

REFUGE IN KENTUCKY C. O. O. L. J. C.

That One Where...In the Desert...Korah...

Numbers 16:1-18:32; 1 Samuel 11:14-
12:22; 2 Timothy 2:8-21; Jude 1-25

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Teaching Lesson

עלייות; aliyot: "ascent" or "going up". An aliyah is a subdivision of the Torah portion. There are seven aliyot in each portion. Each one is read by a different person and the last aliyah contains the maftir (concluder).

(1443 B. C.) Numbers 16:1-18:32, Korach

Chapter 16

Aliyah i 16:1-13

Korach... the son of Yitzhar, the son of Kehat, the son of Levi (16:1)

What moved him to start a quarrel? He was moved to it by the fact that Elitzafan, the son of his father's brother, was appointed prince over his family; as it says (Numbers 3:30), "And the prince of the fathers house of the families of the Kehatites was Elitzafan the son of Uzziel." Korach argued: My father was one of four brothers; as it says (Exodus 4:18), "And the sons of Kehat: Amram, and Yitzhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel." As for Amram the firstborn, his son Aaron attained to greatness and Moses to royalty. Who then should rightly take the next office? Is it not the next in line? Now I, being the son of Yitzhar, should by right be the leader of the Kehatites. Yet Moses appointed the son of Uzziel! Shall the [son of the] youngest of my father's brothers be superior to me? Behold, I shall dispute his decision and put to naught all that has been arranged by him...

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

And Dathan and Aviram (16:1)

They were the ones who forced Moses to flee from Egypt (by informing on him to Pharaoh that he killed the Egyptian -- Exodus 2:13-15). They were the ones who hurled harsh words at Moses and Aaron in Egypt (ibid. 5:20-21). They were the ones who left over from the manna (in defiance of Moses' instructions -- ibid. 16:20) and went out to gather the manna on Shabbat (ibid. v. 27). And they joined in Korach's mutiny.

(Torah Sheleimah)

And Dathan and Aviram.... of the tribe of Reuben (16:1)

From this text the saying is derived: "Woe to the wicked and woe to his neighbor!" It applies to Dathan and Aviram, neighbors of Korach, who both camped to the south side of the Sanctuary, as it is written: "The families of the sons of Kehat were to pitch on the side of the Sanctuary southward" (Numbers 3:29); and it says, "On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben" (ibid. 2:10).

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

And On the son of Peleth (16:1)

Said Rav: On the son of Peleth was saved by his wife. She said to him, "What matters it to you? Whether the one remains leader or the other becomes leader, you will be but a follower." Said he: "But what can I do? I have taken part in their counsel, and they have sworn me to be with them"... She said: "Sit here, and I will save you." She gave him wine to drink, intoxicated him and laid him down within [the tent]. Then she sat down at the entrance and loosened her hair. Whoever came [to summon him] saw her and retreated.

Meanwhile, Korach's wife joined in and said to him: "See what Moses has done! He himself has become king; his brother he appointed High Priest; his brother's sons he has made the vice High Priests. If *terumah* is brought, he decrees: Let it be for the priest. If the tithe is brought, which belongs to you [i.e., to the Levite], he orders: Give a tenth part thereof to the priest. Moreover, he has had your hair cut off (cf. Numbers 8:7) and makes sport of you as though you were dirt... ; for he was jealous of your hair." Said he to her, "But he has done likewise!" She replied, "Since all the greatness was his, he said also, 'Let me die with the Philistines'..."

Thus it is written, "A wise woman builds her house" (Proverbs, 14:1) -- this refers to the wife of On the son of Peleth; "but the foolish woman destroys it with her hands" (ibid.) -- this refers to Korach's wife.

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 109b)¹

A midrash taught that Korah took issue with Moses in [Numbers 16:1](#) because Moses had (as [Numbers 3:30](#) reports) appointed [Elizaphan](#) the son of [Uzziel](#) as prince of the [Kohathites](#), and Korah was (as [Exodus 6:21](#) reports) son of Uzziel's older brother [Izhar](#), and thus had a claim to leadership prior to Elizaphan. (Midrash [Tanhuma](#) Korah 1.)

