

# Receiving and Making *Brachos*

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The Torah uses the word “*bracha*” with regard to three very different circumstances: the *bracha* that the *kohanim* invoke for the nation (*Bamidbar* 6:22-27); the *bracha* that someone who finishes eating a meal offers to Hashem (*Devarim* 8:10); and, according to Rashi, the *bracha* that someone who performs the *mitzva* of separating *ma’asros* offers to Hashem (*Devarim* 26:13). While these circumstances are separate and distinct from one another, they are each referenced or alluded to by the verses as a “*bracha*,” which raises the question of what exactly the word “*bracha*” means that connects them.

## The Term “*Bracha*” Implies and Presupposes an Inner Relationship

It is difficult to precisely define, or even to translate, the word “*bracha*.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, the *gemara* in *Brachos* 7a makes one thing clear: nobody can give a *bracha* to himself or herself. In order to be considered a *bracha*, to be properly defined as a “*bracha*,” it has to be given by someone else. The *gemara* states:

א"ר יוחנן משום ר' יוסי מנין שהקב"ה מתפלל שנאמר והביאותים אל הר קדשי ושמחתים בבית תפילתי תפלתם לא נאמר אלא תפילתי מכאן שהקב"ה מתפלל. מאי מצלי אמר רב זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב יה"ר מלפני שיכבשו רחמי את כעסי ויגולו רחמי על מדתי ואתנהג עם בני במדת רחמים ואכנס להם לפני משורת הדין. תניא א"ר ישמעאל בן אלישע פעם אחת נכנסתי להקטיר קטורת לפני ולפנים וראיתי אכתריא-ל-י-ה ה' צבקות שהוא יושב על כסא רם ונשא ואמר לי ישמעאל בני ברכני. אמרתי לו יה"ר מלפניך שיכבשו רחמיך את כעסך ויגולו רחמיך על מדתיך ותתנהג עם בניך במדת הרחמים ותכנס להם לפני משורת הדין. ונענע לי בראשו. וקמ"ל שלא תהא ברכת הדיוס קלה בעיניך.

1 Varying approaches are presented, for example, by Rashi on *Sota* 10a, *Shemos* 16:5, and *Mishlei* 11:25, *Chizkuni* on *Bereishis* 24:27, *Teshuvos HaRashba* 5:51, *Sefer Halkarim* 2:26, *Rabbenu Bechaye* on *Devarim* 8:10, and *Nefesh HaChaim Sha'ar* 2, sections 2, 3 & 4.

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*Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Yosi: From where is it derived that the Holy One, Blessed be He, prays? As it is stated: "I will bring them to My holy mountain and make them joyful in the house of My prayer" (Yeshayahu 56:7). It does not say "their prayer," but rather, "My prayer"; from here we see that the Holy One, Blessed be He, prays. What does He pray? Rav Zutra bar Toviah said that Rav said: "May it be My will that My mercy will suppress My anger, and may My mercy prevail over My other attributes, and may I conduct Myself toward My children with the attribute of mercy, and may I enter before them beyond the letter of the law."*

*It was taught in a baraisa that Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha said: Once I entered the Holy of Holies to offer incense, and I saw Achteriel Ka, the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne. And He said to me: "Yishmael, My son, bless Me." I said to Him: "May it be Your will that Your mercy will suppress Your anger, and may Your mercy prevail over Your other attributes, and may You conduct Yourself toward Your children with the attribute of mercy, and may You enter before them beyond the letter of the law." And He nodded His head to me. And we can learn from this that you should not take the blessing of an ordinary person lightly.*

The two statements in this *gemara* are almost identical to one another, each expressing the desire for Hashem's compassion to prevail over His measured anger. But there are key differences between them.

1. The first statement is formulated as a "prayer;" the second, a "blessing."
2. The first statement is formulated reflexively. Hashem prays for Himself. But in the second statement, rather than giving Himself the blessing, Hashem astonishingly asks the *Kohen Gadol*, Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha, to bless Him.

