



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT NASO

“Just the Messenger”

In the famous and special *berachah* that the *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people with in this week's Parsha, it is prefaced: “Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: ‘Speak to Aharon and his sons; thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them...’” (Bamidbar 6:22-23).

The *Midrash* (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 11:4) notes that the final introductory words – “say to them / אמור להם” – is written with a seeming superfluous letter *vav*, and comments that this actually come to signify a very important element in *Birkat Kohanim*. “[Just] because I commanded you to bless Israel, do not bless them as though compelled to do so, and hastily, but rather, bless them with intent of the heart so that the blessing will take effect upon them completely.”

The *S'fat Emet* explains that the *kohanim* might entertain the thought that the entire *Birkat Kohanim* is a gift to *Bnei Yisrael* straight from Heaven; that they are merely messengers to channel Hashem's downpour of *shefa* and *berachah* onto His people, but that the *berachah* isn't really coming from them whatsoever. The *Midrash* therefore comes to elaborate Hashem's true perspective, that while the *kohanim* are indeed the conduit of the Heavenly blessings, He still wants the *kohanim* to put their heart and soul into it. Instead of just “doing their job,” they are meant to actually activate G-d's blessing through their own ecstasy, enjoyment, and goodwill when performing the *Birkat Kohanim*. On a simple level, one might think that the reason *kohanim* should give it proper intention and joy, as described in the *Midrash*, is since they're doing it anyway, and a “why not do it with a smile” sort of sentiment. But it's much more profound – their delight in the *zechut* of getting to bless their brothers and sisters is actually what gives the potential for the G-dly *berachot* to take root and blossom. Hashem could obviously bless His own people Himself; the fact that He has the *kohanim* doing it serves as living proof that their sincerity and willingness indeed has a powerful impact.

Perhaps we can all – the non-*kohanim*, too – take a potent lesson from here. We may sometimes “burn out” in life, at which point we just start going through the motions without giving our tasks any liveliness, and losing hope of our ambitions. Maybe a person might feel that he or she is just another drop in the bucket, and “what do my actions or accomplishments matter, anyway?” We all have our own *sh'lichut*, our own missions in this world that are unique for each individual to accomplish. Each of us is a necessary component in the vast and incredible tapestry of Hashem's world, and we all have our own roles to play. But don't “just do it;” give it all you have! Show up to life's grandeur with all your creativity to innovate, accomplish, and inspire with your own unique flavor, spirit, resourcefulness, and vision. Embrace your individuality, because Hashem does, too. Your contributions aren't overlooked, since G-d wants you...

*“Our struggles help us stumble
across our strengths.”*

Refuah Sheleimah, b'toch she'ar cholei Yisrael:

Rahamim Ben Shifra Ariel Ben Frida Chana Bat Malka Miriam Bat Bakol
Heleni Orna Bat Chen Chana Yitzchak Ben Naama Frida Bat Yaffa

Priorities

R' Yitzchok Fingerer shared a remarkable story. *There was a shochet in the times of the Brisker Rav who had aspersions cast on him. Rumors were going around that he had been engaging in inappropriate activity, and many people wanted to have him removed from his post. They convened a meeting, hosting the Brisker Rav as the chairman of the conference, and put out a secret code to have only the leaders and dignitaries of the community attend the gathering at the Rav's house to discuss deposing the local shochet.*

Somehow, the shochet found out that there was an important meeting held at the Brisker Rav's house, and, being unaware that he was the very subject of the meeting, he attended the conference. And so it was; the meeting was about to commence, to discuss the firing of the shochet in the presence of the leading figures in the community, with the shochet himself sitting among the crowd. Everyone waited for the Brisker Rav to start speaking and begin the conference, but he just sat there, not saying a word. Time was dragging, and people starting murmuring to each other. Nothing was happening, and after a while of the room filled with silence, having accomplished nothing, the meeting disbanded. No one dared to encroach upon the gadol's territory or speak up before him, and so the people eventually just left.

Afterwards, one of the rabbanim approached the gadol and asked him, “Why were you silent? Everyone came for a reason; each guests' time is valuable. Why didn't we just host the meeting as planned and get rid of the shochet?” The Brisker responded: “You think it's worthwhile to shame the shochet, to humiliate him in public? Then what's kashrut worth? What worth do the mitzvot have, if it means embarrassing another Jew in public? I'd rather still eat questionable kashrut than to degrade another individual.”

We must exert extreme caution when it comes to the dignity of our fellow Jew, and have our priorities straight. Always look at the bigger picture...