

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 7 #32, June 5, 2020; Naso 5780

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning almost 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his recent untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah.

Many Rabbis whose Devrei Torah I follow regularly seem to omit Naso or to treat it in combination with Bamidbar. Combining these parashot makes sense, because much of both portions cover the special census at the time that our ancestors were preparing to leave Har Sinai. Naso continues the counting of the numbers of Levi ages 30 to 50, by families, a counting that started in Bamidbar. Naso, however, continues with a wide range of topics – sending anyone who was tamei (ritually impure) out of the camp, and then discussing the topics of sotah (a married woman accused of being in a closed room or house with a man other than her husband), Nazir (a man or woman who separates from the community and takes on a vow of abstinence to come close to Hashem), the special blessings of the Kohenim, and the special gifts of the Nasiim (leaders of the twelve tribes) at the dedication of the Mishkan. A common homework or exam question for young Humash students is to explain the connections among these (or some of these) seemingly unrelated events. (See, for example, Rabbi Yehoshua Singer's Devar Torah below, taking off from a famous Rashi on 6:2).

Much of Sefer Vayikra concerns ways in which God has separated out the Kohenim from the rest of the Jews by giving them special responsibilities and restrictions. The Kohenim represented B'Nai Yisrael at the Mishkan and Temple – but also had to avoid contact with a corpse (except an immediate family member) and abstain from wine when working in the Mishkan or Temple. Sefer Bamidbar, in contrast, gives more emphasis to Levi, the tribe that acted as a bridge between the Kohenim and the other tribes. Levi would camp and march between the Kohenim and other tribes. When Moshe became too busy to teach all of B'Nai Yisrael, the Leviim would take messages and teach them to the rest of the people.

If a member of one of the other tribes wanted to come closer to Hashem, he or she could voluntarily take on the position of Nazir, normally for a month. Becoming a Nazir required a vow to abstain from wine, contact with a corpse, or shaving or cutting his or her hair during that period. In taking on the goal of coming as close as possible to God, a Nazir would therefore emulate the restrictions of the Kohen Gadol.

The Kohenim, Levi, and Nazir all discuss ways in which some Jews separate themselves (or have specially reserved tasks). Is separation an important message of Judaism? I raise this question during a time when many Americans focus on the disgraceful and disgusting incident when a police officer pressed his leg on the neck of a man and kept it there for nine minutes, until the man was dead, while his fellow officers stood by and did not intervene. The incident provoked screams of racial discrimination and police brutality. Since that incident, there have been protests, riots, property destruction, and looting in many parts of the country. One result of the violence has been killing of police officers, both black and white. Discrimination and violence make life unsafe for many members of society. We Jews know from more than 3000 years of our history that we Jews are always among the first victims of discrimination and violence, no matter where or when they arise.

If the Torah's message were that we should aim to separate ourselves from others in our community and try to be special, I would find that message very troubling. However, there is more to the message of Naso, the longest portion in the Torah. The reason Naso is so long is that the Torah carefully repeats word for word the identical gifts of the princes of the twelve tribes. (According to the Midrash, the internal motivations of the tribes differed, but their gifts ended up being identical in items and value.) For the dedication of the Mishkan, one of the most significant events in our history, the Torah loudly endorses equality rather than special classes. In Orwell's ironic terms, describing a corrupt world, all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others. In the Torah's world, all Jews should aim to be equal. The Torah's mitzvot are for all of us, and the opportunities that matter most are open to all of us. While some Jews have

special tasks (Kohenim and Leviim), we all have the ability to strive for more – whether as a Nazir or as a person distinguished in some other way.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, followed the principles of the Nasiim in his life while teaching these lessons to his congregants. When it was time to protest evil in government or society, such as discrimination against Jews in the former Soviet Union, Rabbi Cahan led the protest and even accepted a two week prison sentence rather than pay a small fine for protesting in front of the Soviet Embassy. Rabbi Cahan never missed an opportunity to relate the Torah portion to our responsibilities to assist those less fortunate than ourselves. Rather than focusing on how some members of society are in a more fortunate position than others, Rabbi Cahan's emphasis was on how we all have a responsibility to help those less fortunate than we are. In reading of the special roles of Kohen and Levi, or the special status of a Nazir, our focus should be on emulating the Nasiim and working together to improve our society. Working together to fight discrimination and violence, and to preserve a safe, lawful society, is the way we lead a life devoted to Torah and Hashem.

Please daven for a Refuah Shleimah for Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Chaya Tova bat Narges, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers. Note: Beth Sholom has additional names, including coronavirus victims, on a Tehillim list.

Hannah & Alan

A Memorial Tribute to Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

We join the Lamm family in mourning the passing of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, one of the great American rabbis of our generation. His leadership to Yeshiva University and the wider community was marked by wisdom, eloquence, and courage.

My personal and professional friendship with Dr. Lamm goes back nearly fifty years. To me, he was a mentor, a friend, and a model of what a rabbinic scholar ought to be.

The Talmud (Ta'anit 4a) cites the opinion of Rav Ashi that "any Talmid Hakham who is not hard as iron is no Talmid Hakham!" A rabbi must have strong principles, must be courageous in upholding these principles, must not bend under pressure. Dr. Lamm was a man of integrity and high principles. He was authentic, he knew who he was. In a world where so many rabbis (and others!) adopt artificial personae to pass themselves off to impress others, Dr. Lamm was genuine. He could not be pressured or intimidated by the "right" or by the "left." He was a proud upholder of centrist Orthodoxy.

Shortly after Rav Ashi's statement, the Gemara goes on to quote Ravina: "Even so, a person must teach himself the quality of gentleness." While it is vital to be strong in one's principles, it is equally important to be gentle. One teaches not by threatening or coercing, but by demonstrating a spirit of love, kindness and gentleness. Dr. Lamm was strong and courageous...and he also was a model of gentleness. He always seemed to have a smile on his face, a sparkle in his eye; he always seemed to have a kind word to share; he carried himself with dignity and humility. He was admired for his eloquence, his wit, and his ability to communicate with clarity and warmth.

Dr. Lamm will long be remembered and respected for his outstanding service as a synagogue rabbi; as President of Yeshiva University; as a scholar and author; and as a cherished friend and leader.

Zekher Tsaddik livrakha: The memory of the righteous is a blessing. We pray that the memory of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm will be a source of blessing, strength and happiness to his family, his community and to all who value a dynamic, thinking Orthodox Judaism.

Drasha: Naso: Eternal Gifts
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1997

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

What a person gives away seems forever lost. The Torah, in cryptic fashion, uses proper nouns and pronouns in a mysterious medley that teaches us a little about real property, about what you give and what one really has. The Torah tells us about tithing. "And every portion from any of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohen shall be his. A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen shall be his." What the Torah seems to tell us is that the donor has no further right to item given to the Kohen. So why not say it clearly? "What a man gives to the Kohen belongs to the Kohen." Obviously, there is a dual reference attached to the pronoun. What lies within that double allusion?

Rabbi Betzalel Zolty, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, of blessed memory, related the following story:

The Rosh Yeshiva of Slobodka Yeshiva, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein was in America in 1924, raising much-needed funds for his Yeshiva. During his visit, he received an urgent telegram. The Lithuanian authorities were going to conscript the Slobodka students into the army. Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel, the founder and Dean of the Yeshiva, made a decision to open a branch of Slobodka Yeshiva in the ancient city of Chevron in Eretz Israel. He would send 150 students to Palestine to establish the Yeshiva, and in this way free them from service in the apostatizing, ruthless Lithuanian army. That monumental undertaking would require a sum of \$25,000 to transport, house, and establish the Yeshiva.

Rabbi Epstein was put to the task. He discussed the program with a dear friend of the Yeshiva, Mr. Schiff, who immediately decided to contribute the massive sum in its entirety.

Years later, in the early 1930s, the tide turned for Mr. Schiff. With the crash of the stock market, and plummeting real estate prices, it took only a few months before he was forced out of his own apartment, and was relegated to the cellar of a building that was once his, existing on meager rations.

At the same time, the health of Rabbi Epstein was failing, and he no longer had the strength to travel. His son-in-law, Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna, made the trip to America, in his stead, to raise funds for the Slobodka Yeshiva. He did not know of Mr. Schiff's situation until the man got up to speak at a parlor meeting on behalf of the Yeshiva.

"My dear friends," he began. "I do not wish my business misfortunes on anyone. I invested literally millions of dollars in all sorts of businesses, and they all failed. I have absolutely nothing to show for them. But there is one investment I made that continues to bear fruit. I gave \$25,000 to establish a Yeshiva in Chevron, and that investment is the best one I ever made. One must know where to invest."

When Rabbi Sarna, heard that Mr. Schiff was literally bankrupt, he cabled Rabbi Epstein, who quickly responded to arrange to give him a \$5,000 loan, in order to get him back on his feet and begin doing business again. Through some generous benefactors, Rabbi Sarna got a hold of the cash and went directly to the basement apartment where Mr. Schiff now resided. He explained to him that Rabbi Epstein insisted he take this money as a loan.

Mr. Schiff jumped up in horror, "What do you want from my life? The only money I have left is the \$25,000 that I gave the Yeshiva. Do you want to take that from me as well?"

In its mystical manner, the Torah teaches us the power of the eternal gift. "A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen shall be his." We invest much in this world. We work. We buy. We build. We spend. But what do we

really have? At the end of the hopefully long day, we call life, what can we say is eternally ours? Stocks crash, and buildings crumble. How real is our estate?

The Torah tells us, what the man gives to the Kohen shall be his. It does not say, "... will belong to the Kohen. It says, it shall be his! What we invest in the eternity of spirituality, in order to proliferate Hashem's eternal message, will never be relinquished. For what we invest for eternity, will be eternally invested. It shall always remain ours.

Good Shabbos!

Shavuot: A Holiday of Communal Justice*

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2009, 2020

The holiday of Shavuot is generally assumed to commemorate the giving of the Torah, which occurred on the 6th of Sivan. In the Torah, however, Shavuot is only described as an agricultural holiday and occurs not on any particular calendrical date, but at the culmination of seven weeks from the beginning of the harvest season that occurs on the second day of Pesach. Shavuot is chag hakatzir, the holiday of harvest, and is closely linked with Sukkot, chag ha'asif, the holiday of the ingathering of the crops. These are the two holidays on which the Torah commands us to be joyous – v'samachta lifnei Hashem, "and you shall be joyous before God" (Deut. 16:11) and v'smachta bi'chagekha, "and you shall be joyous on your festivals" (Deut. 16:14), respectively.

A year of agricultural bounty naturally evokes a sense of joy over one's accomplishment, security, and success. The Torah insists, however, that this joy not be focused merely on oneself, as such could lead to self-satisfaction and arrogance. Rather, the joy is to be directed to God (Deut. 16:11), recognizing that it is only with God's assistance that we have achieved this success.

However, thanksgiving to God is not the only, nor even the primary, theme of this Festival of the Harvest. As exemplified vividly in the book of Ruth, it was during this time of year that the entire Israelite nation, individually and collectively, provided for the poor who had no land of their own and no crops to harvest. In accordance with the Torah's mitzvot, which appear immediately in the context of the holiday of Shavuot (Lev. 23:22), landed farmers left an uncut corner of the field, together with whatever was dropped and forgotten during the harvest, for the poor to reap and glean for themselves.

These two themes – thanksgiving to God and support of the poor – are interconnected, and the Torah states so explicitly, "You shall rejoice before God, you, and the stranger and the orphan and the widow who are in your midst" (Deut. 16:11). If we recognize our material success as coming from God, then we will understand that religious responsibilities attach to that wealth. Just as God is described as caring for the poor and orphan, just as God's compassion extends to all of God's creatures, so too, as beneficiaries of God's beneficence, we must use our means to similarly care for those who are poor and downtrodden.

This framing emphasizes the Jewish value of chesed, the magnanimous act of helping others. There is, however, a more important theme at play here, and that is the value of tzeddek, of doing what is just and right towards other members of society. In commanding us to leave the gleanings for the poor, the Torah concludes, "and you shall remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt." (Deut 16:12). As slaves, we learned what it meant to be strangers, to be marginalized and vulnerable people in society. As free people, we must create a society that is based on tzeddek, on the equal protection of all of its members: "Like a citizen among you shall be the stranger who is dwelling among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Lev. 19:34). Now that we have been redeemed and have gone from slave to free person, from stranger to citizen, we must make sure to not follow in the ways of our past oppressors. This is a basic responsibility of being a citizen: to take responsibility for all of the members of society, its citizens and its strangers, its strong and its weak.

As an expression of tzeddek, this obligation relates to how we structure our society, and thus taking care of the poor, while often performed individually, has always been recognized as a communal responsibility. The mishna tractate of Peah is devoted to the agricultural gifts of Shavuot, and it is here where we are introduced to the rabbinic institution of the soup kitchen (tamchoi), for the town's visiting poor and the charity box (kanon), for the town's local poor. These rabbinic institutions were thus modeled after the communal, agricultural gifts of Shavuot, and, I believe, these communal gifts later served as a model for the Hebrew Free Loan Societies which began as local, communal institutions.

As a communal obligation, it is understandable that priority is given to the community's own poor (as is highlighted by Ruth's astonishment that Boaz has recognized her, given that she "is a foreigner"), but our responsibilities extend to the larger world as well. Halakha specifically mandates a responsibility to the non-Jewish poor, under the rubric of *darkhei shalom*, ways of peace. While often interpreted as a form of enlightened self-interest, it is more properly understood as a fundamental, religious obligation and as responsibility of reciprocity – what it means to be citizens not only of the Jewish community, but of the world (see, for example, Maimonides, Laws of Kings, 10:12.)

In these times of economic downturn and hardship, it may be hard to feel the joy of bounty that is normally associated with Shavuot. However, this is also a time to be even more acutely aware of the needs of those in our community who have lost their jobs and their homes and who are struggling to put food on their tables and clothes on their backs. Those of us who have suffered economically, but who are still supporting ourselves and our families, need, firstly, to be thankful to God for our relative success, for our ongoing ability to provide for ourselves and our families, and to recognize the obligations of *chesed* that attend such success, however relative it may be. As members of the Jewish community and as members of the world community, we must live up to the demands of *tzedek* to do everything in our power to ensure that all members of our various communities – religious, local, and global – are protected and cared for, are given the dignity that they deserve and are empowered, so that they can take their rightful place as full, participating members of our community.

May we all have a *chag* of Torah learning and growth, a *chag* of appreciating all the goodness that God has given us – the material goodness together with the spiritual goodness that we have received in God's giving of the Torah. And let it be a *chag* where we are able to share these gifts with others and with our communities.

* Rabbi Linzer originally wrote this Dvar Torah in 2009, during the last major recession. He is reprinting it now, because it connects both to the Holiday of Shavuot, which we just celebrated, and to the challenge and hardships that many are facing at this time.

Naso -- With a Goal of Excellence by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine ©2020 Teach 613

The Nazir must have been a very unique person. While everyone else in his society would drink wine, he made a vow to abstain. In fact, the very name for a festive meal in Biblical times is "Mishteh," from the Hebrew word for drinking, because drinking wine played a significant role. What is it that would motivate the Nazir to make a vow to abstain from wine?

There is a principle in Jewish tradition, "Nothing stops a person who is determined." Similarly, we find that the Jews were able to say with confidence, "Naaseh V'Nishma," committing to observe the Torah even before they heard its laws. This is because they knew a secret. The secret is: If we are determined, we will succeed. This is a gift that Hashem placed into creation. "In the way that a person wants to go, he or she will be guided successfully." But, a person has to really want.

In self-help school of thought that Dale Carnegie made so popular, many call it: "The Secret." While "The Secret" has many dimensions, at its core it is the principle that if you have a vision and are deeply committed to it, you will generally achieve it. The power of "The Secret" can be illustrated through tens of examples of people who achieved remarkable success due to their determination. But, being deeply committed is not a simple thing; it has very real meaning. It means trying with all our strength and stepping out of our comfort zone, because of a vision that is so important to us.

Others describe this principle as "Do or Die." This means identifying something in your life that is so important that you feel you must achieve it, no matter what. You are willing to drop other things to pursue this one, because failure in this regard is simply unthinkable. You can see this attitude in the behavior of the diligent Torah scholar, who gives up different things in exchange for Torah. You can study it in the lives of people who gave up much to keep Shabbos or make significant decisions in order to pay tuition for their children to attend Yeshiva. Likewise, you will notice it in the lives of people who have children with special needs, and made extraordinary modifications to their lifestyle to bring out the best in their child. It is a sense of vision and clear determination that governs, and it begets results.

I believe the Nazir is not ascetic in an opinionated or other-worldly way. The Nazir is simply motivated to make sure that he stays on track. He has a vision for himself, one of morality and pleasantness. When he witnessed the fallout of the Sotah, when he heard the Kohein's words that her behavior was somewhat understandable if she drank irresponsibly, the Nazir decided that drinking any wine is just too risky, and he wants no part of this risk. "Wine makes things complicated," the Nazir concludes. Surely, some people will think the Nazir is being excessive. When everyone else is drinking, he does

not. But determined people don't mind if others look askance at their determination. The vision is too precious, and the Nazir is extremely motivated. The Nazir will explain simply that he is just determined to stay well, and has no interest in distractions.

This principle is true not only in what a person will choose not to do, but also in what a person will choose to do. I am told that Rabbi Mordechai Schwab would at times drink a coffee to help him wake up in the evening, before he would recite Birchas Hamazon or Maariv. He wanted the help of the caffeine so that he could properly concentrate on the sacred words. Even though it was late at night, and the caffeine would disrupt his plans for going to sleep shortly thereafter, he was so committed to davening with proper Kavanah (intent) that the alternative was unthinkable.

And so I invite you to consider this little exercise. What lesson do you learn from the Nazir? What priorities are so treasured in your life that you would drop other, widely regarded "normal," behaviors to ensure that you stay on track with your vision? Are they priorities in davening, in learning, in relationships, in self-development? Identify your vision and pursue it with determination.

May Hashem guide you to great success!

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos .

The Blessing of Wholeness: Thoughts for Parashat Naso

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel (jewishideas.org)

Many people feel the need to be noticed. They dye their hair neon green, or they wear immodest clothing, or they say things that are intended to shock. They will do anything to keep the limelight focused on themselves: they will tell a stream of jokes, they will speak without listening to others, they will take "selfies" and send them to anyone and everyone they can think of.

The message they convey is: NOTICE ME. Underlying this thirst for attention is the deep feeling of unworthiness, the fear of not being noticed. Also underlying this exhibitionism is the desire to stand above the crowd, to be distinguished in some way from the normal run of humanity.

Human beings are often (always?) frail and insecure. They need to be reassured that their lives mean something to others. They dread being ignored or forgotten. It is as though they evaluate the worthiness of their lives by how others respond to them. Their feelings of success or failure in life are determined by others. The ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius, taught: "What the Noble Person seeks is in himself. What the petty person seeks is in others." The challenge is to be the Noble Person.

The Torah portion this week includes the Priestly Blessing. The Cohanim are commanded to bless the people, serving as the conduits for God's blessings. The third line of the blessing states: May God shine His countenance upon you and give you shalom. Shalom, usually translated as peace, has the connotation of wholeness. The blessing is recited in the singular (lekha, not lakhem), meaning that it is aimed at each particular person, not at the people at large. The blessing is for each individual to feel a sense of completeness within him/herself, to feel secure and unafraid. The blessing is to understand that the value of our lives is dependent on ourselves, not on the opinions of others. When God shines His countenance upon an individual, that person comes to understand that life is ultimately defined by the relationship of one's self with God. God's light eliminates the shadows and doubts.

The kabbalists and musar writers have long emphasized the virtue of "hitbodedut," being alone with oneself. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translated "hitbodedut" as meditation. A person needs time to think deeply and alone, to separate inner reality from outer illusions, to receive God's light and move out of the shadows. "Hitbodedut" helps a person develop the inner wisdom and inner poise that lead to internal shalom. "Hitbodedut" is a means of seeking the self and, at the same time, transcending the self.

Albert Einstein wrote: "The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and

stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness...."

May God shine His countenance upon you and give you shalom.

Parshas Naso

By Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

Any thinking person must find oneself overwhelmed to live in these times. After months of isolation and separation, our communities begin to reopen and reconnect only to discover a world filled with gross disrespect for the dignity and sanctity of others. The news is dominated with a tragic loss of life and with violence. Amidst calls for solidarity and unity throughout the country, we hear of rioting and destruction of livelihood and life's aspirations. This week alone would leave anyone reeling in the best of times. Whether or not our lives have been directly affected, we feel we simply cannot return to life as it was. While there is so much positive to be seen, there is yet so much pain, frustration and confusion. When faced with such challenges, as with all areas of life, we must look to our Torah and traditions as our guide and anchor.

There is a Rash"i in this week's Parsha (Bamidbar 6:2) which speaks directly to this question. Rash"i quotes the Gemara (Sotah 2a) which explains the juxtaposition of the laws of the *Sotah* and the laws of the *Nazir*. The *Sotah* is an individual who is suspected of having sunk to lowest levels of immorality and committing adultery, while the *Nazir* is an individual who has reached for highest levels of spirituality, devoting himself entirely to G-d and reaching a level of spirituality commensurate with that of the High Priest. These two topics would seem to be so distant from one another, that there could not be any connection between them. The Gemara tells us in the name of Rebi Yehuda Hanasi that that Torah is teaching us here how to respond to witnessing terrible atrocities. "Anyone who witnesses a *Sotah* in her downfall, should separate himself from wine." The first step we must take personally when witnessing immoral and improper conduct is to strengthen our own spiritual commitment.

This is a meaningful and powerful insight for our times. As we find ourselves reeling from the news and searching for anchors, we must create our own anchors. We must revisit and reinforce our own commitment to what we hold true and dear. We must reinforce our own morality. The first step in responding to atrocities is to look inward and strengthen ourselves.

This concept of beginning by strengthening ourselves is elemental to all areas of a Torah lifestyle. The Gemara in Bava Basra 60b teaches us in the name of Reish Lakish "Adorn yourself first and then adorn others." The Gemara understands this to mean that whenever we seek to correct others, we must first look inside and perfect ourselves. Only once we've properly developed ourselves in that area, can we begin to actively discuss the actions of others. (Note: This Gemara is referring to individual's addressing each other's flaws. It goes without saying, that a government has the responsibility to protect its citizens and take action when people's rights are being violated. However, this concept would still apply to government officials themselves. Anyone applying for government office should be of the highest caliber of character in every area of personal conduct.)

Rash"i, however, gleans an even deeper and more profound message from this Gemara, noting that the reinforcement for one who witnesses the downfall of the *Sotah* is specifically to abstain from wine. Certainly, there are myriad ways in which one could maintain one's own morality and one's own commitment. Why is the Torah prescribing one specific focus? Rash"i in our Parsha (ibid.) explains that wine has a unique capacity to weaken one's commitment and to lead one to adultery. When one witnesses the *Sotah's* demise, one must not simply seek to remind himself that he has a different standard. One must first take stock and understand the factors that could weaken one's resolve and lead one astray.

Rashi's insight is a fundamental element of a Torah lifestyle. Whether we are seeking to grow or to maintain and strengthen our existing levels of commitment, we must understand the subtleties of human psyche if we wish to succeed.

Before we begin, we must understand not only our strengths, but also our weaknesses, and the pitfalls which may derail us as time goes on. Indeed, Rash"i tells us here that this is the essence of Rebi Yehuda Hanasi's message. The central aspect of strengthening our own commitment and morality is to protect ourselves from those factors which could potentially create challenges or cause us to slip.

The application to current events strikes far too close to home. The essence of both racism and of senseless violence and destruction is despising someone for their differences. A concept which could be rephrased as "baseless hatred" – the very flaw that has kept us in exile for almost two millennia. Following the teaching of Rebi Yehuda Hanasi, we must then begin to anchor ourselves by seeking to better understand baseless hatred, how we are still prey to this vice today and how we can protect ourselves going forward.

Every individual, and indeed every community, has unique strengths and weaknesses. Unfortunately, we are far more adept at seeing the flaws of others than we are at seeing our own. As Mar bar Rav Ashi says, "A person does not see his own faults" (Shabbos 119a). When we look at two communities, we quickly see our own strengths and the other's flaws. It is so easy, and almost natural, to look at the differences between communities and see our own as superior and the other as inferior. Perhaps then this is an area we can each focus on in our own lives. Perhaps we can begin by learning to respect the differences between us, so we can learn from each other. Perhaps, we could thereby begin to cherish those differences and the rifts between us could themselves become the bonds that connect us.

There is perhaps another deeper element which leads us to baseless hatred. We each have certain fundamental moral creeds which we feel to be inviolate. We feel that any sensible and moral being could not possibly deny the truth and power of these concepts. Often, we may even be right. At the same time, we each have our own unique flaws and areas where we need to improve. There are times when we each miss fundamental truths. Yet when someone else denies a moral precept we hold dear we quickly tend to write them off. We dismiss them and refuse them any association, sometimes refusing them even the most basic human courtesies. While this is certainly true in politics, this is not limited to issues of politics. When another fails morally, we write them off and disregard them as low class or inept.

My Rebbe, Rav Dovid Harris shlit"a, Rosh Yehisva of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim, has recently noted on several occasions how far this is from Torah philosophy. The Sifri in Parshas Balak tells us that when a daughter of a Kohein has committed adultery willingly and knowingly and has sunk low enough to be deserving of the death penalty, she yet retains her inherent value and significance. The Kohein Gadol, one of the greatest and most significant figures in Jewish society, should make himself available and present himself for her to see before she goes to her death. In this way, when she sees him, she'll recognize the type of son she could have had, if she had only lived a proper lifestyle. This additional level of remorse may only be in her heart. No one else may be aware of those feelings. Yet those private feelings of this lowly individual are so cherished and important to G-d, that the Kohein Gadol is expected to find the time to be present and provide that inspiration. No matter how wrong or morally corrupt someone may be, they yet have potential, they remain G-d's precious child and even their personal unknown feelings are still of great significance.

In this context, it is worthy to note the language of Reish Lakish when discussing correcting and rebuking, "*Adorn* yourself and then *adorn* others." No matter how far one may have strayed, whatever they do achieve and develop within themselves is still an adornment they will take with them for eternity.

If we recognize this inherent greatness, it becomes much easier to seek the good in others, and thereby recognize what they have to teach us, and to cherish those very differences that currently divide us. In that merit, may we live to see the heralding of Moshiach and the end of all strife and hatred.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Sefer Bamidbar's Lessons for our Current Troubles

By Rabbi Moshe Rube*

Quis custodiet ipsos custodes is the Latin phrase that encapsulates all the travails of human existence. It means "Who will guard the guards?". We set up systems of moral and religious values, base communities and governments on those values and then we shove them off a cliff hoping they can fly with the guidance of the guardians of those values. But who will guard them? Who will make sure the ones guarding our most deeply held truths will not succumb to evil themselves? In human history, spiritual leaders have succumbed, kings and presidents have become corrupted. And policemen have murdered.

Our nation reels from the murder of George Floyd by former Minneapolis police officers. Out of all the police brutality that has ever been committed in this country, this one makes history as the most brazen. For 9 minutes, the officer knelt on George's neck and would not stop even as he was being filmed and begged to stop by the victim and by onlookers. Any sane man would have at least had the humanity to be embarrassed about what he was doing being recorded, but he kept going.

It's one thing to turn a blind eye when we can claim ignorance, but when evil for once exposes itself for all it is for the world to see, we would be inhuman not to be freaked out.

So what do we do now? Unfortunately, the goal is much more opaque than the problem.

The Civil Rights Era had a clear goal. Erase laws that carve out a difference between people based on skin color. But what laws are the target here? Perhaps we should craft legislation that will make it easier to hold cops accountable for when they break the law. That definitely needs improvement. Like the Latin phrase implied, holding cops responsible for guarding themselves can be very dangerous and often it's the cops entrusted with investigating cops. There has to be a better system or at least ways we can make this one better. (Google "qualified immunity")

But from the language of the protests, I hear cries of a different issue. I hear people who are desperate to not have to walk the streets in fear. People crying and praying for racism and hatred to be abolished. That's way more difficult. In a secular legal system, you cannot legislate people's feelings, you can only legislate actions. Love can be preached but it cannot be legislated. Or to put it another way, evil people don't stop being evil just because you told them to stop being evil.

We can make all the laws we want, but people can discriminate within the bounds of the law. All someone has to do is to make their action unclear enough so it can be interpreted multiple different ways. For instance, a cop can harass a person on the street because he has a legitimate reason that they are dangerous or because the cop is prejudiced. It's hard to prove beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law what exactly it was. External laws have a limit.

So how do we change people's souls? It's a frustrating question. Souls are not as measurable as laws.

The answer though, is right in the Book of Numbers. Many dicey political situations happen in this book. For instance, the spies that Israel sent out to inspect the land came back with a damning report about it and encouraged everyone to not go into it. On the surface it seems that the spies could have been motivated by rebellion or by their sincere motivation for the lives of the Israelites. How were the Jews supposed to know? How did they resolve this confusion? Simple. God killed the spies.

And what about Korach? He instigated a rebellion against Moses and told all of Israel that Moses was only out to increase his own power. After failed attempts to get Korach to talk to him, Moshe prayed that God show all of Israel that Moshe did all that he did only because God told him to. So Hashem made a miracle and Korach and his followers were

swallowed up in a giant hole.

