

**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.**

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**Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at [www.PotomacTorah.org](http://www.PotomacTorah.org). Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.**

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**May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere during 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. May the remaining hostages soon come home, hostilities cease, and a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace. We continue to mourn for Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, murdered May 21 outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, DC. For more, see the outstanding tribute by Bari Weiss: <https://www.thefp.com/p/welcome-to-the-global-intifada>**

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Of the five books of the Torah, Bemidbar seems to me to have the most optimistic tone as the Sefer opens. Bereishis does not count, because there are no Jews at that point in history. Most of Sefer Vayikra focuses on mitzvot for Kohanim, so it is difficult to derive a tone as that Sefer opens. When Shemot opens, Yosef and his brothers have all died, and Paro is in the process of making B'Nai Yisrael slaves. Sefer Devarim opens with Moshe's "eicha," or moan of how can he lead B'Nai Yisrael – a moan that reminds us that Tisha B'Av is coming very soon.

The beginning of Sefer Bemidbar, in contrast, has a very positive tone. While Sefer Vayikra concludes one chapter after a vicious Tochacha, warnings of grim punishments coming if (when) B'Nai Yisrael violate Hashem's mitzvot, the mood changes almost immediately once we turn to Sefer Bemidbar. Hashem speaks to Moshe near Har Sinai on 1 Iyar 2450, the second year after the Exodus, and tells him to prepare to depart for Israel. Moshe is first to direct a census, then direct the tribes how to locate themselves around the Mishkan during the journey, and prepare for the final stage. The excitement builds. There is no mention of any dispute, and Yitro (in Midian) hears of the coming departure. He brings Moshe's family to the camp near Har Sinai so they can rejoin B'Nai Yisrael. Moshe invites Yitro to join B'Nai Yisrael. (More next week.)

During this period leading up to the departure, B'Nai Yisrael are unified, and we do not hear of any complaints to either Moshe or Hashem. The princes of the tribes bring their gifts for the Mishkan, jewels for the holy garments, covered wagons to carry the Mishkan and its related items, and identical expensive gifts. No prince tries to upstage any other; rather, they give identical gifts. To show the unity, the Torah presents identical, detailed text to describe the gift of each tribe. Each tribe accepts its place and order to march from Har Sinai to Canaan – without any disagreement. There are no disputes between the Rachel and Leah sides of the family – one of the few times in Jewish history (through Torah and Navi periods) when such disputes are absent.

Naso contains the classic juxtaposition of three mitzvot in the fourth Aliyah: Sotah, Nazir, and Birchot Kohanim. The Gemorah asks why the Torah juxtaposes these three subjects and includes them in the same aliyah. Including these three discussions, two of which are lengthy, in a single aliyah is a hint that they are closely related thematically. There are numerous responses to this question, and I have discussed the topic in previous years. Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Dov Linzer adds an interesting insight. Discord between husband and wife, with suspicion of infidelity, causes tumah in the camp.

The Torah requires that the husband bring this dispute to the Mishkan (later, Temple) to be resolved. The goal is to return shalom bayit, peace and love between husband and wife, and the reward for successful resolution is that the couple will have children.

When a person becomes jealous of the superior holiness of a Kohen, or Kohen Gadol, the Torah provides the option of the person emulating the holiness of the Kohen Gadol by becoming a Nazir for a limited period. A Nazir takes a vow to abstain from wine (or other grape product), cutting his hair or shaving, and coming into contact with a dead person. During this period, the Nazir therefore adopts three of the primary restrictions of a Kohen Gadol. The intent is that this period of abstinence is to be brief. At the end of the period, the Nazir must end his restrictions, bring an olah and a korban chatat (sin offering), and shave his head.

The Torah immediately continues with the blessings that a Kohen is to give to fellow Jews with love – the famous Birkat Kohanim. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, notes that archeologists have uncovered a surviving text of these brachot from the sixth Century B.C.E. – more than 500 years older even than the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest written holy texts ever found.

One interpretation of the juxtaposition of these three subjects is that when we bless our children with the Birkat Kohanim, they are unlikely to feel jealous of those they might consider more holy and therefore not feel the need to become a Nazir. Also, by maintaining a home full of blessings, including weekly giving our children and spouse the Kohens' blessings, we maintain love and shalom bayit – thus avoiding suspicion of infidelity. The literature throughout the ages contains many additional explanations of why the Torah includes these three seemingly unrelated mitzvot in a single aliyah.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander focuses on insights from the Haftarah, lessons from the life of Shimson, a Nazir from birth. Shimson tries to live his life apart from what is going on in the world around him. This effort proves unsuccessful, and his life ends in tragedy. Rabbi Brander prefers the lesson of Rambam, that a person should engage with society and try to improve the world around him. Rabbi Brander brings the discussion back to the issue of whether yeshiva students should isolate from the world and only study Torah or follow the framework of the Hesder Yeshivot, the Modern Orthodox example of students who combine their yeshiva learning with their obligations to join the IDF and help protect our country.

Israel is a small country with only approximately seven million Jews – surrounded by a hundred million Moslem Arabs in nearby countries and enemies killing our people all over the world. In the early days of Israel, eighty years ago, the Arabs were not well equipped to engage in modern warfare. Moreover, shortly after World War II, Israel did not face so many enemies outside the immediate Middle East. In the early post War period, the cost of permitting yeshiva students to devote themselves to Torah study rather than serving in the IDF may have been much lower than it is now, with the Haredi percentage of the population apparently much higher. Israel must face the issue of how to allocate the costs of defense across segments of the population. Hopefully Israelis will come together and find a solution that nearly all Israelis can accept.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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**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](http://www.alephbeta.org). Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.**

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**Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat**

Leah; Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Chag Shavuot Samaich,  
Hannah & Alan

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## **Haftarat Parshat Naso: Do we Find Sanctity in Withdrawal, or in Engagement?**

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander \* 5785 / 2025  
President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone

*Dedicated dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, for the return of our hostages still in Gaza, for the refuah shlayma of our wounded in body or spirit, and for the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.*

Parshat Naso introduces us to the Nazir – a person who voluntarily takes a vow to abstain from wine, avoid impurity, and refrain from cutting their hair. As presented by the Torah, this commitment appears to reflect spiritual elevation. Yet at the conclusion of the Nazir's term, the Torah (Bamidbar 6:14) commands him to bring a korban chatat, a sin offering, indicating some form of wrongdoing. Why should someone who has pursued holiness need atonement?

This question sparks a fundamental debate between the Ramban (Nachmanides) and the Rambam (Maimonides), reflecting two deeply rooted paradigms of religious life.

The Ramban, in his commentary to Bamidbar 6:14, praises the Nazir's spiritual ambition. He views the sin offering as an expression of regret – not for the vow itself, but for returning to ordinary life. The Nazir has tasted a higher plane of kedusha; stepping back into the mundane is, in itself, a loss.

The Rambam, by contrast (Hilchot De'ot 3:1, Moreh Nevuchim 3:33), believes the ideal life is one of balance. Holiness does not demand retreat – it flourishes from engaging with the world. Sanctity emerges when we eat, work, and live in moderation, imbuing the everyday with spiritual purpose. For Rambam, the Nazir's sin is the rejection of this model inherent in the vow he takes. By withdrawing unnecessarily, he disrupts the Torah's call to elevate, not escape, the physical world.

These opposing views reflect two paths to God: Rambam's engaged holiness, which finds God within the world, and Ramban's transcendent holiness, which seeks Him beyond it.

This debate is not just philosophical — it is playing out today in Israeli society.

The ongoing debate over military service in Israel's Torah communities echoes the Nazir's dilemma in real time. Do we sanctify life by stepping back, or by stepping up? The Rambam's vision that holiness is found not in retreat, but in engagement, feels especially urgent today. Torah is most powerful when it brings people together – not when it becomes an excuse for standing apart.

We are building a Jewish state where Torah is meant to inform every facet of life: military, economic, and social. Yet tensions persist between those devoted to full-time Torah study and those bearing the burdens of defense and nation building.

The week's Haftarah, which tells the story of Shimshon – the lifelong Nazir – offers a cautionary tale. Shimshon embodies the Nazir who lives apart, yet his life ends in tragedy. His strength falters, his moral compass drifts, and his connection to his people erodes. Isolation, even for a holy purpose, can become a weakness.

The Torah does not command nezirut; it permits it. Holiness can indeed be found in separation — but it is not the long term ideal. The sin offering at the end of nezirut reminds us: withdrawal may inspire us but it is not sustainable.

Judaism calls us to live in the world.

The challenge – for Israeli society and for every one of us — is to integrate these two visions: to fuse the Nazir's spiritual striving with the Rambam's model of worldly engagement.

We need Torah scholars who understand soldiers, and soldiers who respect Torah scholars. Torah must guide our military, economic, and civic life — not stand away from it.

This is the power of the Hesder yeshivot and midrashot that prepare our youth for both spiritual growth and national service. These young people succeed when they bring these worlds together – as opposed to walling them off from one another.

As we continue shaping the role of Torah in a sovereign Jewish society, may we strive for a synthesis — bringing the depth of Torah into every aspect of life, so that kedusha is not only found in moments apart, but in the way we live, build, and serve together.

\* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact [ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org](mailto:ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org) or 212-935-8672. **Ohr Torah Stone is in the midst of its spring fund-raising drive. Please support this effort with Donations to 49 West 45<sup>th</sup> Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

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## Naso: Harmonizing Without Homogenizing

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5772

HASHEM said to Moshe, One chieftain each day, one chieftain each day, shall present his offering for the dedication of the altar. The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadav of the tribe of Yehuda. And his offering was one silver bowl weighing one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver sprinkling basin [weighing] seventy shekels according to the holy shekel, both filled with fine flour mixed with olive oil for a meal offering. One spoon [weighing] ten [shekels] of gold filled with incense. One young bull, one ram and one lamb in its first year for a burnt offering. One young he-goat for a sin offering. And for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five he goats, five lambs in their first year; this was the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadav. )Bamidbar 7:11-17(

This verse records the details of such a nice inaugural gift from the tribe of Yehuda. The perhaps miraculous fact is that each of the next eleven tribes independently brought the very same offering. It's almost too hard to believe that each arrived at the identical conclusion without any collusion or cooperation. Oddly, each tribe which is blessed with varying native talents and differing roles to play in the nation, somehow formulated with perfect uniformity. How is this possible? If this is not a testimony to the unity of purpose that the Tabernacle- Mishkan, represented I don't know what is! Where is the diversity, the inherent, individual identity of each tribe? We know that the Jews then and even now are not a homogeneous group! When so many act alike where is there room for individuality?

Reb Klonymous Kalman of Piaseczno writes:

*"There is a type of prophetic revelation that comes when one looks into a holy book. Not knowledge of the future, for that ceased when the Temple was destroyed. Rather, it is guidance and a call to service of G-d and the holiness of Israel. At times, we have all experienced looking into a holy book and suddenly becoming extremely moved by a certain idea. A word pierces our heart and gives us no rest for years, until it can transform us into a different person and sanctify*

*and uplift us. What is going on? We have already heard this idea from others and seen it in books, yet we remained untouched. Yet now, the matter suddenly penetrates our heart and mind. This is a form of looking into the Breast Plate worn by the High Priest. There too, all the letters were written, yet only some of them would shine into the eyes of the Kohen; and only a Kohen with divine inspiration. Another Kohen could stand beside him and not see a thing."*

Let's say I would distribute to 50 people a Sefer Tehillim, and along with that everyone would receive a highlighter pen and a well-defined assignment. Each person is requested to carefully review and learn and recite those Tehillim over the course of a year and carefully search out only 50 verses. Those that zing them or sing to them they should highlight. If after one year I would collect that Sefer Tehillim and inspect the pages, I wonder what the chances are that any two of the 50 fifty people highlighted the same 50 verses?!

I do believe the statistical odds are nil and not because of something mathematical but rather due to something mystical. Amazingly, everyone can be reading the same book or listening to the same lecture and each person experiences something completely different. One person decides to make great changes while the other goes home unaffected. What's happening here? Everyone finds his "*portion in Torah*" that we ask for 3 times daily, amongst wishing for the Temple to be rebuilt, when stepping back from our prayers.

Although each tribe miraculously acted in uniform fashion, our sages tell us that each one had a completely different intention to their gift. People may look and dress in uniform fashion but their uniqueness is securely found inwardly. Sure we all wear the same black square Tefillin or learn the same Daf. Each one mines out his hidden vitamins. In this way we can act coordinated outwardly, **harmonizing without homogenizing!**

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5772-naso/>

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## **A Thought on the Parsha (Naso)**

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2014

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom!

From my archives

## The Blessing of Wholeness: Thoughts for Parashat Naso

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel \*

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

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

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

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

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

Albert Einstein wrote: *“The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness....”*

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

\* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/blessing-wholeness-thoughts-parashat-naso>

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## Book Review: Rabbi Moshe Taragin on Rabbi Yehuda Amital

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel \*

Rabbi Moshe Taragin, *To Be Holy but Human: Reflections Upon My Rebbe, HaRav Yehuda Amital* (Kodesh Press, 2025)

Rabbi Yehuda Amital (1924-2010) was a leading Rosh Yeshiva in Israel, founding and building Yeshivat Har Etzion, a premier Hesder Yeshiva which combines Torah study with service in the Israel Defense Forces. Rabbi Moshe Taragin, a leading educator in his own right and a dedicated student of Rabbi Amital (as well as Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, who co-led Yeshivat Har Etzion), offers a strikingly personal glimpse into Rabbi Amital's unique personality.

Rabbi Taragin's book is comprised of two sections: One relates personal stories that offer a window into Rabbi Amital's outlook, and the other focuses on aspects of Rabbi Amital's ideology. The ideological essays are valuable in their own right, outlining the religious worldview of a master educator, communal leader, and model of Modern Orthodoxy and Religious Zionism. Personally, I find the stories even more illuminating, as they present elements of the inner world of Rabbi Amital. Here are just a few examples that speak to Rabbi Amital's core values.

Rabbi Amital stressed that people must develop a healthy personality before trying to become Torah scholars or communal leaders. He rejected a popular adage, often attributed to Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883): *"First, I tried to change the world. When that didn't go as planned, I focused on changing my family. And when that didn't work, I retreated inward to change my own inner life."* Rabbi Amital dismissed this lesson, insisting that the opposite is true. When people fail to change themselves, they often shift focus to changing the world. They use external success as self-proclaimed visionaries as a substitute for self-development or meaningful family relationships (93).

Similarly, Rabbi Amital objected when, at a relative's circumcision, people referred to the infant as *"Yankele Iluy"* (Torah genius) during their speeches. They explained that they wanted him to grow into that role and therefore called him a Torah genius from infancy. Rabbi Amital objected strongly: *"Just grow up to be a happy, well-adjusted balabus (layperson)."* One first must focus on being a well-adjusted person committed to Torah, before thinking of becoming a Torah prodigy (47).

Rabbi Amital instructed his own daughter, in fourth grade at the time, to fail a test. Her teacher was placing far too much pressure on the students to excel, and Rabbi Amital wanted to teach his daughter that academic success should not overshadow emotional well-being (260).

Rabbi Amital had a profound sense of reality and humility. He was famed for changing his mind, even on the most important topics. For example, he initially saw little value in Talmud education for girls, since his own mother and grandmother had been pious without it. Only a couple of years later, when addressing a women's learning program, he remarked, *"You know, I used to think that Talmud study for women was unnecessary, but now I think it is absolutely essential."* He also had evolving views on the religious centrality of the Land of Israel. Initially, he was influenced by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's position that the land was at the very heart of the Zionist mission. Over time, however, Rabbi Amital came to realize that too much focus was on the land itself, and not enough attention was on people and the tenor of Israeli society (116-117).

Rabbi Amital valued creating students who can think for themselves (talmidim), rather than clones who mimic their teachers (hasidim). He once participated in a panel discussion with his illustrious student, Rabbi Yuval Cherlow. Rabbi Cherlow nervously explained to the audience that *"Everything I am about to say stems from Rav Amital's inspiration, but it completely contradicts what Rav Amital himself believes."* Rabbi Amital stood up and announced, *"Ah, finally, I have a talmid!"* (75).



A particularly poignant story reflects Rabbi Amital's Torah leadership through his personal involvement. Once, there was a terrible snowstorm in Gush Etzion, leaving its residents without heat. A kibbutznik arrived on Shabbat, and told Rabbi Amital that the electricity in the hothouse where baby chicks were being raised had failed. If they did not restore the heat, the chicks would die. Rabbi Amital immediately put on his coat and walked through the storm to the kibbutz to offer his ruling. When he returned, people asked why he went, instead of simply asking more questions and then giving a ruling. He explained that Torah is to be lived in the real world, and is not simply book knowledge. He wanted to hear the cry of the chicks himself before issuing his ruling (28-29).

Rabbi Taragin's book title derives from a lesson Rabbi Amital frequently quoted from the Hasidic Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk (1757-1859). The Kotzker interpreted a verse, "*Ve-anshei kodesh tihyun li*" (you shall be holy people to Me, Exodus 22:30). While we strive to elevate ourselves by being holy, we must embrace the fact that we also are anashim, humans. We serve God precisely by recognizing our humanity, rather than falsely pursuing an angelic life (123).

Through these and so many other anecdotes, Rabbi Taragin provides readers with a means of learning transformative lessons from one of the great rabbinic figures of the previous generation.

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## **Did You Ever Wonder?**

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine \*

*Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.*

*May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel*

The Nazir is a major personality in this week's Parsha. The Talmud tells us that he witnessed the story of the Sotah — the sad story of a woman accused of inappropriate conduct outside of her marriage. The Nazir realized that wine could compromise a person's judgment and bring him to the situation that the Sotah was in. So, this man made a vow to be a Nazir, obligating himself, among other rules, to abstain from wine.

In certain ways this man is considered holy for creating an added barrier to protect himself from compromising situations. In other ways he is considered a sinner. The Talmud wonders: Why doesn't he just resolve to observe Torah and mitzvos properly? Why is he depriving himself from that which the Torah permitted?

Interestingly, when he concludes the observance of his vow (typically 30 days), there is a Korban Chatos, an atonement offering that he must bring. The Ramban wonders, what is the reason for this atonement offering? The Ramban suggests that once the Nazir successfully observed this holy vow, there is a looming question: Why doesn't he continue in this saintly mode of life? For this he brings an atonement.

We wonder: When the Nazir began, we questioned why he was prohibiting that which is permitted, and now that he is completed, we are questioning why he doesn't continue?! Why can't we just let him be and not question him at all?

I think the answer lies in understanding the process of healthy deliberation. Allow me to explain with a story.

When Rav Ruderman — the Rosh Yeshiva in Ner Yisroel, Baltimore — was a young man, he studied in the Yeshiva of Slabodka as a student of the Alter, Rav Nosson Tzi Finkel z.l. During this time, he was very poor, and he decided to save money to buy himself a new pair of Tzitzis. After saving small coins for many weeks, he was finally able to buy the Tzitzis. When the Alter saw him walking outside later that day, the Alter noticed his happiness and asked him what was going on. Rav Ruderman explained that he had saved up coins for many weeks and then finally purchased a new pair of Tzitzis. This was the source of his happiness.

The Alter asked him with grave seriousness, *“Before you bought the Tzitzis, did you think of all the good that you could have done with the coins you saved by instead giving the money to help the poor? Do you realize how many people in town struggle to buy food and you could have helped them?!”*

Rav Ruderman was saddened. He wondered, *“Did I do wrong? Should I not have spent the money on my own mitzva of Tzitzis, when the Tzitzis I had were worn out and so badly needed to be replaced?”*

Rav Isaac Sher, another student in the Yeshiva approached Rav Ruderman and explained to him that he should not feel sad. The Alter’s comment was part of the overall educational goal of the Alter. He said, *“The Alter was not saying that you did anything wrong by what you did in spending your saved-up money on your own mitzva needs. He simply asked you if you considered the alternatives. If you had considered giving the money to others and then decided to proceed with your planned purchase because of your own dignity or desire to do the mitzva properly, he would not object. But the fact that you did not think it through is what he objected to.”*

When we consider the Nazir there can be feelings of admiration and there can be feelings of disappointment. Most of all, we hope that at each step in the journey he appreciates the alternatives. When he is becoming a Nazir, we wonder, *“Do you really have to create barriers and forbid that which the Torah allows?”* We would like the Nazir to really think it through. We hope he will ask himself, *“Will this added prohibition possibly bring me to resentment? Is it absolutely necessary for me to create this new prohibition so that I stay moral?”*

Similarly, when the Nazir successfully completes his vow, we wonder, *“If you are successfully on this higher, pious plane, why are you stopping?”* We are not being difficult or purposely contrary. We just want the Nazir to recognize that there is another aspect to consider. We hope that he thought it through.

