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**Insights into the Spiritual Power of Bircas Kohanim**

**By Daniel Keren**

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**Rabbi Naftali Weinberger**

 One of the featured speakers at last week’s Flatbush Memorial Day Hakhel Yarchei Kallah Event at Rabbi Yisroel Reisman’s Shul (Agudath Israel of Madison) was Rabbi Naftali Weinberger, author of the recent ArtScroll book – “The Priceless Treasure of Bircas Kohanim”. His lecture focused on various aspects of Bircas Kohanim (Priestly Blessings.)

 Rabbi Weinberger began his lecture by noting that we find in the Gemora Tractate Sota a reference to the fact that Hakodesh Baruch Hu truly desires Bircas Kohanim, at act in which the Kohanim (the Jewish priests) bestow a blessing upon their fellow Jews.

 Rashi says that Hakodesh Baruch Hu created a world in which the Kohanim can bless the Jewish people and that the Shechinah (the Divine Presence of G-d) is resting in front of the Kohanim at the moment that they bestow their unique blessings. Therefore, Rabbi Weinberger emphasized, they (the Kohanim) are not showing disrespect to the Aron Hakodesh when they turn their back to the holy ark in the synagogue while in the process of blessing the other Jews who are praying in the sanctuary.

 This act of Birkas Kohanim, one of the Taryag (613) mitzvahs in the Torah results in even great Torah personalities such heads of yeshivot and world acknowledged Torah scholar and rabbinical leaders not feeling humiliated when standing in front of Kohanim at the moment of Birkas Kohanim, even if those particular members of the Jewish priestly class are not exceptional Torah scholars.

 The fact is that according to Jewish law, at the moment that the Kohanim are blessing their fellow Yisroelim (Israelites), one who is being blessed is not supposed to look at the hands of the Kohanim.

 Rabbi Weinberger pointed out that according to the classic “Sefer Chareidim,” it is a mitzvah (an obligation) for a Yisroel and Levite to get the Birkas Kohanim. However, other Torah Scholars including the Chazon Ish dispute the argument of Rabbi Elazar ben Moshe Azikri, 1433-1600) the author of “Sefer Chareidim.” Nevertheless, Rabbi Weinberger argues that a non-Kohen should strive to hear Birkas Kohanim.

 Rabbi Yaakov Emden believes that today (after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem,” Birkas Kohamim is mitzvah d’rabbonim, not a Taryag mitzvah, but one after mandated by the rabbis after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdosh, as remembrance of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem where it was carried out daily. Hopefully with the coming of Moshiach and the restoration of the Beis Hamikdosh, it will revert to being a mitzvah d’raisah.

 Strongly disagreeing with Rabbi Emden is the Chofetz Chai who insists that the blessings of the Kohanim remain to this day, even with the Beis Hamikdosh to be a Taryag mitzvah.

 Rabbi Weinberger said that if a man hears the Priestly blessings, it is obvious that his wife who must stay home to take care of their children is include in the blessings that the husbands receives. But, if she is not being blocked by circumstances that require her to stay at home, the wife cannot rely on her husband and should go to the shul and her the Bircas Kohanim herself. The Ben Ish Chai states that the women who make the effort to go to shul will be rewarded from Above for doing so.

 While Sephardim around the world recite Birkas Kohanim daily, Ashkenazim [outside the Land of Israel] only have their Kohanim recite the priestly blessings on 13 days (the two days of Rosh Hashana, the day of Yom Kippur, the first two days of Succos, Shemini Atzeres, Simchas Torah, the first two days of Passover, the last two days of Passover and the two days of Shavuos.)

 Rabbi Weinberger pointed out that in the times of Rashi [Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105] the Ashkenazim did recite Birkas Kohanim every day. When did the Ashkenazim stop having the Kohanim recite the priestly blessings every day? It goes back to the Beis Yosef according to the Maharil [Rabbi Yaakov Molin, 1360-1427] whose influential “She’elot U’Teshuvot and Minhagim” continue to influence Ashkenazi Jews till this day.