This juxtaposition and contrast between the *gemara's* first and second statements, which are otherwise identical, underscores an essential distinction between a "*tefila*" and a "*bracha*." A *bracha* is never given to oneself. Someone receiving a *bracha* has to hear it from someone else; otherwise, it cannot be called a "*bracha*." Even Hashem, *kivyachol*, does not give Himself a *bracha*, thereby prompting the request in this *gemara*: "*Yishmael bni barcheini*."

Hence, a "*bracha*" presupposes a relationship. This is accentuated by the closely connected language of the request in the *gemara*: "*Yishmael bni barcheini*," "*Yishmael, my son, bless Me*." It also adds perspective on the statement toward the end of this *gemara* that "*vena'ana li berosh*," "He nodded His head to me," which Rashi explains

to mean: “*kemodeh bevirchasi ve’oneh amen*,” “as if to acknowledge my blessing and answer ‘amen.’” A bilateral relationship implies mutual assent. A *bracha* is not only bestowed; it is also actively received.

The significance of this is underscored by the concluding sentence of this *gemara*: “*vekamashma lan she-lo tehei birkas hedyot kala be’einecha*,” “and we can learn from this that you should not take the blessing of an ordinary person lightly.” In the context of a respectful relationship, even a *bracha* invoked by someone of incomparably lower distinction and wholly subordinate stature, nevertheless, matters substantially.

This insight that the word “*bracha*” implies an engaged relationship is further reflected by the observation of the Maharal in *Tiferes Yisrael* 34 that the root ב-ר-ב consists of letters with the numerical value of “two.” *Beis* (2) is double *aleph* (1); *reish* (200), double *kuf* (100); *chaf* (20), double *yud* (10). The numerical value of the verb root ב-ר-ב consists entirely of two: 222. The Maharal makes this point to reflect the expansive abundance inherent in blessing (and, thereby, he counters the Ibn Ezra’s dismissive critique of the *midrash’s* statement that the Torah starts with the letter *beis* because the word *bracha* starts with *beis*). But the Maharal’s observation also highlights that, at its core, the act of giving a *bracha* is built on the interaction between the one invoking it and the one receiving it, given that the verb root ב-ר-ב, which consists solely of letters corresponding to the number “two,” points to an engaged one-on-one relationship (*i.e.*,  $1+1=2$ ).

This perhaps also is why the *bracha* recited before *Birkas Kohanim* emphasizes that it has to be performed “*be’ahava*,” with love (see *Sota* 39a). The act of invoking a *bracha* necessitates a close inner connection. The *Magen Avraham* (128:18) explains:

באהבה. נ"ל דפי' כמ"ש בזוהר כל כהן דלא רחים לעמא או עמא לא רחמין ליה לא  
ישא כפיו.

*With love. It appears to me to explain [the reason the kohanim say “with love”] is based on the Zohar that any kohen who does not have compassion toward the nation, or if the nation does not have compassion toward him, should not raise his hands [for Birkas Kohanim].*

An isolated individual might accomplish many things for himself or herself, but conveying a *bracha* is not one of them. A *bracha*, by definition and implication of the term, requires dynamic inner connectedness between the one invoking the *bracha* and its intended recipient.

### ***Birkas Hamazon: Expression of Relationship to Hashem Based on Gratitude for Our Physical Sustenance***

This centrality of an interactive relationship built into the term “*bracha*,” which can be discerned from the *gemara* in *Brachos* 7a that we saw above, is further borne out by *brachos* on food.

*Parshas Eikev* (*Devarim* 8:10) obligates us to be *mevarech* Hashem after eating a meal, “*ve’achalta vesavata uveirachta es Hashem Elokecha*.” It is unclear what it means for a person to offer a *bracha* to Hashem. Yet, in his comment to *Bereishis* 21:33, Rashi connects a *bracha* to the bond formed when someone helps another satisfy physical needs:

אשל. רב ושמואל חד אמר פרדס להביא ממנו פירות לאורחים בסעודה וחד אמר פונדק לאכסניא ובו כל מיני מאכל ומצינו לשון נטיעה באהלים שנאמר ויטע אהלי אפדנו (דניאל יא:מה).

