

“Loyalty Is Not Enough, You Have to Care”
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Rabbi Jay M. Stein

Currently, there are approximately 25,000 Jews living in Iran. Most eligible voters are expected to show up and vote in this country's elections. Ahmadinejad will be running against prominent reformist rival Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi and Mohsen Rezaei.

David Mutai, Spokesman of the Central Organization of Iranian Immigrants in Israel told Ynet, "They are leaning towards leaving Ahmadinejad in his post because Mousavi is unpredictable."

"This is a vote for the lesser evil. In the past four years the president has inflamed the internal public and infuriated the nations of the world. They feel that they know him and know what he is made of, the fear is of the unknown Mousavi, and the concern is that, instead of talk, he may take action."

Meir Ezri, who served as Israel's ambassador to Tehran until 1975, recalls the election process in this country during a completely different era. According to Ezri, during parliamentary elections, heads of the Jewish community were invited to a meeting with the leadership during which they received a "recommendation" of whom to vote for.

"The votes are allegedly secret, but in hindsight not so secret. So the Jews plan to ensure they are on the winning side. In any case, they have no problem supporting whoever is elected," Ezri said.

Ynetnews reports, "Despite denying the Holocaust and repeatedly threatening Israel, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is expected to receive support from most of his country's eligible Jewish voters in Friday's elections."

So, it's pretty clear, there's no loyalty here. There is no love lost. This is a political maneuver to protect themselves. I believe, they, like the rest of the world, fear this maniacal madman, but their danger is immediate and urgent. I can only imagine the dread under which they live. I'm sure horror runs deep while loyalty does not. There is posturing, but make no mistake, the Jewish community of Iran doesn't care for Ahmadinejad. You see, feelings are complicated. The way those feelings play themselves out is even more difficult to understand.

This week's reading is filled with emotion. The Jewish people are upset about their circumstance. God is angry about their behavior. Miriam and Aaron are jealous so God gets even angrier. Miriam gets punished and the Jewish people get obstinate. In fact, the only one in the story that is not overtaken by emotions is the most emotional, reactionary figure in all of the Torah, Moses. It is Moses who, in a fit of rage, strikes down the Egyptian taskmaster. It is Moses who, trying to draw water from a stone, hits the rock. It is Moses who, upon seeing the Jewish people build the golden calf, smashes the two tablets. Yet, in this week's reading, he is essentially docile. Moses has one line, albeit a good one. However, the rest of the story is filled with grand gestures and lines drawn in the sand and we know that the reason Moses had such a small role is others have taken up the mantle. Moses is a non-player in a story that is about him, but that is only because he doesn't have to be. Here is the story.

Chapter 12 opens with Miriam complaining to Aaron that Moses has married a Cushite woman, but, as we see in just one verse, that is not her real complaint. Her real complaint is that she and Aaron have been relegated to a supporting role for Moses, who is bringing the Jewish people out of Egypt. She is tired of being an understudy and she begins to complain. God hears the attack against Moses and becomes infuriated, so he punishes Miriam. She gets leprosy and, as was the procedure for quarantine of such an affliction, she is shut out of the camp. Moses prays for her recovery. The Jewish people see how she has been treated, but recognize the role she has played in their survival in the desert. They refuse to move on until she is returned to them. She is healed and returns and the Jewish people then pick up where they left off.

Everyone in the story acts out of character. Miriam, the quiet savior of Moses, becomes a vocal opponent. Moses is so afraid to speak that God tells him to take Aaron with him to do the talking, however, Moses offers an incredibly eloquent prayer for healing. The Jewish people who are so used to worrying about their own needs, stop for a moment to think of someone else and her suffering, and it is precisely in their role reversal that they learn an important lesson. They learn about caring for someone else and the rewards that comes from the caring for another. On the surface, this is a story about loyalty. God is loyal to Moses and the Jewish people are loyal to Miriam. Also, Moses is not only loyal to Miriam, but also to God.

However, the truth is loyalty is not enough, you have to care.

