Feelings upon Properly Completing a Major Undertaking

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A disagreement regarding the connotation of a redundant verse.

One of the great achievements of the MaHaRaL MiPrague,¹ was the commentary he wrote on RaShI’s interpretation of the bible, known as Gur Aryeh.²³

At the conclusion of Parashat Tzav, the Torah invokes once again a recurrent phrase appearing throughout the construction of the Tabernacle, the fabrication of the clothing of the Kohanim and the various preparations for dedicating the Mishkan and the priests:⁴

VaYikra 8:36
And Aharon and his sons did all the things which the Lord Commanded by the hand of Moshe.

RaShI writes what he believes to be the significance of this particular articulation of the phrase:

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¹ Judah Loew ben Bezalel, alt. Loewe, Löwe, or Levai, (c. 1520 – 17 September 1609)¹¹ widely known to scholars of Judaism as the Maharal of Prague, or simply The MaHaRaL, the Hebrew acronym of the initials of "Moreinu HaRav Loew," ("Our Teacher, Rabbi Loew") was an important Talmudic scholar, Jewish mystic, and philosopher who, for most of his life, served as a leading rabbi in the cities of Mikulov in Moravia and Prague in Bohemia. Within the world of Torah and Talmudic scholarship, he is known for his works on Jewish philosophy and Jewish mysticism and his work Gur Aryeh al HaTora, a supercommentary on Rashi’s Torah commentary. The Maharal is the subject of a nineteenth-century legend that he created The Golem of Prague, an animate being fashioned from clay. Rabbi Loew is buried at the Old Jewish Cemetery, Prague in Josefov, where his grave and intact tombstone can still be visited. His descendants’ surnames include Loewy, Loeb, Lowy, Oppenheimer, Pfaelzer, Lowenstein and Keim… [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judah_Loew_ben_Bezalel](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judah_Loew_ben_Bezalel)

² Since MaHaRaL’s family name was Löwe, or “lion,” it is logical that he should call one of his works, Gur Aryeh or “lion cub.”

³ Yitchak Adlerstein writes about this commentary:
   - His (MaHaRaL’s) running commentary on RaShI enjoys wide distribution, because it appeared in the most often used collection of tools in understanding RaShI,..
   - Gur Aryeh is sometimes extremely straightforward, analyzing RaShI’s words and the options that RaShI rejected. At other times, Gur Aryeh is deeply philosophical or mystical. Students looking for simple Pshat in RaShI and nothing more are sometimes stymied by the deep and difficult pieces, while others who are interested primarily in the creative and probing analysis tire of the pieces that hew closely to simple Pshat. As a result, both give up on Gur Aryeh, denying themselves its gems and treasures… [http://www.torah.org/advanced/guraryeh/](http://www.torah.org/advanced/guraryeh/)

⁴ In Parashat Pekudei alone, the phrase appears 18 (!) times: Shemot 38:22; 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31-2, 43; 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32.
To proclaim their (Aharon and his sons’) praises that they turned neither to the right or the left (with respect to carrying out all of the instructions that they received regarding the rituals associated with the dedication of the Tabernacle and themselves).

**Gur Aryeh takes issue with RaShi in this instance.**

Whereas usually Gur Aryeh explains and supports RaShi against any who might disagree with him, in this case, it is MaHaRaL himself who disputes RaShi’s commentary and expresses preference for an alternate approach:

**Gur Aryeh on VaYikra 8:36 d.h. LeHagid Shevachan**

Because the Divine Service (in the Tabernacle) is something very significant as well as demanding of the strictest attention. There are numerous laws governing the Divine Service. And the text states that they (the Kohanim) did not change or err regarding even a single one of them, not going to “the right of the left.” They employed great intent and extreme care when doing all this. This is RaShi’s opinion. *(A technical observation.)*

But in Torat Kohanim (Midrash Halacha on Sefer VaYikra) they (the Rabbis) did not interpret the verse in this way. But rather (the verse indicates) that they (the Kohanim) did all this joyously when they did what Moshe had commanded them. **And this is more correct.** *(A psychological, emotional observation.)*

