

5-30-26 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene
Torah Portion: Numbers 4:21-7:89 Parasha *Naso* (elevate)
Haftarah: Judges 13:2-25
Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: John 13:3-6

The Aaronic Benediction

Central question of this message: Who gets the blessing?

Today we are the second parasha of the book of B'Midbar (Numbers). It's name is *Naso*, and that name comes from the tenth word in the English and the sixth word in the original Hebrew. This parasha is 176 verses long, the longest parasha in all of Torah.

Num 4:21-26

21 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 22 "Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers' households, by their families; 23 from thirty years and upward to fifty years old, you shall number them; all who enter to perform the service to do the work in the tent of meeting.

וַיִּדְבֹר יְהוָה אֶל־ מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: 21
 And spake the Lord unto Moses, saying,
1696 3068 413 4872 559

נָשָׂא אֶת־ רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי גֵרְשֹׁן גַּם־ הֵם 22
 Take the sum of the sons of Gershon, also them
5375 853 7218 1121 1648 1571 1992

לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם לְמִשְׁפַּחָתָם:
 throughout the houses of their fathers, by their families;
1004 1 4940

מִבֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְנֹמְעָלָה עַד־ בֶּן־ חֲמִשִּׁים שָׁנָה 23
 From old years thirty and upward until old years
1121 7970 8141 4605 5704 1121 2572 8141

תִּפְקֹד אוֹתָם כָּל־ הַבָּא לַעֲבֹד לַעֲבֹד צָבָא לַעֲבֹד
 shalt thou number them; all that enter in to do the service, to perform
6485 853 3605 935 6633 6635 5647

עֲבֹדָה בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:
 the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.
5656 168 4150

In this portion we find the numbering of the priestly families, the commandment to have all those afflicted with *tzarat* (not “leprosy”) and other unclean conditions leave the camp until they can be readmitted as clean. We find here the idea of not only restitution for a wrong committed, but also what we in our courts call today “punitive damages” – the adding of another fifth of that value to the restitution to make it right.

We find the very interesting commandments regarding the situation where a man might believe his wife has been unfaithful to him. This is known as the commandments of *Sotah*.

Right next to that we find the instructions for one who takes a Nazarite vow, he is called the *Nazir*.

Then, immediately following that, and just before the seven days of consecration offerings for the Mishkan, we find something which seems out of place. It is a passage that has now become known as the “Aaronic Benediction”, or the “Priestly Blessing.”

Num 6:22-27

22 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:

24 The Lord bless you, and keep you;

25 The Lord make His face shine on you,

And be gracious to you;

26 The Lord lift up His countenance on you,

And give you peace.'

27 "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel,
and I then will bless them."

There are a number of traditions surrounding the pronunciation of this blessing over the congregation.

Traditionally, in the orthodox shul, this benediction can only be delivered by a descendant of Aaron, and then only in the presence of a *minyan* (ten male worshippers – which may include the Kohen).

Once the Kohenim are assembled at the platform, then in some shuls the Cantor gives a prompting by reciting each word of the blessing, and the Kohenim follow his lead with an echo.

Before and during the benediction, it is appropriate for fathers in the congregation to spread their tallis over their heads, hold the corners wide, and invite their family to come beneath. This practice emphasizes the importance of the blessing, the family, and de-emphasizes the importance of the one pronouncing it. If you are not invited under a tallis, it is not appropriate to go under it. If you are not in the man's family but are invited to come beneath his tallis, it

is proper to come under it. Being under the tallis of a man expresses that man's covering, blessing, and protection over you.

Another tradition is that the one pronouncing the blessing is to raise his hands and hold them in a certain way during that pronunciation. The raising of the hands is called the *Nesiat Kapayim*.



The gravestone of Rabbi Meschullam Kohn (1739-1819) in Furth, Bavaria, Germany, shows the configuration of the hands.

Furth is only 7 km from Nuremberg, where in 1935 the Reichstag to revoked German citizenship of all Jews.

