

May 5, 2019 - Num. 16:1-50 - Rebellion of Korah
Torah Reading: Numbers 16:1-50 - Rebellion of Korah
Psalm 102:13-29
Haftarah: Hosea 10:2-12

Korah's Rebellion

This is the only important event related during the 38 years of "wandering" in the wilderness. Remember that those involved have been cursed and look toward a bleak future of dying in the wilderness. The Israelites might have been in more of position to doubt Moses' leadership, and ready to listen to an alternative.

Also remember that Moses and Korah were first cousins.

Numbers 16:1 - "Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men:"

Korah was a Levite, from the Kohathites. The others were from the tribe of Reuben. Both had issues with Moses concerning the priesthood.

As Levites, shouldn't they be priests too? Perhaps they didn't like the fact that they had been "given" to Aaron and his sons. Korah might have been angry because Moses had conferred the government of the Kohathites on Elizaphan, the son of Uzziel, the youngest son of Kohath, when he himself, Korah, was the eldest son of an elder son of Kohath.

And Reuben, as eldest son of Jacob of the 12 Tribes, shouldn't he have had *primogeniture*, inheriting the ancient custom of the firstborn being the priest of the family? Instead, the birthright had been taken from them and had been given to Joseph and the tribe of Judah. Both Kohath and Reuben were encamped on the south side of the Tabernacle, so it was easy for them to commiserate together.

Ibn Ezra says they both suspected Joshua of using his influence to favor his tribe, the Ephraimites, over others.

Numbers 16:2-3 - "And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?"

The Hebrew here really says "each individual in the congregation are holy," not because they are a common group, part of Israel. They felt this holiness conferred superiority and privilege rather than a call to shoulder responsibilities and duties. God had actually said, "Ye shall be holy to me" (**Leviticus 19:2**).

His presence among them is meant to draw them toward holiness, not confer it wholesale.

Rashi - "all... are holy" - because all of them heard [the] words [of the commandments] at Sinai from the mouth of the Almighty. Not only you heard at Sinai, "I am the Lord, your God"; the entire congregation heard it. - [Midrash Tanchuma Korach 4]

Korah's argument here is that whatever is dedicated for use in the Tabernacle is considered holy. (See **Numbers 16:37** below on the censers) The Children of Israel had pledged themselves to God at Mount Sinai, and thus were holy. But there is a moral aspect to holiness besides the liturgical one.

Korah and his company considered themselves holy "without exception, from the tops of their heads to the soles of their feet" according to the Malbim (19th century Polish rabbi).

According to tradition, in a theatrical display of their "total holiness," the 250 princes show up wearing prayer shawls of woven wool dyed solid blue, rather than the single ribbon or thread of blue that was required. Then, Korah taunted Moses by demanding, "Do these prayer shawls still require a single blue thread?"

(Recall that this was a criticism of the **Pharisees**, that "they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments. And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues" - **Matthew 23:5-6**).

These new prayer shawls focused the eye on the wearer, instead of reminding the wearer of the Law and consequently pointing to repentance for one's failure to keep it. Rebellion will always lead away from the need for repentance.

Korah and the others felt they were undervalued and overlooked, and this bred jealousy.

"took" - Targum: He took himself to one side...

Rashi - He took himself to one side to dissociate himself from the congregation. "Why does your heart take you away?" (**Job 15:12**), meaning, it removes you, to isolate you from others (Midrash Tanchuma Korach 2).

The 250 men of renown were mostly from the tribe of Reuben.

This is the "gainsaying of Korah" mentioned by Jude.

- **Jude 11** - "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah."

"gainsaying" = *antilogia* - dispute, contradiction, speaking against, strife, rebellion

Korah's Tactic

Jewish commentary presents Korah as a classic populist demagogue and rabble-rouser, skilled in oratory.

Rashi observes:

"The whole night he repaired to the tribes and seduced them: 'Do you imagine that I am concerned only for myself? I am concerned for you all. They are monopolizing all the high offices: him the kingship, his brother the priesthood!' - until all of them were won over."

- **Psalm 1:1** - "Happy is the man who hath not walked in the counsel of the wicked and in the way of the sinners hath not stood and in the seat of scorners hath not sat."