[Resh Lakish](#) interpreted the words "Korah . . . took" in [Numbers 16:1](#) to teach that Korah took a bad bargain for himself. As the three Hebrew consonants that spell Korah's name also spell the Hebrew word for "bald" (*kereach*), the [Gemara](#) deduced that he was called Korah because he caused a bald spot to be formed among the Israelites when the earth swallowed his followers. As the name Izhar in [Numbers 16:1](#) derived from the same Hebrew root as the word "noon" (*tzohorayim*), the Gemara deduced from "son of Izhar" that Korah was a son who brought upon himself anger hot as the noon sun. As the name Kohath in [Numbers 16:1](#) derived from the same Hebrew root as the word for "set on edge" (*hikah*), the Gemara deduced from "son of Kohath" that Korah was a son who set his ancestors' teeth on edge. The Gemara deduced from the words "son of Levi" in [Numbers 16:1](#) that Korah was a son who was escorted to [Gehenna](#). The Gemara asked why [Numbers 16:1](#) did not say "the son of Jacob," and Rabbi Samuel bar Isaac answered that Jacob had prayed not to be listed amongst Korah's ancestors in [Genesis 49:6](#), where it is written, "Let my soul not come into their council; unto their assembly let my glory not be united." "Let my soul not come into their council" referred to the spies, and "unto their assembly let my glory not be united" referred to Korah's assembly. As the name Dathan in [Numbers 16:1](#) derived from the same Hebrew root as the word "law" (*dath*), the Gemara deduced from Dathan's name that he violated God's law. The Gemara related the name Abiram in [Numbers](#)

¹ Korach – Chabad.org: http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/plainBody_cdo/AID/2212#Korach16_01

[16:1](#) to the Hebrew word for “strengthened” (*iber*) and deduced from Abiram’s name that he stoutly refused to repent. The Gemara related the name On in [Numbers 16:1](#) to the Hebrew word for “mourning” (*aninut*) and deduced from On’s name that he sat in lamentations. The Gemara related the name Peleth in [Numbers 16:1](#) to the Hebrew word for “miracles” (*pelaot*) and deduced from Peleth’s name that God performed wonders for him. And as the name Reuben derived from the Hebrew words “see” (*reu*) and “understand” (*mavin*), the Gemara deduced from the reference to On as a “son of Reuben” in [Numbers 16:1](#) that On was a son who saw and understood. ([Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109b.](#))

[Numbers 16:1–2](#) reports that the Reubenite On son of Peleth joined Korah’s conspiracy, but the text does not mention On again. [Rab](#) explained that On’s wife saved him, arguing to him that no matter whether Moses or Korah prevailed, On would remain just a disciple. On replied that he had sworn to participate. So On’s wife got him drunk with wine, and laid him down in their tent. Then she sat at the entrance of their tent and loosened her hair, so that whoever came to summon him saw her and retreated at the sight of her immodestly loosened hair. The Gemara taught that [Proverbs 14:1](#) refers to On’s wife when it says: “Every wise woman builds her house.” ([Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 109b–10a.](#))

The [Mishnah](#) in [Pirkei Avot](#) deduced that the controversy of Korah and his followers was not for the sake of Heaven, and thus was destined not to result in permanent change. The Mishnah contrasted Korah’s argument to those between [Hillel](#) and [Shammai](#), which the Mishnah taught were controversies for the sake of Heaven, destined to result in something permanent. ([Mishnah Avot 5:17.](#))²

"The entire community is holy and G-d is amongst them; why do you raise yourselves above the congregation of G-d?" (16:3)

Korach said to them: All heard at Sinai the commandment, "I am the L-rd your G-d"! If you alone had heard it while they had not, you could have claimed superiority. But now that they have all heard it, "Why do you raise yourselves above the congregation of G-d?"

(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

Korach took two hundred and fifty magistrates, most of them from the tribe of Reuben his neighbors, and dressed them in garments that were wholly of blue wool. They came and stood before Moses and asked him: "If a garment is made entirely of blue wool, what is the law as regards it being exempted from the obligation of *tzitzit*?" Moses answered them: "It is subject to the obligation of *tzitzit*." They began to laugh at him, saying: "If a garment of another sort is absolved by a single thread of blue wool, this garment, composed wholly of blue wool, cannot absolve itself?"

