



CLASSIC DAF KESHER

SHAPELL'S /YESHIVA DARCHE NOAM · MIDRESHET RACHEL V'CHAYA · JACK E. GINDI · PATHWAYS PLUS

PARSHAT KORACH פרשת קרח

DVAR TORAH BLOSSOM, BUD, AND ALMONDS

The great Polish Chassidic leader Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshis'che, זצ"ל, was speaking about the verse in our parshah about Aharon's staff. After it had spent the entire night in the Mishkan along with the staffs of the princes of tribes it says: "And on the following day Moses came to the Tent of Testimony, and behold, Aaron's staff for the house of Levi had blossomed! It gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds" (Bamidbar 17:23).

The Rebbe asked the assembled chasidim, "Is Reb Leizer Moshe of Wyszogród here?" They answered in the negative. Reb Leizer Moshe, an elderly talmid chacham, was one of the distinguished and accomplished chasidim of Reb Simcha Bunim's predecessor, Reb Yaakov Yitzchak, the Yid Hakadosh, "Holy Jew" of Peshis'che. "Please call him in," asked the Rebbe.

When Reb Leizer Moshe came in, the Rebbe asked the following question: Why does the Torah mention that a flower and bud appeared on the staff? Why not just say that an almond grew on it? Doesn't Rashi on that verse say that the almond was chosen because it develops swiftly, and would teach that one who contests the Kehunah (priesthood) will be punished without delay? The key is the almond; why mention the flower and bud?

Reb Simchah Bunim answered his own question: this verse teaches us an approach to Avodat Hashem (service of God). Even when a person is at a stage in life when he sees himself as a fully developed almond – and elderly *tzadik*, already accomplished, wise, and saintly – he must still be full of youthful energy and humility. He must retain his flower and bud. Old age is no excuse to stop growing and working.

This message is especially relevant to young people. Someone who envisions him- or herself as an energetic senior citizen must begin young. Those who are energetic, humble, and growing in their twenties, thirties, and forties, will find it much easier to hold on to when they are in their eighties, nineties, and, God willing, beyond. But it is difficult (not impossible, but difficult) to jump-start the *middot* (the character traits) of *zerizut* and *avodah*, energetic striving in service of God, if they are not cultivated in youth. But, חנוך לנער על פי דרכו, גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה, – if a youth builds good character he will hold on to it in old age (Mishlei 22:6).

THE STORY OF OHN BEN PELET AND HIS WIFE

There is a glaring omission in the Korach episode. The opening verses of our parshah list the participants of the rebellion:

<p>Bamidbar 16:1-3</p> <p>1. Korach, the son of Itzhar, the son of Kehat, the son of Levi, took [himself to one side] along with Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, and Ohn the son of Pelet, descendants of Reuven.</p> <p>2. They confronted Moshe, together with two hundred and fifty men from the children of Israel, leaders of the congregation, representatives of the assembly, men of repute.</p> <p>3. They assembled against Moshe and Aharon, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Hashem is in their midst. So why do you raise yourselves above the Hashem's assembly?"</p>	<p>במדבר טז:א-ג</p> <p>(א) וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן יִצְחָר בֶּן קֵהָת בֶּן לֵוִי וְדָתָן וָאֲבִירָם בְּנֵי אֶלְיָאָב וְאוֹן בֶּן פִּלֵּת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן:</p> <p>(ב) וַיִּקְמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה וְאַנְשֵׁים מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאַתָּים נְשִׂאֵי עֲדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד אַנְשֵׁי שֵׁם:</p> <p>(ג) וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב לָכֶם כִּי כָל הָעֲדָה כֹּהֲלִים קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה' וּמִדּוּעַ תִּתְנַשְּׂאוּ עַל קְהַל ה':</p>
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As the story continues Korach, Datan, and Aviram are all players – see verses 12 to 14, 17 to 19. However, On ben Pelet's name does not disappear again. What happened to him?

