

“And On ben Peles.” (16:1)

The *Midrash* teaches us that On *ben* Peles was saved as a result of listening to his wife. She asked him, “What do you gain by being involved in this dispute? Regardless of who triumphs, you still emerge as the loser. If Aharon is selected as *Kohen Gadol* – you will be his student. If Korach becomes the *Kohen Gadol* – you are still nothing more than a student. Why involve yourself in a ‘no win’ situation?” On’s wife spoke with *seichel*, common sense. Is this a reason to praise her? Basically, she only did what any level-headed person would do.

Horav Nosson Vachtfogel, z.l., offers a penetrating insight into the matter. He cites the *Talmud* in *Megillah* 13b where Rabbi Elazar claims that as reward for Rachel *Imeinu’s tzninus*, modesty, she merited that Shaul *Ha’melech* was descended from her. When did she demonstrate such exemplary *tzninus*? *Chazal* explain that when she gave her sister, Leah, the *simanim*, special signs, that Yaakov *Avinu* had given her, she acted with exemplary modesty. *Rashi* explains that her *tzninus* lay in the fact that she never publicized her selfless act of devotion to her sister. She never divulged to Yaakov what she had done. She was prepared to give up that for which she had strived for so much – the opportunity to be the progenitor of the *Shivtei Kah*, tribes of *Klal Yisrael*. She did not once call attention to her exemplary act of kindness. This is *tzninus* at its zenith.

Rav Nosson posits that included in the *middah* of *tzninus* is the ability to maintain a *shev v’al taaseh*, status quo, attitude in regard to a situation in which one is unsure of what to do. He does not take a chance and plunge forward regardless of the consequences. No – *tzninus* demands that one sit back and not act, rather than act rashly. Likewise, one who is a *tzanua* will not divulge a secret. If one is asked for information about someone and he does not know the person, it takes *tzninus* to say, “I do not know.” Regrettably, there are those who are quick to conjecture and state their own opinions about someone, even though they are baseless.

Rav Nosson remembers that, prior to being asked by *Horav Aharon Kotler, z.l.*, to become the first *Mashgiach* of the *Beth Medrash Govohah*, he was asked by a *talmid*, close student, of *Rav Aharon* regarding a controversial *sefer* that was on the table in one of the *yeshivah’s* classrooms. The *Mashgiach* responded, “I do not know.” This response prompted the *talmid* to approach *Rav Aharon* and suggest that *Rav Nosson* be appointed as *Mashgiach* of the *yeshivah*. It takes someone who possesses the strength of character to assert “I do not know” to be the *Mashgiach* of the Lakewood Yeshivah.

This was the power of On *ben* Peles’ wife. She had the ability to see and stress the *shev v’al taaseh* attitude: “If either way you will not be the victor, why bother involving yourself in the fray of the controversy? Stay at home and stay out of trouble.” It takes *tzninus* to act in such a manner. On was fortunate that his wife had this necessary character trait – and he had the wisdom to listen to her.