

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Korach	6 July 2019	3 Tammuz 5779	Num. 16:1-18:32	1Sam 11:14-12:22	John 19:1-17

In Bemidbar (Numbers) 16:14-15 says, ““Also, you have not brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you bore out the eyes of these men? We are not coming up!” And Moshe became very displeased, and said to יהוה, “Do not respect their offering. I have not taken one donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them.”

The words, “bore out the eyes” means “blind.” The Torah says, “For a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise.” (Devarim 16:19) Datan and Aviram who joined Korach in his rebellion against Moshe saw an opportunity for personal gain. Thus, they were saying, “Even if Moshe bribe us, we won’t see him.” Looking beyond their words, we can discover their motive.

We studied that Datan and Aviram were a constant thorn on Moshe’s “rear.” In Shemot (Exodus), they were fighting against each other when Moshe stepped in to stop the fight. (Shemot 2:13) The sages taught that they were against every decisions Moshe made. So, in this instance they were saying, “If Moshe bribes us, then we will see him.” This was the reason Moshe was outraged and said, “I have been the judge of the entire people and had many opportunities to succumb to greed, yet it never dawned upon me to violate the Torah and I have not taken even a single donkey of theirs. How do they have the audacity to think that I would consider such a thing?”

Moshe said to Korach and his followers, “By this you know that YHWH has sent me to do all these works, that they are not from my own heart.” (Bedmidbar 16:28) When Hashem appeared to Moshe and commanded that he is to lead the people out of Mitzrayim, he was reluctant to do so. Moshe came out with all the excuses (Shemot Chapter 4) for seven days. “And the displeasure of YHWH burned against Moshe.” (ibid 14)

Originally, the post of Kohen Gadol (High Priest) was to go to Moshe. Because he resisted following Hashem’s commands, he lost the post of Kohen Gadol that was given to him to Aharon. During the seven days of inauguration of the Mishkan, Moshe served as a Kohen Gadol and hoped that he would retain his position for life. However, on the eighth day, Aharon became the Kohen Gadol.

One of the complaints of Korach and his followers was, “Why did Moshe make decisions on his own and appoint his brother as Kohen Gadol?” Moshe’s response was, “I did not do anything on my own. All my actions were in accordance to Hashem’s instructions (Rashi, 16:3, 28). ‘It was not from my heart’ that Aharon should become Kohen Gadol since the position was originally meant for me and I greatly desired it.”¹

Onkelos uses ‘*arei la meire’uti*’ in place of ‘*ki lo milibi*’ (not from my heart). In Aramaic *meire’uti* means *ratzon* (will). Thus, he (Moshe) was telling them, “The selection of Aharon as Kohen Gadol was not my choice, and actually contrary to my desires.”

In Bedmidbar 16:30, Moshe wished for a strange death upon Korach and his followers. When they sinned by quarreling with him, they were actually defying Hashem’s will. If they were to die immediately, then they would not have time to repent, thereby losing their place in Olam Haba (World to Come). Therefore,

¹ Vedibarta Bam, Bamidbar, Korach, p. 132

he prayed that as they descend alive to the pit, he hoped that they will regret their wrongdoings and do *teshuvah* (return, repentance). Such evidence is found in Tehillim 42-49, 84, 85, 87, and 88 which were written by the sons of Korach.

In verse 32, it says “And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up.” The sages wonder it should have been enough by simply saying, “And the earth opened and swallowed them up.” Why add “her mouth”? We have discussed in numerous places that Hashem is ‘measure for measure’ (מידה כנגד מידה, *middah keneged middah*). Since Korach opened his mouth and caused *lashon hara* (evil tongue; slander), he was paid for his sin by the earth opening ‘her mouth.’

Continuing in verse 32, “And their households (וְאֶת-בְּתֵי־הֵם, *ve'-et-bat-tei-hem*) while the Yisraelites were in the desert, they lived in *tents* (אֹהֲלֵיהֶם, *a·ha·lei·hem*), why the change? The sages explain that when they lived in their tents in the Wilderness during their journey. Once they entered the Eretz Yisrael, they would live in their house, a permanent structure. Spiritually, it means that they were in transition by living in their ‘tents’, but their sin caused their death for a long time in their ‘house.’

There are two thoughts whether Korach died when “the earth opened her mouth and swallowed” him up. One is that Korach did not die with his followers (v. 32), but he died much later in the plague (Sanhedrin 110a) as said in verse 35, “And fire came forth from YHWH, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men that offered the incense.” Korach did not die but he was burned. Because Eleazar collected only 250 fire-pans.

Another opinion is that Korach was burnt and swallowed up into the earth. If Korach was only burned, then Natan and Aviram, and the rest of Korach’s followers would complain, “Why were we burned as followers of Korach, while Korach himself was not?” Therefore, Korach received both punishments. The fire of *ketoret* (incense) burned his *neshamah* (physical body), and his body rolled into the open mouth of the earth. Thus, all his people witnessed him receiving his just punishment.