

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet NASO 5772

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LEADERSHIP :: Rabbi Berel Wein

All societies require leadership and guidance in order to function correctly and efficiently. Though we all state that we crave less intrusive government in our affairs it has become patently obvious that anarchy is even a worse state of affairs. In Jewish life there existed in both First and Second Temple times two parallel systems of leading and governing the people. One was the temporal secular government if you will, the judges and the monarchy. The other group of leaders was the spiritual, Torah, tradition-bound scholars and prophets of Israel.

Sometimes in instances such as Moshe, Yehoshua and Shmuel both forms of leadership were combined within one person. But for the majority of Jewish history, the two systems ran parallel to each other and more often than not were actually aggressively competitive one to the other. When the Exile began the two sets of leaders remained in vogue with only certain exceptions when the leadership of one person, such as Rabi Yehuda HaNassi was recognized by all and was paramount.

In the Exile, after the demise of the Sanhedrin structure in the fifth century, the temporal leadership of the Jews was concentrated in people of wealth, social standing and, especially important, those with connections to the government and rulers of the countries and localities where the scattered groups of Jews resided.

The counterweight to this group of leadership usually was composed of the rabbis and scholars of Israel who oftentimes clashed with the other government-recognized lay leadership group. As can be seen from the records of the Council of Four Lands (sixteenth to eighteenth century Poland and Lithuania) there was no shortage of internecine conflict between the two groups that vied for ultimate leadership of the Jewish community.

The Christian world came into an accommodation after centuries of bloody strife between Church and State where the influence and power of the Church has been greatly diminished. The Church today at best advises but it certainly no longer leads. This is not true in the Orthodox Jewish world where the struggle between the temporal and religious leadership continues unabated.

The rabbinic world continues to lay claim to its prerogative of leadership even when the Jewish people has finally achieved an independent temporal state of its own. We are witness to the recognized phenomenon of our time that hundreds of thousand Jews ignore and some even vehemently oppose the temporal wishes, laws and leadership of the country and rather follow the dictates of their particular religious leaders exclusively.

And this situation must inevitably lead to power struggles, which periodically engulf our Jewish society, usually to no benefit or permanent solution. All it takes is the appearance of some issue, major or minor, to arise on the political scene to touch off this contentious struggle. The current contentious debate regarding a new Tal Law to regulate the service of the religious in the Israeli army is an example of such a power struggle.

The issue of military or national service, which is certainly amenable to practical solution – both sides tacitly agree that this is the case – is secondary to the struggle as to who has the authority of leadership over the tens of thousands of young men who are personally to be involved in serving or not serving the state in one way or another. And it is in this struggle over leadership rights there appears to be little room or hope for compromise.

I have often felt that we are living in times very similar to the period of the Judges and of Second Temple times. Many of the problems of our state are very similar to those faced by those societies thousands of years ago. The inability to amicably settle the struggles between the Torah spirit and the necessity of governing led those societies to disasters and long lasting bitter consequences.

In perfect hindsight we are aware that both sides then engaged in a power struggle that neither of them could win, or for that matter, should have won. I think that this bleak assessment is true for our current contentious situation. It is naïve in the extreme to think that religious Jewry will listen to the demands of the state exclusively and ignore the opinions and dictates of its rabbinic leaders.

It is also unrealistic and unwanted that the rabbinic leadership can or should run the matters of state and temporal governing. We are left to hope and pray that the power struggle will be shunted aside for the greater good of all of our society and that our two parallel systems of leadership will devote their efforts to complement each other and not to constantly oppose one another.

Shabat shalom.

Weekly Parsha :: NASSO :: Monday, May 21, 2012

The longest parsha of the Torah is the parsha of Nasso, which we read publicly this Shabat. A great part of its length is due to the repetition of the offerings and gifts of the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel at the dedication of the Mishkan. Since each one of the twelve leaders brought the identical offering to the occasion and, furthermore, since the Torah itself at the conclusion of the parsha gives us a total summation of their offerings, the question naturally begs itself as to why the Torah should expend so many words and so much detail on this matter.

This question has troubled all of the commentators to the Torah and many divergent answers and opinions have been advanced to help explain the matter. All seem to be in agreement that the Torah wishes to emphasize the individual worth and contribution of each of these leaders of Israel and gave each one recognition by listing his offering individually.

While this explanation and insight is undoubtedly true, it seems not to be wholly satisfactory in light of the great length that the Torah goes to in its detail of every offering. Each of the leaders could have been mentioned by name without having to repeat the entire paragraph detailing his offering. And yet as the length of the parsha indicates, the Torah took no shortcuts regarding this matter. Even in kabbalistic thought and works, no clear explanation emerges regarding this anomaly of Torah writing.

It would be arrogant and foolish of me to advance any personal explanation of mine to address this difficulty. Though space has been left for every generation of Jews to add their insights into the Torah there are areas where even angels should fear to tread. Just as with parsha of the red heifer, the Torah purposely offers up to us a rule that defies our rational powers of logic and explanation, so too are there other areas of the Torah that defy our sense of proportion and human understanding.

I have always felt that this alone – the mystery of it all – is in itself a portion of what the Torah wishes to communicate to us with the repetition of the offerings of the leaders of Israel in this week's parsha. A Torah that makes perfect sense to the human mind can never be a Divine Torah. The mystery, even call it the illogic of certain sections of the Torah is itself the sign of its Divine origin.

The error of the "enlightened ones," the schools of biblical criticism and of many who deem themselves to be scholars in these matters is that they approach the Torah as they would approach any human work of wisdom or prose. If one approaches the Torah from the vantage point of it being a Divine document, mysterious and wondrous, greater than what the human mind can encompass, then the Torah takes on a different dimension in one's thoughts and life.

Perhaps this parsha is one of the many places where Jews can only stand back and wonder in awe as to the Divine wisdom that the Torah blesses us with even when we are unable to discern that wisdom clearly.

Shabat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Nasso
For the week ending 2 June 2012 / 11 Sivan 5772
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

History Lesson

"On the first day, Nachshon ben Aminadav, prince of Yehuda, brought his offerings." (7:12)

At the inauguration of the Mishkan, the princes of the twelve tribes of Yisrael each brought identical donations. These donations contained within them a symbolic "history lesson" depicting the history of the world from Adam onwards. What was the significance of this historical panorama?

The silver bowl that they brought alluded to Adam, the first man, for the gematria (numerical value) of word ke'arat kesef is 930 the years of Adam's life. It was made of silver which hints to the fact that Adam kept six commandments of the Torah, for the Torah is likened to silver. The weight of the bowl was 130 shekels, symbolizing the 130 years that Adam lived before his successor, Shet was born. It was through Shet that mankind was established.

Apart from this silver bowl, they brought a silver basin. The gematria of mizrak ehad kesef ("one silver bowl") is 520. Noach did not have children until the age of 500, and 20 years before this event, G-d decreed the flood. The word mizrak is from the same root as "to be thrown out," and Noach was an outsider in a generation that scoffed at his building of the ark. This basin was also silver to represent the Torah, for in addition to the six mitzvot that Adam observed, Noach kept a seventh mitzvah not to eat the limbs or the meat of a living animal. The basin weighed 70 shekels corresponding to the seventy nations that are descended from Noach who are commanded to observe these seven mitzvot to this day.

