

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet
Parshas Naso 5773
שבת פרשת נשא

Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein
NASSO

The term that the Torah uses for counting the Levite family of Gershon is nasso – to raise and lift up. The word can also mean to carry and bear a burden. It can also mean to lead. When such words appear in the Torah with multiple, differing meanings – and Hebrew is replete with so many of them – the commentators remark that all of the possible meanings of that word are nuanced and meant to be part of the verse of the Torah itself.

I think this insight is especially pertinent regarding the word nasso as it appears in this week's parsha. The family of Gershon, as is the tribe of Levi generally, is quite small in number but nevertheless laden with great responsibilities. It can use its paucity in numbers as an excuse for shirking its responsibilities and for refusing to perform the holy tasks assigned to it. But since it is meant to assume a leadership role in Jewish society, it is bidden to rise to the occasion.

There is no question that this role of leadership will be burdensome and frustrating. Yet it is enjoined at the beginning of its public service to bear up under the yoke of the Jewish people and to serve as the leaders, role models and mentors of the generations of the Jewish people. The Levites are not to shirk their duties and role but rather are to proudly lift themselves up to a higher level of Torah dedication and service to all of Israel. All of this is implicit in the word nasso that introduces this week's parsha to our attention.

Rambam, in a famous statement from his Mishne Torah, states, in effect, that all human beings who enter this world can reach the spiritual status of being a Levite. One must devote one's self to the service of God and of man, practice compassion and goodness and be satisfied and not too over ambitious with one's physical lot in life, in order to aspire to such a status. The Levites were the bearers of the Torah both literally and figuratively. Rambam indicates that they avoided the petty foolishness in our daily lives and instead concentrated on the holy and noble task to which God assigned them.

The tasks and goals of the Levites were clearly delineated for them by the Torah. And even in our time when the service of the Temple is not yet present within Jewish society, the uniqueness of the role of the Levites in our midst has been preserved. At the time of the Golden Calf, when all of Israel was threatened with physical destruction and spiritual annihilation, it was the tribe of Levi that redressed the situation.

In the difficult times and circumstances that surround us today we are also in need of potential Levites who will rise to the occasion and its challenges. One cannot alter one's genealogy but one's spiritual aspirations to become a Levite have no limits or restraints.

Shabat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Naso
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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

All In The Family

"Any man whose wife shall go astray..." (5:12)

A hundred years ago in a brilliant Jewish mind, an exciting idea was born. It went something like this: Man is separated from his neighbor by a huge division, an unbridgeable gulf called individual property. If I own something, it means you can't have it. In a sense, my owning something 'steals' it from you. Property is theft. If we could make a society in which everyone owned everything, then no one would be jealous of anyone else. What we need to do is to redeem capital from the hands of the ruling elite and return it to the people.

The Communist ideal spawned several social engineering experiments. The most notable of these was the collective farm. All property was owned by the collective. Everyone ate in a communal dining room. Every member of the collective gave what he could and only took what he needed.

Probably the most famous and successful application of the commune concept was the kibbutz movement in Israel. However, there were other countries where the idea also took root. It must have seemed at the time like a Utopian dream.

What happened to the dream? The last vestiges of the collective farm have either become Capitalist enterprises or are moribund. Why did such a noble-sounding idea fail?

One inevitable aspect of collective living was a re-evaluation of the role of the family. Rather than sleeping under the same roof as their parents, children now slept in dormitories. One wonders who would answer a small child who might wake in the middle of the night and cry, "Mommy! I want a glass of water!" How successful a mother-substitute could a dormitory supervisor be?

There's something very strange about this week's Torah portion.

Right in the middle of the description of the organization of the Machane, the Jewish encampment, there is a seemingly illogical interruption in which the Torah presents, amongst other mitzvot, the mitzvah of the Sota. The Sota is a wife whose behavior has provoked her husband to suspect her of infidelity. The Torah prescribes a miraculous process by which, if proved innocent, will restore her completely to her husband's trust. But what does the Sota have to do with the Jewish encampment?

The Machane was the paradigm of the future social structure of the Jewish People. Not only did it mandate the placement of each individual tribe, but the Machane represented Jewish Society as it is was to be lived throughout the generations. The Torah puts the mitzvah of Sota in the middle of the description of the Machane to teach us that the harmony of society at large is predicated on the united and happy family.

The family is the basic building block of society. When you tamper with its delicate balance, when you try and 'engineer' it to conform to man-made concepts of Utopian life, inevitably those experiments will be short-lived and eventually founder.

•Sources: Ramban; Rabbi Moshe Eismann, as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Naso

Raise the heads of (count) the children of Gershon as well (after counting Kehas). (4:22)

Shlomo HaMelech writes, Yekarah hee mipeninim v'chol chafatzecha lo yishru bah, "It (the Torah) is dearer (more precious) than pearls, and all your desires cannot compare to it" (Mishlei 3:15). Following the census of the Jewish People, Hashem asked Moshe Rabbeinu to count Shevet Levi separately. Their count was carried out according to their sequence in birth: Gershon, Kehas, Merari. After their tasks within the Bais HaMikdash were designated, the sequence changed; as Kehas, the bearer of the Aron Kodesh, preceded Gershon, who carried the Curtains. The Midrash establishes the order of the counting of the Leviim according to the appointment of tasks: A talmid chacham, Torah scholar, precedes an unlearned Kohen Gadol. This is alluded to by the pasuk in Mishlei mentioned above: Yekarah hee mipeninim, "It (the Torah) is dearer than pearls." The word peninim is now understood as "before," a derivative of the word lifnim (v'zos lifanim b'Yisrael, "This was the custom before in Yis

rael" (Rus 4:7). This refers to Kehas and Gershon. Gershon was the firstborn; as such, he should have been given the "pole" position of being counted first. Since Kehas carried the Aron Kodesh, which was the repository of the Torah, however, the pasuk lists his name first.

Studying Torah places a man on a level higher than that of firstborn or even Kohen Gadol. Torah study is the ideal vocation; it is our lifeblood. If so, why is a scholar not accorded the same privilege as the Kohen Gadol? Why can the Talmid Chacham not enter Lifnai v'Lifnim, into the Holy of Holies, as does the Kohen Gadol? Why can he not stand before the Almighty? The Sefas Emes explains that the difference lies in understanding the nature of Torah and what can be achieved by Torah study.

The Sefas Emes distinguishes between learning Torah and serving Hashem through worship. Anyone may study Torah; there are no eligibility qualifications. As far as worship in the Bais Hamikdash is concerned, the Torah limits who may serve. Distinct guidelines govern the involvement of the Kohen, Levi and Yisrael. The place in which the avodah, service, is carried out - whether it is in the Courtyard, Sanctuary, or Kodesh Kodoshim - also has parameters. In other words, the Temple service is restrictive. Only a select few may serve in specific places.

This does not mean, explains the Sefas Emes, that the place in which the individual serves is indicative of his having achieved a higher spiritual status than that of his peer who is serving elsewhere. He compares the situation to a king who has both children and servants. A servant's level is determined and manifest by his proximity to the king. While a minister may speak face to face with the monarch at any given time - night or day - the lowly servant stationed in a faraway post, working in the basement somewhere, may never come in contact with the king. Not so the prince, who always maintains an intimate, loving relationship with his father, regardless of his proximity - be it in the palace or in a far-off country. He always remains the son of the king.

One who learns Torah is the King's son. There is really no more precise way to describe this relationship. The ben Torah who delves in Hashem's gift to Am Yisrael experiences a spiritual existence, even while he is in the physical dimension of this world. He is so far from the King - yet so close. Our sages compare this world to a corridor that leads into a palace.

The Midrash quoted above, which delineates between Torah study and spiritual worship, is teaching us that a Jew who studies Torah in the "corridor" is dearer to Hashem than even one who enters the palace proper. The Kohanim who serve in the Bais Hamikdash are like servants who stand before the King. Their privileged position in such close proximity to the Melech Malchei Hamelachim, King of Kings, allows them but a mere taste of the reward to come in Olam Habba, the World to Come. Their full reward is reserved for the future, when they are divested of their mortal selves and have entered into Gan Eden.

