

## Korach

The old neighborhood...you pass it sometimes on your way downtown. For the most part there are sweet memories. Where you live now may not have the same "*Taam*" as the old place. Sometimes it is too painful to dwell on why the neighborhood deteriorated and everyone left. Often it was simply a matter of physical safety. But then there were other reasons, such as internal conflict in a Shul. Much to the Rabbi's dismay, occasionally oldtime members with big egos would refuse to let the younger generation become active in key positions in the Shul, resulting in an exodus of the youth to other areas. The remaining older generation gradually faded away and there was nobody left. Then there were the Shuls which were "fortunate" enough to have as congregants many "experts" who felt they knew more than the Rabbi. No Rabbi wanted to work in these Shuls, and eventually they, too, deteriorated. *Machlokes*—arguments—in a shul can seem to be a minor thing, but *machlokes* and dissention have destroyed neighborhoods.

Moshe Rabenu had one of the most difficult leadership responsibilities in the history of mankind. He was sent to Egypt to extract a nation from an unwilling Pharaoh. Eighty percent of the nation itself refused to leave, and many of those who did go out, as great as they were, still had to have their fears calmed as they faced the vast wasteland of the Sinai Desert.

The challenge of Korach and his cohorts gives us insight into the leadership philosophy of Moshe Rabenu. Korach accused Moshe of arrogance and illegal use of power—of seeking too much for those who found favor in his eyes. Even a child who has barely studied Chumash will realize that these accusations made by Korach were completely out of line with the character of Moshe. This was the Moshe who didn't want the leadership position in the first place and who pleaded with the Almighty

to send someone else in his place. This was the leader Moshe who humbly accepted the advice of his father-in-law concerning the administrative set-up of the Judicial system. This was the Moshe who, when asked to silence Eldad and Maydad, was only too happy to say, "Oh, that the Almighty would make the entire nation prophets." And this was the Moshe whom the Torah described as *Anav Mikol Odom*—"the humblest of men."

Unquestionably, then, Korach's portrait of Moshe was completely wrong. The question remains, however, why didn't Moshe give some sort of position to Korach just to appease him? The answer to this is that Moshe was a man of action and he liked people who were the same way. Yisro, his father-in-law, was a person of accomplishment, and Moshe respected his opinion and was willing to change his judicial set-up on Yisro's advice. Eldad and Maydad were prophets whose goal was to help the people, and far from seeing this as a challenge to his authority, Moshe, on the contrary, encouraged people who were ready to go out to do things for the good of *Am Yisroel*. Korach, however, was merely a complainer—someone who only looked out for his own good.<sup>1</sup> This kind of person Moshe refused to put at the helm of leadership of the Jewish people. A Synagogue is a *Mikdash Me'at*—somewhat of a Holy Temple. It is a microcosm of the Jewish People and its leadership. The Rabbi has to exemplify the qualities of Moshe—to take in the young Eldads and Maydads who want to do good for the Shul. Similarly, the "Korachs" in the Shul who feel that they know more than the Rabbi are only going to break down the structure of the House of Worship. The successful Shul is the one that has laymen with the knowledge and tact of a Yisro, and a Rabbi with some of the wisdom and insight of a Moshe. The two together form true Jewish leadership. The Rabbi's learning and wisdom is used as a conduit between Torah ideals and the officers of the Shul. Equipped with these ideals, the laymen can turn them into practice in the daily functions of the Synagogue.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Avoth 5:17