ויקרא שם וגו'. על ידי אותו אשל נקרא שמו של הקב"ה אלו-ה לכל העולם לאחר שאוכלין ושותין אומר להם ברכו למי שאכלתם משלו סבורים אתם שמשלי אכלתם משל מי שאמר והיה העולם אכלתם.

*Eshel. Rav and Shmuel: One said it was an orchard from which to supply fruit for the guests at their meal; and one said it was an inn for lodging in which were all kinds of food. And we find the expression planting used of tents, as it is said (Daniel 11:45): “And he shall plant the tents of his palace.”*

*And he called there etc. Through this Eshel the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, was called “God of the entire Universe.” For after they had eaten and drunk he said to them “Bless Him from Whom you have eaten. Do you think that you have eaten of what is mine? You have eaten of that which belongs to Him Who spoke and the Universe came into existence.”*

Rashi emphasizes the relationship that can be engendered by providing a meal to people in need. Avraham would insist that his guests should not be relating to him in this manner; instead, they should make a *bracha* to thank the One Who provides the created world to us.

This development of a spiritual relationship built on gratitude for the provision of physical nourishment is comparable to an infant who starts life crying for food and then quickly forms a deep bond with the parents who provide basic needs to the little baby. This process inheres within the primary experience of human nature. We

can capitalize on our basic physical needs to cultivate and maintain awareness of our relationship to Hashem.

Moreover, the *gemara* in *Brachos* 20b shows that this inner relationship can become even more developed, pronounced, and paramount than the food (or other basic human need) that initially sparks cognizance of this relationship. The *gemara* states:

דרש רב עזריא זמנין אמר לה משמיה דר' אמי וזמנין אמר לה משמיה דר' אסי אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע כתוב בתורתך "אשר לא ישא פנים ולא יקח שחד" והלא אתה נושא פנים לישראל דכתיב "ישא ה' פניו אליך" אמר להם וכי לא אשא פנים לישראל שכתבתי להם בתורה "ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך" והם מדקדקים על עצמם עד כזית ועד כביצה.

*Rav Avira taught, sometimes he said it in the name of Rabbi Ami, and sometimes he said it in the name of Rabbi Asi: The ministering angels said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, in Your Torah it is written: "[The great, mighty and awesome God] Who favors no one and takes no bribe" (Devarim 10:17), yet You, nevertheless, show favor to Israel, as it is written: "The Lord shall show favor to you [and give you peace]" (Bamidbar 6:26). He replied to them: And how can I not show favor to Israel, as I wrote for them in the Torah: "And you shall eat and be satisfied, and bless the Lord your God" (Devarim 8:10), yet they are exacting with themselves [even if they have eaten] as much as an olive or as much as an egg.*

So, the angels ask based on the verse in *Parshas Eikev* (*Devarim* 10:17) which seems to contradict the third part of *Birkas Kohanim*, and Hashem answers them from the verse earlier in *Parshas Eikev* (*Devarim* 8:10) that the Torah mandated *Birkas Hamazon* when an individual has completed a meal to the point of satiation but *Klal Yisrael* has become scrupulous to make this *bracha* even in cases when a person who has not eaten enough to qualify objectively as a full meal nevertheless considers it to be so. This demonstrates that, while the relationship is initially prompted by the physical need, it continues to build momentum and grow well beyond the initial correlation with satiation to the point that, even when the physical need has not been fully met, the person makes *Birkas Hamazon* solely based on the underlying relationship.

Again, the metaphor of the infant is apt. Soon into infancy, the baby starts to cry even when not hungry or in some other physical discomfort because he or she

wants to see the parent. The sensation of emotional relationship between the child and parent quickly outpaces the prompting of the specific physical need, even though this biological vulnerability was the catalyst that at first precipitated this yearning for relationship.

This stands in direct contrast to the punishment Hashem imposed on the *nachash* that its food would be dirt (*Bereishis* 3:14). Rav Simcha Bunim from Peshischa asks why this is so terrible, given that dirt exists in abundance and the *nachash* will always have plenty to eat (*Matzmiach Yeshuos* 26; see also *Yoma* 75a). He answers that it is a terrible curse because the *nachash* will be precluded from ever again having the need to pray or any remaining desire to pray. This is the paradigm of bounty without *bracha*, when the individual receiving the physical sustenance, though abundant, tragically lacks any remaining sense of connectedness to Hashem.