The offerings of one bullock, one ram and one lamb as olah offerings hint to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The bullock symbolizes the hospitality of Avraham when he ran to bring oxen for his guests. The ram is a reminder of Yitzchak's willingness to be bound on the altar even though a ram was offered in his stead. The lamb represents Yaakov who separated his herds from Lavan.

The two oxen, which were offered as shlamim, allude to Moshe and Aharon who made peace (shalom) between the Jewish People and their Father in Heaven.

The kaf, spoon, represents the giving of the Torah. The Torah is called a kaf because kaf can also mean "hand" — the Torah was given to us directly to be the "Hand" of G-d. The spoon weighed 10 shekels, corresponding to the Ten Commandments. It too was gold, alluding to the Torah. The kaf was filled with ketoret incense. The gematria of ketoret is 613, the number of mitzvot in the Torah.

When Adam sinned the Divine Presence withdrew from this world. The message of the symbolic "history lesson" of the princes' offerings was that with the inauguration of the Mishkan which these offerings honored, the Divine Presence rested on the world once again.

Sources: Bamidbar Rabbah; Tzror Chamor

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Naso
Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

"The Mood of the Priestly Blessing"

I am sure that you have a most favorite activity. I know that I do.

I am also sure that you have a least favorite activity, as I do.

My most favorite activity is visiting Israel. One of the experiences I especially cherish during my visits to Israel is the opportunity to hear the Priestly Blessing every single day. Outside the Land of Israel, the custom has developed, at least in Ashkenazic communities, to dispense with the

daily ritual of hearing the kohanim, the priests, bless the people by reciting the verses contained in this week's Torah portion, Naso:

May the Lord bless you and protect you!

May the Lord deal kindly and graciously with you!

May the Lord bestow his favor upon you and grant you peace! (Numbers 6:24-26)

In Israel, however, everyone has the opportunity to hear those blessings from the mouths of the kohanim every day of the week, all year long. That experience is my favorite of favorites.

I also have a least favorite activity, and that is dealing with complaints on the telephone, or these days, via e-mail. Sympathetic friends are quick to tell me that dealing with complaints is a rabbi's job. That's probably true, because even Moses, the first rabbi, had to listen to more than his share of complaints.

But there's one type of complaint that I have never been able to deal with without becoming angry. I refer to those occasions when the complainer is judgmental and finds fault in another.

Not long ago, I received such a call with reference to, of all things, the Priestly Blessing recited on the High Holidays in the fault finder's synagogue. She formulated her complaint as a question: "Were the blessings I heard valid? I happen to know that the kohen who announced the blessings is a sinner." And she proceeded to describe in detail the exact nature of the poor man's sins and how she came to know about them. Believe me, although he was far from perfect, he was guilty of neither murder nor idolatry, nor even adultery.

I assured her that the blessings she heard were perfectly valid despite the kohen's alleged misdeeds. I was careful to explain that the kohen was merely an instrument through which the Almighty Himself blessed us, and that the errant kohen was no more than His mouthpiece.

I quoted Maimonides, who states emphatically that a kohen, even a wicked one, should never refrain from his mitzvah to bless the people and that the congregation should never be troubled by the lowly status of the kohen, because ultimately the Holy One Blessed Be He bestows His compassionate blessing on the Jewish people, in accordance with His will.

To be even more convincing, I closed my argument by quoting the Shulchan Aruch, the authoritative Code of Law, which rules that no sin should stand in the way of a kohen blessing the people. Even for truly egregious crimes such as murder and idolatry, there are those who opine that if the kohen repents of his sin, he may resume blessing the people.

My elaborate response fell upon deaf ears. The woman was horrified by what she termed my "liberal permissiveness." She insisted that her entire year was ruined because she had failed to hear a proper Priestly Blessing on the High Holidays.

When individuals complain to one rabbi and are dissatisfied with his response, they of course turn to other rabbis. This woman was so disgruntled by my answer that she dashed off an e-mail to no less than six other rabbis and was careful to make sure that I received a copy of her appeal to higher authorities.

This incident occurred some time ago, and I have since had numerous occasions to contemplate my interchange with her. I have come to the conclusion that the Priestly Blessing she heard were indeed invalid, but not because of the kohen's sins. Rather, it was her own sin that rendered them invalid.

This is because prior to blessing the congregation, the kohanim themselves utter a blessing to the Lord:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who...

Has commanded us to bless His people Israel with love.

Our Sages understood that last phrase, "with love," to define the mood which must prevail in the synagogue if the blessings are to be effective. The mood must be one of love. The kohen must not even bear the slightest grudge toward any member of the congregation, and the congregation must reciprocate with an attitude of acceptance and forgiveness toward the kohen. Absent the context of love, or at least tolerance, and the blessings are indeed invalid.

By virtue of her presuming to judge this kohen, and by her sanctimonious condemnation of his behavior, the woman who called me excluded herself from the kohen's blessing.

Armed with our understanding that the atmosphere of the Priestly Blessing must be one of brotherly love, we are in the position to more fully appreciate the insightful comments of Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, the Ba'al HaTurim. His remarks are not found in this week's Torah portion, but rather in a verse in Leviticus which tells us about the very first kohen and the blessing he bestowed upon the people.

That verse reads: "Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he stepped down after offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the offering of well-being." (Leviticus 9:22)

The Ba'al Haturim believes that these three sacrificial offerings correspond to three fundamental human moods: the sin offering is a result of guilt feelings and remorse; the burnt offering is an expression of the exhilaration of success; and the offering of well-being derives from emotions of exuberance and joy.

The power of the Priestly Blessing is that it strengthens and enables and encourages people to cope with and thrive under all manner of spiritual circumstances; it enables the sinner to overcome despair; it protects the victorious hero from prideful arrogance; and it helps the joyous person subdue excessive exuberance.

There is a lesson here for all of us, whether we are the kohanim who convey the Almighty's blessings, or whether we are the recipients of those blessings sitting in the pews. All of us must cultivate an atmosphere in the synagogue of brotherly love and mutual acceptance. Only when that atmosphere is achieved can the blessings address our diverse and complex moods, and help us overcome the challenges of both success and failure, achievement and despair.

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Sages and Saints

As mentioned in a previous Covenant and Conversation, there was an ongoing debate between the sages as to whether the nazirite – whose laws are outlined in today's parsha – was to be praised or not. Recall that the nazirite was someone who voluntarily, usually for a specified period, undertook a special form of holiness. This meant that he was forbidden to consume wine or any grape products, to have a haircut and to defile himself by contact with the dead.

