

The Sins of Our Fathers

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In this study I would like to examine some of the greatest men of the Tanakh[[1]](#footnote-1) and their short comings. We need to be careful not to impose our notions on the text, but, rather to examine the scripture to determine what HaShem says.

When we examine the sins of our forefathers, we need to remember that HaShem always deals with us midda keneged midda, measure for measure. This means that we can understand the sin by examining the punishment. This principle always applies.

We can not say that the apparent sin is the actual sin. We can not do this because sin has so corrupted us that we no longer have the exalted spiritual level of our forefathers. This corruption causes us to apply our lifestyle to them, when it should not be applied.

I am presenting the traditional Jewish views of these events. I am not trying to minimize any sin. I am merely trying to present what is taught by Torah.

Lets start by examining King David.

# I. Shaul and the Necromanceress

*This section was written by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Sosevsky. I have made some minor edits so any errors are mine.*

“How have the mighty fallen”.[[2]](#footnote-2) King Shaul, who had been deemed just a few years earlier as “special in deeds” and introduced to the nation by the great prophet Shmuel with the accolade that “there is none like him in all the nation,” he who had personally “abolished the necromancers from the land” now trudges clandestinely to a necromancer, an act in full defiance of the Torah’s prohibitions against forms of divination and witchcraft. King Shaul — who, Chazal tell us, lived on an extremely high level of purity and sanctity[[3]](#footnote-3) — is now about to enter the shadowy world of the necromancer, whose powers are derived from forces of impurity.

And who does he seek to conjure up? None other than the holy prophet Shmuel, who was raised from birth as a *nazir* and initiated by his prophetess mother Chana into a life of holiness at the tender age of two.

Does it seem conceivable that the righteous Shaul in fact committed so blatant a transgression, in doing so violating his saintly guide and mentor, Shmuel?

Chazal declare, regarding the misdeeds of King David: “Whoever says that David sinned is in error”.[[4]](#footnote-4) Similar declarations are made regarding the misdeeds of other select biblical personalities. These great individuals, while rebuked for the moral inappropriateness of their actions, which were deemed incommensurate with their greatness, nevertheless did not commit any actual sins.

Yet, in contrast to the deeds of King David, we find no analogous statement of Chazal that:

“Whoever states that King Shaul had sinned is in error.” Indeed the Navi text seems to preclude such an assessment by emphasizing that “Shaul died in the transgressions that he committed against G-d”.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Yet it seems highly inconceivable that the righteous King Shaul would willfully violate the Torah prohibition against necromancy and that to that end, he would conjure none other than his great master Shmuel. The Talmud, in *Moed Katan* 16, states that King David was rebuked for composing a song of praise to G-d over the demise of Shaul, because, as Rashi explains, Shaul was deemed more righteous than he. If he indeed committed the sin of necromancy, he could hardly be deemed greater than David. How then can we begin to rationalize his behavior?

In *Eiruvin* 53a, the Gemara cites the following distinction between King Shaul and King David: David’s texts were revealed *(gali masechta*), while Shaul’s texts were not *(10 gali masechta).* Rashi explains: “King David’s halachic statements accurately reflected that which was prohibited and permitted, while Shaul did not merit rendering decisions in accord with the halachah.” In *Sanhedrin* 93b, the Gemara once more suggests that the distinction between King David and King Shaul was that concerning David, “Halachah is in accordance with his opinion everywhere,” which, the Gemara notes, was not the case with Shaul.

We may now have begun to gain insight into how Chazal viewed Shaul’s misdeeds. King David may have been rebuked for his actions as constituting behavior inappropriate to his great level, yet he never technically violated halachah, since he was fully capable of rendering halachically accurate opinions. King Shaul, on the other hand, never set out to commit acts deemed even inappropriate. His misdeeds are attributed to a misinterpretation of halachah, due to what Chazal perceived as a lack of *siyata d’Shmaya[[6]](#footnote-6)* in this regard.

With this insight into Chazal’s perspective on Shaul, we may now seek to discern Shaul’s apparent rationale in conjuring up the prophet Shmuel.

After unsuccessfully attempting to invoke his strange spiritual powers to curse all Israel, the Gentile prophet Bilaam, son of Beor, proceeds to laud the unique relationship between G-d and Nation of Israel by emphasizing the absence of divination in their midst: “For there is no divination in Yaaqov, nor enchanters in Israel. For in due time it shall be told to Yaaqov and Israel what G-d has wrought”.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Rashi suggests the following interpretation: “They (all Israel) have no need for diviners and enchanters, because whenever it is necessary that it be told to Yaaqov and to Israel what the Holy One Blessed be He has wrought and what His decrees are above, they do not divine and enchant. Instead, the decree of the Omnipresent One is told to them by their prophets, or the Urim V’Tumim recount it to them.”

In light of Rashi’s interpretation, we may well ask: What is to be done if the prophets do not notify, and the Urim v’Tumim do not respond? Is it possible to assume that, under such circumstances, one may be permitted to inquire through alternate channels that are otherwise forbidden? Let us recall the circumstances confronting King Shaul at this fateful juncture:

“Shaul saw the Pelishtim encampment and he feared and trembled greatly. Shaul inquired of G-d, and G-d did not answer him, neither by dreams, nor by the Urim, nor by the prophets. Shaul said to his servants, ‘Seek for me a necromancer and I shall go to her and I shall inquire of her’”.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The very juxtaposition of the above verses seems suggestive of Shaul’s rationale for his action: that G-d forbade the use of divination to learn of future events because He provided Israel with pure and holy means to acquire such information. With such means rendered inaccessible, and the nation in such grave danger, would he then not be permitted to utilize sources of information normally off-limits to him?

Indeed, from the Torah’s treatment of the prohibition against various forms of witchcraft and divination in *Devarim* 18:9-15, it would seem that such reasoning possesses much validity.

“You shall be wholehearted with G-d, your L-rd, For these nations ... hearken to diviners and enchanters, but as for you, G-d your L-rd has not given you such. A prophet from your midst, from among your brethren like me, G-d your L-rd will set up for you; you shall hearken to him.”

Rashi interprets: “[He has not permitted you] to hearken to diviners and enchanters, since he has caused the Divine Presence to rest upon the prophets and the Urim V’Tumim”.

Rashi relates the prohibitions against witchcraft and divination to the promise of prophecy in the same manner that, we may infer, King Shaul surely connected them: You shall not seek to investigate the future through divination, since this is an avenue employed by nations not endowed with prophets and Urim V’Tumim, where all necessary inquiries may be directed.

Based upon this conclusion, Shaul apparently proceeds to infer the inverse: If all holy and pure means are no longer accessible to him, then divination in the circumstances confronting him may not be forbidden. Indeed, only after all legitimate modes of inquiry fail does Shaul solicit the assistance of a necromancer. Additionally it should be noted that of the many forms of divination, Shaul specifically selected necromancy, a form of divination about which Chazal comment: “The one who conjures up I the deceased I sees him but does not hear his voice. The one who inquires of him hears his voice but does not see him.” Hence, in choosing this specific avenue of inquiry, Shaul was anticipating an exclusive audience with his mentor, the great prophet Shmuel, whose reliability would be beyond question. While access to the prophet would, under the circumstances, have to derive from the impurity of necromancy, nevertheless the Word of G-d to be gained from His trusted prophet Shmuel, at so critical a time for the nation, would warrant such inquiry.

