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A PORTRAIT OF AARON AS REFLECTED IN THE AGGADA

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for Ordination

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A man who, like Aaron, loved peace and pursued it.

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INTRODUCTION

My own love for Aggada has developed over the course of my studies these past five years. I was taken from the start with the creativity apparent throughout the Aggada and the way in which this reflected a tremendous amount of freedom of expression. The process of arriving at a better understanding of the Biblical text by means of thoughtful consideration of not only what is written, but by "reading between the lines," is an exercise that I find particularly stimulating and exciting. As a rabbi, I shall be engaged in the process of struggling with the Biblical text in order to derive meanings from it that are often less than explicit. In facing the challenge of bringing Torah to the members of my community, I know of no more accessible and useful means of accomplishing this than the process of midrash. Therefore, I chose to write a Rabbinic Thesis in the area of Midrash in order to: 1) expose myself to a large number of aggadic passages, which can be extremely useful in my future teaching and preaching endeavors, and 2) by reading an extensive amount of Aggada, to become familiar with the midrashic process.

My specific interest in the aggadic portrait of Aaron however, sprang from the very ambivalent picture of him in the Bible. Even a cursory reading of the Biblical text results in the realization that Aaron played an important role in the leadership of the Israelite nation, though he is rarely heralded as an important figure. It is easy to understand why this is the case given Aaron's existence alongside Moses, who is clearly the central leadership figure in the Bible.¹ I, therefore, was particularly interested in seeing how the rabbis dealt with Aaron. As part of the requirements of one midrash course I took, I did a study of the Golden Calf incident as presented

in the Midrash Ha-Gadol and Yalkut Shimoni, and was fascinated with the way Aaron was portrayed in these texts. As anthologies, both present rather unified pictures of Aaron, and it was my desire to discover whether this was the case throughout the Aggadah; if so, why, and if not, why not.

In contrast to the Rabbinic material, the Biblical portrait of Aaron is not very well developed. Nothing is revealed of his birth, early life, or upbringing. Nahum Sarna points out, in this regard:

The difficulty of reconstructing a comprehensive biography and evaluation of Aaron is due to the meager and fragmentary nature of the data available. It is aggravated by the fact that details are scattered over several originally independent sources which, in the form they have come down to us, represent an interweaving of various traditions.... Moreover, consideration has to be given to the possibility that the picture of Aaron, the archetypal High Priest, may well be an idealized retrojection of a later period, and that subsequent developments have influenced the narratives in the Pentateuch.²

Some scholars, such as Theodor Mauch, even suggest that Aaron, the priest, should be seen as a totally different figure than Aaron, Moses' brother and partner:

The Bible reveals two Aarons: one is the brother and partner of Moses, leading Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness; the other is a priest and progenitor of an exclusive priestly class, the "sons of Aaron," the Aaronides. The prophets and the writers of Samuel and Kings know only the first Aaron, while the second Aaron (and the Aaronides) co-exists with the first Aaron in the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges. Scholars have consistently demonstrated that the Aaron who sires a priesthood is to be found exclusively in the so-called P Source.³

Mauch goes to great lengths to prove this point, but it is not particularly helpful in understanding how the rabbis viewed Aaron. In the first place, the Documentary Hypothesis originated in the nineteenth century, and the latest works dealt with in this study are

from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Moreover, even if this scholarly technique had been in vogue in the times of the rabbis, it would not have had much of an impact on the rabbinic interpretation of the Bible. The intent of the Aggada was not to provide a critical, scholarly understanding, but to provide "amplification of those portions of the Bible which include narrative, history, ethical maxims, and the reproofs and consolations of the prophets".⁴ To this end, an understanding of the Biblical portrait of Aaron as one figure, both the brother and partner of Moses and the progenitor of the priestly class, is a necessary prerequisite to an investigation of the rabbinic portrait of Aaron.

It should be noted that in the Bible, Aaron's role is generally presented as being subordinate to Moses. He becomes an important figure in the leadership of Israel as a result of Moses' reluctance to assume the leadership alone. He is involved in the leadership of Israel as Moses' spokesman, performing God's sign with Moses in the presence of the Israelites, and in bringing the Ten Plagues.⁵ "For the rest, he is merely a passive associate of his brother".⁶ Aaron's role as a leader, while certainly not unimportant, was clearly not as central as that of Moses.

The Biblical incident that would present the greatest problems for the rabbis is the building of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32). Sarna explains that in Moses' absence, Aaron yielded to the popular desire to build a Golden Calf, which was subsequently worshipped by the Israelites. Not only does he make no attempt "to dissuade the would-be idolators," he assumes the role of their leader, issuing instructions, producing the idol, building an altar, and proclaiming a religious

festival (Exodus 32:2-5). While his culpability is emphasized, there is likewise a tendency to deemphasize his role in the incident. The initiative for building the idol comes from the people (Exodus 32:1). It is they, and not he, who declare the divinity of the calf (Exodus 32:4), and, despite Aaron's involvement, he was not disqualified from the priesthood.⁷ The Biblical text simply does not explain why, in spite of Aaron's involvement in this incident, he still merited the priesthood. It was not surprising, then, to discover that a great amount of material in the Aggada is devoted to this issue specifically, and to a positive presentation of Aaron's character, in general.

In order to locate the extensive rabbinic material, the first step was to isolate all references to Aaron in the Biblical text, as well as those narrative and poetic portions in which Aaron's presence was already established, and sometimes was referred to by a pronoun, e.g., Exodus 32. The next step was to consult verse indices of Rabbinic Literature, such as Torah Ha-Ketuvah V'ha-Mesorah⁸ and Torah Sheleimah⁹ to locate specific passages which cite these Biblical verses. While many of these passages (more than 1000) had no direct bearing on the topic of this study, a number of pertinent passages were identified in this manner. I was then able to add to this collection by consulting three midrashic collections: M. Gross' Otzar Ha-Aggada,¹⁰ J.O. Eisenstein's Otzar Midrashim,¹¹ and Ginzberg's Legends of the Jews.¹² Here, a far greater percentage of the passages cited were relevant to this study. Finally, the indices to the English translation of the Babylonian Talmud and to Midrash Rabbah led to the discovery of several germane passages not located previously.

Once a list of passages was compiled, the next step involved a

thorough perusal of each of these passages in order to determine their applicability to this study. Many passages cite one or more biblical verses which refer to Aaron in the context of making a point about a matter totally unconnected to Aaron. In addition, numerous passages only mention Aaron in a discussion of the role and responsibilities of priests in general, and present no discussion of Aaron in particular. In both cases, these passages were not utilized. Only those passages that would yield some insight into the rabbinic view of Aaron himself were considered.

Once the passages that were considered appropriate were gathered and copied, countless hours were spent reading and re-reading these passages, until the thrust of each passage was clear. Subsequent re-readings led to insights into motif, uses of specific language, types of hermeneutics employed, and any striking similarities to or differences from other passages. Based on the nature of the material, it was decided that the most desirable format was a division based on theme. While there would certainly be value in employing other arrangements, the answer to the central question of how the rabbis explained Aaron's becoming High Priest in spite of his involvement in the Golden Calf incident could be best presented in this manner.

The chapters of this thesis build for the most part upon each other. We begin with an examination of Aaron's status as presented in the Aggadah (Chapter One), followed by a presentation of Aaron's leadership role (Chapter Two), and Aaron's relationship to both Moses and Miriam (Chapter Three). The final substantive chapter deals with the treatment of Aaron's death (Chapter Four).

Though this work is far from exhaustive, and may not be the last word on this subject, it does represent an effort at painting with broad strokes a portrait of Aaron as reflected in the Aggada. Hopefully, it will provide us with some insight into both the midrashic process and the rabbis' world view as seen in their treatment of Aaron, the brother of Moses and the Israelite High Priest.

CHAPTER ONE

AARON'S STATUS

In order to understand how the rabbis viewed Aaron's character, personality and role as a leader of the Israelite nation, it is necessary to first analyze his status according to Rabbinic tradition. As was stated in the Introduction,¹ the Biblical portrait of Aaron indicates certain aspects of Aaron's status, such as his role as priest, as teacher, and his partnership with Moses in the leadership of the Israelites. However, as is to be expected, the rabbis expanded upon certain key aspects of Aaron's status, presumably as a backdrop for developing the overall portrait of Aaron much further. It is important to note that although there is a great deal of divergence among the various rabbinic texts, and even within any one of them, regarding individual aspects of the portrait of Aaron, each of these differences may be traced to a particular view of Aaron's status.

A. Aaron as a Prophet/Receiver of Revelation

As might be expected, there is not clear agreement amongst the various aggadic texts as to whether or not Aaron received divine revelation, and therefore possessed the status of prophet. The Bible is not very specific on this point and so there was great room for interpretation on the part of the rabbis. In fact, we find three distinct outlooks: 1) Moses received revelation, and, in turn, communicated it to Aaron, 2) Aaron received divine revelation along with Moses, and 3) Moses received most of the divine revelation alone, though Aaron did share in the process on occasion.

1. Moses Alone Received Divine Revelation

Several different approaches are utilized to show that Aaron did not receive divine revelation. Sifrei Bamidbar, Piska 117, treats the matter most curtly:

"And the Lord spoke unto Aaron" (Leviticus 10:8). Since I might understand from this that the revelation was given directly to Aaron, therefore Scripture states, "A remembrance for the Israelites (that one should not approach)" (Numbers 17:5). Thus we learn that the revelation was given to Moses, that he should communicate it to Aaron.

Here, the midrash actually reverses the Biblical statement, attempting to discredit the notion that Aaron received divine revelation directly, in spite of the fact that the text clearly indicates otherwise. Perhaps it should be inferred that the issue was of no great concern to the author of this passage, since the passage deals with the matter with such brevity. Nonetheless, the matter was certainly of some concern or the point would not have been made at all.

A more involved attempt to bring out the same point is to be found in Bamidbar Rabbah 14:19. A much later text, though also exegetical like Sifrei Bamidbar, Bamidbar Rabbah deals with those Biblical verses in which we are told that both Moses and Aaron received divine revelation, and does not consider those instances where the Biblical text clearly indicates that revelation was given to Aaron (e.g., Numbers 16:8):

R. Judah b. Bathyra expounded: Thirteen divine communications are recorded in the Torah as having been made to Moses and Aaron, and corresponding to these,

thirteen limiting phrases are recorded, in order to inform you that they were not spoken to Aaron but to Moses that he should tell Aaron.....You have here a total of thirteen limiting phrases, and their purpose is to show that Aaron was excluded in all instances.

Again, we see an effort to limit Aaron's status to that of an indirect receiver of revelation, though greater than the average Israelite. In these cases, the divine revelation is communicated directly to Aaron by Moses, whereas the rest of the Israelites received this communication *en masse*, either from Moses and Aaron or the Elders of Israel.

We now turn to a passage that reflects some of the tension felt regarding Aaron's status in this regard, and an effort is made to balance the image of Aaron by presenting him as possessing other admirable character traits. We read in Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 37:

Seven qualities characterize the fool and seven the wise man: The wise man does not speak before him that is greater than he in wisdom or in age; he does not break into his fellow's speech; he is not in a rush to reply; he asks what is relevant and replies to the point; he speaks of first things first and of last things last; of what he has not heard he says 'I have not heard,' and is not ashamed to admit it; and he acknowledges what is true. Correspondingly, the opposites apply to the ignorant man. The wise man does not speak before him that is greater than he in wisdom or in age. Such was Moses, for it is said, "And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people" (Exodus 4:30). Who indeed was qualified to speak, Moses or Aaron? Surely Moses! - for Moses heard the words from the mouth of the Almighty, while Aaron heard them only from the mouth of Moses. But thus thought Moses: 'Shall I then speak while my older brother is standing by?' He therefore said to Aaron: 'Speak, thou!' That is why it is said, "And Aaron spoke all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses."

He does not break into his fellow's speech: Such was Aaron for it is said: "Then Aaron spoke.. Behold, this day have they offered their sin offering, and their burnt offering...and there have befallen me such things as these" (Leviticus 10:19): He kept quiet until Moses finished what he wanted to say, and Aaron did not say to him, 'Cut thy

words short.' Only afterward did he say to Moses, "Behold, this day they have brought their offerings - although we are in mourning!"

Some say: Aaron drew Moses aside out of the midst of the congregation and said to him: 'Moses, my brother, if of tithes, which are of lesser sanctity, a mourner is forbidden to eat, how much more should a mourner be forbidden to eat of sin offerings which are of higher sanctity!' Forthwith Moses agreed with him, as it is said, "And when Moses heard that, it was well-pleasing in his sight" (Leviticus 10:20) and in the sight of the Almighty.

Several points must be made here. Again, the midrash is concerned with establishing that only Moses received divine revelation directly. However, this notion is more stated than it is proved by the passage, indicating that there was an already existent and accepted tradition upon which the statement was based. In addition, the passage seems to concern itself more with an explanation as to why Aaron and not Moses communicated the divine revelation to the Israelites. In sum, we see a picture of Aaron as, if you will, the "middle-man" for the communication of the divine revelation, but not as a prophet himself.

This passage not only demonstrates Aaron's worthiness to pass on the divine revelation, but even more importantly also offers some insight into his importance as a leader of Israel. Though not qualified to receive the revelation himself, he ~~was~~ qualified to instruct Moses in matters of law. Clearly, the author(s) of this passage had a great desire to present Aaron as the possessor of certain qualities and of a special status, but did not wish to grant him the status of prophet.

A similar point regarding Aaron's status as communicator but not receiver of the divine revelation can be seen in Midrash Tanhuma (Ha-Nidpas), Shemot #29:

"And Moses told Aaron all of the words of the Lord" (Exodus 16:9). Moses began to tell him all that the Holy

One, Blessed be He, told to him, including how to go on, and how to do the signs. As a result, they became equal when they came into the presence of the elders, as it is written, "And Moses and Aaron gathered together all the Elders of the Israelites."

Here, again, we see the assumption that the divine revelation was given directly to Moses, who communicated it to Aaron. At the same time, the status of Aaron as being qualified to transmit the divine revelation is clearly stated.

In all of the above mentioned passages, some effort was made to exclude Aaron from the status of prophet, even in those cases where the Biblical text indicates the contrary. It is evident that the compilers of these particular texts desired to present Moses as the only true prophet of that time, while at the same time not wanting to diminish too much the importance of Aaron's role and his status in the Israelite community. He was portrayed as being worthy of transmitting the divine revelation, but not quite worthy enough to receive it.

2. Both Moses and Aaron Received Divine Revelation

Several passages, however, stress that Aaron received divine revelation, and by doing so make other points about Aaron and Moses as well.

In Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, Aaron is presented as having received divine revelation as part of an effort to grant him and Moses equal status:

"In a pillar of cloud God spoke" (Psalms 99:7). Moses was spoken to from the cloud, as it is written, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud" (Exodus 24:15). Aaron

(was spoken to from the cloud), (as it is written) "And the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud...and he called Aaron..." (Numbers 12:5). The Torah was written by (both) Moses and Aaron, (as it is written) of Moses, "Remember the Torah of Moses my servant" (Malachi 3:22), and (as it is written) of Aaron, "the Torah of truth was in his mouth" (Malachi 2:6).²

In this passage not only is Aaron presented as having received divine revelation, just as Moses did, but in the very same manner. In addition, the writing of the Torah is ascribed to Aaron as well as Moses, something not readily apparent from the Biblical text. However, no explanation of why Aaron was afforded this status is given.