Because such an interpretation (of the Torat Kohanim) is appropriate here. For it is the way of the world that when a great person (such as Aharon) is directed by another (in this instance, Moshe), he does not carry out with joy the directions that he has received from the other. But Aharon was joyful (and acted) as if he had been directly Commanded (by God).…

It would seem that Torat Kohanim takes the implication of “…did all the things which the Lord Commanded by the hand of Moshe” one step further than does RaShi. According to the Midrash Halacha, not only did the Kohanim carry out everything precisely as they had been told, but they felt exhilarated and happy doing so. The perspective of Torat Kohanim is reminiscent of a passage in the Talmud regarding how children fulfill the Commandment to respect their parents:

*Kiddushin* 31a-b

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5 This idiom parallels the Tora’s own language:

*Devarim* 5:29

Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord your God hath Commanded you; ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.

Ibid. 17:11

According to the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do; thou shalt not turn aside from the sentence which they shall declare unto thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

6 It is not that Gur Aryeh summarily says that RaShi is wrong; just that Torat Kohanim is more correct. There are many ways to interpret Tora verses. In this case, Gur Aryeh is exercising independent judgment to side with Torat Kohanim, even if he can see the merits of RaShi’s approach.
Avimi, son of R. Abahu recited: “One may give his father pheasants as food, yet (this) drives him (the son) from the world; whereas another may make him grind in a mill and (this) brings him (the son) to the World to Come!

Rashi d.h. U’Meivio LeOlam HaBa
...And in the Jerusalem Talmud, the text recounts stories regarding both (of these clauses).
One story was about someone who fed his father pheasants (very expensive, high-quality food). One time his father said to him, “Where do you get these things?” He replied, “Old man! Why do you care? ‘Grind’ and eat,” i.e., chew and eat. By his reply he demonstrated that this was burdensome and unpleasant for him.
Another story was about someone who worked as a grinder in a mill, and he had an elderly father. The King sent for the father to come to work in the King’s service. His son said to him, “Father! (Take my place) and grind, while I go in your stead to do the King’s service, because it is unending (and will be too onerous for you).

A similar sentiment is attributed by R. Ovadia MiBartenura to a comment by Shamai in Ethics of the Fathers:

Avot 1:15
Shamai would say: ... Receive every person with a positive attitude.
RAV d.h. VeHavei Mekabel Kol Adam
When you bring guests into your home, do not show them hospitality with your face turned towards the ground, because anyone who give but whose face is indicative of displeasure, even were he to offer all of the gifts in the world, it is as if he has given nothing...

In the end, Torat Kohanim on the end of Tzav, the Babylonian and Jerusalem versions of Tractate Kiddushin and Shamai in Avot all insist that it is not only how one carries out a task, it is also the attitude with which it is performed that indicates greatness and proper personal attributes.

Gur Aryeh explains why he prefers Torat Kohanim’s approach to that of Rashi in this particular instance.

Maharat explains that his disagreement with Rashi on the interpretation of VaYikra 8:36 stems from how he understands the implications of the Tora’s stating concerning someone that he/they “did in accordance with what was expected of them”:

(The only time that it is appropriate to explain) that the text is coming to praise someone for not having diverted from their instructions is when what they were asked to do was extremely difficult (and therefore it was exceptional that they carried out the task anyway).