That would be an elegant solution right? If a policeman does an action that with the incorrect motivation would be criminal and we have no way of knowing what he was thinking, God paints his forehead with a big red mark so we can see.

We may not have access to that solution currently, but perhaps we can learn from Moshe anyway. Moshe invoked God to show the people what was right and to clear up the confusion. Changing souls requires us to rediscover God or that inner transcendent conscience that we have as part of our soul, our tzelem elokim (Godly image). I can't change souls by legislation, but I can emphasize and tell people you do have a part of yourself that extends beyond the letter of the law, beyond nature's dog eat dog rule of cause and effect. Our transcendent conscience perplexed Charles Darwin who (at least initially) saw no evolutionary reason for it and according to George Washington serves as the basis for even our secular laws. It's there and will continue to be if we nurture it.

So with all these people desperate to change their soul and/or the soul of society around us, the best way to do it is through exploring the part of our lives that can't be legislated. And if we keep exploring that part, we will rediscover our transcendence that helped build our society. We will rediscover God who can give us the clarity he gave to our ancestors many years ago. A society like that is our best chance of guarding the guards.

Shabbat Shalom!

P.S. Stay safe! Even with all the righteous protesters trying to keep everything nonviolent, terrible crimes have still been committed in the name of "justice." We hope and pray that this violence will end soon.

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL

Rav Kook Torah

Naso: The Nazir of Jerusalem

Rav Kook's most prominent disciple was the scholar and mystic Rabbi David Cohen. He was known as the "Rav HaNazir" (or "the Nazir of Jerusalem"), since he conducted himself as a Nazarite, never drinking wine, eating grapes, or cutting his hair. The Rav HaNazir edited and organized many of Rav Kook's writings into the four-volume magnum opus, Orot HaKodesh.

Who was this scholar? How did he meet Rav Kook?

Meeting Rav Kook

David Cohen was a yeshiva student from the Vilna area blessed with exceptional intellectual talents. He studied in Radun under the famed scholar Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, known as the Chafetz Chaim. Cohen attended the leading yeshivot of the day, including Volozhin and Slabodka. After preparing himself for matriculation exams, he was accepted to the University of Basel in Switzerland, where he studied philosophy and classical literature for seven years.

However, the 26-year-old student was not at peace with himself. While he rose early every morning for prayers and carefully observed mitzvot, he felt something was missing and suffered from an inner discontent.

When Cohen heard that Rav Kook was staying in St. Gallen, Switzerland, after becoming stranded in Europe due to the unexpected outbreak of the First World War — the rabbi had left Eretz Yisrael to attend a major rabbinical conference in Frankfurt — the hopeful young scholar sent off a letter to Rav Kook: Would it be possible to discuss various matters of faith?

Cohen was overjoyed when he received a positive reply. Lacking the means to pay for the trip, he handed over his gold watch to a local pawnshop to raise the necessary funds.

Cohen prepared himself by performing a ritual immersion in the Rhine River; then he set off for St. Gallen. It was the start of the autumn month of Elul, a time of introspection and repentance preceding the High Holidays.

Rav Kook received the young scholar warmly. They spoke, mainly about Greek philosophy and literature, the entire day. Rav Kook was struck by the expertise his visitor demonstrated on these topics in their original sources. Cohen, on the other hand, felt disappointed. Had he come all this way, even pawning his watch, just to discuss Greek philosophy?

Rav Kook suggested that the young man stay overnight. Reluctantly, Cohen agreed. The entire night, he tossed and turned, unable to sleep. What would be tomorrow? Would Rav Kook resolve his questions? Would he succeed in dispelling his doubts? He felt his life's destiny was hanging in the balance. Which way would it go?

Rav Kook's Tefillah

As the first rays of morning light broke through the window, the young man heard footsteps from the adjoining room. That must be the Rav, he thought. He must be praying. What is he saying?

He heard Rav Kook chant the Akeidah, the Biblical account of Isaac's binding, a story of ultimate love and self-sacrifice. The melody captivated his heart.

Then the rabbi recited the concluding supplication, "Ribono shel olam! Master of the World, may it be Your will... that You recall for our sake the covenant of our fathers...." The sweetness and exhilarating fervor in Rav Kook's prayer shook the very foundations of the young man's soul.

This inspiring tefilah, recited in holiness and purity, changed him. Many years later, he tersely described this transformative experience in his introduction to Orot HaKodesh:

"In the early morning I heard the sound of steps. Then the morning blessings, and the prayer of the Akeidah, in sublime song and melody. "From the eternal heavens on high, remember the love of our ancestors..." I listened; and I became a new person. Immediately I wrote, announcing that I had found more than I had hoped for. I had found for myself a Rav."

(Stories from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Malachim Kivnei Adam, pp. 74-76.)

Shavuos: Questions And Answers

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt (© Torah.org 2013)

Short-Term Motivation

When a morbidly obese friend of mine who was my age suddenly dropped dead of a heart attack, the shock made me recommit to my diet, and I lost some weight. Less than six months later, I had gained it back. While there are exceptions to the rule, when motivation to change stems merely from wanting to avoid a bad outcome, rather than obtaining a good result, the change is usually temporary.

Fearing a theoretical illness or not being pulled towards the good serves better than running from the bad wanting to wind up like someone we are close to who created his or her own premature death through neglect can certainly galvanize us into a new mindset. The fear of a possible future bad "what if" scenario, however, does not provide lasting motivation. What does serve the process of long-term change is flipping the goal into something positive, like feeling confident, strong and healthy, and to be able to resume former activities and physical hobbies.

In the long run, being pulled towards the good serves better than running from the bad. Talk less about your fears and more about your vision. Yes, you may, in fact, be afraid of dropping dead. And, you may be sick and tired of being sick and tired. But give equal or greater attention to what you would like to see for yourself, and how you can be a good role model rather than a bad example.

This idea is taught by the Chassidic master, the Maggid of Mezeritch, who explained the Psalm “stay away from evil and do good” to truly mean “stay away from evil by doing good.” The two are connected. When we do something positive, we are naturally removed from the negative.

Similarly, when the “bad” has been internalized to oneself and the motivation to change comes from thoughts such as: “I’m not thin enough, disciplined enough, healthy enough, pretty enough, successful enough, rich enough, popular enough, worthy enough, etc., etc., etc.” then this comes from a place of need, of lacking. Whatever you are, feeling that it’s just not “enough” originates in fear and creates the emotion of inner shame. That is toxic to the process of healthy change.

Well-Being Is Whole Being

Shame disconnects us from others and also from ourselves. Disconnection is the diametric opposite of wholeness, as connection is the very mainspring of well-being. It should be self-evident that we can’t use persistent negativity to bring about a desired positive result, but we just keep falling into the trap. No matter how we try, we cannot shame and blame ourselves (or anyone else) into personal growth.

In the Torah portion, Nasso, which means “single out,” Moses is commanded to “single out” and allocate different priestly duties to the descendants of two sub-tribes of the Levites: Gershon and Kehot. The descendants of Gershon were tasked with carrying the accoutrements of the Tabernacle (which housed the Ark), while the descendants of Kehot were entrusted with carrying the Ark itself.

Not only does the job description itself speak for the different level of sanctity between these two sub-tribes, but the descendants of Kehot are “singled out” before the descendants of Gershon. What’s strange about that is that this reverses the birth order in that the descendants of Gershon, who were the first-born, would be expected to assume the duties that were allocated to the descendants of Kehot.

To serve G d, one must “turn away from evil” and “do good.” The name Gershon is related to the Hebrew word gerushin, which means, “to divorce.” Thus, the descendants of Gershon were to embody the idea of divorcing oneself and “turning away from evil.” Kehot, on the other hand, means “doing good,” and is derived from yik-has, meaning “will gather,” alluding to the idea of gathering and accumulating good deeds.

What Do You Want More Than You Don’t Want?

So what does that mean for us today? The lesson of switching the birth order teaches us that at the outset, our initial impetus and motivation to change may very well be sourced in the avoidance of an undesirable outcome or overcoming something negative. I know that I have often been galvanized into action as a reaction to the bad behavior of others. Recoiling from what I don’t want to be or whom I don’t want to emulate has often been a powerful motivator for me.

What the Torah is teaching us, it’s a “good” goal, but it’s also vague and undefined however, is that it is a higher spiritual priority to sustain our growth by being drawn to the good and what we see as positive. For example, if we grew up in a home filled with strife, we may be motivated not to repeat the patterns of hostility that we witnessed. It’s a “good” goal, but it’s also vague and undefined. It is much more powerful—and much more likely to produce results—when we flip that into the positive, and create the goal of creating a home imbued with positivity, loving connection and unconditional positive regard. Then we can take actual concrete steps to bring that about.

Throughout the Torah, G d couples the commandments (even the negative ones) with the words, “Be holy for I am holy.” The first of the Ten Commandments opens with the words, “I am the L-rd thy G d,” meaning that every commandment that follows comes from creating a relationship and connection with G d. That is because holiness (wholeness) stems from connection, not disconnection, and striving to reach and actualize our highest selves.

I am not suggesting that we only emulate the descendants of Kehot. Both ways are important. In fact, to be only one or the other can be unbalanced and even dangerous when taken to an extreme.

The way to growth is a two-sided coin: “avoiding evil” and “doing good.” The key is to understand this polar duality, and to know when to do what and how through the doing of good we can automatically avoid the evil. Being able to tap into either of these energies and

consciously choose which will serve you best as you strive to reach your goals and accomplish your mission, however, is anything but simple.

Internalize & Actualize:

Think about something you really want to change, but no matter how many times you try, you keep failing at it. Now, write the emotions that come to mind when you recall this failure. Next to each emotion, write if it is a positive or negative emotion.

Negative emotions paralyze us rather than motivate us, which is why we never make lasting change when those are the feelings connected to that issue. So for every negative emotion you wrote above, write a positive emotion that will inspire you to work on this issue again. For example, when one fails at something, one might feel “ashamed.” The positive emotion could then be “excited” or “committed,” etc. And alongside the positive emotion, write a positive action that you can begin immediately to work on changing this issue.

Based on the concept of staying away from the negative by doing the positive, write down five practical ways that when you are tempted to fall back into bad habits or actions, you can do something healthy and uplifting in its place. What action could you do that is positive in place of something negative? For example, if you are trying to lose weight and you are tempted to eat a candy bar, your strategy could be to call a friend, go on a walk, eat an apple, etc.

How Positivity Affects Our Goals

By Hanna Perlberger* © Chabad 2020

Short-Term Motivation

When a morbidly obese friend of mine who was my age suddenly dropped dead of a heart attack, the shock made me recommit to my diet, and I lost some weight. Less than six months later, I had gained it back. While there are exceptions to the rule, when motivation to change stems merely from wanting to avoid a bad outcome, rather than obtaining a good result, the change is usually temporary.

Fearing a theoretical illness or not wanting to wind up like someone we are close to who created his or her own premature death through neglect can certainly galvanize us into a new mindset. The fear of a possible future bad “what if” scenario, however, does not provide lasting motivation. What does serve the process of long-term change is flipping the goal into something positive, like feeling confident, strong and healthy, and to be able to resume former activities and physical hobbies.

In the long run, being pulled towards the good serves better than running from the bad. Talk less about your fears and more about your vision. Yes, you may, in fact, be afraid of dropping dead. And, you may be sick and tired of being sick and tired. But give equal or greater attention to what you would like to see for yourself, and how you can be a good role model rather than a bad example.

This idea is taught by the Chassidic master, the Maggid of Mezeritch, who explained the Psalm “stay away from evil and do good” to truly mean “stay away from evil by doing good.” The two are connected. When we do something positive, we are naturally removed from the negative.

Similarly, when the “bad” has been internalized to oneself and the motivation to change comes from thoughts such as: “I’m not thin enough, disciplined enough, healthy enough, pretty enough, successful enough, rich enough, popular enough, worthy enough, etc., etc., etc.” then this comes from a place of need, of lacking. Whatever you are, feeling that it’s just not “enough” originates in fear and creates the emotion of inner shame. That is toxic to the process of healthy change.

Well-Being Is Whole Being

Shame disconnects us from others and also from ourselves. Disconnection is the diametric opposite of wholeness, as connection is the very mainspring of well-being. It should be self-evident that we can't use persistent negativity to bring about a desired positive result, but we just keep falling into the trap. No matter how we try, we cannot shame and blame ourselves (or anyone else) into personal growth.

In the Torah portion, Nasso, which means "single out," Moses is commanded to "single out" and allocate different priestly duties to the descendants of two sub-tribes of the Levites: Gershon and Kehot. The descendants of Gershon were tasked with carrying the accoutrements of the Tabernacle (which housed the Ark), while the descendants of Kehot were entrusted with carrying the Ark itself.

Not only does the job description itself speak for the different level of sanctity between these two sub-tribes, but the descendants of Kehot are "singled out" before the descendants of Gershon. What's strange about that is that this reverses the birth order in that the descendants of Gershon, who were the first-born, would be expected to assume the duties that were allocated to the descendants of Kehot.

To serve G d, one must "turn away from evil" and "do good." The name Gershon is related to the Hebrew word *gerushin*, which means, "to divorce." Thus, the descendants of Gershon were to embody the idea of divorcing oneself and "turning away from evil." Kehot, on the other hand, means "doing good," and is derived from *yik-has*, meaning "will gather," alluding to the idea of gathering and accumulating good deeds.

What Do You Want More Than You Don't Want?

So what does that mean for us today? The lesson of switching the birth order teaches us that at the outset, our initial impetus and motivation to change may very well be sourced in the avoidance of an undesirable outcome or overcoming something negative. I know that I have often been galvanized into action as a reaction to the bad behavior of others. Recoiling from what I don't want to be or whom I don't want to emulate has often been a powerful motivator for me.

What the Torah is teaching us, however, is that it is a higher spiritual priority to sustain our growth by being drawn to the good and what we see as positive. For example, if we grew up in a home filled with strife, we may be motivated not to repeat the patterns of hostility that we witnessed. It's a "good" goal, but it's also vague and undefined. It is much more powerful—and much more likely to produce results—when we flip that into the positive, and create the goal of creating a home imbued with positivity, loving connection and unconditional positive regard. Then we can take actual concrete steps to bring that about.

Throughout the Torah, G d couples the commandments (even the negative ones) with the words, "Be holy for I am holy." The first of the Ten Commandments opens with the words, "I am the L-rd thy G d," meaning that every commandment that follows comes from creating a relationship and connection with G d. That is because holiness (wholeness) stems from connection, not disconnection, and striving to reach and actualize our highest selves.

I am not suggesting that we only emulate the descendants of Kehot. Both ways are important. In fact, to be only one or the other can be unbalanced and even dangerous when taken to an extreme.

The way to growth is a two-sided coin: "avoiding evil" and "doing good." The key is to understand this polar duality, and to know when to do what and how through the doing of good we can automatically avoid the evil. Being able to tap into either of these energies and consciously choose which will serve you best as you strive to reach your goals and accomplish your mission, however, is anything but simple.

Internalize & Actualize:

1. Think about something you really want to change, but no matter how many times you try, you keep failing at it.

Now, write the emotions that come to mind when you recall this failure. Next to each emotion, write if it is a positive or negative emotion.

2. Negative emotions paralyze us rather than motivate us, which is why we never make lasting change when those are the feelings connected to that issue. So for every negative emotion you wrote above, write a positive emotion that will inspire you to work on this issue again. For example, when one fails at something, one might feel “ashamed.” The positive emotion could then be “excited” or “committed,” etc. And alongside the positive emotion, write a positive action that you can begin immediately to work on changing this issue.

3. Based on the concept of staying away from the negative by doing the positive, write down five practical ways that when you are tempted to fall back into bad habits or actions, you can do something healthy and uplifting in its place. What action could you do that is positive in place of something negative? For example, if you are trying to lose weight and you are tempted to eat a candy bar, your strategy could be to call a friend, go on a walk, eat an apple, etc.

* Author, attorney, spiritual teacher, and coach. This article is an excerpt from *A Year of Sacred Moments: The Soul Seeker's Guide to Inspired Living*.

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Sponsorship opportunities available.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah
via the Internet

Sponsored by Ari and Esther Jacobs
in memory of Ari's father, Al Jacobs a"h,
(Alter Gavriel Dov Ben Aharon Moshe Hacohen)
whose yearzeit is 20 Sivan

Volume 26, Issue 31

Shabbat Parashat Naso

5780 B"H

Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Sages and Saints

Parshat Naso contains the law of the Nazirite – the individual who undertook to observe special rules of holiness and abstinence: not to drink wine or other intoxicants (including anything made from grapes), not to have his hair cut, and not to defile himself by contact with the dead (Num. 6:1–21). Such a state was usually undertaken for a limited period; the standard length was thirty days. There were exceptions, most famously Samson and Samuel who, because of the miraculous nature of their birth, were consecrated before their birth as Nazirites for life.[1]

What the Torah does not make clear, though, is firstly why a person might wish to undertake this form of abstinence, and secondly whether it considers this choice to be commendable, or merely permissible. On the one hand the Torah calls the Nazirite “holy to God” (Num. 6:8). On the other, it requires him, at the end of the period of his vow, to bring a sin offering (Num. 6:13–14).

This led to an ongoing disagreement between the Rabbis in Mishnaic, Talmudic, and medieval times. According to R. Elazar, and later to Nahmanides, the Nazirite is praiseworthy. He has voluntarily undertaken a higher level of holiness. The prophet Amos (2:11) said, “I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and your young men for Nazirites,” suggesting that the Nazirite, like the prophet, is a person especially close to God. The reason he had to bring a sin offering was that he was now returning to ordinary life. His sin lay in ceasing to be a Nazirite.

Eliezer HaKappar and Shmuel held the opposite opinion. For them the sin lay in becoming a Nazirite in the first place and thereby denying himself some of the pleasures of the world God created and declared good. R. Eliezer added: “From this we may infer that if one who denies himself the enjoyment of wine is called a sinner, all the more so one who denies himself the enjoyment of other pleasures of life.”[2]

Clearly the argument is not merely textual. It is substantive. It is about asceticism, the life of self-denial. Almost every religion knows the phenomenon of people who, in pursuit of spiritual purity, withdraw from the pleasures and temptations of the world. They live in caves, retreats, hermitages, monasteries. The Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls may have been such a movement.

In the Middle Ages there were Jews who adopted similar kinds of self-denial – among them the Chasidei Ashkenaz, the Pietists of Northern Europe, as well as many Jews in Islamic lands. In retrospect it is hard not to see in these patterns of behaviour at least some influence from the non-Jewish environment. The Chasidei Ashkenaz who flourished during the time of the Crusades lived among self-mortifying Christians. Their southern counterparts may have been familiar with Sufism, the mystical movement in Islam.

The ambivalence of Jews towards the life of self-denial may therefore lie in the suspicion that it entered Judaism from the outside. There were ascetic movements in the first centuries of the Common Era in both the West (Greece) and the East (Iran) that saw the physical world as a place of corruption and strife. They were, in fact, dualists, holding that the true God was not the creator of the universe. The physical world was the work of a lesser, and evil, deity. Therefore God – the true God – is not to be found in the physical world and its enjoyments but rather in disengagement from them.

The two best-known movements to hold this view were Gnosticism in the West and Manichaeism in the East. So at least some of the negative evaluation of the Nazirite may have been driven by a desire to discourage Jews from imitating non-Jewish practices. Judaism strongly believes that God is to be found in the midst of the physical world that He created that is, in the first chapter of Genesis, seven times pronounced “good.” It believes not in renouncing pleasure but in sanctifying it.

What is much more puzzling is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative, in the same book, his law code the Mishneh Torah. In Hilchot Deot, he adopts the negative position of R. Eliezer HaKappar:

A person may say: “Desire, honour, and the like are bad paths to follow and remove a person from the world; therefore I will completely separate myself from them and go to the other extreme.” As a result, he does not eat meat or drink wine or take a wife or live in a decent house or wear decent clothing.... This too is bad, and it is forbidden to choose this way.[3]

Yet in Hilchot Nezirut he rules in accordance with the positive evaluation of R. Elazar: “Whoever vows to God [to become a Nazirite] by way of holiness, does well and is praiseworthy.... Indeed Scripture considers him the equal of a prophet.”[4] How does any

writer come to adopt contradictory positions in a single book, let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer lies in a remarkable insight of Maimonides into the nature of the moral life as understood by Judaism. What Maimonides saw is that there is not a single model of the virtuous life. He identifies two, calling them respectively the way of the saint (chassid) and the way of the sage (chacham).

The saint is a person of extremes. Maimonides defines chessed as extreme behaviour – good behaviour, to be sure, but conduct in excess of what strict justice requires.[5] So, for example, “If one avoids haughtiness to the utmost extent and becomes exceedingly humble, he is termed a saint [chassid].”[6]

The sage is a different kind of person altogether. He or she follows the “golden mean,” the “middle way,” the way of moderation and balance. He or she avoids the extremes of cowardice on the one hand, recklessness on the other, and thus acquires the virtue of courage. He or she avoids miserliness in one direction, prodigality in the other, and instead chooses the middle way of generosity. The sage knows the twin dangers of too much and too little, excess and deficiency. He or she weighs the conflicting pressures and avoids the extremes.

These are not just two types of person but two ways of understanding the moral life itself. Is the aim of the moral life to achieve personal perfection? Or is it to create gracious relationships and a decent, just, compassionate society? The intuitive answer of most people would be to say: both. What makes Maimonides so acute a thinker is that he realises that you cannot have both – that they are in fact different enterprises.

A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But what about the members of the saint's own family? They may suffer because of his extreme self-denial. A saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint's country and its defence? A saint may forgive all crimes committed against him. But what then about the rule of law, and justice? Saints are supremely virtuous people, considered as individuals. Yet you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Indeed, saints are not really

To sponsor an issue of Likutei Divrei Torah:
Call Saadia Greenberg 301-649-7350
or email: sgreenberg@jhu.edu
<http://torah.saadia.info>

interested in society. They have chosen a different, lonely, self-segregating path. I know no moral philosopher who makes this point as clearly as Maimonides – not Plato or Aristotle, not Descartes or Kant.[7]

It was this deep insight that led Maimonides to his seemingly contradictory evaluations of the Nazirite. The Nazirite has chosen, at least for a period, to adopt a life of extreme self-denial. He is a saint, a chassid. He has adopted the path of personal perfection. That is noble, commendable, and exemplary. That is why Maimonides calls him “praiseworthy” and “the equal of a prophet.”

But it is not the way of the sage – and you need sages if you seek to perfect society. The sage is not an extremist – because he or she realises that there are other people at stake. There are the members of one’s own family as well as the others within one’s community. There are colleagues at work. There is a country to defend and a society to help build. The sage knows he or she cannot leave all these commitments behind to pursue a life of solitary virtue.[8] In a strange way, saintliness is a form of self-indulgence. We are called on by God to live in the world, not escape from it; in society not seclusion; to strive to create a balance among the conflicting pressures on us, not to focus on some while neglecting the others.

Hence, while from a personal perspective the Nazirite is a saint, from a societal perspective he is, at least figuratively, a “sinner” who has to bring an atonement offering.

Maimonides lived the life he preached. We know from his writings that he longed for seclusion. There were years when he worked day and night to write his Commentary to the Mishnah, and later the Mishneh Torah. Yet he also recognised his responsibilities to his family and to the community. In his famous letter to his would-be translator Ibn Tibbon,[9] he gives an account of his typical day and week – in which he had to carry a double burden as a world-renowned physician and an internationally sought halachist and sage. He worked to exhaustion.

Maimonides was a sage who longed to be a saint, but knew he could not be, if he was to honour his responsibilities to his people. That is a profound and moving judgement, and one that still has the power to inspire today.

[1] Judges 13:1–7; 1 Sam. 1:11. The Talmud distinguishes these kinds of cases from the standard vow for a fixed period. The most famous Nazirite of modern times was Rabbi David Cohen (1887–1972), a disciple of Rav Kook and father of the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, Rabbi She’ar-Yashuv Cohen (1927–2016).

[2] Taanit 11a; Nedarim 10a.

[3] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 3:1.

[4] Ibid., Hilchot Nezirut 10:14.

[5] Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, III:52.

[6] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 1:5.

[7] However, see J. O. Urmson’s famous article, “Saints and Heroes,” in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*,

ed. A. Melden (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958). See also P. F. Strawson, “Social Morality and Individual Ideal,” *Philosophy* 36, no. 136 (Jan. 1961): 1–17.

[8] There were Sages who believed that in an ideal world, tasks such as earning a living or having children could be “done by others” (see Berachot 35a for the view of R. Shimon b. Yochai; Yevamot 63b for that of Ben Azzai). These are elitist attitudes that have surfaced in Judaism from time to time but which are criticised by the Talmud.

[9] See Rabbi Yitzhak Sheilat, *Letters of Maimonides* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Miskal, 1987–88), 2:530–554.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

This week’s reading of Naso describes the “Sota,” the woman who acts immodestly. At the very least, she sequesters herself alone with a man despite the fact that her husband warned her against seeing that person. She therefore undergoes the test of the bitter waters. However, during the spring holiday period, we saw two other women – great heroines of our people, Esther (Purim) and Ruth (Shavuot) who also commit immodest acts, for which they are ultimately praised and through which salvation and redemption are brought about. Let us revisit their stories to see how they differ from that of the Sota.

Both heroines compromise their modesty and perhaps even their chastity, Esther with Ahasuerus in the palace of the king and Ruth with Boaz on the threshing floor in Efrat. Moreover, both of these outstanding women hail from gentile countries of exile and one even from gentile stock: Esther from Persia and Ruth from Moab.

But here is where the comparisons end. Although each of these two women undergoes a profound, existential change, a switch in direction with profound ramifications, they part company in very significant ways.

Esther seems to have been an assimilating Jewess who was eager to become the Queen of Persia. She used her Persian name – from the pagan goddess Astarte – rather than her Hebrew name Hadassah; she is taken for the nighttime beauty contest and undergoes a 12-month preparatory beauty treatment without protest. She even concurs with Mordecai (her cousin, or even perhaps her husband as the midrash suggests) not to reveal her national heritage (lest she be rejected on the grounds that she is Jewish – see the suggestion, albeit rejected by the Ibn Ezra).

It is only when Mordecai publicly demonstrates in front of the king’s gate in sackcloth and ashes against Haman’s decree to annihilate the Jews of Persia, bidding Esther to “come out of the closet,” as it were, and go before the king on behalf of her people, that Esther puts her life on the line. By doing so, she becomes one of the greatest penitents of Jewish history.

Likutei Divrei Torah

The words Mordecai uses to convince Esther have reverberated throughout Jewish history: “Do not imagine in your soul that you will be able to escape in the king’s palace any more than the rest of the Jews. For if you persist in keeping silent at a time like this, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether it was just for a time such as this that you attained the royal position” (Esther 5:13,14).

The Jews in Shushan gather for three days of prayer and fasting, Esther persuades the king to allow the Jews to protect themselves during the Persian “pogrom” against them, Haman and his sons are killed, and the Jewish community survives.

The Talmud (B.T. Megila 14a) rules that despite all the other festivities, Hallel (psalms of praise) is not to be chanted on Purim; since “we still remained slaves to Ahasuerus” – and an Ahmadijad can still become a replacement for Haman.

Esther, was born of Jewish parents but married the gentile Ahasuerus: Ruth was a Moabite, she followed Naomi to the Land of Israel, changing geographically and existentially by converting to Judaism. Her ancestor Lot had defected from Abraham when he left Israel and moved to Sodom, now she repaired this by becoming a second Abraham.

Like our forefather, she left her birthplace and homeland for the Land of Israel, a strange nation and the God of ethical monotheism. In her own words, “Where you go, I will go” (to the Land of Israel) – “your nation will be my nation, your God shall be my God” (Ruth 1:16).

In the deepest sense, Ruth entered Abraham’s “Covenant between the Parts” (Genesis 15). God promised Abraham that he would be an eternal nation, his seed would never be destroyed and his descendants would live in their homeland, Israel and through this nation, “all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:1). This is far more than the survival of the Jews in Persia; this is world redemption.

Hence Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor to seduce Boaz, to bear his Jewish seed, just as Tamar, the widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi’s ancestor Judah the son of Jacob, had seduced her father-in-law in order to bear his seed (Gen. 38).

But Ruth is not satisfied. She understands that Jewish eternity is linked to two crucial components: Jewish seed in the land of Israel. She doesn’t consummate their relationship on the threshing floor; she asks him to “redeem” her, to buy back Naomi’s familial inheritance and to marry her “in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel” so that her descendants can be Jews in the Jewish homeland.

Through their actions, Esther succeeded in gaining a respite in persecution, which is the most we can hope for in galut (exile). Ruth succeeded in entering Jewish eternity, the Abrahamic Covenant, and due to her compassionate righteousness and loving-kindness toward Naomi she became the herald of Jewish redemption. Her journey leads to the day when the nations of the world will join the family of Abraham, father of a multitude of nations.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Kohanim Are Not Giving Out Free Blessings

One of the mitzvos in Parshas Naso is the positive Biblical commandment for the Kohanim to bless the Jewish people on a daily basis. We in Chutz L'Aretz only practice this mitzvah on Yom Tov (the Shalosh Regalim, Rosh HaShannah, and Yom Kippur), but in Eretz Yisrael, there is Birkas Kohanim every single day. In fact, you do not need to travel to Eretz Yisrael to see this. The Kohanim also bless the people on a daily basis at Sephardic congregations who follow the Psak of the author of Shulchan Aruch (Rav Yosef Karo). In fact, on Shabbos at Ner Yisroel, where all the Iranian young men together with other Sephardic young men have their own minyan, they say Birkas Kohanim.

