

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
PRIVILEGES AND RIGHTS

The nature of human beings is to automatically transfer that which begins as a privilege – an extra perk in life – into a right, something that the person is automatically entitled to have. No one ever wants to experience the loss of the privilege or boon that one once attained. A reduction in salary, loss of a professional or commercial title, the defeats suffered in an election, all of these are painful experiences to have to absorb in one's lifetime.

Therefore, we are witness to former government and legislative position holders, even when they are no longer serving in that position, called by the former title. This is not necessarily arrogance or hubris on their part but rather an example of how something that once was a privilege now, because of time and circumstance, is deemed to be a right.

And, while it is possible to absorb and even understand the loss of privileges, human beings find it difficult, if not well-nigh impossible, when they consider denial to be a right, an entitlement. A very large portion of the governmental budget in all Western societies, as well as the State of Israel, include what are euphemistically called entitlements. Social Security, healthcare programs, Workmen's Compensation, unemployment benefits and many other types of welfare programs all began as privileges granted by the government. Today they are untouchable rights that no political party or ambitious politician would dare touch or curtail. There simply is no way to take something that people now view as a right and restore it to its original status as being a privilege.

The Western world is based on the belief that there are "certain inalienable rights" that exist for the benefit of all human beings. The American Declaration of Independence listed these rights as being life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, among other unspecified other ones. France phrased it differently as being liberty, equality and fraternity. Whatever phrases or words are used, it is obvious that all believe that there are certain basic rights that all human beings are entitled to, and that simply being alive is sufficient to acquire these entitlements for one's self.

This mental and social attitude governs much of current society. There are precious few things left in our world that we would consider to be a privilege and something that we are allowed to automatically demand for ourselves as a right. And when, for whatever reason, one is diminished or removed from our lives, a personal or even national crisis develops.

This attitude drives much of society today especially among our young. Growing up with a sense of entitlement often leads to great complications in later life when those entitlements somehow disappear or are even only diminished. Something that we feel that we are entitled to is never quite as appreciated or valued as something that you receive as a privilege or a gift. Rights may be squandered easily while privileges somehow are more guarded and treasured.

Affluence contributes to changing privileges into rights. Pesach vacations, school trips to Poland, a gap year or two of study in Israel, a college education, major support from others while continuing to study after marriage, are examples in our current Jewish world of privileges, many of which were completely unknown in an earlier generation of Orthodox Jewish life. These have become rights, not even obligations. This attitude leads to a narcissistic and skewed society.

The basis of the Torah is gratitude – gratitude to our parents, teachers, elders and even to governmental authorities. All this is ultimately related to the gratitude to our Creator with the life and sustenance that has been granted to us. The Talmud disparages those who are chronic

complainers about life and its vicissitudes by stating: "It is sufficient that the person is still alive!"

The attitude of Judaism towards life generally is that everything is really a privilege, even life itself. It is easier to deal with the challenges that life imposes upon us if one views it from the vantage point of privilege rather than that of entitlement and rights.

Shabbat shalom
Berel Wein

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
NASSO

The human drive to be unique and special, to stand out in a crowd, to identify one's self in terms of being of a different status than others, is common to all of us. Many times in life we measure ourselves not by our own lives but rather how we differ from all of the people that surround us. This is true in the usual and mundane events of life that occur to us daily. But it is also true in the holy drive for eternity and meaningfulness that is manifested by the soul that exists within each of us.

Because of this, we look for exceptionalism in areas of life that we deem to be the realm of the soul and of potential holiness. The Torah provides such an example of this inner drive for exceptional and more meaningful feelings of holiness in this week's Torah reading. The entire topic of a person becoming a nazir, a person of special holiness, with additional restrictions on one's personal life and behavior, is an example of this yearning. This is the drive to have one's soul achieve an exceptional holiness that will differentiate this person from his surroundings and from other human beings.

In the view of the Torah here, as in many other instances in religious life, motive is the key. What are the true forces and motives that drive this decision? Are these motives holy and noble, driven by pure altruism and religious fervor or are they merely an expression of ego, arrogance and one-upmanship being played out against the background of religious ritual?

Because of this question and the almost impossibility of answering it, the rabbis of the Talmud took a negative view of the entire concept of declaring one's self as being a nazir. There is something intrinsically dangerous and wrong in using religious ritual as a means of self-aggrandizement. In the tome of uses, as an example, only one case, where according to one of its opinions, the creation of the status of a nazir was held to have been completely justified.

The drive for personal holiness and for raising oneself spiritually higher, especially in an age of decadence and moral depravity, is a positive one. However, to express that drive in a sincere, unobtrusive manner is a very challenging task and it is one where most people fall short. Others are repelled by public displays of holy zeal and alleged religious fervor.

Instead of introducing greater holiness to society, this quest for personal holiness at the expense of others only serves to diminish the content and force of holiness in that society. This fact lies at the heart of the rabbinic disapproval, generally speaking, of those who invoke becoming a nazir as the means for their own spiritual attainments and perfection.

All through the history of Jewish religious observance, it is recorded for us in the Talmud and in the later works of the great Hasidic masters and the holy men of Mussar, modesty and self-effacing were encouraged above all else in the pursuit of holiness. This lesson of the nazir applies to our time and place as well.

**The Pursuit of Peace (Naso 5777)
Covenant & Conversation
Judaism & Torah**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

**Parshat Naso (Numbers 4:21-7:89)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

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

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

This priestly benediction was a regular part of the daily Temple service. To this very day, here in Israel, every morning during the repetition of the Amidah, the descendants of Aaron bestow this blessing upon the congregation. Prior to blessing the congregation, the

Priest-Kohanim recite the following benediction; “Blessed are You, O Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron, and commanded us to bestow a blessing upon His nation Israel with love”. What is the significance of these last two words, “with love”? And if the Priest-Kohen does not feel love in his heart for every member of the congregation, does this disqualify his blessing?