Gur Aryeh applies his principle to a number of Tora examples.
The commentator then cites a number of examples mentioned in *Torat Kohanim* where the phrase or something comparable appears in the *Tora*, and how, in his opinion, these instances conform to the rule that he has just posited:

For example:

a) *Shemot* 14:2
   “Speak unto the children of Israel, that they **turn back** and encamp before **Pi-HaChirot**, between Migdol and the sea, before Ba’al-Tzefon, over against it shall ye encamp by the sea.”
   ➔ It was difficult for them to turn back and draw closer to their pursuers (the Egyptians). (**Placing themselves in a more dangerous situation.**)

b) *Shemot* 12:28
   And the children of Israel went and did so; as the Lord had Commanded Moshe and Aharon, so did they.
   ➔ The Jews did just as they had been Commanded, even though this was the first Mitzva, since the Tora of Moshe had as yet not been clarified to them (as this took place prior to the Revelation at Sinai). (**Accepting laws that had as yet not been made officially part of Tora law.**)

c) *BaMidbar* 8:22
   And after that went the Levites in to do their service in the Tent of Meeting before Aharon, and before his sons; as the Lord had Commanded Moshe concerning the Levites, so did they unto them.
   ➔ Not one of the Israelites prevented the Levites from carrying out their duties in the Tabernacle, even though the Israelites would have liked to have been given such a role as well. They all stepped back and relied on the Levites. (**Foregoing status and special Divine Service.**)

d) Ibid. 9:5

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7 Rashi does not comment.
8 Rashi d.h. Ka’Asher Tziva HaShem Et Moshe VeAharon
   To tell of the praises of Israel, who did not omit a single aspect of all of the commandments of Moshe and Aharon. And what does “Kein Asu” connote? Even Moshe and Aharon did so.
9 Rashi d.h. KaAsher Tziva HaShem VeGomer Kein Asu
   To recount the praise of those who did and what was done, that not one of them prevented what was happening from taking place.
10 Was this particularly difficult for the Bechorim (first-born) who had initially been designated to serve in this capacity?

*BaMidbar* 8:17-8 "
17 For all the first-born among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and beast; on the day that I Smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt I Sanctified them for Myself.
18 And I have Taken the Levites instead of all the first-born among the children of Israel.
And they kept the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at dusk, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the Lord Commanded Moshe, so did the children of Israel.¹¹

The Pesach sacrifice, in contrast to other sacrifices, is required of every individual. Every member of Am Yisrael must be part of a Chabura that will make sure to consume a specific amount of the sacrifice by the proper time. This creates the distinct possibility of many not conforming with these requirements. Nevertheless, The Tora states that the sacrifice was performed precisely in accordance with God’s Directives by all of the Jewish people. (Broad compliance with complicated Commandment.)

e) Ibid. 8:2-3

2 Speak unto Aharon, and say unto him: “When thou lightest the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the candlestick.”

3 And Aharon did so: he lighted the lamps thereof so as to give light in front of the candlestick, as the Lord Commanded Moshe.¹²

The Tora praises Aharon in this case who fulfilled the complex Commandments regarding the lighting of the Menora in a precise and correct manner. (Compliance with complicated Commandment.)

f) VaYikra 16:34

And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make atonement for the children of Israel because of all their sins once in the year. And he did as the Lord Commanded Moshe.

The Tora is praising Aharon for not donning the clothes of the Kohen Gadol in order to aggrandize himself, but rather to simply fulfill the Divine Commandment. It is also possible that the Divine Service on Yom HaKippurim was very difficult and complicated, and nevertheless Aharon carried it our perfectly. (Selfless adherence to Commandment; Compliance with complicated Commandment.)

g) BaMidbar 17:25-6

25 And the Lord Said unto Moshe: “Put back the rod of Aharon before the testimony, to be kept there, for a token against the rebellious children; that there may be made an end of their murmurings against Me, that they die not.”

26 Thus did Moshe; as the Lord Commanded him, so did he.

Moshe did this not to gain honor for either himself or his brother, but rather to obey the Commandment Given him. (Selfless adherence to Commandment.)

¹¹ RaShI does not comment.
¹² RaShI d.h. VaYa’as Kein Aharon

To recount the praise of Aharon who did not change (any part of the Divine Commandment).
It seems to me that an additional consideration that influences Gur Aryeh to accept Torat Kohanim’s approach to VaYikra 8:36, as opposed to that adopted by RaShI, is the fact that it had already stated in the Tora any number of times that all had been done correctly. If we assume that no words are superfluous in the Tora text, it follows that some new idea or observation must be attributed to the phrase, as is reflected in Torat Kohanim.

