



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Nasso / פרשת נשא

God's "Ordinary" Blessing from Zion

In this week's parsha we learn of the blessing that the Kohanim bestow upon the Jewish people. While from the verse's themselves it would seem that the Jewish people are passive recipients of these priestly blessings, the Midrash assumes that the Jewish people responded by reciting verses of blessing. For example, the midrash records that on a regular day, the listeners would respond to the priestly blessing with the verse: "Bless the Lord, His angels, those mighty in strength."¹ For each occasion, the Jews receiving the blessing would respond with an appropriate verse.

The midrash reaches its climax with the spiritual zenith of the year:²

During Ne'ilah of Yom Kippur, what would they say? "May the Lord bless you from Zion, and see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life"³

What is the meaning of the choice of particularly this verse as the Jewish people's response at the end of Yom Kippur?

Perhaps the midrash is being sensitive to potential pitfalls of the priestly blessings and Chazal counteracted them by instituting these verses. For example, despite the fact that the Torah emphasizes at the end of the blessings "And I will bless them," there is still a chance that the Jewish listeners will wrongly attribute the blessings to the priests themselves. Therefore, they must recite verses that link blessings to God, thereby demonstrating that He is the ultimate source of blessing.

The potential pitfall on Yom Kippur that the verse is supposed to counteract, takes on a slightly different hue. It is possible that in the magical atmosphere of the day, one might think of blessings in purely spiritual terms. The service in the Beit HaMikdash, the white garments, the four

¹ Tehillim 103:20. Translation is from Chabad.org

² Midrash Rabbah, Parshat Naso, parsha 11.

³ Tehillim 128:5



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times that the priests bless the people all contribute to a spiritually suffused environment. One might potentially associate divine blessing with a Yom Kippur-like existence.

Therefore, at the peak of spirituality, Chazal taught us to recite the above verse. The context of the chapter is thoroughly mundane – a Jewish person works for a living and lives surrounded by his family:

Praiseworthy is every man who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. If you eat the toil of your hands, you are praiseworthy, and it is good for you. Your wife will be as a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. Behold that so will a man who fears the Lord be blessed. May the Lord bless you from Zion, and see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

The blessing of God can also be experienced in professional and family life, as long as the person conducts himself with fear of God.

What better demonstration of this theme can there be than receiving a divine blessing from Zion. Yerushalayim is both the pinnacle of spirituality and otherworldliness while simultaneously an urban metropolis, home to thousands of ordinary people and businesses. God's blessings, and particularly the blessings of Zion, are not only to be found in the Holy of Holies, but can simultaneously be experienced in the daily life of a servant of God.

May we receive the blessing of Zion.