



“Aharon shall carry their names before Hashem”

The Magnificent Rationale for Having Aharon Carry the Names of Bnei Yisrael on Both Shoulders of the Eiphod and on the Choshen over His Pure Heart

This week's parsha is parshas Tetzaveh. With immense pleasure, we will explore why Aharon, the Kohen Gadol, was commanded to carry the names of the twelve shevatim of Yisrael on two of his four golden garments. Those garments were only worn by the Kohen Gadol when he performed his service in the Beis HaMikdash. The names of Bnei Yisrael were on the two shoulder straps of the Eiphod and also on the stones of the Choshen that rested over his pure heart. We will begin by reviewing the pesukim detailing the making of the Eiphod (Shemos 28, 6):

“ועשו את האפוד זהב תכלת וארגמן... שתי כתפות חוברות יהיה לו אל שני קצותיו וחיבר... ולקחת את שתי אבני שוהם ופיתחת עליהם שמות בני ישראל, ששה משמותם על האבן האחת ואת שמות הששה הנותרים על האבן השנית כתולדותם... ושמות את שתי האבנים על כתפות האפוד אבני זכרון לבני ישראל, ונשא אהרן את שמותם לפני ה' על שתי כתפיו לזכרון.”

They shall make the Eiphod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns . . . It shall have two shoulder straps attached; they shall be attached at its two ends . . . Then take two shoham (lazuli) stones and engrave on them the names of Bnei Yisrael; six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth . . . You shall place the two stones on the shoulder straps of the Eiphod, as stones for remembrance of Bnei Yisrael. Aharon shall carry their names before Hashem on both his shoulders as a remembrance.

Then, the text goes on to supply additional details (ibid. 15):

“ועשית חושן משפט מעשה חושב כמעשה אפוד תעשנו זהב תכלת וארגמן... ומילאת בו מלואת אבן ארבעה טורים... והאבנים תהיין על שמות בני ישראל שתיים עשרה על שמותם פתוחי חותם איש על שמו תהיין לשני עשר שבט... ונשא אהרן את שמות בני ישראל בחושן המשפט על לבו בבואו אל הקודש לזכרון לפני ה' תמיד.”

You shall make a Choshen HaMishpat (Breastplate of Judgment) of woven design, like the craftsmanship of the Eiphod shall you make it . . . You shall fill it with stone mountings, four rows of stone . . . The stones shall be according to the names of Bnei Yisrael, twelve according to their names, engraved like a signet ring, each according to its name shall it be, for the twelve tribes . . . Aharon shall bear the names of Bnei Yisrael on the Choshen HaMishpat over his heart when he enters the Sanctuary, as a constant remembrance before Hashem.

As such, we can only wonder why it was necessary for Aharon HaKohen to bear the names of Bnei Yisrael twice—on two separate garments—both on his shoulders and over his heart—as a remembrance before Hashem. Why did it not suffice to carry their names only over his heart? Additionally, why were the names arranged differently on the two garments? On the Eiphod, the names were split into two groups—six on the right shoulder and six on the left shoulder. Whereas on the Choshen worn over Aharon's heart,

all twelve names of Bnei Yisrael were engraved on the stones as a single group.

Aharon HaKohen Wanted to Take the Blame for the Cheit HaEigel and Remove the Stench and Stain from the People of Yisrael

Let us begin our investigation by introducing a teaching in the Gemara (Arachin 16a): **“אפוד מכפר על עבודה זרה, דכתיב אין אפוד ותרפים”**—**the Eiphod atones for avodah-zarah, as it is written (Hoshea 3, 4): “And without Eiphod or teraphim.”** As Rashi explains, this means that when there is no Eiphod, the sin of teraphim, i.e., idol worship, is present. In this light, the Panim Yafos interprets the passuk related to the Eiphod (Shemos 28, 8): **“והחשב אפודתו אשר עליו כמעשהו ממנו יהיה”**—**the belt with which it is emplaced, which is on it, shall be of the same workmanship.** He relies on the teaching in the Gemara (Kiddushin 39b) that with regards to avodah zarah, even a negative thought is considered like an action. Let us plug this fact into the words of the passuk: **“והחשב אפודתו”**—even the mere thought of avodah-zarah, for which the Eiphod atones—**“כמעשהו”**—is considered as an act of idol-worship and requires atonement. So, now let us consider: What is the connection between the Eiphod and atonement for the sin of avodah-zarah?

