

## A Daily Bread

**Date:** 30 Sivan 5785 (June 26, 2025)

**Torah Portion:** Korach

**Topic:** A Wife's Wisdom

It is written (Num. 16:1), "Now Korach, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Lewi, with Dathan and Aviram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben." The Midrash questions the reason for being called "On." They answer that all the rest of his days were spent in mourning. The Midrash tells us that On quit the rebellion because of his wife's intercession. However, for the rest of his life he mourned that he had participated in its initial stages, when he rose with the others and brazenly defied Moshe. Alternatively, he mourned that his wife had to save him because he lacked the strength of character to save himself.

And why was On called as "son of Peleth (פֶּלֶת)?" Because he was a son for whom miracles (פְּלִאוֹת; *pe-la'ot*) were performed. It was miraculous that On was saved from the rebels' fate, and that he came to understand the wickedness of their ways.

The Scripture states (Prov. 14:1), "The wise among women, each builds her house." This alludes to On's wife who saved her husband from sharing in the tragic fate of Korach and his followers. Thus, she is to be commended and held up as an example. She was reasonable, resolute, and resourceful. But was she so sagacious as to exemplify "the wise among women"? After all, all she did is make a simple deduction, "If Aharon remains Kohen Gadol, you are his disciple; and if Korach becomes Kohen Gadol, you will be his disciple. Regardless of who prevails, you will not be Kohen Gadol!"

The great wisdom lay in her ability to keep her poise at a time of great confusion. By the time the rebellion occurred, Korach had thrown the entire nation into turmoil for he had won a large segment of the public to his side, including two hundred and fifty men of renown, who headed courts of Torah law. It was not easy to avoid being swept up with the masses, to keep one's head in the prevailing chaos, to think clearly and independently. On's wife was able to do this is the most compelling sign of her extraordinary wisdom.

Most people are capable of acting with prudence and deliberation in an atmosphere of peace and quiet. But many of those same people will lose their equanimity in times of commotion and upheaval, causing them to follow the "herd" even when doing so is against their better judgment. This is a challenge we all face from time to time. Our task is to remain serene and steady even when others have lost their equilibrium to appraise the situation and weigh the options before us in a calm, level-headed way.

But we need not face this challenge alone. A person's spouse, who may not be vulnerable to the same influences and temptations, can be instrumental in helping one keep things in perspective and avoid getting carried away in the excitement of a new opportunity, a new development, a new perspective. This is especially true of the wife, On, the son of Peleth learned, undoubtedly with profound relief and gratitude, when he emerged from his stupor to find all of his fellow agitators gone from the world.

This is one of the primary ways a woman contributes to her husband's well-being in marriage. The Sages conclude based on the rationale that Hashem Himself created the woman and the institution of marriage. "It is not good that man be alone; I will make him a helper against him" (Gen. 2:18). How can she be a helper and "against him" at the same time? The Midrash explains: "If the husband is meritorious, she will be a helper; if he is not meritorious, she will be against him." At a glance, this appears to mean that the wife's role is either to help her husband or to antagonize him, depending on the latter's merits. But this understanding is hard to accept, because the plain sense of the verse, "It is not good for man to be alone..." is that Hashem created the woman for the man's benefit, to compensate for his deficiencies.

Therefore, we must understand differently. Certainly, the woman was created solely for the good of man. But there are two reasons why her help is needed. One is that the man cannot do everything alone. "When a man bring home wheat,

does he eat the kernels raw? Or when he brings home flax, does he wear the flax as is? It is his wife who turns the raw materials into a finished product. Does it then emerge that she illuminates his eyes and puts him on his feet!!<sup>1</sup>

The second obstacle to man's independence is the limitations of his understanding, the narrowness of his perspective. To help compensate for his handicap, Hashem instilled in the woman an extra level of discernment with which she can point out the flaws in her husband's thinking and save him in the moral sphere from lapsing into sin and in worldly matters from making improvident decisions in his business, social, or family life.

In summary, a woman is always poised to benefit her husband. When he is involved in worthy, productive activities, she helps out by acting as his partner, assuming those tasks for which she is better suited by skill or by temperament. When he gets caught up in something negative and harmful, she contributes by opposing him. That is what the Sages meant with their comment on the verse: If the husband is meritorious – in the sense that he is engaged in honorable pursuits – she will be “a helper.” If he is not meritorious, and he begins to drift in the wrong direction, she will be “against him,” steering him back onto the path of life.

Shalom

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<sup>1</sup> Yavamos 63a