

Parashat Naso 5778, 2018:

*Bringing Mercy and Kindness to the World*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, Shayna Yehudit bat Avraham Manes and Rivka, and HaRav Raphael ben HaRav Ephraim, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Yekutiel Yehudah ben Pessel Lifsha, Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah and Shoshana Elka bat Etel Dina, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* is the source of *Birkat Kohanim* (the Blessing of the Kohanim), one of the most stirring acts in our prayer experience. Nearly anyone who has witnessed this *tefilah* senses its drama and majesty. *Chazal's* (our Sages of blessed memory) analysis of the introductory verse to *Birkat Kohanim*, “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: ‘this is how you shall bless the children of Israel, saying to them (*amore lahem*),” (*Sefer Vayikra* 6:23) illustrates their abiding sensitivity to the Torah’s text. They note that the word “*amore*” (saying) is written in its complete grammatical form (*maleh*, with the Hebrew letter *vav*), rather than in the more usual manner (*chaser*, without the Hebrew letter *vav*). While initially this appears to be nothing more than a minor linguistic change, *Midrash Tanchuma* (Buber) *Parashat Naso*, Siman 18, details its profound significance:

[*Amore*] is spelled *maleh* in the phrase “*amore lahem*.” The reason why you [the *Kohanim*] should bless the Jewish people is not merely because I [G-d] have told you to do so [as if this act was some kind of burdensome chore.] Therefore, you should not bless them as if you were forced to do so (*b'angaria*, Hebrew - Greek) and in a rapid [unthinking and automatic] fashion. Instead, you [the *Kohanim*] should bless them [the Jewish people] with complete intention (*b'kavanat halev*) in order that the blessing should totally encompass them (*she'tishlot habracha bahem*). This is why the Torah writes: “*amore lahem*” [in the *maleh* form]. (Translation my own)

In sum, the *Midrash* informs us that our verse’s unusual spelling of *amore* urges the *Kohanim* to recognize that it is a singular honor to bless the Jewish people, and that they should have total *kavanat halev* during the recitation of the blessing to ensure its complete fulfillment.

The great mid-18<sup>th</sup> century Chasidic master, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Halevi Epstein, known to the world as the holy Me'or Vashemesh after the title of his most famous work, notes that many *meforshim* (Torah commentators) focus upon the question as to why the term *amore* is used instead of the normative word *dabare*, which connotes “speak” in its imperative form. In so doing, he highlights the emotions the *Kohanim* must have prior to ascending the *bimah*:

In my opinion, the answer to this well-known question of the *meforshim* is found by recognizing that our verse suggests that an individual [i.e. *kohane*] who desires to bless the Jewish people must have within him the behavioral quality of one who loves his people with a powerful love – equivalent to the love he has for himself and his own being (*k'nafsho u'k'lavavo*). (*Sefer Me'or Vashemesh*, Parashat Naso, this, and the following translation and brackets, my own)

Next, the Me'or Vashemesh explains that the love that the *Kohanim* have for the Jewish people must include each and every member of our nation, and depicts what this kind of love will achieve:

[The love that the *Kohanim* have] must include even the lowliest of the low of the Jewish people, for even such individuals they must love as they love themselves. Through this kind of love, the *Kohanim* will glorify the Jewish people before their Father in Heaven until the highest imaginable heights, and thereby bestir great mercy and kindness – and bring upon them every variety of blessing...

Clearly, the *Kohanim* have a crucial role to play in improving the status of our people before Hashem. Yet, the vast majority of us are not *Kohanim*. As such, how can we bring mercy and kindness to the world? The Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) answers this question in a manner that underscores the notion that anyone, Jew or gentile, can be sanctified to the point wherein they emulate the *Kohanim*:

Not only the tribe of Levi, but any one of the inhabitants of the world whose spirit generously motivates him and understands with his wisdom [how] to set himself aside and stand before G-d to serve Him and minister to Him and to know G-d, proceeding justly as G-d made him ... is as sanctified as holy of holies. (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shemitah v'Yovel* 13:13; translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger)

With the Almighty's help, may we be counted among those who develop profound and wise understanding, so that, we can become spiritual "*Kohanim*," and bring Hashem's blessings to to all mankind. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.