

"And Korach took." (16:1)

What incited Korach to challenge Moshe and Aharon? Indeed, *Chazal* characterize his behavior as "*shtus*," an act of sheer stupidity. They say that he had a vision of his future descendants, among whom was Shmuel *Ha'Navi*. This was the source of his downfall. He assumed that if such virtuous scholars would descend from him, then he himself must be intrinsically virtuous. *Chazal* state that his mistake stemmed from his lack of awareness that his sons had repented during the last few moments. What lesson can we derive from Korach's error?

Horav Baruch Ezechiel, Shlita, cites the *Midrash* in *Vayikra* that tells the story of a man who was observing two birds arguing with each other. Their quarrel became so heated that one bird struck its antagonist and killed it. As soon as the first bird realized what it had done, it went searching for a special leaf that was known to have unique powers. It immediately placed this leaf beneath the dead bird's beak and resuscitated it. The man who was watching the entire spectacle took the leaf and set out to save the world. He came to the gates of a city and noticed a dead lion lying across the road. Quickly, he took the wonderful leaf and placed it by the lion's nostrils. Suddenly the lion came alive and smote the man that had saved him.

Imagine the tragedy of this man. He was privy to a wondrous tool, a unique gift. He used it inappropriately, however, and he was himself destroyed. A man can have tremendous potential and he can have the capacity to see into the future. Yet, he can make one little mistake, not using this gift astutely. In this way, the gift itself can cause his downfall. So, too, did Korach have the ability to see into the future. What did he do when he saw his impressive genealogy, when he noted the great *tzaddikim* that descended from him? Instead of utilizing this prophecy as a catalyst for repentance, he used it as support for impugning the leadership of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. What should have been his greatest motivation for spiritual advancement, regrettably became the stumbling block causing his downfall.

How often are we faced with similar situations? Hashem grants us a gift: a child who has remarkable potential; financial wherewithal, with which we can sustain our families and many others; or physical or spiritual attributes which can be used for our own spiritual/moral improvement. Do we always seize the opportunity and use it for the right purpose, Hashem's intended purpose? Or rather, do we selfishly manipulate our children to satisfy our own personal proclivities; use our wealth to attain power and exert our influence over others; or use Hashem's gift to us as a means of self-aggrandizement? So many lessons can be gleaned from Korach's downfall. If we take the opportunity to reflect upon them, we might become better, happier and more satisfied human beings.