When Rav Simcha Zissel Brody, zt"l, (the Chevroner Rosh Yeshiva) spent several years here as a "Visiting Rosh Yeshiva," he missed the Birkas Kohanim that he was used to on a daily basis in Eretz Yisrael, so he and Rabbi Neuberger ran into the Iranian minyan every Shabbos to grab an opportunity to be blessed by the Kohanim. This is a positive Biblical commandment – at least for the Kohanim.

The Sefer Akeidas Yitzchak from Rav Yitzchak Arama [1420-1494] asks several fundamental questions on the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim. His answer provides an absolutely new understanding of what exactly Birkas Kohanim is about. He asks five different questions.

1. Why do we need the Kohanim to give us blessings? The Ribono shel Olam is the source of all blessings! Why should we need Kohanim to be a conduit for blessing? In today's efficient society, the primary rule of business is "cut out the middle man." Let's go directly to the source!

2. The Gemara teaches [Rosh Hashana 28b] that the Kohanim may not add any personal blessings to the Birkas Kohanim recorded in Parshas Naso. The Gemara cites the pasuk, "Do not add to the matter that I command you and do not detract from it..." [Devorim 4:2] as a Biblical pasuk which prohibits any Kohen from deviating from the specific text proscribed in this week's parsha. If the Almighty is already giving the Kohanim license to bless the nation, then why limit

them? Why do we not say, "Whoever increases is praiseworthy?"

Poskim in fact discuss this matter. The Minhag Yisrael (Jewish custom) is that when the Kohanim descend from the platform after having blessed the people, the non-Kohanim who were blessed say to the Kohanim "Y'asher Kochacha" [Good job!] and the Kohanim typically respond "Baruch Ti'heyeh" [You should be blessed]. The later rabbinic authorities discuss whether they are in fact allowed to say that. Is it not a violation of adding, so to speak, a non-authorized personal blessing to the Jewish people?

3. The Sefer Charedim holds (as the Mishna Berura brings in the Biur Halacha) that not only is it a Mitzvah for the Kohanim to bless the Jewish people but there is also a Mitzvah for the Jewish people to be blessed by the Kohanim! This, too, seems odd. Is there a need to command anyone to receive a blessing? It seems superfluous to "require" such an action on the part of the non-Kohanim.

4. The text of the 3 Priestly Blessings is such that the Name of G-d is repeated by each blessing. (Yevarechecha HASHEM...; Ya'er HASHEM...; Yisa HASHEM.... In the Bais Hamikdash they actually pronounced the explicit Name of G-d. Why is this necessary? It seems redundant!

5. Finally, what is the meaning of the last line of Birkas Kohanim? "And they shall place MY Name upon the Children of Israel and I will bless them." Who is blessing Israel here – the Kohen or Hashem? It is unclear!

The Akeidas Yitzchak explains that every single blessing begins with the words "Baruch Ata Hashem". What do these three words mean? Older English translations use the expression "Blessed art Thou" and newer translations that are more "contemporary" use "Blessed are You". However, these translations do not reflect the true meaning of "Baruch Ata Hashem". Both Rabbeinu Bachya on Chumash, the Akeidas Yitzchak over here and many other early commentaries write that the expression "Baruch" comes from the Hebrew word "Bereicha" (meaning a pool or reservoir of water). "Baruch Ata Hashem" means "Ribono shel Olam, You are the source of all blessing."

When I say "Baruch Ata Hashem Elokeinu Melech haOlam Borei Pri Ha'Etz," I am declaring that I recognize that You the Master of the Universe are the source of all blessing and therefore if not for You, I would not have this apple. The Ribono shel Olam wants us to do this because He wants us to know that every single apple and every single piece of salami and every single piece of bread we eat comes from Him.

It is not me. It is not my money. It is not my talent. It has nothing to do with me. It all

Likutei Divrei Torah

comes from You! That is what the declaration "Baruch Ata Hashem" teaches. If we acknowledge the present we received from Hashem, He will keep giving us presents. If someone gives you a present and you do not say thank you; you do not show appreciation, he may stop giving you presents. That is only natural. If we want more apples, we want more salami, and we want more cake or bread, then we must say "Baruch Ata Hashem..." each time.

That is what Brochos are about and that is what Birkas Kohanim is about as well. It is not a blessing from the Kohanim. Kohanim do not give blessings. Only the Ribono shel Olam gives blessings. Rather, Birkas Kohanim is a 'Mussar Shmooz': Yevarechecha Hashem v'Yishmerecha – You should know that blessing – and everything else – comes from Hashem. Ya'er Hashem Eilecha vy'Chuneka – Yisa Hashem Panav Elecha... Do you want anything in this world? Know that it comes from the Master of the World. That is why the text repeats and emphasizes the name of Hashem with each sentence.

With this understanding, it becomes very clear why the Kohanim cannot "add another blessing of their own." No sir! We cannot give the impression that it is the Kohanim who are the source of the blessing. A Kohen who would say, "I will go ahead and give another bracha" is defeating the whole purpose of Birkas Kohanim. On the contrary – the lesson of Birkas Kohanim is that there is no other source of brachos other than HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

This also explains the opinion of the Chareidim that there is a mitzvah on Klal Yisrael to hear Birkas Kohanim. Previously, we did not understand this opinion. Why should it be necessary to "command" anyone to go receive blessings? The answer is – Yes, it is necessary – because people do not like to hear mussar. The Kohanim are not getting up on the platform and dispensing blessings. They are dispensing mussar! They are telling the audience "Listen, you may be a millionaire, you may be sitting on top of the world now – but it did not come from you! You are a klutz! As easily as you are the millionaire and he is the pauper, he could be the millionaire and you could be the pauper! Things are the way they are because the Ribono shel Olam wanted it that way.

Do I need to hear a mussar shmooz every single day? I am not interested in that! The Chareidim teaches that it is a mitzvah to hear this mussar shmooz every single day. "It is a mitzvah to "be blessed."

Finally, this explains why Birkas Kohanim ends with the words, "And you will place My Name upon the Children of Israel and I will bless them." Once they repeatedly hear Yevarechecha Hashem...; Ya'er Hashem...; Yissa Hashem... and they understand what

“Baruch” means, and they know what a “Breicha” is, then I will be able to bless them.

This is a whole different understanding of Birkas HaKohanim. They are not giving free gifts. They are not giving out blessings. They are teaching us that we need to know the source of all blessing in this world and that is only the Ribono shel Olam and no one else.

So says the Akeidas Yitzchak in this week’s parsha.

A Story Which Teaches The Lesson of The Longest Parsha

Parshas Naso is the longest parsha in the Torah – 176 pesukim. I remember as a little boy, thinking, “Wow! I am so glad that my Bar Mitzvah parsha is not Parshas Naso.” I remember a fellow about 10 years older than myself, about my brother’s age, who had a Bar Mitzvah on Parshas Naso. I wondered to myself – how did this fellow remember the trop for 176 pesukim!

Then, when I was a little older, I said to myself, “Parshas Naso? That’s a piece of cake for a Bar Mitzvah Baal Koreh!” It is easy because all you do for a good portion of the parsha is repeat a series of pesukim almost verbatim detailing the identical offerings of each of 12 tribal princes. Furthermore, this is the same reading as we do on Chanukah, so it is already familiar. It is no big deal! It is all the same thing!

This leads all the Rishonim to the question – Why do we need to repeat the same thing twelve times? The offerings could have been spelled out for the first tribal prince and then in a few short pesukim, mention that the remaining 11 princes on subsequent days each brought the identical offering. All the commentaries discuss this.

Allow me to share a true story:

In Czarist Russia, when they drafted a person into the army, he remained there for 25 years! Aside from all other implications of the experience, a Jew that went through such a tour of duty would, had his Judaism destroyed. People in Russia tried to get out of the draft. They applied for different exemptions, including sometimes doing some extra-legal things.

A student of Rav Yitzchak Elchanon Spektor, the Rabbi of Kovno, received a letter from the Government that he was about to be drafted. He applied for an exemption but did not receive an answer right away. Everyone was sitting on pins and needles – what is going to be? The Yeshiva and the town, including Rav Yitzchak Elchanon, were all praying that the exemption should come through for this young man. They had to sit and wait.

Rav Yitzchak Elchanon was the greatest rabbi of the generation (Gadol Hador). He was

sitting in on a Din Torah [adjudicating a civil dispute between two parties] together with the Rav of Mir, Rav Elya Baruch Kamai, and one other European Torah authority of the day. It was an intense case and the judges finally convinced the disputants that they should come to a compromise between themselves. They were in the midst of an intense discussion how to work out the details of the compromise.

A young student barged into the room and said “Yankel got his exemption.” Rav Yitzchak Elchanon replied, “Thank G-d! I appreciate very much your telling me this great piece of news. In the merit of you sharing this wonderful news, you should merit a long life and receive much Divine blessing. Yasher Koach!”

Three minutes later, another bochur burst into the room, saying, “Rebi, Yankel got his exemption!” Again, Yitzchak Elchanon said “Ahh! Yasher Koach for letting me know this great piece of news. In the merit of bringing me this news, you should receive much Divine blessing. You should live a long life. Yasher Koach!”

This scene repeated itself six times! Rather than saying after the first or second time, “I know already! Thank you”, he gave the same enthusiastic bracha to each and every person that came in to tell him this piece of good news. Why? Because just like the first person needed that recognition and show of appreciation, the second person and the third person and even the sixth person needed that recognition as well. They were no less worthy than the first person.

This is the lesson taught by Rav Yitzchak Elchanon. When somebody is excited to share good tidings and is getting pleasure from sharing the good tidings – he deserves the encouragement (chizuk), the recognition and the blessing that such a delivery of good news deserves, even if in fact the “news” is already not at all a novel piece of information. If the Almighty can do that with the 12 princes, using all those words to do it, making Parshas Naso the longest parsha in the Torah, so can we.

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

The functioning of the community is reliant on every task, no matter how big or small...

Whatever your task is, you are important.

We learn this from the commencement of parashat Nasso. The Torah gives an instruction, “Nasso et rosh b’nei Gershon gam heim” – “take a census of the children of Gershon as well”. Now why the “gam heim” – ‘them as well’? As well as who? As well as what?

We need to view it within its context. You see, Levi had three sons – Gershon, Kehat and

Likutei Divrei Torah

Merari. At the end of last week’s parasha of Bamidbar we read how the children of Kehat, the second son, were given the sacred task of transporting the Aron – the Ark of the covenant from place to place. At the beginning of our parashat of Nasso we are told how his older brothers’ children, the children of Gershon, had the responsibility of carrying the curtains and the coverings and the hooks.

For them it must have appeared as if they were the afterthought, they weren’t carrying anything important – they weren’t in the limelight! So Rav Moshe Feinstein teaches us that the sedra opens by saying ‘b’nei Gershon gam heim’ – they too are important! They are just as important as the children of Kehat, who are mentioned first only out of respect to the Aron.

I’d like to add that in fact, our tradition gives even greater prominence to the children of Gershon, because it is with him that the sedra starts. Indeed, we often find that people are far more familiar with the beginning of the sedra than with the middle or the end of it – and so we are giving a tribute to Gershon by commencing the sedra with him, his children and their role.

Within our communities around the world, there are those who have titles, who stand on a platform or a stage and give a speech, there are those who are publicly thanked. But, in addition there are so many wonderful, outstanding people – those who work in the office, those who prepare an event, those who stuff envelopes, those who volunteer.

There is no such thing as a menial task. Every single person’s work is of crucial importance for the functioning of the community and that is actually what makes a community – it’s the contribution of absolutely everybody.

So the ‘Kehats’ of our community, perhaps they have the Kodesh ha’Kodeshim and they stand in the limelight. But the beginning of our parasha teaches us the importance of the ‘Gershons’ of our community: ‘gam heim’ – they are just as important.

Whatever your role is – thank you very much.

OTS Dvar Torah

Yisrael Avital Limitless Love?

We ought to enjoy our good lives, accept Hashem’s gifts every day, perpetually, and thank Him for them. On the other hand, we should also remember that we were given a role in this world, and that we aren’t like the beasts of the field, driven solely by our instincts. “Can the two walk together unless they are in agreement?” (Amos 3:3)

The three signs of nezirut – Naziritism – are revealed in our Parsha: letting one’s hair grow wild – foregoing beauty and keeping away from carnal attractions; refraining from

drinking wine – depriving oneself of the opportunity to become drunk and lose control over one’s evil inclination; and taking on the prohibition of becoming impure for the dead – keeping away from soulless bodies. Nazirite is when one deliberately and consciously assumes an extreme state of abstinence and asceticism. The Torah uses phrasing that seems to suggest something that goes beyond the text – “When [either a man or a woman] shall clearly utter a vow”, and our rabbis disagree over whether this situation is ideal.

Rabbi Elazar HaKappar the Great says: What is the meaning when the verse states: “And he will atone for him for that he sinned by the soul [nefesh]” (Numbers 6:11). But with what soul did this Nazirite sin? Rather, the Nazirite sinned by the distress he caused himself when he abstained from wine, in accordance with the terms of his vow.

Rabbi Elazar says: One who accepts a fast upon himself is called sacred, as it is stated with regard to the Nazirite: “He shall be sacred, he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long” (ibid. 6:5). And if this Nazirite, who distressed himself by abstaining from only one matter, wine, is nevertheless called “sacred”, then with regard to one who distresses himself by abstaining from every matter, all the more [so should he be considered sacred]. (Ta’anit 11:61)

Rambam (Maimonides) contradicts himself in his comments on this issue. One the one hand, he calls a person who abstains from drinking wine “sacred”, while on another occasion, he states:

Lest a person state that since envy, greed, honor and so forth are the ways of evil and they will remove a person from this world, I will fully separate myself from them and reach their utmost extreme in doing so, to the point that he will eat no meat, drink no wine, marry no woman, dwell in no comfortable quarters, dress in no proper clothes but in a sack and coarse wool, and the like, as heathen priests do. This, too, is an evil way, and it is forbidden to follow this path. He who does is called a sinner... and the sages had forbidden this.

There are two extreme ways of living in this world: living a life of spirituality while fully abstaining from any part of the material world through asceticism, deprivation, and fasting, or giving one’s animal inclination free reign and indulging in eating, drinking, sinning, etc.

I presume that most of us would automatically exclaim that one should follow the middle path, but what is this “middle path”? Is it a point on the spectrum where we give up on spirituality, though we stop short of allowing ourselves to enjoy the world we live in?

I believe that we must be able to contain these two opposite states within us and engage in a perpetual dialogue between the two. These

extreme ends are legitimate worldviews. They are antithetical yet complementary (or struggle against each other). We will find these contrasts in various forms, such as love and limits, material and spirituality, the pure and the impure, the sacred and the profane, or the Creator and the created.

In other religions, humankind is either elevated to divine status, or utterly nullified in the face of the divine. In Judaism, we have the commandment of *yir’at Hashem* – the fear of God – yet we are also expected to say that the world was created for our sake, and we therefore must toil to fix and enhance the Creator’s creations, and complete them, so to say. There are religions that deify material possessions, and others that completely bar any form of materialism. Some religions will absolve anything through a cursory penance procedure, while others believe that only death will bring about forgiveness. In Judaism, it’s a bit of both. The sacred and the profane coexist, as do wine and the Sabbath, the evil inclination and the means to succumb it, and the understanding that a person may sins alongside the knowledge that one has the power to correct and repent.

These contrasts should maintain their character, and not nullify themselves in the face of their counterpart. By pairing contrasts and extreme ends, we create harmony – not by trying to approach some kind of spineless “middle road” which is devoid of any character. It’s about finding the “golden mean”, not embracing mediocrity.

Nowhere is this paradox expressed more beautifully than in the Sabbath. One the one hand, we have a “microcosm” of the World to Come: special prayers, and Torah study out of a feeling of joy and contentment. On the other hand, we are commanded to make a blessing over wine, we are obligated to eat three meals, and all week, we save up and work hard, all in honor of the Sabbath.

This harmony between contrasts can be likened to the color grey. Grey can be prosaic and dull, and it goes without saying that no one would want to describe their lives in shades of grey. Yet if we peer closer at the shade of grey I’m referring to, we’ll see that it is made of zillions of beautiful white spots juxtaposed with clearly defined black spots, which, together, form a splendid, radiant grey.

To me, this is a reference to the world of education, the world of which I’m a part. An educator can contain these contrasts. The educator must always love and express that love, while constantly setting boundaries, being stern, and speaking unambiguously. Some mistakenly believe that setting boundaries is, as a matter of course, a form of punishment that is decidedly negative – but this is not the case. Setting boundaries is the vital complement to love.

Likutei Divrei Torah

A somewhat wishy-washy mother and a rather stern father, and vice-versa, can sometime complete each other in the way they educate their children, yet a lack of coordination or proportion could put a lid on our pedagogical efforts. If there is an understanding of the need for both approaches, and if the parents are synchronized, children are raised in a loving yet clearly delimited environment. On the other hand, we must also ensure that each parent can embrace these two opposites, and not completely forego the other side of the sympathetic yet stern educator.

Complicated? Yes, a bit. But who says education is easy? We must, however, teach education and talk about it, and in doing so, we can attain the harmony necessary for educating optimally. All we need to do is think about our different children and students who require different degrees of affection and boundaries, for us to understand that to properly educate each child, we need the skills of a tightrope walker. Boundless love is just as destructive as loveless boundaries – that’s not education, it’s conditioning.

Nazirites chose an extreme position, but as long as it’s for a clearly defined and time-delimited purpose, Nazirite can be a decent temporary solution. In education, too, the left hand must, on a rare occasion, drive away resolutely, but this must be a tactic used for a defined goal, and for the short term. It must not be a person’s general outlook on life. Our sages use of the phrase “Always have the left hand drive [sinners] away and the right draw them near” – i.e. always use both hands, simultaneously.

God created the world to benefit His creations. We ought to enjoy our good lives, accept Hashem’s gifts every day, perpetually, and thank Him for them. On the other hand, we should also remember that we were given a role in this world, and that we aren’t like the beasts of the field, driven solely by our instincts.

I will conclude with the Priestly Blessing, which also appears in the week’s Parasha: “May Hashem bless you and keep you” – “May Hashem bless you”, with the material blessings that appear in the Torah; “... and keep you” – may He keep you falling into the clutches of the lusts that you are drawn to by your evil inclination.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

Sacrifices for Unity

At the end of Parshas Naso the Torah describes the sacrifices that the nesi'im brought during the dedication of the Mishkan. In describing these korbanos, the Torah repeats the same formula twelve times. Why did the nesi'im each bring the exact same korban? And why did the Torah have to repeat the details of the korban twelve times? These pesukim are every ba'al korei's dream, but why are they

necessary? The Torah could have just listed the names of the nesi'im and then said that they all brought the same sacrifice.

The Ramban (Naso 7:2-5) answers that the Torah describes the korban of each nasi separately because in fact they did not bring the same korban. They may have offered the same animals and the same items, but each one had different reasons for bringing the various elements of his korban. Rashi (based on the Midrash) outlines the intentions of Nesanel ben Tzu'ar, the nasi of shevet Yissachar. But according to the Ramban, each nasi had his own special thoughts and intentions in mind when offering each element of his korban. The Torah demonstrates this by describing the korban of each nasi separately to show that each of their korbanos was unique. But it still seems puzzling. If each nasi wanted to bring a different korban, why did they all offer the same animals and the same vessels?

The Chofetz Chaim takes a different approach. He suggests that the nesi'im intentionally brought exactly the same korban so that they should not feel jealousy toward each other (like what happened with Kayin and Hevel). No nasi should feel that his korban was more beautiful or more expensive. No shevet should think that its nasi was superior to that of any other shevet.

The Chofetz Chaim adds that this is the deeper meaning behind the comment of the Midrash that Nesanel ben Tzu'ar suggested this idea to the nesi'im. He didn't simply advise them to bring korbanos. Rather, his advice was that each one of them should bring the same korban so that everyone should be equal in the dedication of the Mishkan and no one should feel jealous of someone else.

The Midrash continues that Hashem was so happy with this attitude of the nesi'im that He told them to bring their korbanos even on Shabbos. Although normally the korban of an individual may not be brought on Shabbos, an exception was made for the korbanos of the nesi'im. It was as if Hashem were saying, "I want to have a part in your beautiful gesture, so take my Shabbos with you. Allow me to be part of this wonderful effort to prevent jealousy." The Torah describes the korban of each nasi separately to highlight and to emphasize how important it is to act in a way that prevents jealousy.

That is not to say that individuality and personal expression have no place in avodas Hashem. The fact is there is a concept of hiddur mitzvah (beautifying a mitzvah). Every person can determine how much additional money he will spend on his esrog, his tefillin or his korban to enhance the mitzvah beyond its basic obligation. But if the Torah recognizes the importance of personal expression, then why was Hashem so pleased with the nesi'im for offering the same korban?

Perhaps the answer is that the concept of equality was especially critical at the dedication of the Mishkan. Chazal comment (Avos 3:6) that when ten people learn Torah together, the Shechina dwells amongst them. And the same is true when five people learn Torah together, or three or two or even one. The Mishna cites pesukim to prove each of these statements. Apparently, while the Shechina is found even with one person learning Torah, it dwells with greater intensity in a group of ten. The larger the tzibbur (the group) that unites together in Torah, the greater will be the presence of the Shechina within that group. The most intense revelation of Hashem's presence in all of history was at the giving of the Torah on Har Sinai. That is why the prerequisite for kabbolas haTorah and the experience of ma'amad Har Sinai was the unity of the Jewish people. "Vayichan sham Yisrael neged hahar - and the Jewish people camped opposite the mountain, k'ish echad b'leiv echad - like one man with one heart." (Rashi, Yisro 19:2). For Hashem to reveal Himself with the greatest intensity, all of Klal Yisrael had to unite together to create the largest tzibbur possible.

The presence of the Shechina in the Mishkan was a replica of its presence at Har Sinai (see Ramban, beginning of Parshas Yisro). To enable the Mishkan to become a structure worthy of housing the presence of the Shechina with the same intensity as on Har Sinai, it had to be a place which united the hearts of Klal Yisrael. This was accomplished through the heartfelt donation in which every member of Klal Yisrael participated - "mei'eis kol ish asher yidvenu libo" (see Gra, Shir Hashirim 1:17). And this feeling continued throughout the building and the dedication of the Mishkan.

Perhaps this is why Hashem was so pleased with the korbanos of the nesi'im. The dedication of the Mishkan was not an appropriate time for self-expression. It was a time to unite all of Klal Yisrael together, to ensure that the Mishkan would be a worthy place for the Shechina to dwell. By offering korbanos in a way that prevented jealousy and promoted unity, the nesi'im demonstrated they were willing to sacrifice their personal avodas Hashem for the greater good, to help establish the Mishkan as a place where the Shechina would feel welcome.

Personal initiative and self-expression are important values in avodas Hashem. But sometimes it is by not promoting ourselves but by uniting together with all of Klal Yisrael that we strengthen our connection with Hakadosh Baruch Hu and we make ourselves even more worthy of His bracha.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

A Powerful Lesson in True Humility

The Kohen shall bring her near and have her stand before HASHEM. The Kohen shall take

Likutei Divrei Torah

sacred water in an earthenware vessel, and the Kohen shall take from the (APHAR) dust that is on the floor of the Tabernacle and put it in the water... (Bamidbar 5:16-17)

The Midrash is puzzled why APHAR- dust is invited as part of the Sotah solution. The answer that is given is that in the merit of Avraham Avinu when he was praying on behalf of Sodom he referred to himself as "APHAR v AIFER – DUST and ASHES"!

OK but how is that an answer? What's the connection between his declaration and the requirement of this unfaithful woman to be offered to drink water with dust from the floor of the Temple?

Obviously Avraham Avinu was adopting a posture of extreme humility when praying to HASHEM and interceding on behalf of Sodom. How else can one approach The Creator of the Universe?! It's an exercise in ultimate humility, a finite creature standing before an Infinite Being! This portrait of Avraham's self-effacement and absolute nullification remains etched for all time as the definitive portrait of humility.

I am afraid though that we may have a wrong impression of what true humility is if we view this scene too quickly and superficially. I saw a phrase that might illuminate the topic, "Humility is not thinking less of your-self. It's thinking less about your-self." Is that not the exact description of what Avraham Avinu was doing here?

This aligns with the famous statement from the Kotzker Rebbe. A person should have two pieces of paper. One is each of two pockets. On one piece of paper the words from the Mishne in Sanhedrin should be inscribed, "A person has an obligation to say, 'The whole world was created for me!'"

On the other piece of paper the words of Avraham Avinu should be written, "I am dust and ashes!" The trick is to know when to take out which piece of paper!

Avraham Avinu was hoping to change the mind of The Almighty! He did not consider him-self completely unworthy. How else can one have the temerity to countermand G-d!? It seems he understood very well the import of his position in the world. Obviously Avraham, in all his humility, was not thinking too little about him-self!

It's very clear that Avraham was not thinking about him-self. Just the opposite! All that he is depicted doing is for the sake of the people of Sodom. He was not asking for anything for him-self.

When he was called upon to deliver his beloved son Yitzchok as a Korban he did not whisper a word of protest. For the people of Sodom, Avraham Avinu carried on as a defense

attorney before a strict judge to protect a community he knew was guilty of many crimes. Avraham thought enough of him-self, to have the courage to face off with HASHEM, and at the same time he thought not about him-self at all, but only about the welfare of others. That's the real portrait of humility.

Now let us apply this same standard to the other side of the equation, the Sotah. The woman who allowed her-self to be lured by the seductive sirens of temptation and indulgence was either not considering or was underestimating the import and impact of her actions, which are serious and severe. She obviously thought too little of herself.

At the same time she was thinking only about herself! She engaged in an act of ultimate selfishness! Rather her behavior betrays qualities that demonstrate just the opposite of true humility. Perhaps that's why, now she is forced to digest APHAR- dust, as a strong reminder of and a powerful lesson in true humility.

Weekly Parsha NASO

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

When the Torah describes the count of the tribe of Levi, at the onset of this week's reading, it uses the expression "raise the head of the tribe of Levi." At first glance this is a strange way of to present the matter. The Torah should say directly, "count the tribe of Levi." By using the expression "raise the head" the Torah communicates to us a subtle but vital lesson. And that is that pure numbers by themselves are insufficient when we wish to appreciate the value of tribes, groups, or individuals. For if that group or individual does not have a sense of pride, a sense of mission and purpose, then numbers alone, in the long run, are almost worthless.

The Levites were assigned a special role in Jewish society and temple service. They were also to be the teachers of Israel and, perhaps just as importantly, the role models for Jewish generations and public service. It is no accident of random choice that the greatest public servant the world has ever known, our teacher Moshe, was a Levite. Because, unless leadership feels the impetus of mission and exalted responsibility upon itself, it can never achieve the fulfillment of its assigned task.

This can only be accomplished by raising one's head, by having a sense of pride and self-worth and an individual commitment to excellence in the performance of one's duties and obligations, be they personal or societal. By using the phrase, "raise the head," the Torah emphasizes to us the correct and eternal way of assessing human numbers and accomplishments.

Modesty and humility are necessary traits for all of us and they are extremely necessary for those who find themselves in positions of public leadership, spiritual guidance, and education. Yet, in these areas of human character, like in all other areas of thought and behavior, a proper sense of balance is required. Our teacher Moshe is the most humble and self-effacing of all human beings, yet he realizes that he is Moshe, that his face shines with Godly eternity and that upon him lies the responsibility for preserving the Jewish people and their loyalty to Torah. Therefore, his head is raised while at the same time his inner self retains the humility that characterizes his nature. This is a very delicate balancing act and many a potentially great leader has failed because of an excess of pride, on one hand, and meekness on the other.

We find for instance that King Saul was reprimanded by the prophet Samuel for being overly modest and therefore weak in his response to public pressure. The prophet said to him, "You may be small in your own eyes, but you are the head and leader of the tribes of Israel." Throughout history all of us, and especially those that find themselves in roles of familial, social, educational, and religious leadership are challenged by this exquisite balancing act – how to have a humble heart and a raised head at one and the same time, a demand that the Torah places upon us.

Shabbat shalom

In My Opinion Commentary on Zoom

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

I have been conducting classes and lectures on Zoom for about three months now. I admit that Zoom is a great creation and that it enabled many of us to remain connected one to another, and to be able to study together. However, as with all good things in life, like chocolate and ice cream, they have their limitations and perhaps should only be done in moderation. I find it quite difficult to speak on Zoom. It requires much more preparation and basically does not allow for any spontaneity as does delivering my lectures in classes. In fact, it has a certain degree of inhibitors to it, because even though you may see people whom you were talking to, you're not really talking to people, but you're talking to a machine that is quite impersonal and shows no reaction to whatever you are saying.

This is hard for me because, as someone who has been a public speaker for most of his life, I always depended on audience reaction to instruct me as how to proceed, when to pause and when to stop. All of this is

lacking naturally when I am on Zoom and I am oftentimes at a loss for words. And I find it hard to express my emotions when I am only speaking to a machine.

