

Korach @ the DC Beit Midrash

Tuesday, June 15, 2004; 26 Sivan 5764

Welcome to the DC Beit Midrash!

The Chumash (Five Books of Moses) is divided into 54 portions, which Jews read sequentially each week in services. On a regular evening, a member of our community will lead us in a text-study of this portion, or *parasha*. The voices of both past and contemporary interpreters will inform our discussion. Every week, a sheet summarizing the Torah portion of the week and the other sources the teacher will use will be provided to aid you in your study. Tonight, a member of our community will lead us in a text-study on Pirkei Avot (The Ethics of the Fathers), to be followed by a period of *chavruta* (paired) study and a large group discussion.

This Week's *Parasha* (Torah Portion):

Numbers (*Bemidbar*), Chapter 16: Verse 1 to Chapter 18: Verse 32

In this week's *parasha*, complaints and rebellions reach a dangerous high, threatening to destroy the unity of the Israelite people. A man named Korach, along with his followers Dattan, Aviram and 250 others, challenge Moses' and Aaron's leadership. Korach has powerful arguments, to which Moses realizes he must respond. Moses sets the next day for a dramatic test. When Korach refuses to stay his rebellion, this test demonstrates that Moses and Aaron are in fact God's choice to lead the people. Korach, Dattan, and Aviram, along with their entire families, are swallowed up by the earth, and the 250 other men are consumed by a heavenly fire. Seeing this, a riot breaks out among the people. A plague is sent as a punishment against the rebellious people. Aaron intervenes and stops it, but not before thousands of people perish. At the end of the portion, the duties of the priests and Levites are clarified. Also laws are stated which specify that the first fruits of plants, animals, and human beings are to be dedicated to God.

(http://www.kolel.org/pages/parasha/bemidbar_summary.html)

This Week's Sources

Pirkei Avot

c. 200

Pirkei Avot is the colloquial name for tractate *Avot* of the Mishnah. Perhaps, the most widely studied of the mishnaic tractates, *Avot* presents the chain of rabbinic tradition, the reception of the oral law, from Mount Sinai through the generation of Judah the Prince, the editor of the Mishnah. Accompanying the naming of each rabbi is one or more ethically oriented statements attributed to him. It is for this reason that the name of the tractate is often translated as *The Ethics of the Fathers*. *Pirkei Avot* is often found in prayer books after the Shabbat afternoon service, because it is also commonly used as the study component of the afternoon meal, *Seudah Shlishit*.

(excerpted from <http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/diduknow/sources/pirkeiavot.shtml>)

This Week's Teacher

shira@post.harvard.edu

Shira Fischer, a co-founder of the DC Beit Midrash, keeps a busy schedule but tries to make time for Torah! In addition to the Beit Midrash, some of Shira's favorite things are biking, grammar, contraception policy, Wi-fi, and ice cream.

This Week's Food Sponsor

Craig Chosiad and Judith Blocker

This Week's Food Shlepper

Ethan Merlin

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