 Another reason, offered by Rabbi Weinberger as to why Ashkenazi Jews outside of Israel do not have Kohanim bestowing priestly blessings every day is because of the pressure to get out the synagogue after morning services in order to earn a parnassa, livelihood. It takes time for the Kohanim to have their hands washed [by Levites] and then recite that blessings.

 Another interesting point is that there is a group of Ashkenazi Jews outside of the Land of Israel who don’t just have the Kohanim recite the blessings 13 times a year on festival and the Yomim Noraim (Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur), but actually 27 times a year. They are the German Jews. While other Ashkenazi Jews have their Kohanim recite the blessings at the Mussaf service, the German Jews also have their priests recite the Birkas Kohanim at the Shacharis services and on Yom Kippur also for the Neilah that concludes the services for the holiest day of the year.

 For other interesting insights into the powerful blessings of the Kohanim, you may want to read the entire book “The Priceless Treasure of Bircas Kohanim” authored by the lecturer – Rabbi Naftali Weinberger who is also the author of popular books on Rav Chaim Kanievsky, Rebbetzin Batya Kanevsky and Reb Aharon Leib Shteinman.

*Reprinted from this week’s edition of The Jewish Connection.*

**Rav Avigdor Miller on Why**

**“I’m Always Praising the**

**Chassidim in Williamsburg”**

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This man is bringing up a claim against me that he was in a shul in Williamsburg where they davened fast. So, I’ll tell you that there are other shuls in Williamsburg where they daven slow. You went into the wrong place. But let me tell you something about Williamsburg shtiebels. I walked into a shtiebel in Williamsburg. You can't get a word of davening. You have to hand out nickels every minute. The purpose of davening there is to hand out nickels.

In other places, in Flatbush, you don’t see that. Maybe Flatbush is getting better today but in the olden days they wouldn't stand for it. They’d throw you out on your back.

Everybody's asking for money – not for themselves. Going around begging for other people, for poor families. It looks like half of Williamsburg is begging and half is giving, and sometimes they change. After he finishes collecting, he starts davening and others collect from him.

Now, it disturbs the davening if every minute you have to hand out nickels but in Williamsburg, it looks like that's the purpose of davening. That's why they daven so fast over there. Sometimes it takes me three minyanin of theirs to get through my davening. It's expensive to daven there. That’s why they daven quickly. Otherwise, they’d go broke from one long Shacharis.

*Reprinted from a recent email of Toras Avigdor based on a Thursday night lecture delivered on June 1971.*

**The Paradox of the Nazarite**

**From the Teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



In this week's Torah portion, Nasso, we read, "When a man or a woman utters a Nazirite vow... he shall abstain from new and old wine... grape-beverages, grapes and raisins..."

The term nazir (Nazirite) has two meanings: it denotes "separation; keeping aloof"-in the sense of his obligation to keep away from grapes and grape-derivatives etc..; and it derives from nezer (crown; diadem), as it says, "nezer (the crown) of his G-d is on his head... he is holy to G-d" (Num. 6:7-8).

We are confronted by a paradox. On the one hand the Nazirite is called "holy to G-d," thus a man of lofty spiritual stature. On the other hand, his separation from worldly things could be criticized by the Talmudic retort, "Is it not enough for you what the Torah has already forbidden you?" (Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:1) - because man's purpose is to infuse himself and the material world with sanctity. However:

Maimonides concludes the laws of the Nazirite as follows: "He who vows unto G-d by way of holiness (as opposed to mere abstinence for its own sake) does well and is praiseworthy. Of him it is said, 'the crown of his G-d is upon his head... he is holy unto G-d.' Scripture considers him equal to a prophet, as it is said, "I set up prophets from your sons and Nazirites from your young men' (Amos 2:11)."

