**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT NASO**

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**“So They Shall Put My Name Upon the Israelites, and I Will Bless Them” (*Bamidbar* 6:27)**

**The Priestly Blessing in the Temple and in the Countryside**

**Rav Elchanan Samet**

6:22: And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying:

23: Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying: Thus you shall bless the Israelites; you shall say to them: 

24: The Lord bless you, and keep you;

25: The Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

26: The Lord raise His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

27: So shall they put My name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them.

### I. The cancelation of the mitzvaof the Daily Priestly Blessing "In these countries"

We will open this study by presenting a problem that has been widely discussed by the halakhic authorities. Apparently, this problem has little to do with an examination of the plain meaning of the Torah.

The laws governing the priestly blessing are discussed in the *Tur* and *Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim*, Chap. 128-130, “The Laws of Raising the Hands," “*Hilkhot Nesiat Kappayim*.” (The term comes from *Vayikra* 9:22, when Aharon first blesses the nation at the climax of the dedication of the Tabernacle, “And Aharon raised his hands towards the people and he blessed them.”) These chapters discuss the details and minutiae of how to fulfill this mitzva, based on the Talmudic passages and the rulings of the Rishonim dealing with the issue. Among other things, there is a discussion of the times when this mitzvais to be fulfilled:

The hands are raised [to bless the people] only at the *Shacharit* (morning) and *Musaf* (additional) services and at the *Ne'ila* (closing) service on a day when there is such aservice… But not at the *Mincha* (afternoon) service*,* because drunkenness is common at that time [of the day].

We see then that the priestly blessing is joined to all of the **daytime** services (it is not recited at night), **every day of the year,** with the exception of the *Mincha* service, regarding which it is decreed that the priestly blessing should not be recited. The source for this is the *mishna* and *gemara* on *Ta'anit* 26a.

However, in the Rema's glosses to 128:44, we find a surprising ruling:

It is the customary practice in all of these countries [= Poland, Germany and the rest of Europe] that the hands are raised [to bless the people] only on a *yom tov*… but not on the rest of the days of the year, even Shabbat.

And even on a *yom tov*, the hands are raised only at the *Musaf* service… On Yom Kippur the hands are raised as on *yom tov*…

This custom, reflected in the remarks of the Rema, is practiced in Ashkenazic communities outside Israel to this very day, and it is probably an ancient custom. Evidence of the practice is found in the writings of the disciples of the Maharam of Rothenburg (13th century), but it is certainly much older than that.

This custom left its impression even in Eretz Israel: in the northern part of the country (in the Galilean cities of Safed and Tiberias), the Ashkenazi communities are accustomed not to perform the priestly blessing during the week, but only in the *Musaf* service of Shabbat and *yom tov*.

In the Sephardic and *Eidot Ha-mizrach* communities, both in Israel and abroad, this is not the prevalent practice. There it is customary to recite the priestly blessing every day, in accordance with the Mishna and the Gemara, and the rulings of the Rambam and the *Shulchan Arukh.*

Thus there arises a serious question: how could so many Jewish communities cancel the regular fulfillment of a positive Torah precept, the time for which is every day; and what is the reason that they would do this?

### II. The reasons given for this practice

When Rav She’ar Yashuv Cohen came from Jerusalem to serve as Haifa's chief rabbi, he found that the custom of most of the Ashkenazic synagogues in his city was in accordance with the Galilean custom: to recite the priestly blessing only in the *Musaf* service of Shabbat and *yom tov*. In 1979 he addressed a letter to the rabbis of Haifa, asking that they agree with him to change the custom and to follow the practice of most communities in Israel: to recite the priestly blessing every day. His letter was transformed into an article published in 1981 in Vol. 2 of *Techumin* (pp. 345-363). In the fourth chapter of his article, Rav She’ar Yashuv Cohen reviews the various reasons offered to explain the custom of the communities outside Israel, and we will follow in his footsteps.

1. Rav Yosef Karo, in his magnum opus on the *Tur*, *Beit Yosef*,writes at the end of Chap. 128:

The *Agur* writes that Mahari Molin was once asked: Why do the priests not raise their hands every day, seeing that this is a positive command? And he answered: Because it is the customary practice of the priests to immerse themselves [in a *mikve*] prior [to the blessing]… and in the winter it is difficult for them to immerse themselves every day, and so arose the practice [to recite the blessing] only on *yom tov* [for many are accustomed to immerse themselves on the eve of the *yom tov*]. Also, it is for the reason of the loss of working hours. When a priest is not called upon [to ascend and bless the people] he does not transgress [the positive command].

