

**Wembley Synagogue**

נש"א

Insights from the commentators into the Sidra of Naso 5768

What's the Sidra about?

1st Aliya: The family of Gershon is assigned to carry the curtains and tapestries of the Mishkan. The family of Merrari is assigned to carry the beams, poles, and sockets that comprised the walls of the Mishkan. **2nd Aliya:** The families of Gershon and Merrari are counted. **3rd Aliya:** The laws regarding sending out of the camp: the Metzora, the Zav (a type of discharge), and anyone who has come in contact with a dead body, are stated. The law of stealing from a convert (making restitution if someone steals from a convert who then dies without any heirs) is commanded. **4th Aliya:** The laws and procedures for the Sotah - the accused adulteress; and the Nazir are explained. **5th & 6th Aliyot:** Being that the Leviyim were to be in direct exchange for the first born, Moshe counts all the first born in the rest of the nation. Their total was 22,273. The extra 273 first born are instructed to redeem themselves from Aharon the Kohain for 5 silver shekels. **7th Aliya:** The Korbanot offered by the princes of each Shevet at the inauguration of the Mizbeach are listed. (Source: Rav Aron Tendler)

THE MITZVAH OF BIRKAT KOHANIM**The Weekly Halacha Discussion- A review of practical halachic topics related to the weekly Sidra By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

וְכַלֵּם לְהַלְלֵם - So shall you bless the Children of Israel, say to them (6:23)

Even today when the Beis ha-Mikdash is no longer standing, the Biblical (1) mitzvah of nesias kapayim - the obligation of the kohanim to lift up their hands and bless the Jewish people with the three verses recorded in Parashas Naso(2) -- remains. Although this mitzvah applies at all times and in all places(3), it has become customary in most congregations, especially outside of Eretz Yisrael, to perform it only during the Mussaf service of Yom Tov(4). The poskim suggest several reasons for the curtailment of nesias kapayim: 1. It is proper for kohanim to immerse themselves in a mikveh before nesias kapayim, and it is difficult for them to do so on a daily or even a weekly basis (5). 2. Nesias kapayim should be performed when people are relaxed and not in a hurry to go to work. Even on Shabbos, people are preoccupied with concerns about their livelihood. Only at the end of Mussaf on Yom Tov, when people are in an elevated mood and are ready to leave shul and partake of the simchas Yom Tov, is the time conducive for nesias kapayim(6). 3. It was common in the olden days for non-Jews to barge into shuls at will, and birkas kohanim may be said in the presence of Jews only(7). 4. With the passage of time, the lineage and yichus of the kohanim have become blurred. We nevertheless allow them to bless the people on Yom Tov so that this mitzvah will not be completely forsaken and forgotten(8). In the past, many poskim disputed and refuted the above-stated reasons(9), and some even sought to change the long-standing practice and reinstate birkas kohanim on a daily basis(10). Ultimately, all these attempts failed - almost as if a bas kol min ha-shamayim decreed that nesias kapayim must be relegated to Yom Tov Mussaf alone(11) - and the vast majority of congregations outside of Eretz Yisrael recite birkas kohanim on Yom Tov only. Regrettably, the discussion involving the proper time and occasion for performing nesias kapayim led to some confusion. Some congregations have the custom not to recite birkas kohanim on a Yom Tov which falls on Shabbos, as it does this year. Although several poskim have attempted to explain the reason behind this practice(12) and many prominent congregations practice this custom even today, the consensus of the poskim is that it has "no ta'am or rei'ach"(13), it has no basis in halachah(14), it is not a minhag tov(15) and it should be discontinued(16), provided that there will not be any strife or discord within the congregation if the practice is abandoned.

UPON WHOM DOES THE OBLIGATION REST?

