

KORACH (NUMBERS 16:1-18:32)

Almond Joy

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

REBBETZIN PESHA LEIBOWITZ AND "OUR MAN SEPLOWITZ"

You are receiving this week's Torah Talk message later than usual. I wasn't able to send it earlier because I was attending the funeral of Rebbetzin Pesha Leibowitz, A"H.

Rebbetzin Leibowitz was the wife of my Rebbe, HaGaon Rav A. Henoch Leibowitz, Shlit"a, the Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) of the Rabbinical Seminary of America (Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim). The Yeshiva places great emphasis upon its students going into the field of Torah education. Hundreds of Chofetz Chaim alumni serve in pulpits and yeshivas all over the world. [NOTE: Since the time this was written, her husband, the Rosh Yeshiva, of Blessed Memory, has passed away as well.]

Rebbetzin Leibowitz took a personal interest in every aspect of the Yeshiva. She stood by the Rosh Yeshiva's side as his advisor and confidant.

The Rosh Yeshiva and the Rebbetzin had no biological children of their own. Yet, their love and concern for every student illustrates the Talmudic adage that "one's students are like one's children." The Rebbetzin kept track of all of the students and was concerned about their physical and spiritual well-being. A few years ago, she bumped into my wife (whom she had met a handful of times, over two decades ago) at the local Pathmark store in Monsey. She immediately greeted her with a hug and a kiss. Every Yeshiva student's family was the Rebbetzin's family.

As I was leaving the funeral, a friend of mine whispered, "Our man Seplowitz." I gave him a confused look. He reminded me of an event that took place many years ago.

I once approached the Yeshiva with a request for assistance with a particular issue. The Yeshiva had some contacts that I needed to access; I couldn't do it on my own. I felt a little self-conscious, though. Many of the Yeshiva alumni regularly attend alumni functions; they stay in close contact with the Yeshiva. I had not been around for a few years. I felt a little funny asking for a favor.

The Rebbetzin commented, as I consulted her for advice, "We have to help out our man Seplowitz!"

Not only did she help. She did it in a way that I would feel comfortable about it; entitled to a favor. That was the type of person she was. Everything for Torah, everything for others.

I humbly dedicate this week's Torah Talk message in memory of Rebbetzin Pesha bas HaRav Yosaif Chaim Avraham, A"H. Rest well, Rebbitzen. May you be a "Meilitzas Yosher," a Heavenly Advocate, for our beloved Rebbe, the Rosh Yeshiva, that he should have the strength and good health to continue his work. May the Yeshiva continue to grow and flourish as it did when we had your wisdom and leadership.

And may I be worthy of being "your man Sepowitz."

-----“ALMOND JOY”

How far should we go for positive PR?

Moses had his hands full. We read last week about two rebellions. (Actually three. The nation should have trusted G-d, and not requested a spy mission to Canaan in the first place.) The nation rebelled by believing the spies' negative report about the Land. They refused to go. (See “Fringe Benefits”.) Then, after being told that they were no longer entitled to go, they tried to go anyway. Moses warned them that if they would try to enter the Land without G-d's permission, they would be defeated. They ignored his warning, and returned humiliated. (See “I’m Gonna Do What You Want ... Whether You Like it or Not!”)

This week Moses finds his authority challenged. His cousin Korach accused him of fabricating Commandments. He claimed that some of the Mitzvahs made no sense; Moses must have made them up. This claim was actually a ruse; Korach was covering the fact that he was jealous of the fact that another relative, Elitzafan, had been chosen over him for a position of authority.

Korach and his 250 followers questioned the appointment of Moses' brother Aaron as High Priest. "... *The entire Nation is holy, and G-d is with them. Why have you placed yourselves above G-d's congregation?*" (Numbers, 16:3).

The next day, Korach and his followers were gone. (See "There's More to Being Right than Just Not Being Wrong") In an overwhelming display of Divine support for Moses and his policies, G-d opened the earth under Korach's mob and swallowed them. Now, once and for all, Moses' leadership was solidified. He had, after all, warned Korach and his followers that if they would persist in challenging Aaron's Priesthood that the ground would swallow them. He had showed unequivocally that he was right. Now that G-d had miraculously put down Korach's rebellion, no one would dare question Moses...

No? Apparently, Moses' problems weren't over. In spite of G-d's obvious Hand in punishing Korach and Company, there were still people who were unconvinced. They actually blamed Moses for the deaths! "...*You killed G-d's People!*" (Ibid, 17:6)

Have you ever heard anything so ridiculous?! How dare they open their mouths to Moses? Wasn't it plain to see that G-d was totally behind Moses in everything he did?

How did Moses react to this new challenge? First, he had to stop a plague. G-d was angry with the Nation, and began to kill the complainers. Moses interceded with G-d and the plague ended. Next, G-d told him to propose a new test. He took a stick from each Tribal leader and wrote that leader's name on

it. He then placed each stick in the ground in the Tabernacle. G-d would then designate whom He had chosen by causing that person's stick to blossom. Sure enough, next morning, Aaron's staff was there, for all to see, covered with almond blossoms.

(By the way, there are some families of Kohanim named Mandel. I've been told that the reason is that "*Mand'l*" is Yiddish for almond.)

This is difficult to understand. Why did G-d tell Moses to propose yet a test? Any intelligent person HAD to understand by now that Moses was on the level. Why did G-d "bother" to make another miracle? Some people are never convinced. Why didn't Moses tell them to take it as it is or leave it? "I'm in charge and that's the way it is. If you don't like it, go find yourself another desert!!"

Why did Moses continue to bend over backwards to convince them? Surely, HE knew he was right. Why was it necessary to keep trying to convince the non-believers?

On one hand, we don't live our lives for other people. We are supposed to do the right thing because that's what G-d wants us to do. We're not looking to impress anyone.

On the other hand, we are required to make every effort to avoid the appearance of impropriety. If there were people who thought that Moses was being less than honest, Moses felt a need to educate them. He was totally comfortable with his own position; he knew that he was right. But how could he allow them to sin? In his love for his people, he felt that he had to bring them around.

Therefore, G-d performed another miracle in support of Moses and Aaron; not because Moses and Aaron needed it; rather, because THE PEOPLE needed it.

G-d does not need a public relations agent. He is doing fine whether we serve Him or not. It is WE who gain when given the opportunity to serve Him. It is we who grow when we help others to see the beauty of a Torah lifestyle.

There are many people who do not yet understand Judaism. Many of them DON'T WANT to understand Judaism. Should we just write them off and cast them aside? Should we say, "Well, if you don't want to see the depth and profundity of Torah, that's YOUR problem"?

If my fellow Jew does not yet appreciate all that the Torah can do for him, it is MY problem. Several times a day we recite the Torah's Commandment, "*You will love G-d...*" (Deuteronomy, 6:5) How does one fulfill the Mitzvah of loving G-d? The Talmud tells us that we express our love for G-d by bringing others to love G-d.

That is the main purpose of this website. It is my humble effort at educating my fellow Jews about the holiness and eternal relevance of Torah. That is why I write weekly columns on the Torah Portion.

And that is why I pray to continue to have the privilege of being "the Rebbetzin's man Seplowitz."

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

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