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

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

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

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

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

Love and responsibility are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, the very Hebrew word ahavah is based on the Aramaic word for giving. The Kohen-Priest who is a Jewish teacher and a Jewish leader, simultaneously functions as the agent of the Almighty and of the nation. He must take responsibility for his nation, he must attempt to “brand” them with G-d’s name, with G-d’s love, and with G-d’s justice. He must communicate with his nation, symbolized by the cantor or shaliah tzibbur, he must know what hurts his nation and what his nation needs, and then he must actively try to assuage that pain while raising the nation closer to the realm of the Divine. In

short, he must love his people and take responsibility for them, as the benediction before the blessing explains so very well!

Post Script

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

Shabbat Shalom

Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim Rav Shlomo Aviner Shlit"i

Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Ephraim Fischel Herschkowitz ztz"l:
Rav of Approbations and Rav with Authority
Eulogy given in the Yeshiva

The elder Posek of America, Ha-Gaon Ha-Rav Ephraim Fischel Herschkowitz ztz"l, has ascended on high. Although not everyone knows of him, since he did seek publicity on account of his humility, anyone who is involved with Pesak Halachah knew him well.

Rav Herschkowitz was born in the city of Munkatch in the year 5683 to a family of Spinka Chasidim. He would accompany his father and grandfather to visit the Admor "Chakal Yitzchak" of Spinka on the holidays. In his youth, he learned in the Talmud Torah in Munkatch, but when he reached the age to go and learn in Yeshiva, his father did not want him to learn in one of the large, Ashkenazi Yeshivot out of fear that he would lose his Chasidic fervor. He therefore remained in Munkatch and learned with other young men in the Spinka Kloiz without a Rav and without a Rosh Yeshiva. If he had a question, he would ask his uncle, Ha-Rav David Schliessel, Av Beit Din of the Beit Din of Admor "Minchat Eleazar" of Munkatch (see Shut Minchat Eleazar 4:64 that Rav David's great-grandfather was Rabbi Akiva Eiger).

Rav Herschkowitz had many positions as a Dayan and Posek during his lifetime and was therefore known by various titles. After the Holocaust, he served as the Rabbi of Halein, Austria, and was therefore known as the Haleiner Rav. He later moved to New York and was appointed by Ha-Admor of Sanz-Klausenberg, Rabbi Yekutiel Yehudah Halberstam, author of Shut Divrei Yetziv, to serve as a member of his Beit Din. He was therefore also known as the Klausenberger Dayan, and he is thus being buried in the section of Klausenberg Chasidim in Netanya. One may also see his importance in his approbations to hundreds of halachic books. In merit of this, he was also known as the "Rav of Approbation".

Gedolei Yisrael greatly admired him. For example, see Shut Mishneh Halachot (4:2) and the accolades given to Rav Herschkowitz by Ha-Rav Menashe Klein, the Ungvarer Rav.

As a Posek and Dayan, he had interesting halachic positions.

As is known, today everyone learns Mishnah Berurah, but that was not always the case. Ha-Rav Herschel Schachter, one of the Roshei Yeshiva of Yeshivat Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, once related that when he originally learned in Yeshiva there was hardly one set of Mishnah Berurah, while today there are myriads of sets. And he himself didn't even have a Mishnah Berurah until six years after he was married. His wife bought him a set as a birthday gift since her father had one. If someone had a question, he looked in the Shulchan Aruch and its commentaries.

But many Poskim decided that the Mishneh Berurah was the final arbiter of Halachah, including the Tshbinder Rav (Sar Ha-Torah, p. 298), Chazon Ish (Maaseh Rav Volume 1, p. 23. Kovetz Igrot Volume 2 #41) and Ha-Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Ha-Sod, pp. 124-125). But Ha-Rav Herschkowitz would rule according to the many Chasidic Poskim, such as Shulchan Aruch Ha-Rav of Admor Ha-Zaken of Lubavitch and Shulchan Ha-Tahor - Kamarana.

Here are a few of his rulings: He ruled that one should limit the amount of time he wears Tefillin because of their holiness. One should therefore remove them as quickly as possible after Davening, and it is preferable to take them off after the Shemoneh Esrei. And he ruled that women are not obligated to Daven the entire Shemoneh Esrei, since this was the custom in the past generations (See our discussion in Shut She'eilat Shlomo 1:41. Mishneh Berurah 106:4. Piskei Teshuvot ibid.).

As said, Rav Herschkowitz was an important Dayan, and ruled in the most complex cases. During the terror attack on the World Trade Center, a Belzer Chasid was killed. He and his Beit Din investigated the details and freed the widow from being an Agunah.

One of the most important cases for Chabad Chasidim is what is known as "Didan Natzach". The grandson of the Friediker Rebbe took Sefarim from the Chabad library in New York and sold them, claiming that as the only grandchild, he was the rightful inheritor. The last Lubavitcher Rebbe, however, said that the books belong to the entire Chabad Chasidim. After a lengthy legal battle, the Lubavitcher Rebbe was proven right. The expression "Didan Natzach" means "we were victorious", since this episode also solidified the fact that the Rebbe was indeed the Rebbe of Chabad. In the middle of this episode, the Lubavitcher Rebbe wanted to take counsel with a major Posek outside of Chabad, who was in way connected to the issue. He turned to Rav Herschkowitz through a messenger. Rav Herschkowitz responded that he is unable to render a ruling without hearing both sides of the story, but that it appears to him that the conduct of the grandson is not halachically correct.

