

The Miracle of Aharon's Staff and the Real Life Lesson to be Learned – Y. Landau

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**וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרַת וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אֱהָרֹן הָעֵדוּת וְהִנֵּה פָּרַח מִטֶּה־אֱהָרֹן לְבַיִת לַיְי וַיֵּצֵא פֶּרֶחַ וַיֵּצֵץ צִיץ וַיִּגְמַל שְׂקָדִים:
*The next day Moshe entered the Tent of the Testimony, and there the staff of Aharon of the house of Levi had sprouted: it had brought forth blossoms, produced buds, and borne almonds. (17/23)***

This possuk describes how, in order to verify Aharon's position as Kohen Godol, all the leaders of the tribes had to leave their staffs in the Mishkan and how, overnight, Aharon's staff was transformed into one bearing blossom, buds and almonds.

From the wording of the possuk it seems that even when the fruit itself appeared on Aharon's staff, the earlier stages, namely the blossoms and the buds, remained. Otherwise, it would not have been known that these stages had previously occurred. Indeed, the Gemoro in Yoma 52b states that Aharon's staff "with its almonds and its blossoms" were hidden with the Ark. Tosafos Yeshanim states that usually when there are almonds, there are no longer any blossoms; in this case a miracle occurred, and the blossoms remained. What was the necessity of such a miracle?

R' Moshe Feinstein suggests that perhaps Hashem intended to demonstrate that the blossoms of kedusha (sanctity) do not disintegrate. The fruit of the mitzvah is the performance of the mitzvah itself, and the blossoms are the preparations leading up to it. From here we learn that even the blossoms remain forever, because all the toil and the pain that a person has to endure in order to fulfil a mitzvah and learn Torah remain. Unlike material things, for which a person is paid only for the fruit, i.e. only for the final result, but not for the effort put into it, the preparation which goes into the performance of a mitzvah will remain forever. The blossoms are the means by which the fruit can grow, and they symbolise the preparation, to ensure that the ultimate aim, the performance of the mitzvah, is realised. The blossoms, i.e. these preparations for Torah study and mitzvah observance, are never lost, and reward is paid for all of them.

The same idea is expressed in Gemara Brochos 17a – "Fortunate is one whose toil is in Torah". The reason for this is because the toil itself is a matter of utmost importance. This is unlike the effort spent in worldly pursuits, where it is only the reward resulting from the effort which matters, and man toils only because he would not receive any reward if he did not work. This is true of the ordinary working man who works to earn a livelihood but, generally, not because he takes great pleasure from the work. Even a top sportsman would not train if he did not know that this was the only way he would reach the top of his game and gain the often huge rewards resulting from being the best in his field.

The toil in Torah and mitzvos however is, in and of itself, good fortune for the person involved. For this reason, the blossom and the buds remained on Aharon's staff even once the fully formed fruit appeared, because they were all holy. This miracle occurred because Aharon merited the kehunah by dint of his deeds, because in all of his toil and his work, there was nothing superfluous or wasteful. The same holds true for all who study Torah. The actions they perform to enable them to learn Torah and perform mitzvos are blossoms and they too will endure forever.

Interestingly, this possuk can also help to understand what appears to be an extraordinary transformation in the fortunes of the tribe of Levi. Sefer Bereishis ends with Yaakov blessing his sons but, amongst these blessings, 2 sons do not receive blessings of their own because Yaakov was still upset at their behavior in the incidents of Shechem (and possibly the selling of Yosef). These two sons were Shimon and Levi. However, whereas Shimon never appears to rise from the status accorded him by Yaakov, the beginning of Sefer Shemos sees Levi seemingly already accorded the status of the most eminent of the tribes, whose leading personalities became the leaders of the Bnei Yisroel. The Torah does not discuss or even seemingly drop a hint as to how this remarkable change of fortune came about.

Our possuk however and the lesson we have learned from it however may provide a clue as to what happened. The possuk seemingly goes out of its way to associate Aharon with the tribe of Levi – "the staff of Aharon of the house of Levi" - which, on the surface we don't need to be told as we are well aware of his tribal affiliation. However, in light of what we have learned, it may be that the Torah is teaching us an important lesson here. It is not just Aharon whose efforts were crucial to his assuming the position of Kohen Godol and who can provide us with a lesson as to how toil in Torah and mitzvos is so important. In fact, the whole tribe expended much toil and effort to take the lesson from Yaakov's rebuke and to work to be the very best they could. This effort is perhaps what first allowed them to rise from one of the "lowest" of the tribes, to the pre-eminent tribe it is, until today.

Once again, there is a tremendous lesson to be learnt for all who wish to hear it – the effort is as important as the result and can itself lead to great things.