

BEMIDBAR

NASO

BEHAALOTKHA

SHELAH

KORAH

HUKKAT

BALAK

PINHAS

MATTOT-MASEI



June 22 - 28, 2025 כ"ו סיון - ב' תמוז תשפ"ה



קֹרַח בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- ◆ Korah leads a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon. He is joined by Datan, Aviram, and 250 others.
- ◆ Moshe sets up a test. Aharon and the 250 others will bring קֶטֶרֶת (ketoret, incense) offerings in מַחֲטֹת (mahtot, firepans). Everyone will see which ketoret God chooses.
- ◆ The earth opens up and swallows Korah and those who stuck with him. A fire consumes the 250 people holding the mahtot.
- ◆ The mahtot from the ketoret test are hammered into a cover for the מִזְבֵּחַ (mizbei'ah, altar) as a reminder of this event.
- ◆ Benei Yisrael continue to complain, and God sends a plague. Aharon stands in front of the people to protect them, and he uses the same ketoret to stop the plague.
- ◆ Moshe collects a staff from each שֵׁבֶט (shevet, tribe). Aharon's staff represents Shevet Levi. The next morning, Aharon's staff miraculously blossoms with almonds.
- ◆ It's clear that God chooses the כֹּהֲנִים (kohanim, priests) and לְוִיִּם (Levi'im, Levites). The parashah describes some gifts and privileges they receive in exchange for their work in the mishkan.

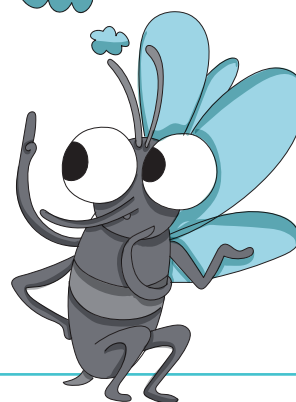




מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Why would anybody take Korah's side against Moshe? Wasn't everyone aware of how much Moshe had done for them?

This midrash suggests that Korah took things Moshe really said (like actual mitzvot) and then twisted them or took them out of context to make them sound really bad.



Bzzzz
A lot of midrashim are
bugged by something
unusual in the Torah text

Midrash Tehillim 1

Korah said to the people: There was a widow with two daughters in my neighborhood. She owned a field.

She tried to plow, and Moshe told her not to plow with a mix of animals.

She tried to plant, and Moshe told her not to plant kilayim (a mix of seeds).

She tried to gather her crops, and Moshe told her to leave the leket, shikhehah, and pe'ah (the dropped sheaves and the corner of the field for people in need).

She tried to create storage for her harvest, and Moshe told her to donate all kinds of terumah and ma'aser (gifts for kohanim and Levi'im).

She accepted all these rules and gave it all to him...

By the end, she and her two daughters were left crying.

מדרש תהלים א

אָמַר לָהֶן: אֶלְמָנָה אַחַת הָיְתָה
בְּשִׁכְוֹנָתִי וְעַמָּה שְׁתֵּי נְעוּרוֹת יְתוּמוֹת
וְהָיְתָה לָהּ שָׂדֶה אַחַת.

בָּאתָה לְחַרֵּשׁ, אָמַר לָהּ מֹשֶׁה: "לֹא
תַּחְרֹשׁ בְּשׁוֹר וּבַחֲמֹר יַחְדָּו" (דְּבָרִים
כב:ל).

בָּאתָה לְזָרַע, אָמַר לָהּ מֹשֶׁה: "שְׂדֶדֶךְ
לֹא תִזְרַע כָּלֵאִים" (וִיקְרָא יט:ט).

בָּאתָה לְקַצֹּר וּלַעֲשׂוֹת עֲרֵמָה, אָמַר
לָהּ: הַנִּיחִי לְקַט שְׂכָחָה וּפֶאֶה.

בָּאתָה לַעֲשׂוֹת גֶּרֶן, אָמַר לָהּ תָנִי
תְּרוּמָה וְתְרוּמַת מַעֲשֵׂר וּמַעֲשֵׂר
רִאשׁוֹן וּמַעֲשֵׂר שֵׁנִי.

הִצְדִּיקָה עָלֶיךָ אֶת הַדִּין וְנִתְּנָה לוֹ...

הַנִּיחָה בֹכָה הִיא וּשְׁתֵּי בָנוֹתֶיהָ.

According to this midrash, Korah made up a story in which the mitzvot—which aim to create a more just society—are actually cruel.

