

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* (study partners). Note the differences in these translations. List all questions you have on these verses, in particular on verse 12.

Text 1

Numbers 16:1–2, 12–15 (The New JPS)

1 Now Korah, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, betook himself, 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

במדבר טז:א-ב, יב-טו

(א) וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח, בֶּן-יִצְחָק בֶּן-קְהָת בֶּן-לוֹי; וְדָתָן וְאַבִּירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב, וְאֹן בֶּן-פֶּלֶת--בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן. (ב) וַיִּקְמוּ לִפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה, וְאַנְשֵׁים מִבְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל הַמְּשֻׁבָּתִים וְיִמְאֵתִים, נְשִׂאֵי עֵדָה קְרָאִי מוֹעֵד, אַנְשֵׁי-שֵׁם.... (יב) וַיִּשְׁלַח מֹשֶׁה, לִקְרֹא לְדָתָן וְלֶאבִירָם בְּנֵי אֱלִיאָב; וַיֹּאמְרוּ, לֹא נֵעֲלֶה. (יג) הַמְעַט, כִּי הֵעֲלִיתֵנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ זְבַת חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ, לְהַמִּיתֵנוּ, בְּמִדְבָּר: כִּי-תִשְׁתַּרְרַר עָלֵינוּ, גַּם-הַשְּׂתַרְרָה. (יד) אַף לֹא אֶל-אֶרֶץ זְבַת חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ, הֵבִיאֵתֵנוּ, וַתִּתֵּן-לָנוּ, נַחֲלֹת שָׂדֵה וְיַכְרֹם; הַעֲיִנִי הָאֲנָשִׁים הָהֵם, תִּנְקַר--לֹא נֵעֲלֶה.

Bamidbar 16:1–2, 12–15 (Artscroll/Stone Edition)

1 Korah son of 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

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also lord it over us? 14 Even if you had brought us to a land flowing with milk and honey, and given us possession of fields and vineyards, should you gouge out those men's eyes? We will not come!" 15 Moses was much aggrieved and he said to the Lord, "Pay no regard to their oblation. I have not taken the ass of any one of them, nor have I wronged any one of them."

וַיִּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה, מְאֹד,
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-יְהוָה, אֵל-תַּפְּן
אֶל-מִנְחֹתָם; לֹא חֲמוֹר
אֶחָד מֵהֶם, נִשְׁאַתִּי, וְלֹא
הִרְעֵתִי, אֶת-אֶחָד מֵהֶם.

*Wilderness, yet you seek to dominate us, even to dominate further?
14 Moreover, you did not bring us to a land flowing with milk and honey nor give us a heritage of field and vineyard!
Even if you would gouge out the eyes of those men, we shall not go up!" 15 This distressed Moses greatly, and he said to HASHEM, "Do not turn to their gift-offering!
I have not taken even a single donkey of theirs, nor have I wronged even one of them."*

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Exercise 1 – Writing my 'Intuitive Tweet'

Background

One pillar of the Beit Midrash Way is the ability to be aware of our own bias, or our own '49' reasons that lead us to interpret a particular text or conflict the way we do. Today, very often people write these intuitive interpretations on social media thus contributing to the 'texts' of the conflict.

Instructions

If you had been an Israelite in the desert and witnessed Dathan and Abiram refusing to accept the invitation of Moses to meet, what would you have tweeted about it? What kind of people were Dathan,



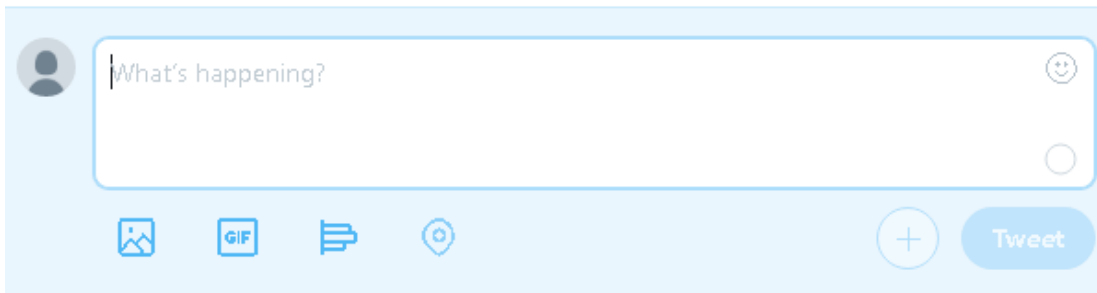
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Abiram, and Moses? How do you understand Moses's intention in inviting them to meet, and their reason for refusing to do so?

