

Patience is a Virtue: A Birthday Thought One Week Late

Personal note: I would have loved to have written a Dvar Torah in time for last week's Darchei Noam Tenth Birthday Kiddush. But I simply did not have enough time to create something before the deadline of last week's emailed missive. So here is my attempt a week late.

This week's Parsha focuses on what some commentators refer to as "The Great Mutiny". Korach, first cousin of Moshe and Levitical leader, desires power. In a populist appeal to the masses, he disdains the need for Moshe's leadership. All the commentators see him as a demagogue (a cursory look at the Torah's text will bear this out) as well as someone who rejects the Mitzvot. (This is not as easily seen in the text, but most commentators agree with this interpretation.) The Earth swallows up Korach and his supporters. Yet the people are still not satisfied and in fact are quite upset. So Hashem tells Moshe to have each tribe bring forth a staff, plus one more staff from Aharon. The staffs are planted in the ground. The next morning, Aharon's staff has turned into an almond tree, as a sign of Hashem's favor. As the text (17:23) reports:

And it happened the next day, when Moshe came to the Tent of Testimony, and behold! The rod of Aharon for the house of Levi had budded, and sent forth buds, and bloomed blossoms and bore ripe almonds.

Why, indeed, was there a need for the incident of the rod planting? And what was the symbolism of Aharon's rod budding, blooming and bearing ripe almonds?

There is a clue to the answer in Rashi's comment on 17:23. He writes:

...And why almonds? Because it is the fruit which blossoms more quickly than all other fruits. Thus, one who stirs up to jump for the priesthood, his disaster will quickly come...

Rashi follows the classic rabbinic reasoning of *mida k'neged mida*, tit for tat. Korach, besides being a demagogue, was also impetuous. He wanted power, and he wanted it immediately. It did not matter that he was already wealthy and powerful. After all, he was very much in the line of Levitical succession. This was not good enough for him or for the followers he inspired. So even after Korach had been swallowed up by the Earth, others still needed a graphic lesson on the futility and consequences of impetuosity and pushing too quickly.

I think, though, that there may be more to the story than Rashi's explanation. If we go back to the Biblical verse, we note that the blooming and budding of Aaron's rod follows the natural order. Hashem could have simply caused almonds to grow overnight, but instead had the staff follow the normal progression of buds, flowers and fruit. People needing reassurance of Hashem's presence witnessed this dramatic event. They saw that even with Divine guidance, the process is important. There are no short cuts or easy

answers for complex problems. Even with a creative miracle, still hard work, loyalty, service, and patience are required.

Anyone who has ever planted flowers or trees knows the truth of this teaching. Those of us engaged in other aspects of life should try to remember it as well. Whether simply dealing with day-to-day issues in our own lives, the development of a shul, or the building of a Jewish Homeland, we know that miracles can and do occur. But we also should remember that process and patience are essential.

Many of us (yours truly included) remember back to the early days when the idea of a vibrant Modern Orthodox shul in St. Louis Park was a dream, the vision of a small group. Hard work and patience have led us to a wonderful place. Along the way, we have seen growth both in numbers and the quality of Torah life. But as we reflect, let us remember that it did not happen overnight. It required patience, process, relationship building, some money, and a lot of hard work. It still does.

Let us constantly and consistently work at our goals, knowing that Hashem is next to us and helping us in the task. Ultimately, our combined efforts, devotion, energy and support will continue to bud and bear fruit.

Shabbat Shalom – Good Shabbos!

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