

## The Power of Speech



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Within a long parasha discussing many topics, I would like to focus on Birkat Kohanim – the priestly blessing.

There are two blessings which are Biblically mandated: the blessings on Torah study and Birkat Hamazon (Grace after meals), both of which are addressed to God directly. Birkat Kohanim is a rare case where a group of people bless others and are instructed to do so. Several Rishonim (early rabbinic commentators) such as the Sefer Chareidim and the Ra'avad write that this is a mitzvah which is carried out not only by the Kohanim who give the blessing, but

also by those who receive it, in which case, their concentration is also central. This provides a new perspective on the process, it is not passively receiving something from the Kohanim, but an experience which must be felt tangibly.

The introduction to Birkat Kohanim comes after a discussion of the laws of the Nazir, a person who takes on a vow to avoid contamination from the dead and abstain from haircuts and consuming grapes and their products. For the vows to be valid, they need to be spoken out by the Nazir.

The common denominator between the concept of *Nezirut*, where a person's words create a new, legally-binding reality upon the speaker, and Birkat Kohanim, is that a person's speech creates and effects a new reality.

The power of speech is not only a gift, but part of our very essence. This is perhaps best encapsulated by the Targum Onkelos, who translates the famous words "And man became a living being" as "And man became a **speaking** being" (Bereishit 2:7). Later, we find that Avraham is told that he will have the power to bless others. Thus, speech became not only a trademark of humanity, but a method through which one could positively affect others.

The mitzvah of Birkat Kohanim is an example of the Torah's broader message of harnessing our talents and gifts on behalf of the masses. We use the power of speech and blessings not only to connect to God, but also to help and come closer to those around us.

## Fun Facts

1. The end of the parasha (the longest chapter in the Torah), is read one part per day over the eight days of Chanukah.
2. Famous Nazirim include Shimshon (Samson) and Shmuel (Samuel), both of whom were nazirim from birth.
3. Naso is the longest parasha in the Torah with 76 verses. The longest tractate of the Talmud (Bava Batra) has 176 **dapim** (two-sided pages), and the longest chapter of Tehillim (Psalms) has 119 **verses**.

**176**

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