



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT KORACH



1ST ALIYA (BAMIDBAR 16:1-13)

Korach staged a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon along with Datan, Aviram and On and with 250 others. They claimed: we are all holy, why then are you above us? Moshe was distraught. He countered: G-d Himself will affirm whom He chooses. Bring an incense offering and He will choose. Moshe spoke to Korach: Why is it insufficient for you to serve as a Levi that you seek to be a kohen as well? Moshe called for Datan and Aviram. They refused, saying: your leadership has failed, for you failed in bringing us to the Land of Israel.

In the description of Korach's rebellion, the Torah tells us precious little about the rebellion but a lot about Moshe's reaction.

If I were writing this story, I would describe who Korach is. Who are his partners? What do they want? Why do they want it? But there is none of that.

Now, the Midrash fills that in. That is what the Midrash does. When there is a lacuna in the Torah, where something is missing, the Midrash jumps to fill in the gap.

**Condolences to
Yaakov Fuchs and family
on the passing of his wife**

EVIE a"h

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

So when learning Midrash, we ask the question: what did the Torah leave out that prompted this comment of the Midrash? And how is the Midrash understanding the story?

But we have to ask a more fundamental question: why did the Torah deliberately leave out details of the story? Or, stated not as a question but as a statement: If the Torah left out the details, then it is far less concerned with the rebellion than with some other broader message.

The Torah leaves out details of the rebellion because the rebellion is not as important as the response to it.

There are parallels in this rebellion and last week's rebellion of the spies. The leaders play the central role in both and both have popular support. Last week the rebellion was an expression of low self-esteem – we are not able to conquer the Land. This week it is a rebellion of arrogance, of puffy self-image – not low self-esteem, but superiority. But at least last week we had plenty of detail as to the job of the spies, their report, the reaction of both the spies and the people to their report. And then the rebellious conclusion that we can't go through with the march to the Land.

In Korach's rebellion what is striking in the text is the paucity of detail of the rebels and the full detail of Moshe's response. Moshe dominates the story. This is perhaps the most talking that Moshe does in the entire Torah (until his 28 chapter speech in sefer Devarim).

And. Very little response from G-d. In the previous rebellions, about water, about meat,

G-d responds and Moshe pleads with Him on behalf of the people. Here, the Divine voice is quiet. Moshe is responding; speaking to Korach, to Datan and Aviram. Telling them to bring incense. Telling them that were their death to be unusual, that is a sign of G-d's disapproval. It's as if Moshe says to G-d: I'm taking this one myself.



2ND ALIYA (16:14-19)

Moshe was angry. He said to G-d: Do not accept their offerings. I never took anything from anyone. He turned to Korach: tomorrow, Aharon and you all shall offer incense on coals, each bringing the incense before G-d. They did so, gathering at the entrance to the Mishkan. G-d appeared to the entire group.

Finally, here, after Moshe gathers the people to the Mishkan, declaring the test of leadership to be an incense test, finally, the "Glory of G-d", the cloud indicating G-d's Presence, descended onto the Mishkan. But, even here, no words from G-d. Just His Presence.



3RD ALIYA (16:20-17:8)

G-d warned Moshe and Aharon: stand clear for I am ready to destroy them. Moshe and Aharon objected: one sins and You are angry at them all? G-d instructed the people: stand clear. Datan and Aviram stood brazenly at their homes with their wives and children. Moshe: The following test will establish whether I am sent by G-d. If you all suffer a unique fate, swallowed into the earth, then it is clear that you have displeased G-d. The earth opened up, swallowing them and theirs into the earth. A fire consumed the 250 incense bearers. Elazar, son of Aharon took the incense fire pans for they had become holy by use. He took these and used them for a plating of copper for the altar, so all will know that only kohanim are

to bring incense. The people complained to Moshe and Aharon that they were killing the nation. A cloud covered the Mishkan.

The previous aliya concluded with the Presence of G-d, though without words from Him. This aliya also concludes with the Presence of G-d, but also with no content. In the entire chapter of 35 verses, we have but 2 verses said by G-d concerning the conflict, and both are: move back. In other words, these people are going to be punished, so get out of the way.

This is a rich story, with multiple actors, conflict, and confrontation. There are rich lessons concerning communal conflict to be limited. But the structure of the telling of the story, with the sheer dominance of Moshe and the absence of G-d is striking.

This paucity of detail of the rebellion and the paucity of involvement of the Divine is deliberate. Because this is a pivotal moment in history. It is the dawn of the switch in the balance of power from Heaven to earth. Oh, the Divine is Present; the cloud. But the dynamic player is Moshe.

This shift began last week with the spies. Moshe was told to send "lecha" spies. Rashi quotes the Midrash that says Moshe was given discretion by G-d. If you think it is a good idea, then do what you think. I, says G-d, am ceding the decision to you.

The desert existence, the one of manna falling from heaven, of miraculous springs of water, that existence is winding down. Divine management is giving way to human initiative. The reins are being passed to man.

Moshe is asserting leadership. He is speaking for G-d. He is championing the Divine in confrontation with man, while previously championing the people in confrontation with G-d.

This is a profound and necessary transition. Jewish life is a heavenly life, but lived on earth. The Divine hovers. But we humans must manage this world. We must manage conflicts, manage the march to the Land, deal with life and its uncertainties. While sensing the Divine.

