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## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON NASO - 5775

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### Rabbi Yisroel Reisman - Parshas Naso 5774

1. I would like to start with a Vort which focuses on the break between this week's Parsha and last week's Parsha. As you know, the Parshios are divided in ways that separate between topics. It is very strange that Parshas Bamidbar contains Masa Bnei Kehas, the Tzavaa and different details of what the family of Kehas carried and this week's Parsha begins with Masa Bnei Gershon and the Masa of the Bnei Mirari (with the details of the job of the Bnei Gershon and Bnei Mirari and the things that they carried when transporting the Mishkan). It is very strange that the 2 Parshios should be broken up in a way that it doesn't leave either the Bnei Gershon or the Bnei Mirari together with Parshas Bamidbar. After all Parshas Naso has plenty of Pesukim to spare. Or the reverse, putting the Bnei Kehas in this week's Parsha. It is a very strange way for it to be broken up.

Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky in the Taima Dikra writes that since Gershon was really the Bechor and being the Bechor he should have been first, however, Kehas merited being the ones that carried the Aron, and since they carried the Aron and had the more important job they were counted first. So Kehas actually precedes Gershon despite the fact that Gershon is the Bechor. As a consolation prize so to speak, Gershon at least got to be the beginning of Parshas Naso. So this is a nod to Gershon who are Chashuve people anyhow. I mention this because this is another example of a Temia Gedolah, an incredible question which I have pointed out on numerous occasions that throughout Torah, Neviim, and Kesuvim it seems that the Bechor, the eldest, the firstborn, the one who you would think would be the most Chashuv, the most successful of all of the children consistently seems to fail to be the most Chashuve, the most successful, the one that makes it. This is something that we have seen repeatedly from Kayin, and all the way down through the generations. Shaim was not the oldest son of Noach, the Avos were not Bechorim, Reuvain lost the Bechora, Efraim and Menashe the Bechora went to Efraim, and this seems to go throughout the history of Klal Yisrael, the greatest people typically were not the Bechorim. Moshe Rabbeinu was not a Bechor, Yehoshua was not a Bechor, Shaul was not a Bechor, Dovid Hamelech was not a Bechor, Shlomo Hamelech was not a Bechor. Consistently throughout the history of Klal Yisrael it seems that the Bechorim did not make it. The whole institution of Bechorim did not make it either because the Bechorim lost their special status to the Kohanim after the sin of the Eigel. It seems very strange that despite the fact that we give a nod

to Bechorim, Bechorim consistently are not the best, the most important. As a matter of fact, I asked my class if they could come up with a Bechor that they could remember and they came up with names like Korach and Pharoh, certainly not people that we want to remember in a positive way and therefore, it needs an explanation and Gershon and Kehas are another example despite the fact that I know nothing negative about Gershon but Kehas was apparently the more Chashuv and got the better position.

2. Let's move on to an absolutely beautiful Vort that I saw in a Kuntres over Pesach. At the end of Bentching we add (בְּמָרוֹם יִלְמְדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַלֵּינוּ זְכוֹת שְׁתֵּהָא) it is a very unusual request. We say (בְּמָרוֹם) in the higher spheres in Heaven (לְמַשְׁמֶרֶת שְׁלֹמֹם) they will say about us (לְמַשְׁמֶרֶת שְׁלֹמֹם וּבִשְׂאֵי בְּרִכָּה מֵאֵת ק. וַיְצַדֵּק מֵאֵלֵינוּ) and that Zechus will bring us (לְמַשְׁמֶרֶת שְׁלֹמֹם וּבִשְׂאֵי עֲלֵיהֶם). What is going on? Since when do we say that in Heaven (לְמַשְׁמֶרֶת שְׁלֹמֹם וּבִשְׂאֵי עֲלֵיהֶם)? Usually our Davening is either a praise of Hashem or a request, a direct Bakasha. Here we have something that is similar perhaps to what we say on Yomim Noraim where we Daven to Hashem and say Has Kateigar V'yikach Saneigar Bim'komo. We say silence the accusing angel and let a defending angel take his place and bring merit to Klal Yisrael. It is strange that (בְּמָרוֹם יִלְמְדוּ) should be so unique and certainly calls for an explanation. The explanation offered is the follows.

The Mishnah in Maseches Shabbos says that the Malachim ask the Ribbono Shel Olam, you write in your Torah in Bamidbar 6:26 (יִשָּׂא יְרוּךְ פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) that Hashem shows favoritism to the Jewish people but on the other hand it also says in Devarim 10:17 (אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִשָּׂא פָנִים) that Hashem doesn't show favoritism. Isn't that a contradiction? The Ribbono Shel Olam answers them that Jews Bentch even when they eat a small amount of food and therefore, they are deserving of this extra Beracha. According to what we are saying now we understand that. This is because Beracha brings Shefa and when Yidden Bentch they bring that Shefa from Heaven and therefore, in Bentching we say that (בְּמָרוֹם יִלְמְדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַלֵּינוּ זְכוֹת שְׁתֵּהָא לְמַשְׁמֶרֶת שְׁלֹמֹם). Therefore, Kavayochel Hashem gives to Klal Yisrael at times when Klal Yisrael does not otherwise deserve.

When we say Birchas Hamazon, most of time it is not a Bentching D'oraissa, most of the time it is a Birchas Hamazon described in this discussion. At that time when we are Bentching we say to Hashem let's keep to that promise (בְּמָרוֹם יִלְמְדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַלֵּינוּ זְכוֹת). That in heaven let them be Melamed Zechus on all of us. A beautiful explanation and even more beautiful when we look as we look at the Birchas Kohanim in the Siddur. As you know, in the Siddur there are Pesukim that are attached to each word of Birchas Kohanim. These are the Pesukim that the Rama says we should not say and most of do not say it. Nevertheless, these Pesukim are somehow attached to the word. Each word has a Posuk. The word (יִשָּׂא) which we are discussing right now (יִשָּׂא יְרוּךְ פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים) the one that talks about Hashem looking at Klal Yisrael in a favorable way has two Pesukim. One is in Tehillim 24:5 (יִשָּׂא בְּרָכָה, מֵאֵת יְרוּךְ;) and the other is in Mishlei 3:4 (וּמִצָּא-חַן וְשִׂכָל-טוֹב) and (מִמְאֲלֵי יִשְׁעוֹ, וּבְצַדִּיקָה בְּעֵינֵי). These are Pesukim quoted in (בְּמָרוֹם יִלְמְדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַלֵּינוּ זְכוֹת) (אֱלֹהִים וְאָדָם). These are the two Pesukim that are mentioned on which the (בְּמָרוֹם יִלְמְדוּ) Nusach is based. Therefore, it fits so beautifully, it is such an insight into what we have been saying since we are little children without thinking. Now we can think about it, understand it, have a Bakasha (בְּמָרוֹם יִלְמְדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם וְעַלֵּינוּ זְכוֹת). Hashem there is a big Yeitzer Hora not to Bentch and not to Bentch properly. When we do Bentch properly, HKB"H, that is a Zechus for us.

3. I would like to end with a Shtickel Torah from the Yeshiva days which is called Shibuda D'ra'v Nassan. This is something that we had in Maseches Kiddushin 15 briefly and in the Nezikin Masechtas as well. We learned a concept of Shibuda D'ra'v Nassan which I will explain momentarily from Parshas Naso. In 5:7 the language that the Torah uses is (וְהָשִׁיב אֶת-אֲשָׁמוֹ) when a person is paying back (וְנָתַן, לְאִשְׁרֵי אֲשָׁם לוֹ) and he pays to the one that he is obligated to pay. This is talking about someone who took money improperly and he gives back (לְאִשְׁרֵי אֲשָׁם לוֹ) to the one he is obligated to pay. Chazal Darshun from this that it doesn't say V'nasan L'asher Gozal Mimenu, give to the one from whom he stole, it says give to the one who you

are obligated to pay. Well, who is the one that I am obligated to pay? The Chidush here is that the one who you are obligated to pay may not be the one you stole from and that is because of the following rule.