Many authorities maintain that in addition to the mitzvah of the kohanim to bless the Jewish people, there is also a separate mitzvah for every Jew to be blessed by the kohanim(17). Women, too, are included in this mitzvah(18). Let us clarify, then, the halachos which pertain to the members of the congregation, to the yisraelim and leviyim who are awaiting the blessings from the kohanim:

WHAT THE CONGREGATION IS SUPPOSED TO DO:

The custom is for the entire congregation to stand(19) - with awe and seriousness - during the birkas kohanim(20). A weak or sick person, however, may sit(21). Every person present must answer amen to each of the three verses that the kohanim recite. One who is in shul and does not answer amen excludes himself from the blessing and does not fulfill the mitzvah(22). The poskim debate whether it is proper to recite Baruch hu u'varuch shemo when the name of Hashem is mentioned during the blessings. One may follow his customary practice, but he should do so quietly(23). The congregants must give their undivided attention to the words of the blessings. Their eyes should be lowered as if they are davening Shemoneh Esrei(24). In order to fulfill the mitzvah properly, they must hear every single letter of every single word(25).

WHAT THE CONGREGATION IS NOT SUPPOSED TO DO:

Since complete concentration is required while listening to the blessings, it is forbidden to look around the shul or to stare at the kohanim while birkas kohanim is being recited(26). The custom is not to look at them at all, neither at their faces nor at their hands(27). For this reason, many have the custom of covering their face with a tallis during birkas kohanim(28). It is prohibited to speak, learn, or say Tehillim during birkas kohanim(29), nor is it proper to recite any other verses [even those verses which appear alongside in many siddurim and machzorim] or prayers while birkas kohanim is taking place(30). When answering amen, it is important to make sure that the kohanim have completely finished the word that they are reciting(31). At the conclusion of birkas kohanim, the custom is for the congregation to thank the kohanim for their blessing(32). While some kohanim have the custom of responding with beruchim tihyu'(33), others advise the kohanim against responding in those words in order to avoid a halachic dispute as to whether their response constitutes an additional blessing over and beyond what is mandated by the Torah(34).

WHERE SHOULD THE PEOPLE LISTENING TO THE BLESSINGS BE?

Since the kohanim must face the congregants during birkas kohanim(35), anyone standing behind the kohanim must leave his seat and face the kohanim(36). The people who are standing to the side of the kohanim should turn their faces so that they face the kohanim(37). It is preferable that the congregation not be standing on a surface higher than the kohanim. Consequently, one should not stand on the bimah during birkas kohanim(38). Some have the custom of moving up to the front of the shul so that nothing intervenes between them and the kohanim. There are valid sources and reasons for this custom(39).

WHEN BIRKAS KOHANIM INTERFERES WITH OTHER MITZVOS:

One who is reciting Kerias Shema [or its blessings] when the congregation is reciting birkas kohanim, should stop and listen to the blessings. He must answer amen to the blessings of the kohanim but not to the blessing of Levareich es amo Yisrael(40). One who is reciting Shemoneh Esrei when the sheliach tzibbur is about to recite birkas kohanim should stop and listen(41). He may not, however, leave his place to face the kohanim nor may he answer amen to the blessings of the kohanim. In view of this potential conflict, one should not start Shemoneh Esrei unless he is sure to finish before birkas kohanim(42).

FOOTNOTES:

