

# PARSHAS KORACH



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## THE DANGERS OF FLATTERY



### SENSELESS SCUFFLE: HOW THE MIGHTY HAVE FALLEN

When you study the *sugya* of Korach you learn that it wasn't only Korach, Dason and Aviram, who stood up against Moshe. The *passuk* says וַיִּקְוּ מִּפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה, "and they stood before Moshe," in defiance. How many people stood in defiance of Moshe? וַאֲנָשִׁים מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשִּׁים וּשְׁנָיִם, "two hundred and fifty people among the Bnei Yisroel" (Bamidbar 16:2). Now 250 people sounds like quite a lot of people to start up with Moshe. This means that Korach was so successful that he was able to gather a lot of people to his side, people who were willing to stand up and face off Moshe Rabeinu.

Now, you might think those were little folks. It says when Yoshka Pondra came up with his initial debut and famous speech, he had a following. He managed to scrape together the following, and as my Zeida always pointed out: "How many *chashuvim* were among those following him? And the answer is none. The only people he could get together for his famous sermon on the mount were degenerates, low-lives and the dregs of society. That's not what I'm (R' Miller) telling you. That's what they're saying! You know what he managed to get together? Thieves, harlots and bums." Now, that doesn't sound like a very *chashuve minyan*. That doesn't sound to me a way to start a religion. That's a very poor marketing technique.

But Korach managed to get together 250 *anashim chashuvim*. They were *roshei am*. They were *nesi'ei ha'eidah*, leaders. How was it possible that he got these people, these *anshei shem*, as the Torah refers to them? How did he get them? These were all people who had a good name and were *chashuvim*, people who knew Moshe Rabeinu's *koach* and what he did. How in the world did Korach persuade them to join him in this first, most famous rebellion in the history of the Torah?! And they were such dedicated and loyal people that they even joined him on his trip to Gehinnom. They traveled on the same train, and they traveled down with him. A *peledike zach*. How did he get them? These were the wisest of the people.

This is such a powerful lesson. We have to pay attention and learn from it. There was nothing to gain in this rebellion, and it had to fail. You knew going into it that it was going to fail.

Let's say we see *machlokes*. Some rabble rousers, even a group of *frum* people. Let's say somebody would tell you that the Lev Tahor group (a cult) is going up against all the *gedolei Yisrael*. And you joined them. You're not just a retard to doing it. You're retard *shebe'*retarded because you know they're never going to win against the *gedolim*. If they tell you they want to go to Guatemala and they want to run to the hinterlands of the universe to find some country they'll take them in, or they settle in the middle of some Vietnamese desert or jungle, I can see them getting some idiots and *tipshim* to go along with that. But to go up against the *gedolei Yisrael*?! You know it's doomed to disaster. The same would happen with any group, for that matter. It doesn't make any sense.

### CAPTURING MINDS THROUGH FOOD

There's a *gemara* in *Sanhedrin* (52b). The *gemara* says in the name of Reish Lakish: דָּאִמֵּר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ מַאי דְּכָתִיב: what is meant by that which it says in the *passuk* in Tehillim? The *passuk* says: בָּחַנְפִּי לְעֵגִי מְעוֹג, "With the flattering mockeries of the cakes (*maog* is interpreted as *uga*, cake), חָרַק עָלַי שְׁנֵימֹר, "he gnashed at me with his teeth" (Tehillim 35:16). He ground his teeth against me. What does that mean? An unusual *passuk*. Reish Lakish asks what does this *passuk* mean? The *gemara* says, בְּשִׁבִיל חֲנוּפָה, it refers to Korach. בְּשִׁבִיל חֲנוּפָה שֶׁהִחֲנִיפוּ לְקֹרַח, because Korach's friends flattered him when he gave them things to eat and drink. What happened? How did they flatter him? עַל עֲסָקֵי לְגִימָה, he made parties for that. חָרַק עֲלֵיהֶם שֶׁר שֶׁל גִּיהֶנֶם שָׁנִי, and as a result of that, the minister of Gehinnom, ground his teeth against them. So what does that mean to say? If you look at Rashi on *amud beis*, it's talking about the *adas Korach* - שֶׁעַל שֶׁמֶ וְעַל שֶׁם, and because *rasha* fed them and stuffed them, when they derived benefit from his money, הִקְלוּ בְּעֵינָיו, it became light in their eyes and they were able to go along, וְלִהְיוֹת יָדוּ בְּמַחְלוּקַת וְלִמְרוֹד בְּהַקְבָּא, and to strengthen his hand in the *machokes* and rebellion against Hashem.