In many places, the Torah specifies that we have to protect widows and orphans (for example, Shemot 22:21, Devarim 24:19, and Yirmiyahu 7:6). But Korah doesn't mention that perspective in his story!

- ◆ When someone only presents one side of a story, or tells a story with a particular agenda, we call that "bias." What do you think the midrash is trying to teach us about bias? Can you find pesukim in the parashah where it seems that Korah is saying something kind of true, but maybe out of context or with a particular bias?
- ◆ In your life, can you think of ways that different people view the same facts in different ways—or might leave certain details out of a story—because of bias?



Send us your thoughts or questions from learning the parashah. We'll write back to you, and some will get published in future issues of Devash! Write to us at devash@hadar.org



פְּרָשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

Korah and his followers reject Moshe and Aharon's authority. Here's Moshe's reaction:

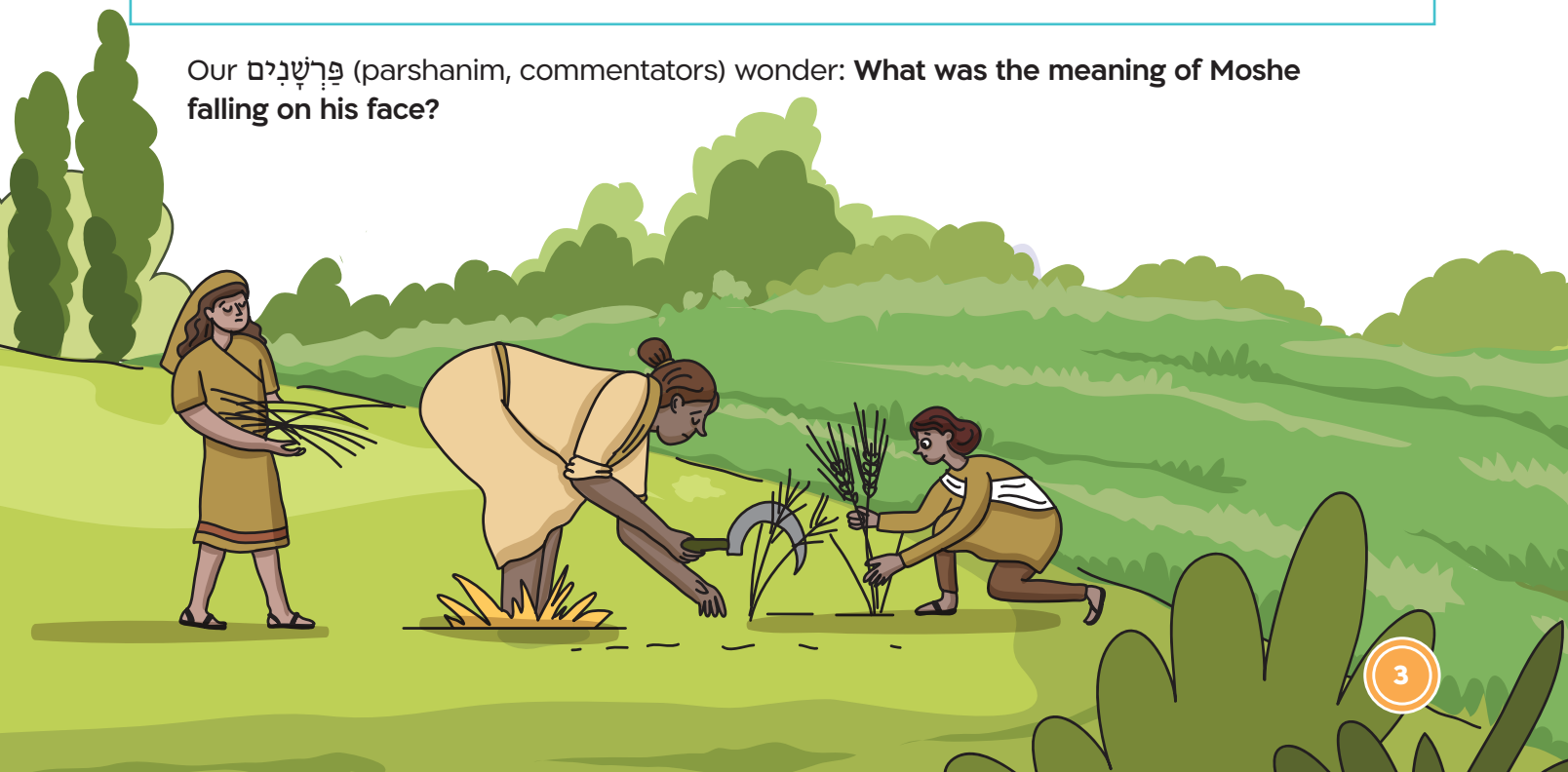
Bemidbar 16:4

Moshe heard this and fell on his face.

