

CONGREGATION KODIMOH

29 OAKLAND STREET
SPRINGFIELD 8, MASSACHUSETTS

Feb. 29, 1956

NORMAN LAMM, RABBI

Dear Friend:

This letter is intended for you in your capacity as a "Kohan". As such, you are not only heir to a glorious and magnificent tradition, but you are privileged to bear the responsibility of acting as a Kohen functionally as well.

One of the most important and beautiful functions of the Kohen in modern times is the "Birchas Kohanim" - the blessing of Israel as pronounced by the descendants of Aaron. This blessing is pronounced, as you know, on all major holidays. And since we are soon approaching the Passover festival, I take the privilege of approaching you about a matter I have been considering for some time now, and in which you may be personally involved.

For many years now, American Orthodox synagogues have been discouraging Kohanim who do not observe the Sabbath from performing this all-important Mitzvah. As a result, the Kohanim who do participate are growing older in age and fewer in numbers. And this beautiful, elegant and inspiring part of our holiday services is gradually facing extinction.

I, for one, feel that something should be done to retain this sacred tradition. I do so while recognizing the fact that a good number of our Kohanim are, for one reason or another; not Sabbath observers, and without in the least encouraging or sanctioning this non-observance.

Some months ago, I presented a paper (soon to be published) to the Halacha (Jewish Law) Commission of the Rabbinical Council of America, of which I am a member, outlining the legal aspects of the problem. The members of the Commission unanimously agreed with me as to my conclusion. The following is therefore authoritatively in accordance with Jewish Laws.

All Kohanim should participate in the "Birchas Kohanim". Even if he not be a Sabbath observer, the Kohen may, and is required, to pronounce the blessing over his fellow-Jews.

ACCORDINGLY, I RESPECTFULLY INVITE YOU TO COOPERATE IN THE REVITALIZATION OF THIS SACRED AND BEAUTIFUL TRADITION.

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I will be more than glad to answer any questions that may occur to you concerning this matter. Furthermore, we are arranging for Mr. Pollak or myself, together with a respected "practicing" Kohen of our congregation, to hold a short and informal session with those who wish to cooperate with us and want to learn the procedure of the "Birchas Kohanim". This lecture will take place in the Kodimoh vestry on Sunday, March 11, 1956, at 1.00 P. M. - so that you may be ready to perform this sacred tradition during the Passover Holiday.

Please be kind enough to contact me, or my office, as soon as possible to let us know if the time and hour is convenient and if you plan to attend.

Finally, let me remind you that your cooperation will: give you a positive sense of active participation in Jewish life in a manner that others cannot duplicate; contribute to the beautifying of our services at Kodimoh; justify the noble tradition you bear as a descendant of Aaron, first High-Priest of Israel; and make of your birthright not only a theoretical privilege but a practical responsibility as well.

And what, ultimately, can be nobler and finer than blessing your fellow-Jews? I feel sure that you will not hesitate in volunteering as the instrument through which G-d Almighty gives His benediction to the entire House of Israel.

I want to thank you for your forbearance, and again ask you to contact me at once and notify me of your plans.

Cordially,

Norman Lamm
Rabbi Norman Lamm

s.