

- 22 God spoke to Moshe, saying: כב וַיִּדְבֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:
- 23 Speak to Aharon and to his sons כג דִּבֶר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר
as follows: Thus shall you bless פֹּה תְבָרְכוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲמֹר
the Children of Israel — this is to לָהֶם: ם
be said to them:

הגר. For that section proclaims the presence of God in the social life of the *nation*.

פרשת סוטה from שילוח זב וזבה finds its concrete realization in

For that section proclaims the presence of God in the sexual purity of the *family*.

פרשת מת from שכינה שכינה finds its concrete realization in

גזיר. For that section proclaims the presence of God wherever the *individual* aspires to spiritual and moral holiness with God.

All three together impress upon society, family, and individual the stamp of God's holiness.

- 23 דבר אל אהרן וגו'. This is not an authorization, but a duty assigned to Aharon's descendants to bless the Children of Israel. The priestly blessing does not emanate from the personal benevolence of the כהנים; rather, it is part of their service in the Sanctuary. For Scripture defines the priestly service as follows: לעמד לפני ה' לשרתו ולברך בשמו (*Devarim* 10:8); and similarly: כי בם בחר ה' אלקיך לשרתו ולברך בשם ה' (*ibid.* 21:5). ברכת כהנים, then, is part of the שרת and is intimately connected with it. The כהן *stands* in service before God and pronounces the blessing at His bidding and in His Name. Hence, only בעבודה, at the completion of the communal offerings, do the כהנים pronounce the blessing — just as it says of Aharon: וישא אהרן את ידיו אל העם ויברכם וירד מעשת החטאת והעלה והשלמים (*Vayikra* 9:22; see Commentary there).

Also בגבולין, when the people assemble for prayer outside the Sanctuary — nowadays as well — עבודה is attached to ברכת כהנים. Hence כל כהן שאינו עולה בעבודה שוב אינו עולה (*Sotah* 38b): Any כהן who does not start moving toward the raised platform (דוכן) during the recital of the prayer for the עבודה (רצה) may not ascend to pronounce the blessing during that prayer service.

Since ברכת כהנים is part of the שרת and the עבודה, it also has the

character of the עבודה procedures. Its meaning lies in its objective prescribed content. The כהן who recites the blessing is merely the appointed instrument through which, there [in the Sanctuary] the procedures, here the words, come to expression. The death of Aharon's sons (*Vayikra* 10:2) has already established a rule regarding the entire עבודה: Only an act performed *as prescribed* is true עבודה; service that one concocts on his own — אשר לא צוה (ibid. 10:1) — is considered זרה, the very opposite of God's service. This rule applies also to ברכת כהנים.

The Torah says: כה, כה תברכו את בני ישראל, “thus,” in the prescribed words, in the prescribed manner, and the Halachah teaches (*Sotah* 38a): כה — i.e., בלשון הקודש, בלשון הזה, בעמידה, standing, in the manner of service; בנשיאות כפים, with up-raised hands, as though pointing to God, not with horizontally out-stretched hands, as though intending to bestow (Jewish priests do not *bestow* blessing); פנים כנגד פנים, face to face with the congregation; בקול רם, in a loud voice. The priestly blessing has no magic power deriving from the priest or from the formula. The attitude of the one who pronounces the blessing is an essential part of the blessing; indeed, it is his attitude that turns the formula he recites into a blessing (v. 27). The *halachos* (בלחש רם, פנים כנגד פנים, בלשון הקודש, בעמידה) are all indicated by the word “כה”: Just as I transmit the command to you in the name of God, so must you fulfill it in the name of God (128 לבוש אורה חיים). And if part of these *halachos* are also derived (*Sotah* 38a) from the words “אמור להם” — which is a call to the כהנים to pronounce the blessing — then these derivations spring from the same concept [both the command to the כהנים and the fulfillment by the כהנים are in the name of God].

