

Gratitude from the Torah

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Korach

What is the Small Adjustment of Attitude that Could Have Prevented Korach's Rebellion?

Why Would we want to Believe that "I'm Getting More Than I Deserve?"

Looking for an inspiring YouTube while making challot, Hashem guided me to a short recording by Rabbi Manis Friedman, which connected to gratitude. The basic message was, "Don't pursue happiness, allow it to happen while being enthusiastic about the things you are doing, or do the things you are enthusiastic about." The recipe for happiness that the Rabbi shared is, cultivating an attitude of "I'm getting more than I deserve." Although my husband disputed this concept, saying that working hard to deserve things in life makes people feel happy, I perceive truth on both sides. My husband is relating to the issue from the perspective of our actions, and I certainly agree that it's commendable to work hard and then allow ourselves a well-deserved vacation. Yet from the perspective of receiving blessings and goodness in life, if we believe that we are getting less than we deserve, we will be constantly unhappy, thinking that life is unfair and that we have drawn the shortest straw. This mindset often leads people to become envious and compare themselves with others, thinking: "How come my neighbor is more successful, has a better job, and is more respected, although I'm working just as hard, and am at least as talented?" Feeling that we deserve all our gifts of life stems from an attitude of - as we say in Hebrew - *מגיא לי* / *magia li* - literally, "I have it coming to me!" Why should I be happy or grateful when things are going well? Don't I deserve it? Why should I be thankful if I have earned the goodness I gained? These attitudes can lead to arrogance. Whenever I'm upset with my husband who doesn't always understand me, or I experience minor marriage problems such as being criticized and accused of being critical, I must remind myself that I'm still getting more than I deserve. Baruch Hashem my husband isn't abusive, he is faithful and never looks at other women, and what's more, he usually dotes on me! Only when we realize that no one can ever deserve any of the gifts of life with which Hashem blesses us, can we truly feel grateful and happy. When we lower our expectations of what we deserve, we will welcome each surprising blessing with overflowing gratitude.

Every Blessing is Bestowed According to Precise Divine Supervision

In certain situations, it's easy to forget that Hashem is in charge of EVERYTHING and that what we receive for good or bad is according to precise Divine Supervision. Sometimes we may feel slighted, when others are remiss in giving us the gifts, or the applause we think we deserve. This reminds me of a story I heard from a recording by Sara Cohen on Torah Anytime. A certain respected Rabbi was invited to a wedding. Since he was a very good friend of both the family of the Chatan (groom) and the Kallah (bride), he surely expected to receive the honor of reciting one of the sheva brachot (blessings) under the Chuppah (wedding canopy). He was waiting patiently, but the brachot were given to others one by one. Finally, they got up to the final sheva bracha, but someone else was called up to recite it. When he was absent, they called a second person who had just stepped out due to an urgent phone call, and the third person they called up was somehow delayed. Now, our Rabbi friend of the family could easily fall into the pitfall of thinking "What's going on here? Do the families not consider me a close friend? Have they forgotten about all I have done for them throughout all the years I have known them? Why don't they even consider me worthy to be the substitute for the substitute reciting a blessing for the couple?" Finally, when three other rabbis were unavailable, the said Rabbi friend heard his name called, and he went up to the Chuppah to give his blessing to the new couple. As he returned to his place, the person standing next to him whispered into his ear:

תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא דף לח/א-ב מכאן אמר בן עזאי: בשמך יקראוך, ובמקומך יושבוך, ומשלך יתנו לך. אין אדם נוגע במוכן לחבירו, ואין מלכות נוגעת בחברתה אפילו כמלא נימא...

Ben Azzai said: “by your name, they shall call you, and in your place, they shall seat you, and from your own they shall give you. Not one reign overlaps with another and deducts even a hairbreadth from the time allotted” (Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma 38a-b*).

In other words, we should not be concerned that others might usurp our livelihood or success, since at the appropriate moment, everyone has a portion designated for him by G-d, and everyone is privileged to receive what is coming to him. The principle is: No person may touch what is prepared for another by G-d. Everyone receives what is designated for him. This implies that the last sheva bracha had the name of the Rabbi-family-friend written on it. If the blessing wasn't designated for him, one of the others called up would have gotten it. Hashem made it so that each of the others was unavailable for various reasons, just so that this particular Rabbi would be the one reciting the last bracha under the chuppah, as he was meant to do.

My Student's First Spelt Challah Gift is Surely More Than I Deserve

This Talmudic teaching has helped bring me back on track when – at times – I may have felt jealous of others who seemingly were chosen over me as teachers, mentors, or healers, or when the younger brothers of my son's friends got married one by one while he remained single. (B"H he is now married to a wonderful young woman who was worth the wait!). The other day, when we had the thank you luncheon for the host families in Bat Ayin who graciously open their homes and hearts to welcome our students for Shabbat meals, was a testing moment. The students had made beautifully decorated goody bags for each host family with handwritten thank-you notes. What a beautiful gesture! Had it not been for recalling the above mentioned Talmudic teaching from Yoma, I may have felt left out, thinking, “Why didn't I get a decorated bag with a handwritten thank-you-note? After all, my husband and I open our home to the students, no less than the other host families.” But I believe I passed the test, focusing on how nice it was that my students expressed genuine gratitude to the families in Bat Ayin who keep hosting them. I'm considered more like the mom that you are always welcome to eat by. Having a welcoming home for students is part of the Rebbetzin role. It's expected and not anything exceptional that warrants special recognition. I remained happy because even without a special decorated bag, I recognized that I was getting more than I deserved thank G-d. as I write these lines, I'm interrupted by a knock on the door, followed by an SMS “Are you home? I'm outside the door, I wanna give you something!” It's one of my dear students holding an immense whole-spelt sourdough aromatic challah giving off the delicious scent of Shabbat. “It's my first challah and I wanted to give it to you! Enjoy! With all my love ♥ Thank you for everything!” she says with a hug. Here I got my confirmation! Hashem knows what He is doing. He ensures that everyone gets what's due to them, as it states, “...and from your own they shall give you...” (*Yoma 38*). Nevertheless, I am overwhelmed with a grateful feeling that I surely am getting more than I deserve!

