



## **Building Unity, One Step at a Time: A Special Series for the Three Weeks**

### **Part II: The Blessing of all Blessings**

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*This series is dedicated in memory of Hallel Ariel Hy'd and Rabbi Miki Mark Hy'd; two precious neshamos (souls) who gave so much and had so much more to give. May their memories bring us closer to one another.*

*The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is how you shall bless the children of Israel, saying to them: "May the Lord bless you and watch over you. May the Lord cause His countenance to shine to you and favor you. May the Lord raise His countenance toward you and grant you peace. "They shall bestow My Name upon the children of Israel, so that I will bless them (Bamidbar 6:22-27)."*

Blessings can be delivered in any language and by any person. But God wanted to give the *Kohanim* (priests) a special verbiage to shower blessing and bounty upon the Jewish people. This priestly blessing is perhaps one of the most beautiful and meaningful blessings we have in the Torah. The three parts of this *beracha* capture the entirety and essence of all our requests and desires. We ask for protection, closeness, connection and peace. So powerful is this blessing that parents use it every Shabbos (Friday) night to bless their children. There are so many blessings we want for our children. Some of these are unique to the child and many are the same aspirational desires every parent has for his or her beloved child. But one thing is certain; the elements of this *beracha* are things we hope will be fixtures and mainstays of our children's existence.

The saintly Modzitzer Rebbe (Rabbi Shaul Yedidya Elazar Taub, 1886-1947) gave a beautiful and penetrating insight into this blessing:

***Ko S'varchu Es Bnai Yisroel, This is how you shall bless the children of Israel*** – *Ko S'varchu, K'mo She'heym, This is how you will bless – this means, bless them as they are. Don't only look for the special and important members of the nation. Don't simply seek out the sages and righteous. Always remember that every Jew is worthy of blessing.*

The Rebbe teaches us such a meaningful and profound lesson. We must learn to accept people for who they are. God was instructing Aharon that his priestly blessing was to be for the entire nation. It is easy to bless the pious and righteous and it is easy to ignore the others. It is easy to gravitate and identify with the important and significant and easy to overlook the simple and ordinary. God tells Aharon, if you are going to be the channel through which Divine energy and blessing will rest upon my nation, you must learn to see, appreciate and love the other – no matter who they are. You must learn to love your fellow Jews, *K'mo She'heym, as they are.*

Often our love for the other comes with conditions. "I will love you – if ....." We want the other to live up to certain expectations before we shower them with our love. The reality is that sometimes the expectations we set for the other may be too high or unrealistic (in the current reality). I must learn to appreciate the other for who and where they are. I must learn to accept others with their shortcomings and deficiencies. I must learn to love and bless even when the other is not living up to "my expectations."

Rav Aryeh Levin (1885-1969) was known as the *Tzaddik* (righteous man) of Yerushalayim. He was known not only for his incredible scholarship but also for his compassion, empathy and love for every Jew. There was a young man named Moshe who grew up in the same neighborhood where Rav Aryeh resided. Rav Aryeh knew the boy well but felt the boy was avoiding him. One day, they bumped into each other in the narrow alleys of Jerusalem and Rav Aryeh confronted him and said, 'Moshe, I can't help but feel you are avoiding me, tell me how are you?' The young man sheepishly replied that it was true, he was avoiding the great rabbi as he had grown up observant but had chosen to walk away from observant life altogether. He said, "Rebbe, I was so embarrassed to meet you since I have taken off my kippah and am no longer observant." Rav Aryeh took the young man's hand into his own and said: "My dear Moshe, don't worry, I am a very short man, I can only see what is in your heart; I cannot see what is on your head." This is what it means to love every Jew, *K'mo She'heym, as they are.*

Perhaps, this is the true blessing we give our children every Shabbos night. We say to our precious sons and daughters, "My dear child, there are so many things I want for you. I pine that you will always find comfort and love in the presence of God; I pray that you will find closeness and connection with our loving Father; I hope that you will find safety and peace underneath the cover of God's divine wings. But what I hope for most is that you will grow to be a true *Ohev Yisroel*, lover of the Jewish people. I hope you appreciate people for who they are and for where they are in life. Always find the strength to bless the other; always find the strength to look deep into the heart of your brothers and sisters and see their spiritual beauty."

This is the blessing we give to our children and may it be the blessing we are able to receive as well. As we continue our journey through the Three Weeks and try to figure out how to right the wrongs of the past, may we be privileged to see into the heart of the other, to learn to appreciate the other and to find the strength to shower blessing upon all we encounter.