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Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The book of Bamidbar contains many puzzling portions. In this week's Parsha, the Torah records the sacrificial offerings by the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel, upon the dedication and consecration of the tabernacle. These twelve offerings were identical in every detail. Yet, the Torah describes each of these offerings individually, as though the offering of each leader was his decision and was unique and different from the offering of his colleague who was the leader of very different tribe.

Over the ages, many ideas and interpretations have been offered for this seeming redundancy. The overwhelming number of interpretations concentrate on the idea that even though the offerings may physically have been identical, the spirit and motivation of each differed from individual to individual, and tribe to tribe.

This type of interpretation lends itself to understanding how one Jew can achieve personal prayer while reciting a set number of printed texts which everyone else around him or her is also reciting at the very same moment. Since no two people are alike physically, they certainly are not alike mentally, emotionally, or spiritually.

Prayer is derived not only from the brain and lips of the person praying but, rather, it also comes from the emotions and unique perspective that each human being brings to the relationship with one's creator and to life. So, too, the offerings of the leaders of the tribes of Israel in the desert may have been physically identical, but the emotional perspective and spiritual elevation of each of the offerings was truly unique and distinctive for that tribal prince who brought it and gave it as a service of the public in the Mishkan.

Another lesson that is to be learned from this seeming repetition of the offerings of the leaders of the tribes of Israel, is the triumph of constancy over flashes of brilliance. It is the old parable regarding the race between the tortoise and the hare. And repetition always leads to a feeling of security and hope. Much of Judaism is based upon repetitive behavior. With each recurring action, we absorb and internalize it into our very being, so that doing the right thing in fulfilling the commandments of the Torah becomes second nature to us.

This is especially true in the field of prayer. I once read a memoir of an Israeli soldier who fought in the battle for Jerusalem's Ammunition Hill in 1967 during the Six Day War. The Jordanian army was entrenched on that hill, and most military experts believed it was suicidal to try and dislodge them. The hill was the central point in the battle for Jerusalem, and by controlling it, the rest of the West Bank was open to mobile contact and conquest. The soldier wrote of the terrible battle that waged that night, and how hundreds of his comrades were killed and wounded, while the Jordanians also suffered great losses. He wrote that at one moment in the battle he was alone and nearly surrounded by Jordanian troops. He said that he felt an overwhelming urge at that moment to pray, but he then realized that since he had never prayed in his life, he did not know what to do. He resolved, therefore, that if he survived – and he did – he would learn how to pray, so that when he had to pray, he would know what he must do.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Naso

The Ideal Nazir Attacks the Illness Rather Than the Symptom

Parshas Naso contains the mitzvah of Nazir. There is a well-known Gemara (Nedarim 9b; Nazir 4b) that talks about a very famous Nazir:

Shimon haTzadik said: My entire life I never ate the Korban Asham of an impure Nazir other than once (when I was convinced that this individual accepted upon himself the Nezirus laws strictly for the sake of Heaven). Once I saw a Nazir come from the South (to Yerushalayim to offer his sacrifice) and I saw that he was very handsome, his hair was beautiful. I asked him, 'My son, what prompted you to destroy this beautiful hair of yours' (as is required in the ritual of bringing the Nezirus sacrifices at the completion of the period of Nezirus)? He told me, 'I was a shepherd and I went to the well to draw water for my sheep. I saw my reflection in the water. (Apparently, it seems that this was the first time this person ever saw himself, as in Talmudic times, men did not, as a rule, look into mirrors.) I saw that my Yetzer HaRah (evil inclination) was getting a hold of me and was attempting to drive me from the world. I said to my

own Yetzer HaRah: ‘You wicked one, why do you get so excited about my beauty which is destined to one day turn into dust and worms. I swear that I will shave off my hair for the sake of Heaven.’ Shimon haTzadik concluded: I immediately arose and kissed him on his head and blessed him, “My son, may the number of those who take Nezirus vows such as yours multiply in Israel. About people such as you it is written: ‘... a man or a woman who utters a Nezirus vow to dedicate himself to Hashem.’ (Bamidbar 6:2)”

