

## פרשת קרח

In certain ways our Parshas Korach may be the most frightening Parsha in the Chumash. I say that because I attend to the words of Rashi who tells us the meaning of Moshe's initial reaction to the rebellion fomented by Korach and his congregation.

The Posuk reads (B'midbar Perek 16/Posuk 4):

וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפֹּל עַל פָּנָיו:

Moshe heard and he fell on his face.

Rashi writes:

ויפול על פניו - מפני המחלוקת, שכבר זה בידם סרחון רביעי, חטאו בעגל (שמות לב/יא<sup>1</sup>) ויחל משה, במתאוננים (במדבר יא/ב<sup>2</sup>) ויתפלל משה, במרגלים (שם יד/ג<sup>3</sup>) ויאמר משה אל ה' ושמעו מצרים, במחלוקתו של קרח נתרשלו ידיו. משל לבן מלך שסרח על אביו ופייס עליו אוהבו פעם ושתים ושלש, כססרח רביעית נתרשלו ידי האוהב ההוא. אמר עד מתי אטריח על המלך, שמא לא יקבל עוד ממני:

---

<sup>1</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיִּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת פָּנָיו ה' אֵלָיו... לֵקוּי וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה ה' יַחַרְהֵ אַפְּךָ בְּעַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּכַח גָּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה:

Moshe entreated before G-d and he said, 'Why, Hashem, will You be angry with Your people whom You took out of the Land of Egypt with great power and with a strong hand.

<sup>2</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיִּצְעַק הָעָם אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וַתִּשְׁקַע הָאֵשׁ:

Moshe cried out to Hashem and Moshe prayed to Hashem and the fire sunk [into the ground].

<sup>3</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי הֶעֱלִיתָ בְּכַחְךָ אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה מִקְרָבוֹ:

Moshe said to Hashem, 'Egypt will hear that You took up this people with Your power from its midst.

*He fell on his face* - Because of the dispute [that Korach engendered]. This was already the fourth instance when Israel soured on Hashem. They had sinned with the Golden Calf [and then it says] Moshe entreated G-d [to forgive them]. [They sinned] with the *mis'o'n'nim* – complainers and Moshe prayed to Hashem [to forgive them]. [They sinned with the spies and he argued before Hashem to spare them] ‘and Moshe said to Hashem , “Egypt will hear...”’.

With the dispute engendered by Korach Moshe felt that he was no longer empowered<sup>4</sup>. The parable is that of the king’s son who soured on his father and the king’s friend assuaged the king once, twice, and a third time. When the son soured a fourth time the king’s friend felt that he was no longer empowered. He said, ‘How much can I bother the king? Perhaps he will no longer accept my entreaties.’

Moshe was concerned and worried. Perhaps he would no longer be capable of being the defender of Israel. He fell on his face, wordless! Only subsequently did Moshe and Aharon fall on their faces and offered prayers to Hashem.

However, in fact, it wasn’t only a souring of a fourth time, the rebellion against Hashem, the *machlokes* against G-d continued and expanded.

We read Perek 16/P’sukim 20-22):

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: הַבְּדִלּוּ מֵתוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאֶכְלָה אֹתָם כְּרָגַע:  
וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֵינוּ לֵאמֹר: הַרְחוּת לְכֹל בֶּשֶׂר הָאִישׁ אֶחָד יִחַטָּא וְעַל כָּל הָעֵדָה  
תִּקְצַף:

Hashem said to Moshe and to Aharon saying. Separate yourselves from the midst of this congregation and I will destroy them in a minute. They fell on their faces and they said, ‘G-d of the spirit of all flesh – if one person sins will You be angry at the entire congregation?’

---

<sup>4</sup> Literally, ‘his hands became lazy’.

The entire congregation was not destroyed but unique and clearly wondrous punishments were visited upon the various groups of sinners. First we read (Posuk 32):

וַתִּפְתַּח הָאָרֶץ אֶת פִּיהָ וַתִּבְלַע אֹתָם וְאֶת בֵּיתֵיהֶם וְאֶת כָּל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר לְקִרַח וְאֶת כָּל הָרְכוּשׁ:

The earth opened its mouth and it swallowed them and their houses and all the people who were for Korach and all property.

We then read of the punishment that was given to the second group:

וְאֵשׁ יֵצְאָה מֵאֵת ה' וְתֹאכַל אֶת הַחֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֲתַיִם אִישׁ מִקְרִיבֵי הַקְטֹרֶת:

A fire went out from G-d and it consumed the 250 men who brought the *Ketores*-incense offerings.

We can only begin to imagine the shock of the effect of these stunning punishments that were visited upon these individuals. It would seem reasonable to assume that the jolt would have shaken all those who survived to their very core and its impact would have been profound and permanent.

But, since a momentary impact does not necessarily have a long-lasting result, HaKodosh Boruch decreed an additional measure in order that the power and influence of these events would not wane.

