



A PROJECT OF CHICAGO COMMUNITY KOLLEL

PARSHA ENCOUNTERS

8 Sivan 5767 / May 25, 2007

Parshas Naso ✍️ Rabbi Yisroel Langer

Man's Best Friend

“A man’s holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohein shall be his.” (Bamidbar 5:10)

The simple meaning of this possuk is that one can decide which kohein to give his terumah or bikurim to. However, once he gives it to a kohein, the terumah or bikurim become that kohein’s personal property. The Chofetz Chaim in his sefer Ahavas Chessed (vol. 3 ch.4) gives another explanation of this possuk based on the following medrash:

There was once a man who we shall call Yaakov, that had three friends. The first friend, was considered to be his very best friend, and Yaakov loved him dearly. His second friend was also beloved, but not as much as the first. Yaakov’s third friend was nothing more than an acquaintance. One day, the king summoned Yaakov to his palace. Someone had apparently informed on Yaakov to the king, and now Yaakov’s life was at risk. Yaakov was terrified! He immediately ran to his very best friend who he always relied upon and begged him to intervene on his behalf before the king. However, to his dismay, this “best” friend refused to be of any help. Yaakov left very depressed, and proceeded on to his second friend. Although he didn’t love him as he did the first, this man was still a good friend and perhaps would be of help to Yaakov. This friend agreed to walk with Yaakov to the king’s palace and protect Yaakov from dangers lurking on the road, but he refused to enter into the palace of the king to intercede on his behalf. Yaakov, left with no choice, went to the third friend who he never particularly liked, and pleaded with him to defend his case before the king. This friend, unlike the others, happily agreed to go on behalf of Yaakov all the way into the king’s palace

and was indeed successful in acquitting Yaakov from any punishment.

The medrash explains that man’s “best friend” who he loves more than anything else, is his money. However, when one is summoned by the King of Kings, Hakodosh Boruch Hu, and he is taken from this world for judgment, his beloved money is of no help. Money is left behind in this world. Yaakov’s second friend, who was kind enough to escort him until the king’s palace, represents one’s family. When one passes away, his family escorts him to the grave. However, after the burial, they are of no help in the next world. It’s only the third friend, the malachim (angels) created through the study of Torah, and the observance of mitzvos in this world, that accompany man all the way into the “palace” before the King of Kings. It is only they who can succeed in defending him on the Day of Judgment.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that this is the way to interpret the posuk:

“A man’s holies shall be his”- only a person’s holy deeds (his Torah study, and mitzvos) are truly his. Those are his “best friends” who remain with him until the very end. “And what a man gives to the kohein shall be his”- only the money that one uses for charity and supporting Torah study is “his money”. Everything else remains behind.

Rabbi Langer learns full-time at the kollel.

HALACHA ENCOUNTERS

Birchas Kohanim

Rabbi Yisroel Langer

In this week's parsha the Torah commands the kohanim to bless klal Yisrael with "birchas kohanim", the priestly blessings, otherwise known as "duchening". According to the chareidim and others, it is also a mitzvah d'orysah for the tzibbur (the yisroelim) to stand opposite the kohanim and receive their blessings. In the times of the Beis Hamikdash, birchas kohanim was done during the avodah (bringing of korbanos). In the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, duchening is done during davening which is in place of the avodah. Birchas kohanim is a very special blessing as the kohanim are a conduit to a bracha that is bestowed upon us by Hakodosh Boruch Hu Himself. One who could not make it to shul for birchas kohanim (ex. someone who's sick, or a woman taking care of young children), shouldn't feel bad as they are also included in the bracha. However, one who does not have a legitimate reason for not going is not included in the bracha.

Listening Intently

In order to receive the brachos of birchas kohanim, one must stand face to face with the kohanim while silently listening intently to every word they utter. During birchas kohanim one may not even learn. Hagaon R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Zt"l rules that even if one heard birchas kohanim that day at an earlier minyan, and he is sitting and learning while a later minyan is davening, he should stop learning when the tzibbur reaches birchas kohanim (Halichos Shlomo 9:6). If one finds himself in the middle of shmoneh esrei when the tzibbur reaches birchas kohanim, and he is located in front of the kohanim, he should stop and listen intently to birchas kohanim, but he should not answer amein (Igros Moshe O.C. 4 siman 21:2). If one is improperly located (i.e. he is davening at the Eastern wall, behind the kohanim), Hagaon R' Moshe Feinstein Zt"l ruled that he should leave his place to go in front of the kohanim as this is not considered a hefsek (interruption) of his tefillah (Igros Moshe O.C. vol. 5 siman 20:23). Hagaon R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Zt"l holds that he should not move from his location but should merely turn his head to face the kohanim as to show he desires their blessings (Halichos Shlomo ch. 10:3).