Finally, אמור להם: Just as you, Moshe, are to give the order to Aharon and his sons to pronounce the blessing, that shall always be the practice. Whenever it is time to pronounce the blessing, the כהנים should be requested to bless the people; otherwise, they are not obligated and are not authorized to pronounce the blessing. The חזן הכנסת who represents the congregation shall call to them in a loud voice to bless the people. (חזן הכנסת: In the Talmud, “חזן” denotes the superintendent or beadle of the synagogue, שמש הכנסת or המתעסק בצרכי בית הכנסת, not to be confused with the שליח ציבור, ש”ץ, who leads the prayers and represents the congregation in prayer; see *Berachos* 34a תוספות אמר לא יענה אמן ד”ה לא יענה אמן. Our custom is that the one who leads the prayers calls to the כהנים, but he does so as חזן — at the bidding and in the name of the congregation.)

24 *May God bless you and keep you.*

כד יִבְרַכְךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ: ס

Even after the כהנים have responded to this call and have already pronounced the first word, every succeeding word of the blessing (according to our custom even the first word, too) is dictated to them. Thus, they merely repeat the blessing that was already dictated to them by the representative of the congregation being blessed, and according to the אמור להם (ה' תפלה) רמב"ם (14:3) this, too, is part of the mitzvah of להם. In pronouncing the blessing, the כהנים are a completely passive instrument. Only when summoned by the congregation do they pronounce it, and they pronounce only the blessing dictated to them in the name of the congregation. In truth it is the congregation that brings upon itself the blessing prescribed by God and pronounced by the כהנים.

The summons "כהן" is not directed to a single individual: לשנים קורא (Sotah 38a). A blessing pronounced by a single person is likely to highlight that single personality and give him an aura of exaggerated importance. Perhaps that is the reason the call "כהן" is not addressed to him.

Let us note that the passivity required by אמור להם is maintained also in the case of the individual כהן by the dictation of יברכך (see מגן אברהם on אורח חיים 128:13). (According to some opinions, a single כהן is not obligated מן התורה to pronounce ברכת כהנים; see on ט"ז.)

Our Sages (Sotah 38a) derive from here that the כהנים should be addressed with a request to bless the people. Onkelos, too, translates: כד תימרון להון (see above).

24 **יברכך וגו'.** Since יברכך is then complemented by וישמרך, we infer that this blessing refers primarily to possessions that require שמירה, protection, even after they have been granted. They need to be protected so that they remain in our possession and thus prove to be a true blessing. Thus, too, our Sages say in the *Sifre* (here): בברכה המפורשת, וכן – יברכך ה' – הוא אומר (דברים כח, ג) ברוך אתה בעיר וברוך אתה בשדה ברוך טנאך ומשאתך וגו', יברכך ה' בנכסים וישמרך בנכסים; ר' נתן אומר יברכך בנכסים וישמרך בגוף; ר' יצחק אומר וישמרך מיצר הרע וכו'; ד"א וישמרך שלא ישלטו אחרים עליך וכו'; ד"א וישמרך מן המזיקים. The first blessing, then, blesses Israel with the prosperity of all

25 *May God illuminate His Countenance for you and favor you.* כה יאר יהוה | פניו אליך ויחנך: ס

their *bodily* and *material* possessions and with protection from anything that might harm them.

25 להאיר להם את־הדרֶךְ, בעמוד אש להאיר להם. *יאַר וגו'* (Shemos 13:21), האירו ברקמים תבל, האירו ברקמים תבל, (ibid. 97:4). In all these verses, האיר means: to illuminate something so that it can be seen. Thus נאור אֵתָהּ (ibid. 76:5; see Commentary there): God was revealed by the almighty deeds of His rule. The world events emanating from Him radiate back on the One Who caused them, revealing Him in the almighty power of His rule.

פניו ה' פני ה' are God's aims, toward which God "directs His Countenance." These aims are achieved by God's rule and by people who do God's Will in freedom. As it says in *Tehillim* (89:15): צֶדֶק וּמִשְׁפָּט מְכוֹן כְּסֵאֶךָ "God's throne is founded upon righteousness and justice; His Countenance is directed to love and truth."

