

I'M A BIG MAN!

by Rabbi Label Lam

The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all the people who were with Korach, and the entire wealth. (Bamidbar 16:32)

Where is the uplifting message associated with Korach being swallowed up by the earth? We find ourselves looking down after reading about that tragic incident. What can one say that will lift our eyes with hope to the Heavens?

Somebody once asked Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. why the "mouth" of the earth swallowed up Korach and his company and in a heartbeat he responded, "Because he opened up his big mouth, the earth opened its mouth and swallowed him up!"

So we know Korach had done something terribly wrong with his mouth. He spoke against Moshe convincingly and he managed to sway the hearts of not less than two hundred and fifty others. He publically and brazenly challenged Moshe and yes the very veracity of the Torah and was appropriately punished Mida Knegeg Mida- Measure for Measure. The Talmud gives the following macabre account regarding the current status of Korach and his crew: *...I was once traveling on the road when a certain Arab said to me, "Come, let me show you where Korach and his party were swallowed up." The Arab went and pointed out two cracks in the ground giving out smoke. He took a piece of wool shearing, soaked it in water, stuck it on the point of his spear, and passed it over the cracks, and the wet wool was singed. The Arab said to me, "Listen to what you are about to hear!" I heard that they were saying, "Moshe and his Torah are true, and we are liars!" The Arab said to Rabba Bar Bar Chana, "Every thirty days Gehinom brings them back here like meat in a pot and they say, "Moshe and his Torah are true and we are liars!" (Sanhedrin 110B)*

Korach got the message. In his Gehinom-hell he is forced to realize and articulate the truthfulness of Moshe and the Torah while openly admitting the fakery of his phony pretentious posturing. Wow! He gets it but it takes the fire of endless shame to force it out of him. That's the hell of it. It is way late. Now he is "down there" praising HASHEM and Moshe and the Torah. That's what he should have done during his life!

Rabeinu Yona writes in Shaare' Teshuvah: *Therefore the servants of the Blessed One will honor those wise in Torah for the Blessed One's honor, and to demonstrate that His service alone is of central significance. When it has become evident to one that the Blessed One created everything for His honor, he must direct his heart at all times to Honor HASHEM to sanctify Him at all times. "His praise shall*

*continually be in my mouth!" (Tehillim 34:2) And when he stands among the people and speaks with his friends, let him commune within himself and be exact and cautious in whatever he utter so that HASHEM is sanctified through his words. **And let him speak about the high worth of His service and the praise of His fear, and let him praise those who serve Him. He will attain thereby, through the communion of his heart and the mere utterance of his lips, without effort and manual exertion , merit ascending to Heaven in its greatness because it is among the foundations of the creation of man.** (Shaare' Teshuvah 3:1448)*

The Vilna Gaon ztl. explained the phrase in Pirke Avos ..."Know before Whom, you will give- "Din v' Cheshbon"- judgment and accounting". What is the accounting beyond the judgment? The din-judgment is what one did. The cheshbon-accounting is what one could have been done. One could easily open his mouth in positive praise and be lifted beyond the heavens-mida tova meruba- in a most generous fashion, instead of stewing below. By looking down we learn to look up! Korach promoted himself in this world and as a result he was demoted. Shame!

Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld ztl. who was a giant of a man spiritually and in physical appearance went to the bank to settle some of the Yeshiva's finances. The teller at the window studied the account information and sorrowfully informed the Rabbi that he's a "little short" (on cash) and he'd better speak to the bank manager upstairs. So up he went only to find the banker absorbed in his work. Looking up with a startle the bank manager suddenly became aware that the tall imposing figure of Rabbi Freifeld was standing over him patiently. "You're a big man!" he exclaimed. Rabbi Freifeld quipped, "That's funny! Downstairs I'm a little short but up here **I'm a big man!**" DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.