This also explains Rashi's comment to *Brachos* 35b. First, on 35a, the *gemara* extends the obligation of making a *bracha* after eating a meal to apply, as a matter of logic and necessity, to also making *brachos* beforehand. Then, on 35b, the *gemara* quotes Rabbi Chanina bar Papa that whoever benefits from this world without making a *bracha* is considered to have "stolen" from *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and *Knesses Yisrael*. Rashi explains that the specific item this individual has "stolen" from Hashem is, not the food consumed, but rather His *bracha*.

גוזל להקב"ה. את ברכתו.

*Steals from the Holy One, Blessed be He. His blessing.*

Rashi's explanation can be understood as follows. The person who eats or benefits without making a *bracha* wrongly (and ironically, given that this is the *nachash*'s curse) imitates and emulates the *nachash*, enjoying physical nourishment but staying unmindful of the fact that Hashem has provided "*bracha*," which is centrally defined by relationship. This person "steals" Hashem's *bracha* by taking benefit but ignoring the relationship that transforms the act of satiation into something higher than biological necessity, as an expression and reflection of "*bracha*."

Accordingly, the command in *Devarim* 8:10 to be *mevarech* Hashem after eating a meal means that we have to articulate awareness of our relationship to Him when we enjoy nourishment from the world that He created and provides to us. A person who eats without making a *bracha* "steals" Hashem's *bracha* because, like the *nachash*, this individual remains ignorant, unaware, completely oblivious of the relationship to Hashem that the act of making this *bracha* when eating would have crystalized and expressed.

### ***Birchos Hamitzvos: Expression of Relationship to Hashem Based on Appreciation for the Privilege of Our Spiritual Responsibilities***

A similar dynamic exists regarding *birchos hamitzvos*. *Parshas Ki Savo* (*Devarim* 26:13-15) provides the text of the “*vidui ma’aser*” recited after *teruma* and the *ma’asros* for the third and sixth years of the *Shemitta* cycle have been given, as follows:

ואמרת לפני ה' אלקיך בערתי הקדש מן הבית וגם נתתיו ללוי ולגר ליתום ולאלמנה ככל מצותך אשר צויתני לא עברתי ממצותיך ולא שכחתי. לא אכלתי באני ממנו ולא בערתי ממנו בטמא ולא נתתי ממנו למת שמעתי בקול ה' אלקי עשיתי ככל אשר צויתני. השקיפה ממעון קדשך מן השמים וברך את עמך את ישראל ואת האדמה אשר נתת לנו כאשר נשבעת לאבתינו ארץ זבת חלב ודבש.

*You shall declare before Hashem your God: “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as all of the commandments that You commanded me; I did not transgress any of Your commandments and I did not forget. I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared out any of it while I was impure, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead; I have listened to the voice of Hashem my God; I have done just as You commanded me. Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the land You have given us as You swore to our fathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.”*

Rashi explains the apparently extraneous phrase “and I did not forget,” as follows:

ולא שכחתי. מלברך על הפרשת מעשרות.

*And I did not forget to bless you over the separation of tithes.*

This interpretation derives from the *mishna* in *Ma’aser Sheini* 5:11 (and an almost identical statement in *Sifrei Devarim* 303:14), which states:

ולא שכחתי. לא שכחתי מלברך ומלהזכיר שמך עליו.

*And I did not forget. I did not forget to bless you and to mention Your name regarding it.*

Two questions arise regarding Rashi’s comment.

- First, how does Rashi state that this verse references a *bracha* when *brachos* on *mitzvos* were established rabbinically, not biblically?
- Second, Rashi slightly changes the explanation of the *mishna* (and the *Sifrei*). The *mishna* (and the *Sifrei*) has two elements: “*milevarechecha*,” blessing Hashem, and

“*milehazkir shemecha*,” mentioning His name. Why does Rashi cite the obligation stated in the *mishna* of making a *bracha* but omit the other requirement of mentioning Hashem’s name?