במדבר טז:ד

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל עַל-פָּנָיו:

Our פְּרָשְׁנִים (parshanim, commentators) wonder: **What was the meaning of Moshe falling on his face?**



According to Rashi, it shows Moshe's despair:

מִפְּנֵי הַמַּחֲלָקֶת, שֶׁכָּבַר זֶה בְּיָדָם סָרְחוֹן רַבִּיעִי.
 חָטְאוּ בְּעֵגֶל, "וַיַּחֲלֵ מֹשֶׁה" (שְׁמוֹת ל"ב:יא),
 בְּמַתְאוֹנְנִים, "וַיִּתְּפֹלֵל מֹשֶׁה" (במדבר י"א:ב),
 בְּמַרְגְּלִים, "וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרִים" (במדבר י"ד:יג),
 בְּמַחֲלָקָתוֹ שֶׁל קָרַח נִתְּרָשְׁלוּ יָדָיו.

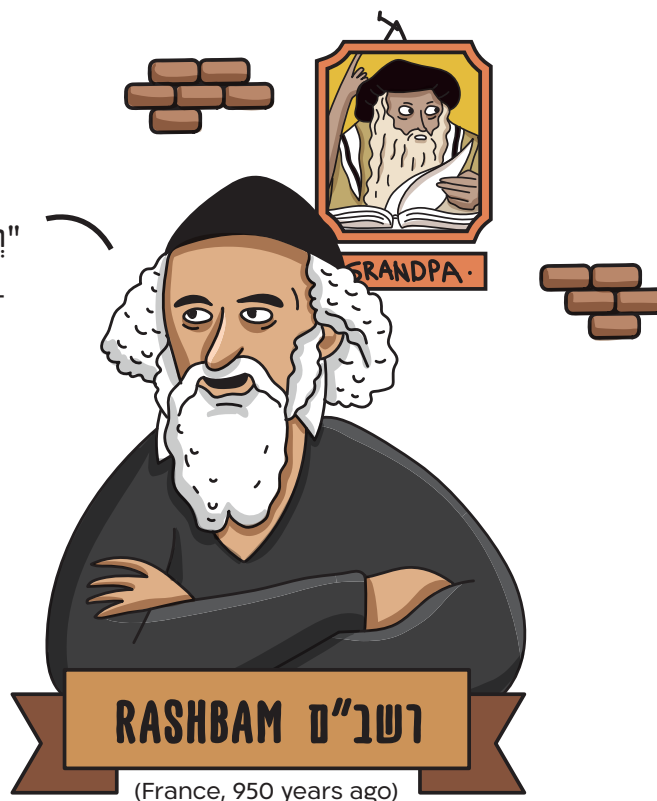
It was because of the arguing. This was already Benei Yisrael's fourth offense. At the sin of the golden calf, Moshe prayed. At the complaining episode, Moshe prayed. With the spies, Moshe prayed. But the arguing caused by Korah took all his strength away, and he couldn't be a defender anymore.



👉 Why would Moshe become so weak now? Was it the cumulative effect of so many sins building up? Or was there something particularly discouraging about the Korah situation?



"וַיִּפֹּל עַל פָּנָיו" - לְתַפִּלָּה.
 "And fell on his face"—
 for prayer.



- ◆ When you read the whole story of Korah, does it seem more likely that Moshe's initial reaction was him falling because he lost all his strength, or was he praying? What's your evidence?
- ◆ Look up these other places where the Torah describes someone falling on their face:
 - ◆ Avraham in Bereishit 17:17
 - ◆ All of Benei Yisrael in Vayikra 9:24
 - ◆ Moshe and Aharon in Bemidbar 14:5 (last week's parashah, with the sin of the spies)

Do these examples affect your understanding of what is going on here in Parashat Korah?



הִלְכָּה • Halakhah

On most weekdays, during Shaharit and Minhah, there is a prayer recited after the עֲמִידָה (Amidah) called תַּחֲנוּן (Tahanun). Its other name is נְפִילַת אַפִּימִים (nefilat apayim), which means "falling on your face." People used to literally fall down on their faces and prostrate while saying this prayer. Now the custom is to recite it sitting down, while facing downward, leaning on your arm (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 131:1).

