

“אשר קדשנו בקדושתו של אהרן”

Birchas Kohanim: 3 Verses, 15 words and 60 letters

To nullify by sixty-fold the six hours

Klal Yisroel spent by the Cheit HaEigel

In our Parsha, Parshas Naso, we learn about the mitzvah of Birchas Kohanim as the Torah says (Bamidbar 6:22), “וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, דבר אל אהרן ואל בניו לאמר, כה תברכו את בני ישראל אמור להם, יברכך ה' וישמרך, יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחנך, ישא ה' פניו אליך וישם לך שלום”, “ושמו את שמי על בני ישראל ואני אברכם.”

'And Hashem said to Moshe: Speak to Aharon and his sons saying: So shall you bless Bnei Yisroel, Say to them: May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you. May Hashem turn His countenance to you and establish peace for you. And you shall place My name on Bnei Yisroel, and I will bless them.'

As we know, prior to Birchas Kohanim, the Kohanim recite a Bracha. The text of this Bracha is brought down in the Gemara in Sotah (39a) and is codified L'Halacha in the Tur and Shulchan Aruch (O.C.128:11) as follows: “ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו בקדושתו של אהרן וצונו לברך את עמו ישראל באהבה.”

The wording of this Bracha demands clarification. Why did Chazal alter the standard text used in all other brachos that states “אשר קדשנו במצוותיו” ‘who has sanctified us with His commandments’ by not only omitting but replacing the word “במצוותיו” with the words “בקדושתו של אהרן” ‘who has sanctified us with the Kedusha of Aharon’?

A wonderful explanation on the text

“אשר קדשנו בקדושתו של אהרן”

As we begin, let us publicize a fascinating explanation of the דובר שלום found in the Siddur Otzar HaTefilos (Chelek Beis by Birchas Kohanim). Earlier, in Parshas Shemini during the חנוכת המשכן, the verse (VaYikrah 9:22) states,

“וישא אהרן את ידיו אל העם ויברכם” - ‘and Aharon lifted his hand toward the nation and he blessed them.’ Rashi states that the blessing Aharon gave them was none other than the 3 verses of Birchas Kohanim (יברכך, יאר, ישא).

In fact, as explained in Toras Kohanim (Parshas Shmini Os 17), “באותה שעה זכה במתנות כהונה, וזכה בנשיאת כפים לו, ולדורותיו עד שיחיו המתים” It was specifically at the חנוכת המשכן when Aharon blessed the nation, that he merited the gift of Kehuna, and was given the privilege to conduct Birchas Kohanim for himself and all future generations.

We see from here that Aharon had Ruach HaKodesh already by the חנוכת המשכן to bless Klal Yisroel on his own volition with the words of Birchas Kohanim. Due to his own initiative, he later merited to be commanded by Hashem to continue the priestly blessings for all future generations. Therefore, explains the “דובר שלום”, Chazal chose to alter the text of the Bracha from the normative text of “אשר קדשנו” ‘who has sanctified us with His commandments’ with “אשר קדשנו בקדושתו של אהרן” - ‘who has sanctified us with the Kedusha of Aharon’ for Aharon deserves the credit for voluntarily blessing Bnei Yisroel with this Bracha.

Aharon merits Birchas Kohanim by Being Moser Nefesh for Klal Yisroel

With unlimited pathways of Torah exegesis, it is possible to offer a novel approach to explain why Chazal altered the Bracha to “אשר קדשנו בקדושתו של אהרן”. With a deeper appreciation for the true events that occurred on the day of חנוכת המשכן, we will arrive at a new understanding as to the incredible power hidden in Birchas Kohanim, Aharon’s direct role in this blessing, and the reason for altering the text of the Bracha to credit Aharon with his role.

Let us first understand an underlying theme that occurred during חנוכת המשכן.

In Parshas Shmini (VaYikra 9:1-4), the Torah states:

”ויהי ביום השמיני קרא משה לאהרן ולבניו ולזקני ישראל, ויאמר אל אהרן קח לך עגל בן בקר לחטאת ואיל לעולה תמימים והקרב לפני ה'. ואל בני ישראל תדבר לאמר, קחו שעיר עזים לחטאת ועגל וכבש בני שנה תמימים לעולה... כי היום ה' נראה אליכם“.

