



## PINCHAS

### From Rebellion to Redemption

*How Korah's Sons Crawled out of the Abyss—and How You Can Too*

# PARSHAH OVERVIEW

## *Pinchas*

Aaron's grandson Phineas is rewarded for his act of zealotry in killing the Simeonite prince Zimri and the Midianite princess who was his paramour: G-d grants him a covenant of peace and the priesthood.

A census of the people counts 601,730 men between the ages of twenty and sixty. Moses is instructed on how the Land is to be divided by lottery among the tribes and

families of Israel. The five daughters of Zelophehad petition Moses that they be granted the portion of the Land belonging to their father, who died without sons; G-d accepts their claim and incorporates it into the Torah's laws of inheritance.

Moses empowers Joshua to succeed him and lead the people into the Land of Israel.

The *parshah* concludes with a detailed list of the daily offerings and the additional offerings brought on Shabbat; Rosh Chodesh (the first day of the month); and the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

We are reminded of when Korah and his followers were swallowed by the earth for rebelling against Moses.



# TEXT 1A

Numbers 16:32–33

לב. ותפתח הארץ את פיה ותבלע אתם ואת בתיהם, ואת  
כל האדם אשר לקרח ואת כל הרכוש.

לג. וירדו הם וכל אשר להם חיים שאלה, ותכס עליהם  
הארץ ויאבדו מתוך הקהל.

32. The earth beneath them opened its mouth and swallowed them and their houses and all the men who were with Korah and all the property.

33. They, and all their possessions, descended alive into the grave; the earth covered them up, and they were lost to the nation.



When the Jews were counted, Reuven's turn brought back the memory of Dathan and Abiram's rebellion.

# TEXT 1B

Ibid. 26:9–10

ט. וּבְנֵי אֱלִיאָב, נְמוּאֵל וְדָתָן וְאַבִּירָם. הוּא דָתָן וְאַבִּירָם קְרִיאֵי הָעֵדָה  
אֲשֶׁר הֵצִו עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן בְּעֵדַת קִרְחַ בְּהִצְתָם עַל ה'.

י. וַתִּפְתַּח הָאָרֶץ אֶת פִּיהָ וַתִּבְלַע אֹתָם וְאֶת קִרְחַ בְּמוֹת הָעֵדָה, בְּאֹכַל  
הָאֵשׁ אֶת חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאֹתָיִם אִישׁ וַיְהִיו לְגִם.

9. And the sons of Eliab were Dathan and Abiram. They are the Dathan and Abiram who were summoned by the assembly that incited against Moses and Aaron, the assembly of Korah, when they incited against G-d.

10. And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and Korah when the assembly died, when the fire consumed 250 men. And they became a symbol.

# TEXT 1C

Ibid. 26:11

וּבְנֵי קֹרַח לֹא מָתוּ.

And the sons of Korah did not die.

Korah's sons were  
swallowed by the  
earth but survived.



## QUESTIONS

1. Did they get out of the hole?
2. If they got out, how did they manage it if the hole closed over their heads?
3. If they deserved to be saved, why did they not get spared from falling to the ground?
4. what did they do to merit survival?
5. Why does the Torah only share this detail in a discussion about events that occurred thirty-nine years later?

## TEXT 2A

Rashi, ibid. 26:11

"וּבְנֵי קֹרַח לֹא מָתוּ: " הֵם הָיוּ בְּעֵצָה תְּחִלָּה, וּבְשַׁעַת  
הַמַּחְלָקֶת הִרְהָרוּ תְּשׁוּבָה בְּלִבָּם. לְפִיכָךְ נִתְבַּצֵּר לָהֶם  
מָקוֹם גְּבוּהָ בְּגִיהֵנוֹם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם.

"And the sons of Korah did not die": They were in the plot at the beginning, but at some point during the rebellion, they repented in their hearts. Therefore, a place was fortified for them in Gehinom, and they sat upon it.

The sons of korah  
repented, so they survived  
in *Gehinom* "purgatory".



# TEXT 2B

Talmud, Sanhedrin  
110a

“ויבני קרח לא מתו.”

