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Sotah Daf 39

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Daf Notes is currently being dedicated to the neshamot of

Moshe Raphael ben Yehoshua (Morris Stadtmauer) o”h
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May the studying of the Daf Notes be a zechus for their neshamot and may their souls find peace in Gan Eden and be bound up in the Bond of life

The [above] text stated: Abba the son of Rav Minyamin bar Chiya taught: The people who are behind the Kohanim do not come within the scope of the blessing. It is obvious that the tall do not create an obstruction for the short, nor does the ark [where the Torah-scrolls are deposited] create an obstruction; but how is it with a partition [within the Synagogue]? — Come and hear: Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Even a partition of iron does not divide between Israel and their Father in heaven.

The question was asked: How is it with those standing on the side [of the Kohanim]? — Abba Mar son of Rav Ashi said: Come and hear: We have learned: If he intended to sprinkle [i.e., the purifying water to remove the tumah of vessels] in front of him and he sprinkled behind him, or vice versa, the sprinkling is invalid; [but if he intended to sprinkle] in front of him and did so on the sides in front of him, his sprinkling is valid. (38b – 39a)

Keeping Quiet

Rava the son of Rav Huna said: When the Torah scroll is opened, it is forbidden to converse, even on matters regarding *halachah*; as it is said: *And when he (Ezra) began to read, all the people stood*, and “standing” refers to nothing else than silence, as it is said: *And I wait because they did not speak; they stood and answered no more*.

Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav Chisda: It may be derived from the following passage: *And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Torah scroll*. (39a1)

Priestly Blessing

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: A *Kohen* who did not wash his hands should not recite the Priestly Blessing, as it is written: *Raise your hands up in sanctity (through washing) and bless Hashem*.

The disciples of Rabbi Elozar ben Shamua asked him: In reward of what have you been living so many years? He replied: In all my years, I never took a shortcut through a synagogue, and I never stepped over the heads of the holy people (*when he went to his seat by passing through the students who sat on the floor; he either arrived first or sat outside*), and I never recited the Priestly Blessing without first uttering a benediction.

The *Gemora* asks: What is the *brochah*?

Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav Chisda: He says: Blessed are You, Hashem our God, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with the holiness of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His people, Israel, in love.

When the *Kohen* moves his feet to ascend the platform (*and according to Rashi, it is recited as he is on the platform, when he is still facing the Ark*), he recites the following prayer: May it be pleasing before You, Hashem our God, that this blessing which You have commanded us to bless Your people Israel, should be free from any stumbling block and sin. The *Gemora* asks: And when the *Kohen* turns his face from the congregation to the Ark

after pronouncing the Blessing, what does he say? Rav Chisda helped Rav Ukva expound the following: He says: Lord of the Universe! We have performed what You have decreed upon us. May You fulfill with us that which You have guaranteed us (*that You will bless the Jewish people*). (39a1 – 39b1)

Rav Chisda said: The *Kohanim* are not permitted to bend their finger joints (*during the Blessing, their fingers were spread apart*) until they turn their faces from the congregation.

Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav Chisda: The *chazzan* is not permitted to proclaim “*Kohanim*” until the response of “*Amen*” to the preceding benediction (*Modim*) has been completed by the congregation. And the *Kohanim* are not permitted to begin the benediction until the proclamation of “*Kohanim*” has been completed by the *chazzan*. And the congregation is not permitted to respond “*Amen*” until the benediction has been completed by the *Kohanim*. And the *Kohanim* are not permitted to begin the other benediction until the response of “*Amen*” has been completed by the congregation.

Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav Chisda: The *Kohanim* are not permitted to turn their faces from the congregation (*towards the Ark*) until the *chazzan* begins the paragraph “*Grant peace*” (*Sim shalom*), nor are they permitted to move their feet and descend the platform until the *chazzan* has finished “*Grant peace.*” (39b1)

Reading the Torah

Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav Chisda: The congregation is not permitted to respond “*Amen*” until the benediction has been completed by the reader. And the reader is not permitted to read from the Torah until the response of “*Amen*” has been completed by the congregation. And the translator (*who would repeat each*

verse in Aramaic) is not permitted to begin the translation until the verse has been completed by the reader. And the reader is not permitted to begin another verse until the translation has been completed by the translator.

Rabbi Tanchum said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: He who is to read from the Prophets (*haftarah*) must first read from the Torah (*for otherwise, the Prophets would be equated to the Torah*). (39b1 – 39b2)

Rabbi Tanchum said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: He who is to read from the Prophets (*haftarah*) is not permitted to begin his recital until the Torah scroll is rolled up (*for otherwise, the one who is rolling and wrapping the Torah will be distracted, and will not listen to the haftarah*).

Rabbi Tanchum said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: The emissary is not permitted to strip the ark bare in the presence of the congregation because of the dignity of the congregation. [*It was their custom to keep the sefer Torah in a different house for protection. The bimah would be adorned with fine garments and the Torah would be placed there. When the gabbai would remove the sefer Torah from the Shul and bring it back to the house, he would not remove the curtains from the bimah until he returned, for otherwise, the congregation would be required to wait longer, since they couldn't leave until the Torah left.*]

Rabbi Tanchum said in the name of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi: The congregation is not permitted to depart until the Torah scroll is removed and deposited in its place. Shmuel said: They may not depart until the scroll has left.

The *Gemora* explains: There is no argument between them; the former refers to when there is another exit (*and they can then leave immediately through the other exit*), and Shmuel is referring to a case when there is no another exit (*for one should not walk in front of the Torah scroll*).



