

# ***PENINIM ON THE TORAH***

## **PARSHA BOOKLET**

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## **PARASHAT KORACH**

*Korach, the son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, separated himself. (16:1)*

Rashi comments: Korach placed himself at odds with the rest of the congregation to protest against Aharon HaKohen's assumption of the Kehunah, Priesthood. The emphasis here is on the fact that Korach started a machlokes, controversy. Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos 5:17, "Any controversy that is l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, ultimately achieves a lasting result; and every controversy that is not in the name of Heaven has ephemeral results in the end. Which controversy was in the name of Heaven? The controversy between Hillel and Shammai. And which controversy was not in the name of Heaven? The controversy between Korach and his followers. When one peruses this Mishnah, the first question that enters his mind is: Is this the only difference between the controversy of Korach and that of Hillel and Shammai? Was everything else on the "up and up," such that the only ingredient that was lacking was l'shem Shomayim?

Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, considers Chazal's words very carefully when he says that Korach was not simply looking for a little more kavod, glory. Originally, his intentions were noble and even praiseworthy. He had sought a deeper understanding of mitzvos, a closer, more intense relationship with Hashem. Kehunah was a medium through which his dreams could be realized. He had high goals, noble objectives, and laudatory aspirations. There was only one flaw in his endeavor: he was not acting l'shem Shomayim. He was self-serving. Hillel and Shammai were in a bitter dispute. The Yerushalmi Shabbos 1:4 contends that their controversy was extremely intense and acrimonious. They each sought ruchniyos, spirituality, and each felt that his approach was more veracious. The only difference between Korach's dispute and that of Hillel and Shammai was the motivation. This is a significant difference. That one point drove Korach to tragic consequences. Why? Why should the motivation play such a critical role in the definition and ultimate consequences of the dispute?

Rav Yeruchem explains that machlokes is not a mitzvah like other mitzvos. Concerning other mitzvos, as long as the objective can catalyze a positive result, we are not concerned about the individual's motivation, whether it is lishmah or not. We then rely on the axiom, Mitoch shelo lishmah ba lishmah, "From the fact that it began with a motivation that was not for the sake of Heaven, it will eventually become lishmah." Perhaps, at the commencement, the individual did not have the positive motivation necessary for a mitzvah, but since it is a mitzvah and its ultimate goal is positive, eventually

he will perform this mitzvah with a motivation that is for the sake of Heaven.

This rule does not apply to every machlokes, regardless of the noble goals. The mere fact that it is a dispute demands that it be one hundred percent for the sake of Heaven. Otherwise, it is absolutely forbidden to separate oneself and become embroiled in a controversy of any kind.

In an effort to better understand how the concept "for the sake of Heaven" impacts the dispute, transforming it into something acceptable and even laudatory, I cite Horav Meir/Marcus Lehmann, zl, who focuses on the Hebrew word machlokes. Indeed, several words other than machlokes express conflict and dispute, such as: riv, hisnagshus, vikuach, midanim. The root of the word machlokes is chalok, which means a division, or separation, leading in different directions. Thus, a difference of opinion is quite likely to stimulate divisiveness. The result of such a difference of opinion, if it is truly intended for the sake of Heaven, leads to the attainment of truth and, ultimately, is of benefit to both sides of the machlokes. A controversy of this nature is not really a conflict, because neither is the difference of opinion about the essence of the matter, nor does it affect the personal relationship of the contenders. They both seek the same goal: the truth.

This type of attitude characterized the halachic dispute between Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel. The Talmud in Eruvin 13b makes the following statement: Rabbi Abba stated in the name of Shmuel:

For three years, a dispute between Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel ensued, the former contending that the halachah was in accordance with their view, the latter disagreeing and claiming that the halachah was in accordance with their view. Then a Divine Voice was heard, declaring, "The utterances of both are the words of the Living G-d, but the halachah is in consonance with the rulings of Bais Hillel." Whenever the Tannaim, Amoraim, Gaonim, Rishonim, or Acharonim differed in the interpretation of the law, their dispute was only in regard to its interpretation. Never was there any question whatsoever concerning the binding force of the law itself.

Interestingly, when the Mishnah mentions the example of a machlokes l'shem Shomayim, it mentions two contending parties. In the example of Korach, only one contender is mentioned. Why is this? Do two parties necessarily comprise a dispute?

Rav Lehmann explains that delving into Korach's character offers us an opportunity to better understand the controversy. Korach was a demagogue; he was ambitious and extremely resentful of Moshe Rabbeinu's position as leader of the nation. He so despised Moshe that he was obsessed with getting rid of him. This could only be done through a court of law, which he quickly convened, using his followers as judges. They would surely sentence Moshe to death once he applied some very convincing tactics. It was unanimous: they all voted for the death sentence. This presented a problem. According to Jewish law, a bais din, judicial court, which passes a unanimous verdict in favor of the death sentence, is considered biased and, thus, the sentence is rendered invalid. Korach was in a bind. Someone had to offer a dissenting opinion. It would have to be him. Imagine Korach, the individual who had started this entire mutiny, was now placed in the predicament of being the only one to "exonerate" Moshe. In other words, although Korach was compelled to "break" with his followers and contradict his earlier opinion, they were all actually of one mind and one position. This controversy was a far cry from that of Bais Hillel and Bais Shammai.

In his commentary, Horav Yitzchak Arama, zl, the Baal Akeidah, renders this Mishnah alternatively. "Any controversy whose goal is Heaven sake and is, therefore, conducted in a manner that bespeaks its goal is aimed at preservation. Conversely, any controversy which is not conducted for G-d's sake is not directed at preservation, but rather, at destruction." We now have a benchmark of values with which we can define a controversy to determine whether it is moral or immoral,

constructive or destructive. This is especially true when one enters into the fray with an objective to correct a wrong, repair a defect, or to amend what seems to be deficient. He should be prepared with a plan of action for replacing what is to be destroyed if his efforts at change are successful. If he cannot, however, create something new and better, just simply to destroy, then he is fighting for one purpose: destruction. This type of contention is clearly not for the sake of Heaven.

We may suggest another approach to *sofah l'hiskayem*, "will in the end achieve a lasting result." If a *machlokes* is *l'shem Shomayim*, it will endure. Why? Perhaps the following episode illuminates this idea. There is a halachic dispute between two giants of Torah, a rebbe and his talmid, Torah mentor and his student, which lasted for quite some time. The Avnei Nezer contended with his talmid, the Chelkas Yoav, concerning one who places a pot of soup on the flame on Shabbos in such a manner that it will reach the *shiur*, measure, of *bishul*, cooking, only after Shabbos. In other words, the forbidden act of *bishul* occurs on Shabbos, but the consequence of his action does not occur until after Shabbos. Is the individual liable for transgressing Shabbos? This dispute extended to other forbidden labors on Shabbos. If someone lights a fire on Shabbos, is he liable for what burns after Shabbos? Rebbe and talmid were very close; nonetheless, this continued on for years with each one devoting extensive responsa to addressing the subject. Shortly before the Avnei Nezer's passing from this world, the Chelkas Yoav visited him as he lay on his deathbed. The Avnei Nezer asked his illustrious student, "Are you prepared to concede to me now, before I die?" The Chelkas Yoav replied, "Yes." The Avnei Nezer asked, "Are you doing this only because I am about to die?" "Yes, rebbe," the Chelkas Yoav answered.

"How can you do this?" The Avnei Nezer exclaimed. "The Torah demands *emes*, that we maintain the highest standard of veracity. How can you rescind your opinion simply because I am sick and about to pass from this world? *Emes* must be *emes*." The dispute continued, with the Chelkas Yoav retaining his opinion. When a *machlokes* is *l'shem Shomayim*, and each contender seeks only the truth, the *machlokes* perseveres, regardless of the challenges - even death.

*Korach, the son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, separated himself. (16:1)*

Quite an impressive lineage, but it stops short of Yaakov Avinu. Chazal tell us that this is by design. Our Patriarch blessed his children prior to his taking leave of his earthly abode. He prophetically saw that his great-great grandson, Korach, would instigate what would become the standard of a dispute for personal gain. It would be devastating with consequences that were to be equally ruinous. He wanted no part of this tragedy. Therefore, he cried out, "With their congregation, do not join, O' my honor." (Bereishis 49:5) The sage wanted to divorce his name from inclusion in this sinful rebellion. We wonder about his purpose in disassociating his name from the family tree. By "covering up" his ancestry, was he accomplishing something? It is not as if Korach's lineage would not be exposed, preventing his great-great grandfather's name from surfacing.

In Rabbi Sholom Smith's latest anthology, *Horav Avraham Pam, zl*, cites the Mishnah in *Meseches Edyos 2:9* that lists those features which a father endows his son: "A father endows his son with a handsome appearance, strength, wealth, wisdom, longevity, and with the number of generations before him..." Whereas the first attributes are understandable, as that which a father carries in his genes will be transmitted to his son, likewise wealth, although not hereditary, is usually bequeathed from father to son. Additionally, a father's merit can catalyze all these attributes to be passed on through the generations. What seems difficult to understand is the phrase, "And the number of generations before him."

In his introduction to the Gaon m'Vilna's commentary to the Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, Horav Yaakov Moshe, zl, son of Horav Avraham, zl, son of the Gaon, mentions that the Gaon addresses this question. In prefacing his commentary, Rav Yaakov Moshe writes that he feels himself to be unworthy of compiling and publishing his grandfather's works. He, therefore, appealed to Hashem in sincere prayer, that in the merit of the Gaon, he be protected from error. He writes that this might be the meaning of the Mishnah's words, "And with the number of the generation before him." It is not only a father who bequeaths wisdom and other characteristics to his son, but also, all the generations of previous ancestors share in this bequest. It might be a grandfather-- or earlier ancestor-- who does so or in whose merit the descendant is granted these qualities. This is why the Mishnah speaks in the generic, ha'av zocheh l'ben, a father endows a son, and not the word libno, to his son. This indicates that it is not only the father himself that endows the son. It might be any one of a number of ancestors who participate in this bequest.

Applying the insight of the Gaon's grandson, Rav Pam explains Yaakov Avinu's intentions in appealing to Hashem that his name not be included in the rebellion of Korach. Clearly, he was denying that he was an ancestor of Korach. He was trying to convey, however, that every person is affected to a certain extent by the characteristics of previous generations. Some pick up the positive attributes, while others might not be so fortunate. Yaakov wanted to make it clear that he bequeathed to his descendants only sparks of holiness - nothing more. Therefore, Korach's mutinous actions were not connected to Yaakov. His character flaws, which resulted in this debacle, should not be attributed to Yaakov. When the Navi in Divrei HaYamim (6:22,23) details the lineage of Korach's sons who sang on the Duchan, the platform upon which the Leviim stood, it says, "Son of Korach, son of Yitzhar, son of Kehas, son of Levi, son of Yisrael," because here we see Yaakov's sparks of holiness in action.

We wonder about our impact on the future. We see from here that our impact is quite compelling and has no limits in time. The spiritual composition of our descendants for generations to come can be greatly impacted by our own spiritual behavior. True, there might be a gap in the generations, but it will surface at times when we might least expect it. This brings me to the baal teshuvah movement, through which so many thousands, some from families that have been assimilated for generations, have returned to the faith to which their ancestors had adhered. After all, at one time, we were all frum, observant. In fact, Torah and mitzvos are an integral part of our lives. There really was nothing else. It is only after we were exposed to the glitter and enticement of modernity that some veered, others swayed, and yet others left the fold. They were, however, descendants of Jews who had been moser nefesh for their religion, whose dedication and self-sacrifice were not forgotten, but were bequeathed through time to their descendants, who had the presence of mind to realize that they did not belong where they were. They came home, and Klal Yisrael is that much better because of it.

*Dasan and Aviram had come out standing (defiantly) at the entrance of their tents, with their wives, children and infants... The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, as well as the people who belonged to Korach. (16:27, 32)*

The punishment that Hashem meted out to Korach and his followers seems to be quite strong and perhaps a bit unfair. Why should innocent children be punished for the sins of their parents? Rashi takes note of this, explaining that this is the severity of machlokes, dispute. An earthly court does not punish the individual until he has reached the age of twelve or thirteen, and the Heavenly Tribunal does not issue punishment until the transgressor has reached the age of twenty. Yet, in this instance of

machlokes, even the infants were punished. Why is this?

Rashi attributes the punishment of the wives and children, those who had no direct involvement in the mutiny, to the exigency of dispute. We can repeat this over and over again, but it still does not explain why innocent babies and children perished because their fathers set into motion the destructive fires of discord. Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, explains that some aveiros, transgressions, are different, and machlokes is one of them. He compares this to the ben sorer u'moreh, rebellious son.

In the Talmud Sanhedrin 107a, Chazal explain the juxtaposition of ben sorer u'moreh upon the yefas toar, beautiful captive, whom the Torah allows the Jewish soldier to marry by special dispensation. They derive from here that one who submits to his lust during the pressures associated with the battlefield will eventually gain nothing from this union. Ultimately, the child born to the woman he married by dispensation will be a wayward and rebellious child. Rav Chaim explains this based upon a principle derived from a pasuk in Devarim 29:17, Pen yeish bachem shoresh poreh rosh v'laanah, "Perhaps there is among you a root sprouting gall and wormwood." The Ramban sheds light on this pasuk: "A bad root matures, and eventually bitter and evil buds develop. A father is the root and a child, whether good or bad, is the inevitable result of the planted seed."

There are many sins that, although committed by the fathers, do not have a punitive effect on their offspring. Contention is a notable exemption to this rule. There is something which lies at the core of strife which invariably leads to the sprouting of "gall and wormwood" in subsequent generations. It is for this reason that even babies were included in the terrible punishment that Hashem meted out to Korach and his followers. Why does controversy have such an all-consuming effect? Why should later generations be victims of its ramifications?

Horav Mordechai Miller, zl, cites the Maharal M'Prague, in his commentary to Pirkei Avos, 1:12, "Hillel used to say, 'Be of the disciples of Aharon; love peace and pursue it.'" On this verse he wrote the following: Dissension is a feature of this earthly world. By its very nature, this world is a place of division and dissension, and it is for this reason that friction is so prevalent. This is noted at the beginning of time, when two brothers feuded in such a manner that devastation ensued. This primordial conflict is an expression of the divisive nature of this world."