Rav Yosef Karo responds to this citation from the *Agur* as follows:

He proposed a forced explanation in order to justify the local custom [in Germany], but this does not suffice. For that which he writes "Because it is the customary practice of the priests to immerse themselves [in a *mikve*] prior [to the blessing]" — this is a stringency that leads to a leniency… for immersion for raising the hands [to bless the people] is not mentioned in the Talmud. If they want to be stringent and immerse themselves, why should they cancel for this reason three positive commands every day?

And even though the priest only transgresses [the positive command] if he is called upon [to ascend], it is preferable that they fulfill three positive commands every day without immersion, since they are not obligated to immerse themselves, and because of this they fail to fulfill three positive commands every day. Praise be given to the people of Eretz Israel and the entire realm of Egypt who raise their hands every day and do not immerse for the priestly blessing.

2. The Rema in his *Darkhei Moshe* on the *Tur* (ibid.) responds to these words:

I say that the reason that they considered secondary [Mahari Molin who adds at the end of his responsum: "Also, it is for the reason of the loss of working hours," and Rav Yosef Karowho does not address this reason at all] is the main reason! For because of the loss of working hours of the people in those countries, where the priests and the people are anxious about their livelihood… and they are not in a state of gladness, therefore they do not raise their hands on a day when there is a loss of working hours for the people. Even on Shabbat they don't raise their hands, because they are anxious in their thoughts about their past and future handiwork, and their bodies receive only a slight rest from their toil, and they are not in a state of gladness as they are on *yom tov*, about which it is stated (*Devarim* 16:14): "And you shall rejoice in your festival," and therefore the practice developed only to raise hands on *yom tov*. So it seems to me.

The Rema briefly repeats this argument in his glosses to *OC* 128:40. Were these words not black and white before us, it would be difficult to suggest them: is it possible that for this reason they cancel the fulfillment of a positive command every day of the year? From where does the Rema derive the idea that "gladness" is a condition for fulfilling this positive command? It seems that he takes it from the words of Rav Yitzchak bar Rav Yehuda, Rashi's teacher, which are brought by the Mordekhai and the *Shibbolei ha-Leket* (cited in *Beit Yosef* at the end of chapter 128), who exempts for this reason an unmarried priest from raising his hands to bless the people. There, however, we are dealing with a particular priest, and not with a sweeping cancellation of the priestly blessing. Moreover, his words have no Talmudic source, and other Rishonimdisagree with them.

3. Rav Efrayim Zalman Margaliot of Brod (early 19th century) in his *Responsa* *Beit Efrayim*, *OC*, 6, writes a long and detailed responsum to defend the custom. Here is the question:

Regarding the prevailing custom in all of these countries, that the priests raise their hands [to bless the people] only on *yom tov*, and some raise the concern that there is a positive Torah precept that they should raise their hands [to bless the people] every day, is there room and foundation for this practice, and should it or should it not be abolished?

At the beginning of his remarks, he clarifies that this is an ancient custom "more than five hundred years old," and he lists the great Torah authorities, early and late, who attest to the practice and give their approval: "And it seems from their words that we must not deviate from the practice, and so it would appear from the words of the rest of the Acharonim*.*"

Rav Margaliot argues:

Who would dare abolish the custom, even if he were greater in wisdom… since the custom was founded by the ancients and practiced before the greatest Rishonim: the Maharam of Rothenburg and his disciple the Tashbatz, the *Kol Bo,* the Maharal, the *Agur*, the Rema, the *Levush*, the Taz, the *Magen Avraham* and all the other great authorities of the generations?

The first reason he suggests to justify this custom is that the priests of our time are only "presumed priests" (see Rambam, *Hilkhot Issurei Bia*, Chap. 20), that is to say, their lineage is not documented, but rather they are presumed to be priests without proof. This being the case, "we certainly cannot presume with certainty that they are priests for the purpose of leniency," and therefore,

How… can we command them to raise their hands [by calling upon them to ascend and bless them], for surely a non-priest who raises his hands [to bless the people] transgresses the positive command “‘Thus you shall bless’ — and not non-priests,” as is explained in *Ketubot* (24b)… Also, in any case, this involves a blessing recited in vain [the blessing recited by the priests over the commandment to bless the people].

Of course, this explanation raises difficulties in the opposite direction: If so, how do we permit "presumed priests" to recite the priestly blessing on *yom tov*? And in those communities where the priests bless the people every day, why do we not prevent them from so doing?

Rav Margaliot answers: "As for the fact that in Eretz Israel, [the priests] raise their hands every day, that is because they enjoy a presumption from ancient times, and we do not remove them from their presumptive status," and he proves the validity of this argument from the Gemara.

With regard to the custom in Europe to recite the priestly blessing only on *yom tov*, he writes:

They allowed them to raise their hands [to bless the people] on the festivals based on their presumptive status [as priests], so that they not forget their priesthood and practice leniency in matters that are prohibited to a priest.

Rav Margaliot's answers are a bit forced, as he tries to have it both ways.

4. The early Ashkenazic authorities (until the generation of the Maharam of Rothenburg) were in possession of a book called *Sefer Ha-miktzo'ot*. This book contained responsa and rulings of the Geonim of Babylonia and the Torah scholars of North Africa, and it appears to have been compiled in the middle of the eleventh century. Prof. Simcha Assaf collected all the remnants and citations from the work, publishing them in 1947.

One of the citations from this book is taken from the end of the commentary to *Tamid* attributed to the Ra'avad, but written by Rav Baruch bar Rav Yitzchak, author of the *Sefer Ha-teruma*. From this work, the citation has migrated to many other works. Here is part of the citation (#47 in the Assaf edition, pp. 39-40):

In a place where there is a menstruating woman in the house of the priest, he may not ascend to recite the priestly blessing as long as she is in her menstrual state, for we are concerned that perhaps he has touched something that she had touched and become impure.

For Rav Yudan said: Any priest who raises his hands to bless the people, and his mother or his wife or his daughter is ritually impure, and he enters the same house where the menstruating woman is found, he renders the prayer of Israel an abomination… And about this it is stated: "And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you" (*Yeshayahu* 1:15).

Just as a priest is forbidden to enter a house in which there is a corpse, so too he is forbidden to enter a house in which there is a menstruating woman. If he designated a room for her, and she did not leave it all the days of her menstruation, it is well.

Rav Efrayim Zalman Margaliot cites this in his aforementioned responsum, and he proposes (already suggested before him by Rav Chayim Alfandari in his book, *Derekh Ha-kodesh,* as cited in that responsum) that this accounts for the custom of the Ashkenazic communities according to which the priests do not raise their hands to bless the people every day.

Rav Chizkiya da Silva, in his work *Peri Chadash* (OC 128), also brings this citation, and keenly comments: "These words should not be made known, as they are not the law." In fact, their source is a work known as *Baraita De-massekhet Nida* (from which the author of *Sefer Ha-miktzo'ot* takes another citation, which appears in #1 in the Assaf edition). Contemporary scholars view this work critically, and this is what Prof. Rav Shaul Lieberman says about it in *Sheki'in*, p. 22:

The strange *baraita*, *Baraita De-massekhet Nida*, ed. Horowitz, was apparently written by a resident of Eretz Israel who belonged to a sect which did not conduct itself in accordance with the Torah and the Halakha. This *baraita* is filled with Karaite opinions…

He brings several examples to support this assertion.

So too the citation from this source brought above bears a distinctively sectarian character, and it would not be a good idea to hang the Ashkenazic custom upon it, as does the author of the *Beit Efrayim* in his responsum and those who precede him in this regard.

One who considers these explanations and others similar to them cannot help but marvel: how did a custom arise that involves the continuous abolition of a positive command, with no real basis? Indeed, criticism of this custom was sounded in earlier generations, e.g., in Rav Menachem Azarya of Fano's *Responsa Menachem Azarya*, #95, where he writes: "Regarding the fact that in most of the world the priests do not ascend to bless the people every day of the year, this is a **bad custom."** (His words are cited in *Responsa Beit Efrayim*, where this responsum as well is used to support leaving the custom in place, for the respondent does not call for the "bad custom" to be changed).

In fact, the students of Vilna Gaon testify that their teacher tried to change the custom in his *beit midrash*, but did not succeed. The author of the *Arukh Ha-shulchan*, Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein, writes in *OC* 128:4:

There is certainly no [valid] reason for our custom of abolishing the positive command of the priestly blessing all year long, and it has been written that this is a bad custom [the reference is to Rav Menachem Azarya of Fano]. I have a tradition that two great Torah authorities of previous generations [the Vilna Gaon and his disciple, Rav Chayim of Volozhin], each one in his own place, wanted to institute the priestly blessing every day, and when they reached the appointed day, the matter got overturned and they failed, saying that they see that so it has been decreed in heaven.

Thus, the question still stands.