He commanded (Perek 17/P'sukim 3, 5):

אֶת מַחֲתוֹת הַחֹטָאִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּנִפְשֹׁתָם וְעָשׂוּ אֹתָם רִקְעֵי פָחִים צְפוּי לְמִזְבֵּחַ כִּי הַקְרִיבִים לְפָנַי ה' וַיִּקְדָּשׁוּ וַיְהִיו לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

[Take] the incense pans of these sinners of their very souls and make them flattened metal [to be used as] covering for the [incense] altar because they offered these pans before G-d and they became sanctified; they should serve as a sign for B'nei Yisroel.

זָכְרוֹן לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִקְרַב אִישׁ זָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא מִזֶּרַע אֶהְרֵן הוּא לְהִקְטִיר קְטֹרֶת לְפָנַי ה' וְלֹא יִהְיֶה כְּקִרַח וְכַעֲדָתוֹ כִּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

It should be a remembrance for B'nei Yisroel in order [that they should know] that one who is foreign [for the service of the Mishkan] who is not from the seed of Aharon should not approach to offer an incense-offering before Hashem, and should not be like Korach and his congregation, as Hashem spoke in the hand of Moshe, to him.

Although it would certainly seem that all of this should have been enough to dissuade Israel from sin for their entire lifetimes, such was not the case; the episode was far from over.

The Torah continues to teach us about the event that does not seem to end (Posuk 6):

וַיִּלְנוּ כָּל עֵדֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמֶּחֱרַת עַל מֹשֶׁה וְעַל אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר אַתֶּם הַמֵּתִים אֶת עַם ה':

On the following day the entire congregation of Israel complained against Moshe and Aharon saying, 'You have killed G-d's People'.

The Divine response occurs immediately (P'sukim 9-13):

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: הֲרָמוּ מִתּוֹךְ הָעֵדָה הַזֹּאת וְאָכְלָה אֹתָם כָּרְגַע וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל פְּנֵיהֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן קַח אֶת הַמִּחְתָּה וְתֵן עָלֶיהָ אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשִׂים קִטְוֹת וְהוֹלֵךְ מִהֲרָה אֶל הָעֵדָה וְכִפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם כִּי יֵצֵא הַקֶּצֶף מִלִּפְנֵי ה' הַחֹל הַנִּגָּף: וַיִּקַּח אַהֲרֹן כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּרָץ אֶל תּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל וְהִנֵּה הַחֹל הַנִּגָּף בָּעָם וַיִּתֵּן אֶת הַקִּטְוֹת וַיִּכְפֹּר עַל הָעָם: וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין הַיָּמִיִּים וַתִּעְצַר הַמִּגַּפָּה:

Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. Lift yourselves up from the midst of this congregation and I will destroy them in a minute; they fell on their faces. Moshe said to Aharon, 'Take the incense pan and place on it fire from atop the altar and place *Ketores* and go quickly to the congregation and atone upon them because anger has gone out from before Hashem; the plague has begun.

Aharon took [the incense] like Moshe said and he ran into the midst of the congregation and behold the plague had begun and placed the *Ketores* and he atoned for the people. He stood between the dead and between the living and the plague was stopped.

The episodes that we have seen so far reveal HaKodosh Boruch Hu as a ‘reactor’. That is, Am Yisroel sins and He Yisborach visits punishments upon them, with Moshe and Aharon defending Israel even when it seems that there is no possible defense.

At this point in history, the Torah does not teach us of any more overt acts of rebellion or complaints that Israel levels at the Ribbono Shel Olom or at His faithful servants, Moshe and Aharon.

Thus, it may seem surprising that the next section of our Parsha is at the ‘initiative’ of HaKodosh Boruch Hu. This next section introduces a ‘test’ to determine who is the rightful Kohen Godol, though it seems that the question is now moot because we do not read that anyone is now any longer contesting the position of Aharon.

What is this Divine ‘initiative’ and how are we to understand it? We read in the ensuing verses (P’sukim 16-26):

