

Wellness Through Concord: The All-Embracing Blessing

"The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus shall you bless the Children of Israel. Say to them: [May] the Lord bless you and guard you! [May] the Lord shine His face upon you and favor you! [May] the Lord lift up His Face unto you and grant you peace! [Thus shall] they put My Name upon the Children of Israel, and I shall bless them (Numbers 6:22-27)." "I form light and create darkness, I make weal [שְׁלוֹמִים] and create woe [רָעָה] — I the Lord do all these things (Isaiah 45:7)."

Parashat Naso's most well-known passage is referred to as the "Priestly Blessing." In addition to the basic three verses of the blessing recited by Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike, Numbers 6:24-26, Sephardic Jews always add the following verse, v. 27, and in certain places add the preceding two verses, v. 22 & 23. These surrounding verses included by Sephardim clarify that the middle three verses are known as a "blessing," which might not be so obvious. Although verse 24 begins "may the Lord bless you," in the rest of 24-26 there is no mention of God's giving us or bestowing upon us anything in particular. Rather, most of those verses ask that God should protect us and be in a "good mood" with us, seeing us favorably, being friendly towards us and not fighting with us or being angry with us. The verses before and after clarify that the three middle verses constitute a type of "blessing," and are known as such.

Still though, in so denominating the verses, the expressions used are bafflingly mystifying. Even in the postscript verse 27, what is meant by "You shall put My Name upon the Children of Israel"? How does that give the people blessing, or anything? In verses 25 and 26, what is meant by God's "Face" being "lit up" or "lifted up" towards us and how does that really help us? And most baffling of all is the culmination of the blessing in v. 26 with God's granting us "shalom," translated as "peace." How is that supposed to be a culmination? Is it that we're not fighting with God or with other people, that God and our fellow peoples are leaving us alone? I mean, great, the so-called "blessing" asks that God protect us from the negatives, from the anger of people or the anger of God. But how does that translate into anything positive we could really call a blessing? In the second paragraph of the Shema, God grants us rain in the proper season, and good crops of grain, oil, and wine – prosperity, in other words. Now that's a blessing! But here, the whole culmination is that God "shines His Face" on us or faces us. Again, that means God is pleased with us or in other words is not angry with us. The whole blessing, then, would be a guarding from war or destruction – peace. A congregant recently asked me, isn't Judaism and all religions all about finding "inner peace"? I told him that might be true of Buddhism, the ancient philosophy of Epicureanism, or yoga or Scientology, or modern psychobabble, but is that Judaism? Really? You can call this granting of "peace" a "spiritual" blessing, if you like, but if that's what it means, I find this ending rather underwhelming, at best.

Of course, once we've made peace with God and He's favorable towards us, we can then ask God for favors, or we can expect God to do us favors by gifting us what we want whenever we ask, or even when we don't ask. This is the way I used to understand this blessing. We want God to be all "battered-up" towards us and to face us or pay attention to us, as a result granting us whatever we ask for or need later on. Or else, perhaps, when we have peace and are not disturbed, prosperity and success will just automatically flow due to God's underlying good nature or from our own underlying good nature. My congregant does have a point that inner peace, God's happiness with us and our happiness with ourselves are great blessings which bring even greater goods in their wake. After asking our needs in our Daily Amidah prayer, we end with three or four sections asking for such peace and a generally good relationship with God, perhaps so He will grant us goodness besides what we specifically ask for. But the order there too has struck me as weird: Shouldn't we first ask God to listen to our prayers, be pleased with us and be at peace with us, and then go ask for our needs? Why is the Amidah order patterned after the Priestly Blessing order, asking for God to pay attention to us, grant us favor, and give us peace at the tail end? If God isn't paying attention or is angry, what is the point of asking Him for things?

However, recently our morning class in Isaiah taught me that the term "shalom" itself can be translated by the Old English term "weal," a term related to our term wealth and well, meaning general goodness. An English equivalent might be our modern term "wellness." In the Isaiah passage, shalom is clearly used as an antonym to "ra," meaning evil or bad. So "shalom" there clearly means goodness, wellness, or "weal," the opposite of "bad." It doesn't merely mean "peace," a lack of strife. Peace means more than a lack of war. Lack of strife might be referred to as a "cold peace." But there is also the "warm peace" of genuinely positive harmony. Such concord is a positive good, and it brings more goods in its wake, once established. Harmony creates good where there wasn't goodness before. When opposing forces are brought into balance and harmony, that's when true goodness is created. Pythagoras figured out that musical concord comes from a proper progression of mathematical order. And our modern quantum mechanics teaches us that our matter is really reducible to concordant mathematical wave patterns. The opposite of harmony is strife and discord, which create destruction and evil. But the "warm peace" of positive harmony in an orderly, law-abiding physical, natural, and human world is responsible for bringing our World into existence and sustaining it. Law-abiding and order lead to concord and harmony, the main component of "positive" peace, which creates goodness and wellness. When we bless each other or greet each other with "shalom," we are blessing our fellows with "wellness," or seeking our fellow's good overall "welfare." And that is why this Priestly Blessing and, following the same pattern, the rabbinic Amidah, conclude with the blessing of shalom, meaning "weal" or wellness and law-abiding concord, a final blessing to wrap up and embrace all the others," as our Sages said.



