

# THE FIRST THOUGHT

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

*And Korach took... (Bamidbar 16:2)*

We need not go further than the first words to figure out the tragic flaw that foiled Korach. He was a taker. If the Torah had not revealed this to us, we too might have been taken by his rhetoric, platitudes, and pithy aphorisms. He managed to sway hundreds of good people to his side but how could his misdeed go undetected by so many highly intelligent and even sensitive people?

A great Rebbe received a visit from a wealthy man who deposited with the Rebbe ten thousand rubles to be distributed for charity at the Rebbe's discretion. The Rebbe put the money in the top drawer of his desk for safe-keeping and the generous contributor left.

Immediately afterward entered a fellow in need of ten thousand rubles to assist in his daughter's marriage. The man was so desperate and deeply in pain but after a few moments of thought the Rebbe insisted he wait outside till a solution to his problem could be found. Outside the Rebbe's office the fellow carried on with open weeping and sobbing.

The Attendant of the Rebbe observed with piqued curiosity, aware that the wealthy devotee had just left the ten thousand rubles in the Rebbe's care. "Why was this fellow left out here to suffer?" He wondered. He could only watch, though, and trust the Rebbe had his reasons. Eventually the Rebbe's door opened and the fellow was relieved from his pain. The Rebbe called him in and bestowed the full amount of his request. The man was elated and left in a state of pure joy and filled with profound gratitude.

The Rebbe's attendant couldn't withhold his curiosity any longer. He needed to know what had just transpired. Why had the Rebbe left this fellow to languish unnecessarily? He had the money there all along. When confronted the Rebbe told him of his decision making process. He said that when the second man came in he began to consider what would be the most efficient way to apportion the funds he had just received. Perhaps it was a bigger mitzvah to give a smaller amount to many more people. That way more people would be helped and more acts of charity would be performed. Then he thought that if that was true, he should give one ruble to each of ten thousand people and the gift would see its broadest influence thereby.

The attendant listened with great interest to the Rebbe's reasoning and all the possibilities that his brilliant mind had entertained. Still, how the Rebbe had arrived at the final decision to give the one man the full sum was not clear. When questioned, the Rebbe made the following amazing

revelation. He said that when he had placed all the possible permutations in front of him, he was more confounded as to what to do.

Finally after the Rebbe had reviewed his entire internal dialogue the decision became clear. The first word that he had exclaimed when the needy man came in was the word, "Don't" he had said to himself, Don't give him all ten thousand rubles, rather give ten men one thousand rubles." The word, "don't," he realized, was a selfish and negative inclination, and only after one full hour of inner conversation and after having visited the first word in the transcript of his mind he had finally concluded to counter that selfish tendency.

The instinct to take, Rabbi Dessler explains, comes from the animalistic urge, while the superior tendency to give, share, empathize, to transcend, is a manifestation of the noble divine soul blown deep into the chest of every human being. There is constantly a struggle for domination and at any one moment a person is either a giver or a taker depending upon which of these two forces reigns supreme at that moment. One may be "giving" in deed but because of ulterior motives taking in actuality. Similarly someone may be "taking" in deed and truly giving. Everything may depend upon, if we can get to that hidden, internal point, the true motive implied in the first thought.

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