

Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Korach
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פרשת קרח
ג' בתמוז תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 16:1-18:32

This week's *parasha* is about the rebellion of Korach and his men against Moshe and Aharon, whom they felt should not be the heads of the Jewish people. The rebellion failed miserably, and Korach and his men are "swallowed by the earth" in an earthquake. Hashem then instructs Aharon regarding laws of the priesthood.

The *parasha* opens by introducing the people involved in the rebellion: "וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח, בֶּן-יִצְחָר בֶּן-קֵהַת בֶּן-לֵוִי; וַדָּתָן וָאֶבְיָרָם בְּנֵי אֶלְיָאָב, וְאוֹן בֶּן-פֶּלֶת--בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן. וַיִּקְמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה, וָאֶנְשֵׁים מִבְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאַתָּים, נְשִׂאֵי עֵדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד, אֲנָשֵׁי-שֵׁם. – Now Korach, the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehat, the son of Levi, with Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and On, the son of Pelet, sons of Reuven, took men; and they rose up in face of Moshe, with certain of the Bnei Yisrael, the elect men of the assembly, men of renown."

Oddly enough, as the story continues, Korach, Datan, and Aviram remain key players, but we never hear from On the son of Pelet again. The midrash realizes this also, and addresses the question of why in *Bemidbar Rabbah* 18:20:

ואון בן פלת למה נקרא שמו און שכל ימיו באנינות בן פלת בן שנעשו בו פלאות אמר רב און בן פלת אשתו הצילתו ואמרה ליה מה לך בהדי פלוגתיה, אי אהרן כהנא רבא את תלמידא אי קרח כהנא רבה את תלמידא, אמרה ליה ידענא כוליה כנישתא קדישא דכתיב ביה כי כל העדה כולם קדושים מה עבדת אשקיתיה חמרא וארוויתיה ואנגיתיה בערסא והוה יתבא אבבא היא וברתה וסתרא למזייה כל מאן דאתא בשביל און בעלה כיון דחזייה הדור אדהכי והכי אבלעינהו היינו דכתיב (משלי יד) חכמת נשים בנתה ביתה זו אשתו של און

And On son of Pelet. Why is his name called "On"? Because all of his days he was in mourning [*aninut*] [for having joined the rebellion against

Moshe.] Son of Pelet? Because wonders [*pela'ot*] were done for him. Rav said, his wife saved her husband by extricating him from the band of complainers. After she saw that he had joined Korach and his company, she told him: "What will you gain from this quarrel? Now Moshe is the teacher, and you are the student. And if your rebellion succeeds and Korach replaces Moshe, once again, he will be the teacher and you will be the student! What will you gain from this revolt?" On told his wife: "What can I do? I took counsel with them, and I swore to them that I would be with them in all!" His wife told him: "'For all the community are holy'; I know that all the community are holy, and that they are scrupulous in matters of modesty. Sit, and I will save you." What did she do? She gave him wine to drink, got him drunk, and laid him down inside the tent. The woman sat at the entrance to the tent and loosened her hair, as if she were bathing. Whoever came to call On saw her and went back. When On awakened, Korach and his company had already been swallowed by the earth, the two hundred and fifty notables had been burnt, and On son of Pelet was saved from being swallowed up alive and from being burnt to death. This is what it means when it is written in *Mishlei* (Proverbs) 14:1: "The wisest of women builds her house," for she saved her household with her wisdom.

In this midrashic depiction, the wife of On son of Pelet is a practical and clever woman. She thinks one step ahead and weighs potential actions by their consequences. She saw that if the revolt were to fail, her husband would suffer grievous harm as a result; and if it were to succeed, then, in any event, her husband would not advance. When she attempts to persuade her husband, she uses the arguments that she knows will have an effect on him, since she is familiar with him and knows that he is acting out of his lust for power. The wife's strong character is stressed, in comparison with the conduct of her husband, who is drawn along by the band of rebels. On's wife does not rely on his ability to withstand the social pressure of his accomplices. When she wants to execute her plan she sees to it that he becomes inebriated and then lays him down in the tent. In this manner she ensures that her husband will not go to the tent entrance if he hears his comrades outside. In the continuation of the *midrash*, we see that although the wife is closely acquainted with the ancient laws of modesty, she is even willing to sit in an immodest manner at the tent entrance in order to save her husband's life. She performs an unbecoming act to achieve a higher goal: rescuing her home and family.

Although the Torah never explicitly mentions the wife of On son of Pelet, the rabbis who wrote this midrash clearly recognized the contribution of such women in the wilderness and acknowledged their wisdom and finesse.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Name three different things that the wife of On did to prevent him from joining Korach's rebellion.
- Which of these do you think was the most effective? Which was the most ethical?
- Do you think this midrash could possibly be historically true? Why or why not?