While Shaul may have been in error in his halachic assessment (since, as noted above, he did not merit to render decisions that unfailingly accorded with the halachah) we can readily empathize with his conduct, given the sources cited and the immense duress under which he was constrained to act.

Yet even this tempered indictment of King Shaul as the victim of flawed halachic deductions may be excessive, since we find that the Netziv[[9]](#footnote-9) remarkably coneludes that Shaul’s actions may actually have been justified, his error being only that he gave up too quickly when he should have repented and further beseeched G-d to answer him through holy, legitimate means. Yet, contends the Netziv, he was certainly mandated, in taking all Israel into battle, to seek to learn what the future held.

Hence, Shaul emerges to the very end as the righteous individual he was throughout his life. At worst, his reasoning was somewhat flawed, but he clearly acted for the sake of All Israel, and never in flagrant disregard of any of the Torah’s teachings.

# II. His Majesty King David

In II Samuel chapters 11 and 12, we find the incident I wish to examine. In this incident, many folks see King David lusting after BatSheva,[[10]](#footnote-10) the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Uriah is a soldier in King David’s army. He is fighting the King’s battle when King David takes his wife in an adulterous relationship. After she becomes pregnant, King David has Uriah recalled from the battle and orders him to sleep with his wife, in order to cover up his sin. Afterwards, when Uriah refuses to sleep with BatSheva, King David Has Uriah killed in battle. After Uriah’s death, King David marries BatSheva.

Most folks understand that King David committed adultery and murder. These are the sins that they see King David committing.

*Nothing could be farther from the truth.*

In fact, Chazal say:

***Shabbat 56a*** *Anyone who says that David sinned is mistaken.*

This does not mean that King David was completely blameless, but it means that, technically, he did not commit any transgressions; he did not breach the Torah’s laws in any way. The reason he was punished so severely is that HaShem judges the righteous very strictly, and David’s actions were not proper for someone of his spiritual stature.

If we apply the principle of *midda keneged midda*, measure for measure, we get an entirely different picture. Further, if we examine the Sages, we see that there is more to this story than first meets the eye.

Was King David committing adultery? The Tanakh says *no*.

Did King David commit murder? The Tanakh says *no*. How can this be?

The Sages record that King David required that all of his soldiers were required to give their wives a “get”, a divorce, before they went off to battle. This was done so that if the soldier failed to return from the battle, and his body was not found, then the wife would not become an “aguna”, a woman who could not remarry. If she was legally divorced, then she could remarry if her husband did not return after a reasonable amount of time.

***Kethuboth 9b*** *Everyone who goes out into the war of the House of David writes for his wife a deed of divorce[[11]](#footnote-11), for it is written, And to thy brethren shalt thou bring greetings, and take their pledge[[12]](#footnote-12). What [is the meaning of], ‘and take their pledge’? R. Joseph learnt: Things which are pledged between him and her[[13]](#footnote-13).*

We know that Uriah had given his wife a “get” and was legally divorced. Chazal ask whether it was a permanent or a conditional get.[[14]](#footnote-14) David required a conditional get.[[15]](#footnote-15) The get is automatically revoked if the soldier returns from battle. In Uriah’s case, we see that Uriah did **not** give a conditional get. Uriah gave a **permanent** get. The fact that Uriah was a rebel might explain why Batsheba demanded a permanent get.

We can begin to understand Uriah’s rebellious nature by examing an illustrative event when Uriah was summoned home. When Uriah was called before David, he made reference to his general as “my master, Joab”.[[16]](#footnote-16) Although this form of address would have been proper in the presence of his commanding officer, referring to anyone other than the king as *master* in the presence of the king himself constituted an act of rebellion punishable by death.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Therefore, we know that King David did not commit adultery. We can know that King David did not commit adultery because the Torah prescribes that the one who commits adultery is to be stoned to death:

***Vayikra (Leviticus) 20:10*** *And the man that committeth adultery with [another] man’s wife, [even he] that committeth adultery with his neighbour’s wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.*

Since HaShem did not cause this to happen, we can know that King David did not commit adultery.

Did King David lust, sexually, after Batsheva? No! King David did NOT lust after Batsheva. He had entirely conquered that evil inclination. The story makes it sound like Batsheva was taking a bath on her roof without any covering. Nothing could be further from the truth. Batsheva was coming out from the mikveh, the ritual immersion that women must must perform every month. As she exited the mikveh house, her exalted spiritual state attracted King David.[[18]](#footnote-18) He prophetically saw that he was to father Solomon with this woman.[[19]](#footnote-19) That is why he took her. Bathsheba was David’s true bashert,[[20]](#footnote-20) “predestined for David from the six days of Creation” but “he enjoyed her as an unripe fruit,” for he married her before the proper time, when the “fruit” was still unripe, neglecting to wait until after Uriah would die a [natural] death.[[21]](#footnote-21)

***Soncino Zohar, Bereshit, Section 1, Page 73b*** *R. Simeon further discoursed, beginning with the verse: For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me (Ps. LI, 5). He said: ‘How much must a man be on his guard against sinning before the Holy One, blessed be He, for each sin committed by man is recorded on high, and is not blotted out save by much repentance, as it is said, “For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me” (Jer. II, 22). For when a man commits a sin once before God, it leaves a mark, and when he repeats the same sin that mark is deepened, and after a third time it becomes a stain spreading from one side to the other, as expressed in the words, “thine iniquity is become a stain before me” (Ibid.). When David committed his great sin in taking Bath-Sheba, he thought that it would leave its mark forever, but the message came to him, “The Lord also hath put away thy sin, thou shalt not die” (II Sam. XII, 13); i.e. the stain has been removed.’ R. Abba put this question to R. Simeon: ‘Since we have been taught that Bath-Sheba was destined for King David from the day of the creation, how comes it that the Holy One, blessed be He, first gave her to Uriah the Hittite?’ R. Simeon replied: ‘Such is the way of the Holy One, blessed be He; although a woman is destined for a certain man, He first allows her to be the wife of another man until his time arrives. As soon as that time arrives, he departs from the world to make way for the other, although the Holy One, blessed be He, is loth to remove him from the world to make way for the other man before his time arrives. This is the inner reason why Bath-Sheba was given to Uriah first. Now reflect and you will find the reason for the Holy Land having been given to Canaan before Israel came there. You will find that the inner reason underlying the two is the same. Observe, further, that David, although he confessed his sin and repented, could not obliterate from his heart and mind the memory of the sins that he had committed, especially of that concerning Bath-Sheba, and was always apprehensive lest one of them would prove a stumbling-block to him in the hour of danger. Hence he never removed them from his thoughts. According to another interpretation, the words “For I know my transgressions” indicate his knowledge of the diverse grades to which the various sins of men are to be referred, while the words “and my sin“ (hatathi=my failing) refer to the defect of the moon, which did not emerge from her impurity until the time of Solomon, when her light once more became whole, so that the world became firmly established and Israel dwelt secure, as it is written: “And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree” (I Kings V, 5). Nevertheless, as David said, “My deficiency is ever before me”, and that will not be obliterated from the world until the Messiah will come, as it is said: “And the unclean spirit I will cause to pass out from the earth” (Zech. XIII, 2).’*

In fact, the Sages teach that King David had asked HaShem for a test in this area because he had completely conquered this inclination.

