

# WHERE'S THE LEMON?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 106, The Temple Mount Today: Obligations & Restrictions. Good Shabbos!*

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## Where's the 'Lemon?'

The parsha begins with the famous words "VaYikach Korach." Literally translated, this means "And Korach took." All the commentaries, going as far back as the Talmud, are bothered by this expression. The Torah never tells us what Korach took!

In the Talmud, Resh Lakish [Sanhedrin 109b] teaches, "he took a bad deal for himself" ('lakach' meaning 'to buy'). In effect he bought a lemon! He made a real bad deal for himself.

Although Resh Lakish is trying to solve the problem of the strange language, it would seem however, that he really is not helping us very much. Korach did not buy anything here. Why should the word 'vaYikach' indicate a bad business deal? Where is the 'lemon' that Korach supposedly purchased for himself?

In order to answer this question, we need to understand another aspect of the incident of Korach. Rash"i asks, "Weren't the 250 people who joined Korach, in effect, fools? And Korach was a wise man -- how did he do such a stupid thing?"

Moshe Rabbeinu warned them that G-d would only choose one person. The odds of any of Korach's followers being chosen were at best 1 in 250! One has to be a fool to take such odds. Even in Russian roulette (spinning a revolver with 6 barrels and 1 bullet and then firing at one's head), although one may be foolhardy to play, he doesn't have to be crazy -- the odds are 5 out of 6 in his favor!

Rash"i wants to know how Korach could have done such a crazy thing. Rashi answers that his eyes misled him. He prophetically saw a chain of greatness descending from him (including Samuel the prophet, who was equated with Moshe and Aharon, and twenty-four Mishmaros who were blessed with Ruach HaKodesh [Divine Inspiration]). Based on this, he felt he had personal greatness and could in fact be the 1 out of 250 who G-d would choose.

The question then becomes a different one. We now understand how Korach could have been misled. But why in fact did he merit having a descendant like Shmuel HaNavi? How does such a wicked person like Korach, who the Talmud says is judged in Gehinom every thirty days, have hundreds of offspring who possess the holy spirit, if he was so evil?

Rav Yosef Salant quotes in the name of the "precious of Jerusalem" that if a person does a good thing in this world, G-d must pay him reward. Korach did a wonderful thing in this world: He made a tremendous Kiddush HaShem and proved Moshe Rabbeinu right.

By standing up and challenging Moshe's prophecy and demanding a proof from G-d that Moshe was entitled to his role, Korach -- despite the audacity of his actions -- did make a great Kiddush HaShem. Everyone saw that Moshe was True and His Torah was true. After that, no one doubted Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership. After that, no one doubted the Master of the World. That was a tremendous Sanctification of the Divine Name!

Because G-d does not neglect the reward due to any living creature [Pesachim 118a], Korach's payment -- as poor as his intentions were, and he certainly did not do it for the right reasons -- was having these great and distinguished descendants.

If that is the case, we can now understand what Resh Lakish means by saying that Korach made a bad deal. Yes, Korach merited Samuel the prophet and yes he merited all the offspring that had Ruach HaKodesh, but what price did he pay? He paid for it with his life, his Olam HaZeh, his Olam HaBah, and with all his property.

Yes, Korach bought something -- wonderful grandchildren. But he paid a terrible price. The price was his own life and all that he possessed, both his Gashmiyus and his Ruchniyus. The purchase was not worth the price. He got a bad deal!

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### Personalities & Sources:

**Rash"i** -- (1040-1105) R. Shlomo ben Yitzchak; France.

**Rav Yosef Salant** -- prominent Rav in Yerushalayim during early 20th century; author of Be'er Yosef.

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### Glossary

**Mishmaros** -- A system of 'Guards' divided by families who served on a rotational basis in the Temple era.

**Ruach HaKodesh** -- Divine Inspiration

**Kiddush Hashem** -- Sanctification of G-d's name

**Olam HaBah / Olam HaZeh** -- The World to Come / This World

## **Gashmiyus / Ruchniyus -- Physicality / Spirituality**

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