And it was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon and his sons and the Elders of Yisroel. And he said to Aharon, take for yourself a young calf for a Chatas, and a ram for an Olah, and sacrifice them before Hashem. And to Bnei Yisroel say the following, take a goat for a Chatas, and a sheep in it's first year, unblemished, as an Olah... For today the glory of Hashem will appear to you.

Rashi explains the purpose of Aharon being instructed to sacrifice a calf:

”קח לך עגל להודיע שמכפר לו הקב“ה על ידי עגל זה על מעשה העגל שעשה. כי היום ה' נראה אליכם - להשרות שכינתו במעשה ידיכם... קרב אל המזבח - שהיה אהרן בוש וירא לגשת, אמר לו משה למה אתה בוש לכך נבחרת“.

Moshe instructs Aharon to sacrifice a calf as a sign that Hashem has forgiven him for his role in the Golden Calf, the Cheit HaEigel. Moshe's instruction concludes with 'For today the glory of Hashem will appear to you' to demonstrate that (once Hashem has forgiven you) Hashem is now ready to rest his Shechina upon your handiwork. When Aharon shows hesitation, Moshe reassures him that you, Aharon, were specifically chosen for this task.

Aharon then brings all the sacrifices as instructed and follows with (VaYikra 9:22-24):

”וישא אהרן את ידיו אל העם ויברכם [בברכת הכהנים כנ"ל], וירד מעשות החטאת והעולה והשלמים, ויבוא משה ואהרן אל אהל מועד, ויצאו ויברכו את העם, וירא כבוד ה' אל כל העם. ותצא אש מלפני ה' ותאכל על המזבח את העולה ואת החלבים, וירא כל העם וירונו ויפלו על פניהם“.

And Aharon lifts us his hands to the nation and blesses them (with the words of Birchas Kohanim as we mentioned earlier). He returns from his Avoda. Moshe and Aharon come to the Ohel Mo'ed and bless the nation. Subsequently, the Divine presence of Hashem appears to the nation, a fire consumes the sacrifices, and the people see, rejoice and prostrate themselves before Hashem.

And Rashi explains:

”ויצאו ויברכו את העם. אמרו (תהלים צ-יז) ויהי גועם ה' אלקינו עלינו, יהי רצון שתשרה שכינה במעשה ידיכם. לפי שכל ז' ימי המילואים שהעמידו משה למשכן ושימש בו ופרקו בכל יום, לא שרתה בו שכינה, והיו ישראל נכלמים ואומרים למשה, משה רבינו כל הטורח שטרחנו שתשרה שכינה בינינו, ונדע שנתכפר לנו עון העגל, לכך אמר להם (ויקרא ט-ו) זה הדבר אשר צוה ה' תעשו וירא אליכם כבוד ה', אהרן אחי כדאי וחשוב ממני, שעל ידי קרבנותי ועבודתו תשרה שכינה בכם, ותדעו שהמקום בחר בו“.

Providing some background information, Rashi explains: Before the eighth day, Moshe spent the seven preceding days, constructing and dismantling the Mishkan every day with the hope that Hashem would rest his Shechina on the Mishkan. Were the Divine presence to descend, it would be an indication that Hashem has forgiven Bnei Yisroel for the Cheit HaEigel. However, Moshe was unsuccessful and Klal Yisroel felt dejected. Then Moshe suggested, how much more worthy Aharon was for this specific task. With his brother's sacrifices and priestly work, Hashem would surely rest his Shechina among Klal Yisroel, and all would know that Hashem has (forgiven them for the Cheit HaEigel and) chosen to dwell among them.

It emerges quite clearly that all the priestly work that Aharon performed that day was directly related to the atonement for the Cheit HaEigel. His first sacrifice, a calf, was to atone for the Golden Calf. All of the supplications that both Moshe and Aharon prayed for was so Hashem would demonstrate to Klal Yisroel that He in fact has forgiven them for the Cheit HaEigel and was now prepared to rest His Shechina among them.

The Mishkan itself in Parshas Pekudei (Shmos 38:21) is identified as משכן העדות, the Mishkan of Testimony which Rashi, ad loc., intimates that the Mishkan itself serves as a testimony to Bnei Yisroel that Hashem has forgiven them for the Golden Calf by the very fact that He now rested His Shechina among them.

Atonement for the Cheit HaEigel by the observance of the שלש רגלים

With this introduction, we can now delve into the hidden power of Birchas Kohanim.

In Parshas Balak (Bamidbar 24:1), the Torah states: **“וירא בלעם כי טוב בעיני ה' לברך את ישראל ולא הלך כפעם בפעם לקראת נחשים וישת אל המדבר פניו”**.

Bilaam saw that Hashem preferred to bless Klal Yisroel. So he chose not to go in the ways of divination as he had done before, but rather he turned toward the desert.

Rashi in explaining what is meant by Bilaam turning to the desert directs our attention to the words of the Targum that states: **“ושוי לקבל עגלא דעבדו ישראל במדברא”**.

In an effort to curse Bnei Yisroel, Bilaam HaRasha tried to direct Hashem's attention to the desert, the location of the sin of the Golden Calf. So what protected Klal Yisroel from Bilaam's truthful accusations?

The great and holy liturgical poet Rabbi Eliezer HaKalir authored for the second day of Pesach (Shacharis Shomne Esrei): **“יוקש אלה אלהיך אשר תעו בלעדי, יכפר אלה באלה הם מועדי”**. Klal Yisroel sinned by the Cheit HaEigel when they said (Shmos 32:4) **“אלה אלהיך ישראל”**. They will be atoned by observing the **שלוש רגלים** referenced by (VaYikra 23:2): **“אלה הם מועדי”**.

It is the observance of the three Yamim Tovim that atones for the sin of Golden Calf. In fact, even Bilaam's donkey tried to hint Klal Yisroel's defense to Bilaam. When Bilaam smote his donkey three times, the donkey responds: **“מה עשיתי לך כי הכיתני זה שלש רגלים”** - **“What have I done to you that you hit me three times?”** And Rashi points out the word **רגלים** is a reference to the Yamim Tovim which, if Klal Yisroel celebrates, will provide atonement for the Cheit HaEigel.

360 hours of the שלוש רגלים nullify sixty-fold the 6 hours by the Cheit HaEigel

Now, come and appreciate the wonders of Toras Hashem. In **“תורת היהודי הקדוש”** (Mo'adei Hashem pg 85), the Yid HaKadosh points out the donkey's reference to Klal Yisroel's atonement for the Cheit HaEigel by the observance of the **שלוש רגלים**, but then enlightens us with how exactly the zechus of **שלוש רגלים** nullifies the Cheit HaEigel. He explains that the total number of holy hours encompassed in the **שלוש רגלים** act to nullify by sixty times the hours spent by Klal Yisroel by the Cheit HaEigel.

Describing the Cheit HaEigel, the Torah (Shmos 32:5) records: **“וירא אהרן ויבן מזבח לפניו ויקרא אהרן ויאמר חג לה' מחר”**

וישכימו ממחרת ויעלו עולות ויגשו שלמים, וישב העם לאכול ושתו ויקומו לצחק” - Aharon HaKohen saw and built an altar before him. And he called out and said that they would observe a chag the next day'. They awoke the next day, they brought Korbanos, then sat to eat and drink, and began to act with levity. It is explained that Klal Yisroel spent from the morning until noon with the Eigel, a total of 6 hours. At noon, Moshe arrived, broke the Luchos, and halted the Cheit HaEigel.

There is a well known rule in **איסור והיתר** called **ביטול בששים** (nullification of 1/60). **איסור** is nullified with sixty times the amount of **היתר**. Using this rule, in order to atone for the Cheit HaEigel, one would need to have 360 hours of **קדושה (היתר)** to nullify the 6 hours of the Cheit HaEigel (**איסור**). Therefore, says the Yid Hakadosh, in the **שלוש רגלים** (with 7 days of Pesach, 1 day of Shavu'os, and 7 days of Sukkos) we have a total of 15 days, or 360 (15x24) hours which is exactly 60 times the 6 hours spent by Klal Yisroel by the Golden Calf!

To recap, Bilaam set out to curse Klal Yisroel and hoped to direct Hashem's attention to the Cheit HaEigel. Yet, while traveling with his donkey, he hit his donkey 3 times. Bilaam's donkey responds, **“מה עשיתי לך כי הכיתני”** **“Why have you hit me these three times (רגלים)?”** The donkey was referencing Bilaam's desire to destroy a nation that would ultimately celebrate the **שלוש רגלים**. With their total hours of observance (360 hours), they would nullify their involvement in the Cheit HaEigel. Hence, Bilaam would be unsuccessful with his mission.

Birchas Kohanim: 3 Verses, 15 words, 60 letters

To understand the hidden power of Birchas Kohanim, Hashem has enlightened me with the following insight: Based on the Yid HaKadosh's chiddush, we can now understand the breakdown of Birchas Kohanim into 3 Verses, 15 words and 60 letters and how this Bracha plays a pivotal role in the atonement for the Cheit HaEigel.

The 3 verses pertain to the **שלוש רגלים**. The 15 words correspond to the 15 days contained within the three festivals, and the 60 letters teach us that the hours within these 15 days, nullify, by 60 times (15x24 = 360), the 6 hours spent on the Cheit HaEigel.

Furthermore, contained within the 3 verses of Birchas Kohanim are a total of 6 blessings (there are two blessings per verse), each of which offsets an hour of the time spent with the Cheit HaEigel.

And now we can understand why Hashem commanded Aharon and his Sons to bless Klal Yisroel. Prior to the Cheit HaEigel, blessings descended directly without the intervention of a shliach. After the Cheit, the pipelines of שבע were blocked for those involved in the sin. Thus, HaShem commanded the blessing to descend via the Kohanim, descendants of Shevet Levi, who did not sin with the Eigel.

By the חנוכת המשכן, after Aharon brought his sacrifices and performed the priestly work which in itself atoned for his role in the Cheit HaEigel, he blessed Klal Yisroel with Birchas Kohanim with it's hidden powerful messages; intimating to them the significance of observing the שלש רגלים to atone for their involvement in the Cheit.

**“Who has sanctified us with the Kedusha of Aharon”
Who was Moser Nefesh to save Klal Yisroel**

Continuing with this reasoning, we have a deeper understanding in Chazal’s alteration of the Bracha preceding Birchas Kohanim. Rashi in Parshas Shmini stated: “שהיה אהרן בוש וירא לגשת, אמר לו משה למה אתה בוש לכך נבחרת”. Aharon was embarrassed and hesitated to come close. Moshe Rabbeinu retorted, Why are you timid? For this, you are chosen.” Aharon was mortified to offer a calf as a sacrifice due to his apparent role in the Cheit HaEigel. What then was Moshe’s response?

The Chasam Sofer (Likutim) and Yismach Moshe (Parshas Shmini) both suggest that Aharon merited to this elite status via his mesirus nefesh for Klal Yisroel during the Cheit HaEigel as described in the Medrash (VaYikra Rabbah 10:3). The Medrash explains that Klal Yisroel first went to Chur, a Navi, and beseeched him to create an idol for them. Chur refused and was killed.

The people then turned to Aharon HaKohen. Aharon pondered what to do. If I refuse and they kill me as well (and thereby kill a Kohen and Navi on the same day), they will be subject to exile as dictated in Eicha (2:20), “אם יהרג במקדש ה' כהן ונביא ומיד הם גוליון”... - Aharon then reasoned, if Klal Yisroel builds the Eigel, they will incur incredible punishment. Whereas if I build it, I will take the blame and Klal Yisroel will be spared. Hashem then says, due to your Mesirus Nefesh, I specifically choose you and your sons from all of Shevet Levi to serve as my Kohanim.

Explain the Chasam Sofer and Yismach Moshe, Moshe asked Aharon, “Why are you embarrassed? This is exactly the reason you were chosen to be Kohein Gadol” – because of your direct Mesirus Nefesh on behalf of Klal Yisroel. You elected to spare Klal Yisroel from enormous punishment by creating the Eigel yourself and shifting the blame to you. It is directly because of your role in the Cheit that you were granted the Kehuna!

It seems to reason that Aharon HaKohen was thus granted the Ruach hakodesh to bless Klal Yisroel with Birchas Kohanim during the חנוכת המשכן, prior to ever being commanded to do so. Lest others think Aharon had a real culpatory role in the Cheit HaEigel, Hashem granted him the opportunity to play the leading role once again and publicly bless the nation with a bracha that holds the secrets to forever atone for that grievous sin on the very day when Klal Yisroel obtained forgiveness for the Cheit HaEigel and was zoche to Divine presence.

It becomes obvious then, why the text of the bracha stresses “אשר קדשנו בקדושתו של אהרן”- ‘who has sanctified us with the Kedusha of Aharon’ for it was Aharon that was Moser Nefesh for Klal Yisroel during the Cheit HaEigel and is thereby zoche to forever be the sheliach for this Bracha.



To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com