This verse of Amos relates also to the time of the redemption. Then, too, there will be Nazirites who will attain the ultimate holiness, above and beyond that of earlier times. With the coming of Moshiach, a person will be a Nazirite not for the sake of simply separating from worldy matters, because these will then no longer impact negatively upon us. For in the Messianic era, "good things will be abundant and all delightful things accessible like dust, and the singular preoccupation of the entire world will be to know G-d." Thus, it will be the consummate form of the holiness of being a Nazirite.

The laws of a Nazirite teach us a most significant principle about our belief in the coming of Moshiach.

Halacha (Torah-law) decrees: If one declares, "I undertake to become a Nazirite on the day that Moshiach will come," then if he made this vow on a weekday he is forever bound by it from that very moment. If he made his vow on a Shabbat or a festival day, it will become operative from the next day onwards, forever, but not on that day itself. For it is uncertain whether Moshiach will or will not come on a Shabbat or Yom Tov, which, therefore, precludes making the vow operative on that day (Eruvin 43b; Hilchot Nezirut 4:11).

This demonstrates clearly the fact that "the day that Moshiach will come" is a possibility that applies to each day. Thus, we say in our daily prayers, "every day (and all day long) we hope for Your salvation"; or in the version of the Thirteen Principles of the Faith: "I await his coming every day."

*Reprinted from the Nasso 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim. From Living With Moshiach, adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe by Rabbi J. Immanuel Schochet, Kehot Publication Society*

**Thoughts that Count**

**for Our Parsha**

*The L-rd bless thee and keep thee* (Num. 6:24)

The Priestly blessing is said in the singular because it is primarily the blessing of unity that the Jews need. *(O'lot Efraim)*

*The princes of Israel brought their offerings, the heads of their fathers' houses... they brought their offerings before the L-rd* (Num. 7:2.3)

Twelve times the Torah repeats this phrase, detailing the identical offerings brought by each of the princes of the twelve tribes. Why the repetition? These offerings were the same only externally; in actuality, each prince brought his offering in a different manner, a manner corresponding to the tribe's spiritual source in Heaven. *(Likutei Torah)*

*And they shall confess their sin which they have committed* (Num. 5:7)

Why is the commandment to confess one's sin, the first step and foundation on the path to repentance, mentioned here, where the Torah speaks about robbery? Because any sin a person may commit has an element of robbery in it. G-d gives a person life and strength, in order that he use these gifts to perform His will. If one takes these gifts and uses them to defy G-d, he is misusing and "stealing" the property of his Creator. *(Chidushei HaRim)*

*May G-d cause His face to shine upon you* (Num. 6:22)

G-d's "face" symbolizes His love, goodwill, and closeness to us. "May G-d cause His face to shine upon you" means that the innermost part of G-d's Divine Will should shine upon and illuminate the Jewish people and that which has its source in holiness. Of course, everything in this world comes from G-d, and even things which are not holy derive their sustenance and life-force from G-d too, but this is an inferior and external sustenance. To what can it be likened? A king makes an elaborate party and invites all his highest ministers and officials to partake of the meal. Naturally, his servants and maids, and even the dogs, will eventually benefit from the leftovers, but this was not the king's intent when he made the feast. The dignitaries are influenced by the king's "innermost" will, and the servants, maids and animals receive only the "external" benefits. *(Kuntres U'Maayan)*

*Reprinted from the Nasso 5762/2002 edition of L’Chaim*

**Torah in the Darkness: A Light That Never Goes Out**

**By Rabbi Moshe Oelbaum**



I heard a very powerful story from Rav Avi Weisenfeld. The period towards the end of World War II was one of the darkest and most challenging times for the Jewish people. Amidst the horrors of the Holocaust, there were still moments of incredible resilience and even small glimmers of light that emerged in the most unexpected ways. One such story is about a man who, despite the devastation around him, managed to summon the strength to uphold his commitment to Torah.

In a certain shul, a man made a very unusual invitation to a Siyum. He walked through the aisles, personally inviting each person to attend. The guests were curious, wondering what the significance of this Siyum was, especially since it wasn’t tied to a typical celebration. When the man began to speak, he shared a deeply moving story from his time in the concentration camp.