### III. The priestly blessing in the temple and in the countryside —the Rambam's position

It is worth examining some of the elements of the positive command concerning the priestly blessing, especially in the context of counting the 613 *mitzvot*. While the Rambam’s *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* is the most famous listing, over two centuries before, in the Geonic era, he was preceded by *Halakhot Gedolot* (whose unknown author is referred to as the Bahag) and Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon’s *piyutim* (liturgical poems). In one *piyut*, on which Rav Yerucham Fischel Perla wrote his expansive commentary just over a century ago, Rabbeinu Saadia sorts the *mitzvot* based on the categories of positive commands, negative commands and collective responsibilities; in the other *piyut,* which is found in Rabbeinu Saadia's *Siddur*, he sorts the *mitzvot* based on their connection to the Ten Commandments. This is known as the *Azharot* (Exhortations).

First, let us consider the biblical and rabbinical sources.

The wording of the mitzva in the Torah does not indicate when or where the priests are obligated to bless the people of Israel. It is clear from the Mishnaic and Talmudic sources that this is a daily obligation. *Chazal*, however, distinguish between two places where the mitzva is fulfilled, and in each place the mitzva is fulfilled in a different manner: in the Temple and in the rest of the country.

In *Tamid* 7:2, the Mishna describes the daily observance of the mitzvaof the priestly blessing in the Temple, and it then mentions the differences between the way it is fulfilled in the Temple and the way it is fulfilled in the countryside (*medina*), after the bringing of the continual offering and the burning of the incense each morning.

They [the priests] went and stood on the [twelve] steps [in front] of the Portico… They blessed the people with a single benediction [they recited all three verses as one, for in the Temple there would be no response of Amen after each verse]. In the countryside, they recited it as three blessings, in the Temple as one.

In the Temple, they pronounced the Divine Name as it is written, but in the countryside by its substitute.

In the countryside, the priests raised their hands as high as their shoulders, but in the Temple right above their heads.

This *mishna* appears once again in the seventh chapter of *Sota*, and in the Gemara ad loc. (38a-40b) we find the main Talmudic discussion concerning the priestly blessing.

The obvious question arises: does the main fulfillment of this mitzvalie specifically in the Temple, or is there no fundamental difference between fulfilling the mitzvain the Temple and fulfilling it in the countryside — in both places the mitzvais fulfilled in equal manner, only that regarding certain matters there are differences between them?

If we examine the Rambam's *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, we are liable to get the impression that the main mitzvaof the priestly blessing is in the Temple, as part of the sacrificial service. The Rambam inserts this mitzva (Positive #26) in a set of *mitzvot* relating to the Temple and the service conducted therein (starting with #20). It is preceded by the mitzvato light the lamp (#25), and is followed by the mitzvato set the showbread on the table (#27). The Rambam's wording in #26 is nonspecific:

The command that the priests were commanded to bless Israel every day.

As mentioned, however, the context indicates that this commandment is part of the commandments relating to the Temple and the Divine service.

However, already in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* itself, when the Rambam summarizes the positive commands, he writes:

Some of them are commandmentsthat are mandatory for every person at all times, and in all places, and in all situations… We will refer to these commandmentsas "mandatory commandments*,*" because they are a duty falling upon every adult man in Israel, at all times, and in all places, and in all situations… There are sixty such commandments.

The Rambam then lists the sixty commandments, which include:

The twenty-sixth — this is limited to male priests.

We see then that the mitzvaof the priestly blessing applies to male priests "at all times and in all places," and is not limited to the Temple! Its location in the body of *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* teaches at most that according to the Rambam the main fulfillment of this mitzvais in the Temple, whereas in the rest of the country, the obligation derives from the obligation in the Temple.

This, however, is not what is implied by the words of the Rambam in *Mishneh Torah*, where this mitzvais included in *Sefer Ahava*, in *Hilkhot Tefilla U-virkat Kohanim*:

One: that one should serve God every day with prayer; two: that the priests should bless Israel every day.

All of the laws governing the priestly blessing are included in Chapters 14-15 of *Hilkhot Tefilla* *U-virkat Kohanim,* where he first discusses its fulfillment in the countryside (14:1-8), and only afterwards (in *halakha* 9) does he start: "How is the priestly blessing recited in the Temple?"

This arrangement of the laws suggests that, according to the Rambam in his *Mishneh Torah,* the main fulfillment of the priestly blessing is precisely in the countryside, its being part of the daily prayer service, and a mitzvavery similar to the mitzvaof prayer. By virtue of this general obligation, it is fulfilled [with certain differences] also in the Temple.

Either way, it is clear that according to the Rambam, both in *Sefer Ha-mitzvot* and in *Mishneh Torah*, the obligation of the priestly blessing is by Torah law at all times and in all places.

This is clearly formulated in *Sefer Ha-chinnukh* (which usually follows the position of the Rambam), #378:

This mitzvaapplies in all places and at all times among the priests...

### IV. The Priestly blessing in the Temple and in the countryside — The opinion of Rav Ya’akov Emden in *Mor u-ktzia*

Despite the clear position of the Rambam and other Rishonim, dissenting views are found among the Acharonim, according to which the Torah obligation regarding the priestly blessing is exclusively in the Temple, whereas in the rest of the country the obligation is only by rabbinical decree.

The first among the Acharonimto raise this possibility is Rav Ya’akov Emden in his work on the *Tur* and *Shulchan Arukh Orach Chayim*, *Mor U-ktzia* (Altona, 1761). In his comments to *Shulchan Arukh OC* 128, he raises this possibility several times:

In one of the first discussions that he presents in this chapter, he writes:

As for the law that a non-priest [who blesses the people] violates the positive command "Thus you shall bless" (*Ketubot* 24b), this is only where he blesses in the way that the priests blessed in the Temple as part of the sacrificial service. As for the priestly blessing today in the countryside (*gevulin*), it is very reasonable that this is only by rabbinical decree.

Below he says:

The obligation of raising the hands [to bless the people] in our time is only by rabbinic decree, as is implied by the Gemara in *Chagiga* regarding one who looks at the hands of the priests.

His reference is to a Talmudic passage in *Chagiga* 16a:

Rabbi Yehuda be-Rabbi Nachmani expounded… Anyone who looks at three things, his eyes become dim: at the rainbow, and at the Prince, and at the priests…

One who looks at the priests — at the time when the Temple stood, when they stood upon their platform and blessed Israel with the Explicit Name [of God] [Rashi: "for the *Shekhina* rests on the joints of their fingers"].

The third time, the author discusses the words of the Gemara in *Ta'anit* 27a, which states that a priest with a physical blemish is permitted to recite the priestly blessing, based on a verbal analogy between a priest and a Nazirite (as a Nazirite with a physical blemish is a Nazirite). The Gemara states that this verbal analogy is merely a support (*asmakhta*), a later institution utilizing a biblical verse without having the force of Torah law. Rav Emden explains this as follows:

It is certainly a support, that is, regarding the priestly blessing in the countryside, for the whole obligation is without a doubt only by rabbinical decree. Consider the matter: how is it possible that priests with blemishes are fit to raise their hands [to bless the people] in the Temple? Surely this took place on the steps of the Portico, and priests with blemishes may not enter there… Surely then [blemished priests] are not fit for the priestly blessing by Torah law, but for the priestly blessing in the countryside, which is only by rabbinical decree, as a reminder of the Torah law.

### V. Rav Yerucham FisChel Perla's explanation of the view of Rav Saadia Gaon

Jumping forward a hundred and fifty years, we come to Rav Yerucham Fischel Perla, author of the monumental commentary on Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon’s *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*.

Positive #155 according to Rabbeinu Saadia Gaon is "Thus you shall bless." Rav Yerucham Perla first surveys the literature of the enumerators of the *mitzvot* in general:

The positive command of the priestly blessing is counted by all the enumerators of the commandments.

He notes, however, two exceptions in opposite directions:

The Bahag counts it twice: once in the list of positive commands, and once in the list of [collective] responsibilities. In the list of positive commands he refers to it as "raising the hands," whereas in the list of [collective] responsibilities he mentions it as "the priestly blessing." His words are obscure.

He goes on to reject the suggestion that in the list of positive commands, the Bahagcounts the mitzvaof the priestly blessing in the countryside, whereas in the list of collective responsibilities he counts the priestly blessing in the Temple.

This is not at all possible, for in the Torah there is only one mitzvafor the priests to bless the people of Israel, and [the blessings] in the Temple and in the countryside are included in this positive command.

Rav Perla explains the words of the *Halakhot Gedolot* in #16, based on the words of Rav Eliezer Azikri, author of *Sefer Chareidim* (in the section of positive commands connected to the mouth): "And the people of Israel who stand silently facing the priests and preparing their hearts to receive their blessing as the word of God, they too are included in the mitzva." With this, Rav Perla explains:

Therefore Rabbeinu [Saadia] Gaon counted the mitzvathat falls upon the priests to bless Israel among the positive commands that fall upon the individual, because each priest is obligated in it [it may be added that this is the reason that he defines this mitzvaas "raising the hands," which is the act of the priests when they recite the blessing]… But the mitzvafalling upon the community to be blessed by the priests he writes in the list of collective responsibilities, as they are *mitzvot* and statutes that fall only on the community, because it is only the community that is obligated in this mitzva.

