

UPS AND DOWNS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Ups and Downs

Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the grandson of Kehat, and the great-grandson of Levi took ... (Bamidbar 16:1)

A truly brilliant statement for life has to be, "Be careful how you treat people on your way up, because you see the same people on the way down as well." In its simplicity, it has much to say about the purpose of life and how to live it.

There are two major statements being made here. The first one is that life is filled with ups-and-downs, as each one of us tries to climb his own particular ladder to success. Behind all that mutual cooperation, all that buy-and-selling, are people just trying to get ahead and make it in life. Every moment there those who are up, and those who are down, but just about everyone is trying to float to the top and stay there.

The second statement is that, though succeeding in life may be the main event, it all takes place against a backdrop of relationships. Like it or not, personal success seems to have to involve other people, whose help we seem to need, at one time or another, in one way or another, to achieve our personal objectives. And, just like we do not like to be abused or taken for granted, neither do they, which means that, if you want to get ahead in life, be nice.

It's a simple formula for success. Nice guys do not finish last, but first. Nasty people might get ahead and claw their way to the top, but can it really be called success if no one else is happy about their accomplishments? It's like making a lot of money and having no where to spend it, because, since we are such emotional people, and because our happiness is SO dependent upon what others think of us, who can truly be happy if they are hated?

Yes, such people can build a happy world around them on the outside, purchasing all the pleasures that money can buy. However, what good does any of it really do them if their own inner world is a miserable one? And, it seems, we have been constructed in such a way that this world, our inner world, cannot be built with anything other than good traits and a healthy attitude towards life.

The monkey wrench in all of this is insecurity. Most people are not Korachs, though they can act like him. However, usually due to no fault of their own, insecure people are that way because of some lack in their upbringing, which can even include trauma that was not properly processed.

They grow up with a certain measure of self-doubt, which makes them somewhat emotionally needy and vulnerable, overly sensitive to the words and actions of other people.

Such individuals are easily hurt and offended, and quickly become resentful, frustrated, and angry. As a result, some become reclusive, while others become offensive. However, neither is able to properly relate to other people, including their own parents or spouses. Over time, because they have become self-absorbed, they lose their ability to remain objective enough to know if what they are saying or doing is an appropriate response to the reality before them. They act in what they feel is a justified manner, as others around them look at each other thinking, "Is this person for real?"

It's a real problem. It's a real problem because, as it turns out, what the original statement is really saying is that life is not about getting ahead, as many might think, but about the relationships that we build. Indeed, the main event in life is not the climbing of the corporate ladder; that is merely the backdrop to the main arena of life, and that is the building and maintaining of relationships. For, money comes and money goes, and with it, success, but the people you see on the way up are, are the same people, invariably,

that you see on the way down. They're the constant in life. However, for self-centered person, they might as well not even exist. For the person who only can feel what he is feeling, and in particular, his feelings of lack, relationships are self-serving, as the following mishnah indicates: Any argument that is for the sake of Heaven will result in a constructive outcome; but one not for the sake of Heaven will not have a constructive outcome. What is an example of a dispute that was for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. And, which was not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and his company. (Pirkei Avos 5:20)

Notice the lack of parallelism in the structure of the mishnah. In the first part of the mishnah, both sides of the argument are mentioned, Hillel and Shammai. However, in the example of an argument that was not for the sake of Heaven, only Korach and his company are mentioned; Moshe, with whom Korach argued, is nowhere to be found.

That's exactly the point of the mishnah. Even though Korach challenged Moshe Rabbeinu, argued with him, spoke to him as if he was truly there, for all intents and purposes, from where Korach was coming, Moshe Rabbeinu could easily have been somewhere else. For, Korach was after something; he was taking something for himself, and it really didn't matter to him what Moshe Rabbeinu thought or said about it. Being Korach, he couldn't have related to Moshe Rabbeinu even if he had tried.

It happens all the time, all over the world, and all through history. It's happening right now in the Middle-East, where all the concessions that have been made to date for the sake of peace, have been one-sided, with the Israelis giving more and more to the Arabs, while getting absolutely nothing back in return. Only gangsters say, "Just be happy we're going to let you live," and get away with it.

