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Parshas Behaloscha ✍️ Rabbi Baruch Klagsbrun

Footsteps

The pasuk in Shir Hashirim says, “Ma Yafu Pa’amayich Bane’alim - How lovely are your footsteps in pilgrims’ shoes”. Rava tells us that this is referring to the Bnei Yisroel at the time of aliya la’regel. Rav Schwab Zt”l points out a problem with this explanation of the pasuk, in that one was not allowed to wear shoes when he went to the Beis Hamikdash. He explains that the purpose of the avoda of aliya laregel was not the act of being in the Beis Hamikdash and being exposed to higher levels of spirituality. Rather, the goal of the mitzvah was to use that elevated state of spirituality after having left the beis hamikdash and returned home. Every Jew would return home as a greater oved hashem, having become closer to Hashem and getting charged with extra kedusha. It is this part of the avodas haregel that the pasuk is speaking of – How beautiful were the footsteps of those wearing shoes, on their return home from Yerushalyim, bringing all that they had experienced back home with them after Yom Tov.

The idea that how one leaves exposure to kedusha being as significant as the exposure itself, is further highlighted this year when Shavuos falls out during the week of Parshas Beha’aloscha instead of Parshas Naso. This rare occurrence helps to juxtapose two events – the arrival of the Bnei Yisroel at Har Sinai to receive the Torah and their departure from it just under a year later.

On the first day of Shavuos, we read in Parshas Yisro of the great desire the Jewish nation had to become the chosen people – the Mamleches Kohanim V’goy Kadosh – by accepting the Torah. While not mentioned in the laining on Yom Tov, it is at this time that the Bnei Yisroel made the declara-

tion of Na’ase Venishma, implying not just a commitment to live by the Torah law, but also a desire to strive to reach even greater heights. Rav Shach zt”l viewed this phrase, usually translated as “We will do and we will listen”, as meaning, “We will do whatever the Torah says, and then we want to hear more”.

In contrast to this, in this week’s parsha we find Bnei Yisroel with a very different attitude. Chazal tell us that they left Har Sinai like a child running away from the schoolhouse, implying that they were no longer interested in hearing about the Torah, and they were happy to leave before they were given more. This state of mind was sad enough, according to Tosfos and others, that it is labeled the pooranus rishona – the first event of suffering in the dessert. After all that they had been exposed to and all that they had gained at Har Sinai, the Bnei Yisroel fell short of attaining the goal – taking that higher level of kedusha with them when it came time to leave.

It is currently just after the Yom Tov of Shavuos, still within the days when one could bring the korbanos that he was obligated to bring when he was oleh regel. As we begin to ‘don our pilgrim shoes’ and return home, it would be appropriate to stop for a moment and contemplate what we gained over Yom Tov – a new commitment to Limud Hatorah, an inspiring drasha, an uplifting Tefilla – whatever brought us to a higher level of Avodas Hashem, and make sure to take it home with us.

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Birkas Kohanim: The Role of the Yisrael

Rabbi Ephraim Friedman

The simple understanding we have of Birkas Kohanim is that the Kohanim alone fulfill a mitzva by delivering the brochos in the prescribed manner. The congregants assembled in Shule at the time are, of course, fortunate to be recipients of such lofty brochos, but they fulfill no mitzva in the process. Upon scrutiny, however, it appears that this may not be entirely accurate. Clearly, it is the Kohanim alone who are charged with bestowing the brochos upon Klal Yisroel. A non-Kohain who would attempt to do so in the manner the Kohanim employ would be in violation of a mitzvas aseih. (See Kesuvos 24b and Rema O.C. 128:1.) However, the people who avail themselves to the Kohanim to receive the brochos, do – according to many – fulfill a mitzva in the process, as well.

One of the G'dolei Achronim who introduces this concept is the Hafloah (Rav Pinchas Horowitz zt'l, Rebi of the Chasam Sofer) in his chidushim to Meseches Kesuvos 24b. He maintains, that although the Torah is only explicit in commanding the Kohanim to deliver the brochos, since the mitzva can not be performed without the participation of the Yisroelim, they too fulfill a mitzva. To support this idea, the Hafloah cites Meseches Yevomos 20b, from where it is evident with regard to mitzvas yibum that the woman (yevama) fulfills a mitzva as well, although the Torah only explicitly commands the male (yovom). The Hafloah draws a parallel from there to the relationship between the Kohain offering the brochos and the Yisroel receiving them. He implies that the mitzva of the Yisraelim equals that of the Kohanim.

