

Potomac Torah Study Center
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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 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.

Mazel-Tov to Rabbi Yehoshua and Serena Singer of Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD, on the Bar Mitzvah of their oldest son, Nachi, on Shabbat Behaalotecha. Mazel-Tov also to grandparents Hyam & Naomi Singer and Dr. Gary & Helene Goodman; and to siblings Tehilla, Kalman, Chana Bracha & Meir. Zoom speeches will be next Wednesday afternoon.

Naso has a series of seemingly unrelated topics – census of the Gershon and Merari families (Levi), eliminating those with tzaraat from the camp, Sotah (a woman whose husband accuses her of adultery), Nazir, blessings of the Kohenim, and gifts of the leaders of the tribes for the Mishkan. All these topics, however, have a unifying topic, one especially relevant to what has been going on in the world recently.

A series of E-mails on Wednesday of this week shocked me. A mob of Palestinians and sympathizers gathered along La Cienega Blvd., three blocks north of Beverly Blvd. (West Hollywood), a five minute walk from where my family lived for a decade when I was young. The mob threatened and harassed people at a Sushi restaurant and asked people to identify who there was Jewish. One friend sent me a link to a video that had appeared on television; another sent me a link to an article in the Los Angeles Times. It looked like a return to Germany in the early 1930s.

Rabbi Aaron Lerner, chief Hillel Rabbi at UCLA (whom I have met through Yeshivat Chovevei Torah) sent an E-mail message to Hillel supporters in which he reported that many Jewish students at UCLA felt fear as Jews. Rabbi Lerner added that many of these students also question whether Israel deserves their support while it is bombing Gaza and killing some civilians along with terrorists. I sent a lengthy reply to Rabbi Lerner. I recalled my days at UCLA and Berkeley in the 1960s and 1970s, when I never experienced any anti-Semitism or fear of identifying as a Jew. Those of us who grew up during this period would have been shocked to imagine that Jewish students only a few decades later would feel fear and experience anti-Semitism. I also shared that I was very disappointed that Jewish students would feel torn between supporting Israel and Palestine, especially when the terrorists had sent thousands of rockets with explosives all over Israel. What is happening that Jews are blaming the victims of a murderous attack from defending themselves from terrorism?

As we often find, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, sums up the common theme in Naso better than anyone else. The last word of the blessing of the Kohenim is "Shalom." This word means a lot more than peace. It also conveys completeness, perfection, harmony, and integrated diversity. For example, God is willing to have His name obliterated to make peace between husband and wife. A person jealous of the closeness between the Kohen Gadol and Hashem may take on the restrictions of a Nazir for a period of time and experience much of the life of a Kohen Gadol. The focus of the blessings of the Kohenim is bringing God's attention and positive closeness to the people, ultimately bringing shalom (peace and much more). Although the leaders of the various tribes had different desires in bringing their gifts to the dedication of the

Mishkan, they ended up with identical gifts, with no leader trying to outdo any other, thereby promoting peace among the tribes with their gifts.

Naso brings the story of the generation of the Exodus almost to its high point. All the preparations are in place, and very soon (sixth aliyah of Behaalotecha), B'Nai Yisrael will leave the base of Har Sinai and set out for what was to have been the final, short march to enter Eretz Yisrael. At this point, yes, all the details show the unity and peace in the camp and among all of B'Nai Yisrael. If they had kept this positive spirit, they would have reached the land 38 years earlier than they did. What happened? As we shall see next week, the unity and peace among the Jews fell apart almost immediately when they left the base of Har Sinai. Peace brings wonderful dividends, while disunity brings destruction and death.

How fitting that news reports state that Israel and the Arabs in Gaza have agreed to a cease fire to go into effect on Friday (before Shabbat). From long experience, we know that we must see the cease fire and test it before believing that it will hold. However, a cease fire is a lot more fitting for Naso than for Behaalotecha, so for this reason and many others, hopefully we can return to more normal lives.

According to Internet sources, the current population of Jews is approximately 14 million, of which 6.9 million (approximately half) live in Israel. I suspect that all Jews have relatives and friends who live in Israel. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, visited Israel many times – to see his many close relatives, visit and travel around the country, and shop for items of interest to his congregants. (Rabbi Cahan ran an incredible Jewish bookstore and Judaica market for most of his adult life.) He shared stories about Israel and his family there almost daily, and he helped solidify the connection between each of us and Israel for our generation and for our children and grandchildren. During times of crisis, we must all realize and remember that Israel protects us Jews more than we Jews (especially in the Diaspora) protect Israel.

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I have mentioned numerous times that my close friend Rabbi Yehoshua Singer helps me by reading and improving my weekly message almost every issue. Mazel Tov to Rabbi Singer, his wife Serena, son Nachi, and the rest of their family on the upcoming Bar Mitzvah of their first born son, Nachi. His Torah portion is Behaalotecha (next Shabbat), and the speeches will be on Zoom next Wednesday afternoon. Am HaTorah is unfortunately a small shul, so there is no way to include all the family and friends of the Singer-Goodman family in the neighborhood for Shabbat. With his wonderful yichus, Nachi is on the way to making his mark in our world.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Menachem Mendel ben Chana, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, 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, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, 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.

Drasha: Naso: Possessive Nouns
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 2000

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

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.

Naso: Selfish and Selfless Kedusha

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015, 2021

The book of Bamidbar begins with the organizing of the Israelite camp with the mishkan at its center. In Parashat Naso, the Torah now turns to what it means to be outside the mishkan, to be in the camp, and to continue to orient oneself to God's presence. This emerges, I believe, from the section relating to sotah, the wife suspected of adultery. This section addresses how discord between husband and wife, and the suspicion of infidelity, creates a status of tumah, impurity. This situation, this tumah, is paradoxically brought to the Temple to be resolved, so that purity can be reestablished, and that husband and wife can return to the camp and once again live their lives with the proper orientation towards God's presence.

The parasha of nazir continues this theme. It is a possible solution of how to connect to God and a life of kedusha outside of the mishkan. The solution of the nazir is to attempt to recreate the mishkan in the camp, at least for him or herself personally. Like the Kohen Gadol, he or she does not come into contact with the dead, even with his or her closest relatives. He or she not only refrains from intoxicating drink, as do Kohanim, but does not even eat grapes or mixture of grape products, and – unlike the Kohanim – allows his or her hair to grow wild. These last two extensions ensure that he or she will be cut off from outside society, so that s/he can live in a protected mikdash-reality while outside the mikdash.

However, this form of kedusha is not the ideal. First, it is a kedusha of denial, or rejection. It is not a kedusha that taps into the most creative part of our tzelem E-lohim and seeks to give it expression. But beyond that, what makes this kedusha so problematic, is that it is a kedusha that is self-serving and self-indulgent. It is all about one's own spiritual growth and reflects no sense of responsibility to the larger society or to bringing that kedusha into the real world. This is why I would argue the nazir brings a chatat, a sin-offering. The Gemara and rishonim debate whether one should infer from this that the nazir is a sinner, or whether the nazir is kadosh (and the sin is that s/he terminated the nezirut). I would argue that he or she is both. The nazir is kadosh, but it is a type of a kedusha that is somewhat sinful, because it is completely self-serving.

Thus, the nazir's pursuit of kedusha is not only more restrictive than that of the Kohanim, but – more to the point- lacks the dimension of service that the Kohanim embody. Even the Kohen Gadol, who does not exit the Temple when a relative dies, is present in the Temple so that he can serve the people by doing the avodah and by representing them to God. Kohanim are shluchei didan, our representatives in the Beit HaMikdash; the nazir represents only himself. It is for this reason that when Amos condemns the people, he distinguishes between the nazir and the navi: "and you have made the nazirs drink wine, and you have commanded the prophets – 'do not prophesy!' (Amos 2:12) – the nazir can only be corrupted, while the navi serves a greater function – to admonish and direct the people, so that when one opposes the navi, it is by silencing him and preventing him from doing his duty and his role.

The problematic nature of the nazir is most highlighted in the prohibition of contact with the dead. Coming in contact with the dead, on the one hand transmits the highest form of tumah. At the same time, a person so ritually defiled, and even a

corpse itself, is allowed in the camp of the Levites, the closest camp to the mikdash. Dealing with the dead is both a very physical, this-worldly experience, and is the most profound encounter with death and one's mortality. Hence it is in strong contrast to a pursuit of kedusha and its focus on the spiritual, non-physical realm and in opposition to the immortality of God, the source of all life. On the other hand, dealing with the dead is one of the most profound mitzvot. It is a chesed shel emet, a true selfless kindness, and the helping of the ill, the dying, and those who are dead is one of the most significant and weighty mitzvot that one can perform. The two cases of dealing with the dead in the Torah are exactly in the performance of such mitzvot – Moshe's carrying of the bones of Yosef, and the people who were impure and could not bring the korban pesach, and who became impure because, as Chazal tell us, they had been burying the bodies of Nadav and Aviyahu.

Thus, the nazir's removing himself from the contact with the dead is the removing of himself from the most basic act of engagement with this world, with people, and with their most human needs and concerns. Chazal could not accept this complete divorcing of oneself from the world, and hence stated that even the Kohen Gadol and even the nazir must become impure for a met mitzvah, a corpse whom no one is burying. When there is no one else, then no one can forswear his obligation to respond to this profound human need.

It is for this reason that there exists a special category called nezirut Shimshon. To explain how Shimshon could have been a nazir and nevertheless regularly come in contact with the dead, Chazal stated that there exists a type of nezirut known as nezirut Shimshon which allows one to become tamei li'met, impure to the dead. On the face of it, this is a very bizarre phenomenon, since the prohibitions of the nazir are always bundled together and there is no clear explanation why coming in contact with the dead should be allowed to be an exception. Given the above, however, the explanation is obvious: Shimshon's nezirut was tied into his leadership of Bnei Yisrael: "because a nazir to God the child will be from the womb, and he will begin to bring salvation to Israel from the Philistines." (Shoftim 13:5) A nezirut of Shimshon is a nezirut of being a shofet, being a leader. It is not a self-serving religious pursuit, but a religious leadership. And to lead the people, one needs to be mtamei li'metim, one needs to get one's hands dirty in the physical world, in the suffering, the losses, and sometimes the wars of the people. One cannot remain completely pure in such circumstances, but this is undoubtedly the highest calling.

This kedusha of the nezirut of Shimshon is thus like the kedusha of the Kohen, a kedusha of kehuna, literally, of service. It is a kedusha of being present in the mikdash, but also of serving the people even when one is in the mikdash. It is a kedusha of bringing the kedusha of the mikdash to the outside world and of the focusing much of one's activities outside the mikdash (Kohanim only served 1 week out of 24 in the mikdash) – "they will teach Your laws to Jacob and Your teachings to Israel." And hence the parasha of the nazir is immediately followed by the parasha of birkhat Kohanim, of the priestly blessing. For it is the role of the Kohanim to connect to God, but ultimately to bring God's blessing to the Jewish people.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2015/05/selfish-and-selfless-kedusha/>

Upon Waters of Peace

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2021 Teach 613

The Kohein had been asked to do the unthinkable. He looked up with shock at his mentor who had given him the directive; "To erase G-d's holy name into the water." The Kohein waited for some clarification. Perhaps he had heard wrong or misunderstood; but, no. His mentor nodded firmly in the affirmative. This was the mitzvah. "Erase G-d's holy name into the water." And so, the Kohein dutifully obeyed.

The Kohein of the story is not alone in his surprise. The Talmud too wonders why G-d would have his name erased, an act that would normally be considered a forbidden act of disgrace. The Talmud explains that it is a unique mitzva for the case of Sotah, the woman who compromised her reputation by going privately with a man, after her husband warned her not to be alone with that man. Now her marriage was in jeopardy. Hashem says, "Erase My holy name into the water to try to restore peace between husband and wife."

Reading the story of the Sotah one might get the idea that the name of G-d is erased to give the water its potency. When the woman suspected of immoral conduct will drink it, if she is guilty, it will affect her like a poison, and she will die. But the Talmud does not see the mitzva to erase G-d's name as needed for retribution. Hashem can have the water do its work even without the erasing of His name. The tradition is clear. The erasing is to restore peace between husband and

wife. The erasing is being done for the woman who is innocent, the woman who will live even after drinking the water. It will prove her innocence and restore peace in the home.

One might have expected a more passive position be taken regarding this couple. Their marriage is a bit rocky. He forbade her from socializing with a specific man; she disobeyed. Why not let them wallow in their own mess? Yet, at this very juncture G-d steps in and says, "I value their marriage. I would like to restore peace. This is so important to Me that I am willing to undergo disgrace to try." Perhaps when this couple sees how committed G-d is to try to restore peace, they too might become a little more giving and willing to swallow a perceived insult or indiscretion.

The lesson of the Sotah is not really about the sinful woman. The lesson of Sotah is about how much Hashem values even a rocky marriage. Hashem takes a vested interest in restoring peace, and so should we.

Interestingly, the Talmud does not wait for dramatic cases of Sotah to implement this lesson. The Talmud (Eiruvim 63) writes that, "It is prohibited to hang out where a husband and wife are trying to get some quiet time together, even if she is a Niddah." The phrase, "Even if she is a Niddah," indicates that this has nothing to do with infringing on intimate time. It is referring simply to the chit-chat of husband and wife, a conversation that probably goes something like this:

"So, Shprintza, how was your day?"

"It was pretty good, but the pea soup burned."

He listens as she talks; he talks as she listens. They have a conversation. And the Talmud prohibits us from infringing because that conversation increases their emotional closeness with each other. It promotes marital peace and is therefore sacred.

So, we see that G-d has a special interest in restoring peace in a marriage. "It is worth it - to promote a marriage- even if it means to suffer a disgrace." And we see that the Talmud warns us not to infringe on the private time of a husband and wife, because that simple conversation bonds them and promotes their marriage. What is left is for us, in our own marriages, is to take the lessons to heart. "It is worth it - to promote my own marriage- even if it means to suffer a disgrace." And the friendly conversation that does not seem important, is actually quite valuable. Because promoting peace in marriage- including your own- is important.

The 30 day Jewish Marriage Challenge is now available. Try it, at <http://www.teach613.org/30-day-jewish-marriage-challenge/#more->

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rav of Southeast Hebrew Congregation, White Oak (Silver Spring), MD and Director of Teach 613.
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Imagining Peace: Thoughts on Parashat Naso

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"May the Lord lift up His countenance toward you, and grant you peace." (Numbers 6:26)

When bombs are exploding and missiles are flying, it is difficult to imagine peace. When children are taught to hate and suicide/homicide murderers are called "freedom fighters," it is difficult to imagine peace. When all sides list their grievances and do not listen to the grievances of others, it is difficult to imagine peace.

But if we do not try to imagine peace, peace will not come. So let us imagine, in spite of all the "facts on the ground", that peace must be achieved. What voices can guide us? What words can be a salve to our wounds? How can we put the dream of peace into real terms?

In 1919, Rabbi Benzion Uziel, then a young rabbi, spoke to a conference of rabbis in Jerusalem. He stated: "Israel, the nation of peace, does not want and never will want to be built on the ruins of others....Let all the nations hear our blessing of peace, and let them return to us a hand for true peace, so that they may be blessed with the blessing of peace." In 1939, when Rabbi Uziel became Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, he delivered his inaugural address in Hebrew, and then added words in Arabic. He appealed to the Arab community: "We reach our hands out to you in peace, pure and trustworthy....Make peace with us and we will make peace with you. Together all of us will benefit from the blessing of God on His land; with quiet and peace, with love and fellowship, with goodwill and pure heart we will find the way of peace."

Rabbi Uziel's words reflected the wishes of the tiny Jewish community in the land of Israel in those times. His words still reflect the wishes of the Jewish community of Israel today. Hawks and doves alike would like nothing better than genuine, secure peace. They would like Israeli society to be free and happy, without the specter of warfare and terrorism, without the constant threat and reality of Arab military, economic and political attacks. They would like to live in harmony with their Arab neighbors-and to trust that their Arab neighbors will want to live in harmony with them.

But Rabbi Uziel's words need to be stated and restated by the leaders of Israel. The idea of reaching a mutually rewarding peace must be put into words, must be repeated, must be believed and taught. Will words create peace? Not immediately. But they will set the foundations of peace. The words will help transform the dream of peace into a framework for peace.

In 1919, at the Paris peace conference following World War I, the Emir Feisal, one of the great Arab leaders of the time, made the following comments about the Jewish desire to return to their ancient homeland in Israel: "We Arabs...look with the deepest sympathy on the Zionist movement....We will wish the Jews a most hearty welcome home....I look forward, and my people with me look forward, to a future in which we will help you and you will help us, so that the countries in which we are mutually interested may once again take their places in the community of civilized peoples of the world."

If more Arab leaders – especially Palestinian leaders – could find the strength to say these words, the dream of peace might be brought closer to reality. Israel wants most what the Arab world has for the most part not given: a sign of acceptance, a sign of welcome, a sign that Jews have a right to live in peace and tranquility in the land of Israel. The people of Israel need to hear what Emir Feisal said: welcome home; we will help you and you will help us. Together we will raise our peoples to great cultural and economic heights.

It is encouraging that a number of Arab countries have been making peace with Israel. All involved will benefit enormously from peaceful relations.

If we are to imagine peace, we must look beyond the hatred, war and violence; we must look to a better day...and we must pray that the Almighty will bless the people of Israel--and all good people everywhere--with genuine peace.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, <https://www.jewishideas.org/imagining-peace-thoughts-parashat-naso> **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website [jewishideas.org](https://www.jewishideas.org) or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.**

Rationalism vs. Mysticism: Book Review

Book Review by Steve Lipman *

Rationalism vs. Mysticism: Schisms in Traditional Jewish Thoughts. Natan Slifkin. The Torah and Nature Foundation. 557 pps. \$39.95.

Rabbi Slifkin, who has earned a reputation, depending on your philosophical-theological leanings, as an annoying gadfly, in parts of the Orthodox world, or as a valuable beacon of clear thinking, in other parts, now offers a helpful guide to the widening divide between the dominant segments of Orthodox Judaism.

The British-born rabbi, whose well-documented expertise in the relationship of natural science to Jewish thought reflects his larger perspective on fundamental Jewish beliefs, now focuses on the philosophical gap between large parts of the Orthodox community.

"There are two fundamentally different worldviews regarding such things as epistemology (the nature of knowledge and where it comes from) and the relative roles of natural law and the supernatural. These are the rationalist and the (for want of a better word) mystical approaches," Rabbi Slifkin writes. "The rationalist approach has a rich heritage to it ... it was dominant amongst the Rishonim in many ways ... but has declined over time to the point that there are great Talmudic scholars of today who do not realize that it even existed."

The rabbi's definition of the two camps:

"Rationalists believe that knowledge is legitimately obtained by man via his reasoning and senses, and should be preferably based upon evidence/reason rather than faith, especially for far-fetched claims. Mystics are skeptical of the ability of the human mind to arrive at truths, and prefer to base knowledge on revelation, or -- for those who are not worthy of revelation -- on faith in those who do experience revelation."

Rabbi Slifkin notes that "mystics often demand belief in the absolute truth of every word in the Talmud, along with the Tannaic and ultimately divine origins of the Zohar, and many other texts. Rationalists, on the other hand, usually dispute the divine origins of the kabbalistic texts, and also maintain that not every part of the Talmud is divinely-inspired wisdom....The gulf between the two approaches is vast and unbridgeable."