I had a wonderful idea! Chazal teach us in the Midrash (V.R. 10, 3) that Aharon was willing to sacrifice his life and accept upon himself the entire blame for the “cheit ha’eigel” in order to spare Yisrael from the terrible situation in which they would not have had any tikun, chas v’shalom. In that merit, HKB”H appointed Aharon to be the Kohen Gadol to provide Bnei Yisrael with atonement. This is evident from their elucidation of the following passuk (Vayikra 8, 2):

”קח את אהרן ואת בניו אתו וגו', זה שאמר הכתוב אהבת צדק ותשנא רשע... בשעה שעשו ישראל אותו מעשה, בתחילה הלכו אצל חור אמרו לו קום עשה לנו אלהים, כיון שלא שמע להן עמדו עליו והרגוהו... ואחר כך הלכו אצל אהרן אמרו לו קום עשה לנו אלהים, כיון ששמע אהרן כן מיד נתיירא...

אמר אהרן מה אעשה, הרי הרגו את חור שהיה נביא, עכשיו אם הורגים אותי שאני כהן, מתקיים עליהם המקרא שכתוב אם יהרג במקדש ה' כהן וגביא ומיד הם גוליו... אמר אהרן אם בוגיו הן [את העגל], אותו הסרחון נתלה בהן, מוטב

שיתלה הסרחון בי ולא בישראל... אמר לו הקב"ה לאהרן, 'אהבת צדק' לצדק את בני, ושנאת מזלייב, 'על כן משחך אלקים אלקיך', אמר לו, חייך שמכל שבטו של לוי לא נבחר לכהונה גדולה אלא אתה, קח את אהרן ואת בניו אתו."

"Take Aaron and his sons with him, etc." This is the implication of that which is written (Tehillim 45, 8): "You love righteousness and hate wickedness" . . . When Yisrael performed that ignoble deed, they originally approached Chur. They asked him to make them a god. When he refused their request, they attacked him and killed him . . . Afterwards, they approached Aharon, asking him to make them a god. Hearing their request, Aharon immediately became fearful. . . He deliberated as to how to proceed. They had already killed Chur, who was a prophet. If they now killed him, a kohen, they would in effect be fulfilling the passuk (Eichah 2, 20): "Should a kohen and a prophet be slain in the sanctuary of Hashem"; they would be exiled immediately. . . Aharon figured that if they make the eigel, they will be held accountable for the despicable act; it is preferable that I be held accountable and not Yisrael. . . HKB"H said to Aharon: For "loving righteousness," attempting to vindicate My children, and not wishing to hold them accountable ("hating wickedness"), "therefore, Elokim, your G-d, anointed you." He said to him: From the entire tribe of Levi, only you will be chosen to fill the position of Kohen Gadol.

We will now introduce an incredible insight from the sacred teachings of the Chasam Sofer in Toras Moshe (Ki Sisa). He explains that the concept of **“mesirus nefesh”** means sacrificing one’s spiritual self to Hashem as well as his physical self. In other words, one has to be willing to also forfeit his portion in Olam HaBa. If a person is only sacrificing his physical body in Olam HaZeh, it would not be termed **“mesiras nefesh”** but rather **“mesiras guf.”** Aharon decided to make the “eigel” to spare Yisrael and ensure that they would have the opportunity of tikun via teshuvah. He was willing to have the blame and stench of the “cheit ha’eigel” rest solely on himself, even at the expense of forfeiting his place in Olam HaBa. The Chasam Sofer adds that the Almighty, Who discerns what is truly in a person’s heart, knew

that Aharon had acted altruistically for the love of his blessed Maker and to avoid the annihilation of the entire nation for committing an aveirah l'shma. Hence, he and his descendants were chosen to fulfill the role of Kohen Gadol.

