

KUSHNER COMMENTS



Shabbat Candle Lighting: 7: 55 PM
Havdalah: 8: 55 PM

(Times are for Livingston, NJ)

Parsha Summary: *Parshat Naso*

Parshat Naso picks up where last week's parsha finished, delineating the responsibilities of different families from *shevet Levi*. It then turns to the subject of maintaining an atmosphere of *taharah*, or purity, in the camp, and it explains how to deal with various forms of *tum'ah*, or impurity. The *parsha* then presents the scenarios of a *sotah*, a suspected adulteress, and a *nazir*, an ascetic (as defined by the Torah.) Hashem then commands the *kohanim*, or priests, to give *Bnei Yisrael* His special *birkat hakohanim*, or priestly blessing. Finally, in the end of the *parsha* the twelve *nesi'im*, or tribal leaders, all bring gifts to Hashem in celebration of *hakamat haMishkan*, the erection of the Tabernacle.

Bless You!

Ms. Norma Mintz

In *Parshat Naso* we encounter the passage in which Hashem commands the *kohanim*, or priests, to recite *birkat hakohanim*, the priestly blessing. This *berachah* has three parts that build upon one another, blessing us with wealth, safety, and peace, among other things. The blessings we should receive as a result of the *berachah* are great privileges, and this *berachah* is in its essence a gift to us. Considering all this, however, it is strange that there should be a need for the *kohanim* at all. Why does Hashem choose to have an intermediary bless us, as opposed to His blessing us Himself?

The *midrash* in *Bamidbar Rabbah* asks this same question, depicting *Bnei Yisrael* turning to Hashem and demanding that Hashem bless them directly. In this account, Hashem responds that He in fact does bless *Bnei Yisrael* directly, as He stands alongside the *kohanim* as they recite their *berachah*, peeking through their fingers, which are held up and open in a specific manner during the recital of the *berachah*.

Still, this *midrash* does not answer the question of why there is a need for the *kohanim* in the process. The answer lies at the heart of the concept of what a *berachah* truly should be. When Hashem commands the *kohanim* to bless *Bnei Yisrael*, He first states, "*Koh tevarchu et Bnei Yisrael, emor lahem,*" "This is the way you must bless *Bnei Yisrael*; you must say to them (6:23)." *Rashi* explains that the word "*emor*" was written the long way, with a "*vav,*" in order to teach the *kohanim* that the *berachah* should not be done in a rushed manner, but that it should be taken seriously and that due care and seriousness should be afforded this act of responsibility that has been granted. In fact, many *halachot*, or laws, also instruct the *kohanim* as to how they must conduct themselves both before and during the recital of the *berachot*. As such, we begin to see why the *kohanim* bless us, as opposed to Hashem more directly. It is not for our sakes, but for the sakes of the *kohanim*. This task is meant to drive them to be worthy to give us this very *berachah*.

However, the responsibility does not end with the *kohanim*. The *Abravanel* explains that there are three kinds of

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פרשת נאסו



Parshat Naso (*Bamidbar* 5:11-31) teaches us about the procedure of a *sotah*, a suspected adulteress. In this case a man becomes very jealous after his wife, against his warnings, secludes herself with another man. There is not enough evidence to support or deny the claim that the man 's wife committed adultery. The husband then brings his wife to be tested by a special process that involves judgment by Hashem alone. This process is embarrassing and *Sforno* says that even if the wife is innocent she is still humiliated because she disobeyed her husband. Despite the embarrassment, if a woman is innocent, the Torah says “ *V 'n ezre 'ah zara,*” “ she will bear seed “ (5:28) . While the *Gemara* discusses whether this means she is guaranteed children or perhaps just easy childbirth, it is clear that she will be blessed by being reunited with her husband. However, if one takes a moment to think about this, it can seem quite strange that her blessing is to return to a husband who has just accused her of adultery.

In the case of a *sotah* there is a breakdown in the relationship between the husband and wife. She has disobeyed him and he has become jealous and has embarrassed her. Even though the *sotah* process provides the opportunity for the husband and wife to stay together, there are still issues that would need to be resolved after these betrayals. Considering this, what then is the significance of this blessing “ *V 'nezre 'ah zara* ” ?

A famous *pasuk* from *Yeshayahu* reads, “ *V 'chol banayich limudei HaShem, v 'rav shalom banayich*” (54:13), “ All your children will be students of God and your children 's peace will be abundant.” Children are associated with peace. The *Gemara* in *Berachot* 64a explains that this *passuk* is speaking of children who will become Torah scholars and increase the peace in the world. They will in fact be “ *bonayich,*” (a play on the Hebrew word for “your children,”) builders of the world. Perhaps the child born after the *sotah* incident will help build *shalom bayit*, peace in the home.

The theme of *shalom*, peace, is a recurrent one in *Parshat Naso*. Not long after the *parashah* of *sotah* we read about the *Birkat Kohanim*, the priestly blessing. The final piece of this blessing says “ *Yisa Hashem panav eilecha v 'yasem lecha shalom.*” *May Hashem raise His face to you and place upon you peace*” (6:26). Hashem will help establish peace between husband and wife in the case of a *sotah*, and ultimately, “ *Hashem yivarech et amo bashalom,*” “ Hashem will bless His whole nation with peace ” (*Tehillim* 29:11).

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berachot. those that Hashem gives to us (such as when Hashem blessed Avraham in *brit bein habetarim,*) those that we give to Hashem (in thanks or praise, such as when we say a *berachah* on food) and those that people may give to one another (such as when we ask that Hashem grant someone health.) While *birkat kohanim* seems to belong in the third category, Nechama Leibovitz asks then why the *kohanim* should say “ *Yivarechecha,*” “ May Hashem bless you ” as opposed to “ *Barchem,*” “ Please bless them, ” considering that the *berachah* is really a supplication of Hashem on our behalf. Nechama Leibovitz cites Rav Moshe Alshich as explaining that the language is written in this way because the *kohanim* are turning to us and asking us to be worthy of the *berachah* so that Hashem will give us all of the *berachot* that He wishes to give us.

All of this must teach us that *berachot* are not simple, careless things. They are responsibilities that enable us to give and receive great gifts. By making ourselves the best people we can be, we are allowing ourselves to receive Hashem 's *berachah* .

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