Moshe led the defense against Korach. Moshe took the lead, G-d hovering. And that will be all of Jewish history; Jews managing our history, guided by a hidden Divine Hand.



4TH ALIYA (17:9-15)

G-d wanted to destroy the people. Aharon avoided this calamity by bringing incense immediately, standing between the dead and alive.

The intent to destroy the people by G-d is a recurring theme. But it never happens.

This is a crucial theme: what the people deserve is one thing. What they actually receive is another.

Man may deserve destruction; but the power of G-d's mercy mitigates the harshness of what we deserve. We have seen this theme a number of times; the destruction is avoided.

The Torah is not the story of G-d's wrath burning. It is the story of love of G-d for the Jewish people, suspending what we deserve out of love.

But. It requires man's involvement. Aharon must act. Then the plague is averted. G-d waits for man's initiative.



5TH ALIYA (17:16-24)

Moshe said: inscribe the name of each tribe on a staff, with Aharon's name on the staff of Levi. The staff that sprouts is the one chosen. They were all placed in the Mishkan. Aharon's sprouted.

The staff in the Torah is a symbol of power; Moshe's staff was the vehicle of the plagues, defeating Paro through Divine Power.

But when Moshe used his staff to demonstrate G-d's Power, the staff turned into a snake. Here, Aharon's staff sprouts into flowers, buds and almonds.

Flowers, buds and almonds describe the fruit on the tree. First, a flower. Then a bud. Then the almond.

Aharon's leadership is to be fruitful. Perhaps the image is one of empowerment – my position will allow you to flower. Leadership has power. But I Give you, Aharon, the ability to blossom, to be fruitful. Your leadership too, should be fruitful; your religious leadership should not crush the people, but allow them to flower.



6TH ALIYA (17:25-18:20)

G-d said: place Aharon's staff as a commemoration of this. The people complained to Moshe that those that approach the Mishkan die. The Kohanim and Leviim are charged with protecting the sanctity of the Mishkan. While the Kohanim will serve at the altar, the Leviim will serve them and preserve the sanctity of the entire Mishkan. The Kohanim are to both safeguard and to enjoy the holy offerings. They are given portions of offerings to consume, though with strict holiness. Agriculture also has holy produce, gifts that are given to the Kohanim, eaten with strict holiness. First born animals are holy gifts to the Kohanim, offered as offerings with holiness, consumed by the Kohanim; while first born humans are redeemed. The Kohanim are not to receive a portion of land in Israel; G-d is their portion.

The people complain that proximity to G-d is tough, life threatening. Moshe reassures the people that the Kohanim and the Leviim will protect the holiness, ensuring that all is done in accord with the demands of the holiness of the Mishkan.



7TH ALIYA (18:21-32)

The Leviim also receive Maaser in lieu of a portion in the Land.

With Kohanim and Leviim responsible for the sanctity, calamities ought to be avoided. The Leviim are to give a portion of their Maaser to the Kohanim. The Maaser of the Leviim differs from the portions of the Kohen, as they do not have the holiness that requires them to be eaten in a specific place and with purity. The Maaser is the property of the Levi, a benefit for public service.

Benefits given to those doing the public service, the Kohanim and the Leviim is perfectly understandable. But the Torah is pointing out not only what they get, but what they don't. Those in positions of religious power can easily use that position to extract wealth from a willing public. The Kohanim and Leviim are told that they are to receive portions of offerings, meaning, this and no more. Not land, not gold and silver, not palaces. The allotted gifts alone.

HAFTORAH

SHMUEL I 11:14 - 12:22

The prophet Shmuel gathers together the Jewish people to install Shaul as King of Israel. During the course of his address to Bnei Yisrael he said to them, "Here I am; bear witness against me before G-d and before His anointed; whose ox did I take, or whose donkey did I take, or whom did I rob; or whom did I oppress, or from whose hand did I take a bribe..." This echoes Moshe's statement in this week's Torah reading: "I have not taken a donkey from a single one of them, and I have not harmed a single one of them."

The nation then gathers at Gilgal for a second coronation of King Shaul. The nation

offers sacrifices and rejoices together. Shmuel then speaks to the people: he asks the people to testify that he never committed crimes against them and they confirm. He discusses how Hashem helped them every step of the way and then he rebukes them for wanting a flesh and blood king. He assures them that G-d will be with them if they follow in His ways, and reminds them of the consequences they will face if they do not follow G-d's word.

Shmuel cautions Bnei Yisrael that their newly appointed king is not a replacement for Hashem. He emphasizes that the people must continue to follow Hashem and obey His commandments if they want themselves and their king to be successful. ■



STATS

38th of the 54 sedras; 5th of 10 in Bamidbar.

Written on 184 lines (rank: 32nd).

13 Parshiyot; 7 open and 6 closed.

95 pesukim - rank: 39th 1409 words - rank: 36th.

5325 letters - ranks: 35th.

9th in Bamidbar in these 3 categories
Above average in words & letters per pasuk. Korach is a short sedra (in a Book with many long sedras) with fairly long p'sukim (in a Book with lots of short-pasuk sedras).



MITZVOT

9 mitzvot - 5 positives, 4 prohibitions

Only 17 sedras have more mitzvot; 35 have fewer. Korach just makes it into the top third (tied with Ki Tisa)

רפואה שלמה

Peleg Shabtai ben Chaviva Leah