ויחנך. We have already analyzed (Commentary, *Bereshis* 6:8) the meaning of חנן, based on its relation to ענן and הנן. חנן means: to grant someone his wishes.

In our verse, ויחנך complements the preceding יאר וגו'. Accordingly, the granting spoken of here is God's granting of the spiritual abilities required in order to behold פני ה' which have been illuminated before our eyes; i.e., in order to recognize and understand פני ה' which have been revealed to us. פניו אליך would accordingly mean: May God reveal to you the aims of His rule and the aims to be achieved through you. The aims of His rule are illuminated by His prophets, and the aims to be achieved through you are illuminated by His Torah. ויחנך: May He equip you with the *spiritual abilities* to understand His Words in תורה and in נבואה and to perceive from these His work in history and your own tasks in life. Similarly, our Sages interpret in the *Sifre*: יאר זה מאור תורה שנא' כי נר מצוה ותורה אור, ויחונך בדעת ובבינה ובהשכל ובמוסר ובחכמה; ד"א יחנך בתלמוד תורה – ויחונך. A similar interpretation is found in *Bemidbar Rabbah* (11:6), which finds confirmation in the text of the שמונה עשרה prayer, that חנינה denotes the granting of spiritual gifts. The Midrash

26 *May God turn His Countenance toward you and establish peace for you.* כו יִשָּׂא יְהוָה | פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשְׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם: ס

יִיחַן – הרי הם מבורכים ושמורים ושכינה ביניהן, ומנין אף חנוני בדעת ובכינה תלמוד לומר ויחן – כמה דמצלין אתה חונן לאדם דעת ומלמד לאנוש כינה.

It is to the granting of this spiritual blessing that the Psalmist refers in *Tehillim* 67 (see Commentary there). The psalm states that Israel's enlightenment, enabling it to recognize "God's way" on earth (דרך ה') includes both the way of God's rule and the way of duty which God has commanded us to follow), is a means to the enlightenment of all mankind. In the words of the Psalmist: אֱלֹקִים יְחַנְּנוּ וַיְבָרְכֵנוּ יְיָ אֱתָנוּ: סְלָה. לְדַעַת בְּאֶרֶץ דְּרָכֶךָ בְּכָל-גּוֹיִם יִשׁוּעָתָךְ. יוֹדוּךָ עַמִּים אֱלֹקִים יוֹדוּךָ עַמִּים כָּלֵם. יִשְׁמְחוּ וַיְרַנְּנוּ לְאֲמִים פִּי-תִשְׁפֹּט עַמִּים מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְלְאֲמִים בְּאֶרֶץ תְּנַחֵם סְלָה וְגו'. The entire psalm is a commentary on our verse.

26 *יִשָּׂא וְגו'.* The expression -נשא פנים אל- does not occur elsewhere referring to God. Our Sages (*Bemidbar Rabbah* 11:7) interpret: יהפך פניו כלפי אצלך, "כמה דתימא ופניתי אליכם, "He will turn His Countenance toward you, as it says: 'And I will turn to you' (*Vayikra* 26:9)." Accordingly, this expression is another way of saying יפנה ה' אליך. Indeed, there too, ופניתי אליכם introduces a zenith of Divine blessings (see Commentary there). Onkelos, too, translates (here): יסב ה' אפיה לותך.

There [in *Vayikra* 26], an abundance of blessings had already been promised: fertility, peace, victory; and after these it says: ופניתי אליכם, which can mean nothing other than a still more intimate personal relationship of God to Israel, a relationship which then reaches its climax in the blessing ונתתי משכני בתוכם וְגו' והתהלכתי בתוכם.