If you have Reuvain, Shimon, and Levi let us say and Reuvain owes money to Shimon and Shimon owes money to Levi, Shibuda D'rav Nassan says that Reuvain owes money to Levi. Shibuda D'rav Nassan is a rule in the Torah learned from this Posuk that allows the person who is owed money to collect from the person who owes his debtor money. So that, if someone stole from me, I might not be collecting from him if it is hard to collect from him, I can collect from someone who owes him money. That is the concept of Shibuda D'rav Nassan.

The Pnei Yehoshua on Maseches Kiddushin asks a great Kasha. He says why do I need a Posuk for Shibuda D'rav Nassan? If someone stole from me and he owes me money I could collect from anything he has. I can collect from his shoes, his shirt, from his apples, his car, from his animals, from his home. Of course I can collect from anything he owns. So if he has no money I can collect from anything he owns of course that includes debt which is owed to him. Why do I need a special Posuk for Shibuda D'rav Nassan? To that the Pnei Yehoshua responds, that it is true you can collect from him, from things he owns. Shibuda D'rav Nassan says that you are not collecting from him, you are collecting directly from the original party. The original party really owes you the money not through the middle man. When you go through the middle man and you say I want to take your hat, I want to take your apples, I want to take your sheep, well had the middle man beat you to it and sold the sheep you couldn't collect. In a case of debt says the Pnei Yehoshua if someone owes him money and he owes you money, Shibuda D'rav Nassan says that the original debtor owes it directly to you. Therefore, even if the middle person is Mochel and forgives it, it doesn't work, the Mechila doesn't take effect. In the Shulchan Aruch Siman 86 S'if 5 says Ein Shimon Yochol Limkal, the middle person can't be Mochel. And so, I have told you a Shtickel Torah that you undoubtedly heard at some time in Yeshiva if you were Zoche to be in Yeshiva that Shibuda D'rav Nassan states that it is not just that I collect from my debtor, I can take his money, car and I can take his debt. No, the debt is automatically mine, it is automatically referred to me, of course if I never collect it then I never collect it and it goes to Shimon. But otherwise it is mine. This is what we learned in the Yeshiva years in the heavy Lomdus of Shibuda D'rav Nassan.

I always had a Kasha on this. Let's say someone owes me \$100 and I want to take it from him, however, I take \$100 of apples instead of \$100 of money. However, what happens if I want to take debt. If the person is paying and I am getting \$100 cash but if I am just getting the debt that is not worth \$100 because when you buy debt it is always priced at a discount because you still have to collect it. So Bishlama if I am getting the money from the first person, I understand that it is worth \$100 to me but if the debt gets automatically assigned to me it shouldn't be worth the full \$100 and this is an old question that we had and again my idea is to bring from memory some thoughts from your Yeshiva years.

4. Finally, I want to point out that the words (עֶשְׂרִי עֶשְׂרִי) the Ayin changes it to eleven. Normally we would say Echad Asar for eleven. The Torah says (עֶשְׂרִי עֶשְׂרִי) which teaches you something that is called Kol Hamosif Gorai'a. When you add you are really taking away. Shte'i Asar means twelve. When you add an Ayin you get (עֶשְׂרִי עֶשְׂרִי) it becomes eleven. The Torah is saying that there are times that when you are adding you are taking away. Be careful what you add to. Of course we know that you are not allowed to add to Mitzvos, we take away. So (עֶשְׂרִי עֶשְׂרִי) is a lesson that has to do with the number eleven. Someday we will get into a discussion of the number eleven. There is something very negative about the number eleven. It is a Mosif Gorai'a number. That is why there are never eleven Shevatim, there are twelve Shevatim. If Levi is not counted then Yosef becomes Menashe and Efraim to keep it at twelve. If Menashe and Efraim are one as Yosef then Levi counts. Always twelve never eleven. The depth of it we will leave for a Motzoei Shabbos IY"H.

With that I want to wish everyone a wonderful Shabbos and I want to add that we have a triple Mishmar coming up. In other words, Shavuot night we stay up, even if you stay up on Shavuot night and it is difficult and you Drimmel a little you should know that the point is the Ol Al Tzavoro, the Ol Hatorah, the Achrayos of Torah that a person feels. Chazal have a Peledicka Lashon, they say the Tal Hatichiya is from Talmidei Chachamim who fall asleep over a Sefer and the saliva drools from their mouth onto the Sefer. Chazal use a Lashon that this is a Tal of Techiyas Hamaisim. I am not encouraging that you fall asleep and certainly not to drool over a Sefer, but the Chashivus of someone who goes to the Bais Medrash is extraordinary even if he falls asleep. Shavuot by night pick yourself up and go to the Bais Medrash. Of course the second night of Shavuot it has become the style in Flatbush that we have Shiurim. There are about a dozen Shuls that have second night Shiurim, not all night but Shiurim. Our Shul from 11:15 - 12:15. That is Wednesday night. On of course Thursday night, Motzoei Shavuot, what better way to walk away from Shavuot than a Mishmar. Three straight nights of learning in middle of the night. What a Zechus that would be for each of us. Hopefully you will help us become the Bnei Torah we want to be. Roll up your sleeves and make it happen. Wishing everyone an absolutely Shavuot and next Thursday this broadcast will not be taking place as it is Yom Tov. Come Wednesday night to the Shul where I will be giving a Shiur from 11:15 - 12:15. Or come Thursday night and we will have an absolutely wonderful Mishmar and I am sure the cake will be fresh. A Gutten Shabbos and Yom Tov to everybody.

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**Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting most of the following:**

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

***I've Got Your Back***

The president of the United States has recently reassured us and proclaimed that "America has Israel's back". Given the recent controversies between the prime minister of Israel and the president of the United States, this message was meant to soothe the relationship between the two countries and to allow for a more positive progression of policies that would be in their mutual interest.

The president of the United States also said that he retains the right to criticize and chastise Israel over policies that he feels to be wrong and even harmful to its own welfare. He declared that Israel somehow has departed from the founding views and policies that almost seventy years ago created it as a state. He, like many others before him and probably after him as well, knows better than we do what is good for us and how moral and just we should be.

By stating that "America has Israel's back" he is now free and even compelled to judge Israel and its policies and government from the lofty level of the high ground that he has staked out. There is no question that the United States, from the beginning of the State of Israel till today, has remained a loyal friend and a great supplier of practical and diplomatic help to the Jewish state. There is also no question that the wise course for any Israeli leader is not to be viewed as being hostile or unfriendly to the persona and policies of the American president.

Yet, over the decades since the establishment of the State of Israel, America and its presidential leaders have often adopted policies that have proven to be counterproductive to the interests of the State of Israel, and in fact, of the United States as well. America is not blameless nor spotless in the creation of the terrible mess in which the Middle East finds itself today. It should therefore be somewhat wary, if not even humble when offering advice to those who actually have to live in that Middle East.

Over the long history of the Jewish people we have had many enemies but we have also had numerous non-Jews who were good friends and

appreciated the special role of the Jewish people in the story of human civilization. Nevertheless, at moments of terrible danger and crisis when Jews were being persecuted and slaughtered, no nation, no matter how friendly its citizens may have been disposed towards Jews and Judaism, ever really had our back.

In World War II when European Jewry was almost completely annihilated, the Allies were, or felt themselves to be, powerless to somehow prevent the Holocaust from occurring. The debate amongst historians and scholars as to why the railroads and trains leading to the death camps of Poland were never bombed will undoubtedly continue for years to come.

But whatever the reason and no matter how legitimate the justification for inaction may have been, the simple fact is that those trains and rails never were bombed. And the behavior of most of the Allied countries towards refugees and survivors of the Holocaust and the emerging State of Israel was at the most tepid and at the least hostile. Thus Jews can be excused for not excitedly responding to words and platitudes, no matter how well-meaning about others, having our back. Does anyone really believe that the United States will go to war on behalf of Israel?

The reality teaches us that we alone have our back - and front as well. We need help from the world and we certainly hope to receive it diplomatically, politically and financially. We hope that the United States will continue to provide us with the type of help in the future as it has in the past. However, nations have interests and not friends, and strategic goals that are not usually affected by emotion or bravado.

We would do well to accept the words of the president of the United States and be thankful for his statement. But we would be foolish if we somehow relied on the United States or any other country in the world to truly have our back and to think they would take up the cudgel of actual military action on our behalf.