However, there are instructive things about speaking on Zoom as well. Firstly, one realizes the power of the spoken word. It becomes the means of connection to other people. When you cannot see the person in the flesh and you are not getting a response from your audience, then your only means of connection is the spoken word itself.

The rabbis assign great weight to speech; life and death are in the hands of the spoken word. When one is on Zoom, or at least when I am on Zoom, I measure my words perhaps more carefully than I do when speaking to a live audience, face to face. Also, if one makes a mistake speaking on Zoom, it's hard to rectify. In an ordinary conversation or even in public speaking, somehow it becomes easier to correct errors and to set matters straight.

Zoom has taught me that greater preparation is necessary before giving any sort of lecture. Now, as a rabbi, I have spoken many times about the same subject, albeit in different venues and to varied audiences. Every rabbi has in his arsenal, so to speak, prepared speeches that can be repeated, but I find that with Zoom that becomes almost impossible. Without an emotional or psychological reaction, I am always creatively challenged whenever I deliver a Zoom speech or lecture.

Now that is good for me because somehow it refreshes my old brain, but it also takes a lot out of me, and I noticed that when I used to be able to give a one hour class, let us say, in person, I was not as tired as when I have to give a 40 minute class on Zoom. This is because creative thinking is always something that taxes us physically as well as emotionally and intellectually.

With the reopening of synagogues, there will be also a revival of speeches and lectures that will be delivered personally. I do not know exactly how this will work out and what form it will take, but I am certainly looking forward to it. The question has arisen whether our synagogue should continue Zoom programs even when all of this has passed. I imagine we will cross that bridge when we get to it, but I am much more in favor of speaking to an actual physical audience than I am of Zooming all the time.

However, whatever is necessary will be done. We have all been taught how adaptable we really are and how we can face unimagined situations and somehow deal with them. So, this situation will also be resolved, and we will be able to experience the restoration of personal communication face to face. Personally, I hope it will happen speedily and in good health.

Shabbat Shalom

The Blessing of Love (Naso 5780)

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I confess to a thrill every time I read these words:

Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

"May the Lord bless you and protect you.

May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord turn His face toward you and grant you peace."

Let them put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them. (Numbers 6:23-27)

These are among the oldest continuously-used words of blessing ever. We recite them daily at the beginning of the morning service. Some say them last thing at night. We use them to bless our children on Friday nights. They are often used to bless the bride and groom at weddings. They are widely used by non-Jews also. Their simplicity, their cumulative three-word, five-word, seven-word structure, their ascending movement from protection to grace to peace, all make them a miniature gem of prayer whose radiance has not diminished in the more than three thousand years since their formulation.

In previous years I have written about the meaning of the blessings. This time I ask three different questions: First, why Priests? Why not Prophets, Kings, Sages or saints?

Second, why the unique form of the birkat ha-mitzvah, the blessing made by the Priests over the commandment to bless the people? The blessing is, “who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and commanded us to bless His people with love.”[1] No other blessing over a command specifies that it be done with love.

There is an argument in the Talmud as to whether commands must be performed with the proper intent, kavannah, or whether the deed itself is enough. But intent is different from motive. Intent merely means that I am performing the command because it is a command. I am acting consciously, knowingly, deliberately, in obedience to the Divine will. It has nothing to do with an emotion like love. Why does this command and no other require love?

Third, why have human beings bless the people at all? It is God who blesses humanity and His people Israel. He needs no human intermediary. Our passage says just this: “Let them put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” The blessings come not from the Priests but from God Himself. So why require the Priests to “put His name” on the people?

In answer to the first, Sefer ha-Hinnuch[2] says simply that the Priests were the sacred group within the people. They ministered in the House of God. They spent their lives in Divine service. Their life’s work was sacred. So was their habitat. They were the guardians of holiness. They were therefore the obvious choice for the sacred rite of bringing down God’s blessings upon the people.

Rabbi Aharon Walkin, in the preface to his Matsa Aharon, offered a more prosaic explanation. The Priests had no share in the land. Their sole income was from the mattenot kehunah, the gifts of the Priests, that was their due from the people as a whole. It followed that they had an interest in the people prospering, because then they, too, would prosper. They would bless the people with a full heart, seeking their good, because they would benefit thereby.

Rabbi Avraham Gafni offered a third explanation.[3] We read that on the consecration of the Tabernacle, “Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them” (Lev. 9:22). Rashi says that the blessing he gave the people on that occasion was indeed the priestly blessing as specified in our parsha. However, Ramban suggests that perhaps Aaron’s blessing was spontaneous, and because he showed such generosity of spirit, he was given by God the reward that it would be his descendants who would bless Israel in future.

What then about the reference in the blessing to love? There are two different interpretations: that the reference is to the Priests, or that the reference is to God.

The second reverses the word order of the blessing and reads it not as “who commanded us to bless His people with love,” but rather, “who in love commanded us to bless His people.” The blessing speaks of God’s love, not that of the Priests. Because God loves His people, He commands the Priests to bless them.[4]

The first reading, grammatically more plausible, is that it is the Priests who must love. This is the basis of the statement in the Zohar that “a Priest who does not love the people, or a Priest who is not loved by the people, may not bless.”[5] We can only bless what we love. Recall how the blind and aged Isaac said to Esau, “Prepare me the tasty food that I love and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die” (Gen. 27:4). Whether it was the food that Isaac loved, or what it represented about Esau’s character – that he cared enough for his father to find him the food he liked – Isaac needed the presence of love to be able to make the blessing.

Why then does the blessing for this mitzvah and no other specify that it must be done with love? Because in every other case it is the agent who performs the ma’aseh mitzvah, the act that constitutes the command. Uniquely in the case of the priestly blessings, the Priest is merely a machshir mitzvah – an enabler, not a doer. The doer is God Himself: “Let them place My name on the children of Israel and I will bless

them.” The Kohanim are merely channels through which God’s blessings flow.

This means that they must be selfless while uttering the blessings. We let God into the world and ourselves to the degree that we forget ourselves and focus on others.[6] That is what love is. We see this in the passage in which Jacob, having fallen in love with Rachel, agrees to Laban’s terms: seven years of work. We read: “So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her” (Gen. 29:20). The commentators ask the obvious question: precisely because he was so much in love, the seven years should have felt like a century. The answer is equally obvious: he was thinking of her, not him. There was nothing selfish in his love. He was focused on her presence, not his impatient desire.

There is, though, perhaps an alternative explanation for all these things. As I explained in Covenant and Conversation Acharai Mot – Kedoshim, the ethic of character.

The key text of the holiness ethic is Leviticus 19: “Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy.” It is this chapter that teaches the two great commands of interpersonal love, of the neighbour and the stranger. The ethic of holiness, taught by the Priests, is the ethic of love. This surely is the basis of Hillel’s statement, “Be like the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving people and bringing them close to Torah.”[7]

That ethic belongs to the specific vision of the Priest, set out in Genesis 1, which sees the world as God’s work and the human person as God’s image. Our very existence, and the existence of the universe, are the result of God’s love.

By blessing the people, the Priests showed them what love of one’s fellow is. Here is Rambam’s definition of what it is to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’: “One should speak in praise of his neighbour, and be considerate of his money, even as he is considerate of his own money, or desires to preserve his own honour.”[8] Blessing the people showed that you sought their good – and seeking their good is what loving them means.

Thus the Kohanim set an example to the people by this public display of love – or what we would call today “the common good.” They thus encouraged a society in which each sought the welfare of all – and such a society is blessed, because the bonds between its members are strong, and because people put the interests of the nation as a whole before their own private advantage. Such a society is blessed by God, whereas a selfish society is not, and cannot, be blessed by God. No selfish society has survived for long.

Hence our answers to the questions: why the Kohanim? Because their ethic emphasised love – of neighbour and stranger – and we need love before we can bless. Love is mentioned in the blessing over the commandment, because love is how blessings enter the world. And why have human beings bestow the blessing, instead of God doing so Himself? Because the Kohanim were to be role models of what it is for humans to care for the welfare of others. I believe that Birkat Kohanim contains a vital message for us today: A society whose members seek one another’s welfare is holy, and blessed.

Shabbat Shalom

Shabbat Shalom: Naso (Numbers 4:21-7:89)

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – This week’s reading of Naso describes the “Sota,” the woman who acts immodestly. At the very least, she sequesters herself alone with a man despite the fact that her husband warned her against seeing that person. She therefore undergoes the test of the bitter waters. However, during the spring holiday period, we saw two other women – great heroines of our people, Esther (Purim) and Ruth (Shavuot) who also commit immodest acts, for which they are ultimately praised and through which salvation and redemption are brought about. Let us revisit their stories to see how they differ from that of the Sota.

Both heroines compromise their modesty and perhaps even their chastity, Esther with Ahasuerus in the palace of the king and Ruth with Boaz on the threshing floor in Efrat. Moreover, both of these

outstanding women hail from gentile countries of exile and one even from gentile stock: Esther from Persia and Ruth from Moab.

But here is where the comparisons end. Although each of these two women undergoes a profound, existential change, a switch in direction with profound ramifications, they part company in very significant ways.

Esther seems to have been an assimilating Jewess who was eager to become the Queen of Persia. She used her Persian name – from the pagan goddess Astarte – rather than her Hebrew name Hadassah; she is taken for the nighttime beauty contest and undergoes a 12-month preparatory beauty treatment without protest. She even concurs with Mordecai (her cousin, or even perhaps her husband as the midrash suggests) not to reveal her national heritage (lest she be rejected on the grounds that she is Jewish – see the suggestion, albeit rejected by the Ibn Ezra).

It is only when Mordecai publicly demonstrates in front of the king's gate in sackcloth and ashes against Haman's decree to annihilate the Jews of Persia, bidding Esther to "come out of the closet," as it were, and go before the king on behalf of her people, that Esther puts her life on the line. By doing so, she becomes one of the greatest penitents of Jewish history.

The words Mordecai uses to convince Esther have reverberated throughout Jewish history: "Do not imagine in your soul that you will be able to escape in the king's palace any more than the rest of the Jews. For if you persist in keeping silent at a time like this, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether it was just for a time such as this that you attained the royal position" (Esther 5:13,14).

The Jews in Shushan gather for three days of prayer and fasting, Esther persuades the king to allow the Jews to protect themselves during the Persian "pogrom" against them, Haman and his sons are killed, and the Jewish community survives.

The Talmud (B.T. Megila 14a) rules that despite all the other festivities, Hallel (psalms of praise) is not to be chanted on Purim; since "we still remained slaves to Ahasuerus" – and an Ahmadinejad can still become a replacement for Haman.

Esther, was born of Jewish parents but married the gentile Ahasuerus: Ruth was a Moabite, she followed Naomi to the Land of Israel, changing geographically and existentially by converting to Judaism. Her ancestor Lot had defected from Abraham when he left Israel and moved to Sodom, now she repaired this by becoming a second Abraham.

Like our forefather, she left her birthplace and homeland for the Land of Israel, a strange nation and the God of ethical monotheism. In her own words, "Where you go, I will go" (to the Land of Israel) – "your nation will be my nation, your God shall be my God" (Ruth 1:16).

In the deepest sense, Ruth entered Abraham's "Covenant between the Parts" (Genesis 15). God promised Abraham that he would be an eternal nation, his seed would never be destroyed and his descendants would live in their homeland, Israel and through this nation, "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:1). This is far more than the survival of the Jews in Persia; this is world redemption.

Hence Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor to seduce Boaz, to bear his Jewish seed, just as Tamar, the widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi's ancestor Judah the son of Jacob, had seduced her father-in-law in order to bear his seed (Gen. 38).

But Ruth is not satisfied. She understands that Jewish eternity is linked to two crucial components: Jewish seed in the land of Israel. She doesn't consummate their relationship on the threshing floor; she asks him to "redeem" her, to buy back Naomi's familial inheritance and to marry her "in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel" so that her descendants can be Jews in the Jewish homeland.

Through their actions, Esther succeeded in gaining a respite in persecution, which is the most we can hope for in galut (exile). Ruth succeeded in entering Jewish eternity, the Abrahamic Covenant, and due to her compassionate righteousness and loving-kindness toward Naomi she became the herald of Jewish redemption. Her journey leads to the

day when the nations of the world will join the family of Abraham, father of a multitude of nations.

Shabbat Shalom!

BS"D Parashat Naso

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Degrees of Punishments

Four degrees in a Yiddishe father's tool chest of punishments: frask, shmice, potch, pet'chala.

Father comes home to the mess that his kids made in the house. The oldest boy gets a frask (a big slap on the cheek in anger), the younger one gets a shmice (hit of a stick where he sits), the youngest boy, a potch (a medium slap on his cheek,) and the little daughter gets off with a pet'chala (barely a slap on her cheek).

The Angel of Severe Justice, in his appointed role of prosecutor of humanity, appeared before the Creator with voluminous documentation attesting to the sins of man, which included only one small paragraph regarding the Jewish people. HaShem passes judgement with a punishment of a pandemic virus to mirror the pan-avirus (raixez) that the majority of the world's nations are committing.

What is this pan-avirus the world is being accused of? Some heavenly initiatives take longer than others to register in the dull minds of human beings; but now the puzzle is taking shape, even though the details are still a bit sketchy.

The Gemara declares (Shabbat 55a) that the cause of all human suffering is their sins.

And the corollary: the severity of the punishment is proportional to the sin or to the sum of a variety of misdeeds collectively. So, what is humanity doing so wrong at this time?

We are in the throes of a vicious, obstinate pandemic which is killing hundreds of thousands now, and possibly even millions of human beings around the world. It could bring starvation and deprivation to billions and has signs of reverting national economies to levels of 100 years ago! HaShem the Creator is demonstrating great anger with His creations. Some nations are feeling His frask, others his shmice, others his potch and even we in Eretz Yisrael, albeit a little pet'chala (no more – Thank HaShem).

This degree of world punishment has to be on a Biblical scale of sin. But why now, when there is an unprecedented awareness in many nations of human rights, social justice and transparency in government?

The answer has to be a sin that is rampant throughout the vast majority of the world's states through a common sin. That avenue of sin is the international body that incorporates 193 nations, The United Nations.

Explanation:

The UN Charter of 1945 in Article 2(4) declares that all UN member states "shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations".

A day does not pass when some psychotic, delusional Shi'ite Iranian leader reiterates his country's intention to destroy the holy state of Israel, with never an attempt on the part of Iran to disguise that this is the major thrust behind their ongoing race to develop a nuclear weapon. Despite all this, there has never been a proposal by any UN member state to expel or even censure the rogue state of Iran, based on the above-mentioned article 2(4)! However, It's actually very simple.

Who are we talking about? The Jews and their little Jewish half-acre!!

Most Christian and Moslem theologians, their adherents and allies, would feel spiritually uplifted and fulfilled if there was no State of Israel. The return of the Jewish nation to the holy land and to Yerushalayim is conclusive confirmation of the Biblical proclamation that we, the Children of Israel, are God's chosen people and 'replacement religion' is the figment of some illusionary anti-Semite. Rome, Mecca, the churches, and mosques and certainly those billions of people who are godless are all living a lie. Hence, most UN nations would be delighted if Iran would do the dirty work for them.

Here lies the worldwide pan-avaira – the 70 plus wolves (nations) surrounding the lonely sheep.

The Sifrei (Midrash Halacha Parashat Beha'alatcha) teaches:

Whosoever hates Yisrael (the Jewish people) is considered as hating the Creator... Whosoever rises against Yisrael is considered to have risen against HaShem, and whosoever touches (harms) Yisrael is as if he has harmed the pupil of his eye.

But this is not new, as King David stated in Tehilim (83):

A psalm of Asaph.

O God do not remain silent; do not turn a deaf ear, do not stand aloof, O God.

See how your enemies growl, how your foes rear their heads.

With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish.

Come, they say, let us destroy them as a nation, so that Israel's name is remembered no more.

With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you

The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, of Moab and the Hagrites, Byblos, Ammon and Amalek, Philistia, with the people of Tyre.

Even Assyria has joined them to reinforce Lot's descendants.

Do to them as you did to Midian, as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, who perished at Endor and became like dung on the ground.

Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna (all four were defeated by the judge Gidon), who said, let us take possession of the pasturelands of God.

Make them like tumbleweed, my God, like chaff before the wind.

As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze, so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm.

Cover their faces with shame, Lord, so that they will seek your name.

May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace.

Let them know that you, whose name is the Lord, that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.

The pity in all this is that the world's nations are at this time incapable of doing tshuva (repentance) and will have to undergo more suffering before they see the light. So, until then the words of the prophet MiChai (4,5) will have special meaning:

All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.

So dear friends just remember the three B-s:

B careful B healthy B HERE!

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Weekly Insights Parshas Nasso - Sivan 5780

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Robert Lipton, Reuven Leib ben Mordechai HaLevi. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Jealousy vs. Envy

And a spirit of jealousy passed over him and he warned his wife and she became defiled... (5:14)

In this week's parsha, the Torah discusses the laws regarding a suspected adulteress. Essentially, this refers to a situation where a husband is concerned that his wife may be beginning a relationship with another man and he warns her in front of witnesses not to go into seclusion with that person. If she does indeed go into seclusion with that man, then the husband can charge her with being an adulteress.

If she claims that she was never intimate with the other man, then the husband can bring her before the kohen to test her fidelity by undergoing the Sotah test which, among other things, consists of drinking "bitter water." If she is guilty her body begins to "explode" (she dies gruesomely and so does her paramour); if she is innocent then she is blessed with fertility. It is important to note that a woman can avoid going through the process by confessing and merely forgoing her kesuvah to receive her divorce.

This concept of the Torah catering to a jealous husband requires some explanation. After all, Chazal find jealousy to be one of the more abominable character traits. We find in Pirkei Avos (4:28) Rabbi Elazar

HaKappar said: "Jealousy, lust, and the [pursuit of] honor remove a person from the world." Though the Sotah process is much more civilized and enlightened than other common practices in those times (or even than the pervasive present day practice of "honor killings"), conceding to a husband's jealousy seems to be contrary to Jewish values. In fact, we seemingly find a Torah prohibition against being jealous in a pretty prominent place; Thou shall not be envious of your friend's home, wife, slaves, etc. - is the last of the Ten Commandments! Yet, according to one opinion in the Talmud, it is a mitzvah for a husband to begin this process. Why are we allowing a husband to give in to his jealousy?

In order to understand the concept of Sotah, it is important to recognize the distinction between envy and jealousy. Envy is that overwhelming desire for what someone else has. Envy is prohibited at all times. (See Ibn Ezra points out in his comment on thou shall not be envious (Shemos 20:14), this prohibition applies even when one pays an exorbitant amount of money to coerce the other person to sell what he doesn't really want to sell. The only antidote to envy is to know who you are and to understand that what someone else has is right for them and most likely not for you. The Ibn Ezra (ibid) gives the example: "this is similar to the notion that a common villager does not desire to marry the princess daughter of the king." He knows she isn't right for him.

Jealousy, on the other hand, is the overpowering feeling that comes with the realization that someone is trying to take something that is rightfully yours. In other words, jealousy is the primal instinct to protect what is yours. Jealousy can be experienced in many different situations; someone trying to take your love interest, or your client, or even your car. It is acceptable to be jealous in any of these situations. After all, you are reacting to the fact that someone is improperly trying to take something from you. Of course, jealousy can also be derived from a figment of one's imagination and own insecurity. While we allow a husband to act in a jealous manner, his wife still has to have gone into seclusion in the presence of two witnesses. In other words, his feelings have to be confirmed by facts in the real world, not just in a jealous fantasy.

Perhaps the most prevalent issues of both envy and jealousy occur in family dynamics. The role of a parent is to give each child a feeling that they have a special place in their hearts, a place that no one can ever take away from them. This gives the child a sense of security as to their place in the family, and alleviates many jealousies. Perhaps as important, a parent must make sure every child is actualized and feels accomplished in their area of specialty. After all, if Hashem saw fit to create them, there is something special and unique about them. Once children are comfortable with themselves and happy with who they are, they won't desire what others have.

Brotherhood of Man

On the second day Nesanel ben Tzu'ar the leader of Yissachar brought his offering; one silver tray that weighed one hundred and thirty (shekolim), one silver bowl that weighed seventy shekalim (7:18-19).

This week's parsha discusses in seemingly very repetitive detail (see accompanying Did You Know column) the very specific gifts that the head of each tribe contributed to the Mishkan on the day of the inauguration of the altar. On this verse, Rashi comments that numerical value of the words "silver tray" is equivalent to 930, which corresponds to the amount of years that Adam lived. The one hundred and thirty shekalim that the tray weighed refers to the age that Adam was when he fathered to his son Seth (Bereishis 5:3). The numerical value of "one silver bowl" is equal to 520, which was the age when Noah fathered his children (500) and the twenty years that preceded it when Hashem informed him that a flood was coming. The seventy shekalim weight of the tray refers to the seventy nations of the world who descended from Noah.

All of these allusions to non Jews during the inauguration of the altar seems very strange. This event was celebrating the altar of our Mishkan; what does our altar have to do with the non Jewish world?

Maimonides (Yad Hilchos Beis Habechira 2:2) states, "we have a tradition that the place that the altar was constructed (in the temple) was the place that Avraham built an altar and bound Yitzchak upon it; this

was the place that Noah built his altar when he exited the ark; this was the exact spot that the children of Adam, Kayin and Hevel, brought their sacrifices; and was the very spot that Adam was created from. Our Rabbis have taught 'Adam was created from the spot that he receives atonement.'"

Maimonides is teaching us something truly remarkable. All of mankind is connected to this specific place in the universe. We tend to look at our Beis Hamikdosh as being something that is only for the Jewish people. Our natural discomfort and distrust of the non Jewish world, borne out of thousands of years of oppression and suffering at their hands, makes it difficult to comprehend that they too have a connection to the place of our Beis Hamikdosh, our capital, our home.

Yet, we conveniently forget that the terrible suffering at their hands was really just Hashem punishing us for our wrongdoings. It goes without saying that many of them enjoyed the process of torturing and killing us a little too much. But we must never lose sight of the fact that we brought these painful retributions on ourselves. All of it was because we failed in our primary responsibility of bringing the awareness of Hashem into this world. This is the job that Avraham Avinu took upon himself and why he is considered the first Jew. He went on a crusade to make sure that people were aware of Hashem and understood that we owed Him our fealty.

The place of the altar is the place where all of mankind connects with Hashem and is empowered to serve Hashem through sacrifices. In fact, it is our responsibility to make sure that the entire world is aware of Hashem and is able to connect to Him. It is no wonder, then, that the main religions of the western world all feel intensely connected to Yerushalayim. We must remember that as caretakers appointed by Hashem, it is our responsibility to give the entire world a place to worship Hashem and connect to Him.

Did You Know...

At the end of this week's parsha, we find seventy-two verses describing the gifts bestowed on the Mishkan by each tribe on the day of the inauguration of the altar. Oddly enough, even though each tribe brought exactly the same offering, the Torah saw fit to recount in detail each tribe's contributions (making this the longest parsha in the Torah).

This is difficult to understand; we know that the Torah doesn't even have an extra letter. Why would the Torah go to such great length just to repeat each tribe's identical contribution?

Ramban (Nasso 7:13) answers that the idea to bring an offering occurred to each leader independently and each one had his own specific reasoning for his contribution. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:15) explains why each Nasi brought what he did. We learn from here a remarkable lesson; the same act with a different intention is an entirely different act. A few examples are listed below; for a complete list see the aforementioned Midrash.

Nachshon ben Aminadov (Tribe Yehuda) brought his first, and brought his offering regarding monarchy; as the Jewish kings come from Yehuda. For example, he offered a silver bowl corresponding to the world, which is like a ball, and it weighed seventy shekels since Shlomo and Mashiach will one day rule over the seventy nations of the world.

Nesanel ben Tzu'ar (Tribe Issachar) brought his offering regarding the knowledge of Torah, as that is what Issachar represented. For example, he brought his silver bowl corresponding to the Torah, which is referenced as bread and the lechem hapanim, which were referred to as bowls (Shemos 25:29).

Eliab ben Helon (Tribe Zevulun) brought his offering regarding his commerce that he did to support Issachar. For example, he brought his silver bowl, symbolizing the sea, which is shaped like a dish.

Elizur ben Shedeur (Tribe Reuven) brought his offering corresponding to Reuven. That is, he brought a silver basin, alluding to when Reuven convinced the brothers to cast Yosef into the pit.

Eliasaph ben Deuel (Tribe Gad) brought his offering as an allusion to the Exodus from Egypt. For example, the silver weighed 130 shekalim referencing the age of Yocheved, the mother of Moshe, who was 130 when Moshe was born.

Talmudic College of Florida
Rohr Talmudic University Campus

4000 Alton Road, Miami Beach, FL 33140

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Naso

For the week ending 30 May 2020 / 7 Sivan 5780

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parsha Insights

The Problem Of Slippers

"The Children of Yisrael will encamp, each person by his banner, according to the insignia of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting they will encamp." (2:1)

Ryan Ramsey was the captain of the nuclear submarine HMS Turbulent between 2008 and 2011 and once spent 286 days at sea without seeing the sky. He shared an 84 meter steel tube with 130 people. In the middle of the total lock-down, the BBC screened an interesting interview with him. Two of his tips resonated with me. The first was to be careful to attend to one's personal appearance. It's all too easy in a time of lock-down to let one's personal grooming slip, which can lead to a general decline. For an observant Jew this translates as not davening in your slippers. Man is created b'tzelem Elokim, and he preserves that tzelem by preserving tzurat ha'adam.

The other tip he had was to maintain a routine. Shigra – or routine – is a double-edged blade. One of the great Rabbis of a previous generation (please let me know who it was), when visiting his son in his Yeshiva, would first of all go and check his son's bedroom rather than go and see how his son was learning in the Beit Midrash (study hall).

Personal order is both a barometer and a cause of application and organization. It also accelerates time. The monotony of living in a submarine or locked up at home is reduced by routine – hours become links between set activities – hours become days. Days become months. It's exactly that same difficulty we find when we try to remember a specific day three years ago that helps us deal with monotony. It's a G-d-given amnesia that helps the mind deal with boredom. I have no problem whatsoever remembering the day of my wedding, or my son's first haircut, but try me on a specific day two months ago!

A slave's life is very monotonous, but it's also very regular. In one sense, it's very relaxing. You just keep doing the same thing every day without thinking. When the Jewish People left Egypt and experienced the most memorable event of any life time – the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai – they were challenged by an event that could easily destabilize them. And a few million people wandering around an uncharted desert after the comfort and stability of the fleshpots of Egypt could have been a disaster waiting to happen.

"The Children of Yisrael shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignia of their fathers' household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting shall they encamp." (2:1)

This week's Torah portion goes into great detail about the precise location and the job of each one of the priestly tribes. There is a hint here that order and routine are fundamentals of both sanity and the ability to serve our Creator appropriately — and that starts with not wearing slippers for davening.

© 2020 Ohr Somayach International

rabbibuchwald.njop.org

Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Naso 5780-2020

The Ordeal of the Sotah — Barbaric or Enlightened?

(Revised and Updated from Parashat Naso 5761-2001)

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week's Torah portion, Naso, with 176 verses, is the longest parasha of the Torah, and always follows the festival of Shavuot. Coincidentally, the longest chapter in the Book of Psalms, chapter 119, also contains 176 verses, and the longest tractate of the Talmud, Baba Batra, consists of 176 folios (2-sided pages), as well. On this Shabbat, the first Shabbat after celebrating Shavuot and the receiving of the Torah, the Jewish people show their great love and passion for Torah by extending their Torah reading, demonstrating their unwillingness to bring the study of Torah to an end.

Parashat Naso has many interesting and important themes, but certainly one of the most controversial topics in the entire Torah is the topic of the

סוֹטָה "Sotah," the woman who is suspected of being unfaithful to her husband.

At first blush, this portion seems quite similar to the parallel laws found in the Code of Hammurabi, which read:

If the finger is pointed at the wife of a citizen on account of another man, but she has not been caught lying with another man, for her husband's sake—she shall throw herself into the river.

In our Torah portion, if a woman is suspected of being unfaithful to her husband, but hasn't been caught in the act, the woman doesn't drown herself, but, instead, is brought by her jealous husband to the Kohain, the priest, to the Tabernacle. A special sacrifice, symbolic of her straying, is brought for her, and she is forced to drink holy water from an earthen bowl, containing dust from the Tabernacle floor and the scrapings of ink that have been scraped from the writings on a parchment scroll containing a terrible curse. If the woman were guilty of adultery, she would die from the drink. If innocent, she would live and become pregnant. All this seems very similar to the barbaric trials and ordeals of medieval times, to which women were subjected to prove their guilt or innocence.

But, truth is, that the test of the Sotah, when properly understood, is hardly barbaric at all. To the contrary, it is quite enlightened when studied in the light of the Talmudic commentaries and the Jewish legal codes, and is intended to greatly benefit the suspected adulteress.

The Talmud points out that the Torah verses indicate that the husband's accusations of his wife's infidelity are not groundless or contrived. The verses imply, and the Talmud amplifies, that the woman had been seen by witnesses in a compromising position (secluding herself with another man behind closed doors) even after her husband had taken legal action to warn his wife not to be associated with the suspected paramour. What this implies, is not necessarily the woman's guilt, but that the marriage was already in trouble, and that the woman had definitely given her husband ample and legitimate reason for suspicion. The real question is, can this marriage be saved?

