

## **A World of Lies**

Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

Summer is rapidly approaching. It is a time when people seek to tune out from the regular daily rigors of life and chill instead. This week, some people pack their belongings into boxes and suitcases, trekking out to cooler, calmer zones for the next two months. They spend more time shmoozing, connecting with their friends, and toning everything down a few notches. Grilling, swimming, bike riding and peaceful walks occupy the day. Nirvana has arrived. All concerns have dissipated. Worries have dissolved.

I hate to be a killjoy, and I am really not anything of the sort, but even during these lazy months, there is something that we have to be wary of, something that never sleeps or naps, and that is the yeitzer hora. He's always lurking at the edges, looking to get us into trouble, so while we laugh and play, it's a good idea to remember to look out for him.

That's it. I won't belabor the point. But when we study this week's parsha, which we do even in the country, we get a glimpse of what he is capable of and why, and as smart as we think we are, we have to be on the lookout for him.

We learn Parshas Korach, and like our predecessors, we wonder how the tragic episode came to be. How could one man, said to be a tzaddik and very smart, think that he could take on those who Hashem had obviously chosen to lead the Jewish people? Not only had he himself witnessed the miracles Moshe Rabbeinu had performed, but he also saw how, upon the Creator's direction, Moshe led the people out of slavery in Mitzrayim, took care of their every need, and brought them the Luchos at Har Sinai.

How could he think that he would be successful in a revolution against Moshe and Aharon? And how was it that he gathered to his side 250 leaders of the nation? Something doesn't add up.

In discussing the yeitzer hora, the Chovos Halevavos writes that his objective is "le'ameis hasheker," to make what is false appear to be true. To accomplish that, he uses things that we encounter in our daily lives to prove to us that fiction is fact. Once he is able to convince us of that, he can easily influence us to go down the wrong path and sin.

The novi Yeshayahu (59:15) foretold that in the period leading up to the revelation of Moshiach, "vatehi ha'emes ne'ederes," the truth will be missing.

We are living in that time. The yeitzer hora seems to have perfected his game. We are living in a time when the fiction is so pervasive that it is very difficult to discern truth from lies. When we look at what is going on in the world, we see lies taking hold on social, political, and financial levels.

When you think about where the world is holding and what has become of this country outside of our protected areas, you can't believe the change that has overcome this country since the past presidential election. Immorality is the new moral. You and I are the strange ones. Our beliefs are condemned and may soon be illegal, if they aren't already. In this publication, we don't discuss these topics, but they are out there and they are becoming a bigger threat to our community by the day. The lies have taken hold and the country is rapidly descending.

When the Russian communists began publishing a newspaper and wanted the people to believe what it said, they called the publication Pravda, which is Russian for truth. Of course, there was no truth there. It was all lies. They were ahead of the times, as today, lots of what appears in the mainstream media is false and twisted to fit a political agenda.

It is accepted because we live in a world of lies.

There ought to be a law against lying to people throughout a campaign to con them into voting for you, but there isn't, because lying is part of the system. Everyone lies, they say, so when one politician lies a little more and a little better than others, it is not that big an aveirah. And now that a new presidential election season is getting underway, the lies are on steroids.

Korach was smart, talented and learned, but his yeitzer hora ate away at him. Every time he saw a different one of his Levite cousins with a better job than his, the yeitzer hora ganged up on him and made him jealous and angry. The yeitzer hora caused him to view himself through conceit as more worthy for the positions. Eventually, the yeitzer hora used the jealousy and conceit he had cultivated in him to convince him that he could overthrow Moshe and Aharon.

Acting like a politician, Korach used his cunning to spin the people against Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon Hakohein. With classic demagoguery, he portrayed Moshe as heartless and cruel to the poor, forcing people to do silly things. With deceit and sleight of mouth, he was able to gather around him serious leaders of the Jewish people and present a serious challenge to Moshe's leadership.

The power of the lie is so potent that not only the known troublemakers Doston and Avirom rallied to Korach's side and joined his attempt to supplant Moshe and Aharon, but also people who should have known better, the 250 nesi'ei ha'eidah, were convinced to go against everything they had stood for until then and join the revolution to topple Moshe.

