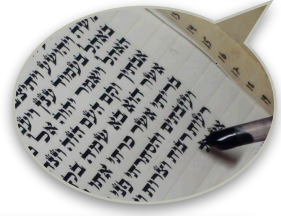




The Collective Conversation

*Weekly Torah Essays from the
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community*



Sefer Bamidbar

Parshat Beha'alotcha

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The Structure of an Important Bracha

By Tobi Katz

As Aaron continues to receive instruction on his role as Kohen Gadol it is timely to look back one week at the signature Kohanic blessing.

Hashem instructed Moshe to convey to Aaron the words with which a person blesses their children. Every week on Friday, as custom, one's parents bestow upon their children this *bracha*. Additionally, this blessing is said by the *Kohanim* during the *duchaning*. The blessing spans three *psukim* and has a very interesting structure of language.

Let's take a look at the deeper meanings of each section.

יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:

May Hashem bless you and protect you (Bamidbar 6:24)

Commentators take a different approach to what *Hashem* means to "bless" us. The *Sifre* explains that these blessings refer to triumph over other nations, successful business, and abundant offspring. *Rashi* takes this verse to mean monetary wealth and abundance, and the *Ibn Ezra* cites that this blessing refers to a long life.

Why are many of these commentators seemingly focused only on material wealth or non-spiritual-related blessings?

Sforno explains by bringing in a verse from *Pirkei Avot* 3:17:

אֵם אֵין קִמְחָה, אֵין תּוֹרָה. אֵם אֵין תּוֹרָה, אֵין קִמְחָה

Where there is no flour [bread], there is no Torah; where there is no Torah there is no flour.

This means that albeit monetary success is secondary to spiritual fulfillment, in order to fully connect to the Torah, we must have the means to eliminate distraction and other worries.

The next *bracha* seems to take on the more spiritual side of things. (*Mishlei* 6:25)

יָאֵר ה' אֶפְנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְיִתְחַנֵּן:

May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you (Bamidbar 6:25)

Illumination, *ohr* in Hebrew, is many times tied to the idea of "*meor Torah*," the light of Torah. In the book of *Mishlei* it states, *For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah is a light.* (6:23) This *bracha* is, in essence, drawing us closer to the Torah (*Sifre*).

This language of light reminds me of the idea that the Jewish people should be *ohr la'goyim*, a light onto other nations. And what is this light within us, but not for Torah, which allows us

to build a connection to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

The *Tanchuma* reads this part of the blessing to be a hope for God to grant us children who will grow up to be Torah scholars.

The *passuk* continues with a request for *chen*, which is often translated as favor. The *Degel Machaneh Ephraim*, which was written by *Moshe Chaim Ephraim* of *Sudilkov*, the grandson of the *Ba'al Shem Tov*, comments on the *Or HaChaim* explaining that this favor is, in fact, not referring to favor in *Hashem's* eyes, as the *Ramban* and other commentators explain, but rather the eyes of one's peers. This is because no matter how awesome a person's attributes may be, unless they are accepted in a positive relationship with others, their great gifts will not be appreciated or successful.

This is an extremely powerful message. Though *Hashem* may grant us special qualities and the ability to be great, ultimately, it is up to us how we shape our lot. We must strive to be kind and uplift others, and the hope is that this kindness will come full circle, allowing us to be uplifted and recognized in return.

The last part of the blessing is as follows:

יְשֹׁא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֵינוּ וְיַשֵּׁם לָנוּ שָׁלוֹם:

May Hashem lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you (Bamidbar 6:26)

According to *Rashi*, this *pasuk* means that *Hashem* should suppress His anger with someone were they to be sinful. This is learned from the language relating to *Hashem's* face. One's countenance can reveal their emotions to another person, and if one were to be ashamed, one often would lower their head in embarrassment. This *pasuk* is essentially relating to us that we should be able to lift our heads, a symbol of pride, even during our missteps without fear because God will be there for us.

The last part of our blessing deals with peace, for if there is no peace, there is no true reason for our other blessings (*Sifra*). Peace does not simply allude to the absence of war or disagreements. Rather, peace is another state of harmony between different conflicting forces, such as the bodily needs of a person and their soul. We end our blessings to our children with the hope that this balance be maintained, and therefore all other blessings may be bestowed upon us.

May this *bracha*, *Bz"V*, hold true for every one of us.

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