

HIS FINAL UNDERTAKING!

by Rabbi Label Lam

And Korach took... (Bamidbar 16:1)

Find the motive - and you've got the motive. (Groucho Marx - On crime detecting)

What had Korach done to deserve infamy? What was his tragic flaw? According to our sages he made many uplifting and true claims about the worthiness of the Jewish People. He stated that all Jews are holy since we had all heard The Almighty speak on Sinai. He only questioned the need for Moshe and Aaron to be the King and the Kohen? It sounds like a legit question. Why should he be swallowed alive into the earth for asking basic questions?

Apparently, his appeal was so attractive that he induced 250 heads of the Sanhedrin to join forces with him. This was no foolish bunch of thugs. The best and the brightest followed him to the grave. Where was he wrong and how did they fail to detect it?

A man enters a bakery hurriedly and asks the attendant how long it would take to make a brand new cake. He was told to return in one hour. An hour later he's back in the store and he looks disappointedly at the cake. "Maybe I didn't make myself clear. I would like the cake in the shape of the letter "K"!" "Come back in a half hour!" He's told! He promptly returns a half hour later and looks critically at the results. "I wanted it to be covered with bright pink icing and fancy flowers!" He is advised to wait a few more minutes. After a short while he is shown the finished product made according to his specs. Sensing his approval, the relieved attendant then asks as he does routinely, "Shall I put it in a box like this?" "No!" he replies, "I'll eat it here!"

Korach's tragic flaw is sadly reflected in this silly joke. Sure he spoke of lofty matters, and many good people were persuaded by his seductive rhetoric but fundamentally he was gravely mistaken. How so? The Torah doesn't delay a word in telling us where the fault line lies. "Vayikach Korach"- "And Korach took..." He was a taker. His motive in creating malcontent amongst the people was for his own hidden agenda. He wanted a title like "Kohen Gadol" for himself. All those convincing speeches he delivered with all their subtle profundity were ultimately self- serving. He wanted for himself a slice of the Kovod, the great glory. He baked that big fancy cake and it was for him to eat in the here and now! He was "taking" albeit under the pretense of a "fairness doctrine".

Rabbi Dessler posits the thesis that at any given moment a person is either a giver or a taker. One is either motivated by some transcendental tendency to care and share or he is animated by an animal urge that centers on the self. The outer actions may not clearly betray the underlying motive,

though. One may need a mind reader or a real prophet to truly tell even about himself.

One of the perks of being on the road a lot is that I get to see lots of different bumper stickers. The one I like the most and honk with approval at describes the essence of Torah Living: "Think global! Act local!" Seeing that we are each, in a nutshell, a microcosm of the universe, our moral imperative is to be an actor here and now for the sake of everywhere else. Korach was thinking local but acting globally! He was talking up a game of concern for the spiritual welfare of the entire nation but his interest in doing so was as local as local could ever be. He was effectively campaigning for his own Kovod!

Korach wasn't just a mover and a shaker. He was fundamentally a taker. When he was suddenly taken from the world he took many decent people down with him obviating the need for an undertaker. Tragically and whimsically this turned out to be with a capital "K" his final undertaking! Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.