

## ACHOO! MAY HASHEM BLESS YOU!

### PARSHAS NASO

In Eretz Yisroel as well as in many Sefardic shules outside Eretz Yisroel, the birchas kohanim is said every day. In Ashkenazic communities it is only recited on Yom Tov. The kohanim bless Klal Yisroel that Hashem should bless us, protect us, deal kindly with us, show us favor, and grant us peace. What beautiful brachos!

I would like to share a few fascinating thoughts about these beautiful brachos.

*The pasuk says, "Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying, This, is how you shall bless Bnei Yisroel, saying to them."* (Bamidbar 6:26). Why does the Torah adds the seemingly repetitive phrase, "saying to them"? **Ohr HaChaim** says that these brachos were not meant only for this one time. Rather, the kohanim were to "say to them", to tell their children, to continue this practice of blessing Klal Yisroel for all generations.

The **Dubno Maggid** asks the same question. He also asks that since the kohanim are davening to Hashem to bless Klal Yisroel, why don't the kohanim face the *aron* and daven towards Hashem as the chazan always does when leading the tefillos? Why do the kohanim face the tzibur? The **Dubno Maggid** answers that the kohanim don't need to turn towards Hashem to ask Hashem to bless the Jewish People. Hashem wants to bless us! Hashem wants to constantly show us kindness as it says in **Micha** (7:18), "*because He delights in lovingkindness.*" It is only because of our sins that we cannot always enjoy Hashem's mercy. Therefore, the kohanim turn towards the tzibur, as if to say to us, that we should behave in a manner to become worthy of being blessed. Now we also understand the meaning of the extra words. Hashem was telling the kohanim to "say to them", to give this message to the tzibur. (The Magid of Dubno and His Parables by Benno Heinemann)

*"Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying; This is how you shall bless Bnei Yisroel, saying to them."  
(Bamidbar 6:26)*

**Rabbi Yissocher Frand** (Torah.org) quotes **Rabbi Dovid Zucker**, a Rosh Kollel in Chicago, who gives another insight into the birchas kohanim. The last bracha of birchas kohanim is, "וַיְשַׁם לָךְ יְיָ שְׁלוֹמֶךָ", "And Hashem

*should give you peace*". The more common Hebrew word for the verb "to give" is "וַיִּתֵּן". Why does the Torah use the less common word "v'yasem", which literally means "Hashem should place peace in you"?

We have the same unusual wording in the last bracha of Shmone Esrei. We ask Hashem, "**sim** shalom", place peace, rather than "tain shalom", give peace. Similarly, we conclude the evening Shmone Esrei with the words "shalom rav **tasim**.", place a lot of peace on us. In all three places, the verb "place" is used instead of "give". Why?

To answer this question, **Rabbi Zucker** quotes a comment from **Rav Chaim Kanievsky zt"l**. There are two ways of achieving peace when people are having an argument. One way is for both sides to make-up and return to their previous good relationship. Unfortunately, sometimes the divisiveness is so strong that the argument cannot be resolved. In such situations, the only way to have peace is by both parties separating from each other. This is what happened between Avram and Lot. Their shepherds had an argument. Avram suggested that the best plan was to separate. Lot agreed and that solution brought peace (Bereshis 13:9) .

The **Talmud** (Temura 34A) discusses one of the jobs of the kohanim which was to remove some of the ashes

from the *mizbayach*, altar, and place them on the ground near the mizbayach. The **Torah** says, "שְׂמוֹ אֶשֶׁר הִמְזַבֵּחַ", the ashes are placed near the mizbayach. The **Talmud** explains that "they are placed" means that the ashes are gently put down and that all of them are put down. Thus, the connotation of the word "samo" means places it, all together.

Based on this definition, we can explain that the bracha of the birchas kohanim is that there should be the optimum type of peace in which both parties make up and are friends again. Similarly, in our Shmone Esrei we are asking Hashem to give us the optimum peace that enables us to be together as before!

The **Rokeach** says that the blessings of Parshas Bechukosai are all conditional, as implied by the word "Im", "if" you will follow My laws. However, the blessings of birchas kohanim, are unconditional.

Another interesting question is that previously, in Parshas Shemini, Aharon the Kohain was told to bless the Jewish People (Vayikra 9:22). **Rashi** explains that the blessings that Aharon gave were the birchas kohanim. If so, then why wasn't the text of the birchas kohanim written in Parshas Shmini instead of waiting to write them in our Parsha?

**Rabbi Frand** answers this question based on what he saw in the sefer Chikrei Lev, from **Rabbi Label**

**Hyman**, z"l. Previously, the total number of Jews were counted by the method of the "half-shekel". In Sefer Bamidbar, for the first time the census counted individuals. Every male from the ages of 20 to 60 went in front of Moshe and Aharon to provide their exact genealogy. The Leviim had their own special count, even more individualized. Each male was counted from the age of one month!

Furthermore, in Sefer Bamidbar, everyone was assigned a specific formation for camping and for traveling. Some were the first to travel and some were the last to travel. This could have led to fighting. People may have argued why he is first or why I am last? Even within the Tribe of Levi, various families had unique assignments. The families of Gershon, Kehas, and Merari each had different jobs assigned to them. That could have led to complaining. They may have complained why are we carrying the boards while they are carrying the holy aron? That's not fair! Boruch Hashem, they did NOT argue all the many years that they were in the desert. The only exception was when Korach and his followers complained.

Everyone getting specific, individualized instructions could have led to jealousy. Therefore, Hashem gave the mitzvah of birchas Kohanim to bless us, that we should always have the optimum level of peace between us.

**May Hashem grant us peace, which is the vessel that holds all the blessings.**

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