Why should this world by nature be prone to schism? The Maharal explains that we are enjoined to "love peace" and "pursue peace." To love peace means to prevent discord. To pursue peace is to do everything within our means to engage in conciliatory action in order to extinguish the fires of hostility and to put a stop to the controversy once it has already begun. When one is involved in an argument, he is automatically distanced from his antagonist. He must now pursue peace and actively "run" towards the fellow with whom he is in conflict.

Restoring peace is an act of kedushah, holiness. In fact, it is so characteristic of kedushah that shalom, peace, is one of Hashem's Names. Since kedushah lies in the spiritual reality outside the parameters of time, peacemaking must be undertaken immediately as befitting this spiritual endeavor. Chazal warn us against allowing our mitzvah observance to become affected by the passage of time. A mitzvah is a spiritual endeavor, a spiritual opportunity and, hence, a sublime and G-dly entity, which should not be allowed to fester in this world, but should be carried out in the littlest amount of time. Thus, we pursue peace with quick action transcending time. This concept of spiritual unity, explains the Maharal, is the basis for shalom. We act quickly to repair the breach created by discord, which is not unusual in this world. We act expeditiously in this time-bound world to bring back the spiritual harmony ruptured by this dispute.

Before "time"/creation, everything was a unified success. With the advent of time, the world was subdivided into fractioned parts; day one, day two, etc. Time is the division into sections: past, present and future. In a world of "time," division reigns supreme. Divisiveness and schism are inextricably bound to this world. Hashem transcends time, and, thus, everything spiritual represents unity. When we perform mitzvot as soon as is necessary; when we act with zeal and alacrity, we connect with the spiritual realm on a plane above time. A delay in time, allowing for matzah to extend beyond the eighteen-minute limit, causes a physical expansion which renders it invalid. So, too, when a mitzvah is delayed, it expands into the physical realm, stunting the ability of its performer to connect with the spiritual world which is the focus of the mitzvah.

Bearing the above in mind, we now understand how schism is the fabric of the universe, the opposite of spirituality. The more unified an entity, the greater its harmony, the closer it is to the spiritual world, to Hashem's unique Oneness. Korach's machlokes was one step back, deeper into the muck of separation and divisiveness, terms that are antithetical to spiritual growth. He was blending back into the constraints of the "nature" of the usual character of this world. The only way not to transmit natural characteristics to one's descendants is by connecting to the spiritual. Thus, one transcends nature. Divisiveness, a character of nature, is passed on to the next generation. It is in the genes. This is why the punishment is not limited exclusively to those who are actively embroiled in the dispute, but also to those who inherit their recessive genes.

*And Korach separated himself. (16:1)*

Korach's mutiny was actually the first rebellion that impugned the integrity of the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Ha'Kohen in their stewardship of the nascent Jewish nation. Korach was not merely a misfit or member of the mixed multitude that tagged along with the Jewish people out of fear for their future in Egypt. He was a mainstream Jew, one of the carriers of the Aron HaKodesh. His envy and dissatisfaction with himself led him to lead this tragic rebellion. In an effort to convince the people and garner support for his cause, he presented himself as someone who was fighting on their behalf. He sought to usurp the present leadership and replace it with leadership of his choice, placing himself as the primary leader representing the entire nation.

His complaints seemed to garner support. After all, he presented Moshe as the king; Aharon, his brother, as the High Priest; and Aharon's sons as the Priests. Moshe was apparently taking it all for himself and his family. Furthermore, as Kohanim, Aharon's sons were privileged to receive the twenty-four gifts of Kehunah. To accuse Moshe of seeking glory was not only ludicrous, it was an outrage. Moshe was the *anav mikol adam*, the paragon of humility. That, however, is what machlokes, controversy, does to a person. He becomes blinded, ignoring the obvious and the rational.

Two glaring questions need to be addressed. First, why did it take so long to initiate the dispute that culminated in open rebellion? It is not as if something new had materialized. Moshe and Aharon had been serving in their positions of leadership ever since Klal Yisrael had left Egypt. What spurred Korach to act now? Second, why did he try to organize this meeting specifically after the episode of the *meraglim*, spies, who slandered Eretz Yisrael? Was there something about the spies' ill-fated mission and its tragic consequences that provoked Korach to proceed with his misguided goals?

The Ramban explains that a rebellion undertaken earlier would not have succeeded. The Jews

were faring well in the wilderness. There was no dissent, no complaints against Moshe's leadership. He was highly admired and loved. Thus, Korach kept still, waiting for a breach in Moshe's popularity, for that moment when he could insert himself and succeed in undermining his leadership. Now that the nation had arrived in the desert of Paran, the trouble began. A segment of the people were burned in Taveirah, while others perished in Kivros Ha'Tavaah, Graves of Lust. The Princes of Yisrael, distinguished leaders who had been highly respected, died as a result of their slander of the Promised Land, causing the people to lose their opportunity to enter Eretz Yisrael. The people were bitter. Depression was rampant. Dissent was soon becoming a way of life. Moshe and Aharon's popularity ratings were at an all-time low. Now was the time for Korach to act. His patient waiting was setting the stage.

This explains why Korach waited for this moment to initiate his rebellion, but why did he rebel against Moshe and Aharon? They had accomplished so much for the people: the exodus from Egypt, followed by the splitting of the Red Sea; the Revelation at Har Sinai with the Giving of the Torah; the manna; and so many other miracles in which Moshe played an integral role. How could he go up against them after all they had done for the People?

In his Haamek Davar, the Netziv, zl, explains that it all boils down to human nature. The overwhelming desire, drive and passion for power is often underestimated. This is especially true when it involves spiritual leadership. Who would not want to be the spiritual leader of the Jewish People? Imagine what this entails and the unique opportunity for personal spiritual elevation it affords a person. To become the Kohen Gadol, to be able to reach the ultimate, the zenith in spiritual ascendancy, is an opportunity from which one cannot easily shy away. It is not as if Korach wanted to be powerful and lead the people; he sought personal spiritual elevation. He felt he deserved it. The problem was that Aharon was an obstacle in his way. This would have to be rectified.

Korach's mistake was one that plagues many of us to this very day. There is no equality in kedushah, holiness. Hashem has clearly delineated various levels of sanctity, distinguishing one from another. There are the Yisrael, the Levi, the Kohen Hedyot and the Kohen Gadol. Each role has its own significance and demands. Each one must also recognize the individual character of the other. Hashem defines boundaries, parameters which must be respected, accepted and understood. The Levi is not a Kohen, and the Kohen is not a Kohen Gadol. A desire to become a Kohen is not sufficient. There can be only one Kohen Gadol, and this position is mandated - not bought or demanded. It must be earned through worthiness. Aharon was worthy of this position, and thus, Hashem chose him to be the first Kohen Gadol. Korach was not. It is as simple as that.

Why did Korach not accept this concept? What prompted him to undertake this blasphemy, to destroy himself so infamously forever? Rashi tells us that *eino hitaaso*, his eye misled him. He saw something in the future which he interpreted to be a supportive and positive sign, so he went for it. Regrettably, he looked with "one" eye, erring in his perspective. He saw Shmuel HaNavi descending from him. Obviously, he was correct in his endeavor. Otherwise, how could a leader of such high caliber be his descendant? Had he looked with "both" eyes, with a clearer, more objective outlook, he might have seen a different picture, another explanation. Regrettably, he saw what he wanted to see. Two eyes represent a balanced outlook. One eye signifies a biased, myopic viewpoint.

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, explains that Korach saw how successful he was spiritually. As a Levi standing on the Duchan, singing the songs of praise that accompanied the sacrifices, he felt a yearning to strive higher, to reach beyond, to elevate himself to a position of greater spirituality, to become the Kohen Gadol. He erred in under-estimating the catalyst for his present success as a Levi. He was

spiritually proficient in his position as a Levi only because Aharon was the Kohen Gadol. Aharon functioned deep within the recesses of the Sanctuary, in areas that the Levi was not permitted entrance, and it was from there that his spiritual influence emanated. It is only when each and every person mans his prescribed position, that all of them achieve success. When the laborer seeks to become the captain, when the student wants to replace the teacher, it indicates their short-sightedness.

Korach mistakenly thought that the secret to Moshe and Aharon's success was their title. Call yourself a rosh yeshivah, and you become a rosh yeshivah. How far this is from the truth! It is not the position that makes the person; it is the individual that gives sanction to the position. Korach was not the Kohen Gadol because he was not worthy of that holy position. It would only have impugned the position. Moshe and Aharon were a perfect fit for their respective positions. Korach saw the holiness of the nation with one eye. Had he focused his other eye on himself, he would have perceived his own inferiority.

*Korach separated himself. (16:1)*

If we peruse history, we will note that some of the greatest movements and achievements were the endeavors of a single individual. This is true on the flip side. Negativity and evil have also been catalyzed by one person who succeeded in convincing others to follow his lead. Korach was a bright person, filled with wisdom and charisma. What caused him to go wrong, to veer away from the truth, to blaze for himself and his followers a path of infamy? Chazal teach us that his "eye" misled him. He saw among his descendants individuals that would achieve spiritual eminence. He must be right, or he would not have been destined to be the progenitor of such distinguished progeny, as Shmuel HaNavi. Surely, Shmuel was to be born in the merit of his ancestor, Korach.

Korach was seriously wrong. Along the way, between Korach and Shmuel, there was a righteous man, Elkanah, who also was an individual who would effect an incredible change. Chazal tell us that it was at a time in which the Jews had refrained from going on the mandated pilgrimage to Yerushalayim. He sought to change this apathetic situation. First, he gathered his family which included his wives and children and close relatives. He would enter a community and set up shop in the street. People began to question him, "Where are you going? Why are you doing this?" After all, it was something that people commonly did. Traveling with one's extended family was universal. His response made people think: "I am going to Shiloh to serve Hashem, to offer sacrifices, to imbibe Torah and kedushah, sanctity." When the people heard his sincere and poignant response, they began to cry. They had begun to lose touch with the Sanctuary. Complacency had set in, and slowly they had lost their desire to serve Hashem as in days of old. After such a speech, a few families would gather their members together and join Elkanah's entourage. This continued every year, with the number of people that joined him increasing. Each year, he would choose a different route to go to Yerushalayim, so that his message of hope would spread - and it did. Indeed, as a reward for his outreach to other Jews, Hashem blessed him with a prodigious child that would one day return the people to serve Hashem. Elkanah was the father of Shmuel HaNavi.

Prior to Elkanah's "arrival" on the scene, that generation of Jews had been lax in their observance of the mitzvah of going up to Mishkan Shiloh. Every man was comfortable in his home, his vineyard, his community. He saw no need to leave it all and "waste time" traveling to Shiloh for what might very well be a religious experience, but, one which he felt he could likewise experience at home. Elkanah changed all of that by infusing the people with spirit, with passion, with a drive to elevate themselves. As Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Shlita, notes, Elkanah was a simple individual, who did

not aspire to any specific greatness. He did what he felt should be done, and he transformed a world!

At first, he saw no siman brachah, positive sign, that his endeavor was Divinely blessed. Nonetheless, he acted and was satisfied with the five families that followed him. The following year that number increased until the word spread throughout Klal Yisrael. People saw his sincere devotion to an ideal. He slept in the street because he wanted to attract attention to himself and his mission. His plan worked, albeit slowly, but he succeeded. A single man had an ideal; a single man had a mission.

"What do you people benefit by staying home administering to your fields? Maybe you will earn a couple more dollars. You cannot take it with you. Why not involve yourselves in an endeavor that is simple and can earn eternity for you?" This is what he told the people. This is how this sincere, dedicated man changed their attitude and saved them from an insipid, meaningless life.

Rav Elyashiv distinguishes between Korach, the individual, and Elkanah, the individual. Korach's perspective was myopic and subjective. He saw only himself and what he wanted to see. His astigmatism made him see the world negatively and cynically, catalyzing him to attempt to usurp Moshe and Aharon's leadership of the Jewish People. What kept him going was his famous grandson, Shmuel HaNavi. How could he be wrong, if he was the progenitor of such an illustrious leader? He saw what he wanted to see. It never entered his mind that somewhere down the road another person would be worthy of fathering Shmuel. Yes, they were both individuals who transformed their worlds. Korach initiated the greatest controversy in the history of Klal Yisrael. His name has gone down in infamy. Elkanah saved Klal Yisrael. With his sincerity and dedication, he single-handedly brought people back to visiting the Sanctuary. He turned their ambivalence into devotion, their complacency into religious fervor. We should never forget that the Korachs of every generation might demonstrate temporary power, but it will not be sustained. They do not make it to the finish line, because they are not l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven. The Elkanahs succeed because this necessary ingredient is intrinsic to their mission.

*And as for Aharon - what is he that you protest against him? (16:11)*

In the Talmud Eiruvim 65b, Chazal say that a person is recognized by: koso, the way he holds his liquor; kiso, his wallet, i.e. how he spends his money and the manner in which he reacts to financial situations; and kaaso, anger, how he reacts when he is pushed against the wall, his self-control in circumstances that are agitating, antagonistic or infuriating. Horav Baruch Shimon Schneerson, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Tchebin, explains Moshe Rabbeinu's dialogue with Korach's assembly based upon this Rabbinic dictum. Moshe told them: "How will you determine Aharon HaKohen's character? You cannot investigate him based upon koso, because as a Kohen, he is not permitted to drink, lest he perform the avodah, service, in the Sanctuary, while inebriated. Kiso is also not a criterion upon which you might judge his character, since as a Kohen Gadol the community has already seen to it that he is financially secure. That leaves the last criterion of kaaso. Fine, attempt to infuriate him, and let us see if and how he will react. V'Aharon mah hu? If you want to know what Aharon is - then talinu alav - dispute him, try to anger him, and see if you will succeed in changing his pleasant demeanor.

Anger is the last and just standard for determining a person's ability to deal with people. This is especially true in the field of education, in which a rebbe must maintain his cool under situations that may often be extremely exasperating and provoking. One who loses his cool is apt to err in judgment, a situation that is hardly compatible with developing an amicable, nurturing relationship with one's

students. It goes even further. Anger management is probably the most difficult emotional problem one encounters in life. Indeed, the proper management of anger is a component of spirituality. Animals react when they are provoked; humans should not. The spiritual dimension within the human being should kick in and prevent him from responding negatively.

This does not mean that, when provoked, a person does not become angry. Feeling anger is normal and, in most cases, spontaneous. It is how one responds to his anger that determines the character of the individual. A spiritual person understands that immediate gratification resulting from a spontaneous response to a provocation is short-lived and, in the end, something for which one pays dearly. Spirituality understands and focuses upon the long term benefit, the future, the enduring - not the ephemeral and fleeting.