תָּנָא מְשׁוּם רַבִּינוּ אָמְרוּ: מְקוּם נְתַבְצָר  
לְהֵם בְּגֵיהֶנָם, וַיֵּשְׁבוּ עָלָיו, וְאָמְרוּ שִׁירָה.

אָמַר רַבָּה בְּרַבְרָה בְּרַב חַנָּה: זִימְנָא תְּדָא הָוָה  
קְאָזִילְנָא בְּאוֹרְחָא, אָמַר לִי הָהוּא טַיִיעָא,  
“תָּא וְאֶחָדִי לָךְ בְּלוּעֵי דְקִרְחָא.” אֲזִילִי, תְּזַאֲרִי  
תְּרִי בְּזַעֲרֵי דְהָוָה קָא נָפְקוּ קִיטְרָא מִנִּיְהוּ.  
שְׁקַל גְּבָבָא דְעַמְרָא, אֲמַשְׂיִיה מִיָּא,  
וְאוֹתְבִיה בְּרִישׁ רֹמְחִיה, וְאַחְלָפִיה הֶתֶם,  
אִיתְרַךְ.

אָמַר לִי: אֲצִית, מָה שְׁמַעְתָּ?

וְשִׁמְעִית דְּהוּוּ קְאָמְרֵי הָכִי: מֹשֶׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ  
אֱמֶת, וְהֵן בְּדָאִים.

“And the sons of Korah did not die.”

It is taught in the name of our teacher that our sages said, “A place was fortified for them in Gehinom, and they sat upon it and recited songs of praise.”

Rabah, son of the son of Chanah, said, “I was once walking on the path, and an Arab said to me, ‘Come and I will show you those of Korah’s assembly who were swallowed.’ I went and saw two fissures in the ground from which smoke was rising. The Arab took a woolen fleece, dampened it with water, placed it on the tip of his spear, and passed it over the fissures. The fleece sanged [indicating the heat level in the fissure].

“He said to me, ‘Listen: What do you hear?’

“I heard them calling, ‘Moses and his Torah are truth, and [we] are liars.’

# TEXT 2B

Talmud, Sanhedrin  
110a

אָמַר לִיה: כּל תּלְתִין יוֹמִין מְהַדְרָא לְהוּ  
גִיהִנָּם כְּבִשְׂר בְּתוֹךְ קַלְחַת, וְאָמְרֵי הָכִי,  
”מִשָּׁה וְתוֹרָתוֹ אֱמֶת, וְהֵן בְּדָאִים.”

“The Arab observed, ‘Every thirty days, Gehinom returns them to this place like meat cooking in a cauldron, and they proclaim: Moses and his Torah are truth, and [we] are liars.’”

## SONS OF KORACH



The sons of Korah sat in *Gehinom*, safe and singing praises.

## OTHERS



They suffered in *Gehinom*, returning every thirty days to punishment.

## QUESTION

How could they go to *Gehinom* if they didn't actually die?

# TEXT 3

Rabbi Avraham ibn  
Ezra, Numbers 26:11

וְהַעֵד, שְׁמוּאֵל וּבָנָיו וּבְנֵי בָנָיו, שֶׁהֵם הַמְּשֹׁרְרִים.  
וְהֵם הַנְּקָרָאִים הַקְּרָחִים, "לְבָנֵי קֶרַח מְזֻמֹּר" (תְּהִלִּים פּוֹ).  
גַּם בַּתּוֹרָה כָּתוּב "מִשְׁפַּחַת הַקְּרָחִי" (בְּמִדְבָּר כּו, נח).

The proof is that Shmuel and his descendants were among the Levitical singers.

They were known as the Korahites [who composed songs of praise such as], "A song to the sons of Korah" (Psalms 87).

Also, the Korahite family is listed in the Torah (Numbers 26:58).