In Vayikra Rabbah 13:1, we again see that Aaron, too, received the divine revelation, and here we are also given a reason and justification for it. The passage deals with the question of whether or not Aaron should be eating of the sin offering on the day that his sons died and stressed that Aaron convinced Moses that he should not. The passage then continues:

Immediately, "Moses heard that, and it was well-pleasing in his sight" (Lev. 10:20), and he issued a proclamation to all the host, saying, 'I made an error in regard to the law, and Aaron my brother came and taught it to me.' Eleazar, too, had known the law, and he, too, kept silence. (As a reward for this,) they were privileged in that divine speech was addressed directly to them, to their father, and to their father's brother in their lifetime. This is (indicated by) what is written: "And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron, saying to them," (with regard to which) R. Hiyya taught: "To them" means to the sons, viz., to Eleazar and Ithamar.

Here, Aaron's status as prophet is based on the respect his sons showed for Moses, and not due to any overtly positive action by or character trait of Aaron, other than, perhaps, having raised these two sons properly. It is interesting to note that in a parallel passage, Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 37,³ the point is clearly made that Aaron **did**

not receive divine revelation, although the same story of Aaron instructing Moses in that matter of law is presented. In fact, Vayikra Rabbah is a slightly more recent work than Avot d'Rabbi Nathan,⁴ and may reflect a desire on the part of the redactor to utilize a pre-existent tradition to make a point about Aaron that was not desired in the earlier text. It is also worthwhile to note here the redactor's wish to grant the status of prophet not only to Aaron, but to his sons as well, though conspicuously not to Moses' sons. This can only be viewed as an attempt by the redactor of this passage to strengthen Aaron's status.

In Shemot Rabbah 7:1, we again see an explanation of why Aaron was accorded the status of receiver of revelation, but for a very different reason than in the preceding passage:

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron, and gave them a charge unto the Israelites" (Ex. 6:13). It is written: "In all labor there is profit, but the talk of the lips tends only to poverty" (Prov. 14:23). Whenever in dealing with any matter a man takes into consideration words of the Torah, he receives a reward for them. Does the same apply to idle speech? Not so, since the verse adds, "but the talk of the lips tends only to poverty." You thus find that Joseph, who should have been imprisoned no more than ten years on account of slandering his ten brothers, was imprisoned for two further years for saying to the chief butler: "but have me in your remembrance when it shall be well with you...and make mention of me unto Pharaoh" (Gen. 40:14), as it says, "And it came to pass at the end of two full years" (Gen. 41:1). Thus also Moses was at first worthy of receiving alone the Divine communication, but because he said, "Send, I pray you, by the hand of him whom you will send" (Ex. 6:13), it was said to him "Is there not Aaron, thy brother, the Levite?" (Ex. 6:13). Here too, he said, "Behold, the Israelites have not hearkened unto me" (Ex. 6:12). Now all the miracles should have been performed only by him, but because of this, the divine speech was addressed jointly to him and to Aaron, as it says: "and the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron."

In this passage, Aaron's status as prophet was acquired not of his own

merit, but as a result of Moses' reluctance to receive the divine revelation on his own. The picture that is presented, in fact, is one that detracts from the status of both Moses and Aaron, i.e., Aaron's status as prophet is granted as a form of punishment of Moses. The effort is made here not to glorify either Moses or Aaron, but to show that Aaron's status as prophet is a direct corollary of Moses' status. Interestingly, the next passage in the very same text draws a similar conclusion about Aaron's status, but based on somewhat different reasons:

It is written, "Lo, all these things does God work twice, even three times, with a man" (Job 33:29). Three times does he wait for a man; if he repents, then all is well; but if not, He visits upon him even the first of his iniquities. So you find, too, in the case of Moses: When God first said to him, "Go, and I will send you unto Pharoah," (Exodus 3:18) he first said, "Behold, they will not believe me" (Exodus 4:1), then he added "I am not a man of words" (Exodus 4:10), and finally, "send, I pray you, by the hand of him whom you will send" (Exodus 4:13)...three excuses. Seeing that still he did not retract, but even added, "Behold, the Israelites have not hearkened unto me," the divine word was communicated to Aaron, too, as it says, "And the Lord spoke unto Moses and unto Aaron" (Exodus 6:13).⁵

again, the reason given for Aaron's status as prophet is based on Moses' incapability of receiving revelation alone. As opposed to the previous passage, here Aaron is called not so much as a punishment to Moses, but as a result of Moses' refusal to go by himself to Pharoah. As in the previous passage, though, the picture is clearly one of Moses' reluctance and Aaron's status being an afterthought due to Moses' actions. Aaron did not receive revelation as a reward for his merit.

3. Moses Received Most Divine Communications Alone

It is now evident that there is a great deal of tension within the various passages that deal with the question of Aaron's status as prophet. No clear picture emerges as to whether or not Aaron did in fact receive divine revelation, nor is there agreement as to what the reasons were. What does emerge, though, is the awareness that throughout, Aaron's status, whether he is or is not a prophet, is secondary to that of Moses, and, in fact, based on Moses' status. Perhaps the clearest example of this is to be found in Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Pischa, Chapter 1:

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt saying...." From this I might understand that the divine word was addressed to both Moses and Aaron. When, however, it says, "and it came to pass on the day when the Lord spoke unto Moses in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 6:28), it shows that the divine word was addressed to Moses alone and not to Aaron. If so, what does Scripture mean to teach by saying here "unto Moses and Aaron"? It merely teaches that just as Moses was perfectly fit to receive the divine words, so was Aaron perfectly fit to receive the divine words. And why then did he not speak to Aaron? In order to grant distinction to Moses. Thus you must say that Aaron was not directly addressed in any of the divine communications of the Torah, with the exception of three, for in the case of these three, it is impossible to say that they were not directly addressed to him.

The question of Aaron's status is most clearly dealt with here, at once affirming Aaron's fitness for prophecy, and indeed, his actual occasional status as prophet, while, at the same time, subjugating Aaron to a status slightly lower than that of Moses.

Throughout the Aggada, there is a strong attempt to present Aaron in a positive light, and this includes Aaron's worthiness to be, and status as, a prophet. However, there does not seem to have been great

concern on the rabbis' part to present a consistent picture of Aaron's status as a prophet, since different works present alternative understandings of the same issue. Indeed, different responses are present in texts which even emanate from the same approximate time periods, e.g., the Mechilta d'Rabbi Ischmael and Avot d'Rabbi Nathan.

B. The Priesthood

No explanation of why Aaron became the High Priest is to be found in the Bible. In contrast, this question is of primary concern to the rabbis, and the passages in this section begin to answer it, stating that Aaron's claim to the priesthood is immutable.

1. The Immutability of Aaron's Claim to the Priesthood

One notion prevalent in Rabbinic Literature is that the choice of Aaron was pre-determined. Shemot Rabbah 37:4 explains in this regard:

"From among the Israelites" (Exodus 28:1). Out of all countries, the Holy One, blessed be He, chose the land of Israel, and from the land of Israel, he selected the Temple, and from Temple he selected only the Holy of Holies. Similarly, God selected Israel, and from Israel He selected the tribe of Levi, and of the tribe of Levi He chose Aaron, as it says, "And I did choose him out of all of the tribes of Israel to be My Priest" (I Sam. 2:28)

The choice of Aaron is not explained, but is to be accepted as part of the Divine Will, in the same way that the Holy of Holies was chosen, and one cannot ask why. Apparently, no justification was deemed necessary or appropriate; Aaron was chosen, and it is not a

matter for further consideration. On a somewhat similar note, we see in Bamidbar Rabbah 18:4 that the unsuccessful rebellion attempt by Korach and his followers, in fact was scuttled by virtue of the immutability of Aaron's claim to the Priesthood:

"And bring thou near unto thee Aaron thy brother and his sons with him" (Ex. 28:1). Behold, they are facing us with intent to slay us! Said he: "In this morning the Lord will show who are his" (Num. 16:5). What is the reason why he chose such a time? R. Nathan explained: The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'If all the magicians of the world were to assemble and try to turn the morning into evening they would not be able to do so. Therefore as I have made a partition between light and darkness, so have I set Aaron apart to sanctify him as most holy.'

Again, the choice of Aaron is fixed and immutable, and is as set as in the division between night and day. The rabbis seem to feel that no justification is necessary.

Justification is evident, though, in Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, (pp. 73-74):

How great is peace, that by peace did the Holy One, blessed be He, honor Aaron, as it is written, "My covenant was with him of life and of peace." (He was blessed) in that he would pursue peace between individuals, between husband and wife, between families, and between tribes. And what reward did he receive for this? "And I gave them to him, and he feared Me".⁶ The Holy One, blessed be He, gave more than he saw, as it is written, "And no man shall be in the Holy Tabernacle at the time that he enters to sanctify it" (Leviticus 16:17). And this is the gift that the Holy One, blessed be He, gave to the perfect and righteous ones, as it is written, "I shall listen to what the Lord God speaks, for He speaks to his people and to his righteous ones" (Psalm 85:9).

The connection between Aaron's role as a peacemaker and his warranting the Priesthood is now presented clearly. While other passages also refer to Aaron as a peacemaker,⁷ they do not overtly indicate that this was the reason for his acquiring the Priesthood. In

fact, much of the rationale for Aaron's receiving the Priesthood must be inferred from the various passages that reflect Aaron's character. It is only in this passage and Midrash Tanhuma Ha-Nidpas, Tetzaveh 10 that any direct explanation is offered for why Aaron merited the Priesthood.

In Midrash Tanhuma Ha-Nidpas, Tetzaveh 10, the rabbis explain the Biblical verse, "And it shall be unto him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting Priesthood, because he was jealous for his God; and made atonement for the children of Israel" (Numbers 25:13). Though the verse, in fact, refers to Pinchas, Aaron's nephew, and **not** Aaron himself, the rabbis use this verse as proof of Aaron's immutable possession of the priesthood. The passage goes on to explain Aaron's actions in the Golden Calf incident, exculpating him of any guilt and actually suggesting that it was due to his actions at that time that he was given the priesthood. While this might be viewed as merely a different tradition than the one in Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, I suggest that in fact this very passage is the epitome of the rabbinic justification for Aaron's becoming High Priest. The key question that must be addressed is: why, in spite of Aaron's apparent transgressions in the Golden Calf incident, did he **still** warrant the priesthood? In this one passage, we see the answer clearly: rather than transgression, Aaron's actions are taken to be noble. As a result, he was given the priesthood not so much as a reward, but as a means of expiation for his action. By means of the sacrificing of the red heifer, Aaron and his descendants are given the opportunity to directly atone for the incident of the calf. This might further be viewed as a message for the reader of the midrash; that the means through which one

transgresses can also be the means by which one atones. Throughout much of the Aggadah, though, there is a great deal of disagreement as to how culpable Aaron was for his actions, and whether or not his actions were admirable or deplorable.⁸

There are several texts that indicate that for some period of time Moses served as Priest along with Aaron. Whereas one might think that this would indicate an elevation of Moses' status, examination of these passages in fact proves the contrary.

Shemot Rabbah 37:1 clearly states that there is a conflict as to how long the time was that Moses acted as High Priest. Some say that Moses served as High Priest for the entire forty years that Israel was in the wilderness, while others hold that he did so only during the seven days of consecration. The same point is made in Pesikta Rabbati 14:11, but in both cases, it is merely raised, and not considered further. I would attribute this to the fact that the amount of time is not the matter that was of primary interest, but rather the question of what occurred that led to Aaron's takeover of the priesthood was the foremost consideration. In both the Pesikta Rabbati passage and Vayikra Rabbah 11:6, the point is made that throughout the seven days of the consecration of the Tabernacle, while Moses ministered in a white robe, the Shechinah did not dwell in this world, but on the eighth day, when Aaron began his ministration as High Priest, the Shechinah. The intent of these passages is clear: when the time came for the priesthood to be fixed, it was exclusively Aaron's role to assume. While Moses served in other important leadership roles, the priesthood was not his, and would not be. This notion is borne out further by statements in the Pesikta Rabbati passage and Avot d'Rabbi

Nathan A, Chapter 34, which indicate that Moses is counted amongst the Levites, and Aaron is not.

3. Moses Was Originally to Receive the Priesthood

Given Moses' extraordinary status in the Pentateuch, the question arose as to why he and his descendants were not given the priesthood, and two distinct responses are evident.

On the one hand, there is a tradition that Moses was indeed to be appointed High Priest, but was not, as a form of punishment for his refusal to go before Pharaoh. Note, in this regard, Shemot Rabbah 3:17:

What anger was there? The priesthood was taken from Moses and given to Aaron. Our sages said, this is the meaning of "Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite?" Since it says "thy brother," do we not know that he was a Levite? But God said to him, "You were worthy of being a Priest and he a Levite, but since you decline my words, you shall be a Levite and he a Priest."

As in the case of those passages where Aaron was said to have received divine revelation by virtue of a punishment of Moses, so, too, here do we see that Aaron received the Priesthood as punishment for his declining God's command to go to Pharaoh. A similar passage is to be found in Midrash Tanhuma (Ha-Nidpas), Shemini #3, where Moses is told by God that although he thinks he is going to receive the priesthood, indeed he will not, due to his reluctance to appear before Pharaoh alone. Once again, we see an effort to portray Aaron's status, even as that of priest, as being the result of Moses' sin rather than his own merit. There is, however, another tradition that indicates that the priesthood was intended for Aaron, even though Moses erroneously

thought that it was to be his. It states in Shemot Rabbah 39:1:

"And bring you near unto Aaron your brother, and his sons with him" (Exodus 28:1). From where? "From among the Israelites." It can be compared to a king who had a friend, and when he wished to appoint a controller of his finances, he appointed him over his entire treasury. After some time, he decided to appoint a chief of his bodyguard, and his friend thought that he would appoint him, but he did not, as the king said to him, Go and appoint for me a chief of the bodyguard. He asked, Your majesty, of which family (shall I appoint him)? The king replied: Of yours. So, when God was about to appoint a supervisor over the work of the tabernacle, he appointed Moses head over the judges and over everything; and when God was about to appoint a High Priest, Moses believed that he would be made High Priest, but God said to him: 'Go and appoint me a High Priest.' Moses replied, 'Master of the Universe, from which tribe shall I appoint him?' The Divine reply was: 'From the tribe of Levi.' Moses was thereupon very glad, saying, 'So beloved is my tribe!' God further said to him, 'It shall be Aaron, your brother,' as it is written, "And bring near unto you Aaron your brother."