Korach further challenged Moses: "If a house is full of Torah scrolls, what is the law? Does it need a *mezuzah* on its doorpost or not?" Replied Moses, "It is obligated." Said Korach: "The entire Torah, consisting of 275 chapters, does not absolve this house, and the [two] chapters in

² Korach (parsha) – Wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_(parsha))

the *mezuzah* absolve it? G-d did not command you these laws -- you have invented them yourself."

(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

Rabbi Levi taught that God told Moses "enough!" in [Deuteronomy 3:26](#) to repay Moses measure for measure for when Moses told Korah "enough!" in [Numbers 16:3](#). ([Babylonian Talmud Sotah 13b.](#))³

And when Moses heard it, he fell on his face (16:4)

Moses was thrown into a tremor... for this was already their fourth offense. To what can this be compared? To a prince who had offended his father the king and for whom the king's friend had effected a reconciliation, once, twice, and three times. When the prince offended a fourth time, the king's friend lost courage, saying to himself: How many times can I trouble the king?

So it was with Moses. When Israel had sinned in connection with the Golden Calf, "Moses besought G-d" (Exodus 32: 11). When "the people were as murmurers" then "Moses prayed" (Numbers 11:2). In connection with the Spies, "Moses said unto G-d: 'When Egypt shall hear...'" (ibid. 14:13). When the dissension of Korach broke out he said: How many times can I impose myself on G-d? So "When Moses heard it, he fell upon his face."

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

Come morning, and G-d will show who is His, and who is holy... and whom He has chosen will He cause to come near to Him (16:5)

Why this reference to "the morning"? Moses said to Korach: G-d has set boundaries in His world. Can you transform morning into evening? If you can, you can change this... It is written: "It was evening and it was morning... And G-d distinguished..." (Genesis 1:4-5); in the same way, "And Aaron was distinguished, to be consecrated..." (I Chronicles 23:13).

(Rashi; Midrash Rabbah)

And you desire also the priesthood? (16:10)

Moses said to them: Among the religions of the world there are various customs, and they do not all gather in the same house [of worship]. We, however, have but one G-d, one Torah, one law, one *Kohen Gadol* and one Sanctuary; yet you, two hundred and fifty men, all desire the High Priesthood! I, too, desire it!

(Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi)

³ Korach (parsha) – Wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_(parsha))

If Moses, who personifies the *sefirah* (Divine attribute) of Truth, said "I, too, desire it," this was no mere debating tactic: Moses truly desired the position of *Kohen Gadol* for himself. This means that Korach's desire for the highest spiritual state attainable by man was, in and of itself, a positive thing. The difference between Korach and Moses in this was that Korach acted upon this desire, in defiance of the Divine decree.

This explains why our Torah reading is named "Korach." The Talmud tells us that it is forbidden to name one's child after a wicked person, in keeping with the rule, "The memory of the righteous should be to blessing, and the name of the wicked should rot" (Proverbs 10:7). So how is it that an entire section in the Torah carries the name of a person whose deeds were most negative and destructive?

But the name "Korach," as the name of a Parshah in Torah, pays tribute to the *positive* aspect of Korach's "rebellion". While the story of Korach comes to teach us what not to do -- not to act on even the most lofty of ambitions, if such action is contrary to the will of G-d -- it also comes to teach us that we *should* desire and yearn for the highest ideals, even those which we are prohibited from actually attaining.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)⁴

Aliyah ii 16:14-19

Rav Adda bar Abahah taught that a person praying alone does not say the Sanctification (*Kedushah*) prayer (which includes the words from [Isaiah 6:3](#):

, Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh, Adonai Tz'vaot melo kol haaretz kevodo, "Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord of Hosts, the entire world is filled with God's Glory"), because [Leviticus 22:32](#) says: "I will be hallowed among the children of Israel," and thus sanctification requires ten people (a *minyan*

, toch) in [Leviticus 22:32](#) ("I will be hallowed *among* the children of Israel") and in [Numbers 16:21](#), in which God tells Moses and Aaron: "Separate yourselves from *among* this congregation," referring to Korah and his followers. Just as [Numbers 16:21](#), which refers to a congregation, implies a number of at least ten, so [Leviticus 22:32](#) implies at least ten. ([Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 21b.](#))⁵

Aliyah iii 16:20-17:8(16:43)

And Moses rose up and went to Dathan and Aviram (16:25)

Resh Lakish said: This teaches that one must not be obdurate in a dispute.