It is also seen inlaid in the synagogue of the town of Enschede, Netherlands.



It is also traditional in many of the orthodox communities that while the blessing is being pronounced, those in the congregation will not look at the Kohenim pronouncing the blessing.

That is because it was thought that the very Shechinah of G-d would shine through those fingers, and we shouldn't look into G-d's holiness. So, parents cautioned their children to look down, and some even would turn their backs.

We know that nobody in this flesh can look directly into G-d's holiness and live. We have that fact from G-d directly when he was speaking with Moses, who was asking to see G-d's glory.¹

And we have a record of a person being blinded by gazing too intently at G-d's Holiness.

Acts 9:1-9

9 Now Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest, 2 and asked for letters from him to the synagogues at

¹ Ex 33:17-21

Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, both men and women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. 3 And it came about that as he journeyed, he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but rise, and enter the city, and it shall be told you what you must do." 7 And the men who traveled with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but seeing no one. 8 And Saul got up from the ground, and **though his eyes were open, he could see nothing;** (no better definition of "blind" than this) and leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. 9 And he was three days **without sight**, and neither ate nor drank.

I do know of one young Jewish boy born in Boston to Ukranian Jewish immigrants, who, in 1940 at the age of eight or nine, actually *did* peek during the benediction.

That Jewish boy at age 20 chose the profession of acting, and finally wound up playing an alien in a science fiction series, for which he

was paid \$1,200 per episode. He became known as “Spock” in the *Star Trek* series of TV programs and later feature films.



In episode 34, which aired on September 15, 1967, his character was to be married. The leader of his home planet was to perform the marriage. He had

no “alien” way of greeting, so he suggested to the director that this unique hand sign be inserted into the scene. It was... and it stuck.²

I want to take a much closer look at the Aaronic Benediction. Since the English translation doesn’t capture it well, let’s look at the Hebrew.

We will do it one verse at a time. Begin with verse 24.

² Paste this link to see the story of how it came to be part of Star Trek from an interview with Leonard Nimoy:

<http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=leonard%20nimoy%20origin%20of%20hand%20sign&qs=n&form=QBVR&pq=leonard%20nimoy%20origin%20of%20hand%20sign&sc=0-14&sp=1&sk=#view=detail&mid=DE0C4446A2FBD0656D2BDE0C4446A2FBD0656D2B>

24
וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:
יְהוָה
יְבָרְכֶךָ

and keep thee:
The Lord
bless thee,

8104
3068
1288

The first word is *y'barech'cha*. The root of the word is *barech* – which means to bend the knee, bow, or kneel. The leading *yud* means “he”, and the ending *cha* means “to you”.

When we “bless the L-rd”, that phrase is used in Ps. 103:2, it means that our souls should bow before Him, in worship. But here, it means that G-d is blessing you!

The next word in the verse is the four-letter Name. In Hebrew sentence construction, this identifies the One who is doing the blessing. So, there is no doubt regarding Who is doing the blessing.

How can it be that in this blessing, the first thing we see is that G-d is giving honor and bending over before us? “How ungodlike!” we might cry. But is it *really*?

John 13:3-6

3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. 5 **Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.**

The same One who created all that we know with a spoken word knelt and washed the dirty feet of men who were too busy arguing about who would have higher rank in the kingdom, to minister in this way to one another.

The King of Kings bent down and knelt before us.

When we hear this part of the blessing, let us be reminded to bow and kneel before Him, and follow His example of how we should be servants of one another.

The third word of the first verse, is *v'shmarecha*. The root of the word is *shomer*. It is an active verb, carrying with it the concept of hedging about (as a protection), watching intently, as if guarding.

OT:8104 שָׁמַר **shamar** (shaw-mar'); a primitive root; properly, to hedge about (as with thorns), i.e. guard; generally, to protect, attend to, etc.:



On the *mezuzah*, we often see *Shin, Dalet Yud*. Although this clearly spells *Shaddai*, it can also be an acrostic. It is also understood to mean “*Shomer Daltot Yisrael*” – “guardian over the doors of Israel”.

