mortal when you have Hashem? Korach's intention was to denigrate Moshe and Aharon in order to obtain the leadership for himself. His goal was personal gratification. Korach's argument did not contain one iota of selflessness for the sake of Heaven. He manipulated the people; he twisted words. He presented himself like his descendant, Shmuel. He thought he could fool the world. He was tragically wrong.