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 110a)

And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up (16:32)

⁴ Korach – Chabad.org: http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/plainBody_cdo/AID/2212#Korach16_01

⁵ Korach (parsha) – Wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_(parsha))

Rabbah bar Bar Chana said: I was proceeding on my travels, when an Arab said to me, "Come, and I will show you where the men of Korach were swallowed up." I went and saw two cracks in the earth from which issued smoke. Thereupon he took a piece of clipped wool, soaked it in water, attached it to the point of his spear, and passed it over there, and it was singed. Said I to him: "Listen to what you are about to hear." And I heard them saying thus: "Moses and his Torah are true, and they [Korach's company] are liars."

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 110a)

And all their goods (16:32)

Rabbi Levi said: The keys to Korach's treasure houses were a load for three hundred white mules, though all the keys and locks were of leather.

Rabbi Chama son of Rabbi Chanina said: Three treasures did Joseph hide in Egypt: one was discovered by Korach; one by Antoninus the son of Severus, and the third is stored away for the righteous in the World to Come.

(Midrash)⁶

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avot taught that the opening of the earth's mouth in [Numbers 16:32](#) was one of ten miracles that God created at the end of the first week of creation at the eve of the Sabbath at twilight. ([Mishnah Avot 5:6](#).)

[Rabbi Akiba](#) interpreted [Numbers 16:33](#) to teach that Korah's assembly will have no portion in the world to come, as the words "the earth closed upon them" reported that they died in this world, and the words "they perished from among the assembly" implied that they died in the next world, as well. But Rabbi Eliezer disagreed, reading [1 Samuel 2:6](#) to speak of Korah's assembly when it said: "The Lord kills, and makes alive; He brings down to the grave, and brings up." The Gemara cited a [Tanna](#) who concurred with Rabbi Eliezer's position: Rabbi [Judah ben Bathyra](#) likened Korah's assembly to a lost article, which one seeks, as [Psalm 119:176](#) said: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Your servant." (Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:3; [Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 108a, 109b](#).)

A Tanna in the name of [Rabbi](#) deduced from the words "the sons of Korah did not die" in [Numbers 26:11](#) that Providence set up a special place for them to stand on high in [Gehinnom](#). ([Babylonian Talmud Megillah 14a, Sanhedrin 110a](#).) There, Korah's sons sat and sang praises to God. [Rabbah bar bar Hana](#) told that once when he was travelling, an Arab showed him where the earth swallowed Korah's congregation. Rabbah bar bar Hana saw two cracks in the ground from which smoke issued. He took a piece of wool, soaked it in water, attached it to the point of his spear, and passed it over the cracks, and the wool was singed. The Arab told Rabbah bar bar Hana to listen, and he heard them saying, "Moses and his Torah are true, but Korah's company are liars." The Arab told Rabbah bar bar Hana that every 30 days Gehinnom caused them to

⁶ Korach – Chabad.org: http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/plainBody_cdo/AID/2212#Korach16_01

return for judgment, as if they were being stirred like meat in a pot, and every 30 days they said those same words. ([Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 110a-b.](#))⁷

And they, and all that was theirs, descended into the abyss (16:33)

Rabbi Berechia said in the name of Rabbi Chelbo: even their names flew off all written documents. Rabbi Yossei bar Chanina said: Even a needle of theirs on loan in the hands of another man, was swallowed up with them.

(Jerusalem Talmud)

And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them.... And a fire came forth from G-d and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who offered the ketoret (16:32-35)

Korach himself was smitten with both afflictions -- he was consumed by the fire and swallowed up by the earth.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

There were two distinct groups in Korach's following. There were the 250 "leaders of the community, of those called to the assembly, men of distinction" who were driven by the aspiration to attain the ultimate in closeness to G-d through the offering of the *ketoret*. But Korach's camp also included a mob of rabble-rousers, including the infamous Dathan and Aviram, jealous of Moses and discontent with the "burden" of the divine commandments he had introduced into their lives.

The difference between these two groups is illustrated by the manner in which they met their tragic end. The two hundred and fifty men who offered the *ketoret* were consumed by a heavenly fire, while Dathan and Aviram and their ilk were swallowed up by the earth. As for Korach himself, the Midrash tells us that since he was responsible for both these groups, he received both penalties: his soul was consumed by fire, and his body was swallowed by the earth.