We find in this passage an effort once again to demonstrate the exclusive nature of Aaron's right to the priesthood, and an answer to the question of "Why not Moses" by means of a parable. Moses, we can see, already had a great deal of responsibility, and it would seem to be an imprudent move to add to his responsibilities further by giving him the burden, although a covetable one, of the priesthood as well. By drawing the analogy of a chief of finances to a chief of the bodyguard, though, we can also detect the sentiment, once again, that Moses' status was more elevated than that of Aaron, and can begin to see the effort to separate the roles that Moses and Aaron each played. This notion of division of responsibilities may speak to a certain leadership model, which will be discussed in detail later.⁹

The importance of the institution of the priesthood, as well as Aaron's status as priest, should not be underestimated. As the sacrificial cult was the basis of the Israelite religion, the

priesthood represented the most important leadership group in the Israelite nation. Of course, although Rabbinic Judaism developed institutions that made the sacrificial cult, and so the priesthood, non-essential, Rabbinic Judaism has as its basis the very notion of an ultimate return to the sacrificial cult, and to the priesthood. Were the priesthood and the cult invalidated in any way, the very institutions of Rabbinic Judaism would, in turn, be invalidated. It therefore was necessary for the rabbis to present the priesthood as nothing less than a sacred institution ministered by an exemplary personality, Aaron, Moses' brother. This, of course, will help to explain why so much effort was made to present Aaron as a man of singularly outstanding character, and, at the same time, account for so much of the tension regarding the issue of why Moses himself was not chosen for the role. There can be little argument that in the Biblical text and in Rabbinic tradition no personality is presented as being greater than Moses. However, in order to validate Aaron's role as High Priest, the rabbis tried to equate Aaron to Moses and, at the same time, to present Aaron as being of just slightly lower status than Moses.

C. Aaron's Status vis-a-vis Moses

As is to be expected, there is no one consistent tradition regarding Moses' status vis-a-vis Aaron. While most of what can even be inferred from the various passages that allude to their relationship would indicate that Moses was the greater of the two, there are several passages that state quite simply that they were equal, and several

passages from which it can be inferred that Aaron, at least on certain occasions, was greater than Moses.

1. Moses as Greater than Aaron

As we have already seen,¹⁰ there are various passages that indicate Moses' greater status as a prophet. This is borne out further by two other passages that actually indicate that Aaron had been prophesying for a great deal of time even before Moses was born. In both Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer and Midrash Tanhuma (Ha-Midpas),¹¹ Moses is presented as requesting Aaron to go with him before Pharaoh since Aaron had already been prophesying for eighty years prior to Moses' birth. This should not be viewed as a great honor for Aaron, but an indication of Moses' character, viz., his respect for his older brother. In this case, Moses is presented as hesitating due to his respect for Aaron and not his own reticence to fulfill God's commandment.

It is important to keep in mind that although Aaron played a central role in the leadership of Israel in both the Biblical and Aggadic texts, his role is constantly presented as less central than that of Moses. In the case of the Golden Calf incident, for example, even those Aggadic passages that present Aaron as a positive leadership role model do so by indicating that he used a delay tactic in order to restrain the people until Moses, the "true" leader, would return.¹² Other passages that indicate Aaron's relationship to Moses also demonstrate Moses' position as one of Aaron's superiors; these will be

dealt with in detail later.¹³

2. Aaron and Moses as Equal

We find several passages that balance the picture of Aaron's status relative to Moses, by declaring them as being totally equal. Among those which indicate this, the most straightforward is Bereshit Rabbah 1:15 :

Everywhere Moses is mentioned before Aaron, yet in one place it says, "These are that Aaron and Moses" (Exodus 6:26); this teaches that they are on a par.

And Midrash Shir-Ha-Shirim 4:4-5:

"Your two breasts are like two fawns" (Song of Songs 4:5); These are Moses and Aaron....they were equal. Take note: occasionally, Aaron precedes Moses, as it is written "These are that Aaron and Moses" (Exodus 6:26), and it is written, "And ¹⁴Moses and Aaron performed all the signs" (Exodus 11:10).

Both passages utilize the same hermeneutic to make the same point. In the Bereshit Rabbah passage, Moses and Aaron are given as just one example of the application of the hermeneutic, while in Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim, the example is part of a fuller description of the relationship between Moses and Aaron. In neither case, however, does the passage build to another point, as is the case in Bamidbar Rabbah 21:13 :

"And the Lord said unto Moses: 'Get thee up into this mountain of Abarim'" (Numbers 27:12). What reason did He have for stating this after the section dealing with inheritance? Only this, that when Moses heard the command, "Thou shalt surely give unto them" (Ibid. v. 7), he was under the impression that the Holy One, blessed be He, had been reconciled to him, and thought: 'Behold, I shall allot to Israel their inheritance.' So the Holy One, blessed be

He, said to him, 'My degree retains its force;' "Get thee up into this mountain of Abarim," etc. "As Aaron your brother is gathered," (Ibid, v.13); You are not better than your brother.

In this passage we see that not only were they equal in status in life, but in death as well, and, more importantly, in the eyes of God. At the same time, we again see a glimpse of Moses' belief that he was, in fact, greater than Aaron. But again, as in Shemot Rabbah 37:1, this was a mistaken impression.

The tension between the various passages as well as the effort to present a balanced picture can be seen clearly in the Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Pischa, 1:

Another interpretation: Why is it said here, "Unto Moses and Aaron?" Because it says, "And the Lord said unto Moses: 'See, I have sent you in God's stead to Pharoah'" (Exodus 7:1). From this, I would understand only that Moses was a judge over Pharoah. What about Aaron? By saying here, "unto Moses and Aaron," Scripture teaches that Aaron was equal to Moses: just as Moses was a judge to Pharoah, so also was Aaron a judge to Pharoah; just as Moses would speak his words fearlessly, so also would Aaron speak his words fearlessly. Rabbi says: "Unto Moses and Aaron." I might understand that the one preceding in the Scriptural text actually had precedence over the other. But in the passage: "These are that Aaron and Moses" (Exodus 6:26) Aaron is mentioned first. Scripture thus declares that both were equal, the one is as important as the other.

This passage is, of course, the continuation of a passage cited previously,¹⁵ in which it is stated that although Aaron was fit to receive the Divine revelation, in most cases he did not in order to grant distinction to Moses. We must view this continuation, then, as part of an effort not only to balance the image of Aaron, but also to reconcile the fact that Aaron, too, acted as a leader before Pharoah. This is especially important as a backdrop to Aaron's role in the occurrence of the Ten Plagues.¹⁶

3. Aaron as Greater Than Moses

In two passages already cited, Avct d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 37 and Vayikra Rabbah 13:1, we saw that Aaron instructed Moses in matters of law. While neither of these passages overtly declares that Aaron possessed a greater status than Moses, which would entitle him to undertake such an action, the very fact that Aaron is shown as doing so indicates some greater status on his part. This is not to be understood so much as a matter of him having some innate quality which allowed him to achieve such a level, as much as it must be seen as, again, a balancing of the image of both Moses and Aaron. It is, in fact, the importance of the law that allows Aaron to correct Moses. Even so, if the law is what is important, then the image of Aaron knowing the law better than Moses would at least in this instance attest to Aaron's higher status.

An even clearer picture of Aaron possessing a greater status is to be found in Vayikra Rabbah 33:4. In this passage, Aaron is presented as being concerned with the pedigrees (Hebrew, Yichus) of the Israelites, and is thereby rewarded:

Consequently the Holy One, blessed be He, placed Aaron's honor before that of Moses, as is proved by the text, "Now these are the generations of Aaron and Moses" (Numbers 3:1). It is not written in this verse, "Moses and Aaron," but rather "Aaron and Moses."

In this case, Aaron's status is greater in the eyes of God. Of course, had the author of this passage wished to show that Moses was greater, or that they were equal, he could have done so using either a slightly

different, or the same, proof-text, respectively. In fact, there is no mention here of Moses other than as being less honored than Aaron. Again, we see an effort to elevate Aaron's status, though not in terms of leadership, either as a prophet or even as a priest. Perhaps we can attribute this to a reticence on the part of the authors to give Aaron a higher status than Moses, again bearing in mind the fact that Moses was more of a key leadership figure. In spite of this, there are passages that indicate that Aaron was also held in higher regard by the Israelites,¹⁷ though these do not indicate status as much as they do the effect that each man had on individuals amongst the Israelite nation.

D. Summary

There is little question that Aaron was both a prophet and a priest, but there is some question as to whether he assumed both roles at once, or did so at different times. A great deal of tension exists over the issue of whether Aaron was Moses' equal, and although several texts indicate that he was, the sense that emerges is that Aaron possessed a status far above the average Israelite, though not quite equal to that of Moses. In addition, much of his elevated status can be attributed to Moses' actions.

Since the priesthood was a very important institution for the rabbis, they went to great lengths to validate its existence as well as Aaron's role as High Priest. While difference of opinion exists over the issue of Moses' right to the priesthood, it is clear that, for

whatever reason, the priesthood belonged to Aaron and to his descendants alone.

Having established Aaron's status as background, the remaining chapters will focus on Aaron's personality, and how his actions affected the Israelite nation. In the main, we will deal with the questions of how and why the rabbis presented Aaron's personality.

CHAPTER TWO

AARON'S ROLE AS LEADER

Perhaps the aspect of Aaron's life and personality most often emphasized in the Aggada is his leadership. A great deal of effort went into the describing of Aaron's leadership role, both in terms of a general picture of those leadership qualities that Aaron possessed, as well as specific incidents which involve him acting in a leadership capacity. By presenting Aaron as a model of leadership, the rabbis answer positively the question of why Aaron warranted the priesthood. Though only a small number of passages state this outright, Aaron is consistently presented as a leader worthy of this special status.

A. General Aspects of Aaron's Leadership Role

I. Aaron as Peacemaker

While there is no clear portrait of Aaron as a man of peace in the Bible, it is developed in several different aggadic sources. Though the three passages dealt with here all base the notion of Aaron as a peacemaker on different Biblical verses, all three present a similar picture of a man concerned with peace among individual human beings.

Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer explains that it was because of Aaron's concern for and pursuit of peace that he was rewarded with the priesthood¹, and based the derash on the Biblical verse, "My covenant was with him, of life and peace" (Malachi 2:5). From this, the author of the passage asserts that Aaron was rewarded with the priesthood and the exclusive right to minister in the Tabernacle because of his

pursuit of peace.

A more complete presentation of Aaron's role as peacemaker is to be found in Avot d'Rabbi Nathan, A, Chapter 12. Interestingly, this passage bases itself on the verse immediately following the one cited in Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, i.e., Malachi 2:6:

Hillel says: 'Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace'....Loving peace--how so? This teaches that one should love peace in Israel between man and man the way Aaron loved peace in Israel between man and man, as it is said, "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and uprightness, and did turn away many from iniquity" (Malachi 2:6). Rabbi Meir says: 'Why does the verse say, "And did turn away many from iniquity?" For when Aaron would walk along the road and meet an evil or wicked man, he would greet him. The next day, if that man was about to commit a transgression, he would think: Woe unto me! How will I be able to face Aaron afterwards? I would be too ashamed, for he has greeted me in peace! And so, that man would refrain from transgression.

So, too, when two men quarreled with each other, Aaron would go and sit down with one of them and say to him, My son, look what the other fellow is doing! He is beating his breast, and tearing his clothing, saying, "Woe unto me! How can I face the other fellow! I am too ashamed, for it is I who wronged him!

He would sit with him until he had removed all rancor from his heart, and then Aaron would go and sit with the other one...and say the same thing to him, and sit with him until he had removed all rancor from his heart). And when the two men met each other, they would embrace and kiss each other. That is why it is said of Aaron's death, "They wept for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel" (Numbers 20:29).

Another interpretation: why did all Israel weep for Aaron thirty days, while for Moses only the men wept? Because Moses rendered judgement strictly according to the truth; but Aaron never said to a man, you have acted offensively, or to a woman, you have acted offensively. That is why it is said, "And all the house of Israel wept for him." But of Moses, who reproved them with strong words, it is said, "And the men of Israel wept for Moses" (Deuteronomy 34:8).

Moreover, how many thousands there were in Israel named Aaron! For had it not been for Aaron, these children

would not have been born.

And some say: this is why it is said, "They wept for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel"--for who could see Moses, our master, standing and weeping and himself not weep!

And some say: who could see Eleazar and Pinchas, the two distinguished priests, standing and weeping and himself not weep!

The notion of Aaron acting as a peacemaker on the level of domestic and personal matters is more fully developed here. It is difficult to determine exactly which passage is older, though it is generally held that Avot d'Rabbi Nathan was compiled several centuries earlier than Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer.² In any case, the tradition of Aaron as one who is concerned with peace on a grassroots level is apparently an old one. In this passage, as opposed to the one in Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, Aaron does not receive any specific reward for his peacemaking activity, but the importance of his actions is reflected in how they directly affected the lives of his fellow Israelites. Similarly, we find in Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 17, the notion that Aaron's death was mourned by the entire nation, based on the same proof texts. The explanation here, however, is less developed:

Why was this? Because he loved peace and pursued peace, and passed daily through the entire camp of Israel and promoted peace between husband and wife, and between a man and his neighbor. Therefore all Israel showed loving-kindness to him, as it is written, "And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they wept for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel" (Numbers 20:29)

Again, no effort is made to directly link Aaron's role as peacemaker with his receiving the priesthood, but his effect on the lives of the Israelites is clearly presented. Although this passage is relatively brief,³ it should be viewed as part of the rabbis' effort to emphasize Aaron's importance to the Israelites on a personal level.

2. Aaron as a Teacher of Torah

As we previously mentioned,⁴ there existed a tradition of Aaron instructing Moses in a matter of law. This should not be taken lightly, as it speaks to several issues. First, it presents to us an image of Aaron being absolutely familiar with the law, something that would be considered essential to the rabbinic view of Judaism. Second, it informs us that Aaron was zealous with regard to observing the law. Even though his brother, the giver of the Torah, instructed him as to how to act, Aaron considered the proper observance of the law more important than obedience to Moses' instructions. Again, it touches upon a matter essential to Rabbinic Judaism: the proper observance of the law is of the highest priority. It is important to note that, in this regard, Vayikra Rabbah 13:1 indicates that this was the basis on which Aaron was deemed worthy of receiving revelation. Once again, we see that the rabbis believed that Aaron's character and actions were indicative of his worthiness.

The notion that Aaron not only knew and observed the law himself, but strove to bring others to the observance of the Torah is also apparent in the previously quoted passage from Avot d'Rabbi Nathan, Chapter 12. There the rabbis explain the verse, "And turned many away from iniquity" (Malachi 2:6), by stating that Aaron, by virtue of his merely greeting a transgressor, caused that person to refrain from transgression. This could only occur if Aaron himself zealously observed the law. The fact, however, that Aaron consciously sought to

greet transgressors, indicates a great deal of concern on his part that others observe the law as well.

Perhaps most important of all is the way in which he led others to the observance of the law, which reveals a great deal about Aaron's character and manner of leadership. He is presented as a low-key leader, concerned with the self-image of the transgressor as well as with returning the transgressor to the proper observance of the law. Whereas further on in the passage Moses is presented as having rebuked those who acted wrongly, Aaron, to the contrary, never did so. His method of leadership was, in fact, one of example more than one of exhortation. Aaron's portrayal as being concerned with the specific individual's observance of the law and the way in which he acted upon this, can serve as a model of leadership for all rabbis. While it was desirable, indeed necessary, to be concerned with the entire community's adherence to the Torah, it is equally important, if not more important, for the leadership to be concerned with the observance of each individual. While it was possible to ensure the observance of those laws, the transgressions of which might be publicly discernible, such as the observance of the Sabbath and attendance at worship services, more personal observances, such as private observance of the Sabbath, could not easily be enforced. Aaron, therefore, served as an important model of how to prevent others from transgressing. Once again, this is indicative of the desire of the rabbis to present Aaron as a man of special character.