Let’s look at the second verse, verse 25.

וַיְחַנֶּכֶּ:	אֵלֶיךָ	פָּנָיו	יְהוָה	יֵאֲרָ
and be gracious unto thee:	upon thee,	his face	The Lord	make shine
<u>2603</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>6440</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>215</u>

The first three words should be taken together. *Yo’ir Adonai panav*.

Yo’ir is combined of the leading *yud* – meaning “he”, and the root for light, *Or*, or *Ur*. It means “He (G-d) lights”. The light of G-d

is Yeshua, and even His dwelling presence, His *shechinah* is known to be light as well.

The next word is *panav*, meaning “face of Him.”

Light flows from the “face” of G-d, and toward the one He looks favorably upon.

The next word tells us what that light of G-d’s face shines upon. *Elecha*.

OT:413 לְּ **'el** (ale); (but only used in the shortened constructive form 'el (el)); a primitive particle; properly, denoting motion towards, but occasionally used of a quiescent position, i.e. near, with or among; often in general, to:

The Hebrew root *el* has an element of movement toward something, but also a quiet position nearby something.

Hebrew students will notice that the word *El* also is a reference to G-d. The final Hebrew letter in the word *elecha* in the verse is the *kaph*, meaning “to you”.

The final word of this verse is *v'chunecha*.

It comes from the Hebrew root *chanan*, which means to bend or stoop over in kindness towards someone smaller, who you love and cherish.

Imagine a sweet child looking up at you with a smile, and you will get it. What do you do next? *Chanan*.

OT:2603 **חָנַן** **chanan** (khaw-nan'); a primitive root [compare OT:2583]; properly, to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favor, bestow; causatively to implore (i.e. move to favor by petition):

So, this second verse carries with it the meaning that the face of G-d moves toward you with the loving light of G-d's *shechinah*, and is bending over you like a loving father, and holding you in a warm, close embrace.

Let's look at the third verse, verse 26.

אֵלֶיךָ	פָּנָיו	יְהוָה	יִשָּׂא ²⁶
upon thee,	his countenance	The Lord	lift up
<u>413</u>	<u>6440</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>5375</u>
	שְׁלוֹמֶךָ	לְךָ	וַיִּשָּׂא
	peace.	thee	and give
	<u>7965</u>	<u>3807a</u>	<u>7760</u>

Take the first three words together. *Iso Adonai panaiv*.

The first word *Iso* is made up of the leading *yud*, and a shortened version of the root *nasō*. You have already heard that word today. It's the same as the title of today's parasha – *nasō* – elevate.

Panav – comes from the root *panah* – face, but with an implication of turning so that the face is toward you. The final *vav* simply means “of him”.

Elecha – you already know.

V'yasem l'cha. Leading *vav* means “and”, followed by the *yud* for “he”. Then there's the Hebrew root *sum*, or *sim*. It has a variety of meanings. I believe the best for this context is “to put” or to “to cause to be”.

L'cha – you already know as “to you”.

And now the final word – *shalom*. Certainly it means “peace”, but that's not adequate to fully capture it. It doesn't mean the absence of conflict, or trouble, or tribulation. Although peace is much easier

to realize during times when there is no conflict, trouble, or tribulation, *true peace is not dependent on circumstances.*

Isaiah did not live during a time we would call “peaceful”. The Assyrians were expanding westward, and threatening Judah. They finally conquered Judah, and later when King Hezekiah tried to ally with Egypt to overthrow Assyria, which failed. But what did he say about shalom?