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

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

What is the meaning of the phrase (Num. 6: 11), and make atonement for him, because he sinned against the soul (usually translated as "by coming into contact with the dead"). Against which soul did he sin? We must conclude that it refers to denying himself the enjoyment of wine. From this we may infer that if one who denies himself the enjoyment of wine is called a

sinner, all the more so one who denies himself the enjoyment of other pleasures of life. It follows that one who keeps fasting is called a sinner. (Taanit 11a; Nedarim 10a)

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

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

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

What is remarkable however is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative. In *Hilkhot Deot*, the Laws of Ethical Character, Maimonides adopts the negative position of R. Eliezer Hakappar: "A person may say: 'Desire, honour and the like are bad paths to follow and remove a person from the world, therefore I will completely separate myself from them and go to the other extreme.' As a result, he does not eat meat or drink wine or take a wife or live in a decent house or wear decent clothing . . . This too is bad, and it is forbidden to choose this way." (*Hilkhot Deot* 3:1)

Yet in the same book, the *Mishneh Torah*, he writes: "Whoever vows to God [to become a nazirite] by way of holiness, does well and is praiseworthy . . . Indeed Scripture considers him the equal of a prophet" (*Hilkhot Nezirut* 10: 14). How does any writer come to adopt so self-contradictory a position – let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer is profound. According to Maimonides, there is not one model of the virtuous life, but two. He calls them respectively the way of the saint (*Hassid*) and the sage (*Hakham*).

The saint is a person of extremes. Maimonides defines *hassid* as extreme behaviour -- good behaviour, to be sure, but conduct in excess of what strict justice requires (*Guide for the Perplexed* III, 52). So, for example, "If one avoids haughtiness to the utmost extent and becomes exceedingly humble, he is termed a saint (*hassid*)" (*Hilkhot Deot* 1: 5).

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

These are not just two types of person but two ways of understanding the moral life itself. Is the aim of morality to achieve personal perfection? Or is it to create gracious relationships and a decent, just, compassionate

society? The intuitive answer of most people would be to say: both. That is what makes Maimonides so acute a thinker. He realizes that you can't have both – that they are in fact different enterprises.

A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But what about the members of the saint's own family? A saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint's fellow citizens? A saint may forgive all crimes committed against him. But what about the rule of law, and justice? Saints are supremely virtuous people, considered as individuals. But you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Indeed, saints are not really interested in society. They have chosen a different, lonely, self-segregating path. They are seeking personal salvation rather than collective redemption.

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

But it is not the way of the sage – and you need sages if you seek to perfect society. The reason the sage is not an extremist is because he or she realizes that there are other people at stake. There are the members of one's own family; the others within one's own community; there are colleagues at work; there is a country to defend and a nation to help build. The sage knows it is dangerous, even morally self-indulgent, to leave all these commitments behind to pursue a life of solitary virtue. For we are called on by God to live in the world, not escape from it; in society not seclusion; to strive to create a balance among the conflicting pressures on us, not to focus on some while neglecting the others. Hence, while from a personal perspective the nazirite is a saint, from a societal perspective he is, at least figuratively, a "sinner" who has to bring an atonement offering.

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

Show and Tell: We Had It First
Rabbi Benjamin Yudin
The TorahWeb Foundation

According to the Sefer haChinuch, ten of the eighteen mitzvos found in Parshas Naso deal with the nazir. As such, it is understandable that the haftorah chosen for this parsha would focus on the laws of nazir as found in the book of Shoftim. We are taught that an angel of Hashem appears to the wife of Manoach and informs her that she will conceive and give birth to a son. The prophecy continues, and she is told that this son is to be (Shoftim 13:5), "a Nazirite of G-D from the womb", till the day of his death.

When she relates the prophecy to her husband he prays to Hashem that the angel should reappear and "teach us what we should do to the child who will be born" (13:8). At first glance this is most challenging - what didn't Manoach understand that he needed clarification from the angel? The laws of the nazir are stated explicitly in Parshas Naso and there were no lack of rabbis and teachers who could guide him with any questions.

Moreover, when Hashem accedes to his request and the angel reappears, he repeats to Manoach the same set of instructions as before. What has been accomplished with the second visit of the angel? Rav Schwab zt"l, in his *Mayan Beis Ha-Shoeva*, introduces a novel and insightful message in the form of additional component to the prophecy. The malach tells the father-to-be, (13:13-14), "whatever I have told your wife tishmor - you shall observe." On the surface he is simply restating the rules. However, this may be understood to mean that the malach told Manoach that he himself shall also observe what he had told his wife, namely the laws of the nazir.

What was troubling Manoach, and what caused him to talk to the angel directly, was not that he did not trust his wife's account of the initial prophecy. Rather, Manoach was troubled by a father who is not a nazir himself raising a child to be a nazir. The angel affirmed his concern, and

agreed that the only way to raise a nazir is for the father as well to practice and observe the laws of nezirus. If Manoach would drink wine and cut his own hair, his effectiveness as a mentor would be severely compromised. Thus, the preamble to the birth of Shimshon contains a most valuable pedagogical lesson: "Do as I say not as I do" is not effective parenting.

This positive lesson is gleaned by the Chasam Sofer in his understanding of the verse, (Shemos 12:24), regarding the laws of Peasach, "you shall observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever." He notes that only when the example has been set by the parent, can there be expectation for continuity by children.

Indeed, the same lesson can be derived from the familiar passage of v'shomru (Shemos 31:16), "the children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations." If Shabbos is positive and spiritually uplifting in addition to restful and socially engaging, the reverence and respect for Shabbos by one's children will hopefully follow. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l noted that the generation that sacrificed for Shabbos, often losing their jobs to keep Shabbos, but complained at the Shabbos table "vi shver tzu zein a yid" it is difficult to be a Jew "could not transmit a Shabbos to their children that would be everlasting. Their children, while proud of their parents, were not prepared to make that sacrifice. When Shabbos is observed with pleasantness and sweetness, there is greater likelihood for perpetuity.

The first beracha of Birkas Hatorah recited daily speaks of the sweetness of Torah and asks Hashem for His assistance in experiencing and imbibing this sweetness. What follows next is the prayer that our children and children's children will be immersed and accomplished in the study of Torah. The beracha itself provides the best method of insurance: if you show your children by your studying Torah with excitement and enthusiasm for Torah, there is a much greater chance they will wish to emulate your ways.

Good Jewish parenting begins with the father of our people, Avraham Avinu. We are told that Hashem loved him (Bereishis 18:19), "because he commands his children and his household after him - acharav that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice." "Acharav" denotes that Avraham taught by example and hence his lessons live on.

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Nasso
A Source For The Singing of the Levites

Each of the three Levite families had their own job. The sons of Kehas had the very unique job of carrying the Aron. The Medrash notes that unlike the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, the Torah does not call the family of the third son of Levi by the title "the sons of Kehas" but uses the term "the sons of Ha'Kehati" [Bamidbar 4:34,37]. The Medrash states that because their job was to carry the Aron, G-d joined his own name to theirs (the Yud following Kehas and the Hay preceding it), in order that they not be wiped out. They had a dangerous occupation. If a person had an improper thought while carrying the Aron, he was in danger of losing his life. The Yud and the Hay of G-d's Name were thus placed in proximity to their name to fulfill that which is written "to save from death their souls" [Tehillim 33 :19].

