

A-107

Nasso - 1954 (June 5)

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1. One of the major parts of Sidra - Birchass Kohanim.  
The beauty, meaningfulness and holiness of the Blessings, plus their use as sacred blessing from ancient times to modern, have given them a place of honor and a cherished stature in Jewish life.
2. It is interesting to trace the development of the history of these B.K. Moses first relayed instructions of G-d to Aaron that he and his sons - i.e. all kohanim forever-bless I srael with this formula. The full blessing ~~is recit~~ was recited at its most dramatic moment in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem, on Yom Kippur, in the Holy of Holies, by none other than the High Priest - the Kohen Gadol. The K.G. would raise his hands in the way that Kohanim do when blessing - and ONLY kohanim are permitted to do so - and softly chant the blessing while his colleague-kohanim would chant the traditional melody with him. It was a heart-warming, inspiring scene. This would be repeated ~~each Sabbath~~ after the offerings of the Sacrifices and on all Festivals and Sabbaths.  
After the Temple was destroyed, the tradition of B.K. continued unabated. It was still recited, for a while, on every Sabbath. (Today, in Jerusalem, some synagogues still continue the tradition of B.K. every Shabbos). Later, it was eliminated from the Sabbath Services, only Yom Kippur and Festivals.
3. But the entire procedure, while continued, was rather different as performed in the Temple and as performed ~~in~~ outside the Temple, both during its existence and after its destruction. There are several differences, which are mentioned by the Talmud, between MIKDASH and G'VULIN.
4. But one of them is most fascinating, and goes far in telling us of the distinction between MIKDASH and G'VULIN, between holy and profane, between a place and a life which is sacred, and one which is secular. And that difference lay in the pronunciation of G-d's name. As all of us who can read Hebrew know, there is one Name of G-d - the most important - which is pronounced ADONAY but is actually written otherwise. In fact, we do not know its correct pronunciation at all, and any attempt to pronounce one way or another is only conjecture. The real pronunciation, the explicit Name of G-d Himself, the SHEM HA'MEFORASH, was once known to our ancestors, particularly to the Kohanim who served in the Temple, the MIKDASH. Since, however, the knowledge of the name was lost, and so today we refer to G-d as ADNY, which is a KINUI, i.e. a Divine Nickname, so to speak; one which, despite its sanctity, is not the full, real, explicit Name of G-d. And herein lay the difference: In MIKDASH - SHEM HA'MEFORASH; in G'VULIN - KINUI. Herein, indeed, lay the difference bet. a MIKDASH and G'VULIN. When one can pronounce the Blessings of G-d, and invoke G-d by His full and explicit Name, he creates for himself a MIKDASH. When you beat about the bush, and in invoking G-d refer to Him by KINUI, indirectly, then you are only BI'G'VULIN.
5. Just compare Jewish life of a century or two ago to our modern days. Perhaps we even have more universal Jewish education - which is not the case. Even conceded we have better pedagogic techniques - which is the case. Yet there was something about a Jewish community then which was holy, and something about our own which is coldly secular. Their life, we know, was centered about the MIKDASH, the beis-hamidrash and synagogue. Ours is GVULIN, outside the limits of sanctity. And what is the major consequence? - that they called G-d with the SHEM HA'MEFORASH, and we apply the weakened KINUI. They were direct, frank, straight and forthright in their religious principles. We are indirect, subtle, apologetic and shy in our religion. They were open, explicit Jews. We are silent, ~~stuttering~~ Jews.
6. I, for one, do not believe that to be a Jew you have to tag a label on your lapel saying so. I am not one of those who believes that without sporting a beard one is not a full, traditional Torah Jew. But I still admire those who do. Agree or not, there is some sterling quality of pride and self-respect in the Jew who wears a beard because of the SHEM HAMFORASH - I am a Jew, the servant of G-d, here, my friend, is the beard to prove that I'm a Jew, and just what-are-you-going-to-do-about-it. Some of us, when we even see a bearded patriarchal Jew will walk across the street. Not that we're ashamed of our Jewishness - no one ever admits to that - but KINUI....

7. No, a MIKDASH type of J. life would never tolerate the cringing KINUI type Jewishness we call a blessing. For indeed we do overuse the KINUI.

I wonder if you have ever noticed a truly orthodox Jew wearing a yarmelke while eating in company of people who never saw one. I believe a best-seller could be written about the fantastic imaginative reasons offered by the poor chap who would like to wear one but feels somewhat self-conscious about it. Some suddenly suffer from incipient baldness and the doctor ordered skull-caps. Others have sentimental reasons. Got it from my great-grandfather's uncle. Another will constantly fidget with his hand going over his hesdas if brushing it - an attempt to disguise it. Why, oh why, not admit the real reason (YARMALKE - Y'REI MALKHUSSA - fear of Heaven, form respect G-d).

8. Kashruth - offer reason hygienic. True enough that kosher not unhealthy, but only KINUI. SH.HAMF.-Torah says so. K'DUSHAH.

9. Sabbath - KINUI: social good. SH.H.: Torah - EIDUS L'BRIAS HA'OLAM

10. And yet the achievement of that high status where we use SH.H. & not K. is not too easy. The remaking of GV. into MK., the substitution of K. by SH.H., requires certain conditions before they can be accomplished. How can this openness & directness be achieved?

11. Story by R. Tarfon, one of last of great Rabbis to see the Temple. Destroyed in his youth. Companion and disputant of R. Akiva. In his old age, R.T., reminiscing about his youth, says, MA'ASEH VE'HAYISSI OMED IM ACHAI HA'KOHANIM BA'SHURAH, VE'HITEISSI OZNI KLAPEI KOHEN GADOL, U'SH'MATIV SHE'OMAR BE'SOCH NE'IMOS ECHAV HA'KOHANIM. In this recollection of his last visit to the Temple on Y.K. as a youngster who happened to be a Kohen, R. Tarfon gives us the 3 prerequisites for SH.H., for living a life centered about MK.

a) mutual respect and pride in your own religion: KOHANIM stand, unbending B'SHURAH, all in line, and not trying to outdo and ~~show~~ outshow one another.

b) willingness to learn from religious leaders: HITEISI OZNI KLAPEI KOHEN GADOL, didn't imagine that the K.G. is an old-fashioned over-serious old man...

c) harmony amongst Jews: B'SOCH NEIMOS ECHAV HA'KOHANIM: no discord, petty rivalry.

12. This then, is the method for preparing the ground for SH.H., for a new-old attitude of fearlessness, religious pride & courage, and spiritual forthrightness. This is the way of transforming a house into a home, a home into a Temple. Let us pursue this task of sacredness by centering our lives anew about G-dliness, by mutual respect, by a new willingness to learn, and by a resolve to live in accord and harmony. Let us, in short, invoke G-d by the Name which He prefers.