(I may add a theory of mine, for which I do not have any proof – that there is a relationship between this Nezirus story and the story of Narcissus in Greek mythology. Who was Narcissus? The story of Narcissus is extremely similar to this story in Maseches Nedarim. There was a fellow who saw his reflection in the water and was so taken up with his beauty that he became paralyzed – sitting there staring at his own beauty until (as the mythology goes) he withered up and died because he could not take his eyes off his image. He died on that spot, and out of that spot grew a flower that is called the Narcissus. The psychological profile of a narcissist is such a person who is so into himself that he cannot take his eyes or his thoughts off of himself.

Come and see the difference between Greek mythology on one hand, and the Talmud on the other. In Greek mythology, the hero of the story became so enthralled with himself that he could not move, but in the Talmud the hero of the story recognized the pitfall of what was happening to him, and he declared himself a Nazir.)

What happened over here? This boy saw his own reflection and he saw the Yetzer HaRah getting hold of him. He sensed that he was becoming amazed with his beauty and handsomeness. He went ahead and told his evil inclination, “I am not going to let you do this to me!” That is why he became a Nazir.

When someone becomes a Nazir, he abstains from wine and from contact with the dead, and—at least for thirty days—he cannot cut his hair or shave. So let us analyze this story: This fellow was amazed at his beauty. In particular, he was amazed at his locks, his hair. He sensed his Yetzer HaRah getting hold of him. What should be his natural reaction to stop the Yetzer HaRah in its tracks? Perhaps he should immediately run to the barber and ask for a ‘zero’. The barber should then put the smallest guard on his electric shaver and give the fellow at least a crew cut or

preferably a baldy and that would rid him of his Yetzer HaRah!

Instead, the fellow proclaims that he is going to make himself a Nazir, which causes him to grow his hair even longer, since he cannot cut it for the next thirty days, at a minimum. How is that a logical strategy for fighting the evil inclination?

Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, the Steipler Gaon, zt”l, (father of Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt”l), says that this incident demonstrates a deeper insight into what was happening to this fellow. The Talmud quotes the Nazir’s retort to his evil inclination: “You wicked one, why do you arrogantly boast over a world that is not yours?” The root sin that this fellow noticed ensnaring him was the sin of Gayvah (haughtiness). He was thinking to himself, “I am the most beautiful person walking the face of the earth. I am so proud of my looks. I am so proud of my hair. I think I am something special because I look so good.”

That, my friends, is the Midas HaGayvah. The Midas HaGayvah can be summed up in just a few words: You think it’s ‘you.’ If you are smart, it is you who is smart. If you are rich, it is your wealth. If you are handsome, it is because you are so special! That is what Gayvah is—recognizing these qualities and thinking better of yourself because you either have wealth or looks or brains or money or whatever it may be. As we all know, it does not come from you. Everything comes from the Ribono shel Olam.

This person – sure, he could have gone to the barber and cut off his hair. But that would have been dealing with the symptom of his problem, not the illness. The symptom is the hair. So, he can get rid of the hair! But that would not be attacking what was happening to him. What was happening to him? At that moment, he was thinking that this is MY good looks, and I am so special because I am so good looking and I have such beautiful hair. The antidote for that attitude is to take that beauty and say, “this is not me and this is not mine—it belongs to the Ribono shel Olam.” My wealth belongs to Him, my beauty belongs to Him, my power belongs to Him, my kavod belongs to Him. Everything belongs to Him!

How does someone do that? By becoming a Nazir. I let my hair grow, and then, at the end of my Nezirus what do I do? I take the hair, I cut it off, and I throw it under the sacrifice that is a Korban l’Hashem! Here I am teaching myself that this beautiful hair that I have is not mine, it belongs to the Ribono shel Olam.

