

Spotlight on...Birkat Kohanim

Background:

In parashat Naso Hashem tells us how the Kohanim should bless the people. This is the formula that the kohanim use to bless the people on holidays, and the blessings that many parents give their children on Friday nights.

בְּרַכֶּה ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:	May Hashem bless you and protect you!
יֵאָר ה' פְּגִי אֱלֹהֵי וְיַחַנֶּנֶךָ:	May Hashem deal kindly and graciously with you!
יְשֹׁא ה' פְּגִי אֱלֹהֵי וְיִשֶׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:	May Hashem bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace!

This week we are going to focus on the last part of the bracha - May Hashem give you peace. Before we look at how the mefarshim understand what shalom means, stop and think about how you would define it. What do you think peace might mean in this context?

Here are three different opinions in the mefarshim:

Ibn Ezra: May Hashem protect you from stones, evil animals, and your enemies.

Bechor Shor: Peace means that your yetzer hara, or evil inclination, will not bother you. Nor will the satan, or the other nations of the world. You will be protected from all injury and anyone who seeks to hurt you.

Seforno (translation): "The serenity of peace which is equivalent to an infinite, unbroken and undisturbed existence, not tainted by punishment, something which is a feature of life in the world to come."

Questions:

1. These three opinions have certain features in common, but also strong differences. What are some of the visions of peace that all 3 opinions have in common? What are some of the ways that they are different?
2. Which of these definitions compares most to how you defined peace before you read the mefarshim?
3. According to each of these three opinions, what is our vision of an ideal existence? Which opinion resonates most with you?