

A TALE OF TWO WIVES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 244, Tachanun. Good Shabbos!

A Tale of Two Wives

Korach (from the tribe of Levi), along with Dassan, Aviram, On ben Peles (all from the tribe of Reuven) and 250 other men, rebelled against Moshe and Aharon's leadership. G-d divinely confirmed Moshe and Aharon's leadership when the earth swallowed up Korach, Dattan and Aviram, and their entire families, and a heavenly fire consumed the 250 men.

The obvious question is, what happened to On ben Peles? While On ben Peles and Korach started out in the same clique, they met very different ends. Korach suffered an ignominious death, while On ben Peles escaped.

The Talmud [Sanhedrin 109b] explains how they wound up going their separate ways. The Gemara says that the wife of On ben Peles saved him. She saw that he was getting all fired up about Korach's rebellion. She told him, "What difference does it make to you? If Moshe is the leader, you will be _his_ disciple and if Korach is the leader, you will be _his_ disciple. Either way, your station in life will not change. Why are you getting all excited?"

On ben Peles told his wife that since he had already sworn allegiance to Korach, there was no way he could now remove himself from the group. His wife gave him alcoholic beverages to drink until he fell asleep. She then went outside the tent as the 'mob' passed by, and did not allow them to come in and wake her husband. They ultimately left without him. Because of her, On ben Peles was saved.

On the other hand, the Talmud tells us that Korach's wife egged him on. It was her teasing which angered him against Moshe and fired him up to start his rebellion. We know the rest of the story.

The point of this Rabbinic teaching is to teach us what a difference a wife can make. Every once in a while, we need to hear words from our wives that set us straight and put us in our place. On the other hand, if a person does not merit a good wife, she and her urgings can be his undoing and the

cause of his destruction.

This is the interpretation that Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (The Netziv) gave to explain the expression "Ezer k'negdo" (a helpmate, opposite him) [Bereishis 2:18]. Sometimes she can help by helping, and sometimes she can help by opposing, standing up and protesting -- putting the husband, respectfully, in his right place [Yevamos 63a].

The divergent fate of Korach on the one hand and that of On ben Peles on the other, was the tale of two men, and even more, the tale of two wives.

The Argument of Korach and His Community

The Mishneh [Avos 5:17] says that any argument that is for the sake of Heaven is destined to have lasting, positive results, and any argument that is not for the sake of Heaven (in which people only serve their self interests) will never have positive results. As the classic example of an argument for the sake of Heaven, the Mishneh cites the disciples of Hillel and Shammai. The paradigm of an argument not for the sake of Heaven is that of "Korach and his community." Many have commented that in order to use appropriate, parallel language in the Mishneh, the example should be "the argument of Korach and Moshe" (the two adversaries), not "of Korach and his community."

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) offers the following insight. What does the Mishneh mean when it says that the argument of Korach and his community is an argument that is not for the sake of Heaven? Rav Schwab says that when there is an argument for the sake of Heaven, both parties realize that there is another side to the argument. Beis Shammai may say 'Guilty' and Beis Hillel may say 'Innocent', but they are both interested in arriving at the truth. In order to get to the truth, I must hear the other side. I agree that there is another side to the argument. I may happen to think that the other side is wrong, but I admit that there is another side.

An argument that is not for the sake of Heaven is that of Korach and his followers. These individuals all believed that there was only their side of the argument. There was nothing to talk about. They were not even willing to listen to the other side. They were not interested in finding the truth. They were only interested in promoting their side. It was not the argument of Korach and Moshe. To this community, Moshe did not even exist. He had no 'side' in the dispute.

We must be tolerant enough and understanding enough to realize that there can perhaps be two sides to an issue. We must at least be willing to listen to and willing to consider the other side. We do not need to be willing to agree to the other side, but we must at least admit that the other side exists. Sometimes people become so intolerant and so closed-minded that they are not even willing to admit this.

The Talmud tells us, "Just as the faces of people do not exactly resemble one another, so too their opinions do not exactly resemble one another" [Brochos 58a]. Just as no two people look exactly alike, so too, no two people think exactly alike.

I once heard an insight into this Rabbinical comment, in the name of Rav Shlomo Eiger (1786-1852). The meaning of the Talmud's statement is that just as it should not bother me when someone does not look like me, so too, the fact that someone does not think like me should not bother me.

A person is considered among the disciples of Hillel and Shammai when he is tolerant and is not bothered by someone disagreeing with him. However, when a person can not tolerate disagreement with his own opinion and feels that 'there is no other side', he is unfortunately considered a disciple of Korach and his congregation.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#244). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Tachanun. The other halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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