Addressing the first of these questions, the *Mizrachi* and *Gur Aryeh* explain that Rashi is not referring to the text of the *bracha* coined by the *Anshei Knesses HaGedola* because this formulation was not enacted until much later. Instead, Rashi means that the individual did not forget to praise Hashem generally at the same time the mitzva was being performed.

However, in his comment to *Ma’aser Sheini* 5:11, the *Tosfos Yom Tov* challenges this explanation because Rashi’s comment on the *gemara* in *Brachos* 40b provides a basic text of *bracha* (except without “*shem u’malchus*”) based on the verse. Rashi there provides the formulation of *bracha* that (according to the *Baraisa* quoted by Abaye in support of Rav’s position that only the name of Hashem, but not His kingship, needs to be mentioned as part of a *bracha*) explains the verse’s phrase “*lo avarti mi-mitzvosecha*” to mean “*milevarechecha*,” from making a blessing, and its phrase “*ve-lo shachachti*” to mean “*milehazkir shimcha alav*,” from mentioning Hashem’s name as part of this blessing. Rashi on *Brachos* 40b states:

מלברך. ברוך אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו להפריש תרומה ומעשר.  
 To bless You. “Blessed is He Who sanctified us with His commandments  
 and commanded us to separate teruma and ma’aser.”

Because Rashi quotes a text and specific formulation of the *bracha* that, according to the *baraisa*, is being alluded to by the verse, the *Tosfos Yom Tov* concludes that Rashi’s comment on *Parshas Ki Savo* must be referring in some manner or form to the specific language of the *bracha*, not just general praise to Hashem for a mitzva. The *Tosfos Yom Tov* explains that this connection between the verse in *Ki Savo* and the formulation of *birchos hamitzvos* that *Chazal* later coined is one of “*asmachta*.”

ואע”ג דמדרבנן היא אסמכוה אקרא דמי גריעא ברכה לאסמכוה אקרא משאר  
 דברים דמדרבנן שהסמיכום על המקראות.  
 And even though it is rabbinic, they leaned on the verse. For why should  
 a bracha be inferior with regard to leaning on a verse from other rabbinic  
 items in which they leaned on verses?

There are two ways we might understand “*asmachta*” in this context. Sometimes we view *asmachta* not as an actual legal basis, but instead as referring to a loose correlation with a verse that provides an after-the-fact mnemonic device. But this

understanding of an *asmachta*, which does not view the *asmachta* as having any inherent relationship to the verse, would not address the *Tosfos Yom Tov*'s explanation of Rashi here because Rashi is interpreting this specific verse in *Ki Savo*. There is no way to say that the *post facto* association between the rabbinic enactment and this verse is the verse's explanation, which is Rashi's focus in his Torah commentary. So, when the *Tosfos Yom Tov* uses the phrase "*asmechua akra*" to explain Rashi's comment on *Ki Savo*, the term "*asmachta*" necessarily means that *Chazal*, themselves, relied on this verse when they formulated the text for *birchos hamitzvos*.

Indeed, the *matbe'a habracha*, the language of *birchos hamitzvos*, almost exactly tracks this verse in *Parshas Ki Savo*, as follows:

<i>Devarim 26:13</i>	<i>Birchos Hamitzvos</i>
"...ואמרת לפני ה' אלקיך ..."	ברוך אתה ה' אלקנו
"... ככל מצותך אשר צויתני"	במצותיו וציונו

In this sense, *Chazal* closely mirrored the text of *Devarim 26:13* when they coined *birchos hamitzvos*. The only words in *birchos hamitzvos* that do not correlate to this verse are "*Melech ha'olam asher kideshanu*," which are absent from the verse. Everything else in a *birchas hamitzva* is found in this verse, practically as a one-to-one correlation. This appears to be what the *Tosfos Yom Tov* means when he uses the phrase "*asmechua akra*" in this context to explain Rashi's interpretation of the verse.

This also addresses the second question above why Rashi's comment omits the phrase that appears in the *mishna* (and the *Sifrei*) of "*umilehazkir shemecha*," mentioning the name of Hashem. The basic formulation of the *matbe'a habracha* is mapped by this verse, including mention of the name of Hashem. Indeed, mentioning "*shem Hashem*" is an indispensable part of any *bracha* according to both Rav and Rav Yochanan in *Brachos 40b*. Rashi accordingly omits the words "*umilehazkir shemecha*" because – based on the verse, and as reflected by the *gemara* in *Brachos 40b* – mentioning *shem Hashem* is included and subsumed within his comment "*milevarachecha*."