## Proof Korah's Sons **Survived**

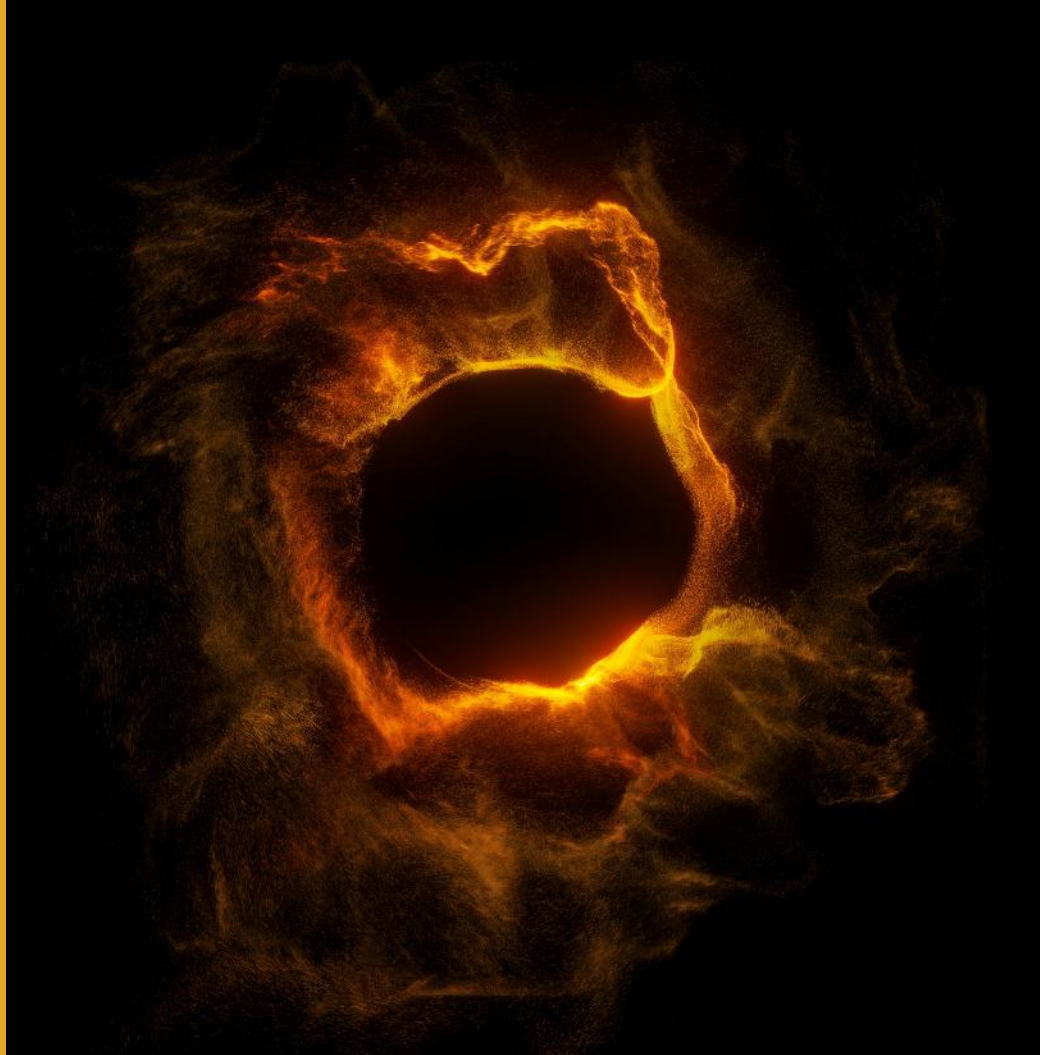
- The prophet Samuel was a descendant of Korah's sons.
- Their kids became leaders in King David's choir.
- They wrote parts of the Psalms, including songs they sang in *Gehinom*.
- The Torah lists their family years later among the Levites.

## TEXT 4A

Rabbi Bachya ben  
Asher ibn Halawa,  
Numbers 26:11

מְקוֹם הַבְּלִיעָה, וְשֵׁהוּא מְקוֹם  
הַמְשַׁפֵּט, וְנִקְרָא גֵיהֵנוֹם.

The place of the swallowing, which  
was a place of judgment, was  
called Gehinom.



There is an opinion that Gehinom refers to the hole that swallowed them, and not to spiritual purgatory.

## TEXT 4B

Rabbi Levi ben  
Gershon, Numbers  
26:11

כִּי הַמְּקוֹמוֹת הַנִּפְתָּחִים בְּזֶה הָאוֹפֵן שֶׁנִּפְתְּחָה  
הָאָרֶץ, בְּעֵת הַיּוֹתָה פְּתוּחָה, יִקְרָאוּ גֵי הַנֹּם  
אוֹ גֵּיא בֶן הַנֹּם.

