

The Double-Edged Dollar (Ekev)

Ambition makes the same mistake concerning power that avarice makes concerning wealth. She begins by accumulating power as a means to happiness, and she finishes by continuing to accumulate it as an end. -Charles Caleb Colton

Moses recounts how Korah, Datan, Aviram and their followers who rebelled against Moses and God were swallowed up by the earth with all their belongings:

“The earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and their tents, and all the fortunes at their feet.”
Deuteronomy 11:6

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the Kli Yakar (1550-1619), notes the interesting phrase, “the fortunes at their feet.” He explains that one’s wealth is what stands a person up on “their feet.” He quotes Maimonides who sets out that wealth is the basis of a normative life and one of the four pillars (admittedly the lowest – hence the “feet”) of a healthy and successful existence.

The Kli Yakar draws on a midrash that claims Korah was extravagantly wealthy. Israelis to this day still use the term “as wealthy as Korah” to denote extreme wealth. This great wealth led him astray. He thought it was a foundation, a platform, for more power. The desire for greater prestige skewed his thinking. Though he had been considered a great man, he did not see what was clearly erroneous thinking. His wealth blinded him to reality and to the fact that he had taken the wrong side in an ill-considered battle.

Ultimately, the same wealth that sustained him and his family corrupted his judgment and betrayed him.

May we control our wealth, as opposed to our wealth controlling us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To Johann Reuchlin. Over 500 years ago, Johann Reuchlin argued in front of Maximilian I of Germany to stop the decree to destroy all Jewish books. The effort was initiated by the apostate Jew, Johann Pfefferkorn. Reuchlin won and Jewish books of that era were saved.

<https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12081-pfefferkorn-johann-joseph>