

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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his 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 archives.

Mazel-Tov to Benjamin Shai Lieberman and Hannah Newburger on their wedding on Sunday at Congregation Har Shalom in Potomac, MD. Mazel-Tov also to the kvelling parents, Sharon & Steven Lieberman and Ruth & Mark Newburger. Special Mazel-Tov to Benjamin's grandparents, Caryl Lieberman and Phyllis Silverman; Hannah's grandmother Beth Newburger; Benjamin's sisters Rachel (& Jaryn) and Jessica; and Hannah's siblings Adam and Abigail.

The first ten chapters of Sefer Bemidbar cover the final preparations of B'Nai Yisrael to leave the base of Har Sinai, where they have been since shortly after leaving Egypt, for the final few days of travel to Canaan. On Rosh Hodesh Iyar of the second year, God tells Moshe (and Aharon) to take a census of all the men aged 20 and older, by tribe and within tribe by family. The census instructions and procedures to purify the camp continue into Naso.

The Torah then presents some important but seemingly unrelated laws. Anyone who has taken possession of another person's property must make restitution (5:5-10). If a man suspects his wife of being a Sotah (adulteress), there is a procedure involving a Kohen, dust from the floor of the Mishkan, and ink used to write Hashem's name (5:11-31). A man who wants to experience extra holiness may become a Nazir (6:1-21), by voluntarily accepting restrictions parallel to those of a Kohen Gadol for a specified period (usually a month). This section ends with the priestly blessings, which a Kohen is to use to bless Jews (6:22-27).

The mitzvot sections of the Torah are in thematic order – any two mitzvot or stories adjacent to each other are related thematically. A rite of passage for day school or yeshiva students is to read through the items above and explain why they are related thematically – that is, explain why possession of another's property, Sotah, Nazir, and priestly blessings follow each other. I remember going through the items with my son when he was in fourth grade, as we worked together to explain their thematic relationships. (Now, with the Internet, there are numerous Devrei Torah that explain the connections.)

What interests me this week is how Naso fits in with B'Nai Yisrael's preparations for their final journey to the land that Hashem had promised to the Avot. Overall, the mood so far in Sefer Bemidbar has been positive and uplifting. The family groups and tribes participate willingly in the census. Each tribe receives a position in which to travel while marching around the Mishkan. The excitement will continue next week in Behaalotecha, when Yitro brings Moshe's family to him, Moshe describes how God has blessed and protected every Jew, and Moshe invites his father-in-law to join B'Nai Yisrael. Finally, B'Nai Yisrael begin their journey (10:33-35). Immediately, the people look for reasons to complain and bring on trouble (11:1 ff.). God becomes angry, God's wrath erupts, and the rabble complain more. How did everything go from unity and happiness to complaining and dispute in a flash? Was there a warning that Moshe and other leaders might have seen?

I believe that the Sotah discussion provides the clearest warning of danger coming. Consider the Sotah ritual. If a man believes that his wife may have committed adultery, and if the wife is willing, a Kohen can perform a divine test. The wife must have been seen to go behind a closed door with a man who is not her husband. The husband must have previously warned his wife to avoid such situations, and the woman must have created the same sort of situation again. If a married couple are willing to undergo the Sotah test, there must be something seriously wrong with their marriage. The husband and wife cannot trust each other, and they are willing to submit to a procedure that will kill the wife if she has committed adultery (and kill her unborn baby if she is pregnant). How can a man and woman who love each other come to mistrust each other enough to require a deadly test of her behavior?

The positive aspect of the Sotah ritual is that if a woman accepts the ritual and is innocent, then she will survive the test and gain a special reward – she will receive the blessing of having children. (In some cases, troubles between a man and woman could start if they live together for a number of years and do not have any children.) Some commentators consider the Sotah a gift from Hashem because it can resolve distrust between a man and his wife and because it can give the blessing of children. However, an equally valid interpretation is that the Sotah indicates mistrust and trouble in the community.

Chazal consider the relationship between Hashem and B'Nai Yisrael to be a marriage between the Jewish people and God. While the Sotah ritual on the surface is about a man and his wife, at a deeper level, it is an analogy for Jews sinning against Hashem by following idols. The struggle against idolatry persists throughout the Torah and Navi periods. Troubles between a man and woman over exclusivity mirror the struggles that Moshe has with B'Nai Yisrael whenever they encounter other nations (since the other nations all pray to idols). By placing the Sotah shortly before B'Nai Yisrael depart from the base of Har Sinai toward Canaan, the Torah is implicitly warning us that struggles with idolatry will come soon. The mitzvah of the Nazir provides a man with a procedure to come closer to Hashem – a welcome route for one who has sinned or for one who wants extra strength to prepare for struggles when encountering members of pagan nations. By blessing our children with the priestly blessings every Friday evening, hopefully we guide them toward Hashem and away from idolatry. The Nazir and priestly blessings hopefully help our people stay faithful to Hashem, especially when we experience troubled relationships with our Creator (as well as with our spouses, others in our family, and members of our community).

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, taught me to look for parallels in each week's parsha with situations elsewhere in the Torah, and to seek a message for us today in the weekly reading. Although I have read the opening sections of Bemidbar many times over the years, I have gained new insights this year. Rabbi David Fohrman, in his podcast this week, delved into parallels between the Sotah and Noach. (The mabul, or flood, and the Sotah are both ways to deal with sin and restart positive relationships. For more, see Rabbi Fohrman's podcast.) For me, the connections between Sotah and the struggles of B'Nai Yisrael to create and maintain an exclusive relationship with Hashem opened up a new way of understanding our ancestors' struggles in the Midbar. The ability to find new meanings in the Torah, even after decades of study, is an example of the rewards that await us through study. Shabbat Shalom.

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 Shleimah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Naso: Echoes of Shavuot (2001)

by Rabbi Label Lam

A senior colleague of mine told me in private conversation a few years back that he had failed seven times where his grandfather had succeeded once. I looked at him with a puzzled expression and that was license enough for him to tell me the following story:

His grandfather owned a small retail business in England. A Russian Jew who had recently emigrated there frequented his establishment and never left before delivering some barb or hostile remark demonstrating his personal disdain for the religious belief system of the store's owner. They never exchanged opinions about the matter of religion, but rather the elderly proprietor absorbed the skillfully aimed comments for years without confronting him directly.

One day the elderly Jew made his customer an offer he just couldn't refuse. He told him the following; "Business is often based upon difference of opinions. What's valuable to one person is plentiful or worthless to another. That thing then is available to be sold. Obviously you don't believe in G-d. If you don't believe in G-d then it's not likely that you subscribe to the existence of an eternal soul. If there is no eternal soul, then I can be certain that your portion in the next world has no value to you at all. If so, then I am ready to offer you \$300 for your portion in the next world."

The customer, with an incredulous look, wondering how an adult in the 20th century could be so stupid, accepted the money, as easily as one takes a lollipop from a baby, in exchange for his portion in the next world, but not before a document stating the terms of the agreement was signed and placed inside the store's safe.

Not even two days passed by and the Russian customer who was raised on a strict diet of Marx and Engel returned to the store looking as if he had seen a ghost, or had not slept for some time.

He hesitatingly expressed his regret at having taken advantage of the old man by taking his hard earned money like that. The elder ensured him that he was still very happy with the purchase and there was no reason to feel bad. The fellow continued with the sentiment of how bad he felt taking the money. The counter offer was made that if he wanted to return the money he would have no problem accepting it back.

The man was still not quite settled until he was made to articulate his demand that the document in the safe be returned and the deal voided completely. In that real moment he confronted the heart of his personal beliefs, in spite of years and years and layers upon layers of contrary mental training.

My colleague humbly admitted that he had failed seven times in this area. After traveling around the world and being involved in hundreds of seminars in the most outrageous of circumstances and locations and after having met Jews of almost every stated opinion about their standing with Judaism, only seven times did he confront a brick wall of resistance. That is, after discussing and arguing till early hours in the morning, his opponent refused, in spite of mountains of good reasoning to consider yielding to the notion of a G-dly world.

At those rare moments, of which there were only seven in so many years, he attempted to do what his grandfather had done. He reached into his pocket and put on the table not less than \$300, which is a significant sum for an Israeli hitch hiking through the far east, and each time, for some inexplicable reason he was never able yet to make the sale. The mystical tradition tells us that the soul of every Jew that ever was or will be was present at the moment of the giving of the Torah 3313 [now 3334] years ago. Perhaps on a deep subliminal level this experience still resonates within all of us and can sometimes be quantifiably tested in the market place...

Good Shabbos!

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5761-naso/>

Naso: The Boat That Wouldn't Row

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

In this week's Parsha we read of the Sotah, the unfaithful wife. A husband saw his wife "hanging out" with a man improperly, and he warned her. Then she did it again. She was seen going privately with the same man. The Torah outlines a procedure to clarify what happened. A portion of the Torah, including the name of G-d, was dissolved into water. The potion was given to the woman to drink. If she was guilty, Divine retribution would strike her; she would die within minutes.

Although the Sotah's inappropriate behavior could happen for a variety of reasons, our sages identified a specific case that caused this tragedy. They discuss a woman who lost her sensibilities as a result of drinking wine. When she drank, her inhibitions left her, and she was willing to go with improper company.

One wonders; The Sotah wasn't a one-time affair. It was a specific case where she acted inappropriately at least once before, causing her husband to issue a warning about her behavior. If she knows that her behavior is caused by drinking wine, why did she continue to drink? With the exception of a full-blown alcoholic addiction, which does not seem to be the case discussed by the sages, why wouldn't this woman refrain from drinking if that causes her compromise?

I once read a story of a boy who loved to row. His parents were afraid to allow him to row on his own. So, they made a deal. He could row as much as he wanted, as long as the boat was tied securely to the dock.

Sometimes in life, a person professes a desire to improve. But even as he or she tries vigorously to move forward, they remain rooted in place because they are not really ready to move forward.

I would suggest that the Sotah was well aware that wine was causing her problem. But she would not stop drinking wine, because she was very pleased with the experiences that resulted. Certainly, she apologized to her husband for her misbehavior; but she truly enjoyed her misbehavior. She was very pleased to be able to blame it on the wine.

I recall one of my first experiences in Jewish education, when I offered to teach Hebrew Reading in a certain synagogue. The Director of Education received my offer pleasantly but informed me that she had no use for such a course. She explained, "We switched our service to English years ago because people didn't know Hebrew. If enough people learn Hebrew, we might have to switch it back."

What struck me most is that she made this statement in her office, which was filled with posters promoting Jewish Continuity and Jewish Education. It seemed to me that she was willing to row the boat of Jewish education and Jewish continuity with great dedication to the cause, as long as the boat was firmly tied to the dock. She was willing to implement any program that promoted Jewish education and Jewish continuity, as long as it didn't rock the boat.

In contrast, during the same time period, a different synagogue opened its doors to our Torah programming. When the Rabbi of the synagogue was asked how he could allow students from the Lakewood yeshiva teach his congregants, he replied, "What do you think will result? That a few congregants will decide to go Kosher? I think that is a good thing."

I once read that in medieval times there were medicine men who administered "Devil's Brew" to their patients. If they saw that a patient was getting better, but they wanted to remain the hero who kept the patient alive, they would mix a drop of poison with its antidote into the patient's food. The potion would wreak havoc on the patient's system. The patient would appear deathly ill. Then the antidote would start working, and the patient would appear to be recovering. The patient would have good days and bad days, but the main thing was that although the medicine man appeared to be helping the patient, he knew that his potion would ensure that the sick person would remain his patient forever.

The story of the Sotah is tragic. But I find the story of the Sotah invigorating as well. Because Sotah is only applicable if after being warned, the woman chooses not to change.

There are areas of our lives as individuals and as a community that we know have produced weak results. If we do not change, estimates are that the results will be the same. The story of the Sotah is an invite to change, to take counsel with the necessary mentors, therapists, or advisors, to ensure that future results are different and better. This is true in our relationships, in how we spend our time, and in the direction that we chart for the community.

The story of the Sotah is essentially an invite. An invite to strategically identify whatever it is that holds us back from success. An invite to untie the boat, and row, row, row the boat...gently...down the stream...

Wishing you and yours a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Together...Uniquely: Thoughts for Parashat Naso

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

When the Almighty calls on Moses to command the priests to bless the people of Israel, the instructions are in the plural (emor lahem). When the blessing is concluded, the Almighty indicates: “and I will bless them” (va-ani avarakhem) — also in the plural. The setting of the priestly blessing, then, is clearly to be a public event intended for the entire collective.

Yet, the tripartite blessing itself is entirely in the singular form. Although the blessing is intended for the plurality of Israel, it is aimed at each individual separately. It prays that God will bless and protect each of us; that God’s countenance should shine on each Israelite and grant each one of us peace — shalom.

The formulation of the priestly blessing is alluding to a profound truth. The blessings are given to the entire community...not as an anonymous mass of people, but as an assembly of individual human beings. The emphasis is on the uniqueness of each person, the desire that each of us finds blessing and fulfillment in life. The goal is shalom...peace, wholeness, personal satisfaction.

God’s infinite wisdom encompasses all...but focuses on each. This idea is underscored in a Talmudic teaching (Berakhot 58a) that requires the recitation of a special blessing when witnessing a vast throng of Jews. We are to praise the Almighty Who is hakham harazim, the One who understands the root and inner thoughts of each individual. “Their thoughts are not alike and their appearance is not alike.” The Creator made each person as a unique being. He expected and wanted diversity of thought, and we bless Him for having created this diversity among us.

Religious life entails participating in a community, observing shared rituals, following traditional patterns. It can happen that one’s individuality may seem compromised or lost in the process. The overwhelming emphasis on communal mores tends to diminish the uniqueness of each individual. The priestly blessing reminds us of the need to be part of the community...but to retain our own distinctive individuality.

In his famous essay, “Self-Reliance,” Ralph Waldo Emerson taught: “There is a time in every man’s education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion.” We each are who we are; to squelch our individuality in order to imitate others is self-destructive. Emerson lamented the tendency to forfeit one’s ideas, ideals and values in order to blend in with the dominant group. Rather, one should be true to him/herself.

Poignantly, Emerson wrote: “Man is timid and apologetic. He is no longer upright. He dares not say ‘I think,’ ‘I am,’ but quotes some saint or sage.” These words, proclaimed in the mid-19th century, continue to ring true nearly 200 years later. So many religious people, including rabbis, are reluctant to express an original opinion unless it is authenticated by sages of earlier generations. Instead of relying on their own thinking, they seek to amass sources of earlier “authorities.”

The framework of the priestly blessing provides a vital dynamic. We are a community; we stand together in our beliefs and observances. At the same time, though, we are each unique individuals with our own particular thoughts, sensitivities and needs. While we — as members of a community — receive the blessings from the priests and from God, those blessings are directed to each of us separately.

This is not merely a blessing on us. It is a challenge for us.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

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 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.
<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/togetheruniquely-thoughts-parashat-naso>

Naso – Appearances Matter

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

In this week's Parsha we learn of the laws of the Nazir. An individual who is inspired and wishes to take time to focus on the deeper meaning of life can take the vow of a Nazir, abstaining from wine and from any grape related products. During this time, the Nazir would focus on spiritual matters and avoid social parties and physical pleasures. Taking this vow, even temporarily, is considered to be a significant expression of dedication to G-d and to living life as He intends. In fact, the Nazir temporarily attains the holiness of the High Priest and is therefore prohibited from attending any funerals or having any contact with the dead, as is the High Priest.

When the accepted term of Nazir is completed, the Torah proscribes a set of sacrifices the Nazir must bring. He brings an elevation offering, a peace offering, and a sin offering. The Gemara in Nedraim (4b) notes that the sin offering of the Nazir is unique in that it is being brought without any prior sin on the part of the Nazir. The commentaries struggle to understand what indeed is the purpose of this offering.

Rabbeinu Bechayei (Bamidbar 6:13) raises this discussion. He indicates that while there is a deeper, mystical significance to this sacrifice, as is true with all sacrifices, we still must try and understand the sacrifice at face value. There must be some purpose of a sin offering in the standard sense.

He quotes the Ramba"n who suggests that the Nazir has a slight "sin" for his willingness to leave his elevated spiritual status and return to normal life. Although the elevated spiritual life of a Nazir is generally not considered an appropriate way to live long-term, nonetheless, the Nazir should be reluctant to give up his elevated lifestyle. His willingness to engage again a normal life requires a certain measure of atonement. Rabbeinu Bechayei notes that according to this interpretation, the Nazir should bring his sacrifice after he has returned to normal life and left his elevated spiritual lifestyle. However, the Torah clearly states that he may only drink wine after he has brought these sacrifices. (Bamidbar 6:20)

Rabbeinu Bechayei, therefore, suggests that the sin offering is in fact not coming to atone for sin, but rather because there is a unique need for a Nazir to express his abhorrence of sin as he leaves his Nazir status. During his term as a Nazir, he enjoyed a particularly close relationship with G-d. When he ends that service and its enhanced relationship with G-d, it looks as though he now wishes to take leave of G-d, and distance himself slightly from G-d. This appearance could lead the Nazir to begin to distance himself from G-d in truth. He might be impacted by this false impression and begin to abandon his spiritual essence and devote himself more than he should to his physical pursuits. To offset this concern, the Nazir brings a sin offering, along with a peace offering and elevation offering. In so doing, he fully expresses his desire to connect with G-d and his abhorrence of sin. This full expression of his spiritual connection with G-d makes it clear that he does not want to abandon his relationship with G-d. In this way he avoids any misunderstanding and protects himself from being led astray.

Rabbeinu Bechayei is clear that he has not sinned in any way and is not doing anything wrong by leaving his elevated status. The only problem is that it doesn't look appropriate. It has the appearance of wanting to distance from G-d. Although it wasn't actually true, once he gives off that impression, he could begin to believe it himself. The Nazir would be aware of how others may view his actions and could begin to view himself that way. He therefore must take action to avoid any false impressions and to protect his own integrity.