You hear this?! Korach was a *pikeach* and he knew that a way to people's hearts and minds is by inviting them over for barbecues, wine and cheese, drinks. People like drinks. People like scotch. People like fancy Glenlivet. They like Blue Label, the expensive Johnny Walker scotch. Fancy drinks.

I was once at a hotel and I noticed there was one table with all the 'aristocratic' guys gathering around it. And I was curious why they were all there, in one spot. It was an outdoor *kiddush*, and I was curious. What are they serving at that table? They had a lot of 'stations.' I walked over and I looked. There were bottles and bottles. The entire tabletop was filled with bottles. So I said to somebody, "What's the attraction here?" These guys didn't look to me like regular *yeshivaleit*, who are not into drinking. They looked like the kind of guys who had plenty of drinks. The fellow told me, "The amount of money on this table is so large, we can't leave it unattended." I said, "What does that mean?" "These bottles are the most expensive bottles out there." So they were all standing there and imbibing. They wanted to get their money's worth.

So Korach invited his friends and he served not "franks in blanks," you understand. That he left for the kids. He served lamb riblets. He served steaks and *zachen*. He knew how to feed his friends. It's a *pelah*. You're talking about these *chashuvei am*! He only invited *chashuvim* and there's no *shaylah* that when he invited them he didn't tell them, "I want to invite you in order to win

you over.” You know what he said to them? What did he say to them? *Divrei chizuk. Seudas mitzvah. Hoda'ah. Hakaras hatov.* He invited them to the most exclusive restaurant. He brought big name chefs. Not once. He did it many times. And he understood that if he would do this he would have those people in the palm of his hand.

### FLATTERY FOLLOWS FRESS-ARY

בחנופי לעגי מעוג, the first thing it says in this gemara was the flattery. When Korach invited them, the first thing they did was flatter him. You know, guests who are invited for free, fancy shindig where it's \$500 a person, you can be sure are going to go over to the host many times on that evening to tell him how amazing he is and “How *makir tov* I am for you,” and “This is the kindest thing that anybody has ever done to me. I was never invited to a \$500 a night plate myself, with *anashim chashuvim*, the best of the best.” Nu. And you can be sure that during those conversations Korach said *gevaldige divrei Torah*. Korach said some *gevaldige zachen*. And he told everybody, “Don't *shtet zach* when I'm talking. I want you to keep on chewing on the beef jerky and rib eye, over here. I want you to keep on drinking your wine and sipping your scotch. Please. I'm not here for *kavod*. Don't be *mechabed* me. Don't worry about my *kavod*.” Some other people would have said, “Excuse me, can I have a minute of your attention? Could you keep quiet for a moment? Don't eat. Listen to me now.” But Korach didn't say that. “Everybody, keep eating.”

And then Korach said, “Did I ever tell you about my nemesis? Did I ever tell you about the one that's *shtoching* me out?” They said, “Who is he?! Who is this enemy of yours?” “You're not going to believe it. My relative!” “Who??” “Moshe ben Amram.” Now, under normal circumstances, if you would have told somebody that you're against Moshe ben Amram, the guy would have punched you in the nose and then he would have been *הקקה את שיניו*, taken your teeth out. And they would say, “Moshe Rabeinu saved our lives numerous times! He was *moser nefesh* for us.” “But this last time by the *meraglim* he didn't. He didn't.” “At the *eigel* he did.” “By the *meraglim* he didn't. You see he's finished. He's not saving us anymore. He's not backing us anymore.”

And they flattered him, it says. And he said, “Did you hear the joke?” Korach said, “Did you hear the joke that my wife said about Moshe?” And he started mocking Moshe's *halachos*, about the things that Moshe said. He started to make *leitzanus*. It's unbelievable. And that was the beginning and the end of their downfall.

To me, it's just amazing that if you invite a guy enough times, you will own that guy. After you 'feed' him, he will be influenced to do exactly what you want him to do, for good or for bad.

### A BREAD FEAST FOR KIRUV

Now, when I got into *kiruv*, way back when, I studied this *gemara* very carefully. My Zeida told me that this is the *gemara* you have to know. It's the key for *kiruv*.<sup>1</sup> And there's another *gemara* in *Chullin* (4b) that says, אין הסתה, If you want to win somebody over and entice him to do *avodah zarah*, it says, אין הסתה אלא באכילה ובשתיה, I knew one of the secrets to *kiruv* was inviting them over to your house for a Shabbos *seudah* and plying them with the kind of food that they never saw.

