

Take for yourselves fire pans... then the man whom Hashem will choose – he is the holy one. (16:6,7)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* told Korach's followers that the way to determine who Hashem had chosen was through the medium of *Ketores*, the Incense service. He chose *Ketores* because it is a service that Hashem desires above all others, but it carries the potential of death if it is not carried out properly. In other words, if Korach's followers were in the right and Korach should lead, they would take the prize. However, if (as it ultimately was indicated) they were wrong, they would die. The decision would come from Hashem. One would think these men, who were Torah scholars of note, leaders of the *Sanhedrin*, would have cringed at the thought of taking this test. As *Chazal* (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:8) teach, Moshe was implying that, in the event one of their own was Divinely chosen, then he – and only he – would survive. The rest would perish. Yet, they foolishly continued their quest that would lead them nowhere but to an early grave. This is the power of fellowship. Who has not seen otherwise intelligent, erudite men, who have achieved so much in life, throw it all away by making the wrong choice? They see a charismatic leader who convinces them to follow him, and, like donkeys, they listen and follow him to infamy.

While this might mitigate the irrational derision of Korach's followers in some manner, what about Korach himself? He certainly was not out of his mind when he organized an iniquitous mutiny against Moshe and, by extension, *Hashem Yisborach*. To question *Torah min HaShomayim* when he was present during the Revelation indicated that he had become unhinged – which is not true. Korach was completely in control of his senses. If anything, his emotions and deficient character traits led him afoul.

Veritably, *Chazal* (*Ibid*) ask this question: *Korach she'pikach hayah, mah raah l'shtus zeh?* What did Korach, who was a clever person, see that brought him to this folly?" They explain that his eye misled him. He saw a great chain of illustrious descendants emerging from him. He saw that Shmuel *HaNavi* – who would be equal in importance to Moshe and Aharon – plus other descendants who would prophesy with *Ruach HaKodesh*, Divine Inspiration, were destined to be his scions. Obviously, he must be correct in demanding a change in leadership – so he thought. He was unaware that, at the very last moment, his sons had repented.

Is the question only concerning Korach? Throughout our checkered history we have confronted demagogues and other forms of malcontents who feel the need to foment controversy in order to catapult themselves to positions of leadership. It goes without question that Korach was envious of Moshe and obsessed with his leadership powers – but still, was he insane to think that he should and could replace Moshe? Once again, if he was so clever, what did he see that provoked him to undertake this lunacy? The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, says that the *shtus*, foolishness, of Korach, was actually his *pikchus*, cleverness. At times, it is best not to be (act) so clever and defer to others; to stand quietly by the side and not seek attention for himself. As the famous secular quote goes, "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt." Korach wanted

to show that he was a *pikach*. His arrogance led to his downfall.

All of Korach's failings notwithstanding, we are still hard-pressed to come to terms with what convinced Korach that he was on a par with Moshe, that he could lead just as effectively as Moshe. Perhaps we may suggest the following: Korach was, without question, a distinguished member of the nation's spiritual elite. He was among those who carried the *Aron HaKodesh* on their shoulders. His pedigree was similar to that of Moshe. If externally they were not far apart (in Korach's mind), why should he not have a chance to become *Klal Yisrael's* leader?

First of all, Korach's hypothesis was built on one primary delusion: Moshe neither decided to become *Klal Yisrael's* leader, nor was he voted in by them. Moshe was *Hashem Yisborach's* choice. As such, who was Korach to impugn Hashem's decision? Second, Korach's (and every other usurper who has wanted to grab a leadership position for himself) line of thinking reflected a serious misconception. Moshe (like so many of our *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah giants) did not ascend to their leadership position based only upon scholarship and leadership skills. Moshe *Rabbeinu* exemplified one who is *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*, shoulders the yoke (of adversity) with his friend. As the adopted prince of the Egyptian palace, Moshe could have continued living in the lap of luxury and opulence. Instead, he went out to be with his brothers and sisters. *Nosan eino v'libo liheyos meitar aleihem*; 'He applied his eyes and heart to share in their pain.'

It was the importance of this character trait that Korach foolishly dismissed, because he was hopelessly deficient in it. One can appreciate only what he acknowledges and to which he is sensitive. Korach was clueless when it involved the emotions of others.

This idea holds true of our *gedolei ha'dor*, preeminent leaders of each generation. Their erudition was heads and shoulders above the rest. Yet, this was not necessarily what catapulted them to distinction – and kept them there. It was their sensitivity to the needs of all Jews that catalyzed their towering over everyone else. *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl*, was the leader of European Jewry. He had no peer in his knowledge of all areas of Torah. His love for and caring about all Jews exemplified him. *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, was not only a *gaon*, genius, in Torah, but he was also a *gaon* in *chesed*. His devotion to the *Vaad Hatzalah*, relief and rescue organization, saved the lives of many Jews. Their pain was his pain.

Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, was not only the scion of an illustrious *mussar* pedigree, but he was also a *mussar* personality in his own right. He singlehandedly transformed the spiritual landscape of England, and, by extension, all of Europe. Yet, he was known for his *nosei b'ol im chaveiro*. The following vignette gives us an insight into the character of one of the premier *mussar* giants.

Prior to *Rebbetzin* Dessler's arrival (from England) in *Eretz Yisrael* (where *Rav* Dessler had accepted the position of *Mashgiach* in *Yeshivas Ponovezh*), he would eat his meals at an orphanage established by the *Ponovezher Rav* to serve the needs of Holocaust survivors. Mrs.

Munk was in charge of preparing the meals for the children, and, as such, out of deep admiration and respect, she would leave an extra treat for *Rav Dessler*. The *Mashgiach* was embarrassed by this privileged treatment, and he more than once asked her to desist from doing so. He was no different than anyone else, he said.

One day, *Rav Dessler* noticed a young boy running out of dinner. He stopped to ask where and why he was running. It turned out that the boy had helped himself to a cherry that had been put aside for the *Mashgiach*. *Rav Dessler* immediately went to Mrs. Munk and said, "From now on, I will either eat the very same meals as everyone else, or I will be compelled to eat elsewhere." A young boy's feeling meant so much to him. Indeed, great people are those who care about (what appears to be) little things.