I believe we can apply this attitude in so many ways to our daily lives and relationships. When we consider any allocation of time or money, we look at it through a certain lens. Consider the vacations we take, the gifts we give, and the products we buy. We can consider things through the lens of cost effectiveness, or time efficiency, or relationship building. We can consider if something will bring us joy or if it is the high moral ground. Each lens will produce a different conclusion. Before finalizing your decision, consider the results if you change to a different lens. Because the type of lens you use will impact the resulting decision. This is not bad, and this exercise is not about being critical. It is simply about engaging in healthy deliberation.

The exercise that the Nazir story teaches us and the lesson the Alter wished to convey is not one of self-doubt, but rather one of thorough decision making. Did you consider the options? Did you stop to wonder if this is indeed the wise path for you to take. If it is, we respect that. If it is not, try to be a human being who thinks. Try not to be impulsive. Try instead to be a person who can change course if your best judgement tells you that you should.

Life is meant to be a celebration of good decisions. Think things through; consider the options. Then proceed with joy and confidence that you are doing your best. The Nazir is a person we admire, even as we wonder about the alternatives when he starts his journey, and as we wonder about the alternatives as he concludes his journey. We admire him because he is trying hard. He is trying his best to live his life with wisdom and with good judgement.

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos,

\* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 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](http://www.care-mediation.com) and [www.teach613.org](http://www.teach613.org); his email is [RMRhine@gmail.com](mailto:RMRhine@gmail.com). **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

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## Parshas Naso

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer\* (1980)

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

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

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

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

Rash"i, however, gleans an even deeper and more profound message from this Gemara, noting that the reinforcement for one who witnesses the downfall of the *Sotah* is specifically to abstain from wine. Certainly, there are myriad ways in

which one could maintain one's own morality and one's own commitment. Why is the Torah prescribing one specific focus? Rash"i in our Parsha *ibid.* explains that wine has a unique capacity to weaken one's commitment and to lead one to adultery. When one witnesses the *Sotah's* demise, one must not simply seek to remind himself that he has a different standard. One must first take stock and understand the factors that could weaken one's resolve and lead one astray.

Rashi's insight is a fundamental element of a Torah lifestyle. Whether we are seeking to grow or to maintain and strengthen our existing levels of commitment, we must understand the subtleties of human psyche if we wish to succeed. Before we begin, we must understand not only our strengths, but also our weaknesses, and the pitfalls which may derail us as time goes on. Indeed, Rash"i tells us here that this is the essence of Rebi Yehuda Hanasi's message. The central aspect of strengthening our own commitment and morality is to protect ourselves from those factors which could potentially create challenges or cause us to slip.

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

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

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

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

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

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

\* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and associated with the Savannah Kollel.

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## **Bemidbar and Naso**

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia \*

[Ed. note: Rabbi Ovadia has a beautiful introduction to Sefer Bemidbar that I do not have time this week to include. I have saved it and hope to share it next year.[]

\* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan )Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria:**

<https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets> . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

**Many Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.**

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## **Naso: Reread**

by Rabbi Moshe Rube\*

*“A person should learn most what their heart draws them to,”* say our Sages, but how exactly do you know what that is? With the never ending stimulation of information, we're pulled in every direction. The Mad Men know that with the right bells and whistles, our hearts can be drawn to almost anything. So how do we know what our heart desires to learn?

You can notice what you reread. Anybody can read a facebook post, an article or even a book. Most of what we read, we read once and then place it back on the shelf and find it again when we reorganize. But some books we reread again and again. Not because someone told us we should but because something inside of us wanted to plumb the depths of this particular avenue of study. On the first read, we see it as the words of the author. But on the second read and third read, we experience the words as our own. The texts that we reread are the words that we know exist inside of us but could never find the way to express. Those texts provide a window to our own soul.

The same goes for music. We have the capabilities to listen to any song we want. But usually there are a few pieces that

we just keep coming back to. Those would be a good place to start on the quest for self knowledge.

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

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

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

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

Shabbat Shalom!

\* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera )Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Kneseth Israel )Birmingham, AL(. I reprinted part 1 last week for Mishpatim.

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## **Rav Kook Torah**

### **Naso: The Nazir of Jerusalem**

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

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

#### **Meeting Rav Kook**

Rabbi David Cohen was a yeshiva student from the Vilna area blessed with exceptional intellectual talents. He studied in Radun under the famed scholar Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, known as the Chafetz Chaim. He attended the leading yeshivot of the day, including Volozhin and Slabodka.

After preparing himself for matriculation exams, Cohen was admitted to the University of Freiburg. When World War I erupted, however, he was interned as an enemy alien. After his release, he made his way to Basel, Switzerland. He continued his academic pursuits at the University of Basel, studying philosophy and classical literature for seven years.

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

Cohen heard that Rav Kook was staying in St. Gallen, Switzerland, after becoming stranded in Europe due to the sudden outbreak of war. The young scholar sent off a letter to Rav Kook: Would it be possible to discuss various matters of faith?

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

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

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

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

### **Rav Kook's Tefillah**

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

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

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

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

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

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

<https://ravkooktorah.org/NASO63.htm>

## **Naso: The Blessing of Love (5776, 5783)**

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, Z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.\*

At 176 verses, Naso is the longest of the parshiyot. Yet one of its most moving passages, and the one that has had the greatest impact over the course of history, is very short indeed and is known by almost every Jew, namely the priestly blessings:

*The Lord said to Moses:*

*"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'Thus shall you 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 give you peace."' Let them set My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." Num. 6:23–27*

This is among the oldest of all prayer texts. It was used by the priests in the Temple. It is said today by the Kohanim in the reader's repetition of the Amidah, in Israel every day, in most of the Diaspora only on festivals. It is used by parents as they bless their children on Friday night. It is often said to the bride and groom under the chupah. It is the simplest and most beautiful of all blessings.

It also appears in the oldest of all biblical texts that have physically survived till today. In 1979, the archaeologist Gabriel Barkay was examining ancient burial caves at Ketef Hinnom, outside the walls of Jerusalem in the area now occupied by the Menachem Begin Heritage Center. A thirteen-year-old boy who was assisting Barkay discovered that beneath the floor of one of the caves was a hidden chamber. There the group discovered almost one thousand ancient artefacts including two tiny silver scrolls no more than an inch long.

They were so fragile that it took three years to work out a way of unrolling them without causing them to disintegrate. Eventually the scrolls turned out to be kemayot, amulets, containing, among other texts, the priestly blessings. Scientifically dated to the sixth century BCE, the age of Jeremiah and the last days of the First Temple, they are four centuries older than the most ancient of biblical texts known hitherto, the Dead Sea Scrolls. Today the amulets can be seen in the Israel Museum, testimony to the ancient connection of Jews to the land and the continuity of Jewish faith itself.

What gives the priestly blessings their power is their simplicity and beauty. They have a strong rhythmic structure. The lines contain three, five, and seven words respectively. In each, the second word is *"the Lord."* In all three verses the first part refers to an activity on the part of God – *"bless," "make His face shine,"* and *"turn His face toward."* The second part describes the effect of the blessing on us, giving us protection, grace, and peace.

They also travel inward, as it were. The first verse, *"May the Lord bless you and protect you"* refers, as the commentators note, to material blessings: sustenance, physical health, and so on. The second, *"May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you"* refers to moral blessing. Grace, grace, is what we show to other people and they to us. It is interpersonal. Here we are asking God to give some of His grace to us and others so that we can live together without the strife and envy that can so easily poison relationships.

The third is the most inward of all. There is a lovely story about a crowd of people who have gathered on a hill by the sea



to watch a great ship pass by. A young child is waving vigorously. One of the men in the crowd asks him why. He says, *"I am waving so the captain of the ship can see me and wave back."* *"But,"* said the man, *"the ship is far away, and there is a crowd of us here. What makes you think that the captain can see you?"* *"Because,"* said the boy, *"the captain of the ship is my father. He will be looking for me among the crowd."*

That is roughly what we mean when we say, *"May the Lord turn His face toward you."* There are over seven billion people now living on this earth. What makes any of us more than a face in the crowd, a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore? The fact that we are God's children. He is our parent. He turns His face toward us. He cares.

The God of Abraham is not a mere force of nature, or even all the forces of nature combined. A tsunami does not pause to ask who its victims will be. There is nothing personal about an earthquake or a tornado. The word Elokim means something like *"the force of forces, cause of causes, the totality of all scientifically-discoverable laws."* It refers to those aspects of God that are impersonal. It also refers to God in His attribute of justice, since justice is essentially impersonal.

But the name we call Hashem – the name used in the priestly blessings, and in almost all the priestly texts – is God as He relates to us as individuals, each with our unique configuration of hopes and fears, gifts and possibilities. Hashem is the aspect of God that allows us to use the word *"You."* He is the God who speaks to us and who listens when we speak to Him. How this happens, we do not know, but that it happens is central to Jewish faith.

That we call God *'Hashem'* is the transcendental confirmation of our significance in the scheme of things. We matter as individuals because God cares for us as a parent for a child. That, incidentally, is one reason why the priestly blessings are all in the singular, to emphasise that God blesses us not only collectively but also individually. One life, said the Sages, is like a universe.]<sup>1</sup>

Hence the meaning of the last of the priestly blessings. The knowledge that God turns His face toward us – that we are not just an indiscernible face in a crowd, but that God relates to us in our uniqueness and singularity – is the most profound and ultimate source of peace. Competition, strife, lawlessness, and violence come from the psychological need to prove that we matter. We do things to prove that I am more powerful, or richer, or more successful than you. I can make you fear. I can bend you to my will. I can turn you into my victim, my subject, my slave. All of these things testify not to faith, but to a profound failure of faith.

Faith means that I believe that God cares about me. I am here because He wanted me to be. The soul He gave me is pure. Even though I am like the child on the hill watching the ship pass by, I know that God is looking for me, waving to me as I wave to Him. That is the most profound inner source of peace. We do not need to prove ourselves in order to receive a blessing from God. All we need to know is that His face is turned toward us. When we are at peace with ourselves, we can begin to make peace with the world.

So the blessings become longer and deeper: from the external blessing of material goods to the interpersonal blessing of grace between ourselves and others, to the most inward of them all, the peace of mind that comes when we feel that God sees us, hears us, holds us in His everlasting arms.

One further detail of the priestly blessings is unique, namely the blessing that the Sages instituted to be said by the Kohanim over the mitzva:

*"Blessed are You... who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His people Israel with love."*

It is the last word, be'ahavah, that is unusual. It appears in no other blessing over the performance of a command. It seems to make no sense. Ideally, we should fulfill all the commands with love. But an absence of love does not invalidate any other command. In any case, the blessing over the performance of a command is a way of showing that we are acting intentionally.

There was an argument between the Sages as to whether mitzvot in general require intention )kavanah( or not.]2[ But whether they do or not, making a blessing beforehand shows that we do have the intention to fulfil the command. But intention is one thing, emotion is another. Surely what matters is that the Kohanim recite the blessing and God will do the rest. What difference does it make whether they do so in love or not?

The commentators wrestle with this question. Some say that the fact that the Kohanim are facing the people when they bless means that they are like the cherubim in the Tabernacle, whose faces *"were turned to one another"* as a sign of love. Others change the word order. They say that the blessing really means, *"who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and with love has commanded us to bless His people Israel."* "Love" here refers to God's love for Israel, not that of the Kohanim.

However, it seems to me that the explanation is this: The Torah explicitly says that though the Kohanim say the words, it is God who sends the blessing. *"Let them put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them."* Normally when we fulfil a mitzva, we are doing something. But when the Kohanim bless the people, they are not doing anything in and of themselves. Instead they are acting as channels through which God's blessing flows into the world and into our lives. Only love does this. Love means that we are focused not on ourselves but on another. Love is selflessness. And only selflessness allows us to be a channel through which flows a force greater than ourselves, the love that as Dante said, *"moves the sun and the other stars,"*]3[ the love that brings new life into the world.

To bless, we must love, and to be blessed is to know that we are loved by the One vaster than the universe who nonetheless turns His face toward us as a parent to a beloved child. To know that is to find true spiritual peace.

#### FOOTNOTES:

]1[ See Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5.

]2[ See Rosh Hashanah 28b.

]3[ Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia, Paradiso* p. 33.

#### Around the Shabbat Table:

]1[ Can you feel that God cares for you and sees you?

]2[ Do we need to "see God" to strengthen this relationship also?

]3[ What is the connection between God turning His face towards us and our experiencing peace?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/naso/the-blessing-of-love/> Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet

Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

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## **Life Lessons From the Parshah - Naso: Piling Your Wagon High**

By Yehoshua B. Gordon \* © Chabad 2025

Naso has the distinction of being the longest single portion in the entire Torah. Towards the end of the parshah, the Torah describes the offerings that the tribal leaders brought in honor of the inauguration of the Tabernacle. With the Tabernacle now complete, the tribal leaders brought offerings on behalf of their tribes.

### **True Leaders**

Who were these leaders? The prince of each tribe — nasi in Hebrew — was not only its political leader but also its spiritual leader.

What kind of people were appointed?

Rashi comments on the phrase, *“They were the leaders of the tribes,”*<sup>1</sup> explaining that these were the same men whom the Egyptians appointed as officers over their Jewish brethren. These Jewish officers were instructed to beat the Jewish slaves if they failed to produce their quota of bricks, but they had compassion and refrained. Instead, when the bricks presented to the Egyptian taskmasters were fewer than expected, the officers themselves took the beatings. Therefore, these officers merited to become the tribal leaders.

The Midrash notes that the Hebrew term *match* means both *“tribe”* and *“stick.”* Thus, *roshei hamatot* can mean both *“the heads of the tribes”* and *“the heads [that were beaten] with sticks.”*<sup>2</sup>

Back when Moses informed the Jewish people of the items required for the construction of the Tabernacle, the leaders did not donate first. They said, *“Let the people bring what they can, and we’ll fill in whatever is missing at the end.”* As the wealthiest Jews, they could have theoretically provided everything on their own. But as true leaders, their aim was first and foremost to ensure that the people did all that they needed to do; only then did they think of themselves.

When Moses announced that all necessary items had been donated and the construction campaign was over, the leaders were caught off guard, having not given anything! Ultimately, they were able to provide the precious stones for the High Priest’s apron and breastplate.<sup>3</sup>

Now, with the Tabernacle complete, the leaders eagerly seized the opportunity to be the first to bring offerings, wanting to avoid the mistake they had made six months earlier. *“They brought their offering before the Lord: six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon for each two chieftains, and an ox for each one; they presented them in front of the Tabernacle.”*<sup>4</sup> God instructed Moses to give these wagons and oxen to the Levites to be used to transport the Tabernacle whenever the Jewish people traveled in the desert.

### **The Role of the Levites**

Regarding the service of the Levites, the verse states, *“From the age of thirty years and upward until the age of fifty years,*

*who are fit to perform the service for the service and the work of carrying, in the Tent of Meeting ... they were appointed by Moses, each man to his service and his burden.”<sup>5</sup>*

What exactly was the Levites’ service and what was their burden? Rashi explains that it refers to the music the Levites played with cymbals and harps, which accompanied the sacrifices and roused the people spiritually during the offerings. Additionally, there was the literal burden of carrying the Tabernacle’s components.

The Levite family was divided into three clans — one for each of Levi’s sons: Gershon, Kehot, and Merari — who transported the Tabernacle after it was disassembled and prepared for travel. Two of the wagons donated by the tribal leaders were given to the families of Gershon, who transported the Tabernacle’s tent coverings and tapestries. The other four wagons were given to the families of Merari, who transported the Sanctuary’s wall panels, sockets, posts, and other structural components. No wagons were needed for the families of Kehot since their burden — the vessels of the Tabernacle — were so holy they bore them on their shoulders.

It appears that the leaders of the tribes calculated exactly how many wagons would be needed and donated six, along with two oxen for each wagon.

Yet the question arises: why only six wagons? The leaders were wealthy. Each could have easily donated a wagon or two on their own. Figuring out precisely how many wagons it would take and donating exactly that amount seems a bit frugal. Moreover, the Talmud<sup>6</sup> describes the six wagons piled so high that the beams would sometimes fall off, requiring that a spot be reserved for the Levite who would hop on and restack the beams each time they fell.

Had these wealthy, dedicated leaders donated more wagons, the work would have been much easier and the Levites could have been free to concentrate on the many other tasks they were responsible for.

## **Pile It On**

The Rebbe explained that herein lies a tremendous life lesson: we must maximize our potential. Nothing in this world should be wasted.

When a person finds an opportunity to do a good deed, they must seize it and make the most of it. We may find ourselves thinking, *“Why should I be the one to do this? There are so many others who can do it just as well! Am I expected to pile my wagon up to the top — to pile it so high with stuff that a Levite needs to climb up to make sure nothing falls off? Why should all the pressure be on me? It would be better to spread it around. Let others get involved!”*

One of the classic books on fundraising, published in the mid-1970s, offered this timeless lesson: A philanthropist was asked to contribute \$10,000 to a charity. The wealthy man replied, *“Why are you asking me for \$10,000? I have an even better idea: you should solicit only \$10 from 1,000 people! You will still end up with \$10,000, and you will have spread the burden around!”*

When you get this kind of response from a philanthropist, noted the expert on fundraising, you should take away three things: Number one, this is a guy who is good at math. Number two, this is a guy who loves to give advice. Number three — most importantly — this guy isn’t giving you more than \$10!

The Rebbe taught that we need to maximize our potential. Take your wagons, load them to the top, and do whatever it

takes to ensure the load doesn't topple. Life is not a vacation. Life is not an opportunity to sit back and see what others can do. Life is about being an active partner with G d. If you can find space on six wagons but look to send some of your burden to a seventh or eighth wagon, you're not going all out. Sure, it may be challenging, and spreading it out would make life easier, but you would be letting some of your potential go to waste. Let the pressures and burdens pile on, live life to the fullest, and contribute your utmost to G d and to everyone around you.<sup>7</sup>

## **To Give is to Get**

At the conclusion of our portion, the tribal leaders once again donate to the Tabernacle, this time all 12 of them bring separate, albeit identical, offerings on consecutive days. Despite being identical, the Torah enumerates each tribal leader's offering verbatim, sparing none of the details.

For example, the first tribal leader to donate was the famous Nachshon ben Aminadav of the tribe of Judah. The verse states, "... *And his offering was one silver bowl weighing one hundred and thirty shekels ... one spoon weighing ten )silver( shekels of gold filled with incense ..., etc.*"<sup>8</sup>

A profound lesson emerges from a simple play on words here: kaf achat – one spoon, asarah – weighing ten shekels, zahav mele'ah – of gold, filled )with incense(. The word kaf also means "*palm*" or "*hand*."

So we can now read it as follows: If a person extends his hand to give ten percent of his earnings to charity, G d rewards him with fistfuls of gold!<sup>9</sup>

Similarly, earlier in the parshah, when discussing one of the mandated contributions to the priest )kohen(, the verse states, "*Every offering of all the children of Israel's holy things which is brought to the priest, shall be his.*"<sup>10</sup> The simple meaning of the verse is that "*his*" refers to the priest.

But the Torah is also teaching us something much deeper. How can we guarantee ourselves wealth?

The answer is not necessarily to work harder; there are people who work hard and don't make a lot of money. The answer is not necessarily to make good investments; every investment looks good when you make it.

The Torah tells us the answer here: *If you want to accumulate wealth, give gifts to the kohen, give the tithe to G d, give to charity. And when you do, "It shall be his!" i.e., the money you give away will be yours, because G d will reward you with wealth.*

When giving charity )or acts of kindness(, it's easy to assume that the recipient is the beneficiary. That is not the case. The Torah teaches that when we give, we are the ones who benefit the most.

## **Our True Net Worth**

A beautiful story is told about a great rabbi who lived many hundreds of years ago in a Muslim-majority country. He was a man of great wealth and substantial influence. Over time, he was even appointed advisor to the caliph, with whom he enjoyed a very close relationship.

The caliph, however, had other advisors who were antisemitic. They harbored a strong hatred for the rabbi and constantly

sought ways to undermine him. At every opportunity, the other advisors spoke ill of him to the caliph, calling him a dishonest crook and accusing him of hiding money.

Finally, the caliph summoned the rabbi and asked him point-blank how much he was worth. *"25,000 gold dinars,"* responded the rabbi. Knowing full well that the advisor's net worth was closer to two hundred and fifty thousand gold dinars, the caliph was understandably upset. *"The accusations are true,"* he thought, and he had the rabbi imprisoned.

Several weeks later, still troubled by the whole incident, the caliph visited the rabbi in the dungeons. *"You're a good man,"* the caliph began, speaking softly and earnestly. *"I know you're an honest man, and I cannot understand why you lied and told me you're only worth 25,000 gold dinars. We both know that you have at least ten times that amount."*

*"Your Highness,"* responded the rabbi. *"You didn't ask me how much money I have; you asked me how much I'm worth. I am only worth the amount that I have given away to charity. Everything else could be taken away from me at any moment."*

The only thing of real value that we can accumulate in our lives is what we give away and do for others.

Our mitzvahs — including the mitzvah of charity — are all we truly possess. So let's create massive piles of them!

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. Numbers 7:2.
2. Rashi ibid. Sifrei 1:145.
3. Exodus 35:27 and Rashi ad. loc.
4. Numbers 7:3.
5. Numbers 4:47-49.
6. Shabbat 98a.
7. *Likkutei Sichot*, vol. 28, Naso 2.
8. Numbers 7:13-14.
9. Cited from *Butsina D'Nehora*, Rabbi Boruch of Medzhibuz.
10. Numbers 5:9.

\* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016. Adapted by Rabbi Mottel Friedman from classes and sermons that Rabbi Gordon presented in Encino, CA and broadcast on Chabad.org. "Life Lessons from the Parshah" is a project of the Rabbi Joshua B. Gordon Living Legacy Fund, benefiting the 32 centers of Chabad of the Valley, published by Chabad of the Valley and Chabad.org.

## **Naso: Mind Over Matter**

by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky

After having told Moses to count the Levite clan of Kehat, G-d instructed Moses to count the Levite clan of Gershon.

*This is the service of the families of the clan of Gershon, to serve and to carry. )Num. 4:24(*

G-d instructed Moses to count the clan of Kehat first because they carried the Ark of the Covenant, which housed the Torah, the means through which we bind our mind to G-d.<sup>1</sup> He then said to *“take a census of the clan of Gershon, too.”* The fact that the clan of Gershon’s tally is secondary to that of the clan of Kehat indicates that the mind is the primary means by which we ascend to higher levels of Divine consciousness.

But once our mind is elevated, our whole life can be elevated together with it, so once the clan of Kehat is *“lifted up,”* we can raise the clan of Gershon, too. In fact, the Torah’s power to raise us higher than the material world is manifest most fully when it elevates our mundane, daily lives.

– From *Daily Wisdom #3*

\* An insight by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on parshat Va’eira from our *Daily Wisdom #3* by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

May G-d grant wisdom, strength and peace in the Holy Land.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman  
Kehot Publication Society

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# Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah  
via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

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Shabbat Parashat Naso

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## Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l

### The Courage to Engage with the World

As mentioned in a previous Covenant & Conversation, there was an ongoing debate between the Sages as to whether the Nazirite – whose laws are outlined in this week’s Parsha – was to be praised or not.

Recall that the Nazirite was someone who voluntarily, usually for a specified period, undertook a special form of holiness. This meant that he was forbidden to consume wine or any grape products, to have a haircut and to defile himself by contact with the dead.

Naziriteship was essentially a renunciation of desire. Why someone would choose to do this is not clear. It may be that he wanted to protect himself against drunkenness or to cure himself of alcoholism. It could be that he wanted to experience a higher form of holiness. Forbidden as he was to have contact with the dead, even for a close relative, he was in this respect in the same position as the High Priest. Becoming a Nazirite was one way in which a non-kohen could adopt kohen-like behaviour. Some Sages argued that the juxtaposition of the law of the Nazirite with that of the sotah, the woman suspected of adultery, hinted at the fact that there were people who became Nazirites to protect themselves from sexual immorality. Alcohol suppresses inhibitions and increases sexual desire.

Be that as it may, there were mixed views on whether it was a good thing or a bad one to become a Nazirite. On the one hand the Torah calls him “holy to God” (Num. 6:8). On the other, at the completion of his period of abstinence, he is commanded to bring a sin offering (Num. 6:13-14). From this, Rabbi Eliezer Hakappar Berebi, drew the following inference:

What is the meaning of the phrase, ‘And make atonement for him, because he sinned against the soul [usually translated as “by coming into contact with the dead”]. (Num. 6:11)? Against which soul did he sin? We must conclude that it refers to denying himself the enjoyment of wine. 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. It follows that one who keeps fasting is called a sinner. Ta’anit 11a; Nedarim 10a

Clearly R. Eliezer Hakappar is engaging in a polemic against asceticism in Jewish life. We do not know which groups he may have had in mind. Many of the early Christians were ascetics. So in some respects were the members of the Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls. Holy people in many faiths have chosen, in pursuit of spiritual purity, to withdraw from the world, its pleasures and temptations, fasting, afflicting themselves and living in caves, retreats, or monasteries.

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

The ambivalence of Jews toward the life of self-denial may therefore lie in the suspicion that it entered Judaism from the outside. There were 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 dualists, holding that the true God was not the creator of the universe and could not be reached within the universe. The physical world was the work of a lesser, and evil, deity. Hence holiness means withdrawing from the physical world, its pleasures, appetites and desires. 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 tendencies in Christianity and Islam.

What is remarkable however is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative. In the Laws of Ethical Character, Maimonides adopts the negative position of R. Eliezer Hakappar:

“A person may say: ‘Desire, honour and the like are bad paths to follow and remove a person from the world, therefore I will completely separate myself from them and go to the other extreme. ‘As a result, he does not eat meat or drink wine or take a wife or live in a decent house or wear decent clothing . . . This too is bad, and it is forbidden to choose this way.” Hilchot De’ot 3:1

Yet in the same book, the Mishneh Torah, he writes: “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.” Hilchot Nezirut 10:14

How does any writer come to adopt so self-contradictory a position – let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer is profound. According to Maimonides, there is not one model of the virtuous life, but two. He calls them respectively the way of the saint (chassid) and the Sage (chacham). The saint is a person of extremes. Maimonides defines chessed as extreme behaviour - good behaviour, to be sure, but conduct in excess of what strict justice requires (Guide for the Perplexed III, ch. 52). So, for example, “If one avoids haughtiness to the utmost extent and becomes exceedingly humble, he is termed a saint (chassid)” (Hilchot De’ot 1:5).

The Sage is a completely different kind of person, one who follows the “golden mean”, the “middle way” of moderation and balance. He or she avoids the extremes of cowardice on the one hand, recklessness on the other, and thus acquires the virtue of courage. The Sage avoids both miserliness and renunciation of wealth, hoarding or giving away all they have, and thus becomes neither stingy nor foolhardy but generous. He or she knows the twin dangers of too much and too little – excess and

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deficiency. The Sage weighs conflicting pressures and avoids extremes.

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

A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But then what about supporting the members of the saint's own family? A saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint's fellow citizens? 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. But you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Indeed, saints are not really interested in society. They have chosen a different, lonely, self-segregating path. They are seeking personal salvation rather than collective redemption.

It is this deep insight that led Maimonides to his seemingly contradictory evaluations of the Nazirite. The Nazirite has chosen, at least for a period, to adopt a life of extreme self-denial. He is a saint, a chassid. He has adopted the path of personal perfection. That is noble, commendable, a high ideal.

But it is not the way of the sage – and you need sages if you seek to perfect society. The reason the sage is not an extremist is because he or she realises that there are other people at stake. There are the members of one's own family; the others within one's own community; there are colleagues at work; there is a country to defend and a nation to help build. The sage knows it is dangerous, even morally self-indulgent, to 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; 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 must bring an atonement offering.

Judaism makes room for individuals to escape from the temptations of the world. The supreme example is the Nazirite. But this is an exception, not the norm. To be a chacham, a sage, is to have the courage to engage with the world, despite all the spiritual risks, and to help bring a fragment of the Divine Presence into the shared spaces of our collective life.

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### **Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

#### **Love Means Always Being Ready to Say You're Sorry**

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"When a man or woman shall commit any sin that people may commit, to do a trespass against the Lord, and that person be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have committed..." (Numbers 5:6-7)

According to Maimonides, this verse, which obligates confession, is the basic source for the commandment of repentance; repentance is incomplete without verbal confession. Writing in his *Mishneh Torah* (Hilkhos Teshuva 1:1), he rules that "every commandment in the Torah... if a person violates any one of them either intentionally or accidentally, his act of repentance must be accompanied with confession before God, because it's written in the Torah 'then they shall confess their sin which they have committed.'"

Detailing the nuts and bolts of repentance, Maimonides divides the process into four pragmatic steps: recognition of sin, confession, the act of resolving never to repeat the sin, and – in order to effectuate "total" repentance – resistance from repeating the transgression when faced with a similar temptation under similar circumstances. Hence guilt, the inevitable accompaniment of sin, can be dealt with by means of repentance, which has the power to totally obliterate the act of wrongdoing.

In contrast, Freud, when he discovered the Oedipal complex, assigned mankind a guilt so profound that his message of the "haunted soul" permeates the modern sensibility, from the bleak no-exit landscapes of the Swedish director Ingmar Bergman to the comic-cosmic ones of Bergman's disciple Woody Allen. According to them, not only are we doomed to repeat the sins of our parents, but we are also limited – and even crippled – by the transgressions of our past. All of us, the theory goes, suffer from primal guilt. The past is inescapable. And inevitably, being born into a situation beyond our control, guilt is coupled with gloom. At best we learn to acknowledge our past, and make do. The past controls our present as well as our future!

But in Judaism, as we began to see from Maimonides, a violation of any of the commandments – whether it was purposeful or accidental, conscious or unconscious – may be repented for and forgiven. That and more: a sin may become the means – a sort of pogo stick – for creative betterment; a transgression may be transformed into a good deed, a black mark into a brilliant jewel – a sort of alchemy for the soul. No, Dr. Freud, not only is our present not controlled by the past, but our present has the ability to change the past. As Professor Mordechai Rotenberg of the Hebrew

### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

University establishes in his work *Rebiographing and Deviance*, repentance is built into the theology of Judaism, allowing us not only to escape from the permanent scars of past misdeeds but through a transformative ascent, our sins become virtues – not just in the metaphoric sense, but in real psychological and interpersonal terms. Through the gift of repentance, each individual can re-biographize the events of his life, transforming transgression into a virtue.

Sources for such transformation can be found in a wide range of classic texts. For example, the Talmud (Yoma 86b) cites Resh Lakish, himself a repentant armed robber, as saying that "when true repentance takes place all transgressions are turned into merits," and Rabbi Abbahu (Berakhot 34b), who taught that "where the penitent stands is higher than that of the completely righteous individual."

How is this possible? After all, "of all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these: 'It might have been.'" How can we recreate, recast, the past? My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, discusses this issue in his classical work *Al HaTeshuva* (On Repentance, edited by Pinchas Peli), and he explains it on the basis of the realization that it is usually only when one loses something – an object or a relationship – that one truly appreciates its value. Hence, tragically perhaps, only when one has lost his closeness to God and the Jewish tradition can one truly re-embrace them in depth, and then with even greater fervor and appreciation than before. As the great Psalmist King David cried out, "From the depths [of despair] do I call upon you, O God" (Psalms 130:1); it is precisely the depths of my despair that provide me with a jump-start, a push upwards to achieve a close relationship.

I would like to suggest a further insight. After all, the pen used to rewrite our lives (rebiographing) is called repentance, as we have just seen, and it itself is one of the 613 commandments in the Torah. And to repent means to turn back, to turn ourselves back to the period before we sinned, to turn the clock of our lives back as well. Even though Maimonides divides the process into four steps, confession must be particularly important to him because, in his first law in the chapter of repentance, a paragraph of eighteen lines (in my edition of *Mishneh Torah*, published by Mossad Harav Kook), the Hebrew word for confession, *vidui*, is repeated no less than thirteen times.

Perhaps by repeating "verbal confession" so often, Maimonides provides us with a clue as to the process by which Judaism turns sins into virtues.

Confessions which lead to a change of heart and personality (recognizing a sin and truly determining, and garnering the strength, never to repeat it again) differ qualitatively from confessions when lying on a psychiatrist's couch or in a dark confessional booth.

Authentic confession must be expressed directly to the individual one sinned against. Such a verbal confession – when the lips utter the words to be heard – becomes not only an “at-one-ment” between two individuals who had become alienated and estranged from each other, but it also makes the individual “at-one” with himself, the self he would like to be and the self he has sadly become. It also brings together and makes “at-one-ment” between conflicting parts of a person's consciousness: heart and mind, internal feeling and external communication. It allows the individual to confront and verbally express his sin, his imperfection, his failure, to conceptualize what he has done, first to himself, and then to the other he has wronged. It enables him to reconnect with his full self as well as with others, without the mask of self-deception and without the curtain of separation. Only from such a brutal and truthful encounter with oneself as well as with other can the difficult process of change begin.

A sin (het) is literally a missing of the mark, a disconnect, a failure to make the proper connection and reach out to the other in love. It's clear that Erich Segal's ridiculous message that love means “never having to say you're sorry” is in direct opposition to the Torah's view. Much the opposite! Saying you're sorry to another is recognition of the other, of realizing the pain of the other. Saying you're sorry in a relationship is an admission of love, a cry from one heart to another that one feels and sees the hurt that one has caused the other, that one has the courage to admit one's smallness, one's selfishness, one's self-centeredness in the presence of the other, whose love will empower the beloved to become whole, to grow, and to give again.

Words are the first tangible, external expression of a new reality; real change can only be proven by different external actions. If verbal confession cannot be spoken, if the individual cannot bring him or herself to at least face and express the crime against the other with words of sorrow and remorse, change will never be effectuated and the relationship between the two will never be repaired. Words can at least begin to create new realities, and a new reality can hopefully create a new individual and a new relationship.

Many years ago, a married woman with two children came into my office, confessing that she had encouraged a relationship with a single man; they had stopped just short of adultery, her husband had found out and he now wanted

to divorce her. She confronted her guilt, recognized who she had become and how much she had sacrificed for momentary lust, and spoke of how she truly loved her husband and desperately wanted to save their marriage and make amends for what had happened. After meeting with both of them, it also became clear that the husband had been neglecting his wife, that his business had taken him away from home much more often than he should have traveled, and that he too shared in her guilt – although not to the same extent. Each confessed wrongdoing to the other, each recognized the need for change, and not only did the marriage continue but it became much improved. In a very real way, the woman's transgression became transformed into a merit; it served as a spark-plug and wake-up call for two individuals to learn how to live with one another in love, consideration, and mutual commitment. Their present repentance redeemed the past and dramatically changed their future. There is no greater tribute to and confirmation of human freedom than the possibility of change, of growth, of renewal – than the mitzva of repentance.

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#### **Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot**

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##### **Visions of Peace: Over Idealization and Under Realization**

The priestly blessings conclude on the theme of “and may He grant you peace.” The Rabbis cherished this blessing above all others, and referred to it as the vessel which contains all blessings. All the previous blessings require peace as the context in which they can be effective and meaningful.

Exactly what does this “peace” refer to? The Sifre gives us two alternative definitions. R. Hanina Segan ha-Kohanim says peace in your home. R. Nathan teaches, it refers to the peace of the Kingdom of the House of David. The difference is that, R. Hanina defines peace as domestic tranquility, whereas R. Nathan gives it a political-national definition, the peace of the realm. What is surprising is that of these two possible interpretations, it is R. Hanina who teaches domestic peace. After all, it is the same R. Hanina Segan ha-Kohanim who tells us, in a celebrated passage in Avot, “Pray for the peace of the realm, for if not for the fear of authority people would swallow each other alive.” Why, then, in the blessings of the priests, does he suddenly turn inward and interpret the concluding blessing as domestic peace, leaving it to someone else – R. Nathan – to emphasize the political aspects of peace?

Perhaps the answer is something we shall all have to learn, painful though it is. Most of us have been reared on a noble vision: peace for all the world and in our own times. Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and every American president since then, have preached and strived for this vision. It is one of the most beautiful and inspiring themes to capture the

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imagination of mankind. Of course, it is not new. It stems from, and is a secularized version of, the great visions of the prophets of Israel – of Isaiah and Amos and Micah. It is they who taught that, “and the wolf shall lie down with the lamb...,” and “they shall beat their swords into plough shares...,” and “nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

The only difference is this: the prophets recognized that these are Messianic dreams, that they will be realized only with the advent of the Messiah. Isaiah, in Chapter Two, introduces his vision with the words, “And it shall be at the end of days.” We must not expect the fulfillment of these uplifting visions until the days of the Messiah.

The secularized version, however, is not Messianic but Utopian. It is a modern phenomenon, the painting of an ideal world which is within the grasp of man. It teaches that we can, with the means available to us, create the perfect society, one of universal peace and justice for all men. The Messianic vision is one which sets an unrealizable goal, and inspires us to approximate it as best we can. But it knows that we cannot do so fully right now. The Utopian dream is one which inspires us with impatience and drives us to expect realization here and now.

Most of us, who are passionately devoted to the cause of peace, have assumed without further reflection that it is indeed possible to achieve peace universally “in our times.” We are, hence, more Utopian than Messianic. Since the advent of the Atomic Age, this has become a working hypothesis of international relations, something which is accepted beyond doubt. Indeed, consider the alternative – all of civilization reduced to a fine atomic ash! Hence, universal peace is not only a distant goal but an immediate necessity. And yet – how frustrating! – how many wars have been fought, and how much blood has been shed, since Hiroshima and Nagasaki!

What R. Hanina Segan ha-Kohanim is telling us is this: dream the dreams of Isaiah, of nation not lifting up sword against nation; pray for the peace of the realm; but don't be unrealistic. Strive for these always – but without illusions as to their viability and applicability and realizability in the present or the immediate future.

Insofar as now is concerned, here we must turn to the blessings of the priests. It is they who refer to that aspect of the good life which can be attained and is within our grasp. The blessing of peace in the priestly blessings speaks of a peace which is much more realistic and attainable, peace in your homes. First you must strive for peace in your own home between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brother and sister. Then you can strive for the larger aspects of peace – political, social, international – which will find their full realization at the end of days, the days of Messiah.

Not only Jewish tradition, but Jewish historical experience as well, teaches us never to over-anticipate the “end of days,” the eschatological age, the days of Messiah. Judaism teaches us to beware of the fallacy of thinking that the visions of the future are all at hand, just around the bend. This is the great Utopian fallacy. There is a process of auto-suggestion and self-hypnosis at work: the facile illusion that turns Utopian dreams into supposed realities, only to disappoint and frustrate us and sow the seeds of disaster.

Jews who have come to Utopianism via a secularized Messianism seem particularly vulnerable to this fallacy, to this illusion. Moreover, many of our fellow Jews combine this Utopian fallacy with yet another element: a highly idealistic readiness to offer great sacrifices on behalf of the visions which are all but realized – and especially are they willing to sacrifice for universal peace such elements as Jews, Judaism, and the State of Israel!

This is especially true of those deracinated Jews, both of the Right and of the Left, who have almost no Jewish affiliation or Jewish identity, and yet when it comes to Israel, express their dovishness by using that patronizing first-person-plural: “we” ought to be “magnanimous” by returning to the Arabs all they wish without any compensation. “We” ought to give up land and security, and perhaps our very existence, for the sake of “peace.” As if Israel’s suicide, Heaven forbid, will bring shalom to the world. Proof of the falsehood of this contention is – Lebanon... Some peace! Some Utopia!

This holds true not only for Israel, but for Jewish interests in this country as well. I refer specifically to the Jewish situation in our own community, something for which you and I share a collective guilt. For too long have we ignored our interests and have had our attention distracted elsewhere. As a result, we have allowed special interest groups to undermine and erode the Jewish commitment to and presence in the West Side of Manhattan.

We are rightly compassionate towards all minorities and especially low income groups. Yet, that does not mean that we must set out deliberately to destroy an excellent neighborhood and de-Judaize it by sending our Jews fleeing to the suburbs. Does turning all the West Side into a slum contribute to universal justice? There are events that happen in this neighborhood that, paradoxically, were advocated as acts of social justice towards lower class people, and resulted in disadvantaging them economically. Businesses were chased out of the neighborhood, and both we and they were the losers – only some rabble-rousing politicians stood to gain.

Yet, I am told that when one official was approached and reminded of the Jewish interest in this community, his answer – whether innocent or not, I do not presume to know – was, “But what about our prophetic tradition?” This – from a man who probably

cannot name any three Jewish prophets – is supposed to be a reason why Jews must abandon the West Side of Manhattan, their homes and businesses and communal institutions...2

For too long have we preached this Utopianism, have we subscribed to this fallacy, have we permitted the confusion of peace and pacifism and of goodness and altruism. Perhaps this distinction and this awareness – that the wholeness of peace and joy and plenty is reserved for the “end of days,” and not available at present – ought to serve not as a depressant but to encourage us. When we lower our over-idealized expectations, we become more realistic and less frustrated – and, in addition, we achieve greater peace in the world too. A generation after the Holocaust is hardly the time to expect age-old beautiful visions to be fulfilled.

A generation after the Holocaust is hardly the time to ask Israel or Jews to oblige the world and disappear so as to bring it peace. A generation after the Holocaust is the time when Jews need the present reality of Samson as much as the future visions of an Isaiah. If we are Jewishly realistic, we will not grow impatient because peace eludes us in the Middle East and in the world. We will learn to live with international tension – even as we live with personal tension if there is no alternative. We will not expect universal peace in our times, but will spare no effort to obtain as much peace as soon as possible. What bothers me is not the absence of universal peace or the peace of the realm as much as the lack of in the State of Israel itself. How can we entertain Isaiah’s vision of the lamb lying down with the wolf, or R. Nathan’s dream of the peace of the kingdom of the House of David in its relations with others, when we have not begun to attain R. Hanina Segan ha-Kohanim’s blessing of domestic peace? How can we speak of peace in the world or in the Middle East, if the Prime Minister and Defense Minister of Israel are not on talking terms?3 – if its two Chief Rabbis do not even greet each other?4 – if Israel’s Ambassador to the U.N. and its Ambassador to the U.S.A. are at loggerheads?5 Peace must be built from the bottom up, not from the top down. So, we need visions – grand visions, holy visions, universal visions – and even if they cannot be realized at once, they still tell us in what direction we should be going and they exercise a “pull” on us.

May He bestow upon us peace, we need not only visions, but blessings. And the greatest of all blessing, peace in our homes

1 Throughout the spring of 1975, minor clashes in Lebanon had been building up towards all-out conflict, with the Lebanese National Movement (LNM) pitted against the Phalange, and the ever-weaker national government wavering between the need to maintain order and cater to its constituency. On the morning of 13 April 1975, unidentified gunmen in a speeding car fired on a church in the Christian East Beirut suburb of Ain el-Rummaneh,

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killing four people, including two Maronite Phalangists. Hours later, Phalangists led by the Gemayels killed 30 Palestinians traveling in Ain el-Rummaneh. Citywide clashes erupted in response to this “Bus Massacre.” On 6 December 1975, a day later known as Black Saturday, the killings of four Phalange members led Phalange to quickly and temporarily set up roadblocks throughout Beirut at which identification cards were inspected for religious affiliation. Many Palestinians or Lebanese Muslims passing through the roadblocks were killed immediately. Additionally, Phalange members took hostages and attacked Muslims in East Beirut. Muslim and Palestinian militias retaliated with force, increasing the total death count to between 200 and 600 civilians and militiamen. After this point, all-out fighting began between the militias.

[https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanese\\_Civil\\_War#:~:text= Fighting%20between%20Lebanese%20e%20Christian%20militias,pan%2DArabists%2C%20and%20leftists](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lebanese_Civil_War#:~:text= Fighting%20between%20Lebanese%20e%20Christian%20militias,pan%2DArabists%2C%20and%20leftists)

2 Starting in the 1970s, the neighborhood descended into chaos as a coalition of politically connected developers, nonprofits, labor unions, and government agencies did its utmost to turn the area into a dispensary for social services. Under the cover of compassionate rhetoric, the groups used public funds to convert the Upper West Side’s private residential buildings into welfare hotels, homeless shelters, halfway houses, and methadone clinics, inundating the neighborhood with crime, homelessness, and drug abuse. <https://www.city-journal.org/article/the-unending-battle-for-the-upper-west-side>

3 A reference to Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, in 1976 Prime Minister and Defense Minister respectively. Rabin and Peres had a fifty-year-long bitter feud. For example, see <https://time.com/archive/6858487/israel-the-struggle-of-peres-and-rabin/>.

4 A reference to Rav Shlomo Goren and Rav Ovadia Yosef, who vociferously disagreed over Rav Goren’s lenient ruling in the so-called Langer affair. For a brief summary of the case, see <https://www.koltorah.org/halachah/great-controversy-in-israeli-batei-din-the-langer-case-by-benz-ion-rotblat-21?format=amp>.

5 A reference to Chaim Herzog and Simcha Dinitz. Herzog and Dinitz had different viewpoints as to how strongly Israel should respond to the infamous UN “Zionism is Racism” resolution, passed on November 10, 1975 Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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### Birkas Kohanim: Peace of Togetherness Vs. Peace of Separate Pieces

I found the following idea in a sefer by Rav Dovid Zucker, a Rosh Kollel in Chicago.

The last bracha of Birkas Kohanim (the Priestly Blessing) is “V’yasem lecha shalom” (And He Will Give You Peace) (Bamidbar 6:26). The more common Hebrew word for the verb “to give” is v’yiten. Why does the Torah here use the less common word v’yasem lecha shalom, which literally means “He will place peace in you”?

Furthermore, the last bracha of Shemoneh Esrei also invokes the prayer “sim shalom” (place peace), rather than “ten shalom” (give

peace). Likewise, the bracha concluding the evening Shemoneh Esrei begins with the words “shalom rav tasim.” In all three places, we find the peculiar verb *sima*, as opposed to *nesina*. Why?

To address this observation, Rav Zucker quotes a comment from Rav Chaim Kanievsky: There are two ways of making peace when people are having an argument. One way is to “make shalom” – everyone shakes hands, makes up, and resets their relationship such that everything is good again. However, sometimes the only way to “make shalom” is by a lack of contact.

Consider the case of two partners who have a business and they get into a fight. They unfortunately hate each other and can in no way, shape or form, reestablish a peaceful relationship. What is the best approach? The best approach is to sell or split the business so that they can each take their half and go their separate ways. They can no longer work together. That is one way to achieve shalom, by no longer being together. This does not only happen in business. In the yeshiva world, this is also sometimes, unfortunately, the case. There can be two *roshei yeshiva* who don’t see eye to eye regarding how a yeshiva should be run. What do they do? They split the yeshiva, sometimes amicably and sometimes not so amicably. But this too can be called “shalom.”

It happens in marriages as well. Sometimes a marriage counselor can make shalom between a husband and wife who are having marital problems. However, sometimes the only way to make shalom is for them to split. This is exactly what happened between Avram and Lot. Their shepherds had an argument. By mutual agreement, they concurred that the best plan was: “If you go left, I will go right and if you go right, I will go left.” (Bereshis 13:9) That made shalom.

We see this in the *pasuk* by Terumas HaDeshen (the daily removing of the ashes from the *mizbayach*) that the connotation of the word *sima* is ‘all together.’ The *pasuk* there says “*v’samo etzel hamizbayach*” (Vayikra 6:3) (you shall put the ashes by the *mizbayach*). Chazal provide the connotations of the word *v’samo*: “You shall place it gently, you shall place all of it, you shall place it in a way that it will not scatter.” (Temurah 34a) For some reason, the connotation of the word *sima* is to place it all together.

Thus, the *v’yasem lecha shalom* – the last bracha of the Birkas Kohanim – is that there should be shalom, but also that it should be a desirable type of shalom – a shalom where people can make up and be together again and have real shalom once more. So too, by *sim shalom* and *shalom rav tasim*, Hashem is giving us a bracha, not merely to have any

kind of shalom, but to have shalom that enables us to coexist and be together as before.

### **The Minhag of Saying “Y’Asher Koach” to the Kohanim for Their Blessings**

The Rashash in *Maseches Sheviis* (4:2) brings a Mishna as the source for the widespread custom of thanking the Kohanim (Y’asher Koach!) individually upon the conclusion of their reciting Birkas Kohanim. This is, in fact, brought in halacha by virtue of the fact that they are instructed to remain on the “platform” until after the conclusion of the Shemoneh Esrei (the Mishna Berura writes until after the conclusion of kaddish following Shemoneh Esrei). This is because the congregation is supposed to give them a “Y’asher Koach” and we would not be allowed to do that in the middle of the repetition of Shemoneh Esrei or kaddish.

Why is this the custom? After all, the Kohen is obligated to recite Birkas Kohanim. If a Kohen is called up to “*duchen*” and he ignores the call, he is *mevattel* a *Mitzvas Aseh*! Y’asher Koach? Y’asher Koach for what? When we put on *tefillin* in the morning, no one comes over to us and says “Y’asher Koach!” I need to put on *tefillin*. I need to recite *krias shema*. I need to sit in the *Succah*. We are not accustomed to receiving complements for doing what we are commanded to do!

The answer is that Birkas Kohanim is not merely the Kohen getting up there and reciting those three *pesukim*. One of the requirements of this *mitzvah* is to say it “*b’ahava u’b’lev shalem*” (with love and with complete sincerity). I assume that Kohanim get in bad moods just like the rest of us, and I assume that Kohanim may have things going on in their lives at times that make them not very happy. A Kohen needs to get up there in front of *Klal Yisrael* and say “I want for you that you should have an abundance of *parnassah*, that you should be healthy and strong, that all your needs should be taken care of” – even though the Kohen himself may be facing bankruptcy, may be facing illness, or may be facing anything. If he can’t come through and deliver that blessing “with love” he has not fulfilled his *mitzvah*. I am not giving him a “Y’asher Koach” just because he fulfilled his *mitzvah* by rote. Doing it right can take a lot of effort.

I think, *rabosai*, that this is a lesson for us. Sometimes we go to a *simcha* and we are not in the best of moods. Sometimes we go to a *simcha* and it perhaps bothers us that the sun is shining so brightly on the *ba’al simcha*, far more than we feel it is shining upon ourselves. His children are getting great *shidduchim*. He has such a wonderful job. Everything is going great for him. In the meantime, we are suffering.

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When we go to such a *simcha*, there are two ways of giving *Mazal Tov*. We can give a perfunctory *Mazal Tov* wish, but our demeanor may reveal the envy and jealousy that we are feeling. Or we can give a sincere “*Mazal Tov! I feel so happy for you! Baruch Hashem!*” Anyone who has been in that situation knows that this is sometimes a very difficult thing to do. It is not easy for a person to raise himself above his own personal *tzores* and to give *Mazal Tov* with a “full heart.”

I once heard from Rav Matisyahu Solomon that a person who does not participate in the trials and tribulations of his friend – empathizing and commiserating with him – is a *rasha* (wicked person). But sincerely participating in someone else’s *simcha* requires the person to be a *malach* (angel).

This is the “Y’asher Koach” that we give to the Kohanim: Great Job that you were able to convey this blessing “*b’ahava*” (with love). No matter what was going on in your life, you raised yourself above that and looked beyond yourself. The lesson for us is that when we need to give *brochos* and *Mazel Tovs*, we should also do it *b’lev shalem* and try to raise ourselves up beyond our own personal issues, whatever they may be.

**The Sotah in Parsas Naso: Miraculous Restoration of Peace Between Husband and Wife** - The Ramban points out the uniqueness of *Parshas Sotah*. This ritual, which determines the fidelity or infidelity of a wife suspected of adultery, is the only *mitzvah* in the Torah that functions via the performance of a *nes nigleh* (open miracle). Explicit Divine intervention does not occur by our carrying out of any other of the Torah’s prescribed *mitzvos*.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky explains that the reason for this is to demonstrate to us the great importance of *shalom bayis* (domestic tranquility). If a husband suspects that his wife was unfaithful to him, even if she produces two witnesses that she was not unfaithful, he still may have lingering doubts in his heart: Can I really trust her? This would cause a reticence on the part of the husband in their relationship. The only thing that could fully dispel such suspicions, removing any and all doubts, is the *Ribono shel Olam* Himself testifying in a miraculous and dramatic fashion about the innocence of the suspected adulteress. By virtue of the fact that she was not negatively affected by drinking the “bitter waters,” the husband fully realizes that his suspicions were unjustified, and that his wife had not been unfaithful.

However, there is another issue that we need to understand here. The *pasuk* says that if the “bitter waters” prove that she had been inappropriately suspected, then, as a reward for

undergoing this ordeal, she will experience much easier childbirths in the future, her children will be more beautiful than before, etc. However, this woman was still no tzadekes! This is a married woman who secluded herself with another man, in violation of her husband's warning and in violation of a Torah prohibition! Why should she merit these brochos (blessings) just because the waters proved that she did not commit actual adultery with the gentlemen with whom she allowed herself to be secluded? This lady is not Rebbetzin Kanievsky or Sara Schenirer! Why should she be reaping such rewards?

The Ibn Ezra explains that these brochos are compensation for the embarrassment she endured. As compensation for the humiliation that she experienced, Hashem gives her a bracha: You will have an easy time in childbirth, etc.

I saw this same issue addressed in the sefer Avir Yakov. The Avir Yakov suggests that perhaps there is another reason behind this bracha that the vindicated sotah receives. The Gemara also says that if a woman does not suffer the fate of a "convicted sotah" (i.e. – "exploding"), it could be because she has a specific zechus (merit). A husband with lingering doubts might think to himself, yes, maybe my wife did not "explode," but maybe that was not because she is totally innocent. Maybe it is because she has a zechus. If the whole point of this process is to remove all doubts in the husband's mind, how do we address this issue? That is why Hashem provides another confirming sign of the wife's innocence. Not only did she survive the drinking of the "bitter waters," and not only did she not explode, but let the husband see that she is now the recipient of special Divine blessing. Notwithstanding the fact that she did something untowardly (by secluding herself improperly with another man), nevertheless, the Ribono shel Olam is rewarding her in order to – once again – restore the peace between husband and wife.

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### **Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

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#### **Sacred and Profane, Separation and Integration - Rabbanit Devorah Evron**

Devorah Evron Headshot scaled 2Parashat Naso, the second portion in the Book of Bemidbar and the longest in the Torah, is largely a continuation of the previous portion and is the central link in the three-portion sequence of Bemidbar, Naso, and Beha'alotcha which deal with the consecration of the Tabernacle and the beginning of the services within it. Nonetheless, the portion of Naso includes several other topics unrelated to the Tabernacle's consecration. Commentators strive to explain why each of these topics is placed here and how they are interconnected.

Using one of the expressions in the portion, I would like to propose a conceptual link between the different sections and the Tabernacle.

In chapter 5, verse 6, it is stated: "Speak to the Israelites: Any man or woman who wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord is guilty." Commentators understand that this verse addresses the action of theft, and indeed the subsequent verses detail what a person, whether man or woman, who has committed theft should do to make restitution and how much they should pay.

The term "to be unfaithful" ("lim'ol ma'al") appears again a few verses later, in the section concerning a sotah, a woman suspected of infidelity: "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: If a man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him." Here, it refers to a man who suspects his wife has been unfaithful to him with another man, but lacks witnesses or proof. The continuation of this section outlines the procedures available to the man in such a situation.

The use of the root M.A.L. (מ.א.ל.) is intriguing. The transgression of "unfaithfulness" ("me'ilah") is familiar to us from the Book of Vayikra in the context of the Temple: "If a person commits a violation and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the Lord's holy things, they are to bring to the Lord as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel, for a guilt-offering." (Vayikra 5:15)

The transgression of unfaithfulness is discussed extensively in the Oral Torah and in Halacha, usually in the context of using Temple property for unintended purposes. For example, if someone leans on an animal designated for sacrifice, it might be considered an act of unfaithfulness because the animal is meant for sacrifice, not as a support. Similarly, if sacrifices were purchased with money designated for repairs to the building itself, this, too, could be considered an act of unfaithfulness.

So, what is the significance of this term in our portion, in matters of ben adam la'chavero, i.e., interpersonal relations? Targum Yonatan translates "lim'ol ma'al" as meaning "to lie deceitfully". Sifrei on Bemidbar (portion of Naso) explains: "Lim'ol ma'al, there is no unfaithfulness except falsehood." Sifrei means that in every instance where the Torah uses the word "ma'al" or "me'ilah," it should be understood as some form of deception or fraudulence.

It is perfectly understandable that in matters between individuals, unfaithfulness should be

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equated with deception. A person who steals from another deceives them. How so? He takes something that is not theirs, claiming it as their own, which is a falsehood. In some cases, the embezzler is even willing to swear falsely in the name of God. Such is also the case when a man suspects his wife of secretly being with another man and lying about it. When she denies her infidelity, her husband takes her to Jerusalem to ascertain the truth. Since Sifrei states that wherever the Torah uses the term "me'ilah," it means that a "falsehood" has been committed, it follows then that acts of me'ila in the Temple, i.e., those committed "in bad faith", are also a form of deception.

If this be so, we must try to determine in what sense unfaithfulness in the Temple is deception. Furthermore, we must ask: What is common to all the seemingly different situations where the word "me'ilah" is used, thus denoting deception?

Me'ilah in the Temple involves using Temple property for purposes other than those for which it was originally consecrated. When a person misuses a sacred object, he implicitly claims that the object is not part of the Temple, nor does it belong to God and the sacred space. The act in itself is one of deceit since it denies the Divine truth by the very fact that it was carried out. As such, it needs no further spoken falsehood to accompany it, for the deed itself denotes deception.

It is clear that such an action, when done willfully, would be considered an act of unfaithfulness. However, the Torah emphasizes that even when done unintentionally, it is considered an act of unfaithfulness, requiring repentance and correction. The Torah expects us to be aware of our surroundings and to be as connected as possible to reality. However, it also understands that as humans we are bound to make mistakes. But even mistakes need rectification.

One might think that, given the high risk of making mistakes in the sacred Temple, the Torah would limit access to the Temple to a very small group of people. However, this is not what the Torah does. The Torah defines the Temple as a holy place where great caution must be exercised, acknowledges that mistakes will happen, and teaches us how to rectify them. The Torah does not ask us to avoid approaching holiness; it expects us to make the necessary distinctions between the sacred and the profane and to maintain this separation.

The act of me'ilah is also related to relationships – between man and God and between individuals. Someone who commits an act of unfaithfulness disrespects the person at which this act is aimed, and undermines

their relationship. When a person steals from another, it demonstrates a lack of appreciation and respect for the victim's ownership. The thief focuses solely on the object, disregarding the person to whom it belongs. Similarly, in the Temple, when someone misuses a sacred object, it expresses his lack of regard for the realm in which the sacred object exists and the reason for its holiness. Ultimately, this is akin to disrespecting God Himself. The Torah expects us to live our lives with a respectful awareness of others, let alone God. And yet being respectful of our fellow man does not fall short of the respect we must have for God. This may be the reason the Torah uses the same term when discussing those who fail to uphold this respect, be it God or man that is subject to disrespect. An act of unfaithfulness, *me'ilah*, against God and another human being stem from the same source and are equally severe.

The portion of Naso is one of the first portions to describe life with the Mishkan permanently residing in the Israelite camp. In this portion, the tribal leaders bring their offerings to the Mishkan, thus initiating regular and sacred rituals in the Mishkan. The sanctity of the Mishkan resides within Israel, and the Israelites learn how to live alongside this holiness. In addition to verses dealing with the sanctity of the Mishkan, Parashat Naso contains sections that emphasize the sanctity interpersonal relationships. The prohibition against theft highlights the importance of respect within society as a whole, and the section on the Sotah underscores the need for respect within the family circle. Understanding relationships and the bonds of respect helps in maintaining boundaries and distinguishing between sacred and profane spaces.

The section on the Nazirite, which is another portion within Parashat Naso, presents a different approach to the relationship between the sacred and the profane – an approach that involves a certain blurring of the two realms, not without its costs. A Nazirite vows himself to God, introducing restrictions into his life that originate from his vow. A Nazirite, as is described in the Torah, does not withdraw from worldly life but lives as a Nazirite within society and within his family. On the one hand, his life continues as usual, but on the other hand, certain aspects of his life change significantly. For instance, a Jew who has taken a Nazirite vow cannot become impure through contact with a corpse, not even for his own father or mother. Therefore, should his parents pass away, he cannot accompany them to their burial or be involved in their interment. One might say that the Nazirite prioritizes his relationship with God over his relationship with his parents. This might explain the ambivalence of our Sages towards the Nazirite. Indeed, it is not clear from the Torah whether taking a Nazirite vow is desirable, and

different Sages held different views on this matter. The Torah, while providing instructions on how to be a Nazirite, leaves the decision of whether to take such a vow to the individual, man or woman, without taking a stance on the decision itself.

Parashat Naso, comprising an array of diverse topics within a single portion, teaches us about the importance of relationships between man and God, and between individuals. It also highlights the boundaries and realms of the sacred and the profane, and the possibility of integrating the two with commitment and mindfulness.

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##### **Rabbi Hershel Schachter**

##### **More Than One Level of Interpretation**

Our tradition has it that the text of the Chumash was dictated by Hashem to Moshe Rabbeinu word for word and letter for letter. All the other *nevi'im* were shown a vision, a *mareh ha'nevuah*, which they interpreted using their own words while under the influence of *ruach ha'kodesh*. When Moshe Rabbeinu was given a message as a *horayas sho'ah*, he was on the same level as all the other *nevi'im*, but all of the text that pertains to the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot which are binding throughout all the future generations was dictated by Hashem to Moshe word for word.