Here, too, material and spiritual blessing has already been pronounced, and the generality of the terminology [in vv. 24-25] indicates that the blessing is most comprehensive. To this is now added the blessing יִשָּׂא וְגו', which is the final product crowning the preceding blessing of יברך and יאר. The meaning of this blessing (יִשָּׂא וְגו') is God's closeness. We will attain it, if we properly utilize all the material and spiritual assets granted to us by God, using them in the spirit of the "illumination of God's Countenance." After our eyes have been enlightened to recog-

- 27 *They shall place My Name upon the Children of Israel; and as for Me, I will bless them.* בּוֹ וְשָׂמוּ אֶת־שְׁמִי עַל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֶם: ם חמישי

nize His Will, we are to channel our material and spiritual assets solely toward the fulfillment of the Divine aims revealed to us by God.

We do not yearn for God's closeness in order to attain through it material and spiritual blessing; rather, we seek material and spiritual blessing in order to do with it God's Will — so as to be worthy of God's closeness. קְרִבַת אֱלֹקִים, God's closeness, is טוב in itself, is the absolute good (*Tehillim* 73:28).

“פנים” in ישא וגוי can be taken in the same sense as “פנים” in יאר וגוי, and it expresses even more clearly God's intimate relationship with Israel. This, then, is the meaning of the blessing: God illuminated His Countenance for you and revealed to you His aims, and you have already been granted the spiritual abilities and material means with which to recognize and achieve these aims. If you properly utilize all these gifts, then ישא ה' פניו אליך: He will direct to you all the aims of His rule in nature and in history. For God is interested in the formation, continuance, and development of a God-serving circle of people; and since you embody this circle, the purpose of God's whole rule on earth will be focused on you. ישא ה' פניו אליך: God will direct His Countenance toward you, and you will be the object of His providence.

וישם לך שלום. Do not think that, because your endeavors are directed solely to God, and because God's providence seems directed solely to you, you will be isolated and at odds with the world; in fact, precisely for you God ישם שלום, will establish peace and supreme harmonious accord. If you will be a true servant of God with all your physical and spiritual powers, so that God will see in you the fulfillment of all His aims, then all those around you who are sensitive and thoughtful will consider you their perfect complement, the element that spurs them on to good endeavors and sustains them in existence. Every breath drawn by an individual who truly serves God will elicit a responsive chord from the universe around him.

- 27 *ושמו את שמי וגוי*. It is not the כהנים who bless Israel; their words have no power of conferring blessing. Their job is only בני ישראל; לשום שמי על בני ישראל;

as for Me — ואני אברכם, *I will bless them*. Their job is to “place” God’s Name on Israel, so that the people of Israel become bearers of the Shechinah. The כהנים are to impress the Name “God” on Israel’s every aspect. They are to proclaim that Israel looks to God and to God alone for all blessing and all protection, all revelation and all ability, all elevation and all peace. Israel expects all these from God alone, so that the blessing and protection, revelation and ability, elevation and peace will themselves constitute a “Name of God”; they will form a book of awesome deeds, by which God reveals Himself. As God has assured us: לא תעשון אתי וגוי בכל מקום אשר וגוי (Shemos 20:20-21). Not in images, but in the blessing that He will bestow on us, will His Presence be revealed to us. Wherever He would have His Name remembered, God will reveal Himself in the blessing bestowed to Israel (see Commentary, *ibid.* 20:21).

The כהן is meant to be the instrument by which God’s Name is pronounced over Israel. The congregation to be blessed shall summon the כהן to be an instrument of blessing, and then God will bless them.

ברכת כהנים in the מקדש differs from ברכת כהנים outside the מקדש in three ways: במדינה אומר אותה שלש ברכות ובמקדש ברכה אחת; במקדש אומר את השם ככתבו ובמדינה בכינויו; במדינה כהנים נושאים את ידיהן כנגד כתפיהן ובמקדש על גבי ראשיהן (Sotah 37b). Outside the Sanctuary, ברכת כהנים is said in three separate verses, as it is done today; in the Sanctuary, the three verses are said together as one verse. In the Sanctuary, the Name of God is pronounced as it is written; outside the Sanctuary, it is pronounced in its attributive form (אדני-י). Outside the Sanctuary, the כהנים raise their hands to the height of their shoulders; in the Sanctuary, they raise their hands above their heads.

