

JUNE 11, 2018

Parashat Korach

Korach's True Intentions

And Korach persuaded... (Numbers 16:1)

ויקח קרח (במדבר טז:א)

In the recent days and weeks Israel has been confronted by continued attacks emanating from Gaza. Some of the latest assaults have come in the form of [setting fires](#) to Israeli lands and agriculture by means of sending over flaming kites or helium filled balloons. Recently firefighters were battling a wave of blazes near the Gaza border area after several flaming kites were sent soaring over the border, causing at least nine fires in Israeli territory. Two large fires broke out near Kibbutz Nir Am, northeast of the Gaza Strip, while a third was reported in the area of Moshav Netiv Ha'asara, to the north. At least six fires were started in the Eshkol region of southern Israel. A brush fire also broke out in a field outside Kibbutz Be'eri, east of the central Gaza Strip. Area firefighters and security personnel worked to put out the blazes as smoke filled the surrounding communities. Since the "March of Return" protests began along the Gaza border at the end of March, hundreds of kites and helium balloons have been flown into Israel outfitted with Molotov cocktails and containers of burning fuel, setting fire to large swaths of land. The blaze in Nir Am briefly threatened the Sapir College in the neighboring town of Sderot. Footage from the scene, filmed by a student, showed the fire spreading rapidly as fire trucks were heard rushing to the scene.

The story of Korach's rebellion is the story of an uncensored ego with a selfish agenda in conflict with a disciplined leader, whose sole purpose was to serve his Creator. It is the story of humility and arrogance doing battle with each other in the public arena. Considering the emotional dissatisfaction of the people following the failure of the mission of the spies (in *Parashat Shelach-Lecha*) and the newness of their religious practices, the setting was ripe for rebellion. Considering the charisma of Korach, his family lineage—that was the same as Moses and Aaron's—his personal ambitions, and his exceptionally creative and insightful intelligence, Korach was perfect to lead the rebellion. However, in the end the rebellion failed. It failed because the arguments presented by Korach were merely a cover up for his true intentions. He hoped to bring down Moses and Aaron and to usurp the leadership for himself and his cohorts. His true inner thoughts and desires were far from being worthy or noble. Korach and the rebels died and many others perished in the lingering aftermath. In the end it was the Divine word and the ethical and moral principles that won out. If we fast-forward to the situation in Israel today in our conflicts with other nations that seek to undermine the Jewish state and seek her downfall, we are confident that will succeed by standing true to the principles that have guided the Jewish nation from its inception. We hearken back to our first years as a young nation and have faith that we will be victorious when we stay true to the principles of justice and truth.

The attacks on Israel continue in multiple forms. On May 29 and 30, the terrorist groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad launched more than 100 rockets and mortars from the Gaza Strip into Israeli communities. Although the Iron Dome missile defense system successfully intercepted many of the projectiles, several struck Israeli targets, including the yard of an Israeli kindergarten. Members of [Congress](#) from both parties expressed solidarity with Israel and strongly condemned the recent wave of attacks on Israeli citizens emanating from the Gaza Strip. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations Ranking Member Robert Menendez (D-NJ) said: "Hamas targeted Israeli civilian structures. This is why I will always ensure that the iron dome is funded. Israel has every right to defend herself. Hamas controls Gaza and is responsible for attacks on Israeli citizens. They must be held accountable." Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) said, "Today Iran-backed Palestinian terrorists like Hamas launched over 100 rockets & mortars at Israel. They attacked in the morning as Israeli children were walking to school. These attacks came after months of using Palestinian human shields as cover for other attacks on Israel. I unequivocally stand with Israel and support Israel's actions to defend itself. The media must cease its mendacious coverage blaming Israel for Gaza

violence, which rewards Hamas for its barbaric tactics. Hamas and other terror groups in the Gaza Strip must be defeated.” We in the Jewish community express our gratitude to our members of Congress and Senators who continue to express their unwavering support for Israel and her right to defend herself from those who attempt to harm the Jewish homeland. ■

Moses Proposes Peace

Moses sent a message calling for Datan and Aviram (Numbers 16:12)

וישלח משה לקרא לדתן ולאבירם (במדבר טז:יב)

In August 2005, then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon unilaterally removed all 8,000 residents of the Jewish settlements, as well as the IDF, from the Gaza Strip. Israel hoped that the withdrawal would prompt Gazans to focus on their own economic development and live in peace with Israel. But in 2007, Hamas violently took control of Gaza from the PA and turned it into a base for launching terrorist attacks, firing rockets, digging attack tunnels and now attempting to breach the border fence with tens of thousands of Gazans. In 2008, then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered PA leader Mahmoud Abbas a peace proposal that included: recognition of a Palestinian state in the territories; withdrawal from almost the entire West Bank and granting the Palestinians part of Israel’s sovereign territory as compensation for keeping the rest of the West Bank; and turning over to the Palestinian state the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. Abbas never responded to Olmert’s offer, stating later that, “the gaps were too wide.”

Korach, a cousin of Moses and Aaron, launches a rebellion against them. He claims that they have unfairly seized leadership roles and have ignored the prophetic powers of the rest of the nation. Korach argues that Moses has unfairly taken all the power for himself. Datan, Aviram, and 250 others join Korach’s cause. Were the rebels’ claims justified? No; they were patently absurd. Who could accuse Moses of snatching power, when in fact Moses had to be persuaded by God to take a leadership role in the first place? Moreover, the Torah describes Moses as “the most humble of all men.” Wielding power was the last thing on his mind. First Moses tells the rebels that they can conduct a test of sorts in order to verify whom it is that God has really chosen. Moses is willing to put his position on the line in order to mollify the rebels. Even more telling, Moses, in a stunning example of humility, asks to meet with Datan and Aviram in order to try to make amends and bring wholeness again to the nation. Though they have been the provocateurs, Moses risks humiliation by meeting with them and tries to make peace. Characteristically, Datan and Aviram rebuff Moses’ offer and insult him. With this last ditch effort being met with failure, the die is cast and the unfortunate episode ends with the tragedy of the rebels’ death. We can derive a dramatic lesson from this story. Though Moses was totally in the right, and though he exposed himself to insult and humiliation, Moses does all he can to stop an impending tragedy and offer a path to peace and reconciliation.

Israel has signed peace treaties with its two most important neighbors—Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. In the treaty with Egypt, [Israel](#) proved they are willing to make extraordinarily painful compromises when dealing with a leader who is genuinely willing to live in peace with the Jewish state. Israel, in 2000, also offered the Golan to Syria in return for peace, but Syria refused. Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, and it offered the Palestinians virtually the entire West Bank and the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, but the Palestinians balked. Since its creation, Israel has never made any territorial demands on Lebanon and has been willing to live in peace with its northern neighbors within the countries’ international borders. Finally, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accepted in 2009 the establishment of a Palestinian state as part of a peace agreement, and continued to call on Abbas to enter into direct talks without preconditions. Regrettably, Abbas has continued to reject this offer.

In the episode of Korach’s rebellion, we see once again an example of the supreme Jewish value of pursuing peace. Moses tries to find a solution in order to avoid death and destruction—he extends his hand in peace even when his adversaries were guilty. This noble path taken by our eminent leaders, Moses and Aaron remains an ideal for our people and its leaders in the Jewish homeland today. The state of Israel continues to consider every path that can potentially lead to peace in the region and bring greater stability to nations across the globe. We pray that this day comes soon. ■

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