

Shayla: Why did Moses fall face down?

Numbers 16:1-4 HCSB Now Korah son of Izhar, son of Kohath, son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took (2) 250 prominent Israelite men who were leaders of the community and representatives in the assembly, and they rebelled against Moses. (3) They came together against Moses and Aaron and told them, "You have gone too far! Everyone in the entire community is holy, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" (4) When Moses heard *this*, he fell face down.

Midrash:

Compare verse 4 in this passage to:

- **Numbers 14:5 HCSB** Then Moses and Aaron fell down with their faces *to the ground* in front of the whole assembly of the Israelite community.

After ten of the spies (*meraglim*) gave their negative report about the dangers facing us in Eretz Yisra'el, the people grew rebellious. As a result, "Moses and Aaron fell down with their faces *to the ground* in front of the whole assembly of the Israelite community."

However, in this passage before us, after Korah and his cronies complained, it says Moses heard THEN fell on his face. No word is superfluous in the Holy Scriptures. Why did the Ruach' HaKodesh spell out this difference? Why did Moses not listen at all to the meraglim or their negative audience, but did listen to Korah's motzi shem ra?¹

I believe that the difference speaks to the very core of who Moses was. Remember that in Numbers 14, the people said, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or if only we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to die by the sword?" It was this statement that caused Moses to fall on his face. When someone criticizes Hashem, there is simply nothing to listen to. No heed should be paid to their comments. The people were obviously wrong and so Moses immediately prostrated himself.

However, the case in Numbers 16 was totally different. Korah's complaints were directed, not at Yahweh but at Moses! To this Moses listened. Perhaps he thought that Korah might have something constructive to say. Perhaps he thought that though the comments were completely critical and without the proper motive, there might yet be something worth hearing. The humblest man on earth² likely thought, "Obviously I'm not perfect. There is only One who is truly good. Perhaps I HAVE done something wrong. Perhaps I have a defect that needs to be remedied." Only after hearing Korah out, realizing his ulterior motive and the evil he was perpetrating, did Moses fall on his face.

Due to our yetzer hara we too often stubbornly refuse to listen to the complaints or criticisms of others. However, gaining an office, even gaining a position of leadership (which are two different things) does not necessarily mean that we are smarter or wiser than the critic.

Moses was eighty years old when Korah criticized him. He possessed the highest level of wisdom it is possible for man to attain (short of Solomon) and did so with a humble spirit that was unsurpassed by any. He was the leader of our nation. In reality, as Abraham was our spiritual founder, Moses was our political founder. It was under his enlightened leadership that we were transformed from a motley crew of slaves, a gangly bunch of distantly related tribes, to a very real political force. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Moses was likely one of the greatest humans ever. Yet he remained willing to hear what Korah had to say.

¹ Slander as in: Exodus 23:1; Leviticus 19:16; Psalm 15:1-3; Proverbs 10:18; 25:18

² Numbers 12:3

May we all gain sufficient merit to follow in Moses' steps and always be passionate about growing in our ability to perform mitzvot. May we all reach our true potential as Yahweh's slaves.