

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 5 Tammuz 5786.
Corresponding to June 20, 2026

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 639 Hz) (p. 879 S) (p. 573 Hi) (p. 820 AS)

KORACH קרח

Numbers 16:1

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED),

Rabbi Emeritus Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale]

1. Korach was a very smart man, and he was quite wealthy as well. So why is he risking it all by leading a rebellion? Much is written to get an insight in Korach's thinking. The Midrash raises a solid point in Korach's position. The firstborn males were supposed to be the Kohanim, to perform all the rituals in the Mishkan and in the Holy Temple on behalf of the people. They lost that privilege because they were involved in the sin of the Golden Calf. The Leviyim and Kohanim were elevated to take the places of the firstborn since they did not worship the Golden Calf. Aharon is the choice as the Kohen Gadol, but Aharon definitely took part in the sin of the Golden Calf. Aharon should not even have been considered for the job. The Midrash answers the question with a challenge: Take a look at the law of the Parah Adumah, the Red Cow. And the Midrash does not explain the answer. The law of the Parah Adumah is enigmatic at best: one becomes purified by the ritual while another person becomes impure. As we do not understand the Parah Adumah, so we do not understand Aharon becoming the Kohen Gadol.

2. Korach was misled by what he saw with the divine spirit. The Midrash states that Korach saw that in the future he would have a most famous righteous descendant, the prophet Samuel. Seeing the future this way was surely an ingredient in Korach's convincing himself that he was righteous and he was right, for otherwise how would he have such a righteous descendant! This proves to us that if a person is given the gift of seeing the future within the divine spirit does not mean that he is beyond sinning, and sinning big time. Korach's eyes and his heart were terribly misguided by this vision of the future. Korach became convinced that he was right; he was actually blinded by the prospect of having a Shmuel in the family. And so it was. Korach's sons did not follow their father in the rebellion. Emphatically the Torah tells us (in Parshat Pinchas) that Korach's sons did not die (with their father). Korach's sons become the ancestors of Samuel. So Korach's vision was right on, but he wasn't!

3. The Torah lists some individual followers, including Ohn ben Pellet, of the tribe of Reuven, but the Torah does not mention him again as the rebellion progressed. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 16a) states that his wife saved him. She said to her husband: You are not going to gain anything in this rebellion. Right now you are a follower. And even if Aharon is deposed, you will still remain a follower. But, said Ohn, I promised Korach that I will go with him. She gave her husband some wine to drink, and he fell asleep. And she then sat in the doorway of their tent, and took off her hair

covering. When the rebels came by to collect Ohn for the rebellion, they saw her with her hair uncovered, and they went away. One of the takeaway messages from the Talmud was that these rebels were very observant Jews. They were dedicated to keep the Mitzvot. Even though these rebels were challenging Moshe and Aharon, they remained committed to Jewish law. The irony of it all does not go unnoticed. (RED)

4. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 110a) gives us a Midrashic view of the rebellion: Korach's wife said to him: See what Moshe has done. He himself has become king; his brother he appointed Kohen Gadol; his brother's sons he made vice High Priests. If Terumah is brought, Moshe decrees: Let it be for the Kohanim. If Ma'aser (a tithe) is brought, which belongs to you (the Leviyim), he orders: Give a tenth of it to the Kohen. Moreover he has your hair cut off (part of the Levitical purification ritual), and makes sport of you as if you were dirt. Korach said to her: But he has done likewise (had his hair shaved). She continued: Moshe commanded you to set Tzitzit on your garments, but if there is virtue in blue wool, then bring forth blue wool, and clothe the entire academy with it. The Talmud paints Korach's wife as the instigator to the rebellion. This is in contrast to Ohn ben Pellet's wife who saved her husband. Women have a major influence on their husbands (as it should be), but blessed be those, men and women, who are devout and religious.

5. The Talmud continued: "When Moshe heard, he fell on his face" (16:4). What news did he hear? Rabbi Shmuel b. Nachmani said in R. Yonatan's name: That Moshe was suspected of (adultery) with a married woman... the Talmud quotes a verse which teaches that every person warned his wife on Moshe's account, as it is written, "And Moshe took the Mishkan and pitched it outside the camp" (Shemot 33:7, to avoid all grounds of suspicion). This Talmudic passage raised a great deal of commentary. It could be that it was allegorical. It is said that if a person strives for a role in leadership, but not for the sake of Heaven, it is seen as an act of adultery. If so, the Midrashic accusation is that Moshe assumed his kingship not for the sake of Heaven. Or possibly a more literal interpretation (which I prefer) is that Moshe pitched his tent outside the camp, where he was alone, without his wife. And women would come there to ask questions of him. Women did not give their jewelry for the Golden Calf. Their husbands would think that their wives prefer to listen to Moshe than to listen to their husbands. (RED's note: All deeds of leaders are subject to over-analysis, and subject to misinterpretation!)

