

## Why Did Aaron's Staff Sprout Almonds?

PARSHAT KORACH  
14-20 June  
29 Sivan - 5 Tammuz

Korach: Numbers 16:1 - 18:32  
Samuel I 11:14 - 12:22

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No One Alone,  
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In the aftermath of Korah's rebellion, which challenged the leadership positions of Moses and Aaron, G-d ordered each tribal leader to place a staff before the Ark. Only Aaron's staff sprouted – not just blossoms, but buds and ripe almonds:

And on the following day, Moses came to the Tent of Testimony, and behold, Aaron's staff for the house of Levi had blossomed! It gave forth blossoms, sprouted buds, and produced ripe almonds. Moses took out all the staffs from before the L-rd, to the children of Israel; they saw and each man took his staff.<sup>1</sup>

This miracle was a clear sign from G-d validating Aaron's priesthood. But why did the sign take the form of blossoms and almonds? And what do each of these stages – budding, blossoming, and fruiting – signify?

Before we begin, let us note that in addition to "almond," the word שקד also implies speed, alacrity, and alertness.

### 1. Swift Justice for Challengers

Rashi explains that almonds, the fastest fruit to blossom, signified the speed of Divine retribution. Just as an almond tree flowers faster than other trees, anyone who challenged the priesthood (as did Korah and his minions) would see punishment arrive quickly. Rashi notes the case of King Uzziah, who illegally assumed priestly duties and was immediately struck with leprosy,<sup>2</sup> as an example of how swiftly judgment falls on those who dispute G-d's chosen Kohanim.

Rabbeinu Bachya adds that almonds are also bitter when unripe, and therefore represent Divine judgment.

### 2. G-d's Watchful Eye

Ibn Ezra focuses on the word shaken (almond), which also means to be watchful. As in Jeremiah,<sup>5</sup> "I am watchful to fulfill My word," the almond on Aaron's staff represents G-d's active vigilance in upholding His choice of Kohanim.

### 3. Was It Almonds?

Bechor Shor suggests that the staff may not have produced actual almonds. Rather, because the fruit appeared miraculously overnight, the Torah refers to them as shkeidim, which connotes something quick.<sup>7</sup>

### 4. Symbols of Priestly Lineage

Chizkuni assigns meaning to the distinct language the Torah uses to describe each stage of the miracle—"vayotzei perach" (it gave forth blossoms), "vayatzetz tzitz" (sprouted buds), and "vayigmol shekeidim" (and produced ripe almonds):

Vayotzei perach (it gave forth blossoms) – uses the root "yatzah" (to go out), suggesting the emergence of something new. This hints at the pirchei kehunah—the young priests who would one day "emerge" from Aaron and begin their sacred service.

Vayatzetz tzitz (sprouted buds) – uses the rare verb tzitz, which shares a root with the Tzitz, the gold forehead plate worn by the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest. This stage symbolizes the priestly garments and dignity that would be uniquely Aaron's.

Vayigmol shekeidim (and produced ripe almonds) – uses the term "gamal" (to ripen or complete), alluding to maturity and diligence. The ripe almonds represent kohanim shokdim al avodatam—priests who are watchful and dedicated in their Divine service, echoing the saying: "Kohanim are zealous."

### 5. The Priesthood Endures

Abarbanel adds that the almonds symbolize the eternal nature of the priesthood, as they ripen and remain fresh longer than most other fruits. He sees these signs as validating Aaron's exclusive appointment to the High Priesthood, along with his descendants' perpetual priestly status.

Similar to Abarbanel, Da'at Zekeinim notes that some of the blossoms remained even after the almonds ripened, an unnatural phenomenon, symbolizing that Aaron's staff – and by extension, his priesthood – would never wither.

### 6. The Swift Flow of Blessing

In Likkutei Torah, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Chabad, expands on an observation made by Rashi and Abarbanel: that almonds ripen more rapidly than other fruits. He connects this attribute of speed to the priesthood and Aaron. It suggests that Aaron's name (אהרן) can be reinterpreted as "nireh" (ראה - revealed), implying that he facilitated the swift and direct flow of divine light and revelation from the highest realms to the lower. Unlike the gradual "thickening" of divine grace required for physical sustenance, the grace channeled through Aaron—as "revealed light"—bypassed delays, rapidly traversing numerous spiritual worlds without hindrance to manifest in the physical realm.

## 7. A Deeper Meaning

In a complex talk, the Rebbe addresses a deeper question: Why was this miracle even necessary, given that G-d had already demonstrated that Korah was in the wrong?

He explains that the earth swallowing Korach and the fire that consumed his followers proved that dissent against G-d leads to harsh punishment. But those events did not resolve the people's doubts about Aaron's legitimacy or clarify why he was chosen.

The miracle of the blossoming staff answered that question by revealing Aaron's uniqueness in two powerful ways. First, a dry, dead staff has no potential for life or fruit; its sudden blossoming could only have come from G-d's will, proving that Aaron's appointment was not the result of Moses' favoritism or political maneuvering, but a direct act of Divine selection: "The man whom I shall choose."

