

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Korach 5786

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Aharon saves the day again; this time with a fire pan filled with incense.

וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין־הַמֵּתִים וּבֵין הַחַיִּים וַתִּפְּצֵר הַמַּגֶּפֶה:

“And he stood between the dying and between the living; and the plague was halted.” (Bamidbar 17:12).

This parsha contains two instances where Aharon used a firepan. He used one to stop the plague that spread after Bnei Yisroel complained – this time about the Scouts’ reports and the death that consumed Korach and his cohorts. The first time is when Aharon brought a firepan full of incense, as did the Korach rebellion. (Ibid 16:18). The first firepan offering brought destruction up Korach and his rebellion. (Ibid 16:31).

Aharon, it seems, is always around when the nation needed saving. The firepans represent both life and death. When Hashem ordered firepans with incense, they bring life. Aharon brought such an offering daily. (Shmos 30:7). He also brought it into the Kodosh Kedashim as part of the Yom Kippur service. (Vayikra 16:13). When a foreign fire is offered, however, it brings death. Hashem warned the kohanim not to bring ketores unless when authorized. (Shmos 30:9). Nadav and Avihu got caught up on their inauguration day and overstepped that exhortation. (Vayikra 10:1). The Torah says they brought an unauthorized ketores offering. Clearly, Hashem used this challenge with Korach. If Korach and his band thought they were worthy, then they should be allowed to bring a firepan with ketores. However, they were not worthy and they did not learn the lesson from Nadav and Avihu. Even though Aharon’s sons were worthy, they still were not allowed to bring a foreign ketores. Korach and his rebellion were unworthy and offered unauthorized ketores firepans, and they were destroyed.

Aharon’s staff is used to punish and used to bring blessing. Aharon used his staff to turn it into a sea serpent in front of Pharaoh. (Shmos 7:10). In this parsha, Aharon’s staff bloomed with sprouts, blossoms, and almonds. (Bamidbar 17:23). The same staff that turned into a monster before Pharaoh, bloomed with life before the eyes of the nation.

Aharon’s mouth was also dichotomous. Hashem appointed Aharon to be Moshe’s mouthpiece. (Shmos 4:16). Aharon had the words of wisdom to be Moshe’s advisor. (Ibid 7:1). Aharon also spoke before Pharaoh. (Ibid 7:2). He also spoke all the words that Hashem wanted him to, before the elders. (Ibid 4:30). Aharon also taught the Mishkan service to the Leviim and kohanim. (Vayikra 10:8). Yet, when tragedy struck, he knew to keep silent. (Ibid 10:3). While it did not work, Aharon tried to quell the wayward behavior of the people through the Molten Calf. (Shmos 32:2). He told them to wait a day, to make a festival the next day. (Ibid 32:5). Aharon saw how Bnei Yisroel were running lawless without Moshe, so he built an altar before them—give them something to occupy themselves until Moshe returned. (Ibid). He saw that removing their wealth was not enough, he had to delay them further.

Conversely, when Moshe challenged Aharon, he did not protect Bnei Yisroel. Moshe asked what the people did to Aharon. (Shmos 32:21). Aharon replied that they are disposed to evil. (Ibid 32:22). The Torah says, "Moshe saw the people, because they were unrestrained; for Aharon had let them loose." (Ibid 32:25). Further, there was a time when Aharon spoke ill of Moshe. (Bamidbar 12:1). Yet, then he readily admitted his fault. (Ibid 12:11). Also, Moshe left Aharon and Chur in charge of the nation. (Shmos 24:14). Yet, we never see Aharon trying to take that mantle upon himself. He also deferred to Moshe and rejoiced when he learned that Moshe was appointed to lead the nation. (Ibid 4:14).

Korach's rebellion was wrong because their main ideology was "The entire congregation is holy" (Bamidbar 16:3). Even though Korach said this, he really meant, leadership can come from anywhere. He was using the entire nation as being holy merely to gather sympathy from the nation. However, he was not intending to share leadership, except with his cronies. This selfishness was completely wrong for spiritual leadership.

Aharon was the opposite. He earned the Kohen Gadol position not because he desired leadership. It was precisely because he did not desire it. Yes, as a leader he may have made mistakes. However, in supporting Moshe he never overstepped his bound. He was happy when Moshe was appointed. He spoke all the words that Hashem said he should—he did not edit or add. He readily gave up his staff to be turned into a sea serpent. He proved he was the opposite of a selfish narcissist. He showed restraint when his children were taken from him by not speaking out (Vayikra 10:3) and by not partaking of the chatos offering (ibid 10:19). He knew when to ask for forgiveness. Also, he did not hesitate when he was required to run amidst the fiery plague with a firepan full of ketores to stop the plague. A firepan of incense should have triggered post traumatic distress in Aharon—who saw his two elder sons perish because of a foreign ketores. Yet, he readily grabbed his firepan and saved the nation.

Aharon's staff bloomed. It was a dead piece of wood. Yet, it became alive and bloomed as if it had life in it. The same staff that swallowed others before Pharaoh, now sprouted life—flowers and almonds. Yermiah saw the branch of an almond tree (shaked) in a vision. (Yeremiah 1:11). Hashem told him, "For I am ever watchful (shaked)." (Ibid 1:12). The root word for almond also means to be watchful. The almond hints at being watchful. Almonds are also the shape of eyes. The cups of the Menorah were also almond shaped. (Shmos 25:33). Aharon did not grow more ambitious after his staff sprouted. He did not even keep his staff. It was placed before the Aron. (Bamidbar 17:25). It was a lesson for all those that would want to rebel and seek undeserved leadership. The staff hinted at Hashem being ever watchful over His nation. It also hinted at Aharon being watchful over the nation. They cried for thirty days after he passed. (Ibid 20:29). His service, that of the Menorah, gave light to the nation through almond shaped goblets.

Aharon was the epitome of quiet leadership. He was the archetype of kahuna. He served with humility and with joy. He could not partake of a korban if he was in quiet mourning. He also did not speak out of turn. He supported Moshe and did Hashem's will. That is what a true leader is.