

"And Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, took." (16:1)

Rashi explains that he took himself to one side to be set apart from the congregation to argue against the priesthood. The name Korach serves as the paradigm of one who came with destructive, rebellious scorn, initiating a quarrel with the sole purpose of self-aggrandizement. As the *Mishna* in *Avos* (5:20) states: "Every controversy which is for the sake of Heaven will endure in the end, and every one which is not for the sake of Heaven will, in the end, not endure. Which is the controversy for the sake of Heaven? Such was the conflict of Hillel and Shamai. And which is not for the sake of Heaven? Such was the conflict of Korach and his entire assemblage." Every controversy, conflict, or debate concerns an issue on which there are sincere varied opinions. The *Mishna* suggests that the focal point of a given conflict is not about the **what**, but rather about the **how** and **why** of the dispute. It is necessary to delve into the inner motives of the individual participants. Hillel and Shamai differed in opinion regarding various aspects of Jewish law, but from the very beginning they had one purpose in mind; to help their people properly observe the *Torah* way of life. Theirs is an example where neither side really wins, but rather the thoughts and ideas of both sides ultimately merge into the stream of Jewish tradition. The controversy that existed between these two schools was above personal rivalry. The sterling character and intentions of both Hillel and Shamai, and their respective schools, were obvious since once *Chazal* decided on a *halacha* in any matter in which Hillel and Shamai differed, both sides accepted the decision without any bitterness or acrimony.

A question yet remains. The first example is given as "*the controversy of Hillel and Shamai*" since they were the actual antagonists. Why then is the second example given as "the controversy of Korach and his assemblage?" Should it not read "*the controversy between Korach and Moshe*?" This question has received many answers, of which we offer two. In the event that a group attacks its teachers and leaders, claiming, that it is all for the sake of Heaven, we can discern the truth by examining the group. If the group is harmonious and its various members are bound by genuine unselfish friendship and camaraderie, this indicates that their intentions are noble and proper. However, if the unifying force in their relationship is their contempt for to their antagonist, but otherwise are contentious and envious of each other. We have a clear indication that their actions are not for the sake of Heaven. The *Mishna* lists only Korach and his assemblage since they are the proof that they had no heavenly intentions in their conflict. There were 250 members, all of whom wanted to be the *Kohain Gadol*, a position reserved for only one individual.

Rabbi Aharon Walkin Zt"l offers another very interesting thought. When two leaders differ in opinion and their intention is to seek the truth, they will then meet among themselves to discuss the various issues in order to reach a reasonable conclusion. In contrast are those who do not seek to clarify the issue with a truthful conclusion. The leaders will not meet among themselves for discussions, since their intention is to see who will succeed in overwhelming his antagonist. This is the message of the *Mishna*. Shamai and Hillel would discuss the *Halacha* in an effort to reach a

suitable conclusion. There was no argument and discord among their congregations and assemblages. However, regarding Korach, a whole group of people became involved, whose whole intention was to cause discord. They did not even permit Korach to discuss the issues privately with Moshe. The affiliation of the assemblage of Korach is what indicated that it was not for the sake of Heaven.

Rabbi Zerach Eidlitz Zt"l adds a thoughtful note to the phrase "*will in the end endure*". If the controversy ultimately reaches a peaceful conclusion, and both sides part amicably, then this argument will never be reawakened. However, a conflict which is not for a heavenly goal, will only resolve in a temporary conciliation. It will eventually resurrect itself, since the actual motivating force of the controversy has not been entirely eradicated.