Regarding this dictation, we are told (Tehillim 62:13) that the *passukim* were given to Moshe Rabbeinu with one text but often had more than one level of interpretation. The most obvious understanding of the *passuk* is considered *peshto shel mikrah* while the additional level of interpretation is considered part of the Torah *sheb'al peh*. Sometimes we have a *passuk* with more than one interpretation and all of the interpretations are considered *peshto shel mikrah*. One such example is, "Lo Sichoneim" (Devarim 7:2). When we enter Eretz Yisroel we will meet up with many different *ovdei avodah zarah* and we are instructed *lo sichoneim*. The Gemarah has three interpretations of the verb, "sichoneim", based on three different possible roots of the word, and all three are considered *peshto shel mikrah*: 1) the root is *chinom* (free), and the *passuk* is saying that we may not give a *matnas chinom* to an idol worshipper. 2) the root is *chein* (favor), and we're being told that they should not find *chein* in our eyes; we may not praise a baseball player or a professor or an artist who worships *avodah zarah*. 3) the root is *chanoya* (encampment or settling), and we are commanded that we should not enable the idol worshippers to live in Eretz Yisroel by selling or renting any real estate to them.

There is a difficult *passuk* (Vayikra 19:26) which prohibits us from eating "*al ha'dam*".

#### **Likutei Divrei Torah**

The simple reading of the *passuk* has one meaning, but the Torah *sheb'al peh* has additional levels of interpretation which are not *l'fi peshto shel mikrah*. The Gemarah (Sanhedrin 63) therefore says that if one violates one of the prohibitions that was taught by one of these additional interpretations, there would be no punishment of *malkus*. *Malkus* is only for one who violated an *aveirah* which is similar to, "*lo sachsom shor b'disho*" (Devarim 25:4), i.e. the prohibition must appear in the Chumash and has to be the understanding of the *passuk* according to *peshto shel mikrah*.

Every so often there will be a *passuk* where the additional level of interpretation will be just the opposite from the *peshto shel mikrah*. In Parshat Naso, (Bamidbar 6:23) the Torah instructs the Kohanim to recite *Birchas Kohanim* at the conclusion of offering the *korbanos tzibbur*. The Chumash presents this *mitzvah* with the two words, "*emor lo'hem*". The simple translation of the *passuk* is that they (the Kohanim) should recite the blessing to them, (the *tzibbur*.) The Torah *sheb'al peh* has an additional level of interpretation which is just the opposite from the *peshto shel mikrah*: the Kohanim are required to offer this blessing only when they (the *tzibbur*) requested it of them (of the Kohanim). Although this additional level of interpretation is just the opposite of the *peshto shel mikrah*, there is no contradiction between the two, and *halacha l'maaseh* we follow both instructions.

Similarly, the Torah tells us (Devarim 22:3) that one who finds someone else's lost item should publicize the fact that he found it, and he should hold onto it until the owner will come and ask him to return it. The words in the Chumash are, "*odd drosh achicha oso*". The Torah *sheb'al peh* has an additional level of interpretation on this *passuk* which is just the reverse of the *peshto shel mikrah*: the one who found the lost article is required to hold onto it until he interrogates the one who claims to be the rightful owner. You must not just take the person's word for it that he is the owner, rather you must ascertain to the best of your ability that he is telling the truth. The additional level of interpretation is just the opposite from the simple reading of the *passuk*, but *halacha l'maaseh* there is no contradiction between the two.

The Torah also tells us (ibid 22:4) that if one notices someone else's lost article he may not walk away an act as if he simply did not see it; "You may not make believe that you did not see it" is the simple translation of the *passuk*. Here, too, the Torah *sheb'al peh* gives an additional level of interpretation which is just the reverse of the simple meaning; it explains the word "*v'hisalamta*" to mean "you may ignore the item and make believe that you did not see it". The Gemarah explains that the *passuk* means to tell us that sometimes you

may ignore it, and sometimes not, and then goes into detail to explain under what circumstances is it permissible to make believe that you did not notice the other person's lost item.

We usually assume that the Aramaic Targum Onkelus is only giving peshuto shel mikrah. Rav Soloveitchik explained that Onkelus was an adult when he decided to convert so he had to sit in class with young children in cheder where the rebbe was teaching Chumash according to peshuto shel mikrah. On the passuk in Parshas Naso, where the Torah sh'baal peh gives the additional level of interpretation that the Kohanim are only obligated to duchen when the tzibbur requested the beracha from them, many editions of the Chumash we have this additional level of interpretation in the Targum Onkelus, who adds on a word "Kad - when", i.e. when the tzibbur will request a blessing of the Kohanim. In the Sefer Toldos Odom, which is a biography of R' Zelmeleh Volozhiner, the younger brother of R' Chaim Volozhiner, there are several divrei Torah from this prominent student of the Vilna Gaon. He suggests that the word "Kad" that appears in the Targum Onkelus was simply a typo. This passuk happens to be passuk twenty-three in chapter six of Bamidbar. Before the next passuk the typesetter put in the two letters kof and daled to imply that the next passuk is twenty-four. In typesetting ever so often letters float from one line to the other; so the letters kof and daled floated into the middle of passuk twenty-three in the Targum Onkelus, and it sounds as if Onkelus is saying that that was the peshuto shel mikrah. The two letters (kof and daled) do not belong in the middle of the passuk because Onkelus is always supposed to be giving the peshuto shel mikrah for young children learning has'cholas Chumash in cheder.

This point that ever so often we will have a passuk with more than one level of interpretation is one of the many aspects of the Torah sh'baal peh.

**Weekly Parsha**

**Nasso**

**by Rabbi Berel Wein**

The words of the rabbis that “One who sees the shame of the woman who was unfaithful should thereupon abstain from consuming wine” are well known and oft-repeated. The obvious meaning of this message is that in life everyone must drive defensively. Let no one allow one’s self to be found in compromising circumstances and to think that somehow one is immune from its consequences.

In our current world there are numerous shameful and sad examples of people in high office and great achievement who have been brought to shame and grief by the revelations of their indiscretions. The rabbis in Avot stated that there always is “an eye that sees us”— a constantly recording surveillance camera, if you will, that captures our movements and behavior. The public revelation of another’s sin should serve as a reminder to all of the consequences of that sin. The Torah that ordinarily is very protective of one’s right to privacy, even the rights of a sinner, chose to publicize the fate of the unfaithful woman in order to impress upon others the necessity of care and probity in all matters of life.

One should never say: ‘This can never happen to me.’ When it comes to the areas of human appetites and desires there are no automatic safeguards. Rather, only care, vigilance and avoidance of risk and compromising situations are the unique tools of prevention readily available. There is a clear connection that the rabbis make between witnessing sin and imbibing too much wine. Just as driving an automobile under the influence of alcohol and drugs is legally forbidden, so is life generally to be lived free of those types of influences. Addiction to alcohol was a rather rare occurrence in Jewish society over the ages. However acculturation and assimilation over the past century have made alcohol a problem in our current Jewish world. The idea of abstinence from wine as described in the parsha regarding the regimen of the nazir is meant to be taken generally as a message of moderation and good sense.

Like many other things in life, a little alcohol can be pleasurable and beneficial but a lot can be harmful and even lethal. The Torah holds up the faithless woman and the nazir as examples of the dangers that lurk in everyday life. It is essentially foolish for any human being to ignore these omnipresent temptations and dangers.

Again, we read in Avot that one should not trust one’s self even until the final moment of life. An abundance of over-confidence in one’s ability to withstand temptations of all sorts will always lead to unforeseen problems and sad consequences. All of human experience testifies to this conclusion.

Much of the modern world, including much of the current Jewish world as well, mocks and derides any type of defensive driving in personal life matters. The concept of personal freedom has morphed into a lifestyle where any restraints on personal behavior, reasonable as they may be, are attacked and derided. Fashions and mores may change with the times but human behavior does not, and the moral restraints the Torah imposes on us remain eternally valid and cogent.

Shabat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

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**The Courage to Engage with the World**

**Naso**

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

As mentioned in a previous Covenant & Conversation, there was an ongoing debate between the Sages as to whether the Nazirite – whose laws are outlined in this week’s Parsha – was to be praised or not.

Recall that the Nazirite was someone who voluntarily, usually for a specified period, undertook a special form of holiness. This meant that he was forbidden to consume wine or any grape products, to have a haircut and to defile himself by contact with the dead.

Naziriteship was essentially a renunciation of desire. Why someone would choose to do this is not clear. It may be that he wanted to protect

himself against drunkenness or to cure himself of alcoholism. It could be that he wanted to experience a higher form of holiness. Forbidden as he was to have contact with the dead, even for a close relative, he was in this respect in the same position as the High Priest. Becoming a Nazirite was one way in which a non-kohen could adopt kohen-like behaviour. Some Sages argued that the juxtaposition of the law of the Nazirite with that of the sotah, the woman suspected of adultery, hinted at the fact that there were people who became Nazirites to protect themselves from sexual immorality. Alcohol suppresses inhibitions and increases sexual desire.

Be that as it may, there were mixed views on whether it was a good thing or a bad one to become a Nazirite. On the one hand the Torah calls him “holy to God” (Num. 6:8). On the other, at the completion of his period of abstinence, he is commanded to bring a sin offering (Num. 6:13-14). From this, Rabbi Eliezer Hakappar Berebi, drew the following inference:

What is the meaning of the phrase, ‘And make atonement for him, because he sinned against the soul [usually translated as “by coming into contact with the dead”]. (Num. 6:11)’? Against which soul did he sin? We must conclude that it refers to denying himself the enjoyment of wine. 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. It follows that one who keeps fasting is called a sinner.

Ta’anit 11a; Nedarim 10a

Clearly R. Eliezer Hakappar is engaging in a polemic against asceticism in Jewish life. We do not know which groups he may have had in mind. Many of the early Christians were ascetics. So in some respects were the members of the Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls. Holy people in many faiths have chosen, in pursuit of spiritual purity, to withdraw from the world, its pleasures and temptations, fasting, afflicting themselves and living in caves, retreats, or monasteries.

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

The ambivalence of Jews toward the life of self-denial may therefore lie in the suspicion that it entered Judaism from the outside. There were 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 dualists, holding that the true God was not the creator of the universe and could not be reached within the universe. The physical world was the work of a lesser, and evil, deity. Hence holiness means withdrawing from the physical world, its pleasures, appetites and desires. 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 tendencies in Christianity and Islam.

What is remarkable however is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative. In the Laws of Ethical Character, Maimonides adopts the negative position of R. Eliezer Hakappar:

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

Hilchot De’ot 3:1

Yet in the same book, the Mishneh Torah, he writes:



“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.”

Hilchot Nezirut 10:14

How does any writer come to adopt so self-contradictory a position – let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer is profound. According to Maimonides, there is not one model of the virtuous life, but two. He calls them respectively the way of the saint (chassid) and the Sage (chacham). The saint is a person of extremes. Maimonides defines chessed as extreme behaviour – good behaviour, to be sure, but conduct in excess of what strict justice requires (Guide for the Perplexed III, ch. 52). So, for example, “If one avoids haughtiness to the utmost extent and becomes exceedingly humble, he is termed a saint (chassid)” (Hilchot De’ot 1:5).

The Sage is a completely different kind of person, one who follows the “golden mean”, the “middle way” of moderation and balance. He or she avoids the extremes of cowardice on the one hand, recklessness on the other, and thus acquires the virtue of courage. The Sage avoids both miserliness and renunciation of wealth, hoarding or giving away all they have, and thus becomes neither stingy nor foolhardy but generous. He or she knows the twin dangers of too much and too little – excess and deficiency. The Sage weighs conflicting pressures and avoids extremes.

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

A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But then what about supporting the members of the saint’s own family? A saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint’s fellow citizens? 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. But you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Indeed, saints are not really interested in society. They have chosen a different, lonely, self-segregating path. They are seeking personal salvation rather than collective redemption.

It is this deep insight that led Maimonides to his seemingly contradictory evaluations of the Nazirite. The Nazirite has chosen, at least for a period, to adopt a life of extreme self-denial. He is a saint, a chassid. He has adopted the path of personal perfection. That is noble, commendable, a high ideal.

But it is not the way of the sage – and you need sages if you seek to perfect society. The reason the sage is not an extremist is because he or she realises that there are other people at stake. There are the members of one’s own family; the others within one’s own community; there are colleagues at work; there is a country to defend and a nation to help build. The sage knows it is dangerous, even morally self-indulgent, to 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; 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 must bring an atonement offering.

Judaism makes room for individuals to escape from the temptations of the world. The supreme example is the Nazirite. But this is an exception, not the norm. To be a chacham, a sage, is to have the courage to engage with the world, despite all the spiritual risks, and to help bring a fragment of the Divine Presence into the shared spaces of our collective life.

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**Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Parshas Naso**

**Who’s on First? No One – They Are All Riding a Merry-Go-Round!**

Who’s on First? No One – They Are All Riding a Merry-Go-Round!

Parshas Naso contains Birkas Kohanim (the Priestly Blessing), immediately followed by the identical korbonos (sacrificial offerings) that each of the twelve nesi’im (tribal princes) brought on consecutive days during the Chanukas Hamizbayach (inauguration period of the altar / the Mishkan dedication).

What is the connection between these two Torah parshios? Why does the Torah place Birkas Kohanim right before the parsha of karbanos shel hanesi’im (the princes’ offerings)? Furthermore, we can specifically ask about the connection between karbanos shel hanesi’im and the very last pasuk of Birkas Kohanim, immediately preceding the karbanos shel hanesi’im, namely the pasuk “v’yasem lecha shalom” (and establish peace for you) (Bamidbar 6:26). What do the karbanos of the nesi’im have to do with shalom?

In addition, why are there certain differences among the otherwise identical korbonos that the nesi’im brought? Every nasi brought exactly the same korban, and yet the Torah spells out the exact same details of the offerings twelve times. When I was a little boy, I used to think that this is the hardest parsha to have as your Bar Mitzvah parsha because, with 176 pesukim, it is the longest parsha to lein! However, when I discovered what is in the parsha, I realized that it is not really so hard to lein because we repeat the same six pesukim twelve times!

Nonetheless, there are slight differences. One difference is that while the Torah identifies each of the final eleven nesi’im as “nasi” (the prince of his specific tribe), by the first nasi (Nachshon ben Aminadav of Shevet Yehudah), the pasuk does not mention that he was the nasi. Another difference is that by Shevet Yehuda, the pasuk begins v’korbanu k’a’ras kesef achas (And his offering was one silver bowl...). Ironically, the conjunctive vov does not appear where we might expect it by princes #2-12 (connecting one nasi’s korban to the next), but rather only by the first nasi from Shevet Yehudah, where we would least expect it (connecting the entire topic of karbanos shel hanesi’im to Birkas Kohanim). Why would that be?

There is a beautiful Kli Yakar on this pasuk, which says that the “vov” at the beginning of the korban of the first nasi is indicative of a connection between karbanos shel hanesi’im and the bracha (blessing) of shalom, which appears at the end of Birkas Kohanim, for if there is no peace, there is nothing.

The last Mishna in Shas (at the end of Tractate Uktzin) says that the Ribbono Shel Olam did not find a more appropriate receptacle to hold bracha for the world than shalom. The Medrash says that shalom is so critical that even the deceased need shalom, as it is written “And you will come to your fathers in shalom.” This does not mean that the deceased fight, but rather, if those who are still living fight with one another then the deceased have no peace either. Unfortunately, such stories occur on a daily basis. Someone dies, there is a contested will, the children are not happy with the division and families get into the most bitter of arguments. The Medrash is saying that if these problems of the living are not solved, even the dead will have no peace.

Then the Kli Yakar writes that all the other brachos of Birkas Kohanim are lacking until the bracha of shalom at the end, and then, after Birkas Kohanim concludes with shalom, the Torah immediately begins another parsha, which also involves shalom (that of the korbonos hanesiim). That is why the latter section is connected to the prior section with the connective vov.

However, what is the connection between the korbonos hanesi’im and the idea of shalom? The connection is that it was not so obvious which nasi should be the first one to offer his korbonos. The Medrash says that Reuvain said “I should go first because I am the bechor.” However, the Ribono Shel Olam told Reuven that he would not go first because Yehuda was the melech (king) and the melech needs to go first. Reuven then said “Okay, so I will go second.” Again, the Ribono Shel Olam told him “No. Yissacher comes after Yehuda because he is the shevet of limud haTorah (Torah learning). Reuven was then willing to settle for third place but again he was told that Zevulun merited the third spot, because he supports Yissacher.

So, it was not so simple. As a matter of fact, the Medrash says that the twelve shevatim correspond with the twelve mazalos (constellations).

The mazalos don't stay in the same Heavenly position. They rotate around and around. Chazal say that even though Yehuda brought the first korban, he wasn't really first because the rotation of shevatim was like a merry-go-round. When a merry-go-round is rotating, there is no first and there is no second. Each horse in the merry-go-round moves in a circular movement, constantly changing position, just like the heavenly constellations.

The Medrash is saying that this is how they solved the jealousy problem. Even though Nachshon Ben Aminadav went first, he was only first temporarily. That is why, says the Kli Yakar, Yehudah's korban begins with the conjunctive vov – "v'korbano" (And his korban). Why 'And'? His was the first korban! The answer is that the 'and' does join his korban to the next nasi's korban and then to the next one because they were all going around. And that is also why even though it says nasi this shevet and nasi that shevet, by Nachshon ben Aminadav, it does not call him nasi Yehudah. This is because even though someone had to be 'first' but in the end, he wasn't really first, because they were all rotating. That is the "semichus haparshiyos" between "v'yasem lecha shalom" and the parsha of hakravas hakorbanos. If you don't have shalom, you don't have anything.

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### **Rabbi Eliezer Melamed**

#### **The World's Existence Depends on the Giving of the Torah Revivim**

Without the Torah the world could not have fulfilled its destiny \* After the Torah had already greatly influenced the world, it seemed to many of the Jews that the people of Israel had completed their role \* The current war expresses the deep crisis, and forces us to return to fundamentals \* Our Sages instituted that outside the Land of Israel every holiday should be observed for two days \* When a visitor has a deep connection to the Land, while he is in the Land he should conduct himself according to the custom of the Land of Israel

Our Sages said that the world was hanging in the balance until the sixth day of Sivan, if Israel would accept the Torah on it – it would exist, and if not, it would return to the primordial state of chaos and disorder (Shabbat 88a). This is because without the Torah, the world could not have fulfilled its destiny. It would have remained enslaved to the shackles of the evil inclination, without the ability to begin a process of moral repair that would bring it to its redemption.

We will illustrate the tremendous influence of the Torah in three areas:

1) Thanks to the guidance of the Torah, the value of marriage was established throughout the entire world. Without the Torah, phenomena of marriages involving incest within the family were common. Therefore, the halakha had to rule that a brother and sister, father and daughter, or mother and son who were married and converted, must separate.

2) The abolition of slavery: One of the principles that the Torah teaches us is that repair requires a deep process, and as long as according to the prevailing consciousness based on reality, the existence of slavery is necessary for the survival of many people, because without slavery the poor would die of hunger, and members of a defeated nation would be put to death – the Torah does not command to abolish slavery. But the Torah commands to treat the slave with respect, who has a soul, and to preserve his right to live and fulfill God's commandments. Not only that, but the Torah itself was given to a nation of slaves who by God's word went out to freedom. Thus, in a gradual process the world progressed to the abolition of slavery.

3) In those times, kings established the law and could bend it as they wished, and judges perverted justice for the strong and wealthy. In a gradual process the commandment was accepted that justice must do equal justice for all, and it is forbidden to discriminate against the poor and needy in judgment. And even the king himself is subject to the law, and therefore, he must write for himself a Torah scroll that would accompany him all the days of his life, and not deviate from its instructions.

The Crisis in Modern Times

After the Torah had already greatly influenced the world, through the religions that accepted part of its values (Christianity and Islam), and through the various thinkers who developed political theory and moral theory in the light of the Torah, it seemed to many of the Jews that the people of Israel had completed their role. There is no longer a need to cling to Jewish identity and preserve the consciousness of exile, and it is possible to join the enlightened nations, and through them, continue to repair the world in the light of the morality of the Torah and the Prophets. Thus began a serious and dangerous process of secularization and assimilation, and came the Communist revolution, and after it, the Holocaust. Even in democratic countries, a dangerous process began of the disintegration of the family, identities and values, until it is clear to many that the world is still far from its repair. However, still, without understanding the Torah in its greatness, the process of assimilation continues.

#### **Let Us Return to Fundamentals**

The current war also expresses the deep crisis, and forces us to return to fundamentals. For years, the State of Israel tried to explain to the world that it is ready to compromise with the Arabs, and behold, when despite everything the Arabs attacked us and wickedly harmed civilians – contrary to all international conventions – many in the world do not justify our war to destroy the enemy.

