

## If these die like the death of all men and the destiny of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me. (16:29)

Korach and his henchmen impugned the integrity of Moshe *Rabbeinu's* leadership. This was a mutiny against our quintessential leader and what he represented – Hashem and His Torah. This was unmitigated *chutzpah* at its nadir. We have unfortunately had despots throughout our nation's history who have raised their fists against Torah leadership and have denounced our nation's bond with the Torah. Korach, however, was the first to breach the peaceful coexistence of our people and disparage its leadership. His punishment was equally unparalleled: He went to his grave – alive.

The entire Korach debacle begs elucidation. First, the Torah has prescribed capital punishment for serious offenders. The worst perpetrators of iniquity paid with their lives. Sins such as murder, adultery and idol worship, as well as *Shabbos* desecration and the desecration and the transgressions of other prohibitive *mitzvos*, make the sinner liable for the ultimate punishment. We wonder, as serious as Korach's violation was, did it warrant such a punishment? It is almost as if his transgression was worse than the three cardinal sins of murder, adultery and idol worship.

Perhaps Korach's sin was over the top, shattering the basic foundation of the Jew's relationship with Hashem. We note that the first *Bais Hamikdash* was destroyed as a result of the three cardinal sins. Yet, it was rebuilt. The second *Bais Hamikdash* was destroyed due to *sinaas chinam*, unwarranted hatred between Jews. It still remains to be rebuilt. Does this mean that discord is worse even than the three cardinal sins?

The *Nesivos Shalom* addresses these questions. In his explanation, he sheds light on Korach's sin and gives us a window into understanding the evil of *machlokes*. Rabbi Akiva focuses on what has become the cardinal rule of relationships: "Love your friend as you love yourself." This is the underlying principle of the Torah. What is so special about the mutual love between Jews? The *Rebbe* explains that it is only when we are bound together as one that Hashem relates to us as a Father. In order to achieve son/daughter status, we must practice and adhere to this *mitzvah*. Otherwise, we lose the distinction of being Hashem's children.

*Machlokes* is the antithesis of love. When we live in discord, we are not Hashem's children. It is as simple as that. Once this occurs, we become flawed Jews. We are able to attach ourselves to Hashem only when we are one among ourselves. *Machlokes* sadly achieves what the three cardinal sins perpetrate: a severance between the Jew and Hashem. One who commits adultery, murder or idol worship acts in a manner unbecoming a Jew. Such a person has, by his actions, rejected his Father in Heaven. When this connection was torn asunder during the period of the first *Bais HaMikdash*, Hashem destroyed it. When *machlokes* was rampant during the second *Bais HaMikdash*, Hashem destroyed it. In both instances, we acted as non-Jews. One significant

difference stands out: the first *Bais HaMikdash* was rebuilt. The second was not. Sadly, the disease of *machlokes* has not yet been eradicated.

Perhaps we may suggest a new approach to understanding *machlokes*. The word *machlokes* is derived from *chalak*, to argue, to separate; *chelek* is a portion. However one looks at it, *machlokes* is derived from a word which bespeaks division/divisiveness. Another definition for the three letters – *cheis, lamed, kuf* – is *chalak*, which means smooth (polished). This definition is used much less frequently. I think a person who acts divisively implies, by his actions, that he considers himself perfect, smooth, in need of no one. Let me take this further.

In materials science, surfaces with texture or ridges provide more points of contact for molecules to adhere to one another, creating a stronger bond. Likewise, in relationships, individuals who have gone through challenges or have some “rough edges” might find it easier to connect, because they have shared experiences or common ground upon which to build. These imperfections can actually strengthen the bond between people, making the relationship more resilient. Relationships between people who, on the surface, appear to be smooth and polished (another term for arrogant) might lack depth and substance, rendering it difficult to connect with them on a meaningful level. The *baal machlokes* is unable to bond properly, because he considers himself perfect and better. He can do no wrong. It is always the other fellow. He refuses to embrace the complexities of others, because he is better than they are. His being *chalak* is the precursor of *machlokes*, because he must have his way. After all, he is perfect.