

Parashat Korach: An anonymous "Eshet Chayil"

We have today a great Parasha with one of the most interesting stories related to power and leadership. The central story is about a character called "Korach", a charming and charismatic leader who organized a revolt against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Together with him were two brothers, Datan and Aviram, from the Tribe of Ruben, and a third character called On the son of Pelet, about whom I want to speak with you.

When we read the text of the Parasha we see that at the beginning of the revolt he is mentioned as one of the four leaders: *"Korach, the son of Izhar son of Kehat and son of Levi, betook himself along with Datan and Abiram, son of Eliab of On the son of Pelet, from the tribe of Reuben rose up against Moses with two hundred and fifty Israelites"*.

But there is a very curious detail that we find when we continue reading the story: This man On ben Pelet is never mentioned again! The Torah will continue describing the revolt with Korach, Datan and Aviram, but there is no mention about On. So, what happened to him? Did he escape? Was he killed? Was he taken prisoner?

According to the Midrash, the Rabbinical commentaries, On is not anymore part of this story because he was saved by his wife: The Rabbis tell that when she realized that her husband joined Korach's revolt, she said to him: "Please tell me, what will you gain from this revolt? Now Moses is the teacher and you are only a student... and if your rebellion succeeds and Korach replaces Moses, Korach will be the teacher and you will be a student as well! So, what are you going to get from this revolt?"

On answered to her: "But what can I do now? I have a commitment with them!" And the wife said: "Don't worry, I will take care" The wife then took wine and gave it to him until he was drunk and went to sleep. She sat at the entrance of the tent and loosened her hair (a sign of immodesty according to some traditions) so when the people came looking for On to participate in the revolt, they saw the wife in the front and didn't want to get close. When On woke up from his long sleep, Korach and his company had already been punished and swallowed alive by the earth.

This is a great Midrash. On's wife was a woman of a strong personality and determination. I think she taught us a couple of important lessons:

The first one: A man should listen to his wife. I have to confess that many times my wife has saved me from making bad decisions, from buying timeshares to situations when I was going to trust on someone who didn't have good intentions. Maybe not everyone will agree with me, but I think that sometimes women have better tools than men on how to understand people and human relationships. Maybe it is a gendered approach, but I think this not only because of my personal experience, but also because as a Rabbi I have been in contact with many families, and I think the dynamics is similar.

We have also a clear example of that in the Torah: God once commanded Abraham saying: *"Kol asher tomar Sarah shma bekola"* – "Every that Sarah says to you, listen to her voice".

And there is an additional lesson: On's wife teaches us how important is for a couple to work as a team:

In a marriage, each one in the couple has to complement the other and not to try to silence his or her voice. When that happens, the result is an unhealthy family. We also have an example from the Torah: In the book of Devarim we learn about the case of the "rebellious son". This is a child who doesn't obey his parents and he has so many problems that the Torah gives to him the worst of the punishments. But the interesting thing is that the Rabbis in the Talmud decided to annul the law arguing that it was not correct to punish a child because his parent's mistakes. The text says: *"If a man has a rebellious son who doesn't listen to the voice of his father or to the voice of his mother"*. And the Rabbis ask: "Why the text speaks about the "voice of the father" and then about the "voice of the mother", why not to say "the voice of his parents"?" And they conclude: When in a family the father has one voice and the mother has a different voice, and they don't manage to create one "voice" in terms of how to educate their children, that will create an unhealthy environment and a possible "rebellious son". In that case, it won't be the child's fault and it would be unfair to punish him.

On ben Pelet and his wife were a very good team: He was a leader (The Torah says so), an important person and that means someone who knows how to make wise decisions. But at the same time it is clear that for other types of decisions he wasn't so smart, and he needed his wife to complement him. Each of them learnt when to act, when to let the other to act, when to speak and when to be quiet letting the other to speak.

These are some of the lessons we can learn from this anonymous but important character from the Torah, the wife of On ben Pelet. May we can apply some of those lessons to our lives, in order to build healthier and happier relationships and in order to raise healthy and happy children.

Shabbat Shalom