

Countering Cunningness Parshat Korach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

The parsha begins by listing the main protagonists in a rebellion against the leadership of Moshe Rabbenu. First is the instigator, Korach ben Yitzhar followed by Dathan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and Ohn ben Peles. However, as the narrative continues, Ohn seems to have disappeared. A well known Medrash begins to clarify this mystery. Ohn's wife asked him what he would gain by joining in the rebellion. If Korach succeeded, he would lead, but Ohn would still be a follower. Ohn then asked how he could effectively separate himself from the group. Mrs. Peles devised a plan. She placed herself at the entrance of their tent and began combing her hair. When Korach and his group saw her they came no further and Ohn and his family were saved. It is because of the insight of Mrs. Peles that our Sages say, "The wisdom of a woman has established a house..."

If Ohn did not remain part of the rebellion, why mention his name? Our tradition teaches that while we are rewarded for thoughts and intentions to do *mitzvot*, we are not punished for thoughts and intentions of sinning unless we carry them out. The Gemara cites only one exception to this rule, thoughts of *apikorsut*, a denial of God Himself and arguing against one's Rebbe. This indicates the seriousness of heresy and of rebellion against Torah authorities.

Ohn ben Peles stands as a prototype for all of us who can fall prey to the lures of the *yetzer hara*, Ohn/he finds himself in a constant struggle, but he is also a ben Peles, a being with a higher and wondrous self. His wife was his *ezer kinegdo*, the reflection of his better half. She understood the focus of the *yetzer hara* and used that point as the basis for her

argument rather than pure logic, for the *yetzer hara* uses many tools, often emotional and psychological rather than logical.

The Sifsei Chaim notes that Korach used the power of mockery to attract supporters. By telling a hypothetical story of a poor widow who was left indigent because whatever she tried, she was forced to give so many gifts to the priests, Korach mocked the fundamentals of Torah, implying that Moshe's teachings were flawed and self-serving. The Ramchal observes that when people observe mocking behavior, they generally stop thinking clearly and join in the derisive outlook.

Mrs. Peles didn't argue logically. She used the *yetzer hara's* own tools. The lure of honor that propelled Korach would not affect Ohn no matter who the leader was. Then she made Ohn drunk, a condition that would parallel that lack of logical thought mockery had created. Cynicism and mockery prevent growth, just as a drunken stupor followed by sleep prevent growth. Mockery is the hallmark of Amalek and is their major weapon against *Bnei Yisrael*, writes Rabbi Frand. Arrogance and egotism tear down other people and what they represent. Cynicism is its most effective tool. We must remain on guard, for there's a little of Amalek in each of us. When we fall into the trap of the *yetzer hara*, when our desires overtake us, it is hard to extricate ourselves from them.

As Rabbi Elazar states in Pirkei Avot, envy is one of three things that remove one from this world. Korach was so consumed with jealousy of Moshe and Aharon, notes Rabbi Segal, that he refused to recognize his own exalted position in Hashem's service. Someone in that state of desire loses sight of reality. This was

the wisdom of Ohn's wife, continues Rabbi Ezrachi. She got Ohn to sleep, and when he woke up, he would see things with greater clarity. Most of us are fortunate enough to have someone in our lives who can bring us back to reality, but we also have the power of countering the power of the *yetzer hara* within ourselves. One must know what argument to present at the current moment that will create the momentum for change. Similarly, when we find ourselves in a state of inertia before doing a *mitzvah*, we can motivate ourselves by focusing on the positive aspect of our action, whether it's our love of coffee to help us get up in the morning, to the smile we'll get from someone we help, to the benefit we always get from praying to Hashem.

The Manchester Rav suggests that perhaps Ohn himself was afflicted with a similar envy that blinded him to the illogic of Korach's persuasion. Mrs. Peles, by putting Ohn to sleep, writes Rabbi S. Grosbard, gave him the opportunity to stop, breathe, and think things through properly. To overcome the *yetzer hara*, we must turn off the distractions, be honest with ourselves and admit that we are not calm. We must work to retain the serenity and integrity of our souls. How do I respond to outside pressures? Do they cause me to get shaken up or do I stay focused on my inner truth? Mrs. Peles stayed focused on the truth and could recognize the real motivation behind Korach's challenge.

Rabbi Wachtfogel elaborates on this idea. Mrs. Peles showed Ohn that he was exactly where Hashem wanted him to be, regardless of who was the leader. If we know who we are and recognize our place in the world, we will not easily become ensnared in the traps of the *yetzer hara*.



