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אור ישראל

Living Life Deeper

PARSHAS
KORACH

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS

בְּשִׁיטְחָא

A WELL GREASED SHIELD

This week's *Parshah* records a showdown that should never had happened. Korach challenged Moshe *Rabbeinu's* authority, and instead of *Klal Yisrael* rallying around Moshe, some actually defected to Korach! After all that Moshe *Rabbeinu* had done for them, it is hard to fathom how Korach was so successful. What trick did Korach use to sway the people to his side?

The *Yalkut Shimoni*¹ explains that Korach gathered the *Bnei Yisroel* and mocked Moshe with a made-up story involving a widow and her two daughters. Korach described how they came to plow, and Moshe said to them, "Remember, you cannot allow the ox and the donkey to plow together." When they came to plant, Moshe said to them, "Remember, you cannot plant two species together." When they came to reap, Moshe said to them, "Remember, you need to leave some over for the poor people." When they came to store the produce, Moshe said, "Remember, you need to separate *Maaser Rishon* and *Maaser Sheini*," and so on. Korach did not intend to intellectually debate or challenge Moshe. His tactic was simply to ridicule Moshe and the laws, and doing so swayed the *Bnei Yisrael* to his side.

Klal Yisrael was not made up of fools. How, then, was Korach's ridicule, which was devoid of reason and rationale, so effective? The *Mesillas Yesharim*² elucidates - mocking places us in a state of mind similar to that of a drunk and we lose the ability to think rationally. We replace our focus and sensitivity with a repellent that stunts our ability to grow. In addition, we destroy much of the inspiration that we may have already gained. In short, Korach convinced *Klal Yisrael* by short-circuiting their power of reasoning!

We have people in our life that we respect, people who can help us grow. There are times where those people may do or say something that would cause us to laugh - not *with* them, but *at* them. We should be careful, because by doing so, we aren't just disrespecting someone, rather, we hinder our ability to properly learn from that person, and we even destroy a lot of what we have already gained. However, by being careful to listen and understand, and not insult others, we preserve our self-growth, and continue on our path of *Avodas Hashem*.

¹ *Yalkut Shemoni Remez* 750

² *Perek* 5

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

If one is prone to cynicism and mockery, it can be particularly difficult to eradicate.¹ How, then, does one tackle a foe that, by its very nature, rebuffs all intervention?

The first step is to recognize how inclined one is given to derision. How often, and how intense - is it a seldom occurrence, or an hourly event? All *Middos* require self-knowledge before working on them, but mockery often hides itself as being logical, witty, or pragmatic, and therefore requires greater effort to recognize it.

Once a person is aware of their nature, they can then begin to work towards a goal. One idea would be to remind oneself of situations where they were cynical, and the fallout that occurred. Perhaps there are people that were hurt, warnings that weren't taken to heart, and opportunities missed.

Reviewing those situations where we hurt ourselves can be a powerful reminder that we lose more than we gain when we disparage others.

¹ *Mesillas Yesharim Perek* 5

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STUMBLING OVER THE TRUTH

The story is told* of The Yiddish Theatre, which was not particularly fond of the Torah and its values. One day a student came running to the Brisker Rav, breathless with indignation. "Does the Rav know about the new play the Yiddish Theatre is putting out!? They're mocking the Torah!"

The student continued, "We know that only the *Tzadikim* go out to fight *Klal Yisrael's* battles. Based on that, they had an actor get up and announce, 'Who is the man who has built a new house and has not inaugurated it? Let him go and return to his house lest he die in the war and another man will inaugurate it.' A couple of people left the stage.

"Then, he announced, 'Who is the man who has planted a vineyard and not redeemed it? Let him go home lest he die and another man redeem it.' And again, a bunch of people left the stage.

"Then he said, 'And who is the man who has betrothed a woman and not married her? Let him go home lest he die in the war and another man marry her,' and another bunch of people got up and walked off the stage.

"Finally he said, 'Whoever is afraid, let him go home so he won't scare everyone else.' At that point, everyone left the stage except two actors, one playing the Vilna Gaon and the other, the Shaagas Aryeh. And with that, the audience laughed and clapped. It's terrible!"

The Brisker Rav paused and said, "Well, what's wrong with that? The only thing they forgot is the last scene."

"What last scene?"

"The last scene is where the Vilna Gaon and the Shaagas Aryeh win the war."

When we choose derision instead of comprehension, we lose sight of the miracles in front of us.

**Though this is a well-known story, this author was unable to find a primary source.*

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DID YOU KNOW?

- Even the wink of an eye or the wrinkling of a nose can obstruct inspiration that one could have otherwise received.¹
- Everything Hashem created has a purpose. Ridicule stems from not according proper respect to the object of ridicule. Doing so denies the purpose that Hashem according that item or person.²
- Many times the feeling of jealousy is behind the ridicule.³

1 *Lev Eliyahu, Parshas Re'eh* p. 272

2 *Daas Chachmah U'Mussar* 3:34

3 *Chidushei HaLev, Bereishis* 7:13