This had a protective effect, it was a "segulah"; but it was not fool-proof. It did not always work. The Medrash quotes Rav Pedas in the name of Rav Yosi ben Zimra that when the Aron travelled, two bolts of fire emerged from the ends of the poles of the Aron to protect the camp from any enemies who might attack them. However, sometimes the bearers of the Aron were themselves the victims of these bolts of fire and their number was diminished by the fire's destructive force. It was a dangerous occupation.

Knowing this, we can perhaps understand another teaching of Chazal. They were commanded specifically to carry the Aron on their shoulders. The Talmud [Eruchin 11a] senses a redundancy in the words "on their shoulders they should carry it" [Bamidbar 7:9] – obviously if it is on their

shoulders they will be carrying it! The Talmud therefore derives a nuance of "song" in the word "yisa-u" [literally 'they will carry it'] as we find in the expression 'se-u zimra' [Tehillim 81:3] [carry a tune] and states that this is a hint from the Torah to the fact that the Levites accompany the Temple Service with shirah [song].

Usually, when the Talmud or Medrash provides homiletic exegesis from a pasuk, the exegesis somehow dovetails with the simple interpretation of the pasuk. However, here we have a situation where the p'shuto shel mikra [simple reading of the pasuk] relates to one matter (i.e. – carrying the Aron on their shoulder) and the d'rush (i.e. -- they sang while doing the service) seems to come literally out of left field. What is the connection? Who would ever think that carrying the Aron is related to carrying a tune and singing shirah during the course of the Temple Service?

The Shemen HaTov (volume 4) suggests a connection. Whenever a person is in a trying situation where his life is on the line, if he emerges successfully or victorious from that situation, he feels an extraordinary sense of joy and jubilation. We find this by soldiers who have been in combat. If they come out alive, having achieved success, they feel a sense of euphoria. This same concept occurs in the Mishna in Yoma [7:4]: After Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol made a holiday for his friends and relatives. The fact that he survived entrance into the Holy of Holies, which was fraught with danger and from which many High Priests did not emerge alive was reason to celebrate. To this very day, there are many places that have a special festive meal after Yom Kippur – having hopefully emerged successfully from the awesome Judgment that we face during the High Holiday period. Many people sing and dance immediately following the conclusion of Neilah for this same reason. We were just figuratively "in battle" and we have "emerged in peace from the (period of) Kodesh [holiness]."

The children of Kehas felt themselves in mortal danger, having been tasked with the awesome duty of carrying the Aron. When they successfully completed this mission, they sang to express the emotion one feels having emerged from danger. Thus the two expositions (1) they carried the Aron and (2) they carried a tune (se'u zimra) are not disconnected and disjointed expositions. They dovetail perfectly.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion Naso - The Blessing of a Kohen

"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is how you should bless the Israelites..." (Num. 6:23)

Rav Kook's position as chief rabbi of Jaffa and the surrounding settlements was extremely demanding. To rest from the long hours and pressures of his work, Rav Kook would go on vacation in the late summer, staying at the agricultural settlement of Rehovot during the harvest season for grapes.

But even in Rehovot, relaxation was not a simple matter. The local residents were excited to host the revered scholar. They sought out his advice not only in Halachic matters, but also in local administrative issues - tax collection, building local roads, and so forth. And if a Torah subject was raised, Rav Kook became a ma'ayan hamitgaber, an overflowing wellspring of knowledge and creativity, often expounding on a topic for hours.

Guarding over the Rav

Rav Kook would stay in the humble home of the Lipkovitz family. R. Avraham Yitzchak Lipkovitz, who had studied in European yeshivot before making aliyah with his family at age 18, took upon himself to watch over their esteemed guest's rest and recuperation. He took this duty most seriously, and formulated an appropriate plan. It quickly became clear that at their home and in the synagogue, where Rav Kook was constantly badgered with queries and solicitations, the rabbi could not properly rest.

R. Lipkovitz owned a vineyard, one that produced some of the choicest grapes in the country. In his vineyard he erected a simple hut for Rav Kook's personal use. Each day, Lipkovitz would lead Rav Kook, riding on a donkey, to the vineyard. And for two hours, Rav Kook would rest in the hut.

Lipkovitz probably thought that the Rav spent this quiet time resting, eating grapes, and reading light material. In fact, Rav Kook's mind was far away from Rehovot and its plentiful vineyards. His thoughts soared to the heights of the Torah scholarship of Vilna. He utilized those precious hours of peace and quiet in deep study, composing an erudite commentary to the Vilna Gaon's glosses on the Shulchan Aruch. This scholarly work, Be'er Eliyahu ('Elijah's Well'), elucidates the Gaon's terse hints and novel thoughts in Halachah and Talmud.

Visitors would frequently arrive from Jaffa or Jerusalem in order to consult with Rav Kook. They were allowed to accompany him on the trip to the vineyard. But once reaching the vineyard, the entrance was barred. R. Lipkovitz gave strict orders to his Arab watchman not to allow any visitors disturb the rabbi's rest.

Lipkovitz took charge of all aspects of Rav Kook's rest and recuperation during his stays in Rehovot. He zealously watched over the Rav's meals and sleep, adamantly preventing anyone from disturbing his sleep, no matter what the occasion.

Rav Kook's Blessing

R. Lipkovitz was overjoyed with the great privilege of serving Rav Kook during these visits. Yet he had a modest request of the rabbi, a request which he was unable to present for some time. He related:

"Rav Kook stayed at my house, and I very much wanted to receive a blessing from him. But the Rav was always occupied in his Torah learning, or he had visitors, and I dared not interrupt.

"One day I noticed that the Rav had raised his eyes from the sefer he was studying. At the time, I was holding some chickens in my hands. I immediately released the birds and approached the Rav and presented my request.

'You require a blessing?' the Rav replied in surprise. 'After all, you merited to ascend to the Land of Israel and live in the Holy Land in financial comfort.'

'Nonetheless,' the Rav continued thoughtfully, 'I am a kohen; and it is a mitzvah for me to bless the Jewish people at all times.'

Rav Kook blessed his host that he would merit a long life - arichut yamim - until the time of the Redemption.

"From then on," Lipkovitz remarked, "I lived in tranquility, placing my trust in the scholar's blessing."

But after the Six-Day War in 1967, when Jerusalem was liberated and the borders of Israel were expanded, Lipkovitz began to worry. Perhaps the Rav's blessing has already been fulfilled, and his hour had arrived?

Avraham Yitzchak Lipkovitz in fact lived to be over a hundred years old, passing away in Shvat, 5732 (1972). Over the years, when asked how he had merited such a long life, he would reply with simplicity, "Why, I have a blessing from Rav Kook!"

(Adapted from Chayei HaRe'iyah, pp. 332-337. Shivchei HaRe'iyah, pp. 91-95)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

Weekly Halacha

by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Modesty at the Shabbos Table

Question: May Kiddush be recited in the presence of a married female guest whose hair is not covered?

