

## And On ben Peles. (16:1)

*On ben Peles* was one of the original leaders of the Korach dispute. Yet, he was ultimately absent from the end confrontation; thus, he was spared the horrible punishment meted out to Korach and his followers. In the *Talmud Sanhedrin* 109a, *Chazal* teach that *On* was blessed with a wise and righteous wife, who saw where this confrontation was going and devised a plan, a logical argument, by which she was able to convince her husband to stay “home.” She said to him, “What do you (personally) have to benefit from this folly? Regardless who emerges the winner, Moshe or Korach, you will still be the stooge. You will never achieve leadership status; so, why not stay home and let the others fight with Moshe?”

As a result of the argument which she presented, *Chazal* refer to her in the *pasuk* in *Mishlei* 14:1, *Chochmas nashim bansah beisah*, “The wise among women, each builds her house.”

When we analyze the argument which *On*’s wife presented, we wonder if it really demonstrates such unusual wisdom on her part. It is not as if she argued that Moshe *Rabbeinu* was the nation’s quintessential leader, who was chosen by G-d. He was the *Adon Ha’Neviim*, master of all prophets, whose integrity one may not impugn. Furthermore, she claimed that, regardless who emerged successful, he – *On* – would continue as the subservient one, the “loser.” Why did she simply not say that Korach was an *apikores*, heretic, who was subverting the nation? This would have indicated true wisdom on her part!

**Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl**, explains that wisdom connotes knowing what to say and what will be effective. Korach was trying to precipitate an argument concerning Moshe’s suitability and right to lead. *On ben Peles*’ mind was made up. He believed in Korach and resented Moshe. When two sides argue philosophically, supporting one side against the other only lands the supporter right in the middle of the argument. Hence, *On*’s wife was compelled to come up with an argument that would keep her husband’s mind away from the fray. She also knew the true reason that Korach and his followers were in contention with Moshe. It had nothing whatsoever to do with who was a better leader. It was all about *kavod*, glory, and *kinaah*, envy. As a wise woman, she had to play on the *kavod* and *kinaah* that was driving this *machlokes*.

She saw that whoever won, her husband would be subservient. He would never become a leader – because he was not destined for leadership. A smart person analyzes a situation and determines the proper course of action. This is what she did. She addressed the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, within her husband. “Even if you are correct that Moshe is not as qualified to lead as is Korach, where does that put you?” She understood the perverted psyche of these men. They had no problem impugning Moshe’s leadership, denying Hashem as the nation’s Divine leader, and undermining the Torah, but Heaven forbid should they gaze on a woman whose hair was uncovered! She was acutely aware of the double-standard that governed the lives of these men. Wisdom does not mean that one presents a better argument; rather, it is the one whose argument has greater efficacy that makes the difference.