The reason is simple: almost all the official representatives of Israel do not express our absolute connection to the entire Land of Israel, a connection that stems from God's word that bequeathed the Land to our forefathers, and to us. Except for a few ambassadors, like Dror Eydar and Tzipi Hotovely, our representatives do not mention the verses of the Torah, and do not quote the words of the Prophets who prophesied thousands of years ago about the return of the people of Israel to their Land, in order to make it flourish, and bring blessing to the world. The Bible is the most important and famous book in the world, but instead of speaking about it, and expressing the greatness of the miracle of the fulfillment of the Prophets' words, our representatives speak about security and readiness for compromises, without an answer to the Arabs who claim that we came to a foreign land, and dispossessed its inhabitants. Out of wishful thinking, they describe the conflict with the Arabs as a neighborly conflict that can be solved by compromise, instead of explaining to the world that the Muslim Arabs who fight us, fight the people of Israel and the great idea of the Torah of Israel, and to a large extent, all the rest of the world that is not Muslim.

#### **The Holiday of Shavuot**

May it be God's will that we merit on the coming holiday of Shavuot for good, to return and connect to the holy Torah, and each person, according to what is suitable for him, will add regularity in Torah study, and through this, we will understand our national destiny – to settle the Land, to do charity and justice, to defeat our enemies, and to bring blessing to the world.

#### **Yom Tov Sheni Shel Galuyot**

Our Sages instituted that outside the Land of Israel, every holiday should be observed for two days. The foundation of the institution is that the timing of the holiday depends on the sanctification of the month, and since in the Diaspora they did not know when they sanctified the month in the Land, on the 30th of the previous month or the 31st, they instituted that they should practice two days because of the doubt. However, this institution also had a spiritual foundation. The main revelation of the holiness of Israel and the holidays is in the Land of Israel, while outside the Land of Israel, in order to absorb the holiness of the holiday, they need to observe it for two days. This is analogous to a flashlight, that when it illuminates a close object, its light is strong and focused on a small area, but when it illuminates a distant object, its light weakens, and spreads over a large area. Similarly, the light of the holidays is revealed in the Land of Israel in one focused day, while outside the Land of Israel, their light weakens, and spreads over two days (Derech Mitzvotcha 114a).

#### **Yom Tov Sheni for Diaspora Residents Who Are in the Land**

The poskim (Jewish law arbiters) disagreed about the law of a Diaspora resident who ascended to the Land of Israel for a visit. Some say that

when he is in the Land, his status is like a resident of the Land of Israel, and he should observe only one day of the holiday (Chacham Tzvi 167; Shulchan Aruch HaRav 496:11), and according to the majority of poskim, since his place of residence is outside the Land, even when he visits the Land, his status is like a Diaspora resident, and this is the practice (Birchei Yosef 496:7; Mishnah Berurah 496:13).

And although according to the basic law it would have been possible to be lenient, since the law of Yom Tov Sheni is rabbinic, and the rule is that in case of doubt regarding rabbinic law we are lenient, the custom was accepted to be stringent according to the rule that we follow the opinion of the majority of poskim. And since this is the custom, Diaspora residents who are in the Land on Yom Tov Sheni even recite the special blessings for the holiday.

However, it seems that when the visitor has a deep connection to the Land, and therefore, there is some chance that he will choose to immigrate to the Land, while he is in the Land, he should conduct himself according to the custom of the Land of Israel.

Those with Connection Who Are Exempt from Yom Tov Sheni

1) One who comes to the Land for a year of study, his long stay in the Land makes him a resident of the Land of Israel during his stay, and every time he visits the Land, he should observe only one day.

2) One who visits the Land from time to time, when his visits accumulate to a year, he is already somewhat a local resident, and from now on, during the holidays when he stays in the Land, he should observe only one day.

3) One who comes to visit the Land with the intention to immigrate to the Land when this becomes possible, even if he visits for a short time, and years will pass before he can realize his plan, during his stay in the Land, he should conduct himself like a resident of the Land.

4) A visitor who has children or parents who immigrated to the Land, is considered as having a connection to the Land, and during his stay in the Land, he should conduct himself like a resident of the Land.

5) One who buys an apartment in the Land of Israel to live in it during his visits, even though his visits have not yet accumulated to a year, by virtue of his apartment, while he is in the Land, his status is like a resident of the Land of Israel.

6) An expatriate who established his home outside the Land, even if he has been living there for decades, since for a significant period of his life he lived in the Land, as long as there is any chance that he will return to the Land, when he visits the Land, he should conduct himself like residents of the Land of Israel.

However, when they are outside the Land, since in practice their main residence is outside the Land, their status is like Diaspora residents in every matter, and they are obligated to observe Yom Tov Sheni (these laws are explained in Peninei Halakha: Moadim 9:8).

Laws for One Who Stays Awake All Night

One who stays awake all night, needs to wash his hands before the morning prayer. According to the custom of Sephardic Jews, he should not recite a blessing on the washing, and according to the custom of Ashkenazi Jews, the recommendation is to relieve oneself before prayer, and touch one of the covered places on the body that have sweated a little since the previous washing, and thereby become obligated in washing hands with a blessing.

Birchot Ha'Torah (Torah blessings): The prevalent custom is according to Rabbenu Tam, that even one who did not sleep at all throughout the previous day, since he comes to pray the morning prayer of the new day, he recites the Torah blessings. And one who wants to fulfill all opinions, should hear the blessings from his friend, and intend to fulfill his obligation thereby.

Birchot Ha'Shachar (Morning blessings): Even one who stays awake all night recites all the morning blessings, because these blessings were instituted for the general good that exists in the world, and not specifically for the personal good of the one reciting the blessing.

However, some say that one who did not sleep should not recite 'Elokai Neshamah' and 'Hama'avir Sheinah', and therefore, ideally, if there is someone there who slept and is about to recite them, it is better to hear them from him, and intend to fulfill his obligation thereby. And if not,

he should recite them himself. And an Ashkenazi Jew who knows that his father's custom is not to recite them himself, should not recite them.

Time of the blessings: According to halakha, we say the Birchot Ha'Shachar and Birchot Ha'Torah blessings close to the morning prayer. And according to Kabbalah, they customarily say Birchot Ha'Shachar after Chatzot (midnight), and Birchot Ha'Torah after Amud Ha'Shachar (dawn).

Eating and Drinking at Night and Before Morning Prayer

During the night, one is permitted to eat and drink without limitation. And from the half hour close to Amud Ha'Shachar, it is forbidden to establish a meal, lest one be drawn into continuing eating his meal. This includes also being forbidden to eat bread or cakes in the amount of more than a ke'beitzah, but it is permitted to eat, without establishing a meal, vegetables, fruits, and grain dishes, without limitation.

From the time dawn rises, it is forbidden to eat anything and also forbidden to drink a flavored beverage, and even one who began to eat or drink before then – must stop. Only water is permitted to drink after dawn rises (one who needs coffee in order to concentrate in prayer, may drink coffee without sugar, before prayer).

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Although this article may be a little late for those sending out wedding invitations for this year's June weddings, it is still helpful in many other ways.

**What May I Not Write?**

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

Question #1: Invitations

"I was told that I should not include quotations from pesukim on my daughter's wedding invitation. Yet, I see that 'everyone' does! Could you please explain the halacha?"

Question #2: Sukkah Decorations

"Someone told me that sukkah decorations should not include any pesukim. Is this true? My children bring home decorations like this from school."

To answer these questions, we need to explain several halachic issues, including:

1. The original prohibition against writing Torah she'be'al peh, and the later "heter" to write and publish it.
2. The concern about producing divrei Torah that will not be treated appropriately.

The original prohibition against writing Torah she'be'al peh

Originally, it was prohibited to write down any Torah she'be'al peh (Gittin 60b), except for an individual's personal notes recorded for one's own review (Rambam, Introduction to Mishneh Torah; see also Rashi, Shabbos 6b s.v. Megilas). The Oral Torah was not permitted to be taught from a written format. Torah she'be'al peh was meant to be just that -- Torah taught completely without any written text. Thus, Moshe Rabbeinu taught us the halachos of the Torah orally, and Klal Yisrael memorized them. Although each student wrote private notes for the sake of review, the Oral Torah was never taught from these notes.

The prohibition against writing Torah she'be'al peh included writing midrashim, prayers and the texts of berachos, as well as translations and commentaries of the Written Torah, since all these are considered Torah she'be'al peh. In those times, all these devarim she'be'kedusha were memorized, and the only parts of the Torah that were written were the pesukim themselves.

The Gemara (Gittin 60b) records this halacha as follows: Devarim she'be'al peh, iy atah resha'ie le'omram bichsav, "You are not permitted to transmit the Oral Torah in writing." The Ritva (ad loc.) explains that this is because divrei Torah taught verbally are understood more precisely, whereas text learning is often misunderstood.

Another prohibition forbade writing the books of Tanach except when writing a complete sefer (Gittin 60a). Thus, one could not write out a parsha or a few pesukim for learning, although it was permitted to write an entire Chumash, such as Sefer Shemos. Similarly, one could not write out part of a sefer of Navi to study or to read the haftarah. In order to recite the haftarahs regularly, every shul needed to own a scroll of each of the eight Nevi'im (Yehoshua, Shoftim, Shemuel, Melachim, Yeshayahu, Yirmiyahu, Yechezkel, and Terei Asar) in order to read the haftarah from the appropriate sefer. Similarly, a person who wished to study Shiras Devorah or the prayer of Channah had to write the entire Sefer Shoftim or Sefer Shemuel.

Why do we no longer abide by this prohibition?

Chazal realized that it was becoming increasingly difficult for people to learn Torah and to observe certain other mitzvos, such as reading the haftarah. Therefore, they ruled that the prohibition against writing Torah must be superseded by the more vital need of keeping Torah alive in klal Yisrael. This takanah was based on the pasuk, Eis la'asos laShem heifeiru torasecha, which is understood to mean "It is the time to act for Hashem, since Your Torah is being uprooted" (Tehillim 119:126). In order to facilitate Torah study, they permitted

writing individual verses and teaching Oral Torah from written texts. We will refer to this *takanah*, or heter, as “*eis la’asos*.”

The first part of the Oral Torah to be formally written for structured teaching was the Mishnah, edited by Rebbe (Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi) at the end of the period of the *tanna'im* (circa 390/200 c.e.). To quote the Rambam, “Rebbe gathered all the laws and explanations that had been studied and interpreted by every *beis din* since the days of Moshe Rabbeinu and organized the Mishnah from them. He (Rebbe) proceeded to teach publicly the scholars of his generation from this text, so that the Oral Torah would not be forgotten from the Jewish people. Why did Rebbe change the method that had been used previously? Because he saw that the numbers of Torah students were decreasing, the difficulties facing the Jewish people were on the rise, the Roman Empire was becoming stronger, and the Jews were becoming increasingly scattered. He therefore authored one work that would be in the hands of all the students, to make it easier to study and remember the Oral Torah” (Introduction to *Mishneh Torah*).

We see that Rebbe instituted the first formalized use of a text to teach the Oral Torah, because of the new circumstances confronting *klal Yisrael*. After Rebbe’s days, Chazal gradually permitted writing down other texts, first Aggadah (ethical teachings of the Gemara), later the entire Gemara, and still later, the explanations and commentaries on the Gemara.

As a very important aside, we see from the end of the quoted Rambam, “to make it easier to study and remember the Oral Torah,” that even though it is now permitted to write down the Mishnah and Gemara, it is still important to know the entire Oral Torah by heart. The Rambam seems to explain that the Oral Torah that each individual is required to know includes all the accepted conclusions of the Torah *she’be’al peh*.

In the context of the rule of *eis la’asos*, the Gemara tells us the following story: Rabbi Yochanan and Reish Lakeish (*amora'im* in Eretz Yisrael shortly after the time of Rebbe) were studying from a Talmudic anthology of ethical teachings, a “*sefer Aggadah*.”

The Gemara asks, “How could they study from such a book, since it is prohibited to learn Torah from a written text?” The Gemara replies, “Since it is now impossible (to retain all the knowledge of the Torah without a written text), ‘it is the time to act for Hashem, since Your Torah is being uprooted’” (Gittin 60a). We see that the Gemara initially assumed that it was still prohibited to study Torah from a written text, except for the study of Mishnah. The Gemara responded that the prohibition had been further relaxed because it had become even more difficult to learn Torah than it had been in the days of Rebbe.

The Gemara relates a similar episode concerning the recital of the *haftarah*. As mentioned above, it was originally forbidden to write part of a book of Tanach, and, therefore, every *shul* needed to own scrolls of all the *Nevi'im* in order to read the *haftarahs*. However, as communities became more scattered, making this increasingly difficult, the Gemara permitted the writing of special *haftarah* books that contained only the *haftarah* texts, but not the text of the entire *Nevi'im*. This, too, was permitted because of *eis la’asos* (Gittin 60a).

What else is permitted because of *eis la’asos*?

We see that in order to facilitate Torah learning, Chazal permitted the writing of the Oral Torah and parts of the books of the Written Torah. To what extent did they override the original prohibition?

This is a dispute among early *poskim*, some contending that it is permitted to write only as much as is necessary to prevent Torah from being forgotten. According to this opinion, it is prohibited to write or print even *tefillos* that include *pesukim*, when they are not intended for learning Torah (Rif and *Milchemes Hashem*, Shabbos Chapter 16). This opinion also prohibits writing or printing a translation of Tanach into any language other than the original Aramaic Targum, because a proper translation constitutes Torah *she’be’al peh*. In addition, this opinion prohibits the printing of a *parsha* of Chumash in order to teach Torah, since one could write or print the entire *sefer* (Rambam, *Hilchos Sefer Torah* 7:14; Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 283:2).

Other *poskim* permit the writing of any Torah that one uses to learn. Thus, they permit writing a single *parsha* in order to teach Torah (Taz, Yoreh Deah 283:1; Shach, Yoreh Deah 283:3) and the translating of Tanach into any language. These *poskim* rally support to their opinion from the fact that Rav Saadya Gaon wrote *sefarim* in Arabic, including commentaries on Tanach (Ran, Shabbos, Chapter 16).

Both opinions agree that it is prohibited to publish translations of Tanach that will not be used to spread Torah knowledge (Ran, Shabbos, Chapter 16).

How does this prohibition affect us?

All of the opinions quoted above prohibit writing disparate parts of the Written Torah and any of the Oral Torah in situations where there is no Torah benefit. For this reason, early *poskim* note that one may not embroider a *pasuk* or a *beracha* on a *talis*, since writing this does not serve to teach Torah (Rabbeinu Yerucham, quoted by Beis Yosef, and Taz, Yoreh Deah 283:3. It should be noted that the *Levush* is more lenient, see Shach, Yoreh Deah 283:6.).

Another concern

There is an additional reason why one should not embroider *pesukim* on a *talis*. Since the *talis* could be brought into an unclean place, it is not proper to have a *pasuk* written on it.

A third concern – causing the words of Torah to be destroyed

To explain this concept, we must first introduce a surprising statement of the Gemara: *Ko’svei berachos kesorfei Torah*, “Those who write *berachos* (to enable people to recite them) are considered as if they burnt the Torah” (Shabbos 115b). What does this Gemara mean? We would think that these individuals have performed a tremendous *mitzvah*, since they have enabled people to recite *berachos* correctly!

This statement was authored at the time when it was still prohibited to write down the Oral Torah. At that time, it was forbidden to teach any *halachos* in written form, even the correct text of a *beracha*. Everything had to be taught orally. Therefore, the Gemara states that by writing a *beracha*, even without the name of Hashem (Shu’t Tashbeitz #2), one is violating the *halacha* by teaching Torah *she’be’al peh* in writing.

But why is it considered like “burning the Torah?”

This Gemara introduces a new prohibition. Someone who writes prohibited Torah works is considered culpable afterwards, if those *divrei Torah* become consumed by a fire! Writing unnecessarily, which results in subsequent destruction, is akin to burning Torah.

We know that it is prohibited to erase or destroy the Name of Hashem (Shabbos 120b), and that this prohibition includes erasing or destroying words of Torah and all other holy writings, including notes of Torah classes, stories of Chazal, *sefarim* for learning, “*benschers*,” etc., even if they do not include Hashem’s Name (Shu’t Tashbeitz #2). Therefore, even small *benschers*, *tefillos haderech* and similar items published with abbreviated names of Hashem are still considered *divrei Torah* imbued with *kedusha*. For the above reason, one must treat these items with proper care and dignity and place them in *sheimos* when they become unusable.

It is also prohibited to cause destruction of words of the Torah indirectly by writing or publishing *divrei Torah* that might subsequently be destroyed. This prohibition exists whenever there is insufficient reason to write or publish the *divrei Torah*. This explains the Gemara’s statement, quoted above, that someone who wrote *berachos* when it was prohibited to do so is held responsible, if the words of Torah are subsequently destroyed.

Although, nowadays, we are permitted to write and print *berachos* and *siddurim* to enable people to recite them properly, it is forbidden to produce these items unnecessarily. It is certainly prohibited to put *pesukim*, parts of *pesukim*, or *divrei Torah* in places where it is likely that they will be treated improperly. Both of these reasons preclude writing *pesukim* on *Sukkah* decorations, unless one can assume that they will be properly cared for.

How much of a *pasuk* is considered to be *divrei Torah*?

Even three words in a row are considered a *pasuk* that may not be written without sufficient reason (see Gittin 6b). However, if the letters are improperly or incompletely formed or spelled, it is permitted (Shu’t Tashbeitz #2).

For this reason, some people print on invitations the following, *Naaleh es Yerushalayim al rosh simchaseinu*, “We will place our memories of Yerushalayim above our celebrations.” This is permitted, because it is not a quotation of a *pasuk*, although it is similar to the *posuk* in Tehillim 137:6.

There is another solution that may be used: rearranging the words of the *pasuk* so that they are not in the correct order. When doing this, one must be certain that one does not have three words in the proper order.

I once received an invitation which stated on the cover, *Yom zeh asah Hashem nismecha venagila bo*, “This day was made by Hashem. We shall rejoice and celebrate on it.” The person who prepared this quotation had done his *halachic* research. Although very similar to the *pasuk*, “*Zeh hayom asah Hashem nagilah v’nismecha bo*” (Tehillim 118:24), the words of the original *pasuk* were transposed in such a way that there were no longer three consecutive words together!

Some authorities permit printing *pesukim* if marks are placed between the words, or if the words are not in a straight line. They feel that these arrangements of words do not constitute *pesukim* (cf. Shu’t Tashbeitz #2 who disagrees).

Some producers of “*lulav bags*” are meticulous not to quote three words of the *pasuk* in order. Thus, they write, “*Ul’kachtem lachem... kapos temarim...us’machtem*” avoiding writing three consecutive words of a *pasuk* (Vayikra 23:40). This is permitted.

Invitations

Perhaps people who print *pesukim* on invitations rely on the fact that this is considered mere poetic writing style, or that the printer has no intent to produce *divrei kedusha*. However, recent authorities prohibit this practice. In Sivan 5750/June ’90, an open letter signed by the *poskei hador* warned that advertisements, invitations, receipts, signs, and raffle tickets should not include *pesukim* or parts of *pesukim*, except when the *pasuk* is written as part of literary style, with no connection to its context.

We live in an age of proliferation of written material. Many pamphlets have the positive value of spreading Torah. We must be careful to show our honor to Hashem by treating pesukim and divrei Torah with proper respect. May we always merit to demonstrate Hashem's honor in the appropriate way!

[CS – Addition:

www.jewishpress.com **A Vision -- By Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser - 10 Sivan 5785 – June 5, 2025**

Hashem asks Aharon to direct the Kohanim in every generation to bless Bnei Yisrael (Birkas Kohanim) with the three-line blessing, "May Hashem bless you and safeguard you; may Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you; may Hashem turn His countenance to you and establish peace for you" (Bamidbar 6:23-26).

The Ba'al Ha'Akeidah (R' Yitzchak Arama 1420-1494, a Spanish rabbi and author) asks: Why is there a need for Birkas Kohanim? What is the purpose of this commandment? Hashem is the source of all blessing in this world. Does Hashem need the assistance of mortal man to bless His children?

The tzaddik gives a remarkable observation. He explains that an individual's success and all the good he has in life is primarily contingent on the strength of his emunah. It is a conviction and confidence that all the blessing and beneficence come to this world from Hashem, and it is He alone who guides the world. Nothing happens by chance, is driven by man, or influenced by the constellations. One's success is not because the individual is so smart, charismatic, or capable. It is only the power and force of Hashem that grants man contentment and prosperity. Likewise, when a person experiences challenging situations presented by neighbors, friends, or family, they are merely messengers from Heaven.

That is the meaning of "may Hashem turn His countenance to you." May Hashem's messengers serve to heighten and increase our emunah that, indeed, everything – good and otherwise – come from Hashem.

With regard to the Birkas Kohanim, the Zohar comments that actions performed in this earthly world inspire astounding conduct in Heaven. When the Kohanim spread their fingers to bless the Jewish people, it rouses the Divine Presence to dwell upon His people. It is a favorable time in the upper and lower worlds, a moment when strict judgment is reversed to mercy, because when the Kohanim ascend to the bimah, mercy abounds in all of the worlds. One who is affected by a dream can have his dream ameliorated.