The reason why there is no peace in the Middle-East is not because we are holding on to land that

belongs to us, or building in areas that we have already built-up. There is no peace in the Middle-East because this is an argument

during which the Israelis do nothing but listen to the "plight" of the Palestinian people, while the Palestinian do nothing to hear what the Jewish people are saying. They couldn't relate to the Israeli people and their plight even if they wanted to.

When was the last time any Arab nation conceded anything to the Western world? They don't even concede anything to their own kind, so what makes us think that they are capable of agreeing to any kind of compromise, when it is off their religious and political radar. Like all people with a chip on their shoulder and a belief that they are bolder, it has always been about winning, and always will be about winning. Losing, on any level, in the Muslim world, is just an excuse to come back another day and fight harder to win.

And, they have won again. Like the bully in the school courtyard who gets what he wants by making others fear him, the Arab world has done the same to the Western nations. As the 44th President of the United States of America, Barack Hussein Obama, told the Arab nations this week, he's on their side all the way, prepared to allow them to win once again, albeit in Western political fashion.

Willy was slick, but Barack is slicker. Indeed, he is dangerously slick, saying what the Jewish people think they want to hear, when in fact, what they are hearing plays right into the hands of those who would love to see Israel take a quick exit from this world. It's really a two-state solution designed to morph into a one-state solution, in favor of the Arab world, as the Holocaust, which Obama used as the basis to justify the modern Israeli state, becomes less and less important in the eyes of the world.

Not only does the Holocaust mean absolutely nothing to the Arab world, they would be willing to repeat it with their own hands. So, President Obama, in effect, you just told the Arab world, "Let Israel exist for a reason that you don't even believe in." And, they're supposed to buy into that, and accept our existence based upon it? Is that an intelligent assumption to make?

Or is it another way of saying, "Stage one of getting you the entire land is to disconnect the Jewish people from any Biblical right to be there. Let's transform this entire issue from being a religious one, to a political one, and a mission of mercy. Because, where as the former is hard to snuff out, the latter can easily be overrun by changing the politics and reducing the need for further mercy. Then the Jewish state will yours for the taking and the world will look the other way, indeed, maybe even cheer you on."

Did that actually occur to President Obama when he made his speech? Does it really matter, if that is what the Arab's, and the entire world heard? Some of the worst ideas have been given over innocently and even with good intentions, like what happened with the Spies in last week's parshah, and with Korach in this week's parshah.

Faulty perspectives on life and reality result in faulty thinking and planning, and if Obama truly believes that what he is saying is the best approach to peace in the Middle-East, then he is really off-base regarding his perspective on life, the Middle-East, the Arabs, and the Jewish people. Certainly he has no, or little, appreciation of his role in history.

We can debate the core of President Obama for a long time to come; many already do. In the meantime, the point is that you can't make peace with someone, or "someones" who can only relate to their own world, with people who live with a chip on their collective shoulder. No doubt that every time the Palestinians have sat down with their Israeli counterparts to discuss peace, it has been more of a formality than a reality. When it comes to the Arab opinion of the Jewish people and their state, they are quite transparent.

It is interesting how Korach was able to convince so many "good" and "important" people to join his cause against Moshe Rabbeinu. It is interesting how they weren't afraid to question Moshe and usurp his authority, in the name of what they thought was a just and honorable cause. And, it is interesting how, just like the Spies, they could be so wrong in their thinking, and how, just like the Spies, so worthy of Divine retribution. As the Talmud says:

Rav Avin HaLevi said, "Whoever pushes his hour will be pushed by his hour, and if one is pushed away from before his hour, his hour is pushed away from before him. (Brochos 64a)

It is interesting that Rav Avin is referred to as "the Levi" in reference to this statement, not a very common occurrence in the Talmud. And, though there is no reference here to Korach, did he have his descendant, a former Levi, in mind when he taught it? After all, the Torah states:

"Tomorrow, Korach and all his assembly should take fire pans, and put fire and incense in them before God. The one whom God chooses, he is the holy one. Isn't it enough that you are Levites?" (Bamidbar 16:6-7)

There is seder — order — to this world. Secure people know that, respect that, and work with it. They understand and appreciate that true success can only be achieved this way. All failure is the result of those who ignore the Divine seder of Creation, and try to make reality something it is not, just to make it work out better for them. They do no one any favors, and least of all, themselves. Text

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org