

# אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

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Shmuessen from  
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

## פרשת קרח

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**Sponsored by  
R' Yisroel Rabinowitz (Rebo)  
Talmid Ner Yisroel Toronto  
In honor of my dear Rabbi  
Rav Moshe Zatzal**

## פרשת קרח

וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן יִצְחָר בֶּן קֵהָת בֶּן לֵוִי וְדָתָן וְאַבִּיָּרָם בְּנֵי אֶלְיָאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן פִּלֵּת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן  
(במדבר טז א)

In the personas of Korach and Moshe Rabbeinu and in the way each one acted, we discover two completely opposite modes of behavior and attitudes.

### Korach - Shelo L'sheim Shamayim

Let us begin by examining the actions of Korach as described in the *parshah*.

#### Korach Made his Campaign Appear to Have True Points and Merits

When learning the story of Korach's *machlokes* against Moshe, one may perhaps have the impression that the argument had no appearance of validity to it whatsoever. Rather, it was merely a group of obviously power-seeking individuals who contrived an obviously baseless and meaningless argument, all in their efforts to be given their own leadership. However, when we analyze the language of Chazal in regard to this *machlokes*, a different sort of picture emerges.

Chazal (אבות ה יז) tell us *זו מחלוקת לשם שמים, ושאינה לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי, זו מחלוקת שהיא לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת הלל ושמאי, ושאינה לשם שמים, זו מחלוקת קורח וכל עדתו* – *Which is a Machlokes l'sheim shamayim? The Machlokes of Shammai and Hillel. Which is a Machlokes which is not l'sheim shamayim? The Machlokes of Korach and his congregation.*

Let us try to understand this *mishnah*. The *mishnah* seemingly compares the *machlokes* of Shammai and Hillel to the *machlokes* of Korach, differentiating between them only in the inner motive and driving force behind the *machlokes*. The actual arguments themselves though, appear as though they were similar externally. On the surface, we can question: What is even the comparison to begin with? Would this not be like explaining the difference between, for instance, a person and a stone? There is no need to explain the difference between a person and a stone; there's nothing similar about them! Regarding the arguments Shammai and Hillel vs. that of Korach, as well, there would likewise seem to be no similarity. After all, Shammai and Hillel were arguing about real points of Torah, while Korach came to complain and rebel with completely fabricated claims!

From the fact that the *mishnah* nonetheless compared these two arguments, it would seem that Korach had the necessary talent and organizational ability to stage his *machlokes* to have the appearance of a real, genuine *machlokes*.

#### Korach Utilized his Talents for his Own Selfish Purposes

Indeed, when we analyze the life situation of Korach, we will see that indeed, he had many things "going" for him:

He was a big *Talmid Chacham*.

He had family – *yichus*: He descended from a line of distinguished *tzaddikim*, some of whom – Levi and Kehos – had been handpicked from among their brothers to occupy a special position of *ruchniyus*.

He himself was a *tzaddik*, selected from his family to be from the bearers of the *Aron*.

He was wealthy – 'as rich as Korach'!

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He had charisma and talent, able to convince many people and even great men in Klal Yisroel to join his side.

Korach, then, was utilizing the gifts he had at his disposal to run a campaign which had real merits to the ideas that he was purporting. The problem Korach had, however, was that with all that he did have 'going' for himself, he did not have intentions *l'sheim shamayim*. All the above qualities and gifts that he possessed, were employed in his quest for his own self-glorification.

### **Using One's Gifts for Kovod Shamayim**

The proper practice is the opposite: One should use his gifts for *K'vod Shamayim*. My father zt"l would oftentimes repeat the *passuk*, (דברי הימים א' טז ט) *Sing for Him, make music for Him!* He would explain that the *passuk* is instructing us: Use whatever you have for Hakadosh Boruch Hu and Klal Yisroel. If you have a sweet voice – then שירו לו – sing for Hashem; daven for the Amud in a beautiful manner *lichvod Hashem*. If you have money, *koyach*, leadership skills, any advantage or quality – then use them *l'sheim shamayim*.

Korach though, took each quality he possessed, and used it for himself.

