

PENNIES FROM HEAVEN

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The portion of Naso contains phrases that are said every day by every congregation in the world. In the Diaspora they are incorporated in the repetition of the Shemone Esrai, the (morning) standing prayer, and in Israel the kohanim themselves, the priests, recite them each morning as they bless the nation: Birkas Kohanim, the priestly blessings. In this week's portion Hashem instructed the kohanim to bless the people: "Thus shall you bless the nation of Israel, speak unto them. May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May He illuminate His countenance upon you and let you find grace. May He lift His countenance upon you and establish peace for you." (Numbers 6:22-26)

It seems that we ask for more than blessing. Why is each one of the blessings followed with its practical implication? Bless us... and safeguard us. Illuminate us ... and let us find favor in the eyes of others. Lift countenance.. and establish peace for us. Is it not enough to be blessed and have the illumination of his countenance? What is the necessity of the second half of each blessing?

Noted attorney Robert Harris, Esq. of Woodmere, told me a wonderful story:

A man once pleaded with the Al-mighty to bestow a bit of His abundance upon him. He implored and begged his Creator for long life and wealth. After all, the poor soul figured, G-d had an abundance of everything; why then, wouldn't He spare something for a Jew in need. He entered a huge, empty synagogue on the Lower East Side and began to cry.

"Ribono Shel Olam (Master of the universe)," he cried "in the great extent of Your eternity what is a million years?"

The man began to tremble. He imagined that he actually heard a response.

"To Me a million years is just a mere second!" boomed a voice inside his mind.

The man continued. "And," he pleaded, "to the magnitude of Your great bounty, what, may I ask, is a billion dollars?"

"A billion dollars is just a mere penny," came the resonating reply.

"Then," begged the man, "can I not have just one of your pennies?"

"Surely!" came the response. And then a pause. "But you must wait a mere second!"

It is not enough to get a blessing from Hashem. It must be given with the assurance that it will have a practical implication. Many people receive blessings of wealth and health only to lose them to

thieves and aggravation. Each of the priestly blessings is followed by a safeguard - a follow up. A blessing of wealth alone is not enough. Hashem must guard it. Illuminating us with His countenance is not enough. Unless fellow humans appreciate the grace that G-d has given the Jews, in this very corporeal world, it is a worthless gift. And of course, even if He lifts his countenance upon us we still need the blessings of shalom - peace.

The Torah also teaches us that blessing others must be done with a full heart and full hand. To bestow generosity on others must include a vehicle to appreciate the bounty. Otherwise you have given the gift of a billion dollars - in a million years. We may give blessings to our fellow Jews, but the greatest blessings we receive and give are those that we can use - immediately and forever.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordecai Kamenetzky

Dedicated in memory of Irving I. Adelsberg by the Adelsberg Family

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Drasha is the e-mail edition of FaxHomily, a weekly torah facsimile on the weekly portion which is sponsored by ***The Henry and Myrtle Hirsch Foundation***

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