

Naso 5773

BS"D

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

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

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 mitvot 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.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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