Compose New Tweet



Reply Tweet

Consider exchanging your 'intuitive tweet' with your *havruta* or someone sitting near you and writing a positive or critical reply tweet. Then pass it back.

Personal Reflection

Would you define your 'intuitive tweet' as more "pro-Moses" (or anti- Dathan and Abiram) or more "anti-Moses" (pro-Dathan and Abiram)? Explain why.



Text Study 2

Understanding the 49 vs 49 Conflicting Interpretations of the Facts of the Biblical Story

How did the following commentators understand Moses's intention in inviting Dathan and Abiram to meet, and their reason for refusing to do so?

Understanding the First 49

Text 2.1

Rashi, Bamidbar 16:12
(Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040–1105, France)

'Moses sent' - From here we derive that one should not persist in a dispute (mahloket), because Moses sought them out to conciliate them by peaceful words.



רש"י, במדבר טז:יב

וישלח משה - מכאן שאין מחזיקין במחלוקת, שהיה משה מחזר אחריהם להשלימם בדברי שלום.

https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/9944/jewish/Chapter-16.htm#showrashi=true
Image courtesy of Sinai Publishing.

Understanding the Other 49

Text 2.2

Rashbam, Bamidbar 16:12
(Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, 1085–1158, France)

And they said 'we will not go up' - to you for judgment, the language of 'going up' is often said in the context of going to judges (see Deuteronomy 25:7, Judges 4:5, Ruth 4:1).



רשב"ם, במדבר טז:יב

ויאמרו לא נעלה, אליך למשפט. לשון עלייה רגיל לומר אצל הולכה אל השופטים (דברים כה:ז, שופטים ד:ה, רות ד:א).

Image courtesy of the Abraham Schwadron Collection at the National Library of Israel.

Understanding the 49 vs 49 Conflicting Interpretations

Text 2.3

Hirsch, Numbers 16:12

(Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, 1808–1888, Germany)

“Sent to call to” - In no way (does this verse) involve a dictatorial ‘order’ coming from a superior, but rather it is used to designate a friendly invitation (see for example Bamidbar 22:5, Shemot 2:20). But “going up” ... is especially used for going to a court of law.... Moses in the most friendly way had asked them to come to him, but they took the invitation as a ‘summons’, and answered “We are not coming up to ‘my lord’, i.e. we do not take orders from him, it is a presumption on his part to order us about from above to come to him, “we do not ‘go up’ to him.”



רש"ר הירש, במדבר טז:יב

ויאמרו "שלח לקרא ל-" איננו מציין קריאה היוצאת כפקודה מטעם השליט; אין זו הזמנה לדין או לבירור אלא זו הזמנה ידידותית. אולם "עלה" איננו מציין רק הליכה למקום גבוה אלא גם הליכה למקום שהוא נעלה בחשיבותו, הליכה אל איש רם מעלה, בייחוד הליכה לבית משפט: "ועלתה יבמתו השערה" (דברים כה, ז), "ובעז עלה השער" (רות ד, א). משה קרא להם בצורה ידידותית וביקש מהם לבוא אליו. אך הם שיוו להזמנתו את האופי של הזמנה לבירור וענו: "לא נעלה אל האדון!"- הוה אומר: לא נשמע לפקודתו; זו יהירות מצידו לצוות עלינו לבוא אליו, אין לו זכות לתת פקודות, "לא נעלה אליו."

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, The Pentateuch Translated and Explained Vol. IV, Numbers (translation to English, Isaac Levy), Judaica Press, LTD, Gateshead, England, 1976, p. 277-278.

Image: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Samson_Raphael_Hirsch_\(FL12173334\)..crop.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Samson_Raphael_Hirsch_(FL12173334)..crop.jpg)

Exercise 2 – Writing the 49 vs 49 Faces of the Book

Background

Another pillar of the 'Beit Midrash Way' is the ability to understand contradictory interpretations of texts as well as ideological and political issues today. This has been referred to in short as the '49 vs 49' and more precisely in rabbinic literature as the 49 *panim* or faces (מ"ט פנים) why a matter may be understood in contradictory ways. In this exercise we will connect between these multi-dimensional contradictory 'faces' of the Book, with the too often singular-dimension, simplistic nature of Facebook.

Instructions

Write two Facebook posts about the biblical story, one for Dathan and Abiram and one for Moses, with each post telling over the story from a different perspective. Feel free to be creative, drawing upon both your own interpretations and the interpretations of the biblical commentaries.

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Instructions

1. Read in *havruta* the two articles brought below reporting on President Trump's invitation to NBA star Stephen Curry from September 2017 and the two articles reporting on President Obama's invitation to NFL star Tom Brady from April 2015.
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 from reading each article and from reading the news in general this way?



