



## The Fifteen Words and Sixty Letters of Birkas Kohanim Allude to the Matrimony of HKB”H with Yisrael

This week’s parsha is parshas Nasso. It describes the incredible privilege bestowed upon Aharon HaKohen and his descendants. They were given the mitzvas aseï to bless the people of Yisrael, as it is written (Bamidbar 6, 22):

”וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, דבר אל אהרן ואל בניו לאמר, כה תברכו את בני ישראל אמור להם, יברכך ה' וישמרך, יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחונך, ישא ה' פניו אליך וישם לך שלום, ושמנו את שמי על בני ישראל ואני אברכם.”

**And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying, “Thus shall you bless Bnei Yisrael. Say to them, ‘May Hashem bless you and protect you. May Hashem shine His Countenance upon you and find favor with you. May Hashem lift His Countenance toward you and bring you peace.’” They will place My Name on Bnei Yisrael, and I will bless them.**

We learn the reason this privilege was bestowed upon Aharon and his descendants from the text in parshas Shemini. Regarding the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, it is written (Vayikra 9, 22): **”וישא אהרן את ידיו אל העם ויברכם וירד מעשות החטאת והעולה והשלמים—Aharon raised his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he descended from having performed the olah-offering and the shelamim-offering.** Rashi comments: **“And blessed them” refers to Birkas Kohanim.** In a similar vein, we learn in Torah Kohanim (Shemini 17): **“Aharon raised his hands toward the**

**people and blessed them”—at that same moment in time, he was awarded the priestly gifts, and he and his future generations were awarded the privilege of “raising their hands” (blessing the people) until the resurrection of the dead.** We will endeavor to explain how exactly Aharon perceived the proper way of performing the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan.

Additionally, we will analyze the formula of the priestly blessings with which the kohanim, acting as the agents of HKB”H, bless the people of Yisrael. They consist of three pesukim: **”יברכך ה' וישמרך, יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחונך, ישא ה' פניו אליך וישם לך שלום.”** They are comprised of fifteen words and sixty letters. Undoubtedly, this structure and these numbers are significant. We will endeavor to explain their significance.

### Three Priestly Blessings Are in the Merit of the Three Holy Avos

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by examining the formula instituted by our blessed sages who formulated our tefilos for the chazan to say in the repetition of the Shemoneh Esrei of Shacharis: **”אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו ברננו בברכה המשולשת בתורה—our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, bless us with the three-fold berachah recorded in the Torah.** According to the Avudraham, this formula recalls the merit of the three Avos, which

entitles us to these Berachos. They are also three-fold, because they are stated in three pesukim.

Similarly, the Ba'al HaTurim writes (Nasso): The first berachah—**"yivarechicha"**—is in the merit of Avraham; **"ya'eir"** is in the merit of Yitzchak; **"yisah"** is in the merit of Yaakov. Another source for this association with the Avos is found in the Midrash (B.R. 43, 8):

**From where did Yisrael merit the Birkas Kohanim? Rabbi Yehudah said: From Avraham,** regarding whom it is written (Bereishis 15, 5): **"כה יהיה זרעך"**. Likewise, regarding Birkas Kohanim, it is written: **"כה תברכו את בני ישראל"**. **Rabbi Nechemiah said: From Yitzchak, for it is stated** (ibid. 22, 5): **"ואני והנער נלכה עד כה"**. **Therefore, the Omnipresent said: "כה תברכו את בני ישראל"**. **The other sages said: From Yaakov, for it is stated** (Shemos 19, 3): **"כה תברכו את בני ישראל"**. In other words, the Midrash associates the term **"כה"** used to instruct Aharon how to bless the people with the word **"כה"** used in relation to each of the Avos.

In the sefer "Eileh HaMitzvos," authored by the Maharam Chagiz (78), he writes that this is the rationale for the minhag for the congregation to respond to the first passuk of Birkas Kohanim recited by the prayer-leader: **"כן יהי רצון בזכות אברהם אבינו—so shall it be His will in the merit of Avraham Avinu;** after the second passuk, they respond: **"כן יהי רצון בזכות יצחק אבינו"**; and after the third passuk, they respond: **"כן יהי רצון בזכות יעקב אבינו"**.