The law that the three verses of ברכת כהנים are said in the Sanctuary as one verse is explained (*ibid.* 40b) as follows: לפי שאין עונין אמן במקדש ברכות pronounced in the Sanctuary are not responded to with “Amen”; instead, the congregation says: ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד (see תוספות *ibid.* ד”ה וכל כך). תוספות suggest the possibility that the response ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד is made immediately after the Name of God is pronounced. But from the wording of the Gemara (*Ta’anis* 16b) it appears that this response is made at the end of every ברכה in lieu of “Amen”; for it says there regarding the מקדש: והן עונין אחריי בשכמל”ו: מן: בגבולין אמן. והן עונין אחריי אמן.

The law that the response “Amen” is not made after the ברכות pro-

nounced in the Sanctuary but, rather, the congregation joins itself to the ברכה by saying שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד (*Berachos* 63a, *Ta'anis* 16b, *Sotah* 40b) from what is stated in *Nechemyah* 9:5, where the לויים call to the assembly: קומו ברכו את־ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם מִן־הָעוֹלָם עַד־הָעוֹלָם: and the response to this call is expressed — in an address to God — as ויברכו שם כבודך ומרומם על־כָּל־בְּרָכָה וּתְהִלָּהּ. This proof is ingeniously explained by the commentator מפולדא ר' אליהו at the end of *Yerushalmi Berachos*: מנין שלא היו עונין אמן במקדש ת"ל קומו ברכו וגו' משמע כולם היו מן המברכין ולא היה בהן שאינו מברך אלא עונה אמן ש"מ שהמברך אומר בא"י וכו' והעונים בשכמל"ו וה"ל שפיר כולך מברכין. Outside the Sanctuary, the reader says the ברכה primarily for the assembled congregation: He recites it out loud so that the words will be taken to heart and appropriated by the listeners. This appropriation is accomplished by the response "Amen" (see Commentary above, 5:22). What is said in the Sanctuary, however, is of national significance, and is said for the whole nation, just as the Sanctuary itself and the offerings at which the ברכות are recited are of broad national significance. In general, what is said in the Sanctuary is but a verbal expression of the acts performed there, and these acts are always directed to the consciousness of the whole national community (cf. *Collected Writings*, vol. III, p. 235ff.: the שמונה עשרה). For this reason "Amen" is not said in the Sanctuary. Responding "Amen" would limit the import of the ברכה, as though it were directed not to the consciousness of the whole community, but to a negligible fraction of the nation [i.e., to those who are physically present in the Sanctuary]. Therefore all those who are present join the reader, and they too are considered pronouncers of the blessing. Thus the character of the blessing as directed to the entire community is preserved.

Similarly, ברכת כהנים in the מקדש differs from ברכת כהנים שבגבולין, which likewise is pronounced only for the limited circle of the fraction of the nation actually in attendance. So as to exclude this limited import, "Amen" is not pronounced in the מקדש after ברכת כהנים also.

This is also the reason that ברכת כהנים in the מקדש is said as one single ברכה. In the מקדש, ברכת כהנים is not directed primarily to the consciousness of those present. Its idea transcends the narrow confines of the Sanctuary. It expresses the מקדש-idea that encompasses the whole nation and ultimately all of humanity. And since this idea is *one* unified idea, ברכת כהנים in the מקדש is likewise said as *one* single ברכה.

