

"And Onn, the son of Peles." (16:1)

The *Talmud* in *Sanhedrin 109b* states that although Onn was one of Korach's original followers, it was his righteous wife who saved him from certain destruction. Even after she logically established the folly of following Korach it was still difficult to prevent the others from forcibly convincing her husband to return to the group. Therefore, she contrived a plot to rescue her husband from imminent disaster. She mixed a strong drink that put him to sleep. Then she and her daughter uncovered their hair and sat at the entrance to their tent. When Korach's messengers arrived at the tent to summon Onn, they immediately turned back at the sight of Onn's wife and daughter. Thus, Onn never appeared.

The Jewish people were rightfully depicted by Korach as a "holy people," in whose midst resides the Divine Presence. This generation had accepted and exemplified the *Torah's* perspective on *tzenius* (moral modesty and privacy). Onn's wife knew that even Korach's messengers, who were so defiant in the opposition to Moshe's leadership, were morally pure and holy individuals. They would not interact with a woman in a morally questionable manner. It was unacceptable to enter Onn's home at a time when his wife was modestly unrepresentable.

We may wonder at this form of religious inconsistency. Korach and his followers created discord among the Jewish people, openly slandered Moshe and Aharon and questioned Hashem's choice of leadership for His nation. At the same time, however, they maintained an aura of moral modesty and integrity. It is specifically this hypocritical form of religious piety that potentiated the most degrading and insulting form of slander against Moshe. The *Talmud* in *Sanhedrin 106a* states that these same "holy" men suspected their wives of being involved with Moshe. Perhaps we may suggest that it was specifically their distorted approach to religious piety that enabled them to verbalize such perverted suspicions.

The *Baal Shem Tov* states that we perceive the world around us as a mirror. What we see in others is actually a reflection of our own image. Korach and his followers had a distorted perception of Moshe. They projected their own character flaws onto him. They felt that one can differentiate between the various aspects of religious observance. For example, they permitted slander while they simultaneously prohibited themselves from approaching a woman who was immodestly dressed. Consequently, they projected onto Moshe that he was capable of being a great *Torah* scholar and leader while indulging in moral infidelities. A true *Torah* leader is one who maintains the highest standards of moral integrity and religious piety throughout his performance of all of Hashem's *mitzvos*.