The Nazir Is Critiqued Both Coming and Going

There appears to be an obvious contradiction to a Ramban on this week's parsha from a well-known Gemara (Nedarim 10a). The pasuk states that at the conclusion of his Nezirus period, the Nazir offers a burnt offering and a sin offering as atonement for sinning against his soul (Bamidbar 6:11). The question is, why does the Nazir need to bring a Korban Chatas (sin offering). Didn't he just do something admirable? The above referenced Gemara indeed asks – what did the Nazir do wrong that he now needs 'atonement'? The Gemara answers that he denied himself wine (Tzeeair atzmo min hayayin). His aveira (sin) was in depriving himself of one of life's pleasures. There are enough prohibitions in the Torah, without man adding further prohibitions that make life even more difficult.

The Ramban, however, suggests that the reason he must bring a Korban Chatas at the conclusion of his Nezirus period is—on the contrary—that he is now leaving this spiritually holier state of Nezirus that he had accepted upon himself, and is now returning to a more mundane standard of living in which he will be more engaged with the pleasures of life. According to the Ramban, ideally, he should have remained a Nazir, dedicated to this holy state of Divine Service, for the rest of his life! The Ramban views the Korban Chatas as atonement for the Nazir's falling back into the lustful pattern of everyday life!

Rav Simcha Zissel Brody raises this contradiction between the Talmud and the Ramban's interpretation. Which is it? Do we blame the Nazir for abstaining from wine or for his readiness to return to wine consumption? We seem to be criticizing him here, coming and going!

Rav Simcha Zissel answers as follows: Initially, the Nazir should not have done this. This was beyond his normal spiritual level. He denied himself one of life's permitted pleasures. However, during those thirty days of Nezirus, he has not remained static. He has grown. He has become a different person, a holier person. This is what life is all about. Through the experiences of life, we hopefully become better people, more understanding people, holier people.

Rav Simcha Zissel references the Gemara (Avodah Zarah 5b), which states that a person does not grasp the intent of his master teacher until after he has been his disciple for forty years. What happens during those forty years? The answer is that during those forty years, he grows as a person. Forty years earlier, he did not "get" who his Rebbi was and he did not "get"

what his Rebbi was teaching him. Forty years later, he is older, wiser, and more experienced. Now he is a different person. Now I get what my Rebbi meant. I could not understand that when I was 20 years old. Now that I am 60, I get it.

That is the story of the Nazir as well. When he started the Nezirus, we can ask him "Who are you to add to the Torah's restrictions and forbid yourself from drinking wine?" "Why do you think you are such a holier than thou Tzadik that you can deprive yourself of wine?" But now, 30 days or 60 days or whatever amount of time has passed. Guess what? He is now a different person, a holier person, who is on a different spiritual level. Once he is at that higher spiritual level he—in fact—should really stay there. He has demonstrated to himself that he can do this. He has grown. Therefore, the Ramban says, going back to the lower level where he was thirty days ago is sinful.

True: It is an aveira in the beginning and an aveira at the end. It is an aveira in the beginning because at that stage in life, he had no business doing what he did. It is an aveira at the end because now that he has grown, he should not retreat to his earlier lower status. And even if his retreat is justified, it still requires an atonement. The fact that he is retreating is the aveira for which he must bring a Korban Chatas.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Naso (Numbers 4:21-7:89)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel –"And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to Aaron and to his sons saying so shall you bless the children of Israel; say to them, may the Lord bless you and keep you...'” (Numbers 6:22-27)

There are very few passages of the Bible which are as well known as the Priestly Benediction. In Israel, the kohanim-priests rise to bless the congregation every single morning. In the Diaspora, however, the Ashkenazi Jews include this special benediction only on the Festivals. Nevertheless, there are many life-cycle celebrations such as circumcisions, redemptions of the first born, bar and bat mitzvot and even weddings which are punctuated by this Priestly Blessing. In effect, the kohen-priest stands as God's representative, as the "agent of the Compassionate One", as the spiritual leader and as the Torah teacher – and in this function as teacher and guide he calls upon God to bless the congregation. As Moses declares in his final blessing to the Israelites, "[The Priests and Levites] shall guard Your covenant, shall teach Your

laws to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel..." (Deut. 33:9,10)

