



YOM KIPPUR MORNING 5786/2025: Birkat Kohanim

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Birkat Kohanim, the priestly blessing, is the oldest blessing in our tradition. About 50 years ago, this text was discovered on scroll fragments nearly 3,000 years old. I feel such awe knowing that these very words were spoken to our ancestors thousands of years ago and that we still speak them today. There is such beauty, and such strength, in that unbroken chain.

In the past, and still in some congregations today, only the priests—the kohanim—had the authority to say this blessing. At Beth Emet and in Reform congregations, we say it together.

Think about that: in saying it together, we don't just have a blessing bestowed on us—we give it to each other, and we open ourselves to receive it, too.

That makes this blessing not only ancient, but deeply personal and profoundly communal. It becomes about the connection between us in this very moment, about this community gathered here. The three lines we sing together are only the beginning.

What we add—the embrace of a loved one, the glance between parent and child, the sense of being held by generations before us—transforms these ancient words into living blessing.

They become something greater—the strength, love, and holiness of our community.

