

And Korach ben Yitzhar ben Kehas ben Levi separated himself. (16:1)

Korach was not simply another hatemonger who sought to usurp Moshe and Aharon as a result of intense feelings of envy. Korach was among those who "carried" the *Aron Ha'kodesh*. He was obviously sensitive to the fact that the *Aron* was in reality carrying those who attempted to carry it. It would be unrealistic to think that an individual who was so aware of Hashem should stoop to such *machlokes*, controversy, unless something "noble" motivated him.

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, explains that Korach sought *Kehunah*, He felt that he could serve Hashem better if he were a *Kohen*. His complete devotion to serve Hashem drove him to act the way that he did. Let us analyze this further. Korach knew that Moshe was chosen by Hashem to lead *Klal Yisrael*. He was also acutely aware that Hashem implemented the many miracles connected with *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, the exodus from Egypt, and the daily existence in the desert through Moshe's agency. The **Agrah D'Kalah** claims that while Korach was exempt from the service of offering *korbanos* because he was not a *Kohen*, he was nonetheless troubled about his lack of participation in this lofty service. Korach agonized over his lack of inclusion in the *Kehunah* to the point that he was driven to *machlokes*. What went wrong with Korach? His intentions were noble. How did he become the paradigm of conflict?

The answer, claims the *Agra D'Kallah*, lies in Korach's approach towards effecting his goal. The most noble *mitzvah* loses its sanctity if it is involved with strife. No position, regardless of its distinction, has value if it was stimulated by strife. If divisiveness is the means, if contention coupled with slander are the tools for erecting the edifice, then it has no meaning. It is not a *mitzvah*; it is transformed into a contemptible *aveirah*.

Korach thought his *yetzer tov*, good inclination, had inspired him to challenge Moshe. He did not realize that his "*frumer*" *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, was spurring him on. The *yetzer hora* is very clever. Why should it attempt to convince us to sin if it can convince us that the *aveirah* we are about to perform is a *mitzvah*; the individual we are about to disparage is an obstacle in the way of our spiritual progress. A *mitzvah* that is created through an *aveirah* is not in fact a *mitzvah*. This represents the *yetzer hora's* ultimate triumph: distorting a person's *mitzvos*, for then he has nothing. While contentiousness and strife have been with us for a long time, nothing is as reprehensible as the self-righteous type of *machlokes* that some justify in the name of a *mitzvah*. Perhaps, people who behave in this manner should evaluate their idea of what constitutes a *mitzvah*.