

HOLISTIC MODELING

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

"When the Kohain loses his identity beneath the veil of his Tallis, he symbolizes our potential for total subjugation to the sovereignty of Hashem."

Parshas Naso is the second Parsha devoted to what should have been the Bnai Yisroel's final preparation to enter into Eretz Yisroel. The Parsha began with the travel assignments to the Levite families of Gershon and Mirriari. It then specified three types of Tumah - impurity which restricted the affected persons contact with either: the Kohanim, the Leviyim, or all of society. The Parsha then discussed the laws of Gezel Hager - stealing from a convert (making restitution if someone steals from a convert who then dies without any heirs); the laws of Sotah - the accused adulteress; and the laws of the Nazir. Aharon and his sons were commanded to bless the nation, and the remainder of the Parsha lists the Korbans offered by the 12 Princes (heads of the Tribes) at the time of the Mizbeach's inauguration.

Although it is important to understand why these laws, along with the Priestly Blessing and the princely offerings, are included in the Bnai Yisroel's final preparation to enter the land; I will primarily focus on the importance of the Priestly Blessing.

The mission of the Jew is to become a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation", and model for the rest of the world the integration of G-d into daily life of a nation. Shevet Layvie was selected to model for the rest of the Jews the integration of G-d into daily life of a tribe. The Kohanim were selected to model for the rest of the Jews the integration of G-d into the daily life of the individual. The organization of the nation into three concentric groups of role models indicates that the integration of G-d into life is natural and possible for all people and nations. However, it requires experienced teachers who will show us and and them how to properly do it. The most comprehensive example of the integration of G-d into daily living is the Kohain. They are expected to develop their natural capacity for integrating G-d, to the degree that they are comfortable spending time in His home.

The process that developed this natural capacity involved being raised from an early age to "live with Hashem." Once accomplished, the Kohain would assume his rightful place among the workers in the Bais Hamikdash. In addition to learning the laws related to being a Kohain and working in the Bais Hamikdash, the Kohain was immersed in the general study of Torah law, and philosophy. His goal was to attain servitude to G-d by recognizing our total dependency upon Hashem. The greater the recognition, the greater the servitude.

The degree of this servitude can be seen in the law of Pigul, which required the thought process of the Kohain, not just the mechanical performance of his service, to be uncompromised by any other thought other than to serve Hashem.

The Kohain, in his capacity as role model and teacher, was commanded to "bless the people". This three-fold blessing conferred upon the nation their natural capacity for fully integrating G-d into their daily lives. Blessings in general are not magical formulas for creating what isn't there, but indicators of potential that already exists. It often takes the encouraging blessing of a Tzadik or loving parent to help us acknowledge our own potential. Even a stranger can sometimes see in us qualities that we are afraid or reluctant to accept. (remember, every ability carries with it a responsibility) The Gemara in Berachos 7A concludes, "Let not the blessing of a "simple" person be "light" in your eyes." Therefore, when the Kohanim blessed the people they confirmed our potential to fully integrate Hashem into our lives. This should encourage us to overcome our natural reluctance, and accept the responsibilities and restrictions that attend the integration of G-d into daily life.

Considering the Kohain's position as the ultimate role model, it makes perfect sense that the Kohain is the one to confer this blessing. It is far easier to accept that we are capable of accomplishing something when encouraged by someone who has already accomplished the very same thing.

It is important to note that the Kohain's blessing does not depend upon the degree of his own integration of G-d into daily life. Even a Kohain who is less observant than the community he blesses is still obligated to confirm the blessings of Aharon upon them. This is because the blessing does not come from the Kohain, but from Hashem. As Rav S.R. Hirsch writes, "The Priest literally stands in an attitude of service before G-d and it is by G-d's command that he pronounces the blessing along with the name of G-d".

When the Kohain ascends the "platform to Duchan", he symbolizes the individual who has become the worthy vessel through which G-d can confer His blessing upon the community. When the Kohain looses his identity beneath the veil of his Taills, he symbolizes our potential for total subjugation to the sovereignty of Hashem. Through the outstretched arms of the Kohain, Hashem embraces His community and says to them, " you have the capacity to build for Me a sanctuary in each of your hearts, so that I can dwell in your midst."

Considering the significance of the Kohain's blessing, it is imperative that we understand its three-fold capacity for helping us to fully integrate G-d into our lives. The following explanation is gleaned from the commentary of Rav S. R. Hirsch.

The first part of the blessing is directed toward material possession and wealth. Recognizing that all our material wealth, physical well being, and natural abilities come from Hashem, we must accept that He gave it to us for a reason. Whether we are able to use those possessions and abilities to serve Hashem and find true happiness is also dependent upon Hashem.

Take for example, the gifted child in an inner city setting who struggles to reach his or her potential,

but is struck down by the random bullet of a drive-by gang shooting. We must recognize that all we have comes from G-d, and that the time and circumstances necessary to realize our potential are also from Hashem. Therefore, the first part of the blessing confers "G-d's blessing upon us" (with material goodness), and "His watching over us" (so that we can realize our potential).

The second part of the blessing is directed toward spiritual abilities and accomplishments. Beyond material possessions and wealth is the ability to understand how to use what G-d has given us to best serve Him. Each and every one of us has an individual and collective responsibility to proclaim G-d's sovereignty through our every thought and action. To do so properly requires the intellectual ability to understand G-d's Torah, and the wisdom to practically apply His laws to the circumstances of our lives. This is the meaning of total integration. As the Rambam explains, we have the capacity to serve Hashem in every which way; including when we sleep, eat, and exercise. To successfully integrate G-d into our lives to that degree, requires clarity, focus and vision. Therefore, the second part of the Bracha, confers G-d's blessing on us for "illumination" (which is the clarity of purpose that comes with understanding Hashem's Torah); and "showing us favor" (which is the ability to wisely apply that understanding to the circumstances of our lives).

The third part of the blessing is directed toward the mission of the Jews. Keep in mind that our mission as the "chosen people" is to teach the nations of the world. Just as Avraham and Sarah taught non-Jews the reality of monotheism, so too must we teach the non-Jews how to integrate monotheism into their daily lives. All material and spiritual possessions that Hashem has granted us are intended to accomplish this mission.

The challenge inherent in being "chosen" is to remain both humble and effective. Humble - in seeing ourselves as responsible for others, rather than superior to them. Effective - in seeing ourselves as teachers who understand them and are available to help them, rather than holier than thou critics who are judgmental of them and apart from them.

In order for the other nations to learn from our example they must perceive our divinely ordained differences as goals toward which they can strive, rather than differences that merely divide and set us apart. Therefore, in the third part of the blessing G-d "lifts His countenance to us" (meaning, recognizing that we are separate for a reason, and humbly accepting the responsibility of being His Chosen People.) and He then "confers upon us the blessing of Sholom" (meaning, peace, harmony, and our acceptance by the other nations as their teachers and role-models.)

Rav S. R. Hirsch concludes: If only you will be a true, genuine servant of G-d with all your body and soul, so that G-d will be able to see in you the fulfillment of His ultimate purpose, then all those around you who are sensitive and thoughtful will recognize you as that element which makes their own lives whole, spurs them on to good endeavors, and sustains them in existence. Every breath drawn by an individual who truly serves G-d will elicit a responsive chord from the universe around him.

Good Shabbos.

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