The Priestly Blessing

`^r<ñm÷.v.yIw> hwhy ^k.÷rñ<b'y>

The LORD bless you and keep you

The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you

The LORD lift up his face to you and give you his peace

1 This blessing is (ritually) recited (by the kohanim) during synagogue services during Nesiat Kapayim ("the Raising of the Hands"), though it is also recited over children on Friday night before the start of the Shabbat meal or as a bedtime blessing.

2 The name YHVH (יהוה) represents God's attributes of love and mercy (ט OID) in contradistinction to the name Elohim (אלוה), which represents God's attributes of justice and power as our Creator.

3 b'rachah. Jewish tradition considers this both material and spiritual prosperity. Pirkei Avot 3:15 says, "If there is no flour, there is no Torah," by which is meant that material benefits are intended to help you pursue study of Torah. The first occurrence of the word "blessing" in the Scriptures pertains to pru urvu (בראשית בראש וברית), "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:22).

4 shamar: To guard, protect, heed, as in the exercise of diligent care. Only God has the power to secure the conferred blessing and keep it from turning sour or from fading away.

5 The word for "face" (פנים) is plural with the 3rd person singular ending. It is considered metaphorical since God is incorporeal. The plural form is thought by some to indicate God's revealed and hidden attributes in creation.

6 The hiphil verb (ראי) comes from the word "light" (라이), and is thought to refer to God's wisdom. "May God enlighten you" with His wisdom, i.e., the Divine Light that preceded the work of creation (Gen. 1:3).

7 May God grant you grace or favor (חס), i.e., to understand the "breadth and length and height and depth" of God's love (Eph. 3:18). Grace refers to the bestowal of an undeserved gift. The blessing is bestowed even though unearned or unmerited.

8 Since one's face is an indication of the heart's attitude, Rashi says that this means God will suppress His anger by "looking at you" (if God is angry at you, He "turns His face away" and refuses to admit your presence). The "lifting of face" also pictures God lifting you up as a father might lift up his child in joy. The "showing of face" indicates spiritual intimacy.

9 All of the other blessings are useless without the establishment of inner peace, and therefore it is the seal of the blessing. Shalom (שלום) is not simply the absence of strife, but a balance and harmony between the finite and infinite, the temporal and the eternal, the material and the spiritual realms. Shalom is a gift from Sar Shalom (שאול), the Prince of Peace.