

The Priestly Blessing

D (C) A (G) Bm (Am) D (C) A (G) Bm (Am) Em (Dm)

Ye Ye ba - re - che-cha Ye Ye Ba rech - che-cha A - do-nai Sha-

D (C) Em (Dm) D (C) A (G) D (C) A (G)

lom A - do - nai Sha - lom v' - eesh'~m - me - re - cha v' - eesh'm me - re -

D (C) A (G) D (C) A (G) Bm (Am)

cha v' - eesh'm me - re - cha v' - eesh'm - me - re - cha

Words traditional Jewish
 Music and Dance W&A van der Zwan
 Chords in brackets for guitar with capo on II

Ye Ye Barechecha May the LORD bless you
Adonai Shalom LORD, Peace
v'eesh'm'recha and guard you

NB: The CH is pronounced guttural, as in the Scottish LOCH.

The melody and dance use the first line of the so-called priestly blessing and the last word (shalom). Here is this blessing in full transliteration:

Ye Ye barech'cha Adonai v'eesh'm'recha
Yaeir Adonai panav eileycha veechuneicha
Yeesa Adonai panav eilaycha v'yasem l'cha
Shalom

May the LORD bless you and guard you
May the LORD make His face shed light upon you and be gracious unto you
May the LORD lift up His face unto you and give you Peace



The Priestly Blessing is found in Numei (Numbers) 6: 24 – 26. As the One said to Moses: 'Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons that they shall bless the children of Israel with these words,' it is also called the Blessing of Aaron.

During the Exodus, Aaron and his sons were made priests by the One (Exodus 28: 1). The Hebrew word for 'priest' is Kohen (the root of the surnames Cohen and Kahn). The etymology is not clear. It may be derived from a verb meaning to stand, as priests stand serving the One. Also, in the Jewish tradition, blessings are always done standing 'in the presence of the LORD', following Gen. 27: 7. The dance follows this tradition.

The priestly blessing is part of the Jewish Amidah prayer for the morning, afternoon and evening. This prayer, containing nineteen blessings, is also done standing (the 'standing prayer'). When the *chazzan* (precentor or cantor) repeats the blessings, on special occasions the priestly blessing is added between the 18th and 19th blessing. In some synagogues, this blessing is always added by the *chazzan*.



The word BLESSING (*berachah*) comes from the Hebrew word for bowing or bending the knee (barech = bowing, hence the noun berech for knee), so 'blessing is nothing more than an act of submission'¹ This too is embodied in the dance.

The Priestly Blessing is the oldest known text of the Hebrew Bible. Amulets with this text have been found dating back to the times of Solomon's Temple (7th century BCE).

The blessing has a very distinct composition of three sentences of two parts with every time the Tetragrammaton as second word. In Hebrew, the first sentence has three words, the second one adds two words to the first part, so has five words. The third sentence adds another two words to the second part and so has seven words. This totals minus the three Tetragrammatons twelve words, the number of the tribes of Israel.

The Priestly Blessing is also a common blessing at the end of a service in some Christian churches. However, the interpretation of the three Tetragrammatons as forebode of the Christian Trinity is a later Christian dogmatic interpretation that doesn't do justice to the Jewish tradition.

Dance description

The melody for the full blessing came in the early nineties of the last century, when one of our students who had studied Hebrew gave us the Hebrew words. As the Hebrew words take a long time to teach and stretch the practice of mantra yoga – invoking a presence by repeating short sacred phrases – we were inspired some twenty years later to use the first line and the last word SHALOM for a dance, loosely following the original melody.

We hope this way some of the essence of this blessing may be invoked.

Establish partners

1. *Ye Ye Barechecha*
2. *Ye Ye Barechecha*
3. *Adonai*
4. *Shalom (2x)*
5. *v'eesh'm'recha (2x)*
6. *v'eesh'm'recha*
7. *v'eesh'm'recha*

1. Dancers stand in circle facing center in receptive posture, arms to the side, palms open. Bow on Ye Ye, coming up at Barechecha, leaning back with eyes looking up.
2. Turn to partner, while placing hands on the heart. From the heart, bless the partner by describing a halo around partner's head.
3. Turn to the center on Ado- and step in (R –L) on –nai, palms facing up and raising hands.
4. Step back in same rhythm (R –L) while palms come down facing earth in a flowing movement.
5. Embrace yourself in a protective way (right arm crosses over left) and make full turn clockwise on the first two *v'eesh'm'recha*.
6. Face same partner and hold hands.
7. Change position by making a half turn.

¹ Jeffrey M. Cohen: *Horizons of Jewish Prayer*. United Synagogue, London, 1986, p. 196.