Second, the miracle didn't happen all at once. The staff followed a natural growth process—first a flower, then a bud, then ripe almonds. This demonstrated that G-d's choice was not just a miraculous imposition but something that became internal and lasting. Just as the staff behaved like a living tree, so did the priesthood become something woven into the very essence of Aaron and his descendants—not a temporary role, but an enduring spiritual identity that is part and parcel of who they are.

*By Mordechai Rubin*

## Korach in a Nutshell

Numbers 16:1–18:32

The name of the Parshah, "Korach," refers to Korach, head of the rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and is found in Numbers 16:1.

Korach incites a mutiny challenging Moses' leadership and the granting of the kehunah (priesthood) to Aaron. He is accompanied by Moses' inveterate foes, Dathan and Abiram. Joining them are 250 distinguished members of the community, who offer the sacrosanct ketoret (incense) to prove their worthiness for the priesthood. The earth opens up and swallows the mutineers, and a fire consumes the ketoret-offerers.

A subsequent plague is stopped by Aaron's offering of ketoret. Aaron's staff miraculously blossoms and brings forth almonds, to prove that his designation as high priest is divinely ordained.

G-d commands that a terumah ("uplifting") from each crop of grain, wine and oil, as well as all firstborn sheep and cattle, and other specified gifts, be given to the kohanim (priests).

## Spies Dispatched (1312 BCE) 29 Sivan

Moses dispatched 12 spies to tour the Holy Land in preparation for its conquest by the people of Israel.

## Passing of R. Shlomo Kluger (1869) 30 Sivan

R. Shlomo Kluger, rabbi of Brody, was one of the renowned halachic authorities of his day. He was a prolific writer, authoring over 100 books.

## Passing of Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka (Gorodenka) (1765) 2 Tammuz

Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka was a close colleague of the Baal Shem Tov. His son, Rabbi Simcha, married the Baal Shem Tov's granddaughter, Feiga. Their son, the famed Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, became the founder of Breslov Chassidism. The Baal Shem Tov once asked Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka to deliver a letter to Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezritch (who later became known as the Mezritcher Maggid) in which he attempted to persuade Rabbi Dov Ber to become his disciple. Upon receiving the letter, Rabbi Dov Ber said, "I see an auspicious sign in the student who bears this letter. If Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka is such a holy tzaddik, how much more so is his teacher—the Baal Shem Tov." Rabbi Dov Ber then agreed to meet with the Baal Shem Tov and later to join the Chassidic movement.

## Joshua Stops the Sun (1273 BCE) 3 Tammuz

On the third of Tammuz of the year 2488 from creation (1273 BCE), Joshua was leading the Jewish people in one of the battles to conquer the Land of Israel. Victory was imminent, but darkness was about to fall. "Sun," proclaimed Joshua, "be still at Giv'on; moon, at the Ayalon valley" (Joshua 10:12). The heavenly bodies acquiesced, halting their progress through the sky until Israel's armies brought the battle to its successful conclusion.

## Lubavitch Fire (1851)

A great fire destroyed much of the town of Lubavitch, including the home of the third Chabad Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (the "Tzemach Tzeddek", 1789-1866) and many invaluable manuscripts of Chassidic teaching.

## R. Yosef Yitzchak Released from Prison (1927)

The sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn (1880-1950), who was arrested on Sivan 15 of 1927 by agents of the GPU (soviet secret police) and the Yevsektzia ("Jewish section" of the Communist Party) for his work to preserve and disseminate Jewish learning and observance throughout the Soviet Empire. Held in the notorious Spalerno prison in Leningrad, he was repeatedly interrogated and beaten. Initially sentenced to death, international pressure compelled the Soviet regime to first commute the sentence to ten years hard labor in Siberia, and then to a three-year term of exile in Kostrama, a town in the interior of Russia.

On the 3rd of Tammuz, 18 days after his arrest, he was released from prison and allowed six hours at home before reporting to the Leningrad train station to embark on his exile. Many gathered at the station to see him off. Though he knew that there were GPU agents present, he spoke to the assembled crowd, encouraging all to persist in the very activities for which he had been arrested. "This," he proclaimed "all the nations of the world must know: Only our bodies were sent into exile and subjugated to alien rule; our souls were not given over into captivity and foreign rule. We must proclaim openly and before all that any matter affecting the Jewish religion, Torah, and its mitzvot and customs is not subject to the coercion of others. No one can impose his belief upon us, nor coerce us to conduct ourselves contrary to our beliefs!"

(On the 12th of Tammuz, after serving only nine days of his three year term, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak was informed that he was free to return home. Shortly thereafter, he was allowed to leave the Soviet Union and resettled in Riga, Latvia.)

## Rebbe's Yahrtzeit (1994)

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of righteous memory (b. 1902) passed away in the early morning hours of the 3rd of Tammuz, of the year 5754 from creation (1994).