Commenting on this verse the Midrash (Shoher Tov) states: In the seat of scorners...; this refers to Korah who made scorn of Moses and Aaron. What did Korah do? He assembled all the congregation as it said: "And Korah gathered all the congregation against them." He began to speak to them words of scorn, saying: There was once a widow in my neighborhood who had two fatherless daughters and one field. When she came to plough, Moses said to her: Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together; (Deut. 22, 10). When she came to sow, he said to her Thou shalt not sow thy field with divers seeds; (Leviticus 19, 19). When she came to reap and stack the corn, he said to her, Leave gleanings (leket) the forgotten sheaf (shikhehah) and the corner of the field (pe'ah) for the poor. When she came to thresh, he said to her, Give tithes, priestly dues, the first and second tithes. She justified heaven's pronouncement and gave him. What did this poor women do? She went and sold her field, and purchased with the proceeds two lambs, to clothe herself from its shearing and enjoy its products. As soon as they gave birth, Aaron came and said to her: Give me the firstborn, since the Holy One blessed be He hath said: Every firstborn that shall be born of thy herd and flock, the male one, shalt thou consecrate to the Lord thy God;. She justified heaven's pronouncement and gave him the offspring. The time came for shearing and she sheared them - came Aaron and said to her, Give me the first of the shearing since the Holy One blessed be He said (Deut. 18, 3):The first of thy grain, thy wine and oil and the first of the shearing of thy flock shalt thou give to him;. Thereupon she said: Since I have no more strength to withstand this man, I shall slaughter them and eat them. As soon as she had slaughtered them, Aaron came and said to her: Give me the shoulder, two cheeks and maw (Deut. 18, 3). Whereupon she said: Even after I have slaughtered them I am not delivered from his hand. Let them then be forbidden (herem) my use. Said Aaron to her: In that case it is all mine since the Holy One said:Every devoted thing (herem - expression of prohibition, exclusion from ordinary usage) in Israel shall be thine; (Num. 18, 14). He took them, departed and left her weeping with her two daughters. Such was the lot that befell this unfortunate woman! So much they do in the name of the Holy One, blessed be He!

The point was that God and His Law were not to blame, but Moses and Aaron who had distorted its regulations to suit their own needs, and that of their officials.

<http://www.jewishagency.org/nechama-leibowitz/content/23905>

Jealousy vs. Humility

Compare this rebellion event with the near-rebellion at the Last Supper:

- **Luke 22:24** - "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." (All this while eating unleavened, un-"puffed up" bread)

Jesus had already dealt with this in Matthew 18, but they had forgotten:

- **Matthew 18:1**- "At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

A little later He linked this to their authority as royal priests, who carry the gospel of forgiveness of sins:

- **Matthew 18:18** - "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

This all surely links back to a reference to **Numbers 16** and Korah's jealousy over the priesthood.

We can't be priests in His kingdom if we are clamoring for the chief seats. Jesus washes feet. Leaders must always be servants. Humility is the key to our service and ministry.

Numbers 16:4 - "And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face:"

Targum: through shame, blushing at their sin, and through fear of the divine displeasure

Rashi - "and fell on his face": because of the rebellion, for this was already their fourth offense (in which he interceded). [When] they sinned with the calf, "Moses pleaded" (Exod. 32:11); by the episode of the complainers, "Moses prayed" (11:2); with the spies, "Moses said to God, 'But the Egyptians will hear...'" (14:13), but now, at Korah's rebellion, he became disheartened [literally, his hands were weakened]. This is comparable to a prince who sinned against his father, and his [father's] friend placated the king on his behalf, once, twice, and three times. When he offended the fourth time, the friend became disheartened, and he said, "How much more can I trouble the king? Perhaps he will no longer accept my petition." - [Midrash Tanchuma 4, Num. Rabbah 18: 6]

Moses - the most humble man on earth - is being accused of lifting himself up over the

others. But Korah and his company were actually rebelling against God, since it was at God's command Moses was chosen and Aaron's family were made priests.

Numbers 16:5 - "And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even to morrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD to morrow: and it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi."

Perhaps Moses was hoping they would remember what happened to Nadab and Abihum, who, though sons of the high priest, yet offering strange fire, were consumed by fire (**Numbers 10:1**) and hopefully repent. But no...

"sons of Levi" - Possibly, Dathan and the Reubenites were no longer around when Moses finished his prayer and supplications, because later he has to call for them to come up.

Rashi thinks Moses is here addressing the whole tribe of Levi, lest they listen to Korah, join the rebellion and perish with him.

Numbers 16:8-11 - "And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also? For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him?"

Perhaps this is one reason the section "It Would Suffice Us" is included in the Passover Haggadah. It begins, "How many are the goodly favors for which we are indebted to the All-Including."