The Gemara and midrashim fill in the blanks. (There are some variations between the different versions of the story. See Tanchuma Korach 10 and Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar 18:20.)

Part I – Convincing Ohn

<p>Sanhedrin 109b</p> <p>Rav said: On son of Pelet's wife saved him. She said to him, "What does it make a difference to you [who wins, Korach or Aharon]? If one of them (Aharon) ends up being the head (the High Priest), you will be his disciple, and if the other one (Korach) ends up being the head you will be his disciple."</p>	<p>סנהדרין קט:</p> <p>אמר רב און בן פלת אשתו הצילתו אמרה ליה מאי נפקא לך מינה אי מר רבה אנת תלמידא ואי מר רבה אנת תלמידא</p>
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Think about her argument:

- Based on what Ohn's wife says to her husband, try to reconstruct what she is intimating about Korach's confrontation with Moshe. Is Korach saying "All of the community is holy so let us do away with the hierarchal office of the high priesthood" or, more likely, "Let us replace Aharon with Korach"?
- What does she suggest about Ohn's involvement with Korach's cause? Who stands to gain if Korach wins?
- How might Ohn's wife's argument be helpful to us – and how might listening to her voice keep us out of trouble?

Part II – Ohn's Response

<p>Sanhedrin 109b</p> <p>He said to her, "What can I do? I was part of the original plan and they made me take an oath to stay with them."</p>	<p>סנהדרין קט:</p> <p>אמר לה מאי אעביד הואי בעצה ואשתבעי לי בהדיהו.</p>
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- Note – he seems to agree with her point, but says, "But I've already committed myself to this and cannot back out."
- What might be the halachic response to the problem he raises about his oath?

Part III –Ohn's Wife's Solution

Sanhedrin 109b She said to him, "I know that the entire community is holy, as it is written, '... For the entire congregation are all holy.'" She said to him, "Stay, for I will save you." She gave him wine to drink, made him drunk, and had him lie down inside (the tent). She sat herself at the opening of the tent and undid her hair. Anyone who approached saw her [exposed hair] and went back. In the interim they were swallowed up.	סנהדרין קט: אמרה ליה ידענא דכולה כנישתא קדישתא נינהו דכתיב כי כל העדה כולם קדושים אמרה ליה תוב דאנא מצילנא לך אשקיתיה חמרא וארויתיה ואגניתיה גואי אותבה על בבא (ק.י). וסתרתה למזיה כל דאתא חזיה הדר אדהכי והכי אבלעו להו.
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· In the Gemara's version here, the mere appearance of her hair causes the men of the revolt to stay away. But the Chida brings an approach that hair teaches them a lesson. Just as every strand of hair has its root, so God has given every person his or her place in the world. God made Aharon the Kohen Gadol and Korach one of the bearers of the Aron Kodesh, and each and every person has a personal mission.

· What other biblical stories does this Midrash remind us of?

· What does this story teach us about the interaction between a husband and wife in general?

Two Wives

The Gemara and Midrashim go on to contrast Ohn ben Pelet's wife with Korach's wife. Whereas Ohn's wife saved Ohn from conflict and death, Korach's wife encouraged Korach to quarrel with Moshe. A verse in Mishlei is cited to contrast the two women:

Sanhedrin 110a The following verse (Mishlei 14:1) refers to these two women: "Women's wisdom builds her house" – this is Ohn ben Pelet's wife; "And the foolish women destroys it with her own hand" – this is Korach's wife.	סנהדרין קי. היינו דכתיב "חכמות נשים בנתה ביתה": זו אשתו של און בן פלת "ואולת בידה תהרסנה": זו אשתו של קרח.
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· How many points of contrast are there between the first and the second halves of this verse?

· Immediately before the quote from Mishlei the Gemara develops the story of Korach's wife. See how her story contrasts with that of Ohn ben Pelet's (for instance, how hair appears differently in both stories).

Who was Ohn ben Pelet?

The Gemara and Midrashim expound on Ohn ben Pelet's name:

Sanhedrin 109b "And Ohn" – for he sat mourning (Rashi: repenting for originally joining them); "Pelet" – for wonders were done to him (Rashi: for he was saved); "Son of Reuven" – a son who saw and understood.	סנהדרין קט: "ואון" שישב באנינות, "פלת" שנעשו לו פלאות, "בן ראובן" בן שראה והבין.
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The Chizkuni – perhaps because the Gemara does not take his name at face value – suggests his real identity:

Chizkuni Bamidbar 16:1 "Sons of Reuven" – [This refers to] Eliav and Pelet. Pelet refers to Palu, and Eliav was his son, as it is written, "The sons of Palu were Eliav" (Bamidbar 26:8).	חזקוני במדבר טז:א בני ראובן - אליאב ופלת, פלת הוא פלוא ואליאב בנו דכתיב ובני פלוא אליאב.
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According to this Ohn ben Pelet and his wife were Datan and Aviram's uncle and aunt! Ohn was the brother of Datan and Aviram's father Eliav. Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, shlita, (in למכסה עתיק) quotes three other approaches: a. that Ohn was actually Eliav, their father; b. that he was their brother Nemuel ben Eliav, and c. that he was Pelet son of Yonatan of the tribe of Yehudah (Divrei Hayamim II 2:33). Whoever he really was, his name was changed after repenting (Taama Dikra, Korach).

TORAH FROM OUR FACULTY

WHAT IS YOUR STARTING POINT?

BY RABBI YITZCHAK HIRSHFELD

The Mishnah (Pirkei Avot 5:17) contrasts Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai's *machloket leshem Shamayim*, dispute for the sake of Heaven, with that of Korach and his entire group, that was not for the sake of Heaven. This dichotomy is a good illustration of the contrast between *da'at tov* and *da'at ra*, good and bad *da'at*. The concept *da'at*, meaning integrated knowledge or mindset, is rooted in the story of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. What is good *da'at* and what is evil *da'at*?

Good *da'at* is an approach, a mindset that puts truth at the center. The Torah, God's Will, is the fixed point that everything must fit into. Any idea has to be weighed solely based on those criteria. Concerning anything we evaluate we ask: how consistent is this with Torah? Bad *da'at* places a person's desires (whether coarse or subtle) as the fixed starting point and shoves other things into place to achieve those goals. The way people think involves determining a certain starting point as being true and immutable and then fitting everything else into that system. Good *da'at* places God's Will and truth at the center; bad *da'at* opens us up to placing our personal agenda at the core. This openness to bad *da'at* traces itself back to the sin of Adam and Chavah and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Korach did not want to listen to the other side; he wanted to be promoted. His mind was made up and he constructed a theory ("The entire congregation is holy, etc. etc., etc.") that would make sure he'd reach that outcome. Even though he knew there were weaknesses with his theory (for example, God chose Aharon and Moshe was genuinely humble), his strategy was to try to achieve his ends and maintain it until it gets refuted.

Beit Hillel always mentioned Beit Shamai first. They didn't want the "home court advantage" that comes with their approach being considered the standard others must be judged from. They were more worried about hampering their ability to see the other side of an issue properly. Their fixed point was searching for God's truth and they would open their minds to make sure they would attain it.

There are ways to cultivate good *da'at*. One is through *amal ha'Torah*, toiling in Torah, struggling hard to arrive at the truths of Torah. Another is to cultivate a perception of ourselves as part of a *tzibur*, a community. That will help us shift our focus away from a self-centered mindset so the *da'at ra* will not kick in.

(This write-up was based on Rabbi Hirshfeld's notes for a shmuze that also included a discussion of the spies.)

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at www.darchenoam.org & +972-2-651-1178
5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem

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emuna@darchenoam.org

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