

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT KORACH • 26 IYAR 5779 – JUNE 29 2019 • VOL. 26 NO. 40

*In Israel: Korach is read this week and Chukat next week

*Outside of Israel: Shlach Lecha is read this week and Korach next week

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Never Enough Goldfish

“And Korach took...” (15:1)

In 1820, the ratio between the income of the top and bottom 20 percent of the world's population was three to one. By 1991, it was eighty-six to one. A study by the World Institute for Development Economics Research at United Nations University reports that the richest 1% of adults alone owned 40% of global assets in the year 2000. The three richest people in the world possess more financial assets than the lowest 48 nations combined.

Never in the field of human history has so much been owned by so few. The increasing problem for the mega-rich has been: Where in this world can you get a bang for your mega-dollars?

There's an old story about a super-rich father who wanted to make the glitziest Bar Mitzvah of all time. He called up NASA in Houston and asked how much it would cost to make a Bar Mitzvah on the moon. “No problem,” said the indulgent father. “The sky is not the limit!” And so it was that a select party of 25 invitees was ferried to the moon for the most exclusive Bar Mitzvah in history. On his return, one of the lucky invitees was asked by a friend what it was like to go to a Bar Mitzvah on the moon. He replied: “It was okay, but somehow there was no atmosphere.”

I have a friend whose job is to ‘conciierge’ parties for the fantabulously rich. He told me that once he booked Stevie Wonder to play at a private party of no more than six people. His fee? One and a quarter million dollars. But that was just Stevie's take-home stipend. In addition to that there was private jet transport, super luxury housing for Stevie and the band, and, of

course, food. The total? Somewhere between five and six million dollars.

There was an Arab Sheikh my friend ‘concierged’ who had an obsession with gold. When he came to New York everything had to be gold. The limousine had to be gold. The faucets in the bathroom had to be gold. The bath tub had to be gold. The crowning lunacy was the Sheikh's fantasy to fish with a golden fishing rod for goldfish in the Hudson River. I'm not sure when the last time was that a goldfish was sighted in the murky Hudson, but it was probably when little Jimmy got fed up with the prize he won at the fair and flushed it down the toilet. Undeterred, my friend the concierge secured a large 75 ft. yacht, painted it gold (of course), and had a couple thousand live goldfish shipped down from Maine. As the yacht made its stately progress up the waters of the Hudson, a team of scuba divers swimming underneath the yacht released the little fishies.

It seems that madness has no limits. And the more money you have, the madder you become.

“And Korach took....” This sentence from the beginning of this week's Torah portion has no object. It doesn't say what Korach took. Rather, Korach was completely invested in the desire to take. And so, despite his enormous wisdom, status and wealth, he staged a totally self-seeking rebellion against Moshe. How apt that Korach's voracious desire to engulf led to the earth opening up and devouring him!

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Korach: *Erchin* 9-15

When Less Is More

“The king commanded to widen the opening source of the spring’s water so that it would be a positive sign that his kingdom would be successful and long-lived.”

In a *beraita* on our *daf* Rabban Gamliel teaches an important recipe for a leader to be successful over a long period of time. He tells the following story:

The Shiloach Spring flowed from an opening that was only the size of a coin. A king commanded that the opening be made larger to increase the flow of the water. However, after it was made larger even less water flowed. The surprised king therefore commanded to return the opening to its original size. As a result, the water flowed abundantly. Rabban Gamliel concludes that this story illustrates what the verse states, “G-d said: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, nor the strong man boast of his strength, nor the rich man boast of his riches. Rather, the

praiseworthy person is to be praised for this: that he understands and knows Me, for I am G-d Who practices kindness, justice and righteousness in the world. Because in these things I delight, says G-d.” (Yirmiyahu 9:22-23)

From here we learn how a leader will achieve a life of great accomplishment and longevity. Not through false pride, self-aggrandizement and vanity, and a sense that he can be successful through his own efforts and wisdom. Only by being humble and recognizing that true success comes only with assistance from Above, will a leader find true success. (Maharsha)

• *Erchin* 10b

When S'more Is Less

Rabbi Elazar ben Parta said, “Come and see the great (destructive) power of slander. The Spies slandered only trees and stones (and caused horrific consequences.) – Therefore, one who slanders another person, how much more so is his punishment!”

Initially, the *gemara* questions their slander of the Land as the cause for the ensuing punishment, suggesting that the Spies spoke words of heresy that brought on the tragedy. In conclusion, however, Rabba says in the name of Reish Lakish that we learn from a verse that the cause was indeed slander, as Rabbi Elazar ben Parta taught in the *beraita*.

What was their slander of the Land? An obvious answer is based on their words that “It is a Land that consumes its inhabitants.” (Bamidbar 13:32) Rashi in Chumash explains that wherever the Spies went they saw the inhabitants of the Land burying the dead. Referring to this sight, the Spies reported that it was a “killer Land.” (However, Rashi in Chumash explains that the constant stream of burials they witnessed was a result of a Divine decree to preoccupy the locals so that the Spies would go unnoticed.)

The Maharsha, however, offers a more subtle insight into the Spies’ slander. When they returned, they carried back only certain fruits of the Land but not all. The Land of Israel is praised for seven special types of fruit: wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives and dates. The returning Spies stated, “And this is its fruit” (Bamidbar 13:27) – yet they showed only grapes, a fig and a pomegranate. In the same verse they also made mention of date-honey and milk when they called Israel a “Land flowing with milk and honey.” But they made a serious, intentional omission in what they brought back to show the nation. No wheat, barley or olives for oil. Although all seven fruits are certainly important, wheat, barley and oil are essential for making bread and other food products necessary to sustain life. The Spies brought back the “luxury fruits” for show-and-tell, but in an act of subtle slander they omitted the “meat and potatoes” of the Land, despite knowing that the people would want and need to be aware of their existence in the Land.

• *Erchin* 15a

PARSHA Q & A

Questions

1. Why did Datan and Aviram join Korach?
2. Why is Yaakov's name not mentioned in Korach's genealogy?
3. What motivated Korach to rebel?
4. What did Korach and company do when Moshe said that a *techelet* garment needs *tzizit*?
5. What warning did Moshe give the rebels regarding the offering of the incense?
6. Did Moshe want to be the *kohen gadol*?
7. What event did Korach not foresee?
8. What does the phrase *rav lachem* mean in this week's Parsha? (Give two answers.)
9. What lands are described in this week's Parsha as "flowing with milk and honey"?
10. When did Moshe have the right to take a donkey from the Jewish community?
11. What did Korach do the night before the final confrontation?
12. What sin did Datan and Aviram have in common specifically with Goliath?
13. Before what age is a person not punished by the Heavenly Court for his sins?
14. What happens to one who rebels against the institution of *kehuna*? Who suffered such a fate?
15. Why *specifically* was incense used to stop the plague?
16. Why was Aharon's staff placed in the middle of the other 11 staffs?
17. Aharon's staff was kept as a sign. What did it signify?
18. Why are the 24 gifts for the *kohanim* taught in this week's Parsha?
19. Who may eat the *kodshei kodashim* (most holy sacrifices) and where must they be eaten?
20. Why is G-d's covenant with the *kohanim* called "a covenant of salt"?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 16:1 - Because they were his neighbors.
2. 16:1 - Yaakov prayed that his name not be mentioned in connection with Korach's rebellion (*Bereishet* 49:6).
3. 16:1 - Korach was jealous that Elizafan ben Uziel was appointed as leader of the family of Kehat instead of himself.
4. 16:1 - They laughed.
5. 16:6 - Only one person would survive.
6. 16:6 - Yes.
7. 16:7 - That his sons would repent.
8. 16:7, 3 - *Raw lachem* appears twice in this week's Parsha. It means "much more than enough greatness have you taken for yourself (16:3)" and "It is a great thing I have said to you (16:17)."
9. 16:12 - Egypt and Canaan.
10. 16:15 - When he traveled from Midian to Egypt.
11. 16:19 - Korach went from tribe to tribe in order to rally support for himself.
12. 16:27 - They all blasphemed.
13. 16:27 - Twenty years old.
14. 17:5 - He is stricken with *tzara'at*, as was King Uziyahu (*Divrei HaYamim* II 26:16-19).
15. 17:13 - Because the people were deprecating the incense offering, saying that it caused the death of two of Aharon's sons and also the death of 250 of Korach's followers. Therefore G-d demonstrated that the incense offering was able to avert death, and it is sin, not incense, which causes death.
16. 17:21 - So people would not say that Aharon's staff bloomed because Moshe placed it closer to the *Shechina*.
17. 17:25 - That only Aharon and his children were selected for the *kehuna*.
18. 18:8 - Since Korach claimed the *kehuna*, the Torah emphasizes Aharon's and his descendants' rights to *kehuna* by recording the gifts given to them.
19. 18:10 - Male *kohanim* may eat them and only in the *azarah* (forecourt of the Beit Hamikdash).
20. 18:19 - Just as salt never spoils, so this covenant will never be rescinded.

ASK!

Your Jewish Information Resource – www.ohr.edu

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Ullman

A Mother's Mercy

From: Shiri

Dear Rabbi,

I'm concerned about a difference between my husband and me regarding "encouraging" the children to do mitzvot. He takes the hard approach, while I take a softer, more sensitive approach. For example, when the kids want to sleep in on Shabbat after a long week I tend to empathize with them and argue that they need to rest. But he'll encourage them to get out of bed in order to go to shul. Or again, recently, on Shavuot, I didn't think they needed to go learning into the wee hours of the morning, but my husband was insistent that they could and should do it for as long as they can stay up. What is the correct approach?

Dear Shiri,

I empathize with your position toward being sensitive to your children's material and physical health and well-being. I'm sure your husband is very proud of you in that regard, and appreciates how much love and concern you invest in them and in caring for their needs.

However, as I'm sure you also recognize, their spiritual and Jewish education is of no less importance to their upbringing. And just as you want to do all you can to ensure that they will grow up to be physically healthy and stable, you want them to be Jewishly strong and stable adults as well.

Many people think that children need to be raised physically healthy first, providing for their material needs during their younger years, while postponing their religious education and observance until they get older and become young adults. This is a mistake.

Just as the food we provide for our children is with the knowledge that it's precisely that which is needed for them to grow into healthy adults, so too with religiosity. Their spiritual strength and stability as adults depends on what we provide for them and the habits which we instill in them when they are children. And just as we would not forgo their essential needs in childhood with the approach that they will receive them later in life, so we must not forgo their spiritual needs with the idea that they will acquire them later. If so, they will grow with spiritual deficiencies that cannot be made up for later.

So, in cases such as you mention, while it could be counter-productive to force a child to wake up in order to pray, or to push himself to learn beyond his normal capacity, it is still a good thing to convince him through the normal parenting

tools of punishment and reward, where the latter is obviously preferable but the former is not unthinkable.

And from your description it sounds like your husband has a healthy approach of strong encouragement, short of outright coercion. In these instances, generous incentives are also very helpful. For instance, you could prepare special reward-cards to give the children when they go to shul, which can later be redeemed for a prize. And in an instance such as Shavuot, it's a once-in-a-year event which a child can be made to feel proud and grown-up about, and instill within him positive, motivational memories for an entire lifetime.

So, while your concerns are valid, their benefit is primarily short-term, while in the long-term such an approach can be harmful in that it can breed laziness and fear of challenges. And while an approach that responsibly pushes children beyond their childish comfort zone may seem initially harmful, in the long run it's much better for them in that it teaches them fortitude, consistency and self-sacrifice for important values, particularly regarding Yiddishkeit.

Thus, the approach you espouse may seem empathetic and sensitive, but could possibly be uncompassionate if it causes long-term, irreparable harm to the children you think you're helping. Conversely, an approach like your husband's (when not overly-severe) might seem callous, but is actually a great compassion on children since it prepares and empowers them to face the myriad challenges of life.

All of this can be succinctly stated from a Torah teaching regarding two different manifestations of mercy mentioned in ancient sources. The one is referred to as a mother's mercy, and the other as a father's. (This is based on a general difference between men and women, but of course, a woman may act according to a "father's mercy", and a man according to a "mother's mercy".)

Regarding the famine suffered after the destruction of the Temple, the verse states that for food, "The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children" (Lamentations 4:10). This is an extreme form of how a person, out of concern to preserve material life, could thereby "devour" the children he ostensibly loves. However, when calling for Divine mercy we ask G-d to have compassion upon us as "a father's mercy upon his children." This recognizes the need for discipline and expresses understanding that G-d's challenging demands of us, while often painful, actually demonstrate His compassion for our own good.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Names of the Underworld

In this essay we will explore the different words for *gehinnom* (commonly translated as “hell” or “purgatory”). The Talmud (*Eruvin* 19a) cites Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi’s statement that there are seven Biblical terms which refer to *gehinnom*: *sheol*, *avadon*, *be’er shachat*, *bor shaon*, *tit hayaven*, *tzal-mavet*, and *eret hatachtit*. In the following paragraphs we will explore the literal and esoteric meanings of these seven terms, as well as several more.

The word *sheol* and its various forms appear close to seventy times in the Bible. *Sheol*’s literal meaning is “grave.” Interestingly, Ibn Ezra to Gen. 37:35 criticizes the Christian Vulgate for translating *sheol* in that verse as the Latin *infernus* (“inferno”), because Ibn Ezra maintains that *sheol* literally means grave. However, Rashi (there) explains that although the plain meaning of *sheol* is “grave,” exegetically it can refer to the post-mortem purgatory of the soul. The Malbim writes that *sheol* literally means a deep pit from which it is impossible to get out. This may apply to both a “grave” and *gehinnom*.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) explains that the root of the word *sheol* is SHIN-LAMMED, which denotes something “thrown away” or “negated.” That meaning extends to the grave because death marks the onset of a plane of existence which is “away” from the realm of the living. My friend Rabbi Tzvi Matisyahu Abrahams takes a more exhortative approach in his book *Root Connections in the Torah*. He writes (p. 274): “The grave is called *sheol* because at the time when we will be placed into the ground, there will be a big question (*sheilah*) mark hanging over our heads as to where we will be headed.”

A second word for *gehinnom* is *avadon* (Ps. 88:12), which either refers to the destruction/rotting of the body after death, or the fact that souls are “lost” (*avad*) there for some time.

The third term for *gehinnom* is *shachat* or *be’er shachat* (Ps. 16:10, 55:24). In many cases the word *shachat* in the Bible does not clearly refer to the grave or *gehinnom*, but refers to a pit. Rabbi Avraham Bedersi HaPenini (1230-1300) explains that a *shachat* is a pit dug for the purpose of capturing wild animals. He connects this to *gehinnom* by noting that the wicked sometimes set up traps in order to ensnare the righteous. He also explains that *shachat* is an expression of “destruction” (*hashchatah*), for the body rots and decomposes in the grave.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the root of *shachat* is SHIN-CHET, which refers to “bending.” This is connected to a “pit” because when one is stuck in such a cramped place he is forced to “bend” his body. Other words which are derived from this root include *hishtachavah* (“bowing,” by which one “bends” his posture) and *mashach* (“anointing,” because applying oil to hard things softens them, leaving them more pliable and “bendable”).

The fourth term cited by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is *bor shaon* (literally, the “Pit of Noise”), found in Ps. 40:3. Rabbi Yonah ibn Janach and others explain that *shaon* – which means a “ruckus of noise” – and *shaanan* – which means “quiet” – are actually related to each other. This is an example of a common phenomenon in Hebrew where words with diametrically opposed meanings sometimes have related roots. In light of this it seems that *bor shaon* might actually mean “Pit of Silence,” and refer to the fact that one can no longer complain or even speak after death.

Rashi (to Isa. 9:4) and Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* explain that the word *shaon* has the same root as the word *shoah* (“holocaust” or “destruction”). This fits with the terms *avadon* and *shachat*, which are also related to “destruction.”

The fifth term proffered by Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi is *tit hayaven* (literally, “slimy mud”), also found in Ps. 40:3 (alongside with *bor shaon*). *Gehinnom* restricts one’s freedom of movement like somebody stuck in quicksand, and in death the dead lie lifelessly in the grave. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the word *hayaven* is derived from the root YUD-NUN, which refers to “trickery” or “deception.” This root is related to the word *onaah* (essentially “to profit by ripping somebody off”), and *yayin* (“wine,” which deceives the drinker by tasting good but then taking away his capacity to think properly). In the same vein, *quicksand* also “deceives” people by appearing to be dry land that one can walk on top of, but, in reality, if one attempts to do so he will drown in the slime. (Similar explanations are offered by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his commentary to Gen. 9:20 and by Rabbi Aharon Marcus in *Keset HaSofer* to Gen. 10:2.)

The sixth synonym for *gehinnom* is *tzal-mavet*, literally “shadow of death” (Ps. 107:10, Iyov 10:21). The connection is obvious. The seventh and final term that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi mentions is *eret hatachtit* (literally, “the underworld”). When

discussing this term the Talmud cannot find an example of Biblical usage, and so it simply concludes that there is a tradition linking this term with *gehinnom*.

Another version of Rabbi Yehoshua's list, found in *Sefer Russiana* and in *Menorat HaMaor* by Rabbi Yitzchak Abuhav (14th century Spain) has *eretz chittit* (literally, "the Land of the Hittites") instead of *eretz tachtit*. In fact, the Tosafists actually prefer this version. They argue that the term *eretz tachtit* actually does appear in the Bible (several times in Ezek. 31, see also Deut. 32:22), so if *eretz tachtit* was a term for *gehinnom* the Talmud would not have had to resort to a non-Scriptural tradition to prove so. The term *eretz chittit*, on the other hand, does not appear in the Bible. This substantiates the position that the Talmudic passage in question should indeed read *eretz chittit*, which was inadvertently changed to *eretz tachtit* by a scribal error. In other words, if we assume that the seventh term is *eretz chittit*, the Talmud's entire discussion makes more sense. Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555-1631), also known as the Maharsha, explains that these seven names for *gehinnom* correspond to seven different places in *gehinnom* (see *Sotah* 10b). Indeed, *Midrash Kohen* (printed in Rabbi J. D. Eisenstein's *Otzar Midrashim*, p. 256) writes that different types of sinners occupy different places in *gehinnom*: Korach and his companions occupy *sheol*; the lost souls of the wicked occupy *avadon*; robbers, thieves, and those who withhold wages from workers occupy *be'er shachat*; those who violated the laws governing intimate relations occupy *tit hayaven*; slanderers occupy *tzal-mavet*; those who argue with Torah Scholars occupy *eretz tachtit*; and so forth...

The Tosafists cite several sources that presume that *alukah* (literally, "leech" or "sanguisuga") – a word that appears in Prov. 30:15 – is another term for *gehinnom* (although they also discuss the possibility that it is an alternate name for King Solomon). Maharal explains that just as a leech sucks out a person's blood, so does *gehinnom* "suck out" a person's soul. Similarly, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821) explains in *Nefesh HaChaim* (1:12) that *gehinnom* is called a "leech" because a leech sucks out a person's bad blood and then dies. This is comparable to *gehinnom* which cleanses a person of his sins, thus causing all impure pollutants created by his sin to disappear.

Before continuing with the Talmud's reaction to Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, I must state that other sources have alternate versions of his list: *Midrash Hallel* (*Otzar Midrashim*, p. 134) omits *bor shaon* and *eretz hatachtit*, and instead includes *gehinnom* and *tziyah* (literally, "place of desolation). *Midrash Din HaKever* (*Otzar Midrashim*, p. 94) replaces *bor shaon* with *be'er shaon*; *eretz hatachtit* with *bor hatachtit* (literally, "the underpit"); and *tzal-mavet* with *chatzar-mavat* (literally, "Courtyard of Death"). The Targumic Tosefta (beginning of Ezek.) replaces *bor shaon* with *dumah* (literally, "quiet" – in Kabbalistic sources, *dumah* is the name of the angel in charge of *gehinnom*). It also replaces *eretz hatachtit* with *arka* (Aramaic for "earth," see Jer. 10:11), and *tzal-mavet* with *gehinnom*.

After citing and finding proof-texts for the seven words in Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's list the Talmud then turns to another two words which he seems to have neglected: *gehinnom* and *tophet*. Those two words do not explicitly refer to the netherworld in the Bible. In the Bible the terms *gei ben hinnom* (the "Valley of Ben Hinnom," from which the word *gehinnom* is derived) and *tophet* refer to sites in Southern Jerusalem where idol worshippers served the Baal, in part with child sacrifices (see Jer. 19).

Nonetheless, these two terms were borrowed as expressions of the sinner's afterlife. Based on that borrowing, the Talmud asks why Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi did not include these two terms in his list. The Talmud answers that *gehinnom* and *tophet* are not additional names for the underworld or places within that realm, but are actually allusions to the *reasons* why somebody might end up there. Meaning, the Talmud expounds on the word *gehinnom* as referring to the deep "valley" (*gei*) into which those who engage in "pointless" (*chinam*, which Rashi explains refers to sexual impropriety) activities descend. Similarly, the Talmud expounds on *tophet* as referring to the place into which those who are "convinced" or "seduced" (*mifateh*) by the Evil Inclination fall. In light of this, *gehinnom* and *tophet* do not fit into the theme of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi's list (i.e. Biblical terms which refer to *gehinnom*) and he therefore left them out.

- For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rclein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Korach, Datan and Aviram, and 250 leaders of Israel rebel against the authority of Moshe and Aharon. The rebellion results in their being swallowed by the earth. Many resent their death and blame Moshe. G-d's "anger" is manifest by a plague that besets the nation, and many thousands perish. Moshe intercedes once again for the people. He instructs Aharon to atone for them and the plague stops. Then, G-d commands that staffs, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes, be placed in the *Mishkan*. In the morning

the staff of Levi, bearing Aharon's name, sprouts, buds, blossoms and yields ripe almonds. This provides Divine confirmation that Levi's tribe is chosen for priesthood and verifies Aharon's position as *Kohen Gadol*, High Priest. The specific duties of the *levi'im* and *kohanim* are stated. The *kohanim* were not to be landowners, but were to receive their sustenance from the tithes and other mandated gifts brought by the people. Also taught in this week's *parsha* are laws of the first fruits, redemption of the firstborn and other offerings.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch
by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Precocious Blossoming

After the unprecedented challenge to Moshe's leadership, and in particular the selection of Aharon as the High Priest, Korach and his inner circle of rabble-rousing cohorts are swallowed by the earth. The remaining two hundred and fifty of Korach's recruits, vying for the position and foolishly putting their lives on the line by offering *ketoret*, are destroyed in a Heavenly conflagration.

As a final proof to the nation that Aharon from the tribe of Levi was chosen to serve in the Temple, Moshe is instructed to request one staff from the leader of each tribe. The names of the prince of each tribe was inscribed on each of the twelve staffs, and the name of Aharon was inscribed on the staff of Levi. The staffs were then laid down in the Mishkan, before the Tablets. G-d instructed that the staff of the tribe of the chosen priest will blossom. On the following day: *Lo! Arahon's staff... was blossoming. It produced blossoms, sprouted twigs, and bore almonds.*

The order is significant: first it produced blossoms, then it put forth twigs that bear leaves, then it bore almonds. This is the special characteristic of the almond tree – it blossoms even before it grows leaves.

All branches of fruit trees leaf, then blossom, then produce fruit. The same earth bears them all; the same rain waters them; the same wind blows through them, and the same sun nourishes them all. Nevertheless, the almond tree – the *shaked* – stands out among all its comrades in the field. Its uniqueness is in its

shkidah – from which it derives its name. *Shkidah* describes the zeal, devotion and vigor with which it performs its duty, and thereby precedes all its brother trees. While they are still making up their minds, it has already completed its work and it begins immediately with the goal – namely, the blossom, which produces the fruit; the whole purpose of the blossom is to produce fruit. For the sake of the fruit, the almond tree then produces its leaves.

This exquisite characterization of the Levite tribe as an almond tree reveals why it merited being the representatives of Torah and service of G-d. Only the Levites responded to Moshe's call after the golden calf debacle, *Whoever is for G-d, come to me!* This is the spirit inherited by the elite of the Levi family – Aharon and his sons.

At the same time, a consoling promise is expressed here. The almond tree only precedes the others in *blossoming and maturing its fruit*. It leads the way before its brothers in the field, preceding them in development, but they too follow its example and bear their own fruit. Similarly, the Levites and the sons of Aharon lead the way in spiritual development and way of life, and the rest of the tribes are called upon to follow their example and attain the same spiritual level.

▪ Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 17:

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the people of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

Rav Yosef Kahaneman

One of the greatest builders of Torah education in Eretz Yisrael in the previous generation was HaRav Yosef Kahaneman, commonly known as the Rav of Ponovez. Arriving in the Holy Land after losing most of his family and community in the Holocaust, he not only founded the great yeshiva in Bnei Brak which bears the name of the community which he led back in Lithuania but also institutions to care for homeless children who had survived the war.

He was not only a brilliant Torah scholar and orator but also an

extremely effective fundraiser. One particular donor was enamored of this great man's personality but did not particularly care for the religious nature of his institutions. "I am prepared to give you the money you need to build another school, he told the Rav, "but only if none of its students wear a *kipah* on his head!"

Not missing a beat, the Rav agreed to this condition and received the gift. What did he do? He built a school for girls in which not one student kept her head covered.