Rabbi Slifkin experienced hareidi rejection firsthand. About two decades ago, several of his groundbreaking books about aspects of natural science were banned by several hareidi rabbis.

"In many Orthodox Jewish communities today," Rabbi Slifkin writes, "there is simply no place for the rationalist approach... Sages sometimes possessed incorrect beliefs about the natural world; this was widely acknowledged by the Rishonim, and yet this view gradually became less accepted to the extent that today there are some people who are in denial that any rabbinic authority ever subscribed to such a view."

"On the other hand," he writes, "the rationalist approach is championed in Modern Orthodox communities, where it is considered to be the preferred approach."

The accepted wisdoms in some mystical circles often bring claims that counter opinions, or citations of hazal that support them, are forgeries, fabrications, the Orthodox form of "fake news." Instead of the honored "70 Faces of Torah," just a single one.

Often citing the opinions of Maimonides, a pre-eminent advocate of the rationalist path, Rabbi Slifkin mentions "the position of Rambam and many others that the Sages of the Talmud were not infallible in matters of science," whereas, in many hareidi circles, "great Torah scholars are presumed to know much more than merely the texts they have studied."

Included in Rabbi Slifkin's wide swath of Jewish principles upon which rationalists and mystics part company are gematria, netilat yadayim, the size of a kezayit, prayer and Kaddish, Torah study, the plagues of Egypt, miracles and "wonder" rabbis, angels and demons, the inherent sanctity of the land of Israel and the Jewish people and the Hebrew language, the function of mitzvot, segulot and mezuzot, sun's path at night, and infallibility of the Zohar and aggadata...in other words, nearly everything of a significant hashkafic and halakhic basis in which a believing Jew believes.

A representative sampling of the rabbi's thoughts:

* on yeridat hadorot, which "is often assumed today to be axiomatic and fundamental to Judaism, and supported by the full gamut of classical sources. In fact, the Talmud is ambivalent: there are a number of sources which indicate that certain earlier generations were superior, but there are also a number of sources which state that certain later generations were equal or even superior."

* on Daat Torah, the notion "that the ultimate guidance on all areas of life -- even social and political decisions with no obvious connections to Torah. The contemporary concept of 'Daat Torah' is very different from traditional ideas about the wisdom and authority of rabbis. There are

numerous historical forces involved in the evolution of the contemporary notion of Daat Torah ... while it is a source of wisdom, supplementary knowledge and experience is also useful."

* on ayin hara (the "evil eye."): "In Orthodox circles today, it is widely believed that a 'rational' view of ayin hara is that it means stirring up Divine judgment of others via jealousy, whereas a mystical, non-scientific view is that it involves some form of energy being emitted from the eye."

Though Rabbi Slifkin makes clear where his sympathies lie, he buttresses his opinions with a wealth of documentation that makes his book weighty in the literal and figurative sense; he express understanding of mystical fears, and does not overtly attack mystical sensibilities;" it is ... important," he writes, "not to undermine treasured beliefs of the community ... each society will have its own approach to which beliefs are a treasured component of their identity....

The rationalist approach is a Pandora's Box, which can potentially cause more problems than it solves, and which, on a communal level, demonstrates a tendency to weaken zealous passion for Torah observance and sacrifice... The leaders of the hareidi community have decided that, regardless of how many Rishonim and Aharonim espoused the rationalist approach, they do not want it legitimized in their community."

As Rabbi Slifkin points out, the current battle between forces of rationalism and mysticism are an outgrowth of the trenchant divide between the once-emergent, then-minority hasidic movement and the entrenched and dominant "Litvak" approach to Jewish life and Torah learning, whose austere expression of fealty to Judaism fostered the growth of the more-emotional, less-text-oriented hasidic movement. The latter, of course, emphasized joy in daily life and allegiance to wonder-performing rabbis, rather than a cold connection to strict halakha.

Philosophically, the rabbi argues, the hasidim won. Their mystical hashkafa is unquestionably and unquestioningly taught now in most hareidi yeshivot, even the proudly Litvish, yeshivish, mitnagdish, "black hat" ones. Even worse, Rabbi Slifkin contends, alternate interpretations of acceptable norms of Jewish behavior or of Jewish belief are rarely taught, suggesting that only one approach exists.

The rabbi's book, though encyclopedic in its scope, noticeably omits such recent, and current, social issues as abortion, feminism, and approaches to homosexuality. Also absent are references to the year-long divide over reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic; opposition to such measures as protective masks, vaccines and social distancing after the book's writing; Rabbi Slifkin sheds light on the thinking of largely hareidi (i.e., mystical) opponents of life-saving medical practices, whose behavior and high death rate (the worst example were the tragic deaths at the Lag B'Omer celebration at Meron) has given the frum community a collective black eye.

The book offers limited concrete advice on how to reverse the anti-intellectual trend, but offers a necessary insight into why it is taking place. And he puts the topic into the context of Orthodox thought, which traditionally has not mandated -- beyond Rambam's widely accepted Thirteen Principles -- required beliefs. "Scripture does not list required beliefs ... there is no Code of Beliefs, no Ten Commandments of Belief. ... Building up the community does not refer to matters of belief, but rather to practical acts -- the study of Torah, the fulfillment of mitzvot, the loyalty to the halakhic community. Being a Jew is primarily about how one lives, not how one thinks. And that, in turn, is why rationalists and mystics can co-exist.... The goal of this book is not to delegitimize the mystical approach ... [it] seeks to give voice to the rationalist approach."

Rabbi Slifkin's book is likely to earn wide opprobrium, if not an outright ban, in parts of the hareidi community. But that will be familiar territory for him.

* Staff writer at the New York Jewish Week, 1983-2020.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/rationalism-vs-mysticism-book-review>

Naso Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

[Rabbi Singer's Dvar Torah was not ready by my deadline. I hope to be able to have it attached and available for download at PotomacTorah.org by late morning or early afternoon.]

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Naso: Reread
by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

"A person should learn most what their heart draws them to," say our Sages, but how exactly do you know what that is? With the never ending stimulation of information, we're pulled in every direction. The Mad Men know that with the right bells and whistles, our hearts can be drawn to almost anything. So how do we know what our heart desires to learn? You can notice what you reread. Anybody can read a facebook post, an article or even a book. Most of what we read, we read once and then place it back on the shelf and find it again when we reorganize. But some books we reread again and again. Not because someone told us we should but because something inside of us wanted to plumb the depths of this particular avenue of study. On the first read, we see it as the words of the author. But on the second read and third read, we experience the words as our own. The texts that we reread are the words that we know exist inside of us but could never find the way to express. Those texts provide a window to our own soul.

The same goes for music. We have the capabilities to listen to any song we want. But usually there are a few pieces that we just keep coming back to. Those would be a good place to start on the quest for self knowledge.

For myself, some Talmudic chapters I've reread more than others. Although I'm not currently a big novel reader, I've read My Name is Asher Lev by Chaim Potok more than three times. (I know someone who has read Harry Potter And The Sorcerer's Stone 30 times.) The first movement of Beethoven's Fifth and Frederick Delius's Appalachia rank high on the list of music I just keep coming back to.

But what about God? What does He repeat? What does He like to hear over and over?

It seems that He loves and treasures the gifts that the chiefs of the 12 tribes brought to the Mishkan. The Torah recounts every single item that each chief brought even though they all brought exactly the same thing. It could have just said it once and said they all brought these items but no. The Torah (a usually terse and efficient wordsmith) repeats it all on loop. God just wants us to hear this again and again. And again. And again.

This is good for us because we can see what God loves. As Rashi tells us, no leader of the tribes tried to outdo each other. No one tribe tried to "get in good with God" by showing up another one of their brothers. It's that attitude of seeing everyone coming together for the sake of their mission rather than self aggrandizement that God loves to hear about. In our world, such a thing can be very rare indeed, so it's definitely something that bears a reread.

Shabbat Shalom!

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
Naso: Three Priestly Blessings

Birkat Cohanim

Aaron and his descendants, the kohanim, were commanded to bless the Jewish people with three special blessings:

"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is how you must bless the Israelites. Say to them:

May God bless you and watch over you.

May God's Presence enlighten you and bestow grace to you.

May God lift His face toward you and grant you peace.” (Num. 6:23-26)

The third blessing in particular needs clarification. What does it mean when it says: *יִשָּׂא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ* — that God will “lift His face toward you”?

The Need for Divine Favor

While the first blessing refers to God's assistance in the material realm, the second blessing speaks of enlightenment and spiritual attainments. Greater enlightenment, however, brings with it greater responsibility. As we grow in knowledge and wisdom, we are expected to display a higher level of moral sensitivity. Our thoughts should be purer, our character traits more refined, and our lives more ethical.

If one takes into account the resulting moral demands, one may become apprehensive and even discouraged. In order to assuage this concern, the kohanim bestow a third blessing: “May God lift His face toward you.”

To “lift one's face” is a Hebrew idiom meaning to give special consideration or leniency. The Torah cautions a judge, for example, not to “lift his face” toward one of the litigants (Lev. 19:15). The judge must be careful to avoid giving the impression of favoring one side. The other litigant may feel that the case is already lost and lose heart.

The kohanim bless us that, despite the expectations which come with a higher spiritual level, we should not lose heart. God will be lenient, taking into account the physical reality in which we live.

One may, however, feel embarrassed or uneasy with this Divine leniency. Therefore, the final blessing closes with the gift of peace — peace of mind. “And may He grant you peace.”

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 62.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/YITRO_65.htm

The Pursuit of Peace (Naso 5777)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

The parsha of Naso seems, on the face of it, to be a heterogeneous collection of utterly unrelated items. First there is the account of the Levitical families of Gershon and Merari and their tasks in carrying parts of the Tabernacle when the Israelites journeyed. Then, after two brief laws about removing unclean people from the camp and about restitution, there comes the strange ordeal of the Sotah, the woman suspected by her husband of adultery.

Next comes the law of the Nazirite, the person who voluntarily and usually for a fixed period took on himself special holiness restrictions, among them the renunciation of wine and grape products, of haircuts, and of defilement by contact with a dead body.

This is followed, again seemingly with no connection, by one of the oldest prayers in the world still in continuous use: the priestly blessings. Then, with inexplicable repetitiousness, comes the account of the gifts brought by the princes of each tribe at the dedication of the Tabernacle, a series of long paragraphs repeated no less than twelve times, since each prince brought an identical offering.

Why does the Torah spend so much time describing an event that could have been stated far more briefly by naming the princes and then simply telling us generically that each brought a silver dish, a silver basin and so on? The question that overshadows all others, though, is: what is the logic of this apparently disconnected series?

The answer lies in the last word of the priestly blessing: shalom, peace. In a long analysis the 15th century Spanish Jewish commentator Rabbi Isaac Arama explains that shalom does not mean merely the absence of war or strife. It means completeness, perfection, the harmonious working of a complex system, integrated diversity, a state in which everything is in its proper place and all is at one with the physical and ethical laws governing the universe.

“Peace is the thread of grace issuing from Him, may He be exalted, stringing together all beings, supernal, intermediate, and lower. It underlies and sustains the reality and unique existence of each” (Akedat Yitzhak, ch. 74). Similarly, Isaac Abarbanel writes, “That is why God is called peace, because it is He who binds the world together and orders all things according to their particular character and posture. For when things are in their proper order, peace will reign” (Abarbanel, Commentary to Avot 2:12).

This is a concept of peace heavily dependent on the vision of Genesis 1, in which God brings order out of *tohu va-vohu*, chaos, creating a world in which each object and life form has its place. Peace exists where each element in the system is valued as a vital part of the system as a whole and where there is no discord between them. The various provisions of parshat Naso are all about bringing peace in this sense.

The most obvious case is that of the Sotah, the woman suspected by her husband of adultery. What struck the sages most forcibly about the ritual of the Sotah is the fact that it involved obliterating the name of God, something strictly forbidden under other circumstances. The officiating priest recited a curse including God’s name, wrote it on a parchment scroll, and then dissolved the writing into specially prepared water. The sages inferred from this that God was willing to renounce His own honour, allowing His name to be effaced “in order to make peace between husband and wife” by clearing an innocent woman from suspicion. Though the ordeal was eventually abolished by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai after the destruction of the Second Temple, the law served as a reminder as to how important domestic peace is in the Jewish scale of values.

The passage relating to the Levitical families of Gershon and Merari signals that they were given a role of honour in transporting items of the Tabernacle during the people’s journeys through the wilderness. Evidently they were satisfied with this honour, unlike the family of Kehat, detailed at the end of last week’s parsha, one of whose number, Korach, eventually instigated a rebellion against Moses and Aaron.

Likewise, the long account of the offerings of the princes of the twelve tribes is a dramatic way of indicating that each was considered important enough to merit its own passage in the Torah. People will do destructive things if they feel slighted, and not given their due role and recognition. Again the case of Korach and his allies is the proof of this. By giving the Levitical families and the princes of the tribes their share of honour and attention, the Torah is telling us how important it is to preserve the harmony of the nation by honouring all.

The case of the Nazirite is in some ways the most interesting. There is an internal conflict within Judaism between, on the one hand, a strong emphasis on the equal dignity of everyone in the eyes of God, and the existence of a religious elite in the form of the tribe of Levi in general and the Cohanim, the priests, in particular. It seems that the law of the Nazirite was a way of opening up the possibility to non-Cohanim of a special sanctity close to, though not precisely identical with, that of the Cohanim themselves. This too is a way of avoiding the damaging resentments that can occur when people find themselves excluded by birth from certain forms of status within the community.

If this analysis is correct, then a single theme binds the laws and narrative of this parsha: the theme of making special efforts to preserve or restore peace between people. Peace is easily damaged and hard to repair. Much of the rest of the book of Bamidbar is a set of variations on the theme of internal dissension and strife. So has Jewish history been as a whole.

Naso tells us that we have to go the extra mile in bringing peace between husband and wife, between leaders of the community, and among laypeople who aspire to a more-than-usual state of sanctity.

It is no accident therefore that the priestly blessings end – as do the vast majority of Jewish prayers – with a prayer for peace. Peace, said the rabbis, is one of the names of God himself, and Maimonides writes that the whole Torah was given to make peace in the world (Laws of Hanukah 4:14). Naso is a series of practical lessons in how to ensure, as far as possible, that everyone feels recognised and respected, and that suspicion is defused and dissolved.

We have to work for peace as well as pray for it.

Shabbat shalom.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. See <https://rabbisacks.org/pursuit-peace-naso-5777/>

Torah Studies: Naso

Adapted by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks; From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe *

Our Sidra includes the details of the procedure through which a Sotah had to pass: That is, a woman suspected by her husband of adultery in a case where there were no witnesses. A phrase used in this context, "if any man's wife goes aside," is quoted by the Talmud to support the statement that "a person does not commit a transgression unless the spirit of folly enters him." The connection between them, superficially, lies in a play of words, the similarity in Hebrew between the words for "folly" and for "goes aside." But the Rebbe searches out a deeper parallel, resting on the traditional image which sees the relationship between the Jewish people and G d as one of marriage, and hence sees sin as a kind of infidelity. Its theme is the implication of this image for the Jew.

1. Sin and the Spirit of Folly

There is a statement in the Talmud¹ that "a person does not commit a transgression unless the spirit of folly enters him," and the text which is cited in support is a phrase from our Sidra, "If any man's wife goes aside."² The previous Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, in explaining the nature of folly,³ also makes use of the same phrase.

What is the connection between them? Why is adultery, of all the many transgressions, the one that most conclusively shows that sin is always irrational? Neither in the Talmud nor in Chassidut are texts quoted for their own sake or to make a show of learning. They are chosen with precision, to make the most comprehensive case.

In this instance, there is a superficial reason. There is a verbal similarity between "goes aside" (tisteh) and "folly" (shetut). But this does not entirely remove our puzzlement. Why quote a text at all? Many Rabbinic aphorisms are not "derived" from a Biblical text in this way. There must be some deeper connection, not apparent at first sight, between adultery and sin in general.

There is an added difficulty. Adultery is a very grave sin, carrying the death penalty. For someone to commit it is obviously irrational. There could be no grounds for choosing to do an act with such consequences. But the Talmudic saying was intended to apply to all sins, to the most minute detail of Rabbinic law, and even to a permitted act which was not done for the sake of Heaven.⁴ In however slight a way a man turns his back on G d, the saying applies: It is an act of folly. So how can we prove the folly of a minor sin from the obvious folly of a major one?

2. Sin As Infidelity

The answer is that adultery is the prototype of all sins, and this is so in two ways.

Firstly, the sin of adultery in Jewish law applies only if the woman concerned is married. A single woman cannot be guilty of it. Hence the phrase, "If any man's wife goes astray." But the Jewish people as a whole are regarded as the "wife" of G d. The bond forged between them at Sinai was like a marriage. And so every time a Jew commits a sin, however slight, he is betraying the covenant, the "marriage contract" between himself and G d. He is guilty of spiritual adultery, unfaithfulness to his Divine partner.

The Zohar⁵ relates: A philosopher once asked Rabbi Eliezer: If the Jews are the chosen people, how is it that they are the weakest of the nations? Rabbi Eliezer replied: Such is their fate. Because they are chosen, they cannot tolerate any faults, either spiritual or material. Because of their special spiritual vocation, what is pardonable in others is a sin in them. And like the heart—the most sensitive and vital of the body's organs—the slightest tremor or faltering is of life and death significance.⁶

This, then, is the connection between our verse about a wife's unfaithfulness and the maxim about the spirit of folly.

Between the Jewish people and G d is a bond of eternal mutual loyalty, a marriage of which G d is the male, the initiating partner, and we the female, the keepers of the faith. Even exile is not a separation, a divorce. It is recorded in the Talmud⁷ that the prophet Isaiah told ten men to "Return and repent." They answered, "If a master sells his slave or a husband divorces his wife, does one have a claim on the other?" (In other words they argued that with the Babylonian exile G d had effectively divorced Himself from His people and had no further claim to their obedience.) The Holy One, blessed be He, then said to the prophet: "Thus saith the L-rd, Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, whom I have put away, or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you have sold yourselves, and for your transgressions is your mother put away." In this way, it is certain that even in the temporary separation of exile, G d will not take another people for His chosen.⁸

If so, then since the faithfulness of a wife lies in her compliance to her husband's desires,⁹ when a Jew commits even a slight transgression or even a permitted but self-centered act, it is a gesture of unfaithfulness and betrayal of the Holy Wedding at Sinai.

This is why the statement of the folly of sin—every sin—is followed by the phrase from our Sidra, less as a proof than an explanation. How is it that even a trivial sin is folly? Because it brings about a severing of the link between man and G d. Why does it do so? Because it is an act of infidelity intervening in the marriage between G d and the Jew.

3. Sin as a Passing Moment

The second connection between the two statements is this: The phrase "if any man's wife goes aside" does not apply to the certain, but merely to the suspected, adulterer; where there were no witnesses to the supposed act, and it was "hidden from the eyes of her husband." This suspicion by itself makes her liable to bring an offering of barley, which was an animal food,¹⁰ a humiliation in keeping with the nature of her supposed offense.

The whole procedure is difficult to understand. If the charge against her is only based on suspicion, not proven fact, can we not rely on the presumption that most Jewish wives are faithful, and dismiss the charge? The answer is that so high are the standards of fidelity which the Torah sets for Jewish wives, that it is culpable even to lay oneself open to suspicion.

