

KORAH'S
SEVERAL
PERSPECTIVES

next forty years, until the last of their generation was dead (Num. 14:34). The only people exempted from this harsh sentence were Joshua and Caleb, since they had not lost heart like the other spies. They would be allowed to survive the forty years and then enter Canaan and settle there.

Korah's Revolt

Another incident occurred on the way that caused the people great harm. Korah, Moses' own first cousin, led a revolt against him. In fact, he managed to attract numerous followers to his cause and might have succeeded in overthrowing Moses' leadership. In the end, however, God intervened, and Korah was swallowed up in what seems to have been an earthquake (Num. 16:32). Nevertheless, the revolt that he started continued for a time and ultimately resulted in the death of thousands of people.

This incident, like so many in the Bible, contains a number of puzzling elements, for which there are now two sets of answers—those of the ancient interpreters and those of modern scholars. Both of these groups began by focusing on the basic fact of the story, the rebellion itself. What might have caused it? The issue, the Bible seems to say, was Moses himself:

Now Korah son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi, along with Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth—descendants of Reuben—took two hundred fifty Israelite men, leaders of the congregation, chosen from the assembly, well-known men, and they confronted Moses. They complained against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, "Now you have gone too far! Everyone in the congregation [of Levites] is holy, and the LORD is in their midst. So why then *do you exalt yourselves* above the assembly of the LORD?"

Num. 16:1-3

According to this opening paragraph of the story, it was the fact that Moses "exalted himself" that led to the revolt. But for ancient readers of the Bible, this claim sounded completely out of keeping with Moses' character. Had not the text just observed: "Now this man Moses was extremely humble, more than any man on the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3)? No, the rebels must have been motivated by something else.

The real reason for Korah's discontent was, in fact, alluded to later on in the story. He and the other Levites had certain duties in the tabernacle—to burn incense and the like—but since they were not direct descendants of Aaron, they were not allowed to be priests. They could not offer sacrifices in the tabernacle or receive the considerable material benefits reserved for priests. *That* was what was really on their minds. As Moses goes on to say to

Korah and the other Levites: "Yet you seek the priesthood as well" (Num. 16:10). He therefore challenges them to take their incense holders and go before God the next day; then they would see if God approves of their being considered priests. The result was inevitable. The next day, "the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households—everyone who belonged to Korah and all their goods" (Num. 16:32).

Still, as the introductory paragraph cited above attests, Korah was not alone. He had, in addition to his own Levite allies, a group of Reubenites led by Dathan and Abiram. Their complaint could not have been about their exclusion from the priesthood—they were not from the tribe of Levi, but from Reuben. Instead, they seemed to have been bothered by their being put in a subservient position by Moses' leadership:

Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come! Is it too little that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the wilderness, that *you must also lord it over us?*"

Num. 16:12–14

Why should two members of the tribe of Reuben object to Moses' "lording it over" them? Perhaps it was precisely their tribal origin. Reuben, after all, was Jacob's firstborn; by rights, his tribe ought to be the leaders. Even though he personally had been discredited because of his sin with his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22), that was no reason—Dathan and Abiram seemed to be implying—for Reuben's descendants to lose out. Moses should never have become the head of the people. That role should have been granted to someone from the tribe of Reuben.

It is not clear from the text how Dathan, Abiram, and their allies died—apparently they too went down in the earthquake—but however it happened, their death did not end the destruction. The next day "the whole congregation of Israelites" revolted against Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:41), and God struck the people with a plague. "Those who died by the plague were fourteen thousand seven hundred, besides those who died in the affair of Korah" (Num. 16:49).

The Tassels Did It

Such were the basic facts of the story, but they still left a lot of questions unanswered. For example: how was it that Korah managed to convince people to join him in revolt?

One tactic ancient interpreters often employed in trying to fill out the details of a story was to examine the connection between it and whatever just preceded it in the narrative. (They did this, for example, with the biblical

account of Moses' birth.)²⁰ In the case of Korah's rebellion, this might at first have seemed a rather unpromising course. What immediately precedes this story is no particular incident, but a law requiring Israelites to wear a special blue tassel or fringe on their clothing:

The LORD said to Moses: Speak to the Israelites, and tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread on the tassel at each corner. In that way it will catch your eye* and, when you see it, you will remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and not act according to your own ideas or your own desires.

Num. 15:37-39

On reflection, interpreters saw in the juxtaposition of this law with the beginning of the Korah narrative a subtle hint as to how Korah might have enlisted his followers. Forcing people to put a special blue tassel on their clothes, Korah must have said, was an intolerable intrusion into their lives. This time Moses had gone too far!

In that time He commanded that man [Moses] about the tassels. And then Korah and two hundred men with him rebelled and said, "Why is an unbearable law imposed upon us?"

Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 16:1

Later interpreters took a more subtle approach:

What did Korah do [after hearing the law of tassels]? He went and made some garments that were completely dyed blue. Then he went to Moses and said: Moses our teacher, is a garment that is already completely blue nonetheless obliged to have the [blue corner] tassel? He said: It is . . . Whereupon Korah said: the Torah is not of divine origin, and Moses is not a prophet and Aaron is not a high priest.

j. *Sanhedrin* 10:1

Korah's question seems straightforward enough: why, if someone's whole garment is already dyed blue, does that person need to add an extra blue thread to the corner tassel? But this question, ancient interpreters meant to imply, was really a metaphorical version of Korah's complaint in the Bible: "Everyone in the congregation [of Levites] is holy, and the LORD is in their midst. So why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" In

* Literally, "it will be for you as a tassel." But we already knew that! Apparently, a pun is intended, connecting the word for tassel (*šīšit*) with the root for "peep" or "peer" (*šus*).

other words, we are all part of the same garment and we are all blue. What makes you think you are special just because you are the corner thread?²¹

In saying this, of course, Korah set a pattern to be followed endlessly in later history. How many times has a would-be revolutionary sought to bring down the ruling powers with the familiar taunt *What makes you better than the rest of us?* It seemed clear to ancient interpreters that Korah was not really interested in changing the system, merely in taking it over. He was thus a dangerous demagogue, an example of how easily power can be usurped by those without scruples. Here, clearly, was a lesson for the ages.

Korah's Rebellion in Modern Scholarship

Modern scholars suspect that the narrative of Korah's rebellion is really a composite of different texts. A clue to this, they say, may be found in the book of Deuteronomy. There a report of the rebellion is found, but Korah is nowhere to be seen:

You shall love the LORD your God, therefore, and keep his charge, his decrees, his ordinances, and his commandments always. Remember . . . what He did to Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab son of Reuben, how in the midst of all Israel the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, along with their households, their tents, and every living being in their company; for it is your own eyes that have seen every great deed that the LORD did.

Deut. 11:1-7

Nowhere in this paragraph—or, in fact, all of Deuteronomy—is there any mention of Korah. As far as Deuteronomy is concerned, the famous rebellion was the work of Dathan and Abiram alone. The same thing is true of the book of Psalms:

They were jealous of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron, the holy one of the LORD.

The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the faction of Abiram.

Fire also broke out in their company, the flame burned up the wicked.

Ps. 106:16-18

Once again: no Korah. For this reason (as well as because of internal inconsistencies and repetitions within Numbers 16),²² many scholars believe that the Korah element of the story in Numbers 16 was actually grafted onto an original rebellion narrative associated with the Reubenites alone, Dathan and

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Abiram. Such a story might, scholars believe, reflect a relatively early stage in Israelite history, a time when the formerly dominant tribe of Reuben was still struggling to regain its earlier rank.²³ Their complaint, quite naturally, was indeed that the new leadership was "lording it over" people like themselves.

The Korah element, scholars say, was added in later by a priestly writer; it was another salvo in the "Who's a priest?" battle that we have already seen. According to the view that held *all* Levites to be fit for the priesthood, Korah would indeed have been right to say that "everyone in the congregation [of Levites] is holy, and the LORD is in their midst." In other words: we're all Levites, and any Levite can be a priest. But the purported priestly author of this revised version of the episode did not hold that view; he believed that only Aaronids could be priests. Indeed, this is the great lesson, according to scholars, that the Korah episode in its final form was designed to impart: Be content with what you have, Levites! God has made it clear that the priesthood belongs only to Aaron and his sons (a lesson reinforced in the next chapter, Numbers 17), and if you try to usurp their priestly duties, you are in danger of ending up like Korah.

"THE BIBLE AS IT WAS" J. KUBEL

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that the people had subsequently acted willfully, proceeding with their rebellion even after having been solemnly warned:⁴

So was it also with the six hundred thousand strong, who all perished for their willful wrongdoing [*zedon libbam*].
If so, then one who is stiff-necked, will it surely be astonishing if he is not punished.

— Sir. 16:10–11

Joshua, because he fulfilled the commandment, became a judge in Israel. Caleb, because he [officially] warned the assembly [apparently *he'id bā'edāh*] received an inheritance in the land.⁵ — 1 Macc. 2:55–56

It was not with the lightness of men that God had been brought to this wrath against them, but He had deliberately passed sentence upon them.
— Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3:315

Perhaps the same was implied elsewhere:

[. . .] to them at Kadesh: "Arise, take possession of [. . .]"⁶ their spirit and they did not heed their creator, the commandments of their teacher; they spoke rebelliously in their tents [Ps. 106:25, see also Deut. 1:27] and the wrath of God was kindled against their company.

— Damascus Document 3:7–9

Tassels Set Off Revolt

Between the account of the spies' return and the next ill turn in Israel's fortunes, the revolt of Korah and his allies, came Moses' promulgation of the law of tassels. On God's instruction, Moses announced that the Israelites were to make tassels on the corners of their garments; upon each corner tassel was to be a special blue thread "so that you shall remember and do all My commandments" (Num. 16:37–41). Immediately after this announcement, the Bible begins its account of Korah's revolt.

4. That a rebellion did take place is also implied by Deut. 9:23–24, Ps. 106:25.

5. It is all the more striking that this "warning" is the reason given here for Caleb's reward, since everywhere else the reason is that Caleb "wholly followed" (*mille' 'ahar-*) God: Num. 14:24, 32:13; Deut. 1:36; Josh. 14:9, 14.

6. In both bracketed sections, the medieval copyist has apparently omitted something from the original text. The latter probably read something like: "And God said to them at Kadesh, 'Arise, take possession of the land which I have given you' [Deut. 9:23]. But they rebelled against His [!] spirit [see Ps. 106:33] and they did not heed."

