

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בִּשְׁבִּיטִיכָה



אור ישראל
Self Inspired

PARSHAS
KORACH

BY RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN
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THE MOST POWERFUL ARGUMENT

Parshas Korach tells us the tragic story of the eponymous Korach, a man who was a rising star in *Klal Yisrael*, but stumbled over his own bad *middos*.

Dismayed at not being appointed *nasi* of *Shevet Levi*, Korach decided to start a movement, a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon, accusing them of making decisions not commanded by Hashem.¹

How did Korach, a man known as a פָּקָח — a sharp individual, rally his troops, and convince so many others to follow him instead of Moshe? Did he use his oratory skills and give a rousing and inspiring speech? Perhaps he delved deeply into the Korach philosophy of “גָּלַם קְדוּשִׁים” — that Moshe had no right to raise one person over another, as every Jew is equally holy?

No, this is not what Korach did. Korach, brilliant, sharp, and perceptive, used a tactic one would expect to find among the unrefined. Korach mocked. Korach gathered people around him by derisively challenging the divine origin of the *mitzvos*, laughing at what he perceived to be inconsistencies in the commandments.²

In fact, the *Medrash*³ says the verse “Praiseworthy is the one... who does not sit among scoffers,⁴” is referring to one who avoided being among the followers of Korach, as Korach is the prime example of one who scorns and mocks.

Rav Leib Chasman⁵ (1869–1935) points out the power and influence of mockery. Korach did not need flowery speeches or philosophical debates to gather a following. A few witty remarks and a smirk was all it took to challenge the greatest prophet who ever lived.

We are all susceptible to the influence of scorn and ridicule. Sometimes its impact is obvious, sometimes it may be more subtle. Sometimes it comes from others, and there are times it can be the voice inside of our own head. Knowing how dangerous an attitude of derision can be is the first step in strengthening one’s *avodas Hashem* against this potentially deadly perspective.

1 *Bamidbar* 16:1-3

2 *Rashi* on *Bamidbar* 16:1, s.v. דַּתְּן וְאֵבִירִים

3 *Medrash Tehillim* 1:13

4 *Tehillim* 1:1

5 *Ohr Yahel* Vol. III, *Korach*

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Though scorn and derision should not be part of a Jewish person’s repertoire, one who is somber and humorless can be in danger as well.

In today’s day and age, many people are susceptible to despondency and need humor to lighten one’s mood.

Thus, we have a tightrope to walk. It is important for a person to be in a good mood. Both for one’s physical health, and for one’s *avodas Hashem* — it is difficult to serve Hashem when we are wrapped up in unpleasant and bitter thoughts.¹

Nevertheless, one still must be aware of the danger of ‘going too far,’ and the impact of ridicule and contempt.

How does one know if one has gone too far?

A good litmus test is to see the outcome. Is this bringing me closer to Hashem and *avodas Hashem*, or not? Do I now feel more or less likely to *daven*, learn, and do *mitzvos*?²

By asking ourselves these questions, we will be able to better balance our *middos*, and grow in our *avodas Hashem*.

1 *Chidushei HaLev* on *Bamidbar* 16:19-21

2 Based on *Chidushei HaLev* on *Megillas Esther* 4:3

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**Great wisdom and intelligence is
needed to properly acquire Yiras
Shomayim.** - *Mesillas Yesharim*, Introduction

RETREAT AND REALITY

"I know it's so absurd, but that's what it is, and I'm frustrated, but stuck!"

Mrs. Naomi Byrd* looked pityingly at her husband. What an unfortunate reason to ruin a wonderful Shabbos!

The Byrds had decided to go away for the weekend, joining a Torah retreat replete with famous speakers, from all walks of life, for all types of backgrounds. Yissochor and Naomi Byrd hadn't gone away together in years, and it was a welcome respite from the daily grind of their busy lives.

The weekend had started pleasantly enough, both listening to speakers that inspired, uplifted and educated. Yissochor even took some time to swim in the pool that was part of the amenities offered.

But things turned sour when Yissochor looked over the coming classes. At first he was cagey about the issue, but Naomi confronted him when she realized that he was wandering aimlessly on the hotel grounds while everyone else was running to the next class.

"What's going on? What happened to you?"

Yissochor had to say. "It's the silliest thing, it really is. And it frustrates me, because I know it's silly. But it's like this — many years ago, probably close to twenty or so, I was speaking to a friend, and he made a disparaging remark about someone. I was surprised to hear it, and when I tried to change the topic, he doubled down, really ridiculing this person.

"Well, I paid it no mind. Or at least, I thought so. But that person is one of the coming speakers, and though I want to hear what he has to say, my friend's words are ringing in my ears. And I know that if I go, I'm not going to enjoy it, I'm just going to be critical.

"And it's plainly ridiculous! But somehow, his scorn became mine, and I just can't shake it!"

"And there's nothing you can do about it?"

"That sounds funny, doesn't it? There must be something. I guess I'll go in, and see how it goes."

After the class, Naomi and Yissocher met. "How did it go?" asked Naomi.

"I'm so glad I went. Sometimes ridicule needs a healthy dose of reality."

"I'm happy to provide your reality," Naomi smiled.

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- Torah and mockery cannot coexist. The more Torah enters one's heart, the more mockery leaves it. Conversely, the more one strengthens the trait of mockery, the more one's Torah becomes weakened.¹
- Even a negative *middah* like mockery has its place. We find a *navi* using mockery when referring to idols and idol worshippers.²

¹ *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* 1:3

² *Megillah* 25b

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