When Aharon Placed the Blame for the Cheit HaEigel upon Himself He Carried Yisrael on His Shoulders

Upon further scrutiny, it is apparent that by performing this remarkable act of self-sacrifice, Aharon was, in a sense, emulating the ways of HKB"H. For, HKB"H said to Yisrael (Shemos 19, 4): **“אתם ראיתם אשר עשיתי למצרים ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים ואביא אתכם אלי”—you have seen what I did to Mitzrayim, and that I carried you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me.** Rashi comments: **The eagle is different from the other birds for it is only afraid of man – that perhaps man will shoot an arrow at it. For no bird soars higher than the eagle, and therefore he places his young on top of him when he flies and says, “Better that the arrow should enter Me and not My children.” I too did so** (said Hashem when the Egyptians attacked Bnei Yisrael, as it says): **“And the malach of G-d travelled, etc., and came between the camp of Mitzrayim, etc.” And the Egyptians would shoot arrows and catapult stones, and the cloud would intercept them.”**

In Avodas Yisrael, the holy Maggid of Kozhnitz, zy"a, wonders: Does anyone have the power to shoot arrows against the will of the Almighty—compelling Him to proclaim, as it were: **“Better that the arrow should enter Me and not My children”**? He provides the following explanation:

“אלא הענין הוא כך, כי בשעת יציאת מצרים וקריעת ים סוף, וכן בכל זמן כשמגדיל הבורא ברוך הוא חסדיו על עמו ישראל, רוצה המקטרג לקלקל, כמו שאיתא שאמר השר [של מצרים], הללו עובדי עבודה זרה והללו עובדי עבודה זרה, ומדוע אתה ברוך הוא נושא פנים להם. וזה הקטרוג נקרא חיצים שמורה [גם על קטרוג] בלשון, כמו שכתוב (ירמיה ט-ז) חץ שחוט לשונם וכיצא בהם.

ואף על פי כן הקב"ה מגדיל חסדו, ודן את דיננו, ומוציא משפטינו לאורה, ומסיר כל המקטרגים וסותם פיהם. וזה שכינה הכתוב, ואשא אתכם על כנפי נשרים, ואומר מוטב יכנס החץ בי, שהקב"ה מסיר הקטרוג מעל עמו ישראל ולא יכנס בהם החץ, ומקבל על עצמו כביכול להשיבם תשובה ניצחת ולהסיר כל תלונה.”

When Hashem is compassionate towards us, the prosecuting angels try to intervene by finding fault with our actions. Their allegations resemble arrows. Notwithstanding, Hashem subdues and silences them; He carries us and protects us by absorbing all of the arrows our prosecutors aim at us. He accepts upon Himself, as it were, the responsibility of convincingly refuting their allegations.

This is precisely what Aharon HaKohen did by the “cheit ha'eigel.” He avoided allowing himself to be killed, as Chur did, because then Yisrael would not have been afforded the opportunity of tikun. Instead, he sacrificed his spiritual self with his willingness to forfeit his place in Olam HaBa. In this admirable way, he carried Yisrael on his shoulders like an eagle carries its young. Therefore, HKB"H chose him specifically to be the Kohen Gadol, the agent to provide Yisrael atonement.

We can now begin to comprehend the profound wisdom of the blessed Almighty. He commanded Aharon to wear the Eiphod, and to attach straps on each shoulder with stones upon which the names of the twelve shevatim of Yisrael were engraved—half on his right shoulder and half on his left. Thus, he alluded to the fact that in the commission of the “cheit ha'eigel,” the shevatim were divided. Shevet Levi and the tzaddikim from the other shevatim did not participate in that momentous sin; however, the other shevatim that did not align themselves with shevet Levi were guilty of the “cheit ha'eigel.”