And as is known, Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein wrote at great length against establishing an Eruv in Manhattan, Brooklyn and in other large cities in America (Shut Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 1:139-140, 173. 5:96). In the world of Halachah, it is generally stated that Ha-Rav Menashe Klein disagrees with him and established an Eruv in Brooklyn. But Ha-Rav Herschkowitz also held this way and established an Eruv in Williamsburg, where he lived (the opinion of the Satmar Rebbe, who had also lived there, regarding this issue has been the subject of much discussion and several books). Although some Satmar Chasidim harshly disagreed with this ruling and harassed him, Rav Herschkowitz did not fear anyone and held fast to his opinion.

On account of his greatness in Torah, he had wide shoulders and the authority to rule about the most severe and complex issues.

During the 11th Siyum of Daf Yomi in 5765 in New York, Rav Herschkowitz was honored as the elder Posek in America to begin Masechet Berachot. In the first Mishnah of Shas, Rabban Gamliel's sons ask their father how to act according to Halachah in a particular case. We learn from there the incredible importance of asking questions of a Rabbi when there is a doubt and the incredible importance of a Posek to guide us.

In Rav Herschowitz merited a great halachic authority who illuminated the path for us with humility, self-sacrifice, Torah wisdom and fear of G-d.

May his soul be bound up in the bonds of the living with all of the great Tzadikim and Geonim.

מלאכה עונת שהיא עצרת The Message of Shavuos Ma'amar by the Tolna Rebbe

Shavuos, surprisingly, is the only one of the רגלים שלוש that is observed for just one day. Pesach is celebrated for seven days, and Sukkos for eight (including Shemini Atzeres). Why is specifically Shavuos designated by the Torah as a one-day celebration?

This distinction between Shavuos and the other Yamim Tovim becomes especially surprising in light of the fact that it commemorates *Matan Torah*. The entire purpose of creation was for Torah, for *Am Yisrael* to accept the yoke of Torah. Why, then, is

specifically the holiday celebrating *Matan Torah* the shortest of the holidays? Moreover, the seven-day observance of Pesach celebrates the event of *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, the entire purpose of which was for *Bnai Yisrael* to arrive at Sinai and accept the Torah, as *HKB"H* – "היה ה' על האלוקים את תעבודן ממצרים העם את הוציאך, ה' הזהיר על האלוקים את תעבודן ממצרים העם את הוציאך" (Shemos 3:12). Sukkos, too, celebrates the conditions provided by *HKB"H* when *Bnai Yisrael* left Egypt:

כי דורותיכם ידעו למען
...in order that future generations will know that I had *Bnai Yisrael* reside in *sukkos* when I took them from Egypt" (Vayikra 23:43). Why are the holidays celebrating *Yetzias Mitzrayim* so much longer than the celebration of *Matan Torah*, if *Yetzias Mitzrayim* was just the means to reach *Matan Torah*, which was the final goal?

The *Sifrei* (Re'ei, 87) cites the following answer to this question in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai:

מלמד. בלבד אחד יום אלא אינה, מלאכה עונת שהיא עצרת. 'ה זהו זה עשה, מלאכה עונת שאין והג פסח ישראל על הכתוב שחשך.

Pesach and Sukkos, which do not fall during the work season – He made one seven and the other eight. But Shavuos, which falls during the work season, is only one day. This teaches that the Torah spared Yisrael [the loss of work].

It turns out that according to Rabbi Shimon, if not for the fact that Shavuos is observed during the *kedusha* of Yom Tov, the work season, Shavuos would have been designated as a seven-day or eight-day Yom Tov. It is only because Shavuos is celebrated during the time when *Am Yisrael* work in the fields that *HKB"H* saw fit to shorten the celebration of Shavuos, and make it just one day.

The question arises, what is so significant about this factor of עונת that it overrides even the *kedusha* of Yom Tov? We should add that Rabbi Shimon himself is cited elsewhere (Berachos 35b) as commenting, רביה בשעת וזרוע הרישה בשעת חורש אדם אפשר, – "If a person plows during the plowing season and plants during the planting season, what will be with his Torah study?" And yet here, in the context of the Shavuos celebration, Rabbi Shimon says just the opposite – that the need to work during the *kedusha* of Yom Tov overrides the celebration of *Matan Torah*!

לעולם בטל יעמוד אל

* Delivered on Shabbos Parshas Naso, 5769. Adapted into English by David Silverberg.

The answer, perhaps, emerges from the Mishna's teaching in *Pirkei Avos* (2:2):

וכל. עוון משכחת שניהם שיגיע, ארץ דרך עם תורה תלמוד יפה, אומר הנשיא יהודה רבי בני בנו מגליאל רבן עזון וגוררת בטלה סופה, מלאכה עמה שאין תורה.

Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi Yehuda Ha'nasi, says: Torah study is valuable together with work, for toiling in both drives away sin. Any Torah that does not have work with it – eventually ends and leads to sin.

