

So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael, saying to them. (6:23)

The *Kohen* who blesses the people has an “approved text” to which he must adhere verbatim. There is no room for the *Kohen* to supplement the prescribed text stated in the Torah. The *Kohen* who adds blessing transgresses the prohibition of *Es kol hadavar asher Anochi metzaveh eschem oso tishmoru laasos, lo soseif alav v’lo sigra mimenu*, “The entire word that I command you, that you shall observe to do; you shall not add to it, and you shall not subtract from it” (*Devarim* 13:1). In his commentary to the *pasuk*, *Rashi* cites examples of *Bal Tosif*, do not add: five *tosafos*, compartments for *Tefillim*; five species for a *Lulav*; four blessings for *Bircas Kohanim*, Priestly Blessings.

Bearing the above in mind, let us look to *Parashas Pinchas* as Moshe *Rabbeinu* prepares to transfer the reins of leadership to his primary disciple and successor, Yehoshua. The first step in the process was *semichah d’Oraisa*, Biblical ordination, whereby Moshe conferred “rabbinic” status on his student. This was the beginning of a chain of tradition that went on for generations, through the era of the *Amoraim*. There was an attempt to revive *semichah* in the early sixteenth century in Tzfas, but it failed to germinate.

In *Parashas Pinchas*, the Torah relates that Moshe placed both hands on Yehoshua – despite being instructed by Hashem to lay only one hand on him. *Rashi* explains that Moshe ordained Yehoshua *b’ayin yafeh*, “good eye,” with both hands. How could Moshe amend Hashem’s instructions and add to the *mitzvah*? Why was he not in transgression of *Bal Tosif*? The *Kli Yakar* asks this question, wondering why *semichah* should be any different than the other classic *mitzvos* cited by *Rashi*.

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, distinguishes between *mitzvos ben adam laMakom*, between man and the Almighty, and *mitzvos ben adam lachaveiro*, between man and his fellow man. The prohibition against adding to a *mitzvah* applies to those *mitzvos* between man and G-d. Hashem has given strict instructions concerning the parameters of the *mitzvah*. When it comes to performing various acts of loving kindness to our fellowman, there are no restrictions concerning doing more. *Kol ha’mosif, mosifin lo*, “Whoever adds, it will be added to him.” He will be blessed for going beyond the call of duty.

Apparently, the Priestly Blessing is a *mitzvah* which is *bein adam laMakom*. Thus, there is no allowance for addition of any sort. *Rav* Heyman supports this with a statement found in the *Sifri’s* commentary to our *parsha*. The Torah writes, *V’aani avaracheim*, “And I will bless them.” The Torah underscores that the blessing is derived from Hashem, so that people should not erroneously think that their blessings are contingent upon the *Kohanim*. The blessings come from Hashem. The *Kohanim* are the medium for deliverance. Hashem – and only Hashem – can confer blessing. Thus, it is clear that the *mitzvah* is *bein adam laMakom*.

The *Biur Halachah* wonders how a parent may confer blessing on his child, employing the exact

text reserved for the *Kohanim's* blessing. Does the *Talmud* not derive from the words *koh sevarachem*, "So, shall you bless," that a *zar*, *Yisrael* or *Levi*, who are not members of the Priestly family, may not bless?

Rav Heyman explains that a *Yisrael* is considered a *zar* only with regard to ascending the *Duchan* in the Sanctuary and conferring an official blessing in a place reserved for *Kohanim*. Under such circumstances, the *zar* partners with other *Kohanim* in a blessing through which Hashem bestows His favor on those who are the subjects of the blessing. Since the *zar* is not part of this august group of *Kohanim*, he transgresses *koh sevarachu*, by bestowing blessing using the Biblical vernacular. However, a father who blesses his son with a personal blessing – not as a *Bircas Kohanim* – is acting *bein adam lachaveiro*. Thus, there is no reason to prohibit his blessing – even if he uses biblical language. As long as he is not acting *bein adam laMakom*, it is not a *mitzvah*, *per se*.