A thinking person asks himself, "What do I have to gain? Better yet, what do I have to lose?" Chazal tell us that, "One who becomes angry - the Shechinah departs from him." A person who recognizes the Shechinah's Presence in his life will not react to provocation. It might bother him, but he will maintain control over his emotions. Life is filled with situations that incite and provoke, but if we remember Who is Above us, we will not react.

Then, there are those unique individuals who embody spirituality to the point that they not only do not react - they do not even become angry. The incitement passes right over them as if it did not occur - so connected are they to the Shechinah. Horav Mordechai, zl, m'Neshchiz had longed for a Tallis Katan made of wool produced in Eretz Yisrael. Finally, after much difficulty and great effort and expense, he procured a piece of wool. He gave it to one of his students to fashion for him a Tallis Katan.

Upon cutting the wool, he unfortunately folded the cloth one time too many, causing two holes to appear, rather than one. The student realized that he had just ruined his rebbe's Tallis Katan, for which he had waited so long. One can imagine the student's trepidation when he approached his rebbe with the bad news. He waited patiently for a severe scolding. Rav Mordechai looked at the ruined cloth very sadly, wiped away a tear from his eye, and smiled at his student. "It is quite alright," the saintly Rebbe said. "Do not be frightened."

"But rebbe, I have ruined your Tallis Katan for which you had waited so long," the student replied. "No, my son," Rav Mordechai said, "you see, this Tallis Katan was meant to have two holes. One is for an opening for the head, and the second is there to test whether Mordechai will lose his temper." How often do we lose it in the pursuit of performing a mitzvah? Lamentably, our religious fervor can cause us to transgress our sense of *mentchlichkeit*, humanness. As important as a mitzvah is, permitting one's anger to take control of the situation extinguishes whatever illumination the mitzvah provides. We must put our priorities in order. Mitzvos are a priority, but not when it is at the expense of another Jew's feelings.

*Korach took (separated himself). (16:1)*

Korach's dispute superficially seemed focused *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. He sought to elevate himself spiritually, to serve Hashem on a higher plane. The *Kehunah*, Priesthood, was the next step on the ladder of spiritual ascendancy. This is the medium that the *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, employs when enticing us to sin. It is always *l'shem mitzvah*, for the purpose of carrying out a mitzvah. How can it be wrong? The *yetzer hora* convinces us to transgress, but it is most certainly in the guise of a mitzvah. Anyone who has a modicum of common sense can see right through its ruse.

Regrettably, many of us are deficient in this commodity.

What is the litmus test? How does an individual distinguish between the yetzer hora's blandishment and the "real thing"? The Agra D'Kallah gives us a practical guideline towards differentiating between the truth of one's actions and the purity of his intentions. A person should cogently ask himself if his avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty, with regard to all other mitzvos has the same level of intensity as does this endeavor upon which he is now embarking. Does he observe Shabbos with the same devotion? Is his davening, prayer, attendance as fully committed? Does his general mitzvah observance parallel his present attitude towards this mitzvah? If he perceives a disparity between his general observance and his devotion to his present undertaking, he should see a red flag. Something is seriously wrong. This mitzvah is the work of the yetzer hora, and less of a mitzvah than he has been led to think.

The Satmar Rebbe, zl, noted that we often find people whose general commitment is, at best, lukewarm, but when the opportunity to fulfill certain mitzvos surfaces, they suddenly become filled with a newly discovered passion that is inconsistent with their overall relationship with Torah and mitzvos. That is the yetzer hora speaking, motivating them to commit to a certain endeavor, despite the misgivings of the gedolei Yisrael's, Torah leadership's, sage counsel. They are under the influence of the yetzer hora, which has captivated their minds and hearts.

Eisav ha'rasha was the paragon of evil. Yet, Chazal say that no one had ever been able to achieve his level of Kibud av, honoring his father. How are we to understand this? How could one who is the archetype of evil fulfill a mitzvah so well? Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, explains that when one chooses to fulfill one mitzvah out of the entire Torah, that is not mitzvah fulfillment. It is another form of worship - certainly not directed towards Hashem. We cannot pick and choose mitzvos out of convenience or personal affinity. One is either committed to Hashem, or he is not. While it is true that it is easier for us to relate to certain mitzvos, and certain mitzvos have greater appeal to human nature, one's attitude and level of commitment towards all mitzvos must be on the same level. Otherwise, he has lost sight of the meaning and purpose of the mitzvos.

*Korach took (separated himself). (16:1)*

Chazal teach us that prior to the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash, Klal Yisrael heard prophesy from three Neviim, prophets. The message was the same, although the venues were disparate. Yirmiyahu prophesized in the markets and the public square, where the people could be found. Tzephaniah went to the shuls and batei medrash to reach those who did not hear the message in the markets. Chuldah spoke to the women. The reason is that there was limited time. If Yirmiyahu had waited for the people to come to him, he would have had no listeners. He was compelled to go to the streets to reach the people. Tzephaniah communicated with those who were not in the market, but in the bais hamedrash. The women heard on their own turf. Chazal are teaching us that there were no listeners "waiting" to hear the dvar, word, of Hashem. The Neviim had to go to the people's home ground to reach them. Furthermore, one Navi was not sufficient. They needed three Neviim.

Horav Shlomo Y. Elyashiv, Shlita, notes the contrast between conveying dvar Hashem and, l'havdil, Korach's message. When Korach commenced with his demagoguery, he had no problem whatsoever convening a crowd. When the message is anti-Torah, the crowds flock to listen. Korach shared with his captivated crowd the following story: In his neighborhood, a widow lived with two

orphaned daughters. She owned one small field. When she was about to plow, Moshe Rabbeinu told her, "You may not plow with an ox and a donkey together." When she was about to plant, he told her, "You may not sow an admixture of seeds." When she was about to harvest, Moshe informed her to leave over Leket, gleanings, Shikchah, whatever stalks she had forgotten, and Peah, a small corner of the field for the poor. As soon as she was about to store the crops in the silo, he instructed her to separate Terumah and the Maasros, various Tithes. She accepted the Divine imperative and gave and gave again. Finally, she had no recourse but to sell the field and purchase two sheep for their wool and the offspring they would produce. It was not much different with her newly-acquired property. Moshe was very demanding. The sheep gave birth, and Moshe demanded its firstborn. She sheared the wool, and Moshe was there to collect the Reishis HaGez, first shearing. Finally, she said, "I cannot take it any more. I am going to slaughter the sheep." As soon as she slaughtered the sheep, Moshe was there to demand the Zeraa, Lechayayim and Keivah, forearm, cheeks and stomach. This was the last straw. She could take it no longer. "I am accepting it upon myself as a cherem to consecrate it, and nobody will have it!" Moshe immediately responded, "Every cherem belongs to me." Moshe took "his" sheep and left the poor widow and orphans to their misery and tears.

This is the bleak - but completely distorted - picture that Korach painted of Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen. Yet, the people listened. They believed that Moshe and Aharon had nothing else to do but to badger poor widows and orphans, to take their possessions for themselves and the members of their family. However ludicrous this was, the people were fuming at their spiritual leadership.

Let us turn to Korach. Here was a man who represented the zenith of material wealth. Indeed, Chazal say that his total liquid assets were incredible. If he had been aware of a widow who lived in such abject poverty, why did he himself not help her? Furthermore, while he was criticizing the Torah's laws regarding Leket, Shikchah and Peah, he conveniently forgot to mention that these laws were specifically designed for the sake of the poor. Human nature is that way. People listen to what they want, and the sound of a poor widow and her orphans tugs at the heartstrings. Korach had it all in his favor. He could have won. His mistake was that he did not take into account the one factor that could thwart all of his evil machinations: Hashem.

This is the way it has been throughout the millennia. Those who seek to undermine the Torah, to impugn its veracity and values, often appeal to human nature and innocence. They may seem to be on top momentarily, to see their evil schemes triumph, but in the end they will fail as miserably as Korach did.

How does one battle the effects and influence of the Korachs of each generation? The only way is through mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, and determination to adhere to the truth. When people see that the expositors of Torah Hashem steer a course of integrity and devotion, they will eventually take their heads out of the ground and respond to the truth. Indeed, this is why we are still here today - growing, thriving and achieving new successes every day. The truth always prevails.

*It is enough for you, O offspring of Levi. (16:7)*

Moshe Rabbeinu responded to Korach saying that, as Bnei Levi, they had already been granted a distinguished position. Why were they seeking more? Chazal take issue with Moshe's reply. In fact, years later, when Moshe entreated Hashem to grant him entry into Eretz Yisrael, Hashem responded with, Rav lecha, "It is enough for you" (Devarim 3:6), implying that the reward that Moshe would receive in Olam Habah should be sufficient for him. The Midrash comments that Hashem deliberately used the same expression of rav lecha/lachem, "it is enough for you," as Moshe used when speaking to

Korach, because Moshe should have spoken to Korach with greater sensitivity. Korach was wrong. His iniquitous actions were designed to undermine and impugn Moshe's leadership. Yet, Moshe is held accountable for not responding with greater gentleness. Korach was envious; Korach was acting reprehensibly, but Korach was hurting. Moshe should have accommodated him and spoken with greater empathy.

This is a powerful statement. Korach was bent on destroying the spiritual leadership of Klal Yisrael. He had no regard for Moshe or Aharon. His overwhelming envy was driving him to act in the most ignoble manner. Yet, Moshe is critiqued for not being more accommodating to him. We are taught here to what lengths we are required to go to cooperate with others, to think of and be sensitive to their feelings - regardless of who they are and how they act. When Korach had the effrontery to demand the Priesthood for himself, perhaps Moshe should have responded with a more obliging reply. "Let me see what I can do," he might have said. However, for responding curtly, "You have enough," Hashem responded to him with a similar answer, "You (also) have enough."

Let me add that Moshe certainly had his reasons for responding to Korach in the manner that he did, and, as the quintessential leader of our People, his response emanated from daas Torah, the wisdom inspired and acquired by the Torah. It is just that when one achieves such an apex in spiritual distinction, Hashem deals with him differently. Hashem deals with him on a level that is above our comprehension. It is in consonance with that unique position that Moshe's response to an individual such as Korach might be viewed as deficient. Nonetheless, for our own purposes, we are taught a valuable and compelling lesson.

*"Is it not enough for you that the G-d of Yisrael segregated you... to draw you near to Himself... yet you seek Kehunah, Priesthood, as well!" (16:9,10)*

Moshe Rabbeinu asks Korach and his cohorts why Leviah, being a member of the tribe of Levi and serving in the Sanctuary, is not sufficient for them. When we think about it, Moshe's question is enigmatic. Why should someone settle if he can aspire to an even greater spiritual relationship with the Almighty? True, being a Levi with its accompanying responsibilities is a lofty function, but it is not Kehunah. Can we blame Korach for wanting more? Is this not what we tell everyone: move higher; aspire for greater spiritual ascendancy; do not settle when it involves spiritual matters?

The Sefas Emes explains that one of the ploys employed by the yetzer hora, evil inclination, in its attempt to manipulate a person towards sin is to say, "You are too small for this endeavor. It is above you." A young Torah student assuages his lack of diligence in Torah study by saying, "When I will be older, I will daven, pray, with great kavanah, intention and devotion. Now, I am a young student and not ready for this type of life." One whose salary is low will say, "When I will be wealthy, I will give more tzedakah. Now that I have very little, I can hardly give at all." This goes on with regard to many mitzvos. Whenever one seeks an excuse, the yetzer hora helps him along and convinces him that he is not yet on the level in which he is able to participate fully.

The greatest proof that these excuses are the work of the yetzer hora is the fact that in regard to the gashmiyus, material/physical dimension, one does not settle, nor does one let something small go by. For instance, one does not forgo any amount of money by saying, "This will not make me wealthy, so why bother?" Every penny counts, and one is to explore every opportunity to increase his assets. Indeed, if our attitude towards ruchniyus, spirituality, would parallel our disposition vis-?-vis

gashmiyus, we would be standing on a completely different spiritual plane.

There are two reasons why one should not be mevater, acquiesce, concerning even "small" things when it involves spirituality. First, there is no such concept as a small thing in ruchniyus. One moment of Torah and good deeds in this world is greater than all of life in Olam Habah. Furthermore, all of the "little" mitzvos add up to create a large, spiritual entity. In addition, there is another important point that should be noted. We are accustomed to the notion that a wealthy individual has little or nothing to do with those objects that are inconsequential to him. For instance, a multi-millionaire will not bother with pennies. There are those who think that the same idea applies to great tzaddikim, righteous persons, and gedolei Torah, giants of Torah: they have nothing to do with elementary-level spirituality. They are only concerned with spiritual matters of the highest order.

Reality could not be further from the truth. A true tzaddik cares and is concerned with every spiritual entity, regardless of its impact or consequences. In ruchniyus, everything is significant. Indeed, it is specifically because they care about the little things that they have become great. There are mitzvos that many of us seem to ignore. A truly pious person ignores nothing. Everything is important!

This is what Moshe was intimating to Korach and his henchmen. You are coming to seek Kehunah, because you have decided that Leviah is unimportant. The mere fact that Hashem has segregated you from the rest of Klal Yisrael to serve Him in the Sanctuary has very little meaning to you. You want more! That is your mistake. When a person realizes that everything spiritual is great, he receives more and more. One who denigrates every spiritual entity, claiming that it is not sufficient for someone of his elite standing, speaks for the yetzer hora and, thus, is not worthy of spiritual favor.

Dassan and Aviram went out erect at the entrance of their tents, with their wives, children and infants. (16:27)

Dassan and Aviram left their tents in defiance of Moshe Rabbeinu. They stood there, cursing and taunting, refusing to display any form of respect, acting as the total miscreants that they were. The Torah adds that they were not alone. They brought their entire families with them. Rashi adds that the sin of machlokes, unwarranted dispute, unmitigated controversy, has greater ramifications than other sin. While for other sins Bais Din does not punish a child until he or she matures into legal adulthood, concerning the sin of controversy, even the infants were punished. Yet, we must understand why. What is there about machlokes that affects even one's children? After all, they are infants. Why should they be held liable?

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, cites the Ramban in his commentary to the beginning of Parashas Netzavim (Devarim 29:17), concerning the pasuk, "Perhaps there is among you a root flourishing with gall and wormwood." Ramban writes that a deficient root within the father, can, over time, bloom and flourish within the offspring to produce children that have the same bitterness and evil. The evil root can spawn generations of continuing evil.