However, this stigma is short-lived. If, after the procedure for deciding whether the suspicion was well-founded, she is deemed innocent, she returns to her husband untainted; "she shall be cleared and shall conceive seed."¹¹

And this, too, is the case with the Jew who, in a spirit of folly, commits a sin. The breach he opens up between himself and G d is only a temporary one, and in the last analysis, "My glory (that is, the G dly spark within every Jew) I will not give to another."¹² No Jew is ever so distant from G d that he cannot return, untainted and pure.

This is the second connection: Just as a wife suspected by her husband is only temporarily displaced from her marital closeness, so is the separation from G d which a sin creates, only a passing moment.

4. The Fruitfulness of Return

Even though it is true that someone who attaches significance to things independently of G d denies G d's unity, and while contemplating his sins he may fall into the despair of thinking "the L-rd has forsaken me and my L-rd has forgotten me,"¹³ he must remember that he can always recover his closeness to G d.

More than this, he must remember a third resemblance between the woman suspected of adultery, and the sinner in general.

If she is declared innocent, not only is she cleared of any stain on her character; she shall return to her husband "and shall conceive seed." This means¹⁴ that if she has previously given birth with difficulty, now she will do so with ease; if she has borne girls, she will have sons as well; one authority maintains that she will bear children even if beforehand she was barren.

This hope lies before the person who has sinned. He must not fall prey to melancholy or despair. For G d has said, "My glory I will not give to another." And when he returns to G d he too will be fruitful. He will rise to the love and fear of G d. He will work towards true closeness, until "husband and wife are united," and the presence of the Divine is revealed in his soul. This is his personal redemption:¹⁵ a preface to the collective redemption which is the Messianic Age.

(Source: Likkutei Sichot, Vol. II pp. 311-314)

FOOTNOTES:

1. Sotah, 3a.
2. Bamidbar 5:12.
3. Maamar Bati Legani, 5710, ch. 3.
4. Cf. Tanya, Part I, ch. 24.
5. Part III, 221a.
6. Ibid., 221b; Kuzari, Maamar 2:36; Tanya, Part IV, ch. 31.
7. Sanhedrin, 105a.
8. Kiddushin, 36a; Rashba, Responsa, ch. 194.
9. Tana Deve Eliyahu Rabbah, ch. 9.
10. Sotah, 15b.
11. Bamidbar 5:28.
12. Isaiah 42:8.
13. Ibid., 49:14.
14. Sotah, 26a; Rambam, Hilchot Sotah, 2:10; 3:22.
15. Tanya, Part IV, ch. 4.

* Published and copyright: Kehot Publication Society

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2524380/jewish/Torah-Studies-Naso.htm

Of Angels and Porters: An Essay on Parshat Naso

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) * © Chabad 2021

The Levite families

Parshat Naso consists of several subjects, each one of which is basically self-contained: the section on the sotah (suspected adulteress), the section on the nazir, the priestly blessing, and the offerings of the princes. I would like to discuss the matter that appears at the beginning of the parshah – the service of the Gershonites.

In terms of content, the beginning of the parshah is connected to the previous parshah. After the division of the flags and the division of the camps comes the division of the Levite families, each family in its assigned place and standing. Parshat

Bamidbar ends with the service of the Kehatites, and Parshat Naso begins with a description of the service of the Gershonites and Merarites.

The description of the service of the Gershonites follows the pattern of the description of the service of the other Levite families, the Kehatites and the Merarites. The verse, "Take a census of Gershon's sons also, by their fathers' houses, by their families,"¹ is an almost verbatim repetition of the verse from the preceding parshah, "Take a census of Kehat's sons among the Levites, by their families, by their fathers' houses."² The Merarites, too, are described as being counted "by their families, by their fathers' houses."³

Clearly, then, we are dealing with one section. It is also clear that even though it seems that the same thing is repeated, each Levite house appears independently and is described uniquely. The Kehatites are characterized one way, the Gershonites another way, and the Merarites yet another way. But the question remains: Why does a new parshah begin with the Gershonites? What stands out in the case of the Gershonites is the statement "of Gershon's sons also." What is the meaning of the word "also" here?

The Kehatites have a clear designation: "This is the service of the Kehatites in the Tent of Meeting: the Holy of Holies."⁴ The Kehatites dealt with the Holy of Holies. Except in a few cases, the Ark of the Covenant was not carried by the Priests but by the Levites – specifically the Kehatites. It was their responsibility to carry the contents of the Sanctuary, the sacred vessels: the Menorah, the Table, and the Incense Altar.

The service of the Kehatites did not consist of backbreaking labor. Rather, it was work in the sense of conveying the essence of things. One's ability to bear the Ark of the Covenant was not a matter of physical strength. It is difficult to imagine how they carried the Ark of the Covenant, particularly in light of the talmudic statement that the Ark-cover's thickness was one handbreadth.⁵ To create a cover with a thickness of one handbreadth, even without including the cherubim in the equation, required a huge amount of gold, and the weight of such a cover would be well over a ton. Our sages acknowledge this, explaining that this was not an issue, as "the Ark would carry its bearers."⁶ This is an essential point. The Levite who would lift the Ark was not actually lifting a heavy load; he was lifting a supernatural object. Our sages say that "the place of the Ark is not included in the measurement,"⁷ because the Ark of the Covenant exists half in this world and half in another world. It exists between the material and the spiritual. Hence, the whole matter of carrying the Ark, the Table, and the Menorah transcended the physical carrying.

Thus, the service of the Kehatites was service of people who are on a lofty level. Indeed, the Kehatites did not remain within the limits of this service. Many eminent people came forth from their ranks. One of them was a descendant of Korach, the prophet Samuel, whose level of prophecy was equal to that of Moses and Aaron: "Moses and Aaron among His Priests, and Samuel among those who call on His name."⁸ And it is not only Samuel. Anyone who opens the book of Psalms can see that this family accomplished many other profound things: "For the leader, a psalm of the sons of Korach."⁹ Once, they carried the Ark of the Covenant; and even when they stopped carrying it, they continued to produce great people from their midst. These people continued to bear the Ark of the Covenant, if not physically then spiritually.

Unlike the Kehatites, the Merarites were simple porters. They carried the boards, the basic structure of the Tabernacle. They took the whole structure, the entire house – but not the sacred vessels. All over the world, there are people who must do the simple work, the menial labor. They could be exalted people or humble people, but in a certain respect, everything depends on them.

In this respect, the Gershonite families occupied a middle position. "This is the service of the Gershonite families: to minister and to carry."¹⁰ The Kehatites dealt with spiritual matters. Though the service of the Merarites was not intellectual work, when they were finished a house stood. They took a hammer and nails and built something. If the Merarites performed the heavy lifting, and the Kehatites dealt with the important, exalted matters, what was left for the Gershonites? The answer is that the Gershonites carried everything in between. They collected and folded all sorts of things, including various materials and ropes.

Sometimes, it is much easier to be one of the simple porters than to be a member of the Gershonites. To be sure, a Merarite could not be an angel, nor could he perform the work of the angels, but his responsibility was clear and defined, and at the end of each day he knew that he accomplished something. But a Gershonite was neither an angel nor a porter – he was in between. The Gershonites certainly engaged in holy work, but not of the highest sort, like the Kehatites. For the Gershonites, it was easy to feel that they were not accomplishing anything.

Because of this, the Torah emphasizes, “Take a census (naso et rosh – literally, raise the heads) of Gershon’s sons also,” because these people must be remembered, they must be uplifted and told, in essence, that the Kehatites did not take all the plum jobs – “Raise the heads of Gershon’s sons also.”

This is also the reason the parshah begins with the census of the Gershonites and is not connected with the preceding parshah: It is a way to give honor to the Gershonites. Instead of again sandwiching them in the middle, between the Kehatites and the Merarites, they are given the honor of beginning a new parshah.

The Gershonite families – middle people

Needless to say, this distinction between people is not limited to Kehatites, Gershonites, and Merarites; it can be applied to almost anyone. Some people are like the Kehatites who carried the holy Ark, and tend to gravitate to roles of this type in all their undertakings. Whether they pursue these roles because of some inner stimulus, or a feeling that society, or their external reality, is pushing them in that direction, they know that they are going to be something special. When a person has a passion to become a Jewish leader – if not tomorrow then sometime in the future – this is because something burns within him and gives him strength to work hard to achieve his aspirations.

Others are like the Merarites; all they want is to be a decent person, a good worker, to do an honest day’s work and earn a living. They will never do anything out of the ordinary, because no one ever discusses matters of great importance with them. Such people could perhaps achieve more, but they remain within their limits. Many people prefer not to be appointed to high positions, but to just remain an ordinary worker, because in many respects this greatly simplifies one’s life. They exemplify the Talmud’s statement, “‘You will eat the fruit of your labor; you will be happy, and it will be well with you.’¹¹ ‘You will be happy’ in this world, ‘and it will be well with you’ in the World to Come.”¹² There is “fruit of your labor” whose great virtue is “you will be happy in this world.” One knows where the work begins and where it ends, and there is no need to deal with one’s conscience. It is easy to be a decent person, to fulfill one’s responsibilities in life.

When a person does not aspire to great things, he can make for himself a peaceful, simple life. Indeed, many people live this way. One’s life remains simple even when difficulties arise, G d forbid. This does not cause inner dilemmas, and he does not struggle with G d in matters of faith. If he needs money, for example, he looks for work to increase his income.

Someone once said: The rabbi is so unfortunate! Even when he recites the asher yatzar blessing (after using the bathroom) he must make a whole production out of it, with special contemplations and mystical thoughts. Many people have no such problem; they recite automatically not only asher yatzar but also the blessings of the tefillin, winding them, kissing them, and winding them once more without paying the slightest attention to the meaning behind the process. When he comes home from work, he watches television for a while, then goes to the synagogue, attending a Torah lesson between Minchah and Maariv. Afterward, he’ll watch some more television, recite the Shema, and go to sleep. In this way, his life will be a good life. Such a person could have been one of the Merarites.

The problem is in the case of the Gershonites. A Gershonite is not on such a level that he can put on tefillin in a state of ecstatic reverie. On the other hand, he is not one of the simple people whose lives are without delusions and without pretensions. The Gershonites cannot do the lofty work of the Kehatites, nor do they want to do it; on the other hand, they are not assigned the simple, menial work either. They are in the middle, torn between the two extremes. What happens to the middle person? He cannot live like the Merarites, because if he does so, it will eat him up inside. However, he is not really on the level of the Kehatites either.

This is often the tragedy of career-long assistants and subordinates. They have enough authority and intelligence to cause a headache, but on the other hand, they do not have enough power to make major decisions. Pirkei Avot speaks of such people: “In our hands is neither the tranquility of the wicked nor the suffering of the righteous.”¹³ Suffering of the righteous – because a tzaddik undergoes a certain kind of suffering simply by virtue of being a tzaddik, accepting his suffering with love. One who decides to be wicked has a certain kind of tranquility as well. What happens to someone who is neither one nor the other? He has neither suffering nor tranquility, or alternatively, he has both suffering and tranquility. Here stands a man who is not sure why he receives these blows, and when he rests he knows that it will not last long; shortly he will be jolted awake again.

“Raise the heads of Gershon’s sons also”; give these people, who have neither the tranquility of the wicked nor the suffering of the righteous, a role in the Tabernacle. The Torah tells the Gershonite that he may never reach the level of the

Kehatites, who bear the Ark of the Covenant, for he is not cut out for that. The ease and tranquility of placing the boards on the wagon and accompanying them will likewise not be the lot of the Gershonite. Instead, the Gershonite must realize that his service will always include both service of love and service of carrying. That is his lifetime vocation.

The Gershonites receive their very own parshah, an honor that was not bestowed upon the Kehatites and the Merarites. They were given this honor because they suffer on both accounts. They suffer because they want to grow and they have insights into profound matters, but they are unable to realize this or put their lofty aspirations into practice.

“Enthroned upon the praises of Israel”

In the description of the ofanim and the chayot who raise themselves toward the seraphim, we find this same distinction. Some angels fly above, and some remain in the middle. The seraphim “were standing above, at His service”¹⁴ – they are holy angels, and they burn with His light. The ofan, who is both an angel and a wheel, must watch this seraph fly above, whereas he, the ofan, is tied down below. Had this ofan been simply a wagon wheel, this would not have bothered him. His problem is that he is both an angel trying to ascend and a wheel that cannot ascend. On the other hand, this tension is precisely what makes him holy.

The ofanim and the chayot raise themselves toward the seraphim – they, too, want to be above; they constantly try to ascend higher. Even though they are essentially porters who perform simple labor, they must somehow rise up. Hence, it is said that, in the uppermost realms, the ofanim and chayot ascend higher than the seraphim. This is not because they are on a higher level, but precisely because they live amidst this contradiction and distress.

The seraphim ask, “Where is the place of His glory?”¹⁵ because when they speak of G d, they know that however holy they may be, He nevertheless is inaccessible to them. No matter how high they ascend, G d is above and beyond. “Holy, holy, holy”¹⁶ means that G d is above, beyond, from the other side, from another reality, in a different world.

By contrast, the ofanim say, “Blessed is the glory of G d from His place.”¹⁷ Their spirituality consists of revealing G d’s presence in the physical world. The seraphim can fly around the divine chariot, and they are very holy, but they elevate neither the divine chariot nor G d. Those who elevate Him are the ofanim, the wheels that are tied down below, which will never be seraphim. From where does an ofan get such power to elevate? It is precisely because he is miserable, and precisely because he admits that he cannot be a seraph. He is tied down, relegated to a life of labor. However, the ofan still knows that he is not a simple wheel; he knows that seraphim exist and that a divine chariot exists, and thus he will always aspire to higher things.

The problem of the Gershonites is the problem of the ofanim and of all those who are in the middle. On the one hand, the Gershonite knows that he is not an angel. On the other hand, he is not a simple wheel either who is happy with his lot. The ofan of the divine chariot is an angel, and the source of his power is the fact that he endures suffering, through which he elevates and bears G d’s glory.

The essence of the Gershonites applies to mankind in general. A person has enough self-awareness to know that he is not satisfied with his lot in life. He is too corporeal to be an angel and too divine to be an animal. The significance of man as a unique creation lies in his imperfection, and it is on this account that G d does not suffice Himself with angels alone.

Before man’s creation, the angels came to G d, saying, “Does His Majesty want someone holy? Take Michael. Someone to decide halachot? Take Gabriel. Do You want someone who can generate new insights? Assign two or three angels to work on novel Torah ideas. Do You want simple creatures that eat grass and moo? You already have such creatures.”

The angels did not complain about the cows, goats, sheep, and swallows. Only when man was created did the angels have something to say. If G d had created man strictly as a holy soul, the angels might have extolled him.¹⁸ If man had been created as a kind of advanced ape that wanders around the world, this too would not have troubled the angels. But G d created man, and that is the problem. On the one hand, man was given a soul, which constantly urges him to ascend, yet on the other hand he was given a body, which constantly pulls him down. Thus, G d formed a creation that, from its very inception, has existed in a state of contradiction.

We read that G d is “enthroned upon the praises of Israel.”¹⁹ He sits on a throne of sighs, of those who say, “Master of the Universe, I am not on a very high level, but I still want to uplift myself.” These are the “praises of Israel” on which God is

enthroned. The complaints of the angels echo those of many people. These people are constantly distressed by their station in life. They are not simple farmers, because internally they would always be restless. They are not built to be angels either – so what remains? The poor fellow sits there, torn from above and from below. It would have been much better if G d had omitted the creation of man entirely, leaving a pleasant, simple world.

G d ignored the angels and created man, because He knew what they did not know. What man accomplishes with his torn inner self the angels cannot accomplish with all of their perfection. The Gershonites are neither here nor there, but G d appreciates them. Hence, the parshah begins, “Raise the heads of Gershon’s sons.” We conclude the previous parshah by stopping in the middle of the subject, to give the Gershonites the honor they deserve. This is precisely the meaning of “enthroned upon the praises of Israel.”

The Talmud relates that G d has an exalted angel upon whom we cannot gaze, who is taller than all the chayot, and who stands behind the Throne of Glory, wreathing crowns for his Maker from the prayers of Israel.²⁰ Down below, there is a Jew who is neither an angel nor a seraph, but from time to time he becomes bitterly sad and says: “Master of the Universe! I would like to do something for You.” Then this exalted angel lowers his whole stature so as to bend down and take these words, with all the mud that is stuck to them. And he is told to clean them, polish them, and make of them a crown for G d, as the Midrash says, “Israel, in whom I will be glorified”²¹ – as The Holy One, Blessed Be He, is crowned by the prayers of Israel.”²² What is written in God’s tefillin? “Who is like Your people Israel, a unique nation on earth.”²³

The concept of “Israel, in whom I will be glorified” is in one respect awful and sad. But in another respect, it is our glory as human beings, and G d glories in it.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Num. 4:22.
2. Num. 4:2.
3. 4:29.
4. Num. 4:4.
5. Sukkah 5a.
6. Sotah 35a.
7. Yoma 21a.
8. Ps. 99:6.
9. 44:1.
10. Num. 4:24.
11. Ps. 128:2.
12. Chullin 44b.
13. 4:15.
14. Is. 6:2.
15. From the Kedushah of the Musaf service on Shabbat and Yom Tov.
16. Is. 6:3.

17. Ezek. 3:12.
18. Genesis Rabba 8:10.
19. Ps. 22:4.
20. Chagigah 13b.
21. Is. 49:3.
22. Exodus Rabbah 21:4.
23. II Sam. 7:23; Berakhot 6a.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020), internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century, was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5124671/jewish/Knowledge-and-Power-Teaching-the-Awesomeness.htm

Naso: Hearing G-d's Voice

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

At the end of this week's portion, the Torah describes how G-d spoke to Moses inside the Tabernacle. Moses would hear G-d's voice as loud as it had been heard on Mount Sinai, but the sound miraculously stopped at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting; thus, no one outside could hear it.

"When Moses would come into the Tent of Meeting so G-d could speak with him, he would hear His voice." (Numbers 7:89)

Much as we might wish it, we cannot be allowed to hear G-d's voice everywhere and at all times. If we could, we would be deprived of our freedom of choice.

A world in which G-d's voice is constantly heard does not challenge its population. It was G-d's desire to create a world of Divine silence, in which, through our efforts, we can uncover G-d's concealed voice.

It is our task to take what we heard during that short period at Mount Sinai and within that small space of the Tabernacle — and each of us has heard G-d's voice somewhere and at some time, however fleetingly — and transmit it to the rest of time and space.

— From *Daily Wisdom* #1

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Naso – Maintaining Relationships

This week's parsha speaks of the laws of a Nazir. One who wishes to raise their awareness of G-d and to deepen their relationship with Him has the option of becoming a Nazir. They can make a vow to abstain from wine and from all grape products and thereby send the message to themselves that life requires sobriety, a level-headed mind, and careful reflection. This also encourages one to spend their time focused on G-d's existence, His love for us, and His expectations. By committing themselves to this focus through a vow of abstention the Nazir becomes a holier person, elevated through his service and dedication to G-d.

