

A Familiar Figure in his Town: Megillah 24b

Source Sheet by Tali Cohen Carrus

MISHNA: A priest who has blemishes on his hands may not lift his hands to recite the Priestly Benediction.

Because of his blemish, people will look at his hands, and it is prohibited to look at the hands of the priests during the Priestly Benediction. **Rabbi Yehuda says: Even one whose hands were colored with *satis*, a blue dye, may not lift his hands** to recite the Priestly Benediction **because the congregation will look at him.**

מתנבין כהן שיש בידיו
מומין לא ישא את
כפיו. רבי יהודה אומר:
אף מי שקהו ידיו
צבועות סטים לא ישא
את כפיו, מפני שהעם
מסתכלין בו.

GEMARA: It is **taught** in a *baraita*: **The blemishes that the Sages said** disqualify a priest from reciting the Priestly Benediction include any blemishes found **on his face, hands, and feet**, but not blemishes that are not visible to others. **Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said:** If **his hands are spotted** with white blotches, **he may not lift his hands** to recite the Priestly Benediction.

The Gemara notes that **this is also taught** in a *baraita*: If a priest's **hands are spotted, he may not lift his hands** to recite the Priestly Benediction. Similarly, if his hands are **curved** inward **or bent** sideways, **he may not lift his hands** to recite the Priestly Benediction.

גמ' תנא: מומין שאמרו,
בפניו ידיו ורגליו. אמר
רבי יהושע בן לוי: ידיו
בוהקניות — לא ישא את
כפיו. תנא נמי הכי: ידיו
בוהקניות — לא ישא את
כפיו. עקומות עקושות —
לא ישא את כפיו.

1. Why do you think only visible blemishes disqualify a Kohen (priest) from reciting the priestly blessing in front of the community?
2. What does this distinction reveal about the nature of the condition itself and God's perspective, compared to societal perceptions?

Rav Huna said: A priest **whose eyes** constantly **run** with tears **may not lift his hands** to recite the Priestly Benediction. The Gemara asks: **Wasn't there a certain** priest with this condition **in the neighborhood of Rav Huna, and he would spread his hands** and recite the Priestly Benediction? The Gemara answers: **That** priest **was a familiar** figure **in his town**. Since the other residents were accustomed to seeing him, he would not draw their attention during the Priestly Benediction.

אמר רב הונא: זבלגן
לא ישא את כפיו.
וקא שהוא דקה
בשיבביתיה דרב
הונא, וקה פריס
ידיה! קהוא דש
בעירו קנה.

3. Why does it matter whether the Kohen is a familiar figure in his town? How does this familiarity influence his eligibility to stand in front of the community to recite the priestly blessing? Consider once again the distinction between the impact of the condition itself on the priest's status, and the communal perception of the condition.
4. Reflect on the implications of these texts beyond the scope of Kohanim reciting the priestly blessing. How does the communal perception of differences affect the ability of individuals with those differences to fully participate in modern-day community life? Can you think of specific examples?
5. How might our learnings from this text inform our approach to difference and disability within our own communities?