Thus, Rav Zilberstein asserts that when the fathers are baalei machlokes, individuals embroiled in controversy, who seek and promote discord, who thrive on dispute and strife, their children will outshine them and achieve a greater nadir in creating disunity and destroying relationships. It is, therefore, better that they are removed while they are still innocent, before they have the chance to destroy the lives of others. This is no different than an infection filled with bacteria. It must be eradicated, or else it will spread and destroy healthy tissue.

The Maharam Schick, zl, was once asked concerning an individual who was infamous for causing much discord in his community, who had donated an ornament for the Sefer Torah and a "Shivisi" plaque for the shul. This scoundrel made sure to let everyone know that he had a greater share in the shul than they had. The Maharam Schick rendered that the value of these two objects be returned to the man, so that he not have a share in the sanctity of the shul. In contrast, the Maharam Schick clearly states in a previous responsa that the shul may accept a "Shivisi" plaque from one who is non-observant. The reason for this is that by reaching out to him and accepting his gift, it might create a feeling of harmony which will catalyze his eventual repentance and return to observance. Regrettably, the same is neither true of nor applicable to the baal machlokes.

What is the difference? Why is there hope for the sinner and not for the baal machlokes? I think that the answer lies in the root of the problem. The sinner has fallen under the control of his yetzer hora. He has fallen prey to its blandishments, and, thus, must overcome them to regain his position of commitment. This is achievable. Indeed, it happens all of the time. The baal machlokes, however, is a sick, insecure person, who preys on others and achieves satisfaction from destroying lives and sowing discord. This is an illness for which the therapy is much more intense. This is a sickness that, regrettably, destroys all parties.

Korach took (separated himself). (16:1)

Machlokes, controversy/dispute, is an extremely destructive force that has undermined our people's growth throughout the generations. Every community is plagued by it in one form or another. It usually begins with a desire for kavod, honor, and mushrooms into all-out war. Jewish unity has been the mainstay of our People, and the foundation of our strength and continued existence. Does this mean that we should avoid machlokes at all costs - under all circumstances? Yes. It is true that at times we must take a stand, particularly when the Torah is being degraded by usurpers whose goal it is to destroy everything the Jewish People stand for. Even then, however, there is an appropriate way to take a stand.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, the architect of Torah Judaism for the modern world, lived in Germany in an era in which secularism was a way of life and Orthodoxy represented a tradition that was an obstacle to the fruits of a gentile society. Jewish pride was at an all-time low, and assimilation meant much more than maintaining a simple, overt lifestyle which mimicked the gentile world. It meant shunning Bris Milah, Torah, Shabbos and anything that was reminiscent of Yiddishkeit. Inter-marriage was encouraged and almost expected. Yet, Rav Hirsch made every effort to pronounce his opposition without anger or invective. He preferred to emphasize the positive aspects of his Orthodox kehillah, congregation, not focusing on the sins of the others. Indeed, when he advised a rav in Frankfurt to expel from the community those individuals who refused to circumcise their sons, he added that the expulsion be made in a strong, unambiguous, yet calm, manner - without anger or invective. He wrote that while expulsion would not turn these people around - because, regrettably, they were too far-gone - it must be made clear to them that this expulsion was meted neither as a punishment nor as a means to humiliate them, but only in order to rescue pure Judaism.

On the other hand, Rav Hirsch did not fall prey to counter-productive dialogue. Whenever discord arises between factions of the Jewish camp, between observant and secular Jews, there are always those who argue for tolerance. First, we must understand that the term secular in Rav Hirsch's

day, represented something much different than today. Then it defined a group of Jews whose goal was to undermine everything that bespoke of tradition, Hashem, and Torah. These were not simply tinokos she'nishbu, children who were taken captive, a term applied to Jews who did not have the opportunity to study or be exposed to Torah-true Judaism. These were people, many of whom were shanah u'pireish, had once studied Torah and later rejected it. In other words, they knew better; they knew the truth. They just rejected it. Rav Hirsch considered them apostates, people guilty of heresy with whom dialogue - or even argument - was counter-productive and wrong.

He writes, "What should be said to the members of the fallen generation who, in their apostasy, fancy themselves as 'progressives,' and deride the loyal elders as 'backward'? To them, nothing should be said! The Divine Word teaches in relation to the wandering child, the inquiring boy, and the searching youth, V'Amartem le'bincha, V'higadeta l'bincha, V'amartem eilav, 'Tell your son, Say to him, Say to your son. In relation to the scornful generation, however, it does not say eilav - "to him," but simply, v'amartem, 'because to him you have nothing to say.' They wish to instruct you. They do not seek your instruction."

Rav Hirsch contends that the key to the hearts of these estranged Jews rests in the hands of Hashem. Only experience can bring them back. When they experience the hollowness and vacuousness of their lives, the bleakness and emptiness of their decisions, they will return. We have nothing to say to them - only to wait until the time in which they are ready to return. Then we will embrace them with open arms.

We may not, however, be totally silent. While we do not talk theology directly to them, we must resolutely and clearly express the Divine precepts - to ourselves. We must review and cherish them. We must attest to the bliss and joy inherent in keeping Hashem's mitzvos. We must set our conviction clearly against the doubts which they might raise - and our fidelity unambiguously in opposition to their heresy. We must take pride in the vitality which our way of life expounds, as opposed to the degeneracy and debauchery which epitomize their way of life. We accentuate our positive and ignore their negative.

Unity is all-important as long as the focus is on the li, "to Me," to Hashem. The call to Divine judgment is phrased in the words isfu li, "Gather to Me." The word esof denotes a gathering into one spiritual unit, withdrawing from any group that maintains a view contrary of the Torah view. The spiritual unity must be li, "to Me," bonded to Hashem and subordinated to His will. As Rav Hirsch explains, this is all included in the word chasidai, My devoted ones: "those who, in complete selflessness, devote themselves to the fulfillment of Hashem's will." Anything else is simply not unity.

Korach took (separated himself). (16:1)

Horav Chaim Plagi, zl, writes about the ill effects of machlokes, controversy. He attests that in every situation in which a person, a community or a city has ever been embroiled in a dispute, regardless of who was right or wrong, ultimately, everyone suffered both physically and financially. He exhorts every one to be tolerant and overlook what may come his way entailing controversy. Otherwise, whatever he might gain will be short-lived, as he will eventually lose out. Additionally, he notes that in every home that is the scene of a dispute on Erev Shabbos, close to Shabbos, or on Friday night, they can regrettably be assured that the week will not go by without some unfortunate occurrence.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, relates that a number of yeshivos which were able to withstand external and financial pressures, managing to maintain their spiritual stamina under the most difficult circumstances, fell prey to machlokes, and, as a result, eventually went under.

The Chida, zl, writes that the sin of machlokes is the cause of great casualty in the world. It can catalyze the premature passing of a tzaddik, righteous Jew, and other serious calamities that plague the Jewish community. Furthermore, the individuals who participate in the controversy and are the indirect cause of these collective consequences are doubly responsible for their actions in the dispute and for the catastrophic results.

The Alter, zl, m'Novordhok was an individual who abhorred machlokes. He would distance himself from any vestige of machlokes, even if it meant incurring a great financial loss. He felt that the momentary financial gain was not worth the ultimate eventual loss, both financially and spiritually. The story is told concerning a wealthy German Jew who passed away and left in his will that a large office building that he owned be endowed to the Novordhoker Yeshivah. The Alter quickly left by train for Germany to settle the estate. While enroute, it came to his attention that another Rosh Yeshivah was also on the way to "settle" the estate and take the building for his yeshivah. The Alter immediately decided that nothing was worth involving himself in a machlokes. He left the train at the next stop, refusing to entertain the reality that this meant losing his rights to the building.

Many years later, in Yerushalayim, after washing the family's clothes, a woman hung them up to dry on the clothesline in the complex where she lived. Her neighbor passed by and, for some reason, she just could not tolerate that the clothes were hanging publicly. She proceeded to cut the clothesline, causing all the clothes to fall to the ground and become soiled. The woman, whose wash was ruined, swallowed her pride and hurt, picked up her clothes, and washed them again. We must remember that washing clothes in those days was a backbreaking process, since there were no washing machines. Afterwards, she went to the next courtyard to hang her wash. That evening, when her husband returned from the bais ha'medrash, the woman was about to relate to him what had transpired that day and how she was hurt and humiliated. She decided to refrain and not speak lashon hora. Suddenly, the woman who had lost it during the day knocked on the door and asked if she could come in. "I am terribly sorry for what I did today. I do not know what overcame me. I just lost it. Hashem has already punished me for my actions. My young son is presently laying in the hospital suffering from a high fever. Please forgive me," she pleaded. The other woman replied, "I forgive you wholeheartedly. Indeed, let me recite Tehillim on behalf of your son."

One year later, this righteous woman was blessed with a son whose scholarship was to illuminate the Torah world. He is today's posek hador, Horav Yosef Shalom Eliyashuv, Shlita.

They stood before Moshe with two hundred fifty men from Bnei Yisrael... they gathered together against Moshe and Aharon... "Why do you exalt yourself over the congregation of Hashem?" (16:2,3)

Korach is infamous in Jewish history as the individual who led a revolt to undermine Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon's leadership. While others complained and argued about specific problems, it was Korach who fell prey to his desire for prestige and honor, seeking to sabotage the spiritual leadership of Klal Yisrael. He came with a number of claims that to the common person might even seem legitimate. Added to this was the scorn and humiliation that he heaped upon Moshe and Aharon. Thus, the ingredients for an outright rebellion were in place. One would think that this is all it would take to incur the tragic consequences that resulted from their dispute. The Targum Yonasan, however, adds

something in his commentary that suggests a new perspective to this revolt. He writes that Korach and his assembly arose with chutzpah, insolence, to undermine Moshe and Aharon. It seems that the chutzpah is a more compelling factor than the humiliation and scorn of Korach's rebellion. How can the insolent manner in which they spoke, the impudence which they manifest, be of greater concern than the actual rebellion?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, relates an incident that occurred concerning the Chafetz Chaim, zl, that sheds light on this anomaly. The mashgiach in the yeshivah of Radin came to the Chafetz Chaim with a tale of two students and two infractions in behavior. One student had apparently committed a major transgression for which the mashgiach felt the appropriate punishment could be no less than immediate expulsion. The other student was guilty of a lesser deficiency. He had acted with chutzpah toward the baalas habayis, woman of the house, where he boarded. He had been impertinent in the way he spoke to her with regard to the meals she was serving him. The Chafetz Chaim rendered his judgment. The first student, who had committed a grave sin, was to receive a punishment. Hopefully, with time and encouragement, he would perform teshuvah, repent. The second student, who had spoken contemptuously to the woman, was to be dismissed from the yeshivah! No, there was no room for discussion. He had indicated by his chutzpah that he had no respect for people; he was not a person who listened to - or cared about - others. One who did not "listen," who did not care, could never be a student. Consequently, he should be discharged from the yeshivah. It is one thing to sin; it is entirely another to be arrogant about it.

The story is told that the Alter, zl, m'Slabodka, was once upset with a certain student who had acted inappropriately for a ben Torah. Another student, who felt that the Alter was being a bit too strict with his friend, wrote a letter to the Alter, asking how the Rosh Hayeshivah could be so strict with such an exemplary student. The Alter read the letter - once - then read it a second time to let the words sink in. As soon as he completed reading the letter, he dismissed the letter writer from the yeshivah. The student who had made the original infraction was allowed to remain in the yeshivah after undergoing a process of introspection and teshuvah. The Alter explained that the first student had erred and, once he understood what he had done wrong, he could work on correcting his behavior. There was hope for him. The second student, who came to his defense, acted with chutzpah, since he demonstrated the attitude that he knew more than the Rosh Hayeshivah. Such a person does not listen, nor does he seek to grow. He is there already. He knows it all. For him, there was no hope.

This is the idea behind the "chutzpah" of Korach. Yes, the fact that he approached Moshe with chutzpah made a great difference. This indicated that he would not listen to reason. He had all of the answers. For him, there was no hope.

It is too much for you! For the entire assembly - all of them - are holy and Hashem is among them. Why do you exact yourselves over the congregation of Hashem (16:3)

What was Korach's sin and, why was it considered to be so grave? Indeed, Korach's sin was one for which atonement was unattainable. Even the regular manner of execution, the arba missos Bais Din, four forms of execution which was administered by the Bais Din, was not sufficient for him and his cohorts. Hashem created a new death - one that was originally created on the first Erev Shabbos, during bein ha'shemashos, twilight time. Chazal even questioned whether they will arise during Techiyas Ha'meisim, Resurrection of the Dead. Furthermore, why did Moshe Rabbeinu refuse to pardon them? Was he not the most humble man on the face of the earth? This question is especially glaring in light of the fact that there was a personal affront made to Moshe. After the previous sins of Klal Yisrael, the Golden Calf, the complainers, the spies, Moshe made it his responsibility to intercede on behalf of his

flock and entreat Hashem for atonement, but not in this case. Why?

The commentators explain that Korach's sin was a dual infraction, for which there is no room for forgiveness. First, his declaration that Moshe had no right to lead a nation in which everybody was holy contradicts the order of creation. The world was created upon the principle of a mashpia, one who influences, who inspires others, and on a mekabel, one who is influenced, who accepts from him. This is the relationship of male and female, heaven and earth, rebbe and talmid, teacher and student. Just as there is nothing on this physical world that is not in some way connected to the spiritual world from which it receives its sustenance, so, too, is everything in this world sustained through the mashpia/mekabel process. Korach wanted to exist beyond the parameters that Hashem set for this world. He wanted everyone to be equal. This indicated rebellion against Hashem's course of directing the world.

Second, Korach sought to divide up the Torah, seeking to pick and choose mitzvos and traditions as he saw fit. On the one hand, he claimed that the entire congregation was holy and Hashem was in their midst. On the other hand, he disputed a number of the directives that Moshe said he heard from Hashem. In short, Korach sought to create a selective form of Judaism, one with which he would be comfortable.

For someone who sought to undermine the order of creation; who wanted to live beyond the preset boundaries designated by Hashem; who felt that there were portions of the Torah he could live without; for him, Hashem created a unique way of leaving the world, one that was also beyond the periphery of human experience.

And Korach (took). (separated himself). (16:1)

Korach's rebellion, first against Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon, and afterwards against Hashem, serves as the paradigm of a machlokes shelo l'shem Shomayim, controversy not for the sake of Heaven. In Pirkei Avos, Chazal teach us that a machlokes shehee l'shem Shomayim sofah l'hiskayem, a controversy which is for the sake of Heaven will endure.