### The Fifteen Words of Birkas Kohanim Correspond to the Fifteen Years that the Avos Learned Together

So far, we have learned that the three pesukim that comprise Birkas Kohanim correspond to the three holy Avos. Now, I would like to introduce the fascinating words of the holy, Gaon Chida, ztz"l, in Chomat Anach (Nasso 5) referring to what he wrote in Midbar Kedemios (1, 1), in the name of Rabeinu Yehudah HaChassid, ztz"l. Birkas Kohanim consists

of three pesukim and fifteen words commemorating the fifteen years that the three Avos lived together and sustained the worlds. During those fifteen years, they studied Torah together every day and every night for fifteen hours. **This configuration also reflects the fact that a boy is initiated into the study of Talmud at the age of fifteen; there are fifteen Shir HaMa'aloss authored by David HaMelech, a"h, in Sefer Tehillim; there are fifteen praises listed in Yishtabach; there were fifteen steps in the courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash; and Yisrael were redeemed from Mitzrayim on the fifteenth of Nissan. He postulates that Yisrael are entitled to these three Berachos in the merit of three Avos who studied Torah together for fifteen years.**

### The Sixty Letters of Birkas Kohanim Correspond to the Sixty Masechtos Studied by the Avos

Continuing onward on this sacred journey, we will now explain another numerical aspect and curiosity of Birkas Kohanim. In addition to being comprised of three pesukim and fifteen words, they contain precisely sixty letters. We find a wonderful reason for this in the siddur of Rav Amram Gaon. He explains the rationale for reciting the pesukim of Birkas Kohanim immediately after reciting the Berachos of the Torah. Now, as we know, Torah she'b'al peh contains sixty masechtos. The Midrash Rabbah notes this by expounding on the passuk (Shir HaShirim 6, 8): **"שישים המה מלכות, אלו—שישים מסכתות של הלכות"**; **these are the sixty masechtos of halachos.** Hence, the sages instituted learning this mitzvah immediately after reciting the Berachos for Torah-study. They are informing us that anyone who studies the sixty masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh is deserving of the blessings of Birkas Kohanim, which contain sixty letters.

Let us now connect these three numerical parameters. **1)** Birkas Kohanim is comprised of three pesukim—**"ישא", "יאר", "יברך"**—corresponding to the three holy Avos. **2)** They contain fifteen words corresponding to the fifteen years that the Avos

coexisted and studied Torah together fifteen hours each day. **3)** They are comprised of sixty letters corresponding to the sixty masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh that the three Avos studied together during those fifteen years. Without a doubt, not only did they study Torah she'b'chsav but also Torah she'b'al peh. After all, we are taught that Avraham Avinu even kept the mitzvah of "eiruv tavshilin," which is taught in Torah she'b'al peh. Here is the pertinent passage from the Gemara (Yoma 28b):

**"אברהם אבינו זקן ויושב בישיבה היה, שנאמר ואברהם זקן בא בימים, יצחק אבינו זקן ויושב בישיבה היה, שנאמר ויהי כי זקן יצחק, יעקב אבינו זקן ויושב בישיבה, היה שנאמר ועיני ישראל כבדו מזוקן."**

**Avraham Avinu was an elder sitting in a yeshivah, as it states (Bereishis 24, 1): "And Avraham was an elder, well on in years." Yitzchak Avinu was an elder sitting in a yeshivah, as it states (ibid. 27, 1): "It was when Yitzchak became an elder." Yaakov Avinu was an elder sitting in a yeshivah, as it states (ibid. 48, 10): "And the eyes of Yisrael were heavy from age."** [Translator's note: The term "elder" ("זקן") in these pesukim implies "one that has acquired wisdom" ("זה קנה").]

Thus, the three structural elements of Birkas Kohanim are intimately related. There are three pesukim, fifteen words, and sixty letters. They correspond to the three holy Avos, who coexisted for fifteen years studying the sixty masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh together fifteen hours a day.

Notwithstanding, what is the deeper significance of the number fifteen? Why did HKB"H, the Grand Orchestrator, arrange for the three Avos to live together and study Torah together precisely fifteen hours a day for fifteen years? Additionally, why was the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim given to Aharon HaKohen and his descendants specifically on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, when he went out to bless the people of Yisrael?

### The Fifteen Words of Birkas Kohanim Corresponds to the Name ה"ה

I would like to propose a wonderful explanation based on a fundamental idea that is repeated over

and over in the teachings of Chazal. At Matan Torah, HKB"H designated Yisrael as his bride. As we have learned in the Mishnah (Ta'anis 26b), they expounded on the passuk (Shir HaShirim 3, 11):

**"צאינה וראינה בנות ציון במלך שלמה בעטרה שעטרה לו אמו ביום חתונתו וביום שמחת לבו. ביום חתונתו זה מתן תורה, וביום שמחת לבו זה בנין בית המקדש."**

**"Go out and gaze, O daughters of Tziyon, upon King Shlomo adorned with the crown his mother made him on the day of his wedding and on the day of his heart's joy."** **"On the day of his wedding" refers to Matan Torah; "and on the day of his heart's joy" refers to the building of the Beis HaMikdash—may it be built speedily in our days.**

We find a similar elucidation in the Midrash (D.R. 3, 12) concerning what HKB"H instructed Moshe when preparing Yisrael for Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 10):

**"לך אל העם וקדשתם"—go to the people and prepare them.** With the term "וקדשתם", HKB"H was appointing Moshe Rabeinu to be his agent to wed Yisrael with the giving of the Torah. This is corroborated by the following passuk (ibid. 17):

**"ויוצא משה את העם לקראת האלקים מן המחנה—Moshe took the people out of the camp toward G-d, and they stood beneath the mountain.** Commenting on this passuk in the name of the Mechilta, Rashi says that **the Torah is telling us that the Shechinah went out to greet them like a bridegroom going out to greet his bride.**

It is fitting to introduce what we have learned in the Mishnah (Kiddushin 2a):

**"האשה נקנית בשלש דרכים... -- בכסף בשטר ובניאה" a woman is acquired in three ways . . . she is acquired with money, with a document, and with intimate relations.** In his commentary on the passuk (ibid. 19, 4), the Ba'al HaTurim interprets HKB"H's statement to Yisrael:

**"ואביא אתכם אלי"—and I brought you to Me—to mean that HKB"H wed Yisrael with all three. The spoils of Mitzrayim were the money; the Torah was the contractual document; "I spread My wings over you . . . and I entered into a covenant with you," was the spousal relations. Therefore, the prophet Hoshea (Hoshea 2, 21-22) employs the term "וארשתיך לי"—"I will betroth you"—three times.**

Now, when the Ba'al HaTurim writes that HKB"H consummated His marriage to Yisrael with spousal relations (cohabitation), he is clearly referring to the Mishkan; there HKB"H met with Yisrael in intimate, close quarters. As the passuk states (Shemos 25, 8): **"ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם"—they shall make Me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them.**

This is further evident from the passuk (ibid. 18): **—ועשית שנים כרובים זהב מקשה תעשה אותם משני קצות הכפורת—you shall make two "keruvim" (cherubim) of gold—beaten shall you make them—from both ends of the "Kaporesh" (lid).** Rabeinu Bachayei comments that simply understood, the two "keruvim" were a male and a female. He substantiates this assertion by referring to the Gemara (Yoma 54a): **"אמר רב קטינא, בשעה שהיו ישראל עולין לרגל מגללין להם את הפרוכת ומראין להם את הכרובים שהיו מעורים זה בזה, ואומרים להם ראו חיבתכם לפני המקום כחיבת זכר ונקבה."** **Rav Katina said: When the people of Yisrael would ascend on the festival, the kohanim would roll up the "parochet" for them and show them the "keruvim" which were joined together in an embrace. They would say to them, "Behold your affection before the Omnipresent, like the affection of a male and a female."**

