The traditions concerning the Biblical Aaron: Their contribution to understanding the changing status of the priesthood at the end of the Second Temple period and in the generations following the Temple’s destruction

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**Abstract**

A study of the portrayal of Aaron in rabbinic aggadic midrashim raises a major difficulty: The biblical Aaron, having secured the role of patriarch of the high priesthood, represents ritual leadership, entrusted with the central tasks of serving in the Temple, offering sacrifices and atoning for the sins of the nation. In the extant rabbinic midrashim, however, descriptions of Aaron’s ritual role in the Temple leave hardly a trace. Instead, traditions depict Aaron’s unique qualities, his hierarchal status relative to Moses, the special fraternal relationship between the two, and, of course, the extent of his culpability for the sin of the Golden Calf. The conventional wisdom in scholarship is that later biblical and post-biblical traditions dealing with the image of Aaron represent a seismograph of sorts for measuring the degree of support for, or opposition to, the status of priesthood in a given era. In this article, we will explore the unique aspects of the midrashic traditions concerning Aaron, in an attempt to depict the social dynamic during the end of the second Temple period, and to describe the new hierarchy of status in the wake of the Temple’s destruction and later in the periods of the Mishna and Talmud.

**Article**

A study of the portrayal of Aaron in rabbinic aggadic midrashim raises a major difficulty. The biblical Aaron, having secured the role of patriarch of the high priesthood, represents ritual leadership, entrusted with the central tasks of serving in the Temple, offering sacrifices and atoning for the sins of the nation. In the extant rabbinic midrashim, however, descriptions and elaborations of Aaron’s ritual role in the Temple and in the sacrificial order barely leave a trace. Instead, traditions tend to depict Aaron’s unique qualities, his hierarchal status relative to Moses, the special fraternal relationship between the two brothers and, of course, deliberate as to the extent of his culpability for the sin of the Golden Calf.[[1]](#footnote-2)

The conventional wisdom in scholarship is that later biblical and post-biblical traditions dealing with the image of Aaron serve as a sort of seismograph for measuring the degree of support for, or opposition to, the status of priesthood in a given era on the part of a contemporary group of writers.[[2]](#footnote-3) Thus, for example, while one can certainly infer Ben Sira’s admiration for Simon the Righteous (the High Priest in his day) from his direct discussion of Simon,[[3]](#footnote-4) his position can just as clearly be deduced from the place and space he devotes to the image of Aaron in his survey of the nation’s Patriarchs.[[4]](#footnote-5) Feldman attributes Josephus’ great fondness for the image of Aaron in his *Antiquities of the Jews*[[5]](#footnote-6) to Josephus’ own priestly extraction, in which he took great pride.[[6]](#footnote-7) Feldman uses this to explain Josephus’ decision to omit the narratives concerning Aaron’s sins (the sin of the Golden Calf, his conversation with Miriam concerning the Kushite woman and the sin of *Mei Merivah* [the water of contention]). Conversely, Feldman explains Josephus’ negligible discussions of narratives concerning Aaron’s positive actions, as a consequence of his own political perspective on autocratic rule without partners—the accepted form of government in the Greek and Roman cultures of his day.[[7]](#footnote-8) Use of the designation ‘the sons of Aaron’ in the Qumran literature is explained by Hempel as pointing to a transformation in the role attributed to those in the sect who were perceived as being replacements for the priests.[[8]](#footnote-9) The role of ritual leadership which the descendants of Aaron filled in the Temple was now assumed by the sect’s new ‘sons of Aaron’ (later to be replaced by the designation ‘sons of Tzaddok’). Their messianic role in the End of Days is also described in this manner.[[9]](#footnote-10) The early Christian opposition to the Temple and the priesthood is reflected in many citations in the New Testament.[[10]](#footnote-11) The most explicit expression of this appears in the Epistle to the Hebrews, which mentions the preference for the Melchizedek’s priesthood over that of Aaron. Melchizedek, rather than Aaron, is understood as a designation for the High Priest who foreshadows the image of Jesus.[[11]](#footnote-12)

If we are to follow this model proposed by researchers, how will Aaron’s image be treated in the pharisaic traditions from the second Temple period?—assuming these reflects the corrupt priesthood of their time, whose representatives desecrated the pharisaic halakha. Given the shrunken role and dramatic change in the status of the priesthood after the Temple’s destruction, what is the significance of the evolving traditions concerning Aaron?

מטרותיהן של הדרשות על סיפורי המקרא ודמויותיו נדונו רבות בספרות המחקר. לצד המתודולוגיה ההיסטוריוציסטית העוסקת בניתוח ספרות חז"ל על רקע מאפייני התקופה בה היא נכתבה, קיימות גישות נוספות המפקפקות בתרומתו של חקר ההיסטוריה להבנת רבדיו העמוקים יותר של המדרש ומצביעים על מסרים רעיוניים ורוחניים על-דוריים הגלומים בו, או על פרשנות אינטרטקסטואלית המתקיימת בין בעלי הדרשות.[[12]](#footnote-13) במאמר זה, נציע כי הכרת מאפייני התקופות בה נכתבו המסורות על אהרן, ומקום היווצרותן, מוסיפה רובד חשוב ומרכזי להבנתן. נראה כיצד ניתוח תוכנן של המסורות, במקביל למקורות מידע אחרים על אודות אתגריה החברתיים והדתיים של התקופה והמקום בו הן נוצרו, מסייע לשרטט את הדינמיקה החברתית של שלהי בית שני, ואת ההיררכיה המעמדית החדשה שנוצרה עם חורבן המקדש ובהמשך בתקופות המשנה והתלמוד. ניתוח המסורות באופן זה יחשוף פן סמוי של אופי משבר ההנהגה, ויציג את עמדתם ומאווייהם של מי שהשתייכו להנהגה היורשת המתהווה. אופיין החיובי של מרבית המסורות על אהרן וההרחבה בתיאור מעלותיו ילמדו על תהליך ייחודי של ירושת תפקיד. נדמה שהגישה ההיסטוריוציסטית שתעמוד בבסיס ניתוח המסורות במאמר זה, היא היחידה שבכוחה להסביר את אופיין ואת מקורן הארצישראלי של מרבית המסורות העוסקות באהרן, ואת פשר ההבדל בין דמותו המקראית לבין עיצובה בדרשות חכמי המשנה והתלמוד.

<H2> The limited freedom of the traditions dealing with Aaron </H2>

In his book, *החייבים במקרא וזכאים בתלמוד ובמדרשים*,[[13]](#footnote-14) Margulies notes the common phenomenon of significant differences between the presentation of biblical figures in the biblical text and the presentation of biblical figures in rabbinic sources. Sometimes the Sages paint the biblical figures more negatively than they appear in the text; other times, they exonerate them for explicitly mentioned sins. Many diverse reasons have been suggested for the differences in these character assessments. Most of these explanations point to the didactic aims which concern the author of a particular tradition.[[14]](#footnote-15) According to this approach, one would expect to find, interpretations critical of Aaron and his actions in eras of opposition to the priesthood, parallel to a great admiration for Aaron in the traditions belonging to periods in which priestly leadership enjoyed popularity and support. The fact that the biblical text does not cover up Aaron’s sins increases this expectation. A study of the traditions prevalent at the end of the second Temple period and the period of the Mishna and Talmud reveals a plethora of interpretations which deal with Aaron. Only a few of them, however, contain even the gentlest expression of critique. Even these rare instances of criticism only appear in the local context of Aaron’s explicit sins; they do not deal with his leadership role as the patriarch of the high priesthood. The theory that the Sages exercised caution in critiquing national heroes does not stand up to scrutiny; traditions which deal with other biblical heroes, such as Abraham, Moses and David include substantive criticism of their public leadership and personal conduct.[[15]](#footnote-16)

It would seem that the great disparity between the ideal of priesthood as presented in the biblical text and the reality in the period of the Sages at the end of the second Temple period did not allow for the use of Aaron’s image as the reflection of the High Priest in their time. This is as opposed to the figures of Moses or King David who could serve as prototypes for the leader,[[16]](#footnote-17) and the images of the Patriarchs and prophets who could serve as models for the scholar;[[17]](#footnote-18) The popular support enjoyed by these figures allowed them to be used to inculcate lessons of leadership and ethics, both positive and negative. By contrast, the great disparity between the positive image of Aaron in the biblical text and the increasing estrangement from priestly imagery made Aaron irrelevant as a didactic model, whether positive or negative.

What then is the alternative model for the development of Aaron’s image?

The extant rabbinic traditions dealing with Aaron’s image revolve around four central axes:

1. Ethical aspects of Aaron’s image
2. Hierarchy of leadership in the description of Aaron’s status
3. Fraternal relationship between Moses and Aaron
4. Aaron’s role in the sin of the Golden Calf

In the discussion below, we will examine the traditions concerning three of these four axes,[[18]](#footnote-19) and suggest an explanation for the choice to develop Aaron’s image based on these parameters, and the almost complete disregard for his role in the area of the Temple rite.

<H1>1. Rites and ethics</H1>

The biblical text tends to be very terse in describing its heroes’ character traits, relying on their actions to serve as reflections of character.[[19]](#footnote-20) Aaron’s character can be inferred from four key events: From God’s description of Aaron’s reaction to his reunion with Moses—“he will see you and rejoice in his heart” (Ex. 4:14); the defense offered by Aaron to Moses’ rebuke concerning the sin of the Golden Calf (Ex. 32:22–24); from his silence after his sons’ death—“Aaron was silent” (Lev. 10:3) and from his restrained response to Moses’ reproach for the burning of the sin offering (ibid 10:19). In other narratives involving Aaron, such as his appearing before Pharaoh, his joining Miriam in speaking about the Kushite woman, the rebellion of Korah and the sin of Mei Merivah, the texts depict Aaron as being passive and do not relate to any emotional or personal aspects of his actions. That being said, the limited nature of the biblical portrayal did not prevent the extensive development of Aaron’s character by rabbinic sources—a development not necessarily reflected in the text of the Bible itself.

Hillel the elder is the author of the earliest extant tradition describing Aaron’s noble character. His interpretation is formulated in the Mishna Avot 1:1 as follows:

Hillel and Shamai received the tradition from them. Hillel says: Be a disciple[[20]](#footnote-22) of Aaron: Love peace and pursue peace; Love people and bring them closer to the Torah.

Hillel refrains from citing any proof texts for his assertion.[[21]](#footnote-23) Nonetheless, this depiction served as the basis for traditions which took this characterization as fact, further developing it as they saw fit.

There is a discussion in the Tosefta concerning the place of compromise in litigation. A contrast is drawn between Moses’ preference for deciding cases based on justice and Aaron’s penchant for encouraging compromise:

R. Elazar the son of R. Yossi the Galilean says: One who arbitrates [*mevatzea*] is a sinner, and one who blesses [*mevarech*] someone who arbitrates is blaspheming [*menaetz*] before God. Concerning this it states: “the grasping man [*botzea*] reviles [*bereich*] and scorns [*menaetz*] the Lord.” Rather, justice should pierce the mountain, as Moses would say: “Justice should pierce the mountain.” However, Aaron would make peace between people, as it states: “He walked in peace and righteousness etc.” (Malachi 2:6) (Tosefta Sanhedrin 1:2).[[22]](#footnote-24)

The author of this tradition relates to Aaron’s pursuit of peace as a given, contrasting it with his own approach that arbitration is prohibited. His proof text from Malachi actually refers to the traits of the Levites, not necessarily those of Aaron. In the Sifra on Shemini, on the passage describing the death of Aaron’s sons, there is a series of derashot praising Aaron. Only loosely connected to the biblical text,[[23]](#footnote-26) these elaborate on the Torah’s narrative:

“Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron.” Do not I already know that Uzziel was Aaron’s uncle from that which is stated “The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel”? Why then does the text need to state “the uncle of Aaron”? [The answer is] this text juxtaposes the actions of Uzziel to those of Aaron. Just as Aaron pursued peace amongst the Israelites, so too Uzziel pursued peace amongst the Israelites. And from where do we know that Aaron pursued peace amongst the Israelites? It states: “The whole community knew that Aaron had died and all the house of Israel bewailed Aaron thirty days.” But concerning Moses it says: “And the Israelites bewailed Moses.” Why is it that the entire house of Israel cried for Aaron for thirty days, but only the Israelite men cried for Moses, and not the entire house of Israel? Because Aaron never said to any man or women ‘you have done wrong’; but in the case of Moses, since he rebuked them, it states: “And the Israelites bewailed Moses.” And it is stated explicitly with respect to Aaron in the Prophets (Malachi 2:5) “My covenant was with him, life and peace;” for he pursued peace among the Israelites…

“Proper rulings were in his mouth”—as he did not render impure that which was pure, and did not render pure that which was impure. “And nothing perverse was on his lips” as he did not prohibit the permitted, nor permit the prohibited. “He walked before me in peace and righteousness [*mishor*]”—as he did not doubt God, just as Abraham did not doubt. “And held many back from iniquity”—as he brought sinners back to the Torah, and it states: “The just [*mesharim*]love you” (Sifra Shemini 1:37–39).

This passage raises two questions: 1. In the verse which serves as the basis for this midrash, it seems natural to mention the relationship between Uzziel, the father of Mishael and Elzaphan, and Aaron; this is a detail relevant to the narrative. What then is the meaning of the midrash’s question? 2. What is the relevance of the exaggerated praise of Aaron to a section dealing with the death of his sons, especially when it is based on verses which do not even appear in this section?