Regrettably, many people often confuse themselves into thinking that they are entering a dispute for a noble purpose, but are actually being misled by their own yetzer hora, evil-inclination. How is one to determine if his dispute is for the sake of Heaven? How is he to discern between what is noble and holy and what is for purposes of self-esteem in order to carry out a personal agenda? Actually, Chazal teach us the answer when they say, "What is a machlokes l'shem Shomayim? This is the machlokes between Hillel and Shamai."

Horav Yonasan Eibeshitz, zl, in his Yaaros Devash explains that if the two antagonists see eye to eye in everything else other than the subject of their dispute; if they are close friends b'lev v'nefesh, in heart and soul, and their only discord is in regard to this one area, then they are like Hillel and Shamai, who loved each other and whose family members married one another. If the dispute, however, extends beyond the subject matter and the two parties do not talk to - but rather - attack each other, disparaging, slandering, demeaning one another, then it is not a machlokes l'shem Shomayim. It is a simple - but practical - criterion, one that is often ignored in the fiery passion of a machlokes. Another practical test is to question one's motives. Does he seek to win, or does he seek the truth? What if the other side is proven correct? Can he handle losing - or will he be content to see that the truth wins out? Will he be happy for his friend if he wins? Furthermore, will he be happy if his friend loses the dispute? If his friend's loss brings him joy, or if he just fights to win and cannot tolerate losing, his motives are not for

the sake of Heaven. They are for himself. Heaven is his excuse - not his purpose.

*And Korach...(took)(separated) himself and Dasan and Aviram and On ben Peles sons of Reuven.  
(16:1)*

The Rebbe of a group of chassidim, who were also followers of Horav Chaim Soloveitchik, zl, passed away. His son, who was the designated heir, was not able to assume the mantle of leadership. It was just too much for him, both physically and emotionally. There were two grandsons who were prepared to take the position, but their personalities were different from one another. One of the grandsons was particularly extreme in one area. Although the majority of the Rebbe's followers were inclined to accept him, some chassidim were not prepared to accept his extreme nature. They were in a quandary as to whom to accept as the new Rebbe. Being close to Rav Chaim, they turned to him for advice. The question was: Do they accept the grandson, who - for the most part - seemed agreeable to everyone, except for his one area of extremism, or do they follow the other grandson?

Rav Chaim listened to their query, went over to his bookcase and removed a Chumash. He turned to Parashas Korach and asked, "The parshah begins by mentioning On ben Peles at the onset of the rebellion and then, suddenly, his name disappears. What happened to him?" Chazal tell us that On's wife saved him with some practical advice. She said, "What difference does it make if Moshe is the leader or Korach is the leader? You are still nothing more than the student, a nondescript insignificant aide."

Now, let us analyze this assertion. Korach and Moshe Rabbeinu were not in a dispute over who would be Klal Yisrael's leader. There was a much deeper question. Korach claimed that Hashem listened to Moshe because of his righteousness: Tzaddik gozer v'Hakadosh Baruch Hu mekayem; "The righteous decree and Hashem fulfills their demand." Moshe was running the show according to his vested interests. Moshe countered that this claim was ludicrous and could not be further from the truth. Everything that he did was consistent with the dvar, word, of Hashem. He was merely Hashem's agent. A controversy of such a critical nature cannot and should not be discredited with a mere statement, however practical, from On's wife. This was no simple dispute.

Rav Chaim explained that On's wife had a very compelling declaration. She countered, "How do you know that if Moshe was deposed and Korach became the Kohen Gadol, so that there was a new leader, that this new leader would not have his own agenda? You forget that when one sits in the seat of power, he sees things differently. His perspective is not the same as that of the fellow on the street. You might be surprised to discover that Moshe actually knew what he was doing!" When people do not see the entire picture, they cannot develop a clear plan of action. It is always easy to decide world events from the vantage point of the kitchen table. On's wife understood that it is easy to question a leader's decision as long as one does not see the larger picture, the perspective as viewed from behind his desk.

Rav Chaim turned to the chassidim and said, "You are not in favor of one grandson because you do not agree with the way he acts in a certain area, while the other grandson does not seem to have this view. How do you know, however, that once the second grandson becomes Rebbe, he will not change his position. I suggest that you desist from the controversy and allow the majority to rule."

*Korach ben Yitzhar ben Kehas ben Levi (took) (separated) himself. (16:1)*

Rashi explains that Korach's genealogy stops with Levi and does not list Yaakov Avinu as the Patriarch of the family, because Yaakov prayed on his deathbed that his name be omitted, so as not to be associated with Korach's assembly. Actually, what difference does it make if Yaakov's name is mentioned or not? Is it really a taint on his honor to be listed together with a descendant who became corrupt? Are we to believe that Yaakov was so concerned with his honor? Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, derives from here that the Heavenly Tribunal has a much different way of reckoning than we do in the earthly domain. We will have to answer for areas of neglect that under normal circumstances we would otherwise overlook.

The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah 3:2 asserts that we do not necessarily understand the balance of sins and merits. In Heaven, the total is adjudicated and deciphered in a manner that does not coincide with the earthly domain. Thus, we should be meticulous to apply ourselves to every detail in our life's endeavor. What we might view as miniscule might be viewed in the Heavenly domain as significant, having great bearing on our ultimate judgment. Hashem might judge one individual for his grandson's negative activity because, had he been more circumspect with his son's education, his grandson might have demonstrated a more positive attitude towards them. If the grandfather neglects his son's Torah education, what can we already expect from the third generation?

Yaakov Avinu was concerned that history might hold him responsible for his grandson's rebellion. He, therefore, requested that his name be omitted from Korach's genealogy as a way of declaring that he had nothing whatsoever to do with Korach's dastardly act. His chinuch was pure and untainted. Whatever character flaws contributed to Korach's malevolence originated in the subsequent generation.

*They stood before Moshe. (16:2)*

One would think that they arose with *derech erez*, respect. The Targum Yonasan says *kamu b'chuzpah*, they arose with audacity, calling attention to the fact that they were getting up for Moshe. Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, relates that once the two *geonei hador*, preeminent Torah leaders of their generation, Horav Akiva Eiger, zl, and Horav Yaakov, zl, m'Lisa, the Nesivos Hamishpat, were taking a stroll. They walked by a group of uncouth ruffians who were sitting on a bench. The young delinquents demonstrated their lack of respect by not rising up when the two *gedolim* walked by. Rav Yaakov turned to Rav Akiva Eiger and said, "It seems that we have reached the *Ikvesa D'Moshicha*, the period preceding the advent of Moshiach, about which Chazal say, *chutzpah yasgi*, "the people will be filled with audacity." Rav Akiva Eiger countered, "They are still far removed from the type of *chutzpah* which will plague the generations preceding Moshiach. Now we walk by, and those derelicts do not get up. During the period prior to Moshiach, we will be sitting on stools, they will go by and if we do not rise for them, they will say about us that we have *chutzpah*!"

We must take into consideration that Rav Akiva Eiger said this quite some time ago - and his perspective was apparently very realistic, seeing into the future what seems to have become true. Regrettably, there are those who think that *chutzpah yasgi* is a *mitzvah* that has to be fulfilled with all the *hidurim*. They forget it is only a condition which mirrors the society in which we live.

*I have not taken even a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them. (16:15)*

Maase avos siman l'banim, "the actions of the fathers are a portent for the children." This axiom applies to machlokes, controversy, as well. Korach may well have been the first to undermine and rebel against a Jewish leader. He certainly was not the last. The Bostoner Rebbe, Shlita, notes that Shmuel HaNavi, as he turned over the kingdom to Shaul HaMelech, used the same words that Moshe used: "Bear witness against me... whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Who have I defrauded and oppressed? (Shmuel I 13:3)" The people replied that Shmuel had not deprived or oppressed them.

Imagine after a lifetime of service to Klal Yisrael, the best Shmuel Hanavi could ask for was not gratitude, not praise, but, "Yes - you were not a thief Yes - you did not oppress us." With this in mind, communal leaders go to the fore, perform their function, whether it is teaching, leading, advising or guiding, knowing fully well that gratitude is something they can only hope for from a unique minority. They do not expect much in the way of praise. Instead, they become quite used to the complaints, high expectations and subtle abuse. It is worse when the aggressor is someone to whom they have been especially beneficial. That is life and this attitude goes with the territory. Why should we expect to be different than Moshe Rabbeinu?

What really is the cause of dissent? Why do we find that the same people who benefit the most by their leadership are the individuals who go out of their way to sabotage everything that leader does? The answer lies in the fact that they cannot tolerate the fact that they had been helped by someone, that they were weak and they had to come on to someone else's assistance. For some people, gratitude is an overwhelming debt. One who is weak is not hated. One who is poor is not vilified. It is the powerful and mighty that are disparaged. Those who are in a position of supremacy - who are popular because of the wonderful things they do for others - they are slandered. Why? What did they do to deserve such a malignant reaction? Why did Moshe Rabbeinu, the Adon HaNeviim, master of prophets, Klal Yisrael's quintessential leader, a person whose every moment was devoted to his flock, deserve to have a Korach impugn his leadership?

The answer is that he did not deserve it, but, regrettably, it was a natural reaction of simple people. Their disagreement with Moshe was perhaps a small percentage genuine, but mostly envy and insecurity. No one can forgive his protector. There is no loathing that any man harbors more intensely than that toward his benefactor. It may sound cynical, but one only has to peruse history to note a constant languid hatred towards one's sponsor. No one likes to be on the receiving end, but then, they are not waiting in line to dispense aid to others, either.

Korach took/separated himself. (16:1)

What caused Korach, a distinguished leader in Klal Yisrael, to alienate himself to the degree that he fell to such a nadir of iniquity? The Bais Yisrael comments that these two words, Vayikach Korach, "Korach took," says it all. Korach's approach to life was defined by "taking." It was his goal; it was his raison d'etre. He took in gashmius, materialism, becoming one of Klal Yisrael's wealthiest men. He also wanted to take in ruchniyus, spirituality. He was an oveid Hashem, one who serves Hashem, with great diligence. Among the carriers of the Aron Hakodesh, he represented the spiritual elite of Klal Yisrael. He was, nonetheless, a "taker" - whatever he did was for himself. He did not serve Hashem -

he served himself!

In this area, Korach was exactly the opposite of Moshe Rabbeinu. The quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael never took a thing for himself. Indeed, he was prepared to give up everything - both physically and spiritually - for the future of his people. Korach saw himself in every endeavor. Moshe saw Klal Yisrael. This idea is underscored by Rashi in his commentary to the pasuk, "Is it too much for you, O offspring of Levi (16:7)?" Korach was a wise man. How could he have acted so foolishly? Rashi explains that his "eye" caused him to err. He saw prophetically that among his offspring would be Shmuel HaNavi, who, during his tenure, was as great as Moshe and Aharon combined, as well as twenty-four groups of Leviim who would prophesize with the spirit of holiness. Seeing this, he was certain that he would triumph over Moshe and Aharon. How did his "eye" cause his downfall? One who serves Hashem with fidelity, abrogating his personal interests and subordinating "himself" only to Hashem, merits that Ein Hashem el yireiav, "Hashem's eye/looks out for His fearful ones." He becomes worthy of Hashem's perspective. He does not err because he views everything through a different spectrum. Korach took everything for himself. He, therefore, did not merit the ability to see with a spiritual perspective reserved only for the truly faithful. His eye misled him, just as he misled himself.

*And On ben Peles. (16:1)*

The Midrash teaches us that On ben Peles was saved as a result of listening to his wife. She asked him, "What do you gain by being involved in this dispute? Regardless who triumphs, you still emerge as the loser. If Aharon is selected as Kohein Gadol - you are his student. If Korach becomes the Kohein Gadol - you are still nothing more than a student. Why involve yourself in a 'no win' situation?" On's wife spoke with seichel, common sense. Is this a reason to praise her? Basically, she only did what any level-headed person would do.

Horav Nosson Vachtfogel, zl, offers a penetrating insight into the matter. He cites the Talmud in Megillah 13b where Rabbi Elazar claims that as reward for Rachel Imeinu's tznius, modesty, she merited that Shaul Hamelech be descended from her. When did she demonstrate such exemplary tznius? Chazal explain that when she gave her sister, Leah, the simanim, special signs, that Yaakov Avinu had given her, she acted with exemplary modesty. Rashi explains that her tznius lay in the fact that she never publicized her selfless act of devotion to her sister. She never divulged to Yaakov what she had done. She was prepared to give up that for which she had strived for so much - the opportunity to be the progenitor of the Shivtei Kah, tribes of Klal Yisrael. She did not once call attention to her exemplary act of kindness. This is tznius at its zenith.

Rav Nosson posits that included in the middah of tznius is the ability to maintain a shev v'al taaseh, status quo, attitude in regard to a situation in which one is unsure of what to do. He does not take a chance and plunge forward regardless of the consequences. No - tznius demands that one sit back and not act, rather than act rashly. Likewise, one who is a tzanua will not divulge a secret. If one is asked for information about someone and he does not know the person, it takes tznius to say, "I do not know." Regrettably, there are those who are quick to conjecture and state their own opinions about someone, even though they are baseless.

Rav Nosson remembers that, prior to being asked by Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, to become the first Mashgiach of the Beth Medrash Govohah, he was asked by a talmid, close student, of Rav Aharon regarding a controversial sefer that was on the table in one of the yeshivah's classrooms. The

Mashgiach responded, "I do not know." This response prompted the talmid to approach Rav Aharon and suggest that Rav Nosson be appointed as Mashgiach of the yeshivah. It takes someone who possesses the strength of character to assert "I do not know" to be the Mashgiach of the Lakewood Yeshivah. This was the power of On ben Peles' wife. She had the ability to see and stress the shev v'al taaseh attitude: "If either way you will not be the victor, why bother involving yourself in the fray of the controversy? Stay at home and stay out of trouble." It takes tznius to act in such a manner. On was fortunate that his wife had the necessary character trait - and he had the wisdom to listen to her.

*They stood before Moshe. (16:2)*

Targum Yonasan adds, V'kamu bechutzpah, "They arose with insolence." How does the pasuk imply that they acted withchutzpah, impudence, towards Moshe Rabbeinu? On the contrary, the pasuk clearly states that they arose for him. Maharitz gives a pragmatic explanation, one that teaches us a profound lesson of the definition ofchutzpah. He explains that knowing that Moshe was coming, they arose before he came, so that they would not have to get up for him. They refused to demonstrate any derech eretz, respect, for Moshe, so they were standing when Moshe came. This is considered standing up withchutzpah.