Yet, while the *Tosfos Yom Tov* explains Rashi's comment to mean that this verse provides the blueprint for the formulation of *birchos hamitzvos* which *Chazal* later enacted, it is unclear what Rashi intends by presenting this as the interpretation of the verse itself. Even if *Chazal* relied on this verse to later coin *birchos hamitzvos*, what precept underlies Rashi's conclusion that the phrase "*ve-lo shachachti*" means "*milevarechecha*" in the context of this verse?

The most straightforward explanation can be derived from *Chidushei Rebbe Akiva Eiger* on *Brachos* 15a:

ובפרט למה שהקשה לי חכם אחד עמ"ש הצל"ח בחי' לקמן (דף מ) בפירושא דמתניתין דלא שכחתי לברך דהוא מדאורייתא דאף דברכות דרבנן מ"מ מה"ת להודות לה' שזכהו לעשות מצותו דקשה עליו מסוגי' דידן דאמרינן וברכה דרבנן הא מ"מ יש חיוב דאורייתא לברך להודות.

*And specifically regarding what a certain scholar asked me about what the Tzlach writes later [on Brachos 40] regarding the mishna of "I did not forget to bless" that it [appears that] it is Biblical, even though brachos are rabbinic, nevertheless [it fulfills] the Biblical precept to thank Hashem that he privileged us to do His commandment; for our topic [in Brachos 15] raises the problem that we say a bracha is rabbinic, nevertheless there is a Biblical obligation to bless in order to thank.*

Rebbe Akiva Eiger explains the interpretation of “*ve-lo shachachti*” (and I did not forget) as “*milevarechecha*” (to bless You) to mean that this verse in *Ki Savo* conveys the Biblical obligation of expressing gratitude to Hashem for the stature that He bestowed on us through the *mitzva* of separating *teruma* and *ma’aser*. This supports the *Tosfos Yom Tov*’s explanation of Rashi’s comment that *Chazal* – discerning this kernel of a precept in this verse – relied on the proclamation in *vidui ma’aser* as an *asmachta* which provides a model, outline, and basic architecture for the language of *birchos hamitzvos* that they then instituted far more broadly. Thus, the thankfulness articulated to Hashem for the privilege of our spiritual responsibility to separate *teruma* and *ma’aser* becomes the foundation of *birchos hamitzvos* that are formulated using the language of this verse.

### ***Birkas Kohanim: Expression of the Jewish People’s Integrated Relationship with Hashem***

Our unfolding awareness of relationship to Hashem through gratitude for (1) physical sustenance (corresponding to *birchos hanehenin*) and (2) the spiritual stature of *mitzvos* (corresponding to *birchos hamitzvos*) can be closely correlated with the first two parts of *Birkas Kohanim*.

The first verse of *Birkas Kohanim* states “*yevarechecha Hashem veyishmarecha,*” “may Hashem bless you and protect you,” which Rashi interprets as a blessing for the provision and safeguarding of physical sustenance:

יברכך. שיתברכו נכסיד.

וישמרך. שלא יבואו עליך שודדים ליטול ממונך שהנותן מתנה לעבדו אינו יכול

לשמרו מכל אדם וכיון שבאים לסטים עליו ונוטלין אותה ממנו מה הנאה יש לו  
 במתנה זו אבל הקב"ה הוא הנותן הוא השומר והרבה מדרשים דרשו בו בספרי.  
*May He bless you. That your possessions should be blessed.*

*And protect you. That bandits should not come against you to take your property. For one who gives a gift to his servant is unable to guard it against all people and once robbers come against him and take it from him what benefit does he have from this gift? But the Holy One, Blessed is He, is both the giver and the guard. And there are many interpretations expounded on [this verse] in Sifrei.*

This corresponds with the cognizance of our relationship to Hashem developed by appreciation for physical nourishment that is reflected in *birchos hanehenin*.