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְקַח מֵאֲתָם מִטָּה מִטָּה לְבֵית אָב מֵאֵת כָּל נְשִׂיאֵיהֶם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר מִטּוֹת אִישׁ אֵת שְׁמוֹ תִּכְתֹּב עַל מִטָּהוּ: וְאֵת שֵׁם אֶהְרֹן תִּכְתֹּב עַל מִטָּה לְוֵי כִּי מִטָּה אֶחָד לְרֹאשׁ בֵּית אֲבוֹתָם: וְהִנַּחְתָּם בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אוֹעֵד לָכֶם שְׁמָה: וְהָיָה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אֶבְחַר בּוֹ מִטָּהוּ יִפְרֹחַ וְהִשְׁכַּחְתִּי מֵעָלַי אֵת תְּלֹנוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵם מְלִינִם עֲלֵיכֶם: וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּתְּנוּ אֵלָיו כָּל נְשִׂיאֵיהֶם מִטָּה לְנָשִׂיא אֶחָד מִטָּה לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר מִטּוֹת וּמִטָּה אֶהְרֹן בְּתוֹךְ מִטּוֹתָם: וַיִּנַּח מֹשֶׁה אֵת הַמִּטּוֹת לִפְנֵי ה' בְּאֹהֶל הָעֵדוּת: וַיְהִי מִמִּחְרַת וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶל אֹהֶל הָעֵדוּת וְהִנֵּה פָּרַח מִטָּה אֶהְרֹן לְבֵית לְוֵי וַיֵּצֵא פָּרַח וַיֵּצֵץ צִיץ וַיִּגְמַל שִׁקְדִים וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֵת כָּל הַמִּטּוֹת מִלִּפְנֵי ה' אֶל כָּל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּרְאוּ וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִטָּהוּ: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה הֲשִׁב אֵת מִטָּה אֶהְרֹן לִפְנֵי הָעֵדוּת לְמִשְׁמַרְתָּ לְאוֹת לְבְנֵי מְרִי וְתִכַּל תִּלְוִנְתֶם מֵעָלַי וְלֹא יִמְתּוּ: וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' אֹתוֹ כֵּן עָשָׂה:

Hashem spoke to Moshe saying. Speak to B’nei Yisroel and take from them one staff each from their fathers’ house from their chiefs according to the house of their fathers – twelve staffs; write the name of head man on his staff. Write the name of Aharon on the staff of the Tribe of Levi because there is one staff for the head of the house of their fathers.

You shall place the staffs in the Ohel Moed before the testimony [of the Ark] when I will meet with you there. The man whom I will choose – his staff will flower and I will cause the complaints of B'nei Yisroel that they complain against you to subside from Me.

Moshe spoke to B'nei Yisroel and all of their tribal chiefs gave him one staff per chief for their fathers' house, twelve staffs and the staff of Aharon was in the middle of their staffs. Moshe left the staffs in the Tent of Testimony before Hashem.

It was on the morrow Moshe entered the Tent of the Testimony and behold the staff of Aharon from the House of Levi flowered and it produced a bud and it had formed almonds; Moshe took out all of the staffs from before G-d to B'nei Yisroel and they saw and each man took his staff. Hashem said to Moshe, 'Return the staff of Aharon to be before the 'testimony' to be guarded as a sign to the rebellious children and their complaints against Me should be finished so that they will not die. Moshe did as G-d commanded him; so he did.

The question begs to be asked. What was the reason that HaKodosh Boruch introduced a new episode? What was to be gained by this act that was not in response to any new calls against Aharon's role as Kohen Godol?<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Or HaChaim HaKodosh writes:

והיה האיש אשר אבחר בו וגו'. ולא הספיק כל מה שעשה ה' בקרח, אולי שהיו חושבים כי מה שאירע לקרח הוא על שדבר נגד משה וחלק עליו וה' ינקום נקם על כבוד נביאו נאמן ביתו ולעולם אפשר שיבחר בשאר השבטים לשרתו, לזה צוה ה' לעשות מבחן המטות:

*The man whom I will choose...* - All that was done against Korach was insufficient [to dissuade Israel from complaints]. Perhaps the reason is that the people thought that that which occurred to Korach was because Korach spoke against Moshe and disagreed with him and Hashem avenged the honor of his ubiquitously trustworthy servant. And, thus it was still possible that Hashem would choose other tribes to serve Him and therefore Hashem commanded to do the test with the staffs.

Or HaChaim was preceded in this explanation by Rashbam who writes:

Of course, the Ribbono Shel Olom is, in the words of Moshe's prayer (B'midbar Perek 27/Posuk 16):

א...ל"קי הָרוּחַת לְכֹל בֶּשָׂר

The G-d of the spirits of all flesh.

Rashi explains the meaning of this phrase as:

א...ל"קי הָרוּחַת - אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם גלוי וידוע לפניך דעתו של כל אחד ואחד ואינן דומין זה לזה:

---

קח מאתם מטה מטה וגו' - מאחר שמתלוננים על דבר הקטרת ואומרים אתם המתם את עם יי', ואינה הוכחה שבחרתי בכהנים, אני אעשה הוכחה אחרת שלא יוכלו לערער על הכהונה. כי מטהו יפרח על ידי:

*Take from each one a staff* – Since they were complaining about the offering of the *Ketores* and saying ‘your killed G-d’s people and that there was no proof that I Hashem chose the Kohanim, I Hashem will make another proof so that they will not be able to contest the *Kehuna* because Aharon’s staff will flower by My doing.

However Ramban contests this approach that the miracle of the staff was to prove that Aharon was chosen to be the Kohen Godol.

He writes:

למשמרת לאות - ואין המטה הזה אות רק על מטה לוי שנבחר משאר השבטים, לא על אהרן שתהיה לו הכהונה. והנכון, למשמרת לאות, על שבט לוי תמורי הבכורות...

*To be guarded as a sign* – this staff of Aharon is only a sign that the Tribe of Levi was chosen over the other tribes; it is not about that Aharon should be the Kohen. And the correct understanding is that “to be guarded as a sign” regarding the Tribe of Levi that they replaced the first-born...

*The G-d of the spirits [of all flesh]* – Moshe said before Hashem, ‘Master of the Universe, before You is revealed and known the mind of each and every one and no one is like the other.

And thus, if Israel still questioned the validity of Aharon’s position of Kohen Godol, even if they no longer gave public voice to it, HaKodosh Boruch would certainly know. And so, Hashem addressed the issue before it erupted again and closed the issue hermetically. That is, of course, what may be the clear meaning of G-d’s words when He said:

וְתִכַּל תְּלֹוֹנֹתֵם מֵעַלַי וְלֹא יִמָּתוּ:

Their complaints against Me should be finished so that they will not die. Moshe did as G-d commanded him; so he did.

However, the question still must be asked as to why the staff of Aharon was chosen as the means of getting the message of the supremacy of Aharon across to Israel. Moshe could have lined up the heads of all of the tribes and Hashem could have enveloped His chosen one with some type of heavenly aura that would categorically prove that it was he whom the Ribbono Shel Olom chose.

I think that the answer may be found in a Midrash which at first appears to be terribly far removed from the ‘simple’ meaning of the verses. We will learn the Midrash first and its apparent distance from the ‘simple’ meaning will be evident; then we will attempt to explain it.

We read in Midrash B’midbar Rabba (Parshata 18/23) to our Parshas Korach:

ומטה אהרן, יש אומרים הוא המטה שהיה ביד יהודה שנאמר ומטך אשר בידך ויש אומרים הוא המטה שהיה ביד משה ומעצמו פרח שנאמר והנה פרח מטה אהרן ואית דאמרי נטל משה קורה אחת וחתכה לשנים עשר נסרים ואומר להם כולכם מקורה אחת טלו מקלכם ועל מה עשה...שלא יאמרו מקלו היה לח והפריח וגזר הקדוש ברוך הוא על המקל ונמצא עליו שם המפורש שהיה בציץ שנאמר ויצא פרח ויצץ ציץ והפריח בו בלילה ועשה פרי ויגמול שקדים גמל לכל מי שהיה שוקד על שבטו של לוי ולמה שקדים ולא רמונים ולא אגוזים לפי שנמשלו ישראל בהם ואותו המטה היה ביד כל מלך ומלך עד שחרב בית המקדש ונגנז ואותו המטה עתיד



להיות ביד מלך המשיח במהרה בימינו שנאמר (תהלים קי"ב) מטה עוזך ישלח ה'  
מציון רדה בקרב אויביך:

*The staff of Aharon* – there are opinions that this was the staff that was in the hand of Yehuda as it says, 'And your staff that is in your hand'. There are opinions that this was the staff that was in the hand of Moshe and it flowered on its own as it says, 'And behold the staff of Aharon flowered.' There some who say that Moshe took a piece of wood and cut it into 12 pieces and said [to the twelve heads of the tribes], 'Each of you will take your staff from one board.' Why did Moshe do so? So that they would not say that the staff of Aharon was [particularly and unfairly] moist and therefore it flowered.

Hashem decreed and the *Shem HaMeforash*-Holy Name of Hashem that was on the *Tzitz* worn by the Kohen Godol appeared upon the staff as it says, 'It flowered and it produced a *tzitz*'. Aharon's staff flowered during the night and ויגמול, produced שקדים, almonds as a sign that Hashem rewards, גמל, anyone who is שוקד, for the welfare of the Tribe of Levi.

Why did it produce almonds and not pomegranates or nuts? Because Israel is symbolized by almonds.

That staff was in the hand of each and every king until the Beis HaMikdosh was destroyed and it was hidden away [with other elements from the Beis HaMikdosh].

That staff will be in the hand of the King Moshiach who should come quickly in our days as it says, 'Hashem will send you the staff of your strength from Zion and with it you will rule in the midst of your enemies.'

There is a parallel Midrash brought by Yalkut Shimoni (Tehillim 869) that adds to and explains a little more this Midrash Rabba. It reads:

<sup>6</sup>מטה עוזר ישלח ה' מציון. איזה מטה זה מטה של יעקב, שנאמר (בראשית לב/יא<sup>7</sup>) כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה, והוא המטה שהיה ביד יהודה (שם לח/יג<sup>8</sup>) ומטך אשר בידך, והוא המטה שהיה ביד משה (שמות ד/כ<sup>9</sup>) ומטה הא...לקים בידו, והוא המטה שהיה ביד אהרן (שם ז/י<sup>10</sup>) וישלך אהרן את מטהו, והוא המטה שהיה ביד דוד, שנאמר (שמואל א יז/מ<sup>11</sup>) ויקח מקלו בידו, והוא המטה שהיה ביד כל מלך ומלך עד שחרב בית המקדש ונגנז, ועתיד לימסר ביד מלך

---

<sup>6</sup> This verse was brought in full in the previous Midrash. This Midrash uses the verse as its source which is in contrast to the Midrash Rabba which brought this verse has part of the explanation of the staff.

<sup>7</sup> The Posuk reads in its entirety:

קִטְנֹתֵי מְכַל הַחֲסָדִים וּמְכַל הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֵת עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת:

I am undeserving of all of the kindnesses and all of the truth that You have done for your servant because with my staff I crossed this Jordan River and now I have become two camps.

<sup>8</sup> The Posuk reads in its entirety:

וַיֹּאמֶר מָה הָעֲרֻבֹן אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶּן לָךְ וְתֹאמַר חֲתָמְךָ וּפְתִילְךָ וּמִטְּךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדְךָ וַיִּתֵּן לָהּ וַיָּבֵא אֵלֶיהָ וְתַהֲרֶה לָּהּ:

Yaakov said, 'What security shall I give you?' She said, 'Your signet ring and your over garment and your staff that is in your hand; he gave to her and he was with her and she became pregnant to him.'

<sup>9</sup> The Posuk reads in its entirety:

וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת בָּנָיו וַיִּרְכָּבֵם עַל הַחֲמֹר וַיָּשֶׁב אֶרְצָה מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת מִטְּהָ הָאֱלֹהִים...לְקִים בְּיָדוֹ:

Moshe took his wife and his sons and he placed them to ride on the donkey and he returned to the Land of Egypt and Moshe took the staff of G-d in his hand.

<sup>10</sup> The Posuk reads in its entirety:

וַיָּבֵא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל פְּרַעֲהוֹ וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כִּן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אַהֲרֹן אֶת מִטְּהוֹ לִפְנֵי פְרַעֲהוֹ וּלְפָנֵי עַבְדָּיו וַיְהִי לְתַנִּין:

Moshe and Aharon came to Par'o and they did as G-d commanded and Aharon cast his staff before Par'o and before his servants and it became a serpent.

<sup>11</sup> The Posuk reads in its entirety:

וַיִּקַּח מִקְלוֹ בְּיָדוֹ וַיַּבְחֵר לוֹ חֲמֹשֶׁה חֲלָקֵי אֲבָנִים מִן הַנֶּחֱל וַיִּשֶׂם אֹתָם בְּכָלִי הָרַעִים אֲשֶׁר לוֹ וּבִיִּלְקוּט וְקִלְעוֹ בְּיָדוֹ וַיִּגַּשׁ אֶל הַפְּלִשְׁתִּי:

המשיח ובו עתיד לרדות את עובדי אלילים<sup>12</sup>, לכך נאמר מטה עוזך ישלח ה' מציון,  
אמר רבי לוי כל פעולות טובות ונחמות שעתיד הקדוש ברוך הוא ליתן מציון:

*Hashem will send you the staff of your strength from Zion* – Which staff is this? It is the staff of Yaakov about which it is said, 'Because with my staff I crossed this Jordan River. It is the staff that Yehuda held as we read, 'and the staff that is in your hand'. It is the staff that was in the hand of Moshe as it says, 'the staff of G-d was in his hand'. It is the staff that was in the hand of Aharon as it says, 'Aharon cast his staff.' It was the staff that was in the hand of Dovid, as it says, 'He took his staff in his hand' and it is the staff that that was in the hand of each and every king until the Beis HaMikdosh was destroyed and then it was hidden.

In the future, this staff will be given over to *Melech HaMoshiach* and with it he will rule the nations of the world. Therefore the verse says, 'Hashem will send the staff of your strength from Zion.' Rabi Levi said, 'All events that will bring good and consolation in the future, Hashem will give them from Zion.

Undoubtedly, when we read these Midrashim we are taken aback. In so many instances in the P'sukim, the various staves are referred to as 'his staff'. How can

---

<sup>12</sup> This term means 'idolaters', of course. However, I translated it as 'nations of the world' because it is likely that the true term used was גוים and the censors translated it to idolaters.

Furthermore, it is unlikely that the original term would be idolaters because the P'sukim teach us that at the End of Days idolatry will cease.

Thus we read in Sefer Zecharia (Perek 14/Posuk 9):

וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל כָּל הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִי־ה' אֶחָד וְשֵׁמוֹ אֶחָד:  
Hashem will be the King over the entire land; on that day He will be one and His Name one.

We read in Zephania (Perek 3/Posuk 9):

כִּי אֲזַ אֶהְפֹּךְ אֶל עַמִּים שְׂפָה בְרוּרָה לְקִרְאֵי כָל־בָּשָׂר ה' לְעַבְדוֹ שְׂכֵם אֶחָד:  
Because then I Hashem will change the nations to one clear language for them all to call in the Name of Hashem and to serve Him altogether.

it be, then, that the many staffs that are discussed are really one and the same<sup>13</sup>? In so many cases, the particular staff is identified with its bearer most specifically. Could it be otherwise?

In fact, Rashi says that the *p'shat* is not like these Midrashim.

We read in Masseches Ovos (Perek 5/Mishnah 6)

עשרה דברים נבראו בערב שבת בין השמשות ואלו הן...והמטה...

Ten things were created on the Friday of Creation at twilight and they are...the staff.

Rashi writes:

והמטה של משה שבו שם המפורש חקוק מונח ועומד עד שנתנו למשה ולא זהו מטה אהרן דהא כתיב ואת שם אהרן תכתוב על מטה לוי ואי אפשר שכתוב בו שם אהרן.

This is the staff of Moshe that the Ineffable Name of Hashem was engraved upon it and it remained [from Creation] until Hashem gave it to Moshe.

This is not the staff of Aharon because it is written there, 'And the name of Aharon you shall write on the staff of the Tribe of Levi. It is impossible that Aharon's name would be written on it'<sup>14</sup>.

Centuries later, Rav Hirsch expressed the same opinion most emphatically. He wrote:

מטך. אין כל סיבה להניח, כי היה זה מטה משה, ולא מטה אהרן. אדרבה, מסתבר כי מדובר על מטה אהרן, כפשוטו של מקרא. הרי לא במקל טמון כוח א...לוקי...

---

<sup>13</sup> The opinion in Midrash Rabba that says that the 12 staffs used in our Parsha were cut from a new piece of lumber does not present us with a question.

<sup>14</sup> Rashi does not explain the 'impossibility'. However, it stands to reason that if the Divine Name was written on the staff, no other name could be written with it. Otherwise, some might attribute deity to Aharon, *chas v'shalom*.

*Your staff* – there is no reason to assume that this was the staff of Moshe and not the staff of Aharon. To the contrary – it makes sense to say that it was the staff of Aharon – that is the *peshuto shel mikro* – the evident sense of the verses.

Divine power was not embedded in the staff...

However, despite what may convincingly seem to be the force of Rav Hirsch's words that the Pesukim seem to indicate most clearly that it was Aharon's staff, other commentators see it differently. Some state their opinions as possibilities whereas others offer their opinions no less emphatically that those who have the opposite interpretation.

In his commentary to the Mishnah in Ovos, Tiferes Yisroel writes:

והמטה. של משה רבינו עליו השלום, ושל סנפירון היה, ונברא עם שם המפורש החקוק בו, ובכח אותו השם נעשו בו האותות...<sup>15</sup> ואפשר דכלל נמי תנא מקלו של אהרן. שנתן אז הקדוש ברוך הוא כח בהגזע הראשון, שיוציא אחד מהנטיעות שיטעו ממנו, שקדים ופרחים בשעת הנס [כפסחים נ"ד א]:

*The staff* – of Moshe Rabbenu of blessed memory. It was made of precious stone and it was created with the Holy Name of Hashem engraved in it and it was with the power of The Name that the signs were performed.

[It is possible that the word מטה, staff, includes the staff of Aharon in which Hashem gave power in its original stem to produce one of the growths that was implanted in it –almonds and flowers when the miracle occurred.]

Tiferes Yisroel does not say that the staff of Aharon was one in the same as that of Moshe, but, on the other hand, he writes that there was a primordial staff created that first *Erev Shabbos* from which the staffs of Moshe and Aharon were derived.

Rashash goes a step further than Tiferes Yisroel in Masseches Ovos. He writes:

---

<sup>15</sup> The brackets are in the original.

והמטה פירש הרב עובדיה ברטנורא שנעשה בו האותות. ולי נראה לפרש יותר על מטה אהרן אחר שמצינו בפסחים (נד א) ויש אומרים אף מקלו של אהרן שקדיה ...

*The staff* – Bartenura explained that it refers to the staff with which the signs were made. I think that it more likely refers to the staff of Aharon since we find in Masseches Pesachim that there is an opinion that ‘even the staff of Aharon with its almonds’ was created on that first Erev Shabbos.

With all of these various commentaries, we have not found one that truly supports the Midrashic interpretation they we brought above and have found many that reject it.

We did not find one until we came to the *Ibn Ezra* who instructs us how to look at the P’sukim in a manner different than which we are accustomed.

We read in Parshas Voaira, prior to the onset of the 10 plagues (Sh’mos Perek 7/Posuk 9):

כִּי יִדְבַר אֲלֵכֶם פְּרַעַה לְאֹמֵר תִּנְנוּ לָכֶם מוֹפֵת וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶל אֲהֲרֹן קַח אֶת מִטְּךָ וְהִשְׁלַךְ לִפְנֵי פְרַעַה יְהִי לְתַנִּין:

When Par’o will speak to you saying, ‘Give us a wonder’, you shall say to Aharon, ‘Take your staff and cast it before Par’o; it will become a serpent.’

Ibn Ezra writes:

קח את מטך הוא מטה משה שנתנו לו. והעד: אמור אל אהרן קח את מטך ונטה ירך (שם שם יט<sup>16</sup>) וכתוב וירם במטה ויר את המים (שם שם כ<sup>17</sup>). והנה הודיענו בפתחות הבי"ת, שהוא המטה הידוע, שאמר לו:

---

<sup>16</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אָמַר אֶל אֲהֲרֹן קַח מִטְּךָ וְנִטְהוּ יָדְךָ עַל מֵימֵי מִצְרַיִם עַל נְהַרְתָּם עַל יַאֲרֵיהֶם וְעַל אֲגַמֵּיהֶם וְעַל כָּל מְקוֹה מֵימֵיהֶם וְיָהִי דָם וְהָיָה דָם בְּכֹל אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וּבְעֵצִים וּבְאֲבָנִים:

Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Say to Aharon, “Take your staff and extend your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers and their Nile and over their ponds and over every gathering of their water and the waters will become blood; there will be blood in all of the Land of Egypt, in the trees and in the stones.

*Take your staff* – This is the staff of Moshe; Moshe gave it to Aharon. The proof [for this interpretation is] in the verse (Posuk 19) when Hashem tells Moshe, ‘Say to Aharon, “Take *your* staff and extend your hand”. And then it is written, ‘Aharon raised *the* staff and he hit the water.

With this verse the Torah informs us by virtue of the vocalization of the *patach* under the letter *beis*, the meaning is *the* staff. That is *the* staff that was well-known, [the staff of Moshe] that he told him to take.

That is, there are paradoxical words in these verses. If all there was to learn was from the words ‘*your* staff’, then it would be clear that the staff was Aharon’s and that of no one else.

If all there was to learn was from the words ‘*the* staff’, it would be clear that the discussion was regarding the staff of Moshe, ‘*the* staff – the one that was well-known<sup>18</sup>.

---

<sup>17</sup> The entire verse reads:

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֵן מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה ה' וַיִּרְם בַּמַּטֵּה וַיַּךְ אֶת הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר לְעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּלְעֵינֵי עַבְדָּיו וַיִּהְפְּכוּ כָל הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר בַּיָּאֵר לְדָם:

Moshe and Aharon did so, like Hashem commanded and Aharon raised *the* staff and he smote the water in the Nile in the eyes of Par'o and in the eyes of his servants and all the water in the Nile turned to blood.

<sup>18</sup> See for example B'reishis Perek 14/Posuk 10 regarding the war of the four kings against the five kings:

וְעַמְקֵי הַשָּׂדִים בְּאֶרֶת בְּאֶרֶת חֲמָר וַיָּנֹסוּ מֶלֶךְ סֹדֹם וְעַמְרָה וַיִּפְּלוּ שָׁמָּה וְהַנְּשֹׂאִים הָרָה נָסוּ:  
*Lime Valley* had many, many clay pits and the king of Sedom and Amora fled and they fell there; the remainder fled to *a* mountain.

Rashi writes there:

הרה נסו - להר נסו. הרה כמו להר, כל תיבה שצריכה למ"ד בתחלתה הטיל לה ה"א בסופה. ויש חילוק בין הרה לההרה שה"א שבסוף התיבה עומדת במקום למ"ד שבראשה, אבל אינה עומדת במקום למ"ד ונקודה פת"ח תחתיה, והרי הרה כמו להר, או כמו אל הר, ואינו מפרש לאיזה הר, אלא שכל אחד נס כאשר מצא הר תחלה, וכשהוא נותן ה"א בראשה לכתוב ההרה או המדברה, פתרונו כמו אל ההר או כמו לההר, ומשמע לאותו הר הידוע ומפורש בפרשה:

*Fled to a mountain* – the words *horoh no'su* means they fled to a mountain.

But now that we have two words that seem to indicate opposite meanings, we have to understand that it was *the* staff, the staff of Moshe that was well-known for its miraculous actions and in which there was the power to perform more miracles and thus was used by Aharon, and it became the staff of Aharon because Moshe gave it to him.

Of course, we now have an interpreted source that justifies even *al pi p'hat* the Midrashim that write that many people who had this staff that was created at the last moments of Creation, as the Mishnah in Masseches Ovot teaches.

The idea is already embedded in P'sukim that demand that we read them carefully and not take anything for granted.

But now, in the context of our Parshas Korach we must ask and try to understand as best as we can: Why was it necessary for this staff to be used to show that Aharon was the chosen one as Kohen Godol<sup>19</sup>?