Interpreters therefore could not help concluding that the promulgation of this law had something to do with Korah's revolt:

In that time He commanded that man [Moses] about the tassels. And then Korah and two hundred men with him rebelled and said, "Why is an unbearable law imposed upon us?"

—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 16:1

What did Korah do [after hearing the law of tassels]? He went and made some garments that were completely dyed blue. Then he went to Moses and said: Moses our teacher, is a garment that is already completely blue nonetheless obliged to have the [blue corner] tassel? He said: It is . . . Whereupon Korah said: the Torah is not of divine origin, and Moses is not a prophet and Aaron is not the high priest.

—j. *Sanhedrin* 10:1

Moses Accused of Favoritism

In the biblical narrative, Korah complains to Moses and Aaron: "You have gone too far! For all the congregations are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (Num. 16:3). It is not clear from this exactly what Korah's complaint was, but later Moses rebuked him and his followers:

Is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel . . . to do service in the tabernacle of the Lord [as Levites]? Would you now seek the priesthood also?

—Num. 16:9–10

Apparently, then, Korah's complaint was that he was only a Levite (charged with lesser duties in the sanctuary) and not a full-fledged priest (compare Num. 16:40). But if so, what had he meant by accusing Aaron *and* Moses of "exalting yourselves above the assembly of the Lord"? Moses' descendants had not been given the hereditary priesthood—it was awarded to Aaron and his sons. The same question was posed more sharply by a brief recapitulation of the events in the book of Psalms:

And they became jealous of Moses in the camp, and of Aaron, the Lord's holy one.

—Ps. 106:16

Why were the would-be priests jealous of *Moses*?

Considering these matters, some interpreters concluded that Korah, in

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desiring the priesthood, ended up accusing Moses of favoritism, indeed, nepotism. Moses, he said, had chosen his own brother, Aaron, for the hereditary priesthood not on the basis of any divine dictate, but out of a corrupt desire to appoint his close relatives to this high position:⁷

Then, conspiring with each other, and collecting in great numbers, [Korah and his followers] raised an outcry against the prophet [Moses], declaring that he had bestowed the priesthood on his brother and nephews because of their relation to him, and given a false account of their being chosen, which had not really been done under divine direction.

— Philo, *Moses* 2:278

[Korah said that] in defiance of the laws he [Moses] had given the priesthood to his brother Aaron, not by the common decree of the people but by his own vote.

— Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:15

Whereupon Korah said: . . . Moses is not a prophet and Aaron is not the high priest.

— j. *Sanhedrin* 10:1

[Moses told Korah:] "This quarrel that you are stirring up is not with me but with God."⁸

— *Midrash Tanhuma*, *Qorah* 6

Moses Was Polite

The charge of favoritism would no doubt make any leader angry, and Moses was no exception (Num. 16:15). How much more remarkable, then, that he did not seek at once to rally his forces against Korah for personal revenge, or even speak harshly to Korah and his allies. Instead, he addressed them politely and stressed their special status as Levites (Num. 16:8–10). Was not all this included in Scripture to impart a lesson, namely, the virtues of controlling one's anger?

When Moses was angry at Dathan and Abiram, he did nothing against them in anger, but controlled his anger with reason.

— 4 Macc. 2:17

At first very seriously, but without loss of temper, which was indeed alien to his nature, he [Moses] endeavored with words of admonition to bring them to a better mind and to refrain from transgressing the appointed limits or revolting against the sacred and hallowed institutions.

— Philo, *Rewards and Punishments* 77

7. This motif is an elaboration of Moses' own words in Num. 16:28: "Hereby shall you know that the Lord has sent me to do all these works, and that it has *not been of my own accord*." In so saying Moses seems to be combating an unstated accusation that he acted on his own authority in some matter and not on God's.

8. That is, the fact that Aaron is a priest and you are not is not my decision, but God's.

"And Moses said to Korah: 'Please listen, you Levites . . .'" [Num. 16:8]: It is said that Moses sought to have Korah change his mind and so spoke to him politely and appeasingly . . . All these things Moses said to appease Korah, yet you do not find Korah saying anything back to him. For he [Korah] was clever in his wickedness. He said: If I answer him, I know that, since he is a great sage he will overwhelm me with his words and overcome me and I will end up making peace with him against my will.

— *Midrash Tanhuma, Qorah* 6

Korah's Symbolic Death

In response to Korah's challenge to his authority, Moses had warned that the rebels would not "die the common death of all men"; they would be punished in some supernatural fashion so that "you shall know that the Lord has sent me [Moses] to do these things." (Num. 16:28). And so it was:

And as he [Korah] finished speaking all these words, the ground under them split asunder, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods. And all Israel that were round about them fled at their cry; for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us up!" And fire came forth from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men offering the incense.

— Num. 17:31–35

Granted, Korah was guilty and deserved punishment, perhaps indeed death in some supernatural fashion. But to be swallowed up by the earth was certainly an unprecedented way to die. Perhaps the very fact that the earth was involved had some special significance:

This too we should not fail to note, that the work of punishing the impious was shared by earth and heaven, the fundamental parts of the universe. For they had set the roots of their wickedness on earth, but let it grow so high that it rose up to the sky. Therefore each of the two elements supplied its punishment: the earth burst forth and parted asunder to drag down and swallow those who had then become a burden to it, while heaven poured down the strangest of rainstorms, a great stream of fire to blast them in its flames.⁹

— Philo, *Moses* 2:285–286

9. Technically, the "fire" that came down from heaven did not punish Korah and his followers, but targeted those Israelites who reproached Moses following Korah's death (Num. 16:35).

And God was angry and said: I commanded the earth, and it gave me Adam; and to him two sons were born at first, and the older rose up and killed the younger, and then the earth quickly swallowed his blood. But I drove Cain out and cursed the earth and spoke to the parched land, saying, "You will swallow up blood no more." But now the thoughts of men are very corrupt; behold, I command the earth, and it will swallow up body and soul together, and their dwelling place will be in darkness and the place of destruction, and they will not die but melt away until I remember the world and renew the earth.

—Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 16:2-3

A Truly Dangerous Figure

For others, Korah's supernatural death seemed to indicate that the danger posed by him was greater than might first appear. After all, in the biblical story, Korah is simply a dissatisfied Levite who craves higher status and rallies to his support two hundred and fifty men. This was hardly a major revolt! But in reflecting on the Korah episode, interpreters came to the conclusion that far more must have been involved; the very nature of Korah's supernatural death, as well as the fact that the Bible had taken the trouble to recount the whole episode in detail, seemed to argue that Korah was a truly dangerous figure whose rebellion had almost led to destruction:

Thus it was that a sedition, for which we know of no parallel whether among Greeks or barbarians, broke out among them: this sedition brought them all into peril of destruction.

—Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4:12

Woe to them [ungodly men]! For they walk in the way of Cain and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam's error, and perish in Korah's rebellion.

—Jude 11

For the adherents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were made a monument and example of the destruction of schismatics; and everyone who imitates them shall perish even as they did.

—*Didascalia Apostolorum* ch. 23

Aaron's Symbolic Staff

Following Korah's rebellion, another incident demonstrated the legitimacy of the Aaronide priesthood. Numbers 17 recounts the story of Aaron's staff,

Another View



PARASHAT KORACH DESCRIBES the punishment that befalls two groups of challengers. In the case of Dathan and Abiram, the rebels' wives die along with their husbands. Yet in the Korah episode, only the men are punished. The story as a whole reflects a central biblical theme: the tension between a clan-based system of authority and a centralized system of priestly authority.

Dathan and Abiram represent what can be called clan heads or household heads. (The biblical terminology is not always consistent.) Early in Israel's history, male heads of families had authority and jurisdiction over their families. For example, in Genesis 38 the patriarch Judah decides whether his pregnant, seemingly adulterous daughter-in-law Tamar should live or die. In contrast, the priest administers the ritual to determine whether a woman is an adulteress in Numbers 5.

According to the Bible, women within the clan system of authority played a significant role and exercised power as well as some authority. Although subject to the authority of the male head of the household, women clearly influenced the family head. For instance, unable to tolerate her rival, Sarah demands that Abraham expel Hagar. Despite Abraham's reluctance, God tells him to obey Sarah (Genesis 21:12).

Texts that focus on the priesthood shift authority away from the family's head toward the central sanctuary and its priests. Women, in particular, are affected by this shift (see at Leviticus 26:30). Whereas in Genesis 38 Tamar actively works to secure her fate, in Numbers 5 the suspected woman is a passive figure. The inclusion of the wives of Dathan and Abiram reflects the role that women played within the clan system.

Thus, Numbers 16 is not only a story of infighting among families, ultimately championing Aaron and

Numbers 16 tells of the metaphoric demise of patriarchal authority within the family.

his descendants; it also tells a story about the seeming demise of an important notion of the "biblical family." The deaths of Dathan, Abiram, and their wives at the doorway to their tents (16:27) make the point painfully clear: after all, the entrance to the tent is a place associated with theophany and judgment in the clan system, and hence also a symbol of authority (Genesis 18:1; Deuteronomy 22:21). Together, Dathan, Abiram, and their wives represent the clan system that must be erased—swallowed whole—in order to establish the authority of the priesthood. —Amy Kalmanofsky

Post-biblical Interpretations



Now Korah... betook himself (16:1). Literally, "and Korah took" (*va-yikach Korach*), which presents a dilemma for translators and commentators since the verb lacks a direct object. What did Korah take? Midrash *B'midbar Rabbah* 18.4 explains that Korah

"took" his *tallit*—and went to get advice from his wife. BT *Sanhedrin* 110a goes further and portrays Korah's wife as playing an active role in the development of his resentment. She complains that Moses has become a king, his brother Aaron is chief priest, and Aaron's sons are priests, while Levites such as Korah

are disadvantaged in a number of ways. Moreover, she continues, Moses humiliated the Levites by ordering them to shave their entire bodies (8:7). Finally, Korah's wife ridicules the commandment of *tzitzit* (15:37-41), which requires the presence in the fringes of *t'cheilet* (a blue thread). If blue thread is so important, she asks rhetorically, why not wear a cloak made entirely of blue thread?