Does this position sound familiar? In our פְּרָשְׁנוֹת/Commentary section (p. 3), we saw a pasuk about Moshe falling on his face. Rashbam explained this was for prayer. A few pesukim later (Bemidbar 16:22), when God wants to wipe out Benei Yisrael, the Torah says that Moshe and Aharon both fell on their faces to cry out to God (וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם, va-yiplu al peneihem).

According to Rabbeinu Behaye, our customs around nefilat apayim are based on what Moshe and Aharon did. Rabbeinu Behaye explains that nefilat apayim has different meanings:



1

It's a sign of awe before the greatness of God. We can see that Moshe felt this way when he hid his face at the burning bush (Shemot 3:6).

2

It's a way of displaying our pain while praying, in order to help us get into a mindset of תשובה (teshuvah, repentance).

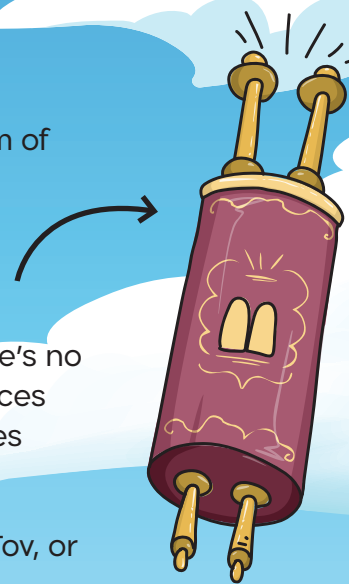
3

It's a way to open ourselves completely to God.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 59b) says that when the Amidah and Tahanun are combined, that can be an extremely powerful form of prayer. This is why we recite them together.

Some Tahanun customs

- ◆ Nefilat apayim is only done if there is a Sefer Torah present where a person is praying (Rema, Orah Hayyim 131:2). If there's no Sefer Torah, we still say Tahanun, just without putting our faces down. This is based on a pasuk (Yehoshua 7:6) that describes Yehoshua falling on his face in front of the ארון (aron, ark).
- ◆ Tahanun is not said on festive days, such as Shabbat, Yom Tov, or Rosh Hodesh.



רגע של עברית • A Moment of Hebrew

Bemidbar 16:31

As soon as he finished speaking all these words, the ground under them **burst open**.

במדבר טז:לא

וַיְהִי כַּכֹּלְתּוֹ לְדַבֵּר אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וַתִּבָּקַע הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר תַּחְתֵּיהֶם:

לְהִבָּקַע (שֵׁרֵשׁ ב.ק.ע)

- ◆ To be split or cracked open (lehibaka)

= בִּקְעָה
Valley (bik'ah)

= בִּקְעָה
Rift or crack, like between two tectonic plates (beka)



דִּקְהָ שָׁל דִּיּוּ • One-Minute Debate

How to play:

Here are some arguments to get you started, but try to come up with your own. Then debate someone!

For a true one-minute debate, give each side 30 seconds to make its best case.

Debate: The Jewish people doesn't need someone in charge.

Agree!



Agree!

- ♦ Every Jew is holy, and no individual should be above any other.
- ♦ God is already in charge!

Disagree!

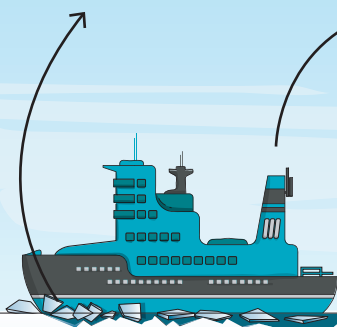
- ♦ Even though everyone is holy, everyone still has their own role to play. Some are going to be Levi'im, and some are going to be leaders.
- ♦ Who will make decisions if somebody doesn't take charge? You can't vote on every single decision.
- ♦ You can't drive a car with five people holding the wheel!

Disagree!

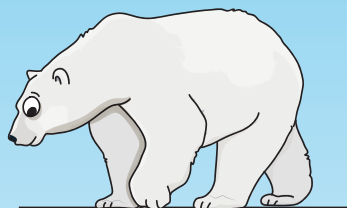


= לִבְקֹעַ

To break out, like a chick from its shell
(livko'a)



= בּוֹקֶעַת קֶרֶחַ
Icebreaker ship
(boka'at kerah)



Find the Word!