Fissures that open in the manner that this one did are called Gehinom, or *gey-ben-Hinom* [the valley of Hinom's son], so long as they remain open.

## TEXT 5

Talmud, Eruvin 19a

תָּנָא רַבָּה בֶּר מָרִיוֹן בְּדַבְּרֵי רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן בֶּן זַכַּאי: שְׁתֵּי תְּמָרוֹת  
יֵשׁ בְּגֵי בֶּן הַנּוֹם וְעוֹלָה עָשָׂן מִבֵּינֵיהֶן . . . וְזוֹ הִיא פֶּתַחַהּ שְׁלֵ  
גֵּיהֶנָּם . . .

גֵּיהֶנָּם — גֵּיא שְׁעֵמוּקָה בְּגֵיהֶנָּם.

Rabah ben Marion taught in the study hall of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai, "There are two date palms in the valley of Hinom's son, and smoke rises from between them, . . . and this is the gateway to Gehinom." . . .

*Gehinom* means a valley [gey] as deep as Hinom's son's valley.

The Valley of Hinom became famous for idolatry and later came to symbolize punishment.





Korah and rebels were dumped into an underground cave, just like bodies in the Valley of Hinom. That's why the sages call it *Gehinom*.

## TEXT 6

Rabbi Shlomo ben  
Aderet, quoted by  
Rabbi Yaakov ibn  
Chaviv, *Ein Yaakov*,  
*Hakotev*, ad loc.

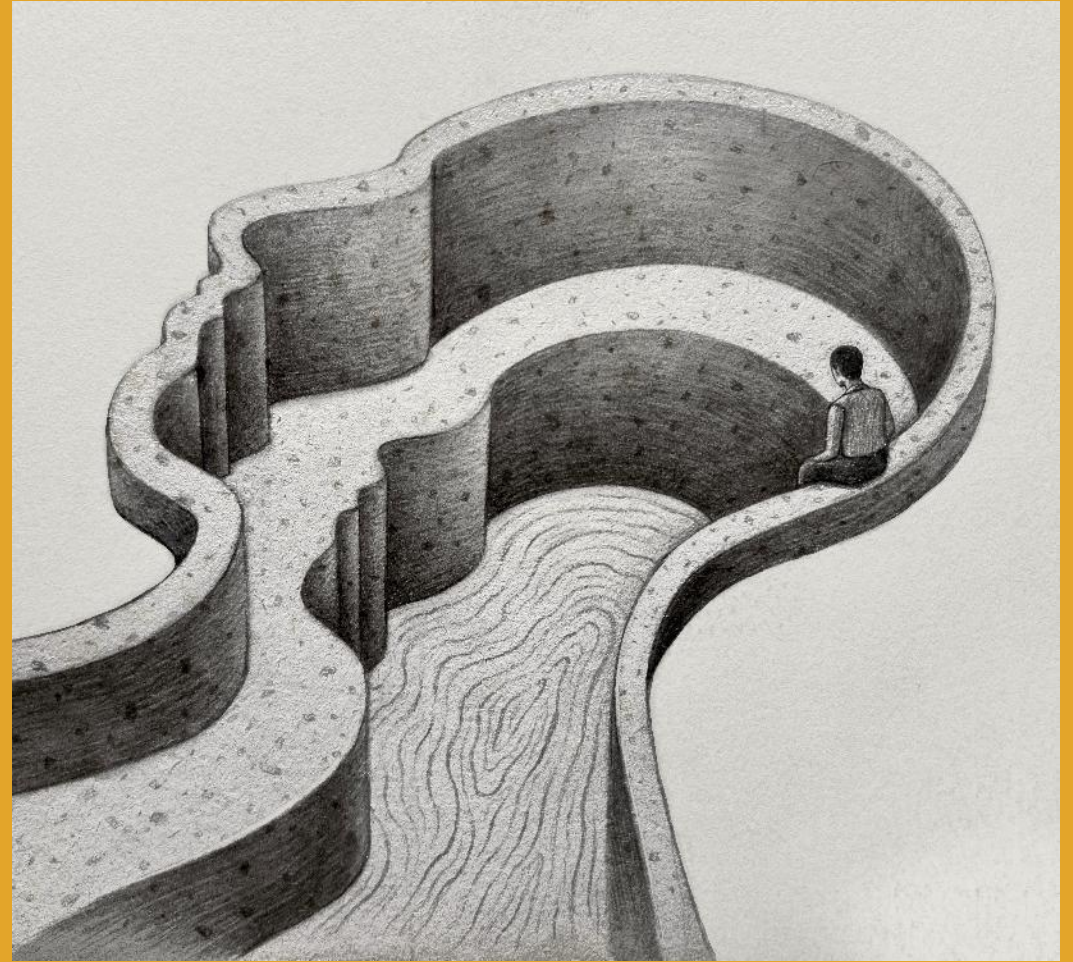
דע פֿי הַגֵּיהֶנוֹם מְקוֹם יְדוּעַ לְרוּעַ עוֹנֵשׁ וְהַצַּעַר, רַחֲמָנָא לְצַלוּן, לְכֹל דְּבָרֵי  
צַעַר וְחֲלָיִים וְהַפְּגָעִים וְהַגְּלוּת וְהַדּוּמָה לָהֶם.

