

Of Levi he said: Your Tumim and Your Urim befit Your devout one. (33:8)

Moshe begins his blessing by addressing the Kohanim. Then, he speaks to the rest of the tribe. The praises that he sings are truly impressive and certainly warranted. Are we to ignore the fact, however, that the greatest controversy in the history of the nascent Jewish nation was initiated by a member of the tribe of Levi? The machlokes Korach, controversy of Korach, is one of the saddest moments in our history. Moshe Rabbeinu, also a member of the tribe of Levi, seems to have glossed over it. Why? Surely it must have pained him to recall that bitter dispute and its ramifications. To laud Shevet Levi with such unparalleled praise, while ignoring Korach's rebellion, appears to be a bit questionable.

We must deduce that Korach's dispute, while certainly a black mark on Shevet Levi and our history, is not as nefarious as it seems. The mere fact that a parsha in the Torah is named after Korach is an indication of this verity. Let us analyze what Korach wanted. He sought Kehunah Gedolah, the High Priesthood. Is that so bad? Moshe Rabbeinu also wanted to be Kohen Gadol. What was Korach's error?

Korach manifested an insatiable desire to be the Kohen Gadol. That in its own right is laudable. After all, Moshe also had this desire. The difference was that Korach acted on his desire. He went beyond the parameters of right and wrong. Moshe was acutely aware that the Kehunah Gedolah was not destined to be in his domain. He accepted Hashem's decision with equanimity. Korach was not as quiescent. If he wanted something, he had to have it. He acted on his desires, defying Moshe and rebelling against Hashem. He abused the lofty attributes that characterize the tribe of Levi. Zealousness, spirited devotion to an ideal, and outstanding commitment are all terms that describe the members of this shevet. Korach had it – he just went too far in pursuing his goals.

Thus, Korach's rebellion was an error that was founded in overzealous commitment, unbridled desire over which he had no control. Wanting something beyond our grasp is not sinful; acting upon this desire is.

