

And Ohn ben Peles. (16:1)

Two women: One catalyzed her husband's downfall, while the other saved her husband from destruction and eternal infamy. Korach and his henchmen, Dasan, Aviram and Ohn ben Peles, together with the support of the 250 heads of the *Sanhedrin*, were bent on usurping the leadership of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 109b) teach that Ohn was saved by his wife. She asked him, "What difference does it make to you which man (Moshe or Korach) leads the nation? At the end of the day, you will still remain a lackey – not someone who is in charge." She then gave him enough wine to drink to make him sufficiently sleepy. When the men came to pick him up, she knew that they would insist on waking him. Therefore, she sat by the doorway of her tent and loosened the braids of her hair. Religious men would not gaze upon the uncovered hair of a married woman. (These same men had no problem with slander and heresy.) Since these men were careful about modesty, they retreated when they saw her sitting there.

Korach also had a wife. Her plans for her husband were quite different. Indeed, she egged him on, claiming that Moshe demonstrated no respect for him, as he took every honor either for himself or for his family. She imbued her husband with a venomous hatred for what Moshe was doing, thereby catalyzing him to dispute our quintessential leader, a grave error which cost him his physical and eternal life.

Two influential women – one incited downfall; the other rescued her husband. Ohn's wife questioned her husband: "What difference does it make who is on top – Moshe or Korach? In any event you are second fiddle." Her remark suggested that he deserved better. He was an honorable man who had leadership qualities. It was not worth disputing Moshe if he had nothing to benefit from it. Let him go back to the *bais hamedrash* and learn until an opportunity for a decent position would avail itself.

Korach's wife took a negative approach by beating up on her husband, putting him down, claiming that Moshe had taken everything from him. He deserved more and better. The only way was to take on Moshe and dispute his leadership. Did she really care about her husband, or did she care only about herself? Korach's wife always looked for the negative, focusing on how everything Moshe did demeaned her husband. Ohn's wife was practical. She cared about her husband. Korach's wife, however, cared only about herself.

While Ohn's wife was a good woman who cared deeply about her husband and his esteem, we are unaware of her personal qualities in imbuing him to achieve greatness. [This is not meant to imply that a woman who looks out for her husband and ensures his respectable treatment by others is not manifesting a remarkable trait.] At the end of the day, Ohn's wife did not effect a positive change in her husband. Without her last minute intervention, he, too, would have joined the 250 heads of the *Sanhedrin* in their premature demise. We do, however, find another woman in the Torah who had a positive influence on her husband, imbuing him with the strength of character to decide on his own that what others were doing was evil.

The Torah relates that prior to Moshe sending off the *meraglim*, spies, he prayed for Yehoshua. Why did he not pray for Kalev, who was left to go alone to Chevron to pray for himself at the graves of the Patriarchs? Surely, Moshe was not playing favorites. *Targum Yonasan* explains that Moshe feared for Yehoshua due to the latter's humility. He was concerned that his humility might cause him to question himself and assume that he was wrong, thus buckling under the weight of the majority of the spies. *Kalev ruach acheres imo*; "A different spirit was with him" (*Bamidbar* 14:24). The commentators say this alludes to his wife, whose attitude and spirit influenced his personality. Kalev's wife was none other than Miriam *HaNeviyah*, sister of Moshe and Aharon.

As a member of *Klal Yisrael's* leadership triumvirate, she was no stranger to bold action and resisting external pressure. She would not fall sway to the harmful diatribe of the spies. As a young girl, she risked her life to protect her baby brother. As a midwife, she defied Pharaoh. When she felt her father, Amram, had rendered a *halachic* decision that undermined *Klal Yisrael's* future, she spoke up. On the other hand, as Moshe and Aharon's sister, she combined their exemplary humility and love of the Jewish People, demonstrating firm, decisive action. She fought for the people to survive after the sin of the Golden Calf, but was quick to excoriate Korach for fomenting dissension. *Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita*, feels that Moshe relied on the influence of his sister rubbing off of Kalev. Thus, he did not feel that it was necessary to *daven* for him. Kalev had a great mentor.

We derive from here that the right wife does not have to take up "arms" to protect her husband. The right wife influences and – in the ideal situation – changes and makes him into a better man.

When the women left Egypt they came prepared, knowing that Hashem would make miracles for the Jews. Following the splitting of the Red Sea the men sang *Shirah*, praising Hashem for saving them. The women, led by Miriam, also sang. Understandably, the men knew that *yetzias Mitzrayim* was the precursor for the Giving of the Torah. Thus, they had much to sing about. What motivated the women's song? *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, explains that Miriam sang *Suss v'rochovo ramah bayam*; "The horse and rider were hurled into the sea" (*Shemos* 15:21). What did the horses do to deserve being drowned? The riders were Egyptian slave masters who participated in making life miserable for the Jews. They received their due. The horses were not simple bystanders – they assisted their masters. It was because of them that the Egyptians were able to move about freely in order to beat the Jewish slaves. Thus, the women who assisted their husbands by encouraging their faith in Hashem, had every right to sing *Shirah*.

David *Hamelech* says (*Tehillim* 119:165), *Shalom rav l'ohavei sorasecha v'ei lamo michshol*, "Great peace have those who love You, and nothing causes them to stumble." *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, comments: There are *lomdei Torah*, those who study Torah; and *ohavei Torah*, those who love the Torah. *Lomdei Torah* is a reference to men who are enjoined to study Torah. Unfortunately, among them are those who waste their time and do not study Torah. They bring upon themselves a grave sin. *Ohavei Torah* refers to women who are devoted to *harbotzas Torah*, dissemination of Torah engendered by their husbands. They share in their husband's *avodas*

hakodesh, holy service. Concerning them it says: "Nothing causes them to stumble." Women love the Torah and fulfill their obligation toward it. Since there is no imperative of *limud HaTorah* for them, no *michshol*, stumbling block, can be in their way.