

Korach and his assembly reconsidered by R. Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin  
(*Netziv, Ha-'emek Davar*)

Ora Wiskind-Elper

Conventional readings of the events surrounding Korach and his followers (Num. 16:1-18:8) focus on the overt sins and moral flaws attributed to the protagonists. R. Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, in contrast, shifts the focus of inquiry to the psychological motivations underlying their actions. His attention to nuances in the biblical narrative and his attempt to reframe the issues it contains in a more comprehensive context bring the *Netziv* to a radically different understanding of the social and personal dynamics involved. Insights related to this broader understanding are dispersed throughout his commentary, *Ha-'emek Davar*. Through a close reading of some of those relevant passages, the author of this article seeks to present a coherent picture of the larger ideological concerns that may have led R. Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, as an influential educator and prominent religious leader deeply concerned with contemporary tensions in the Jewish world, to the reading of Korach's story that he formulates. The appendix notes, as an open question, that the *Netziv's* commentary on these issues bears a striking resemblance to the reading by R. Isaiah Horowitz (*Shnei Luchot ha-Brit*) concerning Korach and his assembly / Nadav and Avihu.