It may be added that this is the reason that he defines this mitzvaas "the priestly blessing," for a blessing involves two parties.

The author now moves on to the second exception:

I am puzzled by Rabbeinu [Saadia] Gaon, for in his *Azharot* on the Ten Commandments, he does not mention this mitzvaof the priestly blessing at all. This is a puzzling matter.

In the *piyut* sorting the *mitzvot* based on the categories of positive commands, negative commands and collective responsibilities, the mitzva appears, but in the Azharot it is missing! Rav Perla offers the following solution:

There is room to say that there he maintains, in accordance with some of the Acharonim, that by Torah law the positive command is only raising the hands in the Temple together with the service, as it is written: "And Aharon raised his hands toward the people, and blessed them; and he came down from offering the sin-offering, and the burnt-offering, and the peace-offerings" (*Vayikra* 9:22). And we learned in the *Sifra* (ad loc.): “‘And he blessed them’ — this is an obscure blessing, [the content of] which you do not know, but the verse spells it out below: ‘The Lord bless you, and keep you’ until ‘and give you peace.’" See there. However, in the countryside, the priestly blessing is only by rabbinical decree.

Later, he cites *Sota* 38b, which implies that the priestly blessing in the prayer service was instituted in the wake of the priestly blessing in the Temple and the sacrificial service (*avoda*) there:

Rav Yehoshua ben Levi said: Any priest who does not ascend [to the platform] for the [blessing of] *Avoda* (*Retzei*) may not ascend later; as it is stated: "And Aharon raised his hands toward the people, and blessed them" (*Vayikra* 9:22). As in this passage, it is at the time of *avoda*, so too here [in the synagogue] it must be at the time of *avoda*.

The *Avoda* blessing is certainly by rabbinical decree, as it is the Rabbis who institute the text of the prayer, whereas actual *avoda* takes place only in the Temple, and it is the Rabbis who institute that the priestly blessing be juxtaposed to the *Avoda* blessing in prayer, i.e. that it be like Torah law.

How does this assumption resolve the absence of this mitzvafrom Rabbeinu Saadia's *Azharot*, his enumeration of the *mitzvot* according to the Ten Commandments?

Now we can say that Rabbeinu [Saadia] Gaon maintains that by Torah law the priestly blessing is recited only in the context of the Temple service, and therefore he maintains that this positive command is not counted separately, as it is part of the mitzvaof service in the Temple… for it was already counted in the positive command of the service in the Temple and it is not counted separately.

However, here [in this count], he changes his mind, either because he maintains that even the priestly blessing in the countryside is included in the positive command of raising hands [to bless the people]… or because he maintains that one cannot say [about this mitzva] that it is part of the positive command of offering sacrifices, and therefore he counts it as a [separate] positive command as do the other enumerators of the *mitzvot.*

Why do Rav Ya’akov Emden and Rav Yerucham Perla entertain the possibility that by Torah law the mitzvaof the priestly blessing applies only in the Temple? Surely in the body of the mitzva — in the verses cited at the beginning of this *shiur* — this is not stated at all, and the implication is that "Thus you shall bless the Israelites" applies "in all places and at all times" (as stated in *Sefer Ha-chinnukh*)? The fact that Aharon raises his hands and blessed the people after bringing the offerings of the eighth day does not prove that only in this way can the mitzvabe fulfilled. We might derive from this that in the Temple the priestly blessing follows the service, but this does not rule out the obligation to recite the blessing even outside the Temple.

It may, however, be argued that when the Torah commands the priests to bless the people of Israel, it assumes as self-evident that the place of the priests is inside the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), and that there, and only there, are they to bless the people of Israel in the framework of their activity in that place.

A hint to the priestly blessing's belonging to the *Mishkan* is found in the Masoretic division of the text into sections: Beginning in Chapter 5 in our *parasha* we find a series of halakhic sections, each of which is “open” in the Torah scroll. This means that when one section ends, the rest of the line is left open, so that section following begins on the next line. The same is true of the separation between the passage of the priestly blessing at the end of Chapter 6 and the Nazarite passage which precedes it, but the priestly blessing is “closed” in terms of what comes next, so that only a few spaces separate it from the offerings of the tribal princes that follow it, brought "on the day that Moshe had made an end of setting up the *mishkan*" (7:1). The implication is that the priestly blessing belongs to the sections dealing with the *Mishkan* in the Book of *Bamidbar*.