### The Fifteen Steps from the Ezras Nashim to the Ezras Yisrael Correspond to the Name ה"י

It is fascinating that we find an incredible likeness in the Beis HaMikdash between the relationship of HKB"H with the congregation of Yisrael and the relationship between a husband and wife. Let us refer to the Gemara (Sotah 17a): **"דריש רבי עקיבא, איש ואשה זכו—שכינה ביניהן, לא זכו אש אוכלתן"—Rabbi Akiva expounded: If a husband and wife are meritorious, the Shechinah is present between them; if they are not meritorious, they are consumed by fire.** Rashi provides the following clarification: **"שכינה ביניהן, שהרי חלק את שמו ושכנו ביניהן, יו"ד באיש וה"י באשה. לא זכו אש אוכלתן, שהקב"ה מסלק שמו מביניהן ונמצאו אש ואש."** The letters ה"י from G-d's name are split between the man and the woman; the letter **"yud"** appears in the word אי"ש, while the letter **"hei"** appears in the word אש"י. If they are not deserving, HKB"H removes His name

from them; as a consequence, they are consumed by fire, because all that remains is א"ש and א"ש --two opposing, conflicting, devastating fires.

We learn from Rabbi Akiva that the name ה"י alludes to the holy Shechinah—the divine presence. In fact, the Megaleh Amukos (Vayeira) writes that the word שכני"ה can be broken down to "שכן י"ה"—indicating that the name ה"י dwells among the people of Yisrael. This is also brought down by the Shela hakadosh.

The dwelling of the Shechinah between a husband and wife via the name ה"י was mirrored in the Beis HaMikdash—the special place where HKB"H secluded Himself and united with the people of Yisrael. This is the implication of the passuk: **"ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם"**—and truly reflects Rabbi Akiva's pronouncement that **if a husband and wife are meritorious, the Shechinah is present between them.** Now, we learn in the Mishnah (Midos 2, 5): **"וחמש עשרה מעלות עולות מתוכה לעזרת ישראל, כנגד חמש עשרה מעלות שבתהלים, שעליהן הלויים אומרים בשיר."** There were fifteen steps going up from the "Ezras nashim"—the women's courtyard—to the "Ezras Yisrael"—the men's courtyard; they corresponded to the fifteen songs of ascension—Shir HaMa'alos—in sefer Tehillim; and the leviim would stand on them and sing. The Kli Yakar (Vayeira) explains that those fifteen steps in the Beis HaMikdash represented the name ה"י, which has a numerical value of fifteen. Thus, they signify the presence of HKB"H among the people of Yisrael like His presence between a husband and his wife.

With this in mind, we can begin to comprehend why HKB"H burned down the two Batei Mikdash with fire when Yisrael sinned. Referring back to the pronouncement of Rabbi Akiva, he said emphatically: **"If they are not meritorious, they are consumed by fire."** Since HKB"H removes the name ה"י from them, all that remains is a consuming, double-dose of fire—אש אש. As the passuk says (Tehillim 74, 7): **"שילחו באש מקדשך"—they have sent up Your Sanctuary in flames.** This is what happened to the two Batei Mikdash. When

Yisrael were no longer meritorious, HKB”H removed His Shechinah and the name ה”י from them, and they were consumed by the remaining, intense, double אש אש.

**Birkas Kohanim Reflects the Name ה”י that Exists between HKB”H and the People of Yisrael**

This enlightens us as to the incredible accomplishment of the three holy Avos, who studied Torah together fifteen hours a day for fifteen years. They intended to prepare the groundwork for their future generations of descendants—for HKB”H to enter into a spousal relationship with the people of Yisrael and have His Shechinah—the name ה”י --dwell in the Beis HaMikdash between Himself and them.

Now, the dwelling of the Shechinah occurs primarily through Torah-study. As we are taught in the Gemara (Berachos 6a), even a solitary Jew studying Torah alone is attended by the Shechinah. For this reason, the Shechinah dwelled between the two “keruvim” atop the Aron of Testimony, which housed the basis of the entire Torah—the luchos. Hence, the Avos devoted themselves to the study of the sixty masechtos of Torah she’b’al peh.

This illuminates for us the mitzvah and structure of Birkas Kohanim. It is comprised of three Berachos in three pesukim representing the three holy Avos. It contains ה”י –fifteen—words representing the fifteen years that the Avos studied Torah together fifteen hours each day preparing the groundwork for the dwelling of the Shechinah via the name ה”י between Himself and Yisrael. It is comprised of sixty letters representing the sixty masechtos of Torah she’b’al peh. The message is clear! If we want HKB”H to dwell His Shechinah among us, we must dedicate ourselves to the study of Torah she’b’al peh.