Why does the Babylonian Talmud—and, by implication, *B'midbar Rabbah*—portray Korah's wife in this negative way? Rabbi Hanokh Zundel (author of the *Etz Yosef* commentary on *B'midbar Rabbah*) hypothesized that because Dathan's and Abiram's wives and children were with the rebels at the fateful moment of being swallowed up (16:27), their wives must have shared their husbands' rebellious sentiments. Presumably, Korah's wife also agreed with Korah's anger. Of course, in a patriarchal society, women would have had little choice but to "agree" with their husbands. Korah's wife, however, may have had a more specific motivation: given that Korah was a first cousin of Moses and Aaron, his rebellion was a family affair—at least in part. Korah's wife may have zealously pursued what she saw as her husband's legitimate interests against her powerful cousins-in-law. It is also possible that the Rabbis, who often impute the worst possible motives to women, are portraying Korah's wife as another Eve who (in rabbinic lore) is leading her innocent husband into temptation and disaster.

On son of Peleth (16:1). The Rabbis give us a different model of a rebel's spouse in their construction of the wife of On son of Peleth. The Rabbis assume that On did not see the rebellion through to the end, and thus he was spared the collective punishment. This is because he is listed among the rebels in 16:1, but there is no specific mention of his death in 16:23-35 when the rebels are destroyed. In a story found in two versions (*B'midbar Rabbah* 18.20 and BT *Sanhedrin* 109b-110a), the Rabbis attribute On's rescue to his wife. In both versions, On's wife points out to him that the rebellion will leave him no better off:

he is currently subordinate to Aaron; if the rebellion is successful, he will be subordinate to Korah. She observes to herself, "I know that all of the congregation is holy," citing as proof Korah's own words in 16:3. She then gets her husband drunk, puts him to bed, and sits at their front door with her hair undone and exposed. The holiness of the congregation is made manifest when the rebels approach the house to summon her husband—and withdraw immediately upon

Korah's wife played an active role in the development of his resentment.

seeing her immodest appearance. By the time On awakens from his drunken sleep, the rebellion has been put down and the rebels destroyed.

In the version of this story in the Midrash (*B'midbar Rabbah*), On never speaks; we do not know if he agrees with his wife or not. We may reasonably infer that he does not; otherwise, why would she have to get him drunk to put an end to his participation in the rebellion? In the version in the Talmud, however, On appears to agree with his spouse's assessment of his status after the rebellion. When he asks her, "What should I do?" she makes her observation about communal holiness and executes her plan to save her family from destruction.

The possible appeal to women—especially poor women—of Korah's overall critique of the Mosaic order is illustrated differently in *Midrash T'hilim* 1:15. Korah is represented there as showing the injustice of Torah laws by pointing out their adverse impact on a widow with two daughters. Whether the poor widow wishes to plow, sow, harvest, or raise animals—Korah notes—Moses and Aaron are there to regulate how she should plow and sow, and to insist that she gives portions of her harvest and her herds to the priests. The widow, frustrated at all these restraints and exactions, ends up bereft and weeping together with her children.

—Alyssa M. Gray

Contemporary Reflection



WHAT A DRAMATIC power struggle we have just witnessed in this parashah! A cabal of influential rebels tries to take power from Moses, daring to risk their lives to promote their own self-interest over the sacred destiny of their people. Their downfall is stark and dreadful.

Yet, the Torah teaches, even though Korah dies, his descendants live on (Numbers 26:11). We certainly see them today: cynical political, religious, and communal leaders cloaking self-interest in the language of democracy, nationalism, or God. In wielding power in such shortsighted ways, these modern-day rebels present an even greater threat to God's creation than Korah did to Moses' leadership. This Torah portion urges us to be vigilant, lest such persons undermine the communities that we are called to create and sustain.

But it is not only public leaders who play Korah's role today. We, too, live with an ongoing conflict between an "inner Moses" and an "inner Korah"—between humility and arrogance, between selflessness and selfishness. And until we can hear the difference between those two voices, our actions will not be effective in countering the power of the Korahs at large in the world. We need to be clear when it is the voice of our needy, small-minded self that advises us to act, or when it is the wise voice that speaks from our deepest and best values and truth. We need a practice of reflection to discern which voice is guiding us. Happily, we can also find some guidance in this parashah.

In our tradition Moses is seen as humility embodied—the true servant of God. The *S'fas Emes*, a 19th-century Hasidic master, understood Moses as being so far from pride in his bearing that people could not fathom his modesty. In *parashat Korach*, we see Moses in that place of humility, able to lead because he loves God and the Israelites with every fiber of his being, despite his constant frustration with both

of them. Twice he falls on his face—before Korah and before God—trying to stop the rebellion and to prevent God from destroying the persistently disobedient Israelites. Moses acts from the deep understanding that Korah's challenge has nothing to do with him; it is a challenge to God. He knows himself to be the vessel through which God's vision for the Israelites could become manifest, not the man who has to prove himself superior to an insolent competitor. Throughout the journeys of the Israelites, we see Moses grow as a spiritual leader: from a reluctant young man who

"We live with an ongoing conflict between an "inner Moses" and an "inner Korah."

struggles with anger and lack of self-confidence to become the quintessential leader—one who is able to overcome his own ego in order to serve a much greater cause. Finally, he becomes one who accepts God's decision that he will die—and that he will die outside the land of Israel.

Korah is different. His challenge to Moses is rooted in personal ambition, not love of God or of the Israelites. Unlike Moses, who hesitated to take the leadership that God offered, Korah seeks to grab it for himself. Tradition interprets the opening of the parashah—literally "And Korah took"—to mean that he took himself *apart from the people* (Tzvi Hirsch Kalischer, *Torah Gems*, 1998, p. 77). Korah would have done nothing to stop God from destroying the Israelites, for he would have loved to be the sire of a whole new people. Unlike Moses, Korah sees the whole story as being about himself and the role he wants to play as a powerful chief priest.

Reading this parashah, I ask: how do I recognize Korah in my own thoughts and actions, and how do I liberate the consciousness that Moses had? In my job

as the director of a wonderful non-profit institute, I find that Korah seems to pop up most frequently when I am afraid. What if I don't succeed at raising enough money? What if I don't succeed at making our work known? What if I am not good enough? What if this work fails because of my incompetence? In such moments of doubt, I make myself the central actor on stage, starring in the "The Tragedy of Rachel." In that place of fear, I separate myself from the community doing the work, and I clutch for some way to feel in control. I can't see the whole. There is no way to make wise decisions.

But if I make time, like Moses, to fall on my face—to breathe and reflect—I can hear the "I" shouting out in all its grandiosity. I reply, "*Rav l'kha* (Enough of this), Korah!"—acknowledging that once again I have made the story about me and my fears. In that space, Moses can emerge and call me back to humility—to the recognition that I, like everybody else, am

but a bit player on this stage. I can rekindle the trust that I have in the wisdom of the unfolding of the work and in the wisdom of my colleagues to figure out what will flow from this moment.

The Korah in all of us gets triggered by different emotions: fear, anger, anxiety, greed or doubt. When this happens, we lose sight of the whole and become caught up in our own inner dramas. Our needs eclipse the needs of others.

Moses' path—and ours—is to move from the narrow place of doubt, fear, anger, and jealousy to an expansive covenanted life in a community of mutual care and responsibility. In such a community, all people are holy. They—we—can remind each other that what matters is not the ambition of the self, but the work of helping to make the soul, the home, the office, and the world a safer, wiser, more compassionate place for all. Such a perspective helps each of us to come closer to being a humble servant of God.

—Rachel Cowan

Voices

Korach

Laurie Patton

Numbers 16:3-5

Moses gave Korach one night.

The origins of insomnia
must be in those hours,
as each man wondered
about the lands
of milk and honey,
and his rights
to hoist banners
for the crowds who loved him.

Moses sure of God's voice,
and Korach sure of his own—
each trying to tell
the difference
between arrogance
and righteous anger—
a line so thin—
thin as a flame
in a fire pan

Their sleepless night
is our own,
echoing restlessly
as we sort spices
in our dark kitchens
and arrange furniture
by moonlight

Sweating in starlight,
we remember arrogance
and mutter righteous anger,
and then quietly beg
to hear God—

for when the dawn comes,

we do not know
which of our sacrifices
will be the right ones

From Day to Night

Dahlia Ravikovitch

(transl. Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld)

Numbers 17:6

Every day I rise from sleep again
as if for the last time.
I don't know what awaits me,
perhaps it follows logically, then,
that nothing awaits me.
The spring that's on its way
is like the spring that's gone.
I know about the month of May
but pay it no mind.
I don't mark the border between night and day,
just that night is colder
though silence is equal to them both.
At dawn I hear the voices of birds.
I fall asleep easily
out of affection for them.
The one who is dear to me is not here,
perhaps he simply is not.
I cross over from day to night
from day to day
like a feather
the bird doesn't feel as it falls away.

THE REBELLION OF KORAH

The Canaanites were not the only ones who did not enjoy their wealth and money, for a similar fate was decreed for Korah. He had been the treasurer of Pharaoh, and possessed treasures so vast that he employed three hundred white mules to carry the keys of his treasures; but "let not the rich man boast of his riches," for Korah through his sin lost both life and property. Korah had obtained possession of his riches in the following way: When Joseph, during the lean years, through the sale of grain amassed great treasures, he erected three great buildings, one hundred cubits wide, one hundred cubits long, and one hundred cubits high, filled them with money and delivered them to Pharaoh, being too honest to leave even five silver shekels of this money to his children. Korah discovered one of these three treasures. On account of his wealth he became proud, and his pride brought about his fall.²⁸⁵ He believed Moses had slighted him by appointing his cousin Elizaphan as chief of the Levite division of Kohathites. He said: "My grandfather had four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Amram, as the firstborn, had privileges of which his sons availed themselves, for Aaron is high priest and Moses is king; but have not I, the son of Izhar, the second son of Kohath, the rightful claim to be prince of the Kohathites? Moses, however, passed me by and appointed Elizaphan, whose father was Uzziel, the youngest son of my grandfather. Therefore will I now stir up rebellion against Moses, and overthrow all institutions founded by him." Korah was far too wise a man to believe that God would permit success to a rebellion against Moses, and stand by in-

differently, but the very insight that enabled him to look into the future became his doom. He saw with his prophetic eye that Samuel, a man as great as both Aaron and Moses together, would be one of his descendants; and furthermore that twenty-four descendants of his, inspired by the Holy Spirit, would compose psalms and sing them in the Temple. This brilliant future of his descendants inspired him with great confidence in his undertaking, for he thought to himself that God would not permit the father of such pious men to perish. His eye did not, however, look sharply enough into the future, or else he would also have known that his sons would repent of the rebellion against Moses, and would for this reason be deemed worthy of becoming the fathers of prophets and Temple singers, whereas he was to perish in this rebellion.²⁸⁶

