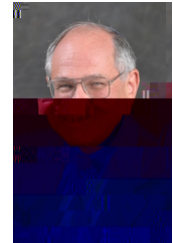


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Shabbat Parashat Korah July 6, 2019 - 3 Tammuz 5779



**By: Rabbi Elliot Dorff
Rector and Distinguished Professor of Philosophy
American Jewish University**

What Did Korah Do Wrong?

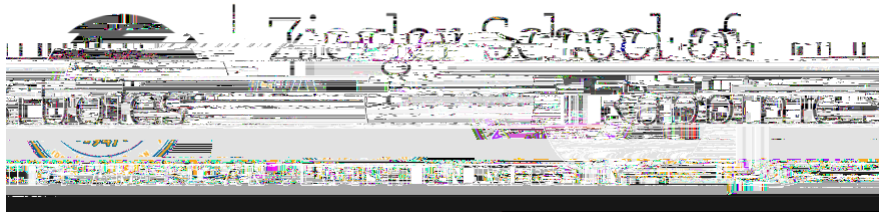
Torah Reading: Numbers 16:1 - 18:32

Haftarah Reading: I Samuel 11:14 - 12:22

I have often felt that Korah was punished unfairly. In fact, the story of Korah reminds me of the cowboy stories I saw on television when I was growing up in the 1950s (you do not have to do the math: I am 76!). The good guys all had white hats, and the bad guys all had black hats. There were no grays: people were either good or bad, and you did not even have to guess who was which. That made for a very clear picture, along with the security of knowing who was right and who was wrong. Moreover, the good guys always won in the end, so justice always prevailed.

Should Korah be wearing a black hat? The Rabbis certainly thought so. Korah's challenge to Moses' authority is the paradigm example that the Rabbis give for a debate "not for the sake of Heaven" but rather solely for personal gain (M. Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 5:20). Moreover, according to a legend recorded in the Talmud (B. Sanhedrin 110a), while Rabbah Bar Hannah was travel!

A much more sanguine view of Korah is suggested by Albert George Butzer in *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953, II:221-223). He suggests that Korah actually had proper and even good motives: he wanted to replace the dictatorial authority of Moses, albeit sanctioned by God, with a true democracy. After all, if "all of us are holy," as God Himself had asserted before announcing the



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