

Parsha Ponders

Vayikra | April 4, 2025 | 6 Nissan 5785

The left out Kohen¹

ושחט את-בן הבקר לפני יקוק והקריבו בני אהרן הכהנים וגו' ונתנו בני אהרן הכהן אש על-המזבח וערכו עצים על-האש

He will slaughter the cow before Hashem, and the **Kohen sons** of Aharon will offer it...and the sons of **Aharon the Kohen** will place a fire on the altar, arranging the wood on the fire²

As we begin the book of the Torah focused on the Temple service, it behooves us to pay attention to the many details listed. One nuance to pick up on is that all of the Temple service is described as being done by the Kohen sons of Aharon. However, one part of the service stands out. Regarding the arrangement of the wood on the altar pyre, the sons of Aharon are again described as the ones who perform this service. However, it doesn't say that they are the Kohen sons of Aharon. Rather, it simply says they are the sons of Aharon, who himself was a Kohen. What are we to make of this inconsistency³?

One of Aharon's grandsons was Pinchas, the righteous Zealot who rises to fame at the end of *sefer Bamidbar*. He killed a brazen sinner, and was rewarded with Hashem's covenant of peace. There's a dispute amongst the Rabbis⁴ if this meant he was rewarded with the status of a Kohen, or not. When Aharon's sons were original given this honored status, some say only their future descendants would inherit it. Pinchas, who was already born at the time, was skipped over, until this incident. Only then was he rewarded with the Kohen status. Others say that since Pinchas at the end of the day is a descendant of Aharon, he was also originally rewarded with the priesthood.

However, even according to the former opinion, it's hard to imagine that Pinchas was merely a Levite for forty years in the wilderness. He was, after all, a descendant of Aharon⁵. Instead, one can suggest that although he wasn't a complete Kohen until later, meaning he couldn't perform the full service of Temple offerings, he could arrange the wood for the fire and ignite it⁶.

This could explain our discrepancy. Every aspect of the Temple service stresses that it is done by the Kohen descendants of Aharon, to exclude the non-Kohen descendants, i.e. Pinchas. However, regarding arranging the wood, it doesn't say the Kohen descendants. Rather, it simply says the descendants of Aharon, who himself was a Kohen. This was meant to serve as a reference to Pinchas, who himself did this service until his status was upgraded to a Kohen. Even he got the chance to serve in the Temple, similar to a Kohen.

Good Shabbos

¹ Based on Chasam Sofer's Toras Moshe to Leviticus 1:5 [#2]

² Leviticus 1:5, 7

³ The following the Chasam Sofer says with unusual trepidation, asking Hashem for forgiveness if it's incorrect (see note 6 for what was perhaps objectionable). It would be interesting to see how often he does this

⁴ Zevachim 101b

⁵ It's not clear to me why the Chasam Sofer can't fathom this idea. I suppose it has something to do with his grandfather being Aharon

⁶ Even though this part of the service also requires Kohen status, Tosafos Yeshanim to Yoma 24b say that a non-Kohen isn't punished for doing it. Perhaps the Chasam Sofer hesitation comes from suggesting that Pinchas did something seemingly prohibited, even if it's not punishable