

Parashat Tzav, 5776, 2016:

Can We be Like Aharon and His Sons?

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The final verse in our *parasha*, “And Aaron and his sons did all the things that the L-rd commanded through Moses,” contains the highly unusual phrase, “that the L-rd commanded through Moses.” (*Sefer Vayikra* 8:36, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) It appears only twice more in *Tanach*, namely, in *Sefer Bamidbar* 36:13 and in *Sefer Nechemiah* 8:14. In stark contrast, the standard formulation, “as the L-rd commanded Moses,” is found 38 times in *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* alone, and three more times in *Sefer Yehoshua*. Little wonder, then, that *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) felt driven to analyze the uncommon use of our expression, “that the L-rd commanded through Moses.”

Rashi (1040-1105) suggests that the reason why the Torah employed the phraseology, “that the L-rd commanded through Moses,” was to “to tell their [i.e. Aharon and his son’s] praise, namely, that they did not deviate to the right or to the left.” In his classic super-commentary on Rashi, entitled *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal of Prague (R. Yehudah Loew ben Bezalel, 1525-1609) explicated Rashi’s comment in the following fashion:

This is the case, since the Temple service is of overarching import and replete with many stringencies that stem from the numerous laws that constitute the Sacrificial Service.

Therefore, the Torah teaches us that they neither deviated from, nor erred regarding, any of them – “neither to the right or to the left,” since they acted with great intention and exactitude [in the fulfillment of their task]. (Translation and brackets my own)

The *Sifra*, the halachic Midrash to *Sefer Vayikra*, takes a different approach to our phrase.

Instead of focusing upon what Aharon and his sons actually did, the Midrash discusses their reactions to being commanded to perform the Sacrificial Service:

They rejoiced and were exhilarated when they heard the command from Moshe, as if they had heard it directly from the Holy One Blessed be He. This is precisely why the Torah states: “And Aaron and his sons did all the things that the L-rd commanded through Moses.” [This means that rather than being Moshe’s emissaries,] they felt they were in the noble position of being Hashem’s immediate representatives, as such; the commandments [of the Sacrificial Service] were [particularly beloved] to them. (Translation, underlining and brackets my own)

It is interesting that although the Maharal of Prague usually advocates for Rashi’s interpretations, in this instance, he instead champions the view of the Midrash:

This interpretation [of the *Sifra*] is more accurate [than that of Rashi], since it is directly reflective of our verse. After all, it is the standard practice in the world that when an intermediary [, rather than the person in complete charge,] mandates someone of stature to perform some act, the individual so commanded will not perform the obligatory deed with authentic joy – since he is merely listening to the words of the middleman. Aharon, however, was jubilant, as if he, himself, had heard the command [directly from the Master of the Universe.]

Rav Meir Lob ben Yechiel Michel Weiser (1809-1879), known to the world as “the Malbim,” offers a third approach to understanding the phrase, “that the L-rd commanded through Moses.” Instead of focusing upon how Aharon and his sons performed the commands of the Sacrificial Service (Rashi), or their exaltation upon hearing these commands from Moshe (*Sifra*), the Malbim takes a step back and focuses upon the question as to who was actually commanded regarding these precepts – Moshe or Aharon?

Our verse contains unusual language, since it always says, that they performed [their task] “as the L-rd commanded Moses,” which means that Moshe was the one directly commanded by Hashem. In our case, however, in deference to the honor due Aharon and

his sons, Moshe was purely Hashem's emissary (*shaliach*) and they were the ones who were actually commanded (*hayah Moshe rak hashaliach v'hame hiyu hametzuvim*). Therefore, the text states, "through Moshe" [instead of "to Moshe"]. (*Commentary to Sefer Vayikra, Parashat Tzav*, gloss 194, translation and brackets my own)

It is clear from the views of Rashi, the *Sifra* and the Malbim that the meaning of our phrase, "that the L-rd commanded through Moses," is subject to a variety of diverse interpretations. All, however, agree upon its singular import, and that it is teaching us something of remarkable significance.

In truth, *Klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) is very much like the *Sifra's* presentation of Aharon and his sons, in that we transhistorically continue to receive the Torah and its commandments from the greatest rebbe of all time: "Moses commanded us the Torah, it is the legacy for the congregation of Jacob." (*Sefer Devarim 33:4*) As such, with Hashem's help and blessings, may we strive, each and every day, to accept and fulfill the Torah with the selfsame alacrity and spiritual joy that Aharon and his sons so powerfully demonstrated. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdbe718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on "Tefilah: Haskafah and Analysis," may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.

