

# UPS AND DOWNS

*by Shlomo Katz*

## **Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz**

### **Nasso**

**Volume XV, No. 31  
11 Sivan 5761  
June 2, 2001**

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Today's Learning:

Sotah 3:7-8

Orach Chaim 451:9-11

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 26

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Horiot 12

Sunday, the twelfth of Sivan, is both the birthday anniversary and yahrzeit of Yehuda, the fourth son of the Patriarch Yaakov (Shalshet Hakabalah; Melitzi Esh). R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l taught: Of all of Yaakov's sons, it was Yehuda who earned the right to be the forebearer of the Davidic dynasty and of mashiach. The Torah portrays Yehuda as a person whose righteousness was tested many times; unlike his brother Yosef, whose behavior was the model of consistency, Yehuda sometimes struggled and fell. Yosef and Yehuda are examples of what the Rambam calls the "chassid me'uleh" and "moshail b'nafsho," respectively.

Rambam explains (Shemonah Perakim, ch.6) that a chassid me'uleh is a person who is innately righteous. He wants to do what is right, and he does it without any obvious internal struggle. Rashi suggests (Shmot 1:4) that Yosef was such a person; "The same Yosef who shepherded his father's flocks is the righteous Yosef who ruled Egypt."

The moshail b'nafsho, on the other hand, is a person who feels the pull of the evil inclination, even if only to the slightest degree, but overcomes the challenges. This is what Yehuda did in saving Tamar, and what he failed to do completely (see Rashi, Bereishit 38:1) when given the opportunity to save Yosef -- an error which he in turn corrected by risking his own life to save Binyamin.

This is why Yehuda, not Yosef, was chosen as the ancestor of kings. The Torah concept of a king is not someone who is "better than" his subjects, but someone who has experienced their spiritual struggles, and has overcome them. Only then can he lead them in conquering their own evil inclinations and fulfilling G-d's will. (Yemei Zikaron, pp. 70-75)

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*"Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying: 'So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael, 'amor lahem' / saying to them: 'yevarechecha Hashem' / May Hashem bless you (singular) . . .'" (6:23- 24)*

The midrash states: How did Bnei Yisrael merit to receive Birkat Kohanim / the priestly blessing? It was because of Matan Torah / the Giving of the Torah.

What does this midrash mean? R' Chaim Zvi Teitelbaum z"l (the "Sigheter Rebbe"; died 1926) explains, after noting another question: Why does the Torah change in mid-verse from plural -- "saying to them" -- to singular -- "May Hashem bless you"?

There are many substances, for example, salt and some spices, which are not edible on their own but which enhance the flavors of other foods. Similarly, there are people who seem to have no redeeming qualities on their own, but they contribute to society as part of a group. Thus we read later in the Torah (Bemidbar 23:13) that Balak told Bilam (after the latter had failed to curse Bnei Yisrael): "Go now with me to a different place from which you will see [Bnei Yisrael]; however, you will see [the camp's] edge but you will not see all of it." Balak thought that the merit of Bnei Yisrael as a whole prevented Bilam from cursing the Jewish people. However, Balak believed, if Bilam focused on only part of the nation, he would succeed. (Balak would have been correct if not for the special protection that Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael at the time.)

Such is the power of a group. Our Sages teach that whenever ten Jews are present, the Shechinah is present. An individual, however, cannot presume that he is worthy of Hashem's presence. Thus, Birkat Kohanim may be recited only in the presence of a minyan. An individual may not merit the blessings of Birkat Kohanim, but, as part of a congregation, he can receive that blessing. This is the message of our verse: Say to them that they can receive the blessing only if they are united as one.

When did Bnei Yisrael demonstrate their unity as a people? At Matan Torah, as we read (19:2), "va'yeechan / Yisrael encamped (singular) there, opposite the mountain." Why is the word "encamped" singular in number? Because, the Sages explain, Bnei Yisrael were "as one man with one heart." Thus, how did Bnei Yisrael merit to receive Birkat Kohanim? It was because of the feeling

of unity they achieved at Matan Torah. (Atzei Chaim)

R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (the "Klausenberger Rebbe"; son-in-law of R' Teitelbaum; died 1994) explained our verse similarly, and added:

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that there are three things worthy of our love: Bnei Yisrael, the Torah, and Hashem, and they are dependent on each other. Only one who loves his fellow Jews can love the Torah, and only one who loves the Torah can love Hashem. (Shefa Chaim IV, p. 85)

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*R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("Rema"; 16th century) notes that the custom in the diaspora is that the mitzvah of Birkat Kohanim is performed only on Yom Tov. In contrast, in most communities in Israel, Birkat Kohanim is performed daily. The reason for this distinction, explains Rema, is that the Jews of the diaspora find it too difficult to concentrate on the performance of this Mitzvah. (Mapah, O.C. 128)*

This explanation is astonishing, writes R' Moshe Sternbuch shlita. Since when can we excuse ourselves from performing a mitzvah by saying that we can't concentrate? Besides, don't we want G-d's blessing?