So often in life we deal with complex situations where the right and proper way to live requires certain leniencies or allowances. Even when this is appropriate, we cannot ignore the impression we give. If we allow ourselves to give off the impression that we don't care, then deep down in our psyche, we will be aware of how people see us. Once we allow them to think negatively of us, we just may come to prove them right.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Naso: Embracing Life

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia **

At first sight the laws of Nazir, detailed in Parashat Nasso, seem to suggest that the Torah encourages people to take upon themselves vows of abstinence. A closer, contextual reading, makes it clear that the life of a hermit, away from society and from the world's bounty, is not the Torah's idea of a perfect life. It makes perfect sense to anyone who knows his Tanakh. The Torah indulges us with the description of the Garden of Eden and the marvels of creation; it praises the beauty of our mothers and meticulously describes the architectural wonder of the Tabernacle. It never tires of mentioning the bounty of the land of Canaan and the riches awaiting those who will inherit it. The book of Psalms and the Song of Songs paint breathtaking canvases of the natural world and the human condition, even if only as allegories. There is no doubt that the Torah wants us to enjoy the opulent smorgasbord God has placed in front of us. The goal is to elevate the mundane actions and the quotidian life by infusing them with faith, loving kindness, justice and honesty. It is very easy to turn your back to the world and walk away. Settle down in the desert and see no one. Be alone with God, hone your spirituality and find your true identity as the poet said (America) - "in the desert you can remember your name for there ain't no one for to give you no pain." This is indeed what Jeremiah wished for (Jer. 9:1) but knew he could not have as a prophet whose role is to be with the people. It is much more difficult, but nonetheless enriching and fulfilling to integrate normal life and Torah values.

Unfortunately, though, it seems that we are gradually adapting the Nazirite view of the world rather than the one celebrating life. Rather than adhering to the Rabbinical adage (Yer. Kiddushin, 4:12): "HaShem will punish those who refused to enjoy that which He has given them," they herald the concept that the stricter the better.

Now, if certain individuals want to be strict and afflict their souls and bodies, no problem, the Torah gave them a reluctant permission to do so, but why would they do it to others? At least let them admit that for almost any opinion in Halakha that says that something is forbidden, there is another that says it is allowed. So let us not look down on those who are "lenient" because they are very strict in keeping the concept of enjoying God's blessings.

Here are some examples that might be of use in the summer which are, for some, precariously near:

1. Relying on the Eruv: it has been the Minhag of all communities, Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike, to rely on an eruv in ANY city in the world. Those who choose not to rely on it and go against the widespread Minhag must understand that they are the exception that goes against the norm. They are welcome to walk in the summer heat with no water and full regalia, but they should not teach their children, as I have personally witnessed, to close their eyes when they see someone "carrying" on Shabbat. Or consider this case which I have also witnessed: during the recent heat wave a "strict" husband was pleasantly marching empty handed while his "lenient" wife had no choice but lag behind with a toddler on one hand and his tricycle on the other. Is this the way of Torah? I really wanted to remind this guy that the rabbis say that a husband and wife are one body and he is therefore "carrying" now, so they should either both stay at home or both rely on the Eruv, because it is OK to be a Nazir, a strict hermit for yourself but it is not OK to impose it on others and make them suffer.

2. Exercising on Shabbat. It is clearly stated in the Shulhan Arukh that jogging and exercising is allowed for recreational purposes but not for pure medical ones (Orah Hayyim 301:2 and 328:42). This includes using weights and non-electric machinery such as stationery bikes. There are those who say it is not in the Spirit of Shabbat because they simply do not connect to the practice, but this is exactly what the Shulhan Arukh says: those people who enjoy this activity are allowed to do so. Period.

3. Swimming: Hakham Ovadia Yossef rules, in Yalkut Yossef on Shabbat, vol. 2, based on the Talmud and the Shulhan

Arukh that swimming in a pool on Shabbat is allowed, but by the time the fifth volume was published the same ruling was restated with many restrictions because of "what will people say" and the "spirit of Shabbat". Here again we must say that if one does not enjoy the pool, no one will push him there, but if the Halakha clearly says that it is allowed, he should not mistake swimmers for sinners.

Shabbat Shalom

* Rabbi Ovadia has a lengthy analysis of Sefer BeMidbar that he has broken into separate sections for each parsha. Watch his column each week for the full analysis. Because my word processor does not handle Hebrew well (especially going back and forth across word processing software), and because of possible Shemos, I have deleted the Hebrew but left the translations. For the full version, see Rabbi Ovadia's postings at <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets>

** Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:** <https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia's original in Sefaria.

Nazir: The Rebalancing Act

By Rabbi Eliezer Weinbach *

Who exactly is the option of Nezirut for? The Nazir takes it upon themselves to refrain from all grape products and hair cutting, and to avoid ritual impurity imparted by the dead (Num. 6:3-6). At a glance, it would seem that anyone would be invited to take this on if they so choose.

However, a closer look reveals an additional interesting requirement, one that not everyone would be able to fulfill. The Nazir is on the hook for a tremendous number of Korbanot – one of every single type, as a matter of fact. Chatat, Olah, Todah, and Mincha, not to mention the possibility of additional surprise plus bird korbanot and Asham offerings if they should become accidentally and unavoidably tamei (Num. 6:14-17).

The korban requirements for the Nazir are extensive. Not everyone is in a position to take Nezirut on for themselves, because not everyone has enough resources to bring the korbanot.

This makes sense – the Torah provides the option of Nezirut for those who wish to constrict themselves. The option of constriction is one given for those who have more than enough. There is no expectation, or possibility, for someone who is not well-off to accept these constrictions upon themselves, nor should there be. The option of Nezirut is one way for someone who feels that they are at a time in their lives when their blessings are overwhelming, and this leads them to counterbalance their excess with constriction.

There is a lot going on in the world these days, and much of it is stressful. And yet, every now and then, hopefully, we get a chance to reflect on how lucky we truly are. We have so many blessings. We may find ourselves to be blessed with abundance when others have so little.

To live below our means is a difficult task, but the Torah consistently provides ways for us to counterbalance – to put spirituality before our material concerns. And while becoming a Nazir is rare these days, we may start to consider for ourselves: where has our material abundance interfered with our spirituality? It is worth our time to take stock of our spirituality – how has our tefillah been? Has our phone interfered with our kavanah? How has our connection with HaShem's natural world been? More or less powerful than our connection with television? Have we had as much time for acts of kindness as we have had for parties?

If we discover that we are blessed with time, entertainment, and connection in abundance, but a lack of God, perhaps it is then time to counterbalance.

Rest assured, this balancing act is blessed. Right after the section on the Nazir, the parsha continues with the Birkat

Kohanim (Num. 6:23-26). This blessing is the result of the connection that is opened up between the Bnei Yisrael and HaShem when we prioritize spirituality over materiality. Now that all is in balance, Moshe tells Aaron, "it is time to bless the people!" We recite Birkat Kohanim daily in our prayers – let us understand the lesson of this parsha, and make sure that we can justify the abundance that we are blessed with.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Rabbi Eliezer Weinbach, an experimental educator, is pursuing graduate level studies in Jewish education and in the environment.

<https://library.yct Torah.org/2022/06/naso22/>

Repetitive and Redundant and Repetitive and Redundant

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

A funny moment over Shavuot at KI came when one of our SEED guests, Yehuda Esral, asked why we say "Good Yom Tov" when wishing someone a happy holiday. "Yom Tov" means holiday but literally means "good day." So when we say "Good Yom Tov" we're wishing someone a "good good day". Yehuda asked, "Why do we do this? It's repetitive and redundant, repetitive and redundant, repetitive and redundant."

I wish they were here for this Shabbat, because Yehuda would have a field day with our Torah portion of Naso where the Torah lists off the gifts that the heads of the 12 tribes brought for the Tabernacle. They all brought the exact same items in the exact same quantity. So it would make sense for the Torah to just list them off once and say all the chiefs brought these items.

But the Torah instead chooses to list off the same items a total of 12 times, one for each tribe. If the service seems to take longer this week, that's the reason.

Why does the Torah do this? Why do we have to hear about silver plates and frankincense, silver plates and frankincense, silver plates and frankincense?

Many have asked and answered this question. So instead of giving you one approach, I will give you two and you will get to choose which one you like better.

1) The Torah wished to emphasize and value that there was no "religious competition" between the chiefs of Israel. No one tried to outdo his fellow chieftain in order to score extra mitzvah points for themselves and their tribe.

2) The Torah wanted to emphasize that though the items they brought were the same, they actually were different because even when two people do the same action, each one brings his unique self, past experiences, intentions and attitude to the table. Two people can pray with the same words, eat the same meal, or shake the same lulav. But each act really is a qualitatively different act because every individual is different. So this Shabbat we actually will learn about 12 different gifts brought by 12 different people.

At the time you read this email, which approach do you prefer?

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL. Note: Because Rabbi Rube's new Dvar Torah was not ready in time for my deadline, I am reprinting an earlier Dvar Torah from his archives.

Rav Kook Torah Naso: The Benefits of the Sotah Waters

The Suspected Adulteress

The integrity of the family unit is of primary importance in Judaism. For this unit to function properly, the husband-and-wife

relationship must be one of trust and constancy. But what happens when this trust, so vital for a healthy marriage, is broken?

The Torah discusses the situation of the Sotah, the suspected adulteress. This tragic case occurs when a woman, previously cautioned by her husband not to seclude herself with a particular man, violates his warning and is seen alone with that man.

The Torah prescribes an unusual ceremony to deal with this potentially explosive situation. The woman is brought to the entrance of the Temple, and she brings an offering of barley meal. The kohen uncovers her hair and administers a special oath. If the suspected adulteress insists on her innocence, the kohen gives her to drink from the Sotah waters.[1] If the wife was unfaithful to her husband, these waters poisoned her. But if she was innocent, the waters did not harm her. In fact, they were beneficial — **“she will remain unharmed and will become pregnant”** (Num. 5:28).

The Benefit of the Waters

The Sages disagreed on the exact nature of the positive effect of the Sotah waters. Rabbi Yishmael understood the verse literally: if she was barren, she became pregnant. Rabbi Akiva, however, disagreed. If that were the case, childless women would purposely seclude themselves with another man and drink the Sotah waters in order to bear children! Rather, Rabbi Akiva explained, the waters would ease the pain of childbirth, or produce healthier babies, or induce multiple births (Berachot 31a).

Rabbi Akiva had a good point — the law of the Sotah could potentially turn the holy Temple into a fertility clinic. In fact, the Talmud tells us that one famous woman threatened to do just that. Hannah, the barren wife of Elkana, threatened to go through the Sotah process if her prayers for a child went unanswered. (Her prayers were in fact granted, and her son became the famous prophet Samuel.) Why was Rabbi Yishmael unconcerned with Rabbi Akiva’s objection?

Rav Kook explained that the ritual for suspected adulteresses was so degrading and terrifying, no woman would willingly submit to it — not even a barren woman desperate for children.

Hannah’s Exceptional Yearning

Hannah, however, was a special case. This amazing woman foresaw that her child was destined for spiritual greatness. Hannah’s profound yearning for a child went far beyond the natural desire of a barren woman to have children. She was motivated by spiritual aspirations greater than her own personal needs and wants. Hannah was willing to actively demonstrate that her longing for a child surpassed the normal desire of a barren woman. Thus Hannah was ready to undergo the ordeal of the Sotah ceremony. And by merit of her extraordinary yearning, her prayers were miraculously answered.

Only in this unique case was the natural deterrent of the ordeal of the Sotah insufficient.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p.135.)

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Water from the Temple washstand was mixed with earth from the Temple grounds. A bitter root was then soaked in the water. The text of the curse was written on parchment, and the ink was dissolved in the water.

<http://www.ravkooktorah.org/NASO60.htm>

The Pursuit of Peace (Naso 5771, 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" Akeldat 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. [emphasis added]

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.

[note: footnotes have not been preserved for this essay]

<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/naso/the-pursuit-of-peace/>

Shouldering the Burden: Why Carting the Ark of the Covenant Led to Disaster

By Yossi Ives * © Chabad 2022

When it came to transporting the Mishkan, the portable tabernacle in the desert, the Torah¹ divided the task between the three families of the Tribe of Levi. The family of Kehat was assigned the duty of carrying the most sacred vessels, and specifically instructed to “carry it on their shoulders.”² They were responsible for transporting the Holy Ark, the Menorah, the table for the showbread, and the golden incense altar. The other two families – Gershon and Merari – were provided with wagons to carry the collapsible structure and all the other sacred vessels.

When Maimonides sets out the arrangement for transporting the tabernacle in his monumental code, the Mishneh Torah, he describes it as follows:

When the ark is transported from place to place, it should not be transported on an animal or on a wagon. Instead, it is a mitzvah for it to be carried on one's shoulders. Since David forgot and had it transported on a wagon, there was an outbreak [of Divine anger] against Uzzah. Rather, it is a mitzvah to carry it on shoulders, as it states: “For the holy task is their obligation. They shall carry it on their shoulders.”

Many aspects of this segment are difficult to understand. Most astonishing is that Maimonides exclusively refers to the Ark being carried on the shoulders, when the Torah³ states that a range of other items were also to be transported by the Kehat family. Clearly, those other items were also carried by shoulder, as the Kehatites were given no wagons. Why does Maimonides only mention that the Ark was hauled by shoulder and make no mention of any of the other vessels? As several prominent commentators⁴ have noted, this is a striking omission.

Some⁵ suggest that Maimonides understands that the other vessels were only transported on shoulders while the Israelites were in the desert, and that only the Ark had to be permanently transported by shoulder (even once they crossed into the Land of Israel). The problem is that Maimonides makes no such distinction in his text.

Another problem is that Maimonides doesn't identify who was supposed to carry the Ark. Was it the family of Kehat, as per above? Or was it the Kohanim (priests), as Maimonides⁶ suggests elsewhere?⁷

The Rebbe shows that the issues melt away once we properly understand Maimonides' intention.

Uzzah's Mistake

The Rebbe begins by pointing to the curious reference Maimonides makes to Uzzah. Who was he and why is he relevant here?

In II Samuel 6:1-7 we read an account of the Philistines seizing the Ark during a battle. When its presence brought calamity upon them, the Philistines released the Ark. It was eventually loaded onto a new wagon and brought to King David. Along the way, the oxen drawing the cart stumbled, and a man named Uzzah reached out to steady the Holy Ark, which appeared to be about to fall. At that moment, Uzzah was struck dead.

(Commentaries⁸ explain that G d showed His displeasure by having the oxen stumble so that the Ark would be removed from the wagon, but Uzza intervened to keep it there. So although it was King David who made the initial mistake of putting the Ark on the wagon, it was Uzza who tried to ensure that it stayed there, undermining the will of the Almighty.)

Maimonides asserts that the Almighty was displeased that the Ark was being transported by wagon, but why does he attribute Uzzah's death to this error rather than the more obvious reason that they had violated the Biblical mandate to carry the Ark on their shoulders?

Why does Maimonides divide his statement into two sections, one that the Ark "should not be transported on an animal or on a wagon," for which he brings proof from what happened to Uzzah, and second that there is an obligation to "carry it on their shoulders," for which he brings the Biblical verse?

Location, Location, Location

The Rebbe explains that in Maimonides' view, aside from the obligation to carry the Ark on the shoulder, there is a more fundamental prohibition against moving the Ark on a wagon (or any means of transport, for that matter).

Unlike any other vessel in the Tabernacle, the Ark was designed to be situated in a very specific location. Placed anywhere else, it loses its sacred status.

The Ark's location when stationary was in the Holy of Holies, the Tabernacle's inner sanctum. When being transported, that location changed to the shoulders of its designated carriers. When the Ark was placed on the wagon by Uzzah, this diminished the Ark's power in a significant way. Uzzah was struck down, Maimonides suggests, because putting the Ark onto a wagon was a uniquely serious affront. Simple failure to carry the Ark in the proper way would not have led to such tragic results.

The Other Vessels

Now we understand why the obligation to carry on the shoulders ceased for all the other vessels once they were no longer sojourning in the desert, but remained for the Ark. And that is why Maimonides focuses on the Ark and omits mention of the other vessels. At the time Maimonides wrote his code, a couple of thousand years had passed since the Tabernacle had been transported. Thus, there was no need to address the transport arrangements that had long been obsolete. He only references the Ark, because how it is carried is intrinsic to its essence.

Nor does Maimonides speak about who transported the Ark, as that also no longer had any practical relevance.

A clear lesson for us today emerges from this ancient law. The Ark contained the Ten Commandments and the Torah scroll. Torah needs to have its designated place, as it is our anchor and lodestar. Torah should not only be treated with reverence and respect, it must also be recognized as the one true fixed feature in our lives. Torah must never be treated as a piece of furniture that can be transported by wagon, but as a precious child that we carry on our person.

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, vol. 28, Parshat Naso III.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 7:2-9.
2. Numbers 7:9.
3. Numbers 4:7-15.
4. Minchat Chinuch 379, Ohr Hatorah Naso p. 256.
5. R' Avraham, son of Maimonides in Maase Nissim chapter 2.
6. Sefer Hamitzvot, Positive Commandment 34.
7. Nachmanides ibid (and many others) disagrees, and insists that the Levite family of Kehat remained tasked with carrying the Ark.
8. Mahari Kra, Il Samuel 6:6.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5132047/jewish/The-Dangers-of-Deconstruction.htm

Naso: Our Spouse, Our G-d By Rabbi Moshe Wisniewsky* © Chabad 2022

G-d then instructed Moses the laws regarding a suspected adulteress. If a husband has grounds to suspect his wife of adultery, he should first raise the issue with her privately; if her actions continue to arouse his suspicions, he may subject her to a test by which G-d would indicate whether she was innocent or guilty. This test only worked if the husband's motives were totally pure, if he himself was not guilty of adultery, and when society as a whole was horrified by adultery. (In consideration of all these factors, this ritual was discontinued some time before the second century CE.)

Who in Their Right Mind?

G-d instructed Moses to tell the Jewish people: "Should a man's wife stray, causing him to suspect that she was unfaithful to him" Numbers 5:12

Committing a misdeed is a terrible act because the Jewish people are "married" to G-d. Were adulterers not married, their behavior would not be judged so harshly; the fact that they betrayed a covenant-relationship is what makes them deserve punishment.

The same is true of the Jewish people. A misdeed is not merely a technical transgression; it is a personal affront to our beloved Divine Spouse. As Jews, our connection to G-d is so strong that it is inherently impossible for us to transgress His will. The only way we can commit a misdeed is by deluding ourselves into thinking that it will not jeopardize our connection to G-d. Reminding ourselves that G-d is our "spouse" helps us avoid committing misdeeds.

* — from *Daily Wisdom*

Gut Shabbos,

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Blessing of Love

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

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

"May the Lord bless you and protect you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Priests but from God Himself. So why require the Priests to "put His name" on the people?

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

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

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

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

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

The first reading, grammatically more plausible, is that it is the Priests who must love. This is the basis of the statement in the Zohar that "a Priest who does not love the people, or a Priest who is not loved by the people, may not bless." [5] We can only bless what we love. Recall how the blind and aged Isaac said to Esau, "Prepare me the tasty food that I love and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die" (Gen.

27:4). Whether it was the food that Isaac loved, or what it represented about Esau's character – that he cared enough for his father to find him the food he liked – Isaac needed the presence of love to be able to make the blessing.