3. The Respectfulness of Aaron

As part of Aaron's general character portrait, the rabbis stress his respect both for Moses and for the Land of Israel. As we have seen in Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 37,⁵ the respect shown for Moses by both Aaron and his sons is given as the reason for their receiving revelation. Whereas he could have rightfully interrupted Moses in order to correct him in the matter of law that was being discussed, he waited until Moses was finished before saying anything. This is particularly significant in that Aaron was Moses' older brother, and would not be expected to show as much deference to Moses as if he had been his younger brother. Aaron was more than simply conscious of the proper etiquette; he was particularly respectful.

In a very different context, both Aaron and Moses are portrayed as being respectful of the Land of Israel. Kohelet Rabbah 9:2:(1) states:

"To the good"(Ecclesiastes 9:2): this alludes to Moses, as it is said, "When she saw that he was a goodly child" (Exodus 2:2). R. Meir said: "Goodly" indicates that he was born circumcised. "And to the clean"(Ecclesiastes 9:2): this alludes to Aaron who was concerned with the purity of Israel. "And to the unclean"(Ecclesiastes 9:2): these are the spies, who delivered an evil report about the Land and did not enter it, while the others (Moses and Aaron) spoke of the goodness and praiseworthiness of the Land of Israel and did not enter it.

Here, Aaron is a superb model for the rabbis on a number of levels. The key point here is that both Moses and Aaron praised the Land of Israel, though neither one actually entered it. In the first place, this indicates Aaron's absolute belief in the importance of the

land, such that sight unseen, he accepted it as praiseworthy, and taught others the same. This would certainly have been an important consideration for a community rooted in the notion that the Land of Israel is special. Second, Aaron's willingness to do so is also an indication of his trust in the Lord. He who had never seen the land, but was instructed of its praiseworthiness, accepted this without hesitation. For the rabbis, acceptance of the divine will was essential; one could not merely choose to follow those laws that they felt were right, ignoring the others. Absolute trust in and acceptance of the law was the cornerstone of Rabbinic Judaism, for it was none other than God's law. Aaron and Moses both, then, are important models here of acceptance of the Lord's words. Third, and of equal significance, is the awareness that one should follow the law and the ways of the Lord without expecting visible reward. In spite of the fact that Moses and Aaron spoke well of the Land of Israel before ever seeing it, they never got to enter the land. Yet they are not presented as being angry or resentful. By displaying such character, they are wonderful models for future leaders, who could not refuse to undertake a particular responsibility on the grounds that they would not be able to see the task through to its completion. Like Moses and Aaron, each person must accept his or her responsibility to lead, and not expect a reward for it.

4. Aaron's Concern With the Purity of Israel

In two previously cited passages, there was evidence that Aaron was particularly concerned with the purity of Israel. *Kohélet Rabbah*

9:2:(23) states it directly, without further elaboration or explanation. It is possible that this tradition is based on an older source, Vayikra Rabbah 33:24. There we have Aaron presented as being particularly concerned with the genealogy of the individual Israelites, and as a result is afforded greater honor than Moses by the Lord. While proselytes were certainly accepted by the rabbis, the question of one's pedigree was always a matter of great importance. One's identity was defined in terms of one's lineage, and one's ancestry was often a critical matter for a people whose right to exist is predicated on their being the descendants of an early nation. By presenting Aaron as being concerned with this issue, the rabbis sought to validate their role as rightful heirs to the Mosaic tradition.

5. Aaron as a Hero

Several passages present Aaron as something of a folk-hero, but in very human terms. In both Bamidbar Rabbah 19:20 and Devarim Rabbah 6:11, we find references to Aaron as 'the one who stayed the Angel of Death.' In neither case, however, do we find an explanation of this. Certainly, it was a well-circulated tradition, for it is too esoteric a concept to be simply inferred from the Biblical text. Moreover, if it were not well-known, it would certainly have warranted some further explanation. In fact, this tradition is more fully preserved in Midrash Tanhuma(ha-nidpas), Tetzaveh #15, in which Aaron is described as offering up the incense at the altar, when he saw the Angel (of Death):

He (Aaron) found the Angel (of Death) preparing to do

his destruction, and he stood in his way and did not allow him to do so, for it is said that "he stood between the dead (and the living)" (Numbers 17:13). He said to Aaron, 'Let me go and perform my mission.' Aaron said to him, 'Moses has sent me, and the Holy one, blessed be He, has sent you; the Holy One, blessed be He, and Moses are in the tent of meeting--let us go to them.' The Angel (of Death) paid him no mind, until Aaron warded him off by his loins and led him away, as it is written, "And returned to Moses at the door of the tent of meeting and the plague was stayed" (Numbers 17:15).

The Biblical account indicates that it was merely by virtue of the offering of the incense that the plague was halted. However, the rabbis sought to present Aaron's role as much more than a functionary whose ministerial rites alone were sufficient to conquer the plague. By presenting the plague in the form of an angel, they make it possible to depict Aaron as an almost super-human being, able to be victorious even over one of the heavenly hosts. Through his supernatural ability and his actions, Aaron saved the lives of countless individuals.

Yet, Aaron is also presented by the rabbis as a hero who is much more of an ordinary human being. Because of this his model is accessible to the common person and, therefore, can be more easily emulated. Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 53, informs us of Aaron's attempt to convince Moses to pray for Miriam's recovery from leprosy:

Aaron went to Moses, and said to him, "Oh my lord, Moses! Brothers do not allow themselves to be separated from each other except through death, as it is said, "Let her not, I pray, be as one who is dead" (Numbers 12:12). Not only this, but now all Israel will hear this and say that the sister of Moses and Aaron is leprous. Half of this infamous report concerns you!" Moses was appeased by these words, and he arose and prayed for her, and He (the Lord) was entreated of him, as it is said, "And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her, oh God, I beseech you" (Numbers 12:13).

In this case, Aaron's heroism is to be found in his appeal to Moses to pray for Miriam. It is assumed here that Moses' prayer is more

efficacious than Aaron's, and that by entreating Moses in this manner, Aaron's heroism is not based on his ability to affect directly Miriam's health, but in his willingness to convince Moses to do so. Once again, we see Aaron as an important role model, and at the same time, witness a strengthening of the image of his character.

In all of the above passages, only Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 17, (the priesthood), Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A 37 and Vayikra Rabbah 13:1 (divine revelation) and 33:4 (honor) connect Aaron's leadership to a specific gift. Yet, remaining passages, which go to great lengths to develop Aaron's traits as a leader, cannot be viewed merely as good examples for leadership. Certainly, if the rabbis were concerned only with presenting positive models of leadership, any number of Biblical figures could have been chosen. Therefore, I must infer that there was a specific, conscious effort to present Aaron as a model of leadership. While Aaron's right to the priesthood, for the most part, is not overtly mentioned, it was important for the rabbis to present Aaron as worthy of the priesthood not only due to his particular status, but due to his character and especially his leadership. Since the priesthood represented the de jure leadership of Israel, and since little information on Aaron's character is given in the Biblical text, it therefore was necessary for the rabbis to paint a portrait of a powerful, thoughtful leader, one concerned both with the law and the well-being of the community, as well as with the welfare and well-being of the individual Israelite. Aaron was a total model to be emulated even by the rabbis themselves.

B. Aaron's Role in the Ten Plagues

If we are interested in Aaron's leadership qualities, it is necessary to investigate the rabbis' portrayal of Aaron's role in the Ten Plagues. The Biblical text is fairly clear about the degree of Aaron's participation; what is not particularly clear is why Aaron was involved the way he was.

Similarly, both Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer 25 and Shemot Rabbah 12:4 offer a general statement about Aaron's involvement, but neither one brings to bear any particular information on why Aaron was chosen for this role. It is worthwhile to note that although no effort was made in either passage to diminish Aaron's role, the rabbis employ any hermeneutic to prove that Aaron was not actually involved. While in these passages no emphasis is placed on Aaron's leadership role in the Ten Plagues, neither is his role in any way denied.

However, there is some material that discusses the issue of why Aaron was involved in the Ten Plagues, and it presents an interesting image of Aaron's leadership role. Note for example, Shemot Rabbah 9:10 which states regarding the plague of blood:

"And the Lord said unto Moses: Say unto Aaron: stretch forth your hand..." (Exodus 7:19). R. Tanhum said: 'Why did Moses not smite the waters? Because God said: It is not proper that the waters which protected you when you were cast into the river should now be smitten by you. No, they shall be smitten by Aaron!'

Similarly, Shemot Rabbah 10:4 and 10:7 discuss Aaron's role in the bringing of the plagues of frogs and gnats, and stress that Aaron was involved because of the inappropriateness of Moses' smiting the water and the ground which had protected him. We find here no disagreement

with the plain understanding of the Biblical text, but an explanation of why Aaron was involved. Aaron was not involved due to any special merit on his part, but due to Moses' inability to act in certain situations. Moses, then, is presented as the more central leader and Aaron's role is relative to that of Moses. While this does in some ways indicate an attempt to suppress the image of Aaron as being Moses' equal as a leader, it also supports the notion of Aaron's fitness to assume the role of leader in the same manner as Moses when the latter was unable to do so.

The tension over Aaron's role in the Ten Plagues is seen clearly in Shemot Rabbah 12:4 :

"And Moses stretched forth his rod toward heaven" (Exodus 9:23). Three of the plagues came through the agency of Aaron, three through Moses, three through God, and one through the united efforts of all three. Blood, frogs, and gnats, being on the earth, were through Aaron; hail, locusts, and darkness through Moses, because they were in the air, and Moses had power over earth and heaven....

This passage might be seen as a continuation of the effort to assert that in spite of Aaron's participation in the bringing of the plagues, Moses was the key leader, who had dominion over earth and heaven.

C. The Golden Calf Incident

Any discussion of Aaron's role as leader must involve an analysis of his involvement in the Golden Calf incident. Of course, the crucial question that must be faced is why Aaron, who, according to the

Biblical text, acted so wrongly, still merited the priesthood? An examination of the rabbinic presentation of Aaron's role in the Golden Calf incident might be very helpful in this regard. I shall approach the issue with two different considerations in mind: the use of Aaron's nephew, Hur, as a literary device to expand on the Biblical text, and the general aspects of Aaron's role as a leader in the incident.

1. Hur as a Literary Device to Expand on the Biblical Story

While Hur, the son of Miriam (and so, the nephew of Aaron and Moses) is mentioned twelve times in the Biblical text, there is, in fact, no mention of his having an involvement, direct or indirect, in the Biblical account of the building of the Golden Calf. For reasons that are not entirely clear, Hur became a lynchpin upon which a variety of rabbinic explanations for Aaron's behavior were hung. Such traditions are found in a number of texts, ranging from B.T. Sanhedrin to the later Yalkutim (anthologies).

In all of the passages that mention Hur, the motif that is employed is the same. Prior to coming to Aaron, and asking him to build a god for them, the Israelites approached Hur, and when he refused they murdered him. Aaron therefore was afraid that they would kill him as well.

The passages which utilize Hur in the explanation of Aaron's behavior can be broken down into two non-mutually exclusive categories: those that present Aaron's actions as a sign of his weakness, and those that present Aaron's concern, and in turn actions, as a model of

aggressive, positive leadership.

A fully developed explanation of what transpired can be found in Bamidbar Rabbah 15:21, which presents Aaron as having acted out of weakness and fear for his life:

"Up, make us a god who shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has become of him" (Exodus 32:1). When the elders heard these words they said to them: "Why do you provoke him who wrought for you all those miracles and wonders?" But they would not listen, and killed them. Furthermore, because Hur stood up and rebuked them, they rose up against him, also, and slew him. All Israel came to Aaron in ranks, as it is written, "The people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said: Up, make us a god..." (ibid.)...We shall do to you the same as this! As we rose against Hur and slew him, so will we do to you! When Aaron saw what they had done to the elders and to Hur he was afraid of them, as it is written, "And when Aaron saw this, he built (va-yiven) an altar (mizbeach)" (Exodus 32:5). "Va-yiven mizbeach" means, he understood (hevin) from the one who lay slaughtered (za-vuach) before him.

This passage presents a clear picture of how Hur was utilized. The rabbis formed a derash on the words va-yiven mizbeach (and he built an altar), reading them as va-yaven me-zavuach (he understood from the one who lay slaughtered). By presenting Aaron as acting in response to an outside stimulus, it became possible to explain his actions, and even totally vindicate him. Parallels can be found in Yalkut Shimoni I:456, and Midrash Ha-Gadol, Ki Tissa #32, which indicate that Aaron acted as he did only out of fear for his life, and not because of any of the ramifications that would result from his being murdered. While this does not overtly explain why Aaron was given the priesthood, it does hint at the possibility that because he acted out of fear, he should not be held culpable. In fact, this is explicitly stated in Midrash Tanhuma (Ha-Nidpas), Tetzaveh #10:

And Aaron was afraid that perhaps the Holy One,

blessed be He, would hold him culpable. Therefore, did the Holy One, blessed be He, say to Moses, 'This is the thing that you shall do to them, to sanctify them to be Priests to me, and to elevate them and make great Aaron and his sons through the High Priesthood, since it is well-known that Aaron acted only out of fear, and therefore, I do not hold him culpable.'

There is no begging the issue here; yes, Aaron's actions were less than admirable, but the rabbis argued that he should not be punished since he acted out of fear. This does not exactly constitute strong praise for Aaron, as it only indicates that he is, in modern terms, "guilty with an explanation." This passage offers an explanation of Aaron's behavior that is consonant with the Biblical text, and, at the same time, exculpates him.

There are, however, a number of passages that employ the device of the slain Hur in order to make definitive, positive statements about Aaron's leadership qualities. In several passages, this is accomplished by demonstrating that Aaron's fear was not for his own life, but for what would befall the Israelites as a result of their actions. A good example of this is found in B.T. Sanhedrin 7a:

"And when Aaron saw [it], he built an altar before it" What did he actually see? R. Benjamin Japhet says, in the name of R. Eleazar: He saw Hur lying before him and said (to himself): If I do not obey them, they will now do unto me as they did unto Hur, and so will be fulfilled (the fear of) the prophet, "Shall the Priest and the Prophet be slain in the sanctuary of God" (Lamentations 2:20), and they will never find forgiveness. Better let them worship the Golden Calf, for which offense they may yet find forgiveness through repentance.