1 Footnote to Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 128:133, who flatly rejects the minority opinion which maintains that it is merely a rabbinical mitzvah. See Kol Bo (Tefillah 11) who says that Shlomo ha-Melech instituted birkas kohanim outside the Beis ha-Mikdash. 2 Bamidbar 6:24-27. 3 Chinuch 378. 4 In certain parts of Eretz Yisrael, nesias kapayim is performed only on Shabbos. 5 Sefer Chasidim 1613, quoted by Beis Yosef O.C. 128, who rejects this argument for several reasons. 6 Rama 128:44, Mishnah Berurah 167. Yom Kippur, too, is a day of happiness, since Hashem forgives our sins; ibid. 166. 7 Responsa Maharil 21; Responsa Zera Emes 3:13 quoting the Zohar. 8 Responsa Beis Efrayim 6. 9 See Responsa Rama Mi'pano 95 and Beis Yosef O.C. 128. 10 The Gr"a and his disciple Reb Chayim of Volozin repeatedly attempted to change the custom. Reb Nosson Adler, in his own beis medrash, performed birkas kohanim daily. 11 Language of the Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:64. See similar idea in Meishiv Davar 2:104. 12 There are several possible theories as to how this custom developed: 1. The Ribbono shel olam prayer is not said on Shabbos (Magen Avraham 128:70); 2. Birkas kohanim is not said unless the kohanim have immersed themselves, which is not done on Shabbos (ibid.); 3. Shabbos itself serves as a shemirah and no additional blessing is needed (Da'as Torah 128:44); 4. To avoid inadvertently transgressing the prohibition of carrying water which is needed to wash the hands of the kohanim (Eishel Avraham 128). 5. So that presents for the kohanim would not be carried on Shabbos (Mor Veahalos). 13 Taz 128:35; Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:64. 14 Shulchan Aruch Harav 128:57; Chayei Adam 32:11; Meishiv Davar 1:47; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 100:1; Mishnah Berurah 128:165; Minchas Elazar 3:56. 15 Igros Moshe O.C. 3:18. 16 Igros Moshe O.C. 5:15. 17 This is the view of Sefer Chareidim 12:18 [and other Rishonim], and it is quoted as halachah by many later authorities, including the Be'ur Halachah (beginning of 128) and Igros Moshe O.C. 4:21. There are also dissenting opinions. See Responsa Chasam Sofer 22 and 167 and Devar Avraham 1:31 for a review of this issue. 18 Minchas Chinuch 378-4; Igros Moshe O.C. 5:20-23. 19 Leaning heavily on a shtender, etc. is considered like sitting - Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 607:8. 20 Mishnah Berurah 128:51. 21 Tzitz Eliezer 14:18; Yechaveh Da'as 5:15. 22 Igros Moshe O.C. 2:31. 23 See Yechaveh Da'as 4:9 for the various views. 24 O.C. 128:23. 25 Mishnah Berurah 128:65 and 67. 26 O.C. 128:23. 27 Mishnah Berurah 128:88. In addition to being a distraction, it is also not proper to look at the kohanim since the Shechinah rests on their hands; Kaf ha-Chayim 128:140. 28 Mishnah Berurah 128:92. 29 O.C. 128:26, Be'er Heitev 46, and Mishnah Berurah 102. 30 Mishnah Berurah 128:103. 31 O.C. 128:18. 32 Mishnah Berurah 128:60. See R'shush Sh'vi'is 4:2 for an explanation. 33 Aruch ha-Shulchan 128:24. 34 Har Tzvi 62 based on the view of the Rambam, quoted by Be'ur Halachah 128:27. 35 O.C. 128:10. 36 O.C. 128:24. Since, as mentioned earlier, women are also included in this mitzvah, they, too, should make sure not to stand behind the kohanim. 37 Be'ur Halachah 128:24. 38 Ko Sevarchu (Tzadik 1). 39 See Minhagei Chasam Sofer 88 and Orchos Rabbeinu. 40 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:21; Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:78; Az Nidberu 11:36; 12:25. 41 Chazon Ish (Dinim v'Hanhagos 4:29); Igros Moshe O.C. 4:21; Shevet ha-Levi 3:15. A dissenting opinion maintains that he need not do so; Harav S.Y. Elyashiv (Avnei Yashfei on Tefillah, pg. 205); Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 2:77. 42 Igros Moshe O.C. 4:21. See, however, Igros Moshe O.C. 5:20-23 where he rules that even during Shemoneh Esrei one should leave his place to face the kohanim.

שבת שלום!

Shabbat Shalom



Shabbat starts 8.00pm



Shabbat ends: 10.19pm

לע"נ ר' מרדכי צבי ב"ר חיאל משה וולפסון ז"ל

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

Online at: http://www.wembleysynagogue.org/html/sedra_notes.html