

"PI" IN HEBREW

by Rabbi Label Lam

The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households and all the people who were with Korach, and their entire wealth. They and all that was theirs descended alive to the pit; the earth covered them over and they were lost from among the congregation. (Bamidbar 16:32-33)

"Korach took" an awful risk by challenging Moshe's authority. In the end he lost everything. He was deluded by his own biases and blind ambition and able to convince many a clever neighbor of his opinions. He openly mocked Moshe, claiming that an entirely blue garment would not need a blue thread, implying that there is no real need for leadership since the entire nation is already holy. With his brilliantly crafted rhetorical devices he held sway and demonstrated the genius of his way. The Talmud declares boldly, "Truth remains! Falsehood does not remain!" Korach's premise was false. Moshe was no author! He was rather more like a compatible printer. He only recorded only what was dictated to him by HASHEM and without the slightest deviation. Moshe was like a clear window that selflessly allows the light of the sun to shine through it. Korach had projected the color and stain of his own personal agenda and political aspirations on Moshe when actually everything he accused Moshe of, was more true about himself.

Korach's name is for all time synonymous with those, who in every generation have caused themselves and many others to break away from being a part of Jewish Nation because they cherished their own pompous opinions above all, while reveling in finding what may seem like faults in the Torah, written and oral, and its scholarly class. Inevitably history bears out how wrong the accusing party is while the veracity of the accused is vindicated over and over again.

In Malachim I, Chapter 7, Verse 23 there is a fairly detailed account of something called the "Yam Shel Shlomo". It states there, "He made the " sea" of cast (metal) ten cubits from its one lip to its other lip, circular all around , five cubits its height; a thirty cubit line could circle it all around." When I was a kid they used to have in the doctor's office a magazine for children called "Highlights"! One of my favorite sections consisted of a picture with multiple mistakes camouflaged and woven into the scene. The title challenged the reader with the nagging question, "What's wrong with this picture!"

We can ask here too about this vessel constructed by King Solomon the wisest of all men, "What's wrong with this picture?" Maybe the answer is too obvious and needs to be spelled out clearly.

Any high school student with a rudimentary knowledge of geometry knows how to figure the circumference of a circle. Rashi on the verse spells out the proportion as stated in the Tractate

Eruvin and Sukkah that for every 1 in the diameter the circumference of the circle is 3 times that. You and I both know that this is not entirely true. It is a verifiable law of math and a principle in building that when the diameter is multiplied by Pi- 3.1415... (An irrational number) that the yield is the truth length of the circumference. In the vessel made by King Solomon the mistake is ten times larger and that becomes already a significant discrepancy. How do we understand that the wisest man, as recorded in our holy books, presumably written with prophecy, could be so openly and glaringly mistaken? It's enough to shatter one's faith, G-d forbid, in the scriptures and/or wake-up a "baby Korach within"! How can this credibility gap be cured? Here are three approaches.

1. The Torah is not a geometry book or an engineering manual. Rather it speaks approximately when listing the general proportion of the diameter and the circumference as being 1 to 3! Nice!
2. The Ralbag explains that even if the diameter is 10 from edge to edge, the circumference can still be 30 if the inner part of the circle is measured, as opposed to the outer dimension of the rim (depending on the thickness of the vessel's metal). A little better!
3. The word in the verse for circumference is written "Kava" -Kuf, Vuv, Hey, yet our tradition is to pronounce it "Kav"- Kuf, Vav. Who knows why this word has that built- in discrepancy between the way it is written and the way it is read. The Vilna Gaon with genius discerns that the numerical value of the way it is written is 111 while the value of the way it is pronounced is 106. If you divide 111 by 106 you get a number slightly larger than "one" to be precise 1.04717. When that value of "one" is multiplied by 3 the result remarkably is 3.1415 which is Pi carried out to the 10,000 column -namely the forth place.. WOW!!

Korach was so brazen to open his mouth against Moshe that he was swallowed up by the earth's "mouth"- that's **"Pi" in Hebrew!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).