

KORACH (NUMBERS 16:1-18:32)**Behind Every Successful (and Unsuccessful!) Man...**

2007 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

G-d said, “It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper compatible for him.” (Genesis, 2:18)

Ever since the beginning of time, from Eve’s offer of fresh fruit to her husband to this morning when your wife asked you (again!) to take out the garbage, our wives have been right there telling us what we need to do.

Two wives played very important behind-the-scenes roles in this week’s Torah Portion.

Korach ... began a rebellion, along with Dathan and Aviram ... and Onn son of Peleth... They, together with 250 Israelites confronted Moses ... (Numbers, 16:1-2)

Korach and his gang challenged the authority of Moses. They questioned appointments that Moses had made, and eventually accused him of making up the Commandments without G-d’s authority. (See “True Blue” and “Almond Joy”.)

How did it all start? Two weeks ago we read of the Consecration ceremony for the Levites. (Ibid, 8:5-15) Korach, along with his fellow Levites, (including Moses’ sons) had their hair shaven. Korach came home looking like Yul Brenner. Mrs. Korach reprimanded her husband for allowing Moses to degrade him like that. She later suggested to him that Moses was fabricating Commandments. By the time she finished with him, he was prepared to take Moses on in an uprising designed to “take back our religion.”

Korach ended up being swallowed alive by an opening in the ground. (“Thanks for the advice, dear!”)

Moses went to visit Dathan and Aviram. He wanted to talk some sense into them. He didn’t want to see them perish along with Korach:

Dathan and Aviram went out and stood defiantly at the entrance of their tents, along with their wives... (Ibid, verse 27)

Mr. & Mrs. Dathan, and Mr. & Mrs. Aviram, together with their children, stood at the entrances of their tents, cursing Moses. They followed Korach into the ground. (“Thanks for the advice, dear!”)

There is one more Mrs. who played an important role. Remember Onn?

Korach ... began a rebellion, along with Dathan and Aviram ... and Onn son of Peleth...

Onn son of Peleth! What happened to Onn son of Peleth? He's mentioned at the very beginning of the story, but we never hear from him again. He was not swallowed up along with Korach. He did not continue his participation in the rebellion. Why not?

Saved by Mrs. Onn! She did everything she could to dissuade him. "What do you need this rebellion for? You gain nothing! If Moses wins, his brother Aaron will remain as High Priest. If Korach wins, he'll be the High Priest. Why are you involved in this?"

Onn was wavering. His wife took action. She sat outside of her tent, dressed in a less-than-fully-modest fashion. Korach and his cohorts maintained the façade of being very devout Jews. They wouldn't approach a tent where the woman of the house was not properly dressed. They left, and finished the revolt without Onn.

The wives of Korach and Onn are contrasted in the following verse:

The wise among women builds her house, while the wicked woman demolishes it with her own hands.
(Proverbs, 9:1)

Onn's wife had the wisdom to convince her husband to remain devoted to G-d and to Moses. In that way she saved her home. Korach's wife continued to egg him on, drawing him into this dispute, ultimately destroying them both.

So who gets the credit and who gets the blame? If Korach was instigated to evil by his wife, why should he be punished? If Onn was leaning toward rebellion and was only prevented due to his wife's intervention, why should he be spared?

I think we can see the answer by rereading the verse I quoted in the beginning:

G-d said, "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper compatible for him."

The literal translation is "... a helper *AGAINST* him." The Talmud (Yevamos, 63a) inquires, "Is she a *helper*, or is she *against him*?"

The answer, says the Talmud, is that it depends. "If the man is worthy, she will be a *helper*; if he is unworthy, she will be *against him*."

A man gets the wife he deserves. She will encourage her husband to go in the direction toward which he is generally leaning.

Korach was an evil, jealous, and power-hungry man. It didn't take much encouragement from his wife to go where he was headed. Onn was a basically decent man who had been temporarily led astray. His wife put him back on the right track.

Are you successful? Thank your wife. Are you a failure? Blame yourself!

Have a great Shabbos.

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