

# LOOK WHO'S CALLING MOSHE AN HONOR SEEKER!

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Korach

### Look Who's Calling Moshe An Honor Seeker!

Korach challenged the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu. He charged: "You have assumed too much power (rav lachem) for the whole congregation is entirely holy and why do you raise yourself over the congregation of the L-rd." [Bamidbar 16:3] Rashi comments on the words "rav lachem" - "way too much honor have you taken for yourself".

This is the most ludicrous charge that one could have leveled against Moshe Rabbeinu. Of all things, who could call the humble Moshe a seeker of honor? Just two parshios ago, the pasuk [verse] said: "For the man Moshe was the most humble man on the face of the earth." [Bamidbar 12:3] Moshe had an amazing array of positive attributes. He was the master Rabbi of the Jewish people. He was the master teacher. He was the master prophet. He had so many positive traits. But of all these traits, the one attribute the Torah singles out for praising Moshe was the fact that he was the most modest person to ever live. Humility was his greatest trait.

Now if one wants to mount a rebellion against a leader and wants to be a rabble rouser and incite the crowd against their leader, logic would dictate that one should seek out a character weakness of the leader and make an issue about it. No one is perfect. What would be a logical "complaint" against Moshe Rabbeinu? Let Korach complain that Moshe Rabbeinu was not a good speaker. We often hear that about rabbis - "He's not a good speaker." Certainly, there are other complaints they could have come up with. But the most ridiculous thing to complain about was to say that Moshe was an honor seeker! That is patently ludicrous.

Three pasukim later Moshe throws this phrase back at Korach. Moshe basically challenges Korach to a duel: "Do this: Take for yourselves fire-pans - Korach and his entire assembly - and put fire in them and place incense upon them before Hashem tomorrow. Then the man whom Hashem will choose, he is the holy one. You have taken too much upon yourselves (rav lachem), sons of Levi." [Bamidbar 16:6-7]

Is this not striking and ironic? They complain to Moshe "rav lachem" [too much for you] and Moshe complained back to them "rav lachem". In line with Rashi's earlier interpretation of rav lachem,

Moshe was responding "No. You are the ones who are seeking honor."

Now we can understand why, out of all the things in the world to complain about Moshe Rabbeinu, Korach picked the charge that he was an honor seeker. The reason is because of something the Talmud teaches about the nature of human beings [Kiddushin 70a]. "Kol haposel, b'mumo posel." When a person invalidates another (kol haposel), he invalidates him with his own shortcoming (b'mumo posel). A person who labels everyone as a slave or a mamzer must be suspected of having that very blemish in his own lineage.

Modern psychology has termed this behavior 'projection'. Someone who always goes around complaining about a specific characteristic of other people most likely has that shortcoming himself. What Peter says about Paul says more about Peter than about Paul. L'havdil, what Korach says about Moshe says more about Korach than it does about Moshe.

This explains why, of all things, Korach chose the ludicrous charge that Moshe was an honor seeker. It is precisely because it was Korach himself who was seeking honor that he projected this personality fault onto his leader.

After Moshe heard the charges of Korach and his assembled mob, the Torah says: "And Moshe heard and he fell upon his face" [Bamidbar 16:4] The Talmud [Sanhedrin 110a] elaborates on "And Moshe heard." What did he hear? He heard that they accused him of adultery. What kind of crazy accusation is that? Why would the Talmud even tell us of such a ridiculous charge being made against Moshe?

Rav Chaim Soloveitchik participated in a Din Torah [judicial case] together with another great Rabbi. The litigants each picked a judge and the two judges picked a third judge to complete the court, as is standard procedure. During the Din Torah, one of the litigants opened his mouth and started accusing one of the judges of terrible disgusting behavior. The judge asked that the court be temporarily adjourned because he was so upset at the charges being leveled against him.

During the adjournment, the litigants left the court room and Rav Chaim said to the other judge "Don't let this faze you. This is all part of being a Jewish leader. The role of a Jewish leader is includes being able to take abuse and keep on going." Rav Chaim noted that several months earlier, he was involved in another Din Torah and the litigant whom he ruled against asked Rav Chaim, "How much money did the other side pay you to rule this way?"

Rav Chaim said "I calmly told him that never in my life have I ever taken a penny to even SIT on a Beis Din, let alone consider any bribe." Fundamentally, a judge DOES have a right to be paid for his time, but on principle, Rav Chaim refused even to accept compensation. This losing litigant had the nerve to accuse Rav Chaim of taking a bribe! Rav Chaim trained himself that such insults go with the territory of being a Jewish leader.

Rav Chaim explained that we learn that the leader has to take such embarrassment from the above

quoted Gemara. The Torah merely says "Moshe heard and he fell on his face." It is the Gemara that fills in the detail that he heard that he was suspected of adultery. Rav Chaim asks: What is the purpose of the Gemara telling us this bit of information? Who has to know that? It is slanderous gossip. Why does the Gemara have to print this vile falsehood that some idiot came up with? Why does the Torah even need to record for posterity the fact that Moshe was abused to the extent that he had to fall on his face? Strike it from the record! Why do we need to know that?

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us the paradigm. The quintessential leader of the Jewish people is Moshe Rabbeinu. Chazal are describing the insults that Moshe had to endure and are telling us that nevertheless, Moshe went on and did not let it faze him. It did not stop him, shortly thereafter, from again pleading for Klal Yisrael.

Would he not have been justified in saying "I've had it! Enough with these guys already! I don't have to take this any more!?" No! The leader must accept the greatest insults and keep on going. This is what Rav Chaim told the other great Rabbi: "I've had it in my life. I've heard disgusting things. I've heard people accuse me of the worst things, but I'm of the same school as Moshe Rabbeinu. I just keep going." If you cannot have that attitude you cannot be a Jewish leader.

(Of course, this does not in any way, shape, or form, give license to people to act in this way or excuse people for doing so.)

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