

Date: 7 Adar 5786 (February 24, 2026)

Torah Portion: Tetzaveh

Topic: Intents and Outcomes

As written in Exodus 28:1, “*Now you, bring near to yourself Aharon your brother, and his sons with him, from among the Children of Yisrael – Aharon, Nadab and Abihu, Elazar and Ithamar... to minister to Me.*” The Midrash is struck by the unusual phrase, “*bring near to yourself.*” Why this language? Why must Moshe personally draw Aharon close?

The Sages teach that this command comes in the shadow of the Golden Calf. When Moshe descended from Sinai and saw Yisrael worshipping the Calf, he also saw Aharon striking the molten form with a hammer. Though Aharon’s intent was to delay the people until Moshe’s return—hoping to prevent greater bloodshed—Moshe, at that moment, perceived him as complicit. A subtle distance entered Moshe’s heart. The wound was not ideological alone; it was relational.

Thus, the Kadosh Barchu intervenes: “*Moshe, I know Aharon’s heart.*” Divine knowledge penetrates beyond action into motive. Where human sight sees only the external act, Heaven evaluates the inward intention. Therefore the Torah says, “*bring near to yourself.*” Restore him. Draw him close again. The priesthood begins not merely as an institutional appointment, but as a healing of fractured trust.

Yet this Midrashic defense appears to contradict another verse. In Deuteronomy 9:20, Moshe recounts, “*YHWH was very angry with Aharon to destroy him.*” How can Aharon be both defended and nearly destroyed? The Eitz Yosef resolves the tension: the anger directed “toward Aharon” was not anger at his inner motive, but rather anger channeled through him. As the future Kohen Gadol, Aharon would stand as the vehicle of national atonement. The weight of the nation’s sin would pass through him. In this sense, he absorbed judgment on behalf of Yisrael.

This concept finds support in the Talmud (Shabbos 33b), which teaches that the righteous sometimes suffer so that the generation may be spared. The *tzaddik* becomes a living altar. His personal trial becomes communal purification. Aharon’s near-destruction is thus reframed: not annihilation, but elevation into a redemptive role.

Shem MiShmuel, citing the Chassidic master R’ Avraham “the Malach,” deepens this further through the verse in Ecclesiastes 7:20: “*For there is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he always does good and never sins.*” Even the righteous stumble—but how they respond defines their spiritual stature.

There are, says the Malach, two types of *tzaddikim*. One, upon recognizing error, withdraws from public life to engage in intense *teshuvah*. He isolates himself, repairs the breach, and only then resumes his mission. This is righteous and holy.

But there is a loftier type. This *tzaddik* does not suspend his service even to repair himself. To interrupt the mission for personal spiritual rehabilitation would, in a subtle way, center the self. Instead, he continues serving Hashem and uplifting others while bearing the burden of his own imperfection internally. His *teshuvah* unfolds within ongoing action, not retreat from it. His repentance is woven into service.

Shem MiShmuel explains that Aharon embodied this second category. In the Golden Calf episode, he acted to protect Yisrael, even at the cost of personal suspicion and spiritual danger. His motives were pure—aimed at minimizing catastrophe. Yet the external appearance of his action resembled idolatry. Heaven therefore judged him on two planes simultaneously.

On the plane of action (*ma’aseh*), a sin-offering was required. The *korban chatat* atones specifically for an inadvertent transgression—an act that objectively violates the Divine will even if subjective intent is innocent. Aharon’s involvement, though strategic and protective, nonetheless took tangible form as the fashioning of a calf. The physical reality required rectification.

But on the plane of intention (*machshavah*), Aharon was rewarded beyond measure. For the concealed purity of his heart, Hashem chose him—and only him—to serve eternally as Kohen Gadol. The very hands that shaped the Calf would later lift the incense before the Ark. The very figure suspected of facilitating idolatry would become the mediator of holiness. Judgment did not erase destiny; it refined it.

Thus we see a profound dialectic in Torah theology:

- Human perception evaluates visible behavior.
- Divine judgment weighs inner intention.
- Communal atonement may pass through personal suffering.
- External misstep does not cancel internal righteousness.
- Consequence and calling can coexist.

The sin-offering does not negate chosenness. Rather, it perfects it.

In Mussar terms, Aharon teaches that spiritual leadership is not defined by flawlessness but by alignment of heart. Even when a righteous person's action becomes entangled in ambiguity, Heaven discerns motive. At the same time, pure intent does not exempt one from responsibility for tangible consequences. Both dimensions are real.

The command "*bring near to yourself Aharon*" thus resonates on multiple levels. It is reconciliation between brothers. It is restoration of public trust. It is Divine affirmation of hidden righteousness. And it is the transformation of crisis into vocation.

From the ashes of the Golden Calf emerged the garments of glory and splendor.

The Kohen Gadol stands not as one untouched by failure, but as one refined through it—carrying both the memory of error and the fragrance of incense.

Shalom.