The standard Nazir vow lasts for thirty days. At the end of the thirty-day period, the Nazir brings three sacrifices, a burnt offering, a sin offering and a peace offering. (Bamidbar 6:14) The Rambam (ibid.) notes that the Torah does not tell us why every Nazir has to bring a sin offering upon completing their Nazir vow. He suggests that the basic understanding is that the Nazir is sinning simply by completing his Nazir vow and moving on. The experience of being a Nazir should leave one feeling uplifted and inspired. After spending a month on this holy level, the Nazir should be reluctant to return to his old ways. He should feel such a strong sense of remorse that he feels compelled to make a new vow and to be a Nazir again for another thirty days. He is bringing a sin offering as an atonement for his failure to maintain this lofty level.

This approach is difficult, as there may be a Nazir who is correct in choosing not to maintain his lofty level. Why would we say that every Nazir is sinning when he chooses to allow his Nazir status to end? Furthermore, Rash"i tells us that when one sees a Sotah (a married woman who is accused of secluding herself with another man), a person's own spiritual level may be impacted by having seen such a situation. To reinforce one's spiritual level, it is appropriate for one to become a Nazir. It is possible that such a Nazir may only need thirty days to reinforce themselves. It can be very challenging to live as a Nazir. Why does the Torah make a blanket statement and declare that every Nazir requires a sin offering?

I believe this Rambam is teaching us an important lesson about the depth and sensitivity of the human psyche. A person who is living as a Nazir experiences a more acute and clear awareness of G-d. When we think of someone all day, that person will become part of our psyche and their needs will impact everything we do. When a person is spending their time thinking about G-d, then Torah study, mitzvos and Torah philosophy will become part of one's psyche, as well. By the end of the month, the Nazir should feel that he is living with G-d in everything he does. When he returns to normal life, he feels a loss as he no longer has that heightened awareness of G-d. Even though G-d certainly understands, the Nazir himself still feels a loss.

The purpose of the sin offering is not to atone in the standard sense. Rather, the Torah is providing the Nazir with a means to maintain his heightened relationship with G-d, even after he no longer lives with that heightened awareness and focus. Giving a gift to G-d expresses his remorse and shows how much he values the relationship. He is not just saying, "Sorry to go". He is actively showing G-d that he is sorry to be leaving.

Life is dynamic, and we often have to make decisions where one option will require us to sacrifice in our relationships. The Rambam is teaching us how to maintain our relationships even in those situations. We must find a way to express our sense of loss and to show that we cherish the relationship. Simply explaining why the decision is necessary and saying we are sorry is not enough. To maintain our relationship, we need to find other ways to invest in it. Even when it is justified, a sacrifice can still take a toll. However, by making the effort to give a gift or to do something special, we show that we care. Actively showing that we cherish the relationship can make all the difference. An outward gesture can be worth more than we may think.

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Politics of Envy

Few things in the Torah are more revolutionary than its conception of leadership.

Ancient societies were hierarchical. The masses were poor and prone to hunger and disease. They were usually illiterate. They were exploited by rulers as a means to wealth and power rather than treated as people with individual rights – a concept born only in the seventeenth century. At times they formed a *corvée*, a vast conscripted labour force, often used to construct monumental buildings intended to glorify kings. At others they were dragooned into the army to further the ruler's imperial designs.

Rulers often had absolute power of life and death over their subjects. Not only were kings and pharaohs heads of state; they also held the highest religious rank, as they were considered children of the gods or even demigods themselves. Their power had nothing to do with the consent of the governed. It was seen as written into the fabric of the universe. Just as the sun ruled the sky and the lion ruled the animal realm, so kings ruled their populations. That was how things were in nature, and nature itself was sacrosanct.

The Torah is a sustained polemic against this way of seeing things. Not just kings but all of us, regardless of colour, culture, class or creed, are in the image and likeness of God. In the Torah, God summons His special people, Israel, to take the first steps towards what might eventually become a truly egalitarian society – or to put it more precisely, a society in which dignity, *kavod*, does not depend on power or wealth or an accident of birth.

Hence the concept, which we will explore more fully in parshat Korach, of leadership as service. The highest title accorded to Moses in the Torah is that of *eved Hashem*, “a servant of God” (Deut. 34:5). His highest praise is that he was “very humble, more so than anyone else on earth” (Num. 12:3). To lead is to serve. Greatness is humility. As the book of Proverbs puts it, “A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour” (Prov. 29:23).

The Torah points us in the direction of an ideal world, but it does not assume that we have reached it yet or even that we are within striking distance. The people Moses led, like many of us today, were still prone to fixate on ambition, aspiration, vanity, and self-indulgence. They still had the human desire for honour and status. And Moses had to recognise

that fact. It would be a major source of conflict in the months and years ahead. It is one of the primary themes of the book of Bamidbar.

Of whom were the Israelites jealous? Most of them did not aspire to be Moses. He was, after all, the man who spoke to God and to whom God spoke. He performed miracles, brought plagues against the Egyptians, divided the Red Sea, and gave the people water from a rock and manna from heaven. Few would have had the hubris to believe they could do any of these things.

But they did have reason to resent the fact that religious leadership seemed to be confined to only one tribe, Levi, and one family within that tribe, the Kohanim, male descendants of Aaron. Now that the Tabernacle was to be consecrated and the people were about to begin the second half of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land, there was a real risk of envy and animosity.

That is a constant throughout history. We desire, said Shakespeare, “this man's gift and that man's scope.” Aeschylus said, “It is in the character of very few men to honour without envy a friend who has prospered.”[1] Goethe warned that although “hatred is active, and envy passive dislike; there is but one step from envy to hate.” Jews should know this in their very bones. We have often been envied, and all too frequently has that envy turned to hate, with tragic consequences.

Leaders need to be aware of the perils of envy, especially within the people they lead. This is one of the unifying themes of the long and apparently disconnected parsha of Naso. In it we see Moses confronting three potential sources of envy. The first lay within the tribe of Levi. Its members had reason to resent the fact that priesthood had gone to just one man and his descendants: Aaron, Moses' brother.

The second had to do with individuals who were neither of the tribe of Levi nor of the family of Aaron but who felt that they had the right to be holy in the sense of having a special, intense relationship with God in the way that the priests had. The third had to do with the leadership of the other tribes who might have felt left out of the service of the Tabernacle. We see Moses dealing sequentially with all these potential dangers.

First, he gives each Levitical clan a special role in carrying the vessels, furnishings, and framework of the Tabernacle whenever the people journeyed from place to place. The most sacred objects were to be carried by the clan of Kohath. The Gershonites were to carry

the cloths, coverings, and drapes. The Merarites were to carry the planks, bars, posts, and sockets that made up the Tabernacle's framework. Each clan was, in other words, to have a special role and place in the solemn procession as the house of God was carried through the desert.

Next, Moses deals with individuals who aspire to a higher level of holiness. This, it seems, is the underlying logic of the Nazirite, the individual who vows to set himself apart for the Lord (Numbers 6:2). He was not to drink wine or any other grape product; he was not to have his hair cut; and he was not to defile himself through contact with the dead. Becoming a Nazirite was, it seems, a way of temporarily assuming the kind of set-apartness associated with the priesthood, a voluntary extra degree of holiness.[2]

Lastly, Moses turns to the leadership of the tribes. The highly repetitive chapter 7 of our parsha itemises the offerings of each of the tribes on the occasion of the dedication of the altar. Their offerings were identical, and the Torah could have abbreviated its account by describing the gifts brought by one tribe and stating that each of the other tribes did likewise. Yet the sheer repetition has the effect of emphasising the fact that each tribe had its moment of glory. Each, by giving to the house of God, acquired its own share of honour.

These episodes are not the whole of Naso but they consist of enough of it to signal a principle that every leader and every group needs to take seriously. Even when people accept, in theory, the equal dignity of all, and even when they see leadership as service, the old dysfunctional passions die hard. People still resent the success of others. They still feel that honour has gone to others when it should have gone to them. Rabbi Elazar HaKappar said: “Envy, lust and the pursuit of honour drive a person out of the world.”[3]

The fact that these are destructive emotions does not stop some people – perhaps most of us – feeling them from time to time, and nothing does more to put at risk the harmony of the group. That is one reason why a leader must be humble. They should feel none of these things. But a leader must also be aware that not everyone is humble. Every Moses has a Korach, every Julius Caesar a Cassius, every Duncan a Macbeth, every Othello an Iago. In many groups there is a potential troublemaker

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driven by a sense of injury to their self-esteem. These are often a leader's deadliest enemies and they can do great damage to the group.

There is no way of eliminating the danger entirely, but Moses in this week's parsha tells us how to behave. Honour everyone equally. Pay special attention to potentially disaffected groups. Make each feel valued. Give everyone a moment in the limelight if only in a ceremonial way. Set a personal example of humility. Make it clear to all that leadership is service, not a form of status. Find ways in which those with a particular passion can express it, and ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute.

There is no failsafe way to avoid the politics of envy but there are ways of minimising it, and our parsha is an object lesson in how to do so.

[1] Aeschylus, Agamemnon 1.832.

[2] See Maimonides, Hilchot Shemittah ve-Yovel 13:13.

[3] Mishnah Avot 4:21.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

What is the real meaning of love? And why is it that the Priest-Kohanim, the ministers of the Holy Temple and Torah teachers of the nation, must administer their priestly benediction "with love"? What has "love" to do with their specific leadership role?

In our Biblical portion, the Almighty tells Moses to command Aaron (the High Priest-Kohen) and his sons, "... So shall you bless the children of Israel: Say to them, 'May the Lord bless you and keep you; May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; May the Lord lift His face towards (forgive) you and grant you peace'. And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:22-27).

This priestly benediction was a regular part of the daily Temple service. To this very day, here in Israel, every morning during the repetition of the Amidah, the descendants of Aaron bestow this blessing upon the congregation. Prior to blessing the congregation, the Priest-Kohanim recite the following benediction; "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron, and commanded us to bestow a blessing upon His nation Israel with love". What is the significance of these last two words, "with love"? And if the Priest-Kohen does not feel love in his heart for every member of the congregation, does this disqualify his blessing?

A Midrash asks why the command to bless Israel is prefaced by the words "say to them". It answers that this teaches that the Cantor, the representative of the congregation who repeats the Amidah for all the congregants, must say each word of the benediction, which is then repeated word by word by the Priest-Kohen (Midrash Sifrei 6, 143).

Rashi points out that the Hebrew Amor (say) is vocalized with a Kametz, as in Zakhor:

Remember the Sabbath day, Remember the day you came out of Egypt). This implies an active form of the verb, as in remembering the Sabbath by our weekly repetition of the Divine primordial week of creation in which we too actively work for six days and creatively rest on the Sabbath, or in our re-experiencing the Egyptian servitude and exodus on the seder night. Apparently, the Kohen-priest must "actively" bless. Rashi adds that the Hebrew amor is spelled in the longest and fullest form possible, in order to teach us that the Priest-Kohen "must not bestow his blessing hastily but rather with intense concentration and with a full, loving heart" (Rashi, ad loc). There is even a French, Hassidic interpretation of the word which claims that the Hebrew amor is akin to the French amour, meaning with love!

Our God is a God of unconditional love, both before and after we sin, thus, the very opening of the Ten Commandments, God's introduction to His Revelation of His laws, is "I am the Lord who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the House of bondage". The Almighty is telling His nation that by taking them out of difficult straits of Egyptian slavery, He removed our pain thus demonstrating His love for us! It is almost as if he is explaining that His right to command them is based upon His having demonstrated His love for them.

A religious wedding ceremony is fundamentally a ritual acceptance of the mutual responsibilities of husband and wife. The marriage document, or Ketubah, is all about the groom's financial obligations to his bride. And yet, our Talmudic Sages teach us that the young couple must love each other in order to get married, that the over-arching basis for every wedding ceremony is "You shall love your friend like yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The nuptial blessings refer to bride and groom as "loving and beloved friends" (B.T. Kidushin, 41a). Our Sages are telling us that there can be no real love without the assumption of responsibility; when I declare my love for you, I must take a certain degree of responsibility for easing your life and sharing your challenges.

The Hassidic Rebbe, Reb Zushia told of how inspired he was by a marvelous conversation he overheard between two drunks at an inn. "I love you, Igor", said one drunkard to the other. "You don't love me", said his friend. "I do love you," protested the first. "You don't love me," insisted Igor. "How do you know that I don't love you?" shouted the first in exasperation. "Because you can't tell me what hurts me," answered Igor. "If you can't tell me what hurts me, you can't try to make it better. And if you don't try to make it better, you certainly don't love me."

Love and responsibility are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, the very Hebrew word

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ahavah is based on the Aramaic word for giving. The Kohen-Priest who is a Jewish teacher and a Jewish leader, simultaneously functions as the agent of the Almighty and of the nation. He must take responsibility for his nation, he must attempt to "brand" them with God's name, with God's love, and with God's justice. He must communicate with his nation, symbolized by the cantor or shaliah tzibbur, he must know what hurts his nation and what his nation needs, and then he must actively try to assuage that pain while raising the nation closer to the realm of the Divine. In short, he must love his people and take responsibility for them, as the benediction before the blessing explains so very well!

Post Script: The Sages of the Talmud ordained that at the time of the priestly benediction, the congregation should think of their dreams – individual and corporate – crying out "Master of the Universe, I am yours and my dreams are yours..." The Hebrew word dream, halom, has the same letters as hamal, love, compassion, as well as laham, fight, struggle, wage war. Dreams which continue to engage us when we are awake are dreams of love and passion, such as the return to Zion which was "as in a dream" (Psalms 126:1). Dreams, as loves, are the beginning of responsibility, a responsibility which often means struggle and even war. Kohen-Teachers must love their student-congregants and take responsibility for them teaching them likewise to take responsibility for each other and for the dream. Only then will our dreams and God's dreams be one dream: the perfection of the world, Tikkun Olam.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb Distinctly Different

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

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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.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand **Now is the Time for the Kohein's Blessing of Peace**

The Ramban notes here that Parshas Shemini already contains a mitzva for Aharon to bless the nation. In the ceremony relating to the inauguration of the Mishkan, the pasuk states, "And Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them." [Vayikra 9:22] However, the Ramban says that mitzva was a "one-time affair" following the initial erection of the Mishkan. On the other hand, Parshas Naso contains the mitzva for the Kohanim to bless the people for all future generations.

What was the nussach (text) of this first occurrence of Birkas Kohanim in Parshas Shemini? Rashi there writes that the inaugural Birkas Kohanim was exactly the same as the Birkas Kohanim for all future generations: "Yevarechecha Hashem...; Yissa Hashem...; and Ya'er Hashem...." However, the Ramban argues that it is strange to say that the pasuk in Shemini stating that "Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them" is only referring to a blessing that is not specified until

much later in the Torah, in Parshas Naso. The Ramban prefers to say that the blessing Aharon gave in Parshas Shemini was some other blessing that the Torah does not bother to record.

What is difficult – even according to the Ramban, but particularly according to Rashi – is: Why isn't the parsha of Birkas Kohanim (that appears here in Naso) written over there in Parshas Shemini? Simply, what is the Priestly Blessing doing over here in the Book of Bamidbar? Its appropriate place seems to be in Sefer Vayikra – Toras Kohanim – which details all the obligations of the priestly rituals!

Why does Birkas Kohanim appear in Naso, when it seemingly belongs with the laws of the daily Tamid offering? Was there no room to fit it into Vayikra, such that they had to push it into Bamidbar? The last thing in the world Parshas Naso (already the longest parsha in the Torah in terms of number of pesukim) needs is another six pesukim! Legitimately, Birkas Kohanim belongs in Vayikra! Why is it in Parshas Naso?

I saw in the sefer Chikrei Lev, from Rabbi Label Hyman, z"l, the following idea to address this issue. His theory is that something happens here in the parshios of Bamidbar and Naso that has not happened until now. This is the first time that Klal Yisrael is individualized. This is not the first time they were counted. They were counted already in Parshas Ki Sisa (Shemos Chapter 30). How were they counted there? By method of the "half-shekel". They had this big barrel (or many big barrels). Everybody came in, threw in their half shekel coin, and the leaders counted the money. There were X number of coins. Lo and behold, that is how they determined the population.

This is not what happens in Sefer Bamidbar. Here the census was individualized – "by families, by the house of the fathers." In Parshas Ki Sisa, there is not any indication of the size of the Tribe of Ephraim, the Tribe of Dan, or the Tribe of Yehuda, etc. It was all just one big number. Here, not only did they know how many people were in each tribe, they knew the population break-down to the level of each family and each patriarchal home (l'mishpechosam u'l'beis avosam). Not only that, but Chazal say that every person went in front of Moshe and Aharon. He stated his name and the name of his father, the name of his family, and the name of his tribe. Everyone provided their exact genealogy. "I am not just some anonymous half coin. I am somebody!" "I am ploni ben ploni – Reuven son of Yaakov."

Here in Sefer Bamidbar, we highlight the individual. It does not stop there. In Bamidbar, everyone was assigned how to travel and where to travel. Here in the second year, they established "the flag of the Camp of Yehudah," "the flag of the Camp of Reuven," "the flag of

the Camp of Ephraim," and "the flag of the Camp of Dan." Some people were the first to travel; some people were the last to travel. Why is he first? Why am I last? Why is Gad there? Why isn't Gad with Dan? These are all valid questions, but that is the way the Ribono shel Olam wanted the travel to occur. They were all individualized. They were singled out.

It goes further. The Leviim had their own special count. First of all, the criteria of who was counted differed for the Leviim. They were counted from the age of thirty days (rather than from twenty years). Moshe Rabbeinu came to each tent where a Levi lived, and a Heavenly Voice called out to him, "There are X number of babies in this tent". The Levites were thus individualized to an even greater extent—down to granting an individual identity to every male from the age of one month!

What happens when the individuality of each and every person is pointed out? Until now there was just this one conglomerate, but now everyone is personalized. This can unfortunately lead to jealousy and competition. It can lead to "why are you so special?", "why do you have privilege X, Y, and Z that I do not have?", "Why does he travel first and he travels last?", and "Why, just because you are a Levi, are you different than me?" Even within the Tribe of Levi – various families had unique assignments. Gershon, Kehas, and Merari each had different jobs assigned by family. That might really be taken as insulting. "I have to schlep the boards and you get to carry the Aron???" That's not fair!

This all begins to take place in Parshas Bamidbar and Parshas Naso. And the individualization continues further. Think about the Law of the Nazir (appearing in this week's Parsha)! This fellow says "I am holier than thou! I am not going to drink wine. I am not going to shave my hair. I am not going to funerals. I am a "High Priest"! He stands out.

Individualization creates fertile ground for divisiveness, hatred, back-biting, and all the things that happen when people are jealous of each other. Therefore, the Ribono shel Olam gives Klal Yisrael a mitzva—every single day – the mitzva of Birkas Kohanim!

What does this blessing include? "May Hashem lift His countenance to you and ESTABLISH PEACE FOR YOU." [Bamidbar 6:26] Peace is needed here because the Ribono shel Olam saw the potential for dissension and division. Remind the people daily that what I want as their Father in Heaven is that there should be peace among them.

How is peace achieved? Chazal say in Maseches Derech Eretz that "Great is peace for all the blessings and all the prayers conclude with peace (Shalom)." The climax of Birkas Kohanim is the blessing of Shalom. All the blessings need to include Shalom. As Rashi

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says in Parshas Bechukosai [26:6], "If one does not have peace, one has nothing."