Korach's mutiny also had both a soul and a body: the positive forces that agitated it and the negative form they assumed. At its climatic end came a separation of these two elements: its "soul" ascended on high in a holy conflagration ("fire" being the process in which the energy implicit in a substance is released and rises through the atmosphere), while its "body" fell away to be absorbed by the earthly abyss. Released from its iniquitous embodiment, the spirit of Korach could now be reclaimed for its pure and holy applications.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Lift up ... the offering-pans of these mortal sinners, and beat them into sheets with which to plate the altar; for they have been offered to G-d, and have become sanctified (17:2-3)

⁷ Korach (parsha) – Wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_(parsha))

These pans have been sanctified, said G-d to Moses. Their very metal has been hallowed by an act which, though sinful and severely punished, was motivated by a holy desire -- a desire to come close to Me.

The copper plating of the Altar holds an eternal lesson: If such is G-d's regard for a piece of inanimate metal, certainly no human being is irredeemable. For no matter how deleterious his deeds, they hide a desire and striving, intrinsic to every creature of G-d, for the goodness and perfection of the Divine.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

To be a memorial to the children of Israel... that he be not like Korach and his company (17:5)

Anyone who engages in divisiveness transgresses a Divine prohibition, as it is written, "That he be not as Korach and his company."

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 110a)

Why does the Torah not say, "And G-d saw that it was good" on the second day of Creation (as it says in all other days)? Because on that day divisiveness was created; as it is written (Genesis 1:6) "Let there be a firmament within the water; and it shall divide between water and water"...

(Midrash Rabbah)⁸

[More...](#)

Aliyah iv 17:9(16:44)-17:15(16:50)

Rabbi [Joshua ben Levi](#) explained how, as [Numbers 17:11–13](#) reports, Moses knew what to tell Aaron what to do to make atonement for the people, to stand between the dead and the living, and to check the plague. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi taught that when Moses ascended on high (as [Exodus 19:20](#) reports), the ministering angels asked God what business one born of woman had among them. God told them that Moses had come to receive the Torah. The angels questioned why God was giving to flesh and blood the secret treasure that God had hidden for 974 generations before God created the world. The angels asked, in the words of [Psalm 8:8](#), "What is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man, that You think of him?" God told Moses to answer the angels. Moses asked God what was written in the Torah. In [Exodus 20:2](#), God said, "I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the Land of Egypt." So Moses asked the angels whether the angels had gone down to Egypt or were enslaved to Pharaoh. As the angels had not, Moses asked them why then God should give them the Torah. Again, [Exodus 20:3](#) says, "You shall have no other gods," so Moses asked the angels whether they lived among peoples that engage in idol worship. Again, [Exodus 20:7](#) (20:8 in the NJPS) says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," so Moses asked the angels whether they performed work from which they needed to rest. Again, [Exodus 20:6](#) (20:7 in the NJPS) says, "You shall not take the

⁸ Korach – Chabad.org: http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/plainBody_cdo/AID/2212#Korach16_01

name of the Lord your God in vain,” so Moses asked the angels whether there were any business dealings among them in which they might swear oaths. Again, [Exodus 20:11](#) (20:12 in the NJPS) says, “Honor your father and your mother,” so Moses asked the angels whether they had fathers and mothers. Again, [Exodus 20:12](#) (20:13 in the NJPS) says, “You shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal,” so Moses asked the angels whether there was jealousy among them and whether the Evil Tempter was among them. Immediately, the angels conceded that God’s plan was correct, and each angel felt moved to love Moses and give him gifts. Even the Angel of Death confided his secret to Moses, and that is how Moses knew what to do when, as [Numbers 17:11–13](#) reports, Moses told Aaron what to do to make atonement for the people, to stand between the dead and the living, and to check the plague. ([Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 88b–89a.](#))⁹

Chapter 17 (in the Christian Bible)

Aliyah v 17:16(1)- 24(9)

It brought forth blossoms, produced budding fruit, and bore ripe almonds (17:23)

Ness, the Hebrew word for miracle, means "elevation". The purpose of a miracle is to elevate those who experience it to a higher consciousness, to a recognition of the Divine reality which underlies the natural reality we encounter in our everyday lives.

There are two types of miracles: a) miracles which utterly disregard the laws of nature; b) miracles which, though they may be no less "impossible" by the standard norms and no less obvious a display of the hand of G-d, nevertheless occur by natural means, employing natural phenomena and processes to achieve their ends.