Rabbenu Yonah explains as follows:

וגם, אדם של כחו שמתשת בתורה יעסוק לכן, הרע יצר עליו ישלש לא, ובמלאכה בתורה יגע שהוא ידי שעל במלאכתו מביאתו ממלאכה כשיבתל... בטלה סופה מלאכה עמה שאין התורה וכל. לעולם בטל יעמוד ולא, חיותו לכדי גם. לו שיתנו כדי רשעים הם אם אדם בני ויהי...מתנות יאהב מפניה כי, רבה ורעתה, עונות כמה וגוררת יתם כי המדות אל אדם ובהגיע, ברבע ימות לבל לביתו העני גלות ויביא קוביוסטוס או גנב יהיה מהמתנות הכסף מעצר אין האלה

עבירה גוררת עבירה כי, בתורה האמורות המצוות כל לע עבור עד ישקוט ולא ינוח ולא, לרוחו. *For through his toiling in Torah and work, the evil inclination will not exert control over him. Therefore, one should engage in Torah which diminishes from a person's strength, and in his work for his livelihood, and he should never remain idle. Any Torah that does not have work with it will end...because when one is idle from work, this brings him to poverty, which leads to several sins and causes great evil, for as a result of it one will love gifts...and he will flatter people even if they are evil, so that they will give him [gifts]. Also, when the money from the gifts runs out, he will be a thief or swindler and bring stolen goods from the poor to his home so he will not die from hunger. Once a person arrives at this behavior, there is no stopping him, and he will not rest or relax until he violates all the commands written in the Torah, for one transgression leads to another transgression.*

Indeed, the *Shulchan Aruch* (Orach Chayim 156:1) rules – without any disagreement – that one must combine Torah learning with work:

קנו דעת על יעבירו העוני כי, עוון וגוררת בטלה סופה מלאכה עמה שאין תורה כל. *Any Torah which does not have work with it will ultimately end and lead to sin, for poverty leads a person to violate the will of his Creator.*

Quite obviously, *HKB"H* could have arranged when He created the world that the work season would not be at the time of *Matan Torah*, and He could have set the celebration of *Matan Torah* for a time that was not during the work season. But He specifically saw to it that the celebration of *Matan Torah* would fall during the *kedusha* of Yom Tov in order to teach us this vital lesson, that Torah without work will not succeed and will lead to sin, and that one must therefore ensure never to be idle, not even for a moment. One should engage, primarily, in his *kedusha* מלאכה (sacred, spiritual endeavors), and, secondarily, in his mundane work. For this reason, *HKB"H* established the festival of Shavuos for this season, during the *kedusha* of Yom Tov, and then cancelled the other days of the celebration, so that we would learn this important lesson – that it is forbidden for a person to be idle, for only toiling in Torah and work can keep a person away from sin.

עול בפריקת לפניך שחטאנו חטא על

Chazal emphasized the gravity of בטלה (idleness) in other contexts, as well.

The Mishna (Sota 1:4) tells that when a *sota* was brought to the *Beis Ha'mikdash*, she would be urged to confess her wrongdoing, and she would be told, עושה ילדות הרבה, עושה שחוק הרבה, עושה יין הרבה, בתי – “My daughter, wine leads to a lot [of sins]; frivolity leads to a lot [of sins]; childishness leads to a lot [of sins].” Frivolity and childishness are the products of בטלה, which is the cause of all sins.

Likewise, the Mishna teaches in Maseches Kesubos (59b) that even if a wife has one hundred maidservants to care for the household needs, she must perform some kind of work, because idleness leads to sin (זימה לידי מביאה הבטלה). The Mishna further establishes that if a husband declares a vow forbidding his wife from performing work, he must divorce her and pay her *kesuba*, because she may not remain idle.

The root cause of בטלה is עול פריקת – removing from oneself the yoke of Torah obligation. The *Sefas Emes (Likkutim – Aseres Yemei Teshuva, Yom Kippur)* raises the question of why the sin of בטלה – wasting time that could be used for Torah learning – is not included in the list of sins that we confess on Yom Kippur. He answers that in truth, בטלה is included in our Yom Kippur confession, as it is rooted in עול פריקת, and we confess on Yom Kippur על שחטאנו חטא על – “for the sin that we committed against You by removing from ourselves the yoke.” It is only when a person extricates himself from the yoke of Torah and *mitzvos* that he then wastes his time and fails to utilize it for Torah. If a person sees himself bound by this yoke, then he would take advantage of moment for Torah and *tefilla*.

It is told (in *Mira Dachya, Avodas Hashem*, p. 159) that Rav Mordechai of Lechovitch¹ would often say that he would not want to speak to anybody who did not view the waste of a single moment of time as severely as he regarded the sin of adultery. It is also mentioned (in the footnotes there in *Mira Dachya*) that Rav Mordechai was cited as saying that if the world treated a moment of בטלה with the same severity as adultery, then *Mashiach* would come.² The Kotzker Rebbe³ would say that he wanted the young students to avoid sin not because of the prohibition, but rather because they did not have the time to sin. He went so far as to say that idleness is even worse than sin, as evidenced by the laws of the *sukka*. If a *sukka's shechach* contains some material that is invalid as *shechach*, the *sukka* is disqualified only if there is four *amos* of such material. Empty space in the *shechach*, however, disqualifies the *sukka* even in a much smaller amount – just three *tefachim* (Sukka 17a). This shows that “empty space” – idleness – is even more severe than actual “invalid” behavior.

תבלין תורה בראתי

Every year, the summer months bring with them casualties – both in terms of actual loss of life, Heaven forbid, but also in terms of spiritual downfall. The *yetzer ha'ra* lies in ambush everywhere and seeks to ensnare us, and *Chazal* teach us that the only way to oppose the *yetzer ha'ra's* efforts is through Torah learning: הרע יצר בראתי ובראתי תורה – “I created the evil inclination, and I created the Torah as its antidote” (Kiddushin 30b). We must make every effort not to allow ourselves the עול פריקת which leads to wasting time, which in turn leads to sin. We must gird all our strength and work to ensure that we harbor a deep internal connection to Torah, such that if it ever happens that we go an entire day

1 1742-1810.

