

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter III: Lech Lecha (Gen. 12:1–17:27)

### Essay 7. A blessing for Israel and the priests

**ויקרא** פרק ג' דחולין, ישמעאל פהנא מסייע פהני, דמוקים לה לברכת פהנים במקום ברכה דישראל דתניא "זה תברכו את בני ישראל", למדנו ברכה לישראל מפי פהנים, לכהנים עצמן לא למדנו. כשהוא אומר "ואני אברכם" הני אומר פהנים מברכין לישראל והקב"ה מברך לכהנים. ר' עקיבא אומר הפהנים מברכים לישראל והקב"ה מסכים על ידם כדכתיב "ואני אברכם"—לישראל, וברכה לכהנים מנא ליה? נפקא ליה מ"ואברכה מברכיה" עכ"ל.

### **It is written in chapter 3 of tractate Chullin:**

**Yishmael the priest supports the priests, in that he establishes the blessing for the priests in the [same] place, [the same verse, that one finds] the blessing of Israel, [indicating that they receive the same blessing]. As it is taught [in a *Baraita*, regarding the verse]: “Thus you shall bless the children of Israel” (Num. 6:23). **Rabbi Yishmael says: We learn [from this verse about] a blessing for Israel from the mouth of the priests, [but] we have not learned [about a blessing] for the priests themselves. When it says [afterward with regard to the priests]: “[And they shall put My name upon the children of Israel,] and I will bless them” (Num. 6:27) you must [interpret that latter verse to] say: [The] priests bless Israel, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, blesses the priests. [I.e., Rabbi Yishmael interprets “and I will bless them” as “I will bless the priests.”]****

**Rabbi Akiva says: the priests bless Israel and the Holy One, Blessed be He, agrees with them, as it is written: “And I will bless them”—I.e., Israel. From where [does Rabbi Akiva derive] the blessing for the priests? He derives it from “And I will bless those who bless you” (Gen. 12:3).**

- Chullin 49a

יש לדקדק מהו סיוע זה שר' ישמעאל מסייע לכהנים, דמה חילוק יש ללמוד ברכה לכהנים מקרא ד"ואני אברכם" או ללמוד מקרא ד"ואברכה מברכיה".

**It is necessary to analyze what this support is by which the Gemara says Rabbi Yishmael supports the priests? What difference is there whether to learn the blessing for the**

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priests from the verse “And I will bless them,” or learning it from the verse “And I will bless those who bless you”? Both Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva agree that the priests receive a blessing from G-d, so why does the Gemara say that Rabbi Yishmael supports the priests?

וַיִּשַׁר לֵאמֹר דְּמַקְרָא דְּנֹאבְרָכָה מְבָרְכִיהָ" לֹא לְמַדְנֵהּ אֲלָא שְׂאֵם תְּתַקְיֵים אוֹתָהּ הַבְּרָכָה עַל חֲבִירוֹ שֶׁתְּבוֹא אַף לוֹ הַטּוֹבָה הַהִיא, עַל דָּרָךְ הַמִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל חֲבִירוֹ וְהוּא צָרִיךְ לְאוֹתוֹ דְּבָר הוּא נִעְנֶה תַּחֲלָה כְּלוֹמֵר דְּוִקָא כְּשֶׁתְּפַלְתּוּ מְקוּבְּלַת אַף הוּא נִעְנֶה, אֲבָל כְּשֶׁתְּפַלְתָּה עַל חֲבִירוֹ אֵינָה מְקוּבְּלַת עַל חֲבִירוֹ, אַף עָלָיו לֹא תִּהְיֶה מְקוּבְּלַת שְׂלֵא תְּבוֹא לוֹ אוֹתָהּ הַטּוֹבָה, שֶׁהָרִי אֵין לוֹ בַּר קְדִימָה עַל חֲבִירוֹ, וְאַף עַל פִּי שְׂנֵיהּ הַמִּתְפַּלֵּל וְהַמְבָרֵךְ יֵשׁ לוֹ זְכוּת אוֹתָהּ מִצָּנָה שֶׁל גְּמִילוּת חֲסָדִים שֶׁעָשָׂה עַל חֲבִירוֹ, מִפְּלֵ מְקוֹם שֶׁכָּר מִצּוֹת בְּהֵאֵי עֲלָמָא לִיכָא.

