

THE BEIT MIDRASH WAY - UNIT 1: Meet or Refuse to Meet? From Korah and Moses to Political Adversaries Today

Ibayau Lehu (a question was asked in the Beit Midrash):

**When do we agree to meet with our political adversaries,
and when do we refuse?**

Text Study 1

Witnessing the Shared “Facts” of the Biblical Story of Dathan and Abiram’s Refusal to Meet with Moses

Study the following verses in *havruta*. Note the differences in the translations.
List all questions you have on these verses, in any language you wish.

Text 1

Numbers 16:1-5

1 **Now Korah** — the son of Korah, son of Levi, brother of Aaron, — along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab and On son of Peleth — descendants of Reuben — **2 to rise up against Moses,** together with two hundred and fifty Israelites, chieftains of the community, chosen in the assembly, men of repute.... **12 Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; but they said, “We will not come! 13 Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us?**

במדבר טז

א וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח, בֶּן-יִצְחָר בֶּן-קְהָת בֶּן-לוֹי; וְדָתָן וְאַבִּירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב, וְאוֹן בֶּן-פֹּלֵת-בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן. ב וַיִּקְמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה, וְאַנְשִׁים מִבְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשִּׁים וְשָׁמָּה, וְרָאִי חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאַתִּים, נְשִׂאֵי עֵדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד, אֲנָשֵׁי-שֵׁם... **יב וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה, לִקְרֹא לְדָתָן וְלֶאבִירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, לֹא נֵעֲלֶה. יג** הַמַּעַט, כִּי הֶעֱלִיתֵנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ, לְהַמְיִיתֵנוּ, בַּמִּדְבָּר: כִּי-תִשְׁתַּרֵּר עָלֵינוּ, גַּם-הַשְּׁתַּרֵּר. יד אַף לֹא אֶל-אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ, הִבִּיאֵתֵנוּ, וְתַתֵּן-לָנוּ, בְּחֶלֶת שָׂדֶה וְכָרֶם; הַעֵינֵינוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים הָהֵם, תִּנְקֶר—לֹא נֵעֲלֶה.

Bamidbar 16 (Artscroll/Stone Edition)

1 Korah son Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi separated himself, with Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth, the offspring of Reuben. 2 They stood before Moses with two hundred and fifty men from the Children of Israel, leaders of the assembly, those summoned for meeting, men of renown.... **12 Moses sent forth to summon Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they said, “We shall not go up! 13 Is it not enough that you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to cause us to die in the**

Text Study 3 – Implications for the Children of Isaac and Ishmael Today

What may be the possible implications of this Biblical story for the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians today?

Understanding the First 49



Dr. Yehezkel Landau <http://landau-interfaith.com/>

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Ishmael and Isaac in Jewish Tradition: Implications for Our Times Dr. Yehezkel Landau,

(This essay will appear in a publication issued by the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) in 2015. *ISRAELI MUSLIM RELATIONS: LESSONS FOR ARABS AND JEWS TODAY*)

Judaism views both Ishmael and Isaac ambivalently, with strengths and weaknesses, merits and flaws. And we have noted that these mixed assessments, along with the ambivalent portraits of Abraham's other Arab (such as the decision to expel Hagar and Ishmael, D.R.), are in line with the Jewish approach to Biblical personalities: none is flawless; each is presented as a complex being, containing light and shadow. Such honest portrayals of Biblical figures are a humanizing and liberating, for we can more easily identify with morally flawed heroes than with the god-like, flawless ones. Examining the relationship between Ishmael and Isaac as the Bible presents it, through the variegated lens of Jewish tradition, we can glean some important lessons to help us address the present challenges facing their descendants, Jews and Arabs caught up in a territorial dispute over a shared holy land...Given the ongoing bitter and bloody conflict between Israelis and Palestinians over their common homeland...the future depends on us, on what we do, and on how we understand what is truly holy, based on our respective faith traditions. Jews, Muslims, and Christians all need to broaden their sense of the sacred to affirm that life is holier than land, that God's love and blessing are bestowed upon all equally without hierarchical favoritism, and that inclusive justice and compassion are both the essential attributes of the Divine and the central imperatives to guide our behavior. Once we do this, we will have the capacity to change our "victim and vindication" scripts, using our scriptures as justification...With more pluralistic and compassionate faith orientations, we can come to see the Holy Land as a laboratory for collective consecration, not a battleground between peoples and theologies. If we choose this path of devotion, ready to sacrifice land rather than human lives, then the reconciliation which Ishmael and Isaac experienced in their lifetime can serve as an example for us, their faithful descendants—insha'Allah, im yirtzeh Hashem, if God wills it, and if we do, too.

Exercise 3 - Studying Today's News the Beit Midrash Way

Where is this question coming up today? To what extent can this question be discussed constructively with each side seeking to understand the 49vs49?

Background:

At the core of the Beit Midrash Way is the interpretive skill of identifying key textual ambiguities in the Biblical verses, (i.e. the “shared facts” of the Biblical story), as well as understanding the conflicting interpretations of the commentaries of these textual ambiguities. These same interpretive skills are critical for reading current events in the news today.

Instructions:

1. Read in *havruta* the two articles brought below both reporting on the New York Times Op-Ed article, “I am part of the resistance inside the Trump administration”, from September 5, 2018.
2. What are the shared facts mentioned in both articles?
3. What facts and interpretation of facts are unique to each article?
4. With which article do you identify with more, why?
5. What did you learn to agree in each article and from reading the news in general this way?

SAMPLE UNIT 5