This idea is hinted to in the very first *passuk* of the *parshah*: ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם: *And Korach, the son of Yitzhor, the son of Kehos, the son of Levi took, with Dasan and Aviram the sons of Eliav, and On the sons of Reuven.* Why does the *passuk* list all of these ancestors of Korach? The Ohr Hachaim explains that the meaning of the *passuk* is that Korach himself *took* his own connection to each one of his ancestors, and he used it for his own agenda. He likewise took Dasan and Aviram and On, the leaders of Shevet Reuven – all to fulfill his agenda.

### **The Machlokes of Shammai and Hillel**

Korach's form of *machlokes* is the exact opposite of the *machlokes* of Hillel and Shammai, who argued completely לשם שמים. When Hillel and Shammai argued, they shared one common interest: they both desired completely to discover what the true meaning of the Torah was. Because of this, their arguments led to *shalom* and friendship (יבמות י"ד:). They were not afraid to give in should they discover that they were wrong, and in fact in numerous places in the *Mishnah* we encounter one side conceding that the other had been correct: והזרו בית הלל להורות כדברי בית שמאי: *They retracted their position and began to rule like their opponents.* Chazal tell us that this form of *Machlokes* will last – meaning to say that the desired goal will be reached. Both sides will work together to find the truth. True, until they discover the truth, they'll argue forcefully. However, it will be with a common agenda, so that when the truth is discovered, the side in the wrong will happily abandon their position in favor of the truth.

### **This Path Leads One to Destruction - אין סופו להתקיים**

Not so, in the case of someone who argues for his own selfish glory. He will never give in, because he fears that his own honor will suffer – and that was what he was fighting for in the first place.

What will become of such a path? Chazal reveal to us that, unlike the *machlokes* *l'sheim* of Shammai and Hillel, this path of אין סופו להתקיים *is machlokes* שלא לשם שמים */It will not last* – One who takes this path will get swallowed up into the earth, like Korach did with all his riches and his family, and everything that he harnessed for his battle to attain his own glory.

This is a concept that will hold true in any circumstance and position which a person will encounter.

*A manager in a company who is always seeking to take credit for his own accomplishments, will end up destroying the business. He does not have the best interests of the business in mind, and he is not truly working for his boss. He will soon lead himself into acting in his own interests even at the expense of the business's. If, however, he acts selflessly for the business, i.e. he doesn't care if his boss or co-worker takes the credit, as long as the best path is being followed for the business*

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– he will bring hatzlacha to the business. Ultimately, he himself will only gain exponentially as well, far more than if he would act selfishly, causing himself to have only himself on his team.

When a chassan and kallah enter a marriage with each one fulfilling his/her marital responsibilities out of a genuine desire to benefit and take care the other – that marriage has a future of success. As long as they continue on the path of selflessness, they are working toward a common goal, of building a relationship and a union between the two of them. Together they can form a powerful, unbreakable bond.

If, however their attitudes are selfish, with each one expecting and demanding of the other one to fulfill his/her responsibilities, much trouble can be anticipated r"l. Each one has his/her own personal agenda and goal, and they will never be satisfied that the goal was met. There will always be more room for the other side to serve him/her even more and better. How much strife can result, r"l.

This is the lesson we must learn from Korach. As long as a person has himself in mind, he is dragging himself under the ground, as Korach went.

### **The Nature of the Machlokes is Based upon One's True Inner Motive**

The yetzer hara can often deceive the person: The one instigating an argument will declare, 'I'm not fighting for my kavod, this is *Kavod Shamayim*!'

If the claim of this individual is true, then indeed he is working for a lofty cause, and he must be accorded the utmost respect for his battle against the detractors of *Kavod Shamayim*. If, however, his true motive is his own glory – whether he himself is aware of it or not – that *machlokes* is disgusting. He is destroying himself, and all those who involve themselves in his *machlokes*. How careful we must be not to fall into the trap of the yetzer hara, to fight and argue for our own selfish desires.

### **Moshe – L'sheim shamayim**

The actions of Moshe Rabbeinu stand in stark contrast to those of Korach. While Korach was focused on his own benefit, Moshe never allowed his own personal gains to stand in the way of Klal Yisroel's interests.