We all know that ultimately the God of Israel has our back. The Talmud long ago taught us that relying on humans is a futile policy and that ultimately our reliance can only be placed in the God of Israel, Who has guided us and preserved us against all odds until today. It is nice to hear reassuring words of support but let no one think that somehow those words gives one license to play with the future of the Jewish people and its state. With God's help, Israel will survive and will prosper because of Israel itself. Shabbat shalom

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>

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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel**

**Nasso**

The tribe of Levi always seemed to have special responsibilities and privileges within the Jewish people. Our father Jacob spoke harshly of their father's tendency to be impetuous and even violent, albeit for what was believed to be a holy and necessary cause. As a result of this admonition of Jacob, the tribe of Levi first assigned for itself a roll of service to the community of Israel and of scholarship and education.

Early on in the history of the Jewish people, even before we were redeemed from Egyptian bondage, the tribe of Levi was seen as being the clergy, so to speak, of Israel. According to Jewish tradition, the tribe of Levi was not subject to physical enslavement and harsh labor as were the other tribes of Israel during the period of Egyptian bondage. The leadership of the Jewish people in Egypt, in the personages of Aaron and Moshe, were members of the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi was relatively small in number in comparison to the other tribes of Israel. The rabbis ascribe this to the blessing that the Lord bestowed upon the Jewish people, that in spite of their affliction they would nevertheless increase in their numbers. This did not apply to the tribe of Levi since they were not involved in any forced labor. It was from the tribe of Levi that the priestly line of Aaron was created and until today the special, unique character and respect bestowed upon the tribe of Levi is part of the social and religious fabric of the church society. Naturally, with rewards and benefits, the Torah always imposes duties and responsibilities. The tribe of Levi was excluded from ownership of land in the Land of Israel and from most general commercial activities as well. Its role was to serve in the Temple, to be the educators and teachers of Torah to the Jewish people and to be moral personal examples of the values involved in living a truly Jewish life.

The tribe of Levi lived in forty eight cities scattered throughout the boundaries of the land of Israel. They were the spiritual soldiers, so to speak, who were on the ground engaging and influencing Jewish society. They were entitled to be supported by the Jewish people as a whole through the system of tithing but they were seen to be an elite group given over to God, so to speak, in order to serve their fellow Jews spiritually and in many cases even physically.

Even after the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people throughout the nations of the world, the Levites have retained certain special privileges and honors and have a unique role in the Jewish religious world. They are the symbol of national and religious service in the realm of the obligations upon all Jews to work for the common benefit of all of their brethren. Because of their special role in Jewish life they are entitled to be counted separately and uniquely, as it appears in these sections of the Torah. There is a lesson in that for all of us, whether we are of the tribe of Levi or not. Shabbat shalom

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Nasso**

**For the week ending 30 May 2015 / 12 Sivan 5775**

**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonofthemoon.com**

**Insights**

**Hair Suit**

***".....he shall take the hair of his Nazirite head and put it on the fire that is under the peace-offering." (6:18)***

Almost every part of the body is covered with hair.

Some is fine and some is thicker, but all hair has the same primary function — to insulate the body.

Hair does this in two ways. It serves as a physical barrier between external cold air and the skin, and it also traps warm air in-between the skin and the hair, keeping the body warmer.

Hair protects skin from the elements, such as sun and wind damage. It blocks dust and dirt from settling on the skin, and also serves as a buffer against friction.

When a nazir desists from cutting his hair, he is indicating his withdrawal and insulation from the physical world to devote himself totally to the service of Gd.

However after this period of separation, the nazir returns to society; he shaves his head and places his hair on the fire under the feast peace-offering. A peace-offering symbolizes well-being and community life.

The nazir takes his elevation and separation from the physical, and subordinates it to the well-being of the community.

In Judaism asceticism is not a tool for the removal of oneself totally from society. It is a time of separation, so that one may return to the community as a more proficient and giving member.

Based on Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch

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**Orthodox Union / [www.ou.org](http://www.ou.org)**

**Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column**

**Naso: "The Nazir and Narcissus"**

Webster's dictionary defines paradox as "a statement that is contradictory in fact and, hence, false." In life, however, there are numerous paradoxes that are, strangely enough, not false at all. In religious life we find many such paradoxes, and one of them is to be found in the Torah portion that we read this week.

This week's parsha is Naso (Numbers 4:21-7:89). It is the longest of all Torah portions and treats many subjects which seem to be unrelated to each other. One of the most fascinating subjects treated in this parsha is the practice of the Nazir. The details of this practice are quite clear: "If anyone, man or woman, explicitly utters a Nazirite's vow... He shall abstain from wine... Throughout his term as Nazirite he may not eat anything that is obtained from the grapevine... Throughout the term of his vow... the hair of his head must be left to grow untrimmed... Throughout the term that he has

set apart for the Lord, he shall not go in where there is a dead person...” (Numbers 6:1-6).

Generally speaking, the Jewish religion does not require its adherents to abstain from the world and its legitimate pleasures. Ours is not a religion of asceticism. How then are we to assess the practices of the Nazir? Did he do the right thing or the wrong thing by voluntarily adopting such stringencies? Is he a saint or a sinner?

A careful reading of the text suggests that we have here a classical example of a paradox. The Nazir is both a saint and a sinner. On the one hand, he is called “holy”: Throughout his term as Nazirite he is consecrated to the Lord.” (ibid. verse 8). On the other hand, he is referred to as a “sinner”: “The priest shall... make expiation on his behalf for the sin that he incurred...” (ibid. verse 11).

While some commentaries stress the saintly achievements of the Nazir, others emphasize the sinful nature of his abstinence. Obadiah Sforno, for example, states: “He has become illuminated by the very light of life, and has become numbered among the holy ones of his generation”. And yet the Jerusalem Talmud (Nedarim 9:1) chastises him with these words: “Is it not enough for you to abide by the Torah’s restrictions that you have prohibited upon yourself things which are perfectly permissible?” Upon which Maimonides proclaims: “Never have I heard a more wondrous statement” (Eight Chapters, chapter 4). The Nazir’s way, nezirut, is the way of paradox. The paradox can be clarified by comparing the story of one young Nazir to a legend drawn from Greek mythology. The story to which I refer is told in the Babylonian Talmud (Nedarim 9b) by the ancient Sage and High Priest, Simon the Just: “Once I encountered a young Nazir traveling up from the south. I saw that he had beautiful eyes, was markedly attractive, and his hair was arranged in curls. He had come to me to conclude his nezirut, as required, by shaving his hair and beard. So I asked him why he would choose to be a Nazir. He told me that he had been a shepherd boy and once went to fetch water from a well. ‘I gazed at my reflection in the well,’ he said, ‘and was overcome by a passionate urge to admire my own beauty. I harshly rebuked my false pride. At that moment I committed to becoming a Nazir, so that I would one day come to shear off my hair for the sake of Heaven.’” When Simon the Just heard this man’s story he stood up and kissed him upon his head and told him, “My son, may Nazarites such as you increase among the people of Israel.”

The young man in this story was entranced by his own good looks. He was almost carried away by a passionate urge toward self-worship and self-admiration. He overcame that urge by vowing to become a Nazir, with all its restrictions culminating in the requirement to shear his flowing locks and diminish his beauty in the process.

Greek mythology tells us a similar story, but in its version the young man is forever condemned to futile self-worship. I refer to the legend of Narcissus. He was a physically perfect young man beloved by the nymphs. One nymph, Echo, loved him deeply but was rejected rudely by him. The gods punished him by assuring that he too would experience unreciprocated love. One day, Narcissus saw his own image reflected in a clear mountain pond and fell in love with it, thinking that he was looking at a beautiful water spirit. He could not tear himself away from this mirror image, and very slowly pined away and died.

Psychologists have diagnosed a mental disorder which the story of Narcissus epitomizes. They call this disorder narcissism. Many of the features of narcissism are present in the myth: arrogant pride, self-centeredness, self-admiration, and the inability to show love to another person.