The names of this unfortunate rebel corresponded to his deeds and to his end. He was called Korah, "baldness," for through the death of his horde he caused a baldness in Israel. He was the son of Izhar, "the heat of noon," because he caused the earth to be made to boil "like the heat of noon;" and furthermore he was designated as the son of Kohath, for Kohath signifies "bluntness," and through his sin he made "his children's teeth be set on edge." His description as the son of Levi, "conduct," points to his end, for he was conducted to hell.²⁸⁷

Korah, however, was not the only one who strove to overthrow Moses. With him were, first of all, the Reubenites Dathan and Abiram, who well deserve their names, for the one signifies, "transgressor of the Divine law," and the other, "the obdurate." There were, furthermore, two hundred

fifty men, who by their rank and influence belonged to the most prominent people in Israel; among them even the princes of the tribes. In the union of the Reubenites with Korah was verified the proverb, "Woe to the wicked, woe to his neighbor." For Korah, one of the sons of Kohath, had his station to the south of the Tabernacle, and as the Reubenites were also encamped there, a friendship was struck up between them, so that they followed him in his undertaking against Moses.²⁸⁸

The hatred Korah felt against Moses was still more kindled by his wife. When, after the consecration of the Levites, Korah returned home, his wife noticed that the hairs of his head and of his body had been shaved, and asked him who had done all this to him. He answered, "Moses," whereupon his wife remarked: "Moses hates thee and did this to disgrace thee." Korah, however, replied: "Moses shaved all the hair of his own sons also." But she said: "What did the disgrace of his own sons matter to him if he only felt he could disgrace thee? He was quite ready to make that sacrifice."²⁸⁹ As at home, so also did Korah fare with others, when people at last discovered who was before them, they asked him in astonishment who had so disfigured him. In answer to their inquiries he said, "Moses did this, who besides took hold of my hands and feet to lift me, and after he had lifted me, said, 'Thou art clean.' But his brother Aaron he adorned like a bride, and bade him take his place in the Tabernacle." Embittered by what they considered an insult offered him by Moses, Korah and his people exclaimed: "Moses is king, his brother did he appoint as

high priest, his nephews as heads of the priests, he allots to the priests the heave offering and many other tributes."²⁹⁰ Then he tried to make Moses appear ridiculous in the eyes of the people. Shortly before this Moses had read to the people the law of the fringes in the borders of their garments. Korah now had garments of purple made for the two hundred fifty men that followed him, all of whom were chief justices. Arrayed thus, Korah and his company appeared before Moses and asked him if they were required to attach fringes to the corners of these garments. Moses answered, "Yea." Korah then began this argument. "If," said he, "one fringe of purple suffices to fulfil this commandment, should not a whole garment of purple answer the requirements of the law, even if there be no special fringe of purple in the corners?" He continued to lay before Moses similar artful questions: "Must a Mezuzah be attached to the doorpost of a house filled with the sacred Books?" Moses answered, "Yea." Then Korah said: "The two hundred and seventy sections of the Torah are not sufficient, whereas the two sections attached to the door-post suffice!" Korah put still another question: "If upon a man's skin there show a bright spot, the size of half a bean, is he clean or is he unclean?" Moses: "Unclean." "And," continued Korah, "if the spot spread and cover all the skin of him, is he then clean or unclean?" Moses: "Clean." "Laws so irrational," said Korah, "cannot possibly trace their origin from God. The Torah that thou didst teach to Israel is not therefore God's work, but thy work, hence art thou no prophet and Aaron is no high priest!"²⁹¹

KORAH ABUSES MOSES AND THE TORAH

Then Korah betook himself to the people to incite them to rebellion against Moses, and particularly against the tributes to the priests imposed upon the people by him. That the people might now be in a position to form a proper conception of the oppressive burden of these tasks, Korah told them the following tale that he had invented: "There lived in my vicinity a widow with two daughters, who owned for their support a field whose yield was just sufficient for them to keep body and soul together. When this woman set out to plow her field, Moses appeared and said: 'Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.' When she began to sow, Moses appeared and said: 'Thou shalt not sow with divers seeds.' When the first fruits showed in the poor widow's field, Moses appeared and bade her bring it to the priests, for to them are due 'the first of all the fruit of the earth'; and when at length the time came for her to cut it down, Moses appeared and ordered her 'not wholly to reap the corners of the field, nor to gather the gleanings of the harvest, but to leave them for the poor.' When she had done all that Moses had bidden her, and was about to thrash the grain, Moses appeared once more, and said: 'Give me the heave offering, the first and the second tithes to the priests.' When at last the poor woman became aware of the fact that she could not now possibly maintain herself from the yield of the field after the deduction of all the tributes that Moses had imposed upon her, she sold the field and with the proceeds purchased ewes, in the hope that she might now undisturbed have the benefit of the wool as well as of the younglings of the sheep. She was, however,

mistaken. When the firstling of the sheep was born, Aaron appeared and demanded it, for the firstborn belongs to the priest. She had a similar experience with the wool. At shearing time Aaron reappeared and demanded 'the first of the fleece of the sheep,' which, according to Moses' law, was his. But not content with this, he reappeared later and demanded one sheep out of every ten as a tithe, to which again, according to the law, he had a claim. This, however, was too much for the long-suffering woman, and she slaughtered the sheep, supposing that she might now feel herself secure, in full possession of the meat. But wide of the mark! Aaron appeared, and, basing his claim on the Torah, demanded the shoulder, the two cheeks, and the maw. 'Alas!' exclaimed the woman, 'The slaughtering of the sheep did not deliver me out of thy hands! Let the meat then be consecrated to the sanctuary.' Aaron said, 'Everything devoted in Israel is mine. It shall then be all mine.' He departed, taking with him the meat of the sheep, and leaving behind him the widow and her daughters weeping bitterly. Such men," said Korah, concluding his tale, "are Moses and Aaron, who pass their cruel measures as Divine laws."¹⁸⁷

Pricked on by speeches such as these, Korah's horde appeared before Moses and Aaron, saying: "Heavier is the burden that ye lay upon us than was that of the Egyptians; and moreover as, since the incident of the spies, we are forced annually to offer as a tribute to death fifteen thousand men, it would have been better for us had we stayed in Egypt." They also reproached Moses and Aaron with an unjustified love of power, saying: "Upon Sinai all Israel heard the words of God, 'I am thy Lord.' Where-

fore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?"⁵⁷⁰ They knew no bounds in their attacks upon Moses, they accused him of leading an immoral life and even warned their wives to keep far from him.⁵⁷¹ They did not, moreover, stop short at words, but tried to stone Moses,⁵⁷² when at last he sought protection from God and called to Him for assistance. He said: "I do not care if they insult me or Aaron, but I insist that the insult of the Torah be avenged. 'If these men die the common death of all men,' I shall myself become a disbeliever and declare the Torah was not given by God."⁵⁷³

MOSES PLEADS IN VAIN WITH KORAH

Moses took Korah's transgression much to heart, for he thought to himself that perhaps, after the many sins of Israel, he might not succeed in obtaining God's pardon for them. He did not therefore have this matter decided immediately, but admonished the people to wait until the following day, having a lingering hope that Korah's horde, given time for calm reflection, might themselves perceive their sin to which an excess of drink might have carried them away. Hence he said to them: "I may not now appear before the Lord, for although He partakes of neither food nor drink, still He will not judge such actions of ours as we have committed after feasting and revelling. But 'to-morrow the Lord will show who are His.'⁵⁷⁴ Know ye now that just as God has set definite bounds in nature between day and night, between light and darkness, so also has He separated Israel from the other nations, and so also has He separated Aaron from the rest of Israel. If you can obliterate the boundary between

light and darkness, then only can you remove the boundary of separation between Israel and the rest, but not otherwise. Other nations have many religions, many priests, and worship in many temples, but we have one God, one Torah, one law, one altar, and one high priest, whereas ye are two hundred fifty men, each of whom is imbued with the desire of becoming high priest, as I too should like to be high priest, if such a thing were possible. But to prove Aaron's claim to his dignity, 'this do; take you censers, Korah, and all his company; and put fire therein, and put incense upon them before the Lord to-morrow.' The offering of incense is the most pleasant offering before the Lord, but for him who hath not been called this offering holds a deadly poison, for it consumed Nadab and Abihu. But I exhort ye not to burden your souls with a deadly sin, for none but the man God will choose as high priest out of the number of you will remain alive, all others will pay with their lives at the offering of incense." These last words of Moses, however, far from restraining them, only strengthened Korah in his resolve to accomplish his undertaking, for he felt sure that God would choose him, and none other. He had a prophetic presentiment that he was destined to be the forefather of prophets and Temple singers, and for this reason thought he was specially favored by God.

When Moses perceived that Korah was ir reclaimable, he directed the rest of his warning to those other Levites, the men of Korah's tribe, who, he feared, would join Korah in his rebellion. He admonished them to be satisfied with the honors God had granted them, and not to strive for priestly dignity. He concluded his speech with a last appeal to

Korah to cause no schism in Israel, saying: "Had Aaron arbitrarily assumed the priestly dignity, you would do right to withstand his presumption, but it was God, whose attributes are sublimity, strength, and sovereignty, who clothed Aaron with this dignity, so that those who are against Aaron are in reality against God." Korah made no answer to all these words, thinking that the best course for him to follow would be to avoid picking an argument with so great a sage as Moses, feeling sure that in such a dispute he should be worsted and, contrary to his own conviction, be forced to yield to Moses.

Moses, seeing that it was useless to reason with Korah, sent a messenger to Dathan and Abiram,²⁰ summoning them to appear before his court. He did this because the law requires that the accused be summoned to appear before the judge, before judgment may be passed upon him, and Moses did not wish these men to be punished without a hearing.²¹ These, however, made answer to the messenger sent by Moses, "We will not come up!" This shameless answer held an unconscious prophecy. They went not up, but, as their end showed, down, to hell. Not only, moreover, did they refuse to comply with Moses' demand, they sent the following message in answer to Moses: "Why dost thou set thyself up as master over us? What benefit didst thou bring to us? Thou didst lead us out of Egypt, a land 'like the garden of the Lord,' but hast not brought us to Canaan, leaving us in the wilderness where we are daily visited by the plague. Even in Egypt didst thou try to assume the leadership, just as thou doest now. Thou didst beguile the people in their exodus from Egypt, when thou didst promise

to lead them to a land of milk and honey; in their delusion they followed thee and were disappointed. Now dost thou attempt to persuade us as thou didst persuade them, but thou shalt not succeed, for we will not come and obey thy summons."²²

The shamelessness of these two men, who declined even to talk about their transgression with Moses, aroused his wrath to the uttermost, for a man does get a certain amount of satisfaction out of discussing the dispute with his opponents, whereas he feels badly if he cannot discuss the matter. In his anger he said to God: "O Lord of the world! I well know that these sinners participated in the offerings of the congregation that were offered for all Israel, but as they have withdrawn themselves from the community, accept not Thou their share of the offering and let it not be consumed by the heavenly fire. It was I whom they treated so, I who took no money from the people for my labors, even when payment was my due. It is customary for anyone who works for the sanctuary to receive pay for his work, but I travelled to Egypt on my own ass, and took none of theirs, although I undertook the journey in their interests. It is customary for those that have a dispute to go before a judge, but I did not wait for this, and went straight to them to settle their disputes, never declaring the innocent guilty, or the guilty innocent."