Along came Aharon, a member of shevet Levi, who did not have anything to do with the “cheit ha'eigel,” and, nevertheless, was willing to sacrifice his life on behalf of Yisrael. To commemorate his “mesirus nefesh,” Aharon was commanded to wear the names of the tribes of Yisrael on his two shoulders—divided up into two groups. This is the significance of the passuk: **“And Aharon shall carry their names before Hashem on both his shoulders as a remembrance.”** HKB"H intended to highlight the memory of Aharon's heroic, selfless act. Thus, it was apparent to all that Aharon merited the position of Kohen Gadol, to provide Yisrael with atonement,

because he was willing to sacrifice his life and soul to save Yisrael from annihilation. Therefore, it was fitting for HKB"H to receive the korbanos he offered on behalf of Yisrael.

At this point, it gives me great pleasure to explain why the Eiphod atones for the sin of avodah-zarah. For, as explained, the two stones on its two shoulder-straps with the names of the twelve shevatim of Yisrael engraved on them, commemorated the "mesirus nefesh" of Aharon in the matter of the "cheit ha'eigel." Therefore, the Eiphod specifically atones for the sin of avodah-zarah just like Aharon atoned for the "cheit ha'eigel."

The Twelve Names of Bnei Yisrael Were Etched on the Choshen which Sat over Aharon's Heart so that He Would Illuminate and Inspire Them with His Pure Heart to Unite

Following this enlightening path, we will proceed to explain the reason HKB"H commanded Aharon to also bear the names of the twelve shevatim on the Choshen over his heart. As explained, the twelve names of Yisrael that he carried on his two shoulders were a remembrance before Hashem that since Aharon was willing to shoulder the blame for Yisrael, he was worthy to be the Kohen Gadol to provide atonement for the "cheit ha'eigel" and the cheit of avodah-zarah in general. This constituted a process of **"סור—avoiding negative, bad behavior.** Aharon, however, also was privileged to bestow the Berachos of Birkas Kohanim upon Yisrael—a process of **"עשה טוב—acting in a positive, good manner.** This is evident from the following pesukim (Bamidbar 6, 22): **"וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, דבר אל אהרן ואל בניו לאמר, כה תברכו את בני ישראל אמור להם, יברכך ה' וישמרך, יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחונך, ישא ה' פניו אליך וישם לך שלום."** **And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying, "Thus shall you bless Bnei Yisrael. Say to them, 'May Hashem bless you and protect you. May Hashem shine His Countenance upon you and find favor with you. May Hashem lift His Countenance toward you and bring you peace.'"**

It appears that we can explain the reason that Aharon and his offspring merited bestowing the Berachos of Birkas Kohanim on Yisrael based on the following Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 11, 7): **"רבי שמעון בן חלפתא אמר, גדול שלום שאין כלי מקבל ברכה אלא שלום, שנאמר ה' יברך את עמו בשלום, אף בברכת כהנים אחר כל ברכות סיימן בשלום וישם לך שלום, לומר עמו בשלום."** **Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta said: Great is shalom; for there is no vessel that receives berachah other than shalom, as it says (Tehillim 29, 11): "Hashem will bless His people with shalom." Even in Birkas Kohanim, after all of the Berachos, He concludes them with shalom: "And bring you shalom"—to convey that the Berachos are meaningless unless they are accompanied by shalom.**

This teaches us that all of the Berachos are of no value if shalom does not prevail among the people of Yisrael. Without shalom, it is analogous to a person who goes to draw water from a well with a bucket that is full of holes and cracks. Clearly, any water that he draws from the well will spill out onto the ground. Therefore, HKB"H concludes Birkas Kohanim with the berachah of shalom: **"וישם לך שלום"**; because we have an important principle (Berachos 12a): **"הכל הולך—everything follows the conclusion** (of the berachah). So, if shalom prevails among Yisrael, then they possess the vessel necessary to retain all of the Berachos contained in and forthcoming from Birkas Kohanim.

This explains magnificently why HKB"H chose Aharon and his descendants to bless Yisrael in this manner. For, the Gemara teaches us a fundamental principle (B.M. 107b): **"קשוט עצמך ואחר כך קשוט אחרים—first correct yourself and only afterwards correct others.** In other words, in order to bestow the blessing of shalom upon others, one must first have achieved that midah to perfection in himself. Now, Aharon was the personification of the midah of shalom, as we are taught in the Mishnah (Avos 1, 12): **"הלל אומר, הוי מתלמידי—Hillel says: Be among the disciples of Aharon—love peace and promote peace, love your fellow creatures and bring them closer to Torah."**

Furthermore, we have an explicit passuk extolling the virtue of Aharon (Bamidbar 20, 29): **“ויראו כל העדה—the entire assembly witnessed that Aharon had perished; they wept for Aharon thirty days—the entire house of Yisrael.** Rashi comments: Everyone grieved over Aharon’s death, both men and women alike, since he was the ultimate peacemaker—he promoted shalom and amity among disputants, and between husbands and wives. Therefore, it was only fitting for Aharon HaKohen, the epitome of shalom, to be the agent to bestow the Berachos of Birkas Kohanim on Yisrael—the Berachos that culminate with the berachah of shalom—Aharon’s trademark.

As a Reward for Rejoicing in His Heart He Was Privileged to Don the Choshen over His Heart

Continuing onward on this sublime path, we will now explain the reason for the following command: **“Aharon shall bear the names of Bnei Yisrael on the Choshen HaMishpat over his heart when he enters the Sanctuary, as a constant remembrance before Hashem.”** Chazal teach us that Aharon was granted the privilege of wearing the Choshen HaMishpat over his heart, because he demonstrated a benevolent heart toward his younger brother, Moshe.

This is apparent from HKB”H’s statement to Moshe (Shemos 4, 14): **“הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי ידעתי כי דבר ידבר הוא וגם הנה—is there not your brother Aharon, the levi? I know that he will surely speak; moreover, behold, he is going out to meet you, and when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart.** Rashi comments: **“And when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart”:** Not as you think, that he will resent your attaining a high position. Because of this, Aaron merited the ornament of the Choshen, which is placed over the heart. The source for this comment is the Gemara (Shabbas 139a): **“בשכר וראך ושמח בלבו זכה לחושן המשפט על לבו.”**

We will now present a fascinating passage from the Midrash Tanchuma (Shemos 27) expounding on the passuk (Shemos 4, 27):

“ויאמר ה' אל אהרן לך לקראת משה המדבר, זה שאמר הכתוב מי יתנך כאח לי. ישראל אומרים לפני הקב"ה, מי יתנך כאח לי, את מוצא כל האחים שונאים זה לזה, קין שונא להבל... ישמעאל שונא ליצחק... עשו שונא ליעקב... השבטים שונא ליוסף...”

“Hashem said to Aharon, ‘Go meet Moshe in the midbar.’” This is the implication of the passuk (Shir HaShirim 8, 1): “O, that You were like a brother to me.” (The Midrash is perplexed) Yisrael say to HKB”H, “O, that You were like a brother to me”; yet, you find that all brothers hate each other. Kayin hated Hevel . . . Yishmael hated Yitzchak . . . Eisav hated Yaakov . . . the shevatim hated Yosef . . .

ובאיזה אח אמרו ישראל להקב"ה, כמשה ואהרן, שנאמר הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד, שהיו אוהבין ומחבבין זה את זה, שבשעה שנטל משה את המלכות ואהרן את הכהונה, לא שנאו זה את זה, אלא היו שמחים זה בגדולת זה וזה בגדולת זה.

So, which brother is Yisrael speaking of to HKB”H? Like Moshe and Aharon, as it says (Tehillim 133, 1): “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together.” For, they loved and appreciated each other. When Moshe took the kingship and Aharon the priesthood, they did not hate each other; rather, they each rejoiced in the other’s greatness (rise to power).

תדע לך שבשעה שאמר הקב"ה למשה שילך בשליחותו אצל פרעה, ואמר לו שלח נא ביד תשלח, את סבור שמה עיכב משה שלא רצה לילך, אינו כן אלא כמכבד לאהרן, אמר משה עד שלא עמדתי, היה אהרן אחי מתנבא להם במצרים שמונים שנה... אמר משה כל השנים האלו היה אהרן אחי מתנבא, ועכשיו אני נכנס בתחומי Know that when HKB”H instructed Moshe to go on his mission to Pharaoh, and he (Moshe) said to Him (Shemos 4, 13): **“Send by the hand of whomever You will send”—you might have thought that Moshe was stalling, because he did not want to go. It is not so; rather, he was acting out of respect for Aharon. Moshe said: “Until I came onto the scene, Aharon, my brother, prophesied for them in Mitzrayim for eighty years” . . . Moshe said, “And, now, I am intruding in my brother’s territory and he will be upset.” Therefore, he did not want to go.**

אמר ליה הקב"ה למשה, לא אכפת לאהרן בדבר זה, לא די שאינו מיצר אלא עוד שמח, תדע לך שאמר ליה וגם הנה הוא יוצא לקראתך וראך ושמח בלבו, אינו אומר ושמח בפיו או ושמח בלבו, אלא ושמח בלבו. אמר רשב"י הלב ששמח בגדולת אחיו, יבוא וישמח וילבש אורים ותומים, שנאמר ונתת אל חושן המשפט את האורים ואת התומים והיו על לב אהרן."

HKB"H said to Moshe: Aharon does not care about this (this does not bother him). Not only is he not upset, but he is very happy. Know that He said to him (ibid. 14): "Moreover, behold, he is going out to meet you and he will see you and he will rejoice in his heart." It does not say that he expressed happiness or was simply happy, but rather that his heart was happy. Rashbi said: The heart that rejoiced in his brother's greatness, should come and rejoice and wear the Urim V'Tumim, as it says (ibid. 28, 30): "Into the Choshen HaMishpat shall you place the Urim and the Tumim, and they shall be on Aharon's heart."

We now have cause to rejoice! We can begin to comprehend the profound reasoning of HKB"H for issuing the command: "ונשא אהרן את שמות בני ישראל בחושן המשפט על לבו בבואו אל הקודש לזכרון לפני ה' תמיד". For, as we learn from this Midrash, Aharon was the first of all the brothers that preceded him to exist amicably and happily with his younger brother Moshe. In fact, his brother's rise to greatness gave him genuine joy and pride, as attested to by HKB"H: "When he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart." In fact, we see that Aharon felt genuine love not only for his brother Moshe but for all of Yisrael. Hence, he is characterized as: "אוהב שלום ורודף שלום".

Therefore, in his infinite mercy, kindness, and wisdom, HKB"H commanded: "Aharon shall bear the names of Bnei Yisrael on the Choshen HaMishpat over his heart"—he should gather together the names of all twelve shevatim of Yisrael and place them in the Choshen HaMishpat, in one place, over his pure heart. Thus, his heart will exert a positive influence over all the twelve shevatim of Yisrael to live together harmoniously, in keeping with the depiction: "וראך ושמח בלבו". Thus, he will be able to impart the abundant good inherent in all the Berachos in the merit of the shalom that will prevail among the people of Yisrael "when he enters the Sanctuary, as a constant remembrance before Hashem."

In conclusion, the twelve names of Bnei Yisrael that Aharon bore on his two shoulders (split six and six) were to commemorate before Hashem the "mesirus nefesh" demonstrated by Aharon when there was divisiveness among the shevatim of Yisrael. At that time, Aharon accepted upon himself the blame for the "cheit ha'eigel" rationalizing: "It is preferable that the stench be attributed to me and not to Yisrael." In that merit, HKB"H chose him to the Kohen Gadol responsible for the atonement of Bnei Yisrael. Whereas the placement of the twelve names of Bnei Yisrael over his pure heart, all together in one place, was designed to instill brotherly love and harmony from the love in his heart in all of Yisrael. In that situation, they will merit all of the Berachos inherent in the Birkas Kohanim that culminate with the berachah "וישם לך שלום"—and He will bring you shalom!

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