



PARSHAS KORACH – SHLOMO STAHL

The Second Grumbling and Aharon's Staff

Even after the earth had swallowed up Korach's people together with Doston and Avirom and the 250 people who had offered the Ketores had been burned by a fire from Hashem, the Bnei Yisroel were still not quietened. They blamed Moshe and Aharon for all these deaths (Ch17 v6), because it was they who had suggested the idea of the Ketores (it was not instructed by Hashem), and the matter was not settled until the miracle of Aharon's staff blossoming. After all these miracles, was it not evident that this was Hashem who had chosen Aharon?

Ibn Ezra suggests that Bnei Yisroel suspected that perhaps Moshe and Aharon had davened for this; or perhaps they knew of some other means to bring this about. However that is difficult because you could argue this about all other miracles or signs from Hashem.

R' S R Hirsch suggests that perhaps they realised that yes, Hashem had brought all these punishments, but perhaps He had done so only because of the honour of Moshe and Aharon. Had Moshe and Aharon forgone their kovod and forgiven the people this might not have happened.

This explains why Moshe and Aharon then showed that, more than anything else; they cared for the Bnei Yisroel. Because immediately afterwards, when Hashem appeared to Moshe and said: "You and Aharon withdraw from amongst these people and I will destroy them in an instant", they did not. Instead of allowing Hashem to do so, they fell on their faces and davened; remaining on the spot to protect the people.

Also when Moshe instructed Aharon to take the Ketores and run among the people, placing himself between the dying and the living, and making atonement for them, it proved again, that contrary to their accusations, he would rather protect them from the Angel of Death.

But then why was the blossoming of Aharon's staff necessary? And why was Aharon's staff taken to represent the tribe of Levi and not just the Kohanim?

Ramban suggests that the people indeed believed that Aharon's appointment as Kohen Godol was chosen by Hashem. After all, his korbonos in the Mishkan had brought down fire from Heaven. What bothered them was the choice of the Levi'im. Perhaps the first-born should still do that service as had been the initial plan. They were therefore not convinced by the contest of offering up Ketores, and the death of those who did, because that was a service for Kohanim – not Levi'im – so it proves nothing. The grumbling was only settled when the staff blossomed. Because it represented the tribe of Levi - (see ch17 v18 "and the name of Aharon you shall inscribe on the staff of Levi") - as there was no complaint about him only about the Levi'im.

This explains why B'nei Yisroel grumbled a second time after Korach, and why the miracle of the staffs, but does not explain the part of Aharon stopping the Mageifa with the Ketores.

For this we return to **Rashi**, who, quoting a Mechilta, sees an entirely different lesson from the Ketores. The people slandered the Ketores saying that it only brought death. It killed Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon, when they offered it at the inauguration – and it now killed Korach's followers. Said Hashem – I will show you that on the contrary - it halts plaque - what kills is sin !