But is it so surprising to hear that Aharon would follow directions given by Moshe joyously?

When we consider the specific content of the passage in Torat Kohanim that MaHaRal favors, I think that it is fully expected that Aharon, as head of the Kohanim, would have set the tone for the rest of the Priests to carry out their mandate to serve HaShem on behalf of the Jewish people with great joy. Right from the outset, when HaShem informs the reluctant Moshe that He would appoint Aharon to assist him in his mission to demand from Phaorah to let the Jews leave Egypt, Moshe is told:

Shemot 4:14
And the Anger of the Lord was kindled against Moshe, and He said: “Is there not Aharon thy brother the Levite? I know that he can speak well. And also, behold, he cometh forth to meet thee; and when he seeth thee, he will be glad in his heart.”

RaShI understands HaShem’s assurance to Moshe regarding his brother, that despite what Moshe might think, Aharon would be totally fine, even happy, serving as Moshe’s spokesperson:

RaShI d.h. VeRa’acha VeSamach BeLibo

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13 See fn. 4.

In Parashat Tzav, the phrase is used not only with respect to Moshe—8:4, 9, 13—but even vis-à-vis Aharon—8:17, 21, 29—prior to the concluding verse 8:36 which is the focus of the dispute between Torat Kohanim and RaShI, at least according to Gur Aryeh (Mizrachi appears to have a different view regarding the relationship between RaShI and Torat Kohanim on this point).

14 This is borne out by the Tora’s description of the meeting between Moshe and Aharon after so many years of separation:

Shemot 4:27
And the Lord said to Aharon: “Go into the wilderness to meet Moshe.” And he went, and met him in the mountain of God, and kissed him.

RaMBaN d.h. VaYishak Lo
Aharon kissed Moshe, but Moshe the humble one displayed respect for his older brother. For this reason, the text does not state, “And each one kissed his brother.”
It is not like you think that he will be upset that you are rising to greatness. And for this, Aharon merited having the Choshen placed upon his heart.  

RaShi, following the lead of the Rabbis, probably used this verse to lend context to why Moshe resisted so mightily before agreeing to be God’s representative in Egypt:

Shemot 4:10
And Moshe said unto the Lord: “Oh Lord, I am not a man of words, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast Spoken unto Thy Servant; for I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.”

RaShi d.h. Gam MiTmol VeGomer
We learn (from this phrase “Gam MiTmol Gam Shilshom Gam MeiAz Dabercha”) that for seven days the Holy One Blessed Be He, Attempted to “Seduce” Moshe at the bush to go (to Egypt) as His Surrogate. “MiTmol,” “Shilshom,” “MeiAz Dabercha”—represent three (days); and three “Gam”’s are inclusive words—making a total of six (days), and He was Standing on the seventh day when He Said this to him, until He became “Angered” and Moshe agreed.

And all of this (resistance) was because he did not wish to assume a position superior to Aharon his brother, who was older than he and a prophet, as it is