Man has one primary purpose in this world: to study Torah and perform its mitzvos. As such, nothing is dearer to him than Torah study. This precludes all physical and spiritual pursuits. Torah is "it": "All your desires cannot compare to it." Chazal teach that "desires" here refers to spiritual aspirations, such as performing mitzvos and maasim tovim, good deeds. Yet, such magnificent aspirations cannot compare to even one word of Torah.

Everyone who comes to perform the work of service and the work of burden in the Ohel Moed. (4:47)

The Talmud Arachin 11a seeks a Scriptural source for the obligation to have song in the Bais Hamikdash. Ten sources are cited. One source is from the above pasuk: La'avod avodas avodah, "To perform the service of the service." Chazal ask and others respond, "Which service requires another service? We must say that this refers to song." An earlier source quoted by the Talmud employs the pasuk in Devarim 28:47 to provide the reason for the various calamities visited on the Jewish People. Tachas asher lo avadita es Hashem Elokechem b'simchah u'betuv leivav, "Because you did not serve Hashem, your G-d, with joy and goodness of heart." According to this interpretation of the pasuk, the Torah seems to treat the

mitzvah of song with uncommon stringency. The commentators offer a number of reasons for the unusual power of song. It drives away depression, which is the root of much of our sinful behavior. One who is satisfied and happy develops a positive self-esteem and does not get depressed. Song can elevate the soul to the heights of prophecy.

The Ein Yaakov writes, concerning the glory and splendor of song, that the beauty and goodness of the world of man, the world of angels and the Heavenly world of Hashem all correspond to the music and songs of praise. The soul is inspired by music to arise and ascend from the physical/mundane world in which we live to the Heavenly abode of the Creator.

In his commentary to Divrei Hayamim II, 29:25, Rashi writes that, while the Torah does not explicitly state that a korban, sacrifice, must be accompanied by song, our sages derive its significance and requirement from the words, Avodas avodah, "service of service." The service of the bringing of the sacrifice requires a musical accompaniment. The koach ha'neginah, power of song/melody, is underscored in the Sifrei Kabbalah. Indeed, Sefer Chassidim writes that one should seek out and select melodies that are sweet and pleasant and apply them to his tefillah, prayer service. These melodies gladden one's heart and allow him to better express his praise of Hashem.

In his sefer Nitzotzos, Horav Yitzchok Hershkowitz, Shlita, relates a number of episodes in which the compelling effect of a song has had a major effect on a person. His first episode takes place concerning the Talmidei Ha'Gra, students of the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, shortly after his petirah, passing. It was just before Simchas Torah, the happiest day of the year, at a time when all Torah-loving Jews celebrate with Hashem's greatest gift to His People: the Torah. Yet, this group of devoted Torah students who had recently been left bereft of their holy mentor was steeped in mourning. They grieved for their Rebbe; they grieved for themselves.

"How can we even begin to celebrate Simchas Torah without our Rebbe? True, there are Sifrei Torah in the Aron HaKodesh, Holy Ark, but we are missing our Rebbe, the living embodiment of a Torah scroll." They wept and wept. A few hours went by, and the Gaon's primary disciple, Horav Chaim Volozhiner, zl, arose and banged his hand on the bimah, lectern, to call everyone to attention. Once they quieted down, Rav Chaim asked, "Do any one of you have an idea where our beloved Rebbe's neshamah, soul, presently rests? Can you imagine in whose proximity he sits?"

It was a very powerful question, but these were not simple Jews. They were scholars who had a far greater perception of the workings of Heaven than the average man. One student conjectured, "He most certainly sits in the proximity of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, author of the Zohar HaKadosh. After all, our Rebbe expended great effort in understanding and explaining the depths of Kabbalah." Another student felt that, indeed, the Gaon was sitting in the midst of the great Tannaim and Amoraim, since, having elucidated their comments; he made their words accessible to the Torah world. Yet another student suggested that the Rebbe was surrounded by the Rashba and Ramban for having aspired to - and attained - their level of greatness in Torah.

When they had all completed their suggestions, Rav Chaim summed up, "One thing is for certain: our Rebbe has acquired for himself a most lofty place in the Olam Habba. To this we all agree. Now, let us go back to a moment shortly before our Rebbe's mortal body left this world. Remember how he bemoaned the fact that in this world for a few pennies one can purchase a pair of tzitzis which will earn him immeasurable reward for the fulfillment of a mitzvah. In Olam Habba, however, it is all over. One can no longer earn reward. He either has earned it here in this world, or it is too late. Therefore, Rebbe wept bitterly that he was leaving this world of spiritual opportunity. It was over! Despite the incredible reward in store for Rebbe, he would rather have remained here!"

At that climactic moment, he burst out in song, "Olam Habba is a gutte zach, lernen Torah is a beser zach. Varf avek fun dir der yoch, lernen Torah nach un nach, "The World to Come is a good thing; studying Torah is a better thing." "Throw away from yourself the yoke and learn Torah more and more."

When the Gra's students heard this, they all arose from their seats and began to sing in honor of the Torah. They sang and danced for the privilege of being able to remain in this world to achieve growth in Torah. The lyrics of the song, with its lively melody, catapulted them out of their melancholy, as they now understood the significance of the gift of life.

Before we continue, an understanding and appreciation of the power of music is in order. Music has the amazing power to sweep us up in its rhythm. We might be in no particular mood, or even in a negative mood, but as soon as we hear a lively tune, a joyous musical score, the beat envelops us; in the course of a few moments, we are transported to an entirely different sphere. Our mood has been altered. Our low spirits have been forgotten, as a sense of hope takes hold of us. Lovers of music will attest to its power to captivate and mold their deepest emotions. Indeed, some individuals hum a tune throughout the day.

Rhythm captivates - but its feeling is temporary. Only music has the power to entrance and engage the individual on a more lasting basis. While rhythm plays a critical role in establishing the energy and mood of the music, it is the melody that speaks to the heart and soul. In Torah terms, the melody is on a higher level than the rhythm. The next level is "holy music," a term applied to a melody emanating deep from within the recesses of the soul. Horav Shaul Taub, zl, the second Modzitzer Rebbe, would say, "I sing from an overflowing heart." Such melodies are far more than entertainment. It reflects a deep-rooted holy wisdom. To paraphrase Horav Nachman Breslover, zl, "Know that every wisdom in the world has its own unique song and melody; it is from this song that this wisdom is actually derived; and so, from level to level, a higher wisdom has an even more exalted song and melody."

When we talk about the significance of music, a name that immediately comes to mind is Modzitz. This small town in Poland was host to a Chassidic Rabbinic lineage which viewed song and music as not merely contributory to prayer, its melody not simply a manner of liturgical expression. In Modzitz, music was the very essence of spirituality, the primary path towards achieving true avodah she'b'lev, service of the heart. Horav Yechezkel, zl, m'Kuzmir, ancestor of the first Modzitzer Rebbe, felt that he could not commence Shabbos until he had composed a new niggun, song. It was an essential requisite for his Shabbos experience.

The founder of the Modzitz dynasty was Horav Yisrael Taub, zl, author of the Divrei Yisrael. He emphasized song as a primary component of Jewish worship. While he composed hundreds of nigunim, the song by which he is most remembered is entitled, Ezkerah, "I Will Remember," a compelling melody composed at a time of great travail. In his later years, he had to undergo a serious surgical procedure during which his leg was to be amputated. Weakened by his disease, the physicians feared for his life if they were to administer anesthesia. They knew, however, that without the surgery, the Rebbe's chances of living were nil. In a quandary, they asked the Rebbe what to do. He offered a unique suggestion: He would compose a niggun. As soon as the doctors saw that he was completely engrossed in the song, they should begin to operate.

That is what they did. As they performed the painful amputation, the Rebbe sang the song - feeling no pain. The song has thirty-six stanzas, because it was a long surgery. He was concentrating so deeply on the song that he was unaware of anything else: thus, he did not feel any pain. How did he do it? It is all about concentration. We are not on the Rebbe's madreigah, level, to be able to shut our minds to excruciating pain. When it hurts - it hurts! It has to do with how much we allow what takes place around us to affect us. Some of us retain memories of a sad experience for a lifetime. Others have the capability of shutting them out of their mind. If we do not think about it, the pain will cease. Yes, we are capable of controlling what goes into our minds. It is not easy, but it can be done. Song has the ability to either block or assuage unpleasant thoughts. It has that power.

