

Parashat Korah: Who Lives, and Who Dies?

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Bemidbar 26:10-11	
וּבְנֵי־קֹרַח לֹא־מָתוּ:	The sons of Korah, however, did not die.

1. Who Lives, and Who Dies?

Bavli Sanhedrin 109b	
<p>תְּנוּ רַבָּנִן: עֲדַת קֹרַח אֵין לָהֶם חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא, שְׁנֵאֲמַר: "וַיִּתְּסָה עֲלֵיהֶם הָאֶרֶץ" – בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, "וַיֵּאבְדוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַקְּהָל" – לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. דְּבָרֵי רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בֶּן בֶּתִירָא אוֹמֵר: הֲרִי הֵן כְּאֲבִידָה הַמִּתְבַּקֶּשֶׁת, שְׁנֵאֲמַר: "תַּעֲיִתִי כְּשֶׁהָאֲבִיד בִּקֵּשׁ עֲבָדְךָ כִּי מְצֹתֶיךָ לֹא שִׁכַּחְתִּי".</p>	<p>The Sages taught in a <i>baraita</i> (Tosefta 13:9): The members of the assembly of Korah have no share in the World-to-Come, as it is stated: "And the earth closed upon them" (Numbers 16:33), meaning in this world, and also: "And they perished from among the assembly" (Numbers 16:33), meaning in the World-to-Come; this is the statement of Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira says: Although it says that they perished, they are like a lost item that is sought, ultimately found, and rehabilitated, as it is stated: "I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek out your servant, for I do not forget your mitzvot" (Psalms 119:176).</p>

Bavli Sanhedrin 110a	
<p>וְאָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: קֹרַח לֹא מִן הַבְּלוּעִים וְלֹא מִן הַשְּׂרוּפִין. לֹא מִן הַבְּלוּעִין, דְּכָתִיב: "וְאֵת כָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר לְקֹרַח" – וְלֹא קֹרַח. וְלֹא מִן הַשְּׂרוּפִים, דְּכָתִיב: "בְּאֹכַל הָאֵשׁ אֵת חֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֵתִים אִישׁ" – וְלֹא קֹרַח.</p>	<p>And Rabbi Yohanan says: Korah was neither among the swallowed nor among the burned; he died in a plague. He was neither among the swallowed, as it is written: "And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses and all the men who were with Korah" (Numbers 16:32), from which it is inferred: But not Korah himself. Nor was he among the burned, as it is written: "When the fire consumed two hundred and fifty men" (Numbers 26:10), but not Korah.</p>
<p>בְּמִתְנִיָּתָא תָּנָא: קֹרַח מִן הַשְּׂרוּפִין וּמִן הַבְּלוּעִין. מִן הַבְּלוּעִים, דְּכָתִיב: "וַיִּתְּבַּל אֹתָם וְאֵת קֹרַח". מִן הַשְּׂרוּפִין, דְּכָתִיב: "וַיִּתְּצָא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי ה' [וְאֵשׁ יִצְאָה מֵאֵת ה'] וַתֹּאכַל אֶת הַחֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֵתִים אִישׁ", וְקֹרַח בְּהֶדְיָהּ.</p>	<p>It was taught in a <i>baraita</i>: Korah was both among the burned and among the swallowed. He was among the swallowed, as it is written: "And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them with Korah" (Numbers 26:10). He was among the burned, as it is written: "And fire came forth from the Lord, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men that burned the incense" (Numbers 16:35), and Korah</p>

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

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Bavli Sanhedrin 110a	
<p>“וּבְנֵי קֹרַח לֹא מָתוּ.” תֵּנָא מִשּׁוּם רַבִּינוּ אָמְרוּ: מְקוֹם נִתְבַּצֵּר לָהֶם בְּגִיְהֵנָם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עָלָיו וְאָמְרוּ שִׁירָה. אָמַר רַבָּה בַּר בַּר חֲנָה: זִימְנָא חֲדָא הָוָה קְאָזִילָנָא בְּאוֹרְחָא, אָמַר לִי הָהוּא טִייעָא: תָּא וְאֲחִיו לָךְ בְּלוּעֵי דְקֹרַח. אָזְלִי חֲזָאִי תַרִי בְּזַעֵי דְהָוָה קָא נָפֵק קִיטְרָא מִפְּיָהּ. שָׁקֵל גָּבֵבָא דְעַמְרָא, אֲמַשְׁיָיָה מִיָּא, וְאוֹתְבִיָּה בְּרִישׁ רִוּמְחִיָּה, וְאֶחְלָפִיָּה הָתָם. אִיחֲרָהּ. אָמַר לִי: אֲצִיתָ מָה שְׁמַעְתָּ. וְשִׁמְעִיתָ דְּהָוָה קְאָמְרִי הָכִי: “מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת, וְהֵן בְּדָאִים.” אָמַר לִיה: כָּל תַּלְתִּין יוֹמִין מִהֲדָרָא לָהּ גִּיְהֵנָם כְּבָשָׂר בְּתוֹךְ קִלְחָתָהּ, וְאָמְרִי הָכִי: “מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת, וְהֵן בְּדָאִים.”</p>	<p>With regard to the verse: “And the sons of Korah did not die” (Numbers 26:11), it is taught in a <i>baraita</i> that in the name of our teacher, the Sages said: A place was fortified for them in Gehenna and they sat upon it and recited songs of praise. Rabba bar bar Hana said: One time I was walking on the path, and a certain Arab said to me: Come and I will show you those from the assembly of Korah who were swallowed. I went and I saw two fissures in the ground from which smoke was emerging. That Arab took a woolen fleece and dampened it with water and placed it on the tip of his spear and passed it over the fissures there. The fleece was singed, indicating the level of heat there. He said to me: Listen; what do you hear? And I heard that this is what they were saying: Moses and his Torah are truth, and they, referring to themselves, are liars. The Arab said to him: Every thirty days Gehenna returns them to this place like meat cooking in a cauldron, and they say this: Moses and his Torah are truth, and they are liars.</p>

2. Korah, But Not His Sons?

Rashi on Bemidbar 26:11	
<p>ובני קרח לא מתו. הם היו בעצה תחלה, ובשעת המחלוקת הרהרו תשובה בלבם, לפיכך נתבצר להם מקום גבוה בגיהנום וישבו שם (סנהדרין ק"י):</p>	<p>However, Korach's sons had not died. They were in the plot originally, but at the moment when the rebellion broke out they had thoughts of repentance in their hearts; therefore, a high spot was fenced round for them in Gehinnom, and they stayed there (Sanhedrin 110a).</p>

3. Do We Need All The Answers?

Adam Gopnik, <i>The New Yorker</i> , 18 November 2024
<p>The eternal truth, from Rome to now, is that one man's rampaging mob is another's righteous protest, and the line between the open crowd and the closed...remains ever changing.</p>
<p>Crowds really are emergent entities...people will do together what they might never do alone. This can be a positive and community-building emotion; crowds supply the reinforcing circles of mutual trust—and, often, the simple insulation of numbers—that keep the authorities at bay. In the carnivalesque spirit, we can be emboldened to laugh together at jokes at the expense of the powerful. But the permission granted by aggregation can also be a wholly cruel and destructive force. That Southern lynch mob brought together people who went to church on Sundays and lived in peace with their Black neighbors, most days.</p>

Big Question: What might we learn about the tension the rabbis reveal in debating what it means to say that Korah's sons did not die?