The Talmud (in the ninth chapter of Berachot) as well as our Prayer Liturgy declare "At the time of the priestly blessings, the congregation responds, 'Master of the Universe I am Yours and my dreams are Yours.'" Apparently, our Sages saw a profound connection between the dreams of the Congregation of Israel and the function of their priest leaders. Exactly what is the nature of that connection?

I would suggest that first and foremost a leader and an educator must inspire his students/ congregants/ nation with a lofty vision, an exalted dream. The Psalmist and sweet singer of Israel King David declares in the Psalm which we recite each Sabbath and Festival before the reciting the Grace after Meals, "When the Lord returned with the restoration of Zion we were as dreamers"; after all, had the Jews not dreamt of the return to Israel throughout their long exiles, we never would have returned to our homeland.

One sees the same idea from the opposite vantage point when one realizes the cause of the great tragedy of the Book of Numbers. In Numbers, the Jewish people descends from the great heights of the Revelation at Sinai to the disastrous depths of the sin of the scouts, the rebellion of Korah, the sin of Moses and the destruction of that entire generation in the desert. What caused such a mighty fall? The Bible itself begins its account of the descent with the words, "And it happened that the nation kvetched (mitonenim) evilly." (Numbers 11:1)

The 18th century Netziv explains the difficult Hebrew word mitonenim as meaning "wandering hither and thither" aimlessly and without purpose or direction, from the Hebrew *anna*. Simply put, this great Torah leader was saying that the Israelites had lost the dream and the vision which they felt at Sinai when they had cried out "We shall do and we shall internalize," when they accepted upon themselves the Divine mission of being a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation." They descended into destruction because they lost the dream.

Secondly, the Hebrew word for dream is *halom*, and – with a simple switch of letters, it spells *hamal*, which means love and compassion. The priest-leader who inspires with his dream must first and foremost love his nation; only if he loves the Israelites will they believe themselves worthy of being loved, will they believe in their ability to realize the dream and

achieve the vision. Great leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and David Ben Gurion lifted their respective nations to unheard of heights because they helped make them believe in themselves.

Thirdly, the Hebrew word *halom* with another switch of letters spells *lohem*, which means fighting, warring (if need be) to achieve the necessary goals. A great measure of imparting a dream is to impart idealistic sacrifice on behalf of that dream.

Fourthly, the Hebrew word *halom* also spells *lehem*; a dream must be nourished with the material necessities of program, tactics and strategy necessary to accomplish the dream.

Fifthly, the Hebrew word *halom* also spells *melah*, or salt. Salt symbolizes tears – the tears of sacrifice and commitment – as well as eternity, since salt never putrefies. Salt is therefore the symbol of our Covenant with God, the Covenant which guarantees Jewish eternity and ultimate redemption.

And finally, *halom* is linguistically tied to *halon*, a window; a light to the outside world. The dream with which the priest–kohen must inspire the Israelites is a dream which encompasses the entire world, the dream of "Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth", the dream of "They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks".

Those who believe in a God who is invisible may well dare to dream the dream which is impossible but only those who dream the impossible will ever achieve the incredible.

Shabbat Shalom!

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

NASO – Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks ZTL

Sages and Saints

Two Versions of the Moral Life

Parshat Naso contains the laws relating to the Nazirite – an individual who undertook to observe special rules of holiness and abstinence: not to drink wine or other intoxicants (including anything made from grapes), not to have his hair cut, and not to defile himself by contact with the dead (Num. 6:1–21). Such a state was usually undertaken for a limited period; the standard length was thirty days. There were exceptions, most famously Samson and Samuel who, because of the miraculous nature of their birth, were consecrated before their birth as Nazirites for life.[1]

What the Torah does not make clear, though, is firstly why a person might wish to undertake this form of abstinence, and secondly whether it considers this choice to be commendable, or merely permissible. On the one hand the Torah calls the Nazirite “holy to the Lord” (Num. 6:8). On the other, it requires him, at the end of the period of his vow, to bring a sin offering (Num. 6:13–14).