The connection between the priestly blessing and the *avoda* is alluded to also in a verse in the Book of *Devarim*:

10:8: At that time the Lord separated the tribe of Levi, to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord **to minister to Him and to bless His name,** to this day.

"To minister to Him" means to serve in His sanctuary, and so the verse draws a connection between these two roles of the priests. Indeed, on *Sota* 38b, Rav Natan draws a verbal analogy between the two, and from the verbal analogy he derives that the priestly blessing must be recited while standing, just as the ministering of the priests in the Temple must be done while standing.

It must, however, be admitted that nothing that we have said proves that the priestly blessing applies by Torah law only in the Tabernacle or the Temple, and neither Rav Ya’akov Emden nor Rav Yerucham Perla bring clear evidence of this claim.

### Vi. "SO that they shall place my name" — in the countryside?

The Mishna in *Tamid* and in *Sota*, which we cited above in Section III, lists three differences between the priestly blessing in the Temple and the priestly blessing in the countryside. Do these differences relate to the essence of the priestly blessing, to a fundamental law in its regard, that is liable to impact upon the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the mitzva as the Torah intends? Let us examine the matter.

The first difference is whether "Amen" is answered after each verse (so in the countryside), or perhaps the priests recite the entire blessing as a single unit, because "Amen" is not answered to a blessing recited in the Temple. This difference appears insignificant, as the response of "Amen" on the part of those receiving the blessing is not indispensable and does not change the blessing of the priests.

The third difference mentioned in the Mishna relates to the height of the hands as they are raised by the priests: in the countryside, as high as their shoulders; whereas in the Temple, over their heads. This also does not appear to be an essential difference, as in the end the raising of the hands is fulfilled one way or the other.

However, the second difference mentioned in the Mishna seems to touch upon the essence of the priestly blessing:

In the Temple they pronounced the Divine Name as it is written [the Tetragrammaton], but in the countryside by its substitute [the name *Ado-nai*].

Pronouncing the Tetragrammaton in the priestly blessing is of course of great significance, and it gives weight to their blessing that is different from a blessing in which that name is not pronounced. What is the source for requiring the blessing to be recited with the Tetragrammaton, and from where do we derive a distinction regarding this matter between the Temple and the countryside?

The *baraita* in *Sota* 38a teaches as follows:

"Thus you shall bless the Israelites" – with the Explicit Name [= the Tetragrammaton]. You say that it means with the Explicit Name, or perhaps its substitute was used! Therefore the verse states: "So shall they put My name" — the name that is unique to Me. It is possible to think that [the Explicit Name was also used] in the countryside. Therefore it is stated: "So shall they put My name," and elsewhere it is stated (*Devarim* 14:24): "The place which the Lord your God shall choose to set His name there" — as in this latter passage it denotes being within the Temple, so also in the former passage it denotes being within the Temple.

The blessing with the Explicit Name is thus part of the essence of the priestly blessing, and its source is in an explicit verse:

6:27: So shall they put My name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them.

Rashi explains, in the footsteps of the *Sifrei*:

"So shall they put My name" — they will bless them with the Explicit Name.

"And I will bless them" — Israel, and I will agree with the priests.

Ibn Ezra offers two explanations for our verse. The first is as follows:

"So shall they put My name" — as in: "to set His name there" (*Devarim* 14:24) — that they be sanctified with the name.

According to this interpretation, this is a metaphor, and it is as if it said: So shall they sanctify the Israelites, when they bless them. This metaphor serves also in the description of the Temple in *Devarim* 14:24: "The place which the Lord your God shall choose to set His name there" — that is to say: the place which the Lord shall choose to sanctify. It does not relate to the pronouncing of God's name.

However, in his second explanation, ibn Ezra agrees with *Chazal*:

Or else it means: When they mention My name there, for in each of the three verses, there is the venerable and terrifying name.

According to this explanation, this is not a metaphorical expression, but rather a literal statement: the priestly blessing, when it is done with the threefold mention of the venerable and terrifying name, "places" God's name on the people of Israel, and creates a unique closeness between God and Israel — "and I will bless them."

