

“Korach, son of Yitzchar, son of Kehas, son of Levi separated himself.” (16:1)

So begins one of the most tragic sagas in Jewish history, one that regrettably still plagues us to this very day. *Machlokes*, strife, controversy, dispute, political in-fighting: these are all words that describe the state of affairs which Korach and his followers have catalyzed in every generation. We can never free ourselves of dispute. At times, it is *l'shem Shomayim*, sincere, for the sake of Heaven: to promote observance, to stamp out religious incursion, to challenge those who would undermine and disgrace *Torah* and its disseminators. For the most part, however, it is petty, self-serving controversy. It is usually trivial, beginning with a desire for recognition and becoming an all-out fight for power. There are those who, as a result of their vested interests, expound *Torah* law in a self-serving manner, distorting its meaning and undermining its message, so that they can present themselves and their ignoble message in a positive light. Korach did just that.

Rashi cites *Chazal*, who explain Korach's critique of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Korach claimed religious conviction; he questioned the law. He and his misguided followers came before Moshe dressed in cloaks made entirely of *techeiles*, a form of sky blue-dyed wool. According to the *Torah*, one of the strands of the *tzitzis* must be colored this way. They asked Moshe, “Does a *tallis* that is *kulo techeiles*, entirely made of *techeiles*, require *tzitzis* or not?” Moshe responded in the affirmative, indicating that it would require *tzitzis*. They began to laugh, to scoff at him, “Is this possible? If a cloak is made of a different type of cloth, one thread of *techeiles* exempts it. Should not a cloak which is entirely of *techeiles* be exempted from this requirement?” This is how they began, using *Torah* to support their miscreancy. What was Korach's error? After all, he was no fool. Certainly, he was enough of a scholar to know that a *tallis* of *techeiles* would need *tzitzis*.

In the *Be'er Moshe*, the *Ozrover Rebbe*, z.l., explains that Korach's mistake lay in his thinking that the *tallis* was exempted by virtue of being *techeiles* in color. He did not penetrate the underlying motif of this *mitzvah*. Hashem is not concerned with colors; He wants us to fulfill *mitzvos* which carry out His divine decree. Thus, a *tallis* of *techeiles* still needs *tzitzis*, because Hashem's command is that a four- cornered garment have *tzitzis* at its fringe, regardless of its color.

Korach questioned whether a house filled with *seforim*, religious books, needs a *mezuzah*? After all, the Hebrew *parshiyos*, or words which are contained within the *mezuzah*, are certainly written in the *seforim* throughout the house. Once again, Korach missed the point. The *Torah* enjoins us to have a *mezuzah* on the doorpost of our house to remind us to Whom the house really belongs. Hashem is the real owner of this home; He protects it and its inhabitants. The *mezuzah* is a constant reminder of this fact.

Consequently, the contents of the house are irrelevant to the requirement that a *mezuzah* be on

the doorpost. Korach looked at the superficial and saw a color, a *mezuzah*. He did not use his G-d-given brain to delve into the rationale, to look beyond the surface. That is the precise problem that plagues so many who have alienated themselves from the *Torah*.