***Soncino Zohar, Bereshit, Section 1, Page 82a*** *David further said to God: “Sovereign of the Universe, wherefore do not the Israelites conclude one of their blessings with my name as they do with the name of Abraham, [Tr. note: The first blessing of the Amidah.] of whom it is written ‘I am thy shield’ (Gen. XV, 1)?” God replied: “Abraham I have already tried and tested and found to be wholly stedfast.” Said David: “If so, ‘examine me, O Lord, and prove me, try my reins and my heart‘ (Ps. XXVI, 2).” When he sinned in the matter of Batsheva, David remembered what he had said, and he exclaimed “ ‘Thou hast proved mine heart, thou hast visited me in the night, thou hast tried me and hast not found, my thoughts should not have passed my mouth‘ (Ps. XVII, 3). I said, Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, and thou hast proved my heart; I said, Try my reins, and thou hast tried me; but thou hast not found me as I should be; would that what was in my mind had not passed my lips.” (And with all this the Israelites do conclude a blessing with his name. [Tr. note: The third blessing after the Haftorah.]) Therefore David said: “‘Thou, O Lord, art a shield about me, my glory and the lifter up of my head‘: this grade assuredly is my glory with which I am crowned.”’*

Did David cause the murder of Uriah the Hittite? The Tanakh says no. How can this be? To understand this part, we must look carefully at the text to understand what is going on:

***2 Shmuel (Samuel) 11:8-9*** *And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king’s house, and there followed him a mess [of meat] from the king. But Uriah slept at the door of the king’s house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house.*

At any rate, the permanent get meant that Uriah could NOT obey the King’s order to go home and sleep with his wife.[[22]](#footnote-22) The fact that he refused the King’s orders, twice, suggests that King David wanted to show the world that Uriah had given a permanent get and could never go back to Batsheba.

***2 Shmuel (Samuel) 11:10-12*** *And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from [thy] journey? why [then] didst thou not go down unto thine house? And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? [as] thou livest, and [as] thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing. And David said to Uriah, Tarry here to day also, and to morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow. And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.*

On two separate counts, therefore, Uriah placed himself in the category of *mored b’malchus*, a rebel against the king. As such, Uriah forfeited his life immediately since the extralegal powers of the monarch include the authority to invoke the death penalty upon rebels without the due process of law.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Undeniably, the law gave David the right to bring Uriah before the Sanhedrin and demand his execution. Nevertheless, David worried (for good reason) that the people would question the integrity of a king who ordered a man’s death and immediately married his widow, and David sought to avoid the public appearance of conspiracy and impropriety when he married Bathsheba.[[24]](#footnote-24) Therefore, rather than demanding Uriah’s execution from the Sanhedrin, David instructed his general, Joab, to arrange Uriah’s death in battle.[[25]](#footnote-25)

At this point King David has no choice. Uriah has disobeyed a direct order of the king. The penalty for this offense is death.

***2 Shmuel (Samuel) 11:14-17*** *And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent [it] by the hand of Uriah. And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die. And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men [were]. And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell [some] of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.*

King David knows that Uriah has an evil heart,[[26]](#footnote-26) never the less, one MUST obey the King no matter what. Not wishing to publicly shame Uriah, King David has him killed in battle in an honorable manner. Notice that Joab does not protest in the least. Joab knew that the order of the King, as the chief justice, must be obeyed.

Ok, so now we know that King David did NOT commit adultery with Bath-Sheba and that he did not cause Uriah to be murdered. What we need to know is: What was King David’s sin?

It is clear that David was neither an adulterer nor a murderer. Indeed, when the prophet Nathan presented David with the parable of the rich man who stole the poor man’s sheep, he alluded to theft but to neither murder nor adultery.[[27]](#footnote-27) Had David been truly guilty of murdering Uriah, what possible explanation could there have been for the prophet to employ a parable that implied theft but not murder?

HaShem‘s punishments are always just. To determine the sin, we should look at the punishment:

***2 Shmuel (Samuel) 11:26*** *And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased HaShem. And HaShem sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich [man] had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor [man] had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, [As] HaShem liveth, the man that hath done this [thing] shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.*

King David was also the chief Hakham, the chief Judge. Nathan the prophet naturally came to the King for a judgment.

David, being a great Torah scholar and Sage, renders a judgment in keeping with Torah. HaShem agreed to this judgment, EXCEPT for the death penalty:

***2 Shmuel (Samuel) 12:13*** *And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against HaShem. And Nathan said unto David, HaShem also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.*

Despite his failure, when confronted by the prophet with his sin David immediately accepted responsibility for his actions with the words, “*Chotosi LaShem* I have sinned against God”.[[28]](#footnote-28) Although innocent of adultery and murder, sins against *man,* David had nevertheless sinned against God when he failed to uphold the divine will by manipulating the intent behind the law.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The bottom line is this: HaShem has accused King David of stealing a ewe, a female sheep. The penalty is, therefore, in keeping with the sin:

***Shemot (Exodus) 22:1*** *If a man shall steal an ox, or a sheep, and kill it, or sell it; he shall restore five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.*

Therefore, King David’s sin was: **Theft of a sheep**.

Now that we have seen the picture, we can begin to understand why HaShem said that David was a man after His own heart:

***II Luqas (Acts) 13:22*** *And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the [son] of Jesse****, a man after mine own heart****, which shall fulfill all my will.*

HaShem would never say this about an adulterous murderer. Further, we must understand that Uriah[[30]](#footnote-30) was an evil man:

***Shabbath 56a*** *R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in R. Jonathan’s name: Whoever says that David sinned is merely erring, for it is said, And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways: and the Lord was with him. Is it possible that sin came to his hand, yet the Divine Presence was with him? Then how do I interpret, Wherefore hast thou despised the word of the Lord, to do that which is evil in his sight? He wished to do [evil], but did not. Rab observed: Rabbi, who is descended from David, seeks to defend him, and expounds [the verse] in David’s favour. [Thus:] The ‘evil’ [mentioned] here is unlike every other ‘evil’ [mentioned] elsewhere in the Torah. For of every other evil [mentioned] in the Torah it is written, ‘and he did,’ whereas here it is written, .’to do’: [this means] that he desired to do, but did not. Thou hast smitten Uriah the Hittite with the sword: thou shouldst have had him tried by the Sanhedrin, but didst not. And hast taken his wife to be thy wife: thou hast marriage rights in her. For R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in R. Jonathan’s name: Every one who went out in the wars of the house of David wrote a bill of divorcement for his wife, for it is said, and bring these ten cheeses unto the captain of their thousand, and look how thy brethren fare, and take their pledge [‘arubatham]. What is meant by ‘arubatham? R. Joseph learned: The things which pledge man and woman [to one another]. And thou hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon: just as thou art not [to be] punished for the sword of the Ammonites, so art thou not [to be] punished for [the death of] Uriah the Hittite. What is the reason? He was rebellious against royal authority, saying to him, and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open field [etc].*