In an alternative explanation, they looked in Moshe's face, indicating that they were neither in awe of him, nor of the Karnei Hod, Rays of Glory, that shone from Moshe. This is the meaning of Vayakumu lifnei Moshe, the word lifnei being derived from panim, face. They did not fear facing Moshe.

It was thischutzpah that defined their dispute. It "happens" that people do not see eye to eye on an issue. There is a way, however, to discuss the area of controversy. When the dialogue becomes a forum for insolence and disparaging remarks, it is indicative of a machlokes, dispute, shelo l'shem Shomayim, not for the sake of Heaven.

*And it (the earth) swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korach. (16:32)*

Korach's sons repented at the very last moment, so they did not die. They were originally involved in the dispute, but they later saw the light. Korach, however, was too embroiled, too involved in himself, to be saved. He went down in infamy. Yet, I think there is something to be derived from this thought: Korach could not have been all that bad. Apparently, if his children repented, then there had to have been a value system at home that was spiritually correct. They had to have been raised correctly. Horav Avigdor HaLevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, cites the Arizal, who takes the last letters of the words, Tzaddik katamar yifrach, "A righteous person blooms like a palm tree," kuf, raish, ches. These letters spell out the name Korach and imply that, in the future, Korach will be judged favorably. His claim of "the entire nation is holy" might have had some validity to it. It is just that, in this world, society can exist only through one leader who possesses attributes and virtues not found in any one other person.

He leads; he makes the decisions; he inspires the generation with holiness. He is the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation.

In addition, Korach's shelo l'shem Shomayim dispute, not intended for the sake of Heaven, was "off" by a hair. Chazal have designated the controversy of Korach as paradigmatic of the machlokes shelo l'shem Shomayim. When Chazal intend to teach us a lesson, they select an example from something that just goes just over the line. What chiddush, novelty, is there about Korach's dispute, if it was "very much" shelo l'shem Shomayim? Clearly, Korach's controversy contained only a miniscule of vested interest. Basically, his intention and goal were noble. Yet, since they veered ever so slightly from the standard of l'shem Shomayim, demanded by the Torah, it was iniquitous and serves as the prototype of machlokes.

We now understand why Korach's sons repented. They were raised in a Torah home with Torah values. Their father tragically erred. Although he imparted lofty Torah values in his home, he regrettably erred in implementing his goal. I recently read an incredible story about the powerful long-term effect an ancestor can have on his descendant.

The story takes place in Yerushalayim, as a young man, whom we will call Dan, was leaving shul Friday night. He quickly scanned the remaining congregants to see if anyone needed a place to eat. He saw a young fellow, with dark skin and curly black hair, wearing dungarees and carrying the "traditional" backpack over his shoulder. He looked like a Sephardic Jew, perhaps from Morocco.

"Good Shabbos, my name is Dan. Perhaps I could invite you to my house for the Shabbos meal."

"Yeah, thanks. My name is Machi. I would really like to join you." Quick invitation - quick response, and they left shul together on their way to a memorable meal.

They arrived at home and immediately after the introductions, Dan began to sing Shalom Aleichem. Dan sang, and Machi smiled. He was either shy or did not know the tune. They washed and sat down to eat the meal. Dan commented on the parsha. After some small talk, he asked Machi if he had a zemirah, song, he would like to sing.

Machi's face lit up, "Yes, I would like to sing the Dodi song that they sang tonight in the synagogue."

"Well," Dan said, "it is not usually sung during the meal, but I am sure we can make an exception. Children, we are going to sing the Lecha Dodi hymn in honor of our guest."

As soon as they completed the song, Machi resumed his silence until after the soup. When Dan asked him, "Which song do you want to sing now?" "Lecha Dodi, please," Machi answered. This happened again after the chicken course was completed. Machi only wanted to sing Lecha Dodi.

"Are you sure you do not want to sing something else?" Dan asked. "No, only Lecha Dodi." "Well, we will have to sing it a little lower this time. It is not your usual Friday night Zemirots. The neighbors might think we are a little strange." By the time they were ready to bench, they had sung Lecha Dodi nine times!

Machi was an enigma. Who was he, and why was he so into Lecha Dodi? Dan figured that the easiest way to find out was to ask. So, he did. The story is incredible.

"I come from the city of Ramallah. Yes, the large Arab city on the West Bank. My full name is Machmud Ibn-es-Sharif, but, I am a Jew. Let me explain: I was born and grew up in Ramallah. I was

taught from birth to despise my Jewish oppressors. The teaching bothered me. Should I not love my neighbors as I love myself? Why were the Jews different?

"These questions got me in trouble. My father threw me out of the house with nothing but the clothes on my back. My mind was now made up. I was going to run away and live with the Jews. I snuck back into the house at night to retrieve my clothes. My mother caught me in the middle of packing. She appeared pale and upset, but she was quite gentle with me. She understood my travail.

"When I told her I was going to live with the Jews, she became very still and pale and said, "You do not have to convert to Judaism. You are already a Jew. In Judaism, the religion follows the mother. I am Jewish, so you are also Jewish. I made a terrible mistake by marrying an Arab, one for which I have paid for my whole married life.

"She went and found my birth certificate and her old Israeli ID card, so that I could prove that she was a Jew. She also gave me an old picture of her grandparents, which was taken when they went up North looking for the grave of a great ancestor of ours. That is when the picture was taken."

"Do you have the picture with you?" asked Dan, hopeful that the picture would lend some closure to the mystery surrounding Machi's roots.

"Sure," Machi responded. "I always carry it with me." He reached into his backpack and produced a tattered envelope from which he extracted a picture. It showed an old Sephardic family at the turn of the century. He then focused on the grave. When he read the inscription, he nearly dropped the photo. He rubbed his eye to make sure! There was no mistake. This was a grave in the old cemetery of Tzfas, and the inscription on the grave identified it as the grave of the great mekubal and tzaddik, Rav Shlomo Alkabetz - the author of Lecha Dodi!

Dan's voice shook with excitement as he related to Machmud who his great ancestor was. It all made sense now. Machmud was drawn to the song of Lecha Dodi because it was composed by his great-grandfather. Tears flowed down Machmud's cheeks as Dan stretched out his arms and said, "Welcome home, Machmud. Now, how about choosing a new name for yourself?"

*Why do you exalt yourself over the congregation of Hashem. (16:3)*

The Kotzker Rebbe, zl, says that this is the pattern that is followed by all controversy. When people take it upon themselves to dispute a tzaddik, righteous person, they will invariably claim that he is guilty of some outlandish sin. It was no different with Moshe Rabbeinu - the man whom the Torah attests was the humblest person on the face of the earth. Yet, Korach and his followers could not find anything else to say about Moshe, other than the fact that he was arrogant and power hungry. Some things just never change.

Horav Naftali, zl, M'Ropshitz descended from a distinguished lineage. He was sitting at his table surrounded by chasidim as he related his yichus, pedigree. After a while, one chasid said, "With all due respect, my yichus is greater than the Rebbe's." "Indeed," said the Rebbe, "how is this?" "Well," said the chasid, "In my family, I am the only one who puts on Tallis and Tefillin daily." When the Rebbe heard this, he said, "You are truly right. You are a bigger yachson than I. You have certainly earned your pedigree."

Chazal wonder how someone as bright as Korach could make such a foolish mistake as to

dispute Klal Yisrael's leadership. The Chasam Sofer, zl, wonders why Chazal ask this question only about Korach. What about his two hundred and fifty followers - they did not seem to exhibit any signs of great wisdom either. He explains that Korach's followers had nothing to lose since the decree against Klal Yisrael catalyzed by the sin of the Meraglim, spies, was already in effect. They knew that they were destined to die in the desert. Human nature determines that one who is disgusted with life will often do something foolish. Korach, however, was a Levi and, therefore, excluded from the decree. He had everything to lose. What possessed him to act so irrationally?

*Korach took (separated himself). (16:1)*

Korach was not the first person to complain, to rebel, to question Klal Yisrael's leadership. In fact, he followed a line of insurrection that had more than once threatened to undermine Moshe Rabbeinu's stewardship of Hashem's nation. Immediately following their departure from Egypt, the Jewish People expressed fear of their pursuing masters. They questioned and complained. A bit later, when there was no water to drink, they complained. It was better in Egypt, or so they said. They quarreled with Moshe time and again. The sin of the Golden Calf was catalyzed by fear of a loss of leadership. They needed someone - something to which they could relate. They reacted by rebelling. They just could not handle the pressure, so they deferred to their anxiety.

Was Korach any different? Yes! His rebellion was not precipitated by impulse. There was no hunger, no Egyptians, no missing leader. There was, however, something else: something more dangerous than pursuing Egyptians; something more virulent even than capricious idolatry based on fear. Korach's insurrection was not impulsive; it was planned sedition. Korach's rebellion was a well-thought out conspiracy whose goal was to destroy Torah leadership. It was founded in pure envy. Korach's insatiable thirst for power was not consistent with Hashem's selection of Moshe and Aharon as Klal Yisrael's preeminent leadership. He was a smart man whose pursuit of glory led to demagoguery and apostasy. He was a smart man who acted like an utter fool.

Korach took great pains to prepare an agenda to which Klal Yisrael's intelligentsia would relate. He did not reach out to the common man; rather, he sought the intellectual, the aristocrat - others like himself, who had a difficult time being number two. He cleverly presented the type of arguments in which these individuals delighted. He sought to undermine Moshe's authority by manipulating those who themselves had significant roles. "When one has a hundred (dollars), he seeks two hundred." Korach's assembly were people who were "up there." Once they had taken an authoritative position, they wanted more.

Korach's rebellion was different. One can deal with impulse based upon fear. Planned subversion with an intrinsic desire to destroy authority must be crushed in the manner with which Hashem dealt with Korach. Regrettably, through this very day we are plagued by individuals like Korach, manifesting his style of seditious undermining of Torah leadership.

*Korach took (separated himself). (16:1)*

Korach had it all: wisdom, family background and wealth. Unfortunately, he threw it away. In the end, nothing helped him, neither his vast riches nor his illustrious lineage. His wisdom seemed to

backfire on him, since he did not act wisely. What happened? Chazal teach us in Meseches Avos, 4:1: "Ben Zoma says, 'Who is wise? He who learns from every person... Who is strong? He who subdues his personal inclination... Who is rich? He who is happy with his lot... Who is honored? He who honors others.'" Horav Yaakov Kaminetzky, zl, says that the source for this Mishnah is two pesukim in Yirmiyah 9:22, 23: "Let not the wise man glorify himself with his wisdom, and let not the strong man glorify himself with his strength; let not the rich man glorify himself in his wealth. For only with this may one glorify himself: contemplating and knowing Me, for I am Hashem Who does kindness, justice and righteousness..."

It is clear from these pesukim that wisdom, strength and riches are not reasons for one to glorify himself. This, however, is not consistent with Chazal's statement in the Talmud Nedarim 38a which states that Hashem rests His Shechinah only on one who is strong, wise, wealthy and humble. This is derived from Moshe who was extremely wealthy. When this question was asked of Ben Zoma, he offered a new perspective on the definition of the ashir, rich man, gibor, strong man, etc. The pasuk is merely teaching us that the wise man should not allow his wisdom to go to his "head," acting as if the wisdom was really his own. The rich man should, likewise, not get carried away with his wealth. They must realize that whatever they have is a gift from Hashem. When a person recognizes the source of his talents and gifts, they become something of value. Without this awareness, they are nothing.

Rav Yaakov views the Korach mutiny as paradigmatic of this rule. Korach was certainly a wise man. Otherwise, he would never have considered himself worthy of the Kehunah Gedolah, High Priesthood. In fact, not only did he consider himself worthy, he even considered himself to be more suitable than Aharon. What motivated him to think that he was so smart? His incredible wealth went to his head. He was so incredibly wealthy that he thought he was capable of anything.

Regrettably, he was not aware of Ben Zoma's teaching: "Who is wise? He who learns from every person." A wise man loves to learn. He never wastes an opportunity to learn something new, to ratify and elucidate something which he already knows. He does not care about the source of wisdom - as long as it is "kosher," it may be derived from a young child or a wisened, old sage. As long as an individual knows more than he does in a specific area, he can be his mentor. If it is emes, he wants to absorb it in his being. Korach's "wealth" and "wisdom" were the source of his downfall. He thought he was smarter than everyone else. He certainly did not act in this manner.

*Korach took (separated himself). (16:1)*

Chazal offer Korach's insurrection as the example of a machlokes she'lo l'shem Shomayim, dispute not for the sake of Heaven. They say in Pirkei Avos 5:20, "Any dispute that is for the sake of Heaven will have a constructive outcome; one that is not for the sake of Heaven, however, will not have a constructive outcome. What sort of dispute was for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shamai. And which was not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his entire assembly." We wonder why the Tanna cites the episode of Korach as the antithesis of the dispute between Hillel and Shamai, when we would understand on our own that any controversy which does not follow the criteria established by Hillel and Shamai is a dispute not for the sake of Heaven. Obviously, the Tanna chooses to emphasize the machlokes of Korach for a reason.

We submit that the Tanna is teaching us that there is no gray area in the realm of controversy: it is either l'shem Shomayim, or it is Korach. There is no middle road. Only one form of dispute is

appropriate: that of Hillel and Shamai. Anything else falls under the purview of Korach and his assembly. I was fortunate to discover support for this idea from a teshuvah, halachic response, of the Teshuvah Me'Ahavah. He writes the following: "I have made for myself a stringent rule never to render a halachic reply in a community where there is already a halachic authority, unless the rabbi himself - in his humility and virtue - seeks to avail himself of the word of Hashem as halachah. So, how can I break my own fence?" "Moreover, I, in my sins, fail to see a controversy that is wholly for the sake of Heaven.

"I am in the habit of repeating Chazal's dictum, What controversy is for the sake of Heaven? The controversy of Hillel and Shamai. And what is not for the sake of Heaven? The controversy of Korach and his entire assembly.

"Which controversy is totally for the sake of Heaven, without any ulterior motive whatsoever? Only that of Hillel and Shamai, for all their thoughts and intentions had one focus: the glory of Heaven. They were pure and straightforward in their hearts. And what was not for the sake of Heaven? This means that which did not have any thought for the sake of Heaven? That of Korach. Aside from these two examples, all other controversies are a mixture of both; none are really pure.

