



Sermon Tidbits

JUNE 3, 2013

Parashat Korach

Expressing Appreciation

And Korah took... (Numbers 16:1)

ויקח קרח (במדבר טז:א)

More than anything else, Korach was a taker, concerned primarily with personal gain and self-fulfillment. In a famous essay entitled *Kuntras Hachesed*, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler explained that people can be divided into two categories: givers and takers. “The faculty of giving is a sublime power; it is one of the attributes of the blessed Creator of all things... On the other side stands the faculty of taking, by which a person aspires to draw to himself all that comes within his reach. This is what people call egotism or selfishness. It is the root of all the evils in the world...” While the taker believes that everything is his and feels no obligation to repay a kindness, when the giver receives, “he is immediately prompted to give something equivalent in return. If he is unable to do this in kind, his heart urges him to repay by giving happiness to that person by way of thanks and appreciation.”

The cautionary tale of Korach reminds us to appreciate the positive acts of others and not take them for granted. In this light, we must express our appreciation to our Senators for their strong support of a secure Jewish state.

By a vote of 99-0, the U.S. Senate recently passed a resolution ([S. Res. 65](#)) pledging to stand by our Israeli ally should it take military action in its own legitimate defense against the nuclear threat from Iran. Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez (D-NJ) and Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) sponsored the resolution, which garnered 92 co-sponsors. The resolution specifies that the United States should provide diplomatic, military, and economic support to Israel “in its defense of its territory, people, and existence,” and also reiterates that the policy of the United States is to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability and to take such action as may be necessary to implement this policy. This Senate action comes at a critical moment, as the International Atomic Energy Agency said Iran had made progress across the board in its nuclear program. Tehran is enriching more uranium and installing hundreds of next-generation centrifuges. Iran stands on the verge of attaining nuclear weapons capability following repeated defiance of the international community. The passage of this resolution is an extremely significant and timely statement of solidarity with Israel and a restatement of America’s determination to thwart Iran’s nuclear quest. It is critical for us to contact our Senators and express our thanks for their strong voice of support for Israel as the Iranian threat continues to grow. To thank your senators for backing this important resolution, click [here](#).

As we read about Korach’s desire to only take, we are reminded of how important it is to repay the dedicated friends of Israel in the U.S. Senate who continue to demonstrate their solid support for a strong, safe state of Israel.

Outright Rejection

And they said ‘We will not come up’ (Numbers 16:12)

ויאמרו לא נעלה (במדבר טז:יב)

Confronted by Korach’s rebellion and his questioning of Moses’ authority, Moses invited Dathan and Abiram in an attempt to broker a truce and avoid further conflict. They rejected his invitation and outright told him, “We will not come up.” Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, in his work *Meshech Chochmoh* (on 16:12), notes that in their response, *lo na’aleh*, Dathan and Abiram refused to meet with Moses but also alluded to Moses’ failure to successfully lead the nation to the Promised Land, telling him that they would not “go up” to the Promised Land “along with Moses

himself.” In their rebuke of Moses, Dathan and Abiram both insulted Moses and rejected his right to lead the Jewish nation moving forward.

Dathan and Abiram refused to meet with Moses and rejected his leadership. The Palestinian Authority’s recent actions represent a similar rejection of American efforts to rekindle the peace process.

Over the past several months, Secretary of State John Kerry has engaged in intensive meetings between Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Washington in a bid to restart negotiations. While Israel has repeatedly expressed its willingness return to the negotiating table without preconditions, the Palestinian Authority continues to “invent excuses in order to evade the negotiations,” Israeli officials [said](#). “Yet again they are recycling old claims on the basis of mistaken data; and are running to the microphone so as not to do the basic and simple thing—which is to sit down and talk about all the issues. Israel continues to call for the immediate start of direct negotiations.” Kerry announced a plan to invest as much as \$4 billion to develop the economy of the West Bank and increase the gross domestic product of the West Bank by 50 percent over three years and slash unemployment by two-thirds. The very next day, the Palestinian Authority [rejected](#) the idea of gaining economic benefits in exchange for political concessions. PA President Mahmoud Abbas’s economic adviser Mohammad Mustafa said, “The Palestinian leadership will not offer political concessions in exchange for economic benefits.” Mustafa said the PA’s priorities are not economic but rather a political framework for the creation of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital that also ensures the rights of refugees and a political compromise. For more on the peace process, click [here](#).

Dathan and Abiram’s rebuke of Moses represented a rejection of his ability to lead the nation. Similarly, the PA’s recent outright rejection of Secretary of State Kerry’s peace initiative represents a sharp rebuke of American efforts. ■

A Dangerous Neighborhood

Depart, I pray you (Numbers 16:26)

סורו נא... (במדבר טז:כו)

Rashi (on 16:1) explains that Dathan and Abiram found themselves involved in Korach’s group because the tribe of Reuben camped to the south “in the neighborhood of Kehoth and his sons...they associated themselves with his rebellion.” Rashi concludes, “Woe to the wicked, woe to his neighbor.” Before Korach received his punishment, Moses warned the congregation, “Depart, I pray you from the tents of these wicked men...lest you be swept away in all their sins” (16:26). Rabbi Yehoshua ben Prachya comments “Run away from a wicked neighbor...this refers to the neighborhood of Korach...” (Avot D’rabbi Natan, Chapter 16).

Proximity to Korach spelled disaster for his neighbors, who found themselves swept up in his dangerous ways. Today, the Jewish state finds itself in similar danger, as violence in its neighbor Syria threatens to draw Israel into its conflict.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad was recently quoted in the Lebanese newspaper al-Akhbar as [saying](#) that Syria has received the first shipment of Russian anti-aircraft S-300 rockets and that more of the missiles would arrive soon. Israel has become particularly wary of the S-300 shipments. Israel’s defense minister Moshe Yaalon recently told reporters, “...if, God forbid, [the shipments] reach Syria, we will know what to do.” Over the past month, Israel has twice bombed Syrian targets destroying advanced weapons systems that posed a threat to the Jewish state. While Syria has failed to respond in the past, it has sent clear signals that it will respond aggressively in the future. [The New York Times](#) recently reported that while Israel has assiduously avoided involvement in the civil war raging in Syria, it is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid deeper involvement. With both Israel and Syria, the language has grown more heated. Syrian officials declared they are prepared for a major confrontation with Israel and Israel’s military chief warns of consequences. For more on Syria, click [here](#).

Moses warned Korach’s neighbors to separate themselves from him and avoid getting caught up in his conflict. Israel, unable to separate itself from Syria, finds itself increasingly involved in the dangerous conflict raging next door. ■

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