

Korach – The Lesson of On’s Wife – Avi Friedwald (reprint)

ד' תמוז תשע"ט – 6th July 2019 – שבת פי' קרח

This week’s sedra describes how *Korach*, *Dasan*, *Aviram* and *On Ben Peles* all disputed Moshe’s right to lead the Jewish people. But shortly afterwards *On* disappears from the story and his name doesn’t appear any further. Chazal explain that *On*’s wife saved him by arguing that he won’t gain whatever the result of the dispute. If Moshe wins, you’ll be subservient to him – and if *Korach* wins you’ll be subservient to him, so there’s no point in getting involved. He accepted her refutation – but asked her what he should do when *Korach* comes to get him, as he’d committed to help. She then gave him a meal and some drink to make him fall asleep. While he was sleeping, she put off *Korach* and his contingent by combing her hair by the entrance to their tent, which was halachically unacceptable even in their opinion. Chazal in Sanhedrin (109b-110a) praise her wisdom quoting a pasuk in Mishlei (14:1) – חכמת נשים בנתה ביתה – *the wise among women, each builds her house*.

Rav Avigdor Nevenzahl asks what she did that was so worthy of praise? It’s true she prevented her husband from joining *Korach* in the rebellion, but surely she should have rebuked him and told him that Moshe was the Godol Hador and he should be supporting him, rather than giving him the impression she believed he was right – but that he won’t gain either way?

He answers that this was precisely the wisdom of *On*’s wife – to recognise that the whole rebellion was based on the Yetzer Hora, rather than based on facts. Any proofs of Moshe’s authenticity would not convince her husband that he was wrong – as the Yetzer Hora had convinced him otherwise. The only way to cause a change of heart was to show him that he had nothing to gain by supporting *Korach* – and therefore would just be wasting his time and effort.

To defeat the Yetzer Hora, the best technique is to realise that the “benefits” of the wrongdoing are actually non-existent, or very short-lived. He brings another example to illustrate this point:

When Yaacov Ovinu spoke to Rachel and Leah and asked them to leave Lovon’s house and come with him to Eretz Yisrael – he first justified this by telling them how dishonest Lovon was and how he felt he wasn’t welcome anymore. Only at the end he mentioned as an aside that an angel of G-d told him to return to Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Nevenzahl asks – surely Yaacov could have told his wives outright that he was instructed by Hashem to leave Lovon’s house and return to Eretz Yisrael? Similarly – when they responded to his request – they should have simply said – if G-d commanded us to return, we must do so. Why did they first respond to Yaacov’s first statement and only afterwards to the fact Hashem asked them to leave?

He suggests that this was based on similar logic to *On*’s wife. Although Hashem had commanded Yaacov and his family to return to Eretz Yisrael – Yaacov first had to battle with the Yetzer Hora and only then would he have the strength to take his family away from Lovon.

He says that there is a common misconception that the Yetzer Hora is only interested in destroying us spiritually, but happy to keep us alive physically. He explains that in truth, the Yetzer Hora wants to destroy our Olam Hazeh as well as our Olam HaBo. The Yetzer Hora believes that if we have Olam Hazeh, we can do more mitzvos and emulate Hashem in various ways.

He brings as a proof the snake who convinced Chava to eat from the tree of knowledge. He advised her that as a result she’ll be “like G-d – knowing good and evil”, but as a result not only did she not get the spiritual result she was after – but ended up being kicked out of Gan Eden, losing her longevity and having to live a much more challenging existence.

May we all have the inner strength to defeat the Yetzer Hora and see the “benefits” of doing the right thing.