The second verse of *Birkas Kohanim* is “*ya’er Hashem panav eilecha vichuneka*,” “may Hashem shine His countenance to you and give you grace,” which Rashi explains as a spiritual connectedness to Hashem that the individual then radiates outward to society.

יאר ה' פניו אליך. יראה לך פנים שוחקות פנים צהובות.

ויחנך. יתן לך חן.

*May Hashem shine His countenance to you. May He show you a smiling countenance, a radiant countenance.*

*And grace you. May He give you graciousness.*

This corresponds with awareness of our relationship to Hashem developed by gratitude for the spiritual elevation through the opportunity of performing *mitzvos* that is articulated in *birchos hamitzvos*.

*Birkas Kohanim* then introduces a third aspect of the Jewish people’s relationship to Hashem, separate and apart from material bounty or spiritual largesse: simply, “*yisa Hashem panav eilecha veyasem lecha shalom*,” “may Hashem lift His countenance to you and endow you with peace.”

As discussed above, the *gemara* in *Brachos* 20b raises the apparent contradiction that, on one hand, *Devarim* 10:17 describes Hashem as being impartial, “*asher lo yisa panim*,” but, nevertheless, *Bamidbar* 6:26 uses the identical phrase in *Birkas Kohanim* to describe the favor that Hashem displays toward *Bnei Yisrael*: “*yisa Hashem panav eilecha veyasem lecha shalom*.” The *gemara*’s resolution is that this favoritism is wholly appropriate because the verse in *Devarim* 8:10 requires *Birkas Hamazon* after eating

to satiation, but the Jewish people scrupulously make this *bracha* even when they have not eaten enough to be full, when they have eaten only the minimum amount to barely be called a meal. This expresses a relationship for its own sake, connectedness maintained unconditionally without the need for recourse to any other motivation.

Likewise, Rashi explains this third part of *Birkas Kohanim* as follows:

יְשֵׁא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלַיךְ. יִכְבוֹשׁ כַּעֲסוֹ.

*May Hashem lift His countenance to you. May He suppress His anger.*

Even when there might be cause for Divine anger, *kivyachol*, this third part of *Birkas Kohanim* is for any such anger to be dispelled and dissipated through the strength of Hashem's underlying relationship with the Jewish people.

And, of course, Rashi's explanation of this part of *Birkas Kohanim* is the same as the *bracha* that, in *Brachos 7a*, Rebbe Yishmael ben Elisha offers when prompted by the Divine request "Yishmael bni barcheini," "Yishmael, my son, bless Me," to which he responds: "yehi ratzon milfanecha sheyichbeshu rachamecha es ka'ascha," "May it be Your will that Your mercy will suppress Your anger." Indeed, commenting on this verse, Rashi subtly changes the word from "*ya'avov* ka'aso mimcha" that the *midrash* uses (*Bamidbar Rabba* 11:7, *Sifrei* 42) to "*yichbosh* ka'aso" (Rashi *Bamidbar* 6:26). In doing so, Rashi directly and reciprocally mirrors, as his interpretation of this third portion of *Birkas Kohanim*, the language of the *bracha* expressed by the *Kohen Gadol* toward Hashem in *Brachos 7a*.

## Conclusion

We can discern from the *gemara* in *Brachos 7a* that the word "*bracha*" implies an engaged, dynamic relationship between the one invoking a *bracha* and its recipient. This sense of strong relationship at the heart of every *bracha* provides an explanation of how the term "*bracha*" encompasses *birchos hanehenin*, *birchos hamitzvos*, and *Birkas Kohanim*. The *brachos* made on food express a relationship with Hashem underlying our physical sustenance. The *brachos* made on *mitzvos* articulate gratitude for the stature bestowed on us by Hashem through the privilege of our spiritual responsibilities. *Birkas Kohanim* reflects each of these two facets and then adds another aspect: the unconditional relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people, simply for its own sake. This implication of the term "*bracha*" which presupposes an interactive relationship thereby integrates the categories of *Birkas Kohanim*, *Birkas Hamazon*, and, according to Rashi, the beginning of a *birkas hamitzva*, that the Torah references or alludes to.

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