

Parshas Korach

In the aftermath of *Korach's* destruction with all of his followers, there was still considerable resentment and consternation within the Jewish people. How had *Moshe Rabeinu* allowed a challenge to the *kehuna, priesthood of Aharon*, to cause such a major loss of life? In response to this challenge, *Hashem* instructed the *Nesiim*, princes of the tribes, to each submit a wooden staff and that *Aharon* too should give in a staff. These were placed in the Holy of Holies next to the Ark and each was labeled with the name of the tribe. The next day, *Moshe* went to retrieve them and all of the staffs remained the same except for *Aharon's*. His staff had blossomed and given forth almonds. *Moshe* was commanded to place *Aharon's* staff next to the *Aron* for posterity to memorialize this important event. The message of the staff's blossoming into fruit was to demonstrate that *Aharon* was the chosen one and that his selection to this elevated status was *Hashem's* choice, not *Moshe's*.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein ZT'L (Halachic decisor and Rosh Yeshiva in Russia and the U.S. 1895-1986) notes that the blossoms that preceded the almonds remained on the staff. The *Gemara* in *Pesachim 54a* refers to the "staff with its blossoms and almonds" at the time of the destruction of the first *Bais HaMikdash*, some 900 years later. We know that blossoms are precursors to the fruit and always fall off to allow the bud to form into the fruit. Why was this miraculous occurrence necessary and what message did it bring to our people?

Reb Moshe answers that the blossoms represent the preparatory steps for *mitzvos* and worthy activities. The message of this miracle was that when we prepare for a *mitzvah*, those steps are also infused with holiness and are, therefore, eternal just like the *mitzvah* itself. This is why the blossoms remained even after the fruit emerged. We should recognize this when we prepare to do worthy deeds and to be mindful of the significance of preparation for a *mitzvah*.

Reb Moshe adds that for this reason we must be careful about the purity and morality of preparing for a *mitzvah*. One should not think that the ends justify the means. When we are creating the circumstances for *mitzvos* and *Torah* learning to be accomplished, we must do it with the same level of integrity and *kedusha* as the worthy end itself.