He recalled how one of the men who slept next to him would constantly mumble words. At first, he didn't understand what this man was doing, but one night, the man revealed a special request. He told him that he was reviewing the entire Shas by heart, but was missing only one Masechta: Nazir. He feared he would not survive the war, and asked that, if he did survive, he should complete the Masechta of Nazir on his behalf. The man was struck by the holiness of this request, especially in the middle of such unimaginable suffering. And the next day, the man was gone. The survivor promised himself that he would keep his word, and he survived the war. Though it took time, he eventually acquired Masechta Nazir, learned it, and mastered it by heart.

At the Siyum, he said, “This is not just a Siyum on Nazir. It’s not even a Siyum on the entire Shas. This is a Siyum on a Yid who never gave up, even in the darkest times. This is a Siyum on a Yid who showed us that no matter how much the world takes away from us, they can never take away our Torah. It’s this Torah that keeps us going, it’s what gives us life, no matter the circumstances."

*Reprinted from the June 1, 2025 email of Daf HaYomi B’Halacha.*

**A Parable from**

**the Dubno Maggid**

Chazal discuss in many places the requirements of being a Nazir . Only a person who is on a high level and confident that he will be able to keep all the requirements of a Nazir is permitted to become a Nazir.

The parable is given of two neighbors. Both are poor and barely make ends meet. One is a lumberjack by trade, while the second one is a thief making his living by stealing. The lumberjack is able to marry off all his children while the thief can’t afford the dowry necessary and therefore his daughters are all single.

The thief approaches the lumberjack. We both know that we are both poor - both of us can barely afford to put food on the table. How is it that you can afford to marry off your children while I can’t?

The lumberjack explains - it is very simple. When my child is born I build myself a little box. I put a lock on the box. Every week I put a dollar into the box. By the time the child is ready for marriage, I open the box and have all the money I need.

The thief listened and answered. It works for you - it would never work for me. After all I am a thief. The minute I would need money I would break open the lock and empty the box. I would never be able to save money for a dowry in that way. After all, if I steal from others, I would surely steal from myself.

The Nimshal . A Tzadik - someone who observes the Torah and all the Mitzvahs, can add to the mitzvahs - become a Nazir - add restrictions and be expected to keep them. But a Rasha , someone who breaks the lock on the Torah itself, surely cannot be expected to keep the additional restriction of being a Nazir. That’s why Chaza"l limited to the Tzadikim the right to become a Nazir. (Rabbi Yakov Kranz - Dubno Magid)

*Reprinted from this week’s email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s whY I Matter parsha sheet.*

**A Joy to the Righteous**

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z”l (Zaragoza, Spain; 1255-1340) opens his commentary on this week’s parashah with a verse from Mishlei (21:15), “Performance of justice is a joy to the righteous.”

He writes: King Shlomo informs us in this verse that a person is obligated to feel joy when he sees a mitzvah being performed, not only when he is the one performing it, but also when someone else is. This is indicated by the fact that the verse says, “Performance of justice is a joy,” not, “Performing justice . . .”

It is known, Rabbeinu Bachya adds, that the joy one experiences when performing a mitzvah is itself a mitzvah. Just as performing a mitzvah is a form of serving Hashem, so the joy one experiences because of mitzvot is a form of serving Hashem. Rabbeinu Bachya continues:

We read (Devarim 28:47) that the curses in Parashat Ki Tavo will come to pass “because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, with joy and goodness of heart.” We also are commanded (Tehilim 100:2), “Serve Hashem with joy.” Joy makes our service complete. This is why the Temple service was accompanied by music–both vocal and instrumental– for music puts man’s soul on the path to joy.

In our parashah (4:47), the Levi’im are commanded to perform “the service of service.” The Gemara (Arachin 11a) explains: “What service serves the Temple service? The musical accompaniment!” The Levi’im are commanded to sing so that the mitzvah of the sacrificial service will be performed joyously.

*Reprinted from this week’s email of R’ Yedidye Hirtenfeld’s whY I Matter parsha sheet.*