When he now perceived that his words had no effect upon Korah and his horde, he concluded his words with a threat to the ring leaders: "Be thou and all thy company before the Lord, thou and they, and Aaron, to-morrow."

Korah spent the night before the judgment in trying to

win over the people to his side, and succeeded in so doing. He went to all the other tribes, saying to them: "Do not think I am seeking a position of honor for myself. No, I wish only that this honor may fall to the lot of each in turn, whereas Moses is now king, and his brother high priest." On the following morning, all the people, and not Korah's original company alone, appeared before the Tabernacle and began to pick quarrels with Moses and Aaron. Moses now feared that God would destroy all the people because they had joined Korah, hence he said to God: "O Lord of the world! If a nation rebels against a king of flesh and blood because ten or twenty men have cursed the king or his ambassadors, then he sends his hosts to massacre the inhabitants of the land, innocent as well as guilty, for he is not able with certainty to tell which among them honored the king and which among them cursed him. But Thou knowest the thoughts of man, and what his heart and kidneys counsel him to do, the workings of Thy creatures' minds lie open before Thee, so that Thou knowest who hath rebelled against Thee and who hath not, for Thou knowest the spirit of each one. 'Shall one man sin, and wilt Thou be wroth with all the congregation?' " God hereupon said to Moses: ²⁰⁶ "I have heard thy prayer for the congregation. Say then, to them, 'Get you up from about the Tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.' " ²⁰⁷

Moses did not immediately carry out these instructions, for he tried once again to warn Dathan and Abiram of the punishment impending upon them, but they refused to give heed to Moses, and remained within their tents. "Now," said Moses, "I have done all I could, and can do nothing

more." Hence, turning to the congregation, he said: ²⁰⁸ "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, that even in their youth deserved death as a punishment for their actions. In Egypt they betrayed the secret of my slaying an Egyptian; at the Red Sea it was they that angered God by their desire to return to Egypt; in Alush they broke the Sabbath, and now they trooped together to rebel against God. They now well deserve excommunication, and the destruction of all their property. 'Touch, therefore, nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins.' " ²⁰⁹

The community obeyed the words of Moses and drew back from the dwellings of Dathan and Abiram. These, not at all cowed, were not restrained from their wicked intention, but stood at the doors of their tents, abusing and calumniating Moses. Moses hereupon said to God: "If these men die upon their beds like all men, after physicians have attended to them and acquaintances have visited them, then shall I publicly avow 'that the Lord hath not sent me' to do all these works, but that I have done them of mine own mind." God replied: "What wilt thou have Me do?" Moses: "If the Lord hath already provided the earth with a mouth to swallow them, it is well, if not, I pray Thee, do so now." God said: "Thou shalt decree a thing, and it shall be established unto thee." ²¹⁰

Moses was not the only one to insist upon exemplary punishment of the horde of Korah. Sun and Moon appeared before God, saying: "If Thou givest satisfaction to the son of Amram, we shall set out on our course around the world, but not otherwise." God, however, hurled lightnings after them, that they might go about their duties, saying to them:

"You have never championed My cause, but now you stand up for a creature of flesh and blood." Since that time Sun and Moon have always to be driven to duty, never doing it voluntarily because they do not wish to look upon the sins of man upon earth.

KORAH AND HIS HORDE PUNISHED

God did not gainsay satisfaction to His faithful servant. The mouth of hell approached the spot upon which Dathan, Abiram, and their families stood,²⁸¹ and the ground under their feet grew so precipitous that they were not able to stand upright, but rolled to the opening and went quickly into the pit. Not these wicked people alone were swallowed by the earth, but their possessions also. Even their linen that was at the launderer's or a pin belonging to them rolled toward the mouth of the earth and vanished therein.²⁸² Nowhere upon earth remained a trace of them or of their possessions, and even their names disappeared from the documents upon which they were written.²⁸³ They did not, however, meet an immediate death, but sank gradually into the earth, the opening of which adjusted itself to the girth of each individual. The lower extremities disappeared first, then the opening widened, and the abdomen followed, until in this way the entire body was swallowed. While they were sinking thus slowly and painfully, they continued to cry: "Moses is truth, and his Torah is truth. We acknowledge that Moses is rightful king and true prophet, that Aaron is legitimate high priest, and that the Torah has been given by God. Now deliver us, O our teacher Moses!" These words were audible throughout the

entire camp, so that all might be convinced of the wickedness of Korah's undertaking.²⁸⁴

Without regard to these followers of Korah, who were swallowed up by the earth, the two hundred and fifty men who had offered incense with Aaron found their death in the heavenly fire that came down upon their offering and consumed them. But he who met with the most terrible form of death was Korah. Consumed at the incense offering, he then rolled in the shape of a ball of fire to the opening in the earth, and vanished. There was a reason for this double punishment of Korah. Had he received punishment by burning alone, then those who had been swallowed by the earth, and who had failed to see Korah smitten by the same punishment, would have complained about God's injustice, saying: "It was Korah who plunged us into destruction, yet he himself escaped it." Had he, on the other hand, been swallowed by the earth without meeting death by fire, then those whom the fire had consumed would have complained about God's injustice that permitted the author of their destruction to go unpunished. Now, however, both those who perished by fire and those who were swallowed up by the earth witnessed their leader share their punishment.²⁸⁵

This terrible death did not, however, suffice to atone for the sins of Korah and his company, for their punishment continues in hell. They are tortured in hell, and at the end of thirty days, hell again casts them up near to the surface of the earth, on the spot where they had been swallowed. Whosoever on that day puts his ear to the ground upon that spot hears the cry: "Moses is truth, and his Torah is truth, but we are liars." Not until after the Resurrection

will their punishment cease, for even in spite of their grave sin they were not given over to eternal damnation.

For a time Korah and his company believed that they should never know relief from these tortures of hell, but Hannah's words encouraged them not to despair. In reference to them she announced the prophecy, "The Lord bringeth low, to Sheol, and lifteth up." At first they had no real faith in this prophecy, but when God destroyed the Temple, and sank its portals deep into the earth until they reached hell, Korah and his company clung to the portals, saying: "If these portals return again upward, then through them shall we also return upward." God hereupon appointed them as keepers of these portals over which they will have to stand guard until they return to the upper world.¹⁰⁰

ON AND THE THREE SONS OF KORAH SAVED

God punishes discord severely, for although the decree of Heaven does not otherwise punish any one below twenty years of age, at Korah's rebellion the earth swallowed alive even children that were only a day old—men, women, and children, all together.¹⁰¹ Out of all the company of Korah and their families only four persons escaped ruin, to wit: On, the son of Peleth, and Korah's three sons. As it was Korah's wife who through her inciting words plunged her husband into destruction, so to his wife does On owe his salvation. Truly to these two women applies the proverb: "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her own hands." On, whose abilities had won him distinction far beyond that of his father, had

originally joined Korah's rebellion. When he arrived home and spoke of it to his wife, she said to him: "What benefit shalt thou reap from it? Either Moses remains master and thou art his disciple, or Korah becomes master and thou art his disciple." On saw the truth of this argument, but declared that he felt it incumbent upon himself to adhere to Korah because he had given him his oath, which he could not now take back. His wife quieted him, however, entreating him to stay at home. To be quite sure of him, however, she gave him wine to drink, whereupon he fell into a deep sleep of intoxication. His wife now carried out her work of salvation, saying to herself: "All the congregation are holy, and being such, they will approach no woman whose hair is uncovered." She now showed herself at the door of the tent with streaming hair, and whenever one out of the company of Korah, about to go to On, saw the woman in this condition, he started back, and owing to this scheme her husband had no part in the rebellion. When the earth opened to swallow Korah's company, the bed on which On still slept began to rock, and to roll to the opening in the earth. On's wife, however, seized it, saying: "O Lord of the world! My husband made a solemn vow never again to take part in dissensions. Thou that livest and endurest to all eternity canst punish him hereafter if ever he prove false to his vow." God heard her plea, and On was saved. She now requested On to go to Moses, but he refused, for he was ashamed to look into Moses' face after he had rebelled against him. His wife then went to Moses in his stead. Moses at first evaded her, for he wished to have nothing to do with women, but as she wept and lamented bitterly, she

was admitted and told Moses of all that had occurred. He now accompanied her to her house, at the entrance of which he cried: "On, the son of Peleth, step forth, God will forgive thee thy sins." It is with reference to this miraculous deliverance and to his life spent in doing penance that this former follower of Korah was called On, "the penitent," son of Peleth, "miracle." His true name was Nemuel, the son of Eliab, a brother of Dathan and Abiram.²⁸⁸

