

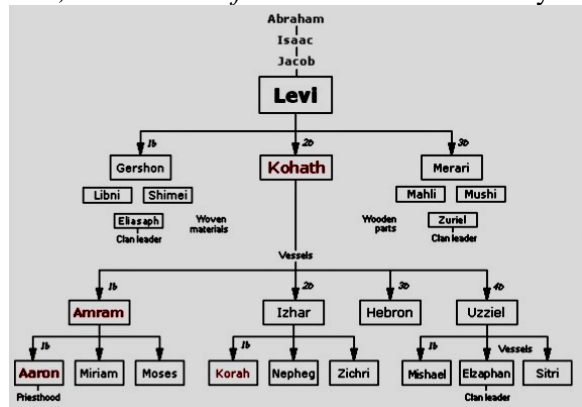
Korah - Selected Shorts (Number 35)
Rabbi Eliot Malomet June 12, 2021 2 Tammuz 5781

במדבר ט"ז:א

(א) וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן־יִצְחָר בֶּן־קֹהַת לְוִי־לִגְי... .

Numbers 16:1

Now Korah, son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, betook himself... Who was Korah? Analyze:



Korah is Aaron, Miriam, and Moses' first cousin. He's also Izhar's first-born. The Amram's have the High Priesthood (Aaron) and the Chief Executive (Moses). The Uzziel's have the premiership of the tribe of Levi (Elzaphan). What do the Izhar's have? Nothing! Why was the whole family of Izhar snubbed? Korah could have been appointed to some office? Secretary of State? Minister of Finance? Chief of Police? Besides, by conventions of succession, he should have at least been head of the Levi tribe! Why Elzaphan and not Korah? Recall that Moses orders Mishael and Elzaphan to carry Nadav and Avihu's bodies out when they were incinerated in the "strange fire" incident (Lev. 10:4). Korah was snubbed there as well. What was going on between the cousins? Speculation: Moses had no patience for Korah. He was already aware of Korah's inflated ego and outsized sense of entitlement. He snubbed him because he was unsuited for any leadership post.

במדבר ט"ז:ג

(ג) וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם רַב־לָכֶם כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה בְּכֶלֶם קְדוֹשִׁים וּבְתוֹכְכֶם ה' וּמִדּוֹעַ תִּתְנַשְׂאוּ עַל־קְהַל ה':

Numbers 16:3

They ganged up against Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have too much! For all the community are holy, all of them, and the LORD is in their midst. Why then do you raise yourselves above the LORD's congregation?" Korah is only interested in himself and the emoluments of the

priesthood, the trappings of power, and the honor of heading a dynasty. He could care less about the responsibilities of leadership. Examine what he says: *all of the community is holy*. But wait! Doesn't Leviticus say *You shall be holy*? Y. Leibowitz said, holiness is not an **intrinsic** state; it is an **aspired** state. **You "shall be"** is different from **you "are"**. What makes you holy is your behavior not your genes.

במדבר ט"ז:ו

(ו) זאת עשו קהוֹלֵלְכֶם מִחַתוֹת קָרַח וְכָל־עֵדְתוֹ:

Numbers 16:6

*Do this: You, Korah and all your band, take fire pans... We recall what happened the last time some people (his cousins) took firepans and violated a rule. Shouldn't it have occurred to Korah that he was being set up? The lesson from the Nadav and Avihu incident was clear to everyone: if you step over the line in the ritual realm you get zapped. This is another illustration of how boneheaded Korah was. He could have backed down. Moses gave him an out. He could have saved himself, **and** his followers! Instead, either out of self-importance, self-righteousness, or because he didn't want to show any sign of weakness, he stayed in the duel. His ego cost him his life, and the lives of his acolytes.*

במדבר ט"ז:יג

(יג) הַמַּעֲט כִּי הֶעֱלִיתֶנּוּ מֵאֶרֶץ זֶבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבַשׁ לְהַמִּיתֵנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי־תִשְׁתַּחֲרַר עֲלֵינוּ גַם־הַשְּׁתַחֲרָר:

Numbers 16:13

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? Ouch! This is what Dathan and Aviram say to Moses and it's not surprise that this made Moses furious. We have already had some romanticization of the recent past, but to refer to Egypt as a land flowing with milk and honey had to hurt. And what does this expression mean anyway? N. Leibowitz points out that 19 out of 20 times that it appears in the Torah it refers to the Land of Israel. Only here does it refer to Egypt. Milk and honey are products of pasture and grazing land. They can even be produced without husbandry. This suggests then that a land flowing with milk and honey is a land full of potential in its natural

state. Egypt is the exact opposite. Egypt is a land in which everything is fixed. It possesses no potential whatsoever because of it lacks the one ingredient necessary to unleash human potential: human freedom. To refer to Egypt as “a land flowing with milk and honey” is to state a big lie. We see how easy it is for people to become so committed to their lies. The current spasm of anti-Semitism is a potent example.

