

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist
[91]

Be Among the Disciples of Aaron
Insights into Avot D'Rabbi Natan 12:1
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Background to Our Story

Aaron, the Priest

◆ **AI Overview**

Aaron was the first High Priest of Israel, Moses' brother, and a central leader who mediated between God and the people. Appointed to wear sacred garments, he bore the names of the twelve tribes on his shoulders and heart, representing them before God. Despite his role in the golden calf incident, Aaron is described as a lover of peace who interceded for the people, notably standing between the dead and living to stop a plague

Key Aspects of Aaron and the People:

- **Mediator and Representative:** Aaron was set apart to represent Israel in God's service. His priestly garments—specifically the breastpiece and onyx stones—symbolized carrying the people's names and burdens before God.
- **Intercessor:** In Numbers 16:47-48, during a plague, Aaron rushed into the midst of the congregation with incense to make atonement, highlighting his role in protecting the people.
- **The Golden Calf Incident:** Despite being high priest, Aaron faltered by facilitating the creation of the golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai, a moment showing his humanity.
- **Leader of the People:** Along with Hur, Aaron supported Moses' hands during the battle with Amalek. He and his sons were consecrated to bring the people's offerings before God.

- Death and Legacy: Aaron died on Mount Hor and was mourned by the entire nation for 30 days

Genealogy

Descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

Great-grandfather: Levi, third of 12 sons and tribes of Israel

Grandfather: Kohath

Father: Amram

Mother: Jochebed

Sister: Miriam

Brother: Moses

Uncles: Izhar, Hebron, Uzziel

Sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, Ithamar

Grandson: Phinehas

Pirke Avot 1:12

הלל ושמאי קבלו מהם. הלל אומר, הוי מסלמידיי של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב את הכריות ומקרין לתורה:

Hillel says: Be among the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace; loving people and bringing them closer to the Torah.

The Text: Avot D'Rabbi Natan 12:1

כשהיה אהרן מהלך בדרך פגע בו באדם רשע ונתן לו שלום למחר בקש אותו האיש לעבור עבירה אמר אוי לי היאך אשא עיני אחר כך ואראה את אהרן בושתי הימנו שנתן לי שלום נמצא אותו האיש מונע עצמו מן העבירה.

וכן שני בני אדם שעשו מריבה זה עם זה הלך אהרן וישב אצל אחד מהם אמר לו בני ראה חברך מהו אומר מטרח את לבו וקורע את בגדיו ואומר אוי לי היאך אשא את עיני ואראה את חברי בושתי הימנו שאני הוא שסרחתי עליו הוא יושב אצלו עד שמסיר קנאה מלבנו. והולך אהרן ויושב אצל האחר וא"ל בני ראה חברך מהו אומר מטרח את לבו וקורע את בגדיו ואומר אוי לי היאך אשא את עיני ואראה את חברי בושתי הימנו שאני הוא שסרחתי עליו הוא יושב אצלו עד שמסיר קנאה מלבנו. וכשנפגשו זה בזה גפפו ונשקו זה לזה לכך נאמר (במדבר כ) ויבכו את אהרן שלשים יום כל בית ישראל:

Story 1

Whenever Aaron walked along the road and met a wicked man, he would offer him greetings. On the following day when that man was about to commit a transgression, he would say, 'Woe is me! How can I raise my eyes after doing that and look Aaron in the face? I should be ashamed before him, since he greeted me'. Consequently, that man withholds himself from transgression.

Story 2

Similarly, when two men had quarreled one with the other, Aaron would go and sit with one of them and say, 'My son, see what your companion is doing! He beats his breast and tears his clothes, exclaiming, "Woe is me! how can I raise my eyes and look my companion in the face? I am ashamed before him since it is I who offended him"'. Aaron would sit with him until he had removed all enmity from his heart. Then Aaron would go and sit with the other and say likewise, 'My son, see what your companion is doing! He beats his breast and tears his clothes, exclaiming, "Woe is me! how can I raise my eyes and look my companion in the face? I am ashamed before him since it was I who offended him"'. Aaron would sit with him until he had removed all enmity from his heart.

Later when the two met, they embraced and kissed each other.



Explaining the Text

What's going on here? (The sequence of events)

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

Story 1

Bonus **?** Why do you think Aaron offered greetings to a wicked man whenever he met one on the road?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? Why is Aaron's behavior counterintuitive?

? What is the risk Aaron is taking by greeting the "wicked man"?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? What is the definition in our story of a "wicked man"?

? Why did the man refrain from committing a transgression after Aaron greeted him?

Bonus **?** Please explain: "I should be ashamed before him, since he greeted me."

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? What do you think was Aaron's rationale for his course of action?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Story 2

Bonus ? Why did the two men quarrel one with the other?

? What did Aaron do to make peace between the two men who quarreled one with the other?

Extra Bonus ? What didn't Aaron do to make peace among the two men who quarreled one with the other?

Extra Bonus ? Why was it necessary for Aaron to sit with each man until each had removed all enmity from his heart? Wasn't it enough for Aaron to tell each of them; *"My son, see what your companion is doing! He beats his breast and tears his clothes..."*?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

? What do you think was Aaron's rationale for his course of action?

Story 1 & 2

? What do you think is the common denominator in Aaron's course of action in both stories?

? From the ending of each story, what can we learn from the personalities of the men involved? What do you think was lacking in their lives?

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

! Effecting change and building community: a time-consuming endeavor, one person at a time!

! "By the Power Vested in Me¹" - Using your position of power to bring positive change in your community.

¹ Bloom, Jack: *he Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar: By the Power Vested in Me*. Haworth Press. 2002



This classic text shows Aaron the Priest, the community leader, at his best. We all remember Aaron as Moses' partner, as the High Priest, and in his role during the episode of the Golden Calf. Our story shows us a different Aaron, one who despite his humility is aware of his worth and position; and who understands that building community and bringing the best out of people is a time-consuming project, which requires wisdom, patience, ingenuity, and humility.