For at the very first glance one can see how the three verses of ברכת

מקדש וכליו are but the verbal expression of what is represented by *יהוה*, the Sanctuary and its contents. *יהוה*, *יהוה*, and *יהוה* correspond to the *יהוה*, *יהוה*, and *יהוה*. *יהוה* expresses the idea of the *יהוה*, *יהוה*, and *יהוה*. They teach that the nation's material prosperity and spiritual enlightenment depend on God's dispensation and care. *יהוה* expresses the idea of the *יהוה* and the *יהוה*: that God's Presence dwells wherever the material and the spiritual unite (*יהוה* = *יהוה*, *יהוה* = *יהוה*) to receive and fulfill God's revealed Will (*יהוה*). And just as the focal point of the Sanctuary is the *יהוה*, to which the *יהוה* and *יהוה* are subordinate as prerequisites, so, too, in *יהוה*: the *יהוה* of *יהוה* is the focal point of *יהוה* in the Sanctuary, to which the *יהוה* of *יהוה* and *יהוה* are attached as antecedent clauses. This is the meaning of *יהוה* in the Sanctuary: May God grant you blessing and protection, enlightenment and ability, and may He then let His Presence dwell in your midst and grant you everlasting peace.

Outside the Sanctuary, it is different. There, everything is oriented toward the actual realization of these blessings. The nation's various classes and circles strive to attain the goal of the blessing. There, special attention must be paid to each one of the blessings: The circles seeking blessing must first learn that God alone grants them material blessing and preservation; and when they grasp this truth, they shall appropriate it by answering "Amen." Then let them hear that the longing for peace can be satisfied only through God's closeness, and by answering "Amen" they shall appropriate this truth as well.

In this respect, the relation between *יהוה* and *יהוה* resembles the relation between *יהוה* and *יהוה* (see Commentary, *Devarim* 6:8).

If this interpretation is not mistaken, it could also resolve the question raised by *יהוה* (*Sotah* 40b *יהוה* [regarding the absence of a response after each *יהוה* of *יהוה* in the *יהוה*]). The Gemara's statement *יהוה* implies that what is pronounced in the Sanctuary is not directed solely to those present; they are not the only ones who are to appropriate those pronouncements. Accordingly, *יהוה* in the Sanctuary is only one *יהוה*, and if those present are to make a response, they can do so only at the conclusion of the third verse. According to the *יהוה* (14:9), those who are present respond at the end of the one *יהוה*: *יהוה*; according to others (*יהוה*, *Sotah* 7:6), they respond: *יהוה*.

ועד (see באר שבע on *Sotah* 40b), and thus link the awaited blessing from God with our ברכה-dedication to Him (see חורב, chap. 111). None of the above excludes the possibility suggested by תוספות that the law applicable to יום הכיפורים applies also to ברכת כהנים, and when they would hear God's Name pronounced by the כהנים the people would respond: ברוך שם מלכותו לעולם ועד.

The foregoing also explains the other differences between מקדש and גבולין. In ברכת כהנים in the Sanctuary, God's Name (שם המפורש) is pronounced, whereas בגבולין the usual practice for גבולין is followed, and the Name is pronounced in its attributive form (אדני). For the ברכה in the Sanctuary is a pronouncement, in which the מקדש comes to expression, whereas בגבולין the ברכה is something appropriated by the listeners, hence God's Name, too, is pronounced there in the form of the attribute by which we conceive of Him.

Finally, בגבולין the כהנים raise their hands to the height of their shoulders, whereas in the Sanctuary they raise their hands above their heads. In the Sanctuary, it is necessary to negate the idea that God's Presence is limited to the Temple. Hence, the כהנים' hands, pointing to God, are raised heavenward; they point to the universe, where the heavens are God's throne, and the earth His footstool. By contrast, outside the Temple it must be recalled that here, too, God is present; that מלא כל הארץ כבודו, that שכינה למעלה מראשינו, God's Presence is just above our heads wherever we are, and God is close to man; and where man's realm ends, the holy Divine realm begins (see *Kiddushin* 31a). Hence, the כהנים' hands, pointing to God, are raised only to the height of their shoulders.

If we now consider פרשת ברכת כהנים in connection with the preceding פרשיות, what strikes us first is that

the ברכה of יברכך is realized in מחנה ישראל,
 the ברכה of יאר is realized at first in מחנה לוייה,
 the ברכה of ישא is realized in מחנה שכינה.

Thus, the three מחנות of the Jewish people form the integrated fundamental idea for the order and connection of the following laws:

שילוח מחנות
 גזל הגר, סוטה, נזיר
 ברכת כהנים