

## Korach separated himself. (16:1)

The literal translation of *va'yikach* is “and he took,” which, in this case, is translated as Korach separating himself. *Rashi* explains *Lakach es atzmo liheyos nechelak mitoch ha'eidah*; “He took himself to one side to be separate from the assembly.” *Rashi's* exposition is based upon the premise that *lokach* is a transitive verb, which means that he must have taken something. What was that something? Thus, *Rashi* teaches that he took himself by separating himself from the community. Perhaps we might add to this. By his very nature, a Jew wants to observe Torah and *mitzvos*. Those who do not have fallen prey to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*. Therefore, the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Geirushin (Perek 2)* writes concerning one who defies *halachah* and refuses to give his wife a get, divorce, the *bais din* is permitted to compel him to do so – even if it involves corporeal punishment. The reason for this is: Every Jew wants to do the right thing; every Jew wants to follow *halachah*. Under certain circumstances, some have fallen subject to the *yetzer hora*. The punishment will “release” the *yetzer hora's* hold on the person and allow for the “real Jew” to emerge. Likewise, Korach was born and raised along the proper lines of adherence to the Torah dictate. He was now acting as an adversary to Torah because he took himself out. He forcibly removed himself from the community.

I came across the *Mishmor HaLeviim* in which *Horav Moshe Mordechai Schlesinger, zl*, cites the *Igeres Teiman*. The *Igeres Teiman*, in turn, cites the *Rambam* concerning the importance of permeating our psyche with *zichron Maamad Har Sinai*, remembering the Revelation at Mount Sinai. Furthermore, one must inculcate this verity into the minds and hearts of his offspring, as this will ensure that Torah will never be forgotten. This is the foundation of our *emunah*, faith, in Hashem. The Revelation at *Har Sinai* was unprecedented and stands as the greatest, most prodigious illuminating Revelation to be experienced by an entire nation together. It will never be repeated that an entire nation would see and hear G-d. The *Rambam* concludes with his famous epistle: “The Creator, may He be blessed, has assured much like one who is a guarantor for his friend, that anyone who stood at *Har Sinai* believes in the prophesy of *Moshe Rabbeinu...* he and his children and all future generations... Therefore, you should know that anyone who has turned away from the law that was given at *Har Sinai* is not among those who stood at *Har Sinai*.” In other words, a Jew who apostatizes himself – who is an *apikores*, who denies *Torah min ha'Shomayim* and the veracity of *Moshe's nevuah* – does not descend from anyone who experienced the Revelation.

*Rav Schlesinger* asks the question that is on everyone's mind when he learns *Parashas Korach*. This man denied *Torah min Ha'Shomayim* and *nevuas Moshe*. He certainly stood at *Har Sinai* and received the Torah like everybody else. What happened? According to the *Rambam*, it is impossible for someone who experienced *maamad Har Sinai* to become an *apikores*. Korach seems to disprove this hypothesis.

The *Steipler Gaon, zl*, explains that the *Rambam's* statement holds true on condition that no circumstances or reasons undermine one's *emunah*. One who falls prey to his *yetzer hora*, evil

inclination, whose desire for the prohibited, unclean and impure is too much with which to grapple; one who is overwhelmed with *middos ra'os*, evil character traits – will override his innate *emunah* to the point that he will sink deeper and deeper into the muck of sin, such that he will have difficulty extricating himself. A classic example is Korach, who became insulted and angry at being passed over for the *nesius*, leadership, of his tribe. As a result of his unabashed arrogance, he lost control of his senses and lashed out at Moshe and forthwith followed up with his heretical diatribe against Hashem and His Torah. Korach stood at the base of *Har Sinai* and heard Hashem's declaration, *Anochi Hashem*. What happened? His *middos/yetzer hora* happened.

*Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, posits that regardless of the Heavenly assurance that one who stood at *Sinai* will retain his belief in Hashem, and this will be transmitted through the generations, it does not sidestep one's *bechirah*, free-will. Furthermore, we cannot forget that the greater one is – the more overpowering is his *yetzer hora*. Yes, it should all be guaranteed – until the advent of *Moshiach* – that a Jew will always be a believer. Free-will, however, is part of the dynamics of Judaism. We make our choices. One who chooses the path of evil will have to live with the consequences of his decision.