I remember one specific case where I was trying to get a guy to come to my house for Shabbos. He said, “What do I need to come for? What are you going to serve me already?” I said, “I'm going to serve you food like you never saw in your life.” “Could you give me an example?” “We're going to start with a bit of wine just to sweeten your palate, and we'll give you an assortment of wines. If you don't like this one, you can try another one. If you don't like the other one, we'll try another one. Then we'll go to challah.” He said, “What's that?” I said, “Challah means...” I said, “What's the biggest array of bread you've ever seen in your life?” I said, “You're going to have rye bread, white bread. You're going to have pumpernickel bread. You're going to have sourdough bread.” I made sure my wife made some of them, and we also ordered some from the bakery. We came up with a grand assortment of breads. I continued, “And then, we're going to go to the fish.” He had never heard of *gefilte* fish. I told him, “That's Jewish fish.” I told him about salmon, about this, about that. I told him about all kinds of fishes. By the time I was up to the meat dish, the guy's mouth was salivating already. He tells me, “I've got to try this once.” I said, “You're a wise young man. You'll never regret this. And I guarantee, you have never seen a meal like this in your life.” And he came. And today - he already finished *Shas* two times - and he's still thinking about that meal. He enjoyed all the food.

The *pele-dike* thing is that it works on *chachamim*, on קריאי עדה שם, אנשי שם. It's a *peleh*. You just have to find the right approach and discover how to get them.

### FRUM PEOPLE NOT ACCEPTING “BUY-OFF” MONEY

Now, that was the beginning of the end of how they got destroyed. It's for this reason, you should know, that in Eretz Yisrael, the *gedolim* were petrified to take money from the Zionist government for *chadarim*, for *yeshivos*, for *kollelim*. One thing they knew without a doubt, that the evil, wicked Zionist government has no interest a *ki hu zeh klal* to benefit *frum* people. As my grandfather used to always quote, that great, wicked, evil person who is together with Korach in Gehinnom today, Golda Meir, that witch, she said, “Six hours after I finish taking care of my Arab problem, I'm going to begin to take care of my Haredi problem.” That's what she said.

You have no idea what kind of *sina* they have. They hate the *haredim*. They hate the fact that their children are all falling off and going into the Mediterranean Sea - on their own, without the Arabs pushing them there. They're all going, getting lost. And in the *chadarim*, they're growing by leaps and bounds. And the *frum* people are spreading out all over Eretz Yisrael. וישרצו וירבו מאד מאד and you can be sure it's very, very painful, extremely painful to see! So when they offer money to the *cheder*, it's not because they have any interest in our goals. You know what they want? They want control.

That's why the Brisker Rav then and many *gedolim* now don't take a penny from this evil government - because they want to dictate to you. “No,” people said. “Fools!” they said. “They don't want to dictate. We're citizens of their country. They help

<sup>1</sup> גופא אמר רב ענן אמר שמואל ישראל מומר לעבודת כוכבים מותר לאכול משחיתו שכן מציונו ביהושפט מלך יהודה שנהנה מסעודת אחאב שנאמר (דברי הימים ב יח, ב) ויזבח לו אחאב צאן ובקר לרוב ולעם אשר עמו ויסיתו לעלות אל רמות גלעד. ודלמא מיזבח זבח מיכל לא אכל ויסיתו כתיב ודלמא דברים אין הסתה דברים. ולא והכתיב (דברים יג, ז) כי יסיתך אחריך באכילה ובשתיה והכתיב (איוב ג, ג) ותסיתני בו לבלעו חנם למעלה שאני [רשאי]: למעלה שאני - דאין אכילה לפניו אבל אדם דצריך לאכילה עיקר הסתה דדידה באכילה ושתייה

everybody. Why shouldn't they respect us too?" Because you're *frum* and you represent Torah and they're out to get you. You know what happens? It happened already. They make curriculums for the schools. They make curricula that say that the schools have to mention 'yom ha'atzamos, the day of the bones' when Eretz Yisrael became established as a pile of bones. Some people decided to say *Hallel* on that day. They should have said *Kaddish* not *Hallel*. And the rest is history. Today, they make this curriculum for every *cheder* that takes their money. My grandfather used to *shrei* about it. My grandfather started a fund in Eretz Yisrael for *chadarim* that did not take money from the government. "I want to have a *chelek* in those *chadarim* – I don't care what the government has to say."

