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### Erasing the Divine Name Brings the Divine Name

In this week's *parashah*, we find the procedure for the investigation of the suspected adulteress: "The *kohen* shall inscribe these curses on a scroll and erase it into the bitter waters. He shall cause the woman to drink the waters that curse" (*Bemidbar* 5:23-24). This dissolved scroll contained the holy Name of Hashem. *Chazal* say that although it is usually forbidden to erase the Name, and one who does so is liable for lashes, nevertheless, Hashem commanded that it be done in order to bring peace between man and wife, upon her being proven innocent. The Maharal explains that when there is marital harmony, the Divine Presence dwells between the couple. Although on one hand we are erasing the Divine Name, the peace that will ensue following her being proven innocent will in fact once again cause the Shechinah to dwell between them. The laws of the *sotah* seem somewhat out of place at the beginning of *Sefer Bemidbar*, where we mainly find the designation of the tribes' positions, the counting of *bnei Yisrael* and the allocation of roles. The Mikdash Mordechai explains that in fact there is a very important connection between the laws of the *sotah* and these other topics. During the opening chapters of *Bemidbar* we find the phrase *lemishpechosam leveis avosam*, "according to their families, according to their fathers' houses." This phrase is repeated over and over again, stressing both the fact that the Jewish people and its tribes are made up of family units and the importance of that unit to the nation's survival. We can now understand why the *parashah* of *sotah* is inserted here: to tell us that when the family unit breaks down, *klal Yisrael* as a nation breaks down as well. Without a secure family unit, the result is a suspected *sotah*, and eventually the whole structure collapses, precisely because there is no *lemishpechosam leveis avosam*.

### A Machlokes about Peace

The Mikdash Mordechai then resolves a dispute in the Sifri. After the portions of *sotah* and the *Nazir*, we find the portion of *birkas kohanim*, which ends: *veyasem lecha shalom*, "and He shall grant you peace" (*Bemidbar* 6:26). According to R. Chanina Segan Hakohanim, this phrase refers to peace in the home, while according to R. Natan this refers to peace on a national level. It seems rather strange to have an argument on the meaning of the word peace!

The Mikdash Mordechai says that there is no contradiction and reconciles the two opinions. Everyone agrees that the concern is for national peace within *klal Yisrael*. This consists of both peace on her borders, as well as internal peace. However, in order to achieve peace on a national level, there must be peace in the home first, precisely because *klal Yisrael* is made up of a collection of family units.

### Birkas Kohanim

If we look at the text of the *birkas kohanim*, we see another manifestation of this idea. The Toldos Yitzchak explains that the first verse contains three words. This alludes to the three forefathers, in whose merit Hashem blesses us. The middle verse contains five words, alluding to the merit of studying the five books of the Torah. The final verse contains seven words, which alludes to the seven firmaments. Alternatively, the first verse alludes to the three people who are called up to the Torah on Mondays and Thursdays. The middle verse alludes to the five people called up on *yamim tovim*, while the final verse alludes to the seven called up on Shabbos. Since it says, *veyasem lecha shalom*, "and He shall grant you peace," in order that there shall be no arguments between *kohanim* and *levi'im* on one hand, and *yisraelim* on the other, the Rabbis determined that each set receive eight *aliyos* in a week. The *yisraelim* receive five on Shabbos morning, one at Shabbos *minchah*, and one on Monday and Thursday. *Kohanim* and *levi'im* together receive two on Shabbos morning and *minchah*, and two on both Monday and Thursday. This shows how the Rabbis, in fixing the law, made no room for quarrels to arise. The Me'am Loez comments on the fact that the *birkas kohanim* is written in the singular. He says that, strictly speaking, it should have been in the plural, addressing the multitude. This is to allude to the fact that all these blessings apply only when all of Yisrael are dwelling in harmony and considered like "one man with one heart." This is why they were said in the singular, as if to say that these blessings will take effect only when there is *achdus* and not when *machlokes* is rife. Similarly, when the final blessing concludes with "He shall grant you peace," it alludes to the idea that the previous blessings are all dependent on peace.