

A Taste of Torah

Staff Meeting

by Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher

You've probably had the opportunity, at some point in your life, of attempting to create something and meeting with failure. Maybe it was that triple-decker gooey caramel-chocolate cake that looked great in the cookbook (and was supposed to be "so easy to make!"); perhaps it was the vegetable garden that succumbed to every insect, weed and disease that ever existed; possibly that cabinet you really needed for your workroom just didn't quite come together as planned ("What kind of nail did you say I should've used?"). I would assume that after your efforts met with disaster, you disposed of the leftovers and moved on; shrine-building was not intended for this sort of thing.

This very logical assumption makes one incident in this week's parsha rather difficult to understand. As a proof that G-d had, indeed, chosen the Tribe of Levi to serve in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and Aharon to be the High Priest with his children becoming the *kohanim* (priests), G-d orders Moshe to take a staff from the prince of every tribe, with Aharon providing a staff for the Tribe of Levi. All the staffs were placed in the Holy of Holies, in front of the *Aron* (Ark of the Covenant) for the night. The next morning - behold! - Aharon's staff had sprouted leaves, flowers and almonds, while the rest of the sticks remained dry and leafless. This great display of the chosenness of the Levites and Aharon settled the issue for once and all, and the story ought to have ended there and then. But the Torah adds one more detail - that every prince retrieved his staff and went on his way.

Why did they need to retrieve their staffs? They were initially necessary to see whom G-d had truly desired to serve in the *Mishkan*; the test was over, and the sticks had served their purpose. Throw

them away! Why the need for the princes to take them back?

Let's examine the entire exchange between the Jewish People and Moshe. While Korach himself had his eye on the High Priesthood, the claim of most of his followers was that they, too, desired to perform the service in the *Mishkan*. Why, said they, is the service reserved for a select few? All of us ought to have the opportunity to draw close to G-d through bringing the *ketores* (incense offering).

Moshe warned them that only certain people had the spiritual ability to bring the *ketores*; anyone unqualified was reaching beyond his level and would suffer the dire consequences. Despite Moshe's warning, several hundred Jews attempted to bring a *ketores* offering, and it cost them their lives. The Jewish People learned the hard way that certain spiritually-uplifting endeavors are limited to specific groups. This led to a sense of disappointment among the rank-and-file Jew; am I to be forever limited in my efforts to strive ever-higher?

The staff test was, in part, a response to this sentiment. The fact that only Aharon's staff responded immediately does not prove that the other sticks were dead. Rather, it showed that right now, only Aharon and his descendants were at a level of being able to serve in the *Mishkan*.

Ever wonder what trees do in the winter? They're not dead; they're dormant. All winter, it rains, and the tree absorbs that water as it prepares for a warmer time. The life that is developing deep within the core of the tree is not yet manifest. Come spring and it will burst forth with all of the pent-up energy it spent months storing.

The *kohanim* were designated by Hashem to be that group that served as a paradigm of connection to Hashem. Whether

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Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Stories For The Soul

Taking the Fight Out

Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam, the Bobover Rebbe (1907-2000), lost his father, his wife and two of his three children during the Holocaust. He came to America and rebuilt the Bobover chassidus. One of the great Torah leaders of his time, the Rebbe was known for his abhorrence of *machlokes*, conflict and discord.

Inevitably, there were some who disagreed with some of his positions and policies, and one time, leaflets were posted and distributed against the Rebbe. His followers were inflamed, but Rabbi Halberstam moved quickly to quell any flames of fighting that would spring up. At the very next gathering of his chassidim, he announced, "I forgive those who spread the defamatory papers against me.

"However, know that if anyone tries to defend my honor in any way, shape or form, I will not forgive that person, not in this world, nor in the Next World!"

After this statement, no one dared react to the scurrilous fliers, and the matter soon died down.

Korach and his followers felt they were creating a dispute for a just cause. Nonetheless, they paid a heavy price for starting a *machlokes* - all of them died. One must strive to avoid *machlokes* whenever possible.

