

Kinder Torah®

Parashas Korach

בס"ד

Tachanun

"Welcome to our Beis HaKinesses. Are you new in the neighborhood?"
"Yes. Thank you so much for the warm welcome."
"I hope that you settle in well."
"Amen. May I ask you a question?"
"Yes, please."
"Not only am I new in the neighborhood, but I am also a newcomer to Torah observance. I do not have much experience praying. I noticed that after the Shemoneh Esray prayers, everyone sits down and puts their head down on their arm. Which prayer are they saying, and why do they put their head down for that prayer?"

The man thinks for a moment, and then begins to answer the newcomer.

"I also had the same question. I believe that the answer is found in this week's parasha. Come let's look it up together. Korach and his companions started a rebellion against Moshe Rabbeinu. Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon to separate themselves from the rebels. Then He would destroy them in a moment. Moshe and Aharon did not want to see Korach's congregation die, therefore they 'fell on their faces' in prayer (Bamidbar 16:22). Rabbeinu Bechaye, in his commentary on the Torah, takes the opportunity to expound on the subject of 'tachanun' - the prayer of supplication when we 'fall on our faces' (i.e. put our heads down and cover our faces). He cites three reasons for falling on our faces. The first is the fear of the *Shechina* (Divine Presence). We need to realize that when we are praying, we are standing in front of Hashem Himself. This is quite a humbling experience. Therefore we perform a very humbling action - we put our heads down and cover our faces. Secondly, this action helps us to do *teshuvah* (correct our mistakes). One who feels distressed and low puts his head down. This is one of the key factors in doing *teshuvah* - feeling distressed and low about your sins. Therefore, we perform an action which demonstrates our regret and desire to correct our ways. Thirdly, we show that our senses and feelings are powerless before The Almighty, Creator of the universe. When we cover our faces, we seal our eyes and mouths. We demonstrate that we can only see what Hashem wants us to see. We can only go in the direction which Hashem allows us to go. We are powerless before the Will of Hashem."
"What a powerful prayer!"
"Yes. We should all appreciate it and say it with great *kavannah* (concentration)."

Kinderlach . . .

Tachanun is a tefillah that summarizes some of the foundations of prayer. We stand before Hashem in tefillah, weigh our deeds, and resolve to submit ourselves to His Will. It is a humbling experience, standing before the Almighty Creator of the universe. We put our heads down and cover our faces to show our fear, humility, distress, and desire to do teshuva. This action arouses our feelings to come closer to our Father in Heaven. Say tachanun with a renewed kavannah, kinderlach. Humble yourselves before Hashem.

A Joke is No Joke

"Everyone in the class please keep together. We are coming to the exhibition of ancient weapons."

"This is really exciting, Avi. I want to see how they fought battles in the times of the Tanach. Let's listen to the tour guide."

"Here are several types of swords.

Some are longer than others are. Notice that these

swords are curved and those are straight. Over here, we find spears with very sharp tips. On the other side are bows and arrows."

"May I ask a question Mr. Tour Guide?"

"Go right ahead young man."

"How did the warriors protect themselves from being injured by these weapons?"

"Excellent question, young man. They used armor. Now we are coming to the armory section of the exhibition. Here you see iron helmets, body armor, and shields. The metal protected them from the swords, spears, and arrows. The warriors would grease their shields with oil. If the spears or arrows hit the shield, they would slip off and not reach the body."

"That's like a joke."

"What?!? A joke? Hand to hand combat is life and death!"

"Yes, and a joke is also life and death."

"Young man, can you please explain yourself?"

"Yes, Sir. One of our great Rabbis, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato wrote a book called *Mesillas Yesharim*. It is a guide to ascending the ladder of spiritual accomplishments. The very first step is called *zehirus* - taking care not to commit any sins. Rav Luzzato describes in detail the hard work

that is required to acquire this *middah* (trait) of *zehirus*. Then he lists dangers that can cause a person to lose out on this trait. One of them is senseless joking and mockery. It is like a disease the creeps upon you unknowingly and slowly destroys everything. You can no longer be serious about the important matters in life."

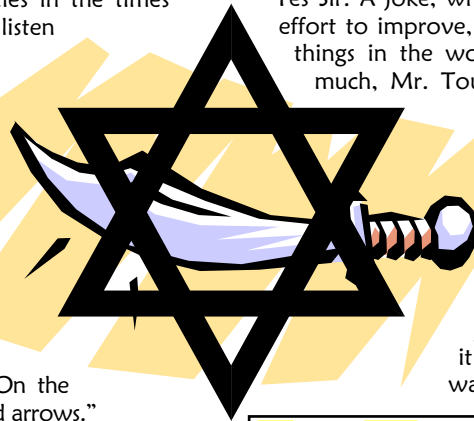
"That is certainly important information, young man. But how is it related to ancient armor?"

"Rav Luzzato compares mockery to a greased shield. Arrows fired at it will not penetrate to the body of the warrior. So too, mockery will prevent any serious *tochacha* (correction) or regret about a sin from reaching the heart of a person. He will laugh off all attempts to help him correct his ways. In this way, the armor is like a joke."

"You are right. That is no joke, young man."

"Yes Sir. A joke, when it mocks a serious effort to improve, is one of the saddest things in the world. Thank you very much, Mr. Tour Guide. This was a fascinating exhibition."

"My pleasure. Thank you too, boys. You have taught me an important lesson. A joke is no joke, when it is used the wrong way."



Kinderlach . . .

The Keli Yakar on Bamidbar 17:5 cites the Medrash Shochar Tov on the first chapter of Tehillim. Korach was in the group of letzim (mockers). The letters of his name reflect this. "Kuf" is for keset (bow), "reish" is for romach (spear), and "ches" is for cherev (sword). A different verse explains that letzim have teeth like spears and arrows, and their tongues are like sharp swords (Tehillim 57:5). A jokester uses his speech as a weapon to mock people and their serious efforts to improve. Korach went even farther. He mocked Moshe Rabbeinu in an attempt to gain honor and power! What is the antidote to this poison of mockery? Learn Torah! Rebbe Chanania ben Teradion (Pirkei Avos 3:3) teaches us that if two people sit down to eat and do not share between them Divrei Torah, it is a moshav letzim (gathering of disrespectful people.) Kinderlach, don't let this happen to you! Be serious about the important things in life! They are no joke. When you sit with your friends, share a Devar Torah! This will keep you on the right path. Jokes are no joke!