Rashi explains that the first blessing of "Yevarechecha HaShem v'Yishmerecha" refers to a blessing for a person's property. A person should make a decent living. Rashi interprets the second blessing of "v'Yishmerecha" (He will Guard you) to mean that robbers will not attack you to steal your property. I have my money. I have my protection. I should be a happy person. But a person needs something else. A person needs Shalom. The way to achieve peace is to be happy with what we have. The word Shalom (peace) comes from the word Shleimus, to be satisfied that we have, to feel that we have everything that we need. Even if you have the blessing of a good livelihood and the blessing that no one will steal it from you, if you look at your friend and say "he has more than I do," then you have nothing. For "one who has one hundred, wants two hundred." Unless a person learns to live and be happy with what he has, he will never be happy.

Therefore, Birkas Kohanim, which speaks about money and about having enough, is meaningless unless it is sealed with Shalom. Shalom is achieved by rejoicing with what we ALREADY have, and not looking over our shoulders. Therefore, in these parshiyos, where each individual is highlighted, introducing the potential for terrible dissension, the Ribono shel Olam says, "You shall place my Name upon the Children of Israel and I will bless them." And how is that? It is through "And establish Shalom for you." Shalom is not just peace. Shalom means Shleimus, the concept of a person being satisfied with what he has. If someone has that attribute, he will never be wanting; if he does not have it, he will always be looking over his shoulders with a jealousy that will devour any sense of happiness.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Sixty armed warriors surrounded King Solomon's bed every night! King Solomon had sixty armed warriors surrounding his bed every night to protect him. How do we know this?

In the Song of Songs 3:7, we are told,

"Hinei mitato shel Shlomo," – "Behold the bed of Solomon!"

"Shishim giborim saviv lo migiborei Yisrael," – "Sixty warriors surrounding it from amongst the mightiest men of Israel."

We recite this verse as one of the reassuring Biblical texts that we say every night before we go to sleep in our krias shema al hamitta, and it begs the question: is this really reassuring?

If King Solomon required sixty armed men to

protect him every night then how much more vulnerable, even with the best alarm system in the world, should we feel? Our sages in the Midrash Shir Hashirim Rabba 3:7:1 give us the answer. They tell us that actually, what King Solomon had around his bed was not armed men at all! Rather, he had the words of the Yevarechecha blessing surrounding his bed – the well known priestly blessing given to us in Parshat Nasso.

“Yevarechecha Hashem veyishmareicha,” – “May Hashem bless you and keep you,”

“Ya’er Hashem panav eilecha vichuneika,” – “May the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you,”

“Yisa Hashem panav eilecha veyasaim lecha shalom.” – “May the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.”

So the letters of those words surrounded his bed. How do we get to that? It says ‘shishim giborim’ – sixty mighty warriors!

But the Midrash explains: If you count the letters of the Yevarechecha blessing, there are exactly sixty.

So here we learn something really powerful: King Solomon was the cleverest of all people and it takes a wise person to know that as powerful and as mighty as you are, you are still vulnerable. We all, whoever we are, need the blessing and the protection of Hashem.

This verse – Yevarechecha – was surely the favourite passuk of King Solomon, and the Midrash explains why. The name Shlomo, Solomon, comes from the root shalom. He was ‘ish shel shalom shelo’, a person blessed with peace. Indeed, we see that he reigned over Israel for 40 years without a single war to wage. The people were blessed with peace during his reign. The shalom which is embodied within the Yevarechecha blessing accompanied him at all times.

Our prayer therefore is: may we, through the blessings of the Kohanim (our priests), be given blessing and protection. May Hashem always shine His face upon us and give us ongoing peace.

OTS Dvar Torah

“Renewing our Vows” with God Rabbi Kenneth Brander

We’re on the balcony of my office in Gush Etzion, overlooking Highway 60, the road which the Jewish people would take, as they were oleh regel – as they ascended to the Beit haMikdash – three times a year; the road from which the Romans conquered and pillaged Jerusalem; the road on which we, the Jewish people, reconquered Jerusalem, as well as the environs of Gush Etzion all around us.

It’s the road of Jewish history, right outside my office, and you’re all welcome to come and visit it in person.

“Vayehi bayom kalot Moshe lehakim et haMishkan.” It is the day on which Moshe finishes the construction of the Mishkan, after seven days of taking it apart and putting it back together again.

Rashi comments on this verse, Kalat ktiv, that it’s written as “kalat.” You see, Rashi’s version of this verse is different than ours; we have a vav in the word Kalot, but Rashi has it without a vav. For Rashi, the word means, “kalat ktiv” – it’s like a bride and groom. Rashi is trying to explain why it is that Moshe, a man, a leader north of 100 years old, needs to deconstruct and reconstruct the Mishkan for a week. After all, he’s not the moving company, responsible for moving the Mishkan from place to place. There’s a message that Rashi is trying to communicate, in his very cryptic language, and that is that the Mishkan is not an end in itself, but a means to an end: to create sacred moments in time with God.

And therefore, what Rashi is highlighting is that Moshe has to take it apart and put it back together again to signify to the Jewish people that the structure is only important when we imbue it with relevance and holiness.

This is exactly the message that the prophets give to the priests when they say “be careful,” when the Temple was being abused and becoming not a place of holiness, but rather of idol worship, as happened at various points in history.

And Rashi is trying to highlight the fact that the Mishkan represents the relationship between the bride and groom. It’s for this same reason that every bride and groom has Sheva Brachot. What is Sheva Brachot? Sheva Brachot is the ma’ase nisu’in – it’s the act of marriage. It’s the responsibility for seven days to take apart the marriage and renew it, to highlight that the institution of marriage itself is not the mitzva. There’s no special bracha on the marriage; it’s what you do with the marriage. That’s what’s critical, that’s what’s important.

And therefore Rashi says, Moshe takes apart the Mishkan and puts it back together again, like a Chatan and Kallah, as a Chatan and Kallah “renew their vows” for seven days, to highlight that what’s important in a marriage is not the institution, but what we do with the institution, how we infuse it with relevance.

What an important message for all of us. It’s important for us on two levels. Because of corona, our weddings are looking so different now than they did not so long ago. It’s no longer about the pomp and circumstance, it’s about understanding the meaning and the beauty. It doesn’t matter if the wedding is in a hall with 500 people, or in a backyard with 50

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people. What counts is the message of “kalat,” the message of consecrating a relationship between a bride and groom.

What counts, as we read this parsha, is how we re-consecrate our relationship with God. It’s about taking it apart, evaluating, where are the weaknesses, and where are the strengths, and rebuilding our relationship to God. Or, as we journey through this age of corona, to remind ourselves of the opportunity even during tragedy to renew our relationship with God, to create a renewed bond, a renewed relationship, a new face. Because ultimately, our commitment to a relationship is what imbues the structure with holiness and purpose.

Stealing from a Convert Rabbi Shaul Vider

A convert recognizes the God of Israel as the creator of the world, and wishes to be part of the Jewish people. Therefore, those who steal from a convert not only renounce their commitment to the victim – they renounce Heaven itself.

“Speak to the Israelites: When a man or woman commits any wrong toward a fellow man, thus breaking faith with Hashem, and that person realizes his guilt, he shall confess the wrong that he has done. He shall make restitution in the principal amount and add one-fifth to it, giving it to him whom he has wronged. If the man has no kinsman to whom restitution can be made, the amount repaid shall go to Hashem for the priest—in addition to the ram of expiation with which expiation is made on his behalf.” (Numbers, 5:6-8)

These three verses from our Parasha are engulfed within the many topics that are discussed. They appear between the passages describing the roles of the tribe of Levi and the purity of the camp, and the law of Sotah (the wife accused of adultery), the laws of the Nazarite, and the offerings of the tribal princes on the day the Tabernacle was inaugurated. Why, then, do these verses appear in this location, if we have already read of the laws of those guilty of theft in chapter 5 of the Book of Leviticus? The answer can be found in verse 8, which depicts a different reality than the one described in the original law.

Rashi explains that the thief in this week’s Parasha is one who had repented for his sin of theft, but has no one to return the stolen property to, since he had stolen from a “convert who had died, and has no heirs”. Since the thief would like to get rid of the property he had stolen, the solution the Torah devises is to give the priest currently serving in the Holy Temple an amount equivalent to the value of the stolen property.

Sforno explains why this act of theft is “a desecration of Hashem” – for by stealing from a convert, he had committed a desecration that the convert was exposed to after that convert had “come to seek refuge under his wings”. Thus, we can understand from this that stealing

from a convert is unlike stealing from any other Jew. This is because the act of theft that had victimized the convert caused the convert to painfully question the value of Hashem's commandments. The thief has thus desecrated Hashem's name by being the cause of that.

According to Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, the restitution of the stolen property to the priest is akin to returning the property to Hashem. Yet in the case of stealing from a convert who has no heirs, the transgressor does something we haven't seen before – he performs confession when returning the property to the priest. In other words, the Torah wishes to teach us the value of confession, which was also mentioned already in the Book of Leviticus – in fact, with regard to stealing from a convert.

In that case – what is the value of confession here? Unlike other biblical commentators who call these verses “the passage of theft from a convert”, Sefer Hachinuch calls these verses “the commandment of confession of sin”. The author states that “through the verbal admission of iniquity, the sinner reveals his thoughts and opinion: that he truly believes that all his deeds are revealed and known before God, blessed be He, and that he will not act as if ‘the Eye that sees’ does not see. Furthermore, through mentioning the sin specifically, and through his remorse about it, he will be more careful about it on another occasion not to stumble in the same way again...”

According to the author of Sefer Hachinuch, confession has two traits tied to the re-education of the sinner. One concerns the sinner recognizing that he had denied Hashem, who had forbidden him from stealing. The other is the understanding that a verbal expression of remorse helps a person be more cautious and avoid sinning again. In other words, if someone had wronged a convert who has no heirs, that person may perform full repentance as a baal teshuva, by restoring the stolen property and confessing his sins, and in so doing, renews his worship of the Almighty. Thieves who confess “refresh” their fear of Hashem and reawaken to the reality of Hashem's oversight of his actions. They also elevate their good virtues and improve their personal behavior, as they become more conscious of their own actions.

This seems to indicate that the process of confessing having stolen from a convert resembles what the convert himself had done during the conversion process. During the convert's lifetime, the convert recognized the God of Israel as the creator of the world, the God that sees the actions of human beings, and had commanded them to keep His commandments concerning how they are to behave in this world. These thoughts are what had prompted him to desire being part of the Jewish people. Those who steal from converts hadn't just renounced those converts – they

had renounced Hashem Himself, in terms of having been commanded to keep Hashem's laws. Thus, through verbal confession, the sinner is compelled to undergo a more meaningful process of internalizing what he had done to the convert. The sinner's recognition of his actions corresponds with a convert's recognition of the God of Israel, and wronging a convert is akin to wronging the God of Israel. If we study this commandment, through candid and genuine speech, it may make us cognizant of the role the fear of God plays in our own lives, and of how cautious we must be in our actions toward ourselves and others.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

The Sanctity of Jewish Marriage

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'neyem" - there will be an element of keddusha in their lives.

When the Torah tells us the laws of the sotah in Parshas Noshah, 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 tamei may not enter; korbonos, maaser sheini, and terumah have keddusha and one who is tamei 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

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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.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah

by Rabbi Label Lam

Authentic Shalom

HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is how you shall bless the children of Israel, saying to them: “May HASHEM bless you and watch over you. May HASHEM cause His countenance to shine to you and favor you. May HASHEM raise His countenance toward you and grant you peace.”. (Bamidbar 6:22-27)

This blessing is scripted by HASHEM for the Kohanim to shower upon the Jewish People on special occasions and in some places daily. Parents too, employ the same words to bless their children every Friday night. It's rich with wishes for everything good, including the blessing of wealth, security, and basking in the favorable light of The Almighty. What can be better!? Oh, there's one giant ingredient. The finale and the crown of all this abundant goodness is something called SHALOM! Why is that so valuable and necessary after so much has been granted. What is Shalom and what it does it add to the equation of life?

This question is actually asked by Rashi earlier in Chumash. Before the barrage of rebuke is launched in Bechukosai, the Torah promises material wealth with the mental tranquility of living securely in the land. Then the Torah says, “And I will give you Shalom...” Rashi on the spot says, “Maybe your going to say, ‘We have food and drink’ but if there is no peace then there is nothing! ...From here we learn that Shalom is equal to everything!” So we see that Shalom has a high value, and that's an understatement. How does it work?

The Jerusalem Talmud and the Midrash in Parshas Nasso both say, “Ain Kli Machzik Brocha Ella Shalom”- “No vessel can hold blessing like Shalom”. How can we conceptualize this. Imagine walking through a giant grocery store. Pick your favorite, Evergreen, Pomegranate, Seasons, you name it. You fill up your cart with goodies for Shabbos. You are hungry and tired and you can't wait to get home and to eat a nice filling dinner and begin to creatively prepare for Shabbos. After checking out by the cash register and with ease happily paying the cashier you are told that you have to bring your own bags. You have a giant cart load of groceries and no way to hold them. You pile them in your arms dropping some and trying to hold onto what you have while bending to pick up what has fallen. Things are breaking and melting and ripping and most of what you have paid for is lost before you get home, leaving a trail of groceries along the way. You are now

extremely frustrated and aggravated. You can't even enjoy a bite of food. What a night mare. But so it is to have everything and to be lacking in Shalom. Shalom is the vessel that holds, preserves, and carries whatever Brochos flow our way.

The Mishne in Pirke' Avos invites us to be from the students of Aaron, "Love peace (Shalom), pursue peace (Shalom), love people and bring them close to Torah." Why must one love Shalom first and then pursue it? Because not only can you not effectively sell what you don't have, but you don't want to. Once you experience it then automatically you become a naturally enthusiastic advocate. Did you ever read a book or hear a song that excited and inspired you to the point where you could not wait to share it with others!? We have all experienced that. Shalom is not an abstract idea, it's experiential and to achieve it requires many life and social skills.

Shalom is harmonizing all the elements in our lives, so that that not only are they not at war with each other but they compliment each other, like instruments of various sizes and sounds blending symphonically into one orchestra. This requires discipline, a musical score, (a plan), patience, a conductor, (a Rebbe), and self knowledge. A person with Shalom may possess nothing and yet have everything, and someone can have loads of stuff and still have nothing, because whatever he has complicates and destabilizes his life and it gives him no peace. The art of achieving and practicing peace is an almost natural fulfillment of living a Torah life, because "All it's ways are pleasantness and all its paths are peace!" It could be that the biggest ambition and the richest reward we can hope to attain in life is authentic Shalom!



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from: **Peninim on the Torah** peninim@hac1.org

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

date: May 20, 2021, 11:22 AM

subject: Parashas Naso

איש על דגלו באתר לבית אבותם

Every man shall encamp by his banner with the sign of his father's house.
(2:2)

Chazal teach that the arrangement of the Jews' encampment in the Wilderness paralleled the configuration of the Heavenly entourage that accompanied the Shechinah when it descended upon Har Sinai prior to the Giving of the Torah. Myriads of Heavenly Angels descended with Hashem, all grouped in composition under Degalim, banners. When Klal Yisrael saw this pattern, they, too, sought a sequence of Degalim for their encampment. It did not stop there. Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:4) state that when umos ha'olam, the nations of the world, saw Klal Yisrael encamped under the Degalim, they approached the Jewish People and attempted to initiate a relationship with them. They said, "We too will grant you distinction, giving you positions of importance, power and monarchy. The Jewish response was straightforward, "You cannot give us anything that will in any way match the greatness of the Degalim which Hashem bestowed upon us." In summation, the gentiles attempted to disenfranchise us from Hashem, by enticing us with kavod, honor, prestige. Our response is quite simple: Whatever you tempt us with pales in comparison with the distinction Hashem accorded us with the Degalim.

What was notable about the Degalim that granted such extraordinary prestige to Klal Yisrael? What was it about the Degalim that made them feel so special? Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:6) teach that the Degalim were a sign that Klal Yisrael represented the legion of Hashem. It elevated their image. They were Hashem's children, His hosts, His guard. The Shechinah reposed in the middle of the Camp, with all of the Shevatim, Tribes, encamped around it – each in its own pre-arranged place based upon its purpose and

mission vis-à-vis the nation of Hashem. Yissachar symbolized and focused on Torah, Yehudah focused on the monarchy, while Reuven represented the attribute of teshuvah, repentance. Each of the tribes focused on its own Heavenly-designated mission; each was part of the large conglomerate of Klal Yisrael, who together were mekadesh, sanctified, the Name of Hashem. What is the adhesive that bonds us together? The Meshech Chochmah (commentary to Parashas Emor) explains that the unified connection of Klal Yisrael that links us together as one people is unlike the relationship that the nations of the world have with one another. People of one country are linked to one another by virtue of the fact that they were born and raised in the same country and that they are culturally like-minded (for the most part). Klal Yisrael is bound together, its hiskashrus is its eternal bond with Hashem. This enduring relationship is ceaseless and constant, and it is what perpetuates us as a people.

Yaakov Avinu descended to Egypt with shivim nefesh, seventy souls (Bereishis 46:26). Nefesh is singular, because Yaakov's entire family was viewed as one unified soul. Eisav's family consisted of six nefashos, souls, in the plural (Bereishis 36:6), because they were all distant from one another, each with his own god, own religious philosophy, own way of life, own value system and goals. Klal Yisrael is focused collectively on Hashem – one G-d, one hashkafah, one matarah, purpose and meaning in life. This, explains Horav Eliyahu Svei, zl, is why we require the services of our gedolei Yisrael, Torah giants, who lead and guide us. Chazal (Bamidbar Rabbah 2:8) teach that when Hashem instituted the designated places for each tribe's encampment around the Mishkan, Moshe Rabbeinu was concerned lest the tribes dissent and challenge their assigned places. Hashem reassured him that each tribe "knew" its allotted place. They would follow the same configuration that was designated by the Patriarch Yaakov for his funeral. He had demonstrated to them how and where each one should stand around his bier. This taught them volumes concerning each one's ordained place. This is where he belonged; this is where he should encamp. The Rosh Yeshivah gleans from here that in order to place everyone in his designated place, to show him clearly what is his mission, his purpose, how valuable and crucial he is to the success of an endeavor, how important his involvement is in its every aspect, one needs a father (figure). It was Yaakov Avinu who was mei'acheid, unified, Klal Yisrael, by showing each respective tribe where it should stand, where it belonged. This can only be performed by a father, because it is only to a father that one will listen and adhere.

This is the function of manhigei Yisrael, Torah leaders. They act as our "fathers." That is how they should feel toward us and how we should respond reciprocally to them.

ונתנו עליו כסוי עור תחש ופרשו בגד כליל תכלת מלמעלה

They shall place upon it a tachash – hide covering, and spread a cloth entirely of turquoise wool over it. (4:6)

erves that in the case of the other klei haMishkan, vessels of the Mishkan, they were first covered with wool and then covered over with the tachash – hide. The Aron HaKodesh was singular in that it was first covered with the tachash – hide and then was covered with the techeiles, turquoise wool. Chazal describe techeiles as having a color similar to that of the sea, similar to the sky which symbolizes the purity of Heaven. Thus, (according to Ramban) it was placed above the tachash – to call attention to the purity and sanctity of the Aron/Torah.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, offers another perspective on the Aron's distinction vis-à-vis its coverings. Techeiles and tachash represent distinct concepts. The blue color of techeiles makes people think of Heaven, the place of Hashem's Kisei HaKavod, Throne of Glory. Thus, techeiles denotes faith in Hashem. Tachash, on the other hand, focuses on material/physical beauty (the tachash – hide-was unusually beautiful) which encourages us to enhance our mitzvah observance by cloaking them in physical beauty. [Understandably, we perform mitzvos because they are the tzivui Hashem, command of G-d, but people will find mitzvah observance more attractive and desirable if the mitzvah involves an element of aesthetic beauty. We

perform mitzvos due to our commitment rooted in faith in Hashem. This does not mean that we cannot enhance our performance.]

