

They gathered together against Moshe and Aharon. (16:3)

Korach was not an average person. He was a revered scholar with an illustrious pedigree. He had acquired wealth and power. Yet, it was his guile that helped him acquire his distinguished following. He used false and misleading arguments to undermine the *Torah*, to present its disseminators in a selfish and even foolish role. We will focus on some of his arguments in order to manifest the pattern of *machlokes*, controversy. We will also demonstrate how this timeless evil continues to thrive in contemporary times.

First, Korach brought his two hundred and fifty followers clothed in garments made of *techeilas*, blue wool. He asked Moshe if those garments required *tzitzis*. When Moshe responded in the affirmative, Korach challenged him, asserting that if four blue threads -- which comprise the *halachic* requirement of *tzitzis* -- can satisfy the criterion for *tzitzis*, how can a garment made entirely of blue wool be unacceptable? As **Horav Eliyahu Munk, zl**, explains, in Korach's mind the garments made completely of *techeilas* served as an analogy to his own men, who were distinguished and noble; they should have been able to dispense with the demands of *tzitzis* required of lesser men. Their superior souls should have elevated them above the *mitzvos* placed on "ordinary" people. Korach failed to address the fact that the actual performance of each *mitzvah* has its own function. Even a child born circumcised must undergo *hatofas dam bris*, the ritual removal of a few drops of blood, in order to discharge the *mitzvah* of *Bris Milah*. Korach focused on one element of the *mitzvah*. He did not take the entirety of the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis* into perspective.

This same underlying error is apparent in Korach's next two "critiques" He asked Moshe if a house filled with *seforim* mandated the "protection" of a *mezuzah*. Moshe responded that it certainly would. Korach responded with a taunting question: How could a *mezuzah*, which contains only two small *parshios*, accomplish more than the whole *Torah*? Once again Korach emphasized the distinguishing features of his congregation. What he failed to address is that, regardless of one's erudition, if he does not submit his heart and mind to Hashem's will, then his knowledge has no significance. External knowledge does not automatically transform an individual into a *ben Torah*, as evidenced by some scholars whose knowledge of - and relationship with - *Torah* is, at best, intellectual.

After Korach's attempt to denigrate *Torah* and humiliate its disseminators, he continued his assault by trying to present the *Torah* as insensitive to the needs of people. Indeed, he charged that the *Torah* was Moshe's initiative in an attempt to benefit himself and his family. He accomplished this with an analogy about a poor widow who had to care for her orphans. While she had a field, she was beset by many difficulties because of the *Torah's* "demands." She was forbidden to plow with an ox and donkey together, because of the law of *Kilayim*. The same law also prohibited her from planting with diverse seeds. Finally, when she was ready to harvest the fruits of her hard labor, "Moshe" came to present more demands. The laws of *Leket*, *Shikchah*, and *Peah* mandated that the corners and gleanings of her field must be given to the poor. When she was able to gather

what was remaining, she was notified that the *Kohanim* and *Leviim* must receive their portion through the *Terumah* and *Maaser Rishon* and *Sheni*. In disgust, she sold her field and purchased two ewes, hoping that she could support her family with the benefits of their wool and offspring. This time, *Aharon Hakohen* "came by" to pick up the first-born lambs that were born. When the wool was about to be sheared, *Aharon* demanded the first shearings. Angry, she slaughtered the sheep, only to have *Aharon* come by demanding the shoulder, jaw and stomach. When the widow said she was prepared to be *makdish*, consecrate, everything to Hashem, *Aharon* said that would be fine, because now he would have everything. The widow was beside herself, destitute, heartbroken, with nowhere to go and no one to approach for help.

The misleading arguments presented by this story indicate the underlying venom. Regrettably, this is typical of all those who seek to undermine the *Torah* in order to justify their own malevolent activities. These people pick on a particular aspect of a law and present it in the most negative perspective. They never present the *mitzvah* in its entirety, because that would expose them for the miscreants that they are. They just happen to delete those areas of the law that do not support their line of thinking.

It is not the point of this thesis to respond to *Korach's* vicious diatribe or to answer his questions. People like *Korach* do not seek answers. Interestingly, the word "*machlokes*" which is translated as dispute -- includes the word "*chelek*" which means a "part of." The *baal machlokes* is a person who focuses on a part of the law. He actively seeks an area that he can dispute, disparage, and denounce. He never presents the entire issue. That is the only way in which he can attract a following. His arguments reflect his cowardice.