



## Korach

### The Worst Argument in the Torah

Where in the Torah do we find an example of the worst possible argument? In Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, we're given the example of an argument in which Korach contended with the leaders of our people, Moshe and Aharon. But instead of debating the issue at hand, he strove to demonise his opponents.

The Mishnah cites this as a prime example of a *מחלוקת שלא לשם שמים*, an argument which is not for the sake of Heaven. The text says:

“קֹרַח וְכָל עֲדוּתוֹ”

“Korach and his followers,”

But surely the Mishnah should have said, “Korach and Moshe and Aharon”? The specific phrasing of “and his followers” is very important. Korach brought together a group with one thing in common: they disliked Moshe and Aharon. But within their own ranks, the group were adversaries.

This often happens in life, when people come together because they have a common enemy, but are not like-minded themselves. That is what happened with Korach and his followers. It was an argument for the worst possible reason.

The Mishnah gives an example of an alternative kind of argument: a *מחלוקת לשם שמים*, an argument for the sake of Heaven. The example of Hillel and Shammai.

Our sages teach us that Hillel and Shammai were fierce opponents with regard to halacha, but they always treated each other with respect. In fact, they always quoted the view of the other together with their own. Socially, they got on well, even marrying into each other's families. What mattered to them was only the issue at hand, as opposed to an attack on the people who opposed them.

Right now, within our challenged societies, we often see arguments which are not for the sake of Heaven. When there is a need for a robust debate – that is absolutely fine, as long as it is for the sake of Heaven. And that is why in our parsha, the Torah gives one of the 613 commandments:

“וְלֹא תִהְיֶה כְּקֹרַח וְכַעֲדוּתוֹ”

“We should never be like Korach and his followers.”

Shabbat shalom.