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

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

There is, though, perhaps an alternative explanation for all these things. As I explained in Covenant and Conversation Kedoshim, it was the Priests who taught the people the specific ethic of holiness. The Prophets taught them the ethic of social justice. The Sages (as in the book of Proverbs) taught them the ethic of character.

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

That ethic belongs to the specific vision of the

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Priest, set out in Genesis 1, which sees the world as God's work and the human person as God's image. Our very existence, and the existence of the universe, are the result of God's love.

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

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

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

[1] Sotah 39a.

[2] Section 378.

[3] R. Avraham Gafni, Be-Inyan Birkat Cohanim, Zakhor le Avraham, 1996, 523-531.

[4] Rabbi Yerucham Perla, commentary to R Saadia Gaon, Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, 16.

[5] Zohar III, 147b; see Magen Avraham, 128:18.

[6] Sotah 5a: "Any person who has arrogance within him, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: He and I cannot dwell together in the world."

[7] Mishnah Avot 1:12.

[8] Rambam, Hilchot Deot 6:3.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to Aaron and to his sons saying so shall you bless the children of Israel; say to them, may the Lord bless you and keep you...'" (Numbers 6:22-27)

There are very few passages of the Bible which are as well known as the Priestly Benediction. In Israel, the kohanim-priests rise to bless the congregation every single morning. In the Diaspora, however, the Ashkenazi Jews include this special benediction only on the Festivals.

Nevertheless, there are many life-cycle celebrations such as circumcisions, redemptions of the first born, bar and bat mitzvot and even weddings which are punctuated by this Priestly Blessing. In effect, the kohen-priest stands as God's representative, as the "agent of the Compassionate One", as the spiritual leader and as the Torah teacher – and in this function as teacher and guide he calls upon God to bless the congregation. As Moses declares in his final blessing to the Israelites, "[The Priests and Levites] shall guard Your covenant, shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel..." (Deut. 33:9,10)

The Talmud (in the ninth chapter of Berachot) as well as our Prayer Liturgy declare "At the time of the priestly blessings, the congregation responds, 'Master of the Universe I am Yours and my dreams are Yours.'" Apparently, our Sages saw a profound connection between the dreams of the Congregation of Israel and the function of their priest leaders. Exactly what is the nature of that connection?

I would suggest that first and foremost a leader and an educator must inspire his students/ congregants/ nation with a lofty vision, an exalted dream. The Psalmist and sweet singer of Israel King David declares in the Psalm which we recite each Sabbath and Festival before the reciting the Grace after Meals, "When the Lord returned with the restoration of Zion we were as dreamers"; after all, had the Jews not dreamt of the return to Israel throughout their long exiles, we never would have returned to our homeland.

One sees the same idea from the opposite vantage point when one realizes the cause of the great tragedy of the Book of Numbers. In Numbers, the Jewish people descends from the great heights of the Revelation at Sinai to the disastrous depths of the sin of the scouts, the rebellion of Korah, the sin of Moses and the destruction of that entire generation in the desert. What caused such a mighty fall? The Bible itself begins its account of the descent with the words, "And it happened that the nation kvetched (mitonenim) evilly." (Numbers 11:1)

The 18th century Netziv explains the difficult Hebrew word mitonenim as meaning "wandering hither and thither" aimlessly and without purpose or direction, from the Hebrew *anna*. Simply put, this great Torah leader was saying that the Israelites had lost the dream and the vision which they felt at Sinai when they had cried out "We shall do and we shall internalize," when they accepted upon themselves the Divine mission of being a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation." They descended into destruction because they lost the dream.

Secondly, the Hebrew word for dream is *halom*, and – with a simple switch of letters, it spells *hamal*, which means love and

Likutei Divrei Torah

compassion. The priest-leader who inspires with his dream must first and foremost love his nation; only if he loves the Israelites will they believe themselves worthy of being loved, will they believe in their ability to realize the dream and achieve the vision. Great leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and David Ben Gurion lifted their respective nations to unheard of heights because they helped make them believe in themselves.

Thirdly, the Hebrew word *halom* with another switch of letters spells *lohem*, which means fighting, warring (if need be) to achieve the necessary goals. A great measure of imparting a dream is to impart idealistic sacrifice on behalf of that dream.

Fourthly, the Hebrew word *halom* also spells *lehem*; a dream must be nourished with the material necessities of program, tactics and strategy necessary to accomplish the dream.

Fifthly, the Hebrew word *halom* also spells *melah*, or salt. Salt symbolizes tears – the tears of sacrifice and commitment – as well as eternity, since salt never putrefies. Salt is therefore the symbol of our Covenant with God, the Covenant which guarantees Jewish eternity and ultimate redemption.

And finally, *halom* is linguistically tied to *halon*, a window; a light to the outside world. The dream with which the priest-kohen must inspire the Israelites is a dream which encompasses the entire world, the dream of "Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth", the dream of "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks".

Those who believe in a God who is invisible may well dare to dream the dream which is impossible but only those who dream the impossible will ever achieve the incredible.

The Person in the Parsha Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Sanctity and Sanctimony

We are all full of contradictions. There is a part of us which is noble, kind and generous. But there is another part that is selfish and stingy, and which can even be cruel.

That is the way we were created. We have the potential for good, yet it is matched with our potential for evil. At different times in our lives and in different circumstances throughout our lives, one part or the other dominates.

What is especially fascinating is that often we are both good and evil, kind and cruel, at the same time. It is no wonder then that we know so many people who can best be described in paradoxical terms: the wounded healer, the generous miser, the sinful saint, the foolish sage, the righteous knave.

In this week's Torah portion, Naso, we meet an individual who displays both negative and

positive qualities in the very same role. I speak of the Nazarite, or Nazir in Hebrew, the man or woman who vows to adopt an ascetic lifestyle, a lifestyle of abstention from wine and anything connected to wine, and who commits to never shaving or taking a haircut, or to coming into contact with the dead, even at the funerals of his or her own parents or siblings.

The very word "nazir" means to withdraw, to remove oneself from others and from worldly pleasures. The Torah describes such a person, over and over again, as holy. "He shall be holy..."; "He is holy unto the Lord..." (Numbers 6:5 and 6:8)

Yet, should the Nazarite inadvertently come into contact with the dead, then he is to offer a specified set of sacrifices. And these sacrifices are to "make atonement for him, for he sinned al hanefesh – by reason of the soul." (Numbers 6:11)

What does it mean to "sin by reason of the soul"? The simple meaning is that the "soul" here refers to the soul of the dead body with whom he accidentally came into contact. So he needs atonement for his chance exposure to a corpse.

There is another opinion in the Talmud that says that "soul" here refers to the Nazarite's own soul, and that somehow, in renouncing the pleasures of life, he has sinned against his very own soul. In the words of Dr. J.H. Hertz, whose commentary on the Bible has become, regrettably in my opinion, less popular than it once was, "...he was ordered to make atonement for his vow to abstain from drinking wine, an unnecessary self-denial in regard to one of the permitted pleasures of life."

The Torah recognizes the inner contradiction of the Nazarite's lifestyle. On the one hand it is a lifestyle of holiness, and that is to be commended. But on the other hand, it is an act of renunciation of the pleasures of God's world, and as such it expresses ingratitude, perhaps unacceptably extreme piety.

I find myself frequently reflecting upon this Talmudic view and its implications. For we often encounter in our religious worlds individuals who are in many ways paragons of spiritual virtue, but who at the same time radiate an attitude of condescension to others of lesser spiritual attainments.

We have all met people who are outwardly very religious, and perhaps even inwardly and sincerely so, but who seemed to be saying to us, "I am holier than thou." And we have all felt belittled, sometimes insulted, but invariably put off by such individuals.

There is a word in English, although I have never been able to find a precise Hebrew equivalent, which describes such behavior. That word is "sanctimonious". Webster's dictionary defines "sanctimonious" as

"pretending to be very holy or pious; affecting righteousness".

Whereas this dictionary definition seems to stress the fraudulent or insincere quality of the sanctimonious individual, I have often found that these individuals are quite sincere in their own inner conscience; but along with their righteousness is an attitude of "holier than thou".

I do not want to end this little essay by simply pointing out the self-righteous behavior that we experience in others. I think that we are all sometimes guilty of sanctimony, and need to be on guard against it.

The readers of these weekly words on the parsha, by virtue of the very fact that they are readers, are religious people. And religious people need to be very careful not to send the message, "I am holier than thou." We have to be careful that our acts of piety are sincere, that's for certain. But we also have to be cautious that those acts not be viewed by others as statements of spiritual superiority.

The religious person must always be on guard against hypocrisy and must always be sensitive to the reactions he or she provokes in others. If those reactions are of respect and admiration, then we have made a kiddush Hashem, thereby advancing the cause of our faith.

But if others are made to feel inferior by our airs of religious observance, then not only have we lost them to our faith, but we have fostered a chillul Hashem, causing others to look negatively upon the religion they represent.

I encourage the reader to find a Hebrew equivalent for the word "sanctimony". But even if such a word cannot be found, I urge all observant Jews to avoid sanctimonious behavior.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

An Important Rokeach to Know When Listening to Birkas Kohanim

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'

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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 Levi, 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.

Dvar Torah**Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis**

What does the Torah say about good parenting? The term Nasso, which is the title of this week's Parsha, has three separate meanings. Nasso means to count. It also means to carry and Nasso means to raise or elevate.

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

The Jewish View of Competition

The reason that this Parsha is the longest in the Torah (176 verse), is that the very detailed and multifaceted aspects of each of the sacrifices of each of the Nesiim-leaders of each of the twelve tribes, in dedicating the Mishkan-Tabernacle for twelve days. But these verses (all 72) are a Torah reader's dream, because each sacrifice

was identical, repeated twelve times! We know that not one letter in the Torah is "extra". Why, then, repeat each Nasi's sacrifice, when it was identical? Why not just tell us that each Nasi brought a sacrifice matching his predecessor's from the day before? Perhaps this repetition is teaching us a fundamental concept in how we should behave today.

Moshe did not specify what the tribal leaders should bring. Thus, it was up to each leader to decide how much and what specifically should be brought. The competition between the tribal leaders was on! The first Nasi-Prince to bring a sacrifice on the first day, the eminent Nachshon from the tribe of Judah, brought a silver dish and silver bowl, both filled with fine flour and oil, a spoon made of gold full of incense, a bull, ram and lamb as burnt offerings, a kid goat as a sin offering, and two oxen, five rams, five goats and five lambs – all as peace offerings (Numbers 7:12-17). This was quite a display and quite an offering. Now everyone was waiting for the next day's offering to see what the next leader would bring, in his natural effort to try to top what Nachshon had contributed. Who was to be second in line after Nachshon? The Midrash explains that there was great competition between the Nesiim to be second, and Netanel was chosen by God to bring his sacrifice on the second day because he was a great Torah scholar, as the entire tribe of Yissachar were known as Torah scholars (Midrash Tanchuma Naso 14). Another Midrash affirms that Netanel was not only smart in Torah learning, but altogether very intelligent (Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 72:5). This is very important to know because of Netanel's decision of what to bring. In fact, one commentary states that Netanel gave advice to all the other tribes about what was the proper sacrifice to bring (Baal HaTurim commentary on Numbers 7:18). What precisely did Netanel do and what did he bring as his sacrifice?

Instead of joining the competition of what today has become known as the "Bar Mitzvah syndrome" mentality, where Jews often try to outdo each other in how special, unique and expensive their Simcha-celebration will be, Netanel, with his Torah and innate wisdom, decided to bring the identical sacrifices brought by Nachshon, down to the last detail (Numbers 7:18-19). In this way, he set the tone for the Nesiim that followed during the next ten days. After two identical sacrifices one day after the next, each Nasi then fell in line and also brought the exact same sacrifice as the leaders from the first two days, as it would have looked "gaudy" for the Nasi of the third day, Eliav, to start bringing more. Thus, Netanel created a situation in which the potential competition between these leaders was eliminated. Netanel's special "sacrifice" and advice are alluded to in Rashi. Rashi says that the verse says "he sacrificed" twice -- only by his offering -- in order to teach us that not only was he more deserving than the others because of his vast Torah scholarship,

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but also because he gave special advice to all the Princes of each tribe to bring the sacrifices specifically in this manner (the same has he did, imitating the first offering of Nachshon) (Rashi commentary on Numbers 7:19). These twelve sacrifices, brought in a non-competitive spirit and spelled out in detail, taught the entire Jewish people that there need not be competition between tribes, and that everyone could work together without the need to be the "best" and outdo the other tribes. In fact, when these leaders brought all the sacrifices to the Tabernacle, the Torah records that the sacrifices were brought all together, not in twelve separate wagons, but together in six wagons with two sacrifices in each wagon (Numbers 7:3).

What, Then, is the Jewish Attitude Towards Competition? - Even before man was created, the Torah already alludes to competition in this world. A verse in the Torah says that on the Fourth Day of Creation, two large luminaries were created, the sun and the moon, and then the verse states that the larger luminary, the sun, ruled during the day, while the moon ruled the night. Rashi asks (Genesis 1:16 with Rashi commentary): if the verse calls them both large, how could the moon later in that same verse be referred to as small? He answers that originally there was a competition between the sun and the moon for dominance of the world. They contended about which would provide more light for the earth. Since there cannot be two equal rulers and two "winners" in this competition, Rashi says that the moon was made smaller and "moved" to the night.

The next competition alluded to in the Torah is that between the Serpent and Adam. Before its sin, the Serpent, according to the Midrash, was erect, tall and able to speak. It vied for the affection of Eve and, as part of its sin, competed with Adam for Eve's love, and even attempted to kill Adam in order to marry Eve (Midrash, Beraishit Rabbah 20:5). This continued into the next generation between the very first two brothers in the world, Cain and Abel. One commentary describes the entire episode of the sacrifices of Cain and Abel (which led to Cain slaying Abel) as a competition between the two for the affection and approval of God (Abarbanel commentary on Genesis 4). There was subsequent sibling rivalry and competition between the children of Abraham – Isaac and Yishmael – a rivalry that continues today in their descendants, the Jewish people and the Arabs. In fact, the entire book of Genesis thereafter can be viewed as a competition between brothers: Eisav-Yaakov, Yosef- his brothers, Menashe-Ephraim. In each succeeding generation, the results of that competition became less harmful.

In traditional sources, the term for competition is usually associated with the negative traits of jealousy and hatred, and it depicted as a trait to be avoided. Thus, the Midrash says that Tacharut-competition is not a good trait to possess as it stands in opposition to the desired

trait of peace between people. Rashi states that the natural outgrowth of jealousy is competition (Rashi commentary on Shabbat 152b). Rabbi Joseph Albo refers to the trait of competition as evil (Sefer Halkaraim 2:28). Rabbi Shimon stated that the reason God gave the Jewish people the laws about courts even before He gave them all the Torah laws is that the laws of the court, if followed properly, would encourage peace and discourage competition (Exodus 15:25, Midrash Mechilta Mishpatim Nezikin 1). In the fourteenth century, Sefer HaChinuch explained (Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 501) that the reason for the Torah's prohibition for the king to have too many wives (and presumably this explains the common Jewish practice of why every Jewish man should have only one wife) is that with more than one wife, the competition between these ladies for the husband's favor will be so great that it will cause great damage

In order to avoid competition between Jews, the Rabbis enacted several edicts as part of established Jewish practice. The Talmud records (Moed Katan 27a) that there used to be a competition regarding the fruit baskets that were brought to the homes of mourners. The wealthy people went out of their way to give the fruit in silver and gold baskets, which the poor could not afford, and they gave fruit in baskets of peeled willow wigs. Since poor people were embarrassed by this practice, the Rabbis enacted that this competition had to be eliminated, and from that point on, only peeled willow twigs were allowed for all fruit baskets for mourners. In was the same vein, the mourners themselves used to compete to serve their guests in their house of mourning by offering drinks in the finest glasses, and the poor mourners could not compete with this and felt embarrassed. The Rabbis then enacted an edict that all glasses served at a mourner's home had to be plain and cheap, regardless of the level of wealth of the mourner. The Jerusalem Talmud records that for a certain time period there was competition between mourners about how they would dress at a funeral, as the custom was for the mourners to pass between two rows of people after the burial. The wealthier mourners would "show off" their fine clothing. The Rabbis then changed this practice so that the people would pass before the mourners (in order that there would be no "parade of the mourners") until, after a time, the competition between mourners ceased and the original custom was reinstated (Jerusalem Talmud Berachot 25a).

Although we do not know or fully understand what the Next World will be or feel like, the Talmud states that it will be a spiritual world without eating or drinking, and also devoid of competition (Berachot 17a). Maimonides states that in this world as well, during Messianic times, there will be no competition between people (Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 12:4-5).

Can There be Good Competition? - From all of the above sources, it seems that from the Jewish perspective, all competition is something truly evil to be avoided. But is that true? Are Jews supposed to quash all of their natural feelings to compete, or are they supposed to channel these feelings to something positive?

In certain aspects of Jewish life, competition is encouraged. Each day, as every Kohen-Priest in the Temple desired to be that Kohen-Priest who would do the first service of the Removal of the Ashes on the Altar, they conducted an actual running competition: Two Kohanim-Priests raced up the ramp to the Altar in order to see who would get to the Altar first. The winner would be given the coveted honor of Removal of the Ashes (Mishna Yoma 2:1). Therefore, we see that when it is for a positive purpose and goal, competition is indeed not only allowed but encouraged in Judaism, even in the Temple itself. However, if the result will make the loser feel bad or will hurt or embarrass someone, it is not permitted. Thus, in the same Temple, one of the requirements of bringing the Bikurim-First Fruits by every Jew was to recite a few Torah verses as part of the ceremony. When all Jews could read Hebrew, this was no problem, and there was healthy competition over who could recite these Hebrew words "the best." But once some Jews did not know how to read Hebrew properly, this competition turned into an embarrassment for them. Thus, the Mishna records that the Rabbis decided to appoint one permanent reader would read the verses for all, not only to eliminate the competition but also to eliminate embarrassment. (This is the same reasoning today for why a reader of the Torah reads for all men called up, even for those called up who know how to read.) Likewise, as noted above, unfair competition between the rich and poor had to be eliminated. Thus, when there was a competition to see who would bring the nicest baskets of Bikurim-First Fruits, the poor would be embarrassed by the rich Jews, and then the Rabbis had to eliminate this form of competition (Mishna Bikurim 3:7-8).