"All controversies have a mixture of impurities, vested interests, tainted motives, self-centered agendas and desires, and inappropriate ideas that undermine whatever benefit one has to gain. While there are some disputes founded in self-interest, they still maintain some grain of good, they are equally abhorred by Hashem. If a sanctuary of Hashem is to be built through controversy, better it not be built at all."

*For the entire assembly - all of them - is holy, and Hashem is among them. (16:3)*

Korach orchestrated the first "movement" to attempt to revise the Torah of our People. Throughout history, he has had his "dedicated" followers who have sought to undermine and abrogate Torah Hashem. They have only succeeded in producing a sterile version of Judaism whose followers pay lip-service to the term "Jew" and whose future as faithful, committed Jews is bleak. These people have the audacity -- and perhaps even foolishness -- to deny Revelation, the reality that Hashem gave the Torah to our ancestors. Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, teaches us that Korach, the father of controversy to undermine Torah values and beliefs, did not deny that Hashem gave the Torah. After all, how could he? Together with his "distinguished" cohorts, he stood at Har Sinai and received the Torah - together with all of Klal Yisrael. No, Korach had other intentions. Korach attempted to undermine Moshe Rabbeinu's authority. He posited that since they had all been together at the giving of the Torah, and had all heard Hashem speak at Har Sinai, each individual Jew should be free to interpret the Torah himself. They were all equally holy. Why divide them into different classes? Korach's view that each individual has the ability and the right to determine how and when the Torah should apply to him has become the precedent by which many of history's Korachs have attempted to usurp the authority of the Torah.

This is a serious error. Torah is complex and intricate. To the unschooled, it can be perplexing. It is for this reason that those who are not fully engrossed in its teachings can easily distort it. Furthermore, the nature of Torah is different than that of any other body of knowledge. It has kedushah, sanctity, because its author is Hashem. Consequently, the individual who interprets the Torah's message

must himself be of a holy and pure nature. A genius may be able to interpret a difficult scientific problem due to his extraordinary acumen. Torah is not responsive to acumen. If the one who interprets the Torah is not "spiritually correct," his elucidation will be similarly inaccurate. We must therefore, rely on the spiritual leadership of each generation to explain properly and to apply the Torah's message to each era.

*For it is a wage for you in exchange for your service. (18:31)*

The toil that one expends in pursuit of his goal determines the reward. This is especially true of spiritual pursuits. The reward is commensurate with the toil. Otzar Meshalim cites an insightful analogy that underscores this idea. A king - who was in the process of redecorating his palace, decided that he wanted the vestibule that led into his palace to be most beautiful and impressive. He chose four of the greatest artists in the land, commissioning each one to draw a beautiful mural which would be placed on each of the four walls of the room. He figured that, in this manner, the room's beauty would be unparalleled. The king instructed the artists to exert their full effort to enhance the beauty of his palace. Their reward would, likewise, be impressive.

Three of the artists immediately set to work. They used their imaginations and talents to produce their greatest portraits. The fourth artist was lazy. He had an idea that would not only help him circumvent the work; it would also produce the most beautiful portrait. In fact, he thought that his idea was so novel that the king would reward him handsomely for his brilliance.

He waited until each of the three artists hung his painting on the wall. Then, he brought in his contribution for the fourth wall: a mirror. He had purchased a large mirror that covered the entire wall. The mirror captured the breathtaking view of the other three paintings, melding them all into one beautiful portrait.

Everything was set for the king to enter and view the exceptional work of the artists. He entered the room and slowly lifted the drape that covered each portrait. Greatly impressed, the king declared that the next day he would return to reward each artist accordingly.

The king returned the next day and gave each artist a sealed envelope with his compensation inside. Each one took his envelope and eagerly opened it. The first three each found an incredible amount of money in his envelope. They all looked curiously at the fourth artist to see what he had received for his "idea." The fourth artist opened his envelope and found a note from the king: "I concede to your idea of hanging a mirror, so that I could see a conglomerate of the portraits painted by the other artists. Since your mirror works so well, you probably also saw how I rewarded each one of your colleagues. Hence, the image will be restitution for your efforts. "

The lesson is simple, but compelling. Without effort, there is no reward. One does not achieve a high spiritual plateau without expending effort. Similarly, one does not obtain his spiritual reward unless he has worked for it. Some receive the ultimate reward, while others just catch a fleeting glimpse, a mirror-image of the transaction.

*Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi separated himself. (16:1)*

Rashi observes that in detailing Korach's lineage the Torah does not mention Yaakov Avinu. It stops at Levi. He explains that Yaakov implored for mercy that the Torah not mention his name in regard to the dispute. Yaakov sought to distance himself as far as possible from any vestige of controversy. We must endeavor to understand this move. It is common knowledge that Levi is Yaakov's son. Therefore, when the Torah mentions Levi, it is clearly referring to Yaakov by extension. What did Yaakov accomplish by excluding specific mention of his name?

Horav Zev Weinberger, Shlita, explains that Yaakov's life had been marked by controversy. From birth, he was battling Eisav. The conflict with Lavan, followed by the anguish over his daughter, was only a continuation of a life of crusading against evil, confronting it head-on. Yaakov feared that people might err and think that Korach had assumed the mantle of crusader against evil, that he was following in the footsteps of his distinguished ancestor. Yaakov sought to dispel this notion. Korach did not seek to uproot evil, to battle l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, to elevate Hashem's Name. No! Korach was arrogant and insecure. He sought to undermine Moshe's leadership. He was not a crusader; he was not a warrior for the sake of Heaven. Korach was a baal-machlokes, a man who pursued dispute as a means of subverting Klal Yisrael's leadership. He was a demagogue who sought to destroy the inherent good that Moshe Rabbeinu infused in the people so that he could assume control. Yaakov could not relate to this type of machlokes. Thus, we can understand why he did not want to be included in Korach's lineage.

*Korach, the son of Yitzchar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi separated himself. (16:1)*

So begins one of the most tragic sagas in Jewish history, one that regrettably still plagues us to this very day. Machlokes, strife, controversy, dispute, political in-fighting: these are all words that describe the state of affairs which Korach and his followers have catalyzed in every generation. We can never free ourselves of dispute. At times, it is l'shem Shomayim, sincere, for the sake of Heaven: to promote observance, to stamp out religious incursion, to challenge those who would undermine and disgrace Torah and its disseminators. For the most part, however, it is petty, self-serving controversy. It is usually trivial, beginning with a desire for recognition and becoming an all-out fight for power. There are those who, as a result of their vested interests, expound Torah law in a self-serving manner, distorting its meaning and undermining its message, so that they can present themselves and their ignoble message in a positive light. Korach did just that.

Rashi cites Chazal, who explain Korach's critique of Moshe Rabbeinu. Korach claimed religious conviction; he questioned the law. He and his misguided followers came before Moshe dressed in cloaks made entirely of techeiles, a form of purple-dyed wool. According to the Torah, one of the strands of the tzitzis must be colored this way. They asked Moshe, "does a tallis that is kulo techeiles, entirely made of techeiles, require tzitzis or not?" Moshe responded in the affirmative, indicating that it would require tzitzis. They began to laugh, to scoff at him, "Is this possible? If a cloak is made of a different type of cloth, one thread of techeiles exempts it. Should not a cloak which is entirely of techeiles be exempted from this requirement?" This is how they began, using Torah to support their miscreancy. What was Korach's error? After all, he was no fool. Certainly, he was enough of a scholar to know that a tallis of techeiles would need tzitzis.

In the Be'er Moshe, the Ozrover Rebbe, zl, explains that Korach's mistake lay in his thinking

that the tallis was exempted by virtue of being techeiles in color. He did not penetrate the underlying motif of this mitzvah. Hashem is not concerned with colors; He wants us to fulfill mitzvos which carry out His divine decree. Thus, a tallis of techeiles still needs tzitzis, because Hashem's command is that a four-cornered garment have tzitzis at its fringe, regardless of its color.

Korach questioned whether a house filled with seforim, religious books, needs a mezuzah? After all, the Hebrew parshios, or words which are contained within the mezuzah, are certainly written in the seforim throughout the house. Once again, Korach missed the point. The Torah enjoins us to have a mezuzah on the doorpost of our house to remind us to Whom the house really belongs. Hashem is the real owner of this home; He protects it and its inhabitants. The mezuzah is a constant reminder of this fact.

Consequently, the contents of the house are irrelevant to the requirement that a mezuzah be on the doorpost. Korach looked at the superficial and saw a color, a mezuzah. He did not use his G-d-given brain to delve into the rationale, to look beyond the surface. That is the precise problem that plagues so many who have alienated themselves from the Torah.

*Moshe heard and fell on his face. (16:4)*

What did Moshe hear that agitated him so? In the Talmud Sanhadrin 110a, Chazal say that he heard that rumors were being spread about him. They suspected him of infidelity, of having relations with an eishas ish, a married woman. Indeed, as Chazal continue, it was not just a married woman, it was many married women. Every man suspected his wife of being with Moshe. We must attempt to grasp this utter foolishness. How could intelligent human beings conjure up such an absurd claim against an individual whose devotion to them - whose piety, virtue and spiritual status are beyond characterization - with anything less than superlatives.

Horav Yechiel zl, m'Ozrov cites the Sabba Kadisha zl, m'Shpol'e who derives a profound remez, allusion, from the last of the Aseres Ha'dibros, Ten Commandments. We are admonished, "Lo sachmod eishas reiacha" "You shall not covet your fellow's wife." Eishas means "the wife of." It also means "the fire of," since eish means fire. The Sabba interpreted this pasuk as an enjoinder against being envious of and coveting the eish, fire and spiritual passion, that our friend is able to expend in his service to the Almighty. What our friend has merited to be granted from Heaven is the result of his spiritual ascension. When we apply ourselves as well, when we devote ourselves to our spiritual quest with as much devotion as our friend, we will also be the recipient of the fiery passion that is his hallmark.

This explains the underlying meaning of "they suspected Moshe of being with an eishas ish." Korach was under the erroneous impression that Moshe's spiritual distinction was due to his role as leader of Klal Yisrael. To this end, he claimed that the source of the "eish" within Moshe was the people. As leader, he was "living off" the people's inherent kedushah. His mistake was, as the pasuk previously states: (12:3), "The man Moshe was exceedingly humble." Moshe's distinction was his own. He took nothing from others. He was "the man," Moshe. He was an ish, man, in his own right.

This idea is to be understood from Moshe's response to Korach (16:7): "Then the man whom Hashem will choose, he is the holy one." True distinction is to be found by he who is chosen by Hashem as a result of his own inherent character and quality - not in the merit derived from others. Aharon was the man selected by Hashem to be the Kohen Gadol. Moshe was the man chosen to be the quintessential leader of Klal Yisrael. Korach was not selected. This misunderstanding was at the root of

his error.

*Is it not enough that you have brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the wilderness. (16:13)*

Korach was not a fool. Yet, everything that he asserted could not be the words of a smart man. To attempt to usurp Klal Yisrael's leadership - is audacious and foolish. To malign Moshe and Aharon - constitutes brazen disrespect. To refer to a land that was the source of so much suffering, persecution and death as a land flowing with milk and honey - is downright insane! Korach was neither foolish nor insane. He was mistaken. He misled himself. Where did he go wrong? What led him to act in a way so inconsistent with his own character? Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl, explains that the stimulus for his behavior was negios, personal, vested interests. When someone is subject to negios, he neither perceives accurately nor acts normally. Indeed, as Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, observes, Korach was an enigma, his behavior paradoxical. On the one hand, he sought to ascend to a loftier spiritual plateau, to become closer to Hashem. On the other hand, he did not care how he achieved his goal. He did not care whom he stepped on, whom he destroyed - even himself - so great was his obsession to perform a greater spiritual service for the Almighty.

Horav Dessler cites a powerful, penetrating analogy which is related by Rav Hai Gaon that clearly demonstrates this idea. It once happened that a lion who was hunting for food came upon a fox. As the lion was about to eat the fox for dinner, the fox spoke up, "Why would you want to eat me? I am nothing more than skin and bones. Let me show you a hefty man whose flesh is more than sufficient to provide a satisfying meal for you." The lion listened and proceeded to follow the fox to a place where there was a man sitting in a clearing, right next to a hole in the ground, which was covered with branches and leaves. This trap was there to protect the man from any harmful animals that might strike him - like the lion. When the lion saw the man, he turned to the fox and said, "I am afraid to attack the man because of his ability to pray. His prayers will prevent my successful attack and will probably harm me." "Do not worry," said the fox. "His prayers will have no immediate effect on you. They will, however, affect your descendants two generations in the future."

The lion listened to the fox and made a running leap for the unsuspecting man sitting peacefully in front of him. As expected, the lion fell into the trap and was severely injured. He looked at the fox and exclaimed, "You told me that the man's prayers would have no effect on me. They would only affect my grandchildren, but look what happened. Apparently, you were wrong."

The fox, using his natural guile, responded, "It appears to me, my dear lion, that you are being punished for your grandfather's sin. You forget that you are someone's grandson." The lion looked at the fox with questioning eyes and exclaimed, "Why should I be held responsible for the sins of my ancestors?" The fox turned to the lion and with a dead-pan look said to him, "Why did you not care about your descendants?"

This narrative's message is clear and simple: when the lion was not personally involved, when he had no negios, he did not care if others would pay for his sins. Now that he is the one that is paying, the entire perspective is altered.

Korach was a wise, erudite man until it affected him personally. He then became a fool. When someone wears blue glasses, everything he sees is blue. The spectacles of vested interests distort a person's vision - regardless of the individual's stature. A truly great person is able to transcend his

personal negios in order to avoid becoming a victim of the resulting myopia.

Horav A. A. Mishkovsky, zl, Rosh HaYeshiva of Knesses Chizkiyahu, was such a unique individual. He distinguished himself in his ability to see beyond himself and maintain the lucidity needed to advise others, even if the decision would have an adverse effect upon him personally. There was once a student in the yeshivah whom the administration had decided was not living up to the standard of the institution. They decided that it would be best to ask him to leave. They elected to allow him to complete the zman, term, before notifying him of their decision. Meanwhile, unknowingly, this student made an appointment with the Rosh HaYeshivah to determine if it was best for him to remain in the yeshivah, suggesting that perhaps it would be better for him to pursue other areas of endeavor. The Rosh HaYeshivah, being a man of uncompromising integrity, told him that it was best for him to remain within the yeshivah environment.