The text describes the death of Aaron’s sons as resulting from a ritual error: “They offered… alien fire, which He had not commanded them” (Lev. 10:6) “when they offered and alien fire” (Numbers 3:4; 26:60) or “when they drew too close” (Lev. 16:1). One can discern two interwoven sets of derashot in the Sifra’s discussion about the reason for the death of Aaron’s sons. One set focuses on the ritual aspect of the sin and its punishment, while the other focuses on its ethical aspect.[[24]](#footnote-27) It would appear that elaborating on Uzziel’s ancestry in the context of a description of Aaron’s ethical virtues aims at intensifying the ethical aspect of the sin, contrasting the sons’ trangressions with the ethical character of the beloved dynastic patriarch who refrained from harsh criticism, pursued peace, was meticulous about halachic matters and drew sinners closer to the Torah. Choosing the sons of Uzziel, Aaron’s uncle, to carry the bodies of his sons, is at first explained in ritual terms:

“Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, ‘Come forward and carry your kinsmen’—based on this they ruled one may not defile oneself for a corpse. For Elazar and Ithamar who were priests did not defile themselves for them. Who did? The Levites (ibid 25–26),

However, the midrash proceeds after this to discuss the similarity between Uziel’s ethics and those of Aaron. The midrash thus places the ethical aspect of the sin—and its correction by ethical people—on an even footing with its ritual aspect and its means of atonement.[[25]](#footnote-28)

Aaron’s ethical perfection is elaborated on in a narrative in a passage in Avot D'Rabbi Natan which bears clear similarities to statements made by Hillel and in the Sifra regarding Aaron’s character: [[26]](#footnote-29)

‘Be of the students of Aaron”—this teaches that Aaron would greet the traitors of Israel. When one of them considered committing a sin, he would say: Woe unto me! Tomorrow Aaron will come and greet me, how will I respond to him? This person would then be too embarrassed to sin. Similarly, when a person was angry[[27]](#footnote-30) with another, Aaron would go to him and say to him: My son, why are you furious with your friend? He just came to me crying and remorseful, saying: Woe to me that I was furious with my friend who is greater than me! I will wait here in the marketplace, go and ask forgiveness from him on my behalf. He would then leave this one and go to the other and say to him: My son, why are you furious with your friend? He just came to me etc. When they went out to the marketplace and met, they would caress and kiss each other. This is what Aaron did every day, thereby making peace between people.

Similarly, if a man was furious with his wife, and expelled her from his house, Aaron would go to him and say: My son, why are you furious with your wife? He would reply: Because she wronged me. [Aaron] would answer him: I guarantee that she will not wrong you from now on. [Aaron] would then go to the wife and say to her: My daughter, why did you anger your husband? She would say to him: Because he struck me and cursed me. [Aaron] said to her: I guarantee that he will neither strike you or curse you from now on. This is what Aaron did daily, until he brought her back to his house. She would then become pregnant and give birth to a son; and she would say: I only received this son in Aaron’s merit (Avot D'Rabbi Natan B 24).[[28]](#footnote-31)

The upshot of the rabbinic traditions concerning Aaron’s actions is a depiction of an ethical social leader, whose presence was a positive influence on people’s behavior; not through the power of rebuke, but rather by force of his personality and the love he showed to all people, regardless of who they were. Aaron is depicted as someone who is capable of appeasing opponents; not by means of judicial authority, but rather through incisive human reason. Additionally, Aaron instilled love of the Torah in people who had become estranged from it.

R. Hammer and H. Bamberger have noted the gap between Aaron’s image as reflected in the biblical narrative and his image as it was developed in derashot which portray him as an ethical social leader. Hammer points out the parallelism between the description of Hillel’s character found in rabbinic aggadot, and the development of Aaron’s image. He sees this as an attempt to develop the image of leaders, emphasizing the significance of noble character as opposed to heredity and ancestry. Hammer identifies in these traditions a critique of the priests in Hillel’s time, as well as a subtle polemic against the school of Beit Shamai, which ascribed greater value to pedigree and scholarship than to ethics and fine character.[[29]](#footnote-32) Bamberger suggests that the Pharisaic traditions formed Aaron in the image of the Torah scholar, thereby pointing to themselves as the heirs of the status of priesthood, and as the religious authorities. The Pharisees portrayed Aaron as the type of person who they envisioned as being worthy of sacred service.[[30]](#footnote-33) Hammer and Bamberger both view the derashot as a critique of the character of the priests of the second Temple. However, whereas Hammer maintains that the derashot present ethical advice to the current priestly leadership, Bamberger views them as a political proposal for an alternative form of leadership, a rejection of the religious leadership of the ethically corrupt priests.

Also, it seems that post-destruction works continued to develop Hillel’s statement even though the leadership role of priests had already waned. This would seem to indicate that even if Hillel’s original intent in encouraging people to follow the ethical path of Aaron was directed at priests and meant to guide them, in later traditions, Aaron represents an alternative to the priestly leadership, with a different non-ritual role. On the other hand, it is strange that Aaron’s image continues to be used to describe the Sages’ alternative leadership (as explained by Bamberger). If the aim is to dismiss heredity and ancestry, and to replace these with ethics and Torah Aaron does not seem to be the most appropriate figure.

We will now explore the second axis of derashot, and thereby attempt to identify the model used by the authors of the midrash to depict Aaron.

<H1> 2. Equality and hierarchy in the description of the status of Aaron </H1>

There is barely any discussion of the hierarchal relationship between Moses and Aaron in the biblical text. Aaron is presented as Moses’ firstborn brother, Moses’ spokesman to Pharaoh, his partner in the leadership of the nation and a protégé of Moses in his role as High Priest. The division of labor between the two brothers places each of them at the pinnacle of his hierarchy in his respective area of leadership: Aaron as the patriarch and dynastic founder of the High Priesthood, and Moses as the master prophet. The fact that Moses is usually mentioned as the object of God’s revelation makes it amply clear that Moses had the superior status of the two, and that Aaron was subservient to him.[[31]](#footnote-34) A study of the many rabbinic traditions devoted to the status of these two figures raises a double question: In some traditions Aaron is presented as being on par with Moses, a portrayal which does not dovetail with the portrayals appearing in most biblical texts. In others traditions, however, there is an attempt to emphasize Aaron’s subservience to Moses. Here too one might ask, why it is necessary to emphasize this, given the fact that this is already clear from the biblical texts? Moreover, what is at stake in the conflict between these two types of traditions?

The discussion that follows contrasts these traditions, which have opposing implications concerning the question of the brothers’ hierarchy.

<H2> Who was being addressed?</H2>

The formulation of the manner in which God addressed Moses and Aaron, or the order in which they are mentioned, is documented numerous times in the Bible. In some instances, Moses alone is addressed, in others the text Moses is mentioned before Aaron, in one lone verse Aaron is addressed prior to Moses[[32]](#footnote-35) and in five verses Aaron alone is addressed.[[33]](#footnote-36) Ostensibly, one can draw from this a clear conclusion, with respect to their internal hierarchy in terms of relaying the divine message to the people. Some of the traditions dealing with this issue reach this very conclusion.

A derasha which appears in the Sifra, and a parallel passage in the Sifrei on Numbers,[[34]](#footnote-37) compare those verses in which both Moses and Aaron are addressed by God with those in which Moses alone is addressed—the goal to emphasize the disparity in their leadership:

“[The Lord called to Moses and spoke] to him” (Lev. 1:1)—to exclude Aaron. R. Judah b. Beterah said: There are thirteen instances of God speaking to Moses and Aaron in the Torah, and there are thirteen instances of exclusion, to teach you that none of these were said directly to Aaron, but rather to Moses, to be relayed to him. And they are the following […][[35]](#footnote-38) Aaron is excluded from being addressed at Mount Sinai. What does it say concerning the Tent of Assembly? “The Lord called to Moses”—it excluded Aaron from being addressed in the Tent of Assembly. R. Yossi the Galilean says: It mentions God speaking to Moses in three locations: In Egypt, on Mount Sinai and the entire Torah in the Tent of Assembly. What does it say concerning Egypt? “For when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt.” it excluded Aaron from being addressed in Egypt. What does it say concerning Mount Sinai? “This is the line of Aaron and Moses at the time that the Lord spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai.” it excluded Aaron from being addressed on Mount Sinai. What does it say concerning the Tent of Assembly? “The Lord called to Moses”—it excluded Aaron from being addressed in the Tent of Assembly. “Speak to Moses,” and not to Aaron. (Sifra, Diburah D’Nedava 1).

The derasha points out key locations and areas where God addressed Moses exclusively, and concludes that Moses was the exclusive teacher of the Torah.

By contrast, there is a tradition cited in the Mekhilta which deals with the language God uses to address Moses and Aaron regarding the first commandment which they were instructed to teach the people. This tradition reaches the conclusion that Moses and Aaron were equals.

“[and God spoke] To Moses and Aaron” (Exodus 12:1)—why does it state this? Since it states: “The Lord said to Moses: See, I place you in the role of god to Pharaoh” (Exodus 7:1). From this all I can deduce is that Moses was Pharaoh’s judge; from where can I learn that Aaron was there, as well? For this reason it states: “To Moses and Aaron,” juxtaposing Moses and Aaron. Just as Moses was Pharaoh’s judge, so too Aaron was Pharaoh’s judge. Just as Moses would state his message without fear, so too Aaron would state his message without fear.[[36]](#footnote-39)

Alternatively: “To Moses and Aaron”—I would think that whoever is prior in the text was prior in the actual event. However, since it states: “It is the same Aaron and Moses,” (6:26) we are being told that they are equals. Similarly: “When God began to create heaven and earth” (Genesis 1:1)—I would understand that whichever is prior in the text was prior in the actual event. However, since it states: “When the Lord God made earth and heaven,” (ibid 2:4) we are being told that they are equals. (Mekhiltah D’Rabbi Ishmael Masechtah D’Pischah 1).[[37]](#footnote-40)

According to this exegete in the Mekhiltah, the fact that Aaron is Moses’ partner in receiving the first commandment, and is mandated to teach it to the people alongside Moses, indicates that his leadership role was equal to that of Moses. Another exegete cites an alternative proof for this notion from the language of the verse which sums up Moses and Aaron’s genealogy, placing Aaron’s name prior to that of Moses.

Each of these two opposing schools needs to explain the verses which ostensibly contradict the conception they propose. The hierarchal school needs to account for those verses in which God addresses Moses and Aaron together, whereas the equality school needs to account for those verses where God addresses Moses exclusively.

R. Ishmael and R. Achi express surprise at the apparent equality of Moses and Aaron in terms of conveying the word of God to the people. They, therefore take pains to explain why Aaron is mentioned as a partner:

“Speak [second person plural] to the whole community of Israel.” (Exodus 12:3) Rabbi Ishmael says: Did they actually both speak? But doesn’t it already state: “And you [singular] shall speak to the Israelite people and say” (Exodus 31:13)? Why then does it state “Speak [second person plural]”? The reason is that when Moses spoke, Aaron would bend his ear to listen in awe, and the text considers it as if he heard from the Holy One, blessed be He. R. Achi the son of R. Yosheya says: Did they actually both speak? But doesn’t it already state: “And you [singular] shall speak to the Israelite people and say”? Why then does it state “Speak [second person plural]”? The reason is that when Moses spoke, Aaron was to his right and Elazar was to his left and Ithamar was to the right of Aaron; and the speech emanated from amongst them, as if they were both speaking. R. Simon b. Yochai says: Moses would defer to Aaron and say ‘please teach me’, and Aaron would defer to Moses and say ‘please teach me’; and the speech emanated from amongst them, as if they were both speaking. (Mechiltah D’Rabbi Ishmael, Masechtah D’Pischah 3).

The phrase ‘as if they were both speaking’ expresses the perspective of the authors of this tradition with respect to the brothers’ hierarchy. Moses is the one who actually conveys the word of God. Nevertheless, the text gives Aaron his due for his humility and his dedication to Moses, mentioning him *as if* he were Moses’ partner in conveying God’s word to the people.

How does the equality school account for the verses which attribute the speech to Moses alone?

“And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying.”—One might have understood from this that both Moses and Aaron were being addressed. However, since it states: “For when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 6:26), it is clear that it is Moses who was addressed, and not Aaron. If so, why does the text state “to Moses and to Aaron”? Rather it teaches us that just as Moses was a party to the speeches, so too Aaron was a party to the speeches. And why wasn’t he addressed? Because of Moses’ honor. It turns out that Aaron is excluded from all of the addresses in the Torah with the exception of three instances, where it was not feasible (Mechiltah D’Rabbi Ishmael Masechtah D’Pischah 1).

According to this tradition, God spoke to both Moses and Aaron, even in those cases where only Moses is mentioned. Aaron is excluded from many of these addresses because of Moses’ honor. In both derashot, the exegetes depict a dichotomy between what occurred and how it was depicted in the Bible. The hierarchal school defends Aaron’s honor; the equality school defends that of Moses.

The last tradition mentioned above alludes to three places where Aaron is addressed without Moses; and explains that, despite the affront to Moses’ honor, it was necessary to describe these as being addressed to Aaron exclusively.[[38]](#footnote-41) The significance of addressing Aaron exclusively is also subject to exegetical dispute between two schools; does Aaron being addressed directly imply that he is ranked higher than Moses in terms of specific commandments? Or is Aaron never a superior to Moses and therefore his being addressed needs to be explained in a different manner?

The first passage in which Aaron is addressed exclusively deals with Aaron and his sons’ role in safeguarding the purity of the Temple vessels. The second passage deals with priestly gifts. R. Ishmael expounds on the first time that Aaron is addressed:

“The Lord said to Aaron: You and your sons and the ancestral house under your charge [shall bear any guilt connected with the sanctuary; you and your sons alone shall bear any guilt connected with your priesthood]” (Numbers 18:1). Rabbi Ishmael says: Those[[39]](#footnote-42) who are in charge of the matter are the ones who are warned (Sifrei Numbers 116 p. 332).

That is to say, Aaron is addressed directly because this commandment belongs to the realm of priestly tasks.

The second address is expounded as follows:

“The Lord spoke to Aaron” (Numbers 18:8)—one might have understood from this that it was Aaron who was addressed. Therefore it states: “It was to be a reminder to the Israelites, so that no man presume to offer […as the Lord had ordered him through Moses] (Numbers 17:5). We learn from this that it was Moses who was addressed, and he was to convey the message to Aaron. (ibid 117, p. 342).

The derasha proves this from an earlier verse (Numbers 17:5), in which Moses is the one who is addressed directly.

Ostensibly, one could explain the difference between the two derashot as a function of the nature of the commandment in each case.[[40]](#footnote-43) However, an examination of the verses in the second derasha reveals several difficulties:

1. The proof text for the idea that only Moses was addressed and then he conveyed the message to Aaron deals with a different topic than the one which describes God speaking to Aaron.
2. The topic of the second derasha is priestly gifts, and we learned from the first derasha that Aaron was addressed directly in matters that are the responsibility of the priests.
3. The derashot of these verses are reversed in the Sifrei Zuta.[[41]](#footnote-44)

It would therefore seem that this is an extension of the dispute between the equality and hierarchal schools. Those who argue for the brothers having equal status would explain that despite their equality, in specifically ritual-priestly matters Aaron is addressed exclusively.[[42]](#footnote-45) However, the hierarchal school would argue that even in specifically ritual-priestly matters Moses was addressed prior to Aaron.

What is the background for the dispute about Aaron’s status? Why did a group of Sages feel a need to emphasize the hierarchal differences between Moses and Aaron, even when it is already clear from the plain sense of the text, and even in areas where Aaron ostensibly possessed hierarchal superiority over Moses? And why did another group of Sages make such an effort to reinterpret the text in order to prove the equality of the status of Moses and Aaron, even in terms of spiritual leadership?

Finkelstein and Kahana, in their commentary on the Sifra’s derasha (Diburah D’Nedava 1, above p. ), suggest that the goal is to expropriate the role of transmitting and interpreting the Torah from the priests, and to emphasize the role of the Sages, who are represented by the prophecy of Moses, as the sole transmitters, and eternal interpreters of the Torah. Finkelstein maintains that the derasha reflects a polemic against the Sadducee priests of their generation.[[43]](#footnote-46)

The attribution of the Sifra’s derasha to Judah b. Beterah and that of Mekhiltah (Masechtah D’Pischa 1), in several of the parallels, to R. Elazar b. R. Simon, supports this theory.[[44]](#footnote-47) Judah b. Beterah (whether this refers to the first one or the second) lived several generations before R. Elazar b. R. Simon, at the end of the second Temple era or immediately thereafter in generation of Jabne.[[45]](#footnote-48) R. Elazar b. R. Simon lived at the end of the period of the Tanaim.[[46]](#footnote-49) Tensions with the priesthood reached their zenith at the end of the Second Temple period, when the Sadducee priests aspired to establish their status and to assume the role of religious leadership.[[47]](#footnote-50) On the other hand, the years following the destruction of the Temple, and the large shift away from Jerusalem after the Bar Kochba revolt, took a heavy toll on the status of the priesthood.[[48]](#footnote-51) Despite the fact that many priests continued to conduct themselves in an aristocratic manner and were amongst the wealthiest citizens,[[49]](#footnote-52) their aspirations for spiritual-religious leadership did not pose a real threat to the growing status of the Sages. The need to distinguish Moses’ status from that of Aaron was critical at a time when the hierarchy of sage and priest was being challenged. However, in an era when the status of the priesthood did not present a real challenge, the Sages had no qualms about highlighting the common denominator between the two positions. The qualifying verses cited by the Sifra’s derasha—which all deal with God appearing to Moses when he was isolated from Aaron, and his receiving practical instructions for guiding the people in fulfilling the divine command—also bolster Finkelstein and Kahana’s contention with respect to excluding the priests from the task of conveying the Torah’s laws.

Kahana suggests that the derasha of the Sifrei (above p. )—which explains that although the text indicates that the command was addressed to Aaron, it was actually first said to Moses—also aims at emphasizing the ultimate authority of the Sages even in the realm of the Temple ritual and priestly gifts, as part of the battle against the Sadducees.[[50]](#footnote-53) Perhaps the opposing tradition—which explains Aaron’s being addressed the first time (116) as an indication of his being solely responsible for matters of purity—expresses the efforts of R. Ishmael, who was the offspring of a High Priest, on behalf of the ritual status of his offspring, in the absence of the Temple.[[51]](#footnote-54)

העיסוק הרחב בתיאורי ההיררכיה שבין משה לאהרן, במסורות שנתחנו ביחידה זו, מרמז על שיאו של מהפך דרמטיבתפיסת היררכית ההנהגה של הקהילה הארצישראלית. הדומיננטיות של מעמד הכהנים לאורך ימי הבית השני, מתוקף תפקידם כמרכזי הפולחן הדתי, הולכת ודועכת במציאות נטולת מקדש. הכהנים כמי שמייצגים את ההנהגה הדתית נאבקים על המשך אחיזה בתפקידי הנהגה זו המשמשת תחליף לפולחן המקדש, ואף להמשיך להנות מפריווילגיות של מי שמשרתים את העם. חוסר שביעות רצונם של חכמים מפועלם של הכהנים עוד בימי הבית, הוביל להתנגדותם להמשך הנהגה דתית הנשענת על ייחוס, והצביעו על גדלות בתורה ובמוסר כמי שתחליף את קריטריון הייחוס במועמדות להנהגה הדתית.[[52]](#footnote-55) הטמעתו של המהפך בקרב הציבור מוצאת את ביטויה במסורות על אהרן המציבות שתי תפיסות**:** התפיסה המבקשת המשך של הנהגת כהנים לצד הנהגה חדשה של חכמים, מול התפיסה המבקשת לראות את החכמים כיורשי תפקיד ההנהגה הבלעדיים, וכפיפותו של מעמד הכהנים להם בכל תחומי הפולחן הדתי. על השאלה אם היו אלו שתי תפיסות מקבילות, או שיש כאן עדות לתמורה חיובית שחלה ביחס למעמד הכהנים במהלך הדורות, עם ההתרחקות מטראומת החורבן ונטרול ההסתייגות מכהני בית שני, לא נוכל לענות,[[53]](#footnote-56) אולם נציע הבטים נוספים של התמורה ונבחן את ביטוין של שתי התפיסות במסורות אחרות על אהרן.

<H2> Three Crowns</H2>

A derasha in the Sifrei on Numbers deals with the three “crowns” acquired by the Israelites: Torah, priesthood and royalty. Scholarship has dealt at length with the aims of this derasha and the universalistic ideology which it expresses.[[54]](#footnote-57) The aspect which is relevant to our discussion is the hierarchy of the three crowns:

One may conclude that there are three crowns: The crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of royalty […] and if you will ask, ‘Which is greater than the others?’ R. Simon b. Elazar says: Which is greater, one who crowns others or one who rules? One should say the one who crowns others. The one who appoints officers, or the one in authority? One should say the one who appoints officers. These two crowns themselves only exist by virtue of the Torah; as it states: “Through me kings reign etc. Through me princes rule etc.” (Proverbs 8:15–16). The covenant established with Aaron is greater than the one which was established with David. Aaron secured it for offspring both righteous and evil, while David only secured it for his righteous offspring, but not for the evil ones. As it states: “If your sons keep My covenant and My decrees that I teach them, then their sons also, to the end of time, shall sit upon your throne” (Psalms 132:12). And it states further: “The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere God and observe His commandments! For this is all of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). (Sifrei Numbers 119, p. 368–369)

The derasha ostensibly deals with three crowns. Yet its question pertains only to two of them (the Torah which crowns and royalty which rules), and its answer to all three.[[55]](#footnote-58) How is one to understand this discrepancy between the derasha’s components? Kahana offers several possible explanations and suggests that it is the consequence of editing an earlier, shorter version of the derasha.[[56]](#footnote-59) According to his compelling hypothesis, the ancient derasha dealt with praise of priests (as suggested by the context of the verses), while the segment dealing with the crowns of Torah and royalty were composed later, and inserted by the editor of the derasha. The components of the derasha which Kahana suggests are more ancient deal with praise of priests and praise of Aaron: “Aaron experienced great joy on the day when the covenant of the gifts was established for him” (ibid., ibid. pp. 363–364), in the opening of the derasha; and “The covenant established with Aaron is greater than the one which was established with David,” in its conclusion. The editor of this derasha could not tolerate unequivocal praise of the priesthood “due to the influence of his religious world view towards the reality which he experienced at the end of the tannaitic period.”[[57]](#footnote-60) He, therefore, combined it with another later derasha which dealt with the subservience of the crown of royalty to that of Torah, serving as a basis for subjugating the crown of priesthood to that of Torah. If we follow Kahana’s suggestion, we can understand the relevance of the verse in Ecclesiastes with which this derasha concludes, which perplexed many of the commentators of the Sifrei. The author mitigated the initial praise for the status of the priesthood by means of the derasha which teaches about the subservience of the crown of priesthood to that of Torah; he similarly qualifies the second praise which teaches of the superiority of Aaron’s covenant to that of David by means of the statement: “Revere God and observe His commandments!”

Based on this hypothesis, the derasha of the crowns also teaches us about the changing attitudes towards priesthood over the generations, and the attempts to define it dependent on the crown of Torah–that is to say, Aaron’s subservience to Moses, i.e. the priest’s subservience to the sage.

<H2> “The lesser and the great people of this world”</H2>

A verse which is taken from Samuel’s speech of rebuke to the people after they request a king, serves as the basis for derashot, which attempt—in a variety of ways—to equate the authority of leaders of different generations. The most succinct version is cited in PT Rosh Hashana in a discussion of the court’s authority to accept the testimonies of witnesses regarding the new month:

It states: “The Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron and who brought etc. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel.” Jerubbaal is Gideon, Bedan is Samson and Jephthah is Jephthah the Gileadean. The verse juxtaposes three of the lesser individuals of this world with three heroes of the world. This teaches us that the courts of Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson are equal to those of Moses, Aaron and Samuel. What is more, it placed the great individuals on either side and the minor individuals in-between. (PT Rosh Hashanah II:5, 58b).

It seems clear from the derasha’s context and conciseness (in contrast to the longer and more ancient tradition in the Tosefta, or the later ones in Kohelet Rabba, Midrash Shmuel and the Babylonian Talmud) that it intends to provide basis for the authority of a contemporary court, fortifying the hegemony of the Jerusalem court, defending it against criticism from within and from without (in Babylonia) and from the attempts to undermine the standing of its members.[[58]](#footnote-61) The derasha does not attempt to blur the lines between different types of leadership. Rather it seeks to render the disparity irrelevant for determining the authority of a court and its decisions. It makes sense in this derasha to place Aaron alongside Moses and Samuel in the category of ‘heroes of our world’ in this derasha, as it even tries to equate them to the three ‘lesser people of our world.’[[59]](#footnote-62) The more ancient tradition appearing in the Tosefta[[60]](#footnote-63) is longer:

Why are the names of the righteous not related? So that individuals do not say, ‘I am going to compare Rabbi so and so to Eldad and Medad, I am going to compare Rabbi so and so to Nadab and Abihu. As it states: “The Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron” (I Samuel 12:6). And it further states: “And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel.” (ibid. 12:11) Jerubbaal is Gideon, Bedan is Samson and Jephthah is as it sounds. And it further states: “Moses and Aaron among His priests; [and Samuel, among those who call on His name].” (Psalms 99:6) The text gives equal weight to three of the lesser individuals of this world and three heroes of the world. This indicates that God considers the court of Jerubbaal as great as the court of Moses, and the court of Jephthah as great as the court of Samuel. This teaches us that whoever is appointed to be a community leader, even if he is the least of lesser individuals, is considered to be equal to the greatest of heroes. As it states: “And appear before the Levitical priests, or the judge etc.”—you only have the judge who is in your generation. And it further states: “Do not say why is it etc.” (Tosefta Rosh Hashanah 1:18).

The differences between the Tosefta and the Palestinian Talmud are as follows:[[61]](#footnote-64)

1. The addition of the introduction which deals with the reason for concealing the names of the seventy elders, and the baraita’s answer which points to the desire to prevent comparisons between ordinary leaders and the greatest of prophets, and between ordinary leaders and High Priests.
2. The addition of the verse from Psalms, which equates the leadership of Moses and Aaron and that of Samuel.
3. The addition of the derasha concerning the order of the leaders mentioned in Samuel’s words.
4. The elaboration on the derasha concerning the stature of every community leader and judge.
5. The addition of the lesson: “Do not say …”.

These additions in the Tosefta reflect a desire to extend the lesson of equality to include even those areas of leadership which are beyond the purview of the court. The Tosefta’s explanation for the concealment of the elders’ identity indicates its author’s opposition to hierarchy amongst the leaders of the same era. The concealment of the elders’ identity serves to blur the boundary between the Sages, prophets and priests living in the same generation.[[62]](#footnote-65) The verse from Psalms intensifies the comparison between the elite amongst the priests and those known for their prophetic leadership.[[63]](#footnote-66) The Tosefta does not settle for merely equating the three great people to the three lesser individuals; it breaks them up into pairs, in order to emphasize this equality within different forms of leadership. As the derasha continues, the role of the communal leader (*parnas*) is mentioned explicitly,[[64]](#footnote-67) and is portrayed as also being subject to the principle of equality in stature, alongside other types of leadership.

A comparison of the two formulations reveals that the later tradition of the Palestinian Talmud strives to limit the broad principle of hierarchal equality of leadership implied by the Tosefta—limiting its implications to the status of the judges of the Sanhedrin. In both traditions, Aaron’s name is subsumed under the category of the heroes of our world (this is especially glaring in the section of the derasha in which the greater and lesser people are grouped as pairs and Aaron and his partner are ignored).[[65]](#footnote-68) However, whereas the tradition cited in the Tosefta considers priests (Aaron, Nadab and Abihu) to be on par, in terms of leadership, with prophets (Moses, Samuel, Eldad and Medad) and Sages (the seventy elders), the tradition cited in Palestinian Talmud does not mention the priesthood independently.

In the version of the derasha appearing in Kohelet Rabba and Midrash Shmuel, Aaron’s image is more dominant:

R. Aba b. Kahana said, and some cite this in the name of R. Adda b. Huniah: You should view the generation to come as you view the generation which has passed. You should not say, ‘were R. Akiba alive, I would study in his presence’, or ‘were R. Zeira and R. Yochanan alive I would study in their presence.’ Rather, the generation which arrived in your days and the sage in your days is like the generation that passed and like the earlier Sages who came before you. R. Yochanan said: It states: “The Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron” (I Samuel 12). And it states: “And the Lord sent Jerubbaal and Bedan and Jephthah and Samuel.” (ibid. ibid.) Jerubbaal is Gideon, Bedan is Samson and Jephthah is as it sounds. And it further states: “Moses and Aaron among His priests; and Samuel, among those who call on His name.” (Psalms 99) Scripture gives equal weight to three of the lesser individuals of this world and three great individuals of the world, to teach us that God considers the court of Jerubbaal to be as great as the court of Moses, and the court of Samson to be as great as the court of Aaron and the court of Jephthah as great as the court of Samuel. This teaches us that whoever is appointed to be a community leader, even if he is the least of lesser individuals, is considered to be equal to the greatest of earlier heroes. As it states: “And appear before the Levitical priests, or the judge who will be in those days.” (Deuteronomy 17)—one would only know from here about a judge that is in your generation; from where do I know about a judge who is not in your generation? What does the phrase “who will be in those days” teach us? It teaches that the judge who is in your generation is, in his time, like the earlier judges. And so it states: “Do not say, why is it that the earlier times were better than these?”. R. Simon b. Lakish said: You are only to obey the judge who is in your generation. It states: “The family heads in the clan of the descendants of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh, came forward etc.” (Numbers 36) R. Yudan said: [Here it says] ‘the family heads’ [and there it says] ‘family heads.’ This is because these were entering the position, whereas these were avoiding it; therefore the text disparages them. R. Berachiah said: It states: “Jehoiada, chief officer of Aaron” (Chronicles 12:28) Was Jehoiada actually Aaron’s chief? Rather, it means that were Aaron to have been alive in the generation of Jehoiada, Jehoiada would have been greater than him, in his time. R. Simai said: It states: “But Aaron and his sons made offerings upon the altar of burnt offering etc.” (ibid. 6:34) Were Aaron and his sons actually alive? In fact, Zaddok and his sons were. Rather, it comes to teach us that were Aaron and his sons alive, Zaddok would be greater than them, in his time. R. Hillel, the son of R. Samuel b. Nahman derives this principle from the following: “The whole community that returned from the captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths—the Israelites had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun to that day—and there was very great rejoicing.” (Nehemiah 8:17) The text disparages a righteous man in his grave in order to honor an anonymous individual in his time! The Rabbis derive this principle from here: “Abishua son of Phinehas son of Eleazar etc. that Ezra came up from Babylon.” Rather, were Aaron alive, Ezra would be greater than him, in his time. (Kohelet Rabba 1:4)

The differences between the formulation of the derasha in Kohelet Rabba and in the Tosefta are as follows:

1. The opening of the derasha in the Tosefta cites the great **prophets and priests** of the past as an example of outstanding leaders. whereas the opening of the derasha in Kohelet Rabba utilizes **sages** of the recent past.
2. In Kohelet Rabba, as well as in the Tosefta, the exegete divides the subjects of the comparison into pairs (the great people being compared to the lesser individuals). However, whereas the exegete in the Tosefta omits Aaron in this division, and is satisfied with comparing Moses and Samuel with Jerubbaal and Jephthah, the exegete in Kohelet Rabba also mentions the comparison of Aaron and Samson.
3. There is a lengthy addition in Kohelet Rabba which emphasizes that the contemporary leaders are equal—or even superior—in wisdom, to their counterparts, the great people of the world in previous generations. Four of the five examples which cite verses to demonstrate this principle relate to the status of priests.

It would appear that the aim of the exegete in Kohelet Rabba—in contrast to the exegete in the Tosefta—was to critique the tendency of the citizens to glorify past leaders, and to long for the days of their rule. The Tosefta relates primarily to the quality of the serving leaders relative to each other. By contrast, the midrash in Kohelet Rabba interprets the verse “a generation comes and a generation goes” as teaching the equal status of leaders of different generations, which is not based on comparing them to each other, but rather, is relative to the generation which they are leading. R. Abba b. Kahana illustrates this principle with examples of sages of the generation which preceded him.[[66]](#footnote-69) However, Reish Lakish (who was active alongside the sages of the generation mentioned by R. Abba b. Kahana) uses examples from the distant past, citing biblical heroes. Reish Lakish chose four biblical figures who inherited leadership roles from the great leaders who preceded them. One would have expected these heirs to fare poorly in such a comparison, but Reish Lakish proves from a close reading of the verses that the status of heirs in the present is greater than the status of their ancestors—had they served during the same era.[[67]](#footnote-70) It is no coincidence that Reish Lakish chose to prove this principle primarily by means of examples selected from the priestly leadership. Had he wanted to clarify a general principle of leadership, would not it have been better to choose Joshua’s leadership in comparison to that of Moses, or Elisha compared to Elijah? It would seem that Reish Lakish is trying to teach, by means of the examples in his derasha, about the diminishing significance of priestly pedigree over the course of the generations, and the empowerment of leadership which is compelled to act in response to current challenges. The examples which Reish Lakish cite demonstrate that pedigree does not grant absolute status. Ostensibly, Aaron possessed the ultimate priestly status, as defined by pedigree and nonetheless his heir was greater than he was. Ezra’s priesthood was irrelevant to his role as a leader; more important was the? his character (cited at the conclusion of the derasha) which accompanies the verses relating his pedigree which engendered his greatness: “That Ezra came up from Babylon, **a scribe expert in the Teaching of Moses** which the Lord God of Israel had given, whose request the king had granted in its entirety, thanks to the benevolence of the Lord toward him.” (Ezra 7:6)

To sum up the conclusions which can be drawn from a comparison of derasha’s three versions:[[68]](#footnote-71) the version of the Tosefta, which is the most ancient, clarifies the concept of equality between different types of leadership. According to the Tosefta, priestly leadership is not superior to prophetic leadership. That is to say, figures are evaluated as leaders based on the role itself regardless of what type. The version of the Palestinian Talmud relates exclusively to judicial leadership, laying a basis for its status. It makes no attempt at providing a basis for other forms of leadership. R. Abba b. Kahana, in Kohelet Rabba, strives to provide basis for the position of the Sages of all generations. Reish Lakish emphasizes that the status of a leader is not determined by ancestral merit or pedigree and is instead a function of the nature of the role and its current degree of necessity.

An analysis of the development of the derasha of ‘the lesser and the great people of this world’ adds another layer to the nexus of friction between the priests and the Sages as identified by Kahana and Finkelstein. Kahana and Finkelstein identified the tension at the end of the Second Temple period as forming the background for those derashot which differentiate between the status of priesthood (Aaron) from that of the Sages in the realm of deciding matters of Torah. The development of the derasha of ‘the lesser and the great people of this world’ through the Talmudic period indicates that the points of friction between the priests and Sages continued to accompany Jewish society for many years after the destruction of the Temple, and was not limited to questions of deciding matters of Torah. Likewise, it appears that sometimes the Sages of that period were not in complete agreement concerning the hierarchy between these two classes.[[69]](#footnote-72)

An interesting midrash in Shir Hashirim Rabba elaborates on the description of the Moses and Aaron’s equality in all areas but one. While ostensibly falling between the cracks of the categories of equality, it actually establishes the relationship between Moses and Aaron as one of mother and child:

“Your two breasts”—these refer to Moses and Aaron. Just as breasts are a woman’s majesty, so too Moses and Aaron are the Israelites’ majesty. Just as breasts are a woman’s beauty, so too Moses and Aaron are the Israelites’ beauty. Just as breasts are a woman’s honor and praise, so too Moses and Aaron are the Israelites’ honor and praise. Just as breasts are filled with milk, so too Moses and Aaron fill the Israelites with Torah. **And just as in the case of breasts, the infant nurses whatever the mother eats; so too, Moses taught all of the Torah which he learned to Aaron.**[[70]](#footnote-73) This is what the verse states: “Moses told Aaron about all the things that the Lord had committed to him.” (Exodus 4:28) The Rabbis say: He revealed the explicit name of God to him. Just as in the case of breasts, one is not larger than the other, so too Moses and Aaron were equal. That is what the verse states: “These are the same Moses and Aaron” (Exodus 6:27), and it also states: “It is the same Aaron and Moses” (Exodus 6:26). Moses was not greater than Aaron, nor was Aaron greater than Moses. R. Abba said: [It is analogous] to a king who had two excellent gems and placed them on a scale and neither was larger than the other. So too, Moses and Aaron were equal. R. Chaninah b. Pappa said: Blessed is God who chose these two brothers, who were created exclusively for Torah and for the glory of the Israelites. (Shir Hashirim Rabba 4:1 (5))

It is reasonable to assume that this derasha was written by sages belonging to the equality school. Despite their conception, they emphasized Moses’ authority in Torah; Moses was the source of Aaron’s Torah knowledge.

<H1> 3. Moses and Aaron’s Fraternal relationship </H1>

Another unique characteristic of the traditions dealing with Aaron is the great weight which they place on Moses and Aaron’s unique fraternal relationship: The great concern which each showed for the other’s dignity, the anguish each one felt over possibly damaging the other’s stature?primarily traditions which deal with the brothers’ great mutual joy at the other’s appointment as leader.

The description of the amicable fraternal relationship between Moses and Aaron does not contradict the biblical depiction. In the Bible, Moses and Aaron are the first positive example of two brothers treating each other with mutual respect and without of envy?—brothers leading the nation in partnership. The psalmist reinforces the beauty of this fraternal relationship in a psalm describing Aaron’s anointment. He opens with the words: “How good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together”. (Psalms 133:1)[[71]](#footnote-74) It is not surprising that this refreshing description of a happy fraternal relationship—in contrast to the narratives of envy and tension between brothers in Genesis—serves as an educational foundation for instilling the value of brotherhood.[[72]](#footnote-75) Nonetheless, Scripture does not hide evidence of anger, reproach and even wrath between Moses and Aaron.[[73]](#footnote-76) These were not developed in the derashot, which were generally devoted to describing the great fraternity, devoid of tension, which prevailed between them, and how each one showed sincere concern for the other. We will examine a number of traditions, and explore whether—aside from the central aim of instilling the value of brotherhood—there is also a hidden historicist aim which might be discerned, which may shed light on particular emphases in these traditions.

<H2> Each was joyous of the other’s accomplishment</H2>

A number of derashot describe, in various ways, Aaron’s joy at Moses’ appointment as leader, and Moses’ joy at Aaron’s being anointed as High Priest. In the biblical text, God describes to Moses Aaron’s joy before the two actually meet (Exodus 4:14). The fact that the Sages saw a need to amplify Aaron’s reaction[[74]](#footnote-77) is understandable, as it is only natural for an older brother to be envious of his younger brother being appointed above him. Aaron’s joy is an exemplary model of a noble reaction, devoid of envy. It is harder to understand the aim of the derashot which praise Moses for not being envious of Aaron’s appointment as High Priest. It would be unusual for an ordinary brother to be jealous in such a situation, let alone for Moses who was humblest of men, whose exclamation, ‘Are you wrought up on my account? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets!’ (Numbers 11:29) testifies to his generosity of spirit vis-à-vis his subjects’ rise to eminence.

The traditions which describe Moses’ reaction to Aaron’s appointment attribute to him a range of emotions. At the two extremes, derashot deal with Moses’ refusal to undertake the mission of the Israelite exodus from Egypt. The first describes Aaron’s appointment as High Priest as a punishment for Moses’ recalcitrance:

R, Samuel b. Nahman said: During the entire week at the bush, God persuaded Moses to go on his mission to Egypt. This is what the verse states: “Neither yesterday nor two days ago, nor since You have spoken to Your servant.” (Exodus 4:10) This refers to six days. On the seventh he said to Him: “Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent.” (ibid. 4:13) The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: You are telling me “Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent”? By your life, I will wrap it in your cloak! When did He repay him? R. Berachyah cited R. Levi and R. Chelbo:

R. Levi said: During the entire first week of Adar Moses prayed and pleaded to be allowed to enter the land of Israel. On the seventh day, He said to him: “You will not cross this Jordan river”. (Deuteronomy 3:27) R. Chelbo said: During the entire week of Inauguration Moses served as High Priest, and he believed that the position was his. On the seventh day, He said to him: It is not yours, rather it is your brother Aaron’s. “On the eighth day Moses called Aaron and his sons […]”. (Vayikra Rabba 11:6, pp. 226–228).[[75]](#footnote-78)

This derasha implies that Moses was not satisfied with the role of leader, and thought that he would also receive the position of High Priest.[[76]](#footnote-79)

At the other extreme, there is a derasha which explains that Moses’ refusal to undertake the mission stemmed from his belief that his brother was worthier of the role:

You should know that this is true, for you find that when The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: “Come, therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh,” (Exodus 3:10) he replied: “Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent.” (ibid. 4:13) Do you think that he was resisting going? He was only attempting to show honor to Aaron. Moses said: Until I was appointed, Aaron prophesized to them for eighty years, as it states: “When I made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt. (Ezekiel 20:5) […] He said: Aaron prophesized to them for all of those years, and now I will come and usurp his place, causing him anguish?! Therefore, he did not wish to go. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Your brother Aaron will not be upset by this, rather he will rejoice. You can see that this is so from the fact that he is coming out to your region, as it states: “Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he will be happy to see you.” (Exodus 4:14) Not only in his mouth, but even in his heart. His heart even more than his mouth, “and he will be happy to see you.” […] Once He told him this, he agreed to go. The Holy One, blessed be He, immediately appeared to Aaron and said to him: Go out and meet your brother Moses so that he will know that you are happy about it. Therefore it states: “Go to meet Moses in the wilderness.” This is the meaning of “If only it could be as with a brother,” like Moses and Aaron, who loved each other. “Then I could kiss you when I met you in the street,” (Song of Songs 8:1), “He went and met him at the mountain of God, and he kissed him” (Exodus 4:27) (Tanhuma (2) 24).[[77]](#footnote-80)

There are also more moderate derashot which fall between these two extremes (coveting the role of High Priest and forgoing his leadership role in favor of Aaron): The editor of the derasha in the Tanhuma, who interprets the language of the command to Moses to anoint Aaron (Leviticus 9:1), begins with a derasha relating that Moses was expecting to be given the role. He then adds that Aaron thought the same thing (that Moses would be given the role). He continues with a description of Moses’ joy at discovering that the role was, in fact, being given to his brother:

There is a summons to eminence, as it states: “Moses called.” Moses said to him: The Holy One, blessed be He, instructed me to appoint you High Priest. Aaron replied: You toiled to create the Tabernacle, and I will be the High Priest?! Moses replied: By your life, even though you will be the High Priest, it is as if I will be; because just as you rejoiced in my eminence, so I rejoice in yours. (Tanhuma (2) Shemini 5)

The depiction of Moses as coveting the role of High Priest is moderated; and instead, Moses is depicted as rejoicing at the transfer of the task to Aaron.

There is a further development in two other derashot. In order to neutralize the possibility that Moses envies Aaron because of his appointment as High Priest, Moses is depicted as being concerned for his brother’s status and distressed about the possibility of Aaron being slighted.

In the first derasha, Moses is distressed about the nature of Aaron’s role:

R. Levi said in the name of R. Chama b. R. Chaninah: Moses had tremendous anguish over this matter: Is it really dignified for my brother Aaron to examine afflictions? The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: But doesn’t he benefit from it by receiving the twenty-four priestly gifts? As the saying goes: One who eats from the palm tree is pierced by its sharp points. (Vayikra Rabba 15:8 p. 337)[[78]](#footnote-81)

In the second derasha, Moses expresses distress and concern about the mitigation of Aaron’s role due to his sons’ sin:

“And he shall not enter [the sanctuary] at any time.” R. Judah b. R. Simon said: Moses had tremendous anguish over this matter: He said: Woe is to me, perhaps Aaron has been pushed from his domain, … The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: It is not as you think. It is not a ‘time’ for an hour, nor a day, or a year, or twelve years, or for seventy years or forever. Rather he may enter whenever he wishes, as long as he follows this procedure. (ibid. 21:7, p. 483).

The identical words, ‘Moses had tremendous anguish [*tsa’ar gadol*] over this matter,’ appearing in both derashot, may indicate a relationship between them: They stress the fact that the spiritual leader, the scholar, recognized the status of the priest and was concerned for his being slighted.

The derasha which describes Moses as believing that Aaron ought to become the leader is also moderated. Moses undertakes the position of leadership, but does not act in accordance with the divinely prescribed hierarchy. Instead, he turns Aaron into an equal partner in the leadership of the nation:

“With plaited wreaths [*torim*]”—with two appearances [*toarim*], with two brothers. This refers to Moses and Aaron, whose appearances were pleasant with respect to each other, each rejoicing in the other’s eminence. R. Pinchas said: It states (Exodus 4:16): “And he shall speak for you to the people. Thus, he shall serve as your spokesman, with you playing the role of God to him.”—as an interpreter. ‘With you playing the role of God to him’—did Moses actually become a form of idolatry to Aaron that it states ‘with you playing the role of God to him’?! Rather, this is what The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Moses, just as you are in awe of me, so too Aaron should be in awe of you. However, this is not how he acted. Rather, “Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. Aaron repeated all the words.” (Exodus 4:29–30) Shoulder to shoulder, as they each still rejoiced in the other’s eminence […] (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1. 1:10).

In another derasha, in which the biblical text describes a situation in which there is tension between Moses and Aaron as a result of burning the sin offering sacrificed after the death of Nadab and Abihu, Moses is depicted as acknowledging his error and announcing that Aaron understood the halakhah better than he did:

Immediately: “And Moses heard” (Leviticus 10:20)—he issued a proclamation throughout the camp, stating: ‘I erred concerning the halakhah and my brother Aaron corrected me’. Elazar knew the halakhah and was silent, Ithamar knew the halachah and was silent. They merited that God singled them out to address them and their father and their uncles in their lifetimes. That is what the verse states: “The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them.” (Leviticus 11:1) (Vayikra Rabba 13:1, p. 272).

If we sum up the range of emotions reflected in the derashot dealing with Moses’ reaction to Aaron’s appointment as High Priest, the following stages emerge: Moses covets the role; Moses is instructed by God to anoint Aaron and is happy to carry out this command; Moses is zealous on Aaron’s behalf and protests the nature of the role or the diminishing of its authority; Moses bestows a portion of his own status on Aaron and turns him into his partner; Moses announces that Aaron understood the halakhah that was his responsibility better than he did; Moses wishes to forego the leadership role, believing Aaron was more worthy.

<H2> The oil on Aaron’s beard</H2>

Two other derashot also indicate a transformation in the portrayal of Moses’ emotions at the time of Aaron’s anointment as High Priest. These derashot deal with the verse in Psalms which describes the oil dripping down Aaron’s beard.[[79]](#footnote-82) The earlier tradition describes Moses’ concern regarding misappropriation of the sacred oil which trickled onto Aaron’s beard (a misuse of oil intended exclusively for anointment) and God’s subsequent reassurance:

They said that when Moses poured the anointing oil onto Aaron’s head, he recoiled and it fell backwards. He said: Woe is to me, as I misappropriated [*ma’alti*] the anointing oil! The Holy Spirit answered him: “How good and how pleasant it is that brothers dwell together. It is like fine oil on the head running down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron, that comes down over the collar of his robe; like the dew of Hermon that falls upon the mountains of Zion.” Just as the dew of Hermon is not subject to misappropriation, so too the anointing oil is not subject to misappropriation (Sifra Shemini 1).[[80]](#footnote-83)

This earlier derasha is cited in a later tradition, albeit with an added section which has no parallel in Tanaitic literature:

“It is like fine oil on the head running down onto the beard, the beard of Aaron.” (Psalms 133:2) Did Aaron really have two beards, that it says ‘onto the beard, the beard’? Rather, when Moses saw the anointing oil which flowed down Aaron’s beard, he rejoiced as if it flowed down his own beard. (Vayikra Rabba 3:6, p. 71).

These two traditions present opposite descriptions of Moses’ mental state when he anointed Aaron for his priestly role: recoil, concern and panic in the former; joy and serenity in the latter. Both states were the result of the oil poured on Aaron’s beard during his anointment.

What is the significance of these differences in terms of Moses and Aaron’s relationship? Why did the Sages feel the need to prove that Moses originally desired Aaron’s role? Why is Moses described as worrying that he misappropriated the oil during the anointment? And why did the Sages emphasize Moses’ joy at the time of the anointment—embellishing it in other derashot—along with his concern for Aaron’s status and honor?

Before answering these questions, it is useful to quickly sum up the previous sections, and to thereby attempt to clarify the contribution made by the ensemble of derashot regarding Aaron to understanding the social complexity of priestly status; from the time when its purpose as the ritualistic leadership was undermined, first by virtue of its constituency’s conduct, and later as a result of its ostensible irrelevance as a consequence of Temple’s destruction.

The first section took note of the homiletic tendency to promote Aaron as an ethical role model, while virtually ignoring his role as the central authority with respect to conducting the religious Temple rite. Two explanations were offered for this tendency: It is intended as reproach directed at the priests, regarding the primacy of ethics over rite; or as presenting an alternative to the priestly leadership in the form of Sages who stand out for their ethical conduct.

The second section delineates two schools of thought regarding the status of Moses and Aaron, the school of equality and that of hierarchy; and suggests that the dispute between the schools stems from difference between different eras. These differences relate to the change in the priests’ station in the wake of the Temple’s destruction and through the period of the Talmud. They may also stem from an internal debate in that period concerning the question of how to relate to the status of priesthood in a reality devoid of a Temple.

The third section outlines the range of depictions of Moses’ feelings regarding the command to appoint Aaron as High Priest; from his thinking that he would receive that role to depicting him as worrying about the possibility of Aaron being slighted in terms of the content and extent of his role and status.

By carefully tracing the traditions dealing with Moses and Aaron presented in this article, one can outline another dimension to the picture of the transitions in the status of the priesthood from the end of the Second Temple era through the Talmudic era presented by various scholars. Scholars present the priesthood as a typological group sharing certain characteristics: Suspicion of the Sadducees at the end of the Second Temple era,[[81]](#footnote-84) a desire which arose amongst certain groups of Sages to take over the religious leadership role of the priests—from the era following the Temple’s destruction and beyond,[[82]](#footnote-85) social clashes between the strata of elitist priests and the populist leadership of the Sages,[[83]](#footnote-86) and the struggle of the Talmudic Sages to preserve the priests’ station and role in an era when the people have already adapted to a life devoid of a Temple rite.[[84]](#footnote-87) The additional dimension presented in the derashot dealing with Aaron dismantles the complete picture, removes one of its pieces and thereby highlights the complexity of Aaron’s image as the representative of priesthood throughout the generations, as discussed by scholars.

<H2> May the descendants of gentiles who emulate Aaron’s actions return in peace</H2>

The dispute between the Sadducees and Pharisees is mentioned quite a bit in the Mishnaic and sectarian literature.[[85]](#footnote-88) One can also find hints of it in later midrashim.[[86]](#footnote-89) However, it would seem that since these were redacted at time when the dispute had nearly died out, this literature relates to it to a far lesser degree. Nonetheless, it would seem that it is possible to detect in certain derashot analyzed in this article an attempt to extinguish the flames of the dispute. The suspicion of the position of the priesthood which developed during the period of the conflict did not vanish, and it was necessary to rebuild trust between the strata of the Sages (the heirs of the Pharisees) and the priests (who were suspected of being belonging to the sect of the Sadducees). A possible witness to this suspicion can be found in a derasha describing the chaos which prevailed amongst the people when they learned of Aaron’s death, and their suspicion that Moses was responsible:

Three righteous people, Moses, Aaron and Miriam, died in one year and the Israelites were unable to find contentment any more […] When Aaron died, the pillar of cloud ceased […] At that point the Israelites were in disarray and devoid of any commandments. All the Israelites gathered around Moses and said to him: Where is your brother Aaron? He answered them: God sequestered him for eternal life, but they did not believe him. They said to him: We know that you are merciless; perhaps he said something inappropriate to you, and you sentenced him to death. What did the Holy One, blessed be He do? He brought Aaron’s bier and suspended it in the high heavens and the Holy One, blessed be He stood over him and eulogized him, and the ministering angels responded. What did they say? “Proper rulings were in his mouth, and nothing perverse was on his lips; he walked before me in peace and righteousness, and held many back from iniquity.” (Malachi 2:6) (Sifrei Deuteronomy 305)

The Holy One, blessed be He and the ministering angels rushed to Moses’ defense, by describing Aaron as a person who followed the Torah of truth, and therefore Moses had no reason to sentence him to death.

The main suspicion of the Sadducee priests related to ritual role in the Temple. The Mishnah describes how the Pharisees cried when they accompanied the High Priest to the service of the Day of Atonement, when they were unable to supervise his actions in the Holy of Holies.[[87]](#footnote-90) It is possible that Moses’ recoil and concern regarding misappropriation when anointing Aaron (“He recoiled and it fell backwards. He said: Woe is to me, as I misappropriated the anointing oil!” [Sifra Shemini 1]) hints at this ritual anxiety which characterized this conflict. If so, one can see in the later derasha, describing Moses’ joy regarding the oil beyond the confines of Aaron’s beard (Vayikra Rabba 3 p. ), a process of this suspicion waning, freedom from rigid rules of ritual purity, and an attempt to construct the priestly status independent of the Temple rite.

It would seem that the development of Aaron’s ethical character, and its being highlighted as his main defining characteristic (discussed in the first section), presents a priestly alternative to the value system of the Sadducee priests, emphasizing the superiority of ethics to rite. Aaron is presented in these derashot as being memorable by virtue of his pursuit of peace and his efforts to bring people closer to each other and to their father in heaven, rather than by virtue of his meticulousness and care in performing the Temple rite.

<H2> Even in a case of a *mamzer* (a product of incest) who is a scholar, and a High Priest who is an ignoramus; the *mamzer* who is a scholar takes precedence over the High Priest who is an ignoramus.[[88]](#footnote-91)</H2>

The question of the hierarchy of the status of scholars and priests was a pressing issue during the early generations following the destruction of the Temple. The loss of the Temple deprived the priests of their central role in communal service. The question of their status in the absence of this role was raised by their competitors for leadership—i.e. the sages.[[89]](#footnote-92) The exegesis which relates to Moses and Aaron through the prism of hierarchy and equality, which we dealt with in the second section, presents the spectrum of aspects of this issue, as well as the heterogeneous position of the Sages. The derashot which emphasize hierarchy and Moses’ precedence over Aaron in the instruction of the Torah, aim at instituting a form of leadership to replace the priesthood, to single out mastery of Torah as a leader’s determinative characteristic.[[90]](#footnote-93) The scholar is, therefore, the ultimate authority regarding the transmission of the Torah. A priest can be on equal footing with a scholar; but only to the degree that his mastery of Torah is equal to that of the scholar, and not merely by virtue of his pedigree. The fact that one can find derashot proving the equality of the leadership Moses and Aaron, in addition to the hierarchy derashot indicates that alongside the approach basing the hierarchy on mastery of Torah, there were also those who believed that pedigree continued to serve as a parameter of leadership, and therefore fought for the priests’ retention of their status in the spiritual leadership of the community.

<H2> Lest the Israelites say that he appointed himself High Priest[[91]](#footnote-94)</H2>

The glaring dominance of the derashot featuring fraternity in describing the Moses and Aaron’s relationship points to the great degree of difficulty entailed in neutralizing the suspicion and tension which arose over time between the status of the Sages and that of the priesthood. The purpose of the derashot concerning the relationship between Moses and Aaron was not to critique the aspects of suspicion and tension. On the contrary, it was to teach that even amongst the patriarchs of status and lineage, expressions of suspicion and tension played a role. However, they highlight the fact that alongside these there is the idyll which manages to overcome past tensions and foster a relationship of true brotherhood, each one rejoicing in other’s appointment and being concerned about his recognition. The emphasis on Moses’ joy over Aaron’s appointment as High Priest, taken for granted in the biblical narrative, required reinforcement and emphasis, in the social reality of the Mishnaic and Talmudic period, a time in which the status of the priests was eroding and calls to abolish it were heard from the various strata of society.

