

“And it (the earth) swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korach.” (16:32)

Korach's sons repented at the very last moment, so they did not die. They were originally involved in the dispute, but they later saw the light. Korach, however, was too embroiled, too involved in himself, to be saved. He went down in infamy. Yet, I think there is something to be derived from this thought: Korach could not have been all that bad. Apparently, if his children repented, then there had to have been a value system at home that was spiritually correct. They had to have been raised correctly. *Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, Shlita*, cites the *Arizal*, who takes the last letters of the words, *Tzaddik katamar yifrach*, “A righteous person blooms like a palm tree” (*Tehillim* 92:13), *kuf, raish, ches*. These letters spell out the name Korach and imply that, in the future, Korach will be judged favorably. His claim of “the entire nation is holy” might have had some validity to it. It is just that, in this world, society can exist only through one leader who possesses attributes and virtues not found in any other person. He leads; he makes the decisions; he inspires the generation with holiness. He is the *gadol ha'dor*, preeminent Torah leader of the generation.

In addition, Korach's *shelo l'shem Shomayim* dispute, not intended for the sake of Heaven, was “off” by a hair. *Chazal* have designated the controversy of Korach as paradigmatic of the *machlokes shelo l'shem Shomayim*. When *Chazal* intend to teach us a lesson, they select an example from something that just crosses the line. What *chiddush*, novelty, is there about Korach's dispute, if it was “very much” *shelo l'shem Shomayim*?

Clearly, Korach's controversy contained only a minuscule amount of vested interest. Basically, his intention and goal were noble. Yet, since they veered ever so slightly from the standard of *l'shem Shomayim*, demanded by the Torah, it was iniquitous and serves as the prototype of *machlokes*.

We now understand why Korach's sons repented. They were raised in a Torah home with Torah values. Their father tragically erred. Although he imparted lofty Torah values in his home, he regrettably erred in implementing his goal. I recently read an incredible story about the powerful long-term effect an ancestor can have on his descendant.

The story takes place in *Yerushalayim*. A young man, whom we will call Dan, was leaving *shul* Friday night. He quickly scanned the remaining congregants to see if anyone needed a place to eat. He saw a young fellow, with dark skin and curly black hair, wearing dungarees and carrying the “traditional” backpack over his shoulder. He looked like a Sephardic Jew, perhaps from Morocco.

“Good Shabbos, my name is Dan. Perhaps I could invite you to my house for the *Shabbos* meal.”

“Yeah, thanks. My name is Machi. I would really like to join you.” Quick invitation – quick response,

and they left *shul* together on their way to a memorable meal.

They arrived at home and immediately after the introductions, Dan began to sing *Shalom Aleichem*. Dan sang, and Machi smiled. He was either shy or did not know the tune. They washed and sat down to eat the meal. Dan commented on the *parsha*. After some small talk, he asked Machi if he had a *zemirah*, song, he would like to sing.

Machi's face lit up, "Yes, I would like to sing the *Dodi* song that they sang tonight in the synagogue."

"Well," Dan said, "it is not usually sung during the meal, but I am sure we can make an exception. Children, we are going to sing the *Lecha Dodi* hymn in honor of our guest."

As soon as they completed the song, Machi resumed his silence until after the soup. When Dan asked him, "Which song do you want to sing now?" "*Lecha Dodi*, please," Machi answered. This happened again after the chicken course was completed. Machi only wanted to sing *Lecha Dodi*.

"Are you sure you do not want to sing something else?" Dan asked. "No, only *Lecha Dodi*." "Well, we will have to sing it a little lower this time. It is not your usual Friday night *Zemiros*. The neighbors might think we are a little strange." By the time they were ready to *bentch*, they had sung *Lecha Dodi* nine times!

Machi was an enigma. Who was he, and why was he so into *Lecha Dodi*? Dan figured that the easiest way to find out was to ask. So, he did. The story is incredible.

"I come from the city of Ramallah. Yes, the large Arab city on the West Bank. My full name is Machmud Ibn-es-Sharif, but, I am a Jew. Let me explain: I was born and grew up in Ramallah. I was taught from birth to despise my Jewish oppressors. This teaching bothered me. Should I not love my neighbors as I love myself? Why were the Jews different?

"These questions got me in trouble. My father threw me out of the house with nothing but the clothes on my back. My mind was now made up. I was going to run away and live with the Jews. I snuck back into the house at night to retrieve my clothes. My mother caught me in the middle of packing. She appeared pale and upset, but she was quite gentle with me. She understood my travail.

"When I told her I was going to live with the Jews, she became very still and pale and said, 'You do not have to convert to Judaism. You are already a Jew. In Judaism, the religion follows the mother. I am Jewish, so you are also Jewish. I made a terrible mistake by marrying an Arab, one for which I have paid my whole married life.'

"She went and found my birth certificate and her old Israeli ID card, so that I could prove that she

was a Jew. She also gave me an old picture of her grandparents, which was taken when they went up North looking for the grave of a great ancestor of ours.”

“Do you have the picture with you?” asked Dan, hopeful that the picture would lend some closure to the mystery surrounding Machi’s roots.

“Sure,” Machi responded. “I always carry it with me.” He reached into his backpack and produced a tattered envelope from which he extracted a picture. It showed an old Sephardic family at the turn of the century. He then focused on the grave. When he read the inscription, he nearly dropped the photo. He rubbed his eyes to make sure! There was no mistake. This was a grave in the old cemetery of *Tzfas*, and the inscription on the grave identified it as the grave of the great *mekubal* and *tzaddik*, *Rav Shlomo Alkabetz* – the author of *Lecha Dodi*!

Dan’s voice shook with excitement as he related to Machmud who his great ancestor was. It all made sense now. Machmud was drawn to the song of *Lecha Dodi* because it was composed by his great-grandfather. Tears flowed down Machmud’s cheeks as Dan stretched out his arms and said, “Welcome home, Machmud. Now, how about choosing a new name for yourself?”