Mesilat Yescharim: First Steps-Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Nisyonot (challenges) are meant to bring out the best in us and elevate us to the highest level so that we can earn *olam haba*. "*Hayom la'sosom umacher l'kabel secharam*- This day is for action and tomorrow-in the next world, we will receive reward." (Eruvin 22a)

The Mesilat Yescharim is based on a Gemara in Masechet Avodah Zorah. Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said there are nine steps to get to the

highest point of *kedusha*. He begins with *zehirut* (watchfulness). One has to work on oneself and restrain oneself from sin. If a person invests in this even a little Hashem will help him. However it works step by step. In order to come to any level of *sur me'ra* (separating oneself from evil) one has to begin with *Torah*. A man who lacked *zehirut* and unintentionally killed someone had to run to a city of refuge. There the Leviim taught Torah

which brings to *zehirut* and there the murderer would come to realize the importance of living a Torah life.

This is the first thing Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair tells us. Before we begin any process of destroying evil we must begin with Torah. Torah shows us how to live a life of discipline and values which will ultimately lead to true joy and fulfillment.

Kavod Shabbat and Candle Lighting: Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

In the Mishna in Shabbat Rabbi Yishmael says one should not light candles with *itrin*, residue of tar, because it has a foul odor. Rava explains, if you light with *itrin* it may cause you to immediately leave. Abaya asks why would it matter? Rava answers, "For I state that lighting Shabbat candles is an obligation." Rashi explains that lighting Shabbat candles fulfills the *mitzvah* of *kavod* (honoring) Shabbat. Leaving the area after lighting would be undermining the purpose of the candles. Tosfot adds to light the candles in the place where one will eat the meal as it adds to *oneg* (deriving pleasure) Shabbat. Some Acharonim imply that Rashi also held that lighting candles increases *oneg* because it's linked to the meal. This suggests, says the Griz (based on the Rambam), that there are two aspects to lighting Shabbat candles - *oneg* and *kavod Shabbat*. *Oneg*, as when there's light one enjoys the food more and *kavod*, as one lights the candles before the onset of Shabbat to honor the day. The Griz praised his mother for being meticulous to light candles before the start of *yom tov* to honor the festival, although according to *halacha* one may light later.

There's a disagreement between Abaya and Rava whether *kavod* or *oneg* is the dominant aspect of *hadlakat neiroi*. Rava holds that it is for *oneg*. If you're not enjoying and using the candles you haven't fulfilled the *mitzvah*. Abaya maintains that it is for *koved Shabbat*. One honors the Shabbat by lighting candles and even if you leave after lighting you've fulfilled the *mitzvah*.

The Bahag held that when you say the blessing on the candles you accept Shabbat. In general when making a blessing on a *mitzvah*, first you make the *bracha* and then you do the action. However with *hadlakat neiroi*, we first light and then make the *bracha*. Therefore the Rema brings the custom to cover one's eyes while making the *bracha* so that one does not derive benefit from its light before the blessing.

The Mishna Berurah discusses a scenario of a wedding that was held Friday. By the time the bride got back it was *hashmoshot* (twilight) when it is *safek* (possibly) Shabbat and so she couldn't light. A solution would be to light early before the wedding and then come back and make the blessing. The Magen Avraham was of the opinion that if it's still *bein*

hashmoshot one could ask a non-Jew to light and then she could make the blessing. We generally rule that a gentile can't be a *shaliach* (messenger) to do a *mitzvah*. How can the gentile light on the Jew's behalf? The Magen Avraham explains, perhaps the *mitzvah* is not the action itself but the *oneg* -deriving pleasure from its light and therefore the lighting may just be a *hechsher* (preparation) *mitzvah*. Therefore she can make a blessing as the gentile isn't the *shaliach* for the actual *mitzvah* but for the *hechsher mitzvah*. Rav Akiva Eiger disagrees and holds that the *mitzvah* is the lighting itself and so the gentile cannot do it.

In fact, Tosfot in Shabbat brings an opinion that you don't have to make a blessing on the candles. When the Gemara calls it a *chova* (obligation) it does not mean for ritualistic reasons but for reasons of danger so that one shouldn't be in darkness. The Mordechai quotes Rabbeinu Meshulam that there's no *bracha* until the *mitzvah* is completed which in this case is eating the meal by its light and enjoying the illumination. Rabbeinu Tam disagrees and says one must make a *bracha* as there is an obligation to formally light candles for *kavod Shabbat*.