

Parsha Ponders

Parsha | Month #, #### | # Month ####

*Pearls of gratitude*¹

ובאהרן התאנף יקוק מאד להשמידו ואתפלל גם-בעד אהרן בעת ההוא

Hashem became incredibly enraged towards Aharon, in order to destroy him. I prayed on Aharon's behalf that that time²

Our Sages relate³ a very unusual interaction between Moshe and Aharon. When Aharon was inaugurated as the Kohen Gadol, he was anointed with special sanctified oil. After doing so, Moshe and Aharon noticed that two pearls of oil remained on Aharon's beard⁴. Upon realizing this, Moshe was very concerned he had committed מעילה, misappropriated sanctified property⁵. Immediately, a heavenly voice declared that there was nothing to be concerned over. Aharon then started worrying that perhaps he himself had committed מעילה, by getting inappropriate pleasure from the remaining oil on his beard, desecrating its sanctity. Immediately, a heavenly voice declared that there was nothing to be concerned over. That's the entirety of the story. There are many questions here. First and foremost, what's the significance over these two pearls of oil? Why is this story worth relating?

Our Sages tell us⁶ that there was no one who saw as much joy as Elisheva⁷, the wife of Aharon HaKohen. She had five sources of joy: 1) Her brother-in-law Moshe was the leader of the Jews, a type of king 2) Her husband was the *Kohen Gadol* 3) Her son Elazar was the assistant *Kohen Gadol* 4) Her grandson Pinchas was the Kohen anointed for war⁸ 5) Her brother Nachshon was the prince of the tribe of Yehuda⁹. Unfortunately, her joy was marred by the death of her two sons, Nadav and Avihu. On the day that the *Mishkan* was inaugurated¹⁰, they acted inappropriately, and their souls were taken by Hashem. As such, our Sages say that it was as if Elisheva saw no joy. Meaning, her joy was overshadowed by tragedy. One could easily ask¹¹ on this *Midrash* why it specified Elisheva. Why didn't it include her husband Aharon? He, just as much as his wife, had five reasons to be happy, and he lost his two sons.

¹ Based on Maharsha to Horayos 12a s.v. 'כמין ב'

² Deuteronomy 9:20

³ Horayos loc. cit.; Kerisos 5b

⁴ This is based off of Psalms 133:2: 'כשמן הטוב היורד על הראש יורד על הזקן זקן-אהרן וגו'. *Chazal* infer it was two pearls of oil from the repetition of the word זקן in the verse (Maharsha loc. cit.)

⁵ See Rashi ad. loc.

⁶ Midrash Tanchuma Shemini § 2; Tanchuma Yashan Shemini § 3

⁷ Tzror HaMor to Leviticus 10:2 clarifies that it was specifically on the day the *Mishkan* was inaugurated that she saw so much joy

⁸ According to the opinion in Zevachim 101b that Pinchas was always a Kohen

⁹ Midrash Tanchuma and Tanchuma Yashan loc. cit.; Midrash Tanchuma Acharei Mos § 1; Zevachim 102a; Vayikra Rabbah 20:2; Koheles Rabbah 2:2; Shir HaShirim Rabbah 3:6; Seder Olam Chapter 7 (although I saw it cited sometimes as Chapter 4). Midrash Tanchuma Acharei Mos (and not *Shemini*), Koheles Rabbah, and Seder Olam list **four** sources of joy by leaving out (3) and (4) and saying instead that her two sons were assistants to the Kohen Gadol. This refers to Nadav and Avihu before they died. The other *Midrashim* are focusing on honors accorded her after their death. Torah Temimah to Ecclesiastes 2:2 § 17 suggests the *Midrashim* that list four joys hold that Pinchas only became a Kohen after he killed Zimri (Zevachim 101b)

¹⁰ See note 7

¹¹ Maharsha loc. cit.; Iyun Ya'akov to Zevachim loc. cit.; Biur Ha'amarim to Midrash Tanchuma Shemini § 2; Torah Temimah loc. cit.

We could suggest¹² that Aharon didn't experience any joy at all. Elisheva was accorded all this honor, and in contrast to the joy she felt she was bereaved of her two sons. Both were true, just the pain she felt overshadowed her joy. Aharon, once his two sons died, started to be very concerned. He knew that Nadav and Avihu died because they got too close to Hashem. They entered the Holy of Holies¹³. However, they had not yet been forbidden from entering. Why then were they killed? Aharon was scared that they were really killed because of his own failings. As it says in this week's *parsha*, Hashem became very angry with Aharon for creating the Golden Calf, which was worshipped by the Jews.

The verse says¹⁴ that Hashem wanted to destroy Aharon, which our Sages interpret¹⁵ to mean he would lose his four children. Moshe prayed that Aharon be spared, and only two of Aharon's sons died. Nevertheless, when they died while performing the Temple Service, Aharon was concerned that he and his children were forever disqualified from being Kohanim. Hashem wasn't interested in their service. This fear made all the honors he and his family had been accorded insignificant. The *Midrash* therefore only mentioned Elisheva's joy, and not Aharon's.

To assuage Aharon's concerns, Hashem performed a miracle. After Moshe anointed his brother with the anointing oil, they both discovered that two pearls of oil remained on Aharon's beard. These pearls miraculously stayed there, regardless of his movements. They were to symbolize two types of anointed Kohanim: the assistant *Kohen Gadol*, and the Kohen designated to lead during war. After Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu died, their positions were filled with Aharon's son Elazar, who became the assistant *Kohen Gadol*, and his grandson Pinchas, who led during war. The everlasting nature of these pearls of oil in Aharon's beard were to symbolize that the *Kehuna* would never be removed from his offspring.

This interpretation gives a whole new read to the *gemarra*. When Moshe saw the pearls of oil, he became concerned. Not that he had misappropriated the oil. He saw their miraculous nature, and understood their true intent. He was concerned that he hadn't received a similar promise from Hashem. He had no assurance that his offspring would remain the leaders of the Jewish people. He was concerned that he had acted unjustly¹⁶ towards Hashem! A heavenly voice declared that Moshe had nothing to worry about. He hadn't committed any error. Although his descendants won't remain leaders, Moshe was assured that he had properly taught the people the Torah, and successfully trained his student Yehoshua to take over¹⁷.

As has been already emphasized, Aharon was very concerned. He saw his two sons die while performing the Temple service, and was worried that his offspring had become disqualified from the *Kehuna*. He

¹² Maharsha. His initial suggestion is that there's no concept of mourning for a *Kohen Gadol* (Leviticus 10:6). Since the *Midrash* wanted to contrast the joy with the mourning, it chose Elisheva instead of Aharon. Iyun Ya'akov suggests that it specified Elisheva, because it is in the merit of the righteous women that their relatives become *Kohanim Gedolim* (Yoma 47a). Biur Ha'amarim suggests that Aharon was too distraught over the pearls of oil in his beard to pay any attention to these five honors. Torah Temimah sees it as a rebuke of Elisheva, that her joy was marred since she took credit for the joy she was experiencing. Aharon knew that these honors were a complete *chessed* from Hashem, so he wasn't overcome with joy in them like Elisheva was

¹³ Toras Kohanim to Leviticus 10:5; Vayikra Rabbah 20:8; Midrash Tanchuma Acharei Mos § 6

¹⁴ Deuteronomy *loc. cit.*

¹⁵ Vayikra Rabbah 7:1, brought by Rashi *ad. loc.*

¹⁶ חס ושלום מעלתי בשמן המשחה. The Maharsha reads מעלתי to mean that he had committed some sort of crime or injustice towards Hashem, and this was evident based on his lack of having the שמן המשחה on his beard

¹⁷ See Maharsha for how he reads this into the wording of the *gemarra*

thought he had committed an affront to Hashem with his sin with the Golden Calf¹⁸. To this came another heavenly voice to declare that he had nothing to worry about. The miraculous pearls of oil were to testify that his offspring shall forever remain Kohanim. Aharon's sons, in fact, did not die because they were disqualified from the Temple service. Rather, they died because of their lofty level¹⁹. They had attained perfection in their closeness with Hashem, and their souls left them²⁰.

We are hosting this *kiddush* in honor of the birth of our daughter, as a form of *hakaras hatov* to Hashem for bringing her into our life. After some deliberating, we decided to name her Elisheva Liba. Liba is after my wife's great-grandmother. Elisheva, on a simple level, is because we really liked the name. Also, we know that Aharon's wife Elisheva was a very righteous woman. However, in retrospect, perhaps Elisheva was a very fitting name for our daughter. As we mentioned, Aharon's wife Elisheva saw more joy than any other. Alas, that joy was turned bitter when her two sons died. The pain overshadowed any joy that she could have felt.

The birth of a child can be an exhilarating experience. A new life on its own is a major source of joy. However, we as a family had many other reasons to be joyful. After months of waiting to get to the land of Israel, we finally were granted entry shortly after Sukkos of last year. We came knowing my wife was expecting, and that we would G-d willing have a child here. This is where we wanted to be. As well, not something insignificant, is all the paperwork for Bituach Leumi was resolved just in time for the birth, covering the hospital stay. We had every reason to be happy.

At the same time, and I'm speaking for myself at the moment, the circumstances of the birth of our daughter were one of the most stressful times in my life. Sparing the details, there were complications with the birth, and because of COVID-19 there were hospital regulations barring our one-and-a-half-year-old son from entering to see his mother. We were all alone here without any family to help watch him. It was very difficult to see and help my wife and new baby while coordinating what to do with our son. He desperately missed his mother who had a hard time leaving her recovery bed to see him. Once my wife and new baby were finally released, our daughter got a virus. My wife had to spend the weekend with her alone in the hospital, holding her the entire time.

And yet, we saw tremendous *siyata dishmaya*, Divine assistance. There were so many people who offered help. The staff at the hospital took great care of my wife and baby. There was a social worker there who got us the help we needed when we needed it. People in the community offered to watch our son, and make us meals. The joy of having a new child could have been marred by all the stress and anxiety, like what happened with Aharon's wife Elisheva. However, with our Elisheva, Hashem was openly taking care of us by sending us the help we needed, when we needed it. It was a difficult situation, but definitely not one which overshadowed the joy we felt at having a new child. It is for this we are truly grateful, and thought it was appropriate to host this *kiddush* as a small token of expression of thanks.

Mazel tov and Good Shabbos

¹⁸ שמא משה לא מעל אבל אני מעלתי. There's no mention of the anointing oil, so the Maharsha is able to read his explanation into the wording of the *gemarra*. Based on this, it's not impossible to suggest that the Biur Ha'amarim in note 12 intended the explanation of the Maharsha

¹⁹ בקרובי אקדש (Leviticus 10:3)

²⁰ See Aruch LaNer to Kerisos *loc. cit.* for another satisfying explanation of this *Aggadata*