

SILENCE

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)

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 visited with a punishment Mida Knegged Mida- Measure for Measure. Therefore the mouth of the earth swallowed him up. There may be another dimension of the "Measure for Measure" factor at play here.

The Mishne in Pirke Avos (1:17) states, "Shimon his son (of Raban Gamliel) says, "All my days I have been raised among the Sages and I have found nothing better for the body than silence, not study but practice is the main thing; everyone who talks excessively brings on sin." The Maharal wonders why the Mishne does not declare that silence is beneficial for the person. Why is it good for the body?

The Maharal explains that speech is not necessarily a purely rational process. Both the physical body and the G-dly intellect like some banana republic are constantly competing for control of the communication system. Whoever or whichever force dominates the propaganda machinery, namely the power of speech, that one is victorious, for now, over the entirety of the system.

Now there is a way there is a way to discern which is dominant and there is a way to manage the outcome of that battle for the human spirit. Remaining quiet is almost a guarantee that when one speaks, it's likely the intellect that has turned on and is giving voice.

On the other hand if one is talking excessively it is likely the body and the world of emotions is dominant and expressing itself. Therefore the body is invited as a quiet partner. The more it can remain still and calm the greater the likelihood the Divine spirit has a chance to be heard. That is the victory we seek.

An obvious follow up question could be asked on Rabbi Miller's answer about the mouth of the earth

swallowing up Korach because he opened up his big mouth. Why the earth?! Why did the heavenly domain not open a mouth pull him up and out?

Perhaps we can say that following the same line of Mida Kneigged Mida –Measure for Measure that the earth swallowing him was indicative that it was his earthiness was that speaking the whole time. He had many intellectual and high minded reasons why the Jewish People did not need leaders unless of course he was the leader.

He was able to convince mighty minds of the correctness of his opinions. He did a lot of talking. He spoke of the loftiest ideals, but his intellect was being hijacked and employed in the service of his earthy personality.

A person in such a state is like a dog barking, but a dog with a rich vocabulary. We all know what Woofy wants. It could only be one of three or four things that cause him to howl so. He may be ashamed to say it out loud or even admit it to himself. If he would be so sophisticated so as to have a Webster's Dictionary at his disposal, you can be certain he would dress those primal needs in an elaborately woven garment of well-placed fig leaves.

He would convince you that this is a real human rights crisis with global implications and not the beast within agitating for one or more of its local and basest desires. One mighty word might have saved Korach from Korach and it can rescue us from ourselves too, if employed. He would have gone up and not down, and we too can climb high with **silence**.