More marvellous still than that of On was the salvation of Korah's three sons. For when the earth yawned to swallow Korah and his company, these cried: "Help us, Moses!" The Shekinah hereupon said: "If these men were to repent, they should be saved; repentance do I desire, and naught else." Korah's three sons now simultaneously determined to repent their sin, but they could not open their mouths, for round about them burned the fire, and below them gaped hell.²⁸⁹ God was, however, satisfied with their good thought, and in the sight of all Israel, for their salvation, a pillar arose in hell, upon which they seated themselves. There did they sit and sing praises and songs to the Lord sweeter than ever mortal ear had heard, so that Moses and all Israel heartened to them eagerly. They were furthermore distinguished by God in receiving from Him the prophetic gift, and they then announced in their songs events that were to occur in the future world. They said: "Fear not the day on which the Lord will 'take hold of the ends of the earth, and the wicked be shaken out of it,' for the pious will cling to the Throne of Glory and will find protection under the wings of the Shekinah. Fear not, ye pious men, the Day of Judgment, for the judgment of sinners will have as little power

over you as it had over us when all the others perished and we were saved."²⁹⁰

ISRAEL CONVINCED OF AARON'S PRIESTHOOD

After the death of the two hundred and fifty followers of Korah, who perished at the offering of incense, Eleazar, the son of Aaron, was ordered "to take up the censers out of the burning," in which the souls, not the bodies of the sinners were burned,²⁹¹ that out of these brassen plates be made a covering for the altar. Eleazar, and not his father, the high priest, received this commission, for God said: "The censor brought death upon two of Aaron's sons, therefore let the third now fetch forth the censor and effect expiation for the sinners."²⁹² The covering of the altar fashioned out of the brass of these censers was "to be a memorial unto the children of Israel, to the end that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to burn incense before the Lord." Such a one was not, however, to be punished like Korah and his company, but in the same way as Moses had once been punished by God, with leprosy. This punishment was visited upon king Uziah, who tried to burn incense in the Temple, asserting that it was the king's task to perform the service before the King of all. The heavens hastened to the scene to consume him, just as the celestial fire had once consumed the two hundred and fifty men, who had wrongfully assumed the rights of priesthood; the earth strove to swallow him as it had once swallowed Korah and his company. But a celestial voice announced: "Upon none save Korah and his company came punishments like these, upon no others. This man's punishment shall be leprosy." Hence Uziah became a leper.²⁹³

MOVA (11. AL. 1) (Lk Kōmā). A site mentioned in the book of Judith which is otherwise unknown (Jdt 4:4). Kona is one of the towns which prepares to meet the onslaught of Holofernes as he comes down from the N. It is located, according to the author of Judith, N of Jerusalem. The name was early corrupted in certain Greek manuscripts to "villages" (Gk *kōmas*), indicating that the name was unfamiliar from a very early period (see also Old Latin⁵, Syriac⁶, Stummer (1947: 16) makes a tentative identification with Kamon, the village in Gilead of the judge Jael (Judg 10:5). See KAMON. He identifies this with modern Qamm, 3 miles N of Taiybeh (M.R. 218221). Aharoni and Avrami (1947: 16) also indicate this as a possibility, as well as Camus, according to Polybius one of the cities conquered by Antiochus III (Polyb. 5:54-56). Camus is located NE of Pella. These identifications are possible only if one accepts the equation Kona equals Kamon. Given the genre of the book of Judith, it is entirely possible that the name is fictitious.

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KORAH (PERSON) [Heb *qārāh*]. KORAHITES. Names based on **qrh*, "bald, bald head," are frequently attested in Semitic languages. In addition to several individuals named Korah, there is also the biblical Karea, *Qrh* in Ugaritic and Arad Ostrakon 49:2; Akkadian *Qar-la-a* and *Qar-ji*; Thamnide *Qrh*; Nabatean *Qrh*, *Qrhw*, *Qrhth*; and Arabic *Qārīh*, *Qārāh*, etc.

1. Son of Esau and Oholibamah (Gen 36:5, 14, 18; 1 Chr 1:35). However, Gen 36:16 lists him as a son of Eliphaz, and therefore Esau's grandson. He is credited with being one of the "tribal chiefs" (Heb *ʿallāpīm*) of Edom, and as such his name probably represents a tribe or clan within the Esauite/Edomite tribal system.

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2. One of the principal families involved in leadership in the Jerusalem temple. The earliest attestation to the role of the Korahites is perhaps to be seen in 2 Chr 20:19, where the Korahites are listed alongside the Kohathites as leading the people in praise. Though it is generally assumed that the temple arrangements as projected by Chronicles are postexilic, this reference must date to a time prior to the development of the formal postexilic levitical genealogy. Here the Korahites and the Kohathites are parallel and equal participants in the cultic leadership, a state that conflicts with the later tradition which establishes Kohath as one of the primary eponyms of levitical leadership and the Korahites as but one sub-subgroup of the Kohathites.

The note in Num 26:58 likewise reflects a relatively early tradition, listing the family of Korah as one of five major levitical families. Already, however, we most likely see a development in which the levitical families of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari have established themselves as dominant phratries, and the major families—Libni, Hebron, Mahli, Mushi, and Korah—are understood to be the major

representatives of these phratries. According to the genealogy of Exodus 6, Libni is the son of Gershon, Hebron of Kohath, Mushi and Mushi of Merari, and Korah the grandson of Kohath.

The early importance of the Korahites in Israelite worship is also attested to by the numerous psalms derived from the "Korahite Psalter" (Psalms 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88). The "prophesying" of an Asaphite Levite (2 Chr 20:14-17), along with the connection of both Korah and Asaph to cultic psalmody, has led many to make a connection between preexilic cultic prophecy and the development of the postexilic temple offices.

The early prominence of the Korahites in the postexilic (and possibly already preexilic) temple apparently faded during subsequent generations. Although there is genealogical instability, the dominant tradition establishes them as a sub-subgroup of the Kohathites. The various genealogies are as follows:

Exod 6:18 presents the shortest genealogy:

Kohath → Izhar → Korah, with the sons of Korah listed horizontally as Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph

1 Chr 6:22-24 extends the horizontal dimension vertically:

Kohath → Amminadab → Korah → Assir → Elkanah → Abiasaph → Assir → Tahath → Uziel → Uzziab → Shaul

1 Chr 6:31 presents an even lengthier vertical genealogy:

Kohath → Izhar → Korah → Abiasaph → Assir → Tahath → Zephaniah → Azariah → Joel → Elkanah → Amasai → Mahath → Elkanah → Zuph → Toah → Eliel → Jeroham → Elkanah → Samuel → Joel → Heman the Singer

In all three genealogies Korah is listed in third position in the Kohathite phratry. Although some would attempt to locate Korah's origins outside of the tribe of Levi, and although these genealogies obviously attest to variation in the tradition, noticeably with regard to the name of Korah's father and the horizontal vs. vertical treatment of his "sons," there is little reason to deny him levitical status.

There is significant evidence, however, that the status of the Kohathites was diminished in the later postexilic period. In 1 Chr 23:12-20 a genealogy of the Kohathites is once again presented, but now with Korah conspicuously absent (v 18; cf. 24:22).

This reduction of the Kohathites to oblivion is likely the subject of the polemic underlying the major story of Korah and his followers in Numbers 16. It is generally acknowledged that the narrative in Numbers 16 is a composite of at least two stories: an Epic tradition (1E) concerning the civil/political conflict between Dathan and Abiram, in which they charge Moses with "making himself a prince" over the people (v 13); and a priestly tradition concerning the cultic/religious conflict between the Korahites and Aaron over the exclusive claims of Aaron to the priesthood (v 3). Some would further seek to distinguish between an early priestly narrative and a later priestly editing of the entire complex. What is clear, however, is that in this

priestly narrative the Korahites have dared to challenge the exclusivity of the Aaronide claims to the priesthood and, as a result of a trial by ordeal, are consumed by the very fire which they desire to usurp (v 35). Although some have sought to place the origins of the story of Korah in the period of the early monarchy, this priestly narrative is certainly to be understood as attesting to the intense struggle for the control of temple prerogatives in the postexilic community. It is generally assumed that the Levites had full priestly authority in preexilic Israel, but that with Deuteronomy and Josiah's reform movement there ensued a tremendous power struggle which was eventually won by the Zadokite priests. The postexilic "settlement" may have broadened this to include some non-Zadokites, who were now subsumed, along with the Zadokites themselves, into a newly contrived "Aaronide" genealogy. Whether the Korahites were among former groups of levitical priestly groups who went into exile or whether they were a prominent levitical group which functioned in Palestine during the exile (so Budd *Numbers* WBC, 190) is unclear. What is clear, however, is that the Korahites were among the major losers in this power struggle. The genealogy in Exod 6:16-22 suggests that the tradition located the Korahites as the "cousins" of the Aaronides, i.e., they were very close to the center of power—but not close enough. The social struggle between the Korahites and the Aaronides concluded with the Aaronides consolidating their power and the Korahites reduced further and further to the periphery. In spite of the obviously contrived note in Num 26:11, the clear message of the priestly propaganda in Numbers 16 is that the Korahites were on the verge of social extinction, reduced to gatekeepers (1 Chr 9:19; 26:1, 19) and temple bakers (1 Chr 9:31). Any other Levites who would encroach upon Aaronide prerogatives would meet the same fate. They have the altar covering, hammered out of the 250 censers of Korah's followers, as a witness.

3. A member in the genealogy of Caleb, according to 1 Chr 2:43 (Caleb → Meshah → Hebron → Korah); but contrast 2:18-19). Given the number of geographical place names in the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 2, the name Korah might likewise be taken as the name of a city. Though the tradition clearly associates Caleb with the city of Hebron, it is not necessary to assume that Korah must have been in the same environs. In fact, the genealogies of 1 Chr 2:18-24 suggest that a genealogical relationship was thought to exist between Judah and Gilead. Given such ambiguity, it is possible that the note in 1 Chr 12:21-27 might be accurate. There the town of Korah is associated with the tribe of Benjamin. According to this text, it is from this town, as from the other Benjaminite towns of Gibeon, Anathoth, Gibeon, and Gedera, that several of Saul's kinsfolk defected to David's ranks at Ziklag. However, this tradition has no attestation in the Deuteronomistic History, and may reflect a late and spurious tradition.

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for a little while ¹; and we were the inheritors of *their wealth*. ² But thy LORD did not destroy *those* cities, until he had sent unto their capital an apostle, to rehearse our signs unto them: neither did we destroy *those* cities, unless their inhabitants were injurious to *their apostle*. The things which are given you, are the provisions of this present life, and the pomp thereof; but that which is with GOD, is better and more durable: will ye not therefore understand? Shall he then, unto whom we have promised an excellent promise of *future happiness*, and *who* shall attain the same, be as he on whom we have bestowed the provision of this present life, and who, on the day of resurrection, *shall be one* of those who are delivered up to *eternal punishment*? On *that* day GOD shall call unto them, and shall say, Where are my partners, which ye imagined to be so? And they upon whom the sentence of *dannation* shall be justly pronounced, shall answer, These, O LORD, are those whom we seduced; we seduced them as we also had been seduced: but now we clearly quit them, and turn unto thee. They did not worship us, but *their own lusts*. ³ And it shall be said unto the idolaters, Call now upon those whom ye associated with GOD: and they shall call upon them, but they shall not answer them; and they shall see the punishment *prepared for them*, and shall wish that they had submitted to be directed. On *that* day GOD shall call unto them, and shall say, What answer did ye return to our messengers? But they shall not be able to give an account thereof on that day: ⁴ neither shall they ask one another for information. Howbeit whoso shall repent and believe, and shall do that which is right, may expect to be happy. Thy LORD createth what he pleaseth; and chooseth freely: but they have no free choice. Praise be unto GOD; and far be he removed from the idols which they associate with him! Thy LORD knoweth both the secret malice which their breasts conceal, and the open hatred which they discover. He is GOD; there is no GOD but he. Unto him is the praise due, both in this life and in that which is to come: unto him doth judgment belong, and

¹ That is, for a day, or a few hours only, while travellers stay there to rest and refresh themselves; or, as the original may also signify, unless by a few inhabitants: some of those ancient cities and dwellings being utterly desolate, and others thinly inhabited.