Although he speaks specifically about jealousy, Rabbeinu Yonah actually writes about two kinds of competition – the good kind and the bad kind (Rabbeinu Yonah commentary on Mishne Avot 4:21). If a person is jealous of the good accomplishments of a friend, and it causes the friend to become angry and frustrated, this prompts a bad type of competition. But if the jealousy causes this onlooker to compete in a way that imitates the success and accomplishments of the other individual, and it betters himself or herself as a result, this becomes good competition. The Midrash makes an astounding statement that can only be understood in this light. It says that without jealousy the world could not possibly survive because then no one would marry or build a home (Midrash Tehilim, Psalm 37). What this Midrash is telling us is that it is the jealousy of another person (whether it is about

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another's wife or his home) that provokes an individual to equal or better the other person's accomplishments. If he consequently tries to find a better wife or build a better home, this form of jealousy and competition is very positive, because it helps the world function better. But if a person's competitiveness is inner directed, bringing someone to hate an opponent, and the goal is to beat the other person at any cost, then no victory will be truly satisfying and morally legitimate. However, if the other person's attainment pushes a person's competitive spirit outward – i.e., to do better and become better in order to maximize one's abilities, then this competition is good. Orchot Tzadikim demonstrates this idea when he says that hatred based on a specific incident is tolerable, such as hatred for a person who stole from you, since if the situation changes (i.e., the stolen object is returned), the hatred dissipates. But hatred due to jealousy (i.e., the bad form of competition) can never be corrected (Orchot Tzadikim, "Jealousy").

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Wine or Wine not? Lessons from the Negligent Nazir - Tamar Green Eisenstat

This week's parsha, Parshat Naso, includes an in depth look at the ascetic life of the Nazir, including instructing us on how a person becomes a Nazir, what a Nazir must do when their cycle of Nazirut ends, and what a Nazir can and cannot do during their cycle of Nazirut, including the prohibitions on: consuming alcohol/grape products, cutting or shaving the Nazir's hair and coming into contact with dead bodies.

In the midst of this overview, a perplexing rule is found in verse eleven: if someone dies in front of a Nazir, the term of Nazir's cycle ends immediately, and after the regular purification process for coming into contact with a corpse is complete, the Nazir must then bring multiple sacrifices to a priest in order to seek out a special atonement for the soul – "וכפר עלי" – "מאשר הוא על-הנפש". Only then may the Nazir restart their Nazirut term afresh.

But why exactly is the corpse-defiled Nazir being punished so heavily for something that is not their fault? A Nazir may be able to avoid going to a cemetery or visiting a deathbed, but how is a Nazir supposed to prevent someone from unexpectedly dying in front of them?

In shedding light on this pasuk, Rashi explains that the Nazir in question is punished because they had not been vigilant enough in guarding against defilement by a corpse – "שלא נזהר" – "מטמאת המת", ie that the gravity Nazir's oath is

such that a person should go above and beyond to the highest degree in order to avoid any possible situation in which they could encounter a corpse.

Rashi continues by citing the renowned statement of Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappar (Sifrei Bamidbar 30, Talmud Bavli Nazir 19a, 22a, and Taanit 11a) that the sin of the corpse-defiled Nazir is that “they afflicted themselves by abstaining from the enjoyment of wine” – “שצער עצמו מן היין”.

This statement seems puzzling – what does a Nazir’s requirement to avoid corpse-defilement have to do with a Nazir giving up alcohol? And since when do we punish people for not drinking alcohol for pleasure, especially as we know from the Midrash that Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappar was not exactly lackadaisical when it comes to alcoholic consumption, as he remarked: “When wine enters, a secret comes out” – “כנס יין שהוא שבעים, ויצא סוד שהוא שבעים” (Midrash Tanchuma on Parshat Shemini 7:6)?

In explaining Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappar’s statement, Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, the Kli Yakar, emphasises that becoming a Nazir is not an especially praiseworthy vow to take on, and it should only be undertaken in very narrowly tailored situations, eg to help a person work on a specific character flaw. Indeed, he states that regular people, already deeply immersed in Torah and Mitzvot, absolutely do not need such additional ascetic stringencies in order to serve Hashem at the highest levels, as he states in his commentary to verse 11:

“כי אילו היה איש תם וישר מכלכל דבריו במשפט לא היה צריך לדגור ולהזיר”

As such, there is nothing per se admirable about giving up earthly pleasures such as drinking wine, and if anything, these abstinences are considered problematic behavior that open a person up to temptation. Consequently, even seemingly low stakes failings, like unexpectedly being present when someone passes away, become incredibly concerning in the face of a less than ideal oath. As the Kli Yakar writes: “כי אילו היה שמה” ie. if the Nazir had been happily absorbed in their Nazirut practices, they would have been extra scrupulous to avoid encountering any possible impurity.

Although the life of the Biblical Nazir seems somewhat antiquated and alien to us, our lives during the COVID epidemic have some parallels to ascetic regimes. Indeed, many aspects of our smaller and quieter lives over the past fifteen or so months have started to look hermitic: from our unkempt hairdos, to our pared-down clothing choices, to our startlingly few in-person social encounters. Infact, certain parts of this slower, more insular lifestyle have started to become second nature,

so much so that it may be hard to entirely let go of this new routine when the world opens up again. However, as we propel ourselves forward, we must remind ourselves of the teachings of Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappa as interpreted by the Kli Yakar, that the ascetic life, while of import in certain narrow situations – such as during a mandated lockdown – is absolutely not the ideal way to live, and that as and when the world returns to “normal”, we have an obligation to get back out there and enjoy and share the pleasures of this world in a safe and healthy way. L’Chaim!

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

The Torah Within

The following is the service of the sons of Kohas in the Tent of Meeting-the Holy of Holies. When the camp is about to travel, Aaron and his sons shall come and take down the dividing screen; with it, they shall cover the Ark of the Testimony. They shall place upon it a covering of Tachash skin and on top of that they shall spread a cloth of pure blue wool. Then they shall put its poles in place. They shall place upon it a covering of Tachash skin and on top of that they shall spread a cloth of pure blue wool. Then they shall put its poles in place. (Bamidbar 4:4-6)

At the center of the encampment of the Jewish People in the desert was the Mishkan. In the center of the center, the heart of hearts, resided the Kodesh Kedoshim, the Holy of Holies. The centerpiece of the Kodesh Kedoshim was the Aron – The Holy Ark. Inside the Holy Ark rested both sets of the Luchos- Tablets, the first ones that were broken and the second ones that Moshe carved out. There was also to be found in there a Sefer Torah written by Moshe. The entire life of the Children of Israel circled around this exquisitely holy place. What do we learn from this seemingly simple arrangement?

Years back I was in Jerusalem for the summer with a group of American college students who were getting their first taste of Judaism at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach. Thousands have found their way home and built newly found Torah families through the portals of that special place. It was lunch time. I was sitting alone, absorbed, supposedly, in a Gemora. The Bais Midrash eerily quiet. Suddenly, the Dean, Rabbi Nota Schiller shlita strode in with his arm draped over the back of what I presumed to be a potential benefactor of the Yeshiva. I was perfectly positioned to hear every word of his elegantly poetic presentation.

He pointed to the Aron Kodesh and said, “You see that magnificent Aron Kodesh?! That tells the story of our students. It was once proudly adorning a beautiful shul in Europe that was ravaged during the second world war. Someone discovered the Aron Kodesh, took pity on it and had it disassembled and shipped off to America.

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There it sat in a garage in Long Island with an old record collection and other odds and ends for many decades. When we built this Yeshiva, the owner decided to have it shipped here where it was reconstituted and now it stands proudly again here in Jerusalem holding the Torah in its bowels.

So too our student body consists of individuals who came from proud Jewish families, once dedicated to Torah and Mitzvos. The ravages of war and the extended exile diminished all that. Much of the Yiddishkeit that their ancestors had lived and died for had been dismantled. There it sat in broken pieces in a garage someplace in America collecting dust until they found their way here to Jerusalem where they have reconstituted their connection to Yiddishkeit and now they proudly embrace the Torah within.” I was listening with rapture and taking mental notes.

Years later a young surgeon that I was learning with came with me to visit the campus of Ohr Somayach in Monsey. I was showing him around. We peaked into a room where there was a daily Alumni Shiur and morning Minyan. Recalling a fascinating fact, I decided to borrow a part of that glorious script. I told him, “Doc, you see this Aron Kodesh. This tells the story of our students. I remember when this campus was being built. We were eating and learning in trailers. One day a carpenter came to divide one of the trailers so we could eat in one and use the other as a new classroom for this Minyan.

There was a broken ping pong table there and I watched as the worker man sawed it into pieces and then reassembled it into a box and covered it with ornate paneling. This Aron Kodesh was once a ping pong table but now it holds the Torah within.

So many of our students were living normal all-American lives, but like ping pong, they realized that when one wins another loses – a zero-sum game, and sensing there must be more, they found their way here to Yeshiva. where they discovered that everyone gains from Mitzvos. They rearranged their priorities, launched new generations, and they proudly embrace the Torah within.

Home Weekly Parsha Nasso 5782
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The book of Bamidbar contains many puzzling portions. In this week's Parsha, the Torah records the sacrificial offerings by the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel, upon the dedication and consecration of the tabernacle. These twelve offerings were identical in every detail. Yet, the Torah describes each of these offerings individually, as though the offering of each leader was his decision and was unique and different from the offering of his colleague who was the leader of very different tribe.

Over the ages, many ideas and interpretations have been offered for this seeming redundancy. The overwhelming number of interpretations concentrate on the idea that even though the offerings may physically have been identical, the spirit and motivation of each differed from individual to individual, and tribe to tribe.

This type of interpretation lends itself to understanding how one Jew can achieve personal prayer while reciting a set number of printed texts which everyone else around him or her is also reciting at the very same moment. Since no two people are alike physically, they certainly are not alike mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.

Prayer is derived not only from the brain and lips of the person praying but, rather, it also comes from the emotions and unique perspective that each human being brings to the relationship with one's creator and to life. So, too, the offerings of the leaders of the tribes of Israel in the desert may have been physically identical, but the emotional perspective and spiritual elevation of each of the offerings was truly unique and distinctive for that tribal prince who brought it and gave it as a service of the public in the Mishkan.

Another lesson that is to be learned from this seeming repetition of the offerings of the leaders of the tribes of Israel, is the triumph of constancy over flashes of brilliance. It is the old parable regarding the race between the tortoise and the hare. And repetition always leads to a feeling of security and hope. Much of Judaism is based upon repetitive behavior. With each recurring action, we absorb and internalize it into our very being, so that doing the right thing in fulfilling the commandments of the Torah becomes second nature to us.

This is especially true in the field of prayer. I once read a memoir of an Israeli soldier who fought in the battle for Jerusalem's Ammunition Hill in 1967 during the Six Day War. The Jordanian army was entrenched on that hill, and most military experts believed it was suicidal to try and dislodge them. The hill was the central point in the battle for Jerusalem, and by controlling it, the rest of the West Bank was open to mobile contact and conquest. The soldier wrote of the terrible battle that waged that night, and how hundreds of his comrades were killed and wounded, while the Jordanians also suffered great losses. He wrote that at one moment in the battle he was alone and nearly surrounded by Jordanian troops. He said that he felt an overwhelming urge at that moment to pray, but he then realized that since he had never prayed in his life, he did not know what to do. He resolved, therefore, that if he survived – and he did – he would learn how to pray, so that when he had to pray, he would know what he must do.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Naso

The Ideal Nazir Attacks the Illness Rather Than the Symptom

Parshas Naso contains the mitzvah of Nazir. There is a well-known Gemara (Nedarim 9b; Nazir 4b) that talks about a very famous Nazir: Shimon haTzadik said: My entire life I never ate the Korban Asham of an impure Nazir other than once (when I was convinced that this individual accepted upon himself the Nezirus laws strictly for the sake of Heaven). Once I saw a Nazir come from the South (to Yerushalayim to offer his sacrifice) and I saw that he was very handsome, his hair was beautiful. I asked him, 'My son, what prompted you to destroy this

beautiful hair of yours' (as is required in the ritual of bringing the Nezirus sacrifices at the completion of the period of Nezirus)? He told me, 'I was a shepherd and I went to the well to draw water for my sheep. I saw my reflection in the water. (Apparently, it seems that this was the first time this person ever saw himself, as in Talmudic times, men did not, as a rule, look into mirrors.) I saw that my Yetzer HaRah (evil inclination) was getting a hold of me and was attempting to drive me from the world. I said to my own Yetzer HaRah: 'You wicked one, why do you get so excited about my beauty which is destined to one day turn into dust and worms. I swear that I will shave off my hair for the sake of Heaven.' Shimon haTzadik concluded: I immediately arose and kissed him on his head and blessed him, "My son, may the number of those who take Nezirus vows such as yours multiply in Israel. About people such as you it is written: '... a man or a woman who utters a Nezirus vow to dedicate himself to Hashem.' (Bamidbar 6:2)"

(I may add a theory of mine, for which I do not have any proof – that there is a relationship between this Nezirus story and the story of Narcissus in Greek mythology. Who was Narcissus? The story of Narcissus is extremely similar to this story in Maseches Nedarim. There was a fellow who saw his reflection in the water and was so taken up with his beauty that he became paralyzed – sitting there staring at his own beauty until (as the mythology goes) he withered up and died because he could not take his eyes off his image. He died on that spot, and out of that spot grew a flower that is called the Narcissus. The psychological profile of a narcissist is such a person who is so into himself that he cannot take his eyes or his thoughts off of himself.

Come and see the difference between Greek mythology on one hand, and the Talmud on the other. In Greek mythology, the hero of the story became so enthralled with himself that he could not move, but in the Talmud the hero of the story recognized the pitfall of what was happening to him, and he declared himself a Nazir.)

What happened over here? This boy saw his own reflection and he saw the Yetzer HaRah getting hold of him. He sensed that he was becoming amazed with his beauty and handsomeness. He went ahead and told his evil inclination, "I am not going to let you do this to me!" That is why he became a Nazir.

When someone becomes a Nazir, he abstains from wine and from contact with the dead, and—at least for thirty days—he cannot cut his hair or shave. So let us analyze this story: This fellow was amazed at his beauty. In particular, he was amazed at his locks, his hair. He sensed his Yetzer HaRah getting hold of him. What should be his natural reaction to stop the Yetzer HaRah in its tracks? Perhaps he should immediately run to the barber and ask for a 'zero'. The barber should then put the smallest guard on his electric shaver and give the fellow at least a crew cut or preferably a baldy and that would rid him of his Yetzer HaRah!

Instead, the fellow proclaims that he is going to make himself a Nazir, which causes him to grow his hair even longer, since he cannot cut it for the next thirty days, at a minimum. How is that a logical strategy for fighting the evil inclination?

Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, the Steipler Gaon, zt"l, (father of Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt"l), says that this incident demonstrates a deeper insight into what was happening to this fellow. The Talmud quotes the Nazir's retort to his evil inclination: "You wicked one, why do you arrogantly boast over a world that is not yours?" The root sin that this fellow noticed ensnaring him was the sin of Gayvah (haughtiness). He was thinking to himself, "I am the most beautiful person walking the face of the earth. I am so proud of my looks. I am so proud of my hair. I think I am something special because I look so good."

That, my friends, is the Midas HaGayvah. The Midas HaGayvah can be summed up in just a few words: You think it's 'you.' If you are smart, it is you who is smart. If you are rich, it is your wealth. If you are handsome, it is because you are so special! That is what Gayvah is—recognizing these qualities and thinking better of yourself because you either have wealth or looks or brains or money or whatever it may be.

As we all know, it does not come from you. Everything comes from the Ribono shel Olam.

This person – sure, he could have gone to the barber and cut off his hair. But that would have been dealing with the symptom of his problem, not the illness. The symptom is the hair. So, he can get rid of the hair! But that would not be attacking what was happening to him. What was happening to him? At that moment, he was thinking that this is MY good looks, and I am so special because I am so good looking and I have such beautiful hair. The antidote for that attitude is to take that beauty and say, “this is not me and this is not mine—it belongs to the Ribono shel Olam.” My wealth belongs to Him, my beauty belongs to Him, my power belongs to Him, my kavod belongs to Him. Everything belongs to Him!

How does someone do that? By becoming a Nazir. I let my hair grow, and then, at the end of my Nezirus what do I do? I take the hair, I cut it off, and I throw it under the sacrifice that is a Korban l’Hashem! Here I am teaching myself that this beautiful hair that I have is not mine, it belongs to the Ribono shel Olam.

The Nazir Is Critiqued Both Coming and Going

There appears to be an obvious contradiction to a Ramban on this week’s parsha from a well-known Gemara (Nedarim 10a). The pasuk states that at the conclusion of his Nezirus period, the Nazir offers a burnt offering and a sin offering as atonement for sinning against his soul (Bamidbar 6:11). The question is, why does the Nazir need to bring a Korban Chatas (sin offering). Didn’t he just do something admirable? The above referenced Gemara indeed asks – what did the Nazir do wrong that he now needs ‘atonement’? The Gemara answers that he denied himself wine (Tzeair atzmo min hayayin). His aveira (sin) was in depriving himself of one of life’s pleasures. There are enough prohibitions in the Torah, without man adding further prohibitions that make life even more difficult.

The Ramban, however, suggests that the reason he must bring a Korban Chatas at the conclusion of his Nezirus period is—on the contrary—that he is now leaving this spiritually holier state of Nezirus that he had accepted upon himself, and is now returning to a more mundane standard of living in which he will be more engaged with the pleasures of life. According to the Ramban, ideally, he should have remained a Nazir, dedicated to this holy state of Divine Service, for the rest of his life! The Ramban views the Korban Chatas as atonement for the Nazir’s falling back into the lustful pattern of everyday life!

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody raises this contradiction between the Talmud and the Ramban’s interpretation. Which is it? Do we blame the Nazir for abstaining from wine or for his readiness to return to wine consumption? We seem to be criticizing him here, coming and going!

Rav Simcha Zissel answers as follows: Initially, the Nazir should not have done this. This was beyond his normal spiritual level. He denied himself one of life’s permitted pleasures. However, during those thirty days of Nezirus, he has not remained static. He has grown. He has become a different person, a holier person. This is what life is all about. Through the experiences of life, we hopefully become better people, more understanding people, holier people.

Rav Simcha Zissel references the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 5b), which states that a person does not grasp the intent of his master teacher until after he has been his disciple for forty years. What happens during those forty years? The answer is that during those forty years, he grows as a person. Forty years earlier, he did not “get” who his Rebbe was and he did not “get” what his Rebbe was teaching him. Forty years later, he is older, wiser, and more experienced. Now he is a different person. Now I get what my Rebbe meant. I could not understand that when I was 20 years old. Now that I am 60, I get it.