Thus, the uppermost cover of the Aron, which is visible to the eye, should be techeiles, which calls to mind unarguable, accomplished faith in Hashem. This sets the standard and tone for how we are to view mitzvos. Only then can we cover the other vessels – the other mitzvos – with tachash – hide, representing beauty and enhancement of mitzvos which make their performance more inviting.

Horav Zev Weinberg, zl, takes a basic approach to the variation of the covers between the Aron and other vessels. The Aron is the receptacle in which the Torah is housed. The Torah is our spiritual guide. As such, its inner beauty, the beauty of the mitzvos, the beauty of living as a Jew, is what should be emphasized – not externals. Techeiles personifies a beauty of sorts – a beauty of purity of action, of deed, of service to Hashem. The Torah's greatness lies in its inner aesthetics, not in its external beauty. When we feel the need to couch Torah in external elegance, we diminish its inner sublimity. Torah's radiance shines from within. Does one daven better, with greater and more intense fervor, in a magnificent, spacious and elegant appealing shul? How many of us grew up davening in shtieblach that were situated in old, dark basements and storefronts? Those of us who have been davening in hot (in the summer) and cold (in the winter) tents (during the pandemic) have neither felt shortchanged, nor our davening lacking. On the other hand, this does not mean that beauty is denigrated. The significance of the Kohanim's vessel's, the Klei haMishkan was not diminished by showing their beauty. Torah, however, requires the motif to project its majesty.

We have been in exile for too long. As a result of our persecution, poverty, always being on the run, we have neglected the aesthetics in our service to Hashem. The world has not wanted to see Jews who dress better than they do, have nicer homes and cars than they do, and have places of worship which are tributes to the finest, most talented architects. We have been instructed to keep our collective heads low and our mouths silent. Today, baruch Hashem, the Jewish community is thriving and, in some instances, has lost sight of its age-old parameters. While the pursuit of a pleasant, aesthetically-pleasing environment is wonderful and can, in some instances, enhance our service to Hashem, we should not allow ourselves to fall into the abyss of excessive emphasis on external grandeur. This will ultimately do harm to the inner dimension of our service.

A shul is a house of worship because of the prayers and supplications that are rendered there. Just because it looks like a shul does not make it a place of worship. Physical structure can expand one's spiritual consciousness, but if his focus is on the scenery, his prayers will lose their urgency and intensity. Thus, the colors of the tachash – hide overlapped the pure color of techeiles. Modesty and purity have a greater impact on inspiring, heartfelt prayer than large, imposing, art-deco edifices.

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date: May 16, 2021, 3:20 PM

An Important Rokeach to Know When Listening to Birkas Kohanim Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Outside Eretz Yisrael, we only say Birkas Kohanim on limited occasions—the Shalosh Regalim, Rosh HaShanah, and Yom Kippur. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his sefer *Oznayim L'Torah*, stresses that when the Kohanim recite the three Priestly Blessings mentioned in Parshas Naso, they should realize that they have vast power in their hands. Every word of the Birkas Kohanim can make tremendous differences in a person's life.

The pesukim in the beginning of Parshas Bechukosai, prior to the Tochacha, contain the blessings of “Im Bechukosai Teileichu.” The Rokeach writes that throughout all those pesukim, which describe the blessings that will come our way if we keep the Torah's laws, [Vayikra 26:3-13], the letter Samech does not appear. The Rokeach explains that the blessings of Parshas Bechukosai are all conditional, as implied by the word ‘Im’ (‘if’ you will follow My laws). However, he says, the blessings of Birkas Kohanim, which contain sixty letters are unconditional. The letter Samech, with a numerical

value of 60, represents the Birkas Kohanim. Those blessings do not have strings attached. Therefore, we do not find the letter Samech in the conditional blessings of Parshas Bechukosai.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin quotes an idea from Rav Yaakov Gezuntheit, who wrote a sefer on Maseches Chullin and other masechtos as well. The end of Parshas Shoftim contains the parsha of Eglah Arufah (the Decapitated Calf). When a dead body is found whose murderer is unknown, there is a whole ceremony which must be performed, involving the Elders of the closest city, to achieve communal atonement for this tragedy. The pasuk there [Devorim 21:5] singles out “the Kohanim, sons of Levi, who were chosen by G-d to serve Him and to bless in the Name of Hashem.” They need to participate in that ceremony. Following that, representatives of the Court come and proclaim “Our hands have not spilled this blood...” [Bamidbar 21:7]

Rav Gezuntheit asks – What do the Kohanim have to do with all this? We understand that the Beis Din represents the city. They need to proclaim the innocence of the population. They state that they did not do anything wrong. “We did not send this victim away without food and accompaniment, etc.” But what is the role of the Kohanim? More pointed, why does the pasuk need to say that the Kohanim are “the sons of Levy, for G-d has chosen them to serve him and to bless in the Name of G-d?”

Why is that germane to this parsha? What does this mean?

The Tiferes Yaakov explains that if the Kohanim would have had proper Kavana (intent) when uttering the blessing “And He will place upon you Peace” (v'Yasem Lecha Shalom) this would have never happened. If a Jew kills another Jew, it is because there is no Shalom. That is why the Torah mentions the Kohanim and singles out their role in blessing in the Name of G-d.

The Rokeach writes that the congregants should face the Kohanim with open arms and make personal requests for whatever their needs are during Birkas Kohanim. This is a most propitious time for making such requests, which then have an increased potential for being answered. If someone has pressing needs, a most fitting time to ask for Help is during Birkas Kohanim—a point in the liturgy that is particularly ripe for Heavenly dispensation of blessing. This is something worth keeping in mind when listening to Birkas Kohanim. Why Didn't Manoach's Wife Tell Her Husband the Rest of the Story?

Parshas Naso's Haftorah contains the story of the birth of Shimshon. Shimshon's mother was childless. The Angel of Hashem appeared to her and told her that she was going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. That son turned out to be Shimshon haGibor. However, the pasuk does not only say she would become pregnant and have a son. It begins by saying “Behold you are barren and have not given birth.” [Shoftim 13:3]

The Medrash asks – why was it necessary for the Angel to tell Manoach's wife that she was barren and had not given birth. This was a fact of which she was obviously aware! The Medrash answers “This teaches that there had been a dispute between Manoach and his wife.” In Biblical times, they did not possess the medical knowledge or technology that we have today to determine when a couple is infertile, whether the cause lay with the husband or the wife. Manoach had told his wife “Our childlessness is your problem! You are the barren one.” She argued back to her husband, “No. The problem comes from you. You are the infertile one and the reason we do not have children.”

According to the Medrash, this was part of the Angel's message to the woman. The Medrash first says that Manoach's wife was a Tzadekes (a righteous woman) and for that reason the Malach appeared to her with this Divine message rather than to her husband. The Medrash says that the Malach came to make peace between husband and wife, by presenting them with the “Divine diagnosis” of the source of the problem. “It is indeed your “fault” that you have not had children with your husband. Stop fighting about that. But you should know that now, you are going to become pregnant!”

Manoach's wife told him, “An Angel told me that we are going to have a baby.” [Shoftim 13:7] However, she conveniently left out from her statement to her husband the fact that the Malach confirmed that he had been right all those years in their argument regarding the cause of their inability to have

children.

Now this seems somewhat odd. The Medrash says that she was a Tzadekes, and that in her merit, the Angel appeared. We are not talking here about just your average woman on the street. We are talking about a woman who merited speaking with a Malach, and whom the Medrash calls a Tzadekes! So then why does she not confess to Manoach that she had been wrong? Why doesn't she tell him "You know, after all these years that we have been fighting with each other about this matter, the Angel revealed to me that you were right and I was wrong!"?

The reason is that one of the hardest things to do in life is to say "I am wrong. It is my fault." The novel idea here is that a person can be a Tzadekes, and a person can be on the level where they merit speaking with a Malach, but to say the words "It is my fault. I am wrong" is a very difficult challenge.

I once gave a drasha entitled "The Three Most Important Words in Marriage." I began my speech by asking "What are the three most important words in a marriage?" Some suggested "You look beautiful." Others suggested "I love you." I maintain that the three most important words in a marriage are "It's my fault." This is very hard to do. One can be a Tzadekes, one can speak with an Angel, and one can announce that "we are going to have a baby." But to say "You were right. I was wrong. It was my problem"—that is very difficult.

from: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy** Trust <info@rabbisacks.org> v

date: May 19, 2021, 2:16 PM

subject: The Politics of Envy (Naso 5781)

The Politics of Envy (Naso 5781)

Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book *Lessons in Leadership*. The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah. Few things in the Torah are more revolutionary than its conception of leadership.

Ancient societies were hierarchical. The masses were poor and prone to hunger and disease. They were usually illiterate. They were exploited by rulers as a means to wealth and power rather than treated as people with individual rights – a concept born only in the seventeenth century. At times they formed a *corvée*, a vast conscripted labour force, often used to construct monumental buildings intended to glorify kings. At others they were dragooned into the army to further the ruler's imperial designs. Rulers often had absolute power of life and death over their subjects. Not only were kings and pharaohs heads of state; they also held the highest religious rank, as they were considered children of the gods or even demigods themselves. Their power had nothing to do with the consent of the governed. It was seen as written into the fabric of the universe. Just as the sun ruled the sky and the lion ruled the animal realm, so kings ruled their populations. That was how things were in nature, and nature itself was sacrosanct.

The Torah is a sustained polemic against this way of seeing things. Not just kings but all of us, regardless of colour, culture, class or creed, are in the image and likeness of God. In the Torah, God summons His special people, Israel, to take the first steps towards what might eventually become a truly egalitarian society – or to put it more precisely, a society in which dignity, *kavod*, does not depend on power or wealth or an accident of birth. Hence the concept, which we will explore more fully in parshat Korach, of leadership as service. The highest title accorded to Moses in the Torah is that of *eved Hashem*, "a servant of God" (Deut. 34:5). His highest praise is that he was "very humble, more so than anyone else on earth" (Num. 12:3). To lead is to serve. Greatness is humility. As the book of Proverbs puts it, "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour" (Prov. 29:23).

The Torah points us in the direction of an ideal world, but it does not assume that we have reached it yet or even that we are within striking distance. The

people Moses led, like many of us today, were still prone to fixate on ambition, aspiration, vanity, and self-indulgence. They still had the human desire for honour and status. And Moses had to recognise that fact. It would be a major source of conflict in the months and years ahead. It is one of the primary themes of the book of Bamidbar.

Of whom were the Israelites jealous? Most of them did not aspire to be Moses. He was, after all, the man who spoke to God and to whom God spoke. He performed miracles, brought plagues against the Egyptians, divided the Red Sea, and gave the people water from a rock and manna from heaven. Few would have had the hubris to believe they could do any of these things.

But they did have reason to resent the fact that religious leadership seemed to be confined to only one tribe, Levi, and one family within that tribe, the Kohanim, male descendants of Aaron. Now that the Tabernacle was to be consecrated and the people were about to begin the second half of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land, there was a real risk of envy and animosity.

That is a constant throughout history. We desire, said Shakespeare, "this man's gift and that man's scope." Aeschylus said, "It is in the character of very few men to honour without envy a friend who has prospered." [1] Goethe warned that although "hatred is active, and envy passive dislike; there is but one step from envy to hate." Jews should know this in their very bones. We have often been envied, and all too frequently has that envy turned to hate, with tragic consequences.

Leaders need to be aware of the perils of envy, especially within the people they lead. This is one of the unifying themes of the long and apparently disconnected parsha of Naso. In it we see Moses confronting three potential sources of envy. The first lay within the tribe of Levi. Its members had reason to resent the fact that priesthood had gone to just one man and his descendants: Aaron, Moses' brother.

The second had to do with individuals who were neither of the tribe of Levi nor of the family of Aaron but who felt that they had the right to be holy in the sense of having a special, intense relationship with God in the way that the priests had. The third had to do with the leadership of the other tribes who might have felt left out of the service of the Tabernacle. We see Moses dealing sequentially with all these potential dangers.

First, he gives each Levitical clan a special role in carrying the vessels, furnishings, and framework of the Tabernacle whenever the people journeyed from place to place. The most sacred objects were to be carried by the clan of Kohath. The Gershonites were to carry the cloths, coverings, and drapes. The Merarites were to carry the planks, bars, posts, and sockets that made up the Tabernacle's framework. Each clan was, in other words, to have a special role and place in the solemn procession as the house of God was carried through the desert.

Next, Moses deals with individuals who aspire to a higher level of holiness. This, it seems, is the underlying logic of the Nazirite, the individual who vows to set himself apart for the Lord (Numbers 6:2). He was not to drink wine or any other grape product; he was not to have his hair cut; and he was not to defile himself through contact with the dead. Becoming a Nazirite was, it seems, a way of temporarily assuming the kind of set-apartness associated with the priesthood, a voluntary extra degree of holiness. [2]

Lastly, Moses turns to the leadership of the tribes. The highly repetitive chapter 7 of our parsha itemises the offerings of each of the tribes on the occasion of the dedication of the altar. Their offerings were identical, and the Torah could have abbreviated its account by describing the gifts brought by one tribe and stating that each of the other tribes did likewise. Yet the sheer repetition has the effect of emphasising the fact that each tribe had its moment of glory. Each, by giving to the house of God, acquired its own share of honour.

These episodes are not the whole of Naso but they consist of enough of it to signal a principle that every leader and every group needs to take seriously. Even when people accept, in theory, the equal dignity of all, and even when they see leadership as service, the old dysfunctional passions die hard. People still resent the success of others. They still feel that honour has gone

to others when it should have gone to them. Rabbi Elazar HaKappar said: "Envy, lust and the pursuit of honour drive a person out of the world." [3] The fact that these are destructive emotions does not stop some people – perhaps most of us – feeling them from time to time, and nothing does more to put at risk the harmony of the group. That is one reason why a leader must be humble. They should feel none of these things. But a leader must also be aware that not everyone is humble. Every Moses has a Korach, every Julius Caesar a Cassius, every Duncan a Macbeth, every Othello an Iago. In many groups there is a potential troublemaker driven by a sense of injury to their self-esteem. These are often a leader's deadliest enemies and they can do great damage to the group.

There is no way of eliminating the danger entirely, but Moses in this week's parsha tells us how to behave. Honour everyone equally. Pay special attention to potentially disaffected groups. Make each feel valued. Give everyone a moment in the limelight if only in a ceremonial way. Set a personal example of humility. Make it clear to all that leadership is service, not a form of status. Find ways in which those with a particular passion can express it, and ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute. There is no failsafe way to avoid the politics of envy but there are ways of minimising it, and our parsha is an object lesson in how to do so.

fw from hamelaket@gmail.com

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subject: Rabbi Zweig

Parshas Nasso

Rav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Itka bas Dovid.

"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"

Letting Go

Speak to Bnei Yisroel, and say to them, if any man's wife goes astray, and commits a trespass against him... (5, 12)

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Gemara in Brachos (63a) that explains why the Torah places the laws of Sotah (a woman who was warned by her husband not to go into seclusion with another man) following the laws of giving the Kohanim Teruma and Ma'aser; for anyone who withholds from the Kohen the priestly gifts will find that he needs the Kohen (i.e. he will be obligated to come to the Kohen) and bring his wife to be tested through the Sotah waters.

Maharal (Gur Aryeh 5, 12) asks two fascinating questions: 1) There are a number of reasons that a person would need the service of a Kohen (e.g. tzoraas); why do we necessarily associate the occurrence of Sotah to not giving the Kohen the priestly gifts? 2) Why does the Torah introduce the laws of Sotah with "if any man's wife goes astray"? Why not just begin "when a married woman goes astray;" why does the Torah introduce the man at all?

After a careful reading of Rashi, one can see how he understands what Chazal are teaching: Rashi doesn't say that the man refuses to give the Kohen the priestly gifts, rather Rashi says that the man withholds the gifts from the Kohen. This is a critical point. Essentially, a landowner has the obligation to distribute the priestly gifts to the Kohen. Yet someone who withholds them is trying to exert influence over the Kohen; to make him come and beg for something that, in reality, he is entitled to receive. Why would someone behave in such a manner?

This is how a person with a controlling personality acts. Making someone come to him to ask for what is rightfully theirs is done to send a clear message of who is in charge. The Torah juxtaposes these two sections to teach us that they are interrelated. A controlling person doesn't just behave this way in business, he behaves like this in all aspects of his life including his personal life. The reason a woman would go into seclusion, after being warned by her husband not to, is to demonstrate her independence. She is rebelling against his overbearing and controlling personality. In other words, she is telling her husband "you're not the boss of me."

This is also why the Torah begins with "any man's wife goes astray;" the

Torah is explaining the root cause of her disloyalty. Even if she never sinned by being intimate with another man, by going into seclusion she is trying to send her husband the message that he is not in control.

Living in Denial

Speak to Bnei Yisroel and say to them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate themselves for Hashem... (6, 2)

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Gemara in Sotah (2a) that makes the well-known comment: "Why is the law of the Nazir juxtaposed with the law of the Sotah? To teach us that anyone who sees a Sotah in her degradation should take a vow of abstinence from wine."

When a woman is suspected of infidelity she is tested with the Sotah waters. If she is indeed guilty, she will die a gruesome death. Chazal teach us that a witness to that death should take a vow of Nezirus to prevent himself from succumbing to the temptation for immorality as the Sotah did. Rashi explains that excessive drinking is a common cause of licentiousness, and the Nazir's vow to abstain from wine will thus help a person avoid committing an act of immorality.

Nevertheless, it is hard to understand how a vow of Nezirus can have a greater impact than the sight of the Sotah's death itself. Surely, witnessing such a shocking sight should itself be enough to deter anyone from committing the same sin. Moreover, even if it is not sufficient, it is difficult to imagine that becoming a Nazir will suffice in its place. A Nazir's vow generally takes effect only for thirty days; after that time, the Nazir is freed of the restrictions associated with his vow, including the prohibition of drinking wine. Chazal's intention is obviously that a person who witnesses a Sotah's death should do something to reinforce his own standards of morality on a permanent basis. How can this be accomplished by eschewing wine for only thirty days?

Chazal give us a fascinating insight into human nature: Consider the case of a person who is speeding along a highway when he suddenly comes to the scene of an accident. Traffic slows long enough for him to take in a chilling sight: A car is overturned, there are emergency vehicles with flashing lights, and there is the unmistakable shape of a human body lying motionless on a stretcher at the scene of the crash. For just a moment, the driver passing by will be shaken by what he has just observed. Yet it invariably takes less than a minute for a person to lapse back into all his normal (less than cautious) driving habits even after witnessing such a shocking sight. Why does the effect of the shock wear off so quickly?