² There being none left to enjoy it after them.

³ See Chap. X. p. 202.

⁴ Literally, The account thereof shall be dark unto them; for the consternation they shall then be under, will render them stupid, and unable to return an answer.

before him shall ye be assembled at the last day. Say, What think ye? If GOD should cover you with perpetual night, until the day of resurrection; what god, besides GOD, would bring you light? Will ye not therefore hearken? Say, What think ye? If GOD should give you continual day, until the day of resurrection; what god, besides GOD, would bring you night, that ye might rest therein? Will ye not therefore consider? Of his mercy he hath made for you the night and the day, that ye may rest in the one, and may seek to obtain provision for yourselves of his abundance, by your industry, in the other; and that ye may give thanks. On a certain day GOD shall call unto them, and shall say, Where are my partners, which ye imagined to share the divine power with me? And we will produce a witness out of every nation, ¹ and will say, Bring hither your proof of what ye have asserted. And they shall know that the right is GOD's alone; and the deities which they have devised shall abandon them. (Karûn) was of the people of Moses; ² but he behaved insolently towards them: for we had given him so much treasure, that his keys would have loaded several strong men. ³ When his people said

¹ viz., The prophet who shall have been sent to each nation.

² The commentators say, Karûn was the son of Yeshar (or Izhar), the uncle of Moses, and consequently, make him the same with the Korah of the Scriptures. This person is represented by them as the most beautiful of the Israelites, and so far surpassing them all in opulence that the riches of Karûn have become a proverb. The Mohammedans are indebted to the Jews for this last circumstance, to which they have added several other fables: for they tell us that he built a large palace overlaid with gold, the doors whereof were of massy gold; that he became so insolent, because of his immense riches, as to raise a sedition against Moses, though some pretend the occasion of his rebellion to have been his unwillingness to give alms, as Moses had commanded; that one day, when that prophet was preaching to the people, and, among other laws which he published, declared that adulterers should be stoned, Karûn asked him what if he should be found guilty of the same crime? To which Moses answered, that in such case he would suffer the same punishment; and thereupon Karûn produced a harlot, whom he had hired to swear that Moses had lain with her, and charged him publicly with it; but on Moses adjuring the woman to speak the truth, her resolution failed her, and she confessed that she was suborned by Karûn to accuse him wrongfully; that then GOD directed Moses, who had complained to him of this usage, to command the earth what he pleased, and it should obey him; whereupon he said, O earth, swallow them up! and that immediately the earth opened under Karûn and his confederates, and swallowed them up, with his palace and all his riches. (Abulfeda, Jallalo'ddin, Al Beidâwi, &c.) There goes a tradition, that as Karûn sank gradually into the ground, first to his knees, then to his waist, then to his neck, he cried out four several times, O Moses, have mercy on me! but that Moses continued to say, O earth, swallow them up, till at last he wholly disappeared: upon which GOD said to Moses, I have had no mercy on Karûn, though he asked pardon of thee four times; but I would have had compassion on him if he had asked pardon of me but once. (Al Beidâwi. D'Herbel. Bibl. Orient. Art. Carun.)

³ The original word properly signifies any number of persons from ten to

unto him, Rejoice not *immoderately*; for God loveth not those who rejoice in *their riches immoderately*: but seek to attain, by means of *the wealth* which God hath given thee, the future mansion of *paradise*.¹ And forget not thy portion in this world; but be thou bounteous unto others, as God hath been bounteous unto thee: and seek not to act corruptly in the earth; for God loveth not the corrupt doers. He answered, I have received *these riches*, only because of the knowledge which is with me.² Did he not know that God had already destroyed, before him, several generations, who were mightier than he in strength, and had amassed more abundance of *riches*? And the wicked shall not be asked to *discover* their crimes. And *Karîm* went forth unto his people, in his pomp.³ And they who loved this present life said, Oh that we had the like *wealth* as hath been given unto *Karîm*! verily he is master of a great fortune. But those on whom knowledge had been bestowed, answered, Alas for you! the reward of God in the next life will be better unto him who shall believe and do good works: but none shall attain the same, except those who persevere with constancy. And we caused the ground to cleave in sunder, and to swallow up him and his palace: and he had no forces to defend him, besides God: neither was he rescued from *punishment*. And the next morning, those who had bestowed his condition the day before, said, Aha! verily God bestoweth abundant provision on such of his servants as he pleaseth; and he is sparing unto whom he pleaseth. Unless God had been gracious unto us, certainly *the earth* had swallowed us up *also*. Aha! the unbelievers shall not prosper. As to this future mansion of *paradise*, we will give it unto them who seek not to exalt themselves in the earth, or to do wrong; for the *happy* issue shall attend the pious. Whoso doth good, shall receive a reward which shall exceed the merit thereof: but as to him who doth evil, they who

forty. Some pretend these keys were a sufficient load for seventy men; and Abulreda says forty mules used to be employed to carry them.

¹ This passage is parallel to that in the New Testament, *Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations*. (Luke xvi. 9.)

² For some say he was the most learned of all the Israelites, and the best versed in the law, after Moses and Aaron: others pretend he was skilled in chemistry, or in merchandizing, or other arts of gain, and others suppose, as the Jews also fable—Vide R. Gheda. Shash. hakrah. p. 13—that he found out the treasures of Joseph in Egypt (Jalalo ddin, Al Beidâwi).

³ It is said he rode on a white mule adorned with trappings of gold, and that he was clothed in purple, and attended by four thousand men, all well mounted and richly dressed.

work evil shall be rewarded according to the merit only of that which they shall have wrought. Verily he who hath given thee the Korân for a rule of *faith and practice*, will certainly bring thee back home unto Mecca! Say, My Lord is best knoweth who cometh with a *true* direction, and who is in a manifest error. Thou didst not expect that the book of the Korân should be delivered unto thee: but thou hast received it through the mercy of thy Lord. Be not therefore assisting to the unbelievers; neither let them turn thee aside from the signs of God, after they have been sent down unto thee: and invite men unto thy Lord. And be not thou an idolater; neither invoke any other god, together with the true God: there is no god but he. Everything shall perish, except himself; unto him *belongeth* judgment; and before him shall ye be assembled at the last day.

XXIX

THE CHAPTER OF THE SPIDER²

Revealed at Mecca.³

IN THE NAME OF THE MOST MERCIFUL GOD.

A. L. M.⁴ Do men imagine that it shall be sufficient for them⁵ to say, We believe; while they be not proved? We heretofore proved those who were before them; for God will surely know those who are sincere, and he will surely know the liars. Do they who work evil think that they shall prevent us from taking vengeance on them? An ill judgment do they make. Whoso hopeth to meet

¹ This verse, some say, was revealed to Mohammed when he arrived at Jocha, in his flight from Mecca to Medina, to comfort him and still his complaints.

² Transient mention is made of the spider towards the end of the chapter.

³ Some think the first ten verses, ending with these words, *And he will knoweth the hypocrites*, were revealed at Medina, and the rest at Mecca; and others believe the reverse.

⁴ See Sale, Prel. Disc. Sect. III. p. 64.

⁵ Literally, *That they shall be let alone*, &c.

⁶ This passage reprehends the impatience of some of the prophet's companions, under the hardships which they sustained in defence of their religion, and the losses which they suffered from the infidels; representing to them that such trials and afflictions were necessary to distinguish the sincere person from the hypocrite, and the steady from the wavering. Some suppose it to have been occasioned by the death of Mahja, Omar's slave, killed by an arrow at the battle of Bêr, which was deeply lamented and laid to heart by his wife and parents. (Al Beidâwi.)

hath commanded me; for he is the mighty, the wise. And we gave him Isaac and Jacob; and we placed among his descendants the gift of prophecy and the scriptures: and we gave him his reward in this world; and in the next he shall be *one* of the righteous. *We* also sent Lot; when he said unto his people, Do ye commit filthiness which no creature hath committed before you? Do ye approach *lustfully* unto men, and lay wait in the highways,¹ and commit wickedness in your assembly?² And the answer of his people was no other than that they said, Bring down the vengeance of God upon us, if thou speakest truth. Lot said, O LORD, defend me against the corrupt people. And when our messengers came unto Abraham with good tidings,³ they said, We will surely destroy the inhabitants of this city; for the inhabitants thereof are unjust doers. Abraham answered, Verily Lot dwelleth there. They replied, We well know who dwelleth therein: we will surely deliver him and his family except his wife; she shall be *one* of those who remain behind. And when our messengers came unto Lot, he was troubled for them, and his arm was straitened concerning them.⁴ But they said, Fear not, neither be grieved; for we will deliver thee and thy family, except thy wife; for she shall be *one* of those who remain behind. We will surely bring down upon the inhabitants of this city vengeance from heaven, for that they have been wicked doers: and we have left thereof a manifest sign⁵ unto people who understand. And unto the inhabitants of Madian we sent their brother Shoaib; and he said *unto them*, O my people, serve God, and expect the last day; and transgress not, acting corruptly in the earth. But they accused him of imposture; wherefore a storm from heaven⁶ assailed them, and in the morning they were found in their dwellings dead and prostrate. And *we also destroyed the tribes of Ad and Thamûd*; and *this* is well known unto you from *what yet remains* of their dwellings. And Satan prepared their works

¹ Some suppose the Sodomites robbed and murdered the wayfarers; others, that they unnaturally abused their bodies.

² Their meetings being scenes of obscenity and riot.

³ See Chap. XI. p. 219.

⁴ See *ibid*.

⁵ viz., The story of its destruction, handed down by common tradition; or else its ruins, or some other traces of this signal judgment; it being pretended that several of the stores which fell from heaven on those cities, are still to be seen, and that the ground where they stood appears burnt and blackish.