CONGREGATION SHEARITH ISRAEL
The Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue

Shabbat Naso

June 10-11, 2022 | 12 Sivan, 5782

SCHEDULE

Hertz: p. 586 | Haftarah: p. 602
Kaplan: p. 676 | Haftarah: p. 1184

Virtual Hashcobot | Rev. Z. Edinger | 6:15 pm

Candle Lighting | 8:08 pm

Friday Evening Services | 7:00 pm | Main Sanctuary

Zemirot | 8:30 am

Shahrit | 9:00 am | Main Sanctuary

Youth Program | 10:00 am | Gabi & Raph | Fidanque Youth Room

Kiddush | following services | Outdoors on Paved Paradise | *Yayin l'kiddush sponsor: The Jacobowitz Family, in memory of Evelyn Haies (Chaya bas Shaul)*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 7:20 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik

Shabbat Afternoon Services | 8:05 pm

Shabbat Ends | 9:09 pm

Weekday Service Times

Morning Services

Sunday: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday: 7:05 am

Evening Services

Sunday-Thursday (Minha/Arbit): **6:45 pm (note new time)**

THIS SUNDAY

Virtual Jr. Congregation with Mrs. Lisa Rohde

THIS Sunday, June 12
on Zoom | 9:30-10:15 am

For zoom details and reminders, contact Mrs. Lisa Rohde.

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

Time's running out to submit your graduate listings!

DEADLINE: THIS Wednesday, June 15

2022 Graduate Scroll of Honor & Graduation Kiddush

Next Shabbat, June 18 | Following Morning Services

Submit your graduate's information to ensure that we can properly list and congratulate them in our 2022 Graduate Scroll of Honor!

Kiddush sponsorships are appreciated.

Refer to our emails for the link.

There's still time to contribute to our Spring Fundraiser!

*Last chance to be recognized in our commemorative booklet -
Don't miss out!*

While Rabbi Soloveichik's inspiring lecture series has come to an end, for just a few more weeks, while we prepare the beautiful and content-rich commemorative booklet, our fundraising campaign is still open. Please give as generously as you can.

We are delighted to announce a unique opportunity:

For this one time, we are making the videostream of Rabbi Soloveichik's final lecture - streamed from *ANU: Museum of the Jewish People* in Israel - available to view through the end of June. Go to our YouTube channel to watch it and share with friends!

COMING UP

Bring your friends!

Young Families Potluck Picnic

NEXT Shabbat, June 18 | Following the Graduation Kiddush
Led by Gabi & Raph

The weather outside is finally warm!

To celebrate it we were a bit torn,

Until we thought of a potluck picnic on Paved Paradise!

You're in charge of packing all your food - don't worry though, we'll supply the ice!

We will have games, lots of fun, and a special treat.

The dessert we are bringing is dairy, so have your meal be anything but meat!

Sign up your family at tinyurl.com/csi-picnic.

Super Soccer Stars & Shearith Israel present

Soccer on Paved Paradise - now with Summer Camp!

Ages 1-8 | Paved Paradise, 8 W. 70th Street

Refer to our emails for the registration links

Members, use our promo code "Shearith15" for a 15% discount!

Super Soccer Stars in partnership with Congregation Shearith Israel is going to be back for Summer Soccer Camps! Check out the registration links in our emails to find the option that's right for your kids.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Tikva & Irwin Ostrega**, upon the birth of twin grandsons.

Mazal tob to **Martine & Jack Schenker**, on the occasion of their grandson Ezra, son of Alisa & Zachary Schenker, becoming a bar mitzvah.

Special thanks to **the Sisterhood** for making our Sanctuary so beautiful with extraordinary floral arrangements in honor of the holiday.

Hazakot u'Berukhot to all our Ruth Readers:

In-Person Reading: Laelah Aaron, Lily Cohen, Flora Jakobishvili, Yaara Kaplan, Hella Sasson-Gelman, Neta Wiznia and Zahava Wiznia

Virtual Reading (Sunday pre-Shabuot): Amalia Berg, Rachel Daitch, Miriam Daitch, Hudson Lentnek, Fina Oslick, Cecilia Roberts, Jenna Roberts, Daniella Roberts, Hella Sasson-Gelman, Ruth Sherizen, Dafna Vega, Maayan Vega, Neta Wiznia, and Zahava Wiznia