

Short Comments on Parashat Tzav
 Rabbi Eliot Malomet April 1, 2023 10 Nisan 5783 Shabbat HaGadol

Command Aaron and his sons, saying... Juliet famously asks Romeo, *What's in a name?* Here we could ask, *What's in the way a name appears in the text?* Up until our parasha, Aaron's name only appears *in conjunction with* his sons. In the first chapter of Leviticus alone, we have four such instances of Aaron's name conjoined with his sons: **בני אהרן-sons of Aaron** -

1:5	והקריבו בני אהרן	the Sons of Aharon , the priests, are to bring near the blood...
1:7	ונתנו בני אהרן	Now the Sons of Aharon the priest are to put fire on the altar...
1:8	וערכו בני אהרן	The Sons of Aharon , the priests, are to arrange the sections...
1:11	ונרקו בני אהרן	and the Sons of Aharon , the priests, are to dash its blood...

In the ensuing chapters we have several instances of this conjoined form: **אהרן ובניו-Aaron and his sons** -

2:3	והנותרת מן המנחה לאהרן ולבניו	Now what is left of the grain-gift is Aharon's and his sons! ...
6:13	זה קרבן אהרן ובניו	This is the near-offering of Aharon and his sons ...
7:31	והיה התזה לאהרן ולבניו.	And the breast is to be Aharon's and his sons! ...
8:14	ויסמך אהרן ובניו את ידיהם	and Aharon and his sons leaned their hands...

But here in our parasha, Aaron's name appears for the first time on its own, *un-conjoined*. It is separated from his sons by the particle **את**. **צו את אהרן ואת בניו לאמר**: Even though every English translation renders it: *Command Aharon and his sons*, that doesn't adequately capture the precise Hebrew phrasing because it's impossible to translate the word **את** into English. There is no precise equivalent for **את** in the English language. **את** is what grammarians call a *definite direct object marker*, which means that it (**את**) cues us to anticipate the immediate arrival of...an *object*. There are two **את**'s in the Torah's first verse: **את השמים ואת הארץ**. *In the beginning, God created את the heavens and את the earth*. These two **את**'s cue us to anticipate the arrival of the *objects* in that verse, namely, the things that God *creates*: *heaven and earth*. In our verse above, the verb **צו** is in the imperative form. It means, *Command!* and the **את** that follows it cues us to anticipate the immediate arrival of ...the *objects* of that verb, namely Aaron and his sons. *Command את Aaron and את his sons*. But since English doesn't have a *definite direct object marker*, we can't pick up the subtlety of the Hebrew here, and we overlook the fact that this is the first time in the book, after 11 occurrences (!), that Aaron's name occurs *un-conjoined*. But the rabbis noticed the difference! To them, the difference between **בני אהרן**, **אהרן ובניו** and **את אהרן ואת בניו** was no trivial matter. There's a story behind it:

COMMENTARY:

<p>רבי מנא דישאב ורבי יהושע דסקנין בשם רבי לוי: מתחלת הספר ועד כאן כתיב: וערכו בני אהרן (ויקרא א:ח) ... אמר משה לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא: הבור שנואה ומימיה חביבין! חלקת כבוד לעצים בשביל בניהן, דתנינן תמן: כל העצים פשרים למערכה חוץ משל זית ושל עץ, ולא אהרן אין אתה חולק לו כבוד בשביל בניו!?! אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: חיה שבשבילך אני מקרבך, ולא עוד אלא שאני עושה אותך עקר ובניו טפלים צו את אהרן ואת בניו לאמר. ויקרא רבה ז:א</p>	<p>R. Mana of Sh'av and R. Joshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R. Levi: From the beginning of the book until now, it only refers to Aaron by way of his sons... ... (See the verses above). Moses said to the Holy One blessed be He: The well is despised but the water is beloved! You gave honor to a species of wood because of its "children" as we learned elsewhere in a mishna (Tamid 29a), All species of wood are fit for arrangement (on the altar) except for that of the olive tree and the grapevine, and to Aaron, you are not going to give any honor on account of the special role his sons play in the sanctuary?! The Holy One blessed be He replied: By your life, because of you I will draw Aaron close to me. Moreover, I'm going to make him the main object of my instruction and make his sons secondary. So God said to Moses: Command Aaron and (also) his sons. Vayikra Rabbah 7:1</p>	<p>The well is despised but the water is beloved! This is a cliché like, <i>a chip off the old block</i>. Or, <i>the apple doesn't fall far from the tree</i>. Here, Moses is referring to the father-son relationship. (Well=parent, water=children)</p>
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Just as water emerges from a well, Aaron's sons emerge from Aaron. Moses is castigating God for demeaning Aaron. *God, do you despise Aaron that much that you never mention his name on his own? You always conjoin his name to his sons. How can you favor the sons without honoring the father?*

You gave honor to a species of wood. There is a rule in the mishnah about what kind of species of wood you could use on the altar. One would think that all wood would be eligible for use as fuel for the sacrifices. But that is not the case. Olive wood and vine wood have a privileged status and are not to be used. Why? Because the trees from which these woods are procured have "children." These trees produce consecrate-able fruit: olives and grapes. Since olive oil and wine are used in sacrificial rites, the woods that bring them into being were exempted from being used as fuel, lest people harvest this wood with abandon and cause a shortage of olives and grapes. *God, if you can honor a species of wood because of its fruit, surely you can honor Aaron because of his sons.*

By your life, because of you, I will draw Aaron close to me. So what's the story here? Aaron has a privileged status as the High Priest. But this midrash hints that there was a falling out between God and Aaron. After Moses interceded on their behalf, God forgave the people for the Golden Calf, but it appears that God is still was holding Aaron somewhat accountable for the role that he played. After all, it was Aaron who asked them to hand over their gold, and it was Aaron who made the idol. By noticing that up until now the text referred to Aaron by always cojoining his name to his sons, the midrash picks up on the distinct possibility that God was slighting Aaron by diminishing his honor. But just as Moses interceded on behalf of the people, Moses intercedes here on behalf of his brother and, in the end, Aaron's honor is restored. *I was moved by your argument, Moses. Not only that, but I see in Aaron the essence of goodness. From now on, when I issue my commands, I will honor him and differentiate him from his sons. I will address him first אֶת אֶהְרֵן and then his sons, וְאֶת בְּנָיו because of you, Moses.*

	Elijah - Malachi 3:23	Moses - Exodus 23:20	<i>A Little Drash on a Big Thing.</i> The Haftarah for Shabbat HaGadol ends with an iconic line that has captivated the Jewish imagination from the moment it was uttered: Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet. It's fascinating to note that the only other time this phrase הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ - Behold I will send - occurs in the entire Bible, is in Parashat Mishpatim, after the Exodus, and after the Revelation at Mount Sinai, (but before the sin of the Golden Calf), as Israel is getting ready to embark for the Land of Israel. The similarity of these two verses is very compelling. While Malachi points specifically to Elijah as the herald of redemption, the verse in Exodus leaves the messenger unspecified. A host of commentaries (Gersonides, Luzzatto and others) identify this messenger simply as Moses, since Moses was - literally - God's agent, the one who lead Israel on their journey and instructed them with God's laws.
Hebrew	הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ לְכֶם אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּבִיא לְפָנַי בּוֹא יוֹם ה' הַגָּדוֹל וְהַנּוֹרָא	הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי שֹׁלֵחַ מִלֶּאֱדָה לְפָנֶיךָ לְשַׁמְרֵךְ בְּדַרְךְ וְלִהְבִּיאָה אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר הִכַּנְתִּי	
English	Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming Of the great and terrible day of the LORD.	Behold, I will send a messenger (Moses) before you to care for you on the way, to bring you to the place that I have prepared.	
Context	This is the final message of the prophetic era. (Haftara for Shabbat HaGadol)	This is after the revelation at Mount Sinai, as Israel embarks for the Promised Land. (Parashat Mishpatim)	
Role of the prophet/messenger	To herald God's day of judgement, and to pave the way for the ultimate redemption of the people.	To guard you and care for you on your way, in the present moment of your journey to freedom from slavery and oppression.	
Mission	To reconcile the older generation with the younger.	To give you instruction, to guide you in God's laws and the correct way to live.	
This implies that:	The People of Israel will need to be inclined to reconcile with each other.	The People of Israel will need to be inclined to listen to the voice of God's moral instruction and wisdom.	
Relevance to Passover	The Ultimate Future Passover of Redemption	The Passover of Egypt	

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When we sit at the Seder, we remember redemption in our past but also look to the redemption in our future. The pre-requisite for our past redemption was our willingness to listen to God's teachings. The pre-requisite for our future redemption (according to Malachi) is family reconciliation, and we might add, a spirit of willingness for reconciliation between factions in conflict. Especially among us. That is our profound hope for Israel at this deeply challenging national moment. It's also our hope for America and for the world. Shabbat Shalom!

This week's Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Rabbi Stephanie Dickstein and Dr. Marc Weinstein to commemorate their family yearzeits of Reina Kissel, z"l, and Ira Weinstein, z"l.