When the Torah describes the beginning of the Flood, it uses a word from this שָׁרֵשׁ (shoresh, root) to say that the skies split open. Can you find that word? (Hint: Look in Bereishit chapter 7.)



שאלות השבוע • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. **The answers to the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.**

aliyot:

- 1) Bemidbar 16:1 to 16:13
- 2) 16:14 to 16:19
- 3) 16:20 to 17:8
- 4) 17:9 to 17:15
- 5) 17:6 to 17:24
- 6) 17:25 to 18:20
- 7) 18:21 to 18:32

Good luck!

1 What was Korah's relationship to the person, Levi?

2 How many מַחֲתוֹת (mahtot, firepans) were used in total in the showdown between Moshe and Korah?

3 What happened to the copper mahtot used by the 250 rebels?

4 How many people died in the plague that followed Korah's rebellion?

5 What kind of food grew out of Aharon's staff?



6 Aharon and his descendants got a lot of privileges, but what do they **not** get?

7 When the לְוִיִּם (Levi'im, members of the tribe of Levi) received מַעֲסֵר (ma'aser, a tenth) from the crops of Benei Yisrael, what percentage did they have to give to the כֹּהֲנִים (kohanim, priests)?

8 What was Korah's family relationship to Moshe?

9 Which person started out as a named rebel and then disappeared from the story? What tribe was he from?

10 How many times in our parashah does God talk directly to Aharon without speaking to Moshe?

*
Look for the answers on page 12!





Mahpakh מַהפָּךְ



The mahpakh is a common note that appears in most of the verses in the Torah. The name means “reversal” and its shape looks like that too: it is like a “V” on its side, the line first going forward (in the Hebrew direction!), then reversing course and going backward. It kind of sounds like that too; the note goes down and then comes a bit back up. If you see a mahpakh, you always know what comes next—a pashta (wait to hear more about that one next week)! That’s right, the mahpakh always just sets up the next word and doesn’t really stand on its own. It literally appears all over the place. Here is an example from the first aliyah of our parashah:

במדבר טז:

כִּי כָל־הָעֵדָה כֻּלָּם קֳדָשִׁים

Bemidbar 16:3

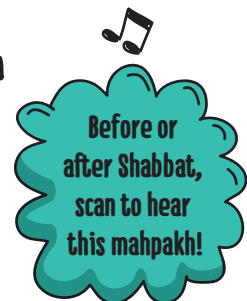
For all the community are holy

1 How many times does it appear in the Torah?
3042—Common
More than once every 2 pesukim

2 Does it end a musical phrase?
No

3 Is it above or below the word?
Below

4 Where is it placed on the word?
On the accent



Don’t confuse mahpakh with yetiv, another note we will meet in a few weeks. Although they look similar, mahpakh always appears right under the accented part of the word, so look for it there!

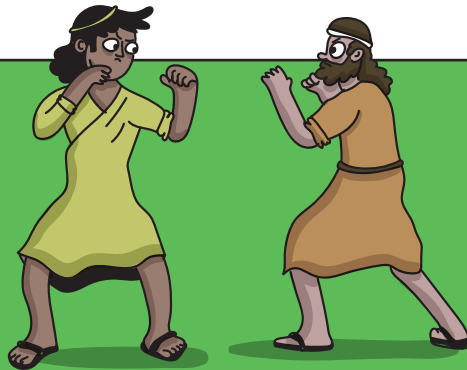


מה קרה • What's Going On Here?

In the opening verse of our parashah, we learn that Datan and Aviram joined Korah's rebellion against Moshe. Who were they?

This is the first time the Torah mentions their names. But some people explain that Datan and Aviram had been long-time troublemakers!

While living in Pharaoh's palace, Moshe once saw two people from Benei Yisrael having a fight. Rashi says they were Datan and Aviram! (Shemot 2:13)



Rabbi Yohanan says that anyone in the Torah who argued with Moshe was Datan and Aviram (Nedarim 64b). For example, when Pharaoh stopped providing straw for Benei Yisrael to make bricks, some people blamed Moshe (Shemot 5:20). These people must have been Datan and Aviram.

Moshe told Benei Yisrael not to store מַן (mann, miraculous food from heaven) overnight. But some people tried to anyway (Shemot 16:20). Rashi says these were Datan and Aviram!



Not that kind of mann!