במדבר ט"ז:ט

(טז) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־קֹרַח אַתָּה וְכָל־עֲדֻתְךָ הֲיִי לִפְנֵי ה' אַתָּה וְהֵם וְאַהֲרֹן מִקֹּר:

Numbers 16:16

And Moses said to Korah, “Tomorrow, you and all your company appear before the LORD, you and they and Aaron. You still have time Korah. But if you still think you can get away with this, just a reminder, all of you are going to be standing before God, and that could be dangerous.

במדבר ט"ז:יט

(יט) וַיִּקְהַל עֲלֵיהֶם קֹרַח אֶת־כָּל־הָעֵדָה אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיִּבְרָא כְבוֹד־ה' אֶל־כָּל־הָעֵדָה:

Numbers 16:19

Korah gathered the whole community against them at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Then the Presence of the LORD appeared to the whole community... What more proof do we need that he was not fit to lead? Like Jim Jones the cult-leader, he was ready to take everyone down with him.

במדבר ט"ז:ל"ג

(לג) וַיִּרְדּוּ הֵם וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם תַּיִם שְׂאֵלָה וְתַבְּסִים עֲלֵיהֶם הָאָרֶץ וַיִּאֲבְדּוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקֹּהֶל:

Numbers 16:33

They went down alive into Sheol, with all that belonged to them; the earth closed over them and they vanished from the midst of the congregation. What is the punishment for someone who wants to lord over others? To descend to the depths. What is the punishment for someone who is only interested in self-aggrandizement? To vanish from the earth without a trace.

במדבר ט"ז:ל"ה

(לה) וְאִשׁ יִצְאָה מֵאֵת ה' וְתֹאכַל אֶת הַחֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאֵתִים אִישׁ מִקְרִיבֵי הַקֹּטֶרֶת: {ס}

Numbers 16:35

And a fire went forth from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense. Told you so.

במדבר י"ז:ד'

(ד) וַיִּשָּׂח אֱלֵעָזָר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת מִקְהוֹת הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר הִקְרִיבוּ הַשָּׂרָפִים וַיִּרְקְעוּם צְפוּי לַמִּזְבֵּחַ:

Numbers 17:4

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. Because the firepans became holy and could not be discarded. But it is fascinating to consider that a symbol of the rebellion remains literally plated onto the physical point of contact between the people and God a constant reminder of the challenge and its aftermath. The need to preserve relics of cataclysmic events is quite common in different cultures. In Tel Aviv, the exact spot of Rabin’s assassination has an eternal marker of that catastrophic moment. The ‘x’ on the Dealey Plaza roadway serves the same purpose to recall the Kennedy Assassination.

במדבר י"ז:י"ב

(יב) וַיִּקַּח אַהֲרֹן פָּאֶשֶׁר וְדָבָר מִנְשֵׁה וַיִּרְץ אֶל־תּוֹךְ הַקֹּהֶל וְהִגִּיד הַתֵּל הַגָּגִף בְּעַם וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַקֹּטֶרֶת וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל־הָעָם:

Numbers 17:12

Aaron took it, as Moses had ordered, and ran to the midst of the congregation, where the plague had begun among the people. He put on the incense and made expiation for the people. Following the ordeal, a plague breaks out; Aaron quells it by standing between the living and the dead with some incense. Last year when the pandemic began, we saw a lot of focus on this episode and many people developed the practice of liturgically reciting Mishnaic passages dealing with incense to pray for it to go away.

במדבר י"ז:כ"ה

(כה) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הֲשִׁיב אֶת־מִטָּה אַהֲרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת לְמִשְׁמֶרֶת לְאֹת לְבְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתִכְלֵל תְּלוּנְתָם מֵעֲלֵי וְלֹא יָמָתוּ:

Numbers 17:25

The LORD said to Moses, “Put Aaron’s staff back before the Pact, to be kept as a lesson to rebels, so that their mutterings against Me may cease, lest they die.” A second relic of this tumultuous moment would be forever stored in the Holy of Holies alongside the other relics of the wandering experience: a jar of manna and some anointing oil. The altar plating served as a warning sign for the public sacred space; Aaron’s staff was a warning sign for the private, sacred space.

Shabbat Shalom!