Aaron's selflessness is dramatically presented here. Faced with imminent death by an angry mob, Aaron can only think in terms of what will happen to the murderers. By building the calf, he averted the terrible fate which would have befallen the Israelites. Rather than an

act done out of weakness, Aaron's act is transformed into a righteous one, indeed a noble, admirable one. While no mention is made here of the priesthood, there can be little question that this passage has as its intent the complete vindication of Aaron. Not only is Aaron's concern for the Israelites praiseworthy, but the fact that the basis for his concern arose from his knowledge of the Biblical text is certainly notable, as well.⁶

In Vayikra Rabbah 10:3, a very similar passage is immediately followed by a different interpretation of the phrase, "And Aaron saw [this] and built an altar before it." There the rabbis stress that Aaron knew that if he did not involve himself in the building of the altar, the work would be completed post-haste. However, if he took control of the situation, he could prevent the completion of the altar, thereby delaying the people until Moses would descend and destroy the object of idol-worship. In both parts of the passage, Aaron is presented in a very positive light by using very different interpretations of the same Biblical verse. While there was clearly no attempt to present a unified picture as to why Aaron built the Golden Calf, both interpretations strive to demonstrate that Aaron's actions were, again, noble. What was apparently important to the redactor of Vayikra Rabbah was not a particular explanation of Aaron's behavior, but the general impression that Aaron's actions were above reproach.

In Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 45, the two motifs of Aaron's fear and a delay tactic are brought together as part of one continuous passage:

Aaron arose and saw that Hur, the son of his Sister, was slain; and he built for them an altar, as it is said, "And when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it."

Aaron argued with himself, saying: If I say to Israel, give to me your gold and silver, they will bring it immediately. But behold, I will say to them, give to me the earrings of your wives and of your sons, and forthwith the matter will fail, as it is written: "And Aaron said to them, break off the golden rings."

In all probability, the redactor of Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer was bringing together the two separate tradition of Aaron's fear and his desire to delay the Israelites from completing the building of the calf. This is most clearly borne out by the fact that the notion of Aaron seeing the slain Hur is not at all explained as it is in the previous passages, indicating that the tradition regarding Hur's death was already well-known, and was certainly drawn from an already extant source. By connecting the two traditions, there was no need to make any blatant statements about the positive basis of Aaron's decision. Hur is utilized to explain what Aaron saw, but his decision to delay the Israelites is brought to bear as the symbol of his righteousness. As in the Sanhedrin and Vayikra Rabbah passages, Aaron is presented as taking an active leadership position. By making the building of the golden calf an example of positive leadership in a difficult situation, Aaron is presented in a very favorable light, and certainly as one whose character makes him worthy of being High Priest. Though no specific mention of the priesthood is made in these passages, there can be little doubt that the connection between Aaron's behavior in this incident and his receipt of the priesthood was foremost in the minds of the writers and redactors of these passages.

Throughout the passages that mention Hur, we see attempts to justify Aaron's behavior in different ways. In some cases, he is presented as an "ordinary" frightened human being, not responsible for his actions. In other cases, his behavior is presented as being

laudable, an example of leadership. It is important to note, though, that regardless of whether Aaron is presented as a model of leadership or an individual acting out of fear for his life, all of these passages seek to exculpate Aaron for the building of the calf. Though the device of Hur led the authors of the various passages to different explanations of Aaron's actions, all of them had a great deal at stake in vindicating Aaron. As such, all of the passages arrive at the same general conclusion: while Aaron did indeed build the calf, this is not something that should be held against Aaron, and certainly not sufficient cause for denying him the priesthood.

2. Other Aspects of Aaron's Role in the Golden Calf Incident

In addition to demonstrating various aspects of Aaron's desire to delay the Israelites until Moses' return, the rabbis' treatment of the Golden Calf incident shows other aspects of Aaron's leadership qualities. The majority of these are found in Shemot Rabbah 37:2 :

When Moses descended from Sinai and beheld Israel engaged in that incident, he looked at Aaron, who was beating the calf with a hammer. The intention of Aaron was really to restrain the people until Moses came down, but Moses thought that Aaron was a partner in their crime and he was incensed against him. Whereupon God said to Moses: 'I know that Aaron's intention was quite good.' It can be compared to a prince whose mind became unsteady, and took a digging tool to destroy his father's house. His tutor said to him: "Do not weary yourself. Give it to me and I will do it." When the king saw this, he said: I know your good intentions. By your life, you alone shall rule over my palace. Similarly, when Israel said to Aaron, "Up, make us a god," he replied, "Break off the golden rings," etc. He further said to them: 'Since I am a priest, let me make it and I will offer up sacrifices before it,' his sole idea

being to restrain them until Moses would descend. Whereupon God said: 'Aaron, I know what your intention was; surely then, only you shall have full sovereignty over the sacrifices which my children will bring.'

As we saw above, Aaron is presented as leading the people in the construction of the calf as a means of delaying the Israelites until Moses came down from Sinai.⁷ Only in the Shemot Rabbah passage, however, is Aaron's action directly connected to his receiving the priesthood.

In addition, the passage also implies that Aaron's action was meant to change a transgression into an act done for "the sake of the heavens." This is most clearly stated in Vayikra Rabbah 10:3 :⁸

He (Aaron) saw the situation this way: If they build it, one will bring a pebble, another a stone, and as a result their work will be completed at once... Moreover, as I am building it, I shall build it in the name of the Holy One, blessed be He. This is indicated by what is written, "And Aaron made a proclamation, and said: 'Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord' (Exodus 22:5). It is not written, 'a feast to the (golden) calf,' but "a feast to the Lord."

By showing Aaron's actions as perhaps the only plausible response to an extremely difficult situation, the rabbis once again justify Aaron's behavior by pointing to it as a technique of leadership. Passages such as these, if they stood alone would not suffice to present Aaron as a strong leader. At best, they portray him as doing something relatively minor to avert an all-out catastrophe. However, in the context of being one part of a series of passages that display Aaron's leadership in the incident, they serve to reinforce the general picture of Aaron as taking an active, positive leadership role.

In addition to the Shemot Rabbah passage, Vayikra Rabbah 10:3 also utilized the motif of the tutor of a king's son "saving the day" by taking over the work of the son. In this passage, though, rather than a delay tactic, the action is seen more as an attempt to transfer the transgression to himself:

"And Aaron saw this"--What did he see? He saw the situation this way: if they build it, the sin will attach to them; better that the sin should attach to me and not to Israel.

As in the Shemot Rabbah passage, Aaron's reward for this action is the priesthood. In this passage, a more involved explanation for this gift is offered, based on several Biblical verses which are given as proof-texts. Both of these passages present his action as a noble one, and indicate the appropriateness of his action.

It should be noted, however, that all sources do not see Aaron's actions as having been totally appropriate. Quite to the contrary, Vayikra Rabbah 7:1 indicates that Moses correctly rebuked Aaron for turning a sin made in error into one of malice and awareness. By beating on the calf with a hammer to demonstrate that the calf was nothing but a piece of metal, the Israelites were thus made aware that their worship of the calf was pure idolatry. Had Aaron not done so, the argument could have been made that the people were caught up in their anger, and would not have transgressed quite so seriously. The question, then of what punishment did he receive, and, more to the point, why did he still warrant the priesthood, is addressed towards the end of the passage. There it explains that the Lord's anger was vented in the form of the extinction of Aaron's sons, by, again, utilizing several Biblical verses as proof-texts. While no mention of

the priesthood is made here, the fact that the passage discusses Aaron's punishment is sufficient for us to realize that this question was on the mind of the passage's redactor.

D. Summary

Aaron is presented, alternately, as a strong leader and an "ordinary man" ensconced in a difficult situation. He possesses wisdom and respect, and utilizes these to make peace and to teach Torah. He is concerned with the welfare of Israel and takes steps to insure their well-being. He is a man willing to put himself in a tenuous position for the sake of Israel and, at times, is presented both as being more concerned with Israel's status than his own and as having little concern for his own life.

Even so, his leadership is apparently dependent on Moses' absence or inability to act in a given situation, something that he, Aaron, seems to willingly accept.

The picture of Aaron's leadership, though, is a mixed one. There is no attempt, even within the same text, e.g. Vayikra Rabbah 10:13, to present a consistent image of Aaron's leadership, but instead, divergent traditions, which present Aaron as both a strong leader and an average man are included. In addition, we find both justification and remonstrance of Aaron's actions. There is no clear agreement and the redactors of these texts seem to have been less concerned with presenting a unified picture of Aaron's leadership, than with putting forth various viable options for the understanding of Aaron's actions.⁹

Even so, all of the passages, especially the ones which present Aaron as a less than positive model of leadership, face the issue of why Aaron received the priesthood, and resolve this issue through various means. While Aaron's receiving the priesthood is only occasionally mentioned, all of the passages present Aaron as a leader worthy of the priesthood and a man of such character that even during times of weakness, he is not to receive direct punishment.

CHAPTER THREE

AARON'S RELATIONSHIP TO MOSES AND MIRIAM

There is little material in the Biblical text that informs us about Aaron's relationship with either of his siblings. As a result, the rabbis had a great deal of leeway in dealing with these relationships. Once again, there is no unified tradition, but rather a series of alternative views that portray Aaron's relationship with Moses and Miriam in a variety of different ways.

A. Moses as Aaron's Superior

1. In God's Eyes

Several passages indicate Moses' superiority to Aaron in God's eyes by way of Moses' greater qualifications to receive the Divine revelation. In two previously cited passages, Sifre Bamidbar 117 and Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 37, this point is made explicitly, as well as in Bamidbar Rabbah 14:19,¹ where an involved hermeneutic is used.

Other passages demonstrate Moses' superiority in God's eyes by means of Moses' involvement with the priesthood. Shemot Rabbah 37:4 indicates Moses' position by means of a parable:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses, "And bring near unto you Aaron your brother"(Exodus 27:20) he was displeased, but God comforted him by saying: 'The Torah I possessed I gave to you; had it not been for the Torah, I would have destroyed My world.' It can be compared to a wise man who married a relative, and though he lived with her for ten years, she did not give birth to a child. He then said to her: 'Seek a woman for me,' further explaining to her, 'I can really take a woman without your approval,

but I desire your forbearance.' This is also what God said to Moses: 'I could have appointed your brother as High Priest without informing you, but I wanted you to be his superior.'

In this passage, Moses' superiority is overtly stated and given as the explanation for why Moses was called on to appoint Aaron to the priesthood. By viewing the Biblical passage in this light, the question about why Moses himself did not receive the priesthood is resolved by means of ascribing to the priesthood a status lower than that of Moses. In addition, the rabbis emphasize the absence of jealousy based on Moses' own status, and the respect shown Moses by God. Shemot Rabbah 3:17 that the priesthood was actually intended for Moses,² but was given to Aaron as a means of punishing Moses. In spite of this, the passage continues to show that Moses maintained his superiority:

"And you shall be to him his master"(Exodus 4:16)--though he is your older brother, your fear will be upon him. This is a proof that the respect due to your teacher equals the respect to heaven. God said to him: 'Just as my fear is upon you, so will your fear be upon him.'

At one and the same time, the redactor of this passage firmly reinforces Moses' position as Aaron's superior, and provides us with an important lesson that reflects the rabbinic value system. Moses is presented as Aaron's teacher, and by virtue of this, Moses is due the greatest respect. Ordinarily, age in itself is worthy of respect, but learning was of even greater importance. Knowledge was always considered to be a primary value, and in this case, the respect due Moses for his knowledge and his role as a teacher supercedes the respect due Aaron for his age.

A clear presentation of the different roles played by Moses and

Aaron, with Moses' being the greater, is found in Shemot Rabbah 8:3 :

"And Aaron, your brother, shall be your prophet"(Exodus 7:1). 'Just as the preacher sits and preaches while the interpreter sits before him, so shall you speak all that I command you to Aaron, and Aaron, your brother, shall speak unto Pharoah.' By means of both of them, were all these things performed, and it is said, "And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharoah"(Exodus 11:10).

There is no question that Moses' role is more significant than Aaron's in this passage, but Aaron should not be seen as a mere interpreter, either. The fact that Aaron was specifically chosen for the role of Moses' spokesman indicates great merit for him; of all of the Israelites, Aaron alone was chosen to appear by Moses' side before Pharoah. While the image used is that of an interpreter, we might be better off to understand Aaron's role as that of a spokesman. There is no indication here that Moses did not speak the same language as Pharoah, and that Aaron did. Rather, Aaron is seen as carrying out an important, official capacity. In terms of their separate role, Moses' is of a higher status, but Aaron's is of equal importance. In the case of a preacher and interpreter, while the preacher's words are what is important, without the interpreter, they would be meaningless.

Throughout these passages, there is a strong attempt to present Moses as being superior, but also a great effort to demonstrate Aaron's role as necessary, though on a different level from Moses. It is possible to infer, especially from Shemot Rabbah 8:3, that the rabbis sought to present Moses and Aaron as a model of leaders with different roles and responsibilities working together, unencumbered by differing levels of status, and each concerned with the significance of his role. Moses, the great leader and receiver of the Divine revelation,

needs Aaron, his spokesman, to transmit the knowledge that he has acquired.

2. In Moses' Eyes

A number of passages indicate that Moses, too, saw himself as Aaron's superior. In the case of the Golden Calf incident, we can see by Moses' reaction that he considered it perfectly appropriate to admonish and rebuke Aaron for his actions. We saw how Vayikra Rabbah 7:1 underscored Moses' anger upon seeing Aaron battering the Golden Calf in the presence of the Israelites,³ and his justification in denouncing Aaron for worsening the transgression. Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 45, states the matter more succinctly, and offers a response by Aaron:

Moses said to Aaron: 'What have you done to this people? You have made them unruly, like a woman who is unruly due to her immorality.' He said to Moses: 'I saw what they did to Hur, and I feared very greatly.'

Both the lack of response in the Vayikra Rabbah passage and the type of response in the Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer passage indicate that Aaron did not regard Moses' reaction as inappropriate. This issue here is not whether Aaron had acted incorrectly, but whether Moses had the right to speak to Aaron in this fashion? Had Moses not been Aaron's superior, and if both Moses and Aaron did not see it this way, then surely some stronger response would have been forthcoming from Aaron, indicating the inappropriateness of Moses' behavior. Were it simply a

matter of obedience to the law, and Moses' correction of Aaron, it undoubtedly would have been presented in a different fashion.⁴ Instead, we must infer that there was no need to justify Moses' behavior. He was Aaron's superior and Aaron owed him an explanation, regardless of the reasons for his action.

We can also see Moses' status as Aaron's superior when he protected Aaron during the incident of the rebellion of Korach (Numbers 16:1-35). The Biblical account presents Moses as Aaron's protector, rebuking Korach and his band for their rebellion against Aaron, and Bamidbar Rabbah 18:9 extends this image further:

"Therefore you and all your company that are gathered together against the Lord" (Numbers 16:11). Moses implied that this quarrel, is not with us but with the Holy One, blessed be He. The matter may be illustrated by a parable. A king had numerous servants, and he chose to make one of them a free man and to give him the rod (and appoint him an officer). He then went further and made him a senator. His colleagues rose up against him. People said: 'If he had come forward himself and taken that position of his own accord, they would have been right to rise up against him. Seeing that his master conferred this distinction upon him, then whoever rises against him, are they not rising up against his master?' It is the same here. Moses said to the Levites: 'If Aaron, my brother, had taken the priesthood on his own initiative, you would have been right to be angry with him. Now, however, since it was given to him by the Holy One, blessed be He, to whom belongs greatness, might, and sovereignty, then anyone who rises against Aaron, does he not rise up against the Holy One, blessed be He?' Accordingly, it is written, "And to Aaron, what is it that you murmur against him?" (Numbers 16:11).

