

JUNE 18, 2012

Parashat Korah

Refusing to Negotiate

...to call Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16:12)

...לקרוא לדתן ואבירם (במדבר טז:יב)

After a failed attempt to resolve his dispute with Korah, Moses tried to reach out to Dathan and Abiram (16:12). Why did he reach out to them instead of pursuing Korah? The Midrash (Tanchuma Yashan 15) explains that Korah refused to negotiate with Moses. “You do not find that [Korah] responded a word [to Moses] for he was an intelligent in his wickedness. He said, ‘If I answer him, I know that he is a great and wise man, and he will overwhelm me with his words and cause me to stumble, and I will be forced to submit to him. It’s better that I not present myself to him.’” When Moses realized that there was no benefit [to pursuing Korah] he broke away from him and sent for Dathan and Abiram. They too maintained their wicked stance and refused to appear and answer him.”

Recognizing that negotiations would not get him the outcome he desired, Korah avoided negotiations with Moses at all costs. In modern times, in efforts to avoid cooperating with Western demands, Iran has deliberately utilized negotiations with the international community to stall for time to further its nuclear weapons research.

After two earlier unproductive meetings since early April, which failed to yield results in efforts to curb Tehran’s nuclear activities, Western countries remain worried that Iran might be stalling talks to buy time to produce a nuclear weapon. Iran recently raised the possibility of delaying or canceling the resumption of nuclear talks with the big powers if they only focus on the nuclear issue, but [Agence France Presse](#) reported Iran is scheduled to resume talks with the five permanent United Nations Security Council members and Germany in Moscow. Progress has yet to be made on the issue of Iran’s enrichment of uranium in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions demanding a suspension. According to [The Wall Street Journal](#), the six-nation negotiating group says it is concerned that Iran is developing nuclear weapons and has demanded that Iran suspend its current practice of enriching uranium to 20 percent purity. Western negotiators say that they have no patience for Iran’s stalling tactics or “talks for the sake of talks.” While negotiations with Iran continue, Washington must not forget Iran’s history of exploiting negotiations to buy time to advance its nuclear program. In any negotiations, the U.S. must make clear that it will prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapons capability. For more on Iran, visit www.aipac.org/Iran.

Korah realized that his best negotiation tactic was not to negotiate at all. Iran seems to have taken a play out of Korah’s book, demanding round after round of meaningless talks as it works feverishly to build a nuclear weapon. ■

Crimes Against Children

And their little ones (Numbers 16:27)

וטפם (במדבר טז:כז)

According to the Torah, after God instructed Moses to warn the people to move away from the camp of Korah, to prevent innocent bystanders from suffering their terrible punishment, Dathan and Abiram defiantly stood at the door of their tent, “with their wives, and their sons, and their little ones” (16:27). Rashi (on 16:27) notes the terrible price of strife, “for the worldly court only punishes [once an individual reaches] adulthood, and the celestial court [does not punish until age] twenty, but here even small children were lost.” In their selfish quest for power, Dathan and Abiram recklessly endangered their own innocent children, ultimately causing their untimely deaths.

Korah's rebellion reminds us that too often, innocent children pay a painful price during battles fought by adults. Sadly proving that children today continue to suffer, recently Syria was formally accused of crimes against children.

The United Nations recently accused Syrian troops of using children as "human shields." According to [The Globe and Mail](#), the U.N. said in a report that Syrian children as young as nine had been victims of killing and maiming, arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and sexual violence. Former soldiers told the U.N. team that their commanders instructed them to fire indiscriminately into crowds, despite the presence of children among the demonstrators. Children between eight and thirteen years old were taken from their homes and placed in the windows of buses carrying military personnel, to shield them during a raid on a village. Children as young as fourteen have been tortured for information. Witnesses described militiamen placing gun nests on the roofs of schools while children were still attending class. Meanwhile, parked tanks on the outskirts of the town of Al-Heffa raise concerns that the regime is planning to carry out new atrocities. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

Unlike Korah, whose challenge of Moses' leadership indirectly brought harm to innocent children, the Assad regime has actively put children in harm's way through torture, massacre and their use as human shields, as Syrian President Bashar Assad tries desperately—and futilely—to retain his stranglehold over the Syrian people. ■

Flowering the Desert

And put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms (Numbers 17:23) (במדבר יז:כג) ויוצא פרח ויצץ ציץ

After the nation questioned the credentials of Aaron to serve as high priest, Moses arranged a test in which the head of each tribe placed a staff in the ground at the entrance to the Tent of the Testimony. The next morning when they came to inspect the staffs, "behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bore ripe almonds" (17:23). The Midrash (Yalkut Meor Ha'afeilah) notes that, "This was a miracle during which a dead branch returned to growth, from which branches arose, and after the branches buds and after the buds almond fruit." This miraculous growth symbolized the blessing of Aaron's role among the nation.

The miraculous flowering of Aaron's staff sprouted life and produced fruit from a dead piece of wood. Although we can't replicate this supernatural miracle, an Israeli scientist has discovered the next best thing by creating a watering system that enables plants to grow in some of the driest locales in the world.

As a young boy growing up on a kibbutz in the Jezreel Valley, Professor Daniel Hillel was fascinated with plants that thrived in unfavorable conditions. "That's where I discovered and became enthralled by open spaces—and land and water and plants and sunshine," Hillel, now 81, told [The Jerusalem Post](#). Hillel, renowned for his micro-irrigation methods in bringing water to crops in arid and dry-land regions, will receive the World Food Prize for his innovative invention which has helped millions of people around the world. The system Hillel developed carries water through narrow plastic pipes to plants, where it drips or trickles onto the roots. World Food Prize Foundation President Kenneth Quinn said, "Hillel's innovation has revolutionized agricultural practices in more than 30 countries over the past 60 years, helping thousands of farmers, and affecting millions of lives." According to [The Times of Israel](#), David Ben-Gurion, the founder and first prime minister of Israel, visited the farm where Hillel worked and was so impressed he asked Hillel to take his ideas to Asia, Africa and South America. Some letters supporting Hillel's individual nominations came from Egypt, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates. "I'm a great believer in international cooperation, and I've devoted much of my career to it," Hillel said. "I'm a passionate believer in peace rather than rivalry, enmity and destruction." For more on Israeli achievements, click [here](#).

Aaron's staff miraculously sprouted and brought peace to the Jewish people. Today, Israelis like Dr. Hillel advance the cause of peace by bringing prosperity to the poor, helping farmers make the world's deserts bloom. ■

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