This led to an ongoing disagreement between the Rabbis in Mishnaic, Talmudic, and medieval times.

According to Rabbi Elazar, and later to Nahmanides, the Nazirite is praiseworthy. He has voluntarily undertaken a higher level of holiness. The prophet Amos said, “I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and your young men for Nazirites,” (Amos 2:11) suggesting that the Nazirite, like the prophet, is a person especially close to God. The reason he had to bring a sin offering was that he was now returning to ordinary life. His sin lay in ceasing to be a Nazirite.

Eliezer HaKappar and Shmuel held the opposite opinion. For them the sin lay in becoming a Nazirite in the first place and thereby denying himself some of the pleasures of the world God created and declared good. Rabbi Eliezer added:

From this we may infer that if one who denies himself the enjoyment of wine is called a sinner, all the more so one who denies himself the enjoyment of other pleasures of life.

Taanit 11a; Nedarim 10a.

Clearly the argument is not merely textual. It is substantive. It is about asceticism, the life of self-denial. Almost every religion knows the phenomenon of people who, in pursuit of spiritual purity, withdraw from the pleasures and temptations of the world. They live in caves, retreats, hermitages, monasteries. The Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls may have been such a movement.

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

The ambivalence of Jews towards the life of self-denial may therefore lie in the suspicion that it entered Judaism from the outside. There were ascetic

movements in the first centuries of the Common Era in both the West (Greece) and the East (Iran) that saw the physical world as a place of corruption and strife. They were, in fact, dualists, holding that the true God was not the creator of the universe. The physical world was the work of a lesser, and evil, deity. Therefore God – the true God – is not to be found in the physical world and its enjoyments but rather in disengagement from them.

The two best-known movements to hold this view were Gnosticism in the West and Manichaeism in the East. So at least some of the negative evaluation of the Nazirite may have been driven by a desire to discourage Jews from imitating non-Jewish practices. Judaism strongly believes that God is to be found in the midst of the physical world that He created that is, in the first chapter of Genesis, seven times pronounced “good.” It believes not in renouncing pleasure but in sanctifying it.

What is much more puzzling is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative, in the same book, his law code the Mishneh Torah. In Hilchot Deot, he adopts the negative position of Rabbi 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.

Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 3:1.

Yet in Hilchot Nezirut he rules in accordance with the positive evaluation of Rabbi Elazar: “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.”[2] How does any writer come to adopt contradictory positions in a single book, let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer lies in a remarkable insight of Maimonides into the nature of the moral life as understood by Judaism. What Maimonides saw is that there is not a single model of the virtuous life. He identifies two, calling them respectively the way of the saint (chassid) and the way of the sage (chacham). The sage follows the “golden mean,” the “middle way.” The moral life is a matter of moderation and balance, charting a course between too much and too little. Courage, for example, lies midway between

cowardice and recklessness. Generosity lies between profligacy and miserliness. This is very similar to the vision of the moral life as set out by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The saint, by contrast, does not follow the middle way. He or she tends to extremes, fasting rather than simply eating in moderation, embracing poverty rather than acquiring modest wealth, and so on. At various points in his writings, Rambam explains why people might embrace extremes. One reason is repentance and character transformation.[3] So a person might cure himself of pride by practising, for a while, extreme self-abasement. Another is the asymmetry of the human personality. The extremes do not exert an equal pull. Cowardice is more common than recklessness, and miserliness than over-generosity, which is why the chassid leans in the opposite direction. A third reason is the lure of the surrounding culture. It may be so opposed to religious values that pious people choose to separate themselves from the wider society, “clothing themselves in woollen and hairy garments, dwelling in the mountains and wandering about in the wilderness,”[4] differentiating themselves by their extreme behaviour.

