

# Women Power

Category: Bamidbar, Korach

*What is the unique power of women, and in what context is that same power given to men?*

## The Gender Gap

Let's start this week with a simple question: What are there more of in the world—men, or women?

The answer, interestingly enough, is that if left entirely in G-d's Hands, for every 100 girls there will be 100 boys. And this is something that has been proven again and again throughout the generations. G-d takes pains that the number is pretty much 50/50.

But over the last 30 years, there has been a veritable "Holocaust" of females around the world. Now, I know that's a strong word to use, and it's not like there are soldiers going around rounding up and executing women and girls simply because they are females, but the fact is this: Ever since the ultrasound test was introduced to modern medicine, people have been able to know in advance what gender their child would be. And unfortunately, in many cases, when they find out that they'll be having a girl, they instead have an abortion.

This happens primarily in the Far East, particularly in China, where the culture values boys over girls, but it happens in many other countries too.

Thus, there are places in China where for every 100 girls born, 150 boys are born— and other places where the ratio of boys to girls is two to one. And so, over the past 30 years throughout the world, an estimated 163 million girls were lost to abortion.

One reason so many people abort female fetuses is that in various countries, the social norm is that if you want to marry off your daughter, you have to pay a dowry—and parents want to spare themselves this expense. In India, for example, there was an ad that read, "Better \$500 for an ultrasound now than \$5,000 for a dowry later." This ad was later publicized by the Wall Street Journal.

However, the problem is that when mankind tries to manipulate and engineer the natural order, nothing good can come of it.

First of all, in today's world—and especially in the Far East—there are indeed more men than women. And what's been happening is that parents are saving money so that they could get a bride for their son by paying a dowry to the parents of the bride. It's absurd, but the situation has completely reversed itself—everyone has boys, not girls, and now, the parents of the groom, not the parents of the bride, must pay a dowry.

But additionally, history proves that in every generation and every place where there were far more men than women, there were also far more wars and far more bloodshed.

For example, in today's India, the best indicator of the level of crime in any given area is not the economic situation in that area but rather, the ratio of men to women in that area. And in every area where there is a vast difference in favor of men, the level of crime is also far higher.

## **On Ben Peless and his Wife**

This idea, that women are a stabilizing force in society, is found in this week's Torah portion.

Our Parshah begins with the words, "Vayikach Korach ben Yitzhar... v'Dasan va'Aviram v'On ben Peless bnei Reuven." In English, that's "And Korach, son of Yitzhar, took... and Dasan, Aviram and On ben Peless, the sons of Reuven."

In plain English, that means that this group of individuals started to stir up a dispute with Moshe. They came along with a complaint: "The entire congregation is holy... and why do you elevate yourselves above G-d's congregation?"

Rashi explains that what they were saying was this: "Everyone heard G-d's Words at Mt. Sinai... It wasn't you alone who heard at Mt. Sinai, 'I am the L-rd Your G-d'— the entire congregation heard!" And so, how are you better than us?

What Korach really wanted can be determined by Moshe Rabbeinu's response: It's not enough that you are Levi'im, members of the special tribe of Levi—"and you ask for priesthood too?!" In other words, what Korach really wanted was to be

the Kohein Gadol, the High Priest.

And we all know the rest of the story—how Moshe tried to make peace with them and they wouldn't agree, and eventually, the very earth swallowed them alive.

When we read the entire story, we discover that in the entire dialogue between Moshe and the disputants, only the names of Korach, Dasan and Aviram are mentioned. On ben Peless is not mentioned at all.

So the question is obvious: Where did On ben Peless disappear?

In the Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 109b), Rav says, "His wife rescued him"—On ben Peless' wife saved him from death. She said to him, "What's in this whole dispute for you? This is an argument over who is the leader—Moshe or Korach. But in any case, you will never be the leader. So what do you get from this whole controversy?"

