



Adapted from the sefer חמין במוצאי שבת and חדוותא דדעיר אנפין collections of maamarim given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Seuda Shlishis and Melave Malka

Melaveh Malkah Parshas Naso 5762

In this week's *parshah*, we find the *mitzvah* of *birkas kohanim*. Those of us who live in *Eretz Yisrael* and are used to receiving *birkas kohanim* every day, often don't appreciate how much we benefit from the *shefa* of goodness that results from that *brachah*. One needs only to read and understand the words of the *brachah* to realize how fortunate we are to receive each day, the *brachos* that Jews in *chutz l'aretz* receive only a few times a year.

There is a very deep and powerful lesson that each of us can learn from *birkas kohanim*. The Torah certainly elevates the status of the *kohanim*. The *Gemara* (מועד קטן כ"ח) states that the *mitzvah* of וקדשתו, - sanctifying the *Kohen* (ויקרא כ"א:ח), means that we should give the *Kohen* precedence in all matters of *kedushah*. He receives the first *aliyah* when we read the Torah. He is the first to lead *birkas hamazon*, and we are even supposed to be serve him first at meals, and to give him the choicest portion of food.

A *kohen* whose lineage makes him the recipient of so much honor, is in grave danger of becoming arrogant. In order to protect him from this fate, the Torah established safeguards that will protect him from the repulsive sin of arrogance.

One of those safeguards can be found in Chazal's *drashah* on the *pasuk*, דַּבֵּר אֶל אֶהְרֹן וְאֶל בְּנָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה תִבְרְכוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמֹר לָהֶם (במדבר ו' כ"ג). They explain (ספרי ו' קמג) "אמור להם - we might think that they will begin to bless Am Yisrael before the *chazan* calls upon them to do so. Therefore, the Torah writes, אמור להם - say to them, to teach us that the *kohanim*



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aren't allowed to raise their hands and bless until the *shaliach tzibur* calls out "*Kohanim*".

We should not forget that this *halachah* applies even in a case where the *Kohen Gadol* himself goes up to bless the *tzibur* with *birkas kohanim*, and the *shaliach tzibur* doesn't come from a family of impressive *yichus*. Even if the *chazan* is a *mamzer* who is also an *am ha'aretz* - the *Kohen Gadol* is forbidden to begin *birkas kohanim* until that simple *chazan* instructs him to do so.

It is difficult for us to understand why the *kohen* must receive permission from the *shaliach tzibur*, in order to bless the *tzibur*. Doesn't the *shaliach tzibur* himself want and need to receive the *brachah* of the *kohen*?

However, it is quite possible that the need for the *chazan's* permission comes to remind the *kohen* that he didn't attain his elevated position as a result of his own *avodah*. It is simply a gift from above. He is no more than a *shaliach* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu whose mission is to bless Am Yisrael *b'ahavah* - with love. His ability and privilege to bestow *birkas kohanim* on Am Yisrael has nothing to do with the individual *kohen*, and doesn't signify that he is "better" than any other Jew.

We find another safeguard against arrogance in the *Gemara* (ר"ה כ"ח)
"From where do we know that a *kohen* who goes up to the *duchan* shouldn't say, 'Once the Torah has given me the authority to bless Am Yisrael I will add a blessing of my own..'? The *pasuk* states,
לֹא תִסְפוּ עַל הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר אֶנְכִּי מִצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם – Do not add to that which I command you. (דברים ד":ב").

The *Sfas Emes* (על הש"ס ר"ה כ"ח:) asks;

"It would seem that according to this, a *kohen* would be forbidden to bless anyone at any time, even if it is not during *birkas kohanim*, with his own personal blessing... If so, that would mean that a *kohen* would never



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be able to bless or give *shalom* to another Jew, and that can't be. However, a differentiation can be made..."

Based on the principle we have presented; I believe that it is possible to provide a very elegant answer to the question of the *Sfas Emes*. (Aside from the answer he provides in his *chidushim*). As the *Sfas Emes* said, a *kohen* is certainly allowed to bless a Jew by saying "Good morning", "Good Shabbos", or any other common *brachah*. We find no authority who suggests otherwise. The *Gemara's* statement comes to teach us that a *kohen* is forbidden to add any *brachos* of his own, מדין כהן - as an expression of the *kohen's* power of *brachah*.

This *halachah* demonstrates the Torah's care and concern for the *kohen*, for it protects him from arrogantly assuming that the *brachos* he bestows upon *Am Yisrael* during *birkas kohanim* are an expression of his own righteousness. By forbidding him to add any personal *brachos* as a kohen, the Torah reminds him that, as a kohen, his power of *brachah* is limited exclusively to *birkas kohanim* as defined by the Torah.

The *kohen* can certainly bless any Jew he meets with any *brachah*, as long as he does so with the understanding that, like any other Jew, he is allowed and commanded to bless and benefit any Jew in any way. Those day-to-day *brachos* have nothing to do with his identity as a *kohen*.

The language of the *gemara* supports this distinction. מניין לכהן שעולה לדוכן. The *gemara* speaks about the specific scenario of a *kohen* who goes up to the *duchan* in order to fulfill the Mitzvah of *birkas kohanim*. At that particular time, he is forbidden to add any personal *brachos*, because by doing so, he demonstrates his intention to bless them by utilizing his inherent power of *brachah* as a kohen. The Torah forbids such *brachos*. However, as a regular Jew, let him bless every Jew he meets with as many heartfelt *brachos* as possible.



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We have learned that essential power of a *kohen* depends on his understanding that he is not a *kohen* because of any particular merit of his own. The more a *kohen* understands and recognizes his place, and humbles himself before every Jew, the more fitting vessel he will be for *hashraas ha'shechinah*, and bring *brachah* into his own home. However, if he entertains even the slightest thought of arrogance, he destroys the power of his *kehunah* with his own hands.

This lesson doesn't only apply to *kohanim*. Each and every Jew has received great gifts from his Creator. One Jew may be born into *yichus*, one may have particular talents, and another may have other advantages. Often, a person mistakenly assumes that he acquired those gifts as a result of his own efforts. Therefore, a person must utilize every opportunity to remind himself that any power or talent that he has, is simply a *matnas chinam* - a free gift that Hakadosh Baruch Hu has mercifully decided to give to him.

By remembering this, he will feel no reason to be arrogant and to look down on others. If we increase our awareness of our own shortcomings, we will become vessels that are fit to receive the *shefa* of *brachah* and goodness from above.

וְשָׂמוּ אֶת שְׁמִי עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֶם – אֲכִי"ר.

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