***Yoma 22b*** *R. Huna said: How little does he whom the Lord supports need to grieve or trouble himself! Saul sinned once and it brought [calamity] upon him, David sinned twice and it did not bring evil upon him — What was the one sin of Saul? The affair with Agag. But there was also the matter with Nob, the city of the priests? — [Still] it was because of what happened with Agag that Scripture says: It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king. What were the two sins of David? — The sin against Uriah and that [of counting the people to which] he was enticed. But there was also the matter of Batsheva? — For that he was punished, as it is written, And he shall restore the lamb fourfold: the child, Amnon, Tamar and Absalom. But for the other sin he was also punished as it is written: So the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed? — There his own body was not punished — But in the former case, too, his own body was not punished either? Not indeed? He was punished on his own body, for Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: For six months David was smitten with leprosy, the Sanhedrin removed from him, and the Shechinah departed from him, as it is written: Let those that fear Thee return unto me, and they that know Thy testimonies, and it is also written: Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation. But Rab said that David also listened to evil talk? — We hold like Samuel [who says] that David did not do so. And even according to Rab, who says that David listened to calumny, was he not punished for it? For Rab Judah said in the name of Rab. At the time when David said to Mephibosheth: I say: Thou and Ziba divide the land, a heavenly voice came forth to say to him: Rehoboam and Jeroboam will divide the Kingdom.*

Never the less, King David did sin grievously for a man in his exalted position with his exalted spiritual status. The Torah is quite blunt regarding the seriousness of King David’s sin:

***2 Shmuel (Samuel) 12:7-13*** *And Nathan said to David, Thou [art] the man. Thus saith HaShem God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if [that had been] too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of HaShem, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife [to be] thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith HaShem, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give [them] unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst [it] secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against HaShem. And Nathan said unto David, HaShem also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.*

For his transgression, David endured the most severe punishments: the death of his first son from Bathsheba, and the rebellions of his sons Absalom and Adonijah. But because of his spontaneous and unqualified repentance, David retained his distinction as founder the messianic line. It was he who prepared Israel for its crowning glory, the building of the Temple.

We must be very careful not to read into the scriptures more than what should be there.

It is also instructive to note that the union of King David with Batsheva produced Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived.

***2 Shmuel (Samuel) 12:24*** *And David comforted Bath-sheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and HaShem loved him.*

It is apparent that King David was destined to marry Batsheva. Being a prophet, David knew that his heir and successor would be the son that would be born to him and Bathsheba, a woman of renown, famous for her excellence of character, no less than for her unsurpassed beauty. It seems that his timing was off a bit.

OK, so lets assume that you have read this far and still think that King David committed adultery and murder, consider the following: Why did the Prophet, Nathan, say that David stole a sheep? What was the point of the Prophet’s story?

Now, because of David’s greatness, his crime is dealt with in a VERY severe way. It is dealt with as though he committed a murder. In the same way, Moses lost entry to the promised land simply by hitting a rock.

Also note that the PROPER punishment for murder, in death. David must die IF he committed murder. The Torah is quite clear. Why didn’t David die?

The PROPER punishment for committing adultery is DEATH. Why wasn’t David stoned?

Since when does HaShem kill *my children* when I have committed a capital crime? Not even men would do that. When Nathan declared: “*You are that man*!” David at once understood how dastardly his actions towards Uriah had been and immediately repented. In this merit, **the death sentence itself was repealed**. David continued to rule and his children inherited his kingdom, but tragically he did pay fourfold, as he himself had decreed. David’s life was one of agonizing family strife and rebellion from that day onwards.

***Sanhedrin 107a*** *Rab Judah said in Rab’s name: One should never [intentionally] bring himself to the test, since David king of Israel did so, and fell. He said unto Him, ‘Sovereign of the Universe! Why do we say [in prayer] “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” but not the God of David?’ He replied, ‘They were tried by me, but thou wast not.’ Then, replied he, ‘Sovereign of the Universe, examine and try me’ — as it is written, Examine me, O Lord, and try me. He answered ‘I will test thee, and yet grant thee a special privilege; for I did not inform them [of the nature of their trial beforehand], yet, I inform thee that I will try thee in a matter of adultery.’ Straightway, And it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed etc. R. Johanan said: He changed his night couch to a day couch, but he forgot the halachah: there is a small organ in man which satisfies him in his hunger but makes him hunger when satisfied. And he walked upon the roof of the king’s house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. Now Bath Sheba was cleansing her hair behind a screen, when Satan came to him, appearing in the shape of a bird. He shot an arrow at him, which broke the screen, thus she stood revealed, and he saw her. Immediately, And David sent and enquired after the woman. And one said, Is not this Bath Sheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite? And David sent messengers, and took her, and she came unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanliness: and she returned unto her house. Thus it is written, Thou host proved mine heart; thou hast visited me in the night; thou host tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. He said thus: ‘Would that a bridle had fallen into the mouth of mine enemy [i.e., himself], that I had not spoken thus.’*

*Raba expounded: What is meant by the verse, To the Chief Musician, A Psalm of David. In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain? David pleaded before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Sovereign of the Universe! Forgive me that sin, that men may not say, “Your mountain [sc. the king] has been put to flight by a bird.”‘*

*Raba expounded: What is meant by the verse, Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest? David pleaded before the Holy One, blessed be He: ‘Thou knowest full well that had I wished to suppress my lust, I could have done so, but, thought I, let them [the people] not say, “The servant triumphed against his Master.”‘*

*Raba expounded: What is meant by the verse, For I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me? Bath Sheba, the daughter of Eliam, was predestined for David from the six days of Creation, but that she came to him with sorrow. And the school of R. Ishmael taught likewise: She was worthy [i.e., predestined] for David from the six days of Creation, but that he enjoyed her before she was ripe.*

***Tehillim (Psalms) 51:2-5*** *Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin [is] ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done [this] evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, [and] be clear when thou judgest. Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*

Watch the punishment to see the sin.

# III. Aaron and the Sin of the Golden Calf

Did Aaron participate in the sin of the golden calf? If he sinned, why was he made High Priest? If he sinned, why wasn’t he killed along with the rest of the 3000 idolaters?

***Shemot (Exodus) 32:25-29*** *And when Moses saw that the people [were] naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto [their] shame among their enemies:) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who [is] on HaShem’s side? [let him come] unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith HaShem God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, [and] go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to HaShem, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day.*

The fact that Aaron “never” received punishment and in fact received the reward of the High Priesthood, may indicate that he did not sin. Again, it is important to look at the results of an incident in order to determine what, if any, the sin was. Let us begin by looking at the story of the golden calf:

***Shemot (Exodus) 32:1-2*** *And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for [as for] this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which [are] in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring [them] unto me.*

Notice in Exodus 32:1 that the people gathered themselves onto Aaron. Why did they gathered unto Aaron? Why not gather into some of the other tribal leaders? The Torah tells us the answer:

***Shemot (Exodus) 24:13-14*** *And Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God. And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and, behold, Aaron and Hur [are] with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them.*

Moses leaves clear instructions: Aaron and Hur are in charge. If you have any matters to be dealt with, they will handle it. So, why don’t the people gather unto Aaron and Hur? Why do they gather only unto Aaron? The Midrash tells us:

***Midrash Rabbah - Exodus XLI:7*** *AND WHEN THE PEOPLE SAW THAT MOSES DELAYED (BOSHESH) TO COME DOWN FROM THE MOUNT. etc. (XXXII,1). What does BOSHESH mean? That six hours [of the day] had come[[31]](#footnote-31) (bau shesh) and he had not yet descended, whereas Moses had promised them, ‘After the expiration of forty days I will bring you the Torah’; and now that six hours had elapsed[[32]](#footnote-32) and Moses had not yet come down, the people immediately GATHERED THEMSELVES TOGETHER UNTO AARON (ib.). The Sages said: Satan then found his opportunity; for Moses appeared suspended between heaven and earth[[33]](#footnote-33) and they pointed at him the finger, saying, FOR AS FOR THIS MOSES,[[34]](#footnote-34) etc. (ib.). Hur arose and rebuked them: ‘Ye brainless fools![[35]](#footnote-35) Have you forgotten the miracles God performed for you?’ Whereupon they rose against him and slew him. They then came to Aaron, as it says, AND THE PEOPLE GATHERED THEMSELVES TOGETHER UNTO AARON (ib.), and said to him: We will do to you what we have done to this man.’ When Aaron saw the state of affairs, he was afraid, for it says, And Aaron was afraid, and he built an altar (mizbeah) before it (ib. 5).*

So, the people first gathered themselves unto Hur and then after he denounced them for their wickedness, he was slain. Thus, when the people gather themselves unto Aaron he decided to comply with their wishes rather than be slain and to cause the people to sin further.

## A Diversion

Before we look at Aaron’s involvement with the golden calf, let us look at Hur. Who was Hur? What was his sin that he should die? Did he receive a reward for sanctifying the name of HaShem? The Torah reveals some fascinating details:

***1 Divre Hayamim (Chronicles) 2:50*** *These were the sons of Caleb the son of Hur, the firstborn of Ephratah; Shobal the father of Kirjath-jearim, …*

Now we know that Hur is Caleb’s son, but who was his mother? The Midrash gives us some great insight:

***Midrash Rabbah - Exodus I:17*** *AND IT CAME TO PASS, BECAUSE THE MIDWIVES FEARED GOD, THAT HE BUILT THEM HOUSES (I, 21). Rab and Levi discussed this. One says: It means that they established priestly and Levitical families; and the other, that they were founders of a royal family.[[36]](#footnote-36) Priestly and Levitical families-from Moses and Aaron; a royal family from Miriam, because David descended from Miriam, as it is written: And Caleb the son of Hezron begot Azubah his wife[[37]](#footnote-37)-and of Jerioth-and these were her sons: Jasher, and Shobab and Ardon (I Chron. II, 18). ‘Azubah’ is Miriam[[38]](#footnote-38); and why was she so called? Because all had forsaken her.[[39]](#footnote-39) He begot’? But she was his wife! This is to teach you, said R. Johanan, that if one marries a woman for the sake of heaven,[[40]](#footnote-40) he is regarded as if he had given birth to her. ‘Jerioth’-because her face was like the curtains of (yeri’oth) the tabernacle.[[41]](#footnote-41) And these are her sons’-do not pronounce it banehah (her sons) but bonehah (her builders).[[42]](#footnote-42) ‘Jasher’ is Caleb, because he rectified (yashir) his ways. Shobab,’ because he disciplined (shibbeb) himself.[[43]](#footnote-43) ‘Ardon,’ because he chastised (ridah) his soul. ‘And Azubah died’-to teach us that she was ill and was treated as if already dead, Caleb too forsaking her. ‘And Caleb took unto him Ephrath,’ this is Miriam.[[44]](#footnote-44) And why was she called Ephrath? Because Israel were fruitful (paru) and increased, thanks to her. What is meant by ‘and he took unto him’?[[45]](#footnote-45) When she was healed, he treated her as though he were now marrying her, placing her in the litter,[[46]](#footnote-46) on account of his great joy in her. Similarly, you will find in another place that Miriam is called by two names on account of the incident that happened to her. Thus it says: And Ashur the father of Tekoa had two wives, Nelah and Naarah (ib. IV, 5). ‘Ashur’ is Caleb, because ‘Ashur’ was the son of Hezron.[[47]](#footnote-47) Why was he called Ashur? Because he made his face black (hishhiru)*

Thus we know that Hur is the son of Caleb and Miriam, the sister of Moses.

So, Why does Hur have to die? What was his sin that he should be punished midda kneged midda, measure for measure? The answer is found in the Midrash:

***Midrash Rabbah - Exodus XLI:7*** *… Hur arose and rebuked them: ‘Ye brainless fools![[48]](#footnote-48) Have you forgotten the miracles God performed for you?’*

Hur’s sin was a railing rebuke against God’s chosen people. His words were addressed to everyone, though only 3000 of the mixed multitude actually participated in the sin. For his Lashon HaRa, evil speech, against the Jewish people, Hur was given a death sentence by the heavenly court.

At the same time, Hur gave his life for the sake of Heaven:

***Midrash Rabbah - Exodus XLVIII:3*** *Another explanation of SEE, THE LORD HATH CALLED BY NAME BEZALEL, THE SON OF URI, THE SON OF HUR, OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH. Why is Hur mentioned here? Because when Israel were about to serve idols, he jeopardized his life on God’s behalf and would not allow them to do so, with the result that they slew him. Whereupon the Holy One, blessed be He, said: ‘I assure thee that I will repay thee for this.’ It is like the case of a king whose legions rebelled against him, whereupon his field- marshal rose and fought with them, saying, ‘What! You dare rebel against the king?’ In the end they slew him, and the king thereupon said: ‘ If he had given me money, would not I have had to repay him? Then how much more is this the case now that he has given his very life on my behalf? How can I reward him? Surely, by ordaining that all his male offspring shall become generals and officers?’ Similarly, when Israel made the Calf, Hur gave his life for the glory of God; whereupon God assured him: ‘By thy life, I shall give all thy children that will descend from thee a great name in the world,’ as it says, SEE, THE LORD HATH CALLED BY NAME BEZALEL, etc. AND HE HATH FILLED HIM WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD, etc.1 Not him alone, but God endowed with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge all those who engaged in the construction of the Tabernacle, as it says, And all the wise men, that wrought all the work of the sanctuary (Ex. XXXVI, 4). Not only to the men [who engaged in this work], but even to the cattle and beast, for it says, In whom (bahemah) the Lord hath put wisdom and understanding (ib. I): this is written behemah[[49]](#footnote-49), and it implies that wisdom was given to man and beast, but Bezalel alone was selected for special mention. This is why it says, SEE, THE LORD HATH CALLED BY NAME BEZALEL.*

Hur’s reward for giving glory to HaShem was that his grandson (who was thirteen years old when given the task) should merit to build the furniture in the Mishkan, the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The Torah gives us the genealogy of Bezalel:

***Shemot (Exodus) 35:30*** *And Moses said unto the children of Israel, See, HaShem hath called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah;*

## Aaron

Let us now return to Aaron. Lets see how the Midrash depicts Aaron’s reaction to the death of Hur:

