

GREAT FOR SHARING  
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

PARSHAS  
KORACH

# בשבת

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## FOLLOWING THE CROWD

**P**arshas Korach opens by naming the leaders of Korach's rebellion, Korach, Dasan, Aviram, and Ohn. Korach challenged *Moshe Rabbeinu's* authority after seeing that he was passed over for a position within the leadership of *Klal Yisrael*. He reasoned that as a member of the tribe of Levi, his place in the family should have garnered him a powerful position, one which was instead given to his younger cousin.<sup>1</sup>

We can understand what inspired Korach's insurrection, but what about the other leaders? They and their followers were from *Shevet Reuven*, what could have influenced them to fight against *Moshe Rabbeinu*?

Rashi<sup>2</sup> explains that they truly had no reason to rebel. However, the tribe of Reuven were neighbors to the tribe of Levi, and specifically the family of Korach, thus, they were drawn in through their ongoing contact.

On the flip side, we find that although all *shevatim* produced leaders and *talmidei chachamim*, those produced by Yehudah, Yissochar and Zevulan were known to be particularly brilliant and skillful. Why? Rashi<sup>3</sup> points again to their neighbors, *Moshe Rabbeinu*, *Aharon HaKohen*, and their families.

Both of these points are astounding! These interactions took place in the desert, at a time when *Klal Yisrael* was surrounded by constant miracles. These were the very same people who received the Torah directly from Hashem! After an experience like that, how could one's neighbor influence them to rebel against Hashem's messenger? Or, conversely, after an experience like that, wouldn't one be saturated with inspiration, already giving their all — how does living near Moshe and Aharon add anything?

Yes, we all know we must carefully choose the company we keep. But here we see how far reaching the influence can truly be. An influence so powerful that it can last generations.

When we surround ourselves with friends who drag us down, it will be nearly impossible to resist their draw. However, when we surround ourselves with friends who pull us higher, we will indeed be elevated to the greatest of heights.

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### Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

It is well-known that our peers and surroundings influence our thoughts and decisions. However, there are some challenges when it comes to utilizing this idea as a tool for *avodas Hashem*.

Our friends are generally people who are similar to us in the first place. Thus, though they may not interfere with our current relationship with Hashem, they are also not necessarily influencing us to raise our level of commitment.

Additionally, it may be daunting to try to befriend a group of individuals who are focused on different things than oneself. Maybe they don't seem to be cool, or maybe we are afraid we are being judged by them.

Nevertheless, there are ways to inspire oneself, to a lesser extent, through the influence of others. The idea is to change the culture that we are exposed to — the books we read, the news we follow, and the heroes we admire.

By spending some time reading about the great people in Jewish history, we can impress upon ourselves the fire of *yiras shamayim*, and *avodas Hashem*.

1 Rashi on Bamidbar 16:1 s.v. דתן ואבירם

2 *ibid.*

3 Bamidbar 3:38 s.v. משה ואהרן

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**Success in life is built upon proper character development of the personality of the individual. This calls for an understanding of one's personality, followed by proper training of one's character traits.** - R' Mordechai Gifter zt"l, Telzer Rosh Yeshiva, approbation to "Lifelines" by Avi Shulman, Feldheim Publishers, 1988

# THANKS FOR THE COOKIES

When Rabbi Yosef Miller\* was a young man studying in *Eretz Yisrael*, he had the opportunity to learn with Reb Yeshaya Radinsky, one of the great *Roshei Yeshiva* of the generation. Every Shabbos, he would walk from his dorm in Sanhedria to Reb Yeshaya's apartment, and they would learn until *mincha*, whether it was the winter or the summer.

Rabbi Miller had many stories about this experience, but there was one that he was particularly fond of repeating. Every Shabbos, Yosef would show up, knock on the door, and would be let in. Reb Yeshaya would walk with him into the living room, where they would sit down in their respective chairs. And every Shabbos, to his chagrin, there was a plate of cookies sitting on the coffee table. Yosef Miller was actually quite fond of cookies, but he dreaded what would happen next.

"Have a cookie," Reb Yeshaya would prod. How can you say no? So, tentatively, Yosef would pick up a cookie. "Make the *brachah* out loud, I would like to say *amein*," Reb Yeshaya would add. "The pressure is on!" thought Yosef. Speaking slowly, he would make the *mezonos* out loud. "Amein! Have another cookie, so that you can say an *al hamichyah*."

Yosef would then take another cookie, chewing in the silence, while Reb Yeshaya looked on. "Did I say the *brachah* correctly? Am I eating them fast enough to say an *al hamichyah*? Am I eating them too fast?" All these thoughts swirled around Yosef's head, until... "You must be thirsty. Have a drink!"

Oh no! But despite himself, Yosef reached out, took some water, and the process repeated itself, and he munched and drank before they began.

But the worst was yet to come. After he finished, it was time to say a *brachah acharonah*. Normally, during the week, he would rattle off a *borei nefashos* or *al hamichyah* without any hesitation. But this time — "Can I have a *bentcher*? I, um, I like to say *al hamichya* from a *bentcher*." Reb Yeshaya would dutifully hand him a *bentcher*, and Yosef would recite the entire *brachah* out loud, enunciating each word, until Reb Yeshaya would respond with a hearty, "Amein!"

That done, they would then open up their *sefarim*, and start their learning. Yosef was free — until next week.

When Rabbi Miller would repeat this story, he would often wait for the laughter to die down, and then make his point. "Why was it so awkward? Because I was in the presence of greatness. I saw it, I felt it, and I did not want to mess up! But the truth is, one should strive to always make their *brachos* with that level of focus and clarity.

"It's not easy, but after being in the presence of greatness, it gives us a glimmer of what we can strive for, and indeed accomplish."

*\*Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The influence of those who surround us can be so great, that we might not even be considered to be exercising our own determination when following in their ways!<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sifsei Chachamim* on *Bamidbar* 17:3, s.v. שניעשו פושעים

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