

# Korach; Leadership

- Nisson Shulman.

The Earth swallowing Korach and his followers did not stop the complaints, so that the selection of Aharon had to be proven by the miracle of the staffs. When hidden in the ark, the flowers were included. Why were not the almonds on the staff enough? They were the fruit, why flowers as well? This sermon answers the question in terms of continuity of leadership and planning for the future.

## KORACH

### LEADERSHIP

(The thought which produced this sermon was first heard at a sermon seminar, and came from one of the participants, Rabbi Hershel Schacter, Rabbi Philip Singer, Rabbi Max Schreier, Rabbi David Hollander or Rabbi Abraham Besdin)

The earth swallowed Korach and Datan and Aviram, together with their close followers. And a fire from heaven consumed the rest of the 250 rebels. Thus ended the rebellion.

But the dispute was not quite settled. The damage was too deep for so quick and incisive a victory. When the people's leaders rebel, the spirit of rebellion lives on in many hearts, even when the leaders are gone.

So the people, the whole people, continued to complain to Moses, declaring that perhaps God didn't cause the earth to open. Maybe Moses and Aaron brought it about, somehow, through magic! "You have killed God's people!" they said; *atem hamitem et am adoshem*.

A clear sign was needed to show that God had chosen Aaron, and that all was done by God's will.

So the Lord commanded Moses to take a staff of every tribe's leader, and write each one's name upon it and place them in the sanctuary before the Ark. The staff belonging to God's chosen one would blossom forth. The others would remain the same. Thus, the true High Priest would be selected by the Almighty.

"And it came to pass," says the Torah, "on the morrow, that Moses brought out all the staffs, and behold, only Aaron's had blossomed. It gave out buds and blossoms and finally it produced almonds." So was Aaron elected.

The Talmud, in tractate Yoma, teaches that when the Holy Ark was hidden, with it were hidden a flask of Manna, a bottle of the holy oil for anointing priests, kings and prophets, and the staff of Aaron together with its almonds as well as its blossoms.

On the pages of the large Vilna Shas, is a fine commentary which the publishers had found in manuscript, edited, and added to their publication, called *Tosfot Yeshanim*. This commentary

asks an interesting question. If it were necessary to place the staff in the ark as a sign for future times of Aaron's selection, then placing it there with its almonds would have been enough. Why does the Talmud also add that it was hidden together with its blossoms? Of what use are the blossoms now that we have the fruit? Lama mazkir peracheha, vehalo gamal shekedim? He answers that in the staff where the blossoms had ripened into almonds, new buds and blossoms had sprouted, and this was also important to place into the Ark.

I suggest that in this question and answer lies an important lesson for us: that even after bearing fruit, buds and blossoms are still necessary. And I suggest that this lesson should apply to us as individuals as well as a community.

Many of us have achieved success in our fields, renown, wealth and personal satisfaction, to a greater or lesser degree. Such achievements are the shekedim, the fruits. "In enjoying the fruits of our labour at the time of maturation", says the Talmud, "do not forget buds and blossoms." Do not forget to seek new challenges, new areas for expression of our talents and abilities. As long as we give out new buds and blossoms, we remain strong and vigorous.

We have done great things for our people. The tendency is to say: "It is a time for fruit. Let me graciously accept credit for what I have done, and let others begin to produce the new buds and blossoms and fruit. As for me, I'm tired."

No, says the Talmud. No shekedim without perachim. No fruit without blossoms. If your life has meaning, it is not only because of the achievements of the past. It is also, and perhaps especially, because you will not give up the work for the future. If this is true of individuals, it is all the more true of organizations.

No president, no set of officers is finished, unless succession is well established so that blossoms will grow to fruit in the future time as well. So when an organization is replete with achievements, that is precisely the time to look for new challenges, new areas of concern, new ways of doing old things which had become old ingrained habits, for otherwise the organization loses its reason for being. And it is certainly required to look for new leadership.

And do not forget to prepare for the future through future generations....

The synagogue is the fruit of a great investment of time and money. You all can point to many synagogues, fruitful in their time, that dried and withered and died because they didn't pay sufficient attention to the buds and blossoms of their community, the children, their greatest investment in future years and their only security.

And finally, consider our state of Israel. Once we thought that with the establishment of the State all our problems would be solved. The time of shekedim, of good fruit was at hand! Not even in our imagination could we foresee the many challenges, which would arise and face us and which we would have to overcome, challenges to our survival. Every step is a new crisis, economically, politically, militarily. Every item of news presents new demands and requirements. Now is the time for the new perachim which will in the future mature into the shekedim, the fruit which represents the solutions. The security problems are now uppermost on our Jewish agenda; and

with security, the problem of the anti-Israel slant of the media, the new substitute for the anti-Semitism of old. These challenges will be met properly only with proper leadership, and proper leadership means, concentration not only on immediate problems, but also on preparing the flowering of the future, not only remaining strong in our leadership positions here, but especially preparing young people for future achievements and new leadership. And finally, the disengagement issues that have divided our people in Israel and even all over the world, wherever Jews live and debate the Gaza issues, must be solved if we are to remain a united people, and if – despite the anguish this disengagement will undoubtedly bring – we are to overcome this time and prepare for a vibrant future, a future of perachim, a future where the youth will mature into the leadership of a united people of Israel, “Ken yehi ratzon, venomar amen.”

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(Submitted by Nisson Shulman)