In light of modern psychology, we know that suspicion of infidelity is one of the most corrosive, and destructive elements in a marriage. In fact, once suspicion has entered into the marital relationship, it is so pernicious that it can hardly ever be eliminated. While some husbands or wives might forgive a spouse's indiscretions, the suspicion usually lingers, and often festers, and, in most instances, a meaningful subsequent relationship becomes virtually impossible.

The Torah, through the ritual of Sotah, provides a Heavenly mandated method to heal the suspicion, and to provide the couple that wishes to repair their relationship the ability to start afresh without the taint of suspicion, since G-d Himself testifies that the woman is guiltless.

In fact, argue the rabbis, only a guiltless woman who wishes to save her marriage, would go through the ritual, either because of her love for her children, or because she realizes that she had, indeed, misled her husband. On the other hand, a woman, guilty or not, even after she had been accused, could choose not to subject herself to the ordeal, by opting out of the marriage and declaring that she wants a divorce. Since there is no concrete evidence that she has ever committed adultery, even a guilty woman is not punished. That is why a guilty woman would never go through the ritual, even though the whole test might very well be a Divine "psychosomatic" examination, resulting in true physical manifestations.

The Talmud tells us that, remarkably, the innocent woman who was subjected to the ordeal will not emerge from the trial tainted or degraded. In fact, she will emerge blessed, and will become a source of pride for the community, since her chastity has been confirmed by G-d.

What about the man? The Talmud tells us that if the accusing husband had been guilty of any infidelity, this ritual would not work on his wife. And, if the woman were guilty, and would die from the Sotah drink, her paramour, her lover, would somehow die as well. But, on the other hand, there is no comparable test for men suspected of being unfaithful since men are not given the benefit of the doubt, as are women.

We today, live in a very complex and confused environment, with much too much improper and immoral behavior. Almost 50% of American

marriages terminate in divorce, for one reason or another, and an even higher percentage of second marriages fail. Once suspicion sets in, there is little recourse to rebuild the trust that has been shattered. Once faithfulness has been questioned, in most cases, it is, almost always, downhill.

Should we pray for the restoration of the Sotah ritual? Well, I don't know, since it only functioned in a chaste society, and ours is certainly not worthy. But, I do believe that the many fascinating truths and insights that are to be found in the complex ritual of Sotah are worthy of examination and consideration. Surely, we should not be quick to ridicule, condemn, and dismiss the lessons to be gleaned from the ritual of the Sotah.

May you be blessed.

torahweb.org

The Sanctity of Jewish Marriage

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

The Gemorah (Kiddushin 2b) tells us that the phrase "hari at m'kudeshet li" that we use under the chuppah is not a biblical expression at all, rather it is a rabbinical formulation. However, the commentaries on the Gemorah (Gilyonei ha'Shas by Rav Yosef Engel, Kiddushin 41a) point out that the concept behind the expression is in fact biblical. Specifically, we assume that when a Jewish couple gets married, an element of keddusha is introduced into their lives. The Gemorah (Sotah 17a) points out that in the Hebrew language the word "ish" has a letter "yud" and the word "isha" has a letter "hay", and combined these two letters spell out the name of Hashem (yud - hay.) The Gemorah also tells us that when a couple has shalom bayis, "shechinah sh'ruyah bei'neiyem" - there will be an element of keddusha in their lives.

When the Torah tells us the laws of the sotah in Parshas Nosh, the verb that is chosen and repeated three times in the posuk is "v'nitme'ah." Why should that verb have been chosen to connote ruining a marriage? The Avnei Nezer explains the choice of this verb by quoting a section from the Kuzari in which the king of the Kuzarim asked the rabbi, "if you Orthodox Jews follow everything that it says in the Torah, why don't you go to mikva every time you come in contact with tumah as prescribed in the Torah?" The rabbi responded that the laws of tumah are only relevant when you are dealing with keddusha. For example, the Beis Hamikdash has keddusha and one who is tomei may not enter; korbonos, maaser sheini, and terumah have keddusha and one who is tomei may not eat them. But we live so far away from the Beis Hamikdash - we have no terumah and no korbonos, and nothing of keddusha to speak of, and therefore we don't have to go to mikvah. Tumah is only an issue when it is in contradiction to keddusha; if one is nowhere near aspects of keddusha, then the tumah is irrelevant.

Based on that comment of the Kuzari, the Avnei Nezer (Even Hoezer, 240,5) explains that the Torah seems to be assuming that every Jewish marriage contains an element of keddusha. When dealing with a sotah, i.e. a marriage that was ruined, the Chumash can use the word "v'nit'meah" exactly for the reason of the Kuzari, i.e. that tumah is a contradiction to keddusha. This interpretation of the posuk is not merely agadata - it is a halachic reality that the Avnei Nezer uses to explain some halachos in that Gemorah.

Copyright © 2020 by TorahWeb.org

chiefrabbi.org

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Dvar Torah: Nasso

What does the Torah say about good parenting?

The term Nasso, which is the title of this week's Parsha, has three separate meanings. Nasso means to count. It also means to carry and Nasso means to raise or elevate.

I believe that, encapsulated in this one single word, we have three Torah-true keys to good parenting.

First of all, each child needs to know that he or she counts in our eyes. That we do not view children in comparison to other children but rather, each child is special in his or her own right. Each child is unique and we value and appreciate each person's talents, abilities and potential.

Secondly, we need to ‘carry’ our children. Of course, where ‘babes in arms’ and infants are concerned, we literally carry them. But this should extend well beyond that time – even into adulthood – because our children need to know that we are there to help them. We want them to move forward independently – encouraged and inspired by our teachings. We want them to carve out a destiny for themselves but they should also know that if ever they falter we’ll be there to steady them. We’re not going to impose anything on them, however if ever they turn to us we will be there to assist, to carry them through the great challenge of life.

Thirdly and perhaps most significantly of all, we need to ensure our children to know that there is an opportunity to lead an elevated form of existence. Children today are searching for meaning. They want to have a purpose in life, they are looking for deep satisfaction and a sense of fulfillment – and we’re exceptionally fortunate that we can place in their hands, a legacy of Torah. Thanks to our Torah roots we can provide our children with the key to happiness and meaning, to joy and deep fulfillment. Thanks to Torah teachings, they will be rooted in tradition and at the same time able to elevate themselves spiritually, to lead a noble and wonderful existence.

So let us always remember the word Nasso. And thanks to a Nasso styled life, let us enable our children always to feel important, always to know we are there to support them and also to appreciate how fortunate they are to lead an elevated form of existence.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Naso - Possessive Nouns

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

There is a seemingly mysterious, if not cryptic, set of verses in this week’s portion. “And every portion from any of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohen shall be his. A man’s holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen shall be his”. (Numbers 5:9-10)

The posuk prompts so many homiletic and Midrashic interpretations. Even after Rashi, the Master of Torah explanation, clarifies a simple meaning to the verse, he affirms that “there are varying interpretation from Midrashic sources.” Obviously Rashi foreshadows a need for deeper interpretation.

To that end I will lend my take. What does the Torah mean that “a man’s holies shall be his”? How are holies, his? And what are holies anyway?

After all, when one dedicates items to the Temple, they are no longer his holies, they belong to the Temple. A plaque may afford recognition, but it surely is not a certificate of title. If the verse is referring to holy items owned by an individual, then it seems redundant as well. A man’s possessions are of course his!

About five years ago, we had the honor of having Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware deliver a commencement address at our Yeshiva’s graduation. The senator, who was at the time Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, was a guest of his good friend and well-known philanthropist, Joel Boyarsky, a member of our local community and dear friend of our school.

After the ceremony, I had the privilege of riding together with the Senator in Mr. Boyarsky’s stretch limousine, a fully apportioned vehicle that was truly befitting its prestigious passengers, among them many dignitaries and businessmen, who frequented its inner chambers.

As we rode for a while, discussing everything from politics to Israel, and issues surrounding Jewish education, something in the back corner of the limousine caught the corner of my eye.

There was a tefillin zeckel, a velvet case that hold sacred Jewish phylacteries tucked away in the corner of the back windshield. Protruding from the corner of the purple-velvet case were the retzuos, the sacred straps that bind a people to their rituals.

I was both amazed and perplexed at the same time. Mr. Boyarsky, as I knew him, was not a very observant Jew. I was not even sure if he kept kosher. Yet the tefillin were right there, almost displayed in open view,

in the same limousine in which he closed multi-million dollar deals with prominent businessmen, and discussed sensitive issues with the most prominent statesman.

A few weeks later, I visited Mr. Boyarsky in his office. It was there that I popped the question.

“I don’t get it. As far as I understand, you are not observant, and your car is hardly a home to Rabbis. But yet you keep your tefillin in your car, in open view for everyone to see? Why?”

His terse answer remains with me until today. “When I travel I take my things. Those tefillin are my things.”

The Torah issues a profound decree that defines not only what we have, but who we are. Those of us who understand that life as fulfilling as it may appear, how succulent the courses that it serves may taste, is but a fleeting moment in the grand scale of endless eternity. Who are we and what do we have.

I saw a bumper sticker that seemed to have survived the NASDAQ plunge the other week, “The guy with the most toys at the end wins.” Wins what? What are the toys?

The Torah tells us that after all the innings are pitched and the crowd walks from the packed stadium, we only have one thing. We have our holies. They are ours. Cars break. Computers crash. Satellites explode. Fortunes diminish and fame is as good as yesterday’s newspaper.

Only the holy things that we do, only our acts of spirituality, whether manifested in relationships with our fellow man or with our Creator, remain. Those holies are ours! They will always belong to us. That is what we travel with and that is what we take along. In this world and the next.

Good Shabbos

©2000 Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

© 1998 by Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

Drasha © 2020 by Torah.org.

blogs.timesofisrael.com

Naso: Holy Men in Holy Land

Ben-Tzion Spitz

We Jews have a secret weapon in our struggle with the Arabs; we have no place to go. - Golda Meir

This week’s Torah reading introduces us to the laws of the Nazir (Nazirite). The Nazir is prohibited from drinking wine or consuming grape products, from cutting his hair and from become ritually impure from any contact with the dead. The underlying motivation of a Nazir is to achieve a greater level of holiness, of sanctity, of closeness to God.

There are several biblical personalities that were Nazirs or whom the Sages believe were Nazirs from hints in the text. One of the most famous ones was Samson. Two others were the prophet Samuel as well as King David’s rebellious son, Absalom.

The Meshech Chochma on Numbers 6:21 digs deeper into some aspects of the significance of being a Nazir, based on what we know of the biblical ones, specifically as it relates to the land of Israel.

Something to bear in mind is, that after the biblical period, the Sages, among numerous decrees they instituted, established that the land outside of Israel has the status of ritually impure land. That means that a Jew who was otherwise ritually pure, just by stepping foot outside the land of Israel became ritually contaminated. Any Jew coming to Israel from outside it had to go through a ritual purification process.

What is interesting is that even before this enactment, we see that the prophet Samuel never left the land of Israel. He was a mighty savior of the people, vanquishing the Philistines who encroached on Israel’s borders. The Meshech Chochma intimates that when the people asked Samuel to provide them with a king, they wanted a king who would venture and fight beyond their borders.

The Meshech Chochma goes on to say that a Nazir can only be in Israel, that the institution of being a Nazir doesn’t function outside of Israel and that if a person did take on a vow of a Nazir outside of Israel, even nowadays in our post-Temple era where the level of required ritual purity can’t be achieved, they are nonetheless forced to go to Israel.

There is a certain level of proximity to God, that can only be undertaken, achieved, and sustained in Israel.

May we all have the merit of being in Israel soon.

Dedication - To the SpaceX Falcon 9, Crew Dragon launch.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Naso

פרשת נשא תש"פ

איש או אשה כי יפליא לגדר נזיר

A man or woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow of abstinence. (6:2)

Why does the Torah juxtapose the incident/*parshah* of the *nazir* upon the incident/*parshah* of the *sotah*, wayward wife? One who sees a *sotah* in her degradation should prohibit wine to himself by taking a Nazarite vow (*Rashi*). The *sotah* had opted to follow her sensual passion, allowing her pursuit of pleasure to take precedence over her commitment to G-d. One who falls under the grasp of wine can, likewise, fall victim to temptation. A *nazir* is prohibited to drink wine.

A well-known story tells about a dedicated Jew who refused to eat the non-kosher food that was standard fare in the Nazi extermination camps. Nothing enraged the Nazi fiends more than a Jew who still believed in Hashem and observed His *mitzvos*. How could anyone still believe in a benevolent G-d after that which all these wretched Jews had experienced? It was not enough for the Nazi to murder Jews – he had to break them emotionally, as well as spiritually. One day, a Nazi grabbed ahold of the Jew and told him in no uncertain terms, “If you refuse to eat the meat, I will kill you!”

The man staunchly refused. The Nazi began to beat him mercilessly, until a puddle of blood surrounded his body. He gave him up for dead. The man, however, was very much alive, and his friends came to assist him and take him back to the barracks. How surprised they were to notice that when the Nazi had returned to see if the Jew had eaten the meat, he had beaten the wrong man. Indeed, the man that he had beaten almost dead was an avowed atheist who thrived on eating non-kosher meat and had done so throughout his life! Why did he suddenly risk his life for kosher food?

The man explained that when he was beaten for refusing to eat *treif* meat, it suddenly became clear to him that eating non-kosher food was wrong. Thus, he bravely refused. When a person is up against the wall – when he stands between a rock and a hard place – his depth of understanding achieves greater acuity and his level of commitment can soar from uncommitted to simple, to *tzaddik*, righteous, status in minutes. The Jew who has lived a life of religious abandon, to whom *mitzvos* had meant nothing, was transformed into a believer when he saw how much the Nazi hated *mitzvos*. Furthermore, crisis catalyzes unparalleled achievement. Perhaps the most precious *mitzvos* in history were: the *matzos* baked in the Nazi bunkers; the *Chanukah* candles lit in the camps; the kosher scraps of food from the garbage; the *Tefillin* smuggled in to the camps and worn at the risk of one's life. Simple Jews became *kedoshim* and reached unbelievable heights.

This is a great story which presents a powerful lesson, but I have always been troubled by it. What really made the atheist change his stripes? Was it the beating he received for refusing to eat *treif*? This was a man who did not believe in Hashem, an individual to whom sin and punishment were shams. If one does not believe in G-d, sin and punishment are not realities to which one ascribes. What suddenly made the man wake up from his self-imposed slumber?

The atheist never thought much of Hashem's *mitzvos* – neither positive nor prohibitive. True, they cause reward and punishment, but he never had really observed the reward, and punishment did not impress him because he felt he could get around it. It was not until he saw how much the Nazi hated the *mitzvah*, and to what extent he was

prepared to punish someone who adhered to it, that he deduced its sublime nature.

This explanation gives us a window of understanding to explain the juxtaposition of the *nazir* upon the incident of the *sotah*, wayward wife. *Chazal* teach that one who observes the *sotah* in her degradation should separate himself from wine, because wine causes inebriation which, when a person's defenses are down, can be the catalyst for prohibited/illicit relationships. One would think that when a person sees a woman's stomach explode as punishment for her moral debasement, the scenario would be a sufficient deterrent from sin; sadly, it is not enough. Punishment in its own right is something we convince ourselves is circumventable. This is especially true when we would like to believe that the prohibited activity is not really that egregious. Punishment has another purpose: it defines the activity. When one realizes that what he/she is about to do carries with it an enormous, bitter punishment, then the realization dawns on him that this activity is of a seriously evil nature.

A person can go throughout life having convinced himself that Divine guidance does not exist, Divine punishment is not real – everything is by chance – until one day he sees how a vicious murderer is prepared to destroy him with his bare hands just for adhering to a *mitzvah*. He now realizes the significance of the *mitzvah* and that the world is not ownerless. There is a G-d of Creation Who is also the G-d of History. The life he has lived until now has been a self-induced sham. It is sad when we require a lesson from the outside world in order to realize how fortunate we are to have the verities of the Torah and the guidance of Hashem to steer us free of life's obstacles.

Let us take this a step further. When redeeming a *bechor*, first-born son, the father gives the *Kohen* five *shekalim*. Likewise, we find the value of five *shekalim* required to redeem the overage of 273 firstborn *bechorim* that were replaced by the *Leviim*, following the sin of the Golden Calf in which the *bechorim* sinned, resulting in the forfeiture of their serving in the *Mishkan*. (There were 273 more *bechorim* than *Leviim*. Thus, these 273 *bechorim* had to be redeemed. The price set for their redemption was five *shekalim*.) How was the “five *shekalim*” amount derived? It certainly was not an arbitrary number. *Rashi* illuminates us with an intriguing commentary: “This was the price for the sale of Yosef (when his brothers sold him to the *Yishmaelim*/*Midyanim*), twenty pieces of silver which equals five silver *shekalim*.” What is the connection between the sale of Yosef and the redemption of the *bechorim*?

Reb Yitzchak (Irving) *Bunim*, זל, offers an insightful and practical explanation. The firstborn who were to serve Hashem in the *Mishkan* were designated to be His holy servants. They erred with the Golden Calf. As a result, it was necessary to replace them through a process of redemption (because they were *kadosh*, sanctified, to Hashem). When we redeem an *eved* Hashem, a servant of Hashem, the Torah instructs us not to sell him short. He should not be worth less to you than that which the pagan traders who purchased Yosef were willing to pay for a Jewish servant. Hashem says: “Pay for a servant of Mine at least what those heathens paid for a Jewish lad.” We apply the gentile evaluation of a Jew as the baseline for redemption. (Obviously, there is much more to this number, but, according to *Rashi*/*Chazal*, it was determined in accordance with the sale of Yosef – who was Rachel *Imeinu's* *bechor*.)

Reb Bunim continues with a fascinating lesson (which coincides with our earlier thesis). It was calculated in the past (fifty years ago, numbers have certainly changed since then) that, on an average, it cost almost \$1200 to give an American pupil an education in the public school system. Thus, city, state and federal government bore the responsibility of approximately \$10,000 to put a student through elementary school. We can tag on another \$6,000 for high school. A minimum of \$16,000 just to prepare an American student for college. At that time, public college tuition was about \$15,000 for an education leading to a bachelor's degree. In summation: the government is prepared to spend \$31,000 to educate a Jewish boy in their system. (Today the cost is far more.) Now, how much is it worth to us *Yidden* to

develop a Jewish boy into a *ben Torah*? Hashem tells us in no uncertain terms: “Do not sell My servant short. Do not pay less for My Jewish child than what the others are prepared to pay for him!” In other words, support for Torah institutions is not arbitrary. The secular world has set a premium which they are willing to spend on our children. Can we ignore our sacred obligation to counteract what the world is willing to spend to draw our children towards a secular lifestyle?

Reb Bunim relates that he shared with *Horav Aharon Kotler, zl*, the report of a conference of missionaries who posited that it cost them upwards of \$50,000 to convert one Jew to their “true faith.” This is what they were willing to spend to kidnap a Jewish soul. How much is it worth to destroy a Jewish life; or better said: How much is it worth to us to save a Jewish soul—at least \$50,000 (fifty years ago).

When *Rav Aharon* heard this, he moaned, “Oy! A *Yiddishe neshamah*, soul.” He was actually in pain to hear the extent to which the heathens were prepared to go to destroy a *Yiddishe neshamah*. He understood that the Jewish *neshamah* was up against a formidable enemy.

כי נזר אלקיו על ראשו

For the crown of his G-d in upon his head. (6:7)

Because he wears the crown of G-d upon his head, a *nazir* has specific laws concerning his lifestyle, i.e. where he may go, what areas he may frequent, what he may consume. He is dedicated to Hashem, having chosen to live on an elevated spiritual plane. While some may consider his choice a bit extremist in nature, he is motivated by a profound desire to achieve spiritual ascendancy. A *nazir* is an adult who has made a choice. Children and young adults do not necessarily have the ability or wherewithal to assume such a positive life change, so they often “go with the flow,” living life in accordance with the environment their parents have chosen for them. I say parents, because, indeed, they are the ones who make the choices by which their children will live, at least until said children are old enough – or adult enough – to make the correct choice.

Economics often plays a critical role concerning where parents choose to live, the school/*yeshiva* they select for their children to attend, or the environment in which they are raised. In some situations, parents make a choice, often against extreme odds, to provide for their children the best education, the finest tutors, an environment that is conducive to spiritual/moral growth, that will alter their child’s spiritual trajectory. This does not mean that those parents who are unwilling or unable to sacrifice for their child’s spiritual growth are doing something wrong or careless; it just means that the other parent who is willing and able to sacrifice is doing something extremely constructive.

Children – even when they grow up and become adults – often do not realize (and more often do not acknowledge) their parents’ sacrifices. Some are so busy blaming everyone for their personal failures, that they do not allow themselves the insight to see/think where they might have been had their parents not sacrificed for them. Then there are those who do realize – and do acknowledge – and never forget that who they are and what they have become is firmly-rooted in their parents’ sacrifice. The following story, which is well-known to some, and should be to others, is a powerful lesson in sacrifice and *hakoras hatov*, gratitude.

Horav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner, zl, was a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, *posek*, *halachic* arbiter, and *Rav* without peer. He merited to live over a century – a life fully devoted to Torah and its dissemination. His son related that one *Shabbos*, following the *seudah*, meal, he asked his grandmother what merit she had to have a child (like his father) that illuminated the Torah world with his brilliance and encyclopedic knowledge.

His grandmother replied, “It is no secret that I was blessed with an extraordinarily sweet, yet powerful, voice. Word soon got out in Austria [they lived in Vienna] that my school was home to a girl who had a voice without peer in the entire country. My principal called for me one day and asked me to audition for a man, who happened to be a representative of the state opera. He had heard about my voice and was willing to offer me a leading role in the opera. I replied that observant

Jewish girls do not sing in the presence of men. The principal countered that this man had the ability and power to alter the present economic status of my family forever. I remained committed to my upbringing and refused to sing. When he saw how obstinate I was, he passed along his offer through the Austrian minister of education.

“Word spread to the newspapers concerning Rosa/Rachel Schiff who refused to audition for the National Opera, despite the most lucrative offers imaginable. Indeed, the publicity generated an incredible *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of the Name of the Almighty. My father, *Rav Ben Tzion Schiff*, was a close *talmid*, student, of the saintly *Chafetz Chaim*, and, whenever the sage visited Vienna for medical purposes, my father would visit with his *Rebbe*. One day (I was eighteen years old at the time), my father made an appointment to visit with him. He brought me along, together with my mother. It was his intention to ask the *Chafetz Chaim* to bless me with a suitable *shidduch*, matrimonial match. My father went into the room where the *Chafetz Chaim* was, with the intention of informing him about my refusal to join the National Opera and my request for a *brachah*, blessing.

“The holy sage was ‘up on the times’ and asked my father about a girl named Schiff who had made a tremendous *Kiddush Hashem* by refusing to compromise her *Yiddishkeit*. My father was visibly shaken, and he replied, ‘Yes, she is my daughter.’ The *Chafetz Chaim* manifest a wondrous smile as his entire countenance became illuminated. At that moment, my father felt it was *shaas ha’kosher*, a propitious time, to ask for a blessing on my behalf: ‘*Rebbe*, I came here specifically to petition the *Rebbe*’s blessing for my daughter, who is now entering the *shidduchim* phase of her life.”

The *Chafetz Chaim* responded, “As reward for your daughter’s *Kiddush Shem Shomayim*, she should merit an excellent *shidduch* (husband) and, not only that, but from her womb shall emerge a child that will illuminate the entire world!”

Now we know the rest of the story.

ביום השני הקריב נתנאל בן צוער נשיא יששכר ביום השלישי נשיא לבני זבולון אליאב בן חלן ביום הרביעי נשיא לבני ראובן אליצור בן שדיאור

On the second day, Nesanel ben Tzuar offered the leader of Yissachar (7:18). On the third day, the leader of the children of Zevulun, Eliav ben Cheilon (7:24). On the fourth day, the leader of the children of Reuven, Elitzur ben Shedeiur. (7:30)

Noticeably, the tribe/*Nasi*/Prince of Yissachar preceded the tribe of Reuven, who was Yaakov *Avinu*’s *bechor*, firstborn. Furthermore, Zevulun also preceded Reuven. The *Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh* explains that Yissachar preceded Reuven because he was the *ben Torah*, of the tribe that devoted itself to fulltime commitment to Torah study. Since Zevulun was his honorary partner, supporting him while he was engaged in commerce, he was placed near Yissachar in sequence. We see from the *Ohr HaChaim* that not only does Torah study take primacy over every other endeavor and achievement, one who supports Torah study, albeit himself not actively engaged in learning, receives due credit on an equal keel.

In its commentary to *Mishlei* (9, *remez* 944) concerning the *pasuk*, *Chachmos nashim bansah beisah*, the *Yalkut Shemoni* says, “The wise among women, each builds her own house” (*Mishlei* 14:1). When the *Yalkut* teaches, *bansah beisah*, “builds her own house,” this refers to the Torah, to teach you that whoever acquires Torah, acquires for himself a house in the World-to-Come. It does not say, one who studies Torah; rather, it says, one who acquires Torah. We derive from here that, just like in our temporal world, a person can build a house either by physically performing all of the necessary labor or by hiring a contractor to build a house for him. One can either personally study Torah, and thereby build his “house” in *Olam Habba*, or he can “commission” the building of his house by supporting a scholar and enabling him to learn Torah (*Shem Olam*15, quoted by *Nifleosecha Asichah*).

The wife of a distinguished *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, *presented Horav Shmuel Primo, zl*, with a *halachic* query. (Indeed, this query was also presented to the *Chida*.) Apparently, her husband had entered into a contract with a “Zevulun,” a good friend who spent his days engaged in various forms of commerce. He did well, but, as a result, he missed out

on the opportunity to engage in Torah study in the way he longed to. He offered to support his friend the scholar in return for a portion of his reward in *Olam Habba*. This was the classic Yissachar/Zevulun partnership. The *ishah tzadeikes*, righteous woman, was concerned that as a result of her husband's partnership, she would forfeit (or at least lose part of) the portion of *Olam Habba* reserved for her due to her support of her husband.

Maharsha Primo replied that she has no reason to be anxious. She will receive her just reward, and her husband and his partner will split their reward. Veritably, a wife's reward is different than the reward shared by the Zevulun who supports her husband. The wife was carrying the yoke of responsibility for their home, thus allowing her husband to study Torah unabated and untroubled. Thus, she deserves to have a complete reward, not a shared reward. The Torah supporter, however, purchased his portion; therefore, he divides the reward accordingly. Indeed, the women who relieve their husbands from their daily responsibilities are earning an incredible reward – one that eludes even Zevulun.

On the other hand, the Torah supporter does have his own unique form of the reward. The *Chafetz Chaim* would relate that when *Horav Chaim Volozhiner* was fund-raising for his *yeshiva*, he promised a certain philanthropist that he would learn *Mishnayos* in his memory. *Rav Chaim* would study *Mishnayos* in memory of this man. One time, *Rav Chaim* had difficulty understanding a *Mishnah*. (We must underscore that *Rav Chaim*'s lack of understanding was quite different than ours.) He dozed off and, in a dream, the *neshamah* of the philanthropist appeared and explained the *Mishnah* to him. When *Rav Chaim* woke up, he told his *talmidim*, students, what had occurred. He then added his own caveat. We see from here that not only do Torah supporters share equally in their partners' learning, but they also merit to learn and understand the Torah (learned by their partner) in *Olam Habba*! This is why the *neshamah* of the philanthropist was able to explain the *Mishnah* to *Rav Chaim*.

Va'ani Tefillah

שאתה הוא אלוקינו – She'Atah Hu Elokeinu. For it is You, Who are Hashem, our G-d.

Horav Shimon Schwab, ז"ל, offers a meaningful explanation of these words. We thank Hashem for informing us that He exists. (This was evident at the Revelation on *Har Sinai*, when He gave us the Torah. As in all revealed messages, however, one can only see when his eyes are open. Sadly, many people choose to keep their eyes closed and their heads in the ground.) Had Hashem not done so, we would not know. The *Rav* compares this to a fish swimming in a tank, who knows nothing of the outside world. To the fish, the tank is its entire world. Thus, the first thing for which we bless Hashem is His revealing Himself to us. This idea is to be derived from the first *pasuk* in the Torah: "*Bereishis bara Elokim – es ha'Shomayim v'es ha'aretz.*" After the word *Elokim*, there is an *esnachta*, cantillation mark, which is similar to a comma, thus dividing the *pasuk* into two parts. The first part of the *pasuk* informs us that Hashem is the Creator – before Him there was nothing, absolutely nothing. Unless one believes this all important verity, the rest of the Book has no real significance.

Sponsored in loving memory of our dear father and zaidy on his yahrzeit

Rabbi Shlomo Silberberg

הרב שלמה בן נתן ז"ל נפ' י"ד סיון תשל"ט תנצב"ה.

Mrs. Mimi Solomon and Family

Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, ©All rights reserved

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

Birkas Kohanim

Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Why is this brocha different?

"Why is the brocha for duchening so different from all the other brochos we recite before we perform mitzvos?"

Question #2: Hoarse kohein

"If a kohein is suffering from laryngitis, can he observe the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim?"

