

"Princes of the congregation, appointed to the assembly, men of renown." (16:2)

The *Talmud* in *Sanhedrin 52a* depicts how a *Torah* scholar is viewed in the eyes of the common man who is not knowledgeable in *Torah* (*am ha'aretz*). He is compared to a shining golden vessel. This analogy is accurate only as long as the scholar does not condescend to the level of the commoner. Once this occurs, the *am ha'aretz* views the scholar as nothing more than a simple clay vessel whose value is ephemeral. *Rashi* applies this description to Korach's relationship with the *Torah* scholars of his generation, who eventually submitted and joined his mutinous revolt against Moshe and Aharon.

Korach, who was successful in persuading the average layman to follow his perverted logic, was in awe of *Torah* scholars. He felt *Torah* scholars were shining objects, their moral integrity radiating forth. He saw their exemplary actions growing as a luminous beacon which refuted the model image of a *Torah* Jew.

This aura, however, was immediately shattered when Korach invited these scholars to a meal, and they accepted. This fatal flaw was the beginning of their misfortune. No longer were they perceived as invulnerable; their sublime stature was now diminished in Korach's eyes. If they were so praiseworthy, how could they profane themselves to associate with such a miscreant as Korach? He now felt he could persuade them to join his unpropitious mission against Moshe. We may note two lessons from this *Talmud*. On one hand, this situation illustrates the power and influence of a respected individual. As long as *Korach* esteemed the scholars, their eminence prevented him from approaching them. With all his audacity, Korach would not propose anything disreputable to the scholars, for he held them in the highest regard. On the other hand, as soon as they demonstrated one slightly inappropriate action, by accepting Korach's invitation, their image was demeaned from Korach's perspective. No longer were they pure; they had become mere putty to be toyed with by this master manipulator. We need to be forever vigilant over the image which we project. We should not underestimate our own stature in the eyes of others, for this can lead to an unfortunate "*Chilul Hashem*" (desecration of Hashem's Name). By maintaining our actions and interrelationships on an impeccable pure level, we not only sanctify Hashem's Name, but also avoid unwarranted harm to ourselves.