**It can be said that from the verse, “And I will bless those who bless you” we have learned only that if one’s blessing upon his fellow is fulfilled, that same goodness will also come to [the one making the blessing]. This is in the manner of the teaching, “One who prays for his fellow, and he himself needs that thing, is answered first.”<sup>1</sup> That is to say, specifically when his prayer is accepted, he too is answered.**

**But when the prayer for his fellow is not accepted upon his fellow, then it also won’t be accepted upon him, so that the same goodness will not come to him, for he has no precedence over his fellow. Even though the one who prays or blesses has the merit of that mitzvah of loving-kindness that he did for his fellow, nevertheless the reward for performance of mitzvot is not in this world.<sup>2</sup>**

וְעַל כֵּן חָנְנוּ לְפָרֵשׁ כֵּן שֶׁהָרִי "נֹאבְרָכָה מְבָרְכִיהָ" אָמְרוּ ו"ל שְׂאֵפִילוֹ גוֹי שֶׁבָרַךְ אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִתְבָּרַךְ, וְכִי תִיֶסַק אֲדַעְתִּין שֶׁהָגוֹי יִתְבָּרַךְ וְלֹא הִישָׁרְאֵל, אֲלָא וְדָאֵי שְׂרָצָה לֵאמֹר כְּשֶׁתְּבָרַכָה שֶׁל הָגוֹי תוֹעִיל לְיִשְׂרָאֵל אִזּוֹ יִתְבָּרַךְ אֲפִילוֹ הָגוֹי. וַיֵּשׁ לְנוּ רָמֵז לְפִירוּשׁ הַזֶּה מִדְּסַמִּיךְ "נֹאבְרָכָה מְבָרְכִיהָ" אֲצֵל "נִהְיֶה בְּרָכָה", כְּלוֹמֵר כְּשֶׁתְּהִיֶה הַבְּרָכָה עַל הַמִּתְבָּרֵךְ אִזּוֹ "נֹאבְרָכָה מְבָרְכִיהָ", וְאִם כֵּן לֵר' עֲקִיבָא שְׂאֵנֵה לְמַדִּים הַבְּרָכָה לְפָהֲגִים מ'נֹאבְרָכָה מְבָרְכִיהָ", אִם לֹא תִתְקַיֵּם הַבְּרָכָה שֶׁל הַפָּהֲגִים עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל גַּם הַפָּהֲגִים לֹא יִתְבָּרְכוּ, אֲבָל לֵר' יִשְׁמַעְאֵל דְּנִפְקָא לִיהֵ מ'נֹאבְרָכָה מְבָרְכִיהָ", תִּכְרַךְ שֶׁבָרַכְוּ הֵם אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל הַקַּב"ה מְבָרְכֶם לְפָהֲגִים בֵּין תְּתַקְיֵים בְּרָכְתֶם עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל בֵּין לֹא תִתְקַיֵּים, וְזֶהוּ יִשְׁמַעְאֵל כְּהֵנָּה מְסִיעַ כְּהֵנָּה.

**We are forced to explain so, for regarding “And I will bless those who bless you,” [the rabbis] of blessed memory said that even a gentile who blesses Israel is blessed.<sup>3</sup> Could it enter your mind that the gentile will be blessed and not the Israelite? Rather, certainly it means that when the blessing of the gentile benefits Israel, then even the gentile will be blessed. We have a hint to this explanation from the juxtaposition of “And I will bless those who bless you” to “and you shall be a blessing,”<sup>4</sup> as if to say, when the blessing rests upon the one being blessed, then “I will bless those who bless you.”**

<sup>1</sup> Bava Kamma 92a.  
<sup>2</sup> Kiddushin 40b.  
<sup>3</sup> Tosafot to Chullin 49a.  
<sup>4</sup> Gen. 12:2.

If so, according to Rabbi Akiva, that we learn the blessing for the priests from “And I will bless those who bless you,” if the blessing of the priests upon Israel does not take effect, then the priests also will not be blessed.

But for Rabbi Yishmael, who derives it from “And I shall bless them,” as soon as they bless Israel, the Holy One, Blessed be He, blesses the priests, whether or not their blessing is fulfilled upon Israel. This is the meaning of: “Yishmael the priest supports the priests.”

אי נמי בדרף אחר שפתיבו התוספות שם (בד"ה והקב"ה מספים על ידם), ולר' ישמעאל לא איצטרף קרא להכי דפשיטא דמספים פיון שצוה להם לברך עכ"ל. נמצא לפי זה דיש מחלוקת אחר בין ר' ישמעאל לר' עקיבא באם הקב"ה מספים, דלר' ישמעאל פשיטא ליה ומשום הכי איימר ליה קרא ד"נאני אברכם", ולר' עקיבא מספקא ליה.

Alternatively, in another manner of interpretation, as Tosafot wrote there (Chullin 49a, at the text that begins “and the Holy One, Blessed be He, agrees with them”): “According to Rabbi Yishmael, the verse is not needed for this [teaching], as it is obvious that [G-d] agrees, since He commanded them to bless [Israel].”

We find that according to this, there is another dispute between Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva as to whether the Holy One, Blessed be He, agrees with the priests blessing Israel. For according to Rabbi Yishmael, it is obvious to him that once G-d commanded the priests to bless, He is automatically fully aligned with them. Therefore, the verse of “And I will bless them” is superfluous for [Rabbi Yishmael].

However, for Rabbi Akiva, there is a doubt whether G-d necessarily “agrees” with or participates in the priestly blessing just because He commanded it. Therefore, he reads “And I will bless them” not as superfluous, but as necessary to confirm that G-d indeed joins and ratifies the priestly blessing.

ובמדרש על פסוק "פה תברכו את בני ישראל", אמרו ישראל לפני הקב"ה אתה אומר לפהגים שיברכו אותנו. אין אנו צריכים אלא לברכותיך ולהיותנו מתברכים מפיד. אמר להם הקב"ה אף על פי שאמרתי לפהגים שיהיו מברכין אתכם עמהם אני עומד ומברך אתכם עכ"ל. ומעתה אם אנו מפרשים "נאני אברכם" פר' עקיבא דאצטרף קרא למימר נאני אברכם לישראל, אין זה שבח אלא גריעות לכהנים, שהרי לפי דעת המדרש ישראל אינם חושבים ברכתם של פהגים לכולם. אמנם אם נאמר פר' ישמעאל ד"נאני אברכם" לכהנים, אם כן ברכת פהגים חשובה מאד על ישראל ובודאי שהקב"ה יספים, וישראל אינם מתרעמים פלום על מה שצוה לפהגים לברכם, וזהו ישמעאל פהגא מסייע פהגי וכו'.

**In the Midrash on the verse “Thus shall you bless the children of Israel,” they said:**

Israel said before the Holy One, Blessed be He, “You tell the priests to bless us? We need only Your blessings, to be blessed from Your mouth.” He said to them: “Even though I told the priests that they should bless you, I stand with them and bless you.”

- Num. Rabbah 11:2

Now, if we interpret “And I shall bless them” as Rabbi Akiva does, that the verse is needed to say “And I shall bless them” referring to Israel, this is not praise but a degradation

**for the priests, for according to the view of the Midrash, when Israel said, “We need only Your blessings,” that means they consider the blessing of the priests as nothing!** I.e., this doesn't imply contempt, but questions if the blessing is really from G-d, why involve human intermediaries at all?

**But if we say as Rabbi Yishmael, that “And I shall bless them” refers to the priests, then the priestly blessing is very significant upon Israel, and surely the Holy One, Blessed be He, agrees; and Israel have no grievance at all about His commanding the priests to bless them.** I.e., then Israel would recognize that the priestly blessing is genuinely powerful, that it activates an immediate Divine blessing upon the Kohanim themselves. **This is the meaning of “Yishmael, a priest, supports the priests,” etc.**

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