Returning to the young man in the story told by Simon the Just we can now understand that his “passionate urge” was an irresistible temptation to become like the mythical Narcissus. The young man, who, by the way, is nameless in the story, recognizes that he was susceptible to arrogant pride and self-worship. He feared lest he yield to a self-centeredness which leaves no room for the love of others. And so he resorted to a very potent “therapy”: the Nazirite vow.

By telling this story so dramatically, assuring that it would be retold time and again throughout the ages, Simon the Just addressed the paradox of the Nazirite practice. It is not for every man. For most of us it is a sin to forbid that which the Torah permits. But for those of us who are vulnerable to the temptations of narcissism the “strong medicine” of nezirut may be necessary, if only for a while.

Rigorously pious lifestyles do not render a person immune from the curses of narcissism. The ultimate paradox is that the Nazir, or anyone else who lives a life of extreme religiosity, can become as guilty as Narcissus of arrogant pride and self-worship. They can come to project a “holier than thou” attitude towards others. The Nazir can fail to rid himself of his self-admiration and instead become sanctimonious, cynically convinced that he is spiritually superior to his peers.

Astute observers of contemporary society have detected therein a pervasive narcissism. One such observer was Christopher Lasch. In his popular book *The Culture of Narcissism*, he writes of a “narcissistic preoccupation with the self” that creates a mockery of traditional values. Our contemporary society, argues Lasch, is full of individuals “who cannot live without an admiring audience... who must attach themselves to those who radiate celebrity, power and charisma. For the narcissist, the world is a mirror...” Few Nazirites are documented in Biblical and Talmudic literature. There are certainly few, if any, today. But there are certainly many narcissists among us. Perhaps we are, as Lasch maintains, a culture of narcissism. If so, we can do well to contemplate the motivation of the Nazirite practices. Nezirut may no longer be the practical way to control our narcissism. But we can surely identify other effective ways to do so.

It may no longer be practical to emulate the Nazir, but we are well-advised to at least ponder the purpose of his path.

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**Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

**Two Versions of the Moral Life (The Saint And The Sage )**

The parsha of Naso contains the laws relating to the nazirite – an individual who undertook, usually for a limited period of time, to observe special rules of holiness and abstinence: not to drink wine or other intoxicants (including anything made from grapes), not to have his hair cut and not to defile himself by contact with the dead.

The Torah does not make a direct evaluation of the nazirite. On the one hand it calls him “holy to God” (Num. 6: 8). On the other, it rules that when the period comes to an end the nazirite has to bring a sin offering (Num. 6: 13-14), as if he had done something wrong.

This led to a fundamental disagreement between the rabbis in Mishnaic, Talmudic and medieval times. According to Rabbi Elazar, and later to Nahmanides, the nazirite is worthy of praise. He has voluntarily chosen a higher level of holiness. The prophet Amos (2: 11) says, “I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and your young men for nazirites,” suggesting that the nazirite, like the prophet, is a person especially close to God. The reason he had to bring a sin offering was that he was now returning to ordinary life. The sin lay in ceasing to be a nazirite.

Rabbi Eliezer ha-Kappar and Shmuel held the opposite opinion. The sin lay in becoming a nazirite in the first place, thereby denying himself some of the pleasures of the world God created and declared good. Rabbi Eliezer added: “From this we may infer that if one who denies himself the enjoyment of wine is called a sinner, all the more so one who denies himself the enjoyment of other pleasures of life.”[1]

Clearly the argument is not merely textual. It is substantive. It is about asceticism, the life of self-denial. Almost every religion knows the phenomenon of people who, in pursuit of spiritual purity, withdraw from the pleasures and temptations of the world. They live in caves, retreats,

hermitages, monasteries. The Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls may have been such a movement.

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

The ambivalence of Jews toward the life of self-denial may therefore lie in the suspicion that it entered Judaism from the outside. There were ascetic movements in the first centuries of the Common Era in both the West (Greece) and the East (Iran) that saw the physical world as a place of corruption and strife. They were, in fact, dualists, holding that the true God was not the creator of the universe. The physical world was the work of a lesser, and evil, deity. The two best known movements to hold this view were Gnosticism in the West and Manichaeism in the East. So at least some of the negative evaluation of the nazirite may have been driven by a desire to discourage Jews from imitating non-Jewish practices.

What is more puzzling is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative, in the same book, his law code the Mishneh Torah. In The Laws of Ethical Character, he adopts the negative position of R. Eliezer ha-Kappar: “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.”[2]

Yet in The Laws of the Nazirite he rules in accordance with the positive evaluation of Rabbi Elazar: “Whoever vows to G-d [to become a nazirite] by way of holiness, does well and is praiseworthy . . . Indeed Scripture considers him the equal of a prophet.”[3] How does any writer come to adopt contradictory positions in a single book, let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer lies in one of Maimonides’ most original insights. He holds that there are two quite different ways of living the moral life. He calls them respectively the way of the saint (hassid) and the sage (hakham). The sage follows the “golden mean,” the “middle way.” The moral life is a matter of moderation and balance, charting a course between too much and too little. Courage, for example, lies midway between cowardice and recklessness. Generosity lies between profligacy and miserliness. This is very similar to the vision of the moral life as set out by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics.

The saint, by contrast, does not follow the middle way. He or she tends to extremes, fasting rather than simply eating in moderation, embracing poverty rather than acquiring modest wealth, and so on.

At various points in his writings, Maimonides explains why people might embrace extremes. One reason is repentance and character transformation.[4] So a person might cure himself of pride by practicing, for a while, extreme self-abasement. Another is the asymmetry of the human personality. The extremes do not exert an equal pull. Cowardice is more common than recklessness, and miserliness than over-generosity, which is why the hassid leans in the opposite direction. A third reason is the lure of the surrounding culture. This may be so opposed to religious values that pious people choose to separate themselves from the wider society, “clothing themselves in woolen and hairy garments, dwelling in the mountains and wandering about in the wilderness,” differentiating themselves by their extreme behavior.

This is a very nuanced presentation. There are times, for Maimonides, when self-denial is therapeutic, others when it is factored into Torah law itself, and yet others when it is a response to an excessively hedonistic age. In general, though, Maimonides rules that we are commanded to follow the middle way,

whereas the way of the saint is lifnim mi-shurat ha-din, beyond the strict requirement of the law.[5]

Moshe Halbertal, in his recent, impressive study of Maimonides,[6] sees him as finessing the fundamental tension between the civic ideal of the Greek political tradition and the spiritual ideal of the religious radical for whom, as the Kozker Rebbe said, “The middle of the road is for horses.” To the hassid, Maimonides’ sage can look like a “self-satisfied bourgeois.” Essentially, these are two ways of understanding the moral life itself. Is the aim of the moral life to achieve personal perfection? Or is it to create a decent, just and compassionate society? The intuitive answer of most people would be to say: both. That is what makes Maimonides so acute a thinker. He realises that you can’t have both. They are in fact different enterprises. A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But what about the members of the saint’s own family? A saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint’s own country? A saint may forgive all crimes committed against him. But what about the rule of law, and justice? Saints are supremely virtuous people, considered as individuals. Yet you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Ultimately, saints are not really interested in society. Their concern is the salvation of the soul.

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

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

Maimonides lived the life he preached. We know from his writings that he longed for seclusion. There were years when he worked day and night to write his Commentary to the Mishnah, and later the Mishneh Torah. Yet he also recognised his responsibilities to his family and to the community. In his famous letter to his would-be translator Ibn Tibbon, he gives him an account of his typical day and week, in which he had to carry a double burden as a world-renowned physician and an internationally sought halakhist and sage. He worked to exhaustion. There were times when he was almost too busy to study from one week to the next. Maimonides was a sage who longed to be a saint – but knew he could not be, if he was to honour his responsibilities to his people. That seems to me a profound judgment, and one still relevant to Jewish life today.

[1] Taanit 11a; Nedarim 10a. [2] Hilkhhot Deot 3:1. [3] Hilkhhot Nezirut 10:14. [4] See his Eight Chapters (the introduction to his commentary on Mishnah, Avot), ch. 4, and Hilkhhot Deot, chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6. [5] Hilkhhot Deot 1:5. [6] Moshe Halbertal, Maimonides: Life and Thought, Princeton University Press, 2014, 154-163.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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### ***Inspiration, Application and Preservation***

**Rabbi Yakov Haber**

#### **The TorahWeb Foundation**

Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldwicht zt"l, founding Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, often gave the following parable. A maggid once came to town, delivering an inspiring talk. One of the listeners, enraptured by his elevating words, decided to transform his life, elevate his mediocre prayers, devote more time to Torah study, and disburse more funds to charitable causes. Alas, all of these exalted commitments were "spilled out with the havdala wine"! The scenario repeated itself many times. How can we hold on to religious inspiration?