At first glance, it might seem that the second miracle's "need" to resort to natural processes makes it less of a miracle. In truth, however, a miracle that operates through nature is more elevating -- hence, more "miraculous" -- than a miracle that supersedes it.

A sudden, shattering change has not transformed nature -- it has only gone beyond it. But when a miracle is integrated into the workings of nature, nature itself is elevated. Otherwise stated: a supra-natural miracle liberates the person who experiences it from the natural order; a natural miracle liberates the natural order itself.

The bearing of fruit by a dry stick of wood would surely have sufficed as a Divine sign of Aaron's chosenness. But G-d did not simply make almonds appear on Aarons staff. Rather, He stimulated in it the full natural process of budding, blossoming, and the emergence and the ripening of the fruit. Aaron's staff defied nature's laws and restrictions, yet it conformed to the phases of growth that the almond naturally undergoes. It transcended nature, but did so on nature's own terms.

⁹ Korach (parsha) – Wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_(parsha))

(The Chassidic Masters)¹⁰**Aliyah vi 17:25(10)-18:20**

A Baraita taught that Josiah hid the Ark, the bottle containing the manna (see Exodus 16:33–34), Aaron's staff with its almonds and blossoms (see Numbers 17:25), and the chest that the Philistines sent as a gift (see 1 Samuel 6:8), because Josiah read in Deuteronomy 28:36: "The Lord will bring you, and your king whom you shall set over you, to a nation that you have not known." Therefore he hid these things, as 2 Chronicles 35:3 reports: "And he said to the Levites, that taught all Israel, that were holy to the Lord: 'Put the holy ark into the house that Solomon, the son of David, King of Israel built. There shall no more be a burden upon your shoulders now.'" (Babylonian Talmud Yoma 52b.)

Chapter 18

A non-Jew asked Shammai to convert him to Judaism on condition that Shammai appoint him High Priest. Shammai pushed him away with a builder's ruler. The non-Jew then went to Hillel, who converted him. The convert then read Torah, and when he came to the injunction of Numbers 1:51, 3:10, and 18:7 that "the common man who draws near shall be put to death," he asked Hillel to whom the injunction applied. Hillel answered that it applied even to David, King of Israel, who had not been a priest. Thereupon the convert reasoned *a fortiori* that if the injunction applied to all (non-priestly) Israelites, whom in Exodus 4:22 God had called "my firstborn," how much more so would the injunction apply to a mere convert, who came among the Israelites with just his staff and bag. Then the convert returned to Shammai, quoted the injunction, and remarked on how absurd it had been for him to ask Shammai to appoint him High Priest. (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 31a.)

Tractate Terumot in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Jerusalem Talmud interpreted the laws of the portion of the crop that was to be given to the priests in Numbers 18:8–13. (Mishnah Terumot 1:1–11:10; Tosefta Terumot 1:1–10:18; Jerusalem Talmud Terumot 1a–.)¹¹

And G-d spoke to Aaron, Behold, I have granted to you... the gifts raised to Me, all the hallowed things of the children of Israel... (18:8)

Korach was a comedian, who made jest of Moses and Aaron. What did he do? He gathered the entire congregation, and began to say to them words of jest. He said: A widow with two orphan girls, who lived in my neighborhood, had a single field. When she came to plow it, and Moses said to her: "Thou shalt not plow with an ox and a donkey together" (Deuteronomy 22:10). When she came to sow, Moses said to her: "Thou shalt not sow your field with mixed seed" (Leviticus 19:19). She came to harvest and make bundles, and he said: Leave behind *leket* ("gleanings"), *shikchah* ("forgotten bundles") and *pe'ah* (unharvested "edge of field"--cf. *ibid.* v. 9; Deuteronomy 24:19). She came to make her silo, and he said: Give *terumah* (the portion "uplifted" for the *kohen*), first tithe and second tithe. She accepted the law and gave him. So what did this poor woman do? She sold her field and bought two sheep, to clothe herself from their

¹⁰ Korach – Chabad.org: http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/plainBody_cdo/AID/2212#Korach16_01