***Midrash Rabbah - Leviticus X:3****. R. Berekiah, in the name of R. Abba b. Kahana, expounded the verse as referring to Aaron. When the Israelites were about to commit that act,1 they went first to Hur, and said to him: ‘Arise, make us a god.’ As he did not hearken to them, they rose against him and slew him. This is [indicated by] what is written, Also in thy assemblies[[50]](#footnote-50) is found the blood of the souls of the innocent poor, which refers to the blood of Hur. Did I not find them breaking in?[[51]](#footnote-51) Yea [I punished them] for all these (Jer. II, 34), for having said: These be thy gods, O Israel. Afterwards they went to Aaron, and said to him: Up, make us a god. As soon as Aaron heard of it [i.e. Hur’s death] he became frightened, as it is said, And Aaron was affrighted when he considered the slaughtering (Ex. XXXII, 5),[[52]](#footnote-52) [meaning], ‘ he was frightened when he saw the slaughtered man before him.’ Aaron said [to himself]: What shall I do? They have already killed Hur who was a prophet; if they kill also me whom am a priest, there will instantly be fulfilled against them the verse saying, Should priest and prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord (Lam. II, 20), Israel will immediately be liable to exile.*

So, a frightened, concerned Aaron must act quickly to prevent the people from committing an even graver sin. And, his actions must be convincing enough that the people will not kill him. We know that Aaron does not want to engage or encourage idolatry, so what is he doing building a golden calf? The Midrash explains:

***Midrash Rabbah - Exodus XLI:7 …*** *Another explanation of AND HE BUILT AN ALTAR. They were desirous of building an altar with him, but he would not allow them, saying: ‘Allow me to build it by myself, for it is not befitting the respect due to the altar that another should build it.’ Aaron’s intention in this was to* ***delay*** *matters; he said to himself: ‘By the time I build it all by myself Moses will come down.’*

And:

***Midrash Rabbah - Leviticus X:3 …*** *Another interpretation: And Aaron saw this, and built an altar before it (Ex. XXXII, 5). What did he see? He saw [the situation thus]: If they build it, one will bring a pebble, another a stone, and as a result their work will be completed at once; but if I build it myself, I shall dally over the work, and our master Moses will [in the meantime] come down and destroy the objects of idol-worship; moreover, as I am building it, I shall build it to the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He. This is indicated by what is written, And Aaron made proclamation, and said: To-morrow shall be a feast to the Lord (ib.). It is written, not ‘A feast to the Golden Calf’ but ‘A feast to the Lord’.*

And:

***Midrash Rabbah - Numbers XV:21*** *GATHER UNTO ME SEVENTY MEN. But where were the former ones? This bears on the text, He breaketh in pieces mighty men without inquisition, and setteth others in their stead (Job XXXIV, 24). While they were still in Egypt they had seventy elders; as it says Go, and gather the elders[[53]](#footnote-53) of Israel together (Ex. III, 16). These elders came out of Egypt with them, and when Moses went up to receive the Torah they were with him; as it says, Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel (ib. XXIV, 9); And unto the elders he said: Tarry ye here for us (ib. 14). When Moses went up he promised Israel that he would come down in forty days’ time. Seeing that he delayed in coming down--as it says, And when the people saw that Moses delayed--boshesh (ib. XXXII, 1)--’boshesh’ bearing no other meaning than that of delay; as is proved by the text, Why is his chariot so long (boshesh) in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots? (Judg. V, 28)--all Israel came to the elders and said to them: Moses promised us that he would come down at the end of forty days, and though now it is six hours beyond that time[[54]](#footnote-54) he has not come down and we do not know what has happened to him. 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 is become of him’ (Ex. XXXII, 1). When the elders heard such 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 expostulated with them, they rose upon him also and slew him. All Israel came to Aaron in serried ranks; as it says, The people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him: Up (ib.)! Why do you sit? ‘Up.’ R. Isaac expounded: It was the Holy Spirit crying: I hate the gathering of evil-doers, and will not sit with the wicked (Ps. XXVI, 5). ‘UP, make us a god,’ and if not, then ‘As for this’! 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 says, And when Aaron saw this, he built (wayyiben) an altar-mizbea’ah. (Ex. XXXII, 5); ‘wayyiben mizbe’ah’ means, he understood (hebin) from the one who lay slaughtered (zabu’ah) before him. How do we know that they slew the elders and Hur? From the fact that Jeremiah reproves Israel by saying: Also in thy skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent poor; thou didst not find them breaking in; yet for all these things (Jer. II, 34). What is the implication of the expression ‘For all these’? It means, because of the statement, These are thy gods (Ex. XXXII, 4)[[55]](#footnote-55). What punishment did He inflict upon them? And the Lord smote the people, because they made the calf (ib. 35). After a time, when He pardoned them, He said to Moses: GATHER UNTO ME SEVENTY MEN in place of the seventy[[56]](#footnote-56) who were slain for the sanctification of My name. This explains the text, ‘He breaketh in pieces mighty men without inquisition, and setteth others in their stead.’*

The Midrash, here, indicates that Aaron was attempting to delay the people from performing an act of idolatry. The key word here is “delay”. Aaron knew that Moses was not overdue. Aaron knew that the people had counted Moses’ first partial day, as the first day. They therefore expected Moses to return at sundown, thirty-nine days later. Aaron knew that Moses would return at the time he left, exactly forty days later. So, it is sundown on the thirty-ninth day when the people demand a calf. Aaron decides to try a delaying tactic that will delay the idolatry until the afternoon of the following day, when Moses will return.

The Torah confirms this in Exodus 32:2, where Aharon said unto them break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters. When Aaron asked them to take the earrings from their wives ears, and from their sons ears, and from their daughter’s ears he knew it would take the men, for only the men were involved in this act of idolatry, longer to accomplish this task because these earrings were more likely to be prized, that is why they were in their loved ones’ ears in the first place. When the people acted more quickly then he expected, Aaron decided to try another delaying tactic:

***Shemot (Exodus) 32:3-4*** *And all the people brake off the golden earrings which [were] in their ears, and brought [them] unto Aaron. And he received [them] at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These [be] thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*

Here we see Aaron engraving the calf. Instead of making a mold and casting the golden calf, Aaron gets out a hammer and a chisel and begins carving the calf from a solid hunk of gold. This action should have delayed the people a great bit. Unfortunately, the forces of evil did not want a delay:

***Shemot (Exodus) 32:24*** *And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break [it] off. So they gave [it] me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf.*

Aaron throws the gold into the fire and out jumps a calf! Aaron has failed. He had desperately tried to prevent the people from sinning, but, his tactics failed and the people committed a grave sin.