15 Shemot 28:15-30
15 And thou shalt make a “Choshen” (breastplate) of judgment, the work of the skilful workman; like the work of the Ephod thou shalt make it: of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, shalt thou make it. 16 Four-square it shall be and double: a span shall be the length thereof, and a span the breadth thereof. 17 And thou shalt set in it settings of stones, four rows of stones: a row of carnelian, topaz, and smaragd shall be the first row; 18 and the second row a caruncle, a sapphire, and an amethyst; 19 and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; 20 and the fourth row a beryl, and an onyx, and a jasper; they shall be enclosed in gold in their settings. 21 And the stones shall be according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names; like the engravings of a signet, every one according to his name, they shall be for the twelve tribes. 22 And thou shalt make upon the breastplate plaited chains of wreathen work of pure gold. 23 And thou shalt make upon the breastplate two rings of gold, and shalt put the two rings on the two ends of the breastplate. 24 And thou shalt put the two wreathen chains of gold on the two rings at the ends of the breastplate. 25 And the other two ends of the two wreathen chains thou shalt put on the two settings, and put them on the shoulder-pieces of the Ephod, in the forepart thereof. 26 And thou shalt make two rings of gold, and thou shalt put them upon the two ends of the breastplate, upon the edge thereof, which is toward the side of the Ephod inward. 27 And thou shalt make two rings of gold, and shalt put them on the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod underneath, in the forepart thereof, close by the coupling thereof, above the skillfully woven band of the Ephod. 28 And they shall bind the breastplate by the rings thereof unto the rings of the Ephod with a thread of blue, that it may be upon the skilfully woven band of the Ephod, and that the breastplate be not loosed from the Ephod. 29 And Aharon shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually. 30 And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Tumim; and they shall be upon Aharon’s heart, when he goeth in before the Lord; and Aharon shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually. {5}


17 שמעון פרק ד: (1) יאמר משה ולא יורות אל אהל אלями (2) מהו תמים (3) שב (4) מאה (5) לחם (6) מעון (7) לו היה אל אהל אלימי (8) ובנה אביוizen אלכס.
said, (I Shmuel 2:27) “And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him: Thus Saith the Lord: Did I Reveal Myself unto the house of thy father (Eli was the Kohen Gadol, implying that his ancestor, Aharon, received Divine Revelation in Egypt), when they were in Egypt in bondage to Pharaoh’s house?”...And so too in Yechezkel 20:5, “And say unto them: ‘Thus Saith the Lord God: In the day when I Chose Yisrael, and lifted up My Hand unto the seed of the house of Yaakov, and Made Myself Known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I Lifted up My Hand unto them, saying: ‘I Am the Lord your God,’” and Ibid. 7 “And I Said unto them: ‘Cast ye away every man the detestable things of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I Am the Lord your God,’” this being a prophecy that was revealed to Aharon.

Whereas Moshe projected onto Aharon his own sense of how he would feel were he to be ordered around by a younger brother, and therefore did not wish to undermine Aharon’s authority or position among the Jewish people, Aharon apparently felt completely differently. 18 Perhaps Aharon understood the prophetic role better than his younger brother, even though the latter in the end was a much greater prophet. 19 When HaShem Informs Moshe of Aharon’s participation in the mission to Egypt and how communications would take place between Pharoah and Moshe, He Said:

*Shemot* 7:1-2

1 And the Lord Said unto Moshe: “See, I have Set thee in God’s Stead to Pharaoh; and Aharon thy brother shall be thy prophet. 2 Thou shalt speak all that I Command thee; and Aharon thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh, that he let the children of Israel go out of his land.”

A true prophet, whether he is informed directly by HaShem, as in the case of Moshe, or is told by another prophet what God in turn had Told him, this would describe Aharon’s situation, in the end it is not about the prophet’s status or how he is viewed by the people that is important, but rather that he has been asked to carry out some type of Divine Mission. It is intriguing that while Moshe is considered the most humble of men, 20 it was apparently difficult for him to understand that Aharon could also embody the attribute of humility and accept a subordinate role not only with grace, but even with joy.

**Conclusion.**

I appreciate Torat Kohanim’s and Gur Aryeh’s understanding of VaYikra 8:36. Hopefully this was not a unique situation applying only to Aharon and those with whom he interacted, but a realizable ideal for even those who come afterwards and are able only to read about Aharon’s great Middot.

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18 Naturally one could wonder whether this attitude came naturally to Aharon, or was this another instance of God Manipulating a human being’s emotions, paralleling what would later occur with respect to the “hardening of Pharoah’s heart.

19 Devarim 34:10

And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moshe, whom the Lord Knew Face to face;

20 BaMidbar 12:3

Now the man Moshe was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth.