



Parshas Naso 2023, blessing with love

The Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Miriam Bas Yamin, Daniel Aaron Ben Yigal, Leah Mintche Bas Ya'akov Yosef, Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

Our Parsha begins with G-d telling Moshe the transport duties of the three families of the tribe of Levi. The first family, Gershon, carried all the tapestries, veils, and skins used in the Mishkan. The Kehos family was tasked with transporting all the holy vessels custom-made for the Kohanim. The Merari family was entrusted with carrying its structural components.

G-d teaches Moshe about the Sotah and the Nazir. A Sotah is a suspected adulteress who was witnessed going into seclusion with another man. This seclusion was specifically after being warned not to associate with that individual. She is forbidden to her husband and must be escorted to the Beis Hamikdash.

When she arrives, the Kohanim write this Torah portion on parchment and soaked in water until the ink dissolves. The Sotah must drink the water, and if she indeed committed adultery, her belly would miraculously swell until she died. But if she is unharmed by the water, it is clear that she is innocent and blessed with many blessings.

Conversely, a Nazir is a person who vows to abstain from wine and grape products. They must not cut their hair and may not come in contact with a human corpse. This was done to achieve and attain a deeper level of spirituality and holiness.

However, a question comes to mind: At the end of the fourth aliyah, G-d tells Moshe the priestly blessings that are recited by Kohanim to this very day. The blessing recited beforehand is *"Blessed are You, the Lord our G-d, King of the universe that sanctified us with the holiness of Aaron and commanded us to bless Your people, the nation of Israel **with love.**"* No other blessings specify it must be done **"with love,"** so why must this unique commandment be done **"with love"?!**

One of the answers given is that the priestly blessing should be accompanied by love. Each element of the blessing should be given and received love and affection.

The priestly blessing is divided into three, (6:24-26) *"May the Lord bless you and watch over you. May the Lord turn His face towards you and favor you. May the Lord raise His face towards you and grant you peace."* When the Kohen ends the blessing **"with love,"** he asks that guardianship, favor and peace be bestowed and obtained without limits or restrictions.

Interestingly, this **"love"** is codified into law; a Kohen that has resentment towards the congregation or they have hostility towards him should not recite the priestly blessing.

However, Rabbi Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that the "love" refers to G-d's love that is then mirrored by the Kohanim blessing the congregation. This love is traced back to Aaron, the high priest, who spontaneously blessed the nation and merited access to this "love" for all his future generations.

Rabbi Sacks explains that the Kohanim are just a channel for G-d's blessings to His chosen people. The Pasuk states, (6:27) **וְשָׂמוּ אֶת-שְׁמִי עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֶם - They (the Kohanim) shall link My name on the people of Israel, and I will bless them."**

Meaning, that it's G-d blessing the nation; he is using the Kohanim as a pipeline for the blessing to reach the Jewish people. Hence, Kohanim must be selfless and pure as they prepare to give the priestly blessing.

Rabbi Sacks continues that all Jewish people are given the responsibility and duty of being a Kohen. On the second day of preparation to receive the Torah, Moshe comes down the mountain and repeats what G-d told him. (Yisro 19:5) *"And you (the Jewish people) shall be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."*

Each of us is honored to be a conduit for G-d's blessings here on earth, to be His light for the rest of His creations. To be a divine ambassador of holiness and righteousness as darkness and chaos blur G-d's presence in our physical world. But it all begins with love, the foundational element upon which blessings unfold, develop and connect us with our Creator.

In our daily lives, it is crucial to understand that love is not merely a theoretical or abstract concept confined to the realm of ideas or emotions. Instead, it is a practical and tangible force that actively shapes and influences our interactions with others.

When we love our fellow human beings as we love ourselves, it not only benefits the recipient but also brings about transformative change within us. This love aligns our actions with the divine will of our Father in Heaven, fostering a deeper connection to the divine purpose and guiding us toward our unique potential.

"At the heart of Judaism is a covenant of love, it has often been viewed as a religion of law and justice, but that is quite untrue.

To be sure, Judaism is a religion of law and justice between human beings, because only where there is law can there be a just society.

**Judaism is nothing if not a religion of society,
but between G-d and humanity there is a bond of love."**

-Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of blessed memory

Have a meaningful Shabbos, Rabbi Sholom Yemini