6. Moshe did not react in haste: "In the morning Hashem will make known the one who is His own and is the holy one..." (16:5). Why did Moshe wait to the next morning? One commentator wrote as follows: Every morning the Mannah would descend from Heaven. For the righteous, he would find the Mannah at his doorstep. The moderate would have to go out and collect it. The evil people had to go further out and find their Mannah (Yoma 75). Moshe would tell the people: wait till morning, and we will all know who is the righteous one in this controversy, by noting where your

Mannah is placed. This is cute, but I would prefer a simpler explanation. Moshe decided to wait until morning, giving Moshe the opportunity to approach each rebel during the rest of the day to attempt to convince them to give up the rebellion. (RED)

7. Each time I read this Parshah, there is always a certain amount of uncertainty in figuring out what each rebel wanted. All of them could not have desired to be the Kohen Gadol. Commentators differ as to what Korach really wanted. Some say he wanted to be the Kohen Gadol; others say he wanted to be the head of one of the Levitical families. This actually supports what our Sages say in Pirkei Avot (5:21): What is an example of a dispute for the sake of Heaven? The dispute between Hillel and Shammai. What is an example of a dispute not for the sake of Heaven? The dispute of Korach and all his company. This latter dispute is actually between Korach and Moshe. Yet the Mishnah states Korach and all his company. Now we understand what the Mishnah was saying. There was a dispute between Korach on one side and all his company were on different sides because they all strived for a position of Kohanic leadership. No way all of them could be satisfied. Truly a dispute between Korach and his allies. (RED)

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT KORACH 5786

I. From the Text

1. Who are the three ringleaders of the rebellion? (16:1)
2. What test did Moshe propose in order to determine who is the Kohen Gadol? (16:6,7)
3. How did the 250 rebels die? (16:35)
4. What did Hashem command Moshe to do with those incense pans? (17:3)
5. How many Jews died by the plague that Hashem sent after the rebellion? (17:14)

II. From Rashi

6. What question did Korach pose to Moshe (to prove that the Torah is illogical, or that Moshe was making things up)? (16:1)
7. What did Moshe proclaim that he did only as a result of Hashem's command? (16:28)
8. Why did Hashem want the plague to stop by Aharon using incense? (17:13)
9. Why did Hashem choose almond blossoms to sprout on Aharon's staff as a show of his divine appointment? (17:23)
10. If someone of Bnei Yisrael were to trespass and enter the Mishkan, who is held responsible? (18:30)

III. From the Rabbis

11. When did Korach's rebellion take place? (Ramban)
12. What was so wondrous about the earth swallowing up Korach and his entourage? We do have earthquakes! (Ramban)
13. Who is responsible to oversee the work of the Kohanim? (Sifre)

IV. Midrash

14. Which three women in TaNaCh did something to cause their husbands to die?

V. Haftarah. Samuel I

15. Whom did Samuel crown as the first king of Israel? And where did this occur?

VI. Relationships

16.
 - a) Datan - Aviram
 - b) Korach - Aharon
 - c) Ohn - Reuven
 - d) Itamar - Elazar
 - e) Yitzhar - Korach

ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT KORACH 5786

1. Korach, Datan, and Aviram
2. Each man would offer incense, and Hashem will choose one.
3. Hashem sent a fire, and it consumed them.
4. Hammer them out as sheets/covering for the Altar.
5. 14,700 people.
6. If a piece of clothing is made completely out of Techeilet, does it require Tzitzit?
7. To appoint Aharon as Kohen Gadol, and Aharon's sons as the Kohen Gadol's assistants, and Eltzafan as the prince of the Kehat family.
8. The people were thinking that incense is the killer. Nadav and Avihu died with an incense offering, and so did the 250 rebels. It was time to demonstrate that incense can be a life saver.
9. Almond blossoms rapidly. To say: Anyone who challenges Aharon's position will be punished quickly.
10. The Leviyim.
11. According to the Ramban, the rebellion took place right after the debacle of the Spy Mission (When Moshe's popularity was not so great.) [According to the Ibn Ezra, it occurred right after the Mishkan was erected.]
12. The earth opened up and swallowed ONLY Korach and his entourage and closed up again as if nothing had happened.
13. The Sanhedrin.
14. Chavah (Eve), Delilah, and Jezebel.
15. Shmuel crowned Saul as king at Gilgal.

Relationships

16.
 - a) Brothers
 - b) First Cousins
 - c) Grandfather Reuven
 - d) Brothers
 - e) Father Yitzhar

