

So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael. (6:23)...Let them place My Name upon Bnei Yisrael, and I will bless them. (6:27)

In the three *pesukim* of *Bircas Kohanim*, the Priestly Blessing, the *Kohanim* serve as the medium through which Hashem's blessing reaches us. Hashem is the One Who blesses us via the conduit of the *Kohen*. Prior to offering the blessing, the *Kohanim* recite a *berachah*, "Who commands us to bless His People, *Yisrael* – *b'ahavah*, with love." Thus, if the blessings are to achieve efficacy, the tenor of the relationship between *kohen* and congregation – and vice versa – must be one of love, no animus towards any member of the congregation for any reason. This applies to the flipside. If the congregant bears a grudge against the *Kohen*, he cannot love him. If one hopes to be strengthened and empowered as a result of this blessing, love must reign.

How important is *Bircas Kohanim*? The *Netziv*, *zl* (*Naso*), writes: "All of the blessings in the world are included within the words of *Bircas Kohanim*. There is nothing to be added to them." *Shaarei Orah* (*Shaar* 10) writes: "When the *Kohanim* bless, they open up via their blessings, the world of *Rachamim*, Heavenly Mercy, a world where Strict Judgment does not exist. Thus, even if the Jewish People transgress, *Bircas Kohanim* prevents any negative influence from reaching them." *Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk*, *Shlita*, relates how some *gedolim*, Torah leaders, went out of their way to participate and receive the Priestly blessings.

Horav Yisrael Gustman, *zl*, insisted that there should be at least two *Kohanim* at his *minyan* (In *Yerushalayim*, *Bircas Kohen* is recited daily.) On *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, he made a point to have ten *Kohanim* at each *minyan*. *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern*, *zl*, and *Horav Moshe Yosef Milotzki*, *zl*, were known to trek from *shul* to *shul* to participate in *Bircas Kohanim*. When *Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman*, *zl*, came to America together with the *Gerrer Rebbe*, *Shlita*, on their historic trip, *Rav Shteinman* insisted on davening in a *Sephardic shul*, since the *minyan* there recites *Bircas Kohanim* every day. Indeed, as *Rav Shteinman* explained, *Bircas Kohanim* is the only *avodah*, service, rendered in the *Bais Hamikdash* that is still extant after its destruction.

Horav Shimshon Pincus, *zl*, was walking home from *shul* in the accompaniment of a number of students. He commented, "You know that there is someone in that *shul* who is proficient in giving *berachos*. His blessings achieve extraordinary efficacy under the most negative circumstances." They followed him into the *shul* during *Chazoras Ha'Shatz*, the repetition of *Shemoneh Esrai*. He looked at them and said, "Two minutes." They joined the congregation for *Bircas Kohanim*. The students looked at their revered *Rebbe* as if to say, "So what? It is only *Bircas Kohanim*." He replied, "Hashem says, 'And I will place My Name on *Bnei Yisrael*, and I will bless them.' Is anyone's blessing more effective than that of Hashem? Let me tell you a story. A relative of mine was experiencing a difficult labor. The doctor wanted to perform a cesarean section surgery to deliver the infant. They called *Horav Nissen Karelitz*, *zl*, for advice and a *berachah*. The *Rebbetzin* took the call and replied that the *Rav* was unavailable. She advised them, however, to refuse surgery at the moment, to hold out until the morning when the situation would be reevaluated. Night

passed, and, by morning, the situation had resolved itself, and mother and child were out of the woods.

Weeks later, *Rav Shimshon* had occasion to visit *Rav Nissen* and his wife. He said to her, “*Rebbetzin*, you are a miracle worker. To take upon your shoulders to offer advice that is counter to medical opinion – great shoulders.” The *Rebbetzin* replied, “You think that it was I who blessed the child? The truth is that I am a firm believer in the power of *Bircas Kohanim*. The *Kohanim* bless the people. At times, however, for whatever reason, their blessing does not (at that time) achieve efficacy. As a result, a number of “loose” blessings are drifting all over. I collect and save them. When someone is in need of blessing, I release one of the blessings. They are not my blessings. These blessings come from Hashem. I just happened to have saved them for the next opportunity.”