וְהוּא וְשָׂאֵמַר הֶחֱכֶם לְתַלְמִידָיו וּמְזַהֲרֵם אַחַר שְׁהֵם סוּבְלִים בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה  
הַגּוֹפְנֵי הַגְּלוּת וְהַפְּגָעִים, שְׂשִׁישְׁתְּדָלוּ לְקַנּוּת הַמְּנוּסָה וְהַשְּׂקֵט בְּעוֹלָם  
הַנְּשָׁמוֹת וְלֹא יַעֲנִשׁוּ גַם בְּבָא. וְאָמַר, בְּמַטּוֹתָא מְנִכּוֹן דְּלֹא תִירְתּוּן תְּרִיתֵי  
גֵיהֶנוֹם.

Know that Gehinom is any location associated with severe punishment and pain, G-d forbid, whether distress, disease, plague, exile, etc.

A wise man once exhorted his students, who suffered exile and plagues in this life, to work toward meriting an afterlife of peace and calm. He said, "I beg you not to suffer Gehinom twice."

Over time, *Gehinom*  
became a euphemism  
for suffering.



## TEXT 7

Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet, quoted by Rabbi Yaakov ibn Chaviv, Ein Yaakov, Hakotev, ibid.

וְהָרַב שְׁלֹמֹה בֶּן אֲדֶרֶת זְכוֹרוֹנוֹ לְבִרְכָה כָּתַב . . . "וּבְהִבָּקַע הָאָרֶץ  
אֲשֶׁר תַּחְתֵּיהֶם, נִתְבָּצַר לָהֶם מְקוֹם שָׁם, שֶׁיָּשׁוּבוּ עָלָיו וְלֹא נִבְלְעוּ.  
כִּי אֲשֶׁר יֵאָרַע לְפָעַמַּיִם בְּמְקוֹמוֹת הַמְּתַבְּקָעִים, שֶׁיִּשְׁאָר קְצַת מְקוֹם  
שֶׁלֹּא תִתְבַּקֵּעַ, וַיִּנָּצְלוּ אֲנָשִׁים."

Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet of blessed memory wrote, . . . "When the gorge opened under them, a space was fortified for them upon which they sat, and they did not fall in. This sometimes occurs during earthquakes. Some parts cave in, while others remain intact, and people are thus saved."

## TEXT 8

Rashi, Sanhedrin 110a

"נְתַבְצָר". מְלִשׁוֹן "עִיר בְּצוּרָה" ( יִשְׁעֶיהָ כִּז, י ).  
הִתְקִין לְהוֹן הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְקוֹם גְּבוּהָ, שְׁלֹא  
הֵעֱמִיקוּ כָּל כָּךְ בְּגִיהֵנָם, וְלֹא מֵתוּ.

"Fortified": Similar to "a fortified city" (Isaiah 27:10). G-d prepared a high ledge for them. They did not fall too deep into Gehinom and did not die.

## RASHI

They fell, but only near the entrance, landing on a ledge close to the surface.