2 See also *Rishpei Eish*, #166.

3 Rav Menachem Mendel Morgenstern of Kotzk, 1787-1859.

without learning, even due to circumstances entirely beyond our control, we will not go to sleep before learning something. Just as a person who was not able to eat or drink the whole day would not go to sleep before eating and drinking something, a person must have this same feeling towards his spiritual sustenance – Torah learning, and ensure to “feed” his soul each day.

We are all capable of reaching this level, where we truly sense the need to sustain our souls through Torah learning. We can do this by

verbalizing the words with our mouths, saying to ourselves and to others, “I need to fill the needs of my soul and learn even a little bit.” Speaking these words will have the effect of arousing a feeling of necessity in one’s heart and soul.

This is particularly important during the period of *bein ha'zmanim*, when people disrupt their normal learning schedule. One must ensure to maintain his deep connection to Torah and set fixed times for Torah learning each and every day, rather than turning night into day and day into night.

We might suggest explaining in this way the Gemara’s comment in Maseches Shabbos (53a), ליה קרירא תמו בתקופת אפילו חמרא – a donkey is cold even in the summertime. During the summer, when the *yetzer ha'ra* burns like a raging fire, we must “cool” our evil inclinations by making ourselves like a donkey toiling and carrying a heavy load, as the Gemara (Avoda Zara 5b) teaches, תורה דברי על עצמו אדם ישים לעולם – “A person must always make himself like an ox ready for the yoke and like a donkey ready for his burden, for the sake of Torah.”

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Nasso

For the week ending 3 June 2017 / 9 Sivan 5777

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Thrust Upon Him?

“...for his father and his mother and his brother he may not contaminate himself” (6:7)

While he still lived in London, Dayan Yechezkel Abramsky, zatzal, would give a shiur (class) every Friday night to non-religious young people. After the meal he would welcome them into his home and teach them something from the weekly Torah portion.

When it came to the parsha of Ki Teitze he spent the whole week pondering how to explain the “yefat toar” — the halacha that allows a Jewish soldier in battle to have relations with a non-Jewish female captive.

How was he going to explain this controversial concept to his young pupils?

Try as he might, he could think of no suitable approach. Friday night arrived, and still no shiur had materialized in his head. He davened that G-d should put the right words into his mouth. Suddenly, during the Friday night meal, G-d opened his eyes and it came to him...

Later, with his students seated around the Shabbat table, Dayan Abramsky said: Before we open the Chumashim, I want you to know something: From what we are about to read we will see clearly how the whole of the Torah is obligatory upon us.

He explained. “From this week’s Torah portion we learn that the Torah never demands that which is beyond a person’s ability. In a situation where it is impossible to hold back, the Torah permits us to follow our instincts. It must be then, that everything that the Torah does demand of us is certainly within our capabilities. And if the Torah itself understands the limits of human endurance and permits that which is beyond Man’s power to withstand, it must be that everything that it commands is within our power to do.”

We see a similar concept in this week’s portion. A Nazir, someone who accepts upon himself a greater level of abstinence than the Torah requires, is not allowed to become spiritually impure through contact with a dead body, even to bury one of his parents or siblings. A kohen, however, despite his elevated level, may become spiritually impure to bury his immediate family.

Why the difference?

A kohen does not accept upon himself his higher level of holiness — it’s thrust upon him. Thus there is a possibility that when faced with a situation that may be beyond his endurance — like not being able to bury his parents — he may not withstand the test. Understanding this, the Torah permits him to compromise the sanctity of his priesthood.

The sanctity of a Nazir is not thrust upon him. It’s something that he willingly submits himself to, and thus the assumption is that he will be able to withstand the test of following his commitment to the end.

Sources: Sefer HaChinuch and a story heard from Rabbi Naftoli Falk

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Naso
Make Unpleasant Experiences as Pleasant as Possible / Hints to
Love from Other Languages

The Lesson of "Count Also The Family of Gershon"

Parshas Naso begins with the instruction to "count also the family of Gershon" [Bamidbar 4:22]. Levi had three sons — Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. We learned at the end of last week's parsha that the Leviyim were counted separately from the rest of the Jewish people. Parshas Bamidbar contained the description of the counting of Kehas, one of Levi's sons. Our parsha, Naso, picks up where Bamidbar left off, with the instruction to count the family of Gershon. This will be followed by the commandment to count the children of Levi's third son, Merari.

The Abarbanel asks why the Torah split up the counting of Leviim in such a strange fashion. We would expect that either all three branches of the family of Levi should be mentioned in Parshas Bamidbar since they already began there with the counting of the Kehas branch of the family or else Parshas Naso should have begun with the counting of the Leviim and should include all three branches of the family! What is the purpose of splitting up the counting of the Leviyim?

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei HaTosfos point out another anomaly. With the counting of Kehas, the Torah writes "By the word of G-d, in the hand of Moshe" (al pi Hashem b'yad Moshe). Likewise, with the counting of Merari, the Torah also writes "al pi Hashem b'yad Moshe." However, concerning the counting of the family of Gershon, the Torah only says "al pi Hashem" — it does not mention "b'yad Moshe."

The Daas Zekeinim concludes that apparently, the counting of the family of Gershon was done by the family of Gershon themselves! Moshe Rabbeinu just asked them to give him a number. The family performed a self-census and gave the tally back to Moshe, but Moshe himself was not involved in the counting. Why should that be?

With Abarbanel's answer to his question, we can perhaps understand the teaching of the Daas Zekeinim as well. The Abarbanel says a beautiful thought. Levi had three sons — Gershon, Kehas, and Merari. Gershon was the eldest son. In Judaism (and in the world in general, for the most part) the first born always receives the preeminent position. He receives a double portion of his father's inheritance. He is the bechor. He always has special importance.

However, among the sons of Levi, the family of Kehas had the most significant duties. This was the family that was assigned to carry the Aron [Ark] and the other keylim ["vessels"] of the Mishkan. Gershon did other things, but the second born received the preeminent assignment, not the first born. As the Abarbanel points out, this was somewhat of a slight to the Bnei Gershon. The Abarbanel says that even though the Almighty had His reasons for giving the Bnei Kehas the more preeminent role, it is still necessary to take into account the feelings of the first born. He must be compensated with some sort of a "consolation prize". It is necessary to make him feel good, in spite of the fact that he has been slighted. Therefore, Parshas Naso begins with the words "Count also the Children of Gershon..." Gershon gets prime billing at the start of the parsha to make him feel good.

The Abir Yosef adds that this could also explain why the counting was done by the Bnei Gershon themselves rather than "through the hand of Moshe," as was the case with the other families of Levi. This is another attempt to compensate them for the "slight" of having their first-born status bypassed in the distribution of assignments. It is telling them "you have special status, you have special integrity. We will trust you to count your own family members and report back to Moshe without requiring Moshe to go around to your tents and count noses." This too was in order to make them feel a little better.

We see this theme in another place in the Torah as well. When Yaakov Avinu gave his blessings to Yosef's sons, he gave the more preeminent bracha to Ephraim, rather than to his older brother Menashe. Yaakov wanted to put his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Menashe's head, but they were not standing in that direction. Yaakov could have said, "Ephraim, why don't you move over here and Menashe you move over there." However, Yaakov did not do that. Yaakov crossed his arms to place his hands

where he wanted them to be without asking the boys to move. He did that because — despite the fact that he felt it was necessary to "slight" the bechor, asking Menashe to "move over" would have been adding insult to injury. Yaakov was sensitive to Menashe's feelings and even though he did need to "slight" Menashe, he insured that this would be done in the gentlest fashion possible.

There is a lesson here for all of us. I will share with you where I use this lesson.

I have students who are in the stage of life where they are going out on dates in order to look for their destined partner in life, their shidduch. Many times, a bochur will go out with a girl three, four, five times or sometimes even longer and then he will decide "she is just not for me." So, he will need to "deliver the news." He will need to tell the girl "Thanks, but no thanks." I tell the bochur that when he is in that type of situation (For example when a boy from the yeshiva in Baltimore has been dating a girl from New York and now wants to terminate the relationship...) that he should go into New York, look the girl straight in the face, and tell her as gently as possible, "I do not think this is going any further." This is how a person should end such a relationship. It should not be done over the phone. It should not be done through the shadchan [matchmaker]. It should be done like a mentch [gentleman].

Now, I know that travelling from Mt. Wilson Lane (the location of the Ner Israel campus) to Ocean Parkway (in Brooklyn) involves at least \$100 in car expenses — gasoline prices being what they are as well as tolls throughout Delaware, New Jersey, and New York. This is not a cheap trip for a "non-date." However, I tell them that it is worth it. It is worth it because phone calls are not the proper way to break up with a girl. "No"s are painful. When you give somebody a "No", you should try to deliver it in the gentlest way possible.

This is of course a mutual thing. When a girl drops a boy, it is very painful as well. So, do it the right way. I do not need to fire people, because I am not a boss. But I am sure that some in my audience have the need to sometimes fire employees. This is a very unpleasant experience. So, you should try to make it as painless as possible. Again, a "no" or a rejection are painful — but leaving a person a voice mail or a text message that they are fired, is not the way to go. I am not speaking of a case of gross negligence or fraud or something like that. However, there are many situations where an employer just does not need an employee anymore for no fault of the employee. It is sometimes necessary to "cut down expenses." Tough times occur. You cannot afford the person anymore. Do it right!

This is the lesson of "Count the Children of Gershon, also them..." The Torah places their census in this most prominent position in order to lessen the sting of losing out in terms of having the preeminent assignment among the family of Leviyim.

An Unbelievably Love-ly Vort

The second observation I wish to share is an amazing interpretation. It is so amazing that I did not believe it could be true. My lifelong friend Rabbi David Twersky, (editor of my weekly emails) sent me a vort [short insight] this week that his son, Mordechai Twersky, saw in a sefer he came across in the library of the Mir Yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael. I wrote my friend back that I did not believe the vort he sent me. I simply could not believe that it was authentic.

The vort was written in a sefer called Shivtei K-ah from Rav Moshe Dovid Valle [1697-1777]. This individual was a foremost student of the Ramchal, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzatto [1707-1746]. The Ramchal is the author of the classic mussar sefer — Mesillas Yesharim. He also wrote the Da'as Tevunos and much more. He was an outstanding Kabbalist. He lived in Padua, Italy.

Here is what he says:

"...So shall you bless the Children of Israel, say to them (amor lahem)" ...the priestly blessing. When the Kohanim bless the nation, they precede their blessing with a birkas hamitzvah [blessing recited prior to doing a mitzvah] "...asher kideshanu b'kedushaso shel Aharon, v'tzivanu l'varech es amo yisrael b'Ahavah" [...who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and commanded us to bless His nation Israel, with love]. The text of this blessing itself is a halachic anomaly. The Taz writes in Yoreh Deah [28:2] in connection with the blessing made when "covering the blood" following the slaughter of fowl and non-domesticated animals (...al kisui dam

b'afar [...to cover blood with dirt]) that normally we do not go into details of halachic ritual in the text of a blessing. The Taz explains there why the mitzvah of Kisui HaDam is an exception.

Therefore, it is certainly noteworthy that “with love” is specified in the text of the Birkas HaKohanim blessing. Apparently, the kohanim are required to give over their blessing with love. This emotional requirement at the time of the blessing reflects a firm requirement on the part of the Kohanim in their mitzvah performance. (It is m'avev proper execution of the mitzvah.) If there is someone in the audience that the Kohen hates, such that he cannot bless him “with love”, then he should not duchen (i.e. — not go up to the platform where the priestly blessing is recited). It must be delivered “with love.”

The Shivtei K-ah, the foremost student of the Ramchal says, “...and the Torah, by writing ‘amor lahem’ (literally ‘say to them’) implies with great focus and with complete love. And there is a hint in the pasuk that it must be said with love.” What is the hint? “For the word amor in the language of other nations means ‘love.’”

How does one say Love in French? Amour

How does one say Love in Italian? Amore

Rav Moshe Dovid Valle, the Italian disciple of the Ramchal, thus interprets the Hebrew expression ‘amor lahem’ [literally ‘say to them’] as hinting at the idea of expressing the priestly blessing to the Jewish people with love. He then says, “Do not be surprised at this ‘foreign allusion’ because we find parallel ideas in the words of our Sages in a number of places.” This is not the first case of a Biblical word deriving etymologically from foreign languages. The most famous example is the word totafos [Devarim 6:8]. The Talmud [Sanhedrin 4b] writes that we derive the fact that the head Tefillin are to contain four Biblical chapters based on exegesis of the word totafos since “tot means two in the Catfi language and fos means two in the Afriki language.”

Rav Valle explains that the Torah is not suddenly speaking Swahili or Italian in describing in describing Tefillin or the laws of the Priestly Blessing. However, the Torah sometimes uses foreign words to convey ideas. The reason for this is that our holy language (i.e. — Hebrew, lashon haKodesh) is the mother of all languages.

The world thinks that “Latin is the mother language of all tongues.” The disciple of the Ramchal says, “Heaven forbid!” Lashon Kodesh is the mother of all tongues! The nuances of all other languages are derived from it. There is no word in any other language that is not alluded to in some derivation from the holy tongue.

Thus, according to the Shivtei K-ah, the expression amor lahem — from the French amour and the Italian amore — is a hint at the source of “bless the Children of Israel with love.”

As I mentioned, if I would not have seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed it!

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

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The Blogs :: Ben-Tzion Spitz

Naso: It's all about the attitude

Friday, June 2, 2017 Sivan 8, 5777

A great attitude does much more than turn on the lights in our worlds; it seems to magically connect us to all sorts of serendipitous opportunities that were somehow absent before the change – Earl Nightingale.

There is an ancient formula, an ancient blessing really, handed down from father to son within the Jewish people for more than 3,000 years. A translation of it goes as follows:

May God bless you and guard you. May God's face illuminate you and give you grace. May God draw His face to you and place upon you peace.”

This archaic prayer is dictated by God Himself to Moses, commanding Aaron, the High Priest, to bless the nation of Israel with these exact words. To this very day, there is a custom every Friday night at the Shabbat meal, for parents to bless their children with these words. In every synagogue in the world, the descendants of the High Priest, the Kohanim, bless the entire congregation in the ritual known as Birkat Kohanim, where the Kohanim, with the prayer shawl draped

over their heads and hands, face the congregation, place their hands in an unusual configuration and proceed to bless those present. This blessing is considered so powerful, that there is a custom not to look at the Kohanim, or their hands, lest we somehow get singed by the force of the divine power they are drawing upon.

Rabbi Hirsch on Leviticus 6:24 argues that Birkat Kohanim is not some incantation with mystical power to bless upon recitation. Rather, it is the attitude of the one uttering the words that determines the ultimate efficacy of the blessing:

There are no magic powers inherent in the priest himself or in the blessing he pronounces. The attitude of the one who pronounces it is an essential part of the blessing; indeed, it is his attitude that turns the formula he recites into a blessing.”

God Himself concludes the dictation of these verses with the affirmation that: “and you shall place My Name upon the Children of Israel and I shall bless them.”

But it is the power of the intention, the focus, the attitude of the one blessing, that calls forth God, brings Him into our lives and spreads divine blessings to all those upon whom we wish it earnestly, passionately and lovingly.

May we be both a source and recipients of grand and multiple blessings.

Shabbat Shalom

Dedication - To my friend Netzer Winter of the Ministry of Commerce's Maof group, for a fantastic attitude.

jpost.com

Parashat Naso: The key to God's blessing

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

June 02 2017 | Sivan, 8, 5777

Birkat Kohanim, the Priestly Blessing, which we read in this week's Torah portion of Naso, is a favorite moment for people who go to the synagogue. In Israel, this blessing is recited every day; outside of Israel, it is recited several times a year.

Toward the end of the prayer service, the kohanim walk up to the front of the synagogue, wrap themselves in their tallitot (prayer shawls), raise their hands toward the congregation and bless it with a blessing composed of three parts: “May the Lord bless you and watch over you; May the Lord cause His countenance to shine to you and favor you; May the Lord raise His countenance toward you and grant you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

Where the Torah instructs the kohanim to bless the congregation with Birkat Kohanim, we read two additional verses. One serves as the introduction to the blessing, and the other as a conclusion. The introduction is: “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is how you shall bless the Children of Israel, saying to them: May the Lord bless...” (ibid. 6:22-23).

Simply, God instructs Aaron and his descendants the kohanim to bless the nation. But at the conclusion of this instruction, we read another verse which raises a question regarding the identity of who is giving the blessing: “They shall bestow My Name upon the Children of Israel, so that I will bless them” (ibid. 6:27).

So who is giving the blessing? God, who says “so that I will bless them,” or the kohanim, who were told “This is how you should bless the Children of Israel”? Actually, when you listen to the content of Birkat Kohanim itself, this question is easily answered. The kohanim say to the congregation “May the Lord bless you and watch over you.” So we see that the kohanim bless the nation with God's blessing. They do not create the blessing themselves. They just pass it on.

On the literal meaning of the words “so that I will bless them,” great Jewish sages of the 1st century CE, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Yishmael, disagreed (Talmud, Hullin 49). According to Akiva, the meaning of these words is as we understand: It is not the kohanim who bless the nation; rather, God provides His blessing to the nation. “I will bless them,” with “them” referring to the Jewish nation.

Yishmael does not disagree with this concept, since, as we have already shown, the blessing itself shows us that God is the one doing the blessing and not the kohanim. And yet he believes the words “I will bless them” contain an additional meaning. The entire nation is blessed with God's blessing by the kohanim, but – asks Yishmael –

who blesses the kohanim themselves? "...so that I will bless them" is the answer. God Himself blesses the kohanim.

But are the kohanim not included in the blessing of the entire nation? Do they not receive the blessing from God that they themselves bequeath to the congregation standing before them, which hears their blessing? Why the need for another blessing in the form of "I will bless them"? It seems that Yishmael is teaching us an incredibly important lesson. Indeed, the kohanim are blessed by the same godly blessing that they pass on to the entire nation. But by performing this deed, by blessing the nation, they merit an additional blessing.

God's blessing is given to all people. But whoever blesses others is privileged to receive an additional blessing. A person who wholeheartedly blesses another person is himself blessed with God's blessing.

Sometimes it is hard for us to wholeheartedly bless another person. We might be worried that his success might harm our own. The Torah teaches us that the opposite is true. The more we bless, the more we are blessed. The more we love and the more we strive for others to be happy, the more loved and the happier we will be.

There is no blessing like God's blessing, giving us abilities, aspirations and hope. Whoever wants to merit receiving this blessing must provide others with abilities, aspirations and hope, all of which we need so badly.

The writer is the rabbi of the Western Wall and holy sites.

ravkooktorah.org

***Rav Kook on Naso: Tithes and the "Sotah"
The Suspected Adulteress***

The first ten chapters of the book of Numbers discuss the organization of the Israelites in the desert. The census, the placement of camps according to tribe, the duties of the Levites, the dedication of the Tabernacle, the inauguration of the Levites - all of these topics pertain to the preparatory arrangements needed to organize the journey of millions in the wilderness.

Yet, in the middle of all of these rather technical subjects, the Torah discusses the Sotah, the suspected adulteress. What does this unfortunate story of distrust and jealousy have to do with organizing the Israelites in the desert? This topic would more naturally belong in the section on forbidden relations in Acharei Mot (Lev. chapter 18).

This anomaly did not escape the Talmudic sages. Rabbi Yochanan noted that the verses immediate preceding the section on Sotah discuss the tithes given to the kohanim.

"Why does the subject of the suspected adulteress immediately follow the laws of offerings and tithes for the kohanim? To teach that whoever does not hand over his tithes to the kohen, will in the end require the kohen's services to deal with his wife." (Berachot 63a)

What is the connection between withholding tithes and a wife's suspected infidelity?

Alienation from the kohanim

It is vital that the masses maintain a strong connection with those dedicated to the service of God and the study of Torah, like the kohanim, about whom it is written (Malachi 2:7), "From the kohen's lips they will guard knowledge, and they will seek Torah from his mouth." This bond is crucial for the ethical instruction of the people, enabling the Torah's teachings to reach the entire nation. Scholars are uplifted as they study Torah and analyze its wisdom, and the rest of the people are influenced through their relationship with those who study and disseminate Torah and its ethical teachings. What is the vehicle for ensuring this connection between the people and the spiritual elite? It is through the various gifts and tithes that the Torah designated to the kohanim.

An individual who cuts himself off from the spiritual leadership is likely to undergo a deterioration in his moral values and spiritual sensitivity. As a result of his overriding occupation with the material world and estrangement from Torah and all that is holy, the moral level of his household will decline to such an extent that even the most basic human values — modesty and fidelity — will be seriously undermined. This spiritual collapse will necessitate the assistance of the kohen because of his wife's suspect behavior. When the moral decline is so great that even his simple soul is appalled by the shocking decadence in his family-life, he will realize how wrong he was to distance himself from the kohanim and Torah scholars.

A Nation Gone Astray

This deplorable phenomenon may also occur on the national level. When the pursuit of material pleasures causes large sectors to cast off the Torah and its teachings, they will distance themselves from Torah scholars and deem them superfluous. They may even come to despise and ridicule them.

At this point, a plague of immorality and corruption will spread among the people. The situation will continue to deteriorate, until those individuals who still retain some spark of humanity and a feeling for the light of Torah will weep with broken hearts. They will painfully recognize that their lives have become debased and bleak by rejecting the ways of Torah. Their separation from Torah brought about such a wild, unbridled national spirit, that the nation is derided and mocked by other peoples.

They brought this affliction upon themselves, however, with their scorn for Torah scholars and contempt for all that is holy. The people, once famous for integrity and modesty, will require the services of the holy kohanim in order to repair the collapse of fidelity and trust.

(Gold from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, pp. 381-382)

לע"נ שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה