

Stories with a Twist [342]

I Was Mistaken Regarding the Halakha, And Aaron My Brother Came and Taught Me. Insights into Leviticus Rabbah 13:1



Background to Our Story (What you need to know to better understand the story)

Leviticus Chapter 10

¹ Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the Lord alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. ² And fire came forth from the Lord and consumed them; thus they died at the instance of the Lord. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord meant when He said:

Through those near to Me I show Myself holy,
And gain glory before all the people."

And Aaron was silent.

⁴ Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come forward and carry your kinsmen away from the front of the sanctuary to a place outside the camp." ⁵ They came forward and carried them out of the camp by their tunics, as Moses had ordered. ⁶ And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not bare your heads and do not rend your clothes, lest you die and anger strike the whole community. But your kinsmen, all the house of Israel, shall bewail the burning that the Lord has wrought. ⁷ And so do not go outside the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, lest you die, for the Lord's anointing oil is upon you." And they did as Moses had bidden.

⁸ And the Lord spoke to Aaron, saying: ⁹ Drink no wine or other intoxicant, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages, ¹⁰ for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and

between the unclean and the clean; ¹¹ and you must teach the Israelites all the laws which the Lord has imparted to them through Moses.

¹² Moses spoke to Aaron and to his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar: Take the meal offering that is left over from the Lord's offerings by fire and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy. ¹³ You shall eat it in the sacred precinct, inasmuch as it is your due, and that of your children, from the Lord's offerings by fire; for so I have been commanded. ¹⁴ But the breast of elevation offering and the thigh of gift offering you, and your sons and daughters with you, may eat in any clean place, for they have been assigned as a due to you and your children from the Israelites' sacrifices of well-being. ¹⁵ Together with the fat of fire offering, they must present the thigh of gift offering and the breast of elevation offering, which are to be elevated as an elevation offering before the Lord, and which are to be your due and that of your children with you for all time — as the Lord has commanded.

¹⁶ Then Moses inquired about the goat of sin offering, and it had already been burned! He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and said, ¹⁷ "Why did you not eat the sin offering in the sacred area? For it is most holy, and He has given it to you to remove the guilt of the community and to make expiation for them before the Lord. ¹⁸ Since its blood was not brought inside the sanctuary, you should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded." ¹⁹ And Aaron spoke to Moses, "See, this day they brought their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord, and such things have befallen me! Had I eaten sin offering today, would the Lord have approved?" ²⁰ And when Moses heard this, he approved.

Acute Mourner (Onen) in Jewish Law

◆ AI Overview

In Judaism, an acute mourner is technically known as an onen (plural: onanim). This term refers to a person during the period of Aninut, the earliest and most intense stage of grief that begins immediately upon learning of the death of a close relative and lasts until the burial.

Second Tithe (Maaser Sheni)

◆ AI Overview

The second tithe (*maaser sheni*) is a biblical commandment requiring Israelites to set aside 10% of their produce—following the first tithe—during the 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 5th years of the seven-year sabbatical cycle. This tithe was traditionally brought to Jerusalem and consumed by the owner in purity or redeemed for money to purchase food/drink for consumption there.

Consecrated Food (Kodesh)

◆ AI Overview

Kodesh sacrifices (Korbanot) are holy offerings in Jewish law, categorized into "Most Holy" (*Kodshei Kodashim*) and "Lesser Holy" (*Kodshim Kalim*) based on sanctity. Kodshei Kodashim, like burnt offerings (Olah) and sin offerings (Chatat), are slaughtered in a specific, highly consecrated area of the Temple and often burned entirely or eaten only by male Kohanim.

Aaron, the Priest - Family Tree

◆ AI Overview

Aaron, the first High Priest of Israel, was a descendant of Levi (son of Jacob) through Amram and Jochebed, with siblings Moses and Miriam. He married Elisheba, and his priestly line continued specifically through his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. The main high-priestly line descended through Eleazar to Phinehas

Key Ancestry and Family Structure

- Parents: Amram and Jochebed (tribe of Levi).
- Siblings: Miriam and Moses.
- Wife: Elisheba (daughter of Amminadab, sister of Nahshon of Judah).

Sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

The Priestly Line (Descending Generationally)

- Aaron (First High Priest)
- Eleazar (Succeeded Aaron) and Ithamar
- Phinehas (Son of Eleazar)
- Abishua (Son of Phinehas)
- Bukki (Son of Abishua)
-

The Text: Leviticus Rabbah 13:1

אמר רבי הונא בשלשה מקומות כעס משה ונתעלמה ממנו הלכה, ואלו הן: בשבת, ובכלי מתכות, ואונן.

...

באונן מנין, שנאמר (ויקרא י, טז): ויקצף על אלעזר ועל איתמר, וכינן שפעס נתעלמה ממנו הלכה שאונן אסור לאכל בקדשים.

...

וידבר אהרן אל משה, בדבור ענה כנגדו, כדכתיב (בראשית מב, ל): דבר האיש אדני הארץ וגו'. (ויקרא י, יט): הן היום הקריבו את השאתם ואת עלתם, אמר לו היום מתו בני היום אקריב קרבן, היום מתו והיום אכל בקדשים, מיך דרש אהרן קל וחומר למשה, ומה מעשר הקל אסור לאונן טטאת דתמיר אינו דין שיהא אסור באונן, מיך (ויקרא י, כ): וישמע משה וייטב בעיניו, הוציא פרוז לכל המהנה ואמר, אני טעיתי את ההלכה ואהרן אחי בא ולמד לי.

Rabbi Huna said: In three instances, Moses became angry and a *halakha* escaped him, and these are: Regarding Shabbat, regarding metal vessels, and the acute mourner.

...

Regarding the acute mourner, where is it derived from? As it is stated (Leviticus 10:16): *He was angry with Elazar and with Itamar*. Because he became angry, the *halakha* escaped him that it is prohibited for an acute mourner to partake of consecrated foods.

...

Aaron [vaydaber] spoke to Moses (Leviticus 10:19). He [Aaron] answered him with harsh speech [*dibbur*], as it is written (Genesis 42:30): *The man, lord of the land, spoke [dibber] [harshly with us]. Indeed, today they presented their sin offering and their burnt offering* (Leviticus 10:19). He [Aaron] said to him [to Moses]: *My sons died today, and today I will sacrifice an offering? Today they died, and I will eat consecrated foods today?*' Immediately, Aaron expounded a *a-fortiori* inference

to Moses: If the lenient second tithe is prohibited for an acute mourner, is it not logical that the stringent sin offering will be prohibited for the acute mourner?

Immediately, *Moses heard and he approved* (Leviticus 10:20). He [Moses] dispatched a messenger to the entire camp and said: I was mistaken regarding the *halakha*, and Aaron my brother came and taught me.



Explaining the Story - What is going on in our story? (Explain the sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

? Knowing what you know about the background of our story, why do you think Moshe became angry?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

? Which halakha related to the acute mourner escaped Moshe because he became angry?

? Please explain the a-fortiori inference that Aaron taught Moses.

Extra Bonus ? The Biblical text tells us that Moses heard and approved, which implies that he recognized his brother Aaron was correct. Why do you think Moses sent a messenger to the entire camp saying: "I was mistaken regarding the *halakha*, and Aaron my brother came and taught me."?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from This Text.

! "I was mistaken regarding the *halakha*, and Aaron my brother came and taught me." - The finest example of Moses' greatness



In our story, we encounter an angry and insensitive Moses, who unjustly admonishes his vulnerable brother on the worst day of his life. The text teaches us the dangers of anger. Not only do we say “the wrong things” while angry, but also our mind doesn’t function well, and we forget simple things we should have known. When confronted by his brother – “My sons died today, and today I will sacrifice an offering? Today they died, and I will eat consecrated foods today?” – Moses readily admits his mistake and makes sure that everyone knows that his brother taught him a lesson, not only regarding the law of the acute mourner, but most importantly, a lesson in sensitivity, in humility, and on the perils of anger.

In our story, Moses passes the lessons he learned the hard way, to all of us.