The aspiration of ousting the priests from their station and taking over their role—expressed in several traditions in the Talmud and aggadic midrashim[[92]](#footnote-95)—is not lacking in the derashot describing Aaron. This can be seen in their depiction of Moses’ expectation that he would be appointed High Priest. That this thought was in error is highlighted in derashot which describe the process undergone by Moses, culminating with insistence that Aaron is appointed publicly, emphasizing that he was chosen by God:

“On the eighth day Moses called [Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel].” And why ‘the elders of Israel’? In order to promote him before the elders. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: Summon the elders and appoint him in their presence, lest the Israelites say that he appointed himself High Priest. Therefore, ‘and the elders of Israel’ (Tanhuma (2) Shemini 5).

Even if human opposition is justifiable—having developed over the course of generations during which the priests did not succeed in justifying their election and their contribution to the religious-spiritual leadership of the community—it is important to remember that this was an eternal divine selection, witnessed by the Sages of Israel.

In the tradition of the Sages of the land of Israel dating from the end of the Second Temple period through the Talmudic period, Aaron serves as a reflection of the transformations of the priesthood. Alongside the position of suspicion, which is critical and aims at ousting the priests, Aaron mostly represents appeasement and the need to reestablish the religious ritual leadership alongside that of the Sages, the instructors of the Torah. The choice of Aaron as the paradigm for teaching these lessons was meant to recall the purity and sanctity which were the basis for the priestly station and role, thereby strengthening the dominant message of forgiveness for past tensions, thus rebuilding their position by means of inspiration drawn from their founding leader.

בראשיתו של המאמר הצגנו את שאלת הפער בין דמותו של אהרן כמי שמייצג את ההנהגה הפולחנית במקרא, לבין הטיפול בדמותו בספרות חז"ל בהיבטים שאין ביניהם לבין תפקידו בפולחן כל קשר נראה לעין. במאמר זה נסינו להוכיח כי נתן לגשר על פער זה, באמצעות הבנת המתודולוגיה של החכמים בשכתוב הסיפור המקראי, ומטרתן העל דורית של הדרשות. הצענו כי החכמים בבואם לדון בדמויות המקרא או בסיפוריו, הציבו אותם כאבות טיפוס לדמויות או סיטואציות בהווה. הם בחרו דמויות או אירועים עם מאפיינים בעלי זיקה לדמויות או מצבים מתקופתם, ועצבו אותם באופן בו בני דורם יכלו להבין את המסרים שניסו להעביר באמצעות הקבלה זו. המאפיין המובהק של אהרן הינו היותו אבי שושלת הכהונה, מכאן ואילך עיצובו של אהרן ישתנה וישתכלל בהתאם לאתגרי הכהונה בתקופת היווצרותן של הדרשות. המוקד הפולחני המקראי של אהרן מפסיק להיות רלוונטי בתקופת היווצרותן של מרבית הדרשות, ולכן כבר בדרשות הקדומות, תתייחסנה הדרשות למרכיבי אישיותו של אהרן ולא אל כישוריו כמבדיל בין דם לדם, בין נגע לנגע ובין טמא לטהור. מעבר חד זה, כשמבינים אותו בהקשר של תקופה, מבטא מסר הדומה במשמעותו לתוכחות נביאי בית ראשון שקבלו על היררכיה מעוותת בה שופכי דמים רצים בידיהם המגואלות בדם לקיים פולחן של קרבנות בחצר המקדש (ישעיהו א, ירמיהו ז ועוד), וקובע כי המוסר עומד הראש ההיררכיה, ובהעדרו אין טעם לעיסוק בענייני פולחן.

העיסוק האינטנסיבי של הדרשות על אהרן בשאלת ההיררכיה שבינו לבין משה, הזרה כל כך לתיאורי המקרא על ענוותנותו של משה מחד, ועל קבלה מוחלטת של הנהגת משה על ידי אהרן מאידך, צריכה לעורר בשומעי הדרשות או לומדיה לאורך הדורות, לזהות את הסיטואציה המעמדית הטעונה בתקופת היווצרותן של הדרשות. הבנה נכונה של הסיטואציה, וניתוח הדרשות לאורה, חושפים את עמדתם המורכבת של החכמים הצריכים לקבוע מחדש את היררכיית ההנהגה, להגדיר את סמכויותיה, מבלי לרמוס את כבודה של ההנהגה שזה עתה ירדה מגדולתה, ואבדה את מרבית תפקידיה.

ההדגשה החוזרת במסורות על אהרן, על מארג קשרי האחווה בין האחים (כפי שראינו בקבוצת המסורות השלישית שנתחנו) ממתנת את מאבקי ההיררכיה, ומכוונת את יריבי ההווה לאמץ מנהגי אחווה אלו, חרף השתנות מדרג בעלי מעמדות ההנהגה של הציבור.

הפיתוח הרחב של דמותו של אהרן בשלושת המוקדים שנותחו במאמר, מתבסס בעיקרו על מסורות ארץ ישראליות המשוקעות בחיבורים ארצישראליים מתקופת המשנה והתלמוד. עובדה זו לכשעצמה, יש בה בכדי להוכיח את הקשר שבין התפתחותן של הדרשות, לתמורות במעמד הכהונה הארצישראלי. אהרן כאב טיפוס למעמד הכהונה לא עניין את חכמי בבל, שהעמידו היררכיות הנהגה אחרות, ולא התמודדו עם המתח שנוצר בדורות שלאחר החורבן עם ירידת קרנם של כהנים, ושאיפתם להמשיך לאחוז במושכות ההנהגה חרף מפלתם. חכמי ארץ ישראל בתור יורשיה של ההנהגה הרוחנית, היו צריכים להלחם על מקומם, להצדיק את מהלך ההדחה, ולהוכיח את הכבוד שהם ממשיכים לרכוש לבני אהרן שעושים מעשה אהרן: אוהבי שלום המקרבים את הבריות לתורה.

הבנת הקשרן ההיסטורי של דרשות חז"ל ומאפייני התקופה שבה נכתבו, מעצימה את המסרים החינוכיים והחברתיים שיש בכוחן להעניק לדור שבו נכתבו, ולכל דור בו שבות ועולות סיטואציות דומות, שהרי 'דור הולך ודור בא והארץ לעולם עומדת'.

1. The focus here is on the traditions of the aggadic midrashim and not on halakhic traditions attached to biblical verses dealing with sacrifices or those concerning the laws of the temple and sacrifices. With respect to distinctions between different types of midrashim regarding priesthood in general, see J. Neusner, “The Mishnah's Conception of the Priesthood: the Aggadah versus the Halakhah,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 14.1 (2011): 92˗107. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Those who hold that this viewpoint already appeared in the later biblical literature argue that the image of Aaron presented in the Deuteronomic literature and in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah reflects the challenges of the generation that returned to Zion. See P. Guillaume, “Exploring the Memory of Aaron in Late Persian/Early Hellenistic Period Yehud,” in *Remembering Biblical Figures in the Late Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods*, ed. Diana V. Edelman and Ehud Ben Zvi (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2013), 95˗105. Similarly: J.W. Watts, “Scripturalization and the Aaronide Dynasties,” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 13 (2013): 1˗15. See B. L. Visotzky, Reading the Book, Philadelphia 2005, p.11 המתייחס לשינויים בתיאור דמותו של אהרן כבר בספר דברים. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. See Chapter 3 of the work, which is entirely devoted to praise of the high priest Simon ben Yochanan. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. See F. V. Reiterer, “Aaron's Polyvalent Role According to Ben Sira,” in *Rewriting Biblical History*, ed. Jeremy Corely and Harm van Grol (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011) 27˗56, especially 46˗51. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. See Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (ed. Shalit), Jerusalem 2002, 3.188: “[…] God appeared to Moses and commanded him to give the priesthood to his brother, Aaron, whose piety (and righteousness) earn for him, more than any (other person) the right to receive this honor.” In the continuation: “And now God Himself decided that Aaron was worthy of this honor, and chose him to serve as priest, for He knew that he is the most righteous amongst us […] (3.190) For (indeed) Aaron was the worthiest of all to receive this honor, by virtue of his family and (the spirit of) his prophecy, and due to his brother’s praiseworthy character.” (3.192). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. As Josephus writes in the introduction to his autobiographical work, *חיי יוסף*,translated by D. Schwartz (Jerusalem, 2007): “My pedigree is not at all unexceptional, but rather descends from priest of ancient generations. Just as each nation has its own basis for belonging to the elite, for us membership in the priesthood is the sign of noble pedigree […]” (63) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. See L. Feldman, “Josephus' Portrait of Aaron,” in *Classical Studies in Honor of David Sohlberg* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1996) 167˗92. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Concerning the opposition of the members of the sect to the priests of Jerusalem, see R. A. Kugler, “Priesthood at Qumran,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years II*, ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. Vanderkam (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999) 93˗116; “The Priesthood at Qumran: the Evidence of references to Levi and the Levites” in *The Provo International Conference*, ed. Donald Wayne Perry and Eugene Charles Ulrich (Leiden; Boston: Brill,1999) 30.465˗79. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. See C. Hempel, “The Sons of Aaron in the Dead Sea Scrolls” in *Flores Florentino*, ed. Anthony Hilhorst, Émile Puech and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007) 207˗24; C. Hempel, “Do the Scrolls Suggest Rivalry between the Sons of Aaron and the Sons of Zadok and if so was it Mutual?” *Revue de Qumran* 24.1(2009): 135˗53. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. See I. Gruenwald, “From Priesthood to Messianism: the Antipriestly Polemic and the Messianic Factor,” in *Messiah and Christos* ed. Gruenwald et.al. (Tübingen: Mohr Seibeck, 1992) 75˗93. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. For further discussion, see “The Aaronic Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in William Horbury, *Messianism among Jews and Christians* (London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2003) 227˗54; D. W. Rooke, “Jesus as Royal Priest: Reflections on the Interpretation of the Melchizedek Tradition in Heb 7,”*Biblica* 8.1 (2000): 81˗94. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. סקירת הגישות השונות מצויה במאמרו של י' גפני, "ארץ ישראל בתקופת המשנה והתלמוד: חקר שנות דור – הישגים ותהיות", קתדרה 100 (תשס"א), עמ' 200 – 226. וכן ראו: B. L. Visotzky, *Reading the Book*, Philadelphia 2005 המרחיב את הגישה ההיסטוריוציסטית ורואה את הדרשות ככלי חינוכי על דורי, המותאם לדורות המשתנים. לדידו מדרשי חז"ל מכילים פתרונות לאתגרי כל דור, וקריאה נכונה של דבריהם מאפשרת למצוא בתוכם הדרכות מושכלות לפתרון בעיות ההווה. הנ"ל, *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation* (ed: C.A Evans; J.N Lohr; D.L. Petersen), Leiden – Boston 2012, pp. 580 – 606. **להרחבת העיון בגישת הפרשנות הפרוגרסיבית (המתנגדת לגישה ההיסטוריוציסטית) עיינו: דניאל בויארין, "המדרש והמעשה: על החקר ההיסטורי של ספרות חז"**ל", ספר הזכרון לרבי שאול ליברמן, (עורך) ש"י פרידמן, ניו יורק וירושלים תשנ"ג, עמ' 105 – 117; הנ"ל, מדרש תנאים, אינטרטקסטואליות וקריאת מכילתא, ירושלים תשע"א, עמ' 21 – 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. E. Margulies, *החייבים במקרא וזכאים בתלמוד ובמדרשים* (London: Ararat, 1948). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. For a more specific survey of approaches to the intent of the interpretations dealing with biblical characters, see B. Elitzur, על *מגמות בדרשות אמוראי ארץ ישראל העוסקות באישי המקרא, דיסרטציה* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2006). An interesting summary of the various explanations given for the anomalies in the midrashic evaluations of biblical images may be found in A. Chwat Shvat?, *הזכאים במקרא וחייבים בחז”ל* in *Talelei Orot* 12 by Yissachar Dov Rubin (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publisher, 1997) 13˗99. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. E.g. in the case of Abraham: “Rabbi Abahu explained in the name of Rabbi Elazar: Why was our father Abraham punished, and his offspring subjugated in Egypt for 210 years? Because he conscripted Torah scholars. As it is written, ‘*He mustered his retainers, born into his household*.’ And Samuel said: Because he overreached regarding God’s attributes, as it states: ‘*By means of what will I know that I will inherit it?*’ And Rabbi Yochanan said that it was because he prevented people from entering under the wings of the Divine Presence, as it states: ‘*Give me the souls, and you take the property for yourself*’” (b. Ned. 32a). The accusation is particularly harsh in the case of Moses: Because Moses heard the Israelites speaking behind his back [Tanhuma 6; Pekudei 7: Because he heard the cynics of the generation speaking about him] as it states: ‘*Whenever Moses went out to the Tent, etc., and gaze after Moses* (Exodus 33:8). And what would they say? R. Yitzchak said they were speaking his praise […] and R. Chama said it was derogatory. They said: See the neck, see the leg. He is eating at the expense of the Jews, he is drinking at the expense of the Jews, and all that he has is from the Jews" (Tanhuma 2; Pekudei 4). And many other such examples. See: B. L. Visotzky, *Reading the Book,* pp.57 - 75 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Concerning the sages’ use of the patriarchs of the nation as models for the leaders of their generation, see E.E. Urbach”מלך ונביא בעיני חז"ל”*,* in *טיפוסי מנהיגות בתקופת המקרא* (Jerusalem: 1973) 55˗68; E.E. Urbach, “המלוכה המקראית בעיני חכמים” in *ספר יצחק אריה זליגמן* (1983) 439˗51; D. Goldblatt, *The Monarchic Principle: Studies in Jewish Self Government in Antiquity*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993) 176˗231. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. See M. Aberbach and L. Smolar, “Jeroboam and Solomon: Rabbinic Interpretations,” *JQR*59 (1968): 118˗32; R. L. Kalmin, *The Sage in Jewish Society of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 83˗109; R.R Kimelman, “The Conflict Between R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish on the Supremacy of the Patriarchate,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981) 3:1˗20; S. Safrai, “Tales of the Sages in the Palestinian Tradition and the Babylonian Talmud,” in *Scripta Hierosolymitana* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1971) 22: 209˗32. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. The elaboration on Aaron’s sin in the context of the sin of the golden calf in the rabbinic traditions and the transformation which took place in these traditions in evaluating his role in the sin are beyond the scope of the present paper. The extensive treatment of Aaron’s role in the sin is not surprising, as it remains close to the biblical text and is elaborated upon in order to derive educational and religious lessons from his sin, in accordance with the needs of the generations of the conveyors of the traditions. In this respect, this axis is different than the other three, where the elaboration on and development of Aaron’s image are not necessarily integrated with the depiction of his image and actions in the text. For further discussion of the topic of Aaron and the sin of the golden calf in rabbinic traditions, see: L. Smolar & M. Aberbach, “The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Literature,” *HUCA* 39 (1968): 91˗116; N. M. Waldman, “Interpretive cover-ups: whitewashing the images of Aaron and the Israelite people in the incident of the Golden Calf, in *Freedom and Responsibility: Exploring the Challenges of Jewish Continuity*, ed. R. M. Geffen and M. B. Edelman (Hoboken, N.J: Ktav, 1998) 51˗64; J. Watts, “Aaron and the Golden Calf in the rhetoric of the Pentateuch” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 130.3 (2011): 417˗430. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. # Concerning the means by which the characters of biblical figures are developed, see: F. Pollack, הסיפור במקרא, in ספריית האנציקלופדיה המקראית, ed. Shmuel Ichitov (Jerusalem: 1994) 255˗301 and bibliography.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Based on ms. Kaufman and ms. Parma, as opposed to the printed editions which have the reading “be of the students of.” See S. Sharvit, *מסכת אבות לדורותיה: מהדורה מדעית, מבואות, נספחים* (Jerusalem: 2014), 73; S. Sharvit שונה וסגנונה של מסכת אבות לדורותיה, (Jerusalem: 2006) 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
21. See the following footnote for an addendum appearing in one of the versions of the Babylonian Talmud, which cites the biblical basis for ascribing these characteristics to Aaron. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
22. Parallels: PT Sanhedrin 1:1, 18b, BT Sanhedrin 6b with the addendum: “but Aaron loved peace and pursued peace, and made peace between people, as it states: ‘*Proper rulings were in his mouth, and nothing perverse was on his lips; he walked before me in peace and righteousness and held many back from iniquity*.’” [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
23. Scholarship deals with the relationship between the Mechilta Demiluimand the Sifra. The consensus is that some of the derashot were added to the Sifra by the editor, and were apparently collected from earlier traditions to which he had access. See A. Shama’a, המכילתות הנספחות לספרא: מכילתא דמילואים ומכילתא דעריות, (PhD. Dissertation, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 2009), including bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
24. It should be noted that first set of derashot (17˗28) does not appear in a number of the key manuscripts of the Sifra (Vatican 66; two Geniza fragments from Cambridge and in the supplement to the ms Parma.). See A. Goldberg, “הדרשות הכפולות במכילתא דמילואים” *Sinai* 89:3˗4 (1981): 115˗18; A. Shama’a, מכילתא דמילואים, 106, 122˗25. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
25. This aim is further developed in many derashot which deal with the nature of the sin of Nadab and Abihu and which develop the ethical aspect. For example, see: Sifra Shemini 1:21;. Sifra Shemini 1:32;Vayikra Rabba 20:10, 464; Pesikta D’Rav Kehannah 26:9, 395. Concerning the aim of the derashot which accuse them of these sins, see A. Shinan, “חטאיהם של נדב ואביהוא באגדת לחז"ל,” *Tarbitz* 48, 3.4 (1979): 201˗14; B. Elitzur, “מסרים אקטואליים והשפעות ביוגרפיות בפרשנות חטא נדב ואביהואבספרות חז"ל” *Masechet* 6 (2007):197˗213. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
26. This tradition appears in both versions of Avot D'Rabbi Natan, albeit with differences. The tradition appearing in version A cites the language of Hillel’s statement, as well as the verse in Malachi upon which the elaboration is based. It thereby strengthens the relationship to the tradition of the Mishna and the Sifra. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
27. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
28. Literally “yellow.” Rashi, BT Sanhedrin 105a, explains: “Yellow: angry. When a person is angry his face is yellow.” See also Avot D'Rabbi Natan A 1:12; Addendum B to Avot D'Rabbi Natan A, Chapter 8; and a concise and abridged version in Eliyahu Rabba 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
29. R. Hammer, “The Apotheosis of Aaron,” *Conservative Judaism*, 53.1 (2000): 20˗33. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
30. H. Bamberger, “Aaron: Changing Perceptions” *Judaism* 42.2 (1993):199˗213. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
31. For the reason that Moses and Aaron are presented in the historical addresses of Samuel and Psalms as equal partners in the leadership of the Israelites, see Y. Zakovitch, “And the Lord sent Moses and Aaron,” *Birkat Shalom* 1 (2008): 191˗99.     [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
32. This will be discussed below. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
33. Exodus 4:27; Leviticus 10:30; Numbers 18:1, 8, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
34. 58, 146–147. Kahana, in his edition of the Sifrei, points out that the language of the Sifrei is more ancient, using as proof the greater degree of detail in citing verses in the Sifra as compared to the Sifrei. M. Kahana, *ספרי במדבר: מהדורה מבוארת*, Vol 2. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2011) 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
35. Concerning the uncertainty regarding the enumeration of the thirteen verses of inclusion and exclusion to which Rabbi Judah ben Beterah refers, see: K. Kahanah, “שלוש עשרה דברות שנאמרו למשה ולאהרן” *Jubilee Volume in Honor of R. Eliayhu Jung* (New York: The Jewish Center, 1962) 107˗19. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
36. See the expanded formulation in the reconstituted Mechiltah D’Rashbi 12, based on the text of the Midrash HaGadol (J. Epstein and E. Melamed, ed., *מכילתא דרבי שמעון בן יוחאי* [Jerusalem, 1955]) 7: “[…] And I may yet say that God spoke to Moses outside of the city, but when Moses spoke to Aaron he did not speak to him outside of the city. For this reason it states: ‘*And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron (in the land of Egypt)*.’ It juxtaposes speaking to Moses and speaking to Aaron. Just as addressing Moses took place outside the city, so, too, Aaron took place outside the city. Just as in the case of Moses, he was addressed using the formula ‘*thus spoke.*’ so too in the case of Aaron, he was addressed using the formula ‘*thus spoke*.’ Just as Moses was in the role of God to Pharaoh, stating his message without fear, so too Aaron was in the role of God to Pharaoh, stating his message without fear. Just as Moses was treasurer in charge of the red heifer and of the lighting oil and of the anointing oil and of the aromatic incense; so too Aaron was treasurer in charge of the red heifer and of the lighting oil and of the anointing oil and of the aromatic incense. It states: ‘*And the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron (in the land of Egypt)*’ in order to teach that Aaron’s eminence is juxtaposed to that of Moses.” The addition which equates Aaron’s role to that of Moses in the service of the Tabernacle alters the message of the Mechiltah D’Rabbi Ishmael. The derasha of the Mechiltah D’Rabbi Ishmael increases Aaron’s status in the leadership of the nation, equating it to that of Moses. By contrast, the addendum addresses Aaron’s role in the temple ritual and argues for equality between Aaron and Moses even in this role. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
37. For parallels, see: Bereishit Rabba 1:1, 14; Vayikra Rabba 36:1, 826˗35. A derasha with a similar message explains the changes in the order in which the sons of Jacob are mentioned in various lists: “This is that which R. Joshua of Sachnin explained in the name of Reish Lakish: Why aren’t the names of the tribes listed in the same order everywhere, but instead sometimes this one comes first and sometimes the other? So that one not say that the sons of the mistresses come first and the sons of the maidservants are last. This teaches us that these were not greater than those.” (Shemot Rabba 1:6, ed. Shinan). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
38. There are actually five places where Aaron is addressed alone. However, it would seem that the derasha refers to those places where he is addressed in the context of a command. Concerning the content of the verses and their selection from amongst the others, see ed. Horovitz, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
39. The reading of the phrase *“Do not those*” is based on several textual witnesses. The commentators of the midrash attempt to interpret this difficult text. It would appear that it actually means “it is his.” See M. Kahana, ספרי במדבר: מהדורה מבוארת, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2011) 4.862. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
40. In other words, the first verse deals with the realm of priestly authority, whereas the second does not. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
41. The derasha on the earlier verse is: “You can conclude that all of the statements made to Aaron were conveyed to him by Moses.” (Sifrei Zuta Numbers 18:1) The derasha on the latter verse is: “The commandment was said to Aaron.” (Sifrei Zuta Numbers 18:8). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
42. See above footnote 37 concerning the version in Midrash HaGadol citing the derasha of the Mechiltah D’Rashbi. There, too, the proof for the brothers’ equality comes from commandments which belong to the realm of priestly authority: “Just as Moses was treasurer in charge of the red heifer and of the lighting oil and of the anointing oil and of the aromatic incense; so too Aaron was treasurer in charge of the red heifer and of the lighting oil and of the anointing oil and of the aromatic incense.” [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
43. Finkelstein, מבוא למהדורת הספרא, (New York: 1989) 23; Y. Kahana, ed., *ספרי במדבר: מהדורה מבוארת*, (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2011), 2:398. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
44. This is in accordance with the reading in Bereishit Rabba. This attribution is questioned by some scholars, who claim that it isn’t possible to reach any conclusions as to the era of a given tradition based on it being attributed to a certain sage. See, for example J. Neusner, “What's in a Name?—The Problematic of Rabbinic 'Biography,'“ in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice* ed. William Scott Green (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978) 72˗96; J. Neusner, “Evaluating the Attributions of Saying to Named Sages in the Rabbinic Literature”, *JSJ* 45 (1994): 28˗51; L. Jacobs, “How much of the Babylonian Talmud is Pseudepigraphic?” *JJS* 28 (1977): 46˗59. Similarly, J. Neusner, “Mishnah and Messiah,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 14, (1984): 3˗11. Neusner argues that greater weight should be given to identifying the aims based on the period of the redaction of the traditions than to identifying them based on the era of the sages to whom the traditions are attributed. Therefore, my suggestions are offered with the caution appropriate in light of these reservations. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