The parasha of nazir provides one answer to this question. In a famous explanation of the juxtaposition of the parasha of nazir to that of the sota, Rashi explains that one who sees a sota b'kilkula should abstain via the nazirite vow from wine. Clearly the sight of the dire consequences of sin naturally leads to inspiration not to fall prey to the yetzer hara'of desire. But, the Torah tells us, that inspiration is insufficient. The inspiration must immediately lead to action. Only through this will the inspiration not be lost. Shlomo HaMelech writes in Shir HaShirim (2:7) "Im ta'iru v'im t'or'ru es ha'avava ad shetechpatz - if you will awaken and if you will arouse the love until it is desired". The root of the word shetechpatz is CH-F-Ts which means desire or will but also means an object, as in the word cheifetz.

Hence, the word shetechpatz can be translated as: until you make it into an object. Based on this reading, Ramban (Emuna uBitachon 19) writes that the verse is instructing us that when love is awakened, when religious inspiration occurs, one must translate that awakening into some physical act of movement toward Hashem in order to solidify the gain. He should immediately perform some mitzvah act to give the feeling expression which in turn helps prevent its dissipation. [1]

In the prophecy of Yechezkel we just read on Shavuot morning, the angels in the "Chariot vision" are described (1:14) as rushing "ratzo vashov - running forth and returning". I once saw a Chassidic teaching explaining that the malachim rush toward the Divine Presence and then "return" applying the new level attained to their Divine connection. Human beings too must emulate the angels in this way whereby every "ratzo", every inspirational moment, must be followed by a "shov", an application to "ordinary" life.[2] Perhaps this indicates a connection between the parasha of the nazir and the subsequent parasha of the offerings of the n'si'im.[3] The Torah relates that the n'si'im brought wagons and korbanos to the Mishkan area awaiting Divine approval to offer them. After Moshe received this approval, they brought their offerings to Hashem (Chapter 7 ff.). Even without being commanded specifically to do so, the n'si'im, inspired by the great event of the revelation of the Shechina on the Mishkan, wished to encapsulate these lofty feelings into action. Without even knowing if it would be accepted, they instinctively wished to offer their gift to Hashem. However, it had to await Divine approval to assure that this individual expression was an appropriate form of Divine service.[4] This motif shares in common one theme of the nazir who, as mentioned above, utilizes the vow to translate inspiration into action.

Another crucial element in preserving religious inspiration entails reminding oneself of the event causing the inspiration. Rav Goldwicht zt"l, when he would visit his students in the United States would comment: "Ani k'mo degel - I am like a flag." Just as a flag reminds someone of the exalted, lofty ideals of the nation, so too does the very presence of the head of a yeshiva remind someone of the inspiration reached in and through the yeshiva. By reminding himself of that experience, the person is able to connect to that which caused the inspiration in the first place and recommit to the changes it motivated him to make. An allusion to this idea is found in the K'tav v'HaKabala quoting Rav Moshe Alshich on a verse, not surprisingly, in the parasha of nazir as well. "V'achar yishte hanazir yayin - and afterward [after the bringing of the various korbanos and the shaving of the head at the end

of the nazirite vow], the nazir may drink wine" (6:20). Why is he called a nazir now after he already completed his vow? Rather, the elevated state achieved is to remain with him forever. But how is this to be accomplished? Perhaps we can suggest, as above, by reminding himself of the feelings of exaltedness reached during the period of the vow. A parallel to this nowadays would be to visit Eretz Yisrael often to be inspired by its holiness especially for those who were privileged to study there. Or revisiting the yeshiva that influenced one's life greatly. Or by visiting and listening to shiurim given by the teachers who inspired the students in the earlier stages of their lives.

Rav Goldwicht zt"l himself stressed the need for constantly remaining receptive to new ideas and even lifestyle changes in order to facilitate spiritual movement upward. He would often state that even though the expression goes: "in one ear out the other", but he would like to add "aval mashehu nish'ar! - something, however small, remains!" When enough of these residual bits aggregate together, lasting change can occur.[5] Utilizing these methods of translation into action, "recharging the batteries" by reconnecting to the source of our change, and always being receptive to new ideas even if we are not ready yet to adopt them, hopefully, b'ezras Hashem, should assist us in making meaningful strides in our avodas Hashem.

[1] See also Kedushas Leivi (Ma'amarei Shavuot) and Agra d'Pirka (226). [2] Many other interpretations of "ratzo vashov" have been given and, it being part of the Merkava prophecy, is obviously a very deep concept. Here, we presented a practical interpretation. [3] Also see The Nazir, N'si'im, and Nuances for a different approach to the connection. [4] See As G-d Commanded Moshe for expansion on this extremely crucial last point. [5] This, he explained is the reason the eved ivri who refuses to go free has his ear pierced rather than any other organ. By insisting to remain a slave, he is forfeiting his "ko'ach hash'miya", his ability to be receptive to change, represented by the ear. Copyright © 2015 by The TorahWeb Foundation. All rights reserved.

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#### **Rav Kook List**

#### **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

#### ***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?

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

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

#### **Meeting Rav Kook**

When Cohen heard that Rav Kook was staying in St. Gallen, Switzerland, after becoming stranded in Europe due to the unexpected outbreak of the First World War - the rabbi had left Eretz Yisrael to attend a major rabbinical conference in Frankfurt - the hopeful young scholar sent off a letter to Rav Kook: Would it be possible to discuss various matters of faith? Cohen was overjoyed when he received a positive reply. Lacking the means to pay for the trip, he handed over his gold watch to a local pawnshop to raise the necessary funds.

Cohen prepared himself by performing a ritual immersion in the Rhine River; then he set off for St. Gallen. It was the start of the autumn month of Elul, a time of introspection and repentance preceding the High Holidays. Rav Kook received the young scholar warmly. They spoke, mainly about Greek philosophy and literature, the entire day. Rav Kook was struck by the expertise his visitor demonstrated on these topics in their original sources. Cohen, on the other hand, felt disappointed. Had he come all this way, even pawning his watch, just to discuss Greek philosophy?

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

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

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

Then the rabbi recited the concluding supplication, "Ribono shel olam! Master of the World, may it be Your will... that You recall for our sake the covenant of our fathers...." The sweetness and exhilarating fervor in Rav Kook's prayer shook the very foundations of the young man's soul. This inspiring tefilah, recited in holiness and purity, changed him. Many years later, he tersely described this transformative experience in his introduction to Orot HaKodesh:

"In the early morning I heard the sound of steps. Then the morning blessings, and the prayer of the Akeidah, in sublime song and melody. "From the eternal heavens on high, remember the love of our ancestors..."

I listened; and I became a new person. Immediately I wrote, announcing that I had found more than I had hoped for. I had found for myself a Rav."

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

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

### ***The Mitzvah of "Duchening" – Birchas Kohanim***

**By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

In Parshas Naso, the Torah teaches about the beautiful mitzvah of Birchas Kohanim, wherein the kohanim are commanded to bless the people of Israel. This mitzvah is usually referred to by Ashkenazic Jews as "duchening" and by Sefardic Jews as Birchat Kohanim, or occasionally as Nesiyat Kapayim, which refers to the raising of hands that the kohanim do in order to recite the blessings.

#### **Why Is This Mitzvah Called Duchening?**

Duchen is the Aramaic word for the platform that is in front of the Aron Kodesh. The duchen exists to remind us of the ulam, the antechamber that stood in front of the Kodesh and the Kodshei HaKodoshim, the holy chambers in the Beis HaMikdash. The Kodshei HaKodoshim was entered on only one day of the year, on Yom Kippur, and then only by the Kohen Gadol. The Kodesh was entered a few times daily, but only to perform the mitzvos of the Menorah, the Golden Mizbayach (altar), and the Shulchan (the Holy Table that held the Lechem HaPanim). Before entering the Kodesh, one ascended into the Ulam as a sign of respect, so as not to enter the Kodesh immediately.

