

Korach took (separated himself). (16:1)

Korach was the first prominent demagogue to create a rift in *Klal Yisrael* when he impugned Moshe *Rabbeinu's* leadership, and, by extension, created a mutiny against Hashem. *Targum Onkeles* defines *machlokes*, controversy, as: *pilug*; a split; a breach; a rift. *Klal Yisrael* is supposed to live in harmony. We must strive to emulate Hashem, Who is *Echad*, One. Thus, when we live together as one, we give satisfaction to Hashem. *Chazal* distinguish between a *machlokes*, which is *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven, and one which is not. A *machlokes l'shem Shomayim* is a dispute in which each party seeks the truth. They each want to meld together to reach an acceptable conclusion which will please Heaven. They seek to become one. In contrast, in a *machlokes* that is not for the sake of Heaven, each disputant seeks to satisfy himself. It is not two seeking to become one; rather, it is one seeking to become the only one.

Why do some people thrive on dispute? Some take arguments personally. Thus, in their minds, to lose means to be disgraced. They must win. Others do not care about what is right – as long as they are considered to be right. Others simply refuse to change their beliefs – regardless of how often they are proven wrong – while yet others feel that capitulating is a threat to their ego. Then there are those who just argue for the sake of argument.

Machlokes has claimed some of our brightest and finest, as they become embroiled in the malignancy of battle from which neither side emerges unscathed. Even he who wins ultimately loses. Usually, it is not as if “A” wants personally to be at the helm; he just wants to make certain that “B” does not achieve the position. One of the most dangerous aspects of *machlokes* is the *l'shem Shomayim* validation, whereby each disputant has convinced himself that he is battling to preserve the dignity of Heaven. Each one has convinced himself that he is acting in the best interests of the community. For this reason, he has found self-justification to commit just about every act of degeneracy in order to impugn his competitor from achieving his would-be prominence. He has nothing to gain other than to see the other fellow lose.

All of the above aptly describe Korach, who was not only spiritually distinguished – of enviable lineage, with more wealth than he knew how to handle – but he was also considered a *pikeach*, wise, clever man, who was able to discern the truth and give advice. While all of the above is true, the thought of Moshe *Rabbeinu* serving as leader instead of him drove him to a premature grave.

Sadly, the Korach debacle has repeated itself throughout the ages, as whole communities have been torn apart by the scourge of *machlokes*. Potentially great leaders have been personally destroyed as they occupied themselves in destroying others. In the end, no one but the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, emerges victorious, having destroyed yet another great Jew. Anything which is the result of a *machlokes* cannot really endure – and, if it does, it is, at best, weak, and its leaders do not wield the same level of respect as those who have waited. How could anyone respect someone who has achieved his position through force?