Kollel Happenings

LEGAL HOLIDAY LEARNING THIS JULY 4TH

Start your day off on the right foot with Torah study! Join the Kollel for learning at three locations around Denver: At the Kollel West Denver Bais Medrash, shacharis at 8 am followed by breakfast and learning. At the Kollel Southeast Torah Center, shacharis at 8 followed by breakfast and learning, and at EDOS, shacharis at 7:30 followed by breakfast and learning. Topic being studied is *Minding Everyone's Business: Dina Dimlachusa in the Business World*.

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HELP BUILD THE FUTURE OF TORAH IN DENVER

Claim your part in building the future of Torah in Denver! The Kollel is in the midst of a capital campaign to build a three-story, state-of-the-art Torah Center that will serve the entire Denver Jewish community. To contribute, or for dedication opportunities and details on the building, visit denverkollel.org or email info@denverkollel.org.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked: What custom, followed today by most Ashkenazic communities in association with every Rosh Chodesh, was originally only practiced regarding Rosh Chodesh coinciding with Shabbos?

A: When announcing the upcoming Rosh Chodesh on the preceding Shabbos, most Ashkenazic communities recite (after announcing the exact day or days of Rosh Chodesh) "*habo aleinu v'al kol yisroel l'tova*" ("which is coming to us and all Israel for goodness"). This ending does not appear in early versions of this recitation, or in the Sephardic version. It seems this custom originated in some communities to be said only when Rosh Chodesh would coincide with the following Shabbos. There are two

reasons given for this original custom. One is to stress that we're referring to the following Shabbos, not the current one. Another is to stress that today is also Shabbos. Eventually, this custom was adopted (by most communities) for every Rosh Chodesh announcement.

(Sources: Sefer Olas Hachodesh, page 66)

Part 2 of a 2-part Shabbos-Rosh Chodesh series

This week's question: What custom, practiced today by Sephardic communities regarding Rosh Chodesh coinciding with Shabbos, would be halachically prohibited under certain circumstances?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Shlomo Luria, the Maharshal Part V

The Maharshal was also opposed to many who engaged in the study of Kabbalah, feeling that they did not know how to properly relate to and understand the mystical ideas contained in this area of Torah. "These modern ones pretend to belong to the sect of the Kabbalists..." writes the Maharshal. "They cannot see in the light of the Zohar, which they do not understand... Therefore, do not go in their ways. Have nothing to do

with things secret."

Despite his sharp words and outspoken views, the Maharshal was a humble person. He had a *mochiach*, an individual whose job it was to rebuke him regularly for his shortcomings. As mentioned previously, his strong stances on controversial issues were intended to bring honor and glory to G-d and His Torah.

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through their blessing the Jewish People or their offering of the sacrifices on their behalf, they are a conduit of G-d's goodness to their brethren. Their achievements can be recognized immediately and they receive instant results; it is not for nothing that the Talmud describes the *kohanim*, on numerous occasions, as *zerizim* (alacritous). Their role is to invest the effort and see the results right away. For the rest of us, our spiritual work doesn't always yield results immediately, or even in the near future. It is stored away for a different time, for a world where we will enjoy the fruits of our labors. As our Sages tell us (Eiruvim 22a), "Today for performing them [the mitzvos] and tomorrow to receive

the reward."

The staffs were returned to the princes to impart a vital lesson: Your stick is alive! Don't give up because you don't see growth now. You need to keep watering your tree. Keep feeding it. Give it sunshine. Nurture it. One day, it will bloom and produce fruits beyond what you can imagine. Aharon and his descendants are here to inspire us toward that, for we can see how their efforts bear fruit. The rest of us may not be the tribe chosen to manifest great spiritual levels in the here and now, but rest assured that every drop of work and effort we put in during our journey in this world will provide luscious fruits in the World to Come.

The Torah Weekly is made possible through a generous grant from the Harry H. Beren Foundation of Lakewood, NJ, in memory of Harry H. Beren, z"l
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