¹¹ Korach (parsha) – Wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_(parsha))

shearings and profit from their offspring. No sooner had they given birth, that Aaron came and said to her: Give me the firstborn, for so has G-d said to me, "All firstborn... you shall sanctify to G-d" (Deuteronomy 15:19). She accepted the law and gave them to him. The shearing season arrived and she sheared them; comes Aaron and says: Give me the first shearings, for so said G-d, "And the first shearings of your sheep you shall give to him" (ibid. 18:4). Said she: I have no more strength for this man! I shall slaughter them and eat them! As sooner had she slaughtered them, he said to her: Give me the foreleg, the cheeks and the belly! (cf. ibid. v. 3). Said she: Even having slaughtered them, I have nor saved them from him! I proclaim them sacrosanct! said he to her: If so, all is mine, for so said G-d: "All things declared sacrosanct in Israel shall belong to you" (Numbers 18:14). He took them and went his way, leaving her weeping. This is what happened to this poor woman. All this they do, and attribute it to G-d...

(Yalkut Shimoni)

The concept of *mattanot kehunah*, the gifts given to the Kohen, represents the crux of Korach's objection to the priorities taught by Moses.

Mattanot kehunah means that a person dedicates the choicest portions of the yield of his material labors to a spiritual cause. In a person's own life, it means that even if the great majority of one's day is devoted to material pursuits, its best hours are devoted to Torah study and prayer. In other words, it means that a person regards the spiritual aspect of his life as "higher" than its material aspect, even when accepting that his mission in life demands that the bulk of his time, talents and resources be applied to interacting with the material world.

This perspective on the interrelation between the material and the spiritual is the antithesis of Korach's claim that everyone and everything is equally "holy" and that there's no reason to set any person or thing on a "higher level" than its fellows.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)¹²

Tractate [Bikkurim](#) in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Jerusalem Talmud interpreted the laws of the first fruits in [Exodus 23:19](#), [Numbers 18:13](#), and [Deuteronomy 12:17–18](#) and [26:1–11](#). (Mishnah Bikkurim 1:1–3:12; Tosefta Bikkurim 1:1–2:16; Jerusalem Talmud Bikkurim 1a–26b.)

Aliyah vii 18:21-32

Tractate [Demai](#) in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Jerusalem Talmud, interpreted the laws related to produce where one is not sure if it has been properly [tithed](#) in accordance with [Numbers 18:21–28](#). ([Mishnah Demai 1:1–7:8](#); Tosefta Demai 1:1–8:24; Jerusalem Talmud Demai 1a–.)¹³

Out of all that is given to you, you shall set aside all that is due as a gift to G-d; of the choicest thereof, the hallowed part of it (18:29)

¹² Korach – Chabad.org: http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/plainBody_cdo/AID/2212#Korach16_01

¹³ Korach (parsha) – Wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_(parsha))

Everything that is for the sake of G-d should be of the best and most beautiful. When one builds a house of prayer, it should be more beautiful than his own dwelling. When one feeds the hungry, he should feed him of the best and sweetest of his table. When one clothes the naked, he should clothe him with the finest of his clothes. Whenever one designates something for a holy purpose, he should sanctify the finest of his possessions; as it is written, "All the fat is to G-d."

(Maimonides)¹⁴

The Commandments in this Portion

- To guard the [Temple](#) area ([Numbers 18:2](#))
- No Levite must do another's work of either a Kohen or a Levite ([Numbers 18:3](#))
- One who is not a Kohen must not serve in the sanctuary ([Numbers 18:4](#))
- Not to leave the Temple unguarded ([Numbers 18:5](#))
- To [redeem the firstborn sons](#) and give the money to a Kohen ([Numbers 18:15](#))
- Not to redeem the firstborn of a kosher domestic animal ([Numbers 18:17](#))
- The Levites must work in the Temple ([Numbers 18:23](#))
- To set aside a tithe each planting year and give it to a Levite ([Numbers 18:24](#))
- The Levite must set aside a tenth of his tithe ([Numbers 18:26](#))¹⁵

¹⁴ Korach – Chabad.org: http://www.chabad.org/parshah/in-depth/plainBody_cdo/AID/2212#Korach16_01

¹⁵ Korach (parsha) – Wikipedia.org: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_\(parsha\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Korach_(parsha))

Parting Lesson

(B.C.) 1 Samuel 11:14-12:22

New Covenant Lessons

(A. D.) 2 Timothy 2:8-21

(A. D.) Jude 1-25