

And put fire in them and place incense upon them. Then the man whom Hashem will choose – he is the holy one. It is too much for you, O offspring of Levi. (16:7)

Rashi asks a simple, but piercing, question: Korach was far from a fool. Indeed, he was well-known as a *pikeach*, wise, intelligent man. If so, what did he see that motivated him to commit to such a foolish act? He knew that there could be only one winner. Offering *Ketores*, incense, was not child's play. It had to be done correctly by the right person, or else the person who offered it became history. Only a fool would risk so much. Korach certainly was no fool.

We wonder why *Rashi* asks this question with regard to the *Ketores*. Why not raise the issue of what prompted Korach to take on Moshe *Rabbeinu* immediately, at the beginning of the *parsha* when Korach initiated the dispute? What motivated Korach to act this way? He was numbered among the ones who carried the holy *Aron HaKodesh*. He was one of the most prominent citizens of *Klal Yisrael*. To act in this manner runs counter to everything that Korach represented and stood for. Indeed, it would make sense to ask the question of Korach right from the beginning, when a member of the nation's spiritual elite chose to defile himself by impugning Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Aharon *HaKohen's* leadership.

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, explains with a simple answer, expressing a profound verity which sadly holds true today – more often than we care to admit. A *tzaddik*, righteous person, is not perfect. It is possible for a *tzaddik* to err. To err is human; to ignore one's error is unforgivable and indicates that one is witless. Korach could have made a mistake. He was envious of Moshe, and envy causes a person to do strange things – even sin reprehensibly. As long as Korach's actions could be defined as sinful, it could be “understood.” It was when he acted insensate, like a fool driven by idiocy, that we ask, “How could he commit such *shtus*, foolishness?” He knew that all but one of the two hundred and fifty incense renderers would die; yet, he committed himself to the test anyway. This shows that Korach had become unhinged. He was acting without *seichel*, common sense. That is inexcusable! To paraphrase the *Rosh Yeshivah*, *Veil di greste aveirah iz tzu zein a naar*, “Because the greatest sin is to be a fool.”

Now, some people cannot help themselves. They are born that way. When one is born with the gift of common sense, yet refuses to apply it, then his actions are unpardonable. We are blessed with a working mind for the purpose of using it. To act foolishly, ignoring the directive of common sense, may not be condoned.

A Torah leader, or anyone, for that matter, who possesses *seichel hayashar*, straight, common sense, has no excuse for making nonsensical mistakes – especially if his mindlessness hurts others. Torah scholarship is important, commendable and is to be respected. If one possesses everything but common sense, however, he – and everyone connected with him – is in serious trouble.

The Torah teaches that when Moshe was judging the entire nation by himself, his father-in-law, Yisro, suggested that he set up leaders over various groups. Yisro suggested four attributes that would qualify the one who possessed them for leadership: *anshei chayil*, men of means, who have no need to flatter or show recognition; *yirei Elokim*, G-d-fearing people; *anshei emes*, men of truth, who inspire confidence and whose words are worthy of being relied upon; *sonei betza*, people who despise money who hate to have their money in litigation, willing to part with their money, rather than go to court to argue over what is truthfully and rightfully theirs. Apparently, these traits were indicative of highly, upstanding individuals; it was a tall list of attributes to all fit one person. The Torah tells us that, in the end, Moshe chose *anshei chayil*, men of accomplishment, men of means, as his judges. Ostensibly, when he had to choose among all four attributes, the one that was most important was *anshei chayil*. This does not mean that the judges did not possess the other qualities. It only means that they did not exemplify them. Thus, when Moshe had to make the decision, he felt that *anshei chayil* was the most crucial characteristic for a judge and a leader.

The definition of *anshei chayil* which was rendered above, men of means, follows *Rashi*. **Sforno**, however, adds to this definition, suggesting that *anshei chayil* means more than being able to transcend the need to impress and flatter, to curry favor from people. *Anshei chayil* is the quality of *mevin davar mitoch davar*, someone who is able to discern the veracity of a matter and bring it to a definitive conclusion. They were chosen even over those who were G-d-fearing, but they were not “able men.”

Sforno views “ability” as the most important quality which a leader/judge should possess. It is vital that he be well-versed in the law, astute and capable of rendering a decision. The *anshei chayil* were scholars who were knowledgeable and of a strong character, although lacking in some of the other qualities which Yisro felt a leader should possess. Apparently, if they could not have it all, they settled for what was crucial – men of ability, who could think through a problem and render a decision.

In the *Shiurei Daas*, **Horav Yosef Yehudah Leib Bloch, zl**, develops this idea further. He posits that to serve Hashem properly, one must be astute, developing a profundity of the *mitzvos* and the manner in which a Jew should serve Hashem. A “thinking” Jewish scholar, who is knowledgeable and understands the depth and veracity, the wisdom and sagacity of Torah – who fears Hashem out of a sense of perception and intelligence – is greater than he who is extremely meticulous and follows the letter of the law with care and fear, but without insight and depth. The *chacham*, wise man, who is capable of developing insight into the verities of Torah, who achieves Heavenly fear through a depth of understanding of before Whom he stands, has a greater potential for spiritual growth than he who fears, but lacks intellectual perfection. To put it in the simple vernacular: common sense is a critical, indispensable requisite for life, without which one is incapable of rendering a decision. A leader who is lacking in this most basic quality is not only personally in a precarious position, but he may also present a serious danger to all.