According to the Midrashim, the staff was created at almost the beginning of time and not only lasted millennia, but will also be the staff that *Melech HaMoshiach* will hold.

---

Any word that needs the letter *lamed* at its beginning the Torah [often] places the letter *heh* at its end.

There is a distinction between the words *horoh* – to a mountain and *he'horoh* – to *the mountain*. In the former, the *heh* at the end of the word is in place of the *lamed* at its beginning but it is not equivalent to the letter *lamed* with a *patach* [read as *la*]. *Horoh* like *l'hor* – to a mountain, not explaining to which mountain it refers. Rather, each of them fled to whatever mountain they found first.

But when there is the letter *heh* also at the beginning [in addition to the *heh* as a suffix that means 'to'] writing *he'horoh* or *ha'midbarah*, the explanation is like the words *el Hehar* – to *the* mountain and it implies to a particular mountain that is well-known and explicitly mentioned in that section.

<sup>19</sup> We saw earlier that Ramban taught that the miracle of the staff was to show that the entire *Shevet Levi* was chosen. But since Ramban does not emphasize whose staff it was, it may not be necessary to provide the explanation that follows, according to the Midrash.



Of course, when we are talking about the staff of the king, we refer to it as a scepter, a symbol of the monarchy.

That is why the blessing of the monarchy that Yaakov Ovinu gave to Yehuda was (B'reishis Perek 49/Posuk 10):

לֹא יִסּוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה וּמַחְקֵק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו עַד כִּי יָבֹא שִׁילָה וְלוֹ יִקְהֶת עַמִּים:

The scepter will not turn from Yehuda and the staff of lawgiving will not turn from between his legs, until *Shiloh* will come and the nations will be gathered to him.

*Shiloh* refers to *Melech HaMoshiach* who will be 'ben Dovid', a descendant of Dovid HaMelech who was from *Shevet Yehuda*.

Thus Yehuda had the staff with him even when he was in his self-imposed exile<sup>20</sup>.

What does this staff that was created during *Ma'aseh B'reishis* mean? What did this staff that was passed on from one leader of our People to another, from one generation to the next generation and today is waiting to be redeemed from its oblivion come to teach the contemporaries of Moshe Rabbenu and Aharon HaKohen HaGodol during the episode of Korach?

What does this staff that was passed on from one leader of our People to another, from one generation to the next generation and today is waiting to be redeemed from its oblivion, come to teach us today?

This staff of reign, this scepter of the King, appeared at the same time that Man appeared on earth, on that Yom HaShishi which began the history of mankind.

G-d made His rule immanent at Creation so that no one should think that the world is *hefker*, without a Ruler, without a plan, without a *tochnit* and without purpose.

G-d's Creation was planned, directed by His Hand, with a plan, a *tochnit* and most of all with a purpose.

---

<sup>20</sup> See B'reishis Perek 38/Posuk 1 and Rashi there.

When Aharon HaKohen ascended to his high office it was far more than a compliment to this eminently illustrious individual. He was a central key for the ongoing history of Israel. If the plan for his assumption of his position would have been thwarted, then disaster would have befallen the people.

That is why that when the plague occurred, Moshe Rabbenu did not take the *ketores* to stop the devastation, even though we would have expected that he would have done so personally. *Moshe* was given the *Ketores*. Chazal tell us (Masseches Shabbos 89 a) that it was a gift to him from the angels at the time of Mattan Torah.

Why then didn't Moshe take the *Ketores* to save Israel? Why did he give it to his brother? This is the point that Moshe Rabbenu wanted to make understood – without the atonement of the Kohen Godol that Hashem appointed, the devastation would have not stopped until Israel was decimated, *chas v'Shalom*.

When that point was not understood, when the power of Aharon was not sufficiently appreciated, then his staff, the inherited staff from the fathers of the nation in early generations and later ones, had to show the continuity that was expressed from the beginning of history until the End of Days.

Rashbam teaches how that continuity was expressed. He writes:

ויוצא פרח ויצץ ויצץ ויגמל שקדים - נראה לפי הפשט כשהוציאו משה מצאו שפרח  
ולא יותר כדכתיב והנה פרח מטה אהרן, אבל אחר כן ויצץ ציץ לעיני כל ישראל,  
ואחרי כן ויגמול שקדים...

*It put out a flower, it budded and it formed almonds* – The p'shat appears to be that when Moshe took the staff out he found that it produced the flower, but no more, as is written, 'Behold, the staff of Aharon flowered'.

But subsequently, it budded before the eyes of all of Israel and it produced almonds.

The almond is the first produce of the tree to appear in the new growing season. It heralds a new era, one of anticipated hope and optimism.

Perhaps when we read this section of Parshas Korach this week we can say a *tefilah* so that Geula that the staff of Aharon represents should come *bimheira b'yomeinu*.

Shabbat Shalom

Chodesh Tov

Rabbi Pollock