<https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/9111572182060453893?lang=en>

1. President Trump's Invitation to Steph Curry, September 2017

After NBA's Stephen Curry Rejects Trump's Whitehouse Invitation, the Disgruntled President 'Withdraws' It

It's a little late to save face.

As part of his continuing war on black athletes, President Donald Trump withdrew his invitation to Golden State Warriors superstar Stephen Curry to visit the White House via Twitter. Less than 24 hours after Trump called former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick a "son of a b*tch," Trump went after the popular Curry who had indicated that he might not attend a White House ceremony celebrating the NBA champion Warriors. "Going to the White House is considered a great honor for a championship team. Stephen Curry is hesitating, therefore invitation is withdrawn!" Trump tweeted. Friday night Curry told reporters that he is not a fan of the idea of NBA team visiting the White House, saying, "I don't want to go."

Donald Trump Cancels NBA Championship Invitation to Steph Curry and the Warriors

President Donald Trump abruptly canceled a White House invitation to the Golden State Warriors after star Steph Curry signaled reluctance to attend

"Going to the White House is considered a great honor for a championship team," Trump said. "Stephen Curry is hesitating, therefore invitation is withdrawn!" Officially, the team hadn't made a decision about whether or not they would meet with Trump at the White House. Curry bluntly said, "I don't want to go," to reporters in Oakland on Friday. Curry said that the team didn't stand for what Trump had "said" and "hadn't said in the right terms" and said that the team "wouldn't stand for it." "By acting and not going, hopefully that will inspire some change when it comes to what we tolerate in this country and what is accepted and what we turn a blind eye to," he said.



President Trump's Invitation to Steph Curry, September 2017		
Article 1	Article 2	
Additional Facts/ Interpretation of Facts	Shared Facts	Additional Facts/ Interpretation of Facts
<input type="checkbox"/> I identify more with this article because: <input type="checkbox"/> I identify less with this article, but still learned:		<input type="checkbox"/> I identify more with this article because: <input type="checkbox"/> I identify less with this article, but still learned:

Can you match the link to the article? <https://www.alternet.org/culture/trump-withdraws-white-house-invitation-nbas-stephen-curry-after-star-says-i-dont-want-go>
<https://www.breitbart.com/sports/2017/09/23/donald-trump-cancels-nba-championship-invitation-steph-curry-warriors/>

2. President Obama's Invitation to Tom Brady, April 2015



<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2015/04/23/president-obama-honors-2015-super-bowl-champions-new-england-patriots>

Tom Brady turned down Obama's White House Invite:

See <https://ftw.usatoday.com/2015/04/tom-brady-white-house-president-obama-super-bowl-ceremony>

The Man Who Was Not There: Tom Brady Leaves Barack Obama Guessing

See <https://www.breitbart.com/sports/2015/04/24/the-man-who-was-not-there-tom-brady-leaves-white-house-guessing/>

President Obama's Invitation to Tom Brady, April 2015		
Article 1	Article 2	
Additional Facts/ Interpretation of Facts	Shared Facts	Additional Facts/ Interpretation of Facts
<input type="checkbox"/> I identify more with this article because: <input type="checkbox"/> I identify less with this article, but still learned:	<input type="checkbox"/> I identify more with this article because: <input type="checkbox"/> I identify less with this article, but still learned:	

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Supplementary Sources

Supplementary Sources for Text Study 2

What was the difference between the interaction between Dathan/Abiram and Moses on the one hand, and Hillel and Shammai on the other, according to the following commentary?

Text 2.1.1

Commentary of Yayin Levanon, on Pirkey Avot 5:17 (Rabbi Naftali Hertz Wessely, published 1775, Berlin)

"And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; and they said: 'We will not come up!'" (Numbers 16:12). (Moses) wanted to speak to their hearts and to offer them tochachah (reproof) and they did not want to listen. And this is great wickedness.... And therefore it says right afterwards "And Moses was greatly angered etc..." (Numbers 16:13). For he saw that there was no hope that they should repent and that the community could continue to exist (together as one). Not like the way the "forefathers of the world" (Hillel and Shammai based on Mishnah Eduyot 1:4) acted, where one group would listen with their ears to hear the arguments of the other group and when their words were right in their eyes they returned to rule in accordance (with the other side).

פירוש יין לבנון, אבות ה"ז
(ר' נפתלי הירץ ויזל)

"וישלח משה לקרוא לדתן ולאבירם בני אליאב ויאמרו לא נעלה. בקש לדבר על לבם ולהוכיחם ולא רצו לשמוע, וזהו רשעה גדולה... ולכן נאמר אחריו "ויחר למשה מאוד וגו'" (במדבר טז:יג) כי ראה שאין תקוה שישו בו ושתתקיים הכנסיה. לא כמו שעשו אבות העולם (משנה עדויות א:ד) שהכת האחת הקשיבו אזניהם לשמוע טענות הכת השני וכשישרו דבריהם בעיניהם חזרו להורות כמותם.



