

Spotlight on...Korach

Background:

Parashat Korach tells the story of a mass uprising against Moshe and Aharon's leadership in the midbar. This uprising seems to have been orchestrated by a man named Korach, even though it included 2 distinct groups of people (Korach and his men, and the sons of Reuven) with two distinct complaints (Aharon kept the kehunah to himself, and Moshe was still the political leader even after the mission of the spies failed.) Moshe is incensed by their accusations against him, and orchestrates two dramatic scenes as punishment. Korach's men are consumed by fire, and the sons of Reuven are swallowed up by the ground.

This whole story opens in our parsha with the words "וַיִּקַּח לְקֹרַח", or "Korach took." The Torah doesn't tell us WHAT Korach took - the rest of the pasuk just lists the names of the people who joined him. So this raises a major question - what did Korach take? Why didn't the Torah instead say "Korach approached" or "Korach organized" or any other formulation?

The mefarshim offer a number of different answers:

Rashi: He took himself to one side with the view of separating himself from out of the community so that he might raise a protest regarding the priesthood to which Moses had appointed his brother.

Seforno: The pasuk is phrased oddly. The word "vayikach" is intended to refer to the fact that Korach, Datan and Aviram, and On ben Pelet took 250 men and approached Moshe.

Bechor Shor: The word "vayikach" doesn't come from the word "lakach," or "to take." It actually comes from the word "rachok," or "distance." Therefore the pasuk means that by starting this fight Korach distanced himself from this world, and the next world.

Questions:

1. According to each of these three opinions, what was the main action required of Korach in order to be able to facilitate this uprising? Was it a physical action or a spiritual action?
2. What do each of these explanations imply about what a person has to do in order to be able to lead an uprising against the leaders of their community?
3. What do you think are some other possible explanations of what the "vayikach" could mean?