

Naso 5771

BS"D Parashat Naso, the Kohanic Blessing, Yom Yerushalayim and Chag Hashvuot 5771

Part A:

The following is an excerpt which deals with the Kohanic blessing, taken from my book "With All Your Might":

Kohanim recite their daily blessing over 450 times a year in Eretz Yisrael; quite a bit more than in the galut, where it is said about 10 times a year. The arithmetic is quite simple: 4500 mitzvot for a kohen in 10 years in Eretz Yisrael, as opposed to 100 times in 10 years in chutz la'aretz, and 9000 times in twenty years as opposed to 200 for a kohen in the galut.

Questions:

1) Is there a qualitative difference between kohanim, or is everyone "tuned into the same frequency" and the community receives a "standard" blessing regardless of the kohen's religious status?

*2) Birkat kohanim begins with a bracha: baruch ata...le'varech et amo yisrael **be'ahava** – "...to bless His nation Israel with love." Why must we emphasize that this mitzva is fulfilled with a conscious feeling of love? Are we not commanded to do every mitzva with love?*

3) It is unacceptable to stand with one's back to the aron (the Holy Ark which contains the Torah scrolls); the chazan and community always face the aron. Why then do the kohanim stand with their backs to the aron?

4) Before turning to face the community, the kohen's hands are closed; but when reciting the blessing, their fingers are opened in the required fashion. What does this mean?

5) At the end of the birkat kohanim, the verse says *ve'ani avorchem* – “and I (HaShem) shall bless them.” Rabbi Akiva, in Tractate Chulin, explains that HaShem is saying to the kohanim that after they bless the community, HaShem will bless the kohanim. Why does the Torah state that HaShem will bless the kohanim who perform this specific mitzva? Are we not all blessed by HaShem for every mitzva we perform?

6) There is a mitzva in the Torah obligating the community to give preference to kohanim in the performance of mitzvot (birkat hazimun, called to the Torah first, etc.). Why this preferential treatment?

7) At the end of the bracha, the kohanim recite a prayer stating, “Master of the universe, we have performed that which you have **decreed** upon us...” After the opening bracha where the kohanim are commanded to bless in “love,” this highly emotional act now turns into a “decree.” Decrees and love don’t go together!

There are many more questions!!

I suggest:

When we become bar or bat mitzva, an “account” is opened in our names in Olam Haba. As we keep mitzvot, the account keeps growing so that after 120 years we withdraw the capital together with its accumulated Heavenly interest.

When a kohen recites the birkat kohanim, there is no general pool of goodness and blessings to which he connects and retrieves for the community’s benefit. The kohen gives **his own** personal bank account of Gan Eden to the community; and at the end of the blessing, the kohen’s “account” is totally depleted.

Now all the questions are resolved.

There is a qualitative difference between one kohen and

another, for the more righteous the kohen the greater his Gan Eden, and hence a more bountiful blessing for the community.

The opening blessing is based on "ahava." Is there a greater expression of love than when one relinquishes his Gan Eden for another person? This is the ultimate act of love!

We face the aron, because, at every moment in our lives, we are "depositing" our mitzvot into Olam Haba; but now the kohen is withdrawing from his Gan Eden, so he stands with his back to the aron.

Prior to the blessing, the kohen's hands are closed as a possessive sign; but as he turns, he opens his hands as if to say, "I no longer possess what I had until now."

The verse says v'ani avorchem – "and I shall bless them" – because HaShem is saying, "Do not worry. Empty out your Gan Eden for the sake of My children, and I will bless you (the kohanim) many times over for the loss of your Gan Eden."

We give preference to kohanim in the performance of mitzvot, because we, the community, will get the reward of the kohen when he releases his Gan Eden to us.

At the end of the bracha, kohanim recite the prayer "Master of the universe, we have performed that which you have **decreed** upon us..." recognizing the fact that the kohen has no choice in the matter. He cannot say, I will keep my Gan Eden and not bless the people. It is a decree to which he must conform.

When performing his duties, a kohen relinquishes his spiritual gains for the good of his fellow Jews. When HaShem sees this ultimate act of love of the kohen, He joins in the act of love by answering the sinner's request, and kohanic intervention of tahara and atonement, just as a father is overwhelmed with pride and happiness upon seeing unity and love among his children.

When HaShem informed the Jewish people that He intended to appoint them as a *mamlechet kohanim* – a kohanic nation, when in fact only about 5% of us are kohanim, He was referring to the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael. For it is here that a Jew is required to be prepared to give the ultimate sacrifice for HaShem, as indeed kohanim do here every day with their kohanic blessing.

