

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist

[28]

Revised on April 30, 2018

"What will you Gain from it?" (Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109b)



Background to Our Story

Korah's Rebellion (The Story)

The Levite Korah son of Izhar joined with the Reubenites, Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab and On son of Peleth and 250 chieftains of the Israelite community to rise up against Moses. (Num. 16:1-2.) Moses told Korah and his band to take their fire pans and put fire and incense on them before God. (Num. 16:6-7.) Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, but they refused to come. (Num. 16:12.) The next day, Korah and his band took their fire pans and gathered the whole community against Moses and Aaron at the entrance of the Tabernacle. (Num. 16:18-19.) The Presence of the Lord appeared to the whole community, and God told Moses and Aaron to stand back so that God could annihilate the others. (Num. 16:20-21.) Moses and Aaron fell on their faces and implored God not to punish the whole community. (Num. 16:22.) God told Moses to instruct the community to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and they did so, while Dathan, Abiram, and their families stood at the entrance of their tents. (Num. 16:23-27.) Moses told the Israelites that if these men were to die of natural causes, then God did not send Moses, but if God caused the earth to swallow them up, then these men had spurned God. (Num. 16:28-30.) Just as Moses finished speaking, the earth opened and swallowed them, their households, and all Korah's people, and the Israelites fled in terror. (Num. 16:31-34.) And a fire consumed the 250 men offering the incense. (Num. 16:35.) God told Moses to order Eleazar the priest to remove the fire pans – as they had become sacred – and have them made into plating for the altar to remind the Israelites that no one other than Aaron's offspring should presume to offer incense to God. (Num. 17:1-5.)

Korah's Rebellion (The Relevant Verses)

Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi took [himself to one side] along with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, descendants of Reuben. They confronted Moses together with two hundred and fifty men from the children of Israel, chieftains of the congregation, representatives of the

assembly, men of repute. They assembled against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for the entire congregation are all holy, and the Lord is in their midst. So why do raise yourselves above the Lord's assembly? (Numbers 16:1-3)

The Lord spoke to Moses saying: "Speak to the congregation saying, 'Withdraw from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'" Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. He spoke to the congregation saying, "Please get away from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything of theirs, lest you perish because of all their sins (Numbers 16: 23-26)

Hair covering



The law (Talmud) Ketubot 72a, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 75:2) is based on Numbers 5:18, where it is stated that the kohen "reveals the hair of the [Sotah] woman." This is a clear indication that women have always covered their hair.

So why don't women cover their hair before marriage?

1. The verse in Numbers is referring to a (sotah) married woman. Therefore only married women are bound by this rule.
2. Practically, women's hair is considered to be sensuous. Once a woman is married, she reserves her sensuous side for her husband. Additionally, once a woman is married, she must make a special effort not to "advertise" herself, for the results of a married woman's illegitimate relationship are much more disastrous than if a single girl were to make the same mistake.

Halacha (Jewish law) requires married women to cover their hair; Maimonides calls this requirement *Dat Moshe* (the law of Moses). The most common hair coverings in the Haredi community are the snood, the tichel (scarf), and the sheitel (wig); some Haredi women cover their hair with hats or berets. Observance of this law is not universal among Modern Orthodox women, but even in this sector virtually all cover their hair in synagogue. The most common hair covering for Modern Orthodox women is a hat or beret; younger women often wear baseball caps and bandannas when dressed casually, and some wear bright and colorful scarves tied in a number of ways. A style of half wig known as a "fall" has become increasingly common in many segments of Modern and Haredi Orthodox communities. It is usually worn either with a hat or headband.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109b

אמר רב: און בן פלת אשתו הצילתו. אמרה ליה: "מאי נפקא לך מינה? אי מר רבה, אנת תלמידא. ואי מר רבה, אנת תלמידא." אמר לה: "מאי אעביד? הואי בעצה, ואשתבעי לי בהדייהו." אמרה ליה: "ידענא דכולה פנישתא קדישתא גינהו, דכתיב: 'כי כל העדה פלם קדשים'." אמרה ליה: "תוב, דאנא מצילנא לך." אשקיתיה חמרא, וארויתיה, ואגניתיה גואי. אותבה על פבא, וסתרתי למינה. כל דאתא חזיה, הדר, אדקהי והכי אכלעו להו.

On, son of Peleth, his wife saved him.

She said to him: What is the difference to you? If this Master, Moses, is the great one, you will be the disciple. And if this Master, Korah, is the great one, you will be the disciple. Why are you involving yourself in this matter?

On said to her: What shall I do? I was one of those who took counsel and I took an oath with them that I would be with them.

She [On's wife] said to him [to On]: I know that the entire assembly is holy, as it is written: "For all the assembly is holy" (Numbers 16:3), and they observe the restrictions of modesty.

She said to him: Sit, for I will save you.

She gave him wine to drink and caused him to become drunk and laid him on a bed inside their tent. She sat at the entrance of the tent and exposed her hair. Anyone who came and saw her stepped back. In the meantime, the assembly of Korah was swallowed into the ground, and On, son of Peleth, was spared.



Explaining the Story (What is the sequence of events that take place in the story?)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Bonus ? Why did Korach ask On to join him in the revolt against Moses if he was not planning to make him a leader?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? How do we know that On agrees with his wife's point?

? What does On mean by his reply "What shall I do? I was one of those who took counsel and I took an oath with them."

? Why did On's wife cause him to be drunk and put him to bed inside the tent?

? Why did On's wife sit outside the tent with her hair uncovered?

? Why did Korach and his followers turn around and leave?

Bonus ? Why do you think On agreed to follow Korach to begin?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

? What is the justification of On's wife to sit outside the tent with her hair uncovered?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Bonus ? How did On's wife save her husband?

Bonus ? How did On save himself?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Even if you are not a leader, you can be a winner!

