

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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## Chapter XXXV: Naso (Num. 4:21–7:89)

### Essay 9. Secrets of the priestly blessing

**בתרא** פרק ה' אָמר רבָּה ברַּב חנא אָמר לי הוּא טייעָא תא וְאָחוּי לָךְ הֵיכָא דְנִשְׁקָא אַרְעָא וּרְקִיעָא אַהֲדָדִי. אַזְוֵלִי וְחִזְוֵאִי, דְעָבִיד כּוּי כּוּי. שְׁקִילְתָּא לְסִלְתָּאִי וְאַנְחַתִּיהָ בְכוּוְתָא דְרְקִיעָא. אַדְמַצְ[לִי] נָא בְעֵיתָהּ וְלָא אֲשַׁכַּחְתִּיהָ. אָמְרִי אֵיכָא גַנְבִי הָכָא. אָמַר לִי גַלְגְּלָא דְרְקִיעָא הוּא דְהִדְר נָטַר עַד לְמַחַר כִּי הִשְׁתָּא וּמִשְׁכַּחַת לָהּ ע"כ.

In tractate Bava **Batra**, chapter 5, we read:

**And Rabba bar bar Chana said: A certain Arab said to me: “Come, I will show you where the earth and Heaven touch each other.” I followed him and saw it was made full of apertures. I took my basket and placed it in a aperture of Heaven. After praying, I searched for [the basket] but did not find it.<sup>1</sup> I said to him: “Are there thieves here?” He said to me: “This is the heavenly sphere that is turning around; wait here until tomorrow and you will find it.”**

- Bava Batra 74a

גוֹזַמָּא זֶה רוֹמְזַת שְׁפִיר עֲנֵן בְּרַפְת כְּהֻנִים, דְּאִיתָא בְּשִׁלְחֵן עֲרוּךְ אֲרַח חַיִּים (סִימֵן קכ"ח סְעִיף י"ב) שְׁכֻשְׁהִפְהֻנִים מְבָרְכִים אֶת הָעָם מִתְכוּוֹנִים לְעֲשׂוֹת חֲמֻשָּׁה אֲוִירִים, בֵּין שְׁתֵּי אֲצְבָעוֹת לְשְׁתֵּי אֲצְבָעוֹת אֲוִיר אֶחָד, וּבֵין אֲצְבָע לְגוֹדֵל וּבֵין גּוֹדֵל לְגוֹדֵל, וּפּוֹרְשִׁים כְּפִיָּהֶם כְּדִי שְׁיִהְיֶה תוֹךְ כְּפִיָּהֶם כְּלָפֵי הָאֲרֶז וְאַחֲרָי דִּיהֶם כְּלָפֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם. וְגוֹדֵעַ כִּי סוּד בְּרַפְת כְּהֻנִים הוּא גְדוֹל וְרַם, שְׁבִשְׁבִילוֹ תִשְׁרָה הַשְׁכִּינָה עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל, כְּדַכְתִּיב "וְשָׂמוּ אֶת־שְׁמִי" וְכוּ' וְהָאֲרֶז מְלֵאָה כְּבוֹד ה', וְזֶה מְקַרֵי דְנִשְׁקָא אַרְעָא וּרְקִיעָא אַהֲדָדִי.

**This exaggerated statement nicely alludes to the matter of the priestly blessing, that it is brought in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim (siman 128, se'if 12), that when the priests bless the people, they intend to make five air spaces: between two fingers [i.e., pinky and ring fingers] and the other two fingers [i.e., middle and index fingers] is the first air space [on each hand], between the index finger and the thumb [is the second space on each hand], and between thumb and thumb.<sup>2</sup> They spread their palms so that the palms face the ground and the backs of their hands face Heaven.**

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<sup>1</sup> Read literally, “it” refers to the missing basket, but see the homiletical analysis below.

<sup>2</sup> I.e., the priest must be careful that his thumbs not touch each other, so that an air space remains there.

It's known that the esoteric secret of the priestly blessing is exceedingly great, that because of it, the Shechinah spreads out upon Israel, as it is written, "So shall they put My Name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them."<sup>3</sup> The Earth was filled with the glory of G-d, and this is called "where the earth and Heaven touch each other."

אזלי ונחזאי, דעביד כני פני, קלומר סלונות, דאמרינון במדרש על פסוק "פה תברכו", אמר הקב"ה על פי שאמרת לכהנים שיהיו מברכים אתכם, עמקם אני עומד ומברך אתכם. לפיכך הכהנים פורשים כפיהם לומר שהקב"ה עומד אחרינו, ולכך הוא "משגיח מן החלונות", מבין כתפותיהם של כהנים, "מציץ מן התרפים" מבין אצבעותיהם של כהנים. "התרפים" ה' תרפים. ועוד דרשינו טעם "אמור להם" מלא נא, קח אות הנא ושים אותה בתוך פה ויהיה "כנה" לשון סלון. כפיהם

**"I followed him and saw it was made full of apertures"—as if to say, “windows,” as it is said in the Midrash on the verse[s]:**

“Speak to Aaron and his sons: **Thus [פה] [coh]** shall you bless the people of Israel, **say [אמור] [amor]** to them: The L-rd bless you and protect you! May the L-rd deal kindly and graciously with you! May the L-rd bestow favor upon you and grant you peace!”<sup>4</sup>

**The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: Even though I have said to the priests that they should bless you, I am standing with them and blessing you. Therefore, the priests spread their palms to say that the Holy One, Blessed be He, stands behind us, and therefore He is “gazing through the window,”<sup>5</sup> i.e., between the shoulders of the priests, “Peering through the lattices,”<sup>6</sup> i.e., between the fingers of the priests.**

- Num. Rabbah 11:3

The word in Song of Songs “**the lattices**” [התרפים] can be homiletically interpreted as **five lattices**, i.e., the five air spaces spoken that are formed by the hands of the priests.<sup>7</sup>

**We also teach the reason that “say to them” in Num. 6:23 has the word “say” [אמור] spelled fully with a vav instead of being spelled אמר, is that one can take the letter vav and place it between the letters of the word פה [coh] [“thus”], and it will be the word כנה [cavah] [“aperture”], the language of “window.”<sup>8</sup>**

<sup>3</sup> Num. 6:27.

<sup>4</sup> Num. 6:23–26.

<sup>5</sup> Song of Songs 2:9.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Asher ben Jehiel (c. 1250–1327) (“the Rosh”) on Megillah 3:21; Jacob ben Asher (c. 1270–1340), Tur, Orach Chaim 128:1.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Karo (1488–1575), Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim 128:22.

"שקלתיה לסלתאי ואנסתיה בכורתא דרקייעא", שקלתי בדעתי כל צרכי מזונתי והנחתי שם, כלומר התפללתי לפני ה' על מזונתי כמו התפלות המיוחדות ל"עת רצון" הזה. ועקר זאת התפלה היא בעת שמסיימים הכהנים "שים שלום". ומיד שסיימתי תפילתי הייתי מבקש אם היתה עוד שם השכינה "ולא אשפחתיה", דאמרינו במדרש "דומה דודי לצבי" מה צבי זה מקיף ממקום למקום ומגדר לגדר ומאילן לאילן כך הקב"ה מדלג ומקפץ מנגוסת זו לנגוסת זו וכל כך למה כדי לברך את ישראל.

**"I took my basket and placed it in a aperture of Heaven." I weighed in my mind all my needs for food, and I placed them there, as if to say, I prayed before G-d for my food, as the special prayers for this "favorable moment."<sup>9</sup> The essence of this prayer is at the time that the priests conclude their blessing of the congregation when the prayer leader begins the blessing, "*Sim shalom*," viz, "Grant peace, goodness, and blessing, favor, kindness and compassion upon us and upon all Israel, Your people."<sup>10</sup> Immediately upon concluding my prayer, I would ask if the Shechinah was still there, "but I did not find It," interpreting "It" not as the missing basket, but the Shechinah. This is as it says in a Midrash, "My Beloved is like a deer,"<sup>11</sup> just as a deer circles from place to place, and from fence to fence, and from tree to tree. Thus, the Holy One, Blessed be He, skips and jumps from one synagogue to another. Why is this so? To bless Israel."<sup>12</sup>**

"אמרי ליה איפא גנבי הכא", שמא יש כאן עונות שגורמים סילוק שכינה? אמר ליה לאו, גלגלא דרקייעא הוא כך דרכו תמיד להיות דולג וקופץ. "דהדר נטר לה עד למחר כי השתא ומשפחת לה", דהינו למחר כי השתא שייכרכו הכהנים את העם פעם אחרת ומצאנה שם, שלפי הדין הכהנים היה להם לישא את פניהם בתפלת שחרית של כל יום ורק מטעם קלוש נחבטלה זאת המצנה.

**"I said to him: 'Are there thieves here?'"—Possibly there are sins here that cause a departure of the Shechinah? He said to him, "No, this is the heavenly sphere that is turning around." This is its nature, always to be skipping and jumping. "Wait here until tomorrow and you will find it"—That is, tomorrow, the priests will bless the people another time, and It, the Shechinah, will be found there. According to the law, the priests should raise their palms in prayer during the morning prayer every day, and it's only because of our dispersion that this commandment has been annulled.<sup>13</sup>**

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<sup>9</sup> Ps. 69:14.

<sup>10</sup> Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 14:6, "The priests are not permitted to turn their faces away from the congregation until the leader of the congregation begins [the blessing] *Sim shalom*. Neither may the priests leave their places until the leader of the congregation concludes [the blessing] *Sim shalom*, nor may they close their fingers until they turn their faces from the community."

<sup>11</sup> Song of Songs 2:9.

<sup>12</sup> Num. Rabbah 11:2.

<sup>13</sup> The Rema's gloss in Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, siman 128, se'if 44, reflects the Ashkenazi custom [in the diaspora] that the priestly blessing is only given on yom tov. [Sephardi communities continue to give the blessing daily in the diaspora, and in Jerusalem, the blessing is given daily even in Ashkenazi congregations.]