In addition to asserting the wrongness of Korach's action, this passage goes to some length to show Moses' absolute acceptance of Aaron's position as High Priest. Not only do we see Moses' role as Aaron's protector, but in his willingness to defend Aaron's claim to the priesthood, we see an important development in the midrashic treatment of Aaron and Moses. Throughout many of the passages presented

thus far, there has been a considerable amount of tension regarding Moses' right to the priesthood. By presenting Moses as the defender of Aaron's right to the priesthood, much of the tension is abated. Not only does God desire for Aaron to be High Priest, but Moses is more than satisfied with this arrangement; he is even willing to stand up for it against those who challenge it. By presenting Moses in this light, one can hardly argue with the notion of Aaron, and not Moses, receiving the priesthood. If Moses himself did not complain, and indeed, supported Aaron's right to it, then there can be no questioning this on anyone else's part.

3. In Aaron's Eyes

According to Aaron, as well, Moses was his superior, as seen in two different texts. The Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Amalek #1, states it simply:

It is said, "And Aaron said unto Moses, 'Oh, my lord'" (Numbers 12:11) Was he not his older brother? What then does it mean by saying, "Oh, my lord?" He (Aaron) treated him as though he (Moses) were his master.

Similarly, Vayikra Rabbah 13:1 and Midrash Ha-Gadol, Ki Tissa, 32 present Aaron as dallying over the building of the Golden calf until such time as Moses would come down from the mountain and destroy it.

All of the passages we have cited indicate that Moses was clearly Aaron's superior, and that God, Moses, and Aaron all acknowledged it. The thrust of the tradition, therefore, emphasizes that while Aaron had an important role to play in the leadership of Israel, he is not to be

seen as a leader equal to Moses. This tradition, however, does not go unchallenged, as will be seen in the following sections.

B. Aaron as Moses' Superior

Contrary to the passages presented in the preceding section, several passages, though certainly fewer in number and less emphatic in tone, indicate that Aaron was, at least in certain circumstances, Moses' superior. Tanhuma Ha-Nidpas Teizaveh 15, presents Aaron as Moses' savior,⁵ delivering him from the Angel of Death.⁶ Aaron's concern for Moses' life is transformed into Aaron's taking on almost supernatural qualities at a time of great crisis. In Vayikra Rabbah 13:1,⁷ Aaron is presented as teaching Moses a matter of law, something he could not have done without at least temporarily having a greater status.

In both cases, though, Aaron's superiority must be inferred, since in neither do we see explicit statements of this, as we do regarding Moses' superiority.⁸ As a result, one might mistakenly draw the inference that Aaron was indeed greater, though in fact, the purpose might not be to demonstrate Aaron's superiority so much as it might be 1) to show that not even Moses was superior to all people at all times; and 2) as a way of balancing the image of Moses. For the most part, Moses is presented as a very strong leader, and it would not be desirable to present any human figure, including Moses, as infallible and immortal.

C. Moses and Aaron as Complete Equals

To bring the rabbinic view of the relationship of Moses and Aaron full circle, we now turn to those passages that, in contradiction to the two previous sections, indicate that Moses and Aaron were totally equal.

We can start with a simple, direct statement of this found in Bereshit Rabbah 1:15 :

Everywhere Moses is mentioned before Aaron, yet in one place it says, "These are that Aaron and Moses" (Exodus 6:26). This teaches that they are on a par.

In Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim,⁹ the statement is equally explicit, but is presented as part of an overview of Moses' and Aaron's relationship. They are pictured as two loving, caring brothers, who rejoice in one another. Similarly, Bamidbar Rabbah 21:13 demonstrates their equality in terms of the rewards each received:

"And the Lord said unto Moses: Get yourself up into this mountain of Abarim" (Numbers 27:12). What reason did He have for stating this after the section dealing with inheritance? Only this, that when Moses heard the command, "You shall surely give unto them" (Exodus 27:7), he was under the impression that the Holy One, blessed be He, had been reconciled to him and thought: "Behold, I shall allot to Israel their inheritance." So the Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: 'My decree remains in force; "Get yourself up into this mountain of Abarim" etc., "As Aaron, your brother was gathered" (Exodus 27:13): you are not better than your brother.'

Here, even though Aaron was already dead, Moses was to receive no better treatment. He is told quite bluntly that he holds no greater status; just as Aaron did not enter the land, so Moses will not enter

the land.

It is especially interesting to note how the question of their equality is dealt with in two different ways within the same passage. The Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Pisha #1, indicates that they were indeed equal,¹⁰ but that the divine revelation was given to Moses in order to grant distinction to him. A tremendous amount of tension is evident in this passage, and it is resolved in a rather dubious manner. The redactor obviously wishes to grant Aaron a status equal to that of Moses, but is uncomfortable in doing so. As a result, he does assert their equality, but qualifies this with a statement of Moses' distinction. The continuation of this passage, though, evidences no particular tension over this issue:

Another interpretation: Why is it said here, "Unto Moses and Aaron"? (Exodus 7:8) Because it says, "And the Lord said unto Moses: 'See, I have sent you in God's stead to Pharoah'" (Exodus 7:1). From this I would know only that Moses was a judge over Pharoah. How about Aaron? By saying here, "Unto Moses and Aaron," scripture teaches that Aaron was equal to Moses: just as Moses was a judge over Pharoah, so also was Aaron a judge over Pharoah; just as Moses would speak his words fearlessly, so would Aaron speak his words fearlessly. Rabbi says: "Unto Moses and Aaron." I might understand that the one preceding in the Scriptural text actually had precedence over the other. But in the passage, "These are that Aaron and Moses to whom the Lord said" etc. (Exodus 6:26); Aaron is mentioned first. Scripture thus declares that both were equal, the one as important as the other.

Had the redactor of this passage not wanted to demonstrate Moses and Aaron's equality, he, of course, could have omitted this passage entirely. In fact, had the author of this passage desired to demonstrate Moses' superiority, he could easily have done so, as in the case of Bamidbar Rabbah 14:19, where a similar hermeneutic is utilized to demonstrate that Aaron did not receive Divine revelation. We must

infer, then, that there was a strong desire to present Moses and Aaron as equals, and to eliminate any doubts that might have resulted from reading the previous portion of this passage.

A certain amount of tension is evident throughout the passage presented in this section regarding the notion of Moses and Aaron's equality. The fact that these passages exist at all is evidence that this was not merely taken for granted; the passages in the first part of the chapter that portray Moses as Aaron's superior only reinforce this. As in other matters, the concern of the authors of these texts was not to present a uniform picture. Instead, they desired to present a more balanced portrait of Aaron as a strong, important figure, worthy of the priesthood, without diminishing the image of Moses. At the same time, they were able to achieve a more balanced picture of Moses, as well. Moses and Aaron are not shown to have a steady, consistent relationship, with one or the other dominant throughout. The overall picture we receive is one of two brothers dependent upon one another, each with his own role to play, and both important for the leadership of Israel.

D. Aaron and Moses Working Together

A significant amount of material exists in the Aggada dealing with Moses and Aaron working together. In several passages already dealt with at length, Moses and Aaron are presented as sharing the duties of the priesthood while in the wilderness.¹¹ Upon the consecration of the

mishkan (sanctuary), Aaron is separated out as the one High Priest. No indication of Moses' jealousy is seen, rather the joy both Moses and Aaron felt for one another.¹²

Several passages indicate that when Aaron was to become High Priest, it was actually Moses who anointed him.¹³ In addition to the image of the two brothers working hand-in-hand, we also see here more evidence of the desire to maintain Moses' relative superiority, as it was he who was appointed to anoint Aaron. Although Moses is presented as sharing the responsibilities of the priesthood, the rabbis made certain that there be no questioning Aaron's status as progenitor of the priestly class. In fact, we see in two other passages the fact that Moses was counted amongst the Levites, and should not be thought of as a priest,¹⁴ and that Aaron, who was a priest, was not counted amongst the Levites.¹⁵ Once again, this must be attributed to the desire on the part of the rabbis to eliminate any sense of jealousy on Moses' part over Aaron's becoming High Priest, by demonstrating that Moses willfully and gladly presided over the ritual that installed Aaron in that capacity. In addition, the material that indicates Moses' inclusion in, and Aaron's exclusion from, the census of the Levites should be seen as an attempt to specify Aaron's role as priest and eliminate any possible confusion over the fact that both Aaron and Moses served as priests in the wilderness.

Yet, as we already have seen, the rabbis portray Moses and Aaron as working together in bringing the Ten Plagues.¹⁶ While some of the plagues were brought independently by Moses and Aaron, at least one plague--the boils--was effected by both Moses and Aaron working together in conjunction with God. In this case, the model is one of two

leaders working in harmony with each other and with God. This conception fits in well with the rabbinic view of the world; when people work together with God, the greatest wonders can become reality.

E. Aaron and Moses Loved and Rejoiced In Each Other

The rabbis had a great deal at stake in depicting Moses and Aaron not only as co-workers, but as brothers who cared for each other and took pride in one another. In order to justify both of their positions as leaders, it was necessary to present them as exemplary personalities who would not be jealous of one another. This was indeed the case, as can be seen in a number of different ways.

A few state explicitly that Aaron and Moses loved and rejoiced in each other.¹⁷ The best example of this is Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim 4:4-5:

"Twins of a Gazelle" (Song of Songs 4:5); just as gazelles love each other, so do (did) Moses and Aaron love each other.¹⁸

For the most part, as in this passage, their love for each other is given as part of a series of statements about their relationship, and is not based on any specific hermeneutic principles. It is presented as a model for the relationship between two brothers and/or two leaders.

Several passages explain Moses' and Aaron's love for each other in connection with the anointing of Aaron. This incident is discussed in

at least six different texts, as early as the Talmud and as late as Yalkut Shimon. Note Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah 1:10, in this regard:

How do we know that Aaron rejoiced in the greatness of Moses? Because it is written, "And also, behold, he is coming forth to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart" (Exodus 4:14). R. Simeon b. Yochai taught: (God said:) "The heart which rejoiced in the greatness of his brother Moses shall wear the Urim and Thummim," as it is written, "And you shall put on the breastplate of judgement the Urim and Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart" (Exodus 28:30). And how do we know that Moses rejoiced in the greatness of Aaron? Because it says, "Like the precious oil coming down upon the beard; Aaron's beard" (Psalm 133:2). Said R. Aha: Had Aaron then two beards, that it should say, "Upon the beard, Aaron's beard?" The fact is that when Moses saw the anointing oil descending upon the beard of Aaron, it seemed to him as if it was descending on his own beard, and he rejoiced; so it says, "On the beard, Aaron's beard."

Other passages which utilize this same explanation of Psalms 133:2 do so without mention of Aaron's rejoicing in Moses.¹⁹ This particular Biblical passage is not only seen as a model of a brotherly relationship, but also emphasizes Aaron's becoming High Priest.

Note, in addition, how verses of this Psalm, ("Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity") is utilized in different texts to make different points. Vayikra Rabbah 3:6 uses this Biblical text to indicate that Moses was not liable to trespass in the use of the anointing oil:

Why does Scripture say, "And before My name he was dismayed" (Malachi 2:5)? At the time when Moses poured the anointing oil on Aaron's head, he trembled and recoiled and cried out, 'Woe is me! Perhaps I have made improper use of consecrated matter, i.e., the anointing oil!' The Holy Spirit answered, saying to him: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, Aaron's beard, that comes down upon the collar of his garments; like the dew of Hermon, that comes down upon the mountain of Zion" (Psalm 133:iff.) Even as to the dew, the law of trespass does not apply, so does that law not apply to the oil.

Bamidbar Rabbah 18:9 offers a very similar explanation of the Psalms passage, but states that Aaron, and not Moses, was (unnecessarily) concerned about trespass. As the Vayikra Rabbah passage is the older of the two, it is likely that the redactor of Bamidbar Rabbah presented Aaron as the righteous one, concerned with transgression, as, once again, a means of balancing the images of both Moses and Aaron.

Both of these traditions, in fact, probably were based on an even earlier tradition found in both Horayot 12a and Keritot 5b,²⁰ where the same passage appears verbatim:

Our rabbis taught: "It is like the precious oil...coming down upon the beard, Aaron's beard" (Psalm 133:2). two drops like pearls hung from Aaron's beard. R. Papa said: A Tanna taught that when he spoke, they ascended and lodged at the root of his beard. Concerning this matter, Moses was anxious and said, Have I, God forbid, made an improper use of the anointing oil? A heavenly voice came forth and called out, "Like the precious oil..., like the dew of Hermon" (Psalm 133:3); as the law of improper use of holy objects is not applicable to the anointing oil on the beard of Aaron. Aaron, however, was still anxious. He said, 'It is possible that Moses did not trespass, but I may have trespassed.' A heavenly voice came forth and said to him, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1); ~~for~~ Moses is not guilty of trespass, so are you not guilty of trespass.

This passage exculpates both Moses and Aaron, but the latter part of the passage differs markedly from the previously cited Vayikra Rabbah and Bamidbar Rabbah passages. In this case, Aaron's innocence in the matter is not based directly on the comparison to the dew of Hermon. It is instead based on the fact that both Aaron and Moses are not guilty, and that both are involved in the matter, rejoicing in one another.

Finally, Tanhuma Ha-Midpas, Shemot #27, utilizes the same verse as a proof-text for their love for each other:

This is what is written, "If only it could be as a brother" (Song of Songs 8:1). Israel said to the Holy One, blessed be He, 'If only it could be as a brother.' You find that all brothers hated each other: Cain hated Abel... Ishmael hated Isaac... Esau hated Jacob... his brothers hated Joseph... so which brother was Israel referring to before the Holy One, blessed be He? To Moses and Aaron, as it is written, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Psalm 133:1); that they loved and adored each other. At the time that Moses took the leadership of Israel and Aaron, the priesthood, they did not hate each other, but rather rejoiced in the greatness of each other.

The use of the same Biblical verse in such different ways might be explained by a number of factors. As many later passages are based on earlier traditions, it is possible that in the oral transmission of the tradition, the specific subject (Moses or Aaron) might have been changed. The verse itself is indeed vague enough to be used as a proof-text in different passages. This theory may also serve to explain the very different use of the Psalms verse in the Tanhuma passage. The redactor of Midrash Tanhuma had many of the previously mentioned passages at his disposal,²¹ and had he desired, could have offered a similar interpretation and use of the Biblical verse. It is probable, then, that the redactor of the Tanhuma chose to utilize the verse as he did in order to make a different point: that Moses and Aaron's relationship was a model of brotherly love.

F. Aaron's Relationship with Miriam

Though relatively little material exists regarding Aaron's relationship to Miriam, which in itself bespeaks Moses' centrality as a

leader of Israel, a few passages do deal with Aaron's and Miriam's role in the slander incident.²² There is some attention given to the apparently troublesome phrase, "Miriam, the sister of Aaron" (Exodus 15:20).