The Dvar Avraham (Vol. I, 31) citing Chidushei HaRitva to Meseches Succah 31 b challenges the accuracy of this equation. The Ritva openly states that while an obligation rests upon the Kohanim to deliver the brochos, there is no obligation upon Yisroelim to receive brochos. Nonetheless, at the same time as the Dvar Avraham objects to equating the role of the Yisroelim in this mitzva to that of the Kohanim, he firmly believes that the Yisroelim do fulfill a mitzva and that even the Ritva could agree to this. Both the Dvar Avraham and the Hafloah quote from the Sefer Chareidim (4: 18) who states: the Yisroelim who stand in silence facing the Kohanim and focus their thoughts on receiving the brochos as Hasehm has dictated are included in the mitzva. HaGaon Rebi Akiva Eiger zt'l and the Chofetz Chaim (in Beur Halacha) also cite the words of the Sefer Chareidim in their opening remarks to Hilchos Nesias Kapayim (O.C. 128). [See also Halichos Shlomo – Tefilla 10:1]

On the other hand, a number of Achronim reject the notion that

the Yisroel actually fulfills a mitzva by receiving the brochos from the Kohain. The Chasam Sofer (Tshuvos O.C. 167) writes that most Poskim disagree with the Sefer Chareidim and are of the opinion that there is no mitzva on the Yisroel to be blessed. Other Achronim – amongst them Tshuvos Mahari Asad 46 and Aruch haShulchan O.C. 128:4 – wish to suggest that even the Sefer Chareidim does not mean to indicate that the Yisroel actually fulfills a mitzva.

In any case, whether or not we view the Yisroel as fulfilling a mitzva by receiving Birchos Kohanim, one thing is certain. It is without doubt a great zchus for us to be the recipients of Hashem's brochos transmitted through Kohanim, the upper echelon of His servants. (See the wording used by the Sefer HaChinuch at the beginning of Mitzva 378.) For this reason, every effort should be made to be present when Birkas Kohanim are recited in Shule. During the brochos it is important to stand silently and attentively. Even one who is in the middle of davening should pause to listen to Birkas Kohanim. As far as answering Amen to these brochos for one who is in the middle of davening, the halacha is as follows. During Psukei Dzimrah and during Krias Shma and its brochos – even in the middle of a perek – one should answer Amen to each of the three brochos of Birkas Kohanim, just as one would answer to any Dovor Shebikdusha (e.g. Amen Yhei Shmei Rabah; Borchu, etc.). During Shmone Esrei, one should pause and listen but not answer Amen. Initially, an effort should be made not to be in the middle of Shmone Esrei during Birkas Kohanim. The Amen at the conclusion of the Kohanim's preliminary brocho (...asher kidishunu b'kdushaso shel Aharon...) is equal in status to any "ordinary" Amen. It can be recited during Psukei Dzimrah provided one is not in the middle of a phrase, or between perokim of Krias Shma and its brochos, but not in the middle of a perek. (For sources and further details see: Shulchan Aruch O.C. 51 M.B. 8; O.C. 66,3 and 5, and M.B. 23; O.C. 59 M.B. 18; Igros Moshe O.C. 4, 21:2.)

Since it is necessary to remain silent during Birkas Kohanim, the psukim which are printed in some machzorim next to the words of the brochos should not be recited. (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 128:26 and M.B. 103; Aruch hashulchan 128:39) The minhag with regard to the "Ribono Shel Olam" which is meant to be recited during Birkas Kohanim, is to say it while the Kohanim sing, before they recite the final words of each brocho. (Shulchan Aruch O.C. 128:45 and M.B. 172. With regard to reciting this tefilla in Eretz Yisroel where the Kohanim recite Birkas Kohanim daily but do not sing, see Piskei Tshuvos 128:93.)

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