Rashi's comment on Numbers 16:12 (Text 2.1) of "not holding on to a conflict" is based upon the following source. What may be the significance of Reish Lakish's comment being on Numbers 16:25 as opposed to Numbers 16:12 as cited by Rashi?

Text 2.1.2

Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 110a

"And Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram" (Numbers 16:25), Reish Lakish says: From here we derive that one may not perpetuate a dispute, as Rav says: Anyone who perpetuates a dispute violates a prohibition, as it is stated: "And he will not be like Korah and his assembly" (Numbers 17:5).

תלמוד בבלי, סנהדרין קי ע"א

ויקם משה וילך אל דתן ואבירם (במדבר טז:כה), אמר ריש לקיש: מכאן שאין מחזיקין במחלוקת, דאמר רב: כל המחזיק במחלוקת עובר בלאו שנאמר "ולא יהיה כקרח וכעדתו" (במדבר יז:ה).

What does Rabbi Jonathan ben David say about the above comment of Reish Lakish?
What in your opinion may be the limits of this approach?

Text 2.1.3

Perushe Rabenu Yehonatan mi-Lunil at 21 Mesekhtot ha-Shas, Sanhedrin p. 16 col. 1. Rabbi Jonathan ben David of Lunel (c. 1135-1211)

"Anyone who perpetuates a dispute violates a prohibition." Meaning, anyone who holds on to a quarrel, even if justice is with them, violates a negative commandment. As it is written "Moses rose up and went to Dathan and Abiram" (Numbers 16:25), and he did not want to hold on to the quarrel, and he went to them in order that they may change their opinion. For if he had not gone there, he would have violated a negative commandment, for he would have held on to a quarrel, as Korah, Dathan and Abiram did. And because of this Scripture warns, "And he will not be like Korah and his assembly" (Numbers 17:5).

פירוש רבינו יהונתן מלונית, סנהדרין

כל המחזיק במחלוקת עובר בלאו, כלומר כל המחזיק אע"פ שהדין עמו עובר בלאו. הכא כתיב "ויקם משה וילך אל דתן ואבירם", (במדבר טז:כה) ולא ראה להחזיק במחלוקת והולך לקראתם כדי שיחזרו בהם שאם לא הלך שם היה עובר שהיה מחזיק במחלוקת כמו שהיו קרח דתן ואבירם, ומשום הכי הזהיר הכתוב "ולא יהיה כקרח וכעדתו". (במדבר יז:ה)

What conclusion does Rabbi Dr. Kaminsky draw from R. Jonathan of Lunel's comment?

Text 2.1.4

Howard Kaminsky, Fundamentals of Jewish Conflict Resolution: Traditional Jewish Perspectives on Resolving Interpersonal Conflicts, Academic Studies Press, 2017, Chapter 2 "Pursuing Peace and Refraining from Destructive Conflict", p. 63.

In other words, R. Jonathan (of Lunel) is saying that, even if someone has been unjustly attacked and enmeshed in a conflict, that individual cannot use this fact as an excuse to perpetuate it, and if the individual should ignore an opportunity for reconciliation he or she will be held guilty for transgressing the prohibition.

How did the Talmudic sage, Rava, interpret Moses's invitation to Dathan and Abiram?
How may this support the interpretation of the Rashbam (Text 2.2)?

Text 2.2.1

Babylonian Talmud, Moed Katan 16a

Rava said: From where do we derive that a court agent is sent to summon the defendant to appear before the court before he is ostracized? As it is written: "And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab" (Numbers 16:12).

תלמוד בבלי, מועד קטן טז ע"א

וישלח משה לקרא, אמר רבא מנלן דמשדרין שליחא דבי דינא ומזנין ליה לדינא (לבעל דין), דכתיב וישלח משה לקרא לדתן ולאבי-רם בני אליאב. (במדבר טז:יב)

How did the contemporary Bible scholar, Prof. Jacob Milgrom, interpret Moses's invitation to Dathan and Abiram? How may this also support the interpretation of the Rashbam (Text 2.2)?

Text 2.2.2

Jacob Milgrom, The JPS Torah Commentary, Numbers 16:12

We will not come! Hebrew lo' na'aleh. The verb 'aleh, literally "go up," is used in connection with appearing before a court (Deut. 25:7, Judg. 4:5, Ruth 4:1).