### **Putting his Own Life and Greatness on the Line for the Sake of Klal Yisroel**

When Klal Yisroel sinned with the *Eigel*, Hashem presented Moshe with a grand offer. Hashem told him that the existing Klal Yisroel would be destroyed ch"v and a new nation will emerge from Moshe himself. Moshe had not asked for this; on the contrary, he was davening with all his strength on behalf of Klal Yisroel. But when presented with this offer he may have replied, "True, I didn't ask for this, but if they must be destroyed ch"v, I won't turn down the offer of being the ancestor of the new nation!"

Moshe, however, did not respond this way; rather, he said, "No, no, please don't destroy them! מִחַיֵּי אֲבוֹתַי/Destroy me – If someone must be destroyed, let it be me, not Your beloved children!"

Moshe davened for Klal Yisroel not once, but numerous times in the *midbar* when Klal Yisroel sinned. His concern was always to defend them and protect them, using all sorts of arguments on their behalf, which demonstrate his pure motive *l'sheim shamayim*.

### **Overlooking the Fault of Those who Challenged his Own Position**

Even when the masses of Klal Yisroel were drawn into Korach's rebellion, standing up against Moshe Rabbeinu, Moshe did not become angry at their challenging of his position. When Hashem informed him that the entire congregation would be destroyed on account of their complaints, Moshe pleaded on their behalf, arguing that it was Korach and Dasan and Aviram who were to blame for leading them astray, and that the people should be treated mercifully.

### **Moshe's Utter Selflessness Ultimately Benefitted Him As Well**

When Moshe acted in this selfless manner, working not for his own interests but for the collective interests of Klal Yisroel – although it would at first appear that he himself would have suffered in the process, in reality, the opposite is true. Moshe's greatest accomplishments include his defending and saving Klal Yisroel through their sins in the Midbar. By working on behalf of a cause other than himself, he is rewarded by being credited for the success of that cause that he was working for – Klal Yisroel. This is an illustration of Chazal's saying that acting *l'sheim shamayim* is סופו להתקיים *it will last*. His accomplishments will be channeled into the greater cause he was striving for, and he himself will have a connection and a portion in that very cause.

### **Accepting Mussar**

Aside from the general lesson we must take for ourselves from the conduct of Moshe about acting *l'sheim shamayim*, there is an additional lesson we can learn from how this *middah* manifested itself in our *parshah*:

### **The Terrible Accusation Levelled Against Moshe by the Adas Korach**

Chazal tell us that each one of Korach's followers warned his wife against secluding with Moshe, as if to suspect her of acting inappropriately with Moshe (סנהדרין ק"י). The Kli Yakar explains that this was as an offshoot of their claim that Moshe assumed the role of leader for his own glory. A *Baal Gaivah*/haughty individual cannot tolerate when there is anyone other than he who holds any sort of position of power. To the *Baal Gaivah*, even the leadership of another man in his own household proves too much to bear, and he tries to interfere in their relationship. So too were the followers of Korach claiming about Moshe (ט"ז י"ג) כי השתרר עלינו גם השתרר ("You are just trying to boss over us and be the bigshot!") To demonstrate their claim regarding the *Gaivah* of Moshe, they thus accused Moshe of acting to interfere in their own married relationships. This claim was effective in raising seeds of suspicion against Moshe, to the point that he was forced to remove his tent outside the camp in order to avoid further suspicion (רש"י בסנהדרין שם).

### **Moshe Was Not Focused on his Own Interests**

If Moshe was focused on his own self-interests, he would have reacted to Korach by lashing out at him. "You claim that I am involved in sin? - I sent away my own wife so that I can be in a constant state of *kedushah* to hear *nevuah* from Hashem! I am on such a greater level than you! You claim that I am trying boss you? - How much have I done for you, from taking you out of Mitzrayim, bringing the man, davening for you by the *Eigel*... What can you say for yourself? Who's the one around here who is looking to be in charge?!"

### **Moshe Accepted the Challenges of Korach**

Moshe, though, is not wrapped up in his own interests, and consequently when faced with Korach challenges against his leadership, he reacted completely differently than what was described. As we shall see, the *pessukim* tell us that Moshe listened to what Korach was saying and accepted it!

When Moshe originally heard Korach's arguments, the *passuk* says וישמע משה ויפול על פניו *Moshe heard and fell on his face*. What was the meaning of this 'falling on his face'? The Ohr Hachaim explains that this was done in response to Korach's attack against Moshe's worthiness to lead Bnei Yisrael. Moshe reacted to this claim by displaying complete humility – as if conceding to Korach that indeed, he was completely unworthy of his position in his own mind, and that Korach's argument against him was essentially correct.

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This is a prime demonstration of the *middah* we are discussing. Moshe was not acting for his own interests. Consequently, when granted an opportunity to further strengthen his trait of humility, Moshe seized the chance. He took Korach's words to heart, and reiterated to himself yet again, that yes, he was unworthy of the position in which Hashem placed him. No matter that Korach was attacking him personally – to Moshe who was not focused on his own honor, that was completely irrelevant. What did matter was that here was one more chance for him to utilize in his growth in *Avodas Hashem*.

### **The Natural Reaction to Words of Mussar Vs. the Proper One**

This is a powerful lesson in itself, on how to react when hearing *mussar*:

When one is in a crowd hearing words of *mussar*, there is a choice. One can choose to accept the *mussar* in relation to himself, applying the words to his own life, and seeking to make changes based on the *mussar*. The natural tendency though, is to apply the *mussar* to someone else, thus deflecting any possible impact the *mussar* could have on himself. A person does this so that he can maintain his pride, and so that he can safely continue on his own paths of behavior, without having to feel any guilt in the process.

*A famed, talented darshan is speaking to a crowd of people about the inyan of Shemiras Shabbos. He talks about the Kedushah of Shabbos, about its beauty and how it elevates the Jewish home. He discusses how so many Jews were moser nefesh for Shabbos etc. etc. It is a beautiful and inspiring derashah.*

*Now, in that audience, everyone happened to be frum and shomer Shabbos, except for one person in the back, Harry, who was known to be mechalel Shabbos in his home.*

*All those present at the shmuess are busy thinking to themselves, "Boy, is Harry really getting it hard. He better do teshuva now and start keeping Shabbos! If he doesn't, he is totally crazy!"*

When those at the above *shmuess* think that way, what benefit does they have from the *shmuess*? Absolutely none! Why can't they instead apply the lesson to themselves? After all, the *halachos* of Shabbos are complicated; the *Mishnah Berurah* writes that without the proper *limud* it is impossible to observe Shabbos properly! Maybe it is time to begin a new *limud* in *hilchos Shabbos*? Moreover, even one who does know the *halacha* can sometimes not be as careful as he should be. When a piece of cholent falls on his tie, is he completely sure that he is not transgressing the *melacha* of *libun*/cleansing? Throughout the day of Shabbos, we are confronted with scenarios such as this, where are *zehirus* in *hilchos Shabbos* is tested.

What about *Kedushas Shabbos*? Is there not room to improve and enhance one's *hanhagah* of *Kedusha* – spending more time and thought in *inyanei ruchniyus* as opposed to worldly matters? The list can grow more and more. When the listener directs the *shmuess* to 'the fellow in the back', his *yetzer hara* has just successfully removed any chance for the *mussar* to affect any positive change within him.

*In truth, 'Harry' in the back is also thinking to himself, "It's too bad Bernie's not here! I, at least, don't desecrate Shabbos publicly – I only do so in my own house. But Bernie? He drives his car everywhere! If he would have been here – boy, would he be finished!"*

### **Applying Mussar to Oneself**

The proper attitude is just the opposite. Each individual should listen to the *shmuess* and immediately try to see where he can apply it to himself.

