

Dvar Torah - Korach

After the tragedy of Korach's rebellion, Hashem instructs Moshe to prove the special designation of Aharon and the tribe of Levi by collecting the staffs belonging to the leaders of all the tribes, including Aharon's. Moshe placed the staffs in the *Mishkan*, and the following day he brought them to the people who saw that Aharon's staff had blossomed and produced almonds. Hashem then commanded Moshe to place Aharon's staff inside the ark as an eternal reminder of Aharon's designation (17:16-26).

In describing the miraculous blossoming of Aharon's staff, the Torah tells that it produced flowers, a bud, and almonds (17:23). Rashi explains that the word *tzitz* ("bud") refers to the bud which appears when the flowers fall and then grows into a fruit. It appears from Rashi's comments that flowers blossomed on the staff and then fell to expose the fruit – the same process that occurs on trees.

The *Raboteinu Ba'alei Ha-Tosefot* commentary suggests a different explanation, claiming that flowers blossomed on two different locations on the staff. This reading is supported by the otherwise repetitive formulation of the verse: "Moshe entered the Tent of Testimony, and behold the staff of Aharon, from the house of Levi, flowered; it produced a flower and brought forth a blossom, and bore almonds." *Raboteinu Ba'alei Ha-Tosefot* suggest that the first phrase – *parach* ("flowered") – means that flowers grew on one side of the staff, whereas the later phrase – *va-yotzei perach* ("produced a flower") – refers to a development on the other side. The flowers that grew on the second side marked the initial stages of the almonds' emergence, and thus fell once the almonds sprouted. The first set of flowers, however, grew independently, not as the early stages of the growth of fruit, and they thus remained forever on the staff.

The Malbim disagrees with Rashi's interpretation altogether, and claims that the flowers never fell from the staff. Part of the miracle, the Malbim contended, was that the flowers did not fall as they normally do once the fruit sprouts and begins to grow (in

addition to the more obvious miracle of vegetation growing on a detached piece of wood).

According to all these approaches, both flowers and almonds appeared and remained on Aharon's staff. What message might have been conveyed through the presence of both the almonds and the flowers?

The flowers on a fruit tree lend it an appearance of beauty and grandeur, but they do not signify the ultimate objective and final stage. They eventually wilt and fall to the ground to give way to the tree's truly significant feature – the fruit. In the context of the aftermath of Korach's revolt, the flowers and the almonds perhaps symbolize, respectively, the honour and nobility associated with the priesthood, and the responsibilities and obligations of priesthood. Korach and his followers were attracted by the "flowers," by the aristocratic" aura of nobility and grandeur surrounding the *kehuna*, the honor and distinction afforded to the priestly class. The beauty and majesty of the "flowers" led them to overlook the "fruit," the essence and ultimate objective of the *kehuna*, the demands and responsibilities for which the *kohanim* were selected. They were designated not to serve as the nation's "flowers," to be just a privileged class of citizens, but rather for the purpose of tending to the *Mikdash* and providing spiritual guidance and leadership.

By producing from the staff both flowers and almonds, Hashem perhaps sought to emphasise the contrast between the two: the flowers, which feature external beauty but play but a temporary, secondary role, and the fruits, the final stage and ultimate purpose for which the tree was planted.