The mind makes it very difficult for a person to handle seeing a disaster. The possibility that the same catastrophic event might happen to him is so daunting that the mind will automatically leap into action, conjuring up one rationalization after another to preserve the person's sense of security. Deep down, every person wishes to believe that he is immune to whatever disaster he has seen befall someone else, and the mind will stop at nothing to ward off any feelings of vulnerability. The driver passing the scene of a deadly accident will reason that the other car was made to inferior safety standards, or that the driver was drunk or not wearing a seat belt – anything that he can identify as a risk factor that does not pertain to him. Within seconds of witnessing the disaster, he will have a dozen reasons to believe that whatever happened to the other person has no bearing on him.

For the same reason, a person who witnesses the shocking death of a Sotah is actually unlikely to improve himself as a result. He is far more likely to begin to rationalize away what he witnessed. He will come up with any number of reasons to assume that the Sotah's punishment has no bearing on his life. Because of this very human tendency, Chazal teach us, the Torah calls for such a person to take a vow of Nezirus.

Obviously becoming a Nazir is not intended to serve as a permanent cure for the drive for licentiousness. Rather, the act of taking a vow of Nezirus is a way for a person to acknowledge and internalize the fact that he, too, is susceptible to the sinful drives that caused the Sotah's demise. True, the 30 days of abstinence from wine will not shield a person from immorality for a lifetime, but those days will drive home the message that the Sotah's

punishment is indeed relevant to him. Once he accepts that, the very experience of seeing the Sotah's death itself can then have a lifelong impact on him.

Did You Know...

This week's parsha, Parshas Nasso, is the longest parsha in the Torah, containing 176 pesukim. Remarkably, we find this exact number in two other places: The longest chapter in Tehillim, Chapter 119, also has 176 pesukim, and the longest Gemara, Bava Basra, goes until page 176! Obviously this can't be a mere coincidence, so what's special about the number 176? Chapter 119 of Tehillim has 176 verses because it follows a pattern of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and each letter is used to begin eight pesukim. That is, $22 \times 8 = 176$.

This of course raises the question: What is the significance of the numbers twenty-two and of eight?

Twenty-two is a number of completeness. We know that Hashem created the world through speech. Therefore, the very letters that make up the language incorporate every aspect of the physical world. Rashi in Parshas Vayakhel explains that the Mishkan was created by Betzalel because he knew the secret of combining the letters used in creation.

As for the number eight: We know that seven represents the "natural realm" (seven days of the week), but eight represents completeness beyond nature, what mankind contributes to the physical world (see Maharal Tiferes Yisroel). That is why the bris milah is held on the eighth day of a boy's life. This also explains why Hashem first commanded Avraham to perform his bris milah with the words, "Walk before Me and be complete" (Bereishis 17:1).

The product of two "complete" numbers, twenty-two and eight, is therefore the ultimate completeness. That's why 176 is used to demonstrate the amazing perfection of the Torah.

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Between the Lines - Fascinating Mystical Insights

By Rabbi Abba Wagensberg

The Triple Pattern

Naso (Numbers 4:21-7:89)

by Rabbi Abba Wagensberg

The Triple Pattern

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

One of the highlights of Parshat Naso is the Priestly Blessing. The text of this blessing, which the Kohanim bestow upon the Jewish people, concludes, "May God turn His face to you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:26).

Our Sages speak very highly of the quality of peace. For example, we find the statement in the Midrash (Bamidbar Raba 11:7) in the name of R' Shimon bar Chalafta, "Great is peace, for there is no vessel that can receive blessing other than peace." The Midrash brings a proof to this idea from the verse (Psalms 29:11), "God will bless His nation with peace."

We can understand this idea more deeply by taking a closer look at the phrase, "His nation." The Jewish people are composed of three categories of people: Priests (Kohanim), Levites (Leviim), and Israelites (Yisraelim). The Hebrew acronym of the words "Kohanim," "Leviim," and "Yisraelim" spells the word kli, which means "vessel." Once we understand that the Jewish people themselves are a vessel, we can gain a more profound insight into the Midrash's statement. The vessel of the Jewish people can receive blessing only when there is peace!

We can offer four primary pieces of advice for how to achieve peace with others:

Make sure that all our efforts are for God's sake. If we do everything for the honor of God, and not for the sake of boosting our own ego, we can view one another as part of the same team, pooling all of our different strengths and talents for a common goal.

Train ourselves to see only the good in others. Instead of being threatened or

challenged by others' differences, view the differences as positive qualities.

The Peleh Yoetz suggests that we should focus on the reward we receive for making peace, as an incentive to pursue it. He gives a striking example.

Imagine a person approaches you and asks you to make peace with someone you can't stand. Your initial reaction is to immediately turn down the offer.

Then the person asks, "What if I give you \$50? Do you think you could try?"

How about \$100? Or \$1,000? If I give you \$100,000, could you do it? How about two million dollars?" There is a point at which every person would give in and decide it was worth the effort to make peace.

According to the Peleh Yoetz, the reward we get in the World to Come for making peace far outweighs any financial bonus this world can offer. This knowledge should be an incentive to us to make peace.

Making peace sometimes requires us to compromise or to give in. We can do this only if we cultivate our humility and learn to be satisfied with the minimum.

* * *

THREE LEVITE FAMILIES

Although these four points are important, we can also suggest another approach in understanding God's expectation of us when it comes to peace.

The beginning of this week's Torah portion focuses on the tribe of Levi,

which is composed of three main families: Kehat, Gershon, and Merari. Based on the Shem MiShmuel and the Netivot Shalom, we can understand these three families as representing three spiritual levels.

The family of Kehat represents the highest, most righteous level. Their role is to carry the Holy Ark (Rashi on Numbers 4:4) - the highest component of the Tabernacle. The importance of this task underscores their lofty spiritual level.

The family of Gershon represents the middle level. They carry the curtain that divides the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Sanctuary (Numbers 4:25). One side of the curtain is close to the intense sanctity of the Holy of Holies, while the other side is not. We could suggest that this curtain hints to the spiritual level of an average person, who fluctuates between moments of intense devotion and moments of feeling less connected to the Divine.

The family of Merari represents the lowest level. They carry the beams and pillars of the Sanctuary (Numbers 4:31), the weight of which can be burdensome. This physical weight represents the heaviness of the lowest spiritual level.

The tribe of Levi is charged with teaching the Jewish people how to attach themselves to the Divine (see Rambam, "Shmita V'Yovel," 13:12-13). The three main families in this tribe show us that we are required to serve God not only when we are on a spiritual high, like the most righteous people, and not only when we feel average, but even when we feel the lowest and furthest away from God. Regardless of the emotional state in which we find ourselves, we must commit ourselves to doing God's will with a positive attitude.

This idea will offer us a new perspective on God's expectation of peace. In addition to being at peace with others, we must learn to be at peace with ourselves - whatever level we are functioning on. When we are frustrated with ourselves, it is much more likely that we will lash out at others. Being at peace with ourselves, however, usually leads to our being at peace with others. If we can learn from the tribe of Levi how to maintain our inner equilibrium, we have a much better chance at establishing peace with others as well.

May we be blessed to cultivate within ourselves the four primary qualities that lead to peace: acting only for God's sake; seeing the good in others; focusing on the rewards earned through this behavior; and being humble and satisfied with the minimum, which will enable us to compromise. Most important, may we learn to be at peace with ourselves. May we recognize the worth of our service, even at its lowest point, and realize that, even then, we have the potential to function at the highest level.

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Rav Kook Torah

Naso: Divine Favoritism?

Chanan Morrison

The Complaint of the Angels

The last blessing of Birkat Kohanim, the priestly benediction, is a request that God should be lenient when judging us:

”יְשֹׁא ה' פָּנָיו אֵלֵינוּ — May God lift His countenance to you” (Num. 6:26).

“Lifting one’s face” is a Hebrew idiom for showing special consideration, especially by a judge. Is it fair that the Jewish people should be judged leniently, more than other nations?

In fact, the Talmud (Berachot 20b) relates that the angels raised this very question.

“The ministering angels asked the Holy One, ‘Master of the Universe, it is written in Your Torah (Deut. 10:17) that You do not show favor or take bribes. And yet, You show Israel special consideration, as it is written, ‘May God lift His countenance to you!’

God replied to them, ‘How can I not favor Israel? For I commanded them, ‘When you eat and are satisfied, you must bless the Lord, your God’ (Deut. 8:10), and they are punctilious [to say grace] over an olive-sized piece of bread [even though they are not satiated].”

What is the significance of this stringency that the Jewish people accepted upon themselves, to recite the grace after meals (Birkat Hamazon) even for a small piece of bread? Why should this earn them special treatment?

When is Leniency Appropriate?

While leniency sounds like a good thing, this is not necessarily the case. We are punished for wrongdoings, not out of Divine retribution or revenge, but in order to direct us to the proper path. Even if an individual is bursting with merits and good deeds, he will not gain from a reprieve, even for the slightest of errors. Without the appropriate measure of Divine justice, we do not learn to mend our ways and strive towards ever-greater perfection.

There is, however, a situation when the absence of Divine justice will not have an adverse effect. This case involves an individual who will continue to strive towards self-improvement even without the Divine wake-up call to introspection and moral accounting.

Such a person must have acquired the quality of hakarat ha-tov, sincere appreciation. When applied to God and His kindness, this trait is the height of morality. Our sense of gratitude is intensified when we feel that we are the recipient of undeserved kindness and compassion. And the only way we can return this favor is through spiritual and ethical growth, thus fulfilling God’s will.

The appreciative individual recognizes that God’s generosity is not commensurate to his actions. Not only will this Divine leniency not cause him to become lax in his conduct, but it will inspire him to work even harder to improve himself, since he has an additional reason to be appreciative of God’s ways.

Now we can understand God’s response to the angels. The explanation that the Jewish people deserve special consideration because they recite blessings even on olive-sized pieces of bread is not just some form of Divine tit-for-tat. Rather, their behavior is indicative of a refined appreciation of God’s kindness for their physical sustenance, even keener than that which the Torah requires.

The Appreciation Test

There is an additional factor at play here. When misdeeds go unpunished, two contradictory processes occur. On the one hand, undeserved leniency bolsters our feelings of gratitude. On the other hand, we may be ensnared by a sense that our actions are not accounted for — so why bother laboring over ethical improvement and spiritual growth?

Which feeling will prevail? An individual blessed with strong character traits will think: I am indebted to God’s compassion; therefore, I must redouble my efforts to improve. A weaker person, on the other hand, will be misled by the mistaken sense that God does not fully monitor our actions.

How can we determine which way of thinking will triumph? Here is a simple test. If a person recognizes God’s kindness even when all of his needs have

not been met, this is a sure sign that he is blessed with a robust trait of appreciation. Such a person has a correct understanding of God’s relationship to His creations, and recognizes that God does everything for the good. In this case, we can be assured that, in a conflict between these two feelings — appreciation for God’s leniency, and a deluded impression of limited Divine providence — the true feeling of appreciation will prevail. Thus, one feels the need to express gratitude for even a small measure — even an olive-sized piece of bread — despite the fact that he is still hungry and his needs have not been fully met; it is clear that his natural sense of appreciation is strong and healthy. The Jewish people, who recite Birkat Hamazon even when they are not satiated, demonstrate their innate mindset of hakarat ha-tov, and will always interpret God’s leniency and special consideration in the correct way.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 102-103.)

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Uniformity and Uniqueness

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

One of the interesting paradoxes of human life is our tendency to copy one another and to try to “fit in” with friends and acquaintances, while simultaneously trying to be distinct from others, and to be our “own person.” The pressures of conformity are very strong in all human societies. People who are different are often treated as outcasts. And each of us determines our behavior with an eye toward others’ opinions. We want to be part of the group, part of the crowd.

The pressures that human groups, large and small, exert upon each of us results, not only in conformity, but in uniformity. Groups demand that all members act in accordance with their norms and its standards. Behavior which breaks the mold of uniformity is seen as threatening, even bizarre. And yet, we all feel the need to assert our uniqueness, our own precious individuality.

One of my personal favorite cartoons shows a crowd of penguins, looking identical, all black and white. In the center of the horde is one penguin with a barely noticeable red bow tie. The cartoon’s caption has that penguin saying, “I got to be me”.

Obviously, conformity is necessary for a society to function efficiently, and to maintain its equilibrium. Individual self-expression is also necessary, to introduce new coping methods into the social process.

There are dangers to both tendencies, that which demands uniformity, and that which allows for the individual’s urge for autonomy and self-assertion. Countless times in history, we have witnessed terrible dangers intrinsic to crowd behavior. We have seen the negative effects of cults, which encourage blind conformity to group norms. We have seen entire nations unquestioningly following cruel calls for the genocide of targeted populations.

We have seen the urge to be different result in equally harmful and dangerous behavior. Individuals who just want to be noticed will resort to serial murders of innocents, or to venting their rage by spraying a school campus with bullets. Self-expression carried to the extreme.

Apparently, there are good sides and bad sides to both social conformity and individualistic behavior. The secret lies in the balance between the two.

In the Torah portion Naso, which is read in the synagogue this week, even the casual reader will be troubled by the repetitive description of the offerings of the twelve tribal princes. Each of them contributes an absolutely identical set of celebratory gifts to the tabernacle. The uniformity of the twelve sets of gifts is absolute. It seems as if each of the twelve princes strove to totally conform to the others, and none dared defy the standards of the rest of the group. An example of conformity, if there ever was one. The congregants in the synagogue who hear the Torah reader repetitively

chant the monotonous lists of contributions often feel bored and ask, "Why the repetition, and why the uniformity?"

Here, the rabbis of the Midrash help us out. They take a different, deeper, and more perceptive view. Motivated by the same discomfort as today's Torah listener, they exclaim, "Their gifts are all identical, but each has his own unique intention."

Although the gifts all shared common explicit language, the thoughts and emotions behind each gift differed from prince to prince. Each lent a different kavanah, a distinct unspoken meaning, to his gifts. And that meaning was based upon the unique nature of each prince and the tribe he represented. The gifts were all the same; the underlying intentions were as different as one can imagine. The lyrics were identical; the melody, different. The rabbis speculate at some length as to the nature of these implicit intentions. They wonder as to how the prince of the tribe of Reuben might have expressed his tribe's uniqueness in contradistinction to the prince of the tribe of Simon, and Levi, and Judah, and so forth.

All human societies contain the tension between the pressure to conform and the inner urge to be distinctive. Religious societies contain that tension all the more. Judaism, for example, requires conformity to an elaborate set of behavioral guidelines. The casual observer of a group of Jews at prayer, or at the Passover Seder table, or circling the bimah with their palm fronds during the holiday of Succoth, will see a group of people who seem to be obsessively imitating each other.

But the observer who is familiar with the inner lives of those who comprise that group of Jews will realize that each person's prayer is different and reflective of his or her unique experience. Everyone around the Seder table is responding to different religious memories, and each of those who are circling the bimah is doing so with a very distinctive and unique set of religious emotions.

If there is a lesson to be gained from this perspective of our Parsha, it is this: Religious behavior calls for a great deal of uniformity, but also insists that each individual draw from his or her own wellspring of inspiration.

We all must be the same, yet we all must be different. This paradox is true of all human societies. It is especially true of the society of Jews.

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subject: Birkas Kohanim

Birkas Kohanim

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Why is this bracha different?

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

Question #2: Hoarse kohein

"If a kohein is suffering from laryngitis, how does he fulfill the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim?"

Question #3: The chazzan duchening

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

Answer:

I have written other articles about the mitzvah of duchening; this article will deal with a few specific issues not mentioned in the other articles.

First of all, I should explain the various names of this beautiful mitzvah.

Ashkenazim usually colloquially refer to the mitzvah as duchening. The word "duchen" means a platform, and refers to the raised area in front of the aron kodesh 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 kodesh, and, even when there is, in many shullen there are more kohanim than there is room for them on the duchen. In all these instances, the mitzvah is performed with the kohanim standing on the floor alongside the wall of the shul that has the aron kodesh, 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, because it avoids

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 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 over any other. Most kohanim, myself included, follow the way that they were taught by their father.

An unusual bracha:

Immediately prior to beginning Birkas Kohanim bracha, the kohanim recite a birkas hamitzvah, as we do prior to performing most mitzvot. The text of the bracha is: Boruch Attah Hashem Elokeinu Melech ha'olam asher kideshanu bikedushaso shel Aharon, ve'tzivanu levareich es amo Yisroel be'ahavah.

"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 bracha are different from the standard structure of brochos that we recite prior to fulfilling mitzvot. The first change is that, instead of the usual text that we say, asher kideshanu bemitzvosav ve'tzivanu, "Who sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us," the kohanim leave out the reference to "His mitzvot" and instead say "Who sanctified us with the sanctity of Aharon." The second change is that the kohanim not only describe the mitzvah that they are performing -- that Hashem "commanded us to bless his people Yisroel" --but they 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 bracha since, unfortunately in our contemporary world, we have no other mitzvot for which we use this text. However, when we are again all teforim 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 mitzvot of offering korbanos, he recites a bracha that includes this reference. Unfortunately, since we are all tamei and we have no Beis Hamikdash, a kohein cannot perform these mitzvot today, and therefore we do not recite this bracha text at any other time.

"With love"

The other detail in this bracha that is highly unusual is the statement that the mitzvah is performed be'ahavah, "with love." No other mitzvah includes this detail in its bracha, and, in general, the brochos recited performing mitzvot do not include details about how the mitzvot are performed. For example, the bracha 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 bracha 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 bracha for washing our hands is simply al netilas yadayim without mentioning any of the important details of the mitzvah. Yet, the bracha 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 bracha: “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 that this means that when people were sitting on the floor in the Beis Hamedrash, as was common in his day, he never walked over them, but either arrived before everyone else did, or else he sat outside) and I never recited the nesi’as kapayim without first reciting a bracha.’”

The Gemara then asks, “What bracha is recited prior to Birkas Kohanim? Answered Rabbi Zeira, quoting Rav Chisda, asher kideshanu bikedushaso shel Aharon, ve’tzivanu levareich es amo Yisroel be’ahavah.”

Thus, we see that the text 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, 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, when 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, that the kohanim bless the people because they want to and not because they are required to, was so important to Chazal that they included an allusion to this in the text of the bracha, something that is never done elsewhere!

Brochos cause longevity

There are several puzzling questions germane to this small passage of Gemara that we 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 bracha before performing the mitzvah of Birkas Kohanim? Didn’t every kohein do the same? And, if so, why did the other kohanim not achieve the longevity that he did?

The Keren Orah commentary notes that the Gemara quotes the amora, Rav Zeira, as the source for the bracha on Birkas Kohanim, implying that the bracha on Birkas Kohanim was not standardized until his time, and he lived well over a hundred years after Rabbi Elazar’s passing. This implies that a bracha on this mitzvah was not necessarily recited during the era of the tanna’im and early amora’im. The Keren Orah suggests the reason for this was because Birkas Kohanim itself is a blessing, and we do not recite a bracha prior to reciting birkas hamazon or birkas haTorah, even though they themselves are mitzvos. Notwithstanding this consideration, Rabbi Elazar was so enthusiastic about blessing the people that he insisted on reciting a bracha before performing Birkas Kohanim. 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 practically.

Hoarse kohein

At this point, let us examine the second of our opening questions: “If a

kohein is suffering from laryngitis, how does 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. Perhaps it means that the bracha should be said quietly, therefore the posuk says Emor lahem, as a person talks to his friend” (Sotah 38a).

This derives from the words of the posuk Koh sevarchu and Emor lahem two different laws. The first is that the audience receiving the kohanim’s bracha 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. It is correct that they should not look at the hands of the kohanim who are duchening, but they can look down to avoid this problem, and, anyway, most kohanim cover their hands with their talis while duchening.)

The second law derived from these pesukim is that the kohein should recite the Birkas Kohanim loudly enough so that the people can hear him. Although there are kohanim who shout the words of the Birkas Kohanim, the continuation of the Gemara clearly explains that be’kol 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 and 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 aseih, 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 aseih.

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 aseih.

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). Any of these three actions summon the kohanim to perform the mitzvah, and that is why they create a requirement on the kohein. A kohein for whom it is difficult 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 just quoted 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 nesi’as 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 the entire hand on Yom Kippur (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 128:6). Several acharonim rule that, since

Birkas Kohanim is a form of avodah, washing before performing this mitzvah includes other requirements, such as 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 bracha 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 also 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 continuation of the davening. The Pri Chodosh disagrees, concluding that this was a concern only when the chazzan led the services from memory, which, although very common in earlier era, is today quite uncommon. If the kohein-chazzan is using a siddur, such that 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.

When the chazzan does recite Birkas Kohanim, he turns around to face the people, recites Birkas Kohanim, and then turns back to complete the repetition of the shemoneh esrei. He is even permitted to walk to the front of the shul from his place in order to recite Birkas Kohanim should he be leading the services from the middle of the shul rather than the front.

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.

Temple services. The Torah guaranteed that there would be a special cadre within the general Jewish public that would be devoted to the spiritual needs of the people, with responsibilities in caring for the Temple. The Levites also provided the necessary atmosphere through song and melody that would provide impetus for the spiritual experience when visiting the Temple in Jerusalem and participating in its services. Apparently, it is necessary to have such an elite group function amongst the public, for the great masses of Israel to be directed towards noble goals, high ideals and, in their own way, the service of heaven and the Jewish people. The Levites were a living spiritual force that taught the people and inspired the spiritual goals and the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to Israel at Mount Sinai. In this three-family group, the Levites were the vanguard of Jewish spirituality and defined the purpose of the Jewish people and of the Temple service in Jerusalem.

The problem with being a special elite group within a general larger population is that the group often becomes discouraged when it fails to see the results that are desired taking hold in the general population. There is, therefore, a tendency amongst elitist groups and institutions to separate themselves from the population that they are to serve, and eventually to look askance, and even in disappointment, upon the masses that somehow fall below the expectations set for it by this elitist group. We then have a situation where the elitist group either gives up on its mission or withdraws in splendid isolation into its own world and institutions. The Torah created 48 cities for the Levites to be scattered throughout the land of Israel, where they would intersperse with the population and become part of the general makeup of the country. By so doing, they served as role models and examples. Through instruction they would guide the Jewish people in becoming a holy nation that would continually aspire for spiritual greatness and a more just society. The Levites were meant not only to be teachers, but moral examples of the type of Jew that the Torah envisioned. The Levites were not to be hermits living in their own splendid isolation in faraway caves, divorced from the lives and problems of the average worker and member of Jewish society. Rather, they were to be the living leaders and examples of a society steeped in Torah, in the service of God and Israel.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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subject: Parshat Nasso 5781 Newsletter - Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha NASSO 5781

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah reading of this week continues with the count of the different families within the tribe of Levi. We are aware that this tribe has been chosen for public service in the Temple and, generally, on behalf of the Jewish people. They do not own land, and their financial support is based upon the tithe that the Jewish people contributed from their produce.

The Levites serve at special functions in the Temple service and are worthy guardians who maintain the physical aspects of the Temple, as well as the talented artists who provided song and melody during the

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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 tzitzit

[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 well

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'
	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 rivra" 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:

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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 "nsim" presented the Leviim with the wagons. The remaining details of that joint

presentation of the nsim 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 BAMIDBAR

The twelve tribes are listed numerous times in Chumash, yet for some reason, each time that they are listed in Parshat Bamidbar - their order seems to change!

In this week's shiur, we attempt to explain why.

PART I - THE ORDER OF THE SHVATIM

In Parshat Bamidbar, the "shvatim" [tribes] are listed in three different instances - when the Torah discusses:

- (A) The LEADERS (see 1:5-15);
- (B) The actual CENSUS of the shvatim (1:20-43);
- (C) Their ARRANGEMENT surrounding the Mishkan (see 2:1-31).

Based on these three sources, the following table compares the order of the shvatim in each respective list.

[A star *- next the name of a tribe will note a significant change from one list to the next:]

#	(A)	(B)	(C)
1)	Reuven	Reuven	*Yehuda
2)	Shimon	Shimon	*Yisachar
3)	Yehuda	*Gad	*Zevulun
4)	Yisachar	Yehuda	Reuven
5)	Zevulun	Yisachar	Shimon
6)	Ephraim	Zevulun	Gad
7)	Menashe	Ephraim	Ephraim
8)	Binyamin	Menashe	Menashe
9)	Dan	Binyamin	Binyamin
10)	Asher	Dan	Dan
11)	Gad	Asher	Asher
12)	Naftali	Naftali	Naftali

Review each of these lists, noting how (and where) the order changes from one list to the next. Before we suggest a reason for these changes, let's begin by explaining what each list is about.

THE COMPARISON

The first list - column (A) - appears to be the most logical.

Note how the leaders of each tribe are presented:

First - the children of Leah (eldest first),

Then - the children of Rachel,

Then - the children of the 'shfachot' (the maidservants)

(Bilha & Zilpa).

The second list (when the census is taken) - column (B) - is almost identical, but with one very peculiar change: GAD has 'moved up' from position #11 to position #3!

For no obvious reason, it appears as though Gad has been 'adopted' by the children of Leah.

In the third list (when the shvatim are organized surrounding the Mishkan) - column (C) - we find once again that Gad is placed with "bnei Leah". However, this time we find yet another very peculiar change: The tribes of Yehuda, Yisachar, and Zevulun -

the YOUNGEST children of Leah - have 'jumped' to the top of list (i.e. ahead of their older brothers Reuven and Shimon)! Even though there is not obvious reason for this change, we should expect it to be significant, for this final list reflects the actual formation in which Bnei Yisrael travel through the desert on their journey to Eretz Canaan (see Bamidbar 10:13-28).

With this in mind, we will now attempt to explain the logic of this 're-organization' by considering the purpose of the Mishkan, and its strategic location within the camp of Bnei Yisrael.

DIVINE DIVISION

Recall God's original commandment to Bnei Yisrael concerning the purpose of the Mishkan:

"v'assu li MIKDASH v'shachanti b'TOCHAM"

"They shall make for a sanctuary that I may dwell AMONG THEM..." (see Shmot 25:8)

Note how this pasuk could be understood as a commandment as well - i.e. to erect the Mishkan in the CENTER of the camp.

Therefore, to enable this placement, the twelve tribes are divided into FOUR DIVISIONS. In this manner, the Mishkan will be surrounded equally in all four directions (East, South, West, and North) by groups of three tribes each. In other words, to create four 'divisions' from twelve tribes, the shvatim must be divided into four groups of THREE tribes each.

However, each group of three also requires a leader - therefore four leadership tribes must be chosen, one for each division.

Now we must explain which tribes are chosen to lead these four groups (and why)?

As family leadership is the responsibility of the "bchor" - the first born son - we find that the four leadership "shvatim" are simply the four sons of Yaakov who possess a certain aspect of being the 'first born' - namely: Reuven, Yehuda, Ephraim and Dan. Let's explain why.

REUVEN

Reuven was the first son born to Leah, therefore, his tribe obviously becomes one of the leaders.

YEHUDA

Recall from Sefer Breishit, that because of Reuven's sin (taking the maidservant of his father/ see Br. 35:22), Yaakov decided to award the family leadership to a different son. As Shimon & Levi had also angered their father (at the incident at Shechem/ see Br. 34:30), Yehuda was chosen as the family leader for the children of Leah.

[See also Yaakov's blessing to his children in 49:3-12 & Divrei Hayamim I 5:1-2!]

EFRAIM

Even though Leah was Yaakov's first wife to bear children, he still considered Rachel as his 'primary' wife. Therefore, Rachel's first child - Yosef - is also considered a "bechor". In fact, at his deathbed blessing to Yosef, Yaakov awards him with a 'double portion' (see Breishit 48:5), the portion set aside for the first born son. However, because of this 'double portion', both of Yosef's sons - Ephraim and Menashe - are considered as tribes. Even though we may have expected the "bechora" to be granted to Menashe, as he was the eldest son of Yosef, Yaakov awarded the "bechora" of the children of Rachel to Ephraim instead, as explained in Breishit 48:17-19.

DAN

The children of the "shfachot" [maidservants] also became an integral part of Yaakov's family, and therefore, the firstborn of these children is also awarded the status of "bechora". Dan becomes the obvious choice, as he is the first born of Bilha, the "shifcha" of Rachel, the first maidservant to give Yaakov a child.

[Note that the four leadership positions are divided equally between Yaakov's two wives: Rachel -2 and Leah -2.]

WHO BELONGS WITH EACH LEADER

Once these four leadership tribes have been designated, each must be joined by two additional tribes in order to form the necessary four groups of three.

Considering that the leaders are chosen based on the first born children of Yaakov's wives, it is only logical that each leader should be joined by his closest brothers.

Therefore:

* Reuven should be joined by Shimon and Levi, his two younger brothers. However, Levi has a 'new job' and must encamp in closer proximity to the Mishkan (see Bamidbar chapter 3). Thus, Reuven is joined only by Shimon and remains one tribe 'short'.

* To make Yehuda's group complete, he is joined by his two younger brothers: Yisachar and Zevulun.

* Ephraim, the "bechor" of the 'house of Rachel', is joined by his brother Menashe, and his uncle Binyamin, (Rachel's youngest son). Thus, the group of "bnei Rachel" - is also complete.

* Dan should be the leader for all of children of the shfachot, i.e. his brother Naftali, and the two children of Zilpa: Gad and Asher. However, had this been the case, his group would have too many for it totals four! Therefore, Dan's group has one 'extra' tribe.

Considering that Reuven is 'short' one tribe and Dan has one too many, it is only logical that one of Dan's 'extras' moves to Reuven's group. For this reason, Gad 'moves' from his 'home camp' to join the camp of Reuven.

But why was specifically Gad chosen?

Naftali remains with Dan, for he is Dan's full brother.

Therefore, we are left to choose between Gad and Asher, the two children of Zilpa. One could suggest that Gad is chosen for he is the eldest son of Zilpa, and hence given the 'privilege' to join the camp of Reuven, while his younger brother Asher remains with the camp of Dan.

HOW THEY TRAVELLED

Now that we have explained how and why the tribes are organized into four groups, we must explain the direction in which they travel (as detailed in Bamidbar 2:3,10,18,25):

EAST - Yehuda, Yisachar, and Zevulun [Bnei Leah]

SOUTH - Reuven, Shimon, and Gad [Bnei Leah +Gad]

WEST - Ephraim, Menashe, and Binyamin [Bnei Rachel]

NORTH - Dan, Naftali, and Asher [Bnei ha'Shfachot]

As Bnei Yisrael must now travel from Har Sinai (through the desert) toward Eretz Canaan, the basic direction of travel is eastward. Therefore the camp in the East travels first.

It would appear that Yehuda is chosen for this direction because of his leadership qualities. Recall that he was originally chosen by Yaakov for his leadership (he took responsibility for Binyamin), and later they are known for their strong army (see Yehoshua chapters 14->15).

The group of Reuven follows (to the south), as they are the other tribes from Leah. Ephraim follows (to the west), as he leads the children of Rachel. As we would expect, the children of the "shfachot" (led by Dan) travel last.

With this background, we can now return to our original question and explain the logic behind the three conflicting orders of the shvatim:

LIST (A) - The Leaders

The presentation of tribal leaders (A) follows the most logical order: by mother/ by birth, i.e. the children of Leah - followed by the children of Rachel - followed by the children of the shfachot.

[For some reason, the children of the shfachot are not listed by the order of their birth. It seems that Naftali must always be last, and Asher precedes Gad for he will remain within the camp of "bnei ha'shfachot."]

LIST (B) - The Census

The census (B) follows basically the same order as (A), however it already reflects the 'transfer' of shevet Gad into the camp of Reuven, placing him in the position of Levi (#3). Most likely, this is because this census will be the basis for the organization of the tribes into groups of three.

LIST (C) - Surrounding the Mishkan

The organization of the shvatim around the Mishkan (C) reflects not only Gad's new position within the camp of Reuven, but also Yehuda's leadership role in travel formation, for he is destined to be the leader of all the shvatim. [See Breishit 49:10 - "lo yasur shevet m'yudah..."] Therefore, this list begins with Yehuda, followed by the tribes of his camp, then Reuven and his camp, etc. etc.

Up until this point, our discussion has been rather technical. In Part II, we discuss this significance of this special manner by which the tribes encamped around the Mishkan.

PART II - WHEN AND WHY

The opening pasuk of Parshat Bamidbar informs us that this organization of the shvatim and the census took place on the first day of Iyar (in the second year, see 1:1). However, in the details of the Mishkan's dedication ceremony, as recorded Parshat Naso, we find an apparent contradiction. Let's explain.

Recall how Parshat Naso describes the dedication of the Mishkan with special korbanot offered by the "nsiim" [the tribal leaders], that took place during the first twelve days of Nisan (see 7:12-83). However, when you review the list of "nsiim", you'll notice that their order is exactly the same as the order of list (C)!

In other words, the order by which the "nsiim" offered their korbanot (on the first of Nisan), was exactly the same as the order by which the tribes encamped around the Mishkan, as established on the first of Iyar.

This proves that the special order of the tribes (C) already existed on the first of Nisan, a month before the census was taken on the first of Iyar! This suggests that this order was already significant, even before Bnei Yisrael prepared for travel to Eretz Canaan!

To explain why, we must recognize that this special organization of the shvatim served a double purpose - both military and spiritual:

- * **MILITARY** - To prepare the camp for travel in military order, in anticipation of their conquest of Eretz Canaan.
- * **SPIRITUAL** - To emphasize to the entire nation that the Mishkan is located at the **CENTER** of the camp, in order that they recognize the God's SHCHINA dwells among them.

Let's explain why:

(1) The census in Parshat Bamidbar is of military nature, for it counted all the males above the age of twenty - "kol yotze tzava b'Yisrael" - because they will be fighting the battle to conquer Eretz Canaan (see 1:3).

Furthermore, the subsequent organization of the twelve tribes into four divisions, was also of a military nature. Finally, the census is taken on the first of Iyar, for only 20 days later Bnei Yisrael will actually leave Har Sinai (see 10:11) and begin their journey to conquer Eretz Canaan.

(2) One month earlier, when the Mishkan was dedicated, we find that this same order of the shvatim already existed. This implies that even before the census, the camp of Bnei Yisrael had already been organized in a manner so that the Mishkan would be located at its center. To do so, it was necessary to divide the

twelve tribes into four groups of three, with each group flanking the Mishkan in a different direction.

This would imply that even when Bnei Yisrael were still encamped at Har Sinai, it was already important that they be reminded (by placing the Mishkan at the center) that God's presence was in their midst, and act accordingly.

THE SHCHINA RETURNS

To appreciate the additional importance of the location of the Mishkan at the center of the camp, we should also consider the events which took place after "chet ha'Egel" - the sin of the Golden Calf.

Recall that in response to "chet ha'Egel", God had instructed Bnei Yisrael to remove their 'crowns' that they had received at Har Sinai (see Shmot 33:5-6), a sign that He is removing His shchina from their midst. For the very same reason, God then instructed Moshe to move his tent (the site where God speaks to Moshe) **OUTSIDE** the camp:

"And Moshe took the Tent, and pitched it **OUTSIDE** the camp, at a **FAR DISTANCE** from the camp, and called it '**OHEL MOED**', then whoever sought God would have to go to the '**Ohel Moed**' located **OUTSIDE** the camp." (Shmot 33:7)

The very location of this "ohel moed" [tent of meeting] **OUTSIDE** the camp served as a constant reminder to Bnei Yisrael that God had removed His shchina from their midst. In order for His shchina to return, it was necessary for Bnei Yisrael to build the Mishkan:

"And they shall build for Me a Mishkan, and I will **DWELL IN THEIR MIDST** [v'shachanti b'TOCHAM]" (see Shmot 25:8)

Therefore, the re-organization of the camp of Bnei Yisrael in such a manner that the Mishkan is located at its center serves as a sign to the people that God has indeed returned His shchina to the camp.

Because of its significance, a 'remnant' of this camping arrangement of the tribes 'around the Mishkan' continued even after the forty years in the desert, when Bnei Yisrael finally conquer and settle the land.

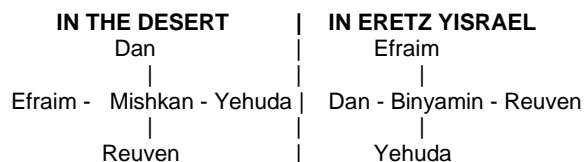
To explain how and why, we must consider the blessing of Moshe Rabeinu in Parshat v'Zot ha'Bracha to the tribe of Binyamin:

"And to Binyamin he said: "ydid Hashem -yishkon l'vetach alav..." [the dear tribe of God - upon whose territory His Presence will dwell...] (see Devarim 33:12).

For this reason, Chazal consider the tribe of Binyamin as "nachlat shchina" [the territory of God], for it is destined to house the Bet ha'Mikdash.

If so, then the following parallel emerges.

Recall from Sefer Yehoshua, that when the tribes receive their "nachalot" (as described in chapters 13->19), we find a very similar configuration!



Note how in both configurations the site of the SHCHINA - be it the Mishkan in the desert, or the Mikdash in "nachalat Binyamin" - is surrounded by the same four 'leadership' tribes! [The directions have simply rotated 90 degrees (and inverted).]

One could suggest that the Torah dedicates such minute detail to this manner of travel, to emphasize how the Mishkan serves this double purpose:

1) It acts as a symbol of God's presence within the camp of Israel (see Shmot 25:8 and above), and...

2) It functions as a constant reminder to Bnei Yisrael, as they travel, of their Divine purpose.

As Bnei Yisrael prepare their departure from Har Sinai towards the conquest of the Land of Israel, they will face new challenges. For example:

Can they translate what they have learned at Har Sinai into the norms of the daily life of a nation?

Will they be capable of fulfilling the mundane tasks of fighting battles, establishing a nation, and cultivating the land etc., while at the same time remaining on the spiritual level of Har Sinai?

This week, as we celebrate Yom Yerushalayim, this challenge takes on special significance. Can we, the nation of Israel, continue our battle for Yerushalayim and the mundane chore of maintaining a secure and prosperous state, without compromising on the spiritual ideals of Har Sinai?

Can we maintain Yerushalayim not only as a unified capital city, but also as a city characterized by "tzedeq u'mishpat" (justice and righteousness)?

Although the Bet-Mikdash, the symbol of this challenge, was destroyed some two thousand years ago - both Parshat Bamidbar and Yom Yerushalayim can serve as a yearly reminder of this eternal challenge.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

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'EGEL

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!)
[b'zchut" Moshe]

* 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.
[b'zchut" ha'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, via its leaders, 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.]

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