When his colleagues in the administration heard of this incident, they were taken aback. "Why didn't you tell him to leave? It would have saved us a big headache if he had left on his own," they asked him. "He asked me what was best for him - not what was best for the yeshivah," said Horav Mishkovsky, "and I gave him the correct advice." This is an example of why he was a gadol - a Torah giant. It is the small people who are restrained as a result of their vested interests. Greatness is determined by one's ability to rise over one's pettiness.

*It is an eternal covenant of salt before Hashem. (18:19)*

Rashi explains that Hashem entered into a covenant with Aharon HaKohen. He called it by the name of something which is healthy - meaning it does not spoil - and which makes others healthy - meaning it preserves other things from spoiling. Salt's unique properties; its own "health," and ability to preserve the "health" of others make it the symbol of the covenant.

It is a well-known and accepted fact that the study of Torah has a lasting effect on a person. The question that, regrettably, has been the source of contention is: does the study of Torah influence others in its proximity? Does a yeshivah or kollel in a community raise the spiritual and moral consciousness of that community? Or, is the effect exclusively centered upon the lomed, learner, himself? Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkovski, Shlita, relates the following incident that occurred between Horav Arye Leib Shteinman, Shlita, and a wealthy philanthropist that sheds light on the above question.

The philanthropist asked Horav Shteinman the following shailah, halachic query: "For many years, I have been supporting a number of yeshivos in America, yeshivos in which the students are engrossed in all-day Torah study in the tradition of old. Recently, I have been approached by the leadership of a number of reputable kiruv, outreach, yeshivos to lend my financial support to their institutions. Shall I diminish my annual contributions to the "mainstream" yeshivos, so that I can support the kiruv yeshivos or not? After all, if I decide to diminish my yearly contribution to the regular yeshivos, it will not have an effect on their learning. Their spiritual development will continue unabated. If anything, their physical state of affairs might change, but their learning will not change. If I contribute to the kiruv yeshivos, however, I might reach those who would otherwise not be reached. I will be saving young Jewish men from spiritual extinction. What should I do?"

Horav Shteinman responded with the following powerful statement: "Do you think that the unparalleled surge of young people returning to the fold is a gift from Heaven? No! It is because there are young men studying unpretentiously in yeshivos throughout the world. The merit of their Torah

study has brought about a resurgence of desire for spiritual development among our people. If you decrease your contribution to the yeshivos, you will cause a reduction in the number of baalei teshuvah, those who are returning to Torah Judaism."

We may add that Horav Shteinman was not addressing someone who was distant from Torah, but one who was a ben Torah himself. It is regrettable that we do not appreciate the value and far-reaching effect of our learning. Perhaps, if we did, our diligence in Torah study would increase, and so would our pride in this endeavor.

*Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehas, the son of Levi, separated himself. (16:1)*

The Torah deliberately traces Korach's lineage back to Levi, stopping there. Why is Yaakov Avinu not included in Korach's pedigree? Rashi explains that when Yaakov was reproving his two sons, Shimon and Levi, for their deplorable actions regarding the people of Shechem, he said, "Bi'kehalam al teichad kevodi," "In their conspiracy may my soul not enter." Yaakov Avinu did not want his name connected to the evil that their descendants would eventually generate. Rashi adds, however, that when the Torah mentions in Divrei Hayamim that a descendant of Korach was among the Leviim who sang in the Bais Hamikdash, it does trace his lineage to Yaakov. If, indeed, it had been imperative that Yaakov's name not be associated with Korach, why is his name recorded in reference to the singing in the Bais Hamikdash?

Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, explains that Yaakov implored Hashem that he not be the source of Korach's negative character traits. If it had to be so - his name should at least not be included in Korach's lineage. It should be understood that whatever middah, character trait, within Korach had motivated this rebellion was not an attribute that he had inherited from Yaakov. Indeed, Yaakov had criticized Levi for his involvement in the destruction of Shechem, because he saw in him various negative character traits that constituted the foundation of this deed. Korach's conspiracy was a result of these negative traits. Thus, the Torah traces Korach's lineage to Levi. Korach's descendants inherited the spiritual level to sing shirah in the Bais Hamikdash from Yaakov. Regrettably, Korach's negative characteristics overshadowed his positive ones.

Horav Gedalyah Shorr, zl, takes an alternative approach towards explaining this pasuk: Yaakov Avinu is synonymous with another very unique quality. The Torah in Devarim 34:4 tells us, "The Torah that Moshe commanded us is the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov." The ability to create a kehilla, congregation/community, was an inherent skill that Yaakov developed. He prayed that his name not be included in "their kahal." Korach's congregation was not one of unity. He did not inherit this type of organization from Yaakov. The "Yaakov" type of achdus, unity, centers around the middah of emes. It is founded on truth and is maintained only through truth. Korach's type of achdus represents the antithesis of unity, since it is based upon pirud, disunity. His goal was not the truth; he sought to destroy, not to create. This is not the type of kehillah that is worthy of Yaakov's imprimatur.

*They gathered together against Moshe and against Aharon and said to them, "It is too much for you! For the entire assembly-all of them are holy." (16:3)*

The Torah recounts a number of controversies that occurred during Klal Yisrael's forty year

sojourn in the desert. They complained and complained. They complained about water and about meat. There were spies who slandered Eretz Yisrael. Yet, after all is said and done, the one dispute that has been recorded in history as the paradigm of machlokes, controversy, is the machlokes of Korach. Why? At least Korach's dispute had a spiritual dimension to it. They questioned the Kehunah. They sought to serve in the Bais Hamikdash and offer korbanos. They even made use of lomdus, logic, using a Tallis made completely of techeilas or a house filled with seforim, to prove their point. A holy congregation does not need spiritual leadership. They were wrong, but should we view this as the nadir of controversy? Is this behavior worse than complaining about a "lack of beef" or a shortage of drinking water?

Chazal view things from a different orientation, a clearer perspective than we do. They say that Korach's l'shaim Shomayim, his Heavenly intentions, were all a ruse, a total sham. His complaints were even more materialistic than asking for meat or water. They made it appear like they sought frumkeit, religiosity, but they only wanted kavod, honor. They covered up their basic desires with frumkeit. This is the work of the yetzer hora, evil inclination. He dresses everything in Heavenly attire. He goes so far that at times the person himself does not realize what he is doing. Korach realized. He knew exactly what he wanted. He was a demagogue who sought to usurp the spiritual leadership of Klal Yisrael from Moshe. He used frumkeit as a smoke screen to conceal his true malevolent intentions. The Torah reveals his controversy for what it was - the worst and lowest form of machlokes in the Torah.

What made Korach go wrong? How did such a brilliant, successful individual destroy everything, his reputation, family and life? Chazal say "eino hitaaso," "his eyes mislead him." He saw that Shmuel Hanavi, who was equal to Moshe and Aharon, would descend from him. How could he have been wrong and still be the progenitor of such a distinguished descendant? He did not realize that his sons would repent, and Shmuel would descend from them. Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, gives deeper insight into Korach's mistake. Korach's primary contention was, "It is too much for you! - For the entire assembly - All of them are holy." In other words, there is no need for leadership - We are all leaders! The entire system of a Kohen Gadol and a Melech is superfluous when each one of us is holy and could himself be that leader. Shmuel Hanavi responded similarly when the people came to him requesting a king. "Why would you need a human king when you have Hashem, the king of kings?" Can we fault Korach for his words? After all, did not his illustrious descendant make the same statement: "Klal Yisrael does not need leadership"?

There is, however, a difference. During Shmuel's tenure, the people wanted a king for all of the wrong reasons. They desired to live like the surrounding nations. Their goal in seeking a king was primarily to restrict Hashem's reign over them. Shmuel reprimanded them. Why seek a mortal when you have Hashem? Korach's intention was to denigrate Moshe and Aharon in order to obtain the leadership for himself. His goal was personal gratification. Korach's argument did not contain one iota of selflessness for the sake of Heaven. He manipulated the people; he twisted words. He presented himself like his descendant, Shmuel. He thought he could fool the world. He was tragically wrong.

*Fire emerged from Hashem and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who had offered incense...  
The fire pans of those who sinned against their souls - make them into beaten plates, a cover for the  
Altar. (16:35, 17:3)*

As part of Korach's rebellion, the two hundred and fifty men who were part of Korach's group were to offer incense in fire pans. They received their due punishment in that they were being consumed by a fire from Hashem. Their fire pans, instead of being discarded, were melted and shaped

into a covering for the Mizbayach. Until now the Altar had been a hollow frame which was filled with dirt every time Klal Yisrael camped. Now, the outside surface was to be covered with a thin mass plating composed of the sinner's fire pans. This is enigmatic! Is it right to take fire pans that were originally used for sin and transform them into a substance for a mitzvah? Moreover, obviously up until this point in time it was fine to offer incense upon a mizbayach filled with dirt. Why should the Mizbayach now require brass plating?

The Shem Mishmuel explains the profound nature of the actual test of offering incense in brass fire pans, as well as the reason it was later melted down to be used as a covering for the Altar. We find that gold was the designated metal to be used for offering incense. The Mizbayach upon which the incense was offered was made of gold. On Yom Kippur, when the Kohen Gadol entered the Kodosh Hakedoshim, Holy of Holies, he came bearing a pan of gold. The glowing coals, which were used to burn the daily incense, were brought to the Mizbayach in a gold pan.

Three metals were used in the construction of the Mishkan: gold, symbolizing fear; silver, denoting love; and brass, which alludes to strength of character. In a number of places in Tanach, we find the connection between strength and power as symbolized by brass. In this case, brass is used to signify the ability to remain firm and resolute in the face of challenge, strong and unyielding in one's conviction, and fidelity to Hashem. This strength can manifest itself in a positive manner, as well as in a negative sense. One individual may be stubborn and resolute, while another may be brazen and insolent. This characteristic may very well be the most powerful of all traits, because of its ability to swing from one extreme end of the pendulum to the other.

The Midrash tells us that gold represents Avraham, silver represents Yitzchak and brass represents Yaakov. Each of our Avos, Patriarchs, possessed unique qualities and virtues to which the various metals allude. For our purposes, we will focus on brass. This metal symbolizes a character trait - which, when thoughtfully utilized - is most credible, manifesting itself as determination in confrontation with challenge and adversity. If this metal is left uncontrolled it becomes inflexible, obdurate and brazen. Yaakov Avinu was the essence of truth. He symbolized the positive aspect of brass, maintaining his conviction in the face of Eisav and Lavan's challenge. He was not afraid that Eisav would inflict bodily damage on him, nor did he fear Lavan's challenge to his spiritual status. He remained resolute and strong as brass. Korach, his grandson, inherited this trait. Regrettably, he utilized its negative aspect. He demanded kavod, honor. He sought a position in Klal Yisrael's hierarchy. He was determined to get more for himself; nothing was going to stand in his way. Indeed, Korach epitomized the "brazenness" of brass. Hence, it was necessary to determine which way Korach's followers were leaning. Were they brazen or were they resolute?

To pretend that there was no realm of good in Korach's rebellion would be wrong. Korach, regrettably, took the "brass" aspects of resoluteness and conviction, and manipulated them into brazenness and arrogance. The ability to stand up for one's principles was distorted by self-seeking hautiness. Korach's followers were excessive in their resolution; they were "carried away" with conviction. They began to believe in themselves, transforming their ideals into full-fledged rebellion.

Thus, we may justify using the brass fire pans as a surface for the Mizbayach. The pans symbolize the basic good intentions of Korach's followers. After the men died, the fire that was upon the pans was "lifted up" and thrown away. The fire symbolized the excess - the frenzy of arrogance that so often is the result of misplaced good intentions. This left the empty fire pans, representing the good aspect of their character. In Jewish theology, mitzvos and sins do not cancel out one another. One is compensated for each mitzvah and sin. Hence, while the men were punished for their arrogance, they

still deserved a reward for their original good intentions. The good element, the original brass, was, therefore, used as a covering for the Mizbayach.

Originally, offerings were brought directly upon the earth of the Mizbayach. Earth is synonymous with Avraham Avinu, whose humility was paradigmatic of "dust and ashes." He symbolized remorse and contrition, the broken spirit and crushed heart one needs, the ingredients necessary for an effective korban. While this emotion prevailed in early times, the people later experienced a resurgence of the strength of character as exemplified by Yaakov Avinu. This personality change in people made it appropriate for korbanos to be offered on brass, which symbolized this strength of character. After Korach's rebellion, the brass fire pans were used as an everlasting memorial to a character trait that is inherently good.

*To the Leviim shall you speak... When you accept from the Bnei Yisrael the tithe... you shall raise from it a gift... your gift shall be reckoned for you like grain from the threshing floor... (18:26,27)*

The Levi who receives his portion of Maaser from the Yisrael must, in turn, give Terumah to the Kohen. The Torah tells us that this Terumas Maaser is considered the same as Terumah Gedolah, which is offered by the Yisrael. Imrei Yosef cites the Zidetchoiver Rebbe, zl, who claims that this pasuk alludes to an ethical lesson for he who has been raised above his peers to be selected for spiritual leadership. One might think that it is his virtue and scholarship, his good deeds and meticulous mitzvah observance, that effected this "promotion". The Torah tells him not to permit this change in position to make him arrogant. He is not better than the others; he is not more virtuous, nor does he possess greater scholarship ability. He was chosen for another reason, unknown to him or anyone else. Hashem has determined that he should ascend to leadership. It is similar to the halachah we find concerning the shiur, measure/amount of Terumah, one is required to contribute. Chazal say "chitah achas poteres es hakri," one stalk of what exempts the entire pile of grain. In other words, there is no set measurement. A person can conceivably fulfill his obligation by giving only one kernel of grain!

Veritably, all stalks of grain were planted and grew equally. There is no advantage of one over the other. Hashem commanded that the people give Terumah, and since "this" kernel of grain is elevated to be that Terumah, it becomes holy and raised up above the rest. Suddenly, the kernels of grain are no longer equal. Does this kernel of Terumah have something about which to be arrogant? Is it any different than the rest of the grain? No - it just happens to be that it was selected for Terumah. Had the goral, lot, fallen on another kernel, then it would have been used as Terumah. It is not because one is better than the other; it is just that one happened to be chosen.

A parallel perspective applies to one who has been selected for leadership. He should not view himself as better, just as the grain which was chosen. It could have been someone else. It just happened to be him. In a homiletic rendering of the pasuk, he says, "Your gift shall be reckoned for you." That which Hashem has raised you above your peers should be considered "like the grain from the threshing floor;" you are only like the one kernel of grain whose lot it was to be selected for Terumah. You should not view yourself as being better than the others; just, perhaps, a little luckier.