The Modzitz manner of prayer worship incorporates melody with prayer to produce an ecstasy that is spiritually and physically uplifting. Once one had experienced a davening in Modzitz, he was no longer the same person. He felt the words as he "lived" the prayer. Indeed, this is how one should

daven. Song transports one to a different world, to a different mood. One has only to experience a Kabbolas Shabbos at any Chassidic center to understand the full meaning of song and music.

I conclude with one last story related by Rav Yitzchak Hershkowitz. Reb Yehonasan Schwartz is a noted singer at Jewish weddings. His grammen are words put to song which touch layers of the psyche that mere words alone cannot touch. They reach into the inner recesses of the soul and leave an imprint which impacts far beyond the wedding celebration. Reb Yehonasan employs the power of song within the four walls of a hospital room. Together with his good friend, Reb Michael Schnitzler, another well-known singer, they are often seen in the hospital wards uplifting the patient's spirits with their captivating melodies.

One day, the duo arrived at Sloan Kettering, a hospital noted for its treatment of patients suffering from dread diseases. They came to visit the patients and, in some way brighten their lives. As they were walking through the hall, they were stopped by someone who asked them to go to a certain room where an eighteen-year-old boy from Lakewood was a patient. He was suffering from a brain tumor, and the doctors had basically told the family that there was nothing more they could do. The way they perceived the situation, it was a matter of weeks before the teenager would succumb to the disease.

The two entered the room to see a young yeshivah student with tubes and drains coming out of him, his face swollen, his eyes filled with fear. They began their work. They sang niggunim and grammen and were even able to engage the patient, as he himself began to sing with them. After a short while, it was time to go. Clearly, they had elevated the patient's spirits. As they were walking out, Reb Yehonasan, not thinking of the ramification of his words, said, "Im yirtze Hashem, we will entertain him at his wedding." As soon as the words exited his mouth, he realized the absurdity of his statement. The boy was no fool, and he commented, "Yes, im yirtze Hashem, in my next gilgul, reincarnation." Reb Yehonasan felt terrible, but what could he do? He had spoken without thinking.

Two and a half years passed, and Reb Yehonasan received an invitation to a wedding in Lakewood taking place in four weeks. He looked at the names of the chassan and kallah and had no clue as to their identities. It must be a mistake, because he had no idea who these people were. Yet, he was curious. Just in case it was for real, he would show his face and leave.

On the wedding night, he entered the chasunah hall to see the chassan sitting on a chair in the middle of a circle of friends and relatives. It was a very Yeshivish crowd; Reb Yehonasan, dressed in chasidish garb, felt totally out of place. He still had no idea why he was present. The invitation had clearly been a mistake. Suddenly, the chassan noticed him. He arose from his seat of honor and beckoned for Reb Yehonasan to join him. As Reb Yehonasan moved closer into the circle, the chassan grabbed him and embraced him. He began to dance with a level of passion and fervor that Reb Yehonasan had not seen in a long time. Yet, Reb Yehonasan still had neither an idea who the chassan was, nor the reason he had been invited to the wedding.

Suddenly, the chosson looked deeply into his eyes and asked, "Do you not know who I am? I am the young man from Sloan-Kettering about whom you quipped, "We will entertain him at his wedding!" I never forgot what you said and the songs you sang. They literally changed my frame of mind, delivering the hope and strength to fight the disease. So far, I am winning! Now you understand why I invited you to my wedding. You are the biggest mechutan!"

A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

The translation of yafli, "shall disassociate," follows Rashi, who views the Nazir as someone who breaks with society's norms, seeking to separate himself from the temptations of his environment. It is a noble position to take, one to which not all of us can aspire. Ibn Ezra takes it a step further. He defines yafli as wonderment. The nazir is doing something astonishing. It is truly out of the ordinary to undertake a vow that will sever oneself from the taavos, physical desires, which others find so "life-sustaining."

Ibn Ezra is teaching us a powerful lesson. To overcome one's habits; to deny oneself a deferment to his yetzer hora, evil inclination; to withstand the pressures of one's taavos, physical desires, takes a very strong person. Such a person commits an astounding act. To change requires greatness. It is a pele, wondrous act of heroism, to break away from one's taavos, desires.

In his Daas Torah, Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl, elaborates upon this theme, deriving from Ibn Ezra that one who follows his cravings is a true slave to his desires. He is not in control of his life. His desires are in control of him. The mindset of a slave is one in which he wholly subjugates himself to his master. A person who is intrinsically a free man does not sell himself. His self-esteem just does not allow for that. One who sells himself is by nature already a slave. His self-esteem has long been gone. As a slave, he has no self-image. He is a component of his master.

Likewise, the baal taavah, one who is a slave to his physical desires, has no natural ability to break the strangle-hold that his desires have on him. The taavah beckons, and he immediately responds: "Hineni. I am here." He has no choice, no ability to say no. His "master's" choice is his choice. He is always thinking of ways to satisfy his lusts, because that is what a slave must do: always think of ways to earn the master's praise.

Thus, when a person is able to extricate himself from the vice grip of his yetzer hora, evil inclination, he is a pele, an astounding person. He was able to go against his natural proclivity. He said no! The Yerushalmi teaches that Rabbi Akiva was once teaching his students when a man who passed by the bais ha'medrash caused the entire bais ha'medrash to light up. Rabbi Akiva asked the man to enter the bais ha'medrash and asked, "What have you done that creates such an aura about you?"

The man explained, "I lusted for a certain woman. It had become so overpowering that I almost lost myself and sinned. At one point, the woman had acquiesced, but she first rebuked me for what I was about to do. I listened to her and overcame my desire." We see a clear indication from Chazal that breaking a desire is a compelling deed. It shows strength of character that only an "astounding" person possesses. This is what Ibn Ezra is teaching us. The average person falls prey to his physical passions. The one who is a pele, an astounding person, an awesome person, is able to overcome his natural gravitation to sin.

There are those who, albeit ensconced in the grips of desire, comment, "I can stop whenever I want." Rav Yeruchem emphatically states that this is untrue. This person is ashamed to admit that he is too weak to break the hold the yetzer hora has on him. He is just a "regular" person. He is not a pele.

Va'ani Tefillah

Hashem Elokeinu - Hashem is our G-d.

Horav Avigdor Miller, zl, explains that the possessive expression of Hashem Elokeinu has two perspectives. First, He is ours in the sense that a child would say, "He is my father," a term which denotes His special interest in people and His special interest and benevolence towards them. Second, we are "His" in the same sense that one refers to his employer, which denotes that all of our interest is surely on Him. Therefore, this reciprocal expression bespeaks our connection to Him and His connection to us. The Almighty bestows holiness and blessing upon us, and we direct our praises, gratitude and all of our hearts' thoughts towards Him. He acquires us as His People, and we acquire Him as our Father, Protector and King, forever. This is all because "Hashem" means forever. Whatever commitment we make must be an everlasting one - because that is the type of bond Hashem has established with us. Thus, Hashem Elokeinu is the proverbial two-way street: We do ours, and He does His.

Sponsored in loving memory of our dear father and zaidy on his yahrzeit Rabbi Shlomo Silberberg Harav Shlomo ben Nosson z"l niftar 14 Sivan 5759 t.n.tz.v.h. - Zev and Miriam Solomon and Family

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Naso

"Uniformity and Uniqueness"

One of the interesting paradoxes of human life is our tendency to copy one another and to try to "fit in" with friends and acquaintances, while simultaneously trying to be distinct from others, and to be our "own person."

The pressures of conformity are very strong in all human societies. People who are different are often treated as outcasts. And each of us determines our behavior with an eye toward others' opinions. We want to be part of the group, part of the crowd.

The pressures that human groups, large and small, exert upon each of us results, not only in conformity, but in uniformity. Groups demand that all members act in accordance with their norms and its standards. Behavior which breaks the mold of uniformity is seen as threatening, even bizarre.

And yet, we all feel the need to assert our uniqueness, our own precious individuality.

One of my personal favorite cartoons shows a crowd of penguins, looking identical, all black and white. In the center of the horde is one penguin with a barely noticeable red bow tie. The cartoon's caption has that penguin saying, "I got to be me."

Obviously, conformity is necessary for a society to function efficiently, and to maintain its equilibrium. Individual self-expression is also necessary, to introduce new coping methods into the social process.