How can people be so foolish? How can people who saw how Hakadosh Boruch Hu redeemed the Jewish people from Mitzrayim through Moshe forget what they had seen and experienced? How could people who stood at the foot of Mount Sinai as Moshe alighted to Heaven and returned with the Luchos then go and turn their back on him?

So powerful and effective is the power of a lie.

That is why the yeitzer hora works "le'ameis hasheker," because when that is accomplished, people lose themselves and fall for anything. He plants the lie, enables it take hold, and then misleads people into thinking that there is benefit for them in believing the new facts.

This is why Korach and his clan were heard shouting from their group burial site in the desert, "Moshe emes veSoraso emes." They were admitting that their insurrection was based on lies. Moshe pursued the truth and was all about the truth. They were all about lies.

When truth is our goal and we remain loyal to it, even when that is unpopular and old-fashioned, we will succeed. The storm will blow over, and the sun of victory and righteousness will shine upon those who remain loyal to the causes of truth and Torah.

When we are on guard for the yeitzer hora and don't fall for his enticements and inducements, we remain motivated by and for the truth. When truth is our motivation, we are spared from the fate of Korach and his followers and those who acted as they did throughout the ages.

People who get involved in petty fights and are quick to judge others without giving the matter much thought become enmeshed in battles with no positive objective. What is plainly obvious to everyone else escapes them. They become entwined in their pursuit of victory and fail to appreciate the virtue of their opponent, losing their objectivity. They stumble, they fall, and they go down to bitter defeat.

In a world of falsehood, we must endeavor to always find the truth and not be taken in by sweet talk, convincing arguments, appealing demagoguery, and clever marketing. The truth is not always comfortable or popular, but we must always pursue it if we wish to feel fulfilled and successful. Quick gains and phantom popularity are fleeting and have no staying power. Ultimately, the truth wins out and sustains those who cling to it. The ones who are convinced by cheap chanifah, glib promises, and dreams of quick easy money are those who lose out to cheats and frauds.

The urge to make money clouds people's vision and allows them to see fiction as fact. When the numbers don't exactly add up, even if the presentation is convincing and the person making it is charming and appreciates your great wisdom, don't write the check. Don't send the wire. Don't be taken in like the followers of Korach. Make sure everything he's saying is true.

Just because you see a good advertisement doesn't mean the product is good and that you should buy it. The designer is appealing to your narcissistic senses and seeking to overwhelm you. Don't let the yeitzer hora guide you. Before making a move, contemplate if it makes sense and what the truth is. If it's not true, then it's a lie, and if it's a lie, it's not for you.

When you're sitting around in the colony and everyone is bashing someone, before jumping to conclusions, before thinking that you understand everything, know that there are usually two sides to a story. The one you heard first is not necessarily the correct one. Everything has to make sense. If it doesn't, despite how many proponents that side has and no matter how prominent they are, don't get involved.

Korach had great yichus and a fine reputation, but his judgment was clouded. He allowed the yeitzer hora to take hold, and before he knew it, he was overcome by jealousy and used his immense talents to pursue a fictitious cause and connive others to sink along with him. They went down with him and earned eternal shame and a tragic death.

Torah represents the ultimate truth, so if you find fault with it, you are lacking understanding.

Don't fight the truth. Embrace it. Pursue it. Fight to understand it. And fight to be part of it.

The yeitzer hora is quite clever. He's been at this for a very long time. Don't fall for his tricks. Don't let him paint for you false impressions. Don't let him present

you with false narratives. Don't let him lead you to take part in a machlokes shelo lesheim Shomayim.

During the summer, when you are taking it easy, as well as during the winter, when you are hard at work, know that the yeitzer hora doesn't take a vacation. He's lurking in the shadows, waiting for an opportunity to twist your thinking, to provoke you to say the wrong thing and make the wrong move. He has a bridge to sell you and you don't want to buy it.

When you need to make a decision, think about what your father would say, and what your mother would say, and make sure your intentions are pure and honest. Then say, "What would Hashem want me to do?"

If it's not true, it's not for you. If it's a lie, tell it goodbye.

Have a great summer.