R' Shimshon Fuchs was giving a shiur in Eretz Yisrael. After the shiur, one of the participants, dressed in a uniform, came over to speak to him. "Tomorrow, I return to the front lines to join my battalion after a few days off. However, I must tell you something that is difficult for me to understand or to explain logically.

We were searching one of the buildings in Gaza for terrorists or hidden weapons. As the commanding officer, I entered the building first, followed by my troop. We saw there were no hidden weapons or people hiding anywhere, and we prepared to take the stairs leading up to the second floor. And then," he paused, "something crazy happened.

"As I led the soldiers up the stairs, I suddenly saw an elderly man, who looked like a rav, coming down the stairs towards me. He had a long white beard, and wore a rabbinical coat and hat. I was certain I was hallucinating. A rav with a long white beard in a building in Gaza?

"We all drew our weapons, as we thought it was a disguised terrorist. With a compassionate look, the 'rav' begged me in Hebrew not to go up the stairs because it was very dangerous. I told him to move out of the way and not to interfere with our search. However, the 'rav' insisted, 'Sakanah, sakanah – it is dangerous. Do not go up.'

"What should I do at that moment? We were under tremendous pressure, as we could be ambushed in an instant, or the building could explode. However, his sincerity pierced my heart, and I believed that he had been sent from Heaven to save us. I just had this feeling that we should listen to his pleas.

"I immediately ordered my men to leave the building," the officer related in a choked voice. "We rushed out of the building, and it was not more than two minutes later that the entire structure exploded and was totally destroyed.

"I turned to another officer, who was not yet observant, and asked him, 'When you experience such miracles, why don't you publicize it?'

"He answered me, 'You know that we are forbidden to reveal many aspects of our ground operations. And if I would talk about this, people would not believe me and think I'm not normal.'

The officer concluded, "I see that you are a rav who believes in Hashem, so I am telling you this. You should know that there are many other miracles that my friends and I have witnessed, but we don't speak about most of them."

When Naomi was left a poor widow after the death of her wealthy husband, Elimelech, in Moav, she decided to return to her hometown, Bais Lechem. She states (Megillas Rus 1:21), "I went away full, and Hashem has brought me back empty." The Shevet Sofer explains her words in the context of what we have discussed.

When a person is successful in this world, he believes "I went away full," i.e. he enjoys affluence and prosperity due to his own merits. However, when he is not successful, and he is not doing well, "Hashem has brought me back empty," i.e. his failure is due to Hashem. Once the person acknowledges that his decline comes from Hashem, he can then reach the awareness that, in fact, there is nothing great or small, good or otherwise, that does not come directly from Hashem. May we all merit great blessing in all aspects of our lives.

[CS – I have added this late-breaking dvar torah:

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### **Our Light, Not Our Darkness, Scares Us Most**

Fear Not Your Power: An Individual Is a Community; Why Ephraim Can Bring a Shabbos Sacrifice

**By: Rabbi YY Jacobson**

The Nuremberg Trials

In the film "Judgment at Nuremberg," American judge Dan Haywood sentences Ernst Janning, an important legal figure in Germany even before the rise of Hitler, to life in prison for condemning an innocent Jewish doctor to death in 1935. Janning pleads to Haywood that he was unaware of the magnitude of the Nazi horror and that he would have never assisted Hitler had he known what the monster was scheming.

"Those people, those millions of people," Janning begged for his freedom, "I never knew it would come to that. You must believe it."

To which Judge Haywood replied: "It came to that the first time you sentenced a man to death you knew to be innocent."

100 Million? Big Deal

The story is told that before Mao-Tse-Tung (1893-1976), the founder and leader of the People's Republic of China, brought the Revolution to China and installed the Communist system there, he was warned that millions of Chinese could starve until they got things working properly.

To which Mao responded, "If I have to lose 100 million Chinese peasants for the revolution, then it's worth it."

Indeed, during his leadership, from 1949 to 1976, it is estimated that 70 million of his own people perished.

This is one type of leader: one who can give up 100 million people, as long as his goals are accomplished. Joseph was taught by his father a vastly different message: One person is the world. Taking the life of one person is extinguishing the light of the entire world.

This message is conveyed with astounding depth in the weekly Torah portion, Naso.

The Seventh Day

In the listing of the offerings brought by the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel, in dedication of the newly erected Sanctuary, recorded in detail in Naso, the seventh leader is from the tribe of Ephraim.

נָשָׂא ז, מִן: בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי נָשָׂא לְבָנֵי אֶפְרַיִם אֶלֶּיֶשָׁמָה בֶן-עַמִּיהוּד

On the seventh day, the leader was of the sons of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud.

Which begs a great question:

The leaders of the tribes began offering their contributions on the first day of the month of Nissan, the day the Sanctuary was erected, which was on a Sunday.[1] This means that Ephraim brought his offering on

the seventh day of the week, on the Shabbos. But on Shabbos you are not allowed to bring an offering. On Shabbos you may not slaughter an animal, nor can you place meat in a fire, nor can you cook meat—all components necessary for an offering in the Sanctuary!

To be sure, when the Sanctuary stood in the desert, and the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the korbanot (animal and meal offerings) offered on its altar came under two categories: A) "Individual offerings" (korbanot yachid) brought by private citizens, such as the "generosity offering" brought as a donation, the "thanksgiving offering" brought to express one's gratitude for a personal salvation, or the "sin offering" brought to atone for a transgression. B) "Communal offerings" (korbanot tzibbur), such as the daily morning and afternoon offerings brought by the collective nation of Israel from a fund to which every Jew contributed an annual half-shekel.

Torah law forbids the bringing of individual offerings on Shabbat, but permits and obligates the bringing of communal offerings on the holy day.[2]

The offerings brought by the leaders of the tribes were individual offerings, brought by private citizens, paid by their own money, based on their own volition, not communal offerings which are always brought on behalf of the entire people.[3] So, here we face a fascinating question! How then can the leader of Ephraim be allowed to bring these sacrifices on Shabbos?[4]

The Midrash Rabah on this verse raises this enigma.

במדבר רבה נשא יד, א בסופו: דבר אחר, ואפרים מעוז ראשי, מדבר בנשיא אפרים, שהקריב קרבנו לתקנת המזבח ביום השבת, שנאמר: ביום השביעי נשיא לבני אפרים וגו', מנין שיום השבת היה, לפי שפירא אומרנו אותו יום שהתחילו הנשיאים יום ראשון היה, מכאן את למד שיום שביעי להקריבה שבת היה, שלא תאמר היאך חלל את השבת נהלו אין קרבן יחיד דוחה את השבת וזה הקריב בשבת, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא לא על פיו עשה, שאני אפרתי למשה (נשא ז, יא) נשיא אחד ליום נשיא אחד ליום יקריבו את קרבנם לתקנת המזבח בלא תפסק יקריבו זה אחר זה, הני: ואפרים מעוז ראשי, לך נאמר: ביום השביעי נשיא לבני אפרים וגו'.

במדבר רבה נשא יד, ב: דבר אחר, מי הקדימני ואשלם, מדבר ביוסף שהוא הקדים ולשמר את השבת עד שלא נתנה, וטבח טבח והכן (מקץ מג, טז), אמר רבי יוחנן ערב שבת היתה ואין הכן אלא לשבת, שנאמר (בשלח טז, ה) והיה ביום הששי והכינו וגו'. אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא, יוסף אהב שמירת את השבת עד שלא נתנה התורה, חידו שאני משלם לכן בנה שיהא מקריב קרבנו בשבת, מה שאין יחיד מקריב, ועלי לקבל קרבנו בראשון, הני: מי הקדימני ואשלם, ומנין שכן הוא, ממה שאמור בענין ביום השביעי נשיא לבני אפרים וגו'.

The answer the Midrash gives is intriguing, if enigmatic.

Ephraim was a son of Joseph. The tribe of Ephraim carried the genes and legacy of Joseph. When the brothers of Joseph came to Egypt to obtain food from him, he told the caretaker of his home to "slaughter a slaughtering and prepare a meal,"[5] which the sages understand to mean that he should cook and prepare all the food on Friday to be ready for the Shabbos.

Rabbi Yochanan states that it was Friday afternoon and Joseph told his people to prepare a Shabbos meal. [The word "hachen," prepare, refers to a Shabbos meal, as Moses tells the Jews in the desert: "And it will be on the seventh day, they should prepare, v'heichinu, ahead of time, that which they will bring".][6] Thus, in the entire Torah, Joseph is the first person who is described as preparing a Shabbos meal ahead of time. This was before the Torah was given. So G-d said: "Joseph! You kept Shabbos even before it was given, I will pay you back, that your descendant will offer his sacrifice on Shabbos, which is not the case of ordinary individuals who cannot offer private sacrifices on Shabbos."

Yet this is so strange. What is the logic behind saying that since Joseph kept Shabbos, and prepared for Shabbos on Friday, his great-grandson would bring a sacrifice that ordinarily violates the sanctity of Shabbos?[7] If anything, Joseph should be rewarded by descendants who increase in the sanctity of Shabbos.

What is more, the sages teach that all the Patriarchs observed the entire Torah before it was given, including Shabbos.[8] What then was the uniqueness of Joseph?

I will present to you one possible answer, based on an address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe on Shabbos Parshas Metzora, 7 Nissan, 5741 (1981) and on 19 Kislev 5721 (December 8, 1960).[9]

The Test

For this we have to recall the fateful story of Joseph and the uniqueness of his observing Shabbos in Egypt.

Joseph, an extremely handsome young man, Genesis tells us, attracts the lustful imagination of his master's wife. She desperately tries to engage him in a relationship, yet he steadfastly refuses her. Then came the fateful day, "When he entered the house to do his work and none of the household staff was inside. She grabbed him by his cloak and pleaded, 'lie with me.' He ran away from her, leaving his cloak in her hand, and he fled outside." [10]

Humiliated and furious, she used the cloak as evidence that it was he who attempted to violate her. Her husband, Potiphar, had Joseph imprisoned, where he spent the next twelve years of his life until, through an astonishing turn of events, he was appointed Prime Minister of Egypt. That is when his brothers came for food and he has the Shabbos feast prepared on Friday, since he observed the laws of Shabbos.

The Face of Jacob

The Midrash [11] explains the meaning of the phrase that Joseph "entered the house to do his work and none of the household staff was inside." What type of work did Joseph come to do?

The Midrash says that the "work" Joseph came to do was to yield to the advances of his master's wife. After all of her unceasing pleas, Joseph at last succumbed. However, as the union between them was about to materialize, the visage of his father, Jacob, appeared to him. This caused Joseph to reject the powerful urge. He left his garment in her hand and he fled outdoors.

What was it about Jacob's visage that inspired Joseph to deny the temptation? [12]

The Lonely Slave

Let us reflect more closely on the psychological and physical condition of Joseph during that day when his master's wife lured him into a relationship.

Joseph was a 17-year-old slave in a foreign country. He did not even own his body—his master exercised full control over his life, as was the fate of all ancient and modern slaves. Joseph had not a single friend or relative in the world. His mother died when he was nine years old, and his father thought he was dead. His siblings were the ones who sold him into slavery and robbed him of his youth and liberty. One could only imagine the profound sense of loneliness that pervaded the heart of this lad.

This is the context in which we need to understand Joseph's struggle. A person in such isolation is naturally overtaken by extremely powerful temptations, and is also likely to feel that a single action of his makes little difference in the ultimate scheme of things.

After all, what was at stake if Joseph succumbed to this woman's demands? Nobody was ever likely to find out what had occurred between the two. Joseph would not need to return home in the evening to face a dedicated spouse or a spiritual father, nor would he have to go back to a family or a community of moral standing. This act would not harm his prospects of getting a good shidduch (marriage partner), nor would it get him thrown out of his Yeshiva... He would remain alone after the event, just as he was alone before it. So what's the big deal to engage in a snapshot relationship?

In addition we must take into consideration the power possessed by this Egyptian noblewoman who was inciting Joseph. She was in the position of being able to turn Joseph's life into a paradise or a living hell. In fact, she did the latter, having him incarcerated in an Egyptian dungeon on the false charges that he attempted to violate her. If it was up to her, he would have remained there for life.

The Talmud [13] described the techniques the woman used in order to persuade Joseph. "Each and every day, the wife of Potiphar would attempt to seduce him with words. Clothes she wore for him in the morning she would not wear for him in the evening. Clothes she wore for him in the evening she would not wear for him in the morning. She said to him, 'Surrender yourself to me.' He answered: 'No.' She threatened him, 'I shall confine you in prison...I shall bend your proud stature...I will blind your eyes,'" but Joseph refused her. She then gave him a huge sum of money, but he did not budge.

Let us recall that this story took place before the giving of the Torah, when adultery became forbidden for Jews even at the threat of death. One may argue that in light of the death threats presented to Joseph by his master's wife, it would have been halachically permissible, perhaps even obligatory, for him to engage in the union! [14]

What, then, was the secret behind Joseph's moral rectitude? What empowered a lonely and frail slave to reject such an awesome temptation?

"The visage of his father Jacob"! That is what gave Joseph the extraordinary fortitude to smack his impulse in the face and to emphatically dismiss the noblewoman's lure.

But why? Jacob was living many miles away, unaware even of the fact that his son was alive. What was the magic that lay in his physiognomy? Adam's Moment

The Talmud presents a tradition that the beauty of Jacob reflected the beauty of Adam, the first human being formed by the Almighty Himself. [15] When Joseph saw the visage of Jacob, he was seeing the visage of Adam as well.

Adam, we know, was instructed by G-d not to eat from the fruit of "the tree of knowledge." His disobeying of this directive altered the course of human and world history forever. [16] Though he did something apparently insignificant, merely eating a single fruit from a single tree, this minuscule act still vibrates through the consciousness of humanity to this very day.

Why? Because every single human being is part of the fiber in which heaven and earth are interlaced. "Each person is responsible to say for me the world was created," says the Mishnah. [17] What this means is that there is something in this world which only I can repair and accomplish.

G-d's dream was not to be alone but to have mankind as a partner in the continuous task of healing the world. Each of us was given our particular mission, and on this task the whole world depends. By whatever we do, we either advance or obstruct the drama of redemption; we either reduce or enhance the power of evil. Something eternal is at stake in every decision, every word, every deed performed by every single man, woman or child. [18]

When Joseph saw the visage of (Jacob which reflected the visage of) Adam, he reclaimed an inner unshakable dignity; he remembered that he was a candle of G-d lit on the cosmic way. Seeing the visage of Adam reminded Joseph how a single act, performed at a single moment by a single man, had the power to change history forever.

At that moment, Joseph remembered, that Adam was not one man; Adam was the entire world. If something would happen to him, if he would die, humanity would die with him. Each decision he made impacted the planet. He could not deceive himself that his actions were unimportant. One move this or that way would define the destiny of mankind.

This is what gave Joseph the fortitude he needed to withstand temptation. This is how he could keep Shabbos as the Prime Minister of Egypt, all alone, with no family or community support. For he realized the depth and significance of his life and decisions.

The greatest mistake in life is to think of yourself as insignificant. Not to realize the centrality of your existence in the cosmic plan. Not to appreciate the truth that you are G-d's personal ambassador to the world. You are never alone, and you are never merely one small individual.

In the words of the Reb Yosef Yitzchak, the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe (1880-1950): [19]

יעדער יחיד איז א רבי, ער איז בכח צו מאכן א רביס און באלעבן א רביס.

Every individual is an entire community; he can create a community and bring life to a community.

Does one need better proof than Joseph's eventual story? Here was one man who saved the entire world from famine!

Your Light

Marianne Williamson's remarks on the subject have become justly famous. She wrote:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that

most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

Nuclear Jew

Rabbi David Lapin, from South Africa, once shared this experience.

As soon as I entered the rabbinate of South Africa, I became concerned about retaining my intellectual independence – something I am fiercely protective of – while serving as a community rabbi at the will of a synagogue's board of directors. Therefore, I believed that I also needed to secure an independent source of income. And so I first went to work for an international commodities trading company, and later I founded the leadership consulting firm which I currently lead.

At about that time, an opportunity arose to join a company of commodity traders in Johannesburg, and this is what I did. But I was not sure I was on the right track. Was I right to divide my time between my business and my rabbinic duties? It seemed as if I had two full-time jobs and my family was paying a heavy price as a result.

There came a time when I felt I needed the opinion of someone much wiser than me, someone who had a global perspective that embraced modernity, history and the future. I decided to seek the advice of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

In 1976 I came to New York, but I had not realized that to see the Rebbe one had to make an appointment many months in advance, and at first I was turned away. Only when I wrote a letter to the Rebbe in which I made the argument that my questions impacted the larger Jewish community – and which I insisted be presented to him – did he invite me to wait until he finished his appointments for the night when he would make time to see me.

I will never forget meeting the Rebbe. I recall that he got up from his chair as my wife and I came in, greeted us and insisted that we sit down. At that moment, I realized that we were going to have a real conversation – this was not going to be just a symbolic encounter.

Indeed, the meeting lasted about fifteen minutes, during which time I felt that he was looking right inside me and communicating with me on a level that transcends the mind, getting straight to the heart and the essence of being. In addition, I sensed a kindness and warmth – all at once I was in the presence of a great man, an intellectual genius, a leader of the Jewish people, but also a grandfather who cared about me. In short, it was an amazing experience.

I asked him about the responsibilities that I faced and the limitations that I felt, which seemed overwhelming. How could I manage it all? What should I give up – my business or my Torah teaching? Where should I direct my energies?

His answer to me was that I should give up nothing and continue working in business while still teaching Torah. I do not remember his exact words, but the gist of it was that my being in business increased my ability to bring people closer to Judaism; my profession increased my influence and was a vehicle of kiddush Hashem, of sanctifying the name of G-d. He stressed that I would have greater impact if I was involved with both business and Torah.

I was still very young, and I couldn't imagine how I could continue to do both. So, I burst out with: "I don't think that this is realistic. I'm already up to here... I feel very humbled and very honored that you would even talk to me this way, but it just isn't realistic!"

I remember clearly his response to my outburst. He said: "I'll tell you what your difficulty is. You think that human interaction is like a chemical reaction. But it isn't. In a chemical reaction, there are two elements which interact with each other, and they result in a third compound. But people aren't chemicals. When people interact, the result is a nuclear reaction. A nuclear reaction occurs at the core and then it

radiates in a spherical, rather than a linear, way. As the outer rings of your sphere get bigger and bigger, the number of people you are touching gets bigger and bigger – indeed, there is no limit."

"When you touch the heart of one person, there is a nuclear reaction because that person in turn touches so many other people. So, each person you touch – even if it is a moment's interaction – represents a nuclear reaction in terms of impact. That's what it really is."

He was right of course, and way ahead of the research that, since then, has proven his words to be true. For example, the Framingham Heart Study showed that people's mood affects others three times removed – that is, one's friend's friend's friends. We impact people not just with our words but with our moods and our energy.

Rabbi Lapin concluded:

"I remembered this whenever I stood in front of a class of fifty people. I contemplated that these fifty could in turn be impacting at least one hundred and fifty others. This meant that, both in my work as a rabbi and as a business person, week after week I was affecting tens of thousands of people without realizing it. That's what the Rebbe tried to get across to me. He was talking about the huge amount of holiness that I had the potential to bring into the world.

"I got it. Indeed, he changed my entire mindset when he said, "Don't underestimate what each person is capable of doing. Just remember that when you touch one person you are causing a nuclear reaction." And that's something that I've never forgotten."

The Public Offering

Now, at last, we can appreciate the words of the Midrash.

Joseph, who kept the Shabbos even in Egypt, who remained connected to truth and morality even in depraved Egypt, can do so only because he understood the truth that an individual is really the entire nation and the entire world. So G-d says, when it comes to your offering, it is not an offering of a private citizen; it is an offering of the entire nation. Hence, it can be offered on Shabbos.

No Despair

During our lonely moments of misery, when we, too, may feel that nobody cares for us and we are alone in a large indifferent universe, we ought never fall prey to the easy outlet of immoral gratification or despair. We must remember that something very real and absolute is at stake at every moment of our existence and in every act we do.

You may view your individual actions in the privacy of your bedroom as insignificant. Yet from the perspective of Judaism, these decisions create history.

If you only open your eyes, you will see the visage of your father whispering to you through the silent winds of history that you are not an isolated creature in a titanic world whose behavior is inconsequential. At this very moment, G-d needs you and me to bring redemption to His world.

Or as one WhatsApp clip quipped: It took only one man in China to create the coronavirus; and only one man in Minnesota to stop it.

NOTES [1] Shabbos 87. Of course, the question comes up regardless of which day of the week they began their offerings. With twelve leaders offering each day, one of them had to violate the Shabbos!

[2] This is the reason for the debate about the Passover offering, if it can be brought on Shabbos. While most offerings belong completely to one class or the other, the Passover offering straddles both categories. On the one hand, it possesses certain features which would define it as an individual offering, such as the fact that it is purchased with private funds and eaten by those who brought it; on the other hand, there are qualities about it that are characteristic of the communal offering, such as the fact that it is brought en masse by "the entire community of the congregation of Israel." When the 14th of Nissan—the day on which the Passover offering is brought—falls on a Shabbat, the question of its categorization becomes crucial. Torah law forbids the bringing of individual offerings on Shabbat, but permits and obligates the bringing of communal offerings. Should the Passover offering be regarded as an "individual offering" which cannot be brought on Shabbat, or as a "communal offering" whose obligation supersedes the prohibition of work on the day of rest?

The Talmud relates (Pesachim 66) that one year when Nissan 14 fell on Shabbat, the leaders of the Sanhedrin (the highest court of Torah law) were unable to resolve the question of whether the Passover offering should be brought. Hillel, a scholar newly arrived in the Holy Land from Babylonia, demonstrated that the communal aspect of the Passover offering is its more dominant element, meaning that it should be offered also when its appointed time coincides with Shabbat. In recognition of his superior scholarship, the leaders of the Sanhedrin stepped down and appointed Hillel as their head. (See at length Likkutei Sichos vol. 18, Behaloscha and references noted there.)

[3] Communal offerings will always be obligatory. Individual offerings are sometimes obligatory and sometimes voluntary. The offerings of the leaders of the tribes were voluntary contributions.

[4] The Even Ezra here concludes that it was not pushed off to Sunday. On the seventh day no one brought an offering. But the straightforward reading of the verses seem to indicate that the offerings were brought on consecutive days. The Rogatchover Gaon explains it based on the view that each tribe of Israel is defined as a "kahal," as an independent community (See Sichas Shabbos Metzora 5741, and references noted there.) But this would still raise the problem according to the other views.

[5] Genesis 43:16

[6] Exodus 16:5. This is the usage of a "gezeira shavah," since these words coming from Joseph seem superfluous. In addition, only Shabbos and Yom Tov meals have to be "prepared" in Jewish law, due to their prominence. See Rashi Beitza 2b. (Sichas Shabbos Parshas Metzora 5741)

[7] Perhaps we can suggest the following explanation. If anyone else brought their offering on Shabbos, it could be construed as a lack of respect for Shabbos. But since the descendant of Yosef performs this, he is obviously not disrespecting Shabbos, so it is permitted. But still the question remains, why does G-d want to honor the Shabbos by appearing to desecrate it? As the words of the Midrash state, "Says G-d, in the merit of your keeping Shabbos before the Torah was given, your child will bring his Korban on Shabbos, even though an individual Korban is not brought on Shabbos." There is very clearly some connection here that requires explanation.

Here is an answer presented by the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum (1887-1979). Since the private offering was in preparation for the altar that eventually would host the public offerings, this very act of preparation (even though it was a private offering now) for later public offerings was already considered like a public offering. It was already imbued with the importance of a Karban Tzibur. This is based on the principle that "hazmanah milsa hi" – preparation counts and has importance in and of itself.

This is the "measure for measure" reward that Yosef was granted. You, Yosef, prepared for Shabbos. You instituted the concept that preparation is important. Therefore, I will accept your grandson's offering – even though it is private – on Shabbos. It too is preparation – preparation for a Public Offering, and Joseph has taught us the value of preparing for a great thing to come.

[8] Yuma 28b. End of Kidushin.

[9] See an entirely different explanation in Likkutei Sichos vol. 23 Naso; vol. 20 Miketz (all from Shabbos Metzora 5741). The answer inside is based on a few talks of Shabbos Parshas Metzora 5741.

[10] Genesis 39:11-12.

[11] Bereishis Rabah 87:7. Tanchumah 8-9. Zohar Vayechi 222a. This is also the opinions of two Talmudic sages, in Talmud Sotah 36b, quoted in Rashi to Genesis ibid.

[12] The Talmud in Sotah ibid. relates that Jacob warned Joseph that if he consorted with her, his name would not appear with those of his brothers on the breastplate of the High Priest. That is what led Joseph to resist her importunities. But from the Midrash and Zohar cited in the previous footnote, it appears that it was Jacob's visage per se that inspired Joseph to abstain.

Even from the wording of the Talmud it seems that it was not only Jacob's warning but also the very appearance of his countenance that caused Joseph to reject his master's wife. Here one must wonder what was the power of Jacob's visage?

[13] Yuma 36a

[14] See Benei Yissachar Maamarei Nissan; Pardas Yosef to Parshas Vayeishev; Sichas Yud Tes Kislev 5721.

[15] Bava Metzia 84a; Bava Basra 58a. Cf. Tanya Igeres Hakodesh chapter 7.[16] See Genesis 3:16-24. Talmud Eiruvin 100b. Likkutei Torah of the Arizal Parshas Bereishis. The writings of Kabbalah and Chassidism are actually full of this theme of how Adam and Eve's partaking of the forbidden fruit altered human history for eternity.

[17] Mishna Sanhedrin 37a. Cf. Tanya chapter 41. Sichas Shabbos Vayigash 5729

[18] Mishnah Sanhedrin 37a. Tanya chapter 41. Sichas Shabbos Vayigash 5729.[19] The Rebbe, whose first name was Yosef, said this on Pesach 1949, a few months before his passing in 1950. See the following letter of his successor and son in law, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe:

מכתב יד ניסן תש"י: הורו לנו נשיאנו בכלל ונשיא דורנו, הוא כ"ק מו"ח אדמו"ר הכ"מ בפרט, אשר צריך להשתדל בטובה - גשמיית ורוחנית - גם של יחיד בכל תוקף ועוז. ומובנה הוראה זו, כי הרי אין אנו יודע איהו ישר ואם כלם כאחד טובים. ומלבד זה שפנש אחת משראל עולם מלא היא מצד עצמה, הנה נתבאר בשיחה הנדפסת בקונטרס [שיחת אחרון של פסח תש"ט]... אשר יעדער יחיד איז א רבים, ער איז בן צו מאכן א רבים און באלעבן א רבים. זאת אומרת, אשר גם א נמצא בין המושפעים שלו איש אשר בטבעו מתבודד הוא, א פארויך'דיגער, הרי אין זה אלא מצד טבעו קודם העבודה בעצמו, ומי יודע באיה מעמד ומצב יח' מחר ולאחר זמן. ובפרט שידוע מרז"ל (ירושלמי כתובות פ"א ס"ח) אשר פסק התורה משנה את הטבע. ואם יקשר את היחיד המתבודד שיה' באתר' דרבי, ובאתר' דרבי, הרי הלכה כרבי, יפעול ויח' יחיד זה את כל סביבתו. והשתדלותו [אשר השקיע בו תביא גידולין וגידולי גידולין עד סוף העולם - ל' העולם]

## The Crown of Aleppo

### The Incredible Loss & Recovery of the Most Authoritative Tanach Manuscript

The Bet on David and Goliath

An archaeologist was digging in the Negev Desert in Israel and came upon a casket containing a mummy. After examining it, he called the curator of a prestigious natural history museum.

"I've just discovered a 3,000-year-old mummy of a man who died of heart failure!" the excited scientist exclaimed.

The curator replied, "Bring him in. We'll check it out."

A week later, the amazed curator called the archaeologist. "You were right about the mummy's age and cause of death. How in the world did you know?"

"Easy. There was a piece of paper in his hand that said, '1 million Shekel on Goliath!'"



## The Story of the Codex

Secured in the lower level of the famed Shrine of the Book at Jerusalem's Israel Museum sits the Aleppo Codex. Its story is thrilling and mysterious, mirroring the story of the people who authored the Codex, the oldest, most complete, most accurate text of the Hebrew Bible, preserved in its entirety in important Jewish communities in the Near East: Tiberias, Jerusalem, Egypt, and in the city of Aleppo, Syria.

As we celebrate this holiday of Shavuot when we were given the Torah, it is worth recalling this story.

Some call it the Aleppo Codex, some call it the Crown of Aleppo. Its Hebrew name is קֶטֶר אֲרָם צוֹבָא (Keter Aram Tzova), the "Crown of Aleppo."

What is its uniqueness? This manuscript of the Hebrew Bible—the Tanach—was written around the year 930 by the scribe Shlomo ben Buya and was annotated (with the vowels—nekudos—and cantillations—trup—of the entire Tanach) by Aharon ben Asher. Aharon was considered the greatest expert on biblical texts and devoted his entire life to researching the most accurate version of the Tanach. How is each word spelled? What is its exact pronunciation? What is the musical note with which it is read in shul? How exactly is it written in the Torah Scroll? Although all Torah scrolls were copied from a previous one since there was no printing at the time, all were copied by hand, and over millennia, a mistake here or there creeps in. Aharon ben Asher spent a lifetime discovering the most authoritative text—and it was this Codex that he edited, time and time and time again until he perfected it.

Despite its name, the Keter (the Aleppo Codex) was not written in Aleppo, but in the northern Israeli city of Tiberias. Soon thereafter, the Keter would travel to Jerusalem and quickly become the authoritative text of the Bible for Jews and non-Jews alike.

Now, if you know your history, you know that eleventh-century Jerusalem was no place for a nice Jewish boy or a Jewish Bible. When Jerusalem was ransacked by the Christian Crusaders, the Keter was saved and ransomed from the Crusaders by Jews of Egypt.

In Fustat, Egypt, the Keter came into the possession of the most famous Jew of the day and perhaps of all times – Rabbi Moses Maimonides, the Rambam (1135-1204).

Before his passing in 1204, Maimonides, upon whose contributions to Jewish law, philosophy, and exegesis we still rely, referred to the Keter as the authoritative text of the Bible.

רמב"ם הלכות ספר תורה פרק ח הלכה ד: וספר שסמכנו עליו בדברים אלו הוא הספר הידוע במצרים שהוא כולל ארבעה ועשרים ספרים שהיה בירושלים מכמה שנים להגיע ממנו הספרים, ועליו היו הכל סומכים, לפי שהגיהו בו אשר ודקדק בו שנים הרבה והגיהו פעמים רבות כמו שהעתיקו, ועליו סמכתי בספר התורה שכתבתי כהלכתו.

And the book that we relied upon in these matters is the well-known book in Egypt, which contains twenty-four books, which was in Jerusalem some years ago, to revise the books from it, and everyone relied on it since it was revised by Aharon ben Asher, and he worked meticulously on it for many years and revised it many times, as they copied, and I have relied on it in the Torah Scroll that I wrote according to the Halakha.

Here Maimonides is telling us of a complete manuscript of the Bible (twenty-four books), which was revised by Aharon ben Asher over and over again for many years. Maimonides prefers this manuscript to all the other Torah Scrolls and manuscripts, and he decrees as Halacha that Torah scrolls should be written according to this manuscript. Because of the great authority of Maimonides, within a few generations, all Jewish communities accepted his ruling, and all the Torah scrolls of all the Jewish ethnic groups are written according to his instructions, which are based on the codex revised by Aharon ben Asher.

Now, you must understand the significance of this. Maimonides transcribed in his code of law the accurate way the Torah scroll must be transcribed—and it was all from this Codex that fell into his hands and which he trusted more than any other scroll.

As to how the Keter arrived from Egypt to Syria, we are not sure. We know that Rabbi Dovid ben Yehoshua, a direct descendant of Maimonides, traveled through Israel in 1375, going to live in Damascus and eventually Aleppo, a historically strong and rich Jewish community. Some speculated he might have brought it to Syria.

There the Keter sat, in the old Aleppo Synagogue, for over five hundred years, in a chest with two locks, like a nuclear briefcase, not to be opened except in the presence of the bearers of the keys. Two leaders of the community had the keys, but the pact was that nobody would open it not in the presence of the other.

### The Riots

The Keter slumbered for centuries – a sacred text under the protectorate of the Aleppo community – right up until November 30, 1947, the morning after the UN General Assembly voted in favor of the establishment of a Jewish State.

That morning a mob attacked the Jewish quarter in Aleppo, setting fire to the synagogues, the start of a riot that would go on for days. The attack, a part of an anti-Jewish wave of unrest across the Middle East and North Africa, resulted in some 75 Jews murdered and several hundred wounded. Following the attack, the

Jewish community went into a steep decline. The wealthy Jews escaped the day after the pogrom and many more fled in small groups in subsequent months. Their property was forfeited and on December 22 the Syrian Government enacted a law forbidding Jews from selling their property. Within a few years after the pogroms, most Jews left Aleppo, a large majority of them relocating to Israel. By 1959, about 2,000 Jews remained in Aleppo. As of 2012, no Jews live in Aleppo. What about the Crown stored away in the synagogue that was attacked? At first, people thought that it had been completely destroyed. Later, however, it turned out that most of the manuscript had been saved. The synagogue sexton, Asher Baghdadi, and his son ran back into the smoldering synagogue to gather the pages of the Crown!

From that day on, the writing was on the wall for the Aleppo Community. For ten years, the Keter went from hiding place to hiding place. It traveled from hand to hand, hiding it from the Syrian authorities. Eventually, in 1958 the Codex was wrapped in cheesecloth and smuggled out by a dairyman to the fledgling new State of Israel. It arrived in Jerusalem and was delivered to the President of Israel, Yitzchak Ben Zvi.

### The Missing Pages

The Aleppo Codex originally had 487 pages. Yet, as it reached Israel, it had only 294 parchment pages, written on both sides. Examinations revealed that many pages were missing because of the damage to the Codex during the 1947 pogrom. Mainly the first part of the manuscript was damaged, the Pentateuch (the Five Books of Moses), of which only the last eleven pages remained. Almost all the Chumash (Five Books of Moses) had been lost, except the final chapters of the Book of Deuteronomy, which were preserved.

Many efforts were made to locate the missing pages of the Aleppo Codex. Despite years of research, and all of types of mysterious and criminal stories circulating, we do not know what happened to the missing pages. Were they burned or destroyed? Were they, perhaps, hidden somewhere? Were they stolen? Did Jewish families from Aleppo take them?

The efforts to ascertain the truth met with many disappointments. Nevertheless, there were two successes: an entire page of the Aleppo Codex from the book of Chronicles reached New York and was preserved by a family from the city of Aleppo. Eventually, that page was given to the National Library in Jerusalem and added to the Aleppo Codex. Then another clue was discovered: a fragment of a page from the Book of Exodus had been preserved in the United States in the wallet of a man from Aleppo, who used it as a kind of lucky charm. This piece of parchment has not yet reached Jerusalem, but a photograph of it has been published.

Today one can see the Codex—whatever parts they found—in the Israel Museum. Its silent pages tell an incredible story, the story not only of a manuscript but of a people holding on to its Torah for the last 3,333 years.

### The Soul of a People

In my mind, this narrative captures the story of our people. The book has been the soul of the people, and the people have been the soul of the book.

Just like the Crown of Aleppo, we too traveled from country to country, yet we held on to our Torah, and it held on to us. As a result, we retained our identity if sometimes only in fragments, ultimately returning—like the Codex—to our eternal homeland.

Just like the Crown of Aleppo, they said about us too that we are no more; that we have been destroyed. But in some inexplicable way, 3337 years after Sinai we are still going strong.

The Jewish people are under attack again. Three millennia later, our foes still crave genocide for the Jews, and the world blames the Jews...

We must stand united and strong and always remember that as long as we hold on to the book, eternity belongs to us.

(My thanks to Rabbi Nir Gurevitch, Spiritual leader, Surfers Paradise, Australia, for his assistance with this essay).

## 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 addresses 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, where she presents 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 debated the exact nature of the positive effect of the Sotah waters. Rabbi Yishmael understood the verse literally: if she had been barren, she would become 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 she became the mother of the prophet Samuel.)

Why was Rabbi Yishmael not troubled by Rabbi Akiva’s concern?

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 extraordinary 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 driven 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 in the merit of her remarkable 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)

[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.

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### Should You Care About What Others Think of You?

#### By Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“What other people think about me is none of my business.”

While empowering and comforting, is this quote from Eleanor Roosevelt true? Should we care what people think and say about us? Should other people’s opinions about us take up space in our head and heart? Should we be listening and paying attention or is it indeed none of our business?

When negotiating with the tribes who wanted to settle east of the Jordan River, Moshe tells them once the land of Israel is fully conquered, then (Bamidbar 32:22) “Vihiysem nekiyim mei-Hashem u-miYisrael,” “And you shall be clean before God and Israel.”

Based on this, the Mishna (Shekalim 3:2) obligates us to not only avoid doing a wrong thing, but to avoid even the perception that one has done a violation. We must remain innocent in the eyes not just of God, but of our fellow man as well. Indeed, the Chassam Sofer (Teshuvos 6:59) writes that he has been troubled his entire life by this obligation and responsibility. It is one thing to be clean in Hashem’s eyes, since He knows the truth of what we have done. By contrast, the expectation that we can conduct our lives in such a fashion that no person can cast a doubt, or a criticism seems almost impossible.

We have a parallel rabbinic law called maris ayin, a prohibition against doing something that can be misinterpreted as a violation of Jewish law. You have likely heard this term invoked when discussing the

permissibility of going into a non-kosher restaurant to order a kosher drink or use the restroom.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe o.c. 2:40, 4:82) explains that the concern of maris ayin is that someone will misinterpret that something wrong is in fact ok and will come to violate a law themselves. The similar concept of chashad, on the other hand, is behaving in a way that will cause others to be suspicious of your wrongdoing, even if it will not impact their own behavior.

The common denominator of both prohibitions is that in both cases, I must be concerned with what others think about me and regulate my behavior accordingly. Or maybe not.

The Mishkan, the central place of holiness and Shechina had a kiyor, a laver that the Kohanim used to wash their hands and feet in preparation for the avodah, the service in the Mishkan. Though Moshe rejected this gift, disturbed that instruments of vanity would be used in the holy Mishkan, Hashem told him that these were, in fact, the holiest gifts and they must be accepted.

Perhaps as the Kohanim prepared to do their service, they needed to look into these mirrors, evaluate their lives, their decisions and their behavior, and consider how they were perceived by those around them. Only when they could successfully look at themselves in the mirror and be satisfied could they continue to do the avodah, to serve in the holy Mishkan.

Yes, we must consider the impact of our behavior on others, how it will be perceived, what others might learn from it, and what type of impression or misimpression we might be giving. Maris Ayin is something we must be cognizant of. At the same time, if we can look at ourselves in the mirror and genuinely be satisfied, if we believe we are acting appropriately in the eyes of Hashem and those we love and respect, I believe we need not look back and think about how others are reacting; rather, we should remember what other people think about me is none of my business.

When people, particular strangers make nasty comments online and offline, it says much more about them than it does about us. Yes, we should consider if the message has merit, even (maybe especially) when we don’t like the messenger or the way they crafted their message. But if the message is unfair, if we can look at ourselves in the mirror and honestly be satisfied with what we see, we cannot and must not absorb the negativity cast our way.

When I was growing up in Teaneck, we had a barber named Chubby. On his mirror was a sign that said, “He who trims himself to suit everyone will soon whittle himself away.” We simply cannot make everyone happy all the time, nor should we try. We must be clean in the eyes of Hashem and do our best to behave in way that is beyond reproach to others. But once we do, not only should we not take too seriously what others are saying about us, we shouldn’t even listen.

A rabbinic colleague shared with me how his assistant was starting to tell him what others were saying about him. He cut her off and asked, is it important to know, do you think I did something wrong? When she said no, he said, “In that case, I would rather not know, please don’t tell me.” She was flabbergasted and in disbelief that he had the discipline to not want or need to know what was being said. If what other people think about me is none of my business, why would I even want to know? At the end of our Amidah, we ask Hashem: v’limkalelai nafshi sidom, may my soul be silent to those who curse me. It is understandable that we ask for the courage and strength that our lips remain silent, but what does it mean to ask for our soul to do the same?

Perhaps we are not concerned we will react or respond harshly, but we are concerned that the curse or criticism of another person might torment and torture our soul. And so we ask, let my soul remain silent, not become frazzled or frustrated by what others are saying about me.

We must do our best and when we are convinced we have done so, we must work on not caring too much about what people say. If all else fails, remember this truism (origin unknown): “When you’re 20 you care what everyone thinks, when you’re 40 you stop caring what everyone thinks, when you’re 60 you realize no one was ever thinking about you in the first place.”

**Mrs. Michal Horowitz**

Shalom is so important that the entire Shas (Shishah Sidrei Mishnah) ends with shalom: אמר רבי שמעון בן חלקפתא, לא מצא הקדוש ברוך הוא פלי מתיקין ברכה לישׂראל אלא השלום, שנאמר (תהלים כט.) ה' עז לעמו יפן ה' יברך את עמו

[בברכת בשורות טובות ושבת שלום

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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 "pshtat" 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.

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#### **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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,  
menachem

# **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