There are dangers to both tendencies, that which demands uniformity, and that which allows for the individual's urge for autonomy and self-assertion. Countless times in history, we have witnessed terrible dangers intrinsic to crowd behavior. We have seen the negative effects of cults, which encourage blind conformity to group norms. We have seen entire nations unquestioningly following cruel calls for the genocide of targeted populations.

We have seen the urge to be different result in equally harmful and dangerous behavior. Individuals who just want to be noticed will resort to serial murders of innocents, or to venting their rage by spraying a school campus with bullets. Self-expression carried to the extreme.

Apparently, there are good sides and bad sides to both social conformity and individualistic behavior. The secret lies in the balance between the two.

In the Torah portion, Parshat Naso, even the casual reader will be troubled by the repetitive description of the offerings of the twelve tribal princes. Each of them contributes an absolutely identical set of celebratory gifts to the tabernacle. The uniformity of the twelve sets of gifts is absolute. It seems as if each of the twelve princes strove to totally conform to the others, and none dared defy the standards of the rest of the group. An example of conformity, if there ever was one.

The congregants in the synagogue who hear the Torah reader repetitively chant the monotonous lists of contributions often feel bored and ask, "Why the repetition, and why the uniformity?"

Here, the rabbis of the Midrash help us out. They take a different, deeper, and more perceptive view. Motivated by the same discomfort as today's Torah listener, they exclaim, "Their gifts are all identical, but each has his own unique intention."

Although the gifts all shared common explicit language, the thoughts and emotions behind each gift differed from prince to prince. Each lent a different kavanah, a distinct unspoken meaning, to his gifts. And that meaning was based upon the unique nature of each prince and the tribe he represented. The gifts were all the same; the underlying intentions were as different as one can imagine. The lyrics were identical; the melody, different.

The rabbis speculate at some length as to the nature of these implicit intentions. They wonder as to how the prince of the tribe of Reuben might have expressed his tribe's uniqueness in contradistinction to the prince of the tribe of Simon, and Levi, and Judah, and so forth.

All human societies contain the tension between the pressure to conform and the inner urge to be distinctive. Religious societies contain that tension all the more. Judaism, for example, requires conformity to an elaborate set

of behavioral guidelines. The casual observer of a group of Jews at prayer, or at the Passover Seder table, or circling the bimah with their palm fronds during the holiday of Succoth, will see a group of people who seem to be obsessively imitating each other.

But the observer who is familiar with the inner lives of those who comprise that group of Jews will realize that each person's prayer is different and reflective of his or her unique experience. Everyone around the Seder table is responding to different religious memories, and each of those who are circling the bimah is doing so with a very distinctive and unique set of religious emotions.

If there is a lesson to be gained from this perspective of our parsha, it is this: Religious behavior calls for a great deal of uniformity, but also insists that each individual draw from his or her own wellspring of inspiration.

We all must be the same, yet we all must be different. This paradox is true of all human societies. It is especially true of the society of Jews.

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Britain's Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

What Counts?

This week's sedra begins with a continuation of the census begun in last week's – the act that gives the entire book its English name: the book of "Numbers." Two things, though, are puzzling. The first is the very act of numbering the people. Jewish tradition conveys two quite different, apparently contradictory, attitudes toward the taking of a census.

Rashi notes that this is not the first time the people had been counted. Their number ("about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children") had already been given as they prepared to leave Egypt (Ex. 12: 37). A more precise calculation had been made when the adult males each gave a half shekel toward the building of the sanctuary (yielding a total of 603,550; Ex. 38: 26). Now a third count was taking place. Why the repeated calculations? Rashi's answer is simple and moving:

Because they (the children of Israel) are dear to Him, God counts them often. He counted them when they were about to leave Egypt. He counted them after the Golden Calf to establish how many were left. And now that He was about to cause His presence to rest on them (with the inauguration of the sanctuary), He counted them again. (Rashi to Bamidbar 1:1)

For Rashi, the counting of the people was an act of Divine love. Yet this is not the impression we receive elsewhere. To the contrary, the Torah sees the taking of a census as profoundly dangerous:

Then God said to Moses, "When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each must give to God a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. (Ex. 30: 11-12).

Centuries later, when King David counted the people, there was a moment of Divine anger, during which 70, 000 died. It seems hard to reconcile the idea of counting as an act of love with the fact that counting involves great risk.

The second source of perplexity is the phrase the Torah uses to describe the act of counting: *naso/se'u et rosh*, literally, "lift the head." There are many verbs available in classical Hebrew to indicate the act of counting: *limnot*, *lifkod*, *lispur*, *lachshov*. Why, in the books of Exodus and Numbers, does the Torah resort to the strange circumlocution, "lift the heads" of the Israelites?

To understand the revolution the Hebrew Bible brought to the world, we have first to enter imaginatively into the consequences for humanity of the birth of civilization. In the earliest hunter-gatherer societies, people lived together in small groups. There were, as yet, no cities, no states, no large concentrations of population. The Torah attributes the building of the first city to Cain (Gen. 4: 17). Cities emerged with the birth of agriculture – in the fertile alluvial plain in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates, and the well-irrigated Nile delta. Twice in the book of Bereishit the Torah

sketches a portrait of urban culture: first, the Tower of Babel, second, the Egypt to which Joseph is brought as a slave. They are both highly critical accounts. In Babel, human life was cheap (when the Tower was being built, said the sages, if a person fell and died, no one noticed. If a brick fell, they wept). In Egypt, entire populations – among them, eventually, the children of Israel – could be pressed into service as a labour force to build pyramids, temples and monuments, many of which still stand today.

The birth of agriculture and the growth of towns had huge social implications. For the first time, surplus wealth was possible and could be stored in the form of money (initially, precious metals such as silver and gold). So too, as populations expanded and the division of labour became more elaborate, social stratification began. Inequality – deep, pervasive and systemic – became one of the universal features of the earliest societies. At the top was the king, emperor or Pharaoh, seen as no less than a god or child of the gods, who held a massive concentration of power. Below him (or her) were the various ranks of privilege: court circles, military chiefs, administrators and priests. The mass of the people – poor, illiterate, expendable – was significant, whether as an army or a construction force, as a mass, by sheer weight of numbers. Hence the significance of censuses in the ancient world (and in this respect, little has changed from then to now). Size meant strength, military or economic. Population counts gave rulers information about the size of the army they could muster, or of the income they could raise by taxation.

The religion of Israel is a sustained protest against this view – military, political and economic – of the human situation. At this distance in time it is hard fully to appreciate the breathtaking novelty, the transformative potential, of the cluster of ideas generated by a single revelation – that the human person as such, man or woman, rich or poor, powerful or powerless, is the image of God and therefore of non-negotiable, unquantifiable value. We are each equally in the image of God, therefore we stand equal in the presence of God. Much of Torah, Jewish history and the development of Western civilization is about the slow translation of this idea into institutions, social structures and ethical codes.

It should now be clear why the taking of a census is fraught with spiritual risk. The numbering of a people is the most potent symbol of mankind-in-the-mass, of a society in which the individual is not valued in and for himself or herself but as part of a totality whose power lies in numbers. That is precisely what Israel is not. The God of Israel, who is the God of all mankind, sets His special love on a people whose strength has nothing to do with numbers, a people that never sets itself to become an empire, that is never commanded to wage holy war in order to convert populations, that was and remains tiny in both absolute terms and relative to the empires with which it was and is surrounded, standing as it does at the vulnerable crossroad between three continents.

Both questions with which we began are now answered. There is a difference between a human census and one commanded by God. David's was a human census. Israel's second king had laid the foundations of a nation. He had waged successful wars, united the tribes and established Jerusalem as his capital. Shortly after his death, Israel reached its zenith as a power in the Middle East. Under Solomon, through strategic alliances, it became a centre of trade and scholarship. The Temple was built. It must have seemed at the time as if, after many centuries of wandering and war, Israel had become a power to rival any other. It was a shortlived, cruelly-shattered illusion. Almost immediately after Solomon's reign, the kingdom split in two, and from then on its this-worldly fate was sealed. A history of defeats, exiles and destructions began, which has no parallel in the annals of any other nation. The Hebrew Bible is not wrong in seeing the starting-point of this decline in the moment at which David acted like any other king and ordered a census of the people.

