



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

נשא / NASO
WITH LOVE AND JOY

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ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל Emil W. Herman
who loved and supported Torah learning.



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This week we will, G-d willing, celebrate the holiday of Shavuos. One of the differences between the holiday prayers and Shabbos prayers in the synagogue is the Priestly blessing.

Outside of Israel, the Kohanim bless the congregation only on holidays, whereas in Israel it's done every Shabbos and in some places even every day.

Let us stop for a moment and think about the idea of the Priestly Blessing. In this week's Torah portion, G-d commands the Kohanim to bless the nation, saying: "And He spoke to Aharon 'So shall you bless'" it is a commandment for the Kohanim to bless the people. This seems to be a bit perplexing. Why would the Kohanim need to bless the Jews in G-d's name? Couldn't G-d bless us on His own? Why does He send messengers?

As the Midrash writes "The Jewish nation asks G-d, 'Master of the Universe, You tell the Kohanim to bless us but we don't need more than your blessings and to be blessed from your mouth.'"

Going to a Tzaddik to ask for a blessing is understandable. A tzaddik has better "connections" than we do as he's closer to G-d. Therefore, when a tzaddik blesses



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someone, he makes G-d agree to the blessing, even if originally the person was not deserving of the blessing.

We find this practice in the Book of Beraishis. Yaakov buried Rachel not in the Cave of Machpaila but on the side of the road, "So she could be a help to her children, so that when Nevuchadnezar exiled the Jews and they passed her on the way, Rachel would go and ask for mercy for them."

In this same manner, we find in Shelach that when the spies were on their way to Canaan, Calev went to Chevron. "Caleb went there alone to pray at the graves of the patriarchs that he not be enticed by his colleagues to be part of their counsel." Nowadays, we do the same by going to the Rebbe's gravesite to pray and receive blessings.

If so, going to a tzaddik for a blessing is accepted and logical. However, a Kohen who goes up to bless his fellow congregants is not a tzaddik, and there is no law that requires a Kohen to do some sort of Teshuva before he ascends to the Bimah.

For example, there is a law that when a person is going to be a witness for a marriage or divorce, he is told to contemplate repentance; otherwise he might not qualify as a witness.

There are only two sins that make a Kohen unfit to give the blessings. The Shulchan Aruch states "A Kohen that has killed a soul, even by mistake, shall not lift his hands (in blessing)" and in the following verse "A Kohen who has changed his



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religion.....has desecrated his holiness and shall not raise his hands....any other sin, even immoral relations, don't prevent him from lifting his hands (in blessing) therefore, an uncircumcised Kohen gives the blessing, even if he is intentionally uncircumcised."

Therefore, it is quite clear that he need not be a great tzaddik, so why do we need the Kohen's blessing? Why did G-d institute this process that specifically a Kohen blesses the nation in His name?

A story is told from the early days of the Chassidic movement. The Alter Rebbe, the first Chabad Rebbe, and other great students of the Maggid of Mezritch were having a farbrengen, when one of the participants suddenly stood up and, crying, asked those gathered to bless him with a complete and speedy recovery.

A number of the Chassidim began to ridicule his request. Did he think they had the power to give blessings? Only a Rebbe had such ability! But the Alter Rebbe silenced them and reminded them of what the Maggid had taught, "What a Chassidic Farbrengen can accomplish even the Angel Michael cannot accomplish!"

The Alter Rebbe went on to explain that at a farbrengen, there is a special power to bless a fellow Jew. It is similar to parents who see how their children treat each other nicely, and are so pleased and willing to give the children whatever they desire, especially if one child asks on behalf of another.



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In this same manner, when a Jew loves his fellow and blesses him, this brings tremendous pleasure and joy to G-d. Seeing how His children love each other causes G-d to want to give them all that they ask for.

This is the idea behind the Priestly Blessing. Certainly G-d is capable of blessing His children and doesn't need any kind of help from anyone. However, G-d knew that it is possible to create a situation where they would be unworthy of His blessings. Therefore, G-d set up this "system" where everyday, Jews are asking for blessings on behalf of their fellow Jews and this makes G-d want to give those blessings, even if, G-d forbid, they aren't worthy.

For this same reason, the blessing must be given with love. The halacha states "For a Kohen who hates the congregation or is hated by them, it is a great danger for him to lift his hands (to bless them) and because of this, it was put into the blessing 'to bless His nation Israel with love'" The purpose of these blessings is to arouse in G-d desire to bless his children and this comes specifically from seeing them be loving towards each other. A Kohen who doesn't love his fellow congregants won't arouse this desire and misses the point of the blessing.

This is why a Kohen does not need to be a Tzaddik and does not even need to repent before he ascends the Bimah to give the blessing. The only thing asked of him is that he do this out of love.

In addition, he is also asked to do the blessings with joy and for this reason "it is customary in most places that the Priestly blessing is done only on holiday when



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the joy of the holiday permeates everyone's hearts and the Kohen will bless with joy."