## OTHER SAGES

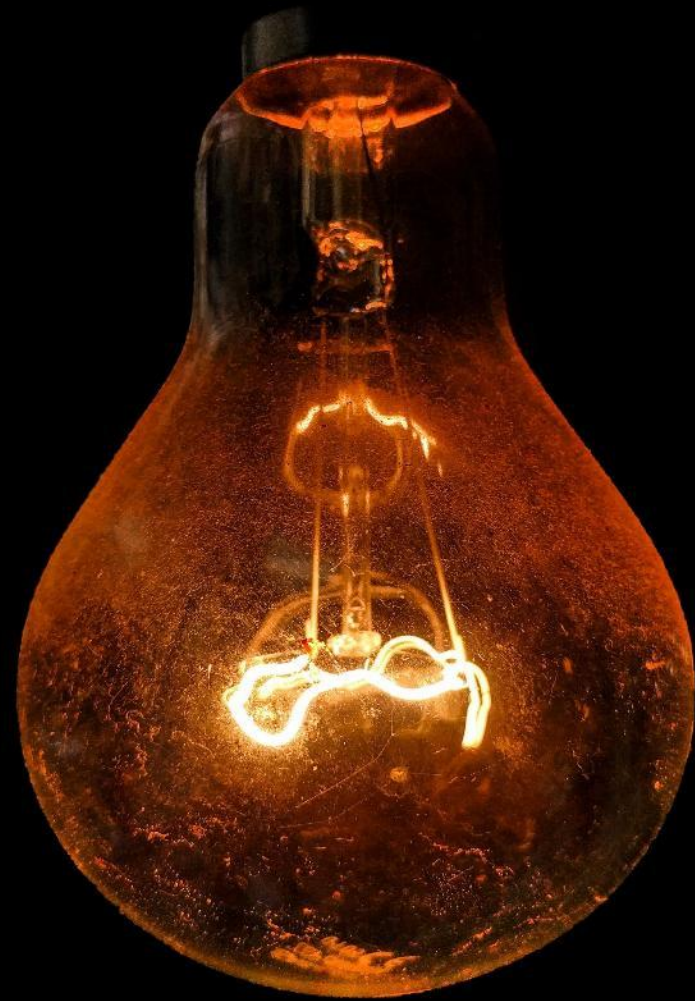
They fell deep inside, but found a solid place to stand on.

## TEXT 9

Rabbi David Halevi  
Segal, *Divrei David*,  
Numbers 26:11

וְאֶפְשָׁר לֹאמַר שְׂאִיזָה זְמַן הָיוּ בְּגִיהֵנָם וְאַחַר  
כָּךְ יֵצְאוּ עַל פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ.

It's plausible that they resided in this Gehinom for a while, then emerged onto the face of the earth.



This shows that they never died. Nor did they go to the Heavenly purgatory. They were underground for a while and then came out and lived.

# TEXT 10

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson,  
Memento from the  
Hecht Family  
Wedding, 29 Adar,  
5762, p. 32

הַנוֹדְאוֹת מְבֵהִילָה.

גַּם בְּן חָמֵשׁ, וּפְחוֹת מִזֶּה, יוֹדֵעַ שְׂיֵשׁ מְעָרוֹת. וְלָמַד מְעֶרֶת לוֹט, הַמְּכִפְלָה,  
שְׂיֵשׁ לָהֶם פֶּתַח בְּקִצְעוֹ וְתַקְרָה בְּכָל הַהֶמְשֵׁךְ דְּחָלָל שְׁלָהוֹן.

וְהָרִי רַש"י כָּאֵן מְפָרֵשׁ שְׂגֵהִינָם הוּא חָלָל בְּתוֹךְ הָאָרֶץ. וּמְפוֹרֵשׁ בְּפִירוּשׁ  
רַש"י דְּמַחִילוֹת בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ כּוּלָּה (וַיְחִי מִזֶּה, כֵּט).

Your self-assurance is astounding.

Children as young as five, and even younger, know about caves. They learned about the cave in which Lot took refuge. They also learned about the cave where Sarah was buried. These caves have mouths at their opening, but the rest extends deep underground.