He explains: Birkat Kohanim was part of the daily service that the kohanim performed in the Temple. Today, when the Bet Hamikdash does not stand, our prayers take the place of the Temple service. This is why Birkat Kohanim is recited as part of the chazan's Shemoneh Esrei.

However, not all prayers are equal. In fact, there are three categories of prayer. The lowest is "tefilat yachid" / the prayer of an individual. The second is "tefilah betzibbur" / prayer with a congregation. The third and highest level is "tefilat hatzibbur" / the prayer of the congregation. What is the difference between the second and the third types of prayer? The former is found when ten individuals pray together as a minyan, each reciting his own prayer silently; the latter occurs when one person prays and the others stand silently and listen.

Only the last type of prayer truly parallels the Temple service, for not every person brought the "korban tamid" / daily offering to the Temple. Rather, the kohanim, as agents of the nation, brought one sacrifice on behalf of all Jews.

It follows, therefore, that only in the context of "tefilat hatzibbur" (the third type of prayer) can Birkat Kohanim be recited, for only then does the blessing parallel the blessing which was recited in the Bet Hamikdash. However, says Rema, we in the diaspora, being unable to concentrate on our prayers, never attain the level of "tefilat hatzibbur" on a weekday. While the chazzan is repeating the Shemoneh Esrei, each member of the congregation is off in a world of his own. One is reading from a sefer, another is talking to his friend, a third is dozing, and so on. Only on Yom Tov, when the shul is full, are we sure to have at least a minyan that is paying attention to the chazzan. Then, having achieved the level of "tefilat hatzibbur," we can perform Birkat Kohanim.

The situation in Israel is different for several reasons. Before the last century, the Jewish community in Israel consisted of two groups: Sephardim, whose ancestors were in Israel long before the practice arose for every member of the congregation to pray silently (they had only "tefilat hatzibbur"), and Ashkenazim, whose ancestors had arrived with one of the aliyot (e.g. the students of the Vilna Gaon or the Ba'al Shem Tov) that abandoned all material concerns and established communities in the Holy Land that adhered to the highest standards of observance. Both of these groups had no difficulty maintaining a sufficient level of concentration to allow for "tefilat hatzibbur" and Birkat Kohanim. (Mo'adim U'zmanim: Yom Tov, ch. 31)

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### **Selected Laws of Shemittah**

(From Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hil. Shemittah Ve'yovel, ch. 4)

[Ed. note: This year is a shemittah year, and, from time-to-time, we are presenting excerpts from the laws of shemittah. As with any halachic issue addressed in Hamaayan, our goal is to increase awareness of the subject, not to provide practical halachic guidance. For such advice, consult a competent rabbi.]

29. If a non-Jew purchased land in Eretz Yisrael, and planted during the seventh year, the fruits may be eaten, for the only reason that the Sages prohibited eating sefichin [in this context, anything that was planted other than by the conscious act of a Jew] was to thwart sinners [who would plant and would claim that the produce grew wild]. Since non-Jews are not commanded to observe the laws of shemittah, there would be no reason to decree that what they plant may not be eaten.

[R' Eshtori Ha'Parchi z"l (14th century) disagrees, and writes: Gentiles are not commanded to observe the laws of shemittah, but the Torah (Vayikra 25:2) commands that the Land should rest in the seventh year. The holiness of the Land cannot be negated by a gentile's acquisition of the Land, for halachah does not recognize a gentile's acquisition of land in Eretz Yisrael insofar as the agricultural mitzvot are concerned. Just as a gentile is not obligated to give tithes, but the fruits that he grows must be tithed (if a Jew buys them), so the laws of shemittah apply to the produce grown by a non-Jew in Eretz Yisrael even though the gentile himself is not obligated to observe mitzvot. (Kaftor Va'ferach quoted in Kessef Mishneh)]

30. Cities in Eretz Yisrael which are near the borders should/may place guards so that the neighboring peoples will not raid and loot the fruits of the shemittah. [It is not clear whether Rambam means that the fields near the border may be guarded, whereas it is generally prohibited to guard fields during shemittah, or whether Rambam means the fields should be guarded. In the latter case, his lesson is that, even though halachah calls for giving charity to non-Jews, we do not allow non-Jews to eat the produce of the shemittah year because it is holy. (Radvaz)]

Sponsored by Yitzchok and Barbie Lehmann Siegel in memory of father Dr. Manfred R. Lehmann a"h

and brother, Jamie Lehmann a"h

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