

JUNE 16, 2014

## Parashat Korach

### Infighting

**And Korach took (Numbers 16:1)**

**ויקח קרח (במדבר טז:א)**

A famous Mishnah in Avot (5:18) contrasts the arguments of Hillel and Shammai, which the Mishnah says will ultimately endure because they were “for the sake of heaven,” with the argument of “Korach and his band” which did not endure as it was “not for the sake of heaven.” Commentators note the asymmetry between the two examples in the Mishnah. Hillel and Shammai represent two opposing sides of debate while Korach and his band seem to represent only one side of an argument with Moses. Malbim (on verse 1) explains that those who engage in improper argument do so “only because of honor and self-infatuation, causing argument and division between people who united on one side, for each one of these individuals is focused on his own benefit and opposed the intention of his friend.”

Like Korach and his cohorts who claimed unity against Moses but truly only cared for themselves, Hamas and Fatah claim to have “unified,” but they really seem consumed with grabbing power from each other.

Following the announcement of a Palestinian unity government between Fatah and Hamas, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said that the purpose of the new government is to “unify the Palestinian people against...the Zionist enemy” and to fight for the “liberation of Jerusalem, the West Bank and the rest of Palestine [i.e., the entire state of Israel].” Yet, while the two factions claim to have unified in the fight against Israel, they seem more intent on dominating each other. According to the [Associated Press](#), “An argument over money set off the first serious dispute...between Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Islamic militant group Hamas since the long-time rivals formed a unity government a week ago.” The unity government began disbursing salaries to some 150,000 civil servants loyal to Abbas, while it delayed payments to former Hamas employees. In response, after scuffles erupted outside cash machines in Gaza, Hamas police forces closed the banks. In the West Bank, Hamas said that security forces loyal to Abbas had used violence to break up a rally organized by the movement and had assaulted senior Islamist leader Hassan Youssef, [Reuters](#) reported. “This is not a unity. They are doing this to push us to say we do not want reconciliation.” Youssef said.

Korach’s tragic story reminds us that only when people band together for the “sake of heaven” will unity endure. President Abbas should heed this warning and disband unity with Hamas and return to the peace table with Israel. ■

### A Courageous Act

**And On the son of Peleth (Numbers 16:1)**

**ואון בן פלת (במדבר טז:א)**

The Talmud notes that while On, the son of Peleth, stands aligned with Korach at the outset of the story, he is not mentioned among those punished for rebelling. What happened to him? The Talmud (Sanhedrin 109b) relates that On’s wife convinced him to reconsider his rebellious behavior. Once he agreed to abandon his subversive behavior, she in fact saved him by protecting him from Korach’s men. Moreover, according to the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 18), On was not his given name at birth. “Why was he called On? Because all [of the rest of his days] he was in mourning (*aninut*).” For the rest of his life On regretted his destructive, rebellious stance against Moses’ leadership.

On, the son of Peleth, demonstrated great courage in reconsidering past behavior and rejecting rebellion. When a prominent Palestinian educator followed in his footsteps, he paid a heavy price for swimming against the tide.

This past April, the New York Times [published a moving story](#) about Al-Quds University Professor Mohammed S. Dajani Daoudi, a PLO-trained guerilla who is leading an effort to teach Palestinians at universities in the West Bank about the Holocaust, and took the first group of students from the Palestinian territories to visit the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland. Once recruited as a Fatah guerilla, Dr. Dajani began to regard Israelis differently after he accompanied his father for cancer treatment at a hospital in Israel and also witnessed the care given to his dying mother by Israeli doctors and even soldiers. “I became confused about my enemy, who did their best to help my father and my mother,” he said. “I started to see the other side of my enemy, which is the human side.” Sadly, his efforts to promote multiculturalism and religious freedom were rejected within Palestinian society, and he has been the victim of harassment, threats and pressure since the trip, and was denounced as a “traitor” and “collaborator” by some of his colleagues, students and members of the public, the [Wall Street Journal](#) reported. Last week, bowing to the pressure, Dajani [resigned from his positions](#) as head of the university’s Department of American Studies and director of the university’s brand-new library.

The Talmud lauded On, the son of Peleth, for his willingness to reconsider his actions and abandon his rebellious activities. While the Palestinian public may not yet value Mohammed Dajani’s similar actions, the world should recognize his courageous stance and encourage others to follow his example. ■

## Forbidden Contraband

**And touch nothing of theirs (Numbers 16:26)**

**וְאֵל תִּגְעוּ בְכֹל אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם (במדבר טז:כו)**

Warning the people to distance themselves from Korach and his men, Moses says, “Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest you be swept away in all their sins.” (verse 26) Why does Moses warn them not to touch their property? While Ibn Ezra explains that anyone who touched Korach’s property would suffer Korach’s fate, Ramban disagrees, rejecting the notion that profiting from Korach would incur punishment. Rather, Ramban writes that Moses’ declared that Korach’s possessions “Were [forbidden] contraband.”

By banning any benefit from Korach’s possession, Moses highlighted Korach’s pariah status in the nation. Today, the United States must continue to enforce a similar ban against forbidden international commerce with Iran.

Earlier this month, the United States announced that the Dutch aerospace firm Fokker Technologies agreed to pay \$21 million in penalties to, “settle accusations that it repeatedly violated American sanctions on sales of aircraft parts to Iran and Sudan,” the [New York Times](#) reported. The Treasury statement also served as a reminder that despite a temporary agreement with Iran over its disputed nuclear energy program, which eased some sanctions on the country, most restrictions remain in force. While this encouraging government action is a step in the right direction, the Treasury Department must also shine a brighter light on Iranian oil exports and the countries and companies purchasing that oil. While Iran agreed to maintain an export level of approximately one million barrels of oil per day during negotiations over its nuclear program, [CNBC](#) recently reported that over the past several months Iran’s oil output has steadily increased. The Joint Plan of Action calls upon Iran not to export, over the course of six months, more oil than they were exporting last November. Yet, Iran appears to be doing just that, running at an average of 1.3 million barrels per day since December.

Just as it has enforced sanctions with foreign companies, the United States must also enforce the sanctions agreement regarding Iran’s most significant economic engine of oil exports. Failure to do so will weaken the international community’s standing at the negotiating table and will lower the prospect of reaching a comprehensive agreement.

Like the property of Korach, which Moses forbade the people to touch, the United States must strictly enforce the sanctions against Iran in order to give the ongoing negotiations the greatest chance for success. ■

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