

HAAMEK DAVAR

- Dr Jacob Solomon

Naso

*"May G-d bless you and keep you."
(6:24)*

These words open Birkat Kohanim - the daily blessing by the kohanim for the Israelites.

Both Rashi and S'forno present "May G-d bless you and keep you" in material terms. Your affluence should expand and it should stay that way, explains Rashi. Your wealth should be permanent. Nothing should come and take it away from you.

The S'forno takes it one step further, and links the material to the spiritual: GASHMIUT to RUCHNIUT. Wealth is needed to support Torah life: IM EIN KEMACH, EIN TORAH (Avot 3:15). Thus Birkat Kohanim opens with the necessities for living life according to the teachings of the Torah. A person's Avoda (service to G-d) should not suffer the frustrations of struggles for food, clothing, and shelter. The blessing is that Am Yisrael should enjoy the prosperity needed to carry out its service to G-d and to Mankind.

The Ohr HaChayim offers an explanation for the Birkat Kohanim that explores a new dimension. As Rashi

and S'forno, he opens in material terms, additionally observing in "May G-d bless you and keep you" that the blessing comes before the keeping. There is a reason, explains the Ohr HaChayim, for that order. It is that the material prosperity should be so great that you will need a separate blessing that that prosperity should stay with you and not dwindle.

But "May G-d shine His Face on you, and favor you" (6:25) takes the Birkat Kohanim into a different area: the relationship between G-d and Am Yisrael. As implied by the words "I will hide My face on that day..." (D'varim 31:18), there are times when and reasons why there are high barriers between G-d and His People. They obstruct G-d's spiritual rays. The Ohr HaChayim suggests that this is the point of that B'racha: that G-d's blessings should reach you without being impeded by spiritual barriers. And G-d's favoring should include giving you the necessary people skills to interact honourably and mutually beneficially with other people, as Yosef was received even when he was thrown in to prison: "G-d was with Yosef and he extended kindness to him, giving him favor with the chief jailer" (B'reishit 39:21).

And the Ha'amek Davar takes it also the other way round. Not only should

G-d's blessings reach the person without being blocked by the spiritual barrier. But also that person should have his own spiritual barrier unblocked, so that he knows that the blessing came from G-d, not by chance or that it was the luck day. That is an additional meaning of "May G-d shine His face on you", that you yourself can see that the good fortune came to you from G-d, from his HASHGACHA P'RATIT, His personal supervision of the individual on the basis of what the individual needs now. The light of 'His face' illuminates His signature, His divine intervention on your behalf. So that when you bentch gomel on being saved or miraculously recovered from a disastrous event, you feel and proclaim with all sincerity, as did Lavan and B'tuel: "This can only have come from G-d!" (B'reishit 24:50).

Perhaps the Ashkenazi in-Israel-only daily practice of Birkat Kohanim with full Kohanim participation is in harmony with the Ohr HaChayim. Eretz Yisrael, "the land that G-d desires" (D'varim 11:12) is where G-d is closest to his people, which enables His Blessings to reach their target without spiritual barriers obstructing. ❀