It is very difficult. Everybody needs money. When the government gives money, it's very hard to say no. Very, very difficult. People have asked many times in America: How come America is different? The presumption that everybody's working on is that the American government doesn't hate us as much as the Israeli government does. They're more *pareve* to us. But now you see different states, such as New York State, where they're dictating the curriculum, and the citizens have no choice. You know why? Because you take money from the government.

I studied in a *yeshivah* in America whose *rosh yeshivah* would not take government funds. I was shocked. He learned in Eretz Yisrael, in a Brisker *yeshivah* for many years. He would not take money from the government. And as far as I understand, he still doesn't take money from the government. It's very successful, a highly successful *yeshivah*. He turned over a whole town, whole city, amazing! Everybody else takes, so when it comes to this and comes to that, they dictate. They tell you what to do. When to close. When to open. How to open. How to close.

Now, this is something that we have to learn from, to realize who's buttering our bread. You know what happens? You lose your free will. And it says this: When the *sar shel Gehinnom* saw this, he got so upset. You know what it says? He gnashed his teeth. חרק שינמו, he was rubbing his teeth in anger. How foolish are you? And he took them down. That's what happens.

### AFTER YOU LICK THEIR BOOTS, CAN YOU TELL THEM THE TRUTH?

And you think it's different when you go to somebody's house? Today there are a lot of rich people, and a lot of *rosh yeshivos* are forced to go to the wealthy people's homes and they have to 'get on their knees' when they walk in the doors. First, they tell you to take off your shoes. Then, they take you on your knees and walk you toward the table like a penguin. You understand? And then, "Tell me how great I am and what kind of *tzaddik* I am," when the guy is a bum. He has no *yiras shamayim*. He has nothing but money. The poor *rosh yeshivah* - he could be an *adam gadol* - is forced to give his whole life up, his whole self-worth and esteem. He can't say the *emes*.

I was once invited to a big, big *gvir's* office, and I asked him, "Where's your *mezuzah*?" He told me he doesn't have one. I said, "Why not?" He said, "I got a *heter*." I said, "Did you give the guy money before he gave the *heter*?" He said, "Yeah." He was a *chashuve* Yid. I told him, "You bought it. He wanted you to give him more money, so he said, 'Save your money from putting a *mezuzah* on the office building and put it in my pocket instead.' I'm telling you, put a *mezuzah* up. In every office today in America they put a *mezuzah* up. You're a *chashuve mentsch*. You're a *frum* person." He said, "How come they didn't tell me this?" I said again, "Because you give them money. I'm telling you straight up. No one's going to tell you straight. You think they're going to tell you what you want to hear or what you don't want to hear? You really think somebody's going to tell you what you don't want to hear? If you're going to tell them, 'I'm thinking of sending my son to Hawaii.' What do you think? What do you think they're going to say? *Brachah v'hatzlachah v'chol tov*. Or will they tell you, 'Shame on you! Shame on you! Your son? Send him to the best *yeshivah* in the world?'"

There was once a very wealthy person in Cleveland, a very wealthy person. I said, "What's going to be with your son?" He tells me, "He's going to go to a certain modern institution." I said, "Shame on you." He said, "Excuse me?" I said, "Shame on you. Hashem gave you enough money to support your kids and your kids' kids' kids. Why can't they go to the best *yeshivos*? Why do they have to be in a compromised atmosphere? Send him to the best *yeshivah* in the country so he can *shteig os* and become a massive *talmid chacham*." He said, "No one talks to me like that." "You know why?" I said, "I don't take a penny from you, so I'm going to tell you the truth, my friend." I said, "Your son will fail in life. He's going to be a nothing. He's going to be a nobody." "My son is brilliant." I said, "Oh boy, I hope he's not brilliant, because if he's brilliant, you're going to come to the next world and Hashem is going to say: 'I gave you the next *adam gadol* and you turned him into some failure from some university.' So he goes to this college. That's what you sent him to?" The proud father. *Baruch Hashem*, his son wasn't as smart as he thought he was. He turned out to be a nobody. His specialty was making food. He knew how to cook. He put together some dishes, that was his specialty. And he failed. Hashem, maybe, will have *rachmanus* on him hopefully, because he didn't have a son who was a *ba'al kishron*. He couldn't even make it in the secular world. So maybe Hashem will have *rachmanus* on him.

