

# ALL WE CAN TAKE FROM A TAKER

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

*And Korach took... (Bamidbar 16:1)*

*He took: He seduced the heads of the Sanhedrin with soft speech. (Rashi)*

*He took ...a bad business for himself. (Tactate Sanhedrin 109B)*

*He took: He assumed the right to himself (Rabbi S.R. Hirsch)*

What exactly did Korach take? The verse is purposefully ambiguous about what it was that Korach took perhaps to imply all of the above and more. The Chovos HaLevavos offers a "must read" prescription on how to be a good neighbor or friend that may help us to understand where Korach went awry and why.

"If one who trusts in G-d has a wife and relatives, friends and enemies, he should trust that G-d will save him from being overly burdened by them and he should endeavor to meet his duties toward them to fulfill their wishes and to be sincerely concerned for them. He should avoid causing them any harm and promote their interests. He should be their steadfast supporter in all their concerns and advise them what is advantageous to them in religious and secular matters.

He should do this to serve G-d as it written, "Love your neighbor as yourself", "Do not hate your brother in your heart". Not because he hopes to be repaid by them, not to make them indebted to him, not because he loves to be honored and praised by them, not to have authority over them, but rather to fulfill the commandment of the Creator and to keep His covenant and His ordinances in their regard.

For if his motive in fulfilling their wishes is one of those ulterior motives mentioned above, he will not obtain what he wants from them in this world, he will labor in vain, and he will lose his reward in the World-to-Come. If, however, he acts solely out of service to G-d, then G-d will help them (his beneficiaries) to repay him in this world and will put his praises in their mouths and will increase his stature in their eyes."

The Chovos HaLevavos gives a clear "if/then" promise without any qualifications. If one engages

personal interactions with a selfish motive then the mission will certainly fail. However, if one acts out of a sense of dutiful concern then success is guaranteed.

We can all testify with our own experience to our reaction when confronting a sales person in a store. "Can I help you?" We remain suspicious as to whom they hope to help. The agenda runs interference with our ability to trust. The child who is asked to recite "Mah Nishtana" to impress the guests will also more likely freeze and fail recognizing subconsciously he is being asked to risk humiliation to offer someone else a feeling of success or nachas.

If a parent or teacher can convince a child that they have his or her best interest at heart then they can really begin to work wonders. The relationship becomes inspired with genuine respect. The person's needs are perceived as an end and not just a means.

Nobody wants to be a mere instrument for somebody else's aggrandizement, a stepping stool or even a medal on their chest. Even if a person is pleasant and charming the weight of the agenda eventually crushes the relationship. I always imagine being hugged by one of those teddy bears on the front of a truck. Watch out!

Why is it that when we go to a doctor and if we don't like what we hear we go for second opinion and yet when we get on a plane we trust the first pilot offered? The difference is that the pilot is also getting on the plane. Korach tragically crashed a plane with 250 families and their possessions by convincing them and himself he had their best interest at heart when it was really only about him. Perhaps this profound lesson of caution is all we can take from a taker. Text Copyright &copy 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.