Part B:

I wish to bring to your attention the prophecy of Yechezkel in chapter 32 verse 17, which is hidden from the understanding of people like us and needs to be interpreted by the great commentators.

The Malbim writes in his commentary on the above verse:

It will come to pass in the end of days, after the Jewish people will return to the land of Israel, that the nations will come together in order to capture Yerushalayim. The prophet names the nations who will come. Gog, the king of Meshech and Tuval from the north and west who are uncircumcised and called "Edom," who are the descendants of Yefet living now in Europe. And Paras, Kush, and the House of Turgama who are all circumcised and adhering to the belief of Yishmael, will join with the children of Edom to attempt to capture the Land of Israel from the Jews.

But when they arrive, they will create chaos among themselves and make war on each other, that is, Edom will make war on Yishmael because their beliefs are different.

And there God will judge them in sword and blood as stated by the prophet Zecharia chapter 14.

And here the prophet (Yechezkel) relates how they all will be lost; and singles out Egypt, Ashur and Elam who adhere to the

religion of Yishmael and are today circumcised. He then mentions Meshech, Tuval and Edom, their kings and princes from the north who are all uncircumcised. And between them will there be a war. The first to be utterly destroyed will be the Egyptians, who are the closest to the Land of Israel and will come forward first and fall. Then the Assyrians and Persians will come to avenge their ally and they all will be destroyed.

I suggest that if the Malbim lived today, he could have been more specific:

It will come to pass in the end of the exile and the Jewish people will return to the land of Israel, that many nations will come together in order to attempt to capture Yerushalayim.

The nations who will come are from the north and west and include the European Union and the nations which comprised the former Soviet Union who are all uncircumcised and called "Edom," the descendants of Yefet living now in Europe and adhere to the Christian faith. And Iran, the Arab peoples, and the House of Saud who are all circumcised adhering to the faith of Yishmael, will join with the children of Edom to attempt to capture the Land of Israel from the Children of Israel.

But when they arrive, they will create chaos among themselves and make war on each other. That is, the Christians from Europe will make war on the Muslims because their beliefs are different.

And there God will judge them in sword and blood as stated by the prophet Zecharia chapter 14.

And here the prophet (Yechezkel) describes how they will be lost. He singles out Egypt, Syria and Iran who adhere to the religion of Yishmael and are circumcised. Then Meshech, Tuval

and Edom, their kings and princes from the north, who are uncircumcised, and between them will be a war.

The first to be utterly destroyed will be the Egyptians who are the closest to the Land of Israel who will come forward first and fall; then the Syrians and Iranians will come to avenge their fallen ally and they all will be destroyed.

We cannot blame the Malbim for generalizing, because he wrote his commentary in the 19th century, when the return of the Jews to Eretz Yisrael was not even a dream. Quite the contrary; he was graced with the Godly spirit when he so rightly explained Yechezkel's words as accurately as he did.

I would fill in some missing details which might seem today as far-fetched, but could be tomorrow's headlines.

The Iranians will soon achieve nuclear capability as nuclear proliferation becomes a fact of life. The West and Islam, confronted on a collision course towards mutual destruction, will meet in order to discuss ways of defusing the ticking time-bomb. They will be utterly frustrated in their attempts to find mutual grounds for understanding, except in one area – their mutual enmity and hostility towards the Jews in general, and specifically the Jews in Eretz Yisrael.

The need of the nations to function together will give rise to the mutual goal of ridding the world of the maverick, renegade State of Israel and its archaic, heretical beliefs.

They will field a volunteer army of millions of Christians and Moslems who will march hand-in-hand in an updated version of the Crusades; but, this time, they are certain that the communion between Rome and Mecca will arouse their God to bless their "pure" intentions.

Here, in Eretz Yisrael, bewilderment will share the stage with dread. Many will try to leave, but there will be nowhere to

go. The emergency "hot-line" request to Washington will go unheeded, after the President informs the Prime Minister that the US has no choice but to be neutral in this situation; since the decision was taken by the General Assembly of the UN where we have no veto power.

The sky will become clouded by the ascending dust caused by the multitudes making their way to Eretz Yisrael, with each person filled with ardor, ecstasy and zealousness to do the will of their god.

At this point the two chapters of Yechezkel come together – chapter 1 which we will read next week on Shavuot with its description of the fiery *Serafim*, *Ofanim* and *Chayot Hakodesh*, and chapter 32 which describes the multitude of nations on their way to destroy what God has blessed.

This is what the Gemara, at the end of the first chapter of Tractate Berachot, is referring to when it predicts that the miracles of the future will outshine the unbelievable miracles of the Egyptian exodus.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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