

TETZAVEH (EXODUS 27:20-30:10)

Bless Your Heart!

2002 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

What is the role of the Priest? The main job of the Kohain today, in post-/pre-Temple times, is to bless the Nation of Israel. In the Diaspora, this event takes place on the Yom Tov Festivals, 13 times a year. In many parts of Israel, it is done daily. The main gist of the Kohain's blessing is a request that G-d give us protection and peace.

During Temple times, there was/will be much more to do. The Kohain, a direct descendent of Aaron the High Priest, was in charge of officiating in the Temple. The Kohanim brought the various offerings in the Temple, and served as spiritual advisors to the Nation.

The High Priest was, as the title implies, the leader of the Kohanim. There were special offerings that only he could bring. He conducted the Yom Kippur service, achieving atonement for his People. His fellow priests accorded him great honor, and he had special golden garments that he wore in the Temple.

Wouldn't it be great to always know the correct answer to your question?

In the Temple, this was the case. The High Priest wore a breastplate over his heart. The breastplate was embedded with stones that lit up to answer questions. There were twelve precious stones on the breastplate, each with the name of one of the Tribes of Israel engraved on it. When the High Priest was asked a question, certain letters lit up. The High Priest would then determine the answer by figuring out what the letters were spelling.

How did this lofty and holy work end up in the hands of the "Aaronites?" What did Aaron do to deserve such honor?

It all goes back to the Burning Bush. G-d wanted Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt; Moses didn't want the job. He used every argument he could to avoid it. G-d insisted. Finally, Moses' main reason came out; he was concerned about his older brother.

Aaron was already a prophet and a Jewish leader in Egypt. Moses felt that by coming to Egypt as G-d's emissary, he would be slighting the honor that was due to his brother. *"Please, G-d," he begged, "send your usual messenger."* (Exodus, 4:13)

Apparently, Moses misjudged his brother, as G-d testified: "*Aaron your brother... is coming to greet you, and when he sees you he will rejoice in his heart.*" (Ibid, verse 14)

Not only was Aaron not hurt by the selection of Moses as leader; he was absolutely thrilled! Aaron was unconcerned about his own honor. He was proud of his younger brother, and happy to see his success.

The Talmud (Shabbos, 139a) says that this selfless pleasure on Aaron's part led to his own elevation to Priesthood. The breastplate, the conduit through which he could communicate with G-d, was worn over his heart. This gift to Aaron was a reward for "*when he sees you he will rejoice **IN HIS HEART.***"

Aaron's children bless us with a prayer for peace. A person can only be at peace when he is free of jealousy. When we look at others and wonder why we can't have what they have, we are questioning G-d's Master Plan. Aaron understood that there was no reason for him to lead the Nation out of Egypt if G-d wanted Moses to do it.

If we spend our lives looking over our shoulders, trying to keep up with the "Jones-steins," we'll never be at peace no matter what we have. There is a degree of serenity that comes with the realization that G-d gives each of us what we are supposed to have.

The Talmud asks, "Who is rich?" It then answers that the one who is rich is he who is satisfied with what he has. The greatness of Aaron was that he was more than simply satisfied with what he himself had. He truly rejoiced in the achievement of others.

Why are the Kohanim given the responsibility of praying for us to have peace? They are the children of Aaron...we know that when THEY pray for us...they really mean it.

Have a great Shabbos.

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