

Nasso – Shabbat 30 May 2015

This week's Sedra contains within it one of the most important and well known prayers of all time. The Birchat Cohanim (Priestly blessing) is very short, comprising of only three verses, fifteen words. It is the blessing with which our Cohanim bless us on Yom Tov in Shul, and it is the blessing with which parents bless their children on Friday nights. But it is also the blessing with which the Rabbi blesses a Chatan and Kallah under the Chuppah.

Interesting is the text of the blessing recited by the Cohanim prior to the Duchaning. "Who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His people Israel with love (Ahavah)."

The Torah itself doesn't say that the blessing has to be bestowed with love. But it is clear, as the Talmud in Sotah says; that a Cohen, who has any hatred in his heart towards anybody in the community, should stand down from Duchaning. The Priestly Blessing is meant to encompass everybody, and the Cohen is only a conduit by which the blessing flows down from the Divine to man. How could man be the instrument to that blessing if he would want to exclude anybody from being a beneficiary of Hashem's blessings, and harbour any hatred in his heart?

The Gematriah (numerical value) of the word Be-Ahavah-with love is fifteen. How do we express that love of Hashem to His people Israel?- it is through the fifteen words of Birchat Cohanim, but also via the first berachah of the Amidah with which we express how God sustains the entire universe Be-Ahavah with love.

So now we can understand why the Birchat Cohanim is drawn upon by a parent on a Friday night. Because the essential love of a parent to a child is a reflection of the love of Hashem to His children. Likewise the bond and commitment of a Chatan and a Kallah should be permeated with that love for one another.

Shabbat Shalom