1. "Miriam, the Sister of Aaron"

One might infer from the Bible that Aaron achieved a great status, since the first time that Miriam is mentioned (Exodus 15:20) she is called "the sister of Aaron." Ironically, she is referred to as Aaron's sister precisely at Moses' finest hour, the crossing of the sea. The rabbis dealt with this by granting distinction to Moses:

"And Miriam the prophetess the sister of Aaron" (Exodus 15:20). Was she only the sister of Aaron and not the sister of Moses? R. Nahman said in the name of Rab: She was so called because she prophesied when she was the sister of Aaron only, and said: 'My mother is destined to bear a son who will save Israel.' When he was born, the whole house was filled with light, and her father arose and kissed her on the head, saying, 'My daughter, your prophecy has been fulfilled.'²³

Rather than a demonstration of great respect for Aaron, the passage interprets this verse as a matter of circumstance. Not only was Moses not yet born, but her prophecy was that of Moses' future birth, and the fact that he would ultimately save Israel! It is apparent, then, that the redactor of this passage sought to discredit the notion that Aaron possessed a greater status than Moses and to embellish the image of Moses as a leader so great that even his birth was a wondrous event.

2. The Slander Incident

Contrary to the previous passage, the rabbis' treatment of Aaron's role in Numbers 12 portrays Aaron in a complimentary and sometimes praiseworthy fashion. Number 12:1 is very straightforward in its message: "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman." The Biblical text goes on to tell us that, as a result of this, Miriam became leprous (v.10). The Biblical text leaves no doubt that Aaron was involved in the incident, but curiously mentions no punishment for Aaron, nor any reason why he was not punished. We find two different explanations for this in Avot d'Rabbi Nathan and Devarim Rabbah. Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A. Chapter 9, bases its understanding of the situation on the placement of Miriam's name before Aaron's:

Rabbi Simeon says: Upon them that speak slander, plagues come. For thus we find concerning Aaron and Miriam, that they engaged in slandering Moses and punishment came upon them as it is said, "And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses" (Numbers 12:1). Why does the verse mention Miriam before Aaron? This teaches that Zipporah went and told Miriam; Miriam went and told Aaron; then both of them stood and spoke against that righteous man. Because both of them stood and spoke against that righteous man, punishment came upon them; as it is said, "And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and He departed" (Numbers 12:9). Why does the verse say, "and He departed"? This teaches that the punishment removed from Aaron and ~~came~~ ^{came} to Miriam; for Aaron was no tale-bearer Miriam, however, who was a tale-bearer, was therefore punished more severely.

Aaron did not escape punishment entirely, according to this passage. He is presented as being guilty of slandering Moses, and received that which was due him. However, by placing the blame for Aaron's action on

Miriam, the punishment due him was rather lenient and very temporary.

Devarim Rabbah 6:11 also puts the blame for Aaron's action on Miriam, and ignores the question of his warranting any punishment:

R. Isaac said: It was as if a snake was lying on the crossroads and biting everyone that passed by, when a keeper came and sat down facing it. A snake-charmer came up and seeing the two of them, exclaimed: 'The habit of the snake is to bite; I am surprised at the keeper that he associates with it.' So Moses said, 'Miriam spoke slander against me, and that I can understand, since women as a rule are talkative. But did Aaron, the righteous, also need to speak against me?' Moses said, "And Miriam spoke" (Numbers 12:1), 'but surely not Aaron!' When, however, he discovered that Aaron had also spoken, he began to lament, "Yea, the man at peace with me, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:10)

No mention of punishment is made here, but Aaron is, again, not vindicated in any way. The point that is emphasized is Moses' disappointment at Aaron's involvement at all in the incident. Rather than an indictment of Aaron, this might be seen as an indication of Aaron's fine character. Whereas Moses had no difficulty in understanding Miriam's role in the incident, this action was so out of character for Aaron that it was difficult for Moses to accept. Again, this might be seen as an attempt to balance the image of Aaron. At once, Aaron is presented as a man of extraordinary character, and as a man who is fallible, as well.

Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 53, deals directly with the question of why Aaron was not punished, and goes on to portray him as being concerned for both Miriam and Moses:

Forthwith Miriam became leprous. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'If Aaron, the High Priest, also becomes leprous, and is afflicted with a blemish, he will not be able to bring an offering upon My altar; but rather he shall look upon his sister and become astonished,' as it

is said, "And Aaron looked upon Miriam, and behold, she was leprous" (Numbers 12:11). Aaron went to Moses and said to him, 'My lord, Moses! Brethren do not allow themselves to be separated from one another except through death, as it is said, "Though he be fruitful among his brethren" [Hosea 13:15]. Our sister, while still among the living, is separated from us, as it is said, "Let her not, I pray, be as one who is dead" [Numbers 12:12]. Not only this, but now all Israel will hear this and say that the sister of Moses and Aaron is leprous. Half of this infamous report concerns you.' Moses was appeased by these words, and he arose and prayed for her, and he was entreated of him, as it is said, "And Moses cried unto the Lord saying, 'Heal her, oh God, I beseech you'" (Numbers 12:13).

As opposed to those passages that seem to justify Aaron's claim to the priesthood based on his behavior, this passage justifies his not being punished in spite of his behavior because of the priesthood. By chiding Moses as he did, we see several other important points. Aaron apparently considered Moses' prayer more efficacious than his own, and, while this is true to the Biblical text, there was no attempt by the redactor of Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer to suggest otherwise. This also indicates, once again, Aaron's view of Moses as his superior; this is evidenced by Aaron's reference to Moses as "my lord," and by the fact that he approached Moses as he did. Additionally, we see Aaron acting as Miriam's protector, and as being concerned with keeping his family together. Finally, it emphasizes his positive influence on Moses and his willingness to stand up for Miriam against Moses. The portrayal of Aaron as intercessor on Miriam's behalf gives further justification for Aaron's fitness for the priesthood; he was a man of fine character. Though he participated in the slander, he was a man of such character as to correct the negative result of his behavior, and stand up against Moses.

Aaron's role in the slander incident, for the most part is minimized. Rather than being condemned for his action, he is

generally presented as having acted out of character. Indeed, by the time of Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, he is shown to be a positive role model, in spite of his participation in the incident. There was a great deal at stake for the rabbis in seeing to it that Aaron was not presented in too negative a light. Aaron, as High Priest, could be presented as fallible and less than perfect, but not less than exemplary.

G. Summary

Moses, Aaron, and Miriam are presented in Rabbinic literature as a model of loving, caring siblings. The image of Moses and Aaron's relationship in particular is that of mutual pride and respect. Even in those cases where the Biblical text points negatively to Aaron, the rabbis manage to present Aaron more positively, as one who was, at worst, enticed into apparently negative behavior. The rabbis had a great deal at stake in Aaron's character, as he was High Priest; it was important for him to be both accepting and proud of his role, while still acknowledging Moses and the importance of Moses' role.

The tension between the importance of Aaron's character and the necessity to maintain his status as relative to that of Moses is apparent throughout the Aggadah. There is a need to exalt Aaron, but not at the expense of the image of Moses. The reality is that for Rabbinic Judaism, Moses, the law-giver, was more important than Aaron, the priest. Even so, it was necessary to portray Aaron as supportive of Moses' position, and Moses as supportive of Aaron's role as High Priest and of the priesthood, generally.

In addition to preserving the proper respect for the priesthood, the image of the closeness of Moses' and Aaron's relationship was a highly employable model for the rabbis. It stressed that leaders of different status and different responsibilities can work together for the welfare of the community.

CHAPTER FOUR

AARON'S DEATH

The death of any leader is a significant event for the community s/he led, and certainly, Aaron's death and its treatment in the Aggadah was no exception. Nonetheless, the bulk of what we can glean from these passages relates not so much to Aaron's death, but provides additional information about his character and importance to the Israelite people. Even Midrash Petirat Aharon ("The Death of Aaron"), actually emphasizes various other points.¹ In fact, only two passages in this midrash deal with the question of why Aaron died, and, in fact, the reason given is based on the Biblical reference that precedes Aaron's death:

The Holy One, blessed be He said "[That] Aaron shall be gathered to his people, he is not to enter the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you disobeyed My command at the waters of Meribah" (Numbers 20:24).²

Quite to the contrary, however, when Moses informs Aaron of his impending death, he does not mention the incident at Meribah:

Moses said, 'My brother, do you not know that it has been forty years since you made the (Golden) Calf, and you were deserving of death? Except that I stood in prayer and supplication before God, praised be He, and I saved you from death, as it is written, "Moreover, the Lord was angry enough with Aaron (to have destroyed him)" (Deuteronomy 9:20).'

Why Moses chose to inform Aaron of his death in this manner, and not as a result of Moses having stricken the rock is, of course, a matter of speculation. It is possible that the reason is to remind us of Aaron's misbehavior; there is no attempt in Midrash Petirat Aharon to justify Aaron's behavior in any way. Perhaps the attempt was to demonstrate Moses' weakness, in that he was unable to admit to Aaron that it was his own misbehavior that brought about his brother's death

prior to entering the land. In either case, both men are presented in a less than positive fashion. In contrast, the remainder of the aggadic passages that deal with Aaron's death present both men, and especially Aaron, in a particularly positive light.

A. Aaron, the Righteous

The redactor of Bamidbar Rabbah used Aaron's death to present Aaron and Moses as particularly righteous men. Bamidbar Rabbah 19:17 states:

"Aaron shall be gathered" (Numbers 20:24). This teaches that the righteous are informed of the day of their death, so that they may bequeath their crowns to their children. Why did not Aaron die in the same way as Miriam, in whose case no human being was aware of the death? Why was Moses told that Aaron shall be gathered? This may be illustrated by the parable of a king who had two financial officers. They did nothing without the king's knowledge. One of them had a fine field on the king's estate, and the king required it. The king said: 'Although it is my domain, I will not take it away without informing them.' So also said the Holy One, blessed be He. 'These two old men, both righteous, never did anything without My knowledge. Now, therefore, when I am about to take them away, I must not do so before letting them know,' as it says, "Aaron shall be gathered."

The parable actually indicates that Aaron himself would be informed of his death, and not only Moses. By looking at the text as applying to both Aaron and Moses, two purposes are served: 1) the midrash can remain true to the Biblical verse (Numbers 20:24); and 2) balance between the images of Moses and Aaron can be achieved. Had the passage sought to portray Moses as being only the vehicle through which Aaron was informed, it would have implied that Aaron's righteousness was greater than that of Moses. By including Moses in this manner, this

danger is avoided.

B. Aaron and the Cloud of Glory

The notion that the Cloud of Glory was given to Israel due to Aaron's merit is to be found in both Taanit 9a and at the very beginning of Midrash Petirat Aharon. This fact is in and of itself significant; Aaron was not merely an important leader on a terrestrial level, but his character was so meritorious that one of the greatest wonders wrought for Israel was done so for his sake. Even more significant is the affect that the rabbis asserted that Aaron's death and the coincident disappearance of the Cloud of Glory had on the Israelites. Note, in this regard, how Petirat Aharon juxtaposes the disappearance of the cloud with Israel's subsequent worship of the sun and the moon:

And when the clouds of the Glory departed, Israel saw that the sun and the moon were born in the heavens. And they wanted to bow down to them, for they had never seen nor known the sun and the moon; for all their days in the desert, they had neither sun nor moon, only the clouds of the Glory, as it is written, "For the cloud of the Lord was over the Temple by day, and a fire would appear at night" (Exodus 40:38). The cloud surrounded them all of their days in the desert. And when the Holy One, blessed be He, saw that they wanted to bow down to the sun and the moon, He said to them, 'Did I not tell you in My Torah, "When you look up at the heavens, and see the sun and moon and stars, you must not be lured into bowing down to them, and serving them...?"' (Deuteronomy 4:19).

It is clear from this that Aaron's importance cannot be understated. Interestingly, the midrash ends here and there is no mention of whether the Israelites heeded God's commandment. The thrust of this passage is to demonstrate the crucial role Aaron played in the leadership of

Israel. This might be viewed as a means of balancing the image of Aaron, who earlier was reminded of his wrongdoing in the Golden Calf incident.

The other passages that deal with the disappearance of the Cloud of Glory emphasize that the result was that Israel was attacked by a foreign king, though they differ as to his identification. While Taanit 9a gives no identification at all, Rosh haShanah 2b-3a identifies him as Sihon, and Bamidbar Rabbah 19:20 speaks of him as Amalek. All of these passages, though, are very similar in presenting the attack as based on Aaron's death. For example, Tannit 9a states:

When Aaron died the clouds of glory disappeared, as it is written, "And the Canaanite, the King of Arad, heard" (Numbers 21:1). What news did he hear? He heard that Aaron had died, and that the clouds of glory had disappeared, and he thought that he was free to make war on Israel. Therefore, it is written, "And all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead" (Numbers 20:29), with reference to which R. Abahu said: "Do not read 'they saw' (Vayir-u) but they were seen (Vayerra-u)."

Once Aaron died and the Cloud of Glory departed, the King of of Arad had reason to believe that not only was Israel vulnerable to attack, but it was now permissible to attack them. Aaron's importance, as symbolized by the cloud, is therefore of twofold importance: on the one hand, the cloud was as a protective cover for the Israelites, keeping them out of the view of potential attackers; on the other hand, the cloud served as an important sign to potential attackers that they were protected by the Lord.

Again, Aaron's importance simply cannot be overstated. Though the actual result of the disappearance of the Cloud of Glory is different

in Midrash Petirat Aharon than it is in the other passages, the notion that Aaron's death brought calamity upon Israel is consistent throughout. Whether the calamity came in the form of apostasy or physical destruction, Aaron's death had an unusually great impact on Israel.

C. The Great Mourning for Aaron

Aaron's impact on the lives of the individual Israelites is clearly reflected in the record of his death. Avot d'Rabbi Nathan, Chapter 9, gives a full account of the details of Aaron's efforts to promote peace between people who had quarreled,⁴ and connects this to the mourning of the Israelites at his death:

Why did all Israel weep for Aaron thirty days, while for Moses only the men wept? Because Moses rendered judgement strictly according to the truth, but Aaron never said to a man, 'You have acted offensively' or to a woman, 'You have acted offensively.' That is why it is said, "And all the house of Israel wept for him" (Numbers 20:29); but of Moses, who reproved them with strong words, it is said, "And the men of Israel wept for Moses" (Deuteronomy 34:8). Moreover, how many thousands there were in Israel named Aaron! For had it not been for Aaron, these children would not have come into the world.

Aaron was not only important to the Israelites in that he kept peace, but his concern for peace helped keep husbands and wives together. As such, he was responsible for the births of a significant number of Israelites--an important quality for the leader of a growing nation. In addition, by contrasting Aaron's style of leadership with that of Moses, we again see an attempt to balance the image of both men. In a similar manner, Aaron's peacemaking efforts are given as the source of

Israel's mourning in Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 17.⁵

The overall picture we see is one that lauds Aaron and does not particularly praise or denigrate Moses. Aaron is portrayed as having special importance to the Israelites due to his concern for them on an individual level. Moses, on the other hand, is presented as being less effective in dealing with individuals than he is as the powerful leader of corporate Israel.

