

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 22

Shmini, Sicha 1

The Verse:

After Aharon completed all the various sacrificial rites on the eighth day of the Mishkan's inauguration, he spontaneously blessed the people"

"And Aharon lifted up his hands towards the people and blessed them. He then descended from preparing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace offering." (Vayikra 9:22)

Rashi explains the contents of the blessing:

And blessed them — with the blessing of the kohanim [see Bamidbar 6:22-27]: "May G-d bless you... May G-d make His face shine... May G-d lift His face...."

He then descended — from the altar.

The Questions:

1. The priestly blessing is only introduced in the book of Bamidbar. How can Rashi suggest that the straightforward

meaning of the narrative is that Aharon blessed the people with a blessing that was not yet commanded to him?

2. Why does Rashi need to cite the words of the blessing itself? Every child is familiar with the "Priestly blessing."
3. In his second comment, Rashi explains that when the verse says "he then descended" it means "from the altar." However, the verse itself says "He then descended from preparing the sin offering," which, obviously, is performed on the altar. Why is Rashi's comment necessary?

The Explanation:

Rashi is not suggesting that Aharon fulfilled the mitzvah of the Priestly blessing, because it was not yet commanded. He was, however, familiar with the liturgy of that blessing, as many of the spiritual leaders of the Jewish people were familiar with the contents of the Torah before it was formally articulated. This contents of this blessing poignantly expressed the message that Aharon wanted to convey to the people on this occasion, and so he blessed them with

those words, but not as the fulfillment of the commandment.

The objective of the building of the Mishkan was to elicit G-d's forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf, and to invite G-d's presence, which was driven away in the wake of that sin, to once again dwell amongst the Jewish people.

Aharon's service on the final day of inauguration was to be the culmination of the people's repentant actions. He was uniquely suited to be their representative, as he was inadvertently complicit in the building of the golden calf. Therefore, when Aharon had offered the sin offering on behalf of the people, and the additional offerings that the service called for, he felt that the moment called for a blessing and prayer — that his efforts in performing the Temple service should be effective in drawing down G-d's presence once again. The three stanzas of the Priestly blessing perfectly encapsulated this desire:

“May G-d bless you” — Aharon emphasized that the blessing would be coming from G-d, not himself, for having taken part in the golden calf, he was in no position to promise forgiveness. What was the content of G-d's blessing?

“May G-d make His face shine” — the revelation of G-d's presence to the Jewish people once again. And how would that come about?

“May G-d lift His face” — “lifting the face” refers to G-d's repression of His anger and his forgiveness of sins (see Rashi to Bamidbar 6:26)

Thus, the wording of the Priestly blessing was perfectly suited to the personal blessing Aharon wished to give at that time.

(The following verse details Moshe's and Aharon's joint blessing that the “Divine presence dwell in the work of your hands.” That blessing, however, was for the entire cumulative effort of the building and installation of the Mishkan to elicit G-d's presence. Aharon's blessing, on the other hand, was offered on behalf of his own personal service; that his own role in forgiveness should be effective.)

This also explains why Rashi reiterates that Aharon “descended from the altar.” He means to clarify that Aharon only descended after giving the blessing. When the commandment of the Priestly blessing is fulfilled, the kohanim were not to stand on the altar. The fact that Aharon did give his blessing from atop the altar underscores that this was his personal blessing, not the fulfillment of the command (which was not given at that point).