Discussion: According to Torah law, a married woman must cover her hair whenever she is outside her home.² In earlier generations, a woman who failed to do so forfeited her kesubah and was liable to be divorced by her husband.³ In more recent times, when some women erroneously, but

sincerely, believed that they were not required to cover their hair, many poskim held that the husband was not required to divorce his wife for this transgression, since it was her ignorance of the Law, not her disregard for it, which led her to sin.⁴

Many theories have been postulated as to why some women — although meticulous in the observance of other mitzvos—are lax in regard to covering their hair. Some do not cover their hair at all and others do so only partially. It must be stressed that this practice is roundly condemned by all poskim. There are no halachic authorities who permit a married woman to leave her hair uncovered. Indeed, most recently—in the last few decades—there has been a gradual improvement, and many women who did not previously cover their hair have begun to do so.

Since the hair must be covered, it is considered an ervah, “an uncovered area,” when it is not covered. No male⁵ may recite Kerias Shema, pray, recite a blessing, or learn Torah when the uncovered hair is visible to him. Consequently, if a married lady with uncovered hair is sitting at your Shabbos table, Kiddush may not be recited. This halachah applies to one’s own wife, sister, mother, daughter and granddaughter as well.

The obligation of covering the hair requires a married woman to cover all of her hair.⁶ If a woman covers most of her hair but leaves part of it exposed, the part which is exposed is considered an ervah. ⁷ But this includes only the hair of the head itself. Hair that grows on the neck, the forehead or the temples, as well as lighter colored hairs which grow sparsely on the face (“baby hairs”) need not be covered.⁸ [As a basic rule, “head hair” includes only hair which could grow in long strands; short, wispy hairs which cannot grow long are not considered “head hair” and need not be covered.⁹]

In the last century or so, the fact that many women did not cover their hair presented a serious problem. The halachah that a married woman’s uncovered hair is considered an ervah regarding Kerias Shema and all blessings made it practically impossible for men to recite tefillos and blessings or to learn Torah in their own homes. In view of this unfortunate reality, the Aruch ha-Shulchan¹⁰ ruled that in a locale where the majority of married women do not cover their hair, we can no longer consider hair an ervah. In his opinion, only in a locale where most women keep their hair covered is uncovered hair considered an ervah. This controversial ruling was accepted by some poskim¹¹ and strongly rejected by others.¹² Rav M. Feinstein¹³ ruled that one may be lenient only under extenuating circumstances. [Quite possibly, the Aruch ha-Shulchan’s leniency may not be applicable nowadays in many locations, as more and more women cover their hair and those who do not may no longer be in the majority.]

Concerning our case, therefore, the following is the correct protocol:

The preferred solution is to prevail upon the woman—in private without embarrassing her—to cover her hair at least during Kiddush. If not practical, then one should look away from the woman, fix his gaze upon a bencher or a siddur, or close his eyes while reciting Kiddush. The same should be done during recitation of all other devorim shebekdushah, including Birkas ha-Mazon and learning Torah. [Under extenuating circumstances, when none of the above solutions apply, one may rely on the Aruch ha-Shulchan’s view that uncovered hair is not considered an ervah.]

If the Shabbos guest is not Jewish, her uncovered hair is not considered an ervah.¹⁴

If a woman¹⁵ is not dressed properly according to minimum halachic guidelines¹⁶—whether she is Jewish or not—then, too, the man saying Kiddush must avert his face or close his eyes.¹⁷ The Aruch ha-Shulchan’s leniency does not apply to immodest dress.

1 Divorced or widowed women are also required to do so, although some poskim hold that their obligation is Rabbinic; see Igros Moshe, E.H. 1:57. See Machazeh Eliyahu 118-120 for a complete discussion.

- 2 According to the Zohar, quoted by many poskim, women should cover their hair even in the privacy of their own homes; see Mishnah Berurah 75:14 and Be'ur Halachah, s.v. michutz, for more details.
- 3 Kesuvos 72a; E.H. 115:1-4.
- 4 See Igros Moshe, E.H. 1:114; Doveiv Meishorim 1:124; Lev Avraham 1:105 quoting the Chazon Ish.
- 5 But a woman is permitted to daven and recite blessings even though she is facing another woman’s uncovered hair; Mishnah Berurah 75:8.
- 6 See Teshuvos v’Hanhagos 1:62 quoting Chazon Ish, Doveiv Meisharim 1:124 and Lehoros Nosan, end of vol. 5.
- 7 Although in some communities some married women leave a small portion of their hair uncovered, see Modesty, An Adornment for Life, pg. 236-240, who explains that this custom has no basis in Halachah and should be discontinued. In addition, even the lenient view which allows exposing a bit of hair, only permits exposing a small area measuring a square tefach; see Igros Moshe, E.H. 1:58 and O.C. 4:112-4.
- 8 A Practical Guide to Tzenius, pg. 24.
- 9 Piskei Teshuvos 75:10.
- 10 O.C. 75:7.
- 11 Ben Ish Chai, Parashas Bo 12; Kaf ha-Chayim 75:16; Seridei Eish 2:14; Yabia Omer 6:13.
- 12 Mishnah Berurah 75:10; Chazon Ish, O.C. 16:8; Divrei Yoel 10 and most other poskim.
- 13 Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:39, 42, 43; O.C. 3:23, 24; O.C. 4:15; E.H. 1:114.
- 14 Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:15.
- 15 Or a girl who is no longer looked upon as a baby or a toddler – approximately 5-7 years old, depending on her size and maturity; Chazon Ish, O.C. 16:9.
- 16 Minimum halachic standards require that a woman’s legs from her knee and above, her arms from the elbows and up and her neckline from the collarbone and down are completely covered.
- 17 Mishnah Berurah 75:1; Chazon Ish, O.C. 16:8. Not all poskim agree that closing one’s eyes is sufficient in this situation.

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Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com

For what may I Pray?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

"Rabbi, this is a very unfortunate and painful question. My grandfather is suffering from Alzheimer's disease and no longer recognizes us. Should we continue to pray that he recover?"

Question #2:

I received this question as an e-mail:

"Dear Rav: I have an extended family member who is, unfortunately, involved in spreading non-Torah ideas. Recently, he was diagnosed with cancer. May I pray for his recovery, knowing that if he recovers he will probably continue to influence people away from Torah?"

Question #3:

"I am a baal teshuvah. May I pray that my non-observant family members find their way to Torah?"

Introduction:

All three questions above revolve around the same halachic issue: The Mishnah (Brachos 54a) and the Gemara (Brachos 60a) rule that one may not recite a prayer in vain. The Mishnah rules that, for this reason, one may not pray for something that has already happened. The Mishnah's example is that someone who hears of a tragedy occurring in a place where he has family should not pray that this tragedy did not affect them.

What else is included under the heading of a prayer in vain? Does praying for someone to recover from a medical condition that appears to be non-reversible qualify as praying in vain? Am I permitted to pray that something miraculous occur? Analyzing the issues involved not only

provides a clear halachic perspective on our daily mitzvah to pray to Hashem, but also clarifies some important hashkafah issues.

