

JUNE 20, 2011

Parashat Korach

Models of Leadership

And Korach took (Numbers 16:1)

ויקח קרח (במדבר טז:א)

Korach's rebellion against Moses demonstrates two opposing models of leadership. While Korach challenged Moses as "ruling over" the "congregation of God," in truth, it was Korach himself who sought personal power and status. Noting the unusual language opening the *parashah*, "And Korach took," Rashi explains that Korach "took himself to one side, to separate himself from the congregation to lay claim to the priesthood." While he rhetorically claimed to represent the people, in fact Korach represented only himself, using the nation for his own personal gain. Moses, on the other hand, acted in the opposite manner. As Rashi notes in his comments on Numbers 12:1, Moses literally sacrificed his family life, separating from his wife for the sake of the nation.

This week, as we read about the opposing models of leadership demonstrated by Korach and Moses, we continue to focus on Egypt and wonder what type of leadership will emerge in the country.

This spring, the world watched the Egyptian people cast off the brutal shackles of a repressive regime. Yet in Egypt, as is true in many cases, the fall of a dictator leaves a vacuum—setting off a scramble for power in which the forces of democracy are just one contender among many. While we all hope that Egypt emerges from its current political transition with a functioning, western-oriented democracy, the fact is the best-organized political force in Egypt today is the Muslim Brotherhood—which does not recognize Israel and which has called for the abrogation of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Given the many threats that Israel faces on its other borders, the Israel-Egypt peace treaty is vital for Israel's security. Because of the treaty, for more than 30 years Israel has not had to seriously worry about an Arab army's tanks reaching Tel Aviv. The treaty enabled Israel to reduce its defense spending burden from 23 percent to 8 percent of its gross domestic product, and it is also the foundation of the principle of "land for peace."

Like the Israelites in the desert, who faced a choice between two vastly different models of leadership, the people of Egypt also face a choice. And we too can act. We have an obligation to urge our policy-makers to do all they can to ensure that Egypt holds to its peace treaty with Israel. ■

No to Negotiations

And they said 'We will not go up' (Numbers 16:12)

ויאמרו לא נעלה (במדבר טז:יב)

After Korach and his group rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron, Moses reached out to Dathan and Abiram, hoping to convince them to abandon their challenge. But, instead of at least giving Moses an opportunity to discuss the matter, they refused to accept his invitation, responding curtly that "We will not go up [to you]." In his commentary on the Torah, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch notes that Moses' invitation carried neither malice nor hostility. Rather, "Moses, in the most friendly way, had asked them to come to him. But they took the invitation as a 'summons,' and answered, 'We are not coming up to 'My Lord,' i.e. we do not take orders from him...'"

Instead of viewing Moses' invitation as an opportunity for compromise, Dathan and Abiram refused to meet with him—a course of action that prolonged their feud and led to their downfall. Sadly, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is now following this same course, refusing to negotiate directly with Israel while reconciling with Hamas.

Despite repeated calls by Israel and the United States to hold serious direct talks, PA President Mahmoud Abbas has refused to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since September 15, 2010. Instead, the PA has launched a campaign outside the negotiations process to win international support for the recognition of a Palestinian state. This campaign will culminate in an effort to have a Palestinian state accepted as a member of the U.N. this September. The United States has repeatedly said it opposes unilateral Palestinian steps at the United Nations. “[W]e don't see action in the United Nations or any other forum as being helpful” in bringing about a resolution to the conflict, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said earlier this year. Meanwhile, the PA's decision to form a unity agreement with an unreformed Hamas greatly complicates peace efforts in the region. As Netanyahu [said](#) on May 16, Israel “can only make peace with those who want to make peace with us. Those who wish to obliterate us are no partners for peace. A Palestinian government with half its members declaring daily that they plan to annihilate the Jewish state is not a partner for peace.” For more on PA actions that are undermining U.S. peace efforts, click [here](#).

Dathan and Abiram's refusal to meet with Moses foreshadowed their own future failure. If the PA wants its efforts to create a Palestinian state to be successful, it must learn from the lesson of Dathan and Abiram, change course, and negotiate directly with Israel. ■

Fiscal Responsibility, Vital Interests

I have not taken one donkey from them (Number 16:15) (לא תמור אחד מהם נשאתי במדבר טז:טו)

Both in the Torah reading and in the *haftarah* we find examples of responsibly using public funds. When confronted with personal accusations that he benefited from his role as leader of the Jewish nation, Moses responds passionately: “I have not taken one donkey from them” (Numbers 16:15). Rashi (on 16:15) notes that even when Moses should have used public funds for his transportation, he refused. In the *haftarah*, Samuel makes a similar declaration, asking the nation, “Whose ox have I taken; whose donkey have I taken?” (Samuel I 12:3).

From these ancient Israelite leaders we learn that our representatives must be held accountable for handling public funds, and dispense resources only after careful scrutiny. Especially now, when America faces significant fiscal challenges, U.S. leadership has embraced the careful scrutiny of both Moses and Samuel. For this reason, a recent decision to increase funding for Israel's missile defense program speaks volumes about both the importance of the program, and its strategic value to the United States.

The United States House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee recently approved record levels of funding for U.S.-Israeli missile defense programs, [The Jerusalem Post](#) reported. The increased funding will total \$235.7 million in 2012. [Politico](#) stated that the funding was approved “In the midst of both diplomatic concerns about the U.S.-Israel relationship and rounds of spending reductions on the Hill,” and noted that “The joint missile defense program is a strategic bulwark against Iranian nuclear ambitions and a sign that the military alliance between the United States and Israel remains strong.” National Security Advisor Tom Donilon summed up American support for Israeli missile defense in a recent speech: “We cooperate across the continuum of development, deployment, and operation of these systems. Our financial and technological support was essential to the Arrow and David's Sling systems to defend against long and short-range ballistic missiles.” For more on Israeli missile defense, click [here](#).

Moses and Samuel remind us that leaders must demonstrate great care when dealing with public funds. The fact that our elected representatives chose to increase funding for Israeli missile defense despite our austere spending environment shows that when it comes to protecting American and Israeli interests, our leaders show great care too. ■