The instruction to the priests that they should bless Israel with the Explicit Name turns out then to be part of the essence of the priestly blessing, and only in this way is the Torah's mitzvafulfilled as intended. In contrast, when the priests recite the blessing with a substitute name, they do not fulfill the mitzvaas required by the Torah, and therefore the biblical commandment is not fulfilled. However, mentioning the Explicit Name is possible only in the Temple, and from here we derive that the Torah's intention is that the priestly blessing be conducted in the Temple.

We see then that that the reason that the priestly blessing is by Torah law only in the Temple is not the connection between the priestly blessing and **the service in the Temple,** but rather its connection **to the realm of the Temple,** for only there may the Explicit Name be pronounced and may the mitzvabe fulfilled as required: "So shall they put My name upon the Israelites, and I will bless them."

This reason for making the priestly blessing obligatory exclusively in the Temple is presented with great brevity and with hesitation by Rav Yitzchak of Karlin in *Keren Ora* (*Sota* 38b):

It appears a bit that the obligation of this mitzvain the countryside is not by Torah law, as it is written: "And they shall place My name" — the name that is unique to Me, and specifically in the Temple, but not in the countryside. However, I am afraid to say this, and from the words of the Rambam, it certainly does not appear so.

Rav Yitzchak is prompted to suggest this because of the following question that he raises: if the obligation to recite the priestly blessing is binding even in the countryside, how and when does this obligation apply?

Now you cannot say that the obligation is during the prayer service, for prayer is only by rabbinical decree. Even according to the Rambam who says that prayer is by Torah law, communal prayer is only by rabbinical law, and the priestly blessing is recited only in a quorum of ten; if so, you cannot say that it is connected to prayer by Torah law…

Thus, since we haven't heard from the Torah about gathering together to pray with the community, it is still difficult: when is the obligation of raising the hands [to bless the people]? It does not stand to reason that the priests and the people are obligated to assemble to receive a blessing from the priests with no other service...

If so, it is not clear in what manner this mitzvais obligatory in the countryside.

Therefore, he raises the possibility that the obligation to recite the priestly blessing in the countryside is not by Torah law, but rather by rabbinical decree, but he retracts this argument because of several proofs that he brings from the two Talmuds and from the *Sifrei Zuta*. We cannot discuss these proofs in the present forum, but let it be noted that Rav Yerucham Perla rejects these proofs one by one.

The truth is that from the Talmud one may also bring counterarguments, evidence that the priestly blessing in the countryside is by rabbinical decree, and such proofs are brought by Rav Ya’akov Emden and Rav Yerucham Perla. Regarding them as well, the debate has not yet been closed.

However, it does not appear necessary to assume that there exists a united front on this issue. The obligation by Torah law to recite the priestly blessing in the Temple is clear, beyond all doubt; the obligation in the countryside is a matter of doubt, and in the sources of *Chazal* — the Mishna and the Gemara – it is not clearly stated whether the obligation is by Torah law or by rabbinical decree. Since there are different opinions on this matter among the Rishonimand Acharonim*,* it is possible that already in the Talmud itself there are two approaches to the question, which do not reach the point of open confrontation and explicit dispute.

### VII. Justification of the Ashkenazic practice outside Eretz Israel

Let us return to the puzzling matter with which we began: how did the custom of the Jewish communities in Europe regarding the priestly blessing come into being, that custom which to this day is the prevalent custom outside Eretz Israel — abolishing the daily priestly blessing and settling for reciting it only in the *Musaf* service of *yom tov*?

It seems that in the wake of what has been clarified in this *shiur* thus far, the answer is clear: this custom could come into being only based on the assumption that the priestly blessing that is recited in the countryside, in places where it is recited without the Explicit Name that is required by the Torah ("And I shall place My name upon the Israelites"), is not by biblical law.

However, even if the priestly blessing in the countryside is a rabbinical institution, we must explain why it has been almost completely abolished outside Eretz Israel. To answer this question, we can make use of some of the answers given across the generations, brought in Section II of this study. According to the understanding that the Torah's mitzva applies even in the countryside, these answers are much more difficult.

It may further be suggested that the rabbinical enactment to recite the blessing even in the countryside is directed primarily at Eretz Israel, "a land which the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are always on it" (*Devarim* 11:12), imitating the practice of the Temple, "the place which the Lord your God shall choose to set His name there." However, outside Eretz Israel, there is no clear rabbinical enactment to recite the priestly blessing, and therefore it is kept to a minimum: to recite the blessing on *yom tov*, when Jews wherever they live remember the land from which they have been exiled, and they are imbued with the joy of the festival by virtue of Eretz Israel.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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