That is the story of the Nazir as well. When he started the Nezirus, we can ask him “Who are you to add to the Torah’s restrictions and forbid yourself from drinking wine?” “Why do you think you are such a holier than thou Tzadik that you can deprive yourself of wine?” But now, 30 days or 60 days or whatever amount of time has passed. Guess what? He is now a different person, a holier person, who is on a different spiritual level. Once he is at that higher spiritual level he—in fact—should really

stay there. He has demonstrated to himself that he can do this. He has grown. Therefore, the Ramban says, going back to the lower level where he was thirty days ago is sinful.

True: It is an aveira in the beginning and an aveira at the end. It is an aveira in the beginning because at that stage in life, he had no business doing what he did. It is an aveira at the end because now that he has grown, he should not retreat to his earlier lower status. And even if his retreat is justified, it still requires an atonement. The fact that he is retreating is the aveira for which he must bring a Korban Chatas.

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

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel —“And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, ‘Speak to Aaron and to his sons saying so shall you bless the children of Israel; say to them, may the Lord bless you and keep you...’” (Numbers 6:22-27)

There are very few passages of the Bible which are as well known as the Priestly Benediction. In Israel, the kohanim-priests rise to bless the congregation every single morning. In the Diaspora, however, the Ashkenazi Jews include this special benediction only on the Festivals. Nevertheless, there are many life-cycle celebrations such as circumcisions, redemptions of the first born, bar and bat mitzvot and even weddings which are punctuated by this Priestly Blessing. In effect, the kohen-priest stands as God’s representative, as the “agent of the Compassionate One”, as the spiritual leader and as the Torah teacher – and in this function as teacher and guide he calls upon God to bless the congregation. As Moses declares in his final blessing to the Israelites, “[The Priests and Levites] shall guard Your covenant, shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel...” (Deut. 33:9,10)

The Talmud (in the ninth chapter of Berachot) as well as our Prayer Liturgy declare “At the time of the priestly blessings, the congregation responds, ‘Master of the Universe I am Yours and my dreams are Yours.’” Apparently, our Sages saw a profound connection between the dreams of the Congregation of Israel and the function of their priest leaders. Exactly what is the nature of that connection?

I would suggest that first and foremost a leader and an educator must inspire his students/ congregants/ nation with a lofty vision, an exalted dream. The Psalmist and sweet singer of Israel King David declares in the Psalm which we recite each Sabbath and Festival before the reciting the Grace after Meals, “When the Lord returned with the restoration of Zion we were as dreamers”; after all, had the Jews not dreamt of the return to Israel throughout their long exiles, we never would have returned to our homeland.

One sees the same idea from the opposite vantage point when one realizes the cause of the great tragedy of the Book of Numbers. In Numbers, the Jewish people descends from the great heights of the Revelation at Sinai to the disastrous depths of the sin of the scouts, the rebellion of Korah, the sin of Moses and the destruction of that entire generation in the desert. What caused such a mighty fall? The Bible itself begins its account of the descent with the words, “And it happened that the nation kvetched (mitonenim) evilly.” (Numbers 11:1)

The 18th century Netziv explains the difficult Hebrew word mitonenim as meaning “wandering hither and thither” aimlessly and without purpose or direction, from the Hebrew *anna*. Simply put, this great Torah leader was saying that the Israelites had lost the dream and the vision which they felt at Sinai when they had cried out “We shall do and we shall internalize,” when they accepted upon themselves the Divine mission of being a “Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation.” They descended into destruction because they lost the dream.

Secondly, the Hebrew word for dream is *halom*, and – with a simple switch of letters, it spells *hamal*, which means love and compassion. The priest-leader who inspires with his dream must first and foremost love his nation; only if he loves the Israelites will they believe themselves worthy of being loved, will they believe in their ability to realize the dream and achieve the vision. Great leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and David Ben Gurion lifted their respective nations to unheard of heights because they helped make them believe in themselves.

Thirdly, the Hebrew word *halom* with another switch of letters spells *lohem*, which means fighting, warring (if need be) to achieve the necessary goals. A great measure of imparting a dream is to impart idealistic sacrifice on behalf of that dream.

Fourthly, the Hebrew word *halom* also spells *lehem*; a dream must be nourished with the material necessities of program, tactics and strategy necessary to accomplish the dream.

Fifthly, the Hebrew word *halom* also spells *melah*, or salt. Salt symbolizes tears – the tears of sacrifice and commitment – as well as eternity, since salt never putrefies. Salt is therefore the symbol of our Covenant with God, the Covenant which guarantees Jewish eternity and ultimate redemption.

And finally, *halom* is linguistically tied to *halon*, a window; a light to the outside world. The dream with which the priest–kohen must inspire the Israelites is a dream which encompasses the entire world, the dream of “Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth”, the dream of “They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks”.

Those who believe in a God who is invisible may well dare to dream the dream which is impossible but only those who dream the impossible will ever achieve the incredible.

Shabbat Shalom!

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

NASO – Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL

Sages and Saints

Two Versions of the Moral Life

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

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

This led to an ongoing disagreement between the Rabbis in Mishnaic, Talmudic, and medieval times.

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

Eliezer HaKappar and Shmuel held the opposite opinion. For them the sin lay in becoming a Nazirite in the first place and thereby denying himself some of the pleasures of the world God created and declared good. Rabbi Eliezer added:

From this we may infer that if one who denies himself the enjoyment of wine is called a sinner, all the more so one who denies himself the enjoyment of other pleasures of life.

Taanit 11a; Nedarim 10a.

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

In the Middle Ages there were Jews who adopted similar kinds of self-denial – among them the Chasidei Ashkenaz, the Pietists of Northern

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

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

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

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

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

Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilchot Deot* 3:1.

Yet in *Hilchot Nezirut* he rules in accordance with the positive evaluation of Rabbi Elazar: “Whoever vows to God [to become a Nazirite] by way of holiness, does well and is praiseworthy.... Indeed Scripture considers him the equal of a prophet.”[2] How does any writer come to adopt contradictory positions in a single book, let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

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

The sage follows the “golden mean,” the “middle way.” The moral life is a matter of moderation and balance, charting a course between too much and too little. Courage, for example, lies midway between cowardice and recklessness. Generosity lies between profligacy and miserliness. This is very similar to the vision of the moral life as set out by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The saint, by contrast, does not follow the middle way. He or she tends to extremes, fasting rather than simply eating in moderation, embracing poverty rather than acquiring modest wealth, and so on. At various points in his writings, Rambam explains why people might embrace extremes. One reason is repentance and character transformation.[3] So a person might cure himself of pride by practising, for a while, extreme self-abasement. Another is the asymmetry of the human personality. The extremes do not exert an equal pull. Cowardice is more common than recklessness, and miserliness than over-generosity, which is why the *chassid* leans in the opposite direction. A third reason is the lure of the surrounding culture. It may be so opposed to religious values that pious people choose to separate themselves from the wider society, “clothing themselves in woollen and hairy garments, dwelling in the mountains and wandering about in the wilderness,”[4] differentiating themselves by their extreme behaviour.

This is a very nuanced presentation. There are times, for Rambam, when self-denial is therapeutic, others when it is factored into Torah law itself, and yet others when it is a response to an excessively hedonistic age. In general, though, Rambam rules that we are commanded to follow the middle way, whereas the way of the saint is lifnim mishurat hadin, beyond the strict requirement of the law.[5]

Moshe Halbertal, in his recent, impressive study of Rambam,[6] sees him as finessing the fundamental tension between the civic ideal of the Greek political tradition and the spiritual ideal of the religious radical for whom, as the Kotzker Rebbe famously said, “The middle of the road is for horses.” To the chassid, Rambam’s sage can look like a “self-satisfied bourgeois.”

Essentially, these are two ways of understanding the moral life itself. Is the aim of the moral life to achieve personal perfection? Or is it to create a decent, just, and compassionate society? The intuitive answer of most people would be to say: both. That is what makes Rambam so acute a thinker. He realises that you cannot have both. They are in fact different enterprises.

A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But what about the members of the saint’s own family? A saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint’s own country? A saint may forgive all crimes committed against him. But what about the rule of law, and justice? Saints are supremely virtuous people, considered as individuals. Yet you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Ultimately, saints are not really interested in society. Their concern is the salvation of the soul.

This deep insight is what led Rambam to his seemingly contradictory evaluations of the Nazirite. The Nazirite has chosen, at least for a period, to adopt a life of extreme self-denial. He is a saint, a chassid. He has adopted the path of personal perfection. That is noble, commendable, and exemplary.

But it is not the way of the sage – and you need sages if you seek to perfect society. The sage is not an extremist, because he or she realises that there are other people at stake. There are the members of one’s own family and the others within one’s own community. There is a country to defend and an economy to sustain. The sage knows he or she cannot leave all these commitments behind to pursue a life of solitary virtue. For we are called on by God to live in the world, not escape from it; to exist in society, not seclusion; to strive to create a balance among the conflicting pressures on us, not to focus on some while neglecting the others.

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

Maimonides lived the life he preached. We know from his writings that he longed for seclusion. There were years when he worked day and night to write his Commentary to the Mishnah, and later the Mishneh Torah. Yet he also recognised his responsibilities to his family and to the community. In his famous letter to his would-be translator Ibn Tibbon,[7] he gives an account of his typical day and week – in which he had to carry a double burden as a world-renowned physician and an internationally sought halachist and sage. He worked to exhaustion.[8] Maimonides was a sage who longed to be a saint, but knew he could not be, if he was to honour his responsibilities to his people. That is a profound and moving judgement, and one that still has the power to inspire today.

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

[2] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Nezirut 10:14,

[3] See his Eight Chapters (the introduction to his commentary on Mishnah Avot), ch. 4, and Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot, chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6.

[4] Eight Chapters, ch. 4.

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

[6] Moshe Halbertal, Maimonides: Life and Thought (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 154–163.

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

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

Parashat Naso –

by Rabbi Nachman Kahana |

Defining our Relations with the World’s Major Powers from the Time We Became a Nation

Midrash Yalkut Shimoni 879 on the pasuk in Tehillim 122:

“ירושלים הבנויה כעיר שחברה לה יחדיו”

א”ר יהושע בן לוי עיר שהיא עושה כל ישראל חברים .

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explains the verse, that Yerushalayim the city, unites all Am Yisrael.

Indeed, Yerushalayim unites Jews of different opinions and inclinations into one brotherhood. However, history has shown that Yerushalayim also unites and energizes the enemies of Israel in their determination to destroy the Jewish nation and seize the holy city.

Midrash Aicha (Aicha raba) chapter 2:

Parashat Lech Lecha (3rd parasha in Bereishiet) relates that Avram (before HaShem changed his name to Avraham) gathered his 318 student-soldiers and defeated the armies of four major powers in the Middle East.

After this miraculous victory, HaShem appeared to Avram with a promise:

אנכי מגן לך

“I vow to protect you”

How strange! The vow to protect a military man is made before going into battle, but here HaShem made His promise of protection after the war had ended and Avram was the acclaimed victor?!

The explanation is very much part of our contemporary reality.

HaShem was telling Avram that he was victorious in the war; however, “your problems are just beginning”. The goyim will not permit you to savor the sweet taste of victory. They will not rest until you and your descendants will no longer be alive, and your victories will be erased from the annals of history.

From that time on, Am Yisrael has been beset with many enemies; some together and some “go it alone”. To this day the gentile world refuses to recognize the special relationship that exists between the Creator and Am Yisrael, as demonstrated by the miraculous victories over our enemies, and our unprecedented, unexplainable return to our holy land after 2000 years of exile, including sovereignty over Yerushalayim. Much to the contrary, every victory creates more enemies for the Jews, in general, and Medinat Yisrael in particular.

So, what is it that blinds gentile eyes from seeing the capital letters of history that proclaim that the Jews are a nation different from all others and we are God’s chosen people?

Are the leaders of the world’s nations mentally challenged? Do they have a scratch in the brain when it come to the Jewish people?

A story is told of two immigrants to the States. After a year Moshe was driving his new car and John was a janitor of a building. They met and John asked Moshe how he arrived at such success? Moshe said that we Jews have a food that makes us smart, and by coincidence I happen to have a piece with me which I can give to you for \$600. John paid the money and Moshe presented him with a wrapped package. John went home and told his wife that soon they would be smart and rich. His wife opened the package and in it was a plain white fish! The following day John went back to Moshe to demand the refund of his money. But Moshe said, I told you that this food will make you smarter. I didn’t lie. Today you are smarter than what you were yesterday!

Could it be that the nations have impaired intellectual skills that prevent them from deducing logical conclusions? No, that is not true, as we see in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni:

אם יאמר לך אדם יש חכמה בגוים תאמין, הה"ד והאבדתי חכמים מאדום ותבונה מהר עשו (עובדי א ה) יש תורה בגוים אל תאמין, דכתיב מלכה ושריה בגוים אין תורה (איכה ב)

If you are told that the gentile nations have acquired knowledge: believe it. But if you are told that have acquired Torah (spirituality) – reject it outright!

So, what is it that drives one anti-Semitic power after another into suicidal spins into oblivion?

Answer:

The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Yeshayahu 420) on the pasuk (Yeshayahu 17,12-14):

הוי המון עמים רבים כהמות ימים יהמיון ושאוון לאמים כשאוון מים כבירים ישאוון

12 Woe to the many nations that rage, they rage like the raging sea! Woe to the peoples who roar, they roar like the roaring of great waters!

13 Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them, they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale.

14 In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

The Yalkut states:

The prophet likens the Jewish nation to the sands of the beach, and the gentiles to ocean waves that beat against the sands.

The prophet is saying that the first wave boasts it will inundate the land, but when it reaches the sandy beach, it crests and falls to the ground in utter submission. But none of the succeeding waves learn the lesson. They all try to inundate the land but in utter failure. So to, Paro tried to destroy the Jews and failed, Amalek followed and failed, Sichon, Og and Bilam also tried but failed.

In post-Biblical times, over the span of 1900 years the Christians tried to eliminate the Jews and Judaism – and failed. Followed by the Communist Soviets, then Hitler and now the Islamic nations. The UN is trying, as is the EU, and in a subtle way the US is backing a two-state solution in the hope that the Arabs will destroy the Jewish state. They too will fail, with none learning the fundamental law of HaShem's world – the Jewish nation is eternal.

So, what is it about these nations that they do not read the lessons of history? If It's not stupidity, what is it?

Albert Einstein once gave an example of insanity: it is when one repeats the same act or process in the expectation of achieving a different result. Age old anti-Semitism is a spiritual disease that initially attacks the soul, evolves into mental illness that paralyzes the brain's thought process and destroys the conscience. It is terminally incurable.

Shavuot: The holiday of Shavuot is the day when the scattered families of Israel entered nationhood. It was not the gradual, normal process covering hundreds of years during which families merge into tribes, tribes into local affiliates and then the ties of custom, language and intermarriage seal the common commitments to function as a nation.

Our nationhood was forged the moment HaShem called out the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am The Lord your God who has taken you out of Egypt". And appointed Moshe Rabbeinu to receive and transmit the Torah to Am Yisrael as the eternal bond between the Creator and His unique chosen people.

So, remember JLMM – Jewish Lives Matter More.

Shabbat shalom

We probably just performed the mitzvah of...

Kiddush Levanah

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Cloud cover

"Can I be mekadeish the levanah when there is just a slight cloud cover?"

Question #2: Northern lights

"I live very far north, and in the summer months, there is only a short period of time from when it gets dark until it begins becoming light, and

that period of time is in the middle of the night. Am I permitted to be mekadeish the levanah either before it gets fully dark or during the post-dawn, pre-sunrise morning hours?"

Question #3: Where's the Rif?

"My chavrusa and I were studying Mesechta Sanhedrin and found the fascinating topic of kiddush levanah there. When we went to look at the Rif and Rosh on the topic, we easily discovered the comments of the Rosh, but could not find the Rif? Did he not write on this topic? Why not?"

Introduction:

The Gemara introduces us to a mitzvah, created by Chazal, which we usually call kiddush levanah, which literally translates as sanctifying the moon. Although today Ashkenazim always refer to the mitzvah by this name, this term is of relatively late origin and is confusing for several reasons. First of all, we are not sanctifying the moon. Rather, this is a mitzvah to praise Hashem for the moon's regular cycle. As we will soon see, there are other hashkafos related to this mitzvah, but these relate to the relationship of the Jewish people and our royal family, the malchus beis Dovid, to Hashem.

Another difficulty is that the expression kiddush levanah creates confusion with a different mitzvah, kiddush hachodesh, which translates into English as sanctifying the month. Kiddush hachodesh is a mitzvah min haTorah that Hashem gave in parshas Bo and requires the Sanhedrin, or its specially appointed committee, to calculate when the new moon will be visible, to receive witnesses who may have seen the first crescent of the newly visible moon, and to declare Rosh Chodesh. Unfortunately, since we no longer have a Sanhedrin, our calendar is set up differently. Hillel Hanasi (a distant descendant of his more famous ancestor Hillel Hazakein) created the calendar that we currently use, because the Sanhedrin could no longer function in Eretz Yisroel, a halachic requirement for fulfilling this mitzvah. But the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh is not the mitzvah of kiddush levanah.

Therefore, it is somewhat unusual that we refer to the mitzvah by this name, kiddush levanah. The earliest use of the term kiddush levanah that I found was by the Mahar"i Bruno, a talmid of the Terumas Hadeshen, a prominent Ashkenazi posek in the fifteenth century.

Notwithstanding that the term kiddush levanah does not surface in the Gemara or the early authorities, the mitzvah most certainly does. It is called birkas halevanah by Rav Amram Gaon, the rishonim and the Shulchan Aruch, which is what the Sefardim call the mitzvah and is also the way the mitzvah is identified in the siddur of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch. In this article, I will use both terms, kiddush levanah and birkas halevanah.

Background The background to the mitzvah of kiddush levanah, or birkas levanah, begins with the following passage of Gemara: One who blesses the moon in its correct time is as if he received the Shechinah... In Rabbi Yishmael's beis midrash, they taught that, if the only merit the Jews have is that they received Hashem every month when they recited the birkas halevanah, this would be sufficient. (The Gemara does not explain -- enough merit for what?) Abayei explained that, because birkas halevanah is such an important mitzvah, it should be recited standing. Mareimar and Mar Zutra used to lean on one another when they recited it (Sanhedrin 42a).

The reason why Abayei required people to stand when being mekadeish the levanah is because this is considered equivalent to receiving a monarch, which you would certainly do standing (Yad Ramah ad locum). Clearly, we are not sanctifying the moon; we are praising Hashem and using the moon's cycles as our means of doing so (Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 426:9). There is much more to this idea, and we will shortly explain some of its basics.

Leaning on one another?