Rashi specified that Gehinom, in this instance, refers to a subterranean cavern. And Rashi (Genesis 47:29) explicitly states that underground tunnels crisscross the entire planet.

## ANSWER 1

The Rebbe suggested that korah's sons found a underground tunnel that led to an opening and they returned.



## THE REMAINING QUESTIONS

1. What did they do to merit such an incredible miracle?
2. Why did they have to suffer a frightening fall if they were going to be saved anyway?
3. Why was this amazing story of miraculous salvation withheld for ten chapters and only reported thirty-nine years after they fell into the hole?

## TEXT 11

Yonatan ben Uziel's  
Aramaic Translation  
of the Bible, Numbers  
26:11

וּבְנוֹי דְקֶרַח לָא הָווּ בְּעֵיטָתָא דְאַבוּהוֹן וְאַזְלוּ בְּתֵר  
אוּלְפָנָא דְמֹשֶׁה נְבִיא. לָא מִיתוּ בְּמוֹתָנָא, וְלָא לָקוּ  
בִּיקִידָתָא, וְלָא טְמָעוּ בְּבִלְיַעַת אֲרַעָא.

The sons of Korah did not join their father and followed the teachings of the prophet Moses. They did not die when the others died; they were not injured in the fire, nor were they lost when the ground swallowed them.



Korah's sons survived  
since they were **innocent**.

# TEXT 12

Rabbi Menachem  
Kasher, *Torah  
Shelemah*, ad loc.

וּמָה זְכוּת הָיָה בְּיָדָן לְשֵׁל בְּנֵי קִרְחַ  
שְׂיִנְצָלוֹ?

שְׂבִשְׂעָה שְׂהָיוּ יוֹשְׁבֵין אֶצֶל קִרְחַ אֲבִיהֶן  
רוֹאִין אֶת מֹשֶׁה וְכוֹבְשִׁין אֶת פְּנֵיהֶן  
בְּקִרְקַע. אָמְרוּ, אִם נִעְמֹד מִפְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה  
רְבִינוּ, נוֹהֲגִין בְּזִיוֹן בְּאֲבִינוּ, וְכִבֵּר נִצְטוּיֵנוּ  
עַל כְּבוֹד אָב וָאִם. לֹא נִעְמֹד, כְּתִיב,  
"מִפְּנֵי שִׂיבָה תִּקּוּם" (וַיִּקְרָא יִט, לב).

מוֹטָב שְׂנִעְמֹד מִפְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה רְבִינוּ אִף עַל  
פִּי שְׂאֵנוּ נוֹהֲגִין בְּזִיוֹן בְּאֲבִינוּ.

בְּאוֹתָהּ שְׂעָה הִרְחִישׁוּ לָבָם בְּתִשׁוּבָה.

By what merit were they saved?

When they sat with their father and saw Moses enter, they hung their heads in shame and deliberated over what to do. "If we rise before Moses, we will shame our father, and we are instructed to honor our parents. If we remain seated, we are taught, 'Before the elderly, rise' (Leviticus 19:32)."

They concluded that it was best to rise before Moses, even if it shamed their father.

At that moment, their hearts wavered in repentance.



They realized they were rebelling against a man of G-d, which led to repentance and a complete turnaround.

# TEXT 13

The Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem Mendel  
Schneerson,  
*Likutei Sichot* 33, p. 172

החסרון בתשובתם של בני קרח הִיָּה בְּכֹף  
שְׁהִיָּתָהּ רַק הִרְהוּר בְּלֵב וְלֹא בְּדִיבּוּר בְּגִלּוּי,  
בְּאוֹפֶן שֶׁלֹּא נִודְעָה לְאִישׁ. וְאֲדַרְבֵּה, תְּשׁוּבַתָּם  
הִיָּתָה בְּשַׁעַת הַמַּחְלֻקָּת, הִיָּינוּ, שְׁלֹפֵי רְאוּת  
עֵינַיִם עֲדִיין הַמְּשִׁיכוֹ בְּמַחְלֻקָּת, וּבִיחַד עִם זֶה  
עָלָה בְּלִבָּם הִרְהוּר תְּשׁוּבָה . . .

וְלִכֵּן הִיָּה עוֹנָשָׁם מְשׁוּנָה כַּנִּתְבָּאָר לְעֵיל, כִּי  
הָרִי זֶה מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה. כְּמוֹ שְׁהִנְהִגְתָּם הִיָּתָה  
בְּאוֹפֶן שֶׁל דָּבָר וְהִפּוּכוֹ, שְׁבִפּוֹעַל וּבְגִלּוּי לֹא  
הִיָּה נִיכָר שְׁפִירְשׁוּ מִהַמַּחְלֻקָּת, אֲלֵא שְׁבִסְתֵּר  
מִחֲשַׁבְתָּם וְהִרְהוּרָם נִבְדְּלוּ מִשְׁאָר עֲדַת קִרְח,  
כִּף גַּם עוֹנָשָׁם הִיָּה בְּמִדָּה זֹה. שְׁרָאוּ כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל  
שְׁנַעְנְשׁוּ בְּדוּמָה לְקִרְח וְעֲדַתוֹ, שְׁכְּמוֹהֶם נִבְלְעוּ  
בְּאֲדָמָה, אֲלֵא שְׁשָׁם, בְּאוֹפֶן מוּבְלָע בְּאֲרֶץ,  
נִבְדְּלוּ מִן הַשְּׁאָר.

The repentance of Korah's sons was lacking because it was only in the heart, and they did not confess openly. No one knew they had repented. On the contrary, they only repented during the rebellion, so it appeared to everyone that they were continuing the uprising while they were, in fact, regretting it in their hearts. . . .

Hence, their unusual punishment was measure for measure. Their behavior was inconsistent: On the surface, there was no indication of pulling back, but in their hearts, they had separated themselves from the rebellion. And so was their punishment: on the surface, the people saw them being swallowed by the ground just like their co-rebels, but behind the scenes, they were separated from the others.

## ANSWERS

1. Because their sin was public but their repenting was private, their punishment had to be seen before their salvation.
2. Those who saw their rebellion never saw their repentance, so they could not witness their redemption. only a later generation could.

# TEXT 14

Rabbi Elisha  
Greenbaum, “Saved  
From the Brink,”  
[www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org)

They were jointly and severally responsible for the sin and richly deserved to share their co-conspirators’ fate. Yet, at the very last moment, as the dramatic denouement drew to a close, they had a fleeting moment of remorse.

And that was enough. That minuscule moment of regret was enough to deliver them from their fate and allowed them to resume their rightful place with their co-religionists on their march to Israel. They married, brought up their children in faith and one of them became the ancestor of Samuel. Far from striving for inconspicuousness, they became known as men of piety, to the extent that the book of Psalms has a number of songs written by “the sons of Korach [Korah].”

What an amazing life lesson! They griped at length, recanted briefly; their sin was public, their regret but a fleeting thought—and yet, when the scaffold dropped out from under them, G-d had already forgiven them in full. . . .

# TEXT 14

Rabbi Elisha  
Greenbaum, “Saved  
From the Brink,”  
[www.chabad.org](http://www.chabad.org)

Our Father in heaven is always waiting and willing us to return. Even when we go wrong, when the fiery pit of temptation yawns at our feet, and there seems no way out but down, we can always come back home. It is our prerogative to change our mind and G-d guarantees to take us back. Even way down in the depths, when falling into a bottomless chasm, G-d has already prepared our landing ledge and is waiting for any sign that we're finally ready for Him to cushion our fall.

G-d saving korah's sons despite what they did shows us the power of repentance.





No matter how far  
we wander from  
G-d's path, He is  
always ready to  
take us back.

## KEY POINTS

1. When Korah led a rebellion against Moses, the rebellious camp was swallowed alive in a fissure that opened suddenly under their feet.
2. Korah's sons also fell into the fissure, but they landed on a ledge high up near the surface. They merited this because they repented.
3. They remained there for a long time, after which they found a tunnel through which they crawled out of the cavern.
4. They repented in their hearts but on the surface appeared to continue with the rebellion. Thus, they were made to suffer the appearance of punishment while secretly being saved behind the scenes.
5. This story teaches us the power of repentance. Even a quiet repentance of the heart can bring one back from the brink of a deep chasm and rehabilitate one's relationship with G-d.