If Aaron sinned by participating in idolatry, he should have been killed along with the other idolaters:

***Shemot (Exodus) 32:25-28*** *And when Moses saw that the people [were] naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto [their] shame among their enemies:) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who [is] on HaShem’s side? [let him come] unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith HaShem God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, [and] go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.*

But Aaron is not slain, on the contrary, he is given an exalted position before HaShem:

***Midrash Rabbah - Leviticus X:3 …*** *Another interpretation: ‘And Aaron saw this,’ etc. What did he see? He saw [the situation thus]: If they build it the sin will attach to them; better that the sin should attach to me and not to Israel. R. Abba b. Judan said in the name of Rabba: This may be compared to the case of a king’s son who became very overbearing and took a sword to cut his father. Said the son’s tutor to him: ‘Do not trouble yourself, leave it to me and I shall cut him.’ The king glanced at the tutor, and said to him: ‘ I know what your intention was, namely [that you thought it] better that the sin should attach to you rather than to my son. As you live, you shall not leave my palace, and that which remains over from my table you shall eat, twenty-four perquisites will you receive.’ So [too with Aaron], ‘ You shall not leave my palace ‘ [is paralleled by], He shall not go out of the sanctuary (Lev. XXI, 12); ‘And that which remains over from my table you shall eat‘ [is paralleled by], That which is left of the meal-offering shall be Aaron’s and his sons’ (ib. I, 3); ‘ Twenty-four perquisites you will receive ‘ [is represented by] the twenty-four gifts of the priesthood[[57]](#footnote-57) assigned to Aaron and his sons. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Aaron: ‘“Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness,” Thou hast loved to keep My children guiltless, and hast hated letting them be condemned as guilty, “Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”‘ He said to him: ‘As thou livest, out of the whole of the tribe of Levi, none is chosen for the High Priesthood but thee.’ [Thus Scripture says], TAKE AARON AND HIS SONS WITH HIM.*

Aaron was a mighty man of HaShem. Because of his exalted position, he was judged very severely for what small wrong he did in the incident of the golden calf. The Midrash infers that for a very minor infraction, he was subjected to the sorrow of the death of his two sons:

***Midrash Rabbah - Leviticus X:4 …*** *Another interpretation: ‘ Wilt thou forbear from delivering them that are being taken unto death, and them that are ready to be slain,’ refers to Aaron’s sons, since they were always side by side with death[[58]](#footnote-58). R. Hanan said: It is written, And he took it from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten calf (Ex. XXXII, 4). Let the ‘taking’ spoken of here[[59]](#footnote-59) constitute atonement for the ‘taking’ spoken of in the other instance.[[60]](#footnote-60) Two [of Aaron’s sons] died and two remained alive.[[61]](#footnote-61) [With reference to the latter, God said]: TAKE AARON AND HIS SONS, etc.[[62]](#footnote-62)*

So, how many people participated in the sin of the golden calf? We can get a hint by how many were killed because of it:

***Shemot (Exodus) 32:25-31*** *And when Moses saw that the people [were] naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto [their] shame among their enemies:) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who [is] on HaShem’s side? [let him come] unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, Thus saith HaShem God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, [and] go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to HaShem, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto HaShem; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. And Moses returned unto HaShem, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold.*

So three thousand folks directly participated in the sin of the golden calf, and died that day. The Sages understand that the three thousand were part of the mixed multitude, and not the Sons of Israel.

Notice that Aaron did NOT die. Also notice that all the rest of the people also sinned in the incident, yet they did not directly participate.

The Sons of Israel, while possibly in the majority, did not stop the mixed multitude from sinning. For this, they are held guilty of sin.

# IV. Yehudah and Tamar

In the evening meeting between Ruth and Boaz (chapter 3), the story alludes to two similar situations--Lot’s daughters (Genesis 19:31ff), and Tamar, Yehuda’s daughter-in-law (Genesis 38). The three situations have common features, most notably, that there are women who have little prospect of having further children who take actions to insure their own offspring. Additionally, each of the cases has the death of two husbands.

Most folks see the encounter between Tamar and Yehudah, in Bereshit (Genesis) 38, as a sin of immorality. Torah, on the other hand, sees this encounter as a very great mitzva. It is a mitzva because Tamar was a childless widow that her dead husband’s family was commanded to correct. The family was required to raise up seed for the deceased on his land. When Yehudah failed to give his son, Shelah, to fulfill this mitzva, Tamar enticed Yehudah himself to fulfill it. The Midrash records that HaShem sent an angel to “force” Yehudah, against his will, to turn in to Tamar’s tent. The angel asked Yehudah, “If you fail to turn to Tamar; from where will the Mashiach come?” So, Yehuda’s sin in not giving his son Shelah, the first in line for this mitzva, was corrected when Boaz gave way to Ploni Almoni, for the same mitzva, because he was first in line. This tikkun, this rectification, required enormous strength.

# V. Lot and His Eldest Daughter

In the same way, many folks see the encounter between Lot and his eldest daughter, in Bereshit (Genesis) 19:30-38, as incest. The Torah, however, records this encounter as a GREAT mitzva. The eldest daughter truly believed that the only way to fulfill the mitzva of filling the earth, was through her father. So, as repulsive as the act was, she endured it in order to sanctify the name of HaShem. So great was the effort that she was rewarded with this offspring to become a part of the Messianic line. For this reason the Midrash states:

***Bereshit Rabbah 41:4*** *“R. Yitzhak says: I have found (Matza‘ti) David my servant - where did I find him? In Sodom”*

The sin of the eldest daughter was not incest. Her sin was in not consulting Lot so that He could bring his wisdom to bear on this situation. This sin had its tikkun, its rectification, on the threshing floor, when Ruth deferred to Boaz to tell her what to do. She did this even though it resulted in great disappointment and a potential loss of Boaz.

# VI. The Usurper = Yaaqov vs. Esav

In Bereshit chapter 27 Torah relates the giving of the blessing of the firstborn to Yaaqov. Many people, who read the Torah casually, believe that Yaaqov stole the blessing from his brother Esav. Nothing could be further from the truth!

In order to understand that Yaaqov merely received what HaShem had promised his mother, it is necessary that we go back in time to the place where the Torah relates the selling of the rights of the firstborn. Esav sold his birthright to Yaaqov, including the right for the blessing:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 25:29*** *And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: 30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. 31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. 32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? 33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.*

So Yaaqov was only trying to get something which actually belonged to him. Viewed this way, it was in fact Esav who was trying to steal the blessing.

How does a tzaddik’s blessing work? It is a prophecy that informs the recipient that a certain future awaits him. Since that is the case, it would make no sense for Yitzchak to say to Esav:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 27:35*** *“Your brother came with cleverness and took your blessing.”*

Either Yitzchak prophesied about Yaaqov or about Esav; there is no way Yaaqov could have “stolen” a prophecy about Esav! A prophet is never blind!

R’ Levi ben Gershon z”l (Ralbag; 1288-1344) explains: There is an element of prophecy at work when a tzaddik gives a blessing. Specifically, a tzaddik cannot give a person any blessing the tzaddik chooses; rather, he gives a blessing that is appropriate for the recipient. This is stated explicitly in the episode of Yaaqov and his grandsons, Menashe and Ephraim (Bereshit 48:19), when Yaaqov explained why he had put his right hand on the younger son: “I know, my son, I know; he [the older son, Menashe] also will become a people, and he too will become great; yet his younger brother shall become greater than he.” Yaaqov said, “Do not be upset, for I only gave each brother the blessing that was appropriate to him.” This is why Yitzchak could not undo Yaaqov‘s blessing.