Similarly, in our shuls the Aron Kodesh represents the Kodesh, since we are permitted to open it and to remove the Sifrei Torah when we need to. But, before entering the Kodesh, one ascends the duchen, in this case, also, to show respect by approaching the Aron Kodesh after a preliminary stage.

The duchen also serves other functions, one of which is that the kohanim stand upon it when they recite the blessings of Birchas Kohanim. For this reason, this mitzvah is called duchening (duchening in Yiddish). In the absence of a duchen, or if there are more kohanim in the shul than there is room on the duchen, the kohanim "duchen" while standing on the floor in the front of the shul.

#### **Basics of Duchening**

There is a basic order to the duchening that occurs during the repetition of the shmoneh esray. When the chazan completes the brocha of modim and the congregation answers "amen" to his brocha, someone (either the chazan or a member of the congregation, depending on minhag) calls out "kohanim" to inform the kohanim that it is time for them to begin the brocha. After the kohanim recite the brocha on the mitzvah, the chazan then reads each word of the Birchas Kohanim that is recorded in the Torah (Bamidbar 6:24-26) for the kohanim to recite, and the kohanim respond. The congregation responds "amen" after each of the three brochos. After the last brocha of birchas kohanim is completed by the kohanim, the chazan returns to the repetition of the shmoneh esray by reciting the brocha "sim shalom".

The Gemara and poskim teach that at each of these stages, one must be careful not to recite one's part before the previous step has been completed. Thus, the person who calls out "kohanim" must be careful not to do so before the congregation has finished answering "amen" to the chazan's brocha; the kohanim should be careful not to recite the words of the brocha before the chazan has completed saying the word "kohanim"; the chazan may not call out "yevarechecha" before the congregation has completed saying "amen" to the brocha of the kohanim, etc. It is important to be mindful of these halachos and allow each stage to be completed before beginning the next. Unfortunately, even well-learned people are sometimes not sufficiently careful and patient to wait until it is time for their part to be recited.

#### **Wearing Shoes During Duchening**

A kohen may not duchen while wearing shoes. The Gemara teaches that this was one of the nine takkanos that were instituted by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai (Sotah 40a). Although there would seem to be an obvious association with the halacha that the kohanim were barefoot when they performed the service in the Beis HaMikdash, the actual reason for this takkanah is unrelated. Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai was concerned that a kohen's shoelace would tear while he was on the way to the duchen and, while stopping to retie his shoelace, he would miss the duchening. However, people who saw that he missed the duchening would not realize what happened. They might start a rumor that he did not duchen because he is not a valid kohen! For this reason, Chazal instituted that every kohen simply removes his shoes before duchening.

#### **What if the Chazan is a Kohen?**

The mishnah states that when there is only one kohen in shul, and he is the chazan, then he may (and should) duchen (Berachos 34a). In this instance, the kohen will remove his shoes and wash his hands prior to beginning repetition of the shmoneh esray. There is a dispute among poskim whether a kohen may duchen when he is the chazan and there are other kohanim who will be duchening. The Shulchan Aruch rules that he should not duchen under these circumstances, because of a concern that he will become confused where he is up to in the davening and have difficulty resuming his role as chazan (Orach Chayim 128:20). Chazal instituted this prohibition even when we are certain that the chazan will not become confused, such as today, when he has a siddur in front of him (Mishnah Berurah 128:72). However, the Pri Chodosh rules that he may duchen, and that the concern referred to by the Shulchan Aruch was only when the chazan might become confused (such as when he does not have a siddur to daven from). In most communities in Eretz Yisrael, the custom is to follow the Pri Chodosh's ruling allowing a kohen who is the chazan to duchen. However, in chutz la'aretz the practice is to follow the Shulchan Aruch, and the chazan does not duchen (unless he is the only kohen).

In a situation where the chazan is the only kohen and there is a platform (the "duchen") in front of the aron kodesh, there is a very interesting halacha that results. Since the duchening should take place on the platform, the kohen walks up to the duchen in the middle of his repetition of the shmoneh esray. After completing the duchening, he returns to his place as chazan and completes the repetition of the shmoneh esray.

#### The Minyan Disappeared

What do you do if you started davening with a minyan, but in the middle of davening, some men left, leaving you with less than a minyan? Can you still duchen?

If the minyan started the duchening with ten men or more, and then some men left in the middle of the duchening, they should complete the duchening (Biur Halachah 128:1 s.v. bipachus).

#### What Happens if a Kohen Does Not Want to Duchen?

A kohen who does not want to duchen should stand outside the shul from before the time that the word "kohanim" is called out, until the duchening is completed.

#### The Days that We Duchen

The prevalent custom among Sefardim and other Edot Hamizrach is to duchen every day. There are many Ashkenazic poskim who contend that Ashkenazim should also duchen every day. However, the standard practice in chutz la'aretz is that Ashkenazim duchen only on Yomim Tovim. In most of Eretz Yisroel, the prevalent practice is that Ashkenazim duchen every day. However, in Tzfas and much of the Galil, the custom is that the kohanim duchen only on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

Why do Ashkenazim duchen in Eretz Yisrael every day, and in Chutz La'Aretz only on Yom Tov?

Several reasons are cited to explain this practice. Rama explains that a person can confer blessing only when he is fully happy. Unfortunately, except for the Yomim Tovim, the kohanim are distracted from true happiness by the difficulties involved in obtaining basic daily needs. However, on Yomim Tovim, the kohanim are in a mood of celebration. Thus, they forget their difficulties and can bless people with a complete heart (Rama 128:44; cf. Be'er Heiteiv ad loc.). Thus, only on Yom Tov do the kohanim duchen. In Eretz Yisroel, the practice is to duchen daily, because the Ashkenazim there followed the ruling of the Vilna Gaon. He contended that Ashkenazim everywhere should duchen every day.

Why do the kohanim in Tzfas duchen only on Shabbos and Yom Tov?

The reason for this custom is unclear. I was once told in the name of Rav Kaplan, the Rav of Tzfas for many decades, that since Tzfas had many tzoros over the years, including many serious earthquakes and frequent attacks by bandits, the people living there did not have true simcha. However, they were able to achieve enough simcha on Shabbos and Yom Tov to be able to duchen. This reason does not explain why the other communities in the Galil duchen only on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

It should be noted that the Sefardim in Tzfas duchen every day, not only on Shabbos.

#### Placement of Shoes

As I mentioned before, Chazal instituted that a kohen should remove his shoes before duchening. Unfortunately, some kohanim leave their shoes lying around in the front of the shul when they go up to duchen. This practice is incorrect. The kohanim are required to place their shoes under the benches or in some other inconspicuous place when they go up to duchen. It shows a lack of respect to leave the shoes lying about (Mishnah Berurah 128:15)

#### Washing Hands

Prior to duchening, there is a requirement that the kohanim wash their hands. In some shuls, the Kohanim wash their hands in the front of the shul before they go up to duchen. What is the reason for this practice?

This custom has a source in Rishonim and Poskim and should definitely be encouraged. Tosafos (Sotah 39a s.v. kol) rules that one should wash one's hands relatively near the duchen, whereas washing further away and then

walking to the duchen constitutes an interruption, a hefsek, similar to talking between washing netilas yodayim and making hamotzi on eating bread. (His actual ruling is that one should wash one's hands within twenty-two amos of the duchen, which is a distance of less than forty feet.) Thus, according to Tosafos, we are required to place a sink within that distance of the duchen where the kohanim stand to duchen. The Magen Avrohom rules according to this Tosafos and adds that since the kohanim wash their hands before retzay, the chazan should recite the brochah of retzay speedily. In his opinion, the time that transpires after the kohen washes his hands should be less time than it takes to walk twenty-two amos (128:9). Thus, retzay must be recited in less time than it takes to walk twenty-two amos. The Biur Halachah adds that the kohanim should not converse between the washing of their hands and the duchening, because this, also, constitutes a hefsek.

#### Duchening and Dreams

A person who had a dream that requires interpretation and does not know whether the dream bodes well should recite a prayer at the time of the duchening (Berachos 55b; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 130:1). It should be noted that the text of the prayer quoted by the Gemara is different from that quoted in the majority of siddurim. The Gemara cites the following text for this prayer:

"Master of the World, I am yours and my dreams are yours. I dreamed a dream that I do not understand its meaning -- whether it is something I have dreamt about myself or it is something that my friends dreamt about me or whether it is something that I dreamt about them. If these dreams are indeed good, strengthen them like the dreams of Yosef. However, if the dreams need to be healed, heal them as Moshe healed the bitter waters of Marah, as Miriam was healed of her tzaraas, as Chizkiyahu was healed of his illness and as the waters of Yericho were healed by Elisha. Just as You changed the curse of Bilaam to a blessing, so, too, change all my dreams for the good." According to the opinion of the Vilna Gaon, this prayer should be recited at the end of all three blessings, rather than reciting the "Yehi Ratzon" that is printed in most siddurim (Mishnah Berurah 130:5).

One should complete the prayer at the moment that the congregation answers Amen to the blessings of Birkas Kohanim. This prayer can be recited not only when one is uncertain of the interpretation of the dream, but even when one knows that the dream bodes evil (Mishnah Berurah 130:4).

Among Ashkenazim in chutz la'aretz, where the practice is to duchen only on Yom Tov, the custom is to recite this prayer every time one hears the duchening, because there is a likelihood that since the last Yom Tov one had a dream that requires interpretation (Mishnah Berurah 130:1). This prayer is not recited on Shabbos, unless one had a bad dream that night (Mishnah Berurah 130:4). In Eretz Yisrael, where the custom is to duchen daily, the practice among Ashkenazim is to recite the prayer for dreams at the last of the three berachos of the duchening at musaf on Yom Tov, when it does not fall on a Shabbos. The custom is that the kohanim chant the last word of the brochah on these Yom Tov days to allow people sufficient time to recite this prayer.

It all places, the custom among Sefardim is not to recite the prayer, unless the person had such a dream.

As a kohen, myself, I find duchening to be the most beautiful of mitzvos. We are, indeed, so fortunate to have a commandment to bless our fellow Jews, the children of Our Creator. The nusach of the bracha is also worth noting. "Ivarach es amo yisrael b'ahava" -- to bless His nation Israel with love. The blessings of a kohen must flow from a heart full of love for the Jews that he is privileged to bless.

#### END OF HAMELAKET ITEMS

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from: Kol Torah Webmaster <webmaster@koltorah.org>

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date: Thu, Apr 23, 2015 at 6:16 PM

subject: Fwd: Kol Torah Parashiyot Tazria-Metzora

## The Hebrew Calendar and its Missing Years- Part Two

by Reuven Herzog ('13) and Benji Koslowe ('13)

Last week we presented the work of *Seder Olam Rabbah* and went through its chronology from Adam HaRishon until Alexander the Great, highlighting important events along the way. This week we will bring light to issues that arise when comparing *Seder Olam's* account of Bayit Sheini chronology with the conventional [BK1] account of history. We will then hopefully explain how *Seder Olam's* account consistently employs the methodology of Chazal to successfully arrive at its conclusions, regardless of outside chronologies.

### III. Addressing Problems with Gaps

The calendric calculation of *Seder Olam*, which we have seen, becomes dubious when compared to the accepted conventional history. These historic accounts are supported by the vast majority of historians. Steles and other archaeological findings from both Persia and Greece, who were classically enemy empires, as well as works from Ptolemy and other Egyptian sources, all support the following account of history:

Name	Start of Reign	End of Reign
Cyrus II the Great	550 BCE	530 BCE
<i>Conquest of Babylonia and Cyrus Proclamation 539 BCE</i>		
Cambyses II	530 BCE	522 BCE
Darius I the Great	522 BCE	486 BCE
Xerxes I	485 BCE	465 BCE
Artaxerxes I	465 BCE	424 BCE
Xerxes II	424 BCE	424 BCE
Sogdianus	424 BCE	423 BCE
Darius II	423 BCE	404 BCE
Artaxerxes II	404 BCE	358 BCE
Artaxerxes III Ochus	358 BCE	338 BCE
Artaxerxes IV	338 BCE	336 BCE
Darius III	336 BCE	330 BCE

There are three main points of disagreement between *Seder Olam* and the accepted conventional history. These variances, taken all together, generate for *Seder Olam* roughly 165 “missing years” during the Second Temple period.

1. *Seder Olam* describes the chronological order of kings as Koresh, followed by Achashveirosh, followed by Daryavesh. In fact, Daryavesh is said to be the son of Achashveirosh and Esther. Secular sources disagree, instead placing Darius chronologically before Xerxes[1] (as well as recording a king, unnamed in Tanach, between Cyrus and Darius). Historians believe that the Persian king who took control over the Babylonian empire was Cyrus. After him ruled Cambyses, then Darius, and then Xerxes. Cyrus is consistent with Koresh from Tanach, both narratively – the Cyrus Cylinder is clear evidence for the Biblical Koresh's proclamation – and linguistically – the names are very similar. Likewise, Darius is naturally identified to be Daryavesh. Pinpointing the character of Achashveirosh is trickier. *Seder Olam* describes that Achashveirosh was king

in between Cyrus (Koresh) and Darius (Daryavesh). However, the name Achashveirosh sounds nothing like Cambyses, whom historians say was the second king of this Persian line.

Of all the kings mentioned, Xerxes is the likeliest candidate to be Achashveirosh. The name “Xerxes” is a Greek translation of the Persian name “Chashyarsha” (“חשיארשׁ”)[BK2]. Interestingly, at the end of Megilat Esther (10:1), Achashveirosh's name is spelled with a Keri UKetiv (a word that is spelled differently than it is read) that is written as though it should be read like “Chashirash” (“אהשרשׁ”)[BK3].

There is additional evidence from Sefer Ezra as to Achashveirosh and Xerxes being one and the same. In Ezra 4:5-6 we have a list of Persian monarchal genealogy. Pasuk 5 mentions Koresh and Daryavesh, after which Pasuk 6 mentions Achashveirosh. The simple read of the Pesukim indicates that Achashveirosh was king after Daryavesh. This also suggests that Achashveirosh is Chashirash/Xerxes.

Thus, while conventional history places Achashveirosh as king *after* Daryavesh, *Seder Olam* places Achashveirosh as king *before* Daryavesh. This is one discrepancy.

2. *Seder Olam* writes that Daryavesh and Artachshasta are the same person. This claim is based on Sefer Ezra. In Perakim 1-6 the king is Daryavesh, whose role in the story ends during his sixth year when the Second Temple is built (Ezra 6:15). In the next perek the Persian king is called by the name “Artachshasta,” and it is his seventh year as king (Ezra 7:7). It is in this year that Ezra arrives in Israel and emerges as the leader of his generation. *Seder Olam* claims that Daryavesh and Artachshasta are the same person – this king sees the completion of the Temple construction in his sixth year, and then Ezra arrives in Israel in his seventh.

*Seder Olam's* account differs very much from conventional history. Conventional history shows that Artaxerxes (i.e. Artachshasta) was crowned king more than 20 years after the death of Darius. In between Darius and Artaxerxes is the king Xerxes (whom we identified above as Achashveirosh). This is another discrepancy between the two calendars.

3. Both *Seder Olam* and conventional history agree that Alexander the Great defeated a Persian king named Darius. However, *Seder Olam* and conventional history disagree as to which Darius this was. According to *Seder Olam*, this king was the Darius who saw the construction of the Second Temple (and who was alternatively called “Artachshasta”). According to conventional history, this king is identified as Darius III, who lived 150 years after Darius I (the character in Tanach). Conventional history identifies several Persian kings in between Darius I and Alexander's defeat of Darius III. *Seder Olam* skips them all.

Because *Seder Olam* moves Xerxes, morphs Darius with Artaxerxes, and equates Darius I with the king who was killed by Alexander the Great, *Seder Olam* winds up with roughly 165 fewer years of history than the conventional account.

Another challenge with *Seder Olam* is that the Chanukat HaBayit-Ezra jump (achieved by identifying Daryavesh with Artachshasta) seems to clash with the narrative of Sefer Ezra. When Ezra arrives in Israel, the entire Jewish population is intermarried with the local idol-worshippers. This would be a truly stunning turn of events only a year after the dedication of the second Beit HaMikdash. Furthermore, Chaggai and Zecharyah, the two central Nevi'im during the construction of the Beit HaMikdash, are nowhere to be found during Ezra's time; if this is only a year later, as *Seder Olam* claims, what happened to them? Furthermore, would they have not stopped the people from intermarrying? It seems clear that there must have been a long period without leaders between the two events.

In summary, as we see from the timeline of conventional history, it is commonly deduced that the [BK4] Persian kings ruled for a total of 220 years. This contradicts the *Seder Olam* account, which assumes 52 years of Persian rule under only three (or four) kings. This is a discrepancy of approximately 165 years (this approximation is due to slight

differences in calculations, which can be explained based on overlapping kings' years). These are the missing years.

#### IV. How Seder Olam is Internally Consistent

We will attempt to resolve this conflict by showing how *Seder Olam*, a Midrashic adaptation of history, is internally consistent. By following its own rules, *Seder Olam* creates an inclusive and precise, if not externally accurate, calendar.

Tanach is not always crystal clear about chronology. *Seder Olam*, though, uses exact dates to chronicle the Jewish story[2]. *Seder Olam's* modus operandi for deciding a date when there is ambiguity is minimalism. We see this minimalist tendency of Chazal as well regarding character identification. For example, in Shemot Perek 2 we encounter two anonymous Jewish men who witness Moshe killing an Egyptian, forcing Moshe to flee (Shemot 2:13-14). The *Midrash Tanchuma* identifies these men as Datan and Aviram, two men who appear in Parashat Korach as leaders of an insurgency against the leadership. Chazal make this identification so as to minimize the amount of characters in the grand story (as well as to teach a lesson about long-time rivalries and their origins).

Similarly, and more relevant to our topic, *Seder Olam* is minimalist regarding chronology. For example, Avraham is told that his descendants will be slaves for 400 years (BeReishit 15:13). However, the Chumash never explicitly identifies when these years begin. Being minimalist and decisive, *Seder Olam* identifies the 400 years of slavery as beginning from the birth of Yitzchak. This minimalism is evident as well by *Seder Olam's* morphing of Daryavesh and Artachshasta. The text of Sefer Ezra is not absolutely clear as to what happens between the sixth year of Daryavesh and the seventh year of Artachshasta, so *Seder Olam* makes an absolute decision and says that Daryavesh and Artachshasta are the same person. *Seder Olam* makes a similar decision by skipping from Darius I to Darius III – instead of having two separate characters, it is possible to say that they were the same person. While these decisions are not consistent with conventional history, they work within the methodology of *Seder Olam*.

Like *Seder Olam's* alterations with Darius, we can show as well how its misplacement of Xerxes is internally consistent within its methodology.

The Perek that unlocks much of the post-Churban calendar actually precedes the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. Yirmiyahu Perek 25 is important in that it contains two critical details that together allow for an explanation of the timeline of Galut Bavel and the return to Israel. First, the Perek opens with a double date. The Nevu'ah is introduced, "*HaDavar Asher Hayah El Yirmiyahu Al Kol Am Yehudah BaShanah HaRevi'it LiYhoyakim* [BK5] *Ben Yoshiyahu Melech Yehudah, Hi HaShanah HaRishonit LiNvuchadretzar Melech Bavel*," "The word which came to Yirmiyahu concerning all the people of Yehudah, in the fourth year of Yehoyakim son of Yoshiyahu, king of Yehudah, which was the first year of Nevuchadretzar, king of Bavel" (Yirmiyahu 25:1). Since all reference points from the Babylonian exile and onward are dated to foreign kings, the synchronization found here between the Judean years and the Babylonian years allows for the shift.

The other key found in this Perek is the message of the Nevu'ah itself, the famous 70 years of Babylonian rule. Yirmiyahu here tells Bnei Yisrael that as a result of the people's refusal to change its evil ways and serve Hashem properly, Hashem will bring Bavel to rule over them for 70 years. After this time is up, Bnei Yisrael will return to independence. (This refers to a period of subservience to Bavel, and does not mean a period of exile. Exile ensues as a punishment and a message since Bnei Yisrael rebel against Bavel and do not accept their lighter punishment of subservience.)

Sefer Ezra begins with the Persian king Koresh's proclamation allowing the Jews to return to Eretz Yisrael and to rebuild the Beit HaMikdash. This is dated, "*UViShnat Achat LeChoreshe Melech Paras Lichlot Devar Hashem MiPi Yirmiyahu*," "In the first year of Koresh, king of Persia, at the conclusion of the word of Hashem spoken by Yirmiyahu." The only relevant speech of Yirmiyahu is Perek 25. Seventy years of Babylonian rule have

expired[BK6] and, as prophesied, Bavel is no longer controlling anyone; Persia is now in charge.

Yirmiyahu 25 occurs in the fourth year of Yehoyakim's reign. Working backwards from the Beit HaMikdash's destruction (year 3338), Tzidkiyahu ruled for 11 years, and Yehoyakim also ruled for 11 years[3]. Accounting for a year of overlap, Yehoyakim's first year was 21 years before the Churban HaBayit. Thus, his fourth year (i.e. the first year of Babylonian rule) was 18 years before the destruction, which comes out to be year 3338-18=3320 of *Seder Olam*. Seventy years later, the first year of Koresh's rule, was in year 3390 of *Seder Olam*.

In fact, there are two different periods of 70 years relating to the end of Bayit Rishon. The first is prophesied by Yirmiyahu as 70 years of Babylonian rule with no mention of exile. The second, which we previously discussed[4], is a retrospective reference by Zecharyah to the time between the destruction of the first Beit HaMikdash and the construction of the second Beit HaMikdash.

The difference in time between the first 70 years and the second is easily calculable. The Babylonian conquest of Israel, the beginning of Yirmiyahu's 70 years, occurred in the fourth year of Yehoyakim's reign. We have already established that this was 18 years before the Churban Beit HaMikdash, the start of Zecharyah's 70 years. Logically, this difference between the beginnings of the two blocks holds for the ends of the two blocks as well. The first year of Koresh's reign – the end of Yirmiyahu's prophecy – would therefore precede the second year of Daryavesh's reign – the end of Zecharyah's 70 years – by 18 years.

As just demonstrated, there are 18 years between Koresh's declaration, in the first year after his conquest of Babylonia, and the construction of the Beit HaMikdash, in Daryavesh's second year. Historical sources point to a nine-year reign of Cyrus over Babylonia, and then another king ruling for eight or nine years, followed by Darius. However, the latest mention of Koresh in the Tanach is his third year (Daniel 10:1). This leaves a large gap until the next date, the second year of Daryavesh – a gap of fourteen years. According to Megilat[BK7] Esther, Achashveirosh ruled for at least 12 years – the primary events all occur then (Esther 3:7). Preferring not to leave a gap in the timeline, *Seder Olam* moves the reign of Achashveirosh/Xerxes into the gap following Koresh, fitting him snugly between Koresh and Daryavesh.

#### Interim Conclusion

In[BK8] the final installment of this essay, we hope to suggest two reasons for *Seder Olam's* intentional deviation from conventional chronology, one looking toward the past and one looking toward the future.

Footnotes [1] Who are equated with Daryavesh and Achashveirosh, respectively, as will be explained. [2] Despite *Seder Olam's* interpretation as such, it is possible that numbers in Tanach (and particularly lengths of time) are not entirely precise. Certain repetitions of number in short spans give an impression of rounding and usage of more typological numbers. As an example, five Shofetim and kings in Sifrei Shofetim and Shmuel are said to have each ruled for 40 years, with another Shofeit ruling for 80 years, twice 40. The number four symbolizing completeness (encompassing all directions), 40 years can simply connote "a long period of time."

We can therefore also suggest that the dates mentioned in Tanach are not intended to be completely exact, but rather are sometimes meant to carry meaning. Due to this, some imprecision of numbers can be allowed. [3] Yehoyachin, in between these two, did not rule for a significant period of time. [4] See section II-B.