



Volume V Issue #33

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Parshas Korach, 2 Tammuz, 5785

June 28, 2025

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On The Parsha

A life devoted to Emes (truth) and integrity can sometimes be challenging when we see others around us who may not respect these values as much as we do. With the rebellion of Korach in this week's Parsha, we see that Moshe fell on his face when he heard the rebellious claims of Korach and his followers. (Bamidbar 16:4)

Rashi explains that Moshe fell on his face because this was Bnei Yisrael's fourth major rebellion.

With the rebellion of the golden calf, Moshe pleaded with Hashem; when Bnei Yisrael complained about the Manna and wanted meat, Moshe prayed to Hashem; when Bnei Yisrael believed in the report of the spies, Moshe pleaded further not to destroy Bnei Yisrael. But now, at Korach's rebellion, his hands were weakened – he became disheartened. Each of these rebellions stemmed from Bnei Yisrael's misjudgments and an inability to see the truth (e.g., regarding the spies, they couldn't see the truth that if Hashem wanted them to have Eretz Yisrael, they would have it, and that the negative report of the spies was irrelevant).

Rashi explains Moshe's feelings at this fourth rebellion as follows: It is comparable to a prince who repeatedly sinned against his father. After his friend interceded three times, the friend became disheartened on the fourth offense, wondering if the king would still accept his petitions.

Without Rashi's explanation, we might have thought that Moshe's prostration was simply a normal response to confrontation or a form of Tefillah (prayer) to Hashem. We might not have understood the insight of the progressive nature of his discouragement or the cumulative effect of repeated exposure to Bnei Yisrael's rebellions based on their misjudgments and inability to see the truth.

Rashi is telling us that even the greatest of leaders can experience fatigue and discouragement when faced with repeated instances of dealing with those that cannot see the truth.

As we strive to live a life of Emes and integrity, we may need to deal with others around us who do not share these values like we do. We should realize that if we have too many encounters with such people, we could get discouraged and disheartened. However, we should realize that standing up for principles of Emes and integrity requires emotional resilience, and even a leader such as Moshe Rabbeinu experienced moments of discouragement when faced with these challenges. Acknowledging this can help us continue to remain strong in our ideals of Emes and integrity even when we repeatedly encounter those who may not share our ideals.

Chizuk - Inspiration

During World War I, there was severe food rationing in Vilna, and Rabbi Grodzinski, like everyone else, received official ration cards for basic necessities. One day, he discovered that the clerk had mistakenly given him an extra bread ration card.

Despite the fact that his family, like all families in the city, was struggling with hunger and food shortages, Rabbi Grodzinski immediately returned to the office to give back the extra card. The clerk was surprised and told him he could simply keep it since it was the office's error, not his.

Rabbi Grodzinski explained that keeping something that did not rightfully belong to him would be theft, regardless of how the mistake occurred or how desperately his family needed the food.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I was exercising on the beach in a frum area and there were two men who were wearing Yarmulkahs that were offering passersby a very bizarre business proposal. They were offering free haircuts to anyone who could do more dips than them on a waist-high set of parallel bars (which was located on the beach). If, however, the barbers were to do more dips, then the challenger must agree to get a haircut from the barber for \$15.

I took the challenge and as it happened, I did more dips than

the barbers could. However, they just packed their things and said, "We have to go now," – I was unable to get my free haircut. I was very disturbed by this behavior. Was it considered theft? Was it just lying? Should I judge them favorably and assume one of them had an emergency? Please tell me what the Halacha is in this case.

ANSWER: The behavior of these two men constitutes a clear violation of Halacha regarding keeping one's word in business dealings.

According to Halacha, one who reneges on his word, whether in business or any other commitment, is worthy of the curse of "Mi Shepara" (see Bava Metzia 47b-49a and Choshen Mishpat 204:4). The content of the Mi Shepara is as follows: "He who punished ('Mi Shepara') the generation of the flood, the Tower of Babel, S'dom and Amora, and the Egyptians by the sea will punish the one who does not keep his word." This curse is serious and harsh, yet a Beis Din (Jewish court) would not hesitate to pronounce it upon someone who unlawfully reneges on his word.

The men made a clear business proposal with specific terms: free haircuts for anyone who could do more dips than they could, with the alternative being a paid haircut if they won the challenge. When you fulfilled your part by doing more dips, they were halachically obligated to honor their commitment. Their sudden departure without providing the promised free haircut constitutes renegeing on their word.

One should not renege on a deal once an agreement has been reached, even if no money has changed hands (Choshen Mishpat 204:11). The only exception to this rule is if new information, developments, or financial considerations suddenly arise that would have deterred one from getting involved in the agreement in the first place (Chsam Sofer, Choshen Mishpat 102; Rav Vosner ZT"l in his Shevet Halevi 4:206; see also Tzitz Eliezer 8:40). A simple claim by the barbers of, "We have to go now" without any explanation or provision for fulfilling the commitment later does not qualify as such an exception.

Anyone who unjustifiably reneges on a deal is not conducting himself as is expected of a Jew (Rambam, Hilchos Mechira 7:1), and is labeled by our sages as a "Mechusar Amana" – a person of untrustworthy character (Bava Metzia 49a; Rambam, Hilchos Mechira 7:9).

While you ask whether you should judge them favorably and assume that they had an emergency, the fact that they provided no contact information or means to fulfill their obligation later suggests this was not a genuine emergency but rather an intentional evasion of their commitment. Had there been a legitimate emergency, they would have been expected to provide some means of contact to fulfill their obligation at a later time.

Mussar – Introspection

This week, we continue with translating the Chofetz Chaim's Sefer entitled, "Sefas Tamim." Sefas Tamim, from which our foundation takes its name, focuses on the importance of honesty in word and in deed.

"Moreover, his prayers will not be answered before Hashem, if he is still in possession of the stolen value, because that very same Tefillah of his is called, "disgusting." As Chazal have taught in commentary on the Passuk, "my prayers were pure" (Iyov 16:17), is there a prayer that is impure? Rather, all Tefilah that has no association with theft is called a "pure" prayer, and if it contains an aspect of theft, then it is called an "impure" prayer. To illustrate, a wine vat that is filled with the sediment and the skins of crushed grapes is disgusting if the sediment and grape skins have not been filtered out and settled to the bottom of the vat. Such wine is not even fit for a poor person and obviously not fit to present as a gift before the king, because a part of this (poor) taste is dispersed throughout each and every drop of the wine. So too is the power of theft. It is interlaced throughout each and every word of this man's prayers and will not allow those words of prayer to ascend and become accepted before Hashem until he rids himself of the theft (until he compensates his victims)."

*"May I back out of a school carpool that
I have already committed to?"
"Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?"*

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