Washing Hands

A kohein must have his hands washed with a vessel prior to birchas kohanim. Preferably a Levi (over the age of bar mitzvah- Piskei Teshuvos 128:24 quoting Keser Kehuna) should be the one to pour the water over the koheins' hands. If no Levi is available, a bechor (firstborn) should do so. If there aren't any bechorim around either, then the kohein should wash his own hands (M.B. 128 sk.22). If there is no water available for the kohein to wash his hands, he may rely on the washing he did in the morning provided that he was careful to keep his hands clean (ex. not touch his shoes or parts of the body normally covered). If his hands became dirty, it is not sufficient to merely wipe them on a surface, and he may not duchen. Therefore, if a kohein removes his shoes after washing his hands, he should be careful not to touch them.

Removal of Shoes

Chazal decreed that a kohein should remove his shoes before going up to duchen. The reason for this is that Chazal were concerned that a kohein may go off to the side to fix his laces while the other kohanim were duchening. Someone watching may think that this kohein left the other kohanim because he is an unfit kohein. Therefore Chazal decreed that no shoes should be worn while duchening. Ordinarily when one removes shoes from his feet, the left one is to be removed first (as this shows honor to the "right"- which the Torah considers more important). However, when it comes to birchas kohanim, some say (Ishei Yisroel ch. 1:10 quoting Harav Kook Zt"l) that because removing one's shoes in this case is a mitzvah, the right one should be removed first.

Others say that since the act of removing the shoes itself is not a mitzvah (if he wasn't wearing shoes in the first place it would be perfectly fine), one should not deviate from the norm and should remove the left shoe first (Piskei Teshuvos 128:17 quoting Dvar Yehoshua).

The kohein should leave to the "duchan" (lit.- stage, where kohanim duchen from) right before the bracha of retzei is recited by the chazzan. If the kohein did not depart from this seat and the chazzan already completed the bracha of retzei, the kohein may no longer duchen at this minyan, and he should walk out. When the kohanim are standing at the duchen, there is a dispute amongst the rishonim as to when the kohanim should turn around to face the tzibbur. Some say they should turn around prior to the birchas hamitzvah, and some say they should do so after the bracha. The Mishnah Berura (sk 40) says that its best to satisfy both opinions by turning around in the middle of the bracha.

Elevated Hands

When the kohanim begin birchas kohanim their arms and hands must be elevated above shoulder length, with the right hand slightly higher than the left. Lechatchilah, the kohein's hand should be raised in the elevated position from the beginning of birchas kohanim until the chazzan begins the bracha of Sim Shalom. B'dieved, if one is too weak, he may lower them in between words or during the niggun. If he can't keep them raised at all, even while saying the words (Yevarechecha, etc.), he cannot duchen (M.B. 128 sk.52).

When the kohanim elevate their hands they spread their fingers in a way that creates five spaces. Each kohein does so in accordance with his minhag. Some say that one may loosen his fingers (without lowering his arms) out of the formation between words (M.B. 128 sk. 43). The Ateres Zekainim (128:12) quotes from the Zohar Hakadosh that warns one from needlessly making this special formation with their fingers outside of birchas kohanim as it can bring curses on one who does so. The Rivivos Efraim (volume 1 siman 93:2) quotes Hagaon R' Chaim Kanievsky Shlita that says that this warning is probably only limited to one who needlessly lifts his hands above his shoulders while spreading his fingers in this special formation.

Birchas Kohanim should be recited by kohanim in a clear voice, loud enough for everyone in the room to be able to hear. (There is no reason to scream). The kohanim should not recite a word from birchas kohanim (Yevarechecha...) until the chazzan completes saying the word. The chazzan also should not begin saying the next word until the kohanim complete saying the previous word. Likewise the tzibbur should not respond with amein until the kohanim complete saying the word. It is crucial for all to hear all the words recited by the kohanim without any voice interrupting them.

The kohanim should recite birchas kohanim with great joy. It is for this reason that one who is in mourning does not duchen. (Note: Some have the minhag not to duchen only during the first seven days of mourning.) The Rema goes as far as to say that the reason for the Ashkenazic minhag not to duchen outside of Eretz Yisroel except for Yom Tov, is because it's only then that we are in the proper state of simcha (joy). Sefardim, however, do have the minhag to duchen outside of Eretz Yisroel. Hagaon R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach Zt"l rules that lechatchilah an Ashkenazic kohein should not go to a sefardic shul in order to duchen. However an Ashkenazic kohein from Eretz Yisroel who is visiting chutz la'aretz may go to Sephardic minyan in order to duchen (Halichos Shlomo ch. 10:2).