D. The Floating Biers

Israel's disbelief over Aaron's death is presented as a demonstration of the love and respect the Israelites had for him. This respect is evident in Bamidbar Rabbah 19:20, where Aaron's previous feat of staying the Angel of Death rendered them unable to accept his death:⁶

"And when all the congregation of Israel saw that Aaron was dead" (Numbers 20:29). When Moses and Eleazar descended from the mountain, all the congregation assembled against them and said to them: 'Where is Aaron?' They answered them: 'He is dead.' The others objected: 'How could the angel of death strike him? He was a man who had withstood the Angel of Death and had restrained him, as it is written: "And he stood between the dead and the living and the plague was stayed" (Numbers 17:13). If you bring him back, fine; if not, we shall stone you!' Thereupon, Moses resorted to prayer and said, 'Sovereign of the universe, deliver us from suspicion.' Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, opened the cave and showed Aaron to them, as is borne out by the text, "And when all the congregation of Israel saw that Aaron was dead."

The Israelites were so adamant in their disbelief in even the

possibility of Aaron's death that only by showing them Aaron's bier could violence be avoided. Midrash Petirat Moshe also indicates that the Israelites were upset over Aaron's death, and therefore Aaron's bier was pictured as floating above the Israelites so that all could see it for themselves. Pirke d'Rabbi Elizer, Chapter 17, also depicts Aaron's bier as being made to float above the camp, but there is no mention of the Israelites becoming unruly.

The image of a floating bier is not applied to Aaron alone in the Aggada. In addition to Aaron's bier being depicted as floating, a much earlier passage from Shabbat 89a applies this theme to Moses. Though Moses had not actually died, the rabbis use the image of the bier as a means of explaining the Israelites' impatience and their subsequent demand of Aaron to build the calf:⁷

R. Joshua b. Levi also said: 'Why is it written: "And when the people saw that Moses delayed [boshesh] to come down from the mountain" (Exodus 32:1)? Read not "boshesh" (delayed) but ba-u shesh [the sixth hour had come]. When Moses ascended on high, he said to Israel, 'I will return at the end of forty days, at the beginning of the sixth hour.' At the end of forty days, Satan came and confounded the world. Said he to them: 'Where is your teacher Moses?' 'He has ascended on high,' they answered him. 'The sixth hour has come,' said he to them, but they disregarded him. Thereupon, he showed them a vision of his bier, and this is what they said to Aaron, "For this Moses the man" etc. (Exodus 32:1).

The use of a common motif in these passages might be explained by the fact that both Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer and Midrash Petirat Aharon are more recent works than tractate Shabbat. The motif, then, probably originated in the Talmud, and came to be applied to Aaron in the later works, either as a matter of improper transmission of the text, or as a conscious effort to connect yet one more image of Moses with Aaron. This may be another attempt to balance the images of both Moses and

Aaron: in life as in death, even hypothetical death, they were treated equally.

E. Summary

In discussing the life of Aaron, the rabbis devote much effort to presenting Aaron as a leader worthy of his special status and special character. He is shown to possess important leadership traits, as well as wisdom, respect and love for his siblings. It is interesting in light of this that Aaron's death is presented as the ultimate testimony to his character, and especially the effect that he had upon the people. Simply put, his death had a tremendous affect upon Israel.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Previous study of the treatment of Exodus, Chapter 32, in Midrash Ha-Gadol and Yalkut Shimoni led me to anticipate that the portrait of Aaron in the Aggada would be very positive. This was, indeed, the case. The vast majority on those passages studied present Aaron in a very favorable light, whether or not a direct connection to the Golden Calf incident is presented. This seems to be in agreement with Elimelech Hallevy who concluded that:

The many praises heaped on Aaron in the Aggada are due to the desire to minimize his guilt with regard to the sin of the golden calf and to explain why, despite it, he was worthy to be appointed High Priest.

The only passages that present Aaron in a decidedly negative fashion refer directly to the Golden Calf incident, but yet explain why he was still worthy of being a High Priest. These do so either by exculpating him on the grounds of mortal fear,² or by asserting that he was punished in other ways for his involvement.³ However, I must take issue with Hallevy's wording. Rather than explain why, **despite** his involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf, Aaron was worthy to be appointed High Priest, numerous passages explain that it was exactly **because** of his involvement that he was so worthy.⁴

There is apparently no ambivalence within the rabbinic tradition regarding Aaron's status as High Priest. As demonstrated in Chapter Two,⁵ not only was Aaron chosen for the priesthood, his claim to the priesthood is immutable, and it is only through his ministrations that the Shechinah dwells in this world.

There is considerable ambivalence, though, regarding Aaron's status as a prophet. Occasionally, he is presented as being on a par

with Moses in this respect, while at other times he is presented as not possessing the status of prophet at all.⁶ This must be attributed to a desire on the part of the rabbis to balance the image of Moses. There was an apparent need to emphasize Aaron's special nature, since he was the High Priest, but not at the expense of the image of Moses, the lawgiver.

Similarly, Aaron is presented as a man possessing many fine leadership qualities. He is respectful, intelligent, knowledgeable in the law and a great peacemaker. And though several passages demonstrate these qualities to be superior to those of Moses,⁷ the thrust of the majority of the passages indicate that Aaron's position as a leader of Israel was secondary to Moses'.

The aggadic portrait of Aaron is a direct outgrowth of its rabbinic context. The laws and institutions of Rabbinic Judaism replaced the sacrificial cult, and the rabbis' authority is based on its being the proper heir to the priesthood. Proper observance of the rabbinic legal system was purported to bring the ultimate return to the Temple and its cult. This resulted in a great deal of tension regarding the character of Aaron. It was, of course, important to present Aaron as worthy of the sacred office of High Priest, an institution to which an eventual return is sought. At the same time, too strong an image of Aaron might weaken the image of Moses, the lawgiver. Moses' role as a leader of Israel is more central than Aaron's not only in the Bible, but in rabbinic tradition as well. It is a basic concept in the rabbinic tradition that Moses received and in turn brought to Israel not only the Written Law, but the Oral Law, as well. All legal interpretations of the rabbis are claimed to have been

handed down to Moses along with the Torah at Sinai. As such, it was crucial for Moses to emerge from the Aggada as a more worthy and more central leader than Aaron.

It was equally important for Moses and Aaron, along with Miriam, to be presented as a model not only for the relationship amongst siblings, but amongst different leaders. By presenting Aaron and Moses as caring for and loving each other, as well as rejoicing in, and supporting each other, a multitude of purposes were served. First, neither Aaron nor Moses need be made completely superior or inferior to the other. Their relative equality had to be consistently presented. Second, and perhaps most importantly, by presenting Aaron and Moses' relationship as one completely absent of jealousy, the rabbis managed to validate both the priesthood and the rabbinic system, without detracting from either one.

However, the most striking characteristic of the Aggada evident in this study is its obvious lack of consistency. Moshe Herr points out:

To understand the aggadot the element of play and the poetic license of every creative story-teller and artist must be borne in mind. The sages themselves explicitly testified that 'no halakhah may be derived from the aggadot' (TJ, Pe'ah 2:6 17a), since the purpose of the aggadist is 'not to state of anything that it is forbidden or permitted, not that it is impure or pure' (TJ, Horayot 3:8, 4c). For this reason, the many contradictions in aggadot are ignored; objections against an aggadic interpretation are not raised and difficulties are not pointed out.

Herr's point is demonstrably borne out by this thesis. Contradictions abound amongst different texts in dealing with any one issue, e.g., Aaron's status as prophet, Aaron's relationship with Moses and Aaron's role in the building of the Golden Calf, and even within

the same text dealing with a particular issue⁹ It is clear that the redactors of these texts, perhaps with the exception of the Yalkutim, were not concerned with presenting a unified picture. Frequent "borrowing" of material amongst different texts is evident, as is the borrowing of motifs.¹⁰

Despite the inclusion of seemingly contradictory material, the aggadic portrait of Aaron is a rather unified one. Though individual presentations approach the issue of Aaron's status as prophet, leadership traits, and especially his role in the Golden Calf incident quite diversely, yet, a consistent message comes through. In spite of the Biblical presentation of Aaron's involvement in the Golden Calf, his claim to the priesthood is validated. It is reasonable then to conclude, as Herr does, that while "contradictions in aggadot are ignored,"¹¹ there is, at least in the case of Aaron, a common notion that is being conveyed. Individual passages may differ in their approach, and even in their conclusions. Nevertheless, the thrust of the message is clear: Aaron was a positive model of leadership to be emulated by all.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Nahum Sarna, "Aaron," Encyclopedia Judaica 2:4.
2. Ibid., 2:6.
3. Theodor Mauch, "Aaron, Aaronides," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible 1:1.
4. Moshe Herr, "Aggadah," Encyclopedia Judaica 2:354.
5. Nahum Sarna, op. cit., 2:4.
6. Ibid., 2:5.
7. Ibid., 2:6.
8. Aaron Hyman, ed., Torah Ha-Ketuvah Veba-Mesurah. Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1938.
9. Menahem Kasher, ed., Torah Sheleimah. Jerusalem, 1927.
10. Moshe Gross, ed., Otzar Ha-Aggadah. Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1955.
11. Joseph Eisenstein, ed., Otzar Midrashim. New York: 1915.
12. Louis Ginzberg, Philadelphia: The Legends of the Jews. 7 vols. The Jewish Publication Society, 1938.

CHAPTER ONE

1. See Introduction, above, pp. vii-viii.
2. Hyman G. Enelow, ed., Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer, pp. 151-152.
3. Cf., Section 4, above, pp. 4-5, for citation of text.
4. Moshe Herr, "Midrash," Encyclopedia Judaica 11:1511-1512.
5. Shemot Rabbah, 7:2.
6. Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 17 and Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 12.

7. All of this will be dealt with in detail in Chapter Two, below, pp. 25-27.
8. See Chapter Two, below, pp. 36-45.
9. Cf. Chapter Three, below, pp. 56-62.
10. Cf. Section A, above, pp. 3-11.
11. Enelow, op. cit., pp. 16-17, and Midrash Tanhuma (Ha-Nidpas), Shemot #27.
12. E.g., Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 45; Vayikra Rabbah 10:3; Shemot Rabbah 37:2; Yalkut Shimoni I, 459; and Midrash Ha-Gadol, Ki Tissa #32.
13. See Chapter Three, below, pp. 48-53.
14. Lazar Grunhut, ed., Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim 4:4-5.
15. Cf. Section A, above, p. 10.
16. See Chapter Two, below, pp. 35-36.
17. E.g., Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer Chapter 17, and Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 12.

CHAPTER TWO

1. Enelow, op. cit., pp. 73-74; see Chapter One, above, p. 12, for citation.
2. Moshe Herr, "Midrash," Encyclopedia Judaica 11:1511-1512.
3. In comparison to Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 12. Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer is a narrative work, and is not as concerned with making a point about Aaron's importance as much as it is with providing a continuous and unified narrative (Herr, Moshe, "Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer," Encyclopedia Judaica 13:558-559).
4. Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 37, and Vayikra Rabbah 13:1. See Chapter One, above, p. 4 and p. 7, respectively.
5. Cf. Chapter One, above, p. 4.
6. See Section A, above, pp. 28-29.
7. See above, pp. 40-42.
8. A parallel passage is Enelow, op. cit., p. 357.

9. This is not the case in the anthologies, such as Yalkut Shimoni and Midrash Ha-Gadol, which present a more unified picture.

CHAPTER THREE

1. See Chapter One, above, pp. 3-4.
2. See Chapter One, above, p. 15.
3. Cf. Chapter Two, above, p. 44.
4. E.g., as in Vayikra Rabbah 13:1 and Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 37.
5. See Chapter Two, above, pp. 32-33 for citation.
6. See Bamidbar Rabbah 19:20 and Devarim Rabbah 6:11 for references to this story.
7. Cf. Chapter Two, above, p. 43-45 for citation and fuller explanation of passage.
8. E.g., Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Amalek #1.
9. See Chapter One, above, p. 19.
10. For a parallel passage, see Midrash Ha-Gadol, Ki Tissa #32.
11. This will be dealt with more fully in Section E., below, pp. 59-62.
12. E.g., Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim 4:4-5.
13. E.g., Horayot 12a, Keritot 5b, Vayikra Rabbah 3:6, Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah 1:10.
14. Pesikta Rabbati 14:11.
15. Vayikra Rabbah 11:6.
16. E.g., Vayikra Rabbah 3:6, Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah 1:10, Midrash Tanhuma (Ha-Nidpas) Shemot #27, Bamidbar Rabbah 18:9.
17. E.g., Vayikra Rabbah 11:6, Pesikta Rabbati 14:11 and Shemot Rabbah 37:1.
18. Grunhut, op. cit., 4:4-5.
19. E.g., Midrash Shir Ha-Shirim 4:4-5 and Vayikra Rabbah 3:6.
20. A parallel passage can be found in Yalkut Shimoni II:503.

21. Moshe Herr, "Tanhuma Yelammedenu." Encyclopedia Judaica 15:795.
22. Numbers 12:1-16.
23. See also Megillah 14a. In addition, Parallels may be found in Sota 12b and Shemot Rabbah 1:22.

CHAPTER FOUR

1. In a report on a rabbinic thesis on this work, Norman Cohen discusses the "interrelationship amongst the various 'events' included in the Petirat Aharon, i.e., Miriam's death, the incident at Meribah and Aaron's death. Their connection is based upon their shared emphasis on: a) the impact of death in general and the death of a communal leader in particular; b) the struggle between Moses, the leader, and Moses, the man; and c) the tension between Israel and Moses during the trek through the desert" (Norman J. Cohen, Report on Unpublished Rabbinic Thesis of Gary Schoenberg, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York, 1981).
2. Midrash Petirat Aharon, vv. 71-74.
3. Ibid., vv. 92-97.
4. See Chapter Two, above, p. 26.
5. Though this passage does present essentially the same discussion as Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 9, it does so more briefly and does not include a comparison to Moses' style of dealing with the Israelites on a personal level. It does, however, allude to the notion that while all Israel mourned for Aaron, only the men did so for Moses. Given the dating of these two works, it is very likely that Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 17, is based, at least thematically, on Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 9, and that this passage attempts to give a more balanced image of Moses, though more elliptically.
6. Cf. Midrash Tanhuma (Ha-Nidpas) Tetzaveh #15, and see Chapter Two, pp. 32-33.
7. A parallel passage can be found in Midrash Ha-Gadol Ki Tissa #32.

CHAPTER FIVE

1. Elimelech Hallevy, "Aaron," Encyclopedia Judaica 2:7.
2. See Chapter Two, above, pp. 36-39.

3. See Chapter Two, above, pp. 44-45.
4. See Chapter Two, above, pp. 36-46, e.g., Aaron's status vis a vis Moses in Mechilta d'Rabbi Ishmael, Pisha #1.
5. See Chapter One, above, pp. 11-17.
6. See Chapter One, above, pp. 1-23.
7. Cf. Chapter Two, above, pp. 25-46.
8. Moshe Herr, "Aggadah," Encyclopedia Judaica 2:357.
9. E.g., similarities between Avot d'Rabbi Nathan A, Chapter 37, and Vayikra Rabbah 13:1; Sanhedrin 7a and Vayikra Rabbah 10:3.
10. E.g., Pirke d'Rabbi Eliezer, Chapter 17, and Shabbat 89a, which utilize the image of the floating biers of Aaron and Moses, respectively.
11. Herr, op. cit., 2:357.

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