

Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Letter of The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parasha Korach
July 9, 2016

פרשת קורח
ג' בתמוז תשע"ו

Torah Reading: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 16:1-18:32

In this *parasha*, Korach and his followers rebel against Moshe's and Aharon's leadership and are killed; God instructs Aharon regarding laws of the *kehuna* (priesthood).

After the rebellion of Korach is quashed, Moshe devises a test to prove once and for all that the tribe of Levi, and specifically the *Cohanim*, are supposed to be the spiritual leaders of Bnei Yisrael. Chapter 17, verses 16-26 read as follows:

טז וַיְדַבֵּר ה', אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. יז דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְקַח מֵאֵתָם מִטֵּה מִטֵּה לְבֵית אָב מֵאֵת כָּל-נְשִׂאֵיהֶם לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם--שְׁנַיִם עֶשֶׂר, מִטּוֹת: אִישׁ אֶת-שֵׁמוֹ, תִּכְתֹּב עַל-מִטְּהוֹ. יח וְאֵת שֵׁם אֶהֱרֹן, תִּכְתֹּב עַל-מִטְּה לְוִי: כִּי מִטֵּה אֶחָד, לְרֹאשׁ בֵּית אֲבוֹתָם. יט וְהִנַּחְתָּם, בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד--לִפְנֵי, הָעֵדוּת, אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹעַד לָכֶם, שָׁמָּה. כ וְהָיָה, הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אֲבָחַר-בוֹ--מִטְּהוֹ יִפְרָח; וְהִשְׁכַּתִּי מֵעָלַי, אֶת-תְּלִנּוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲשֶׁר הֵם מְלִינִם, עֲלֵיכֶם. כא וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וַיִּתְּנוּ אֵלָיו כָּל-נְשִׂאֵיהֶם מִטֵּה לְנִשְׂיָא אֶחָד מִטֵּה לְבֵית אֲבוֹתָם--שְׁנַיִם עֶשֶׂר, מִטּוֹת; וּמִטֵּה אֶהֱרֹן, בְּתוֹךְ מִטּוֹתָם. כב וַיִּנַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הַמִּטּוֹת, לִפְנֵי ה', בְּאֹהֶל, הָעֵדוּת. כג וַיְהִי מִמְּחָרָת, וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אֹהֶל הָעֵדוּת, וְהִנֵּה פָּרַח מִטֵּה-אֶהֱרֹן, לְבֵית לְוִי; וַיֵּצֵא פָּרַח וַיֵּצֵץ צִיץ, וַיִּגְמַל שְׁקָדִים. כד וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-כָּל-הַמִּטּוֹת מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה, אֶל-כָּל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיִּרְאוּ וַיִּקְחוּ, אִישׁ מִטְּהוֹ. כה וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, הֲשֵׁב אֶת-מִטֵּה אֶהֱרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת, לְמִשְׁמַרְתָּ לְאוֹת, לְבְנֵי-מְרִי; וְתִכַּל תְּלוּנֹתָם מֵעָלַי, וְלֹא יָמָתוּ. כו וַיַּעַשׂ, מֹשֶׁה: כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ, כִּן עָשָׂה.

16 And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: **17** 'Speak to the children of Israel, and take from them rods, one for each father's house, of all their princes according to their fathers' houses, twelve rods; you shall write every man's name upon his rod. **18** And you shall write Aharon's name upon the rod of Levi, for there shall be one rod for the head of their fathers' houses. **19** And

you shall lay them up in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you. **20** And it shall come to pass, that the man whom I shall choose, his rod shall bud; and I will make to cease from Me the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against you.' **21** And Moshe spoke to the children of Israel; and all their princes gave him rods, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods; and the rod of Aharon was among their rods. **22** And Moshe laid up the rods before Hashem in the tent of the testimony. **23** And it came to pass the next day that Moshe went into the tent of the testimony; and, behold, the rod of Aharon for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bore ripe almonds. **24** And Moshe brought out all the rods from before Hashem to all the children of Israel; and they looked, and took every man his rod. **25** And Hashem said to Moshe: 'Put back the rod of Aharon before the testimony, to be kept there, for a token against the rebellious children; that there may be made an end of their murmurings against Me, that they die not.' **26** Thus did Moshe; as Hashem commanded him, so he did.

The verse I'd like to focus on is verse 23:

וַיְהִי מִמָּחָרָת, וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אֱלֹהֵי הָעֵדוּת, וַהֲנִיחַ פֶּרֶחַ מִטֵּה-אַהֲרֹן, לְבַיִת לְוִי;
וַיֵּצֵא פֶּרֶחַ וַיֵּצֵץ צִיץ, וַיִּגְמַל שְׂקָדִים.

And it came to pass the next day that Moshe went into the tent of the testimony; and, behold, the rod of Aharon for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bore ripe almonds.

Clearly, the purpose and outcome of this exercise was to show the Bnei Yisrael, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Aharon and his descendants were meant to be the leaders of the Israelites.

But why *shkedim*, almonds? According to Rashi (11th Century Franco-Germany), it is because *shkedim* are the quickest food to blossom on the trees. (Hence the Tu B'Shvat song "*Hash'kediya Porachat*," "The Almond Tree is Blooming.") Ibn Ezra (12th Century Spain) takes it a step further, claiming that the word "*shkedim*" is derived from the word "*she'hikdim*," meaning "that were first (before the others)." The verb *sh'k'd* in Biblical Hebrew actually means "to make haste."

One can see all of these concepts—the blossoming almond branch, the verb *sh'k'd*, the leadership of the *Cohanim*—brought together in the first chapter of the book of *Yirmiyahu*, Jeremiah.

Yirmiyahu was a *cohen* and the primary prophet just before, during, and immediately after the destruction of the First Temple. In chapter 1 of the book bearing his name, God comes to him to initiate him into prophecy (much against Yirmiyahu's will). Verses 11-12 relate the following:

יֵאֱוִי־הִי דְבַר-ה' אֵלַי לֵאמֹר, מָה-אַתָּה רֹאֶה יִרְמְיָהוּ; וְאָמַר, מִקְלָשֶׁקֶד אֲנִי רֹאֶה.
יב וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵלַי, הֲיִטְבֶּתָּ לְרֵאוֹת: כִּי-שֶׁקֶד אֲנִי עַל-דְּבָרִי, לַעֲשׂתוֹ.

The word of Hashem came to me, saying: 'Jeremiah, what do you see?' And I said: 'I see a rod of an almond-tree [*shaked*].' Then Hashem said to me: 'You have seen well; for I hasten [*shoked*] My word to perform it.'

The episode of the almond rod demonstrates God's decision process about the *Cohanim* and leadership; utilizes the richness of the Hebrew language to the fullest; and models the continuity of themes and ideas throughout the Torah and the Prophets. Next time you eat an almond, think of the richness of this little nut!

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Look over the *parasha*. Why do you think that Hashem chose such an obvious test to appoint the *Cohanim* as leaders?
- What is the book of Yirmiyahu trying to teach us by using the same imagery as in our *parasha*?
- Why do you think the verse includes all of the following verbs: the rod ... budded, and put forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and bore ripe almonds?