It is also worth noting that Torah law says that we may keep any stolen item, including a blessing. Thus if Yaaqov did not gain the blessing rightfully and by prophesy, then there was no blessing at all. How so we know that the blessing was obtained rightfully? Because at the point that Yitzchak realized that he had blessed Yaaqov, he did NOT take the blessing back and curse Yaaqov for deceiving a blind old man. Instead, AFTER Yitzchak realized what had happened, he said:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 27:33*** *And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.*

Thus we see that after Yitzchak was fully cognizant of what had transpired, he confirmed the blessing rather than deny the blessing. The Midrash goes on to confirm the understanding:

***Midrash Rabbah - Genesis LXVII:1****. AND ISAAC TREMBLED VERY EXCEEDINGLY (XXVII, 33). It is written, The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be set up on high (Prov. XXIX, 25). The fear which Ruth caused Boaz, as it is written, The man was affrighted and turned himself (Ruth III, 8), ‘bringeth a snare’:for in strict justice he might have cursed her, save that, ‘But whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be set up on high ‘; He [God] prompted him and he blessed her, as it says, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter, etc. (ib. 10). Again, the trembling that Jacob caused Isaac, as it says, AND ISAAC TREMBLED VERY EXCEEDINGLY. ‘ bringeth a snare, for in strict justice he might have cursed him, save that, ‘But whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be set up on high’; He [God] prompted him, so that he blessed him, as it says, YEA, AND HE SHALL BE BLESSED (XXVII, 33).*

***Midrash Rabbah - Genesis LXVII:2*** *R. Levi said: Our father Isaac felt misgivings, thinking, ‘Perhaps I did not act rightly in making him the firstborn who is not so’; but when he [Esau] said: He took away my birthright (ib. 36), he exclaimed: ‘ Rightly did I bless him.’ R. Eleazar said: The validity of a document is established by its signatories; thus, lest you say, Had not Jacob deceived his father he would not have received the blessings, Scripture adds, YEA, AND HE SHALL BE BLESSED.*

**\* \* \***

Please try to understand that I am not trying to whitewash sin. I am trying to present the clear teaching of Torah. The sins of the generation of the Exodus, were smaller than most assume, never the less, for people of their exalted spiritual status, their culpability was great.

**\* \* \***

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1. Tanak is an acronym for: Torah, Neviim, and Ketuvim. These are the Hebrew words for the Law, Prophets, and the Writings. These books compose what some people call the *Old Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Shmuel II* 1:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. see *Midrash Tehillim* 7:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Shabbat* 56a [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Divrei HaYamim I* 10:13 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. With the help od Heaven [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Bamidbar* 23:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. *Shmuel I* 28:5-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. in *HaAmck Davar* on *Devarim* 18:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The name Batsheva means*Daughter of an Oath*, *Daughter of Seven*, *seventh daughter*, or *Daughter of Sheba*. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. [So that in case he falls in battle his wife should be free to marry without the necessity of halizah. The Get would in that case take effect retrospectively from the date of its writing (Rashi). Tosaf.: He writes a Get without any conditions to take effect immediately] [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 17:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I.e., the betrothals, these thou shalt take from them by a deed of divorce (Rashi). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Get al tenai [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ketubat 9a-b [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Shmuel bet (2 Samuel) 11:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Shabbat 56a [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The sages say that Batsheva was meant to be with David from the six days of creation, but that he took her prematurely. In fact, the Torah’s first word, “In the “beginning”, (בֵראשית) equals “Bat sheva to King David”, (בת שבע לָדִוד המֶלך). The Torah’s first word is related in all other places in the Tanach to kingdom and sovereignty. So there is a distinct connection here between Batsheva and the kingdom and between David and Batsheva. In spite of all the evil inclination involved in this act, David sensed their predestination and so did Batsheva. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Mashiach comes from the union between David and Batsheva and not any other of David’s wives. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Soulmate [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Sanhedrin 107a [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Shmuel bet (2 Samuel) 11:7ff; see Malbim ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Maimonides, Laws of Kings 3:8–10 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Malbim on Shmuel bet (2 Samuel) 11:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Shmuel bet (2 Samuel) 11:14ff [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. The understanding is that he was fomenting a rebellion. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Shmuel bet (2 Samuel) 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Shmuel bet (2 Samuel) 12:13 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Zohar 2:107a [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Uriah the Hittite was one of David’s mighty men (2 Samuel 23:39). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Six hours is midday, the day being counted from dawn to sunset. Six hours of the fortieth day had arrived, and Moses had still not returned. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. After midday of the fortieth day. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This was an optical illusion engineered by Satan. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The word zeh (this) indicates that they were pointing to Moses; cf. supra, XV, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Lit. ‘ ye whose heads have been cut off from the [neck](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cbody.html) ‘. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. HOUSES being understood in that sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Lit. translation, taking ,t as the direct object, as usual, though it is obviously impossible here. The [Midrash](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Corallaw.html) discusses it anon. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Y.T.: the Rabbis must have had a tradition to this effect. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Because she had been an ailing woman (Rashi on Sot. 11b). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. For no ulterior motive except that of giving birth to godly children. Since Caleb was attracted by her two brothers Moses and Aaron, he [merited](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cmerit.html) to have descendants of the same rank. According to the [Talmud](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Corallaw.html), children often resemble the maternal uncle. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Beautifully coloured. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. They built up a royal family for her. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Others read rcaa instead of cchaa and urmh instead of unmg I.e. he conquered his evil inclinations-by dissociating himself from the rest of the spies. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. On the present interpretation Azubah and Ephrath are identical. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Since they are identical, how could he marry her, seeing that she was already married to him? [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. I.e. arranging a wedding-procession for her; Sot. 12a. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. V. ib. II, 24: And after that Hezron was dead in Caleb-ephrath, then Abiah, Hezron’s wife, bore him Ashur the father of Tekoa. This verse is interpreted infra, XL, 4, as meaning that after Hezron was dead Caleb married Ephrath, who is identified with Miriam. Thus Caleb and Ashur married Miriam, and since she could not marry two brothers, Caleb and Ashur must have been one. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Lit. ‘ ye whose heads have been cut off from the neck ‘. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. A play on the word bahemah ‘in whom’, which is read as if it were behemah ‘ cattle ‘. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. A Midrashic rendering of a [Hebrew](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Chebrew.html) word meaning wing, corner, hem of garment (E.V. ‘skirts ‘). In Rabbinic Hebrew the root is used for ‘ gather ‘, ‘ assemble ‘. The allusion here is evidently to Ex. XXXII, 1, And the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. E.V.: ‘Thou didst not find them breaking in’. In connection with

Golden Calf the Israelites were like the thief breaking in (the same word is used as in Ex. XXII, 1) since they did it in the absence of Moses. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. This is a Midrashic rendering which presupposes reading wa-yar (and he saw) as if vocalized wa-yira’ (‘ and he feared ‘), and taking the noun mizbeah (altar, lit. ‘a slaughtering place’) as ‘the slaughtering’ (abstract noun) or as ‘ the slaughtered one ‘. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Presumably seventy, v. Mah. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Cf. Ex. R. XLI, 7: What is the meaning of ‘boshesh’ ? Six hours have elapsed (ba’u shesh). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. E.V. singular. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Omitting ‘their fathers’ of cur. edd. with Rash. and Rad. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Enumerated in B.K. 110b. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. I.e. near to death in view of the penalties to which they were liable in the event of transgressing the priestly regulations. The death of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. X) is an instance of the priests’ proximity to death. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Lev. VIII, 2. Tanh. refers to Num. XVII, 11 f. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Sc. the Golden Calf: alternatively Nadab and Abihu. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. The atonement and forgiveness were thus incomplete.--The immediate cause of their death was the taking of strange [fire](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cfire.html) into the [Sanctuary](file:///D%3A%5CWord%5CPeople%5Cmikdash.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. In Warsaw ed. TAKE, etc., is omitted here and commences the next section. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)