This story is a beautiful illustration of this idea:

*There was a yungerman in the Eitz Chaim Yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel who was not behaving properly toward his wife. The hanhalla realized that to simply have one of them speak to him directly would risk causing him anger at his wife for having spoken up about him. They decided instead to Rav Aryeh Levin z"l, a noted tzadik and darshan in Yerushalayim speak to the entire yeshivah about the importance of Shalom Bayis. Hopefully the message would reach this yungerman as well. Rav Aryeh*

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*arrived as planned, and delivered a powerful, fiery derasha about the hakaras hatov one must have toward his wife, the respect he must show toward her etc.*

*At the conclusion of the derasha, the Rosh Yeshiva Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer z"l ran over to Rav Aryeh full of emotion, saying "You're right! I must treat my wife with more care and respect!"*

*Now, let us remember that Rav Isser Zalman's shalom bayis was legendary. When a yungerman would ask him a good kasha, he used to call his Rebbetzin into the study and tell her, "Baila Hinda, this yungerman asked a good kasha!" She, in turn, would smile at her husband, and return to what she was doing. Such was their beautiful relationship, that Rav Isser Zalman could not have the pleasure and happiness of a good kasha without sharing it with his wife.*

*And yet, when hearing a derasha about Shalom Bayis, Rav Isser Zalman applied it to himself, so he could advance even more in his level of shalom bayis.*

When a person has this attitude, he can constantly grow. We must let go of our pride which prevents us from absorbing any criticism, always going on the defense.

### **Common Instances of 'Opportunities' for Mussar**

Rav Avigdor Miller z"l would say, "A person's wife is such a great potential for self-perfection – if he will listen to her criticisms. But if he will train her not to comment about anything he does, he is closing up a valve of mussar, so valuable for his growth in his Avodah."

- *As a man is driving with his wife in the car, she says "Maybe you're driving a little too fast?"*

*"Okay," he responds angrily, "If you don't like how I drive, then you drive! Just stop trying to teach me!"*

*Little by little, the wife gets the message not to try to change her husband. In essence, the husband will be the one to suffer.*

- *I am personally aware of a story in which was a boy, 'Shloimy', was sticking his head out of a school bus window while the bus was driving. A nearby adult man, 'Chaim', witnessed Shloimy's action, and he went over to Shloimy's house to notify the father about it. Chaim assumed that when Shloimy's father would hear of the danger in which his son was placing himself, he would teach his son not to do this anymore.*

*Shloimy's father, however, reacted entirely differently than assumed. He called his son to the door. "Shloimy," he said to his son, "this man claims that you were sticking your head out of the school bus window. Is it true?"*

*Shloimy, of course, denied the incident. The father then proceeded to berate Chaim for making up stories about his son.*

*Chaim was terribly hurt. He replied to the father, "If you think I will ever warn you about your son's behavior again, you are most mistaken! I was trying to help you – for this you humiliate me? I'm not getting paid for this – if you don't want to hear it, I won't tell it to you!"*

- *When parents are called by their children's Rebbeim and Moros to inform them of a problem they are having with their child, the parents may immediately get defensive. "Because you, the Rebbi, haven't learned how to be mechanech children, that's why you're calling me?! Why is this my problem?!"*

*But when the doctor will inform them of a medical issue he discovered in their child, they won't deny it; on the contrary, they are happy to be notified of a problem so that they can take care of it. Why should problems in his chinuch be different?*

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**In Conclusion**

Let us use the *Avodas Hamussar* to strive to train ourselves to focus on *Kovod Shamayim* rather than our own selfish motives and desires. Let us learn to use our gifts and talents for Hashem. By doing so, we will bs"ד achieve great accomplishments for *Kovod Shamayim* and Klal Yisroel – which will ultimately cause ourselves the greatest good as well.

Let us bear in mind that when one acts in the opposite manner – only thinking of himself, and using all his gifts and talents for the goal of advancing his own personal agendas – he brings only destruction, in his endeavors and upon himself r"ל.

When there is an opportunity for improvement that can be reached from hearing some words of good, constructive criticism, let us seize the chance for the lesson that we can learn, and the growth we can achieve. We must not give in to the *yetzer hara* who puts us on the defensive, and who deflects the criticism onto someone else in the crowd. Rather than focusing on the others in the crowd, let us concentrate on how we ourselves can grow from the words of *mussar*.

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