What does the Gemara mean that these two great amora'im, Mareimar and Mar Zutra, used to lean on one another when they recited the birkas halevanah? I found two explanations to this practice. According to the first, it was very difficult for either of them to stand, but they felt it important as a demonstration of proper respect for this brocha. They leaned on one another to be able to stand up.

There is an important halachic principle implicit here. In general, halacha considers leaning on something to be akin to sitting, not to standing. Yet, for fulfilling the mitzvah of kiddush levanah, these two great scholars, Mareimar and Mar Zutra, treated leaning as standing, since it was difficult for them to stand (Bi'ur Halacha, 426:2 s.v. Umevoreich).

A practical, but not overwhelming, difficulty with this approach is that it is uncommon for two people who have difficulty standing to be able to help one another remain standing. Usually, they would have people who are sturdy provide them assistance.

An answer to the above question is found in the Yad Ramah, who explains that these two amora'im each had a servant prop them up to recite the birkas halevanah.

An alternative approach is that of the Tur, who understands that the two amora'im were both steady, but that the Aramaic expression used, mekasfei ahadadi, describes a very respectful way of presenting yourself in the honor of a special guest – in this instance, the Shechinah.

Receiving the Shechinah

What does the Gemara mean when it says that reciting this monthly brocha on the new moon is the equivalent of receiving the Shechinah? Did we suddenly become moon worshippers, G-d forbid?!

Use the phase to praise!

The Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav 426:4) explains this to mean that the monthly phases of the moon teach us many things for which to praise Hashem, including that He decreased the size of the moon when it complained (see Rashi, Bereishis 1:16). The moon's phases are also reminiscent of the royal family of David Hamelech, whose prominence has gone through many periods of waxing and waning. As the Pri Megadim concludes: "The entire brocha is praise to Hashem and it is always inappropriate to bless anything other than Hashem. We use the moon as a means for structuring a prayer to Hashem, for His greatness." Aleinu

Based on this explanation of the Pri Megadim, the Bi'ur Halacha explains the custom, common predominantly among those whose minhagim originate in Eastern Europe, of reciting Aleinu at the end of the kiddush levanah ceremony. The Bi'ur Halacha explains that to prevent anyone from thinking that this blessing is directed toward the moon, we clearly close the procedure with the prayer of Aleinu, which emphasizes that all our praises are only to Hashem.

What is the brocha?

The Gemara records a dispute as to what brocha one recites on the new moon. According to one opinion, the brocha is very simple: Boruch Attah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'olam Mechadeish Chadoshim, "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who renews the months."

The Gemara concludes that this is not a sufficient text of the brocha, but that the correct text is much longer. There are several versions with slightly variant readings, but these slight variations have major differences in nuance. Our standard accepted version translates as follows: Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who with His Word created the Heavens and, with the breath of His mouth, all the Hosts. He established rules and a time that they not change their roles. They rejoice and are happy to fulfill the Will of their Owner.

At this point, there are two variant texts, one which says in Hebrew, po'alei emes she'pe'ulasam emes, which translates as They are actors in the truth whose actions are true. This version means that these words refer to the moon and the other heavenly bodies, whose movements are highly predictable. The Pri Megadim prefers the following version, which is the most accepted text of this brocha: po'eil emes she'pe'uloso emes. I found two approaches how to translate these words. According to the Pri Megadim (Eishel Avraham 426:9), this text also refers to the moon, and means the moon's path follows the dictates of Hashem and demonstrates to us Hashem's greatness. Another approach is that it refers to Hashem and is a continuation of the previous sentence, meaning, They are happy to fulfill the Will of their Owner, the Worker of truth, Whose work is true (Hirsch Siddur).

Continuing the rest of the text of the brocha: And to the moon, He said that it should renew itself, a crown of glory to those (the Jewish people) who are burdened from birth, who, in the future, will renew themselves like the moon does, and to glorify their Creator in the Name of the glory of His kingdom. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who renews the months.

There are several versions of the closing text. For example, the Mesechta Sofrim (20:1) closes Boruch Attah Hashem, Mekadeish Roshei Chadoshim, He Who Sanctifies the new months.

What else do we say?

Practice has developed that we add many prayers to the procedure, including quoting many pesukim; in the Sefardic version, there are piyutim included. Many of these pesukim and short prayers are already mentioned by Chazal. For example, Mesechta Sofrim cites several of the passages that are customarily recited after the brocha. This passage of Mesechta Sofrim is quoted by rishonim and poskim, such as the Tur (Orach Chayim 426), Rabbeinu Bachya (Shemos 12), and the Rema (Orach Chayim 426).

Motza'ei Shabbos

Mesechta Sofrim (20:1) adds that one should recite birkas levanah when in a festive mood and while wearing nice clothes. According to the text of Mesechta Sofrim that we have, it also recommends that kiddush levanah be recited on motza'ei Shabbos. However, it is apparent from several rishonim that their editions of Mesechta Sofrim did not include mention of this practice. Nevertheless, most, but not all, poskim reached the same conclusion: it is preferable to recite kiddush levanah on motza'ei Shabbos (Terumas Hadeshen #35). It is well known that the Vilna Gaon disagreed, contending that it is better to perform the mitzvah at the first opportunity (Maaseh Rav #159). Most communities follow the practice of the Terumas Hadeshen.

Three or seven?

The Rema rules that one should not be mekadeish the levanah until 72 hours have passed since the molad, the exact moment calculated for the new moon. Sefardim and some Chassidim follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 426:2), who contends that one should wait until seven days after the molad to recite the birkas halevanah. This is one of the unusual places where the Shulchan Aruch's ruling is based on kabbalistic sources (see Beis Yosef ad locum). The Shulchan Aruch rules, also, in accordance with the opinion of the Terumas Hadeshen that one should wait until motza'ei Shabbos to recite birkas halevanah. The Rema stipulates that this is true only when motza'ei Shabbos is before the tenth of the month. If one needs to be mekadeish the levanah on weekdays, first change into Shabbos clothes.

The light of the moon

The Zohar (parshas Ki Sissa) adds another insight and halachic requirement to the mitzvah: we should be able to benefit from the moonlight. Based on this Zohar, the Rema (Orach Chayim 426:1) rules that the mitzvah of kiddush levanah can be performed only at night, when you can benefit from the moon.

The early poskim discuss whether you can be mekadeish the levanah when there is a mild cloud cover. They conclude that when the outline of the moon can be seen clearly and some of its light shines through, you can be mekadeish the levanah.

There is a dispute concerning whether you can recite kiddush levanah when the moon is visible, but you estimate that, in the course of your reciting the brocha, it will slide behind a cloud cover. Some authorities rule that you can recite kiddush levanah under these circumstances, just as you can recite the brocha on seeing lightning or hearing thunder, and there is no concern that you will not hear or see them after you recite the brocha (Rav Chayim Sanzer's notes to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 426). However, the consensus of opinion is that the rules for kiddush levanah are different from the rules for the other brochos mentioned. Proof of this is the halacha that you are not to recite kiddush levanah just for seeing the moon, but only when you can receive some benefit from its light (see Mishnah Berurah 426:3 and Bi'ur Halacha 426:1 s. v. Asher). There is no requirement that you benefit from thunder or lightning before reciting the brocha.

Before sunrise?

At this point, let us examine one of our opening questions: I live very far north, and in the summer months there is only a short period of time from when it gets dark until it begins becoming light, and that period of time is in the middle of the night. Am I permitted to be mekadeish the levanah either before it gets fully dark or during the post-dawn, pre-sunrise morning hours?

In other words, is it permitted to recite birkas halevanah when the moon is clearly visible, even when it is halachically considered daytime? Halachically, the day begins at alos hashachar (Brachos 2b), when there is some light across the entire eastern horizon. How long this is before sunrise depends primarily on the latitude you are at and the time of the year, although humidity, elevation, amount of light pollution and other details also factor. In Yerushalayim, it usually varies from between 72 to 96 minutes before sunrise.

Whether you can recite kiddush levanah when it is halachically daytime is debated by late authorities (see Hisorarus Teshuvah 1:199, authored by Rav Shimon Sofer, Erlau Rebbe; Shu"t Yaskil Avdi 8:20:53, by Rav Ovadiah Hadayah, a Sefardic mekubal and posek who lived in Yerushalayim; Chut Shani, Yom Tov, Shu"t #12 by Rav Nissim Karelitz). Those who need a definitive answer to this question should discuss it with their rav or posek.

Where's the Rif?

At this point, let us discuss the last of our opening questions:

"My chavrusa and I were studying Mesechta Sanhedrin and found the fascinating topic of kiddush levanah there. When we went to look at the Rif and Rosh on the topic, we easily discovered the comments of the Rosh, but could not find the Rif? Did he not write on this topic? Why not?"

Of the three major halachic authorities upon which Rav Yosef Karo, author of Beis Yosef and Shulchan Aruch, heavily relied, the Rif, the Rambam, and the Rosh, the works of the Rif and the Rosh are organized following the layout of the Gemara. As a rule of thumb, they discuss the halachic topic in the same place that the Gemara discusses it, but eliminate all but the final halachic conclusion. Nevertheless, there are a few places where their discussion is not in the same place that the Gemara discusses the topic, but placed elsewhere, where it fits more smoothly.

In general, the Rosh follows the system set up by the Rif, who preceded him by several hundred years. However, there are a few exceptions, one of which is the mitzvah of kiddush levanah. Although the Gemara discusses the topic in Mesechta Sanhedrin, the Rif chose not to discuss this within his comments to that mesechta, but, instead, to quote it among his comments on Mesechta Brachos. The Rosh chose not to follow the Rif in this instance, but to place his comments in Mesechta Sanhedrin, where the Gemara's discussion is located. Thus, this question really should be why the Rosh chose not to follow the Rif in this instance. Since the Rosh never explains why he organizes his material as he does, it will be completely conjecture on our part to suggest an answer.

Conclusion

We understand well why our calendar involves use of the solar year – after all, our seasons, and the appropriate times for our holidays, are based on the sun. But why did the Torah insist that our months follow the moon? It seems that we could live just fine without months that are dependent on the moon's rotation around the earth! The accepted calendar for all world commerce is the western calendar, which is completely solar, and all farmers use this calendar almost exclusively.

In parshas Bereishis, the Torah states that the moon will serve as an os, a "sign." In what way is the moon an os? Rabbeinu Bachya (Bereishis 1:18) explains that this refers to birkas halevanah, when we have the opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah. As far as I understand, he means that the waxing and waning of the moon is symbolic of our own relationship with Hashem – which is sometimes better and, sometimes, less so. However, we know that we can always improve that relationship, just as the moon renews itself after waning and nearly disappearing.

Parshas Naso

For Him the Bell Tolls

There is a verse in this week's portion which seems to have a misplaced possessive. But on closer analysis every noun and pronoun lend powerful meaning. "And every portion of Holies that the Children of Israel bring to a Kohen shall be his. A man's holies shall be his, and what he gives to a kohen shall be his" (Numbers 5:9-10). The question is obvious: if the holies shall be his then why are they the Kohen's; and if they are the Kohen's, as the Torah tells us, then why are they his?

Rashi sheds some light by explaining the verse with a Medrash: The man who gives to a Kohen shall surely not lose, as whatever he gives shall ultimately be returned they will be his. On the other hand, one who wants to keep his holies, they shall be his. The only properties left to him shall be the small percent that he was supposed to allot to the Kohen. That is what will be his.

These two diverse explications seem in contradiction. Does what he gives to the Kohen remain "his" or does only what he want to keep remain "his"? How does the word "his" play two different roles, one telling us of fortune, the other of adversity?

Many years ago, my father told me the following story: Before the turn of the century, Reb Dovid, a talented worker, decided that he had had enough of the shtetl. There was no money to be made, and he decided to travel to America in search of even a small fragment of the fabled streets that were paved with gold.

Before he set off, he appointed his friend, Yankel, a prominent businessman, to receive the monies that would soon be pouring in from his successful overseas ventures. After taking a small fee for his services, Yankel would deliver the remaining money to the man's family.

"How much should I take, and how much should I give your wife?" asked Yankel.

The America-bound traveler put his full faith in the friend and simply told him to use his own discretion.

After a few months, Dovid's efforts began to bear fruit, and he sent a respectable sum of money to Yankel's bank account in Kovno to be distributed to his wife and family. Yankel, however, had different plans. He kept almost the entire sum for himself, while allotting only a fraction of the cash to Dovid's wife and family. They, in turn, dejectedly, falsely assumed that Dovid was still not able to make ends meet.

A few months went by and Dovid's wife received a letter from him assuring her that things were going well and soon he would be able to move the entire family to the United States. "Meanwhile," he concluded, "I am sure that the sums you are receiving enable you to live in extreme comfort."

Dovid's wife was flabbergasted. She had hardly received enough to feed her family!

She ran to the Kovno Rav, Rabbi Isaac Elchonon Spector, and cried her heart out.

"Yankel is cheating us! My husband is sending him a fortune, but he is giving us a pittance!"

Immediately, the Rav summoned Yankel to his study,

"Is it true," asked Rabbi Spector, "that you were supposed to give the monies received to Dovid's wife?"

"Yes," the man declared smugly. "But I was allowed to take my fair share."

And what were you supposed to give her?" the rabbi asked, almost incredulously.

"Dovid told me, 'Give her what you want.' So," he continued, a broad smirk on his face, "I took 90 percent of the money and gave her what I wanted. And that was 10 percent."

Immediately Rabbi Spector stood up and asked the man to repeat himself. "Can you repeat yourself? What did Reb Dovid tell you to give her?"

"He told me to give her exactly what I want."

"Good," declared Rabbi Spector, knowing fully what Dovid's true intention was.

“As Rabbi of Kovno, I command you to give her the ninety percent portion that you had kept for yourself.”

“But why?” stammered the man.

“Because that is exactly what you want. You are to give her exactly what you wanted!”

The Torah tells us that a man whose holies are to him will remain his. There are many Heavenly ways to delineate what a man is meant to receive. The words “will belong to him” may ring with plenty or with poverty. If one’s eyes are filled with greed then only his holies will be his. The tithe becomes his only want and Hashem assures him that that is what he will get. But if he gives with generosity than what he gives shall be his in addition to what he already has. Because the One who interprets man’s heart interprets the verse. He fills the meaning in accordance with the man’s intent. And then He interprets the reward.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated in memory of Irving Adelsberg — Yitzchak Eizik ben Gedalia of blessed memory whose Yartzeit is 12 Sivan by the Adelsberg Family

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Robert Lipton, Reuven Leib ben Mordechai HaLevi.

Jealousy vs. Envy

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

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

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

This concept of the Torah catering to a jealous husband requires some explanation. After all, Chazal find jealousy to be one of the more abominable character traits. We find in Pirkei Avos (4:28) Rabbi Elazar HaKappar said: “Jealousy, lust, and the [pursuit of] honor remove a person from the world.” Though the Sotah process is much more civilized and enlightened than other common practices in those times (or even than the pervasive present day practice of “honor killings”), conceding to a husband’s jealousy seems to be contrary to Jewish values.

In fact, we seemingly find a Torah prohibition against being jealous in a pretty prominent place: Thou shall not be envious of your friend’s home, wife, slaves, etc. – is the last of the Ten Commandments! Yet, according to one opinion in the Talmud, it is a mitzvah for a husband to begin this process. Why are we allowing a husband to give in to his jealousy?

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

Jealousy, on the other hand, is the overpowering feeling that comes with the realization that someone is trying to take something that is rightfully

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

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

Brotherhood of Man

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

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

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

Maimonides (Yad Hilchos Beis Habechira 2:2) states, “we have a tradition that the place that the altar was constructed (in the temple) was the place that Avraham built an altar and bound Yitzchak upon it; this was the place that Noah built his altar when he exited the ark; this was the exact spot that the children of Adam, Kayin and Hevel, brought their sacrifices; and was the very spot that Adam was created from. Our Rabbis have taught ‘Adam was created from the spot that he receives atonement.’”

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

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

The place of the altar is the place where all of mankind connects with Hashem and is empowered to serve Hashem through sacrifices. In fact, it is our responsibility to make sure that the entire world is aware of

Hashem and is able to connect to Him. It is no wonder, then, that the main religions of the western world all feel intensely connected to Yerushalayim. We must remember that, as caretakers appointed by Hashem, it is our responsibility to give the entire world a place to worship Hashem and connect to Him.

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“This was the offering of Nachson the son of Aminadav” (7:17) “This was the offering of Nesanel the son of Tzuar.” (7:23)

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The Torah concludes each of the twelve paragraphs which describe the dedication offerings of the Nesiim with the above pesukim. We should note the Torah's refrain in its description of these offerings. Indeed, Chazal expound upon the preciousness of these offerings before Hashem. “The offering of the Nesiim is as precious to Hashem as the “song” Bnei Yisrael sang by the Red Sea, for there it says: This is my G-d; and here it says, “this is the sacrifice of Nachson.” Horav Shlomo Breuer Z”l suggests that this reference by Chazal to the “Shira” is intended to clarify the apparent redundancy of these pesukim. Indeed, if one takes into account that not one letter of the Torah is superfluous and that numerous laws are derived from one single letter, it is almost incomprehensible that the Torah reserves a complete paragraph for each of the Nesiim's offering! He states that this ostensibly pointless repetition of the contribution of each tribe is used by the Torah to express a fundamental truth. Twelve different men may offer an equal contribution, but each individual gift carries its own value before Hashem. The actual gift does not determine its significance. Rather, it is the individual who contributes, the spirit in which he gives, and the joy which emanates from this act. Twelve Nesiim may offer the same contribution, but each performs a unique act.

So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael, saying to them. (6:23)

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The Kohen who blesses the people has an “approved text” to which he must adhere verbatim. There is no room for the Kohen to supplement the prescribed text stated in the Torah. The Kohen who adds blessing transgresses the prohibition of Es kol hadavar asher Anochi metzaveh eschem oso tishmoru laasos, lo soseif alav v'lo sigra mimenu, “The entire word that I command you, that you shall observe to do; you shall not add to it, and you shall not subtract from it” (Devarim 13:1). In his commentary to the pasuk, Rashi cites examples of Bal Tosif, do not add: five tosafos, compartments for Tefillin; five species for a Lulav; four blessings for Bircas Kohanim, Priestly Blessings.

Bearing the above in mind, let us look to Parashas Pinchas as Moshe Rabbeinu prepares to transfer the reins of leadership to his primary disciple and successor, Yehoshua. The first step in the process was semichah d'Oraisa, Biblical ordination, whereby Moshe conferred “rabbinic” status on his student. This was the beginning of a chain of tradition that went on for generations, through the era of the Amoraim. There was an attempt to revive semichah in the early sixteenth century in Tzfas, but it failed to germinate.