⁶ See Chap. VII. p. 152.

for them, and turned them aside from the way of truth; although they were sagacious people. And *we likewise destroyed* Karûn, and Pharaoh, and Haman. Moses came unto them with evident *miracles*; and they behaved themselves insolently in the earth: but they could not escape *our vengeance*. Every of them did we destroy in his sin. Against some of them we sent a violent wind:¹ some of them did a terrible noise from heaven destroy:² some of them did we cause the earth to swallow up:³ and some of them we drowned.⁴ Neither was God *disposed* to treat them unjustly; but they dealt unjustly with their own souls. The likeness of those who take *other* patrons besides God, is as the likeness of the spider, which maketh herself a house: but the weakest of *all* houses surely is the house of the spider; if they knew *this*. Moreover God knoweth what things they invoke, besides him; and he is the mighty, the wise. These similitudes do we propound unto men: but none understand them, except the wise. God hath created the heavens and the earth in truth: verily herein is a sign unto the true believers. (XXI.) ⁵ Rehearse that which hath been revealed unto thee of the book of the Koran: and be constant at prayer; for prayer preserveth a man from filthy crimes, and from that which is blameable; and the remembering of God is surely a most important duty. God knoweth that which ye do. Dispute not against those who have received the scriptures, unless in the mildest manner;⁶ except against such of them as behave injuriously towards you: and say, We believe in the *revelation* which hath been sent down unto us, and *also in that which* hath been sent down unto you; our God and your God is one, and unto him are we resigned. Thus have we sent down the book of the Koran unto thee: and they unto whom we have given the former scriptures, believe therein; and of these *Arabs also there is* who believeth therein: and none reject our signs except the *obstinate* infidels. Thou couldst not read any book before this; neither couldst thou write it with thy right hand: then had the gainsayers *justly* doubted of the divine

¹ The original word properly signifies a wind that drives the gravel and small stones before it; by which the storm, or shower of stones, which destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, seems to be intended.

² Which was the end of Ad and Thamûd.

³ As it did Karûn.

⁴ As the unbelievers in Noah's time. ⁵ Section XXI. begins here.

⁶ i.e., Without ill language or passion. This verse is generally supposed to have been abrogated by that of the sword; though some think it relates only to those who are in alliance with the Moslems.

of the day of meeting,¹ the day *whereon* they shall come forth out of their graves, and nothing of *what concerneth* them shall be hidden from God. Unto whom *will* the kingdom *belong* on that day? Unto the only, the almighty God. On that day shall every soul be rewarded according to its merits; *there shall be* no injustice *done* on that day. Verily God *will be* swift in taking an account. Wherefore warn them, O prophet, of the day which shall suddenly approach; when *men's hearts shall come up* to their throats, and strangle them. The ungodly shall have no friend or intercessor who shall be heard. God will know the deceitful eye, and that which their breasts conceal; and God will judge with truth: but the *false gods* which they invoke besides him, shall not judge at all; for God is he who heareth and seeth. Have they not gone through the earth and seen what hath been the end of those who were before them? They were more mighty than these in strength, and *left more considerable footsteps of their power* in the earth: yet God chastised them for their sins, and there was none to protect them from God. This *they suffered*, because their apostles had come unto them with evident signs, and they disbelieved: wherefore God chastised them; for he is strong, and severe in punishing. We heretofore sent Moses with our signs and manifest power, unto Pharaoh, and Haman, and Karûn; and they said, *He is a sorcerer and a liar*. And when he came unto them with the truth from us, they said, Slay the sons of those who have believed with him, and save their daughters alive.² But the stratagem of the infidels *was* no other than vain. And Pharaoh said, Let me alone, that I may kill Moses,³ and let him call upon his Lord: verily I fear lest he change your religion, or cause violence to appear in the earth.⁴ And Moses said *unto his people*, Verily I have recourse unto my LORD, and your LORD, to *defend me* against every proud person, who believeth not in the day of account. And a man *who was* a true believer, of the family of Pharaoh,⁵ and

¹ When the Creator and his creatures (see Chap. VI. p. 120), the inhabitants of heaven and of earth, the false deities and their worshippers, the oppressor and the oppressed, the labourer and his works, shall meet each other. (Al Beidâwî, Jallâl.)

² i.e., Pursue the resolution which has been formerly taken, and execute it more strictly for the future. See Chap. VII. p. 155.

³ For they advised him not to put Moses to death, lest it should be thought he was not able to oppose him by dint of argument. (Al Beidâwî.)

⁴ By raising of commotions and seditions, in order to introduce his new religion.

⁵ This seems to be the same person who is mentioned on p. 379.

concealed his faith, said, Will ye put a man to death, because he saith, God is my LORD; seeing, he is come unto you with evident signs from your LORD? If he be a liar, on him *will the punishment of his falsehood light*; but if he speaketh the truth, some of *those judgments* with which he threateneth you, will fall upon you: verily God directeth not him who is a transgressor or a liar. O my people, the kingdom is yours this day; and ye are conspicuous in the earth: but who shall defend us from the scourge of God, if it come unto us?¹ Pharaoh said, I only propose to you what I think to be *most expedient*: and I guide you only into the right path. And he who had believed, said, O my people, verily I fear for you a day like that of the confederates *against the prophets in former times*; a condition like that of the people of Noah, and the tribes of Ad and Thamûd, and of those who *have lived* after them: for God willeth not that any injustice be done unto his servants. O my people, verily I fear for you the day whereon men shall call unto one another:² the day whereon ye shall be turned back *from the tribunal, and driven to hell*: then shall ye have none to protect you against God. And he whom God shall cause to err, shall have no director. Joseph came unto you, before Moses, with evident signs; but ye ceased not to doubt of the religion which he preached unto you, until, when he died, ye said, God will by no means send *another* apostle, after him. Thus doth God cause him to err, who is a transgressor and a sceptic. They who dispute against the signs of God, without any authority which hath come unto them, are in great abomination with God, and with those who believe. Thus doth God seal up every proud and stubborn heart. And Pharaoh said, O Haman, build me a tower, that I may reach the tracts, the tracts of heaven, and may view the God of Moses,³ for I verily think him to be a liar. And thus the evil of his work was prepared for Pharaoh, and he turned aside from the right path: and the stratagems of Pharaoh ended only in loss. And he who had believed, said, O my people, follow me: I will guide you into the right way. O my people, verily this present life is but a temporary enjoyment; but the life to come is

¹ See the speech of Gamaliel to the Jewish Sanhedrim, when the apostles were brought before them. (Acts v. 38, 39.)

² i.e., The day of judgment, when the inhabitants of paradise and of hell shall enter into mutual discourse: when the latter shall call for help, and the seducers and the seduced shall cast the blame upon each other. (Al Beidâwî, Jallâloddin.)

³ See Chap. XXVIII. p. 372.

Dead Sea peril: sinkholes swallow up the unwary

By JOSEPH MARKS - 2 days ago

EIN GEDI, Israel (AP) — Eli Raz was peering into a narrow hole in the Dead Sea shore when the earth opened up and swallowed him. Fearing he would never be found alive, he scribbled his will on an old postcard.

After 14 hours a search party pulled him from the 10-meter-(30 foot)-deep hole unhurt, and five years later the 69-year-old geologist is working to save others from a similar fate, leading an effort to map the sinkholes that are spreading on the banks of the fabled saltwater lake.

These underground craters can open up in an instant, sucking in whatever lies above and leaving the surrounding area looking like an earthquake zone.

The phenomenon, Raz said, stems from a dire water shortage, compounded in recent years by tourism and chemical industries as well as a growing population. "This is the most remarkable evidence of the brutal interference of humans in the Dead Sea," he said.

The parched moonscape, famous as the site of biblical Sodom and Gomorra, is the lowest point on earth and runs more than 60 miles through Israel and the West Bank.

Large sections of the coast are fenced off and signposted in Hebrew and English: "danger, open pits" and "sinkhole area ahead." But it's too expensive to inspect every place for danger. Just two months ago an Israeli hiker wandered into an area that had no warning signs and was critically injured when he fell into a sinkhole.

While such accidents are rare, Raz says there are up to 3,000 open sinkholes along the coast and likely just as many that haven't burst open yet. And they're having a big impact on Israeli development plans.

The collapsing terrain has forced authorities to close a campground, date groves and a small naval base, and to scrap plans for 5,000 new hotel rooms, said Galit Cohen, director of environmental planning at the Ministry of the Environment.

The holes, also found on the Jordanian side of the sea, are the result of the Dead Sea having shrunk by a third since the 1960s when Israel and Jordan built plants to divert water flowing through its main tributary, the Jordan River.

The holes form when a subterranean salt layer that once bordered the sea is dissolved by underground fresh water that follows the receding Dead Sea waters.

The main road along the shore has been torn apart by streams whose energy is increased because they are flowing farther to reach the receding sea, and all construction along the strip between sea and highway is banned, Cohen said.

Both Israel and Jordan evaporate Dead Sea water to extract its phosphates and have built hotels along the coasts for the thousands of tourists who come in search of the curative powers of Dead Sea mud, or simply for the experience of floating unsinkably in its salt-saturated waters.

Only micro-organisms survive in the Dead Sea, but indigenous species of fish, amphibians and snails live in small nearby ponds fed by underground springs, and these could be wiped out as the Dead Sea gets smaller, Raz said.

Many of the changes are masked at the pricey resorts on the sea's southern end, which lie on the banks of a large artificial pond built by the mineral industry. But around Ein Gedi, the kibbutz or communal farm where Raz lives, the Dead Sea's shrinkage is evident.

Twenty-five years ago Ein Gedi built a spa by the sea. Now it's a 1.5-km (one-mile) trolley ride from the water.

"Any visitor that's come back for a second visit in these last 10 years would see a dramatic change," said Gidon Bromberg, Israel director of Friends of the Earth Middle East, an advocacy group. "The sea has run away from the cliffs and it's exposed kilometers of mud and sea floor."

No quick solution is in sight.

The World Bank is studying a proposal to dig a canal from the Red Sea, more than 160 kilometers (100 miles) south, to replenish the Dead Sea's waters. But with costs estimated at up to \$15 billion, there's little optimism it will happen.

Without a solution, the sea is expected to shrink to lose another third of its area over the next century.

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In this photo taken Thursday, May 28, 2009, a warning sign is seen near the Dead Sea coast. Geologist Eli Raz says the sinkholes phenomenon, underground craters that can burrow to the surface in an instant, sucking in whatever lies above, stems from a dire water shortage, compounded in recent years by a growing population and robust tourism and chemical industries. (AP Photo/Dan Bality)

