

Shiv Hadash • New Music

TO US ALL

Mark Novak

YEARS AGO, I WAS BLESSED TO ATTEND A workshop with R. Shlomo Carlebach, z"l, and I remember him saying that some melodies, like Torah, have always existed. The process of songwriting, then, can ultimately access what is already etched in the divine musical realm. The result — if we are so blessed — is a penning of melody to ancient liturgy that feels both *bashert* [predestined] and eternal.

The structure and content of *Birkat Kohanim*, the Priestly Blessing, has always drawn me. Mysterious and powerful, the blessing brings back childhood memories of being warned not to look at the shoelace men on the *bimah* as they performed their priestly duty of *dukht'nen*. The three-fold blessing that the priests recite is among the most ancient of our texts; fragments have been found that date back to King Solomon's Temple. And it is a most beloved of texts, used by parents to bless their children at the *Shabbos* table.

יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ
 יְאֹר ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיְחַנֶּנֶךָ
 יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹמִים

The Lord bless you and protect you!
 The Lord deal kindly and graciously with you!
 The Lord bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace!

(NUMBERS 6:24-26)

The 3-word, 5-word, 7-word structure of the blessing has always appeared to me like the base of a pyramid, the only missing piece being one word at the peak, God's unknowable name: The One, from whom all blessing flows.

Like a musician, poet, or sculptor at the moment of creation, the kohen's gift is to channel God's blessing. It is a blessing that begins by bidding us to use our God-given possessions wisely. Numbers Rabbah (11:5) offers us an understanding: May God bless you (in regard to your possessions) and protect you (from robbers), so that you may be in a position to do good deeds with your wealth. As God's blessing and protection encourages our performance of mitzvoth, we are conscious of receiving God's grace and, in the final crescendo, the promise of shalom/peace.

Inspired by this, I offer "To Us All" as an opportunity to channel God's blessings for one another, as we, in turn, are blessed. As a nation of priests, that is both our task and privilege.

To us all
 May we be blessed and watched over
 To us all
 May the light shine brightly on our lives
 To us all
 May the face of God smile kindly
 and grant the peace of heaven
 To us all.

To hear a recording of the song, go to <http://homepage.mac.com/kesem/FileSharing22.html>

Editors' note: Please let us know if you have used the music. We'd love to hear from you, and we invite your musical/liturgical creativity for future columns of Shir Hadash.

Mark Novak (moshebear@verizon.net) is a hazzan, band leader, storyteller, and teacher. Because he has so much time on his hands, he is also in the ALEPH Rabbinical Program. His plan is to receive smicha by the time he reaches 60 and immediately retire. He lives in Washington, DC with his wife, storyteller Renée Brachfeld, and daughter Kaziah.

To Us All

Mark Novak

©2006

Lovingly

To us all May we be
 blessed and watched over To us all May the light shine
 brightly on our lives To us all May the face of
 God smile kindly and grant the peace of heaven to us
 all To us God smile kindly and
 grant the peace of heav - en to us
 Bmi Gmi/Bb
 all and
 D/A A/G A7 D
 grant the peace of heav - en to us all