In Parashas Pinchas, the Torah relates that Moshe placed both hands on Yehoshua – despite being instructed by Hashem to lay only one hand on him. Rashi explains that Moshe ordained Yehoshua b'ayin yafeh, “good eye,” with both hands. How could Moshe amend Hashem's instructions and add to the mitzvah? Why was he not in transgression of Bal Tosif? The Kli Yakar asks this question, wondering why semichah should be any different than the other classic mitzvos cited by Rashi.

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, distinguishes between mitzvos ben adam laMakom, between man and the Almighty, and mitzvos ben adam lachaveiro, between man and his fellow man. The prohibition against adding to a mitzvah applies to those mitzvos between man and G-d. Hashem has given strict instructions concerning the parameters of the

mitzvah. When it comes to performing various acts of loving kindness to our fellowman, there are no restrictions concerning doing more. Kol ha'mosif, mosifin lo, “Whoever adds, it will be added to him.” He will be blessed for going beyond the call of duty.

Apparently, the Priestly Blessing is a mitzvah which is ben adam laMakom. Thus, there is no allowance for addition of any sort. Rav Heyman supports this with a statement found in the Sifri's commentary to our parsha. The Torah writes, V'aani avaracheim, “And I will bless them.” The Torah underscores that the blessing is derived from Hashem, so that people should not erroneously think that their blessings are contingent upon the Kohanim. The blessings come from Hashem. The Kohanim are the medium for deliverance. Hashem – and only Hashem – can confer blessing. Thus, it is clear that the mitzvah is ben adam laMakom.

The Biur Halachah wonders how a parent may confer blessing on his child, employing the exact text reserved for the Kohanim's blessing. Does the Talmud not derive from the words koh sevaracheim, “So, shall you bless,” that a zar, Yisrael or Levi, who are not members of the Priestly family, may not bless?

Rav Heyman explains that a Yisrael is considered a zar only with regard to ascending the Duchan in the Sanctuary and conferring an official blessing in a place reserved for Kohanim. Under such circumstances, the zar partners with other Kohanim in a blessing through which Hashem bestows His favor on those who are the subjects of the blessing. Since the zar is not part of this august group of Kohanim, he transgresses koh sevarachei, by bestowing blessing using the Biblical vernacular. However, a father who blesses his son with a personal blessing – not as a Bircas Kohanim – is acting ben adam lachaveiro. Thus, there is no reason to prohibit his blessing – even if he uses biblical language. As long as he is not acting ben adam laMakom, it is not a mitzvah, per se.

“Speak unto Aharon and unto his sons saying, so you shall bless the Bnei Yisrael.” (6:23)

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Hashem commands that His blessing be conferred only by the kohanim. Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, suggests a practical reason for this. Regrettably, many people posit that the kohen and his present day counterpart, the Torah scholar are supported by the community without any reciprocation.

Many individuals believe that if an individual is not “working” in the way that they are, he is not contributing to the community. This notion is, of course, categorically wrong. The sustaining power of Klal Yisrael is manifest only through Torah and Torah scholars who devote their lives to its study and dissemination. This also applies to each individual Jew's material success. Bnei Torah should be viewed as vehicles for channelling blessing to Klal Yisrael. Consequently, they share as equal contributors to our material success. They should be recognized accordingly.

Horav Shternbuch indicates that the text of the bracha, “And He commanded us to bless His nation Yisrael, with love,” which is recited by the kohanim prior to bircas kohanim, enhances this idea. The blessing is contingent upon the love and harmony that exists between the kohanim and the rest of the people. If there exists no mutual respect, then the blessing will not thrive. The kohanim must recognize those who support and sustain them, and the people must, in turn, pay tribute to the kohanim who are responsible for their blessing.

Let them place My name upon Bnei Yisrael, and I shall bless them. (6:27)

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Chazal, at the end of Meseches Uktzin, say, “There is no greater container to hold Klal Yisrael's blessings than peace.” One may have everything – health, prosperity, and fame – but without peace these gifts have no significance. Consequently, the blessings which the Kohanim are to impart upon Bnei Yisrael are sealed with the hope for peace.

A community can catalyze peace in one of two ways. The first way is the positive approach, in which people work towards ironing out their

differences, seeking ways to increase harmony and good will. Discord is viewed as taboo, so the slightest infraction into the amity of a community is immediately quelled. Another path, one that is regrettably negative, quite often serves as a vehicle to induce unity. Within a community, when we do not take the initiative to engender peace and cooperation, Hashem causes us to become unified in the face of persecution. Then we band together, regardless of our personal beliefs, to face the challenge to our nation – collectively. Each group offers advice, each one seeks solace from the other, as we face our common enemy – together. Who creates this peace? It is Hashem Who must intervene into our discord and bring us together using a destructive medium. How fortunate would we have been had we maintained harmony among ourselves. Instead, we require the tzaros, persecutions, to bring us closer to one to another.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, comments the Kohanim, the spiritual mentors of Klal Yisrael, have the responsibility to influence the people, to sensitize them to the compelling importance of shalom. They must see to it that harmony and peace reign within Klal Yisrael, lest it become necessary to effect this peace via “outside” sources.

This is the pasuk’s message: “Let them place My Name among Bnei Yisrael” Hashem’s Name is Shalom, for He is the essence of peace. Let the Kohanim see to it that My Name, peace, reigns among the Jews while they are in a circumstance of “blessing” and good fortune. If the Kohanim inspire the people, then peace and harmony will emanate from within.

“Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying, so shall you bless the Bnei Yisrael.” (6:23)

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The Kohanim are to serve as the vehicles through which Hashem’s blessing is bestowed upon Klal Yisrael. In order to transmit blessing one must maintain a harmonious relationship with the people. Indeed, Chazal teach us that a Kohen who does not “get along” with the people should not bless them. The Maharsham, zl, was bothered by the brachah which the Kohen recites prior to the blessing. He says, “And He commanded us to bless His nation Yisrael with love.” How does one express himself lovingly to all Jews? Does this “love” apply also to the rasha, wicked Jew, who has a distorted view of Klal Yisrael’s destiny? Does the “ba’havah” apply equally to him?

He cited Rav Shmelke, zl, M’Nicholsberg, who said that we are enjoined to love all Jews, even reshaim. Rav Shmelke explained that all Jews, regardless of their spiritual alienation, have good within them. We are enjoined to focus our love towards that “concealed” good. Likewise, the Kohanim are to direct their blessing to the good in every Jew.

May Hashem bless you and keep watch over you. (6:24)

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The various commentators render their interpretations of the Birkas Kohanim, priestly blessing. Rashi cites the Sifri that views the blessing as a reference to material bounty. “May Hashem grant that you be triumphant over your enemies and that your crops and business ventures succeed. May your possessions increase, and may Hashem guard these possessions from thieves.”

In short, the blessing of “Yevarechecha,” May (Hashem) bless you, refers to receiving abundance, while the blessing of “Veyishmerecha” is a prayer that we be able to retain our blessing. The Midrash Tanchuma supplements the blessing with an invocation that our increase in material wealth be used properly and that it not be the cause of our own self-destruction. “May He protect you from temptation, lest the material aspects of the blessing lead you into sin”.

The greatest blessing, when in the hands of a simple or weak person, can easily turn into a curse. One can lose — or even worse — if he uses his blessing improperly. Money can be the primary motivating factor catalyzing an individual to sin. There is a reason for material abundance. It certainly is not sent to us for self-indulgence and self-gratification.

The Midrash offers a second interpretation that contends that the blessing of “increase” refers to progeny. Hashem will bless us with children who will devote themselves to the Torah. Horav Boruch Sorotzkin, zl, suggests that the Midrash Tanchuma’s interpretation of “Veyishmerecha,” that we should make use of our “increase” for the correct and proper purpose, applies similarly to the blessing of offspring. Indeed, the blessing of children is a very special one, but it is also a challenge. It demands that one accept the enormous responsibility of raising a child according to Torah dictate. How often do parents impose their own shortcomings on their children? The father who unfortunately feels he has not succeeded in life, may try to relive his life through his son, at times inflicting his own idiosyncrasies upon his child. An alternative approach is demonstrated by the parent who wants to see his child “get ahead in the world”, devoting the majority of his educational endeavor to secular pursuits, relegating Torah study to a distant second place. Finally, there is the parent who is simply incompetent as a parent and probably not much better as a human being. He reneges his responsibility as he lives a lifestyle that reeks of double-standard. Then he “wonders” why his child “goes off the derech,” becomes alienated from Torah Judaism. This dual blessing has so much meaning. If we are blessed with children, we must rise to the challenge, accepting the responsibility that accompanies the territory called Jewish parenting.

May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May Hashem illuminate His Countenance... and be gracious to you... May Hashem lift His Countenance... and establish peace for you. (6:24,25,26)

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The Kohanim are enjoined with blessing the Jewish People with a three-fold blessing, petitioning Hashem: to safeguard the nation (shemirah); to shine His Countenance on them and grant them chein, graciousness and favor (v’yechunka); and to grant the third, and greatest blessing of peace (shalom). Obviously, the sequence teaches us an important principle; peace follows after one is protected, both from without and within, from internal enemies and even from himself. Favor is the result of Hashem’s blessing which we earn through the light of Torah. Without Torah, life is very dim; we do nothing but grope from one obstacle to another. Last, once we are secure and embrace the Torah, we are worthy and capable of true peace. One cannot be at peace with others unless he is first at peace with himself. Unless one adheres to a Torah lifestyle and is subservient to Hashem, he is neither safe, nor is he capable of achieving a life of harmony, satisfaction and peace.

V’yishmerecha, “and safeguard you.” Chazal add: Min ha’mazikin, from those who would injure you. Targum Yonasan does not accept the usual definition of mazikin as referring to demons and injurious spirits. He explains that there are two forms of mazikin: bnei tihareirei, the sons of dusk; and bnei tzafrirei, the sons of dawn. There are two kinds of demons, those who present themselves in their true colors: either black as night, or those who camouflage themselves to appear as light as day. Have no fear, they are one and the same. The harsh mazik who comes at us with his true colors showing is an evil and injurious mazik. Is he worse, however, than he who disguises his injurious character beneath a façade of fake sweetness? He may conceal his evil intention, but he is no less injurious. Both of these mazikin are dangerous, and, without Hashem’s protection, we are unable to protect ourselves from their malevolence.

We have enemies who brook no compromise concerning their evil intentions. They neither have shame, nor do they have true intentions. They hate; they vilify. At least, they come at us with a frontal attack. We can prepare ourselves by moving out of harm’s way. What about those who appear as sweet as the early morning rays of sun, breaking through the dark night? Are they for real, or is it all a disguise? They posture themselves as our friends, but, in truth, they would turn against us the moment that they could derive benefit from such a move.

Perhaps we might take this analogy a step further. By their very natures as harbingers of change, dusk and dawn present themselves as periods of ambiguity. At dusk, the sky is beginning to darken, as the rays of

sunshine begin to wane. Nonetheless, the sky still has rays of light left; it is not yet black and bleak. Dawn presents a similar scenario, as the first rays of the morning sunshine begin to pierce the darkness of night. The dark night gives way to daylight, with its hope for a new beginning.

A negative attitude can bring about a most self-destructive downfall. Success requires positivity and self-esteem. One who is negative tends to be downbeat, disagreeable and skeptical. He always expects the worst, and he is surprised when it does not occur. The flipside is positivity, which could be equally damaging when misplaced in opposition to a realistic vision of a person's attitudes and potential for success. In other words, expecting too much can be equally as destructive as expecting nothing at all.

Let me demonstrate how the mazik of misplaced (light) positivity or its contrasting ambiguity (represented by dusk) plays itself out by subtly putting down one's passion for success, under the guise of "I do not want him to get hurt."

A fellow aspires for success in a given field of endeavor. He has potential, but is not eminently capable of achieving his dream. Life is not a bed of roses, and one must be prepared to surmount various obstacles in his rise to success. A positive attitude is not only helpful, it is an absolute requisite if one is successfully to address the various crises which can – and often do – arise. On the other hand, optimistic bias might cause one to view things in a less than objective manner, often ignoring the warning signs to which our own negative emotions are

pointing. Thus, we cause ourselves to lose our grip on reality. Psychologists refer to this as "illusion of control," when, as the result of the natural outcome of optimistic bias, one begins to delude himself into thinking he has greater control over the outcomes of events than is the reality. Psyching ourselves with positive thinking can cause us to become overly optimistic, to the point that we overestimate our ability to succeed. Hence, the mazik of "dawn," the ambiguity that comes with misplaced positivity, is acting in full force.

The ambiguity of dusk is more subtle, as it seeks to pour cold water on the fiery passion and drive of he who is driven to succeed. This mazik can present itself as a "friend" who does not want us to "fail." The mere mention of failure to a person who is driven to succeed can destroy his drive. It creates doubt: "Can I really make it?" "Do I have a chance?" "What if I fail?" This covert mazik with its "well-meaning" intentions has destroyed many people, causing them to give up before they ever start. One can fight the mazik that presents its true colors. It is the more nuanced, "well-intentioned" mazik that is so difficult to overcome, because it is difficult to detect.]

לע"נ

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

Parshot Bamidbar and Naso: Introduction to Sefer Bamidbar

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PART I

This week, we will introduce the 4th book of the Torah. What is the name of this new sefer? Or, more properly, what are its names?

- 1) Hebrew: "Sefer BeMidbar."
- 2) Latin: "Numeri."
- 3) English: "Numbers."
- 4) Hazal: "Humash ha-Pekkudim."

Which of these names does not belong? Clearly, "BeMidbar": this name says nothing about the content of the sefer. The origin of this name is the fact that it is the first significant word in the book (like the word "bereshit" in the first book of the Torah, the word "shemot" in the second book, the word "va-yikra" in the third book, and the word "devarim" in the fifth book). On the other hand, the other names here all seem to fit into a category: numbers, or "pekkudim," which means "counting." These names tell us there will be counting and listing in this book, and indeed, there is plenty of that. But "pekkudim" is more than just "numbers." What does the root "P-K-D" mean in the context of the Humash Ha-Pekkudim?

MEANINGS OF P-K-D IN THIS SEFER:

P-K-D means to remember something and pay special attention to it. This basic meaning of P-K-D is what ties together the three specific ways in which P-K-D is used in our sefer:

- 1) P-K-D = to count or list. Counting or listing is a process which recalls each individual and focuses attention on every individual in the list or count.
- 2) P-K-D = to appoint to a task / position. Appointment to a task, or the appointment of an institution, is a process which involves considering a person's (or an institution's) capabilities and record and then focusing special attention on that individual as a person capable of a particular task.
- 3) P-K-D = to punish. Punishment takes place when Hashem decides to "remember" what a person has done and that the time has come to pay special attention (in this case, special negative attention) to that person.

[Reward, of course, is the opposite of punishment: Hashem decides to "remember" a good deed or a promise He has made to someone, and pays special attention to that person by fulfilling the promise. In Tanakh, we often find P-K-D used in this positive sense, like when Hashem 'recalls' His promise to give Sara a son -- "va-Hashem pakad et Sara." But this sense of P-K-D does not appear in the Humash Ha-Pekkudim.]

P-K-D AS COUNTING OR LISTING:

What counting takes place in this sefer, or what lists do we find in the sefer?

- 1) Nesi'im (chiefs or leaders of tribes) are listed many times in the Humash ha-Pekkudim:
 - a) When they are selected to help take a census of the nation.
 - b) As commanders of the fighting force of each shevet (tribe).
 - c) When they donate large gifts to the Mishkan (portable Temple) to celebrate its grand opening.
 - d) When scouts are sent to Eretz Yisrael to check out the land and the strength of its inhabitants.
- 2) Counting of all males of fighting age:
 - a) Each shevet's fighting-age males are counted and their number is reported to us.
 - b) The total of all the shevatim is also reported.
 - c) Toward the end of the sefer, all fighting-age males are counted again; the Torah again reports the number of each shevet and total of all shevatim.
- 3) Listing of the degalim:

a) The Torah describes how the shevatim were split into four degalim (military wings, or "flags"). Several times, the Torah lists the degalim and each of their member shevatim, as well as listing the number of fighting men in each degel and listing the commander of each degel.

4) Counting of the Leviyyim: The Leviyyim are not counted with the fighting men of the nation because their job is to be the "army of Hashem." But they are counted separately:

a) First, their total number is counted.

b) In a second count, the number of Leviyyim old enough to be part of the "army of Hashem" is also counted and reported.

5) Counting of bekhorim: One of the major events of the Humash Ha-Pekkudim is that the bekhorim (first-born), who are considered holy, are replaced by the members of Shevet Levi. The bekhorim and Leviyyim are both counted, then the bekhorim transfer their holiness to the Leviyyim.

6) Gifts of the Nesi'im: The leaders of each of the twelve shevatim help celebrate the 'grand opening' of the Mishkan with large donations. Even though all of the Nesi'im donate exactly the same thing to the Mishkan, the Torah still takes the trouble to present a complete list of the gifts, repeating exactly the same lengthy description of the gift twelve times.

7) Travels: Toward the end of the sefer, the Torah reviews for us the long list of all the places where the nation stops to camp in its 40-year journey through the desert.

8) Korbanot of Succot: The Torah reports the korbanot (sacrifices) of each day of Succot, which follow a very regular and systematic pattern. On the first day, they are to bring 13 bulls; on every successive day, one less bull. But instead of telling us what pattern to follow, the Torah spells out exactly what korbanot we are to bring on each day, spelling it out: on the first day, 13. On the second day, 12. On the third day, 11

[An example of contrast: the Talmud does not spell out how many candles to light on each night of Hanukka; it simply tells us to start with one and to add one each night.]

P-K-D AS APPOINTING:

To be "poked" means "to appoint"; in modern Hebrew, for example, "pakid" means "an official" or "clerk," someone "appointed." Sefer BeMidbar is the Humash ha-Pekkudim in the sense of "Book of Appointment" because it describes how the nation is to be organized: each group and individual is appointed a specific task; a national infrastructure is created.

1) Nesi'im are appointed to help with the count of their people.

2) Fighting-age men are assigned to the task of being the nation's military force.

3) First-born sons of the nation are removed from their designation as servants for the Mishkan. The Leviyyim are appointed in place of these bekhorim. Shevet Levi is assigned the task of being the nation's "religious force," paralleling the appointment of the rest of the adult males as the "military force." The Leviyyim are assigned to the Mishkan as guards, transporters, and builders/dismantlers. The three family groups within the Leviyyim are each assigned responsibility for a specific part of the Mishkan:

a) Kehat family: the kelei ha-kodesh (holy vessels: Aron, Shulhan, Menora, Mizbehot)

b) Gershon family: the curtains which cover the Mishkan and surround it.

c) Merari family: the structure of the Mishkan itself.