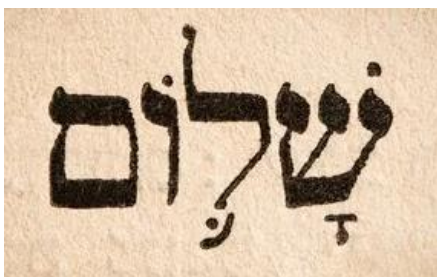
Isa 26:2-4

2 "Open the gates, that the righteous nation may enter,
The one that **remains faithful.**

3 "The **steadfast of mind** Thou wilt keep in perfect
peace, Because **he trusts in Thee.**

4 "**Trust in the Lord forever,**
For in God the Lord, we have **an everlasting Rock.**

The scriptural formula for *shalom* seems to be this: Remain faithful, keep a steadfast mind, and trust in the L-rd – forever – for He is our everlasting Rock.



But the word *shalom* is not only a condition to which we aspire, it carries in its very essence a promise.

In the pre-Babylonian pictographic Hebrew, where each letter can have a meaning, we see more.

Shin, lamed, vav, mem.

Shin = destroyer

Lamed = authority

Vav = connected to (or belonging to)

Mem = chaos.

The larger meaning: “The authority of chaos – destroyed!” Soon it shall be so.

So, let’s put all this together.

I submit to you a somewhat longer English version of the Aaronic benediction – one in which the flowers are more fully opened.

The L-rd bends over you, honoring you, and providing a hedge of protection around you.

The holy light of the face of G-d, the *shechinah*, is directed toward the part of you that looks so much like Him, as G-d bends down towards you, His precious child, in love.

He elevates His face, and turns His full attention right toward you, and He calls into existence for you an island of peace, because you are faithful, steadfast, and you trust in Him – our Rock – forever.

And what's more, all this comes with the promise that one day soon He will fully and finally destroy the chaos that has authority in this world. And His kingdom shall be one of true *shalom*.

The final piece is maybe the best. The last verse of this passage is verse 27.

Num 6:27

27 "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel,
and I then will bless them."

The Psalmist spoke at great length regarding the same subject that Isaiah had referred to in this last passage. That psalm contains not only the themes found in the Aaronic Benediction, but also significant prophecies regarding Messiah. It even speaks about what we see going on in the world today regarding Israel.

Ps 118

118 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;
For His lovingkindness is everlasting.

2 Oh let Israel say,
"His lovingkindness is everlasting."

3 Oh let the house of Aaron say,
"His lovingkindness is everlasting."

4 Oh let those who fear the Lord say,
"His lovingkindness is everlasting."

5 From my distress I called upon the Lord;
The Lord answered me and set me in a large place. 6 The
Lord is for me; I will not fear;
What can man do to me?

7 The Lord is for me among those who help me;
Therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.

8 It is better to take refuge in the Lord Than to trust in man.

9 It is better to take refuge in the Lord
Than to trust in princes.

10 All nations surrounded me;
In the name of the Lord I will surely cut them off.

11 They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me; In the
name of the Lord I will surely cut them off.

12 They surrounded me like bees;
They were extinguished as a fire of thorns;
In the name of the Lord I will surely cut them off.

13 You pushed me violently so that I was falling,
But the Lord helped me.

14 The Lord is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation.

15 The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents
of the righteous;
The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.

16 The right hand of the Lord is exalted; The right hand of the
Lord does valiantly.

17 I will not die, but live,
And tell of the works of the Lord.

18 The Lord has disciplined me severely,
But He has not given me over to death.

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness;
I shall enter through them, I shall give thanks to the Lord. 20
This is the gate of the Lord;
The righteous will enter through it. 21 I shall give thanks to
You, for You have answered me,
And You have become my salvation.

22 The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief corner stone.

23 This is the Lord's doing;
It is marvelous in our eyes.

24 This is the day which the Lord has made;
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

25 O Lord, do save, we beseech You;
O Lord, we beseech You, do send prosperity!

26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord;
We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.

27 The Lord is God, and He has given us light;
Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I give thanks to You;
You are my God, I extol You.

29 Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good;

For His lovingkindness is everlasting.