45. See A. Hyman, *תולדות תנאים ואמוראים*, (London, 1910) 2:555˗57. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
46. Ibid. 1:210˗14. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
47. See A. Regev, *הצדוקים והלכתם* (Jerusalem:Yad Ben Zvi, 2005) 291˗330 and bibliography. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
48. G. Alon, *תולדות היהודים בארץ ישראל בתקופת המשנה והתלמוד* (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad*,* 1966) 1:14 ff.; S.W Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960) . 7:259, n.36; A. Büchler, *Die Priester und der Kultus im letzten Jahrzehnt des Jerusalemischen Tempels*, (Wien: 1895) 16˗23. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
49. See R. Kimelman, “האוליגרכיה הכהנית ותלמידי החכמים בתקופת התלמוד” *Zion*, 48 (5743): 135˗47; M. Bar, “על מנהיגים של יהודי ציפורי במאה השלישית” *Sinai*, 74 (1974):133˗38. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
50. Kahanaספרי במדבר,, 885. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
51. Kahana holds that the exchange between the second derasha of the Sifrei (117) and the second derasha of the Sifrei Zuta is also the product of dispute concerning the status of the sages in the ritual realm. We do not know who the author of the derasha in the Sifrei Zuta is; however, Kahana’s theory bolsters the assumption that the conflicting derashot reflect the dispute among the sages concerning the limits of priestly authority. Concerning hidden disputes in homiletical exegeses in halachic midrash literature, see D. Boyarin, “Analogy vs. Anomaly in Midrashic Hermeneutic: Tractates Wayyassa and Amaleq in the Mekilta,” *JAOS* 106 (1986): 660˗666 . [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
52. ראו: י' גפני, "שבט ומחוקק – על דפוסי מנהיגות חדשים בתקופת התלמוד בארץ ישראל ובבבל", כהונה ומלוכה (תשמ"ז) עמ' 79 - 91; H. Birenboim, "“A Kingdom of Priests”: Did the Pharisees Try to Live Like Priests?", [Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History?](http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/9789004217447)  (ed: [D. Schwartz](http://www.brill.com/search?search_author=Daniel%20R.%20Schwartz) & [Z. Weiss](http://www.brill.com/search?search_author=Zeev%20Weiss)), 2012, pp. 59 – 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
53. ראו: ע' עיר שי, "למקומה של הכהונה בחברה היהודית בשלהי העת העתיקה", רצף ותמורה (עורך: י' לוין), ירושלים תשס"ד, עמ' 67 – 106. עיר שי מתאר תמורה חיובית שחלה בסוף המאה הרביעית ובראשית המאה החמישית במעמדם של הכהנים, היורשים מחדש את הנהגת החכמים והנשיאות. ספרות חז"ל שנכתבה על ידי החכמים, לא תעדה תמורה זו, אולם נתן ללמוד עליה מכתבים נכריים, מהפיוט ומממצאים ארכיאולוגיים. עיר שי מביא במאמרו גם עמדת החולקים על השערה זו. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
54. See, for example, M. Hirschman, תורה לכל באי העולם: זרם אוניברסלי בספרות התנאים ויחסו לחכמת העמים (Tel Aviv: Hakkibutz Hameuchad, 1999(; M. I. Kahana, “The Halakhic Midrashim,” in *The Literature of the Sages:* Second Part, ed. P. J. Tomson, S. Safrai, Z. Safrai and J. Schwartz, (Amsterdam: Fortress Press, 2007) 52, n. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
55. This is because it speaks of two of the crowns which are subordinate to the third. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
56. See: M. Kahana, *ספרי במדבר* , 4:941, 943. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
57. Kahana, ibid., 944. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
58. See E. E. Urbach, מעולמם של חכמים (Jerusalem: Magnes 2002) 324˗25; C. Hezser, The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine, (Tübingen: Mohr Seibeck ,1997)186, 255˗306; H. Lapin, Rabbis as Romans: The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100–400 C.E, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) Chapter Three. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
59. Concerning the meaning of this term in the derasha, see S. Y. Friedman, מחקרי לשון ומינוח בספרות התלמודית, (Jerusalem, 2014) 63–65. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
60. This Tosefta is an elaboration on the Mishna in Rosh Hashanah (2:9): “Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended.” The names of the elders are not mentioned in order to teach us that each and every court of three which arose among the Israelites is like the court of Moses. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
61. Differences in readings which can be explained philologically are not dealt with here. Only additions or omissions which characterize most of the textual witnesses of this text, which I believe teach us about the tailoring of the derasha according to the lessons which change throughout the generations, are addressed. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
62. Had the elders been mentioned by name in the narrative of the covenant of the basins (Exodus 24:9), their importance would have been gauged by the proximity of their names to those of Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu. In Numbers 14, their importance would have been gauged by the proximity of their names to the description of Eldad and Medad’s exceptional prophecy. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
63. As emphasized by the tradition in the Sifra Shemini 1:7: “Moses and Aaron among His priests, Samuel, among those who call on His name, when they called to the Lord, He answered them. He spoke to them in a pillar of cloud.” This teaches us that all three were equal. Aaron is not mentioned in the Mishna in Rosh Hashanah and the comparison is only to Moses. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
64. Concerning the role of the communal leader (*parnas*) in rabbinic literature, see: Y. Levin, *מעמד החכמים בארץ ישראל בתקופת התלמוד* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 1985)109; A. Biechler, *מחקרים בתקופת המשנה והתלמוד* (Jerusalem, 1994) 21; E. Friedheim, ““מנהיגות ציבורית בתקופת המשנה והתלמוד, הערות אחדות על עמדותיהם של חכמי ישראל,” *Sinai* 119 (5757): 276˗87; R. Kimelman, ““ר' יוחנן ומעמד הרבנות *Mishpat HaIvri Annual 9-10* (1981): 329˗58. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
65. This, at least, is how it appears in all extant textual witnesses. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
66. Rabbi Yochanan was literally his teacher. See A. Hyman, *תולדות תנאים ואמוראים*, 1:49. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
67. It is interesting that Reish Lakish is mentioned in a derasha found in the Babylonian Talmud as representing the view opposing that of his teacher with respect to the term “in his generations,” which modifies the description of Noah’s righteousness. Rabbi Yochanan says “In his generations” and not in other generations. However, Reish Lakish says “In his generations” and all the more so in other generations. (BT Sanhedrin 108a) An earlier version of this dispute is attributed to Rabbi Judah and Rabbi Nehemiah (Bereishit Rabba 30:6, 275). One would have expected, based on the derasha under examination, that Reish Lakish would have been the one to define a leader’s eminence in terms of his own generation, rather than in relationship to other generations. Concerning the historical backdrop to this dispute between Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakish, see R.R. Kimelman, “The Conflict Between R. Yohanan and Resh Laqish on the Supremacy of the Patriarchate,” in *Proceedings of the Seventh World Congress of Jewish Studies*, 3:1˗20 . Kimelman holds that in his generation, Reish Lakish’s position was influenced by the prince. He demonstrates that Reish Lakish established opposition to this prince and objected to his retaining his position. The primary reason for his opposition was Reish Lakish’s questioning his greatness in Torah, relative to previous princes. If one were to accept this hypothesis, then his statement in this derasha takes on double significance, as it ostensibly contradicts his attempts at glorifying leaders of the past at the expense of the current leadership. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
68. The version in the Babylonian Talmud synthesizes that of the Tosefta and of the Palestinian Talmud. It does not contain any unique additions. The version in Midrash Samuel is essentially similar to that of Kohelet Rabba. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
69. There are other traditions which deal with the issue of Moses and Aaron’s hierarchy, but these traditions are more closely linked to the plain sense of the biblical text. They deal with the biblical Aaron, rather than with Aaron as a symbol of the status of the priests at the time of the composition of the particular derasha. For example, the derasha in the Mechiltah D’Rabbi Ishmael Masechtah D’Amalek 2, concerning Jethro’s reason for parting from the Israelites: “He said to him: ‘Does a candle benefit anyone if it isn’t in a place of darkness? What benefit does it provide if it is situated between the sun and the moon? You are the sun, and your brother, Aaron, is the moon. What can a candle accomplish situated between the two of you?’” Similarly, the derasha which explains the perplexing order in the attempt at clarifying the sentence of the gatherer in the Sifrei Numbers 113: “’To Moses and to Aaron and to the entire congregation.’” If Moses did not know, how would Aaron know? Rather, reverse the order of the words and interpret the verse. So said Rabbi Yoshiya.” [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
70. This is the reading which accords with all of the textual witnesses but is contrary to the Yalkut Shimoni, which apparently found it difficult to accept this deviation from the descriptions of equality. He therefore amended it to read: “So too Moses and Aaron taught the Israelites everything which they learned.” (Yalkut Shimoni, Song of Songs, 988). [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
71. Concerning the Psalm’s aim and the meaning of the mention of Aaron, see M. Weiss, אמונות *ודעות במזמורי תהילים*, (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 2001) 176˗81. Concerning the depictions of fraternity and a theory regarding its historical significance in the era in which the psalm was composed, see E. Assis, “Family and Community as Substitutes for the Temple after its Destruction: New Readings in Psalms 127 and 133,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 85.1 (2009): 55˗62. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
72. Indeed, this is how the exegete in the Tanhuma introduces his description of the idyll between Moses and Aaron: “That is what the verse states: ‘*If only it could be as with a brother*’ (Song of Songs 8:1). Israel says to the Holy One blessed be He, ‘*If only it could be as with a brother.’* Like which brother? One finds that from the creation of the world until the present, brothers hated each other: Caine hated his brother Abel and killed him, as it states: ‘*Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him*’ (Genesis 4:8). Ishmael hated Isaac, as it states: ‘*Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham playing*’ (Genesis 21:9). ‘Playing’ refers to his wanting to kill him, as it states: ‘*Let the young men come forward and play before us*’ (2 Samuel 2:14). And Esau hated Jacob, as it states: ‘*And Esau said in his heart etc.*’ (Genesis 27:41). And the tribes hated Jacob, as it states: ‘*And they hated him*’ (ibid. 37:4). And to which brother were the Israelites referring? Like Moses and Aaron, as it states: ‘*How good and how pleasant etc.*’ (Psalms 133:1). For they loved each other and had affection for each other. For when Moses acquired the monarchy, and Aaron became the High Priest, they did not envy each other; but, rather, were joyous in the other’s accomplishment.” (Tanhuma (B) 24). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
73. Examples include Moses rebuking Aaron after the sin of the golden calf (Exodus 32:21) and his wrath over the burning of the sin offering after the death of Aaron’s sons (Leviticus 10:16˗18). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
74. See, for example, Rabbi Isaac ben Mirion, who stated that: “The Torah teaches proper conduct. When a person fulfills a commandment, he should do so with joy […] Were Aaron to have known that The Holy One, blessed be He, was going to write about him: ‘“*Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he will be happy to see you*’ (Exodus 4:14), he would have gone out to greet him with tambourines and dancing […] (Vayikra Rabba, Bahar 34:8, 790 and parallels). And from where do we know that Aaron rejoiced in Moses’ eminence? As it states: ‘*Even now he is setting out to meet you, and he will be happy to see you*’ (Exodus 4:14) Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai taught: The heart which rejoiced in his brother Moses’s eminence is worthy of wearing the Urim and Thummim. That is what the verse states: ‘*Inside the breastpiece of decision you shall place the Urim and Thummim, so that they are over Aaron’s heart*’ (Exodus 28:30). (Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:1 (10) and its parallel in Tanhuma (B) Exodus 24).” [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
75. Parallels: Shir Hashirim Rabba 1:3 with variations in the names of the sages; Midrash Tanaim 18:26; Tanhuma (B) Shemini 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
76. See also the derasha in Tanhuma (B) Chukat 21:21. “Rabbi Tanhum ben Rabbi Yudan said: During the entire week of Inauguration Moses served as High Priest, and the Divine Presence did not rest on the Tabernacle through his service. As soon as Aaron served as High Priest, the Divine Presence rested on the Tabernacle. That is what the verse states: ‘*For today God will appear to you*.’ (Leviticus 9:4) This implies that Moses actually attempted to serve in this role.” [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
77. Parallel: Tanhuma (V) Exodus 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
78. See the explanation of Margulies in *החייבים במקרא וזכאים בתלמוד ובמדרשים*, 337˗38: “The meaning of this saying is that one who benefits from something also has to deal with the negative consequences associated with it.” Concerning the educational aspects of this derasha with regard to leadership roles which require dirtying their hands with the blood of amnion and placenta, see B. Elitzur, “מסרים אקטואליים והשפעות ביוגרפיות בפרשנות חטא נדב ואביהוא בספרות חז"ל” *Masechet* 6 (2007): 209˗11. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
79. There are parallels for each of these traditions, which may be divided into two categories presented below. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
80. Parallel: Tanhuma (V) Exodus 27:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
81. See: Y. L. Levine, “המאבק הפוליטי בין הפרושים לצדוקים בתקופה החשמונאית” *Perakim B’Toldot Yerushalayim Biymei Bayit Sheni: Sefer Zikaron L’Avraham Shalit*, ed. A. Oppenheimer, A. Rappaport and M. Stern (Jerusalem, 1981) 61˗83; J. Neusner, “The Mishnah's Conception of the Priesthood: the Aggadah versus the Halakhah,” *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 14.1 (2011): 92˗107; D.R. Schwartz, “Law and Truth: On Qumeran-Sadducean and Rabbinuc Views of Law,” *The Dead Sea Scrolls, Forty Years of Research*, ed. D. Dimant and U. Rappaport (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 229˗40. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
82. See R. Kimelman, “האוליגרכיה הכהנית ותלמידי החכמים בתקופת התלמוד”, *Zion*, 48 (1983):134˗47; G. Alon, “בניהם של חכמים” ,*Mechkarim Bitekufat Hamishnah V’Hatalmud* II, *Hakibutz Hameuchad,* (Tel Aviv, 1976) 58˗73; M. Bar, “בניו של עלי באגדות חז”ל”, *Bar Ilan*, 14˗15 (1973): 79˗93. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
83. See Y. Gafni,”שבט ומחוקק - על דפוסי מנהיגות חדשים בתקופת התלמוד בארץ ישראל ובבבל” , *Kehunah U’meluchah* (1986): 79˗91; M. Bar “על מנהיגים של יהודי ציפורי במאה השלישית”, *Sinai* 74 (1974): 133˗38; O. Bietner, *הכהנים רגזנים הם* (Tel Aviv: 2015) 44˗58. Also see references to Hammer and Bamberger in footnotes 30 and 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
84. See B. Elitzur, “מאפייני אופוזיציה מתקופת הבית השני המשנה והתלמוד בדרשות על מחלוקת קרח” *Netuim* 19 (2014): 67˗68; as well as: H. Birenboim, A Kingdom of Priests:” Did the Pharisees Try to Live Like Priests?*”* in[*Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History?*](http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/9789004217447)  ed. [D. Schwartz](http://www.brill.com/search?search_author=Daniel%20R.%20Schwartz) and [Z. Weiss](http://www.brill.com/search?search_author=Zeev%20Weiss) (Brill Online Books, 2011) 59˗68. Birenboim disagrees with Neusner’s hypothesis that the sages tried to establish a status similar to that of the priests. In his article, Birenboim shows that the sages based their status on the foundation of the instruction of the Torah and its halachah, and did not aspire to inherit either the priests’ role in religious ritual or their social status. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
85. It is necessary to qualify that this relies on the hypothesis, accepted by many scholars, which identifies the Sadducees with the Boethusians. See: A. Regev, *הצדוקים והלכתם: על דת וחברה בימי בית שני* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2005) 32˗58, and bibliography. It is also based on the assumption that the designation Menashe, together with other designations, refer to the Sadducees. Concerning the interpretation of a pesher as a veiled polemic between the members of the sect and the Sadducees, see E. Eshel and M. Kister, “A Polemic Qumeran Fragment,” *JJS* 43 (1992); 277˗281. Concerning the points of contention between the Sadducees and the Pharisees mentioned in the Mishnaic literature, see: Regev, *הצדוקים והלכתם*. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
86. V. Noam offers several means for identifying traces of these polemics in Talmudic literature in his article: V. Noam, “The Story of King Jannaeus (b. Qiddushin 66a): A Polemic Pharisaic Reply to Sectarian,” *HTR* 107.1 (2014): 31˗58.; Regev, הצדוקים והלכתם 59˗89, 98˗115, 132˗95. Concerning the points of contention between the Sadducees and the sectarian law, see: H. Warman and A. Shemesh, *ההלכה במגילות מדבר יהודה, מגילות קומראן – מבואות ומחקרים ב*, (Jersusalem, 2009) 427˗33. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
87. M. Yoma 1:5; BT Yoma 19b. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
88. M. Horayot 3:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
89. See fn. 82 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
90. In connection with this point, it is interesting to read a liturgical hymn by Rabbi Eliezer Kalir, describing Moses’s plea that his life be spared. God mentions Moses’s righteous ancestors who were sentenced to death, and argues that if they perished, then Moses must die as well. Moses rejects this argument, responding by noting his superiority to each of them. One of the righteous is Aaron, who is described by God in the following manner:

    My servant, who was compared to a divine angel,

    And serves in eternal priesthood,

    He died, and you will not?!

    Moses responds:

    It is fitting that he dies,

    He did not descend into the mist to receive that which preceded the world by two millennia (From S. Elitzur, *שירה של פרשה* [Jerusalem: Mossad Rav Kook 2007,] 328˗329).

    Moses thought that he had a clear advantage over Aaron who was like a divine angel, as only he entered the mist and received the Torah. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
91. Tanhuma (B) Shemini 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
92. ראו למשל הסיפורIn PT Shabbat 12:3, 13a. Concerning the social implications of the story, see: Kimelman, “אוליגרכיה”“.” Similarly, in Tanhuma (B) Korah 5, And see: Elitzur, ”מאפייני אופוזיציה”, 62˗68. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)