The Sefer Chassidim

The earliest source that analyzes the questions I mentioned above is the Sefer Chassidim (#794):

"A person may not pray for something that is impossible under normal circumstances, for, although the Holy One, Blessed is He, could make it happen, one is not permitted to request something that is beyond the natural order of the world. It is therefore forbidden to pray that Hashem perform a miracle that changes the way the world normally functions."

We see that we are not permitted to pray that Hashem perform miracles in order to influence and intervene in human matters. (We should note that some authorities contend that a person who has reached an elevated level of faith is permitted to pray for a miracle, but this subject is beyond the scope of this article.) It would seem to me that praying for the recovery of someone suffering from Alzheimer's to the extent that he does not recognize his closest family members would qualify, according to the Sefer Chassidim, as a tefillas shav. Similarly, I have been told by highly reliable sources that the Chafetz Chayim did not pray for a tefillah sheleimah for those smitten by cancer, since in his day the disease was incurable. (Today, when faced with an "incurable" cancer, one may pray that the researchers discover a cure quickly.) I know of great tzaddikim who, when asked to pray for people with incurable ailments, pray that Hashem treat the patient with mercy. One may also pray that the person's condition not get worse (see Tosafos, Bechoros 38b s.v. Vesimaneich).

We will now examine a different case to see if it is considered a prayer in vain.

Chizkiyahu's Prayer

Chizkiyahu, who was one of the most righteous and scholarly kings of all time, was severely ill and racked by pain when Yeshayahu the Prophet visited him. Yeshayahu had been commanded by Hashem to notify Chizkiyahu that he (Chizkiyahu) should inform his household of his final wishes, and that, furthermore, he would not merit Olam Haba. When Chizkiyahu asked why he was being punished so severely, Yeshayahu answered him, "Because you did not marry."

To this, Chizkiyahu responded that he had not married because he knew through ruach hakodesh that he would have a son who would be very evil and cause many others to sin. His decision to remain single was completely for the sake of heaven — it was a tremendous personal sacrifice, made expressly to decrease the number of evildoers in the world. Notwithstanding his intention to increase Hashem's honor, Yeshayahu told Chizkiyahu that he had no right to overrule the Torah's commandment (Nefesh HaChayim 1:22). Yeshayahu explained that it is not our place to get involved in the secret ways in which Hashem runs His world — our job is merely to obey and fulfill His commandments, and Hashem does what He sees fit.

At this point, Chizkiyahu asked to marry Yeshayahu's daughter, hoping that their combined merits might overturn the Divine decree that Chizkiyahu's child would be evil. To this request, Yeshayahu responded: "It is too late. There is already a Divine decree that you will die."

Chizkiyahu retorted: "Close up your prophecy and be gone! I have a mesorah from my grandfather, David HaMelech, that even if a sharp sword rests upon your neck, it is still not too late to pray" (Brachos 10a).

At this point, Chizkiyahu turned to the wall in prayer, and his prayers were heard. He was granted fifteen more years of life (Melachim II 20:1-6).

Analysis of the Dispute

We see that there was a halachic dispute between Yeshayahu and Chizkiyahu as to whether praying that a prophecy not be fulfilled is considered a prayer in vain. Yeshayahu may have held that since he had already received a prophetic verdict regarding Chizkiyahu's prognosis, praying for a different outcome constituted a prayer in vain (see Tosafos, Moed Katan, 21a s.v. De'i). Alternatively, he may have held that this prophecy had the status of a *gzar din she'yeish imo shavua*, a heavenly

decree accompanied by a heavenly oath, which can only be annulled by a prayer of the public (Rosh Hashanah 18a). Chizkiyahu held that the prophecy did not preclude the possibility that his prayer could be successful. Indeed, his prayer was answered. Thus, we see that although one may not pray for something that is clearly miraculous, one may pray for something that defies a prophecy, particularly if the prophecy is about a punishment, and the person has done teshuvah for the evil for which he was to be punished (Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 10:4).

Praying for Sinners

At this point, I would like to address the second of our opening questions: May I pray for the recovery of someone who influences people to turn away from Torah? Although this may not seem as if it qualifies as a tefillas shav, we will soon see that it indeed may be.

Again, to answer this question, I will turn to a ruling of the Sefer Chassidim (#688):

"One should not pray for the recovery of someone who caused people to sin and is now ill. The same approach should be followed regarding someone who prevents the community from performing mitzvos. In addition, one should not pray that someone who caused many others to sin do teshuvah, if some of those people [those that he caused to sin] have already died, because the prayer will not help."

The last part of this ruling seems a bit unusual. Why is the halachah whether I may pray for him dependent on whether some of the people that he influenced are dead?

The commentaries explain that this ruling of the Sefer Chassidim is based on the following Gemara:

Kol hamachati es harabim, ein maspikin beyado laasos teshuvah, whoever causes the public to sin is not given any opportunity to do teshuvah (Yoma 87a).

The Gemara explains that it is intolerable that the one who caused others to sin reach gan eden, while those whom he led into transgression languish in gehennom. To avoid this happening, Hashem will not assist someone to do teshuvah if the person caused the public to transgress.

The Sefer Chassidim rules that as long as all the misguided followers live, Hashem will assist their leader to do teshuvah, since his followers might join him on the proper path. Once some of his followers have died and have arrived in gehennom, Hashem will not assist him to do teshuvah. It is therefore inappropriate at this point to pray that he find his way to Torah, since praying is asking Hashem to help, and Hashem will not help in this situation. However, the Sefer Chassidim adds: "One may pray that he stop causing others to sin."

Only if he qualifies as an Intentional Sinner

Although the Sefer Chassidim prohibits praying that this evil leader do teshuvah, he attaches an important factor to this decision: "If he is influencing them because he is a shogeig [someone who violates the Torah because of ignorance, error or negligence — that is, he does not realize how grievous a sin he is committing], then one may pray that he recover from his illness." The example that the Sefer Chassidim chooses for someone who is deemed to be shogeig is someone who has no tzadik, no righteous individual, near him to influence him as to how to return to Torah. "However, if he was reproofed appropriately by a tzadik and ignored the reproof, he is considered to be someone who violates halachah intentionally."

Based on the Sefer Chassidim, we can answer the second question raised above: "I have an extended family member, who is, unfortunately, involved in spreading non-Torah ideas. Recently, he was diagnosed with cancer. May I pray for his recovery, knowing that if he recovers, he will continue to influence people away from Torah?"

The answer is: if the family member qualifies as a shogeig, I can pray that he recover. If he qualifies as a meizid, one who is sinning intentionally, not only should I not pray that he recover, but, if some of those whom he influenced have died, I may not pray that he do teshuvah, according to the

Sefer Chassidim, although this may be permitted according to others. In all instances, I can pray that he stop influencing people in a harmful way.

An Alternative Reading of the Text

It is important to note that our editions quote the Gemara (Yoma 87a) that is the basis of the Sefer Chassidim's ruling with a slight textual variation that has profound halachic significance. Our version reads kol hamachati es harabim, kimat ein maspikin beyado laasos teshuvah, which translates as whoever causes the public to sin will be given almost no opportunity to do teshuvah. The text quoted by the Sefer Chassidim omits the word "kimat." According to our text, it should be perfectly fine to pray that this evildoer do teshuvah, even though some of his followers have already died. Although Hashem will not provide him with the usual measure of assistance that He gives to help people do teshuvah, the person may still merit some assistance in his endeavors.

Praying that my Friend do Teshuvah

Rav Yonah Landsofer, a great halachic authority and kabbalist of early Seventeenth Century Prague, was asked the following question: A Jewish resident of Izmir, Turkey, had left the Jewish community and converted to a different religion, taking with him his young son. Could they pray that this apostate do teshuvah and return to Judaism? In his volume of responsa called Shu"t Me'il Tzedakah (#7), Rav Landsofer addresses this issue, first asking whether such a prayer qualifies as a tefillah in vain.

All is from Heaven, except...

The Me'il Tzedakah notes that Hashem declared that everything is under His control except for yiras shamayim, fear of Heaven, which He deliberately chose not to control so that people could earn reward – otherwise, there would be no reward and punishment in the world. To quote the Gemara:

"It is declared before each child is born whether it will be strong or weak, wise or foolish, wealthy or poor. But, it is not declared whether it will be evil or righteous, because everything is in Hashem's hands, except for an individual's fear of Heaven (Niddah 16b)."

Thus, the possibility exists that praying for a sinner to repent qualifies as a prayer in vain, since Hashem already decided that He would not interfere in man's decisions.

So, we need to decide whether requesting that Hashem influence someone do to teshuvah means asking Hashem to do something that He has chosen not to do, which is the definition of a prayer in vain.

Removing one's Free Choice

Notwithstanding the Gemara's statement that it is not predetermined what direction in life a person will choose, the Me'il Tzedakah notes that Hashem may, and indeed does, take away free choice from people when He feels it is necessary. Among the several proofs he rallies to this conclusion is the verse in Mishlei (21:1), "The heart of a king is in the hands of Hashem," which means that a king loses some of his free choice, although he does not realize it. (Isn't it amazing how many people are eager to become president of the United States, although it means that they will lose some of their free choice!) Thus, praying that Hashem influence someone to do teshuvah does not qualify as a prayer in vain, even if I were to be praying that Hashem take away the person's free choice in the process. Certainly, praying that he be exposed to positive influences that would encourage his involvement and return to Judaism does not constitute a tefillas shav. However, this might involve a different halachic issue:

A Second Reason

Based on this background, the Me'il Tzedakah asks whether praying that someone do teshuvah may not be correct for a different reason: Hashem has chosen to allow man to decide whether he should do good or evil, and my praying for someone to do teshuvah may be interfering with Hashem's realm. He questions whether a person should ask Hashem for matters that do not affect him personally, since this may be getting involved in "the

secrets of Hashem." In other words, one should pray for things that affect one's self, but whether someone else merits honoring Hashem is Hashem's domain, and not a place for prayer.

For sure, a person should pray that Hashem help him keep the mitzvos -- we have many such prayers. But, may one pray that someone else do teshuvah?

Rabbi Meir and Beruria

The Me'il Tzedakah notes that this discussion will depend on how we understand the famous dispute between Rabbi Meir and his wife, Beruria.

There was a group of troublemakers in Rabbi Meir's neighborhood who were causing him great distress, and Rabbi Meir wanted to pray that they die. His wife, Beruria, said to him: "Why do you feel this way? Because the verse [Tehillim 104:35] says that chata'im should cease from the world? However [noted Beruria], the verse does not say chote'im, which clearly means sinners, but says chata'im, which can be interpreted to mean that which causes sin (that is, their yetzer hora). Furthermore (proceeded Beruria with her lesson), the continuing part of the verse reads, uresha'im od einam, and the evildoers no longer exist -- if the sinners are destroyed, then there is no need for the verse to repeat itself and say that there are no evildoers. Instead, you should pray that they do teshuvah." Indeed, Rabbi Meir prayed for them to do teshuvah, and they repented (Brachos 10a).

The Me'il Tzedakah contends that the troublemakers disturbing Rabbi Meir did so because they did not know Torah; had they known Torah, they would have behaved differently. In other words, they were not inherently evil, but misinformed, and it was, therefore, appropriate to pray that they discover the proper approach to Yiddishkeit, which would help them keep mitzvos. This is not considered a prayer in vain, since the people were inherently sincere, and would have sought to be yirei shamayim, had they known what that was.

The Me'il Tzedakah also offers another possibility for praying that Rabbi Meir's adversaries do teshuvah, the fact that this takes away their free choice notwithstanding: because he was praying to help himself – after all, he was suffering from them, and therefore, he was entitled to pray that they do teshuvah to relieve his own suffering. This is not considered mixing into Hashem's affairs, but praying for something that affects me.

In the context of this discussion, I think it is important to note that Rav Hirsch, in his commentary to Tehillim, explains the difference between chote'im and chata'im differently. Chote'im means people who sin occasionally, and this is something that will always be. Chata'im means those for whom sinning is part of their character. Dovid HaMelech is declaring that there should be no more people who sin, not as an occasional error or temptation, but as part of their lifestyle or temperament.

Chazon Ish's approach

At this point, I should like to note that the Chazon Ish appears to disagree with the way the Me'il Tzedakah explains that Hashem does not decree whether someone do teshuvah. The Chazon Ish writes that, indeed, Hashem does not influence whether a person becomes a yarei shamayim or whether he does teshuvah unless someone prays on his or her behalf. However, when one person prays for another that another person do teshuvah, Hashem will help (Chazon Ish, Orach Chayim page 256). Therefore, when one prays for another person whose behavior affects an innocent party, such as a sinful adult caring for an innocent child, Hashem will help in the child's merit.

Praying for the Apostate

At this point, the Me'il Tzedakah returns to his original question: may one pray that someone who has chosen to live an evil life return to the Jewish fold? The Me'il Tzedakah presents two reasons why one may.

1. A parent may daven for his child to do teshuvah, because the parent suffers greatly; therefore, the parent is davening to Hashem, asking Him to alleviate his own suffering, which is permitted. Therefore, this apostate's parents could pray for his return.

2. In the case at hand, the apostate had taken his son with him -- a young child who would be raised bereft of contact with the Jewish community. One who feels anguish for the Shechinah because this young child will be raised outside of Yiddishkeit could pray for the child's return. And if the most obvious way to return this child to Yiddishkeit would be through his father's return, then one may pray that Hashem bring the father back to Yiddishkeit. This is not a prayer in vain, since sometimes Hashem will force someone to do teshuvah -- as explained above.

The Eye of a Needle

The Me'il Tzedakah then quotes a prayer that he found, which he says was written with tremendous accuracy. The prayer is for a chazzan to say privately prior to leading services on a fast day, similar to the prayers that our chazzanim recite prior to musaf on Yomim Nora'im. In these prayers, the chazzan notes that even the most stubborn evildoers occasionally feel remorse or doubt about what they are doing. The chazzan then asks Hashem to accept this sense of remorse as if these people are attempting the first steps toward teshuvah. If they are attempting to do teshuvah, then they will merit tremendous Divine assistance to repent, as we are aware of from the following, frequently-quoted Midrash.

"Hashem said to Israel: 'My sons, merely open for me an opening to do teshuvah as large as the eye of a needle, and I will expand for you openings wide enough that wagons can drive through'" (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:2).

The Me'il Tzedakah rallies proof that this is an acceptable prayer from the following Midrash:

"A person who sees a place where an idol was destroyed should recite the brocha: 'She'akar avodas kochavim mei'artzeinu.' He should then add: May it be Your will, Hashem Elokeinu, that you uproot it (idolatry) from all places, and bring back the hearts of those who worship it to serve You with a full heart."

The Midrash then asks: "Is this not considered praying on behalf of evildoers?" Rabbi Yochanan answered, "There is hope for the greatest sinners."

The Me'il Tzedakah explains this Midrash to mean that even the greatest sinners may be returned to service of Hashem, and that it is always appropriate to pray that someone find his way back to Hashem. (He notes that his approach seems to disagree somewhat with that of the Sefer Chassidim.) Even the apostate who left the Jewish community of Izmir occasionally doubts the correctness of his new path, and one can pray that Hashem view this as a desire to do teshuvah and open the gates for him, helping him in his return.

In Conclusion

In conclusion, we see that both the Sefer Chassidim and the Me'il Tzedakah conclude that, under most circumstances, someone who feels tremendous grief over the evildoing of certain individuals may pray that Hashem do whatever is necessary to bring them to teshuvah.

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Naso - BIRKHAT KOHANIM

Rabbi Asher Meir

Our parsha contains the special mitzva to the Kohanim to bless the people each day with the familiar three-part priestly blessing. (Bamidbar 6:22-27.) We often refer to this blessing as "nesiat kapayim" referring to the raised hands of the Kohanim or as "duchaning" referring to the platform from which they often bless.

Before we can examine the special nature of the priestly blessing, we should ask, what is any blessing? What does it mean for one person to bless another?

The word berakha or blessing particularly refers to a material undertaking which is granted special success by special Divine favor. This suggests that the key to a blessing is creating a connection between the spiritual and the

material. The material world isolated from holiness is bereft of blessing, but spiritual attainments also translate into blessing only when they are channeled into this world.

So in order to be a conduit of blessing, a person needs to be on the one hand elevated above this world, so as to maintain a living connection with the transcendent world of holiness, yet maintain a connection with this world so as to maintain the ability to infuse this holiness into the material world. Various aspects of birkhat kohanim exemplify this duality.

The Kohanim themselves are elevated in holiness above the people through various restrictions, including special sanctity in marriage, prohibition on becoming defiled to the dead, and the need to maintain purity in order to eat truma, challah, and sacrifices which are their portion. Yet the Kohanim are not hermits; like other Jews they marry, make a living, and engage in most ordinary activities. This makes them specially suited to be a vehicle of blessing.

The posture of the blessing also shows this idea. On the one hand, the Kohanim raise and obscure their hands, symbolizing the connection to the lofty and hidden world of holiness above. Yet at the same time they remove their shoes, demonstrating that they have their "feet on the ground", that they maintain a firm connection to this world.

The choreography of the blessing carries the same message. The Kohanim ascend the platform facing the Ark, the abode of the Torah scroll, showing their connection to the Author of the Torah. But just before they pronounce the blessing they demonstrate their connection to mankind, as they turn their faces away from the ark and face the congregation. "Rav Yitzchak said, Always be in awe of the community, for the Kohanim face the people and turn their back on the Divine Presence." (Sota 40a.)

A NATION OF PRIESTS

This understanding of the role of the Kohanim can help us understand the role of the Jewish people as a whole, whom the Torah refers to as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation". (Shemot 19:6.) We are priests and holy, set apart from mankind by our covenant with HaShem and by the commandments of the Torah. Yet at the same time we are a kingdom and a nation, so that we are able to imbue human activity with holiness.

This is one explanation of why, among Ashkenazim, there is no birkhat kohanim outside of the Land of Israel except on Yom Tov. Our national priestly blessing to mankind is only complete when we are elevated above other nations, as the kohanim ascend the duchen to bless the people. Yet the general state of the Jewish people in the diaspora is one of subordination. Outside of our land, we can overcome this handicap only on Yom Tov, when we particularly celebrate our special status among the nations. The Yom Tov prayer emphasizes that HaShem "chose us from all of the nations, loved us, and favored us, and elevated us above all of the languages". (This is intimately connected to what we wrote last week, that Yom Tov is the time when we have a special ability to subdue our material natures, including subduing the harmful effects of alien culture.)

But in the land of Israel we never have a feeling of subordination. On the contrary, we are conscious of a special sense of elevation. A Jew who moves to the Land of Israel always speaks of going on aliyah; we consider Eretz Yisrael the highest place on earth. (See Rashi on Bereshit 45:9.)

From the land of Israel we are particularly able to spread blessing to the whole world, and indeed Chazal tell us that all other lands receive their providence via Eretz Yisrael. (Sifri on Devarim 11:12; see Taanit 10a.)

Rabbi Meir HAS JUST COMPLETED writing a monumental companion to Kitzur Shulchan Aruch which beautifully presents the meanings in our mitzvot and halacha. Rabbi Asher Meir is the author of the book Meaning in Mitzvot, distributed by Feldheim. The book provides insights into the inner meaning of our daily practices, following the order of the 221 chapters of the Kitzur Shulchan Arukh.

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For the week ending 2 June 2012 / 11 Sivan 5772
by Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

The Impact of Disciples Nidah 14b

When Rebbie (Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi) praised Rabbi Chama bar Basrato Rabbi Yishmael ben Rabba Yossi and described him as a great scholar, the latter asked that he be brought to him. To test him he suggested that he ask him a question in regard to a halachic matter. When he did so Rabbi Yishmael asked him if he wished to hear an answer according to the opinion of his father Rabbi Yossi (who was the teacher of Rebbie), or according to the position of Rebbie.

The response of Rabbi Chama that he favored hearing the position of Rebbie upset Rabbi Yishmael who exclaimed: "This is a great scholar? How can he favor the opinion of a disciple (Rebbie) over that of the master (Rabbi Yossi)?"

What was the rationale of Rabbi Chama?

The gemara's explanation is that since Rebbie was the head of the Sanhedrin and the head of a great yeshiva, he was always interacting with disciples and this sharpened his understanding.

Tosefot raises the problem that we find elsewhere that Rabbi Yossi was a greater scholar than Rebbie. His resolution is that when Rebbie was very young Rabbi Yossi was indeed greater than him, but in his later years the interaction with his disciples made him the superior scholar as indicated in our gemara.

What the Sages Say

"The scion of David (Mashiach) will not arrive until all of the souls in a place called Guf (the storehouse of souls to be born) are born."

Rabbi Yossi - Nidah 13b

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Please address all comments and requests to Hamelaket@gmail.com