

## Unworthy Monuments

In this week's Torah portion, *Korach* (Numbers 16:1-18:32), we read about the infamous rebellion by Korach, of the tribe of Levi, and Datan and Aviram, princes of the tribe of Reuven. They mustered two hundred and fifty other Israelite leaders to overthrow Moses and Aaron. This new revolt came close on the heels of the strife caused by the negative report from ten of the scouts who reconnoitered the Land of Israel, which we read in last week's Torah portion. Obviously, the patience of the Israelites was wearing thin and many even clamored to return to Egypt; they preferred slavery and oppression to the uncertainty of their wanderings through the wilderness. Korach, Datan and Aviram were defeated and many of the rebels died in the confrontation. Afterwards, Moses is instructed to do something very unusual:

*Adonai spoke to Moses, saying: Order Eleazar son of Aaron the priest to remove the fire pans -- for they have become sacred -- from among the charred remains; and scatter the coals abroad. Remove the fire pans of those who have sinned at the cost of their lives, and let them be made into hammered sheets as plating for the altar -- for once they have been used for offering to*

*the Eternal, they have become sacred -- and let them serve as a warning to the people of Israel. Eleazar the priest took the copper fire pans which had been used for offering by those who died in the fire; and they were hammered into plating for the altar, just as the Eternal had ordered him through Moses. It was to be a reminder to the Israelites, so that no outsider -- one not of Aaron's offspring -- should presume to offer incense before the Eternal and suffer the fate of Korach and his band. The next day the whole Israelite community railed against Moses and Aaron, saying, "You two have brought death upon Adonai's people!"*

(Numbers 17:1-6)

After the Israelite "civil war," the offending fire pans of the rebels were hammered in to a type of monument. It was intended to be a warning against future rebellions. It was intended to be a historic reminder that could teach future generations about the disastrous consequences of revolution. Instead it served as a rallying point for those who wished to continue the struggle against Moses and Aaron.

I'm taken by the analogous issue of the statues and monuments of the leaders of the Confederate rebellion against the United States. Our nation suffered over 750,000 deaths during the Civil War (April 12, 1861 – April 9, 1865). That is almost twice as many deaths suffered by Americans in World War II. And yet, throughout the South there are countless monuments and

statues honoring Confederate political and military leaders and soldiers.

While some have argued that these monuments are simply expressions of regional pride and culture, the fact remains that they honor and glorify those who nearly destroyed this nation. Furthermore, the Confederate monuments are rallying shrines for racists and bigots.

Perhaps in the struggle to reunify our nation after the Civil War, some could justify gestures that tried to soothe the pain of loss and humiliation of the rebel states. But that time has long passed. One hundred and fifty years after the war is far too much time to worry about the feelings of defeated Confederates. Rather, the time has come for the removal of all of those symbols that represent the racist sin of slavery.

Let me be clear. I believe that the removal of Confederate monuments should be a project conducted by the guidance and authority of the Federal government and the rule of law. I also believe that we should gather some of those statues to be a part of educational displays in museums to teach about the Civil War, racism and the horrific Jim Crow laws that oppressed Blacks and African Americans in this country until 1965 (and in actuality, well beyond then). However, we should oppose vigilante attacks that vandalize public and private property.

As Jews we have felt outrage and hurt and vulnerability whenever Nazi symbols are displayed. Confederate symbols are equally offensive to our Black and African American friends, neighbors and family. Those rebel symbols, flags and monuments are no longer acceptable on our shared and public grounds.

*L'shalom, Let us strive for peace,*

*Rick*

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