Rava said: Bar Ahina explained to me that the Scriptural source for this *halachah* is: *You shall walk after Hashem, your God.* (39b2)

The *Gemora* asks: At the time that the *Kohanim* are blessing the people (*during Shacharis*), what do the people say?

Rabbi Zeira said in the name of Rav Chisda: They say the following verses: *Bless Hashem, O His Angels, the mighty in strength. Bless Hashem all His legions, His servants that do His pleasure. Bless Hashem, all His works, in all places of His dominion; Bless Hashem O my soul.*

The *Gemora* asks: What do they say during *Mussaf* on *Shabbos*?

Rav Assi said: They say the following verses: *A Song of ascents, Behold, bless Hashem, all you servants of Hashem. Lift up your hands in sanctity and bless Hashem. Blessed is Hashem from Zion, He Who dwells in Yerushalayim. Praise be the Lord.*

The *Gemora* asks: But they should also say: *May Hashem bless you out of Zion*, which occurs in that context!?

Yehudah the son of Rabbi Shimon ben Pazi answered: Since he commenced with the blessings of the Holy One, Blessed be He, he should conclude with His blessings (*and not a verse which discusses man being blessed by Hashem*).

The *Gemora* asks: What does the congregation say by the *minchah* prayer of a fast day?

Rav Acha bar Yaakov said: They say the following verses: *If our iniquities testify against us, O Hashem, act for Your Name's sake. O Hope of Israel, the Redeemer in the time of trouble, why should you be as a stranger in the land.*

Why should You be as a man astonished, as a mighty man that cannot save? (39b2 – 39b3)

INSIGHTS TO THE DAF

Benediction before the Priestly Blessing

The disciples of Rabbi Elozar ben Shamua asked him: In reward of what have you been living so many years? He replied: In all my years, I never took a shortcut through a synagogue, and I never stepped over the heads of the holy people (*when he went to his seat by passing through the students who sat on the floor; he either arrived first or sat outside*), and I never recited the Priestly Blessing without first uttering a benediction.

The Rishonim ask: What is so great about uttering the benediction prior to reciting the Priestly Blessing? Doesn't every *mitzvah* require a *brochah* beforehand? Every *Kohen* would recite the blessing first!

The Ritva in Megillah (27b) answers that perhaps Rabbi Elozar ben Shamua was teaching us that the Priestly Blessing requires a *brochah* beforehand, and that any *Kohen* who blesses *Klal Yisroel* and recites the benediction first will be blessed with long life.

The Meiri writes that a *Kohen* will discharge his obligation of reciting the Priestly Blessing even without saying the *brochah* beforehand. It is nevertheless an enhancement to the *mitzvah*, and because of that, the *Kohen* will merit living a long life.

Some commentators explain that he would say the Priestly Blessing several times during the day, and he never neglected to recite the benediction before each and every one.



The Meiri doesn't agree with this explanation, for he says that one would be obligated to recite a blessing every time, and he would not warrant a reward for this.

The Radal suggests that perhaps other *Kohanim* maintained that a benediction is not required before the Priestly Blessing, even though an ordinary *mitzvah* necessitates a *brochah*. The reason for this exception is because the *mitzvah* itself is a benediction, and therefore it doesn't require an additional blessing. This would be similar to the Grace after Meals, which is a blessing in itself, and therefore, it doesn't require an additional blessing beforehand.

DAILY MASHAL

Blessing with Love

Before the kohanim bless the congregation, they say a blessing in which they praise Hashem for "sanctifying us with the holiness of Aharon and commanding us to bless His people Israel with love."

The commentaries call attention to the closing phrase of this blessing, which seems to indicate that this mitzvah to bless the congregation must be done with love. Why, they ask, is it only regarding this mitzvah that our sages established the text of the blessing preceding it to include the prerequisite of "love?"

Two sources are cited as explanation. One is a midrash (Devarim Rabbah 11:4) which focuses on the word "amor" in the Torah passage (Bamidbar 6:23) instructing the kohanim in what to say in their blessing. This word, meaning "say" (to them), is written with a "vav" to make it "full." The message, says the midrash, is that Hashem wanted the kohanim to know that when He delegated to them the power to bless Israel, He insisted that they not do so in a haughty and impatient, half-hearted manner, but rather with wholehearted sincerity.

The other source is a quote from the Zohar cited by Magen Avraham (Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 128:18): "Any kohen who does not love the people or is not loved by them should not lift his hands in prayer."

Both of these sources indicate that this is not simply a mitzvah for kohanim to lift their hands and pronounce the blessing written in the Torah. There must be a genuine desire on the part of the kohanim to see the people blessed and reciprocally on the part of the people to receive the kohanim's blessing. The kohanim must therefore prepare for this by stressing in the praise they give to Hashem for commanding this mitzvah the need to do so with love.

Two supports of this approach may be suggested. One is the custom of the kohanim saying a special prayer before ascending the podium to bless the congregation, in which they ask that they be able to perform the mitzvah without any obstacle or flaw. This unusual preparation for a mitzvah may be necessary because of the challenge it provides to human emotions. Another support for the symbiotic relation between blesser and blessed is the requirement for kohanim to lift their hands. Rabbi Yosef Elbo, in his Sefer Haikarim, explains this as a virtual placing of hands on the head which is an integral part in every blessing.

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Ohr Sameach