

Shemini: Shiur HaRav Soloveichik ZT”L on Parshas Shemini

- The bracha of Aharon alone, and the bracha with Moshe, as they left the Ohel Moed when it was dedicated. Aharon indispensable for nesias kapayim. Was the second bracha, veyehi noam, required? Yes. Prayer that Hashem accept our service. The concept of ritzyu korban.

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“And Aharon raised his hands and blessed the people.” Rashi interprets this blessing as Birkas Kohanim (Nesias Kapayim) since it says that Aharon raised his hands, which indicates the blessing of Nesias Kapayim. The next verse tells us that Moshe and Aharon entered Ohel Moed and upon their exit they jointly blessed the people. Rashi interprets their blessing as “May the Shechina reside in what you have built for Hahem” and that they said veyehi noam. Nesias kapayim, birkas kohanim was not included in this blessing. As we have previously mentioned, Moshe had the status of a Kohen Gadol. Why didn’t Moshe and Aharon, the 2 Kohanim Gedolim, jointly recite birkas kohanim upon exiting from the Ohel Moed?

The Rav explained: we find that the children of Aharon are sometimes referred to as bnay Aharon hakohanim and other times as bnay Aharon hakohen. Some of the avodos hamishkan were given specifically to Aharon. All those who followed him acted as his representative, a virtual Aharon. For example, the Avodas Yom Kippur was given specifically to Aharon. Aharon was permitted to enter the kodosh hakodoshim any time he wanted to. It is only his successors that were restricted to entering once a year, on Yom Kippur, and only then as the representative and personification of Aharon. (This concept is portrayed in the attah konanta description of the Avodas Yom Kippur, included in Nussach Sefard.) In such cases the children of Aharon are called bnay Aharon hakohen. Aharon permits a kohen gadol as well as kohen hedyot to perform their respective avodos hamishkan. The Ramban comments that the Mitzvah of lighting the Menorah was given specifically to Aharon. Even though kohanim hedyotim could also light the Menorah, they were permitted to do so only because Aharon did it before them.

Nesias kapayim was another Mitzvah where Aharon himself was indispensable. Why do Kohanim recite the blessing asher kidshanu b’kdushaso shel Aharon, why not say that they were blessed with kedushas kehuna? Because the Mitzva of nesias kapayim for all subsequent generations was given specifically to Aharon, and through him, to his descendants who represent him in the performance of the Mitzvah. Since Aharon was given the Mitzvah of nesias kapayim (and his children through him) while Moshe was not given this Mitzvah, Moshe could not join Aharon in birkas nesias kapayim. Therefore they offered a different blessing.

Rashi notes that the second blessing, given jointly by Moshe and Aharon, was the veyehi noam. The Rav asked if this second blessing was given voluntarily or were they somehow required to bless the people at that point?

The Rav explained that it would appear that this was an obligatory blessing on the part of Moshe and Aharon. We find a similar obligatory blessing even today based on korban tamid shel shachar. In the times of the Mikdash, the Kohanim gathered early and the appointed leader would tell them to recite one of the birchos krias shema (it is a machlokes as to whether it was yotzer or or ahava rabbah), krias shema and an abbreviated shemoneh esray of retzay and sim shalom. A Jew who brings a korban is required to pray that Hashem accept the sacrifice. For sometimes Hashem might choose to reject a korban. For example we find that Hashem rejected the korban of Kayin. We find in the tochacha (sections of rebuke) that Hashem promised that he would not accept the korbanos of the people if they sin and do not follow His laws. There is no guarantee that the korban just brought will be accepted by Hashem. Therefore a Jew must pray and ask that Hashem should accept his korban. Moshe and Aharon blessed the people with veyehi noam, and prayed that Hashem should accept their korbanos, just as the Kohanim prayed in the Mikdash that the tamid shel shachar should be accepted.

The Rav asked: why don't the Kohanim pray that the korban should be accepted before they actually do the Avoda, instead of reciting their prayer after it? The Rav explained that we learn from parshas Shemini that there is a requirement to pray after the offering of the korban. The prayer of Moshe and Aharon was more than a personal prayer. It was the prayer of all klal Yisrael that the korbanos that were just brought by Aharon should be accepted. Moshe and Aharon offered the prayer as the representatives of klal Yisrael.

We find a similar concept with the Anshei Maamad. While one group of Kohanim were present at the daily sacrifice in the Mikdash, there were other groups that were located in the cities of Israel that would fast and pray on Monday and Thursday and prayed that the korbanos hatzibbur should be accepted. We learn in parshas Shemini that Moshe and Aharon were the first of the Anshei Maamad in praying for the acceptance of the korbanos hatzibbur.

We find this concept of prayer for the acceptance of our sacrifices in our shemoneh esray. The last Beracha of the section where one details his needs (bakasha) is shema koleinu, which is followed by retzay. On the surface, these two Berachos, shema koleinu and retzay, appear redundant. However, on closer inspection we find that they serve very different purposes. shema koleinu is recited after one concludes his requests that Hashem answer his prayers for personal as well as communal needs (concluding with es tzemach). Though Hashem is the ultimate hearer of our prayers, He may not always accept them. Hence we pray shema koleinu, that the ultimate acceptor of prayer should answer ours favorably.

Tefila is also avoda shebelev. It is equated to korban. We use the term retzay (which is used in conjunction with the acceptance of korbanos) and ask that not only should Hashem accept our tefilos as prayer and supplication, but as a korban and ultimate avoda shebelev. Similarly, we find that as part of the avodas Yom Kippur the Kohen Gadol would read from the Torah and recite Berachos whose themes were that Hashem should accept the korbanos of the day that were already brought. At the conclusion of the Pesach Seder we have nirtzah where we pray that Hashem should accept our korban Pesach which we have just concluded. The concept of nirtzah applies where there is a korban. For example, there is no concept of nirtzah with Lulav. The concept of asking for ritzy hakorban, that the korban should be accepted, is based on these

verses in parshas Shemini.

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[Submitted by Nisson Shulman]