This is a very nuanced presentation. There are times, for Rambam, when self-denial is therapeutic, others when it is factored into Torah law itself, and yet others when it is a response to an excessively hedonistic age. In general, though, Rambam rules that we are commanded to follow the middle way, whereas the way of the saint is *lifnim mishurat hadin*, beyond the strict requirement of the law.[5]

Moshe Halbertal, in his recent, impressive study of Rambam,[6] sees him as finessing the fundamental tension between the civic ideal of the Greek political tradition and the spiritual ideal of the religious radical for whom, as the Kotzker Rebbe famously said, “The middle of the road is for horses.” To the chassid, Rambam’s sage can look like a “self-satisfied bourgeois.”

Essentially, these are two ways of understanding the moral life itself. Is the aim of the moral life to achieve personal perfection? Or is it to create a decent, just, and compassionate society? The intuitive answer of most people would be to say: both. That is what makes Rambam so acute a thinker. He realises that you cannot have both. They are in fact different enterprises.

A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But what about the members of the saint’s own family? A

saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint’s own country? A saint may forgive all crimes committed against him. But what about the rule of law, and justice? Saints are supremely virtuous people, considered as individuals. Yet you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Ultimately, saints are not really interested in society. Their concern is the salvation of the soul.

This deep insight is what led Rambam to his seemingly contradictory evaluations of the Nazirite. The Nazirite has chosen, at least for a period, to adopt a life of extreme self-denial. He is a saint, a chassid. He has adopted the path of personal perfection. That is noble, commendable, and exemplary.

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

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

Maimonides lived the life he preached. We know from his writings that he longed for seclusion. There were years when he worked day and night to write his *Commentary to the Mishnah*, and later the *Mishneh Torah*. Yet he also recognised his responsibilities to his family and to the community. In his famous letter to his would-be translator Ibn Tibbon,[7] he gives an account of his typical day and week – in which he had to carry a double burden as a world-renowned physician and an internationally sought halachist and sage. He worked to exhaustion.[8] Maimonides was a sage who longed to be a saint, but knew he could not be, if he was to honour his responsibilities to his people. That is a profound and moving judgement, and one that still has the power to inspire today.

[1] See Judges 13:1–7; and I Sam. 1:11. The Talmud distinguishes these kinds of cases from the standard vow for a fixed period. The most famous Nazirite of modern times was Rabbi David Cohen (1887–1972), a

disciple of Rav Kook and father of the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, Rabbi She'ar-Yashuv Cohen (1927–2016).

[2] Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Nezirut 10:14,

[3] See his Eight Chapters (the introduction to his commentary on Mishna Avot), ch. 4, and Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot, chapters 1, 2, 5, and 6.

[4] Eight Chapters, ch. 4.

[5] Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Deot 1:5.

[6] Moshe Halbertal, Maimonides: Life and Thought (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 154–163.

[7] There were Sages who believed that in an ideal world, tasks such as earning a living or having children could be “done by others” (see Brachot 35a for the view of R. Shimon b. Yochai; Yevamot 63b for that of Ben Azzai). These are elitist attitudes that have surfaced in Judaism from time to time but which are criticised by the Talmud.

[8] See Rabbi Yitzhak Sheilat, Letters of Maimonides [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Miskal, 1987–88), 2:530–554.

Parashat Naso –

by Rabbi Nachman Kahana |

Defining our Relations with the World's Major Powers from the Time We Became a Nation
Midrash Yalkut Shimoni 879 on the pasuk in Tehillim 122:

“ודחי הל הרבחש ריעכ היוגבה מילשורי”

הושע בן לוי עיר שהיא עושה כל ישראל חברים ר”א .

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi explains the verse, that Yerushalayim the city, unites all Am Yisrael.

Indeed, Yerushalayim unites Jews of different opinions and inclinations into one brotherhood. However, history has shown that Yerushalayim also unites and energizes the enemies of Israel in their determination to destroy the Jewish nation and seize the holy city.

Midrash Aicha (Aicha raba) chapter 2:

Parashat Lech Lecha (3rd parasha in Bereishiet) relates that Avram (before HaShem changed his name to Avraham) gathered his 318 student-soldiers and defeated the armies of four major powers in the Middle East.

After this miraculous victory, HaShem appeared to Avram with a promise:

אנכי מגן לך

“I vow to protect you”

How strange! The vow to protect a military man is made before going into battle, but here HaShem made

His promise of protection after the war had ended and Avram was the acclaimed victor?!

The explanation is very much part of our contemporary reality.

HaShem was telling Avram that he was victorious in the war; however, “your problems are just beginning”. The goyim will not permit you to savor the sweet taste of victory. They will not rest until you and your descendants will no longer be alive, and your victories will be erased from the annals of history.

From that time on, Am Yisrael has been beset with many enemies; some together and some “go it alone”. To this day the gentile world refuses to recognize the special relationship that exists between the Creator and Am Yisrael, as demonstrated by the miraculous victories over our enemies, and our unprecedented, unexplainable return to our holy land after 2000 years of exile, including sovereignty over Yerushalayim. Much to the contrary, every victory creates more enemies for the Jews, in general, and Medinat Yisrael in particular.

So, what is it that blinds gentile eyes from seeing the capital letters of history that proclaim that the Jews are a nation different from all others and we are God's chosen people?

Are the leaders of the world's nations mentally challenged? Do they have a scratch in the brain when it come to the Jewish people?

A story is told of two immigrants to the States. After a year Moshe was driving his new car and John was a janitor of a building. They met and John asked Moshe how he arrived at such success? Moshe said that we Jews have a food that makes us smart, and by coincidence I happen to have a piece with me which I can give to you for \$600. John paid the money and Moshe presented him with a wrapped package. John went home and told his wife that soon they would be smart and rich. His wife opened the package and in it was a plain white fish! The following day John went back to Moshe to demand the refund of his money. But Moshe said, I told you that this food will make you smarter. I didn't lie. Today you are smarter than what you were yesterday!

Could it be that the nations have impaired intellectual skills that prevent them from deducing logical conclusions? No, that is not true, as we see in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni:

אם יאמר לך אדם יש חכמה בגוים תאמין, הה”ד והאבדתי חכמים אל תאמין, מאדום ותבונה מהר עשו (עובדיה א ח) יש תורה בגוים ן תורה (איכה ב) דכתיב מלכה ושריה בגוים אי

If you are told that the gentile nations have acquired knowledge: believe it. But if you are told that have acquired Torah (spirituality) – reject it outright!
So, what is it that drives one anti-Semitic power after another into suicidal spins into oblivion?

Answer:

The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Yeshayahu 420) on the pasuk (Yeshayahu 17,12-14):

עמים רבים כהמות ימים יהמיון ושאוון לאמים כשאוון מים הוי המון
:כבירים ישאוון:

12 Woe to the many nations that rage, they rage like the raging sea! Woe to the peoples who roar, they roar like the roaring of great waters!

13 Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them, they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale.

14 In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us.

The Yalkut states:

The prophet likens the Jewish nation to the sands of the beach, and the gentiles to ocean waves that beat against the sands.

The prophet is saying that the first wave boasts it will inundate the land, but when it reaches the sandy beach, it crests and falls to the ground in utter submission. But none of the succeeding waves learn the lesson. They all try to inundate the land but in utter failure. So to, Paro tried to destroy the Jews and failed, Amalek followed and failed, Sichon, Og and Bilam also tried but failed.

In post-Biblical times, over the span of 1900 years the Christians tried to eliminate the Jews and Judaism – and failed. