

Parsha Ponders

Emor | May 16, 2024 | 9 Iyar 5784

Priestly Parentage Problems and Prohibitions¹

יאמר יקוק אל-משה אמר אל-הכהנים בני אהרן ואמרת אלהם לנפש לא-יטמא בעמיו: כי אם-לשארו הקרב אליו לאמו ולאביו ולבנו ולבתו ולאחיו: ולאחתו וגו'

Hashem said to Moshe: "Tell the Kohanim, the children of Aharon, and say to them: [The Kohen] shouldn't contaminate himself by coming in contact with the dead in his nation. Except for his wife who is close to him, his mother, his father, his son, his daughter, and his brother. His sister..."²

It's well known that a Kohen cannot enter a cemetery, or fully attend a funeral. An exception is made for close relatives. What's interesting is when the Torah lists the exceptions, it lists the Kohen's mother first, and then his father. Usually, the Torah lists males before females. Why was the order switched in this case? Some suggest³ a historical answer. While, thankfully, it's not the case these days, but women used to have a much shorter life expectancy than men. Women would often die in childbirth, and they often had other health problems⁴. As such, a Kohen's mother was more likely to die than his father. Therefore, the Torah lists her exception first, and only then the father's.

However, if this is so, we have the opposite phenomenon when the Torah discusses a Kohen Gadol. Unlike a regular Kohen, the Kohen Gadol doesn't become impure for *anyone*. He cannot attend the funeral for his wife, siblings, kids, or parents. When the Torah expresses this law, it first mentions the Kohen Gadol's father, and only then mentions the Kohen Gadol's mother. Especially now that we know the reason why it mentions the Kohen's mother first, why is the order the opposite for a Kohen Gadol?

We can say that the Torah was writing the law for a Kohen Gadol according to what actually occurred. Meaning, the first Kohen Gadol was Aharon, the brother of Moshe. In truth, Aharon was never commanded against attending his parent's funerals, because they had long passed away before he was ever elevated to this lofty status⁵. If so, this verse commanding a Kohen Gadol must have first been told to Elazar, Aharon's son who took over after the latter died. Once we say this, the Torah had to mention the Kohen Gadol's father first. Meaning, if Aharon dies, then Elazar would be prohibited to attend the funeral. For if Elazar's mother had died first, well, Aharon would still be alive. Elazar wouldn't be the Kohen Gadol yet, and would in fact go to her funeral, as he would still be a regular Kohen.

However, there's a much simpler approach. There's no denying who one's mother is, as she clearly gave birth to them. Who their father is merely based on a very good assumption. Therefore, it's obvious a

¹ Based on [Maharil Diskin](#) to [Leviticus 21:2](#)

² [Leviticus 21:1-3](#)

³ The [Maharil Diskin](#) brought this question and answer from the [Ramban](#), but I couldn't find it

⁴ See [Kesubos 83b](#) with [Tosafos s.v. מיתה](#), as well as [Tosafos](#) to [Kesubos 52a s.v. רצה](#) citing a [Yerushalmi](#) (which we don't seem to have). The [Rambam](#) to [Niddah 5:6](#) writes that most of the time women live shorter lives than men

⁵ It seems from [Shemos Rabbah 3:1](#) (see [Yefeh Toar ad. loc.](#) and [Ramban](#) to [Exodus 3:6](#)) that Amram, Aharon and Moshe's father, died before Hashem first appeared to Moshe. It would make sense then that Yocheved, their mother, also had passed away, as she was must older. This approach disagrees with [Da'as Zekeinim](#) to [Numbers 11:27](#), who write the following: When the Torah was given, certain familial relationships became forbidden (see [Rashi](#) to [Numbers 11:10](#), quoting [Yoma 75a](#) and [Sifrei Bamidbar § 90](#)). Amram was married to his aunt, Yocheved, and this was now a forbidden relationship. As such, they had to divorce. Amram went and married someone else, who gave birth to Eldad and Meidad (see [Numbers](#) Chapter 11. Cf. [Targum "Yonasan"](#) to v. 26, who writes they were Yocheved's sons from Egypt). Clearly, according to this, Aharon's parents were still alive when he became Kohen Gadol

regular Kohen can go to his mother's funeral, as she's definitely his relative. The Torah accordingly mentioned her first. The bigger novelty is he can even go to his father's funeral, even though his parenthood is based on an assumption. However, when describing the prohibitions for the Kohen Gadol, it's the opposite. Obviously a Kohen Gadol cannot go to his father's funeral, as it's only his presumed father. One might have thought that a Kohen Gadol's mother is different, as she's definitely his mother. That's why the Torah mentions her second, to teach us he's prohibited even for her.

Good Shabbos