Let me tell you what I mean. Moses is wronged, but he has no idea that he has been wronged. It makes him the best person to bring about healing. All Moses really knows is that God is really angry and Miriam has leprosy. So, Moses steps forward and says, *el na refa na lah*, (Numbers 12:13) God please heal her. Then the story ends with a great phrase which I never focused on until Rabbi Charlestein pointed it out to me. *V'ha'am lo nasa ad he'asaf Miriam* (Numbers 12:15) and the people did not march on until Miriam had been readmitted. The word *he'asaf* – readmitted – is more powerful than just “readmission,” especially when Rabbi Charlestein pointed out that the word is actually introduced in the beginning of the parasha with regards to tribe of Dan who had a unique task. *V'nasa degel machaneh b'nei dan m'aseif l'chol ha'machaneh*. (Numbers 10:25) It was the tribe of Dan whose job was to bring up the rear. They were given the task of making sure no one got left behind.

It is not enough to be loyal, we must also care.

The unique use of language in both places forces Rashi to offer a really beautiful explanation. With regards to Miriam and Dan's job, the words “to gather” and “to travel” are placed side by side. It is our Torah's way of saying we can't move on unless we have all of the people we need. So, there has to be people who make sure everyone is on the bus before it pulls away. Rashi, based on a statement from the Yerushalmi says, “Since the tribe of Dan was numerous in population, it would journey last. *V'chol mi she'haya m'abed davar, haya machziro lo*. Whoever would lose anything, it would restore it to him. To which the rest of the story begs us to ask, “Who is taking care of the people who have been lost, left behind, neglected, forgotten?”

A generation ago, the Jewish community mobilized to help bring down the iron curtain permitting Jewish prisoners of conscience to leave the Former Soviet Union. Protests were held, lobbying unleashed and thousands of thousands were saved. A decade ago we were finding the lost Jews of

Ethiopia. Money was raised, logistics managed, and thousands of thousands were saved. We can't, as a people, leave anyone behind. We didn't forget the Jews of the Former Soviet Union, and we didn't forget the Jews of Ethiopia. In our lifetime, there has been two redemptions, two miracles and two national triumphs.

What about the individuals? What is happening to our fellow human beings in our own backyards?

The Torah reading we shared this morning is a very personal story. Without a doubt, it has extraordinary national implications but, ultimately, it is about not forgetting one single person. Based on Federal Poverty Guidelines, more than 57,000 Jews in the Greater Philadelphia area are impoverished. Each and every one of them is important to us – but we should provide for all people if possible. Recently, Laura Yatvin made a comment about her involvement with this cause that struck a chord. She said, "I work with the Latino population, but this is different – this is my people."

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This week a terrible tragedy occurred. James von Brunn, the white supremacist, walked into the United States Holocaust Museum and shot and killed a guard. He shot Stephen T. Johns, 39, who died after being taken to a Washington, D.C. hospital. Stephen James was a security guard who, upon seeing this elderly man coming towards the building, went to hold the door open for him. After all, the museum is a museum of tolerance and that is what places of tolerance do, they hold the door open for people. While protecting the people and artifacts inside, he was also teaching the lesson of opening doors. That is what made him a hero. It is an action that will force his co-workers and people throughout this country, especially at Jewish institutions, to think twice before they hold the door open for just any one – but it cannot be.

Today I call out to you to become involved in our social action ministry. When the call goes out for "Cook for a Friend" they came and did just that. Cooked for a friend. When called upon to donate clothing, heed the call. Each week in our email blast called "E-highlights," we provide many opportunities for you to help those in need so, please, pursue any one of them. It isn't enough to be loyal, you have to care.

Sara Bloomfield, the director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum remembers slain guard, Stephen T. Johns. She remembers him as "a great friend who greeted us every day with a wonderful smile." We must do the same. Our sanctuary must be the same. We need to open doors because this week there is one less smiling face to greet the world. Commit today to stand in his place. Reach out and open one door for one person. Don't leave anyone outside looking in.