

## Even if you gouge out the eyes of those men, we shall not go up. (15:14)

*Rashi* explains that Dasan and Aviram replied to Moshe *Rabbeinu's* request for a meeting, "Nothing you do – even if you blind us – will make us come." *Sforno* explains their chutzpah as implying: "Do you think you can blind us to your failures?" We suggest an alternative explanation. Apparently, they specified eyes and blindness for a reason. They could have simply said, "There is nothing you can do; no punishment will convince us to listen to you." I think it all boils down to how one views a person or a situation. If one's vision is superficial, cursory, he may only consider surface-level aspects, missing the underlying complexities and nuances. When one views a situation cognitively, taking the time to delve deeper, he will benefit from a deeper understanding, thus reducing his risk of misinterpretation.

Let us apply this idea to the images portrayed by Korach versus Moshe. As a self-proclaimed demagogue, Korach presented himself with self-confidence. As one of *Klal Yisrael's* wealthiest men and one of the carriers of the *Aron HaKodesh*, he must have cut a dashing figure, given his visually appealing and refined appearance. To the casual observer, he was certainly impressive. This false façade of superficial imagery, this deceptive outer appearance, did not reflect the true nature of the reality that hid beneath the surface. His public façade did not align with his evil intentions. Thus, all that was seared into the peoples' minds was the image of Korach, the leader. Let us now look at Moshe *Rabbeinu*, the apotheosis of holiness and righteousness, the paradigm of humility. One would assume that our quintessential *Rebbe* and leader's image could not be summed up in mundane physical terms. To look at Moshe was to gaze on a human being with an other-worldly appearance. To compare Moshe, the leader, to Korach, the demagogue, would border on the ludicrous. Nonetheless, to one whose view was superficial, whose limited conception was based on external appearances, Korach was probably more their type. Thus, they said to Moshe, "Even if you gouge out our eyes, Korach's image is deeply ingrained into our minds." We have no room for dialogue, for intelligent discourse, with such people.

Korach serves as the paradigm of one who is prepared to risk everything in his pursuit of victory. Sadly, throughout history, people have proven that they are willing to prioritize winning over ethical considerations and social collaboration. The obsession with winning has more than once shown that it can lead to self-destructive consequences. Why? What motivates one to risk everything just to have that "win"? It can stem from a variety of factors, most of which are connected to personal insecurities. The fear of failure, of a competitive environment, may push one to take extreme risks in the pursuit of victory. This is all the more reason that Korach's actions are inexplicable. He had it all. Unfortunately, he wanted more. Why? It troubled him that someone else was higher than he. Regardless of his success, as long as a Moshe, Aharon and Elitzaphon had more than he had, he was a failure.

Regrettably, Korach may have been the first, but he was certainly not the last. The following

vignette was said to involve the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*. Two residents of a Jewish community became embroiled in a full scale *machlokes*. At first, it was a simple squabble, but it quickly blew out of proportion. It was hurting the community, as these two men became consumed in hate. Even the sudden death of some of the quarreler's children did not put a stop to the discord. Word reached the *Chafetz Chaim*, who felt it was incumbent upon him to intercede.

He spoke to one of the protagonists pleadingly, "Do you not see how this *machlokes* is destroying your family?" the *Chafetz Chaim* asked. "Do you not think that enough is enough; is it not time to stop?"

The man's reply should send a shudder up one's spine, "I am in this to the end. I will bury them all – but I am going to win!"

The story and the alleged conversation are sickening. I use the word alleged by design, because it is difficult to imagine that a person could be so obsessed with winning. Furthermore, how could a person look the saintly *Chafetz Chaim* in the eye and give such an audacious response? Either the story lacks veracity, or *machlokes* is truly that evil.