Question #3: The chazzan duchening

"If the chazzan is a kohein, may he duchen?"

Answer:

For the next several weeks, the Jewish communities of Eretz Yisroel and of chutz la'aretz are reading different parshiyos, and I am choosing topics that are applicable to both areas. This week I chose the topic of duchening, partly because I have not sent an article on the topic in many years, and because the mitzvah is in parshas Naso, and kohanim feature significantly both in parshas Naso and in parshas Beha'aloscha. Since I have discussed this topic in the past, this article will deal with issues not previously mentioned, and, therefore, not already on the website RabbiKaganoff.com.

First of all, I should explain the various names of this beautiful mitzvah. Ashkenazim usually refer to the mitzvah colloquially as duchening. The word "duchen" means a platform, and refers to the raised area in front of the aron hakodesh, on which the kohanim traditionally stand when they recite these blessings. However, in many shullen today, there is no platform in front of the aron hakodesh, and, even when there is, in many shullen there are more kohanim than there is room on the duchen. In all these instances, the mitzvah is performed with the kohanim standing on the floor alongside or in front of the aron hakodesh, literally "with their backs to the wall" facing the people.

There are at least two other ways of referring to this mitzvah. One way of referring to the mitzvah is Birkas Kohanim, which is very descriptive of the mitzvah. I will use this term throughout this article in order to avoid confusion.

Nesi'as kapayim

The Mishnah and the Shulchan Aruch call this mitzvah by yet a third term, nesi'as kapayim, which means literally "raising the palms," a description of the position in which the kohanim hold their hands while reciting these blessings. According to accepted halacha, the kohanim raise their hands to shoulder level, and each kohein holds his hands together. (There are some mekubalim who raise their hands directly overhead while reciting the Birkas Kohanim [Divrei Shalom 128:2]. However, this is a very uncommon practice.) Based on a midrash, the Tur rules that while he recites the Birkas Kohanim, the kohein should hold his hands in a way that there are five spaces between his fingers. This is done by pressing, on each hand, the index finger to the middle finger and the small finger to the ring finger. This creates two openings -- one between the middle finger and the ring finger on each hand. Another two openings are created between the index finger and thumb on each hand. The fifth opening is between the thumbs. There are various ways for a kohein to position his fingers, such that he has a space between his thumbs. I know of several different methods, and I have never found an authoritative source that states that one way is preferable to any other. Most kohanim, myself included, follow the way that they were taught by their father.

By the way, the Gra is reputed to have held that the kohanim should not hold their hands in this position, but with all their fingers spread apart.

An unusual brocha

Immediately prior to beginning the brocha, the kohanim recite a birkas hamitzvah, as we do prior to performing most mitzvos. The text of the brocha is: Boruch Attah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha'olam asher kideshanu bikedushaso shel Aharon, ve'tzivanu levareich es amo Yisroel be'avahav. "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who sanctified us with the sanctity of Aharon, and commanded us to bless His people, Yisroel, with love."

Two aspects of this brocha are different from the standard structure of brochos that we recite prior to fulfilling mitzvos. The first change is that, instead of the usual structure that we say, asher kideshanu bemitzvosav ve'tzivanu, "Who sanctified us with His mitzvos and commanded us," the kohanim leave out the reference to "His mitzvos" and instead say "Who sanctified us with the sanctity of Aharon." The second change is that the kohanim not only describe the mitzvah they are performing -- that Hashem "commanded us to bless his people Yisroel" -- but they also add a qualitative description "with love."

The fact that the kohanim make reference to Aharon's sanctity is, itself, not unusual. It is simply atypical for us to recite or hear this brocha since, unfortunately in our contemporary world, we have no other mitzvos for which we use this text. However, when we are again all tehorim and when we have a Beis Hamikdash, every time a kohein performs a mitzvah that only a kohein can perform, such as eating terumah, korbanos or challah, donning the bigdei kehunah in the Beis Hamikdash (Artzos Hachayim, Eretz Yehudah 18:1, page 81b), or performing the mitzvos of offering korbanos, he recites a brocha that includes this reference. Unfortunately, since we are all tamei and we have no Beis Hamikdash, a kohein cannot perform these mitzvos today, and therefore we do not recite this structure of brocha at any other time.

"With love"

The second detail in this brocha that is highly unusual is the statement that the mitzvah is performed be'avahav, "with love." No other mitzvah includes this detail in its brocha, and, in general, the brochos recited prior to performing mitzvos do not include details about how the mitzvos are performed. For example, the brocha prior to kindling the Shabbos or Chanukah lights says, simply, lehadlik neir shel Shabbos or lehadlik neir shel Chanukah, and does not add that we do so "with wicks and oil." Similarly, note that the brocha recited before we pick up and shake the lulav and esrog does not even mention the esrog, aravos and hadasim, and says, simply, al netilas lulav. Again, the brocha for

washing our hands is simply *al netilas yadayim*, without mentioning any of the important details of the mitzvah. Yet, the brocha recited prior to Birkas Kohanim includes the word *be'ahavah*, with love. Why is this so?

Let us examine the original passage of the Gemara (Sotah 39a) that teaches us about the text of this brocha: "The disciples of Rabbi Elazar ben Shamma (who was a kohein) asked him, 'Because of what practices of yours did you merit longevity?' He answered them, 'I never used a shul as a shortcut; I never stepped over the heads of the holy nation (Rashi explains this to mean that he never walked over people who were sitting on the floor in the Beis Hamedrash, as was common in his day -- either he arrived before everyone else did, or he sat outside); and I never performed *nesias kapayim* without first reciting a brocha.'"

The Gemara then asks, "What brocha is recited prior to Birkas Kohanim? Answered Rabbi Zeira, quoting Rav Chisda, *asher kideshanu bikedushaso shel Aharon, ve'tzivanu lewareich es amo Yisroel be'ahavah*."

Thus, the text of the brocha that we recite prior to Birkas Kohanim is exactly the way the Gemara records it, and that the word "*be'ahavah*" is part of the original text. Why is this required?

The Be'er Sheva, a European gadol of the late 16th-early 17th century, already asks this question. To quote him (in his commentary, Sotah 39a): "Where is it mentioned or even hinted in the Torah that the kohein must fulfill this mitzvah 'with love?' The answer is that when the Torah commanded the kohanim concerning this mitzvah, it says *Emor lahem*, 'Recite this blessing to the Jewish people,' spelling the word *emor* with a *vov*, the full spelling of the word, although it is usually spelled without a *vov*. Both the Midrash Tanchuma and the Midrash Rabbah explain that there is an important reason why this word is spelled 'full.' 'The Holy One, blessed is He, said to the kohanim that they should bless the Jewish people not because they are ordered to do so, and they want to complete the minimum requirement of that "order," as if it were "forced labor" and, therefore, they say it swiftly. On the contrary, they should bless the Jews with much focus and the desire that the brochos all be effective -- with full love and full heart.'"

We see from this Gemara that this aspect of the mitzvah -- the kohanim blessing the people because they want to and not because it is required -- was so important to Chazal that they alluded to the idea in the text of the brocha, something we never find elsewhere!

Brochos cause longevity

There are several puzzling questions germane to this small passage of Gemara quoted above. What was unique about Rabbi Elazar's three practices that he singled them out as being the spiritual causes of his longevity? The commentaries explain that each of these three acts were personal *chumros* that Rabbi Elazar, himself one of the last talmidim of Rabbi Akiva and a rebbe of Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi, practiced (Keren Orah, Meromei Sadeh et al). Since our topic is Birkas Kohanim, we will address only that practice: What was unique about Rabbi Elazar's practice of reciting a brocha before performing the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim? Didn't every kohein do the same? So, why did the other kohanim not achieve the longevity that he did?

The Keren Orah commentary notes that the amora, Rav Zeira, is quoted as the source for the brocha on Birkas Kohanim, implying that the brocha on this mitzvah was not yet standardized until his time, and he lived well over a hundred years after Rabbi Elazar's passing. This implies that a brocha on this mitzvah was not necessarily recited during the era of the *tanna'im* and early *amora'im*. (The Keren Orah suggests this might be because Birkas Kohanim itself is a blessing, and that we do not make a brocha on a brocha, similar to the mitzvos of *birkas hamazon* or *birkas haTorah*.) Rabbi Elazar was so enthusiastic about blessing the people that he insisted on reciting a brocha before its performance. This strong desire to bless people was rewarded by his having many extra years to continue blessing them (Maharal).

Notwithstanding that the mitzvah is such a beautiful one, technically, the kohein is required to recite the Birkas Kohanim only when he is asked to do so, during the repetition of the *shemoneh esrei*. We will see shortly what this means in practice.

Hoarse kohein

At this point, we will discuss the second of our opening questions: "If a kohein is suffering from laryngitis, can he fulfill the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim?"

Let us examine this question thoroughly, starting from its sources in the Gemara: "One beraisa teaches: *Koh sevarchu* ('this is how you should bless'): face to face... therefore the *posuk* says *Emor lahem* (say to them), as a person talks to his friend. Another beraisa teaches: *Koh sevarchu*, in a loud voice. Or perhaps *Koh sevarchu* means it can be said quietly; therefore, the *posuk* says *Emor lahem*, as a person talks to his friend" (Sotah 38a).

The passage that we quoted derives two different laws from the words of the *posuk* *Koh sevarchu* and *Emor lahem*. First, that the audience receiving the kohanim's brocha should be facing them during the Birkas Kohanim. (In error, some people turn around while the kohanim recite Birkas Kohanim, in order to make sure that they do not look at the kohanim's hands during the Birkas Kohanim.) The second is that the kohein should recite the brochos loud enough

that the people can hear him. Although there are kohanim who shout the words of the Birkas Kohanim, the continuation of the Gemara explains that *bekol ram*, in a loud voice, means simply loud enough for the people to hear the kohein. However, someone whose voice is so hoarse that people cannot hear him is not permitted to recite Birkas Kohanim; he should leave the sanctuary part of the shul, before the chazzan recites the word *retzei* in his repetition of *shemoneh esrei* (Mishnah Berurah 128:53).

Why retzei?

Why should the kohein leave the shul before *retzei*?

Some mitzvos *aseh*, such as donning *tefillin* daily, making *kiddush*, or hearing *shofar*, are inherent requirements. There isn't any way to avoid being obligated to fulfill these mitzvos. On the other hand, there are mitzvos whose requirement is dependent on circumstances. For example, someone who does not live in a house is not obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of *mezuzah*. Living in a house, which most of us do, creates the obligation to install a *mezuzah* on its door posts. Someone who lives in a house and fails to place a *mezuzah* on the required doorposts violates a mitzvas *aseh*.

Similarly, the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim is not an inherent requirement for the kohein. However, when someone asks the kohein or implies to him that he should perform the Birkas Kohanim, the kohein is now required to do so, and, should he fail to, he will violate a mitzvas *aseh*.

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 128:2) rules that a kohein who remains in shul is required to recite Birkas Kohanim if (1) he hears the chazzan say the word *kohanim*, (2) someone tells him to ascend the *duchen*, or (3) someone tells him to wash his hands (in preparation for the Birkas Kohanim). These three actions summon the kohanim to perform the mitzvah, and that is why they create a requirement on the kohein. A kohein who is weak such that it is difficult for him to raise his arms to recite the Birkas Kohanim, should exit the shul before the chazzan says the word *kohanim* (see Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim 128:4 and Mishnah Berurah). The Magen Avraham and the Elyah Rabbah conclude that it is preferred if he exits before the chazzan begins the word *retzei*. The Shulchan Aruch mentions that the custom is for any kohein who is not reciting Birkas Kohanim to remain outside until the Birkas Kohanim is completed.

Washing hands

The Shulchan Aruch we quoted above rules that telling a kohein to wash his hands creates the same obligation to recite Birkas Kohanim as directly summoning him to recite the Birkas Kohanim. Why is that so?

This is because the Gemara rules that "any kohein who did not wash his hands should not perform *nesias kapayim*." The Rambam (Hilchos Tefillah Uvirkas Kohanim 15:5) rules that the washing before Birkas Kohanim is similar to what the kohanim do prior to performing the service in the Beis Hamikdash. For this reason, he rules that their hands should be washed until their wrists. We rule that this is done even on Yom Kippur, notwithstanding that, otherwise, we are not permitted to wash this much on Yom Kippur (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 128:6). Several *acharonim* rule that since the washing as preparation for Birkas Kohanim is because it is considered a form of *avodah*, there are other requirements, including washing with a cup, with clear water and with at least a *revi'is* (about three ounces) of water (see Magen Avraham, Yeshuos Yaakov, Shulchan Shelomoh and Mishnah Berurah).

In many shullen, a sink is installed near the *duchen*, so that the kohanim can wash immediately before Birkas Kohanim. Others have a practice that water and a basin are brought to the front of the shul for this purpose. These customs have a source in *rishonim* and *poskim* and should definitely be encouraged. Tosafos (Sotah 39a s.v. Kol) concludes that the kohein should wash his hands immediately before ascending the *duchen*. He rules that the kohein should wash his hands within twenty-two amos, a distance of less than forty feet, of the *duchen*. The Magen Avrohom (128:9) rules according to this Tosafos, and adds that, according to Tosafos, since the kohanim wash their hands before *retzei*, the chazzan should recite the brocha of *retzei* rapidly. In his opinion, the time that transpires after the kohein washes his hands should be less time than it takes to walk twenty-two amos, and, therefore, *retzei* should be recited as quickly as possible. The Biur Halacha (128:6 s.v. Chozrim) adds that the kohanim should not converse between washing their hands and reciting Birkas Kohanim, because this constitutes a *hefsek*.

The chazzan *duchening*

At this point, let us examine the third of our opening questions: "If the chazzan is a kohein, may he *duchen*?"

This question is the subject of a dispute between the Shulchan Aruch and the Pri Chodosh. According to the Shulchan Aruch, if the chazzan is a kohein, he should not recite Birkas Kohanim, unless he is the only kohein. The reason he should not recite Birkas Kohanim is out of concern that he might get confused and not remember the conclusion of the davening, when he returns to his role as chazzan. The Pri Chodosh disagrees, concluding that this concern was only when the chazzan led the services from memory, which, although very common in an earlier era, is today quite uncommon. If the kohein-chazzan is using a *siddur*,

which should assure that the Birkas Kohanim will not confuse him from continuing the davening correctly, he can recite Birkas Kohanim. In chutz la'aretz, the accepted practice in this halacha follows the Shulchan Aruch, whereas in Eretz Yisroel, customs vary in different locales. In Yerushalayim and most other places, the accepted practice follows the Pri Chodosh, and the chazzan performs Birkas Kohanim.

Conclusion

As a kohein myself, I find duchening to be one of the most beautiful mitzvos. We are indeed so fortunate to have a commandment to bless our fellow Jews, the children of Our Creator. All the more so, the nusach of the bracha is to bless His nation Israel with love. The blessings of a kohein must flow from a heart full of love for the Jews that he is privileged to bless.

www.ou.org

Parshas Naso : Distinctly Different

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

The term is one that I first heard back in high school. There are times that I find it helpful, and there are times I find myself resistant to using it. The term is "Judeo-Christian."

I understand that this term was first used back in the early-19th century to refer to the fact that the roots of the religion of Christianity are to be found in the Jewish religion and culture. Much later the term came to be used as it is commonly used nowadays; namely, as a way of referring to the mores, beliefs, and ethical norms which our religion has in common with Christianity.

Long before my career in the rabbinate, in fact even quite early in my childhood, I was acquainted with Christians and fascinated by both the differences and similarities between our faiths and our lifestyles. I may have shared with readers of this column my family's exposure to a devout Irish Catholic family. When my siblings and I were quite young, we spent our summers in a cottage in Rockaway Beach that was owned by an elderly Catholic couple. We became familiar with their entire family and indeed my mother, whose yahrzeit we commemorated just a few days ago, maintained a lifelong correspondence with the couple's daughter, Mrs. Eleanor McElroy.

Much more recently, I have been representing the Orthodox Union in a regular forum in which leaders of the Jewish community meet with their counterparts in the Catholic community to work on various social issues in which we have common interests. Following the guidelines of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik regarding interreligious dialogue, we carefully avoid discussing theological matters, and confine our discussions to ways in which we can cooperate in achieving various shared goals.

Often, we encounter striking similarities in the problems that we face; for example, difficulties in funding our respective parochial schools. Then, we speak the same language. But quite frequently, we discover that even when we use the same terminology, we are referring to very different experiences. Indeed, these differences frequently make it almost impossible for us to understand each other. In a recent such forum, for example, the Catholic group, having read so much about the "Charedim" and their involvement in Israeli politics, asked me to define for them just who the Charedim were. I tried my best to do so, but they remained confounded as how a group of fervently pious believers in the literal meaning of the Bible could be anti-Zionist in their politics.

Just as the Catholic group had difficulty understanding such Jewish phenomena, so the members of our Jewish group found some Christian religious concepts practices alien, and even unacceptable. Thus, in one of our conversations, one of the Catholic clergymen wished aloud that he could retreat from the pressures of contemporary society and spend the rest of his years in a monastery. I was just one of our group who immediately protested that for us Jews there were no monasteries, and that we did not see the monastic life as a positive religious alternative.

The response of members of the Catholic group to that remark finally bring us to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Naso (Numbers 4:21-7:89). "How can you not view monasticism positively? After all, the practice has biblical roots, in the Hebrew Bible," they insisted.

They were referring to the following verses in this week's parsha: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying...If anyone, man or woman, explicitly utters a Nazirite's vow, to set himself apart for the Lord, he shall abstain from wine...He may not eat anything that is obtained from the grape vine... No razor shall touch his head...He shall not go in where there is a dead person" (Numbers 6:1-7).

Of course, any one of the Jewish members of the group could easily have referred to the numerous opinions, already recorded in the Talmud, as to the non-desirability of the practice of nezirut. There are certainly forceful statements against taking the Nazirite vow, and even those who consider it a sin.

But I found myself taking a different tack in this discussion. "It is wrong to equate the Nazir with the monk" I said. "Granted, the Nazir must be guided by certain very stringent prohibitions. But he does not absent himself from society. He is neither a hermit, nor a member of some ascetic sect. This is very different from one who undertakes monastic vows, as I understand them."

One of my companions rallied to my side after reaching for a volume of the set of encyclopedias, which was in easy reach in the library where the meeting was taking place. He read out this definition of "monasticism:"

"It is an institutionalized religious practice whose members live by a rule that requires works that goes beyond those of the laity...The monastic is commonly celibate and universally ascetic, and separates himself from society either by living as a hermit or by joining a community of others who profess similar intentions."

Another good friend simply consulted his pocket dictionary which stated: "The word 'monasticism' is derived from the Greek monachos, which means 'living alone.'"

Our Jewish group, which consisted of several diverse individuals who regularly disagree vociferously with each other, were united in our response to the Catholic gentlemen on that day. The Nazirite was not a monk, certainly not in the common understanding of that term.

The interreligious group did not persist in this particular discussion. Afterwards, however, some of us from the Jewish group continued our discussion over coffee. We were struck by the fact that three individuals are understood by our tradition as having been Nazirites, or at least partial Nazirites. They include the heroic warrior Samson, the prophet Samuel, and Absalom, the son of David who rebelled against his father. No question about it: these men were not celibate, not hermits, and not men who refrained from the legitimate pleasures of life. Quite the contrary, they played active roles in the life of the Jewish people, albeit each in very different ways.

The distinct difference between our Torah's concept of the Nazirite and the Christian concept of the monastic is perhaps best expressed in a passage in the third chapter of Maimonides' Hilchot De'ot, which I will allow myself to paraphrase:

"Lest a person mislead himself into thinking that since envy, lust, and vainglory are such negatives, I will therefore separate myself from them; forcefully distance myself from them to the extreme; eat no meat and drink no wine; practice celibacy; shun a finely furnished home; desist from wearing attractive clothing, and instead don sackcloth and coarse wool, and similar such ascetic practices. Let him be aware that this is the manner of Gentile priests!

"Let me make clear that a person who pursues such a path is a sinner. Even the Nazirite, who merely refrains from products of the vine, requires atonement. How much more so the one who deprives himself of the many pleasures of life, which are not prohibited by the Torah. He is simply misguided."

Almost nine hundred years ago, Maimonides recognized the distinct difference between the concept of holiness as practiced by the Gentile priests whom he knew and the model of holiness which is held up to us by our Torah. The Nazirite, in Maimonides' view, is not the paradigm of holiness. The truly holy man must not refrain from living a normal family life, must share in the joys and woes of his friends and neighbors, and must exercise the leadership skills with which he has been uniquely blessed.

It is doubtful, given the sacrificial Temple rituals which conclude the Nazirite's term and which are detailed in this week's parsha, that one can practically be a Nazirite nowadays. But the lessons of this week's Torah portion are clear: there are guidelines for those who wish to be holier than the rest of us. But those guidelines rule out separating oneself from family and community.

In this regard, we cannot speak of a common Judeo-Christian norm. The Jewish norm and the Christian norm are distinctly different.

לע"נ

שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

PARSHAT NASO - Intro to Sefer Bamidbar

Parshat Naso contains what appears to be a very strange progression of topics. After all, what logical connection exists between:

- * the duties of the Leviim in chapter 4
- * laws concerning "korban asham" in chapter 5
- * the laws concerning a "sotah" in chapter 5
- * the laws of a "nazir" in chapter 6
- * "birkat kohanim" in chapter 6
- & *the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan in chapter 7?

Certainly, if we use our imagination, we could suggest some tangential connections; but the fact remains - at first glance, all of these various 'parshiot' appear to very unrelated.

So why does the Torah record them together?

To your surprise, this week's shiur will NOT explain why they are indeed connected. Instead, we will do exactly the opposite - we will suggest a reason for why these parshiot do NOT follow in logical progression!

To explain why, we will study the overall structure of Sefer Bamidbar - in search of its unifying theme. While doing so, we will uncover a rather fascinating pattern - that will explain why it becomes so difficult to find a unifying theme for Sefer Bamidbar.

INTRODUCTION

In our Parsha series thus far, our approach to the study of Chumash has been based on the assumption that each "sefer" carries a unique theme. To uncover those themes, we have studied the progression of 'parshiot' of each Sefer. [For a quick review, we could 'oversimplify' and summarize as follows: Breishit focused on BECHIRA, Shmot on GEULAH, and Vayikra on KEDUSHA.]

Following this methodology, we would expect that a unifying theme for Sefer Bamidbar could be found as well. However, as we will see, finding such a theme for Sefer Bamidbar will be much more difficult, for the progression of many of its 'parshiot' appears to be rather arbitrary.

To demonstrate this difficulty, we have already cited (in our opening paragraph) an example from Parshat Naso. Let's take another example from Parshat Shlach, where the story of the 'spies' (see chapters 13->14) is followed by several totally unrelated mitzvot (see chapter 15):

- * the laws of "nesachim" for korbanot
- * the laws of separating "challah" from dough
- * laws concerning korbanot "chatat" of the nation
- * the story of one who publicly defiled the sabbath
- * the mitzvah of tzizit

[A similar phenomenon occurs in chapters 28 & 29 in Parshat Pinchas as well re: the laws of the "musafim".]

To complicate matters, we also find that some of the laws that are recorded in Sefer Bamidbar had already been mentioned in Sefer Vayikra! [e.g. 5:5-7 compare w/Vayikra 5:20-25]

So what's going on in Sefer Bamidbar?

To answer this question, we must undertake a comprehensive analysis of the book.

DIVIDE & CONQUER

To begin our analysis, we must differentiate between the two basic types of 'parshiot' that we encounter when we study Chumash in general, and in Sefer Bamidbar in particular:

1) **NARRATIVE** - i.e. the ongoing STORY of Chumash

2) **COMMANDMENTS** - i.e. the MITZVOT that God commands Bnei Yisrael to keep for all generations.

In our series thus far, we have shown how each "sefer" of Chumash has been (primarily) either one type, or the other. For example:

* Sefer Breishit was primarily NARRATIVE - i.e. the STORY of the Creation and God's covenant with the Avot.

* Sefer Shmot was also primarily NARRATIVE (the story of the Exodus, etc.), even though it included numerous mitzvot that were presented as an integral part of that narrative. [For example, the Ten Commandments are recorded as an integral part of the story of Ma'amad Har Sinai.]

* Sefer Vayikra was primarily MITZVOT - presented in thematic order (even though it did include two very short narratives).

How about Sefer Bamidbar?

As we will see, it definitely contains BOTH narrative and mitzvot. However, the relationship between its narrative and those mitzvot is rather confusing.

To complicate matters, Sefer Bamidbar also contains two types of mitzvot:

"**mitzvot l'sha'ah**" – commandments that applied only to the generation of the desert (but not to future generations)

"**mitzvot l'dorot**" - commandments that apply to future generations as wekk

To clarify this distinction, here are a few examples:

- MITZVOT L'SHA'AH:

- * Organizing the camp around the Mishkan (chapters 1->4)
- * sanctifying the Leviim (chapter 8)
- * Taking the census in chapter in chapter 26.

- MITZVOT L'DOROT:

- * the laws of "sotah" (chapter 5)
- * the laws of "nazir" (chapter 6)
- * the laws of "korbanot tmidim u'musafim" (chaps. 28->29).]

As the "mitzvot l'sha'a" are essentially an integral part of the ongoing narrative, in our analysis we will simply treat them as part of the ongoing narrative of the Sefer.

In contrast, most of the "mitzvot l'dorot" in Sefer Bamidbar don't appear to have anything to do with the ongoing narrative! In fact, it seems more like they 'interfere'.

To explain how, the following outline charts the progression of topics Sefer Bamidbar, highlighting this contrast by recording the MITZVOT L'DOROT in CAPS.

As you study this outline, note the logical flow of topic within its narrative, in contrast to the 'random' progression of its mitzvot.

CHAPTER =====	TOPIC =====
1->4	Organizing the camp
5	KORBAN ASHAM
6	LAWS OF 'SOTAH'
6	LAWS OF 'NAZIR'
	BIRKAT KOHANIM
7	Dedication of Mishkan
8	The appointment of the Leviim
9	Offering Korban Pesach in the desert / Travelling following the "anan"
10	Gathering camp by trumpet / "chatzotrot"
	Leaving Har Sinai (on 20th of Iyar)
11	Complaints during the journey ("mitoninim", "mitavim", etc.)
12	Complaints against Moshe (sin of Miriam)
13	Sin of the 'spies' ("chet ha'meraglim")
14	The punishment: 40 years' wandering
15	LAWS OF THE 'NESACHIM' (wine & flour offering)
	LAWS RE: 'CHALA'
15	LAWS RE: KORBAN OF THE 'EYDA'
	LAWS RE: DESECRATING SHABBAT
	LAWS OF TZIZIT
16-17	Korach's rebellion
18	LAWS RE: KOHEN'S COMPENSATION
19	LAWS RE: TUMAH CAUSED BY A DEAD BODY
20-21	Events of the 40th year: death of Miriam; the "mei mriva" incident; (Moshe's sin) death of Aharon; conquest of Transjordan, etc.
21-24	Story of Bilam & Balak
25	Sin of Baal P'or and the act of Pinchas
26	The census for inheriting the Land
27	Transfer of leadership from Moshe->Yehoshua
28-29	LAWS OF THE KORBAN TAMID & MUSAF
30	LAWS RE: 'NEDARIM' [VOWS]
31	War against Midyan
32	Inheritance of Reuven & Gad, & half of Menashe
33	Summary of the journey through the desert
34	Guidelines for upcoming conquest of the Land
35	Cities of the Levites, and cities of Refuge
36	Inheritance issues re: to daughters of Tzlofchad

Before you continue, review this table once again, but this time ignoring all of the topics in CAPS - while noting how the narratives (that remain) comprise a congruent story; i.e. of Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai (through the desert) until they reach Arvat Moav (some forty years later).

Hence, if we simply 'filter out' the "mitzvot l'dorot" from Sefer Bamidbar, that story (of what transpired as they traveled for forty years through the desert) emerges as its primary topic.

ALMOST LIKE SEFER SHMOT

As such, the style of Sefer Bamidbar appears to be most similar to Sefer Shmot. Just as Sefer Shmot describes Bnei Yisrael's journey from Egypt to Har Sinai - plus various MITZVOT; so too Sefer Bamidbar describes Bnei Yisrael's journey from Har Sinai towards Eretz Canaan - plus various MITZVOT.

However, there still exists a major difference in style between these two books, in regard to the relationship between the MITZVOT and the STORY in each book. Whereas the "mitzvot l'dorot" in Sefer Shmot form an integral part of its narrative, most of the "mitzvot l'dorot" in Sefer Bamidbar appear to be totally unrelated (or at best tangentially related) to its ongoing narrative.

In other words, the mitzvot in Sefer Shmot 'fit' - while the mitzvot in Sefer Bamidbar don't!

Furthermore, when you take a careful look at the various mitzvot l'dorot in Sefer Bamidbar (see outline above), you'll notice how most of them would have fit very nicely in Sefer Vayikra!

INTENTIONAL 'INTERRUPTIONS'

To appreciate these observations, review the above outline once again, this time noting how the ongoing story in Sefer Bamidbar is periodically INTERRUPTED by certain MITZVOT, while the topic of those mitzvot is usually totally unrelated to that ongoing narrative.

To illustrate how this style is unique to Sefer Bamidbar, let's compare it to the respective structures of Sefer Shmot and Sefer Vayikra.

Sefer Shmot records the story of Bnei Yisrael's redemption from Egypt (chapters 1->13), their subsequent journey to Har Sinai (chapters 14->17), and the events that took place at Har Sinai (chapters 18->40 / Matan Torah, chet ha'egel, and building the Mishkan). As an integral part of that story, Sefer Shmot also records certain mitzvot that were given at that time. For example, as Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt, they are commanded to keep the mitzvot of Pesach and Chag Ha'matzot (that commemorate that event). At Ma'amad Har Sinai, the Torah records the Ten Commandments and the laws of Parshat Mishpatim, for they are part of that covenant (see 24:3-7). In reaction to "chet ha'egel" (or to perpetuate Ma'amad Har Sinai), Bnei Yisrael are given the laws of the Mishkan.

Hence we conclude that the MITZVOT in Sefer Shmot form an integral part of its ongoing narrative!

Sefer Vayikra is quite the opposite for it contains primarily "mitzvot l'dorot" organized by topic. In fact, the lone narrative that we do find in Sefer Vayikra - the dedication of the Mishkan (8:1-10:10) - relates specifically to the topic of the mitzvah under discussion (i.e. the various korbanot).

In contrast to those two books, Sefer Bamidbar contains an ongoing narrative, which is periodically 'interrupted' by "mitzvot l'dorot" that appear to have very little thematic connection.

RAMBAN'S INTRODUCTION

This analysis can help us understand the strange statement made by Ramban in his introduction to Sefer Bamidbar: "... and this book deals entirely with "MITZVOT SHA'AH" that applied only during Bnei Yisrael's stay in the desert...";

Then, only three lines later, Ramban makes a very bold, yet puzzling, statement:

"This book does NOT CONTAIN any MITZVOT L'DOROT (commandments for all generations) EXCEPT for a FEW MITZVOT DEALING WITH KORBANOT that the Torah began discussing in SEFER VAYIKRA, but did not finish their explanation there, and they are finished here instead." [see Ramban 1:1]

Note how Ramban differentiates between two types of mitzvot that are found in Sefer Bamidbar, one type - "mitzvot l'sha'ah" that DO belong in the sefer, while the other type - "mitzvot l'dorot" that DON'T belong!

This distinction between 'parshiot' that DO belong and DON'T belong - implies that Sefer Bamidbar indeed carries one primary theme, i.e. the story of Bnei Yisrael's forty year journey from Har Sinai to Arvat Moav. The stories and the "mitzvot sha'ah" that relate to that topic - 'belong' in the sefer, while those mitzvot that are unrelated (to that topic) do not!
[Note that even though the Ramban did not preface his introduction to Sefer Bamidbar with 'questions for preparation and self study', he clearly expected that the reader was aware of this overall structure!]

[Note as well that Ramban never explicitly defines the primary topic of Sefer Bamidbar, however he does mention that: This book contains:... the miracles that were performed for Bnei Yisrael and how He began to deliver their enemies before them... and He commanded them how the Land should be divided among the tribes...]

To clarify the thematic connection between the various narratives in Sefer Bamidbar, it is helpful to divide the book into three distinct sections:

Chapters 1->10

How Bnei Yisrael prepare for their journey to Canaan;

Chapters 11->25

Why they don't make it to Canaan (i.e. their sins); &

Chapters 26->35

How the new generation prepares to enter the Land.

Basically, the book should have been the story of how Bnei Yisrael traveled from Har Sinai to Israel. Instead, it becomes a book that explains how and why they didn't make it.

How about the MITZVOT L'DOROT of Sefer Bamidbar?

Are they simply random, or do they share a common theme?

At first glance, most of these mitzvot appear to be totally unrelated to Bnei Yisrael's journey through the desert.

WHERE DO THEY ALL BELONG?

Before we suggest an answer to this question, let's review this list of mitzvot in Sefer Bamidbar, and attempt to determine where they DO BELONG.

Take for example:

*** Parshat "sotah" (5:11-31) and Parshat "nazir" (6:1-21):**

Both of these 'parshiot' contain a set of laws that Chumash refers to as "torot" (ritual 'procedures' /see 5:29 & 6:21), and focus on what korbanot need to be offered. Hence, it would seem that these parshiot belong with the other "torot" found in the first half of Sefer Vayikra.

*** Parshat "parah adumah" (chapter 19):**

These laws clearly 'belong' in Parshiot Tazria/Metzora, together with all of the other laws of how one becomes "tamey" and the necessary procedures to become "tahor".

*** The laws of "korbanot tmidim u'musafim" (chap. 28->29):**

These laws also clearly belong in Sefer Vayikra, together with the laws of the holidays in Parshat Emor (see Vayikra 23 / note that on each holiday mentioned in Emor we must bring an "ishe rayach nichoach l'hashem", while Bamidbar chapters 28 & 29 details the specific "ishe" (korban) which must be brought for each holiday. (see Vayikra 23:37)

Thus, it appears as though Chumash has deliberately taken numerous parshiot of mitzvot, which could have been recorded in Sefer Vayikra, and randomly 'inserted' them throughout the narrative of Sefer Bamidbar! But - why would the Torah take a mitzvah which 'belongs' in one sefer and move it to another?

One could maintain that these 'unrelated parshiot' are recorded in Sefer Bamidbar simply for the 'technical' reason that they just happened to have been given to Moshe Rabeinu at this time (i.e. during this journey from Har Sinai through the desert). For example, the mitzvah of "shiluach tmayim" (5:1-4) - sending unclean persons outside the camp - most likely was commanded only after the camp was organized (see chaps. 1->4).

However, that approach would explain only a few of these parshiot, for most of the "mitzvot l'dorot" that are recorded in Sefer Bamidbar seem to have been given at an earlier time (most likely on Har Sinai or after "hakamat ha'Mishkan"). For example, the laws of "tumat meyt" (in chapter 19) must have been given before the Mishkan was erected, otherwise it would have been impossible for the Kohanim to perform the "avodah". Furthermore, certain mitzvot recorded in Bamidbar had already been mentioned earlier in Chumash (e.g. see 5:5-8 / compare with Vayikra 5:20-26).

Hence it would seem that this 'commercial break' type pattern in Sefer Bamidbar is deliberate! And thus, our question must be re-worded to: why does the Torah employ this unique structure in Sefer Bamidbar?

THE 'PSHAT' OF 'DRASH'

If this special structure of Bamidbar is deliberate, then the obvious temptation is to find a connection, even if only tangential, between these 'unrelated mitzvot' and the juxtaposed narrative in Sefer Bamidbar.

In other words, it appears that the Torah deliberately juxtaposes certain sets of laws to the ongoing narrative, EVEN THOUGH they are unrelated - in order that we search for a thematic connection between them! Thus, through this special structure the Torah in essence is telling us to make up "drash" to explain the reason for this juxtaposition. [We could refer to this as the "psbat" of "drash".]

In this manner, the unique style of Sefer Bamidbar challenges us to find a THEMATIC connection between these "mitzvot l'dorot" and the ongoing story. And that is exactly what Chazal do in their various Midrashim.

[This also explains why so often the commentaries ask the famous question: "lama nis'm'cha..." (why are certain parshiot juxtaposed...?)]

Therefore, when we study Sefer Bamidbar, we should not be surprised to find certain parshiot of mitzvot that don't seem to belong. Nonetheless, we are 'obligated' to attempt to uncover a more subtle message that the Torah may be transmitting through the intentional juxtaposition of these mitzvot to its narrative.

With this background, we will now suggest some possible reasons for the inclusion of these specific parshiot of mitzvot in Parshat Naso, even though they could have been recorded in Sefer Vayikra as well.

SHCHINA IN THE CAMP

The first topic of Sefer Bamidbar is the organization of the camp ("sidur ha'machanot") surrounding the Mishkan (chapters one thru four). As we explained last week, this re-organization of the camp stresses the importance of the interdependent relationship between the camp ["machine"] and the Mishkan, i.e. between the nation and the kohanim & leviim.

This may explain the reason why Sefer Bamidbar chose to include the parshiot which follow:

A) "shiluach tmayim" (5:1-4)

As the camp was organized with the "shchinah" dwelling at its center, the first mitzvah is to remove anyone who is "tamey" from the camp.

B) "gezel ha'ger". (5:5-10)

Here we find laws that reflect the special relationship between the nation and the kohanim.

This mitzvah begins with the standard law of the "korban asham" as explained in Parshat Vayikra (5:20-26). The halacha requires that prior to bringing the Korban, the transgressor must first repay the person ("keren v'chomesh"). This 'parshia' also relates to the case when the payment is given to the kohen, when the person who is owed the money has passed away and left no inheritors (see Rashi 5:8). The 'parshia' continues with a general statement regarding the legal ownership of tithes which the nation must give to the kohanim (see 5:9-10).

C) Parshat Sotah (5:11-31)

Here again we find a special relationship between the Mishkan and the nation, as the Kohen is instrumental in solving problems in a marital relationship. Even though this is a "korban mincha", its nature is quite different from those korbanot mentioned in Sefer Vayikra (see Ramban 5:9) - for it is only offered as part of this special circumstance, where the kohen attempts to solve a marital problem within the camp.

D) Parshat Nazir (6:1-21)

Here we find a case where a member of the nation takes upon himself laws similar to those of a Kohen (see 6:6-8), as well as the 'kedusha' of a Kohen. Note also the similarity between the Korban which the "nazir" must bring (6:13-21) and the special Korbanot brought by the Kohanim during the 7 day "milui" ceremony (see Vayikra 8:1-30).

E) Birkat Kohanim (6:22-27)

The blessing which the kohanim bestow on the nation is yet another example of the connection between the kohanim and the camp. The kohanim serve as vehicle through which God can bless His people.

TRAVELLING WITH THE "SHCHINA"

So why are specifically parshiot from Sefer Vayikra woven into Sefer Bamidbar? One could suggest an answer that relates to the underlying theme of each book.

Recall our explanation of how the laws of Sefer Vayikra reflect the fact that God's "shechina" now dwells in the Mishkan. Hence, we found numerous laws that relate to the special level of kedusha in the Mishkan itself in the first half of Vayikra (e.g. korbanot, tumah & tahara, etc.) as well as laws that relate to the consequential "kedusha" on the entire camp in the second half of the book (e.g. the laws of "kedoshim t'hiyu" [adam], holidays [zman], shmitta [makom], etc.).

Sefer Bamidbar, on the other hand, discusses how Bnei Yisrael travel through the desert on their way to the Promised Land. Considering that Bnei Yisrael will now travel with the Mishkan at the center of their camp (as discussed in the opening four chapters), it becomes thematically significant that the Torah periodically interrupts the details of that journey with mitzvot from Sefer Vayikra, especially those that deal with the special connection between the Kohanim and the nation.

As Bnei Yisrael leave Har Sinai, they must now deal with mundane tasks such as preparation for the conquest and settlement of the Land. While doing so, they must constantly remind themselves of their spiritual goals, symbolized by the Mishkan at the center of the camp - and applied in the various laws that relate to the "kedusha" of Am Yisrael - because they are God's nation.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN:

=====

A. CHANUKAT HA'MIZBAYACH (7:1-8:26)

This parsha, discussing the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan, appears to be out of place. The story of the dedication of the Mishkan was already detailed in Parshat Pkudei (Shmot 40) and Parshat Shmini (Vayikra 9). Furthermore, this dedication ceremony took place on the first of Nisan, while the narrative of Sefer Bamidbar began a month LATER, on the first day of Iyar (1:1)! Why then is it included in Bamidbar, and why specifically here?

The primary topic of this perek is the 'korban' which the tribal leaders brought on the day of the dedication of the Mishkan. Their offering included a joint presentation of six wagons and twelve oxen as well as an offering for the mizbayach presented by each "nasi" individually.

Those wagons are given to the Leviim to help them while transporting the Mishkan. Therefore, this detail of the dedication ceremony is recorded in Bamidbar for it relates to the organization of the camp ("sidur ha'machaneh") and the duties of the Leviim in preparation for the journey from Har Sinai. Even though the wagons were presented a month earlier, Sefer Bamidbar begins with the census of the army in anticipation of the journey from Har Sinai.

Once the detail of how the camp will travel is completed, Sefer Bamidbar recalls the story of how "nsiim" presented the Leviim with the wagons. The remaining details of that joint presentation of the nsiim are detailed in the parsha that follows (see 7:12-89).

B. Considering that chapters 7->8 discuss the dedication of the Mishkan that took place on the first of Nisan (see 7:1) including the appointment of the Leviim to work in the Mishkan in place of the first born (see 8:5-15), one could also conclude that the counting of the Leviim described in chapters 3->4 took place earlier - i.e. before the Mishkan's dedication and definitely BEFORE the MIFKAD of the twelve tribes as described in chapters 1->2 [note Ramban on 8:5 that would seem to imply this, even though this seems to contradict Ramban on 1:45].

If so, then chapters 3-4 as well as 7-8 took place on (or close to) the first of Nisan. Hence, one could conclude that these parshiot of mitzvot detailed in chapters 5->6 were given to Moshe Rabeinu from the Ohel Moed on the first of Nisan as well.

PARSHAT NASO - the Nsiim

We were all taught from a young age that the Torah doesn't 'waste' any words. Nevertheless, the repetition of the 'korbanot' of the Nsiim [the Princes (of each tribe)] in Parshat Naso certainly leaves the reader with the impression that [at times] the Torah can be very 'wordy'.

In the following shiur, as we study chapter 7, we will attempt to explain the thematic significance of that repetition - to show how the Torah's 'wordiness' is not 'wasteful' at all.

INTRODUCTION

Rarely does anyone pay careful attention to the second half of Parshat Naso; and for a very simple reason. In those last eighty some psukim (see 7:12-83), the Torah repeats twelve times the exact same details of the exact same korban brought by each "nasi"! Then, 'to top it off', in the final five psukim (see 7:84-88) the Torah tallies them for us as well.

For that reason, you probably never paid attention to the last pasuk of the Parsha - but if you did, it most certainly should have bothered you!

Let's explain why:

AN ALMOST PERFECT FINALE

At the conclusion of the Torah's tally of all of the offerings brought during those twelve days we find what appears to be a 'perfect' summary pasuk:

"zot chanukat ha'mizbeiach..." - 'this was the dedication offering for the Altar on the day that it was consecrated.'
(see 7:88)

Clearly, 7:88 could (and should) have been the final pasuk of this entire unit. To verify this, simply note how 7:88 provides perfect 'closure' for 7:84, as well as for 7:1 (which began the entire unit)!

[It is highly recommended that you take a look in your Chumash to see this for yourself!]

But to our surprise, after this summary is complete, the Torah 'adds on' an additional pasuk that appears to be totally unrelated. Let's take a look:

"...And when Moshe would come into the OHEL MOED to speak to Him, he would hear God's voice speak to him from above the KAPORET above the ARON between the two keruvim, and then He would speak to him."

(See 7:89, i.e. the end of Parshat Naso)

The information in this pasuk may be important, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the 'korbanot' that were just offered. After all, what connection could there be between 'how God spoke to Moshe from the Ohel Moed' and 'the twelve days of korbanot' that were just offered by the Nsiim?

NOTHING NEW

To complicate matters, not only does this pasuk appear to be 'out of place', it also appears to be totally superfluous - for it doesn't contain any information that we didn't already know beforehand. Let's explain why.

Concerning how God spoke to Moshe from above the KAPORET etc. (see 7:89) - note how this very same detail was already recorded in Parshat Terumah - in God's commandment to Moshe concerning how to build the Mishkan:

"and in the ARON put the EYDUT... And I will meet you there and speak to you from above the KAPORET between the two KERUVIM that are on the ARON HA'EYDUT..." (see Shmot 25:21-22)

Later on, in the very first pasuk of Sefer Vayikra, we were already informed that God had indeed spoken to Moshe Rabeinu from the Ohel Moed (see Vayikra 1:1).

Therefore, all the information provided by 7:89 is already known, and hence this pasuk seems to be both 'out of place' and superfluous.

To uncover the importance of this 'add on' pasuk, we must return to our study of what transpired on this special day in the Bible - the day when the Mishkan was first dedicated - as the events on that day are described not only here in Sefer Bamidbar, but also in Shmot and Vayikra!

YOM HA'SHMINI

Recall that in addition to Parshat Naso, there are two other units in Chumash that describe the story of the Mishkan's dedication:

- * Toward the conclusion of Parshat Pekudei, the Torah described how the Mishkan was assembled, followed by how the shechina dwelled upon it (see Shmot chapter 40);

- * In Parshat Shmini, the Torah detailed the special korbanot offered by Aharon and the people on that day, that enabled God's glory to appear (see Vayikra 9, especially 9:1-6).

Even though each of story describes a different aspect of what happened on that day, they both focus on how God's "shechina" returned to Am Yisrael on that day (see Shmot 40:34-38 and Vayikra 9:5-6,24).

We will now show how the final pasuk of Parshat Naso may also relate to that same event, and for an important thematic reason!

BACK TO CHET HA'EHEL

Recall that in the aftermath of chet ha'egel [the sin of the Golden Calf /see Shmot 32], God concluded that Bnei Yisrael would not be able survive if His divine Presence - the shechina" - remained in their midst. Therefore, God informed Moshe that He would be taking away His "shechina" from the camp of Bnei Yisrael (see Shmot 33:1-4). As a consequence of this punishment, God instructed Moshe to re-locate his own tent from inside the camp to **OUTSIDE the camp**:

"And Moshe took the tent, and set it up OUTSIDE the camp, FAR AWAY from the camp, and called it the OHEL MOED, then anyone who would seek God would need to go to the tent OUTSIDE the camp (see Shmot 33:7).

From this perspective, the very placement of Moshe's tent OUTSIDE the camp, and the fact that God would now only speak to him at this location served as a constant reminder of Bnei Yisrael's 'down-graded' status.

[Note as well that Moshe's tent outside the camp is now named the OHEL MOED - the tent of meeting (between God and Moshe) - a name that will later be used to describe the Mishkan itself!]

With this background, we can better appreciate the thematic importance of the wording of God's opening commandment for Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan (in Sefer Shmot):

"And you shall build for Me a MIKDASH, so that I can dwell in THEIR MIDST..." (see Shmot 25:8)

Building the Mishkan would enable the shechina to return to the camp of Bnei Yisrael.

[In regard to whether this commandment was given before [Ramban] or after [Rashi] chet ha'egel - see TSC shiur on Parshat Terumah. This thematic connection between the Mishkan and the story of chet ha'egel certainly supports Rashi's (and Chazal's) approach.]

Recall as well that even though God had answered Moshe Rabeinu's plea to forgive their sin (see Shmot 33:12-19) by invoking His thirteen attributes of Mercy (see 34:1-7) - the "shechina" did not immediately return. Rather, in order to re-establish their special covenantal relationship with God, Bnei Yisrael are instructed to first build the Mishkan (see 35:1-6).

Therefore, during that entire interim time period, i.e. the six months between Moshe's descent from Har Sinai on Yom Kippur and the Mishkan's dedication on Rosh Chodesh Nisan, any conversation between God and Moshe took place in the OHEL MOED located OUTSIDE the camp.

[See Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Chizkuni on 33:7!]

Until the Mishkan would be assembled, the existence of Moshe's special OHEL MOED outside the camp served as constant reminder to Bnei Yisrael that were still not worthy for God to dwell in their midst.

Thus, the location of the Mishkan at the center of the camp, and God speaking to Moshe from its innermost sanctuary (see Shmot 25:21-22) would certainly serve as a sign to Bnei Yisrael that God had forgiven their sin, and that they have returned to their pre-"chet ha'egel" status.

THE BIG DAY!

With this background, it becomes clear why the highlight of the day of the Mishkan's dedication would be the return of God's "shechina" to the camp, a sign not only of their divine pardon, but also an indication that they could now continue their journey to Eretz Canaan.

Therefore, the FIRST time that God will speak to Moshe from the Mishkan (in contrast to his OHEL MOED outside the camp) will certainly be a major event in the eyes of the nation - for it will indicate that their construction of the Mishkan has achieved its primary goal!

From this perspective, the final pasuk of Parshat Naso becomes the most important pasuk of the entire Parsha! It is no longer a misplaced 'add on'; rather it should be understood as the highlight of the entire chapter - for it describes how God spoke to Moshe from the KAPORET in the OHEL MOED (see 7:89) - the key event that everyone was waiting for!

Note how this interpretation completes our parallel to the other two descriptions of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan in Shmot and Vayikra:

* In Sefer Shmot, the Torah described the return of the shechina (i.e. the KAVOD and ANAN /see 40:34) at the conclusion of MOSHE RABEINU's assembly of the Mishkan.

There, the Torah focuses on the leadership of Moshe Rabeinu, and how God answered his prayer (see 34:8--9!)

* In Sefer Vayikra, the Torah describes how the "shechina" word return by the offering of special korbanot (see 9:5-6 & 9:24).

There, the Torah focuses on the function of Aharon, and the kohanim, who serve as the liaison between God and His people.
[*"b'zchut" Aharon*]

* Now, In Sefer Bamidbar, the Torah describes how the shechina returned due to the leadership of the Nsiim.

But why were these korbanot offered by the Nsiim so instrumental towards the return of God's shechina?

To answer this question, we must return to our analysis of Sefer Bamidbar (as discussed in our introductory shiur).

A SHOW OF UNITY

Recall how the first ten chapters of Sefer Bamidbar describe Bnei Yisrael's preparation for their journey from Har Sinai to Eretz Canaan. During this journey it was the job of the Leviim to transport the Mishkan, while the twelve tribes both encamped and traveled with the Mishkan at their 'center' (see Bamidbar 10:11-24).

On the day of the Mishkan's dedication, the leaders of the twelve tribes - i.e. the Nsiim - took a joint initiative to donate six transport wagons - that would help the Leviim carry the Mishkan during their journey (see 7:1-9). Together with the presentation of these six wagons, each and every "nasi" also offered a special korban - in honor of the dedication of the Mishkan (see 7:10).

Instead of each leader trying to outdo the other [ever hear of such a thing?], to our surprise - each NASI offered the exact same korban, and they all presented their korbanot to Moshe Rabeinu together on that very first day.

For some reason, God instructed Moshe not to accept them all on the same day; rather Moshe was commanded to set aside a special day for each NASI (see 7:11!). Furthermore, the Torah dedicates the next eighty psukim to detail the precise korban offered by each leader on each consecutive day!

One could suggest that this show of 'unity' was so important, that the Torah found it worthwhile to detail each and every korban, even though they were all identical!

BACK TO DAY ONE!

It would have been significant enough had the Torah only repeated each korban; but to 'top it off', the Torah continues in 7:84-88 by providing us with a tally of all the offerings brought over those twelve days (like we don't know how to multiply!).

But note carefully how that summary unit begins:
"This was the dedication of the MIZBAYACH, on **THE DAY that it was anointed**, by the NSIIM of Israel... (7:84)

The Torah has returned to 'Day One' of the dedication ceremony, reminding us that all of these korbanot were first presented jointly by all the Nsiim - on the very first day (i.e. when the Mishkan was first dedicated):

This could provide us with a reason for this summary. The Torah does not need to teach us multiplication; rather it is emphasizing once again how all of these korbanot were presented to Moshe Rabeinu by ALL of the NSIIM on the very first day - in a show of national unity!

As these psukim describe what transpired on the first day of the Mishkan's dedication - the Torah concludes (in 7:89) by telling us how this joint offering enabled the most significant event on that day to take place. From now on, God would speak to Moshe from the Ohel Moed **within the camp** of Bnei Yisrael! It may have been this show of unity that inspired God to allow His "shechina" to return to dwell in their midst.

The nation (*"b'zchut" Moshe*) had shown their worthiness to return to their status as God's special nation - chosen to represent Him before the eyes of all mankind.

United in purpose, Bnei Yisrael were now ready to leave Har Sinai with God in their midst, to take the challenge of establishing God's model nation in the Promised Land.

[See also Rashi on Shmot 19:2 "*va'yichan*" everyone as one person with one heart...], describing how Bnei Yisrael first encamped at Har Sinai.]

[*"b'zchut" ha'Nsiim*]

It may be that it was because of this collective effort, where everyone acted together towards a common goal, while keeping their own identity; that God found it important to give each Nasi his own special day. By acting with unity, each Nasi was now able to shine as an individual. It may have been that understanding of the important balance between the nation and the individual - that made room for God to 'join along' with His nation, as they prepared for their next stage of Redemption!

That show of unity was only short lived in Sefer Bamidbar, as the nation returned to divisiveness as soon as they left Har Sinai (see chapters 11 thru 25 in Sefer Bamidbar). Nonetheless, that short moment of unity can remain as inspiration for future generations, especially to their leaders, and especially at times of historic potential.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT NASO – 2nd DAY SHAVUOT OUTSIDE ISRAEL • 7 SIVAN 5780 MAY 30, 2020 • VOL. 27 NO. 25

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

The Problem of Slippers

“The Children of Yisrael will encamp, each person by his banner, according to the insignia of their fathers’ household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting they will encamp.” (2:1)

Ryan Ramsey was the captain of the nuclear submarine HMS Turbulent between 2008 and 2011 and once spent 286 days at sea without seeing the sky. He shared an 84 meter steel tube with 130 people. In the middle of the total lock-down, the BBC screened an interesting interview with him. Two of his tips resonated with me. The first was to be careful to attend to one’s personal appearance. It’s all too easy in a time of lock-down to let one’s personal grooming slip, which can lead to a general decline. For an observant Jew this translates as not *davening* in your slippers. Man is created *b’tzelem Elokim*, and he preserves that *tzelem* by preserving *tzurat ha’adam*.

The other tip he had was to maintain a routine. *Shigra* – or routine – is a double-edged blade. One of the great Rabbis of a previous generation (please let me know who it was), when visiting his son in his Yeshiva, would first of all go and check his son’s bedroom rather than go and see how his son was learning in the Beit Midrash (study hall).

Personal order is both a barometer and a cause of application and organization. It also accelerates time. The monotony of living in a submarine or locked up at home is reduced by routine – hours become links between set activities – hours become days. Days become months. It’s exactly that same difficulty we find when we try to remember a specific day three years ago that helps us deal with monotony. It’s a G-d-given amnesia that helps the

mind deal with boredom. I have no problem whatsoever remembering the day of my wedding, or my son’s first haircut, but try me on a specific day two months ago!

A slave’s life is very monotonous, but it’s also very regular. In one sense, it’s very relaxing. You just keep doing the same thing every day without thinking. When the Jewish People left Egypt and experienced the most memorable event of any life time – the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai – they were challenged by an event that could easily destabilize them. And a few million people wandering around an uncharted desert after the comfort and stability of the fleshpots of Egypt could have been a disaster waiting to happen.

“The Children of Yisrael shall encamp, each man by his banner according to the insignia of their fathers’ household, at a distance surrounding the Tent of Meeting shall they encamp.” (2:1)

This week’s Torah portion goes into great detail about the precise location and the job of each one of the priestly tribes. There is a hint here that order and routine are fundamentals of both sanity and the ability to serve our Creator appropriately – and that starts with not wearing slippers for *davening*.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Shabbat 79-85

I'm Just Dying to Learn Torah!

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, "The teachings of the Torah are not established within a person unless he "kills himself" for the Torah."

Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish bases this teaching on a verse that seems to call out "Explain me!" The Torah states, "This is the Torah [law]: If a man dies in a tent, anyone entering the tent and anything in the tent shall be ritually impure for seven days." (Bamidbar 19:14) Why in the world is the Torah mentioned in this verse? As Rashi explains in Masechet Berachot (63b), "Where do we find that a person should die *in tents of Torah*?" And why should it be that a person needs to "kill himself over the Torah" in order for the Torah's teachings to be established within him?

Reish Lakish's teaching is cited as halacha by the Rambam in his Mishneh Torah. The Rambam writes: "The words of Torah will not be permanently acquired by a person who applies himself feebly to obtain them, and not by those who study amid pleasure and an abundance of food and drink. Rather, one must give up his life for them, constantly straining his body to the point of discomfort, without granting sleep to his eyes, or slumber to his eyelids."

The Rambam continues, writing: "Our Sages alluded to this concept, 'This is the Torah, should a man die in a tent,' " meaning that the Torah cannot be permanently acquired except by a person who gives up his life in the tents of wisdom. (See Bamidbar 19:14.)

He notes an additional hint from our Sages to the utmost importance of extreme dedication to Torah study: "A covenant has been established that anyone who wearies himself in Torah study in a house of study will not forget it quickly. Anyone who wearies himself in Torah study in private will become wise, as the verse states in Proverbs (11:2), 'Wisdom will come to one who is modest.'" (Rambam, Laws of Torah Study 3:12)

The Rambam explains the phrase "killing oneself for the Torah" in two main ways. One approach is that a person must invest great effort in his search for understanding the Torah. In this light, our Sages taught that if a person will say that he has discovered the meaning of a Torah matter without investing extreme effort — do not believe him." (Megillah 6b)

In addition to this investment of great effort, the Rambam explains a second approach to the concept of "killing oneself for Torah" in order to truly internalize and establish it within oneself. True acquisition of the Torah requires that a person deny himself life's comforts that may serve as distractions or

tempt him to waste valuable time and energy from his Torah study. As our Sages taught, "Eat bread with salt and drink water in measure." (Pirkei Avot 6:4)

I'm reminded of a story I once heard from a Rosh Yeshiva regarding the topic of "dying in a tent of Torah." I will tell it as I remember it, but I request that the reader not judge it too harshly and not "try it out at home," as they say. A businessman with limited time for Torah study was constantly interrupted by visitors and calls in the evening during the time he had set aside for his precious Torah study. "What can I do?" he wondered. His solution was to ask his wife to tell all callers that he was unavailable because he was "dead." Of course, as soon as the callers gasped and started offering condolences, she quickly explained that during the limited time he carved out for himself for Torah study, he "killed himself," as it were, in order to avoid any outside distractions.