This teaching is quoted in the name of R. Avraham Eliezer Hirshowitz: Datan and Aviram wanted to embarrass Moshe in front of Benei Yisrael. Moshe announced that no mann would fall on Shabbat. Datan and Aviram snuck out on Friday night and spread their mann from Friday, so that it would seem that Moshe had lied. But a miracle happened, and all the mann was eaten up by birds before the morning!



בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

It can be hard to figure out why some people in the Torah get named and some don't. The Torah has a lot of anonymous characters, and it also tells us the names of people who don't seem particularly important to the story.

Many midrashim notice this, and a common activity in midrash is to assign names to people, often by connecting them to other named characters in surprising ways. In this week's **מה קרה?**/What's Going On Here? (p. 10), we saw midrashim that associated a bunch of anonymous Torah characters with Datan and Aviram.

Here are some other examples:

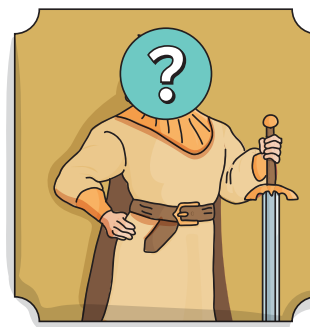
The midwives, Shifrah and Puah (Shemot 1:15)→
A midrash says these were Yokheved and Miriam
(or Elisheva) (Sotah 11b, and see Devash for
Shemot)

CLUE: Miriam knows a lot about
finding a nurse for a baby, and
Yokheved is adept at baby care!



The survivor who brings the news of Lot's capture to
Avram (Bereishit 14:13)→ Bar Kappara says this was
Og, king of Bashan (Bereishit Rabbah 42:8)

CLUE: Og is described as a
survivor from war (Devarim 3:11)

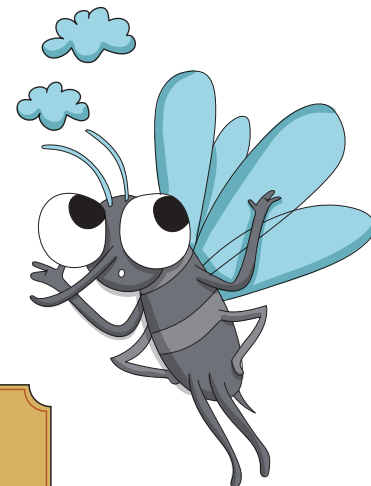


The **עֵשׂ** (eesh, man) who found Yosef when he was
looking for his brothers (Bereishit 37:15) → A midrash
says this was the angel Gavriel (Rashi)

CLUE: The angel Gavriel is also
called eesh (Daniel 10:4)



Who is this person?!





בואו נדבר על זה • Tell Me More About This!

Earlier, we saw a midrash which imagines Korah saying that the Torah is cruel (p. 2). Here's a different midrash that suggests Korah had a different complaint: the Torah is illogical.

Korah asked Moshe (Bemidbar Rabbah 18):

A טלית (tallit) is made of a four-cornered בגד (beged, garment) with ציצית (tzitzit, strings) in each of the corners, including a פתיל תכלת (petil tekhelet, a string of the tekhelet color) in each corner. **But if the whole beged is made out of tekhelet, does it still need the extra strings?**

A מזוזה (mezuzah) is just a few words of Torah attached to a doorway. **But if a whole house is full of ספרים (sefarim, holy books), would it still need a mezuzah?**



Moshe replied yes to both of these. Korah argued back, "These rules make no sense! You made them up yourself!"

- ♦ What assumptions is Korah making here? What message is the Torah telling us by requiring a mezuzah even for a house of Torah?

The idea of a טלית שכלה תכלת (tallit she'kulah tekhelet, tallit that is entirely tekhelet) from this midrash has become an expression in modern Hebrew. It's used to refer to something or someone that appears to be oh-so-holy, but really isn't. It's a way of saying: Nothing, or nobody, is perfect!

Did you see what Avi did...??

Oh please, you aren't exactly such a tallit she'kulah tekhelet



Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. He was his great-grandson (16:1)
2. 252—One for Aharon, one for Korah, and 250 for Korah's allies (16:17)
3. They are beaten into a covering for the copper מזבח (mizbei'ah, altar) (17:2-4)
4. 14,700 (17:14)
5. Almonds (17:23)
6. Land (18:20)
7. A tenth! (18:26)
8. They were first cousins—Korah was the son of Yitzhar, who was the brother of Amram, who was the father of Moshe (16:1)
9. On ben Pelet from the tribe of Reuven (16:1)
10. Three (18:1, 8, 20)



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