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On the Parsha

In this week's Parsha, Korach led a rebellion against the leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu. The Gemorah in Sanhedrin 109b indicates that Ohn Ben Peles ("Ohn"), who was initially mentioned among those that Korach gathered for his rebellion, was a man of high intellect and of great moral fiber. The Daas Zekainim miBaalei HaTosfos ("Daas Zekanim") makes the same point in his explanation of the first Possuk (verse) of this week's Parsha. The Possuk says that Ohn came from the tribe of Reuvain. In a play on words of the name "Reuvain", the Daas Zekanim says that he was a "Ra'ah V'Haveen" – he saw and understood – i.e. he was a man of great intellect.

That being the case, how could such a highly intelligent individual make such a monumental mistake by joining Korach and his rebellion?

The answer to this question begins with a discussion of Ohn's wife. Through her wisdom, she saved her husband from following through on his initial commitment to join the rebellion of Korach which ended in the death of Korach and his followers. The Midrash details how Ohn's wife went about convincing her husband that he was wrong to join Korach's rebellion. The Midrash says that she pointed out to him that he had nothing to gain even if Korach were to mount a successful rebellion against Moshe. She told Ohn that just as he was not in a leadership position now with Moshe in charge, he would not be in a leadership position then if Korach was in charge. Rav Henoch Leibowitz ZT"l ("Rav Henoch") explains that in her wisdom, she saw the truth -- a brilliant man whose brilliant intellect was clouded by a Negiyah (bias). Ohn had envisioned himself being placed in a position of leadership and honor if he joined Korach's rebellion. Rather than argue with Ohn directly about the pros and cons of joining the rebellion which was an argument that she could not win due to his Negiyah, she directly addressed his bias which was the root cause of his clouded judgement and was therefore able to convince him.

The above referenced Gemorah and Midrash explain further how Ohn's wife prevented him from joining the rebellion. She got Ohn drunk so that when it came time to join the rebellion and confront Moshe, he was too inebriated to go with them. Ohn's wife also uncovered her hair at the entrance of their tent, because she knew that when Korach's messengers came to get him, they would not feel comfortable around a married woman with uncovered hair and would leave without him. In this manner, she saved her husband from the terrible fate of Korach and his followers.

Having mentioned the steps she took to save her husband from joining Korach's rebellion, the question now becomes why she needed to take those steps. If, as we mentioned above, she was able to convince her husband that he was wrong to join the rebellion, why did she still need to take measures (i.e. get him drunk, uncover her hair) to ensure that he did not go with the messengers of Korach?

Perhaps there is another bias at play here. Once Ohn was invested and committed to join the rebellion, it became difficult for him to take a different path even if he was convinced by his wife that joining the rebellion was wrong. Ohn was too invested and "in too deep". Therefore, Ohn's wife had to take additional steps to ensure that he would not join Korach's rebellion.

We find this bias by Elisha Ben Abuya, known as "Acher", the Tanna (great sage from the Tannaic period) who went astray. While involved in a discussion with his student Rabbi Meir on Shabbos, Acher tells Rabbi Meir that he must no longer walk with him because they were approaching the Techum (a Halachic boundary beyond which, one may not walk on Shabbos). Rabbi Meir questioned Acher on how he knew how far they had walked and therefore would be approaching the Techum. Acher answered that he had been keeping track based on the number of footsteps that his horse had taken. Noting Acher's sensitivity to Halacha, Rabbi Meir seized the opportunity to ask Acher to repent and said, "Come back – do Teshuvah."

Acher answered that he could not do Teshuva as he once passed by a cave and heard a Divine voice emanate from within and say, "Return ye wayward sons, all except Acher – who knew My honor and rebelled against Me." Rabbi Meir tried to convince Acher to do Teshuva anyway regardless of whether Acher believed that his Teshuva would be accepted. After all, if one commits a sin, the right thing to do is to ask for forgiveness regardless of whether forgiveness will be granted. However, Acher was unable to see it that way because of the bias discussed above. He felt that he was "in too deep". He had strayed too far, was too committed and invested in his evil ways to change them.

Halacha – Jewish Law

The Mesilas Yesharim (chapter eleven) points out that the prohibition of "MiDvar Sheker Tirchak" – distancing oneself from falsehood, is the only prohibition in the Torah that involves the safeguard of distancing from the prohibition in addition to not violating it. This "distancing" has halachic repercussions as well.

What are these other repercussions? It adds another aspect of the prohibition of lying which is the obligation to stay away from anything that could possibly lead to a lie – even if it is someone else who is lying. In other words, if, by one's own actions or inactions, one causes or enables another person to lie, it is a violation of MiDvar Sheker Tirchak.

Thus, Rav Nachum Yavrov zt"l (Niv Sfasayim p. 14) rules that if Reuvain is relating an incident that is a falsehood to Shimon, and Levi believes that Shimon is enjoying the conversation, Levi is obligated to stop Reuvain and tell Shimon that the incident is untrue. Otherwise, due to Levi's inaction, Levi will be enabling Reuvain to continue to tell falsehoods to Shimon and therefore Levi will have transgressed MiDvar Sheker Tirchak.

The Pilpulah Charifta explains that the prohibition of enabling one to continue to tell falsehood is derived from the Gemorah in Shavuos 31a where the Gemorah says that a student should not wait to correct his teacher, "From where do we know in regard to a student who sees that his teacher is erring in judgment that he shall not say, 'I will wait for my teacher until he

concludes the trial and then I will contradict him...' It is derived from the verse: 'Distance yourself from a false matter.'"

Editor's note: The Halacha section of last week's newsletter incorrectly quoted the Gemorah in Berachos 27b stating that Rabbi Yehoshua says that one is obligated to daven Maariv, while Rabbi Gamliel says that it is voluntary. The Gemorah actually says the reverse. It is Rabbi Yehoshua who says that it is voluntary, and it is Rabbi Gamliel who says that it is obligatory. This editor regrets the error which was introduced by the editor during his review of the newsletter.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Rav Avrohom Pam ZT"l once entered a taxicab with a talmid, and gave the address to the driver. When the driver set off on the route, Rav Pam noticed that the driver had not turned on the meter. Rav Pam gently reminded him to turn on the meter.

"Don't worry, Rabbi," responded the driver. "I will take care of you."

Rav Pam did not understand the response. The driver elaborated, "the money will come to me. But do not worry, I will charge you significantly less than the meter rate would have charged."

Rav Pam was very concerned that he might be involved in an act of deception. Realizing that the driver was either planning on stealing from either the Taxi and Limousine Commission or the owner of the taxi medallion, Rav Pam took an assertive, yet gentle tone with the driver. He told the driver that the meter must be turned on, but not to worry as he would be receiving a large tip in addition to the fare as shown on the meter, that was well beyond what the driver would have received if he kept the meter off.

Rav Pam was a tzaddik who was careful regarding every word and every action. He so much wished to avoid this act of deception, that he was willing to pay much more than the quoted price. True, he could have availed himself of other options - but he did not, and instead stood up for the cause of Emes.