Allow me to add an additional point on the topic of physical comfort/acquisition of Torah wisdom. Although the teaching in Pirkei Avot clearly indicates the need for avoiding comfort or luxury that might prevent personal growth in Torah, it is important to learn the *entire* teaching in Pirkei Avot. "Such is the way of Torah: Bread with salt you shall eat, water in small measure you shall drink, and upon the ground you shall sleep; live a life of deprivation and toil in Torah. If so you do, 'Fortunate are you, and good is for you' — 'Fortunate are you in this world, and it is good for you in the World-to-Come.'" (Tehillim 128:2)

I once asked my revered teacher, Rav Moshe Shapiro, *zatzal*, if this teaching means to serve as an absolute decree that a Torah student or scholar must avoid the beauty and pleasure that Hashem created in the world. He answered in the name of the Gaon from Vilna that the warning in Pirkei Avot is a directive for a student of Torah who is in need of finding the correct path to follow in order to learn Torah. In the words of Pirkei Avot, "This is the path (*darkah*) of the Torah." However, he concluded, this is not so for a Torah scholar who has already firmly and steadily travelled on a successful path of Torah acquisition. This category of Torah scholar shares the Creation in all its beauty and pleasures. Regarding him we are taught, "Fortunate are you in this world, and it is good for you in the World-to-Come."

• Shabbat 83b

Questions

1. What is the significance of the number 8,580 in this week's Parsha?
2. Besides transporting the Mishkan, what other service performed by the *leviim* is referred to in this Parsha?
3. On which day did Moshe teach the command to send those who are *temeim* (ritually impure) out of the camp?
4. Name the three camps in the desert.
5. Who was sent out of each of the camps?
6. A person stole from another and swore that he was innocent. If he later confesses his guilt, what are his obligations?
7. Who determines which *kohen* receives the gifts that must be given to the *kohanim*?
8. What does the Torah promise a person who gives *matnot kehuna*?
9. Why are the verses about *matnot kehuna* followed by the verses about the *sotah*?
10. Why is the *sotah* given water from the holy basin?
11. What does the *kohen* do to the hair of a *sotah*?
12. When a *sotah* who is guilty of adultery drinks the water, she dies in a very specific fashion. What happens to the adulterer?
13. Before the name of G-d is erased, the *sotah* has the option either to admit guilt or to drink the water. Does she have a third option?
14. What are *chartzanim*? What are *zagim*?
15. What sin does a *Nazir* commit against himself?
16. Where was the cut hair of a *Nazir* placed?
17. A *kohen* should bless the people "with a full heart". What word in the Parsha conveys this idea of "a full heart"?
18. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d bless you and guard you"?
19. What is the meaning of the blessing "May G-d lift up His countenance upon you"?
20. The Tribe of Yissachar was the second tribe to offer their gifts. Why did they merit this position?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 4:47-48 - It is the number of *leviim* between ages thirty and fifty.
2. 4:47 - Singing and playing cymbals and harps to accompany the sacrifices.
3. 5:2 - The day the Mishkan was erected.
4. 5:2 - The camp of the Shechina was in the center, surrounded by the camp of Levi which was surrounded by the camp of Yisrael.
5. 5:2 - A *metzora* was sent out of all three camps. A *zav* was permitted in the camp of Yisrael but excluded from the two inner camps. A person who was *tamei* from contact with the dead had to leave only the camp of the Shechina.
6. 5:6-8 - He pays the principle plus a fifth to the victim, and brings a *korban asham*.
7. 5:10 - The giver.
8. 5:10 - Great wealth.
9. 5:12 - To teach that someone who withholds the gifts due the *kohanim* may eventually bring his wife to the *kohanim* to be tried as a *sotah*.
10. 5:17 - The holy basin was made from the mirrors of the righteous women who left Egypt; the *sotah* strayed from the example set by these women.
11. 5:18 - He uncovers it.
12. 5:22 - He dies a similar death.
13. 5:27 - Yes, she can refuse both: She can refuse to admit guilt and also refuse to drink the water. (After the Name of G-d is erased, she loses this option.)
14. 6:4 - *Chartzanim* are seeds. *Zagim* are peels.
15. 6:11 - He abstains from enjoying wine.
16. 6:18 - It was placed on the fire under the pot in which the *nazir's shelamim* offering was cooked.
17. 6:23 - "Amor."
18. 6:24 - "May G-d bless you" that your property may increase, "and guard you" from robbery.
19. 6:26 - "May He suppress His anger."
20. 7:18 - The Tribe of Yissachar was well versed in Torah. Also, they proposed the idea **that** the *nesiim* should offer gifts.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Where's The Gold?

King David famously said that the Torah is more precious than gold. In one passage he writes, “The Torah of Your mouth is better for me than thousands of gold (*zahav*) and silver” (Ps. 119:72). Later in that chapter he exclaims, “I love Your commandments more than *zahav* and *paz*” (Ps. 119:127). In yet another passage, King David writes, “They (the Torah’s Laws) are more desirable than gold and much *paz*” (Ps. 19:11). In these few passages we have so far encountered two words for “gold” – *zahav* and *paz*. In addition to these two words we will find another three words in the Bible that refer to “gold”: *ketem*, *charutz*, and *betzer*. This essay will explore these five different words for “gold” and discuss whether or not they are truly synonymous. Various commentators suggest that these different words connote different places in which gold is found and/or different hues of gold.

The most common Hebrew word in the Bible for “gold” is *zahav*. Along with its Aramaic counterpart *dahav* – which is explained by the Hebrew ZAYIN morphing into an Aramaic DALET – this word appears more than four-hundred times throughout the Bible. The Talmud (*Yoma* 44b-45a) states that there are seven types (or grades) of *zahav*: regular *zahav*, *zahav tov* (“good gold”), *zahav Ophir* (gold imported from Ophir, I Chron. 29:4), *zahav mufaz* (explained below), *zahav shachut* (“beaten gold,” I Kings. 10:16-17 and II Chron. 9:15-16), *zahav sagur* (“fine gold,” this term appears eight times in I Kings 6-7, II Chron. 4 and 9), and *zahav parvaim* (“gold from a Parvaim,” or “gold whose color resembles a cow’s blood,” II Chron. 3:6). A similar tradition about seven shades of gold in King David’s blonde hair can be found in *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Tikkun* #70). [For an alternate list of the seven types of gold, a list that replaces regular *zahav* and *zahav Ophir* with *zahav tahor* (“pure gold”) and *zahav mezuakak* (“refined gold”), see *Shemot Rabbah* 35:1.]

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) explains that the root of the word *zahav* is ZAYIN-HEY (or perhaps even just the letter ZAYIN alone), which means “this,” because

something shiny and sparkling like “gold” calls attention to itself. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) similarly explains that *zahav* is derived from the biliteral root ZAYIN-BET which means “flow,” because when one refines gold the unalloyed gold simply “flows” away from its impurities. [Interestingly, though *zahav* literally means “gold,” Ibn Janach and Radak write that the word *zahav* can be borrowed to refer to anything pristine and clean (see, for example, Jer. 51:7 and Zech. 4:12).]

A popular etymology of the word *zahav* argues that it is a contraction of the phrase *zeh hav* (“give this”) – an allusion to gold’s role as legal tender. This explanation is cited by such luminaries as *Peirush HaRokeach*, Rabbi Todros Abulafia (1247-1306), Rabbi Binyamin HaRofeh Anav (a brother of the author of *Shibbolei HaLeket*), the Maharal of Prague (1520-1609), Rabbi Eliezer Papo (1785-1828), and more.

The Torah describes the Pishon River as circumscribing the Land of Havilah, reporting that the especially good gold is found there (Gen. 2:11-12). In explaining those passages, Nachmanides explains that this “good gold” is found in the sand and on the shores along the Pishon River. Based on this, Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) writes that the word *zahav* is related to the word *zav* (“flow”), and denotes the type of gold found near “flowing” bodies of water.

Havilah is probably named after a person named Havilah son of Joktan (son of Eber), who was a brother to someone named Ophir (Gen. 10:29, I Chron. 1:23). The name Ophir also appears as a place name for the location from which both *zahav* (I Chron. 29:4, I Kings 9:28; 10:11; 22:49, and II Chron. 9:10) and *ketem* (Isa. 13:12, Ps. 45:10, Iyov 28:16) are brought. Rabbi Pinchas Eliyahu Horowitz (1765-1821) writes in his *Sefer HaBrit* that Ophir refers to the South American country Peru, where large deposits of gold are supposedly concentrated in the Andes Mountains and in the many rivers that flow across its

jungles. Others identify Ophir as someplace on the Indian subcontinent, with the legendary lost city of Atlantis, with the Phillipines, and even with Australia. Nonetheless, the accepted understanding amongst scholars is that Ophir is somewhere in the Arabian Peninsula or in the Horn of Africa (i.e. Ethiopia). Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (1832-1909) identifies *zahav Ophir* as “white gold” (perhaps platinum or an alloy of gold and some other white metal), which he claims is found in Russia. The American archeologist William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971) identifies Ophir with Punt in Somalia.

The word *paz* appears nine times in the Bible. Although most commentators understand *paz* to mean “gold” (as Radak to Ps. 19:11 writes, it specifically means “good and unadulterated gold”), others disagree. Ibn Ezra (to Ps. 19:11 and Song of Songs 5:11) explains *paz* as a “precious stone,” while Rabbi Moshe David Valle (1697-1777) explains that *paz* refers to “royal jewels” that happened to be made out of gold. As Rabbi Wertheimer puts it, *paz* is the best type of gold in the world and is the most rare form of gold.

Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the two-letter root PEH-ZAYIN – from which the word *paz* is derived – refers to “fast movement.” Thus, when the Bible describes King David as being *mifazez* before the Holy Ark (II Sam. 6:16), this refers to him furiously dancing in honor of the Torah. Based on this understanding of the root, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the word *paz* refers to extremely pure gold that shimmers in the sunlight as though it were dancing. He also explains that the adjectives *mufaz* (I Kings 10:18), *me’ufaz* (Jer. 10:9), and *ufaz* (Dan. 10:5) all refer to shiny gold that has a glistening and glowing glimmer. [Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 49:23-24) notes that there ought to be a connection between *mifazez* and *paz*, but confesses that he does not know what it is. See also Rabbi Hirsch’s comments to Ps. 19:11.]

Others (like Ibn Janach and Radak) explain that the trilateral root PEH-ZAYIN-ZAYIN is separate from the word *paz*, and refers to “strength.” They explain *mifazez* as referring to the “strength” and “vigor” with which King David danced before the Ark. These commentators explain that when these words are used to describe gold, *mufaz* and *ufaz* refer to gold that is especially unalloyed and thus “stronger” than other, adulterated types of gold. Radak explains that *me’ufaz* means “from [a place called] Uzaf,” which is identified by Targum as Ophir (possibly because the ZAYIN of Uzaf is interchangeable with the REISH of Ophir).

The word *ketem* appears nine times in the Bible. Although Ibn Janach first defines *ketem* as “jewels,” he concludes that it more likely means “gold,” which is how most commentators explain the word. Like *zahav*, *ketem* is also said to be imported from Ophir, and according to Dr. Chaim Tawil the very word *ketem* is said to be derived from the Akkadian word *kutimmu* and the Sumerian word *kudim* which mean “goldsmith.” [Interestingly, Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055-1138) writes that the word *ketem* in Iyov 31:24 actually means “silver,” even though he agrees that elsewhere it is a synonym for “gold.”]

Alternatively, *ketem* is derived from the Hebrew root KAF-TAV-MEM, which also means “stain” or “dirtied” (for example, see Jer. 2:22). Rabbi Pappenheim writes that both meanings of *ketem* are actually derived from the monoliteral root KAF, which refers to “hitting.” He explains that KAF-TAV specifically refers to “beating something through repeated rubbing,” such that *ketem* refers to especially pure gold whose malleability allows it to be beaten into something very thin. Since such fine gold is especially eye-catching, the term *ketem* was borrowed to mean anything which noticeably sticks out, such as a “stain” or “dirt” on an otherwise pristine background.

The Modern Hebrew word *katom* (for the color “orange”) is derived from the same root as *ketem*, and the Modern Hebrew word *tapuz* (for the fruit “orange”) is a contraction of the Hebrew phrase *tapuach zahav* (literally, “Golden Apple”) – an expression found in Proverbs 25:11. The English word *orange*, by the way, is related to the Hebrew/Aramaic word *etrog/trunga*, as both are derived from the Old Persian word *narang* and refer to various citrus fruits. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the initial *o* in the English form of this word is probably influenced by the place name Orange, famous for the House of Orange.

The word *charutz* in the sense of “gold” appears six times in the Bible. This word is actually the standard Phoenician (Tyrian) and Akkadian word for “gold,” and so some scholars claim that Hebrew borrowed the word from those languages. On the other hand, Rabbi Marcus explains that since the root CHET-REISH-TZADI refers to “cutting/digging with a sharp instrument,” gold is called *charutz* because it is dug up from underground. Indeed, Rabbi Wertheimer writes that the word *charutz* refers to gold found by “digging.” Rabbi Yishaya of Trani (1180-1250) explains that gold is called *charutz* because the pursuit of gold makes people “diligent” and “industrious,” which are alternate meanings of the Hebrew word *charutz*.

Psalms 68:14 refers to something called *yerakrak charutz* ("greenish *charutz*"), which Menachem Ibn Saruk explains as a type of gemstone. However, Dunash Ibn Labrat and others explain that *charutz* refers to "gold" (see also *Tosafot* to *Nedarim* 32a) such that this term references greenish gold (perhaps a reference to electrum or gold alloyed with cadmium). Indeed, Radak also defines *charutz* as "gold," while noting that some say that *charutz* refers to gemstones.

The Israeli archaeologist Dr. Shmuel Yeivin (1896-1982) wrote (under the pen name Shebna) that the words in question reflect different *colors* of gold (usually depending on what other metals are present in the alloy). In fact, the Mishna (*Yoma* 4:4) teaches that on normal days the fire pan used for the incense in the Holy Temple would be made of greenish gold, but on Yom Kippur, they would use one made of reddish gold. Yeivin thus explains that *zahav* is yellowish gold, *ketem* is reddish gold, and *charutz* is greenish gold. That *ketem* refers to something reddish is hinted to in the Mishna (*Niddah* 8:1), which uses the word

ketem as a "blood stain." Indeed, gold alloyed with copper – known as "Red Gold" or "Rose Gold" – boasts a reddish color. Additionally, Yeivin argues that the word *paz* focuses on the shine/luster of gold, without regard to its particular hue.

The last word in our discussion is *betezer*. The debate concerning this word centers on a specific verse in which Eliphaz the Temanite tells Iyov that man's best hope is to repent "and then you would have a *betezer* on the ground and *Ophir* (i.e. gold) with the rocks of the brooks" (*Iyov* 22:24, see also *Iyov* 22:25, 36:19). Ibn Janach, Radak, and Gersonides explain that the word *betezer* in this context refers to "gold." However, other commentators disagree with this assessment and explain the word differently: Ibn Ezra writes that *betzer* is "silver," while Rashi (following Menachem) writes that it is a "stronghold." Rabbi Isaiah of Trani explains that *betezer* does not actually mean "gold," but is still related to gold because it refers to the crude ore which, when refined, can yield gold.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rklein@ohr.edu

LOVE OF THE LAND

A Mountain of Names

"The Tzidonim call Mount Hermon 'Siryon,' and the Emori call it 'Senir'."
(*Devarim* 3:9)

"To Mount Sion, which is Hermon."
(*ibid.* 4:48)

Hermon, Siryon, Senir and Sion.
Four names for one mountain!

"To teach you the praise of Eretz Yisrael, that four different nations took pride in having some connection with it, each of them demanding that the mountain should bear the name that it gave it."
(*Sifri*, quoted by Rashi)

subscribe @ ohr.edu

to receive Ohrnet directly to your email each week

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Blessing Two – The Thrill of Being Jewish

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for not having made me a non-Jew.”

The next three blessings are unique. With the exception of the Morning Blessings, there is no other time when we recite what can only be described as negative blessings. In Judaism, a blessing is recited over what we have, not over what we do not have. For example, a person who is about to eat an apple does not thank G-d for not having given him a potato. And yet we now have three blessings, one after the other, that all begin with the words, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, for not having made me...” More than that, two of the blessings seem to be phrased in a derogatory fashion. “Blessed are You... for not having made me a non-Jew,” and “Blessed are You... for not having made me a woman.” How are we to understand why the Sages deemed it correct to compose the blessings in the negative? And why did the Sages feel that it was appropriate to speak in such a language about non-Jews and women?

Many, many years ago I posed these questions to Rabbi Uziel Milevsky. Rabbi Milevsky was a senior lecturer at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem and was one of the most erudite, insightful and humble people that I have merited knowing. He began by explaining that the most sublime activities in this world are doing the Will of G-d. And, specifically, keeping G-d’s commandments and learning His Torah. G-d granted the obligation and the responsibility to do so to the Jewish People. That is the reason why the Jews are called the Chosen Nation. The ability to live a life that reflects the teachings of the Torah is truly an indescribable gift. But, it is not always such an easy thing to do. The daily obligations of a Jew are myriad and complex. The Code of Jewish Law is a primer that stretches from pre-birth to post-death. There is not supposed to be even a moment in our day that does not reflect the depth of our relationship with G-d. Rabbi Milevsky emphasized that it is the potential for such infinite profundity that can make our constant striving to connect to the Divine either inestimably exhilarating or just as equally discouraging. The numerous commandments are tools that have been given to us to help us try to overcome the seductive attractions of this

physical world. And, when we are successful, we are connecting ourselves to G-d in the most absolute way possible. But, for someone who finds that immeasurably difficult to do, the commandments can also be regarded as hurdles and barriers to living “the good life” in this world. It is hard to remain focused all the time on what G-d wants. And it is definitely hard to ignore the many corporeal delights that the Torah forbids us to enjoy.

How does this connect to the blessing of thanking G-d for not having made us a non-Jew? In spiritual terms, perhaps the most basic definition of who I am is that I am a Jew. I belong to G-d. And my task in this world is to live my life accordingly. Therefore, when I recite the Morning Blessings, which are – in part – a description of who I am, one of my first obligations is to thank G-d for having given me the most wonderful gift of all: To proclaim that I am a Jew.

However, just because G-d made me a Jew doesn't mean I can behave however I want. Being Jewish carries with it an enormous responsibility to adhere to the ways of the Torah. If I were to declare that I am Jewish by saying, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, *for having made me a Jew,*” it would mean that I would be testifying to the fact that I live my life as a Jew without deviating from any of my responsibilities. The problem is, I do not always live exactly as G-d wants me to. I am not always so careful about the things that I do or the things that I say.

When I make a blessing, I am bearing witness that what I am saying is absolutely true. By proudly making a blessing proclaiming that I am Jew, it would be as if I were telling G-d, “Look at me! Look how wonderful I am!” And, perhaps, that is exactly what G-d would do. It is conceivable that my blessing would be the direct cause of an extremely exacting Divine “investigation” into the way that I live my life. In effect, G-d would do exactly as I asked – plus more. He would not just *look* at me. He

would *scrutinize* all of my actions as well, to see if they really match up to my overconfident declaration that I am a Jew.

In the spiritual realms, being Jewish is not just being born Jewish. Being Jewish is *living* Jewish.

And that leaves us with a most challenging dilemma. On the one hand, my being Jewish is possibly the most fundamental definition of myself, a definition that cannot be ignored. My being Jewish absolutely requires recognition within the Morning Blessings, to proclaim with joy and unbridled passion that I am a Jew. To acknowledge the One Who made me Jewish. And to recognize what an enormous privilege it is. I am not looking down on anyone else. Perish the thought. Rather, I am “counting my blessings” and offering up thanks. But, on the other hand, to do so directly might be the cause of an unwanted Divine accounting. Therefore, the Sages, in their infinite wisdom, composed a blessing that is an indisputable fact: “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d,

King of the universe, for not having made me a non-Jew.”

Obviously, the only conceivable meaning of the blessing is that I am a Jew. But the Sages understood that when it is said in the negative form it becomes a statement of fact, rather than a brash, defiant announcement that could spark an unwelcome Divine reaction.

Finally, let me conclude with a very important point made by Rabbi David HaLevi Segal, who was known as the Turei Zahav (or the Taz for short) after his seminal work on the Code of Jewish Law and one of the most eminent authorities in sixteenth century Poland. He writes that this blessing should not be taken to mean that non-Jews are considered to be of a lower status than Jews. This would be a serious and unfortunate mistake. Every category of being has a powerful purpose in this world, and each one is an absolutely necessary creation. I bless G-d for not creating me as one of the other necessary categories, but, rather, as a Jew – because of the unique role the Jew has in serving the Creator.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Torah assigns the exact Mishkan-related tasks to be performed by the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments.

If a person, after having sworn in court to the contrary, confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbor's property, he has to pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a *kohen*.

In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple. A *kohen* prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from

the Temple floor and a special ink that was used for inscribing G-d's Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her, but, rather, it brings her a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death.

A *Nazir* is one who vows to dedicate himself to G-d for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people. The Mishkan is completed and dedicated on the first day of Nissan in the second year after the Exodus. The prince of each tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the Mishkan, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings

TORAH AND EMUNAH!

by Rabbi Reuven Zail

At the heart of the festival of Shavuot we encounter two concepts that form the foundation for all of Jewish life: Torah and Emunah (faith). In our prayers we refer to Shavuot as "*Zman Matan Torateinu*," the time of the giving of our Torah, and on this date, historically, Hashem spoke the first two of the ten commandments directly to our entire nation, imbuing us with Emunah that to this day forms part of our spiritual genetic make-up.

What is it about Torah and Emunah that touches our souls and draws us closer to Hashem, opening us up to a real and more meaningful relationship with Him?

Both Torah and Emunah share a unique feature. While we are able to experience and grasp the wisdom, beauty and depth of a passage of Talmud, at the same time our sense of attainment might slip away as we begin to realize that Torah is also completely beyond us in scope and magnificence. Similarly, when we give thought to the astounding creativity and design in nature, we become inspired and acknowledge our Creator with a firm belief, and yet moments later this Emunah might remain elusive and beyond our grasp when facing difficult challenges in our own lives and in the world around us.

Both Torah and Emunah elevate us and fill us with meaning and direction. Yet there are times when we engage with them that leaves us with an uncomfortable

sense of our own limitations. The Nesivos Shalom writes: "There is no end to Emunah, and in the same way that Hashem is infinite, it follows that there is no end to our belief in Him as well." There will always be levels of faith higher and more subtle than the levels we attain. The process of acquiring Emunah is always one of seeking and aspiring. It's the quest for Emunah that gives us satisfaction. "*Vedorshei Hashem lo yachseru kol tov*" – "And those who seek Hashem will not lack any goodness." (Tehillim 3 34:11)

So too this is true when we engage in learning Torah. The quality of wanting to know more, of being a "*mevakesh*," is what distinguishes great Torah scholars from lesser ones, who might even have more knowledge, sharper minds and broader intellects. When we study Torah with a sense of wonder and anticipation, we open up our understanding, while simultaneously exposing our intellectual shortcomings. Our curiosity reminds us that there is more to know and we might not have the capacity to know it! "*Yismach lev, mevakshei Hashem*" – "The heart will rejoice when seeking Hashem." (Divrei Hayamim 16:10)

May our Shavuot experience this year, in uncertain times, help us appreciate that, although we might be left with unanswered questions and gaps in clarity, our effort to acquire Torah and Emunah gives us the joy, security and sense of purpose that we all desire.

**WISHING ALL OUR READERS
A CHAG SHAVUOT SOMAYACH
A FESTIVE SHAVUOT HOLIDAY!**

ASK!

Your Jewish Information Resource by the Ohr.edu team – www.ohr.edu

The Torah of Eretz Yisrael

From: Aharon

Dear Rabbi,

Why wasn't the Torah given in the Land of Israel? Since the Land was given by G-d to the Jews to be a holy nation in their own Holy Land, wouldn't it seem to make more sense for them to receive the holy Torah in such a holy place as Israel or Jerusalem?

Dear Aharon,

This is a challenging question, and there are several possible answers.

It is true that Israel is the Holy Land and that the quality of Torah and mitzvah observance there is considered higher than anywhere else in the world. The Talmud (Bava Batra 158b) states that even the air of the Land of Israel is conducive to spiritual growth.

However, for this reason G-d gave the Torah to the Jews before entering the Land in order to prepare them for the elevating experience of entering it, and to ensure that the Land would not be defiled by non-observance upon their arrival. Thus, one reason for giving the Torah in the wilderness was in order to ready the People for the special quality of the Land.

Another reason was to indicate that even though the ultimate place for Torah learning and observance is the

Land of Israel, nevertheless, it is not dependent on the Jewish People being in the Land, and even in exile they connect to G-d through the Torah. In fact, this implies that the importance of the Torah precedes that of the Land. While it's best for the Jewish People to be committed to Torah in the Land, it's better to be committed to Torah outside of Israel than to be in Israel with no Torah.

Additional reasons mentioned in the sources as to why G-d did not give the Torah in Israel but rather in the wilderness: To teach that just as the wilderness is ownerless and freely accessible to all, so too the Torah is free and open to all (Tanchuma); just as the wilderness is materially sparse and simple, so too the Torah is found among people who refrain from luxuries and are humble (Bamidbar Rabbah 1); just as the wilderness is traversed by all, so should a Torah scholar be willing to be plied for his wisdom by all (Eruvin 54a).

Another interesting idea is that if the Torah had been given in Israel, the Jewish People might come to think that the teachings of the Torah are just for them, or non-Jews might think that they have no connection to it. So G-d gave the Torah outside of Israel to indicate that also non-Jews may be inspired by the truths of the Torah.

Eventually, it was the Jewish People who received the Land of Israel, from which they are to be a light among the nations and from Zion shall go forth the Torah. But the fact that the Torah was originally given outside of Israel enables its universal message to be heard by all.

OHRNET magazine is published by OHR SOMAYACH Tanenbaum College

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

Love of the Land, written by RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt"l • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE

NEWMAN • Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO z"l / DANIEL FREEDMAN

© 1992 – 2020 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved • This publication contains words of Torah.

Please treat it with due respect. Editor's disclaimer: Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to be a source for halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified halachic authority for a ruling.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Sotah and Sanctity

The Torah introduces the topic of *Sotah* by describing the infidelity of the disloyal wife as “straying from the path, and committing a breach of trust against [her husband].” The word for “stray” – *tisteh* – from which the term *Sotah* derives, is related to the term “*shoteh*” – fool – one who deviates from the path of rationality. Every moral lapse involves a mental aberration, for no one sins unless he has lost the true perspective.

When she is brought to the Kohen, the first step in the *Sotah* procedure for determining her guilt or innocence involves taking “holy water” – water that was sanctified in the *kiyyor* which was used to wash the hands and feet of the Kohanim – and putting dust from the floor into the water. The dust is not to be stirred and mixed into the water.

By contrast, the ashes from the red heifer – used to purify individuals who have had contact with a corpse – are mixed completely into the water. In that context, the individual to be purified is reminded that although his body will ultimately decay and revert to dust, his true essence is “living water.” (Bamidbar 19:17)

But the *sotah*, a woman who is suspected of sexual and moral impurity, is to be reminded that although her earthly body is dust, and she is gifted with the power of motherhood and with natural urges, she herself is analogous to “holy water.” Her true essence is moral holiness. Her sensual bodily energies, whose nature is like that of dust, are to form only the *external* side of herself. She is to bear them and rule over them, but they are never to mix with her and muddy her purity.

Now, this dust that is placed in the water is taken from the ground on which the people stand in G-d’s sanctuary. This is in recognition that superhuman demands are not made of the people; the earthly sensual side forms the floor, the foundation upon which life is established. The water is drawn from the *kiyyor*, the vessel fashioned from the mirrors donated by the Jewish women who thronged at the entrance to the Sanctuary. The symbolism in the water she drinks is to remind this woman how far she has strayed from the ways of those ancestors, and the sanctity expected of her. While a woman who drinks the *sotah* waters has not necessarily committed adultery, she has been seen in seclusion with another man, and this is sufficient to warrant the reminder of the higher expectations of her modesty.

Citing the Ramban, Rav Hirsch notes that the *sotah* procedure is unlike any other legal institution of Biblical law, in that it depends on a direct miracle – after the woman drinks the *sotah* waters, her bodily reaction will reveal her guilt or innocence. This shows that G-d is the Witness and Judge of every Jewish couple that enters into the union of marriage. He is present in every marriage, because sexual purity is the root of spiritual and moral welfare. Thus, a question concerning the purity of sexual life must be brought before the all-seeing G-d.

▪ Sources: Commentary, Bamidbar 15:31