

Shemini 5770
Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

“The love of Aharon HaKohen”

According to Rav Soloveitchik, the great honor and privilege that the Kohanim are granted the Mitzvah to bestow blessings upon the Jewish people stems from non other than Aharon HaKohen himself.

In this week’s parsha, (9:22), after having completed the first day of sacrificial services, Aharon joyously blessed the people, pronouncing the Priestly Blessings for the first time. Although the Torah merely states that “Aharon raised his hands toward the people and blessed them,” Rashi, based upon the Talmud Yerushalmi (Ta’anit 4:1), states that Aharon employed the formula of Birkat Kohanim as the text for his blessing. Aharon felt an overpowering desire to bless the people, for such is the generous and loving nature of Aharon and his descendants. In reward, HaShem gave the Kohanim the eternal commandment of conferring the Priestly Blessings upon the Jewish people.

The mitzvah of Birkat Kohanim is unique because it requires heartfelt love for its fulfillment. The blessing requires that the love of the Kohen for the whole of Israel should flow spontaneously. The Kohen’s blessing is a reflection of the divine love that the Ribono Shel Olam has for His own creatures, as the Shechinah (Divine Spirit) dwells between the Kohen’s fingertips.

The fingers represent man’s possessiveness, therefore, the commandment “LO TIKPOHTS ET YADCHA MAI’ACHICHA HA’EVYON” [You shall not close your hand against your destitute brother] (Devarim 15:7). During the Priestly Blessing, these fingers of the hand are spread apart, the open fingers serving as a conduit for the blessing. Because the Shechinah rests between their fingers during the blessing, the Kohanim must be enwrapped within their Tallit.

From where did Aharon obtain this extraordinary love for the people of Israel? Apparently, Aharon was imbued with part of HaShem, the Shechinah of HaKadosh Baruch Hu was within him and he thus projected his endless feelings for Ahavat Yisrael. For that is the true feeling of HaShem towards His Chosen People-Am Yisrael.

May we be zocheh to have our share of that feeling in our love for every Jew.