Korach's Rebellion was due to Feeling that He was Getting Less Than He Deserved

ספר במדבר פרק טז פסוק א ויקח קרח בן יצהר בן קהת בן לוי ודתן ואבירם בני אליאב ואון בן פלת בני ראובן:

“Korach the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kahat, the son of Levi took [himself to one side] along with Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and On the son of Pelet, descendants of Reuven” (*Bamidbar*

16:1).

Rashi asked, Now, what made Korach decide to quarrel with Moshe? He envied the chieftainship of Elizaphan the son of Uziel whom Moshe appointed as president over the sons of Kahat by the [Divine] word. Korach claimed, "My father and his brothers were four." ...Amram was the first, and his two sons received greatness, Moshe became the king, and Aharon Kohen Gadol. Who is entitled to receive the second position? Is it not I, who am the son of Yitzhar, the second brother to Amram? And yet, Moshe appointed the son of his youngest brother to become the president of the tribe of Levi! I oppose him and will invalidate his word (Midrash Tanchuma Korach 1, *Midrash Rabbah* 18:2).

Korach is an example of someone who feels he is getting less than he deserves. He was a great Torah scholar, seemingly more suitable for the position as president of the tribe of Levi than his youngest cousin. Therefore, it didn't make sense to him that he wasn't chosen. Here is where emunah comes in! No matter whether it makes sense or not, we must recall the Talmudic teaching that everyone receives the precise portion metered out by Divine decree. By refusing to accept that each person gets exactly what Hashem ordains, Korach caused himself and his cohorts tremendous aggravation, in his unbridled honor-seeking, he brought everyone to meet their untimely death and to be taken out of the world as it states:

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ד משנה כא רבי אלעזר הקפ"ר אומר, הקנאה והתאוה והכבוד מוציאים את האדם מן העולם:

Rabbi Elazar Ha-kappar said: envy, lust, and honor-[seeking] takes a person out of the world (*Pirkei Avot* 4:21).

Since envy, lust, and honor-seeking stem from a feeling of lack - of getting less than we deserve - this attitude interferes with the ability to function in this world, as well as making a person lose entrance into the world-to-come. The world cannot suffer the existence of such a person. Although G-d is not so quick to "remove sinners from the world," those who are driven by these negative character traits of envy, lust, and honor-seeking cannot remain in the world because they are so self-destructive that they actively remove themselves from the world. Had Korach cultivated an attitude of, "I am getting more than I deserve," he could have saved his own life and that of all his 252 followers. Perhaps when reading this, even my husband will agree that this dictum is the secret to living meaningful, happy, long lives in this world and the next!

Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Korach - Some Tips for Being Happy with Our Portion

It takes work to continually live by "I'm getting more than I deserve" and remain happy with our portion even when things don't play out according to our preference. It takes great humility to perpetually accept that Hashem is the Boss and whatever He meters out to us, is exactly what we need even to a hair's breadth. Let us practice some of these tools perhaps with a partner, even a phone partner. In addition to Partners in Torah let us become Partners in Gratitude!

- **Practice Gratitude** - Take time to appreciate the things you have in your life, no matter how small they may seem. Maintain a gratitude journal where you can write down things you are grateful for each day. A journal is a good way to organize your thoughts, analyze your feelings, and make plans. You don't have to be a literary genius or write volumes to benefit. It can be as simple as jotting

down a few thoughts before you go to sleep. If putting certain things in writing makes you nervous, you can always shred it when you've finished. It's the process that counts.

- **Foster Positive Relationships** – Surround yourself with supportive and positive people who bring out the best in you. Cultivate meaningful friendships and spend time with loved ones who make you feel good about yourself and your portion in life.
- **Practice Self-Care** – Pay attention to your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Get enough sleep, eat nutritious food, and engage in regular physical activity. Take time for activities that you enjoy and that help you relax and recharge.
- **Set Goals to Feel Enthusiastic About What you are Doing or to Do What you are Enthusiastic About** – Set realistic goals for yourself and work towards achieving them. Having a sense of purpose and actively pursuing your passions and interests can contribute to a greater sense of fulfillment and happiness with your portion.
- **Find Joy in Simple Things** – Learn to appreciate and find joy in simple pleasures and everyday experiences. It could be spending time in nature, enjoying a hobby, or engaging in activities that bring you joy and contentment.
- **Engage in Chesed to Help Others** – Engage in acts of kindness and service towards others. Helping others not only makes a positive impact on their lives but also brings a sense of fulfillment and happiness with your portion.
- **Focus on the Positive** – Train your mind to focus on the positive aspects of life rather than dwelling on the negatives. Keep repeating to yourself “I’m getting more than I deserve!” Practice positive self-talk and challenge negative thoughts or self-doubt.