4) The Kohanim are assigned the task of supervising the Leviyyim and protecting them from overstepping their bounds and being injured by Hashem; for instance, the Leviyyim are not to touch the kelim or look at them, so the Kohanim must wrap the kelim before the Leviyyim enter to take the kelim in order to transport them.

5) The camp itself: everyone is assigned a place to camp and a position in which to move with the camp as it travels. The nation is divided into four degalim, each with three shevatim. Each degel is led by one shevet, and the Nasi of that shevet is appointed supreme military commander of that degel. The Kohanim and Leviyyim travel with the Mishkan in the center of the camp; each of the four degalim has an assigned position around the Mishkan.

6) The trumpets: besides the setting up of the camp, the Torah also sets up an intra-camp communication system: two silver trumpets. One kind of blast on the trumpet gathers the Nesi'im together. Another type gathers the whole nation. Another type is the signal to decamp and begin travel. Another type is the signal of war. And another type is blown over korbanot on festive occasions.

7) The Mishkan: in Sefer VaYikra, we saw that the grand opening of the Mishkan was celebrated with an elaborate series of korbanot. This was an appropriate angle to take on the grand opening when we were in the middle of VaYikra, which is all about korbanot. In Sefer BeMidbar, the Torah focuses on a different aspect of the "appointment" of the Mishkan in its official capacity as the Center of Worship: it focuses on the 12-day celebration of the grand opening of the Mishkan by presenting us with a grand list, the list of the identical gifts of the Nesi'im. The list is as typical of BeMidbar as the korbanot are of VaYikra.

8) The Zekenim: later on in the sefer, Moshe becomes frustrated with the burden of leading this uncooperative people through the desert and refuses to go on as leader alone. In response, Hashem commands him to assemble 70 elders and takes some of the spiritual power which is concentrated in Moshe and bestows this power on the elders.

9) Elazar succeeds Aharon: also later on in the sefer, Aharon transfers his authority as the Kohen Gadol to his son, Elazar, by giving him the special clothing worn only by the Kohen Gadol.

10) Yehoshua succeeds Moshe: also later on in the sefer, Moshe transfers his authority as leader to Yehoshua by giving him semikha.

P-K-D AS PUNISHMENT:

One of the darker meanings of "P-K-D" is "punishment." Misdeeds and punishment for misdeeds are one of the major themes of Sefer BeMidbar. The opening sections of Sefer BeMidbar paint a picture of beautiful order and organization as the nation prepares for its journey from Sinai to Eretz Yisrael. The structure of the physical camp is set up, the military structure is created, and different groups are assigned to different tasks. But once we get past the first part of the sefer, we encounter a series of stories in which, time after time, an individual or the whole nation does something wrong and is punished, and the beautiful structure which was designed to bring the people successfully to their land becomes ineffectual and irrelevant:

1) Tav'era: people complain against Hashem and are punished by Him. This is the first hint of trouble in the sefer.

2) Kivrot Ha-Ta'ava: the people complain that they are tired of the "man" (i.e., manna from heaven) and want meat. For the first time, we hear rumblings of enormous ingratitude: the people look back nostalgically at Egypt (!) and wish they had never left that lap of luxury and culinary delicacies. Hashem becomes angry, and although He provides them with meat, He sends a plague to punish them.

3) Moshe becomes frustrated with the people: they just don't seem to get it. They receive the Torah straight from Hashem, and 40 days later they're worshipping an idol; they are taken out of slavery with miracles, and before long they are wishing to be back in good old Egypt and furious with Moshe for taking them out. Moshe, demoralized and frustrated, refuses to go on alone as leader, so Hashem removes some of the burden of leadership from him and places it on the 70 elders Moshe selects.

4) Miryam: Miryam and Aharon, Moshe's siblings, join with the chorus of voices challenging Moshe's leadership. Moshe, ever humble, does not react, but Hashem does, angrily putting Miryam and Aharon in their place and striking Miryam with tzara'at (*not* leprosy; if you want more details, see the shiur on Parashat Tazria). It is Moshe who magnanimously prays for her recovery.

5) The Meraglim: Hashem commands that the nation send scouts to reconnoiter Eretz Yisrael. When they return, they describe the beauty of the land but convince the people that they do not have the strength to conquer the powerful nations of the land. The people accept this evaluation even though they have been promised Hashem's help, and they again raise the cry for a return to Egypt. Hashem, furious, decrees that no one of this generation will see the land. For the next 40 years, they will wander the desert, until they are all dead; then the new generation will enter the land.

6) Aftermath of Meraglim: once Hashem has decreed their punishment, the people realize they have made an enormous mistake. They try to regain the opportunity they have lost: they try to enter Eretz Yisrael. But Moshe warns them that they

will fail, as indeed they do. The nation of Amalek meets them in battle, and without Hashem's help, they flee the field and fall before Amalek.

7) The Korah rebellion: Korah, a Levi, challenges the status of Aharon as a Kohen (Aharon is also the Leviyyim's chief supervisor), while Datan and Aviram challenge Moshe's leadership as chief of the people. Moshe becomes angry and arranges a test to show who has truly been selected by Hashem, and the result of the test is the deaths of Korah, Datan, Aviram, and all of their followers in an angry Divine confirmation of the selection of Moshe as leader and Aharon and his sons as Kohanim.

8) Aftermath of Korah rebellion: the people blame Moshe and Aharon for the deaths of the rebels. Hashem, furious again, responds by sending a plague against the people, which Moshe and Aharon halt -- showing the people that, if anything, they are the people's defenders. But then the people simply transfer blame for the deaths to Hashem, and whine that everyone who approaches Hashem seems to meet with a terrible fate.

9) Mei Meriva: Moshe and Aharon lose their chance to enter Eretz Yisrael when they hit the rock and disobey Hashem's instructions to speak to it to tell it to release its water. This is a disaster of tremendous proportions for Moshe personally, as he himself will tell us when we get to Sefer Devarim and he describes how he begged Hashem to allow him to enter the land.

10) Ba'al Pe'or: Toward the end of the sefer, as the people are moving closer to Eretz Yisrael, they encounter the nation of Midyan. The people of the two nations mix, and Bnei Yisrael quickly become involved in the worship of the god of the Midyanites, Ba'al Pe'or, and also in sexual immorality with the Midyanites. Ironically, this takes place just after Hashem has protected Bnei Yisrael from the curses of Bil'am the prophet; instead of cursing Bnei Yisrael, Bil'am is forced to sing praises of their faithfulness to Hashem, but before you can turn around, the people are behaving unfaithfully.

In all of these incidents, individuals or the entire nation makes terrible mistakes which lead to "pekida" -- punishment. These incidents are so frequent that they become part of the theme of the sefer.

PART II:

In Part I of this shiur, we traced many of the events of Sefer BeMidbar. We split these events into three different categories of "pekida," since Sefer BeMidbar is the Humash Ha-Pekkudim. In this sefer, "pekida" has three primary meanings: counting/listing, appointing, and punishment.

In this part of the shiur, we will first present a number of examples of how the word P-K-D is used in the sefer in these three different ways, and then we will discuss how the three themes of pekida interact with one another to produce the coherent literary unit we call a "sefer."

P-K-D: SOME EXAMPLES:

The word P-K-D appears in various forms in Sefer BeMidbar 96 times (Shemot runs a distant second place, with fewer than 20 "P-K-D"s. Many of these instances (the great majority) are in contexts in which counting or listing takes place. In order to demonstrate the use of P-K-D in this "counting" sense but not to belabor the point, I will cite just one example:

BeMidbar 1:19 -- . . . Just as Hashem commanded Moshe, he counted (P-K-D) them in the Sinai Desert.

Somewhat less frequently, we find P-K-D used to describe the appointment of an individual or group to a particular position or function. Some examples:

BeMidbar 1:50 -- "Appoint (P-K-D) the Leviyyim over the Tabernacle of Testimony and over all its utensils and all that belongs to it"

BeMidbar 3:32 -- The head of the princes of Levi was Elazar, son of Aharon, the kohen, appointed over (P-K-D) the guards of the watch of the holy.

BeMidbar 3:36 -- The appointed task (P-K-D) of the children of Merari was the boards of the Tabernacle, its bars, pillars, and sockets, all of its utensils....

BeMidbar 27:16 -- "Let Hashem, God of the spirit of all flesh, appoint (P-K-D) a leader over the congregation."

Finally, our last P-K-D category is that of punishment. Certainly, not every punishment in the sefer is described as a pekida, but I have found it useful to organize the themes of the sefer around this root because the word is used in these ways in the sefer and because, as we will see, the intimate interactions of these three themes, all traceable to this one root, produce the unique character of the sefer. Some examples of this last category:

BeMidbar 14:18 -- Hashem, slow to anger and great in kindness, forgiving sin and transgression, but who will not simply forgive, who visits (P-K-D) the sins of the fathers on the children

BeMidbar 14:29 -- "In this desert will your carcasses fall, all of your countings (P-K-D) according to all of your numbers, from age twenty and up" [This example will be explained further.]

BeMidbar 16:29 -- "If like the deaths of all men do these men perish, and if the visitation (P-K-D) of all men is visited (P-K-D) upon them, then [you will know that] Hashem did not send me."

THE THEMES OF THE HUMASH HA-PEKKUDIM:

Why is it important for the Torah to tell us all of these details about the various countings, listings, and appointments? Since our assumption in reading Tanakh is that it is written for its meaning to all generations, why do we care how many soldiers there were in the shevet of Naftali over 3,000 years ago in the desert? Why is it important for the Torah to painstakingly repeat -- 12 times! -- the gifts of the Nesi'im? Do we really need to know how many male Leviyyim there were from one month old and up, and also how many Leviyyim there were from 25 years old and up? Why does the Torah tell us -- more than once -- all the details of how the degalim were set up, who were the military commanders, and how many soldiers they each commanded? How many times, after all, does the Torah need to repeat to us the list of the Nesi'im?

Second, whatever the significance of these numbers and lists, what do they have to do with all of the disasters and punishments with which the sefer is so occupied?

It seems to me that two of the aspects of P-K-D are in tension with the third aspect: the P-K-D of counting and the P-K-D of appointing stand together in contrast with the P-K-D of punishment. More fundamentally, the former two represent a vision which conflicts with the vision represented by the latter.

The Humash Ha-Pekudim presents Hashem's grand plan for the entrance of Bnei Yisrael into Eretz Yisrael. These former slaves -- miraculously rescued from the death and despair of Egypt, presented with the Torah amid flashes of lightning and peals of thunder -- are now ready to march triumphantly on to their land, trumpets blaring, ready to scatter their enemies with the help of Hashem's sure hand. Soldiers are numbered and formed into battle units, military leaders appointed, each shevet assigned a specific place in the symmetrical formation of the nation surrounding its crown jewel, the Mishkan. Within the army's protective circle nestles the Levite circle, again with each family assigned to a particular task and position in the traveling camp. With the Kohanim directing, the Leviyyim dismantle the Mishkan, shoulder the Aron and other Kelim, and prepare to transport the movable Temple. The silver trumpets blast a signal, the nation breaks camp, and incredibly, two million people move in unison through the desert in ponderous synchronicity.

The lists and numbers of Sefer BeMidbar seem repetitive only when we expect them to communicate discrete bits of information rather than painting a picture. When we put the entire Sefer into perspective, what appears is a dynamic representation of organization, regimentation, assignation, preparation, and finally transportation. The telos of this vision is clear as well: confident, with roles defined and well understood, this group is on the road home. No obstacle can deter them. This is the vision of Hashem and the vision of Moshe.

But it is not the vision of the people. The people do not see the drama or share the excitement; for them, tomorrow is not filled with promise, but with insecurity. At the time of the enslavement, Egypt had been unbearable, a daily genocide. But in rosy hindsight, Egypt was not only the lap of culinary luxury but also, strangely, a place of security. The people made no choices and bore no responsibility to make decisions; their tasks were thrust upon them, their government provided for them from without. In the desert, they must organize themselves, create their own institutions -- their own judiciary, their own army, their own political structure, their own religious representatives. Hashem guides them in all of these tasks, but ultimately the people are responsible for themselves. As if this were not unfamiliar enough after over 200 years of slavery, their daily bread comes falling down from the heavens; instead of the predictable fish, fruits, and vegetables of Egypt, the people are provided with supernatural food directly from Hashem.

Despite incontrovertible evidence of Hashem's presence among them and of His intention to help them reach their goal (after all, He did split the sea and drown their enemies in it), the people cannot muster the courage to undertake the conquest of the Land and its powerful inhabitants; their insecurity deafens them to assurances that Hashem will help them and amplifies the claims of those who insist that the nation cannot match the power of the Canaanites.

The creation of institutions and the appointment of individuals and groups to various responsibilities becomes for many of the people an opportunity to pursue power struggles and bicker over who deserves honor; those who are blind to the Divine vision behind the counting and appointing impute to those in power -- to Moshe especially -- the same motives which energize them. Throughout the Sefer, Moshe's leadership is challenged by those who want more power than they have; for his part, Moshe is bewildered and eventually angered by these attacks, as he sees his leadership function in the context of the Divine process and not as part of the dynamic of ego-driven self-promotion and political jockeying. A reluctant leader from the first moment of his career, Moshe can hardly believe that others accuse him of promoting himself to a position he tried so hard to decline.

In this sense, Sefer BeMidbar is a tragic story of the clash of two visions. The clash between the grand, orderly beauty of P-K-D/counting/appointing and the petty, chaotic P-K-D/punishment produce a Sefer which opens with energy, momentum, and promise, but ultimately delivers death and disappointment. As Hashem says when the people accept the spies' evaluation that they cannot conquer the land, "In this desert will your carcasses fall, all of your countings (P-K-D) according to all of your numbers, from age twenty and up" All of the pekudim, all of the countings and appointments which have been such a focus of this Sefer, all of that will crumble in the desert and come to nothing. All of the planning, all of the assignments of leaders and tasks, all of it is ultimately meaningless and wasted; all of these pekudim are trampled by the pekida of punishment. In this sense, the vision of the people wins out over the vision of Hashem. They refuse (or are unable) to abandon their position, and eventually Hashem gives up on them and pins His 'hopes' on their children, the next generation. For this reason, there is another great counting at the end of the sefer, where the Torah pointedly notes that no one included in the second counting had been counted in the first counting. That entire generation dies; their count amounts to zero. The new generation, unbound by the limitations of their parents, is counted again, undergoing the same process of the setting up of institutions and structures so that they, this time successfully, can enter the land.

Besides being a tragic Sefer, the Humash Ha-Pekudim is also an ironic Sefer: we accompany emancipated slaves whose most plaintive refrain is, "Too bad we left slavery"; we learn of mitzvot introduced by the phrase, "When you get to the Land I am giving to you," when the recipients of these mitzvot already know they will die in this desert and will never see the Land at all; the Leviyim enjoy the status of being raised to holiness above the rest of the nation in an elaborate public ceremony and are assigned to the caretaking of the Mishkan, but they are the same people who, led by Korah, challenge Moshe and Aharon: "Why do you raise yourselves above the congregation of Hashem?"; the Nesi'im, constantly in the spotlight in our Sefer, appointed to positions of responsibility and leadership, are the very same people who participate in the greatest catastrophes of the Sefer: the Torah notes that Korah's supporters are "nesi'im," as are the meraglim (spies), as is Zimri ben Salu, the man who publicly fornicates with a woman from the nation of Midyan; Moshe's leadership, attacked by Korah and his supporters, by the entire nation's frequent angry complaints ("Why did you take us out of Egypt?"), and even by Miryam and Aharon, is something Moshe never wanted at all. He tried unsuccessfully in Sefer Shemot to resist Hashem's command that he lead the people, and in our Sefer, Moshe repeatedly demonstrates great willingness to share his power with others: he wistfully wishes that all of the people could be prophets (not just himself), he willingly grants a portion of his authority to the seventy elders, he is described as an "exceedingly humble" man who did not bother to respond to Miryam's carping at him and indeed seems unperturbed by it (it is Hashem who is furious with Miryam; Moshe intercedes and asks Hashem to heal her of her tzara'at); Bil'am, the sorcerer hired to curse Bnei Yisrael, is forced by Hashem to sing their praises: "[Hashem] sees no evil in Ya'akov, no bad in Israel . . .," but the very next perek reports that the God-beloved nation has become entrenched in the worship of the idol Ba'al Pe'or and in sexual immorality with the Midyanites.

Above all, the greatest irony of the Sefer is the clash of visions: Hashem and Moshe attempt to build a grand, beautiful organization to accomplish transcendent goals, but the people remain interested in water, tasty and varied food (not just manna every day!), and power politics.

Sefer BeMidbar is a Sefer of missed opportunities. It sets the stage for Sefer Devarim, where Moshe reviews these failures for the benefit of the second generation, attempting to inoculate them against these mistakes, and exhorts them to learn from the limitations of their parents.

Shabbat Shalom

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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 tzizit

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

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

So what's going on in Sefer Bamidbar?

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

DIVIDE & CONQUER

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How about Sefer Bamidbar?

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

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

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

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

To clarify this distinction, here are a few examples:

- MITZVOT L'SHA'AH:

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

- MITZVOT L'DOROT:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ALMOST LIKE SEFER SHMOT

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

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

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

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

INTENTIONAL 'INTERRUPTIONS'

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

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

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

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

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

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

RAMBAN'S INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapters 1->10

How Bnei Yisrael prepare for their journey to Canaan;

Chapters 11->25

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

Chapters 26->35

How the new generation prepares to enter the Land.

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

How about the MITZVOT L'DOROT of Sefer Bamidbar?

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

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

WHERE DO THEY ALL BELONG?

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

Take for example:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE 'PSHAT' OF 'DRASH'

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

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

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

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

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

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

SHCHINA IN THE CAMP

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

C) Parshat Sotah (5:11-31)

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

D) Parshat Nazir (6:1-21)

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

E) Birkat Kohanim (6:22-27)

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

TRAVELLING WITH THE "SHCHINA"

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN:

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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 "nsiim" presented the Leviim with the wagons. The remaining details of that joint presentation of the nsiim are detailed in the parsha that follows (see 7:12-89).

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

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

PARSHAT NASO - the Nsiim

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

Let's explain why:

AN ALMOST PERFECT FINALE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOTHING NEW

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOM HA'SHMINI

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

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

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

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

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

BACK TO CHET HA'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!)

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

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

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

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

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

A SHOW OF UNITY

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

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

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

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

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

BACK TO DAY ONE!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
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