"and seek ye the priesthood also?" - i.e. the high priesthood, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan state. This opens the true cause of their discontent and rebellion; they could not be satisfied with being the ministers of the priests, but wanted to be priests themselves, and Korah perhaps to be high priest.

Breaking off Commuication

We hear no more from Korah. The Sages say this was because he was clever in his wickedness. "If I answer him, I know that he, being a wise man, will outwit me in his arguments and I will be forced to become reconciled with him. Better I should not enter into argument with him." (Tanhuma)

Dathan and Adiram Refuse to Come Up

Numbers 16:14 - "And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up: Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up."

"wilt thou put out the eyes of these men?" - they imagine a punishment that ironically fits their situation: blinded by the deceptions of their own heart. Their blindness is evidenced by calling Egypt "a land flowing with milk and honey."

And further, the Midrash says "they were tripped up by their own mouth, and there is a covenant made with the lips." Sort of like a Freudian slip.

i.e. Because they would not "come up" they would "go down" into the underworld.

Moses' Response

Numbers 16:15 - "And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them."

He is not able to even dialogue with either Korah or Dathan, let alone attempt to talk them out of their design.

Because they would not speak, their will be consigned to the silence of the grave:

- **Psalm 115:17** - "The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence."

Perhaps Moses recalls his first meeting with Yahweh at the burning bush, and his hesitancy to speak:

"... they will not listen to my voice, they will say, 'God never appeared to you'" (**Exodus 4:1**)

The Trial

Numbers 16:16-17 - "And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, to morrow: And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer."

The Targum of Jonathan says these men stood on one side (of the door of the tabernacle), and Moses and Aaron stood on the other side of it.

Moses and Aaron Intercede

Numbers 16:20-22 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation?"

Apparently Moses felt this was an example of a congregation "sinning through ignorance" since Korah had deceived the people.

Compare David's plea:

- **2 Samuel 24:17** - "...Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house."

So God arranges another test, this time for the whole congregation of Israel:

Numbers 16:26 - "And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins."

Also, touch nothing of theirs; not carry off anything belonging to them along with their own, it being all devoted to destruction.

The Danger of Being Double-Minded

To separate the rebels from the rest, He requires those loyal to Him to take a physical action to prove it - to get up and move away from the tents Dathan, Abiram and Korah. This is also a response to Moses and Aaron's intercession, lest all the people be consumed.

So far, the people had neither joined with Korah nor opposed him. They were waiting to see what happened. The Sages condemned this attitude, pointing to Haran, Abraham's brother. He chose to wait and see if God rescued Abraham from Nimrod's furnace. "If Abraham comes out alive, I shall proclaim my monotheism like Abraham. If not, I shall support Nimrod. Abraham came out unscathed, but when Haran was thrown into the furnace, he was burnt up.

Elijah confronted a similar situation:

- **1 Kings 18:21** - "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him."

Korah had set up a separate tent where he and his companions plotted. The people moved away from it, and Korah, Dathan and Abiram returned to their own family tents. They brought out their wives and children to stand in defiance of what Moses had decreed.

Judgment on Korah's Rebellion

Numbers 16:30 - "But if the LORD make (*bara* - create) a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD."

Numbers 16:31-33 - "And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation."

The Rabbis say (Pirke Abot, c. 5. sect. 6. Pirke Eliezer, c. 19.), the mouth of the earth, or the opening of the earth, was created from the days of the creation, that is, it was determined or decreed from earliest times.

Josephus (Antiqu. l. 4. c. 3. Sect. 2.): "The ground clave asunder that was under them; on which they stood, not from any natural cause, as by subterranean volcano, forcibly making their way and bursting the earth, and so getting vent, which has been thought to be the cause of earthquakes; but this was by the immediate hand and almighty power of God, and came to pass just as Moses suggested it would, and as soon as he had uttered his words, which made it the more observable."

All Israel fled at the sight: The Targum of Jonathan says "and all Israel that were round about them fled, because of the terror of their voice, when they cried and said, the Lord is righteous and his judgments truth, and truth are the words of Moses his servant, but we are wicked who have rebelled against him"

Numbers 16:36 - "And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense."

'Sinners against their own souls' - A Sign for the Brazen Altar

Numbers 16:38 - "The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel."

These brass censers were different from the ones used by Aaron and his sons, which were silver, except on Yom Kippur when a golden censer was used by the High Priest.

Numbers 16:40 - "To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses."

See Uzziah, who though a king, was punished for this (**2 Chronicles 26:18**).

- **2 Timothy 2:25** - " In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God

peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth"

Israel in Consternation and Unbelief

Numbers 16:41-42 - "But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD. And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared."

Thus, Korah's slander against Moses and Aaron continued in the minds of the people.

The Targum of Jonathan adds they intended to Kill Moses and Aaron.

The glory of the Pillar of Cloud appears to encourage Moses and Aaron, and to come between them and the people, as it came between Israel and Egypt at the Red Sea.

Atonement Offered as the Plague Kills 14,700

Numbers 16:46 - "And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed."

"put fire therein from off the altar" - the coals of the altar were touched by the blood of sacrifice, a type of Christ's blood shed at the cross - the only path to atonement. There was no time for a proper sin offering.

Incense is a type of prayer and intercession.

- **Psalm 141:2** - "Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."

Aaron *ran* to provide atonement for the people who had intended to kill him.

The Targum of Jonathan says, "he stood in prayer in the middle, and made a partition, with his censer, between the dead and living"

Bottom Line

The story of Korah's rebellion is not to teach that spiritual leaders can't be questioned or held accountable. In fact, vigorous debate, disputes and often disagreement were common in the synagogue and later in the early church. One such controversy resulted

in the naming of deacons to feed the Greek speaking widows (**Acts 6:1-6**). Further, we are all called to exhort one another, regardless of our office or gifts.

Things only got really ugly when Korah went silent, and Dathan and his crowd refused to "come up" and talk. There was not even a chance of a discussion after that.

So what's the distinction in Korah's case?

"Every controversy that is pursued in a heavenly cause, is destined to be perpetuated; and that which is not pursued in a heavenly cause is not destined to be perpetuated. Which can be considered a controversy pursued in a heavenly cause? This is the controversy of Hillel and Shammai. And that not pursued in a heavenly cause? This is the controversy of Korah and his congregation."

- *Ethics of the Fathers, 5, 17*

Here's a better translation:

"Every argument for the sake of heaven will in the end be of permanent value, but every argument not for the sake of heaven will not endure. Which is an argument for the sake of heaven? The argument between Hillel and Shammai. Which is an argument not for the sake of heaven? The argument of Korach and his company."

Menachem ben Solomon Meiri or Hameiri (1249–1306) was a famous Catalan rabbi, explains:

" 'The arguments between Hillel and Shammai': In their debates, one of them would render a decision and the other would argue against it, out of a desire to discover the truth, not out of cantankerousness or a wish to prevail over his fellow. That is why when he was right, the words of the person who disagreed, endured. An argument not for the sake of heaven was that of Korach and his company, for they came to undermine Moses, our master, may he rest in peace, and his position, out of envy and contentiousness and ambition for victory."

Thus, a controversy or disagreement in which all sides are committed to God's will and are united in a common mission to discover truth is different from one motivated by selfishness, jealousy, for personal advancement or conducted by slandering others.

Note that instead of saying the controversy was "between Korah and Moses," it says "of Korah and his congregation," - meaning that each of the rebels had a selfish motivation and they would end up fighting among themselves eventually.

Rashi - From here we derive that one should not persist in [that kind of] a dispute, because Moses sought them out to conciliate them with peaceful words. — [Mid. Tanchuma Korach 10, Sanh. 110a]

Constructive vs. Destructive Debate

The Talmud lists literally thousands of *machlokot*, conflicts or disagreements, among the rabbis. The rabbis saw engaging in *machloket* debate as a critical part of uncovering truth. The key, however, is to engage in *machloket* in a constructive way—one that preserves the relationship.

The rabbis used the term "*ba'alei Machloket*" or "masters or lords of dissension," for those who "set all their words upon *din* [strict law] alone" rather than *din* and *chesed* (mercy, or lovingkindness).

They look back at an incident in the first century, as rebellion against the Romans was growing, when the Zealots sided with the hard-nosed House of Shimmei, and the more conciliatory House of Hillel became unpopular. The House of Shammai proposed that all commerce and communication between Jew and Gentile should be completely prohibited. The House of Hillel disagreed, and the Sanhedrin could not come to an agreement. So Eleazar ben Ananias, the Temple captain and a leader of the militant Zealots, invited the students of both schools to meet at his house; Eleazar placed armed men at the door, and instructed them to let no one leave the meeting. During the "discussions" many of the House of Hillel were killed, some say up to 3,000. Later Jewish history came to look back on this as a day of great misfortune.

After the destruction of the Temple, the House of Hillel prevailed in shaping the rabbinical movement.

The Talmud says: "The law is in accord with the school of Hillel] because they were kindly and modest, because they studied not only their own rulings but also those of the school of Shammai, and because they taught the words of the school of Shammai before their own."

Like the generation that led to the destruction of the Second Temple, Korah's discourse is one of total "rightness." Such people bring ruin on the world, the Talmud says. Inflexible and unyielding, they are incapable of "going beyond the strict line of the law."

Korah refused even to enter into a *machlokot* with Moses. Korah felt he was so "right" there was no possibility or reason for discussion. Though Korah and his company spoke the language of equality, what they wanted was power and control.

Willingness to Admit You're Wrong

Shimon the Imsonite, a contemporary of Rabbi Akiva, held that no word in the Torah is superfluous. What then of the word *eth*, whose only function is to indicate the object of a verb, but which has no meaning in and of itself? Shimon's answer was simple. In each case, *eth* came to include something not explicitly stated in the text. He used this principle successfully in a long series of interpretations – until he came to the command, "You shall fear [*eth*] the Lord your God." Here, he suddenly realized, the principle broke down. What else could one include in this verse? To place the fear of something else alongside the fear of God was surely blasphemy.

His disciples said to him: "Master, what is to become of all the *ethin* you have interpreted?" He replied, "Just as I received reward for the exposition, so I will receive reward for the retraction."

Being defeated by the truth is the only form of defeat that is also a victory. But in contrast, Korah was only interested in winning.

Leaving Space

As fallen creatures we have to realize that our understanding has gaps.

Rabbi Nahman says that God had to retract some of His presence to give space to create the universe. Therefore, in discourse, we must leave a vacated space, suspend our pre-existing biases, in order for the possibility of something new to be created.

Moses was already broken in many ways. Understanding he was a man "slow of speech" (**Exodus 3:11**) and of "uncircumcised lips" (**Exodus 6:12**), he was nevertheless still willing to talk, and to listen.

Korah was ultimately unable to do this - to speak and then to listen and really hear. One writer calls him "rigid with selfhood." He imagined himself as already whole and holy, and thus gave up the possibility of repentance. Therefore the Zohar says Korah "repudiated the creation of the world."

If the brokenness - the yearning within - that allows the wholeness of the Sabbath and the Holy Spirit to flood in and fill us - if that is missing and we think we're already whole, we are trapped in inner silence and death.

If we, like the church at Laodicea, think we "have need of nothing," we'll never realize that instead we're "wretched, poor, blind and naked" (**Revelation 3:17**).

Korah leaves no room for "creation," and so God "creates a new thing" by having the earth open up and swallow him.

Charitable Reasoning

To engage in honest "*machloket*" we first must ensure that we are "reading" or hearing another's position in as charitable a light as the actual articulation of the position allows, in the best possible light, not the worst - i.e. in a way that renders it as reasonable and plausible as possible while remaining true to the other's actual words and presentation. Only then should we interrogate the position, allowing for the strong possibility that we might eventually reject it.

At the same time, both Jewish and Christian thought encourages us to "read" people the same way.

This is the thrust of **Philippians 4:8** - "...whatsoever things are of good report; if there

be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think (*logizomai* - reason, reckon) on these things."

Recall that on Lag BaOmer, on the 33rd day of Counting the Omer after Passover, the rabbis celebrated the end of a plague that killed 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiba. The plague was sent by God, they say, because they did not show proper respect to one another.

See more on this:

<http://jtr.shanti.virginia.edu/volume-8-number-1/on-making-texts-and-people-the-best-they-can-be-a-reading-of-talmud-bavli-hagigah-7a/>

<http://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5768-korach-arguments-for-the-sake-of-heaven/>

The Children of Korah

The only bright spot in this story is the tradition that the children of Korah did not die (See **Numbers 26:11** - "Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not."). At the last minute they repented, according to tradition. Teetering on the ledge at the precipice, Korah's descendants regained the quality of speech that Korah had lost, and, more than that, they sang!

Psalm 88 is one of the songs "of the sons of Korah"-

- **Psalm 88:4-5** - "I am counted with them that go down into the pit: I am as a man that hath no strength: Free among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more: and they are cut off from thy hand."

So, from the destructive self-righteousness of Korah, children emerge who fill the Temple with song throughout Israel's history.

[See the book "Bewilderments: Reflections on the Book of Numbers" by Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg]