

Parashat Tzav 5782, 2022:

B'yad Moshe

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The final section of our *parasha* is an expansive 36-verse passage that portrays the public investiture of Aharon and his sons into the *kahuna*. It concludes with the *pasuk*: “And Aharon and his sons did all the things that Hashem commanded through Moshe.” (*Sefer Vayikra* 8:36, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) suggests that the reason why the Torah states, “and Aharon and his sons did all the things,” is to “to tell their praise, namely, that they did not deviate to the right or to the left.” Yet, Rashi’s comment seems to be unnecessary. Aharon and his sons were some of the greatest spiritual leaders of their generation. Why, then, would the Torah need “to tell their praise,” since they acted precisely as we would have expected?

In his supercommentary on Rashi’s *perush* entitled, *Gur Aryeh*, the Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Bezalel, 1525-1609) elucidates Rashi’s gloss in this manner:

[Rashi felt it necessary to provide this explanation] as the Temple service is of overarching import and replete with many stringencies that stem from the numerous laws that constitute the *Korbanot* 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)

In the Maharal's view, Rashi presents a reformulation of the oft-repeated Talmudic dictum: "kohanim zarizim hame—kohanim act with alacrity and punctiliousness in *mitzvot* observance." (*Talmud Bavli, Shabbat 20a*) As such, the behavior of Aharon and his sons warrants recognition and praise at the inception of their *avodah* (service) in the *Mishkan*.

While Rashi's focal point in our *pasuk* is the phrase, "and Aharon and his sons did all the things," the Netziv (Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, 1816-1893), in his *HaEmek Davar*, turns his attention to the end of our verse: "that Hashem commanded through Moshe—*asher tzivah Hashem b'yad Moshe*," and to an explication of the term, "*b'yad Moshe*." He notes that *asher tzivah Hashem* refers to "*kabbalah be'al peh*" (Oral Law). In order to analyze, "*b'yad Moshe*," however, he cites *Sefer Vayikra 10:11* and *Talmud Bavli, Kritot 13b*:

"And to instruct *b'nai Yisrael* regarding all the statutes which Hashem has spoken to them through Moshe (*b'yad Moshe*)."

"And to instruct," this refers to issuing a halachic decision; "regarding all the statutes," this refers to halachic expositions of the Torah; "which Hashem has spoken to them;" this refers to *halachot l'Moshe mi'Sinai* [a specific category of Oral Law]; "*b'yad Moshe*," this is *talmud* [the analyses of Oral Law upon which halachic conclusions are based]. (Translation and brackets my own)

According to the Netziv, "*talmud*" connotes "that which is created through exacting exploration of the Talmud, an ability that was given to Moshe." Building on this definition, he suggests, "this is what the expression, '*b'yad Moshe*,' means, namely, the [singular] ability the Holy One blessed be He bequeathed to Moshe to determine his own halachic positions." At this juncture, he applies his definition of *b'yad Moshe* to our original *pasuk* and states:

And this is the case herein, that they [Aharon and his sons] not only did that which [Moshe] had received through *kabbalah be'al peh*, but, in addition, they did that which Moshe had determined to be the actual halachic practice in this instance [after his prodigious examination of this material]. (*HaEmek Davar* translations and brackets my own)

I believe the Netziv's conceptualization of *b'yad Moshe* helps us understand the depth of Rashi's earlier comment, "to tell their praise, namely, that they did not deviate to the right or to the left." Aharon and his sons not only followed the words of the Torah that we have recorded in our *parasha*, and the *Torah Sheb'al Peh* that Moshe directly received from the Almighty, but, in addition, they did not diverge in any manner from the halachic guidelines they received from Moshe, himself. Surely this is praiseworthy and deserving of acknowledgement. As Malachi the prophet proclaimed so long ago: "*Zichru torat Moshe avdi*—Keep in remembrance the teaching of Moshe, My servant." (*Sefer Malachi* 3:22) With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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