

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel tov to Yakir Hirsch on his *bar mitzvah* this Shabbos. *Mazel tov* also to Yakir's parents, Abby and Joe Hirsch, and to his brothers, Ariel, Dov, and Elisha. Special *mazel tov* to his grandparents, Rosalyn and Irvin Hirsch and Marcie and Yaakov Calm, and to all the other family and friends celebrating with Yakir this Shabbos.

This week's drasha is sponsored by

- Joe and Abby Hirsch, in appreciation of the Shomrei community and in honor of Yakir's *bar mitzvah*. *Mazel tov*!
- Chaim and Eleanor Leventhal, in memory of Chaim's mother, Yitta bas Binyamin, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 14th of Sivan. May her *neschama* have an *aliya*.

May all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

What an inspiring Shavuot in Shomrei! The beautiful *tefillos*, the abundance of Torah learning, and the genuine *achdus* were incredible—a real recreation of *Mattan Torah*. May the inspiration from a true *Kabolas HaTorah* take us through the summer until the *Yamim Noraim*!

Within our little bubble here, things are, Baruch Hashem, joyful, peaceful, and meaningful. But just outside those doors is a daunting world, filled with danger and *machlokes*:

Besides the perennial threats to the free world from Iran, China, and North Korea, Ukraine has been under attack—by a menacing world superpower for months...

Arab terror in Israel is always on our minds, even when everything is quiet on the surface. *Sinas chinam* is unfortunately a plague in the Jewish community, and in this country in the current political climate. There is so much discord in homes, rifts between people; and so much heartache and inner turmoil.

Eli Weisel famously taught: “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.” We cannot stand by with apathy and indifference at this time. We must do our part to correct this problem.

But we may ask: how can we change such a pervasive and widespread problem, with such a long and deeply rooted history? The Torah is already filled with stories of *machlokes* and war, beginning in *Sefer Breishis* (Kayin and Hevel, Yosef and his brothers) and through *Sefer Bamidbar* (Korach). Is a real solution possible before the Messianic age that we daven for, the words of Yeshayahu **לֹא יֵשָׁא גּוֹי אֶל גּוֹי חָרָב וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה**? May we merit those days soon!

Can we really make a difference to bring world peace now? I remember that, 15 years ago, when I was a campus rabbi at Johns Hopkins University, every Friday on North Charles Street, I would see half a dozen people holding signs saying “Bring World Peace.” Or “Honk If You Want Peace.” Did they accomplish anything? Do signs work?

But we cannot simply do nothing in a world that is crumbling through *machlokes* and discord...

Pirkei Avos (1:12) teaches us, in the name of the great Hillel: **הוּי מִתְלַמְּדֵי שֶׁל אַהֲרֹן: אוֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף שְׁלוֹם אוֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת וּמִקְרָבָן לְתוֹרָה**. We should not just dream about peace—we must love it to the degree that we actively pursue it. This can be accomplished by truly loving people and bringing them to the truth of existence...the Torah...which brings the ultimate *shalom*. As Chazal write in several places, **תְּלַמְּדֵי חֻכְמִים מְרַבִּים שְׁלוֹם בְּעוֹלָם**

How do we accomplish this? Who are the Talmidei Aharon?

I believe our *Sedra* provides some insight into this matter. At the end of Parshas Naso, we are introduced to *Birchas Kohanim*. The Kohanim, the spiritual leaders of the nation, are given the responsibility of blessing the people; they are told to recite a *bracha* that is very familiar to us. It is traditionally also given to children on Friday nights, and to a *chosson* and *kalla* on their wedding day: (כד) יברכך ה' וישמרך:

May Hashem bless and protect you

(כה) יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחנך:

May Hashem shine His face towards you and favor you
And finally--

(כו) ישא ה' פניו אליך וישם לך שלום:

May Hashem turn His face towards you and establish peace for you.

The **Rambam** writes in *Hilchos Tefilla* 15:7:

רמב"ם הלכות תפילה ונשיאת כפים פרק טו הלכה ז

ואל תתמה ותאמר ומה תועיל ברכת הדיוט זה, שאין קבול הברכה תלוי בכהנים אלא בהקדוש ברוך הוא שנאמר ושמך את שמי על בני ישראל ואני אברכם, הכהנים עושים מצותן שנצטוו בה והקב"ה ברחמיו מברך את ישראל כחפצו.

Do not ask; of what use is a bracha given by an ordinary person? Because the bracha's effectiveness is not really up to the Kohanim, it is God who issues real blessing... the kohanim simply do their part, fulfilling what they were commanded to do, and Hashem in His mercy blesses the Jewish people, of His desire.

Rav Shaul Yisraeli, former Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Mercaz haRav, in his sefer *Siach Shaul*, asks a basic question on the Rambam:

שיח שאול עמ' שס"ז

אולם גם אחרי ביאורו של הרמב"ם עדיין הענין דורש הסבר: אם עיקר הברכה אינה תלויה אלא בקב"ה והוא המברך את ישראל כחפצו, מה טיבה אפוא שלא המצוה שהכנהנים נצטוו בה? הקצרה יד ה' מלהריק שפע ברכה על עמו מבילי תיווכו של הכהן? מה תתן ומה תוסיף ברכת הכהן, ברכת ההדיוט בביטוי של הרמב"ם, על ברכת השם?

If ultimately God is giving the bracha, what is the function and purpose of the Kohanim? Does God really need middlemen? What does the Kohen add in this process if Hashem is the one real source of bracha?

Rav Yisraeli answers:

"וּשְׁמוֹ אֶת שְׁמִי עַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל," שענינו להקריא על ישראל את שם השם. חסד השם מלאה הארץ. שופע, זורם השפע האלקי בעולם ומלואו, אולם זקוק הוא לכלים בבכדי לקבלו. ברכת ה' צריכה הכשרה בכדי לקבלה. והקראה זו של שם ה' על ישראל, שהיא הנה המצוה המוטלת על הכהנים, היא היא שצריכה להכשיר את ישראל לקבל את ברכת ה'...

Their task is to remind the people that Hashem's glory fills the world, that the world is filled with Hashem's *brachos*, ready to be absorbed and collected. Hashem's *brachos* are always ready to flow, but they require a suitable recipient. To receive these *brachos* and to properly appreciate them, we need to prepare ourselves. That is the task of the Kohanim--to inspire us and remind us to prepare and make ourselves suitable to accept the *brachos*...by aligning our values with those of Hashem.

And the Rambam is clear that it is not only the *Kohanim* who can help bring Hashem's *bracha* into our world and our lives. He writes that this teaches us זה מה תועיל ברכת הדיוט זה that a *bracha* from **everyone**, even an ordinary person, should never be underestimated.

We must all do our part to fill the world with God's *brachos*. Even if our part seems insignificant, even if we feel ordinary and small, we can all do our part to fill the world with *bracha*—and to inspire others to do the same. **And it takes the cumulative effect of many ordinary brachos, by regular people, to help the world reach its ultimate perfected state.**

We see this most clearly in the final section of *birchas kohanim*—a request for **peace**, the ultimate in *brachos*. As the **Netziv** writes, without peace, no other *brachos* can be enjoyed.

העמק דבר במדבר פרק ו פסוק כו

וישם לך שלום. אחר כל הברכות, מברכים בכלי המחזיק אותם, שבלי שלום אין נחת בשום ברכה:

After all the brachos, bless them with the vessel that holds them; without peace there is no enjoyment in any blessing:

What kind of *shalom*, what kind of peace, is being referred to?

To answer this question, the **Sifrei** quotes a dispute regarding what peace the Torah is discussing.

ספרי במדבר פרשת נשא פיסקא מב

וישם לך שלום. . . ר' חנניה סגן הכהנים אומר וישם לך שלום בביתך ר' נתן אומר זה שלום מלכות בית דוד

Rabbi Chanina Segan ha-Kohanim says it refers to peace in our homes שלום בביתך. Rabbi Nosson says it refers to days of *Mashiach*, שלום מלכות בית דוד when the entire world will acknowledge God's glory; when people will stop fighting, when everyone will live properly.

While that goal may seem ambitious, Rabbi Nosson is teaching us that **nothing is too big to dream of and pray for, and to work towards**. When setting our own goals and aspirations, **let us dream the noble vision: let us dream of peace for the whole world and in our own times. Just because something seems beyond us, at least right now, that doesn't mean we shouldn't set our sights on it. That doesn't mean we shouldn't be inspired to try**. We must strive for the larger aspects of peace — political, social, international — which will find their full realization at the end of days, the days of *Mashiach*. We need visions—grand visions, holy visions, and universal visions.

So why is Rabbi Chanina Segan ha-Kohanim arguing? Why does he limit the vision to peace in our homes? Why not dream bigger like Rabbi Nosson?

In a drasha 50 years ago, **Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm** suggested this profound answer:

*“What R. Chanina Segan ha-Kohanim is telling us is this: dream the dreams of Isaiah, of nation not lifting up sword against nation; pray for the peace of the realm; **but don't be unrealistic**. Strive for these always — but without illusions as to their viability and applicability and realizability in the present or the immediate future.*

Insofar as now is concerned, ...refer to that aspect of the good life which can be attained and is within our grasp. The blessing of peace in the priestly blessings speaks of a peace which is much more realistic and attainable: שלום בביתך, peace in your homes. First you must strive for peace in your own home, between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brother and sister. Then you can strive for the larger aspects of peace — political, social, international — which will find their full realization at the end of days, the days of Mashiach.

World peace begins with peace in our homes...an attainable goal...something each of us must work to achieve.

As **Rav Hirsch** writes, we can all help bring world peace through our own small actions:

רש"ר הירש במדבר פרשת נשא פרק ו פסוק כו

וישם לך שלום. . . אם תהיה עבד ה' כהלכה בכל כחותיך הגופניים והרוחניים, ואם ה' יראה בך את הגשמת כל מטרותיו - כי אז כל בעלי הרגש והמחשבה שמסביבך יראו בך השלמה לעצמם; אליך ישאפו, ובך יראו את היסוד להווייתם; והעולם כולו ישיר שיר מזמור לאדם העובד את ה' באמת.

*... **If you will be a true servant of God with all your physical and spiritual powers, so that God will see in you the fulfillment of all His aims, then all those around you who are sensitive and thoughtful will consider you their perfect complement, the element that spurs them on to good endeavors and***

sustains them in existence. Every breath drawn by an individual who truly serves God will elicit a responsive chord from the universe around him.

And this lesson is true when it comes to defeating all discord and evil. We must strive to eradicate it totally. We must have a vision of a world of tolerance and respect for all, but we must begin by making sure that intolerance, discord, and evil have no place in our hearts, our homes, our schools, and our community. We must make sure that we never speak disparagingly of others; that the tolerance we would like to be shown, we display for others as well.

And we can all do our part—to bring the proper respect and love for all of mankind, for all of God’s creations, into our homes. We can bring peace into our lives, and receive the *brachos* of Hashem.

But it does not simply require prayer and hope. The Kohanim were role models of bringing peace into our lives—they were required to give the *brachos* culminating with the *bracha* of peace באהבה, with love and respect. They were the primary תלמידי אהרון, who were required to be אהבי שלום ורודפי שלום.

The *bracha* for *Birchas Kohanim* includes the words “*asher kideshanu bi-kedushaso shel Aharon* — Who has sanctified us with the holiness of Aharon.” Why doesn’t this *bracha* use the standard wording of *birchos hamitzvos*, “*asher kideshanu be-mitzvosav* — Who has sanctified us with His *mitzvos*”? To answer this question, the **Dover Shalom of Vilna**, quotes the *Yalkut*, who writes that the first time Aharon blessed the Jewish nation, it was not because Hashem had commanded him to do so, rather, he did so of his own accord, as a spontaneous display of love for Bnei Yisrael. Hashem approved what Aharon had done and commanded his children, the *Kohanim*, to follow in his footsteps. The *Dover Shalom* explained that the *mitzvah* of *Birchas Kohanim* indeed has its origins in Aharon’s holiness — “*kedushaso shel Aharon*” — and thus merited its own language. When Hillel, in *Pirkei Avos*, guides us to be “of the *talmidim* of *Aharon HaKohen*,” he was teaching us that, like the *Kohanim*, **each of us can be a true *ohev Yisrael* and thereby help bring peace to others.**

There is also a requirement in *Birchas Kohanim* for קול רם, literally a raised voice—but the **Beis HaLevi** understands that this wording teaches us that the *bracha* is something the Kohen must do himself—even with the principal of כעונה, he cannot delegate this task to anyone else. Why not? **Rav Soloveitchik** explained, in the name of his father, that giving a *bracha*, inspiring others, requires a personal relationship... a connection between the one who confers the *bracha* (the *mevarech*) and the recipient of the *bracha*.

רשימות שעורים (רי"ד סולובייצ'יק) מסכת סוכה דף לא עמוד ב
הנה בדין דבעינן קול רם בברכת כהנים כותב בית הלוי (עה"ת, סוף חומש בראשית) דכהן אינו יוצא בשומע כעונה מפני שבאופן זה חסר לו קול רם... ביאר הגר"מ זצ"ל דשאני דין קול רם בבכורים מבב"כ... בב"כ קול רם הוא דין במעשה המצוה, כלומר כהן שאינו מברך בקול רם איננו נחשב כמברך - וא"כ שומע כעונה פסול, כי הכהן השומע אינו מברך בקול רם שלו ואין הוא נחשב למברך. ודומה לפנים נגד פנים ונשיאת כפים - דאטו אם השומע לא יהיה פנים כנגד פנים ולא ישא את כפיו אל הקהל האם יכול לצאת ב"כ מדין שומע כעונה - דכל אלה חלק ממעשה הברכה של הכהן עצמו, וכן קול רם בב"כ דין במעשה הגברא עצמו ולא בחפצא דקול כמו בבכורים.

May we find the inspiration to dream big, like Rabbi Nosson, as well as do our part, like Rabbi Chananya Segan ha-Kohanim, in taking the necessary small steps to make those big dreams come true, by interacting with others with love and respect and inspiring others through our actions. May we be *zoche* to see the day when there will be true *shalom*... true tolerance and respect for all... world peace and harmony...when Hashem and His Glory, and the godliness within all of Hashem’s creations, is recognized by everyone. And those “Bring Peace Now” signs on North Charles Street will finally come true...*amen*.