

## OZTORAH

### A SECOND KORACH?

40 years of leading the people through the wilderness brought Moshe endless aggravation and constant challenge. The most famous challenge was that of Korach.

There seems to have been another Korach-like episode if one follows the explanation of the Sages (Sanhedrin 82a etc.) for the events that led up to this week's portion.

Zimri, prince of the tribe of Shimon, confronted Moshe head on. Why, he demanded, was he, Zimri, forbidden to cohabit with the Midianite princess Kozbi when Moshe himself had a Midianite wife, Tzipora?

Like Korach, Zimri was a skilful demagogue whose rhetoric was just valid enough to secure the people's endorsement, whilst leaving out some of the true facts of the case.

Had Moshe in fact allowed himself something which was prohibited to others?

Not if we remember that his marriage to Tzipora had been before the giving of the Torah, and that she had embraced Judaism.

It was Pinchas who reminded Moshe that there was an Oral Law which permitted summary action when the honour of the Almighty is at stake. The word "stake" might be particularly appropriate here since Pinchas now slew (literally, pierced through) both Zimri and the Midianite woman, and God acknowledged Pinchas's sincerity by conferring upon him his priestly status.

The lesson we learn from Pinchas is that there is such a thing as extreme provocation but a summary response is

not warranted if it is a human being who is being provoked, only if it is God's honour and glory which are in jeopardy.