A Divine census is utterly different. It has nothing to do with strength-in-numbers. It has to do, instead, with conveying to every member of the nation that he or she counts; that every person, family, household is held precious by God; that distinctions between great and small, ruler and ruled, leader and led, are irrelevant; that we are each God's image and the object of His love. A Divine census is, as Rashi says, a gesture of endearment.

That is why it cannot be described by the usual verbs of counting -- limnot, lifkod, lispur, lachshov. Only the phrase naso/se'u et rosh, "lift the head", does justice to this kind of enumeration, in which those entrusted with the task are commanded to "lift the head" of those they count, making every individual stand tall in the knowledge that they are loved, cherished, held special by God, and not merely a number, a cipher, among the thousands and millions.

There is a wonderful verse in Psalm 147 which we say every morning in our prayers: "He counts the number of the stars and calls them each by name." A name is a marker of uniqueness. Collective nouns group things together; proper names distinguish them as individuals. Only what we value, do we name (One of the most chilling acts of dehumanisation in the extermination camps of Nazi Germany was that those who entered were never addressed by their names. Instead they were given, inscribed on their skin, a number). God gives even the stars their names, all the more so human beings -- on whom He has set His image. God counts to signal to us that each of us counts, for what we are as individuals, not en masse. He "lifts our head" in the most profound way known to mankind, by assuring each of us of His special, enduring, unquantifiable love.

That is the nature of the census in the book of Numbers. As the Israelites prepared to become a society with the sanctuary -- visible home of the Divine presence -- at its centre, they had to be reminded that they were to become the pioneers of a new and revolutionary social order, whose most famous definition was given by the prophet Zechariah as the Israelites prepared to rebuild the ruined temple:

"Not by might, nor by strength, but by
My spirit, says the Lord."

To read more writings and teachings from the Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, please visit www.chief Rabbi.org.

Rabbi Yisrocher Frand *Parshas Naso and Shavuot*

The Ramban DOES NOT Contradict The Talmud's Description of a Nazir

A Nazir is a person who accepts upon himself added restrictions. He is compared in some ways to a Kohen Gadol. As a result of his added holiness, he is not allowed to drink wine, he is not allowed to cut his hair, and is he allowed to come into contact with a dead person. After he finishes his period of Nezirus he must bring a series of korbonos [sacrifices].

Regarding the offerings brought by a Nazirite at the conclusion of his status of being a Nazir, the Torah says: [Bamidbar 6:11] "The Kohen shall make one as a sin-offering and one as an olah-offering, and he shall provide him atonement for having sinned regarding the soul..." We understand why a Nazir would bring a burnt offering. It seems he did a very virtuous thing by accepting upon himself the holiness of a Nazirite and an Olah offering would be in line with that idea. However the Talmud is bothered -- what sin did the Nazir commit that requires him to bring a Korban Chatas [sin offering]?

The Gemara in Tractate Nedrim cites an opinion that the sin of the Nazir was the fact that he caused himself pain by abstaining from wine. The Ramban, in his Chumash commentary, says something which seems to fly in the face of that Talmudic teaching. The Ramban, after acknowledging that the Torah does not state why a Nazir brings a Korban Chatas, speculates that the reason for the Korban Chatas is that he knows he is going to re-enter the mundane world again and once again drink wine. After having elevated himself to the status of a Nazirite who abstains from these earthly pleasures, ideally he should have remained in that level of earthly separation. Terminating the Nezirus and resuming a life of normal earthly pleasures is the action -- according to the Ramban's speculation -- that triggers the requirement to bring a Korban Chatas.

Rav Simcha Zissel Broide asks how the Ramban can offer such an interpretation which seems to contradict the Gemara which states that the Korban Chatas is for having abstained from wine in the first place?

Rav Simcha Zissel explains as follows: When this person started out as a regular person and accepted Nezirus upon himself he "pained himself from wine". However something happened to him in the course of his 30 days of Nezirus -- he became a more elevated person. The person who started the Nezirus is not the same person who ended it. The "plain guy" who started the Nezirus is the type of person about whom the Torah says "Do not forbid upon yourself more than the Torah has already forbidden upon you." There is such a criticism for "regular Joes". However, once he has completed 30 days of elevated sanctity, he has reached a higher level. He is no longer a "plain guy" anymore. He is now standing at a level where such behavior becomes appropriate for him. Therefore, to pull the plug now on this level of sanctity and go back to being a "regular Joe" does require atonement.

We are supposed to grow through life. Maybe there are certain things in life that when we started out were not appropriate for us. But with time and experience, we grow and then greater things are expected of us.

This is why the Halacha views a person who has learned and has gone away from his learning (shanah u'peereish) with great disregard. Such a person knows better. He has achieved more. Nebech, a person who has never learned, does not know any better if he turns away from learning; but someone who has learned and knows better and then leaves it all -- that is very bad.

Nachshon ben Aminadav Needed No Titles

The second observation I would like to share with you is from Rav Shlomo Ganzfried, the author of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch.

Parshas Nasso is the longest parsha in the Torah with 176 pesukim. However, it is NOT the most difficult parsha to leyn (read out loud in shul) in the Torah because there is a 12 fold repetition of a series of pasukim dealing with the offerings brought by each of the princes of the various tribes during the 12 days of dedication of the Tabernacle. Each offering was exactly the same and consequently the pasukim are virtually identical. Thus, although the parsha is long, leyning it is, relatively speaking, a breeze.

Although the pasukim are virtually identical, there is one striking difference that we find in these descriptions. By each and every offering, the Torah uses the formula "On day number X the Prince from the Children of Y (name of Tribe): So-and-so." There is only one exception to this pattern. On the very first day, it says: "And it was the one who brought his offering on the first day was Nachshon ben Amindav of the Tribe of Yehudah." It never mentions that he was a Prince. The pattern is different from that of all the other tribes.

Rav Shlomo Ganzfried: explains that there are some people who do not need titles. By virtue of their record until now, we know who they are. We need to be introduced to Nesanel ben Tzuar -- we need to be told: He is the Prince; he is the leader. The same is true for Eliav ben Cheilon, etc. These are the names of the leaders of the tribes. However, none needs to be told about Nachshon ben Aminadav -- he is the leader. We know he is the leader. How do we know he is the leader? It is because when Klal Yisrael was standing on the banks of Yam Suf and everyone was crying "What is going to be with us?" Nachshon ben Aminadav walked into the water and went in up to his neck and then after that, the sea split, and everyone else was able to follow his lead and be saved. Such a leader needs no further introductions.

There are certain Amoraim in Shas who do not have titles. There is Shmuel; there is Abaye. What happened to RABBI Abaye? Should we assume he did not stick around long enough in the Yeshiva to get semicha? Obviously not!

Some people do not need the title. It is ironic but two or three of the "Gedolei HaDor" (great men of the generation) did not have Rabbinic titles. It was "Reb Moshe". When one said "Reb Moshe" that was Rav Moshe Feinstein! Who was "Reb Yakov?" It was Rav Yakov Kamenetsky.

They were not known as HaRav Moshe Feinstein or HaRav Yakov Kamenetsky. They were simply known as Reb Moshe and Reb Yakov. They did not need titles and they did not need abbreviations after their names. They were princes whose very names announced their greatness.

The Sefer Torah Was Waiting For Them At The Right Spot

I heard the following story during Pessach and I saved it for Parshas Nasso. There was a Yeshiva bochur who went on a trip to Eastern Europe before Pessach. He took a tour of Vilna, Minsk, Lublin, and other cities with long Jewish histories. It was the month of Nissan. Chassidim have a custom that every day after davening during the first 12 days of Nissan they read the Torah portion of that particular day from Parshas Nasso. The dedication of the Mishkan started on Rosh Chodesh Nissan and every day for the first 12 days the prince of a different tribe offered his Korbonos as described at the end of the parsha.

The fellow who was leading the tour was a Chassidic Jew and he wanted to observe this custom of reading the "chapter of the princes" during the first days of Nissan. On Rosh Chodesh, they were in Vilna and they found a Sefer Torah in a shul, they took it out and read the section of the first day. The next day they were in Minsk. They went to a shul, they took out a Sefer Torah and they read the section from the second day. On the third day they were in Lublin, but they could not find a Sefer Torah. So they had to skip the reading that morning. Outside of Lublin was one of the Concentration Camps and they took a tour of the camp. Attached to the Concentration Camp was a Judaica museum in which they displayed artifacts from the Polish Jewish community. Lo and behold in this museum enclosed in a plastic case was a Sefer Torah... opened to Parshas Nasso: "On the third day the prince of the children of Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon..." [Bamidbar 7:24]

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD
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Parshat Naso: Biblical rehab **By Shmuel Rabinowitz**

Jewish, moral and enjoyable lives can be lead by keeping our desires in check, setting moral boundaries for ourselves.

In this week's Torah reading we read about a unique observance: The rule of the Nazirite.

When we hear the term "Nazirite," we imagine an individual who abstains completely from worldly pleasures and lives a celibate, solitary and self-mortifying life. But the Nazirite that the Torah describes is quite different. The Torah speaks of a person who has taken upon himself certain obligations for a period of 30 days: to abstain from wine, not to shave or cut his hair, or to come near a dead body. At the end of this short period, the Torah instructs the Nazirite to shave and drink wine, and permits him to approach the dead.

The Torah's attitude to such an individual is ambivalent. On one hand, he is referred to as holy: "The crown of his G-d is upon his head... all the days of abstinence he is holy."

(Numbers 6:7-8) On the other hand, the Torah also refers to him as a "sinner": "And [the Cohen] shall atone for him his sin." (Numbers 6:11) What is the meaning of this ambivalent attitude? Does the Torah see abstinence from worldly pleasures as a sin, or as holiness? In the commandment regarding the Nazirite, we see the biblical approach to rehabilitation from the misuse of alcohol.

A life full of pleasure, joy and verve is the Torah's ideal. In contrast with other religions, Judaism does not idolize the Nazirite who abstains from social life, nor does it look kindly upon one who brings suffering upon himself.

On the contrary, the ideal person enjoys life, naturally within the bounds of Jewish law, the Halacha. These limits offer him the ability to morally

evaluate his desires, and do not permit him to become uncontrollably driven by his drive for pleasure.

Sometimes, however, an individual sees that he is losing control over his desires. He feels that he is being driven by his passions.

In this sort of situation, the Torah suggests that he take "time out." For a month he abstains from wine and grooming, by not shaving or cutting his hair. These 30 days of self-restraint will help him achieve balance and return his ability to curb his passions.

Indeed, an individual of this sort is "holy" – but he should realize that this is not the ideal situation. Had he considered his actions, he would not have needed a month of rehab.

Had he controlled his desires, he could have continued to pay attention to his grooming and enjoyed a glass of wine from time to time. This is why there is an aspect of "sin" in the abstinence of a Nazirite.

For many, many years the observance of the Nazirite laws has nearly completely disappeared among the Jewish people. But the message of these laws applies today as well.

If we enjoy life wisely, keeping our desires in check and setting moral boundaries for ourselves, then our enjoyment will be complete and proper, and we will lead Jewish, moral and enjoyable lives.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

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Rabbi Hershel Schachter **The TorahWeb Foundation** ***Modern Day Centrism***

In the order of the mishnayos, Maseches Sotah follows Masaeches Nazir. The Talmud explains that this is based on the pesukim in parshas Naso, where the parshiyos of nazir and sotah are next to each other. The reason for the juxtaposition is explained by the Talmud as follows: normally the Torah does not want us to be extreme. The middos are referred to as such because each must be implemented with the proper measure (the Hebrew word "middah" means a measure). One who accepts upon himself to become a nazir, i.e. to become, in a certain sense, an ascetic, and to totally abstain from wine, is considered a sinner. However, once in while we consider a nazir to be a kadosh - a holy person. One who lives in a generation (like ours) where there is much corruption and pritzus, and one who witnesses a sotah, must be concerned that he too may follow the path of the corrupt society. Under such circumstances the Torah recommends that we take extreme measures to offset the improper influence of society.

The Rambam is famous for his presentation of this idea in Hilchos De'os. One of the modern Jewish thinkers has attacked the Rambam for having picked up this concept from the Greek philosophers and presenting it in Mishna Torah, as if it had a source in Talmudic literature. But the truth is that it is rooted in the rabbinic comment regarding the juxtaposition of the two parshiyos of nazir and sotah.

We live in a generation of instant communication. Everyone around the world is notified immediately about all the ganovim and all the sotos anywhere in the world. We do not just see one sotah, rather we are made aware of many sotos. Although under normal conditions it would not be healthy to follow an extreme path in life, in our circumstances extreme measures are recommended.

This recommendation is true not only in the area of being adam laMakom, but also in the area of being adam lachaveiro. We are surrounded with many who cheat in business, cheat on income tax, sales tax, etc. We should be careful not only to be honest and follow the law, but even bend over backwards to make sure that we don't follow these extremely improper practices of our society. The Talmud describes kosher fish as having a backbone, and having the ability to swim upstream, i.e. against the current. Jews must always develop such a backbone and see to it that they swim against the current.

The Rambam interprets the mishna in Pirkei Avos as recommending yet another exception to "the golden rule." The Tanna Rabbi Levitas of Yavne used to say, that one should always be "very very" humble. The Rambam

interprets the repetition of the term "very" to imply that one ought not to follow the golden mean with respect to arrogance and humility, but should rather go to an extreme in adopting the quality of humility.

The Rambam explains that biblically humility and arrogance should be the same as any other middos and one should attempt to follow the middle path, but just as the rabbis introduced so many *gezeiros* and *harchokos* in the area of *bein adam laMakom* and *bein adam lachaveiro*, so too here did they introduce a *gezeira* in this area of *bein adam le'atzmo*. The rabbis were concerned that many people, or perhaps most people, would not be able to determine where the midpoint is between arrogance and humility, and would most probably err on the side of arrogance. Therefore the rabbis made a *gezeira derabanan* that we must all go to the extreme regarding humility.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Shavuot: Connecting to Torah Study

For Rav Kook, it was axiomatic that the Jewish soul and the Torah are a match made in heaven. In his book analyzing the essential nature and value of Torah study, *Orot HaTorah*, he categorically asserted that "The Torah is bound together with the spirit of Israel" (12:1). This is true not only for the Jewish people as a whole, but also for each individual:

"Just as Knesset Yisrael [the national soul of Israel] can only realize its full potential in the land of Israel [see *Kuzari* 2:12], so, too, each individual Jew can only fulfill his spiritual potential through the Torah, which is the spiritual 'land' suitable to the special qualities of the Jewish soul. All other studies are like foreign lands with regard to the spiritual development of Israel." (12:7)

While this is nice in theory, in practice things are not so simple. Not everyone takes to Torah study like a fish to water. If Torah study is indeed so natural to the Jewish soul, why do Jewish educators need to work so hard?

Rav Kook was aware of this problem. There are a number of reasons why the words of Torah may not find a place in one's heart - some practical, some spiritual. In analyzing the reasons why a person may feel disconnected from Torah, Rav Kook noted several underlying causes.

Appreciating Torah

To properly appreciate the value of Torah study, we must recognize the essential nature of the Torah. The Torah is a revelation of *ratzon Hashem*, God's Will in the world. It is only due to the limitations of our physical state that we are unable to recognize the Torah's true greatness.

Similarly, we need to have a proper appreciation for our Divine soul and its natural sense of morality. People occasionally err and stumble; but overall, we should have faith in our innate moral sensibilities. Thus there exists an inner correlation between the Torah's ethical teachings and the soul's inner qualities. The extent that one enjoys studying Torah is a function of refinement of character; the greater one's moral sensitivity, the more readily one will identify with the Torah and its teachings.

This fundamental insight is essential in order to properly appreciate Torah study. When Torah is studied in holiness, one may sense the greatness of the Torah and how it emanates from the very source of holiness.

Elevating the Details

A basic appreciation for Torah, however, is not enough. Even if one recognizes the Divine nature of the Torah, one may feel a sense of impatience when faced with its myriad laws and complex details. One may be attracted to lofty matters, and feel restricted and frustrated when studying the detailed minutiae of Halachah.

The remedy for these feelings of restriction is not to avoid Halachic studies but rather "to elevate the significance of each detail of practical studies to the richness of its spiritual source" (*Orot HaTorah* 9:8). A detail may

acquire great significance when illuminated by a flash of insight or sudden inspiration. Success in 'elevating the details' requires spiritual refinement and perseverance in the contemplative pursuit of the boundless heights of holiness.

In fact, each word of Torah contains infinite light, a reflection of the Torah's absolute morality. One who has learned to perceive this light will gain insight into the inner spiritual content of each detail.

Find Your Portion in the Torah

An additional aspect that needs to be addressed is that not all areas of Torah appeal to all people equally. In general we should occupy ourselves with those pursuits that interest us. This is especially true regarding Torah study, as the Sages taught, "One only learns that which one's heart desires" (*Avodah Zarah* 19a).

Some have strayed from and even abandoned the Jewish people because they failed to follow their personal inclinations when choosing what area of Torah to study. They may have been predisposed to philosophical inquiry, but lacking appreciation for their own innate interests, they dedicated themselves to conventional Halachic studies. Unsurprisingly, they felt an inner resistance to this course of study, since it was not compatible to their natural inclinations. Had they focused on learning more suitable topics, they would have realized that their inner opposition to Halachic studies was not due to some flaw in this important area of knowledge, but because their soul demanded a different field of Torah study.

Since they failed to understand the root cause of their inner conflict with Torah study, they attempted to suppress their natural tendencies. But as soon as an alternative path became available, they rejected the Torah and the faith of Israel. Some of these individuals subsequently attempted to promote great ideals lacking practical foundations, and they misled the world with their false visions.

Others are naturally drawn to the sciences and secular studies. These individuals should follow their natural interests, while setting aside set times for Torah study. Then they will succeed in both areas. As the Sages counseled in *Pirkei Avot* 2:2, 'It is good to combine the study of Torah with worldly endeavors.'

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Orot HaTorah*, sections 2:1, 4:4, 4:5, 6:2, 7:1, 7:4, 9:1, 9:6, 9:8, 11:2, 12:1, 12:7.)

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

May I Daven in English?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

I received the following e-mail question from Verna Acular*:

I much prefer to pray in English, since reading the siddur in Hebrew provides me with no emotional connection to G-d. I was told to read the Hebrew even though I cannot comprehend it, yet other people I know were told that they could pray in English. Which approach is correct?

Question #2:

Bella, a middle-aged, new immigrant from Central Europe, struggles to ask the rabbi:

I became frum in Hungary and Hungarian is the only language that I can read and understand. Someone told me that now that I am living in the United States, I cannot pray in Hungarian, but must learn to read either English or Hebrew. Is this so? I am really too old to learn to read a new language.

Question #3:

Bracha Acharona asked me the following:

I heard that some authorities rule that if one recited a bracha in Japanese before eating, one should not recite the bracha again, even if one does not know a word of Japanese; yet, if one benschd in Japanese, one would be required to bensch again. Is there indeed a difference between a bracha before eating and one afterwards?

Introduction:

The Gemara discusses whether a kohen who knows no Hebrew may duchen in translation. Since this mitzvah is in the current week's reading, we have an opportunity to discuss whether mitzvos that require speaking must be recited in Hebrew, or if they may be recited in translation.

Those That Can and Those That Cannot

The Mishnah (Sotah 32a) supplies a rather long list both of mitzvos that are fulfilled only when recited in Hebrew and of those that are fulfilled when recited in any language. For example, one cannot fulfill the requirements of chalitzah (see Devarim 25:7-10), duchening (see Bamidbar 6:24-26), and the narration that accompanies bikkurim (see Devarim 26:5-11), unless one recites the exact Hebrew words that the Torah cites. On the other hand, other mitzvos, including the reciting of shma, prayer, and birkas hamazon (bensching) can be fulfilled by translating the relevant passages into a language with which one is familiar. Indeed the Gemara (Brachos 40b) records an instance in which an individual named Binyomin the Shepherd benschted in Aramaic, and Rav ruled that he had fulfilled his requirement. The Gemara explains the reason for which some mitzvos may be fulfilled in translation, but not others, on the basis of several intricate interpretations from various verses.

Which is preferable?

Having established that one may pray in a vernacular, the first question on which we will focus is whether it is preferable for someone who does not understand Hebrew to pray in a language that he understands, or whether it is preferred to pray in Hebrew, even though it is not understood.

Tosafos' opinion

From Tosafos (Sotah op. cit.) we see that someone who does not understand Hebrew and recites a prayer, shma, or bensching in Hebrew does not fulfill the mitzvah. Tosafos asks why the Mishnah omits hearing Megillah from its list of mitzvos that may be fulfilled in any language. Tosafos answers that the mitzvah of Megillah is qualitatively different from all the other mitzvos mentioned in this Mishnah, because one who does not understand Hebrew fulfills the mitzvah of Megillah in Hebrew. Tosafos clearly understands that someone who prays, benschtes or reads shma in a language he does not understand does not fulfill the mitzvah, even if the language is Hebrew, and the Mishnah is listing mitzvos that one will fulfill only in the vernacular. Thus, according to Tosafos' opinion, Verna should be reciting her prayers in English, and Bella should recite them in Hungarian.

Hebrew for the Hungarians

Although Tosafos holds this way, later authorities reject this conclusion. The Keren Orah notes that, according to Tosafos, someone who does not understand Hebrew will be unable to fulfill the mitzvos of bensching and davening if he does not have a siddur handy with a translation in a language that they understand. He cites other early authorities who answered Tosafos' question (from the Gemara in Megillah) in a different way and concludes that one who prayed, benschted or read shma in Hebrew fulfills the mitzvah, even if he does not understand Hebrew, providing that he knew that he was about to fulfill the mitzvah.

Quoting other earlier authorities, the Mishnah Berurah (62:2) extends this concept, ruling that it is preferable to daven, bensch and recite shma in Hebrew, rather than to use a different language, even when one does not understand Hebrew.

What does veshinantam mean?

The Mishnah Berurah adds an additional reason why one should recite shma in Hebrew. This is because there are several words in shma that are difficult to translate, or whose meaning is unclear. For example, the word veshinantam may often be translated as teach them, but this translation does not express the full meaning of the word. The word for teach them in

Hebrew is velimadtem, which is the word used in the second parsha of shma, Vehayah im shomo'a. The word veshinantam includes teaching students until they know the Torah thoroughly, and simply translating this word as and you shall teach them does not adequately relay the intended meaning.

By the way, this difference in meaning is reflected in the Targum Onkeles Aramaic translation, where velimadtem is translated vesalfun, whereas veshinantam is translated u'sesaninun, which comes from the Aramaic root that is equivalent to the Hebrew veshinantam. Thus, Aramaic possesses two different verbs, one of which means to teach and the other meaning to teach until known thoroughly, whereas English lacks a short way of expressing the latter idea.

I have heard it suggested that one may alleviate this problem in English by translating the word veshinantam with the entire clause you shall teach it to your sons until they know it thoroughly. This approach should seemingly resolve the concern raised by the Mishnah Berurah, although I am unaware of an English translation that renders the word veshinantam in this way.

Other hard translations

Whether or not one can translate veshinantam accurately, the Mishnah Berurah questions how one will translate the word es, since it has no equivalent in most languages. He further notes that the word totafos, which refers to the tefillin worn on the head, is also difficult to translate. However, when we recite these words in Hebrew, we avoid the need to know the exact translation, since we are using the words the Torah itself used. The Mishnah Berurah feels that for the same reasons, someone who can read but does not understand Hebrew should recite Kiddush, bensching, davening and his other brachos in Hebrew.

Although the Mishnah Berurah does not mention this predicament, a problem similar to the one he raises concerns the translation of the Name of G-d. When reciting a bracha or any of the above-mentioned requirements in a different language, one must be careful to translate this Name accurately (Shu't Igros Moshe, Orach Chayim 4:40:27). Rav Moshe Feinstein notes this problem in the context of the anecdote I mentioned above about Binyomin the Shepherd, who benschted in Aramaic. The Gemara records that Binyomin the Shepherd referred to G-d as Rachmana. In a teshuvah on the subject, Rav Moshe notes that although the word Rachmana obviously derives from the same source as the word rachum, mercy, one would not fulfill the requirement of reciting a bracha by substituting the word rachum for Hashem's Name. Thus, Rav Moshe asks, how could Binyomin the Shepherd have fulfilled his bracha by reciting the translation of the word rachum? Rav Moshe answers that although the source of the word Rachmana and the word rachum are the same, Rachmana is the translation of G-d's Name in Aramaic, and therefore it is used in Aramaic prayers and blessings. However, rachum is not a translation of G-d, but an attribute of G-d, and its recital in a bracha is not adequate.

We thus realize that someone translating Hashem's Name into any language must be meticulously careful to translate it with complete accuracy.

Is "G-d" Correct?

I have seen two common ways of translating the Name of Hashem into English, one as Lord and the other as G-d. Translating His Name as Lord is based on the meaning of the Name Adnus as Adon hakol, the Lord of all, which is the basic understanding one is required to have when reciting His Name. However, I have noticed that some recent translations now transliterate the Name in English as Hashem. This is not an accurate translation, and a person reciting the bracha this way will not fulfill his responsibility. I strongly suggest that the publishers not do this, since they are performing a disservice for people using their translation.

The Position of the Sefer Chassidim

Notwithstanding the Mishnah Berurah's conclusion that it is preferred that one recite davening, bensching, and shma in Hebrew, even if he does not

understand them, in an early Rishon we find a compromise position between Tosafos, who holds that one does not fulfill the mitzvos if he does not understand the language, and the Mishnah Berurah's approach. The Sefer Chassidim (#588) advises, "If a G-d fearing man or woman who does not understand Hebrew comes to you, tell them to learn the prayers in the language that they understand, because prayer can only be recited with understanding of the heart, and if the heart does not understand what the mouth expresses, it does not accomplish anything. For this reason, it is best to pray in a language one understands.

He states this even more clearly in a different passage (#785).

It is better for a person to pray and recite Shma and brachos in a language that he comprehends, rather than pray in Hebrew and not understand... It is for this reason that the Talmud, both in Bavel and in Eretz Yisrael, was written in Aramaic, so that even the unlettered can understand the mitzvos. We should ask: Why did the Sefer Chassidim reserve his comments for someone who is G-d fearing? Clearly, he holds that one fulfills the mitzvos whether one recites these prayers in Hebrew that he does not understand or a translation that he does (similar to the Mishnah Berurah's position), but the Sefer Chassidim rules that it is preferable to recite these prayers in a language he understands (unlike the Mishnah Berurah's position). The Sefer Chassidim's position is subsequently quoted by the Magen Avraham (101:5), who also cites this approach in the name of the Asarah Maamaros of the Rama miFanu.

The Yad Efrayim's approach

The Yad Efrayim quotes the Magen Avraham (who ruled as the Sefer Chassidim), but feels very strongly that one should recite the tefillah in Hebrew. To quote him: In our days, when there is no one who can translate the Hebrew accurately, one should rebuke anyone who follows a lenient route and prays in the vernacular. Rather, one should not separate himself from the community to read the prayer in Hebrew and one fulfills his mitzvah even if he does not understand. Someone concerned about the issues raised by Sefer Chassidim should learn the basic understanding of the Hebrew enough to know what he is asking. Although he will not understand each word, we are not concerned about this... If he does not want to learn the Hebrew, then he should pray in Hebrew with the community, and then, afterwards, he can read the prayer in translation.

Thus, we see that the Yad Efrayim is a strong advocate of one's praying only in Hebrew, and he presumably was one of the authorities upon whom the Mishnah Berurah based his ruling.

At this point, we can return to Verna's question:

I much prefer to pray in English, since reading the siddur provides me with no emotional connection to G-d. I was told to read the Hebrew, even though I cannot comprehend it; yet, other people I know were told that they could pray in English. Which approach is correct?

Verna has been told to follow the ruling of the Yad Efrayim and the Mishnah Berurah, which is the most commonly-followed approach today. We encourage anyone who can read the words in Hebrew to recite the prayers and brachos in Hebrew. However, assuming that the "other people" can read Hebrew, they were instructed by someone who followed the approach of the Magen Avraham and the Sefer Chassidim. It is also possible that the "other people" cannot read Hebrew properly. Someone who cannot read Hebrew has no choice but to recite prayers in the best translation that he/she can find.

Is this the Language of the Country?

At this point, I would like to address Bella's predicament.

I became frum in Hungary and Hungarian is the only language that I can read and understand. Someone told me that now that I am living in the United States, I cannot pray in Hungarian, but must learn to read either English or Hebrew. Is this so?

What is the halacha if someone does not understand the language of the country in which he/she lives? Can one fulfill the mitzvos of shma, brachos and davening by reciting these prayers in his native language,

notwithstanding the fact that few people in his new country comprehend this language?

Although this may seem surprising, the Bi'ur Halacha rules that one fulfills the mitzvos in a vernacular only when this is the language that is commonly understood in the country in which one is currently located. Following this approach, one who recites a bracha in America in a language that most Americans do not understand is required to recite the bracha again. Bella was indeed told the position of the Bi'ur Halacha that one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of praying in the United States in Hungarian or any other language that is not commonly understood, other than Hebrew.

The Bi'ur Halacha based his ruling on a statement of the Ritva (in the beginning of his notes to the Rif on Nedarim), who implies that halacha recognizes something as a language only in the time and place that a people has chosen to make this into their spoken vernacular.

Rav Gustman's position

Some later authorities disputed the Bi'ur Halacha's conclusion, demonstrating that this concern of the Ritva refers only to a slang or code, but not to a proper language (Kuntrisei Shiurim of Rav Gustman, Nedarim page 11; and others). This means that if someone prayed or recited a bracha in something that is not considered a true language, he would not fulfill his mitzvah and would be required to recite the prayer or bracha again. However, although most Americans do not understand Hungarian, since this is considered a bona fide language, Bella fulfills the mitzvah by davening in Hungarian. Rav Gustman writes that he told many Russian baalei teshuvah that they could pray in Russian when they were living in Israel or the United States, even though Russian is not understood by most people in either country. He acknowledges that, according to the Bi'ur Halacha, this would not fulfill the mitzvah.

Must one understand the foreign language?

At this point, we will address Bracha's brachos question:

I heard that some authorities rule that if one recited a bracha in Japanese before eating one should not recite the bracha again, even if one does not know a word of Japanese; yet if one benschd in Japanese, one would be required to bensch again. Is there indeed a difference between a bracha before eating and one afterwards?

According to Tosafos, someone can fulfill reciting the brachos before eating and Hallel and Kiddush even in a secular language that one does not understand. Tosafos contends that although one fulfills the mitzvos of bensching, davening and shma only in a language that one understands, there is a difference between them and brachos before eating, Hallel and Kiddush, where one fulfills the mitzvah without understanding the language.

Do We Follow Tosafos' Opinion?

Although the Magen Avraham (introduction to Orach Chayim 62) rules in accordance with this Tosafos, most later commentaries do not (Keren Orach and Rav Elazar Landau on Sotah ad loc.; Bi'ur Halacha 62 s.v. Yachol; Aruch Hashulchan 62:3). Several authorities state that they do not understand Tosafos' position that there is a difference between shma, shemoneh esrei and birkas hamazon, which can only be recited in a language one understands, and Kiddush, Hallel, birkas hamitzvos and brachos before eating, which Tosafos rules one may recite even in a language that one does not comprehend.

The answer is: the drasha of Chazal states that one fulfills shma only in a language that one understands. This is logical, because shma is accepting the yoke of Heaven, and how can one do this without comprehending the words? The same idea applies to the shemoneh esrei -- how can one be praying if one does not understand what one is saying? Birkas hamazon is also a very high level of thanks, and what type of acknowledgement is it, if one does not know the meaning of the words he is saying? However, one can praise in a language that one does not understand, as evidenced by the fact that chazzanim or choirs may sing beautiful praise, although they do

not necessarily comprehend every word. Similarly, as long as one knows that the Kiddush is sanctifying Shabbos, one fulfills the mitzvah, even if one does not understand the words.

The Keren Orah answers Tosafos' question in a different way, arguing that although the Mishnah omits these four cases, each should be included in one of the cases mentioned by the Mishnah. Both Hallel and Kiddush are part of davening, and therefore are included when the Mishnah says that tefillah may be recited in any language, and it is implied that brachos on mitzvos and before eating food would be included in the statement of the Mishnah that one may bensch in any language.

Conclusion

Some people, who cannot read Hebrew at all, have no choice but to pray in the language that they can read and understand. However, anyone who can should accept the challenge of studying the prayers a bit at a time, gradually thereby developing both fluency and comprehension. In the interim, they can read the translation of each paragraph first, and then read the Hebrew, which will help them develop a full understanding of the prayers as Chazal wrote and organized them.

*All names have been changed to protect privacy.

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