

And On ben Peles. (16:1)

Chazal teach that On *ben* Peles, one of Korach's early supporters, was destined to suffer the same bitter end that befell Korach and his mutinous followers. It was his wife who saved him. First, she attempted to bring him to his senses, claiming that he was in a lose-lose situation. Whether Moshe *Rabbeinu* persevered or Korach succeeded, On *ben* Peles was not going to become the leader of the nation. He was going to be a lackey, regardless of who triumphed. So, why did he get involved? The problem was that On *ben* Peles had committed himself and was a man who took his commitments seriously. He had been part of the conspiracy from the get-go. How could he back out now?

His wife was a true *eishes chayil*, who put her husband before herself. She was willing to do whatever it would take to preserve her marriage and prevent her husband from destroying his life. She gave her husband a good dinner, with enough strong wine to leave him slightly inebriated. She then coaxed him to take a nap. As her husband slept off his stupor, his wife heard the men coming to fetch him for the "meeting" to rebel against Moshe. On's wife understood the hypocrisy of these men – individuals who exemplified Torah scholarship, but who had no problem impugning the leadership of G-d's chosen leader. She knew how transparent their *frumkeit* was. She went to the window and unbraided her hair. The men saw a woman with her hair exposed, and they ran! Destroy Moshe – yes. That was fine, because according to their perverted logic, they were acting for the sake of the Jewish People. They all deserved to be leaders. Men who did not fear Hashem's wrath concerning their dispute with Moshe should not be "afraid" of some exposed hair. Why did they run?

The *Yalkut HaUrim* offers a practical explanation. The *Talmud Yoma* 47 states that a righteous woman named Kimchis merited to have seven sons, all of whom served as *Kohanim Gedolim*, High Priests. Clearly, this is no simple merit. *Chazal* questioned her concerning what it was that she did – or did not do – that warranted for her such incredible *nachas*, Torah-oriented satisfaction. She replied, "The walls of my home never 'saw' my (uncovered) hair." This teaches us that *tznius* – modesty and chastity – is a reason to merit sons who are great enough to serve as High Priests.

We now understand why Korach's henchmen made an about-face when they saw On's wife revealing her hair. Obviously, she was not a *tzenuah*, modest woman. Such a woman would not produce sons worthy of carrying on the legacy of Korach. They would never achieve spiritual distinction – so why bother with On altogether? We now have an insight into the perverted logic that guided these men.

Mayanah Shel Torah offers a similar explanation with a slightly different twist. The two hundred-fifty heads of the *Sanhedrin* held themselves in very high esteem. Indeed, every one of them thought himself worthy of becoming *Kohen Gadol*. Concerning the High Priest, the Torah writes, *V'chiper baado u'b'aad beiso*, "He shall atone for himself and for (on behalf of) his household" (*Vayikra* 16:11). *Chazal* define *beiso*, his house/household, as *ishto*, his wife. The mere

fact that the wife of the *Kohen Gadol* is on an even keel with him in regard to atonement indicates that a *Kohen Gadol* whose wife acts inappropriately has a serious problem concerning his own suitability for this lofty position. Thus, when the men saw On's wife acting in a manner unbecoming a Jewish woman, they became acutely aware that On was not their man.