Let us embellish this thought. The prevailing Jewish minhag is to betroth a woman with a ring. At the wedding ceremony—the “kiddushin”—the Chasan pronounces the familiar formula: הרי את

מקודשת לי בטבעת זו כדת משה וישראל” —**you are hereby consecrated to me with this ring in accordance with the laws of Moshe and Yisrael.** This constitutes marriage by means of an object possessing monetary value.

But why a ring specifically and not some other object of value? Now, we have learned in the Gemara (Yevamos 62b) that the scholars in Eretz Yisrael taught that a man without a wife lives without Torah. Based on this notion, we can propose that a ring is round like the letter “samech,” whose numerical value is sixty. Thus, it alludes to the sixty masechtos of Torah she’b’al peh. So, betrothing a woman with a circular ring signifies that in the merit of the marriage, the man will merit the sixty masechtos of Torah she’b’al peh.

This explains magnificently the connection between the fifteen words in Birkas Kohanim and its sixty letters. The fifteen words corresponding to the name ה”י signify that HKB”H dwells among the people of Yisrael like a husband with his wife; while the sixty letters corresponding to the sixty masechtos of Torah she’b’al peh represent the round ring shaped like a “samech,” with which HKB”H betrothed Yisrael.

**Aharon HaKohen Warranted Being the Kohen Gadol because He Was the Companion of the Matron**

Following this majestic path, we will now proceed to explain why the privilege and mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim was bestowed specifically upon Aharon and his descendants. It states in the Zohar hakadosh (Metzora 53b): מֹשֶׁה שׁוֹשְׁבֵינָא דְמַלְכָא, אַהֲרֹן שׁוֹשְׁבֵינָא דְמַטְרוֹנִיתָא —**Moshe is the companion of the king, and Aharon is the companion of the queen.** In other words, Moshe represents HKB”H, while Aharon represents Kenesses Yisrael.

The Zohar hakadosh explains that Moshe Rabeinu always strived to appease HKB”H and draw Him closer to Yisrael. This was evident in the aftermath of the “cheit ha’eigel,” when Moshe beseeched

Hashem (Shemos 32, 32): **“ועתה אם תשא חטאתם, ואם אין—and now, if You would but bear their sin; but if not, erase me from Your book that You have written.** Aharon, on the other hand, worked from the opposite direction. He always strived to draw Yisrael closer to their Father in Heaven, This is taught in the Mishnah (Avos 1, 12): **“הלל אומר, הוי מתלמידי של אהרן, אוהב שלום ורודף שלום, אוהב—Hillel says: Be among the disciples of Aharon—love peace and promote peace, love your fellow creatures, and bring them closer to Torah.**

Now, the Torah attests to the special relationship that existed between Aharon and the people (Bamidbar 20, 29): **“ויראו כל העדה כי גוע אהרן ויבכו את—the entire assembly witnessed that Aharon had perished; they wept for Aharon thirty days—the entire house of Yisrael.** Rashi comments: Everyone grieved over Aharon’s death, both men and women alike, since he was the ultimate peacemaker—he promoted

shalom and amity among disputants, and between husbands and wives. He also promoted shalom between HKB”H and the people of Yisrael.

Therefore, Aharon HaKohen was privileged to be imbued with “ruach hakodesh” and ascertain Birkas Kohanim specifically on the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan. For, it was the day on which HKB”H united exclusively with the people of Yisrael, fulfilling the directive: **“They shall make Me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them.”** Hence, it was the propitious time to initiate the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim comprised of fifteen words representing the name יה”ה indicating the presence of HKB”H between a husband and a wife; it also contains sixty letters representing the sixty masechtos that are the ring with which HKB”H betrothed Yisrael. Aharon earned this privilege for promoting shalom between husbands and wives and, similarly, between HKB”H and the congregation of Yisrael.



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of **אחינו בני ישראל**

Family Madeb - לעילוי נשמת  
their dear mother  
Lea bat Virgini ע”ה

Arthur & Randi Luxenberg לזכות  
of their wonderfull parents, children and grandchildren  
לעילוי נשמת His Father ר’ יצחק יהודה בן ר’ אברהם ע”ה

To receive the mamarim by email: [mamarim@shvileipinchas.com](mailto:mamarim@shvileipinchas.com)