Everybody tells *gvirim* what they want to hear. You can't do that. You don't sell yourself out. It's not worth it. You go to these *gvirim* and they talk against Hashem. They go against the Torah. They tell you their *shittos* of who should be learning and who should not be learning, and shouldn't everybody make a *parnasah* and make money. They're not *machshiv* Torah. They talk about *olam hazeh*. You walk into the house, they look like museums. They have toys. They have miniatures. I walked into a guy's house, a big *gvir*. He invited me to come to his house. The guy had little matchbox *shuls* from Europe. He had a whole wall. I said, "What are these?" "This is a *shul* in Poland. This is a *shul* in this city made of match sticks."

It was beautiful. On the other wall, he had cars, miniature cars, miniatures of real cars. They didn't have motors, but they were made to scale. He was giving me *shiurim*. I told him, "How old are you?" He said he was 74. I said, "You know, it seems like I'm in a big baby's candy store. What's an adult doing playing with these things?" He had another wall with *bechers*, collectible *bechers*. I said, "How much *kiddush* could you make in a week? I mean what are you doing this for? Why would you waste your money on this kind of thing?" It was *mamash* like a miniature museum. That's what he wanted, collecting dolls and toys for himself. *Nebach* on the poor guy. But no one's going to tell him that. I knew he was a very cheap guy, so I wasn't afraid of him.

A *mentsch* has to know that when it comes to this *parshah*, and you see how these 250 leaders fell, you've got to make sure you're not selling yourself out, you're not laughing, and you're not flattering and telling a guy how *chashuv* he is, if he's a nobody and, especially, if the guy is מלעיג על ה'.

## DEFEND THE HONOR OF TORAH AND TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM

I've heard *gvirim* that say, "That *gadol*, I don't like him. Him, I don't like."

I was once at a *chasunah* and some guy started to talk, and the guy told me, "That *rosh yeshivah* I don't like." I said, "What *shaychus* do you have to that *rosh yeshivah*? What did he do to bother you?" He was saying a *shiur* at the *chasunah*. After the *chuppah*, he was saying a *shiur* in the hall to those who wanted to participate. And this guy was up in arms. I said, "The man is a *talmid chacham atzum*. The man is *ligen in lernin*. He's *osek b'tovah*. He wants to say a *shiur* and share some *divrei Torah* with people at the *chasunah*. The people want to hear. You don't want to hear, walk away. Why does this bother you?!" "Ah! That's baloney." He was a *malig al talmidei chachamim*. That's what he was. I told him off very strongly. *Meshugaim*, that's what people are.

But most people who get money from the guy, what are you going to say? "He he he he (fake, ingratiating laugh)." You're going to come to the next world and someone is going to say: You were *malig* on that *rosh yeshivah*. You were *malig* on that *gadol*. You were *malig* on the Satmar Rav. People say: He took things to the extreme, the extreme. But who are you to open up your mouth like that and talk?

Somebody once said a comment to my grandfather in a Thursday night class. I remember way, way back, he said, "How dare the Satmar Rav make such a *chillul Hashem*? My grandfather said, "Who should I ask if the Satmar Rav is making a *chillul Hashem*, *da'as Torah* or the *da'as* of a *beheimah*? Who should I ask? *Da'as Torah* right? So you shut up!" My grandfather never said, "Shut up." He used to say, "Please desist." But in this case, *l'kovod* the Satmar Rav, he stood up and said it. You think they were happy with that? They were furious at him! But he didn't care. He didn't get any money from you. He can tell the truth.

Rabosai, Hashem should help us keep a free mind and be able to be *bocher b'Torah* and *b'Moshe emes v'Toraso emes*, and to stand up for Torah values and ideals.

You see *gvirim* walking around and their priorities are mixed up. Here is a *gvir*. He gets this really expensive car. And he comes in and he says, "What do you think of my car? *Rosh Yeshivah*, give it a *brachah*." You understand? The *rosh yeshivah* thinks: If I give a nice *brachah* to his car, maybe we could make some business here. You understand? *Nebach*.

## IN CONCLUSION

When we look at the bitter end of *Korach v'adaso*, we must ask ourselves: What convinced the dignitaries of Klal Yisrael to join him? Korach's plan to rebel against Moshe Rabbeinu began by collecting a following of very important people. By inviting them to upscale dinners, Korach gradually 'blinded' the leaders and brought them over to his twisted outlook. Eventually, they fell with him. In our times, we must still keep our eyes peeled for 'buy-off' money. It could come from people who secretly or openly fight against *Yiddishkeit*. If we take it, it will surely obligate us to either follow the orders of an established authority, or force us hand over the reins of control to a powerful individual. This week I will (*bli neder*) commit to being more aware of the source and goals of handouts and gifts, asking myself if it could possibly be a subtle plan to drive down the goals of the Torah and those who learn it.