In other words, as we said, Korach wanted to be the Kohein Gadol. He argued that it was coming to him more than it was coming to Aharon. But at least he had some legitimacy—he at least came from the Tribe of Levi, and so he at least stood a chance. "But," On's wife said. "You are from the Tribe of Reuven! You're definitely not able to become the Kohein Gadol."

Still, On told his wife that at the rally with Korach, Dasan and Aviram, when they decided to go to war against Moshe, he solemnly swore to Korach that he would support him to the very end. How could he now suddenly run away from the battle and violate his vow? His wife said, "Leave that to me—I'll work it all out already."

She poured him some wine, she had him say a few good "L'chaim!"s too many, he got good and intoxicated, and she sent him off to bed. Then she went and sat just outside the front door of their house—make that, tent—in a manner that was not too modest. So when Korach's gang came by to pick him up for the next rally, they were embarrassed to approach... And, as Rashi says, "In the meantime, Korach's community was swallowed up."

But even after the entire story, On was ashamed to show his face to Moshe Rabbeinu. After such a mighty miracle, at which everyone saw that Moshe was G-d's true representative and that he was one of Korach's people, On ben Peless was embarrassed to even step foot out of his own house. Again, it was his wife

who said that she would make matters straight.

“Mrs. On” went and stood before Moshe and began to weep and wail. Moshe asked his immediate retinue, “Who is this lady and why is she crying?” They told him the entire story of her husband, the humiliated On ben Peless, and how she had been the one who saved him from the controversy. So Moshe Rabbeinu, the humblest of all men, went together with her to her front door, called out to On and said to him, “G-d will forgive you.”

## **The Power of Jewish Women**

The Rebbe explains that from this story, we learn the power of the Jewish woman’s influence over her entire household—in this case, her power to save her entire family from descending into oblivion.

*“Ani l’dodi v’dodi li”*—“I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me.” Everyone has heard of this famous verse from Shir HaShirim, the Song of Songs. It’s written on wedding invitations, and some people even have it inscribed on their wedding rings. It’s an expression of love between husband and wife.

But this verse refers to something far deeper. Like the rest of the Song of Songs, it’s a metaphor for the relationship between the Jewish Nation and G-d, with G-d being the husband and we, the Jewish Nation (including the men!) being G-d’s wife.

Just as women serve as moderating forces in the lives of their men and the world at large, and it is specifically they who have the power to bring peace to the world, so too, it is the mission of the Jewish Nation, as G-d’s “wife,” to make peace between G-d and His universe—as the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 66b) puts it, “a nation that makes peace between Me and My universe.”

The Midrash further tells us that “G-d did not create one thing in His universe for naught.” Everything has a purpose—and if so, when there are matters and powers in the universe not used for the betterment of mankind, it’s a waste of G-d’s Creation.

It’s as if G-d is saying, “Here I give you opportunities, and you’re not using them!” It’s like your husband making a great effort to make you a fabulous dinner—and

you just don't eat it.

That's why there is a moral imperative for every human being to discover and maximize all the potential there is in all of Creation.

Throughout world history, it was the Jews who contributed more than any group of people to the development and progression of the world in all specialties and all areas. The number of Jewish scientists is completely out of proportion when compared to any other group. It was true hundreds of years ago, and it remains true today—scientists reveal G-d's power in Creation, and Jewish scientists do this more than any other.

This is one way we make peace between G-d and the universe.

But there is something far more important than that.

When is there war among people? When one does not recognize the other.

Until the Jewish Nation came along, the universe did not recognize the Creator of the Universe. They were all busy with idol worship. Everyone made their own personal statue, and they literally and physically worshiped them.

And then there appeared the pillar of the universe, Avraham Avinu, our Patriarch Abraham, who proceeded to teach the world that there is a G-d. At first, people laughed at him and fought with him, but slowly the idea spread—and today, most of the entire world believes that there is One Creator.

By means of spreading this idea of belief in G-d—that every existing thing was brought into existence by G-d and, by extension, every existing thing and certainly every human being is important to G-d—there was forged a bond and relationship between mankind and the Creator, bringing peace between mankind and G-d.