



Sermon Tidbits

JUNE 15, 2015

Parashat Korach

Combatting Hate

Do not turn to their offering (Numbers 16:15)

אל תפן אל מנחתם (במדבר טז:טו)

The international incident began at a news conference in Cairo where Stephane Richard, CEO of French mobile phone giant Orange, was laying out plans for his company's future in Egypt. With more than 230 million customers worldwide, including through its relationship with Partner Communications, an Israeli sister company controlled by Israeli-American businessman Haim Saban, Orange is more than double the size of Verizon Wireless, the largest U.S. mobile carrier. According to the [Times of Israel](#), Richard told reporters that, "Our intention is to withdraw from Israel. It will take time, but for sure we will do it," he said. "I am ready to do this tomorrow morning...but without exposing Orange to huge risks."

Rather than quietly accepting yet another hateful attack, Israel fought back and Richard found himself swarmed with criticism for supporting the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called on the French government, which owns a 13 percent stake in Orange, "to publicly denounce the [despicable statement and miserable actions of a company](#) that is under partial French government ownership," and demanded that Richard apologize personally for his insult to the Israeli people. According to [Ha'aretz](#), "French President Francois Hollande told Netanyahu...that he categorically opposes boycotts of Israel and expressed the desire to maintain economic ties between the two countries." Richard [traveled to Israel](#) last Friday and met with Prime Minister Netanyahu to apologize, saying, "I regret deeply this controversy, and I want to make totally clear that Orange as a company has never supported and will never support any kind of boycott against Israel."

Moses also faced the challenge of dealing with hatred and spite. When Korach and his followers questioned the leadership of Moses and Aaron, Moses—hoping to arrive at a peaceful settlement—reached out to Dathan and Abiram, two of the ringleaders of the uprising. The pair not only refused to meet, but also responded with scorn and hatred. "Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness; but must you also make yourself a prince over us? ...Will you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up [to see you]." (16:13-14) Responding to their unmitigated chutzpah as well as their accusation that Moses might personally harm them, Moses turned to God for redress: "And Moses was very angry and said to God: 'Respect not their offering; I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them.'" (13:15) What does Moses mean when he asks that God not respect—or accept—their offering? In his second interpretation, Rashi writes that Moses was referring to the public sacrifice offered in the Tabernacle each day. He said to God, "May their portion [of the offering] not be accepted before You. Let the fire leave [their portion] and not consume it." Through this unusual request, Moses teaches us that purveyors of hatred must be totally and completely ostracized, even to the point that they cannot partake and benefit from public offerings. This would demonstrate that hateful behavior is totally out of bounds, and repudiate those who promote hateful actions and activities.

Recently, American lawmakers have taken steps to put this lesson into practice, and ensure that companies don't support the BDS movement in the United States. Early this month, South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley signed the first statewide law to stop efforts to boycott, divest from and sanction (BDS) Israel. The legislation (H. 3583) inhibits public entities from contracting with businesses that "blacklist, divest from or otherwise refuse to deal with a person or firm when the action is based on race, color, religion, gender or national origin of the targeted person or entity."

Even though the bill is not specific to Israel, lawmakers crafted the legislation to oppose the recent BDS movement against the Jewish state. While South Carolina is the first state to take legal action against the BDS movement, other states are not far behind. Last month, House and Senate lawmakers in Illinois unanimously passed a similar anti-BDS bill that is now awaiting the governor's signature.

The best way to combat the anti-Semitism of the BDS movement is by holding accountable those who promote this hateful agenda. The CEO of Orange learned this month that Israel will no longer silently abide by efforts made to malign it using hateful economic tactics. We must continue to encourage our legislators to join the fight against BDS, by deterring companies from engaging in the hateful anti-Israel campaign. ■

An Open-ended Agreement

Behold the staff of Aaron was budded (Numbers 17:23)

והנה פרץ מטה אהרן (במדבר יז:כג)

Parashat Korach relates two major challenges to the leadership of Moses and Aaron which are met with harsh retribution. First, Korach's rebellion was snuffed out by a one-two punch of divine fire combined with an abyss that swallowed his followers. Second, when the people complained about Moses' and Aaron's leadership, a plague killed thousands before Aaron could halt its progress through an incense offering. After these two devastating episodes, God commanded Aaron to place his staff before the holy Tent of Meeting, together with the staffs of each tribal leader. When they discovered the next morning that Aaron's staff "was budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bore ripe almonds" (17:23), the people finally accepted that Aaron was indeed divinely chosen as the high priest.

Rabbi Benzion Firer (see *Hegyonah Shel Torah*, volume 4 pp. 103-104) wonders: Why was this additional step necessary for the people? Why weren't the divine fire, the miraculous pit and the plague enough to demonstrate who should lead the nation? He explains that while coercion could quell an uprising, the power of force can never quell dispute. Rabbi Firer writes, "A battle of positions cannot be decided through force. The weak is not convinced by his downfall or by the conquest of he who is stronger than him... It is only possible to convince using words of appeasement. It is incumbent upon the victor to prove his righteousness—if he is indeed correct—with soft language and not because he has the advantage of power. The weakness of the vanquished does not convince him that he is incorrect, as in most cases, righteousness and power do not walk hand-in-hand."

As the United States negotiates its agreement with Iran, it faces precisely the same challenge. How can the international community be assured that Iran's compliance stems not from subjugation, but instead from a true desire to become a respected member of the international community? By using a clear, three pronged strategy: Increased pressure through sanctions, credible military threat and robust diplomacy.

As the diplomatic track comes to a conclusion of its current phase, it is clear that Iran's willingness to negotiate and curb its nuclear program stems from the crushing economic sanctions crippling the Iranian economy. Yet, when the world withdraws the coercive power of sanctions, what will prevent Iran from returning to its previous course of international terror combined with a quest for nuclear weapons? Currently, there is no assurance that Iran's governance or ideology will be more peaceful in the future than it has been for the past 35 years.

The only possible answer is time—essentially keeping the agreement in place, without any expiration until Iran has proved over time that its nuclear ambitions are for peaceful purposes only. Once the agreement is in place and Iran's economy recovers, Iran itself will demonstrate over time whether it choose a course of peaceful nuclear development for energy and medicinal purposes only, or a dangerous path of subterfuge in an attempt to hoodwink the world as it covertly tries to develop a nuclear weapon. Until it's clear that Iran's intentions are truly peaceful, releasing the Islamic Republic from its obligations would leave the world wondering whether Iran truly wanted peace, or was only biding its time. ■

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