



Parshas Chukas

Summer Edition

פרשת חקת

Zehirus and Zerizus: the Life and Legacy of Aharon Hakohen

Yitzchak Hagler ('22)

Every good hero needs a sidekick. Batman has Robin, Woody has Buzz, Shrek has Donkey, and Mr Incredible... well, he works alone. However, because of the prevalence of sidekicks in secular culture, when we think about Aharon *Hakohen*, it is easy to classify him as Moshe's sidekick. Although it is true that in Egypt he was originally designated to be Moshe's spokesperson (*Shemos* 4:16), he comes across as quiet, humble, and maybe even a bit afraid to take action. All this seems to add up to someone who is suited to spend their life working on themselves and becoming closer to Hashem, not someone who should be the second in command of the leadership of a nation. Since we read about his death this week in *Parshas Chukas*, I think now is a perfect time to go back and examine some of Aharon's life and attempt to understand why he was given the leadership position he was given, what he accomplished as leader, and what we can learn from him.

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky (a *Rosh Yeshiva* in RIETS), in his article entitled "A Tribute to Aharon *Hakohen*," writes that to start understanding the life of Aharon *Hakohen*, we must first understand Aharon's heritage, starting with his great grandfather, Levi. The Levi we see in Sefer *Bereishis* is, at least according to the basic reading of the *Pesukim*, a rash, overly zealous man (See however, Rashi on *Bereishis* 35:22 who says that all of Yaakov's sons were in fact *tzaddikim*). When he hears that his sister was violated by the people of Shechem, Levi (along with Shimon) immediately jumps into action, tricking the people of Shechem and then slaughtering them. Even when Yakov later confronts Levi and Shimon, telling them that they have endangered the whole family, they are both adamant and unrelenting in their passion (*Bereishis* 34). Thus, when Yaakov is on his deathbed, meeting one last time with his sons, the only 'blessing' he has for Shimeon and Levi is "*Cursed be the anger [of Shimon and Levi], for it is fierce, and [cursed be] their wrath, for it is relentless*" (*Bereishis* 49:7). This statement paints an ugly picture of Levi for us, a picture of overenthusiasm and hotheadedness, a picture of the helpless ship being easily swept away by the powerful tide of emotion. On the other hand, much later in the *Torah*, when Moshe takes his turn at blessing the different *shevatim*, he addresses Levi very differently. Moshe calls Levi "[Hashem's] Faithful One... [who] will teach [His] Laws to Yaakov and [His] Torah to Yisrael. They shall place... Olah-offerings on your mizbeiach" (*Devarim* 33:8-33:10 with Rashi). Why this dramatic, momentous shift in the identity of *Shevet Levi*? Rabbi Subolofsky answers that just one factor, albeit a major one, changed things so much for *Shevet Levi* from the times of Yaakov to the times of Moshe: Aharon *Hakohen*. As we look into a few episodes of Aharon's life, I think it is very important to keep in mind the question of how Aharon's actions were able to transform the identity of an entire *shevet* in such a manner.

The first incident I want to focus on is the tragic death of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu. Nadav and Avihu, in an attempt to serve *Hashem*, sinned gravely and were punished with death (*Vayikra* 10). Any parent who, *lo aleinu*, loses a child probably experiences unimaginable grief from the loss of their precious child, so full of potential and hope, being lost to them forever. Not only that, but many parents probably naturally feel an intense anger and confusion as to why their innocent child was taken from them. Therefore, when Aharon watched as his sons were killed by *Hashem*, how much more so must he have felt not only an extreme grief but maybe even a slight anger at *Hashem* for ripping away his beloved children. Yet Aharon reacts to this experience in the most pure, *kadosh* way possible- "*vayeedom Aharon*", Aharon was silent. In the throes of emotion, when there was surely at least a sigh of grief or a cry of anger begging to escape from his lips, Aharon remained silent. Unlike his ancestor Levi, Aharon successfully stemmed the intense tide of emotion, allowing him to do one vital thing: think. Rather than acting impulsively, Aharon stood there, silent, probably reminding himself of his value system and planning how his actions could best correspond to it. This is in accordance with the sage advice of Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, who instructs (*Mesillas Yesharim* 2-3) that if a person successfully watches over themselves, both in set self reflection sessions as well as in the midst of the hustle bustle of everyday life, and is constantly thinking about what their goals are in life and how they can act in ways which help achieve that goal, they will be given the help from *Hashem* to be saved from their *yetzer hara*. This is called *zehirus*, and it is the first step on the ladder of spirituality, a ladder which ends with the coming of *Moshiach* and *techiyas hameisim* (*Sotah* 9:15). So it seems from this story that Aharon was successful in completely reversing the impetuous, overzealous nature he inherited by virtue of being a part of the *shevet Levi* to a more reflective, thinking approach. I would humbly suggest that this attribute of Aharon was also the reason why, when approached by a people who literally wanted to worship a false god (!), Aharon's response was simply to tell them to wait until tomorrow. He was trying to give them time to reflect and really think about what they were doing, because he knew that if they would have just taken the time to think seriously about what it is they were doing, they would have realized the foolishness of their ways.

Another time this trait of Aharon's becomes apparent is during the inauguration of the *Mishkan* (*Vayikra* 9:7). Ramban there describes how Aharon, possibly because of his sin with the *egel hazahav*, felt he was unworthy to bring the *korban* to inaugurate the *Mizbeiach*, and therefore he lagged behind. In that instance too, Aharon was not swept up by the excitement of the inauguration, but rather he made a thoughtful decision to remain behind. After this initial hesitation, though, something interesting happens with Aharon. Ramban describes how Aharon, when he hears Moshe's confirmation that he actually is worthy of performing the *avodah*, becomes overcome with *zerizus*, enthusiasm, in his fulfillment of the *mitzvah*. We can find in this *Ramban* an important nugget about Aharon, namely that not only did Aharon work on himself until he learned how to turn off the natural zealousness within his DNA as a member of *Shevet Levi*, but he even learned how to turn it on and harness it for use in serving *Hashem*.

I would suggest that Aharon, by virtue of his high rank within *Bnei Yisrael*, was able to serve as a role model for the whole *Shevet Levi* in learning how to positively express both their natural zeal and zealousness on the one hand, as well the value of not allowing blind emotions to dictate one's actions on the other. This improvement in the overall personality of *Shevet Levi*, brought about by Aharon's example, can help us understand why the *Leviim* were eventually chosen to be the teachers of *Bnei Yisrael*. My *Rebbe*, Rabbi Mendelson, likes to quote his *Rebbe*, Rav Aharon Soloveitchik, that in addition to the "Voice of *Sinai*", the actual *mitzvos* Hashem commanded the *Bnei Yisrael* at *Har Sinai*, there was another, equally important aspect of *Matan Torah*- the "Fire of *Sinai*", the inspiration and deep feeling of *yiras Shamayim* the *Bnei Yisrael* gained from witnessing *Hashem* appear to them as a "consuming fire" (*Shemos* 24:17). A teacher of *Torah*, to properly convey his message to his students, must keep a very careful balance between the 'fire of *Sinai*,' the dynamic enthusiasm for the *Torah* he is teaching, and the calm coolheadedness which prevents him from being impatient and easily angered when teaching (as the *Mishnah* (*Pirkei Avos* 2:5) says: 'an easily angered person cannot be a teacher'). Thus, it makes a lot of sense that one of Aharon's roles was as the teacher of the *Bnei Yisrael*, as he, through his synthesis of *zehirus* (thinking before acting) and *zerizus* (acting with enthusiasm), was uniquely suited to do so.

The most famous of Aharon's roles, though, is as the quintessential peacemaker. Hillel (*Pirkei Avos* 1:12) instructs us to "be of the students of Aharon, loving peace, chasing after peace, loving mankind and bringing them closer to *Torah*". The Tiferes Yisrael there explains that 'loving peace' refers to making preplanned and well thought out strategies to avoid disagreements and fights, and 'chasing after peace' refers to putting extreme effort and passion into running after peace if a fight does come up. Thus, Aharon's greatness in the area of making *shalom* was also likely a result of his mastery in the *middos* of *zehirus* and *zerizus*, as the careful calculations he made before acting probably allowed him to avoid offending anyone or starting any arguments, and his *zehirus* was probably on full display when he would chase after peace to no end in already existing arguments. This fostering of unity, explains Ra"v Bartenura, is the main job of the *Kohen Gadol*. Unlike other nations which might have many priests, Aharon is the centralized, clear cut *Kohen Gadol*, he is The Greatest Priest. This gives him the responsibility of engendering a feeling of unity among *Bnei Yisrael*, a task which was clearly a specialty of Aharon's.

Lastly, I want to focus on Korach's rebellion against the leadership of Moshe and Aharon (*Bamidbar Perakim* 16-17). To summarize, this rebellion consists of, at first, only one recorded complaint: how do Moshe and Aharon dare raise themselves above the rest of the holy congregation of *Hashem*?? Upon hearing this complaint, Moshe immediately fell on his face, seemingly despairing in the face of the controversy. Ramban (16:4) even seems to imply that Moshe was actually a little bit offended at Korach's very aggressive attacks and insults. After this, Moshe immediately devised a dramatic test to prove to everyone that he is following *Hashem*, declaring that Aharon and Korach should both bring *korbanos* to *Hashem* and the one who is accepted will be the one *Hashem* has chosen, while the one who is rejected will be killed (Rashi 16:6). Next, Dasan and Aviram continue to insult Moshe, and Moshe becomes very distressed (Rashi 16:15) and reminds Korach about the upcoming faceoff. Following this, *Hashem* declares that He will destroy this entire congregation, but He is calmed down by Moshe and Aharon (this is obviously not literal, as Hashem doesn't experience anger nor does He have to be calmed down). Finally, the facedown arrives, and Korach and his followers are publicly killed by Hashem. But the story doesn't end there. The people actually react to this violence negatively, accusing Moshe and Aharon of killing the Nation of *Hashem*. In response to this, Hashem, in His 'anger', once again threatens to kill the *Bnei Yisrael*, but this time Moshe and Aharon's *tefillos* are ineffective, and *Hashem* sets loose a plague which kills many and is only stopped when Aharon bring a *korban*. *Hashem* then tells every *shevet* to bring a staff to the *Ohel Moed* and leave it there overnight. The next morning, it is found that *Hashem* has caused Aharon's staff to sprout forth with flowers and almonds, thus proving once again, albeit in a more peaceful way, that Aharon is the one that *Hashem* desires to be the *Kohen Gadol*.

Why did I give you this long synopsis? I brought up this story because I think that this story, and specifically Aharon's role in it, is actually a case study in how to properly balance the above described duality of *zehirus* and *zerizus*. The first thing I want to point out about this incident is that despite the fact that Korach's complaint was largely a complaint against Aharon's right to the *kehuna*, Moshe, not Aharon, is the one to fall on his face when hearing of the complaint. Ramban explains that Aharon, in his kedushah, didn't allow himself to be affected by the personal complaints against him, but rather he remained silent, waiting to see how *Hashem*, through Moshe, would want the situation to be handled. In this we see yet again the extent to which Aharon is constantly controlling his emotions and directing his actions completely for the sake of Heaven. What's even more intriguing, though, about this comment from Ramban is that it could be taken to imply that Moshe, in proposing the deadly showdown, actually did let his emotions dictate his actions, at least to some slight degree. This is further supported by the later *possuk* which describes how Moshe, in his state of great distress, makes sure to remind Korach of the upcoming face off. Thus, it seems that Moshe, in proposing Korach's violent end, was slightly influenced by emotion (although considering the fact that Moshe was the most humble man on earth (*Bamidbar* 12:3), this emotion was likely not the anger of wounded self pride nor the shame of public humiliation but rather probably some sort of defensive anger which was purely for the sake of Heaven). I believe that this is an extremely important key in understanding this story. Why is this so important?

To answer that, I want to bring in one more insight into this story. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points out that in reality, Moshe's ploy failed. Moshe had been looking for an immediate, dramatically violent solution to quell this rebellion and prove to *Bnei Yisrael* that he and Aharon were the ones chosen by Hashem. In other words, Moshe was looking for a miracle. And at that dramatic moment, when everything was at stake for Moshe, the ground opened up and swallowed the rebels! This is exactly what Moshe was looking for! So, as Rabbi Sacks puts it "we would expect that this would end the rebellion and vindicate Moses. Heaven had answered his call in the most dramatic way. He had been proved right. End of revolt. End of story." Yet this is not the end of the story. Immediately after this, the *Bnei Yisrael* complain once again. The message was clearly not well received. The question is, why? What went wrong?

I would humbly suggest that the answer might be that this whole demonstration failed to hit home because Moshe was motivated here, to some degree by his emotions, not a thoroughly coolheaded calculation. I think this can be seen from the 'anger' Hashem displayed. The first instance of Hashem's 'anger' comes right before Moshe follows through with his plan. I would suggest that with this 'anger' Hashem was communicating a warning to Moshe about acting based on one's emotions. And later, when it becomes apparent that Moshe's plan was unsuccessful, Hashem once again displays anger, as if to tell Moshe that this failure came about because of the emotional aspect of this plan. Because he didn't think it through as much as he could, Moshe, in the heat of the moment, was convinced that violence and fear was the right answer. But maybe if he would have exercised a little bit more *zehirus*, if he would've been a little bit more like his brother Aharon, he would have realized that the best way to resolve a conflict is not through escalation of violence, not by throwing a torch on a match, but rather through a different route- the route of peace. Therefore, Hashem followed up Moshe's failed attempt at resolving the conflict through violence by a more peaceful route. What was this peaceful route? Aharon's staff was found to have almonds sprouting out from it. Rashi comments that almonds are the fastest growing fruit, representing the swiftness of punishment which comes to someone who rebels against the *kehunah* like Korach did. I would suggest though, that the almonds also represent the *zehirus*, the swiftness to act once action has been decided upon, that embodies the job of the *kohen*. Thus, the whole story of Korach really can be seen as a praise of Aharon! First of all, through Moshe's possible misstep in the area of *zehirus*, we see Aharon's greatness in that area, and through Hashem's final demonstration, we have a hint to Aharon's mastery in *zerizus*. Lastly, the story teaches the difficulty of making peace, which helps us better appreciate Aharon's unique talent at doing just that.

All in all, Aharon, through his *zehirus* and his *zerizus*, is the epitome of what it means to be a *kohen Gadol*. He was able to act as a role model to all of *Bnei Yisrael* by keeping peace even after watching his kids die in front of him, teach *Torah* to *Bnei Yisrael*, and, most importantly, create peace between each man and his brother. What can we learn from Aharon? Two simple words, which are nearly impossible to balance together: *zehirus* and *zerizus*.

Mussar Moments

Max Korenman ('22) and Avidan Loike ('22)

Multiple times throughout this week's *Parshah*, *Parshas Chukas*, the *Bnei Yisrael* complain to Moshe asking why they were taken out of Egypt just to die in the desert. These complaints are very different from the ones that we have seen in the past which were geared towards not wanting to go to *Eretz Yisrael* and going back to Egypt. In this week's *parshah*, however, the complaints stem from a seeming lack of water. Nevertheless, the *Bnei Yisrael*, however, are punished as though it were a complaint like the ones they had made regarding *Eretz Yisrael*. The question is, what did they do wrong here? They were only asking for basic necessities of life?

Rabbienu Bachya explains what was really happening. The *Bnei Yisrael* had the *mann*, and water from the miraculous well, but they wanted a way to get food like the rest of the world. Meaning that they wanted a way to make their own food and did not want to be entirely reliant on *Hashem*. This clearly fits with the words of Yirmiyahu when he said:

“אָרוּר הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בָּאָדָם... בְּרוּךְ הַגִּבֹּר אֲשֶׁר יִבְטַח בַּי' וְהָיָה יי מְבֹטָחוֹ”

“Cursed is the person that relies on **man**... blessed is the man that relies on hashem and hashem should be what he relies upon.” (Yirmiyahu 17: 5-7)

Clearly what the *Bnei Yisrael* were doing was wrong and through this we can also explain the reason that they were punished specifically with the serpent. The entire time that they were in the desert, *Hashem* protected them from all the animals that lived there. But now that they were complaining that they no longer wanted *Hashem*'s help, *Hashem* allowed the snakes to enter into the *machaneh* to attack. We can learn a great lesson from this that we should always rely on *Hashem*, not in a foolish sense like one walks into a street with their eyes covered, rather in the sense that we should always turn to *Hashem* for help and believe that nothing happens without Him wanting it to. So as we go into *Shabbos* and the *Kriyas Hatorah*, we should realize the importance of *bitachon* in *Hashem* and always believe everything happens for a reason.

Gedolim Glimpse: Hafla'ah

Meir Morell ('22)

Rabbi Pinchas HaLevi Horowitz (1731-1805) was born in Chortkov, Ukraine to Rav Tzvi Hirsh Horowitz. Pinchas' father was his first *rebbe* and eventually he learned with his older brother Shmuel Shmelke, later known as Rav Shmelke of Nikolsburg (For more on Rav Shmelke, see Shema Koleinu, Volume 25, Issue 1). In his early years, Rav Pinchas and his brother were sent to learn at the *Yeshivah* of the Vilna Gaon, however under the influence of Rav Avraham Kalisker, the two brothers left Vilna to become disciples of Rav Dov Ber, the Mezritcher *Maggid*, whom they studied under for several years. At an early age, he married the daughter of the wealthy Yoel Heilpern, who provided for him and permitted him to occupy himself exclusively with his learning. Adverse circumstances then forced him to accept a rabbinical position, and he became rabbi of Witkowo, he then was offered and took a rabbinical position in Lachovice. He was involved in the controversial *Get* of Cleves case and wrote a *Teshuvah* (halachic response) to validate the divorce. However, according to tradition, before he was able to publish the response, his ink bottle spilled over the paper he was writing it on. His students convinced him that enough rabbis had written on this case and it was not necessary to rewrite it. Rabbi Avraham Abish, then the Rabbi of Frankfurt, had fought to invalidate the divorce; in response, when he died in 1769 the rabbinical court in Frankfurt vowed not to hire for the position of Chief Rabbi anyone who had written a *teshuvah* validating the divorce. Since Rav Pinchas' responsum had never been published he was able to become the rabbi in the very prestigious community. When Moses Mendelssohn's *Biur* on *Torah* appeared, Rav Pinchas denounced it in unmeasured terms, admonishing his hearers to shun the work as unclean, and approving the action of those people who had publicly burned it in Vilna in 1782. He also opposed the establishment of a secular school in 1794. Rav Pinchas' magnum opus is "*Hafla'ah*," *chiddushim* on *Maseches Kesubos*, with an appendix, *Kuntres Aharon*. The second volume, contains *chiddushim* on *Maseches Kiddushin*, also with an appendix, appeared under the title *Sefer HaMakneh* in 1800. Other works he wrote were *Nesivos LaShavet*, glosses on the first 24 *simanim* of the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Even HaEzer* and *Givas Pinchas*, a collection of eighty-four *teshuvos* (responsa) in 1837, as well as *Panim Yafos*, a kabbalistic commentary on the *Torah*. He died on either the 4th or 7th of *Tamuz*, 5565. Rav Pinchas was succeeded, as chief Rabbi of Frankfurt, by his son Rav Tzvi Hirsch.

Parshah in a Nutshell

Parshas Chukas begins with the *halachos* of the *parah adumah*, the red cow used to purify someone who had become tamei through contact with a dead body, as well as some other *halachos* about *tumas meis*. The *parsha* then records the death of Miriam, the sister of Moshe and Aharon. Due to Miriam's death, the miraculous well which had followed *Bnei Yisroel* through the desert in her merit dried up, causing the people to complain to Moshe and Aharon about their thirst. Hashem instructs Moshe to speak to the rock in order to cause it to flow with water, but Moshe hits it with his stick. Though this sin, referred to as the sin at *Mei Meriva*, was relatively minor, this slight deviation was a grave sin for a *tzaddik* like Moshe, causing him and Aharon to lose the merit to enter *Eretz Yisroel* with the rest of the nation. The people request to cross through Edom's land, but Edom refuses. Aharon *Hakohen* dies, and is succeeded by his son Elazar. However, Aharon's death caused the *ananei hakavod*, the protective clouds which surrounded *Bnei Yisroel* in Aharon's merit, to disappear, prompting Amalek to attack *Bnei Yisroel*. Amalek manages to capture a single slave woman from *Bnei Yisroel* before *Bnei Yisroel* defeats them. *Bnei Yisroel* consecrate the plunder from the war to Hashem. After this, *Bnei Yisroel* complain to Hashem about the lack of water and food (besides for the *man*), and Hashem punishes them by setting poisonous snakes against them. In order to stop the snakes, Moshe was instructed to create a copper snake on a mount, which miraculously healed the snake bites. After this, the Emori people try to ambush *Bnei Yisrael*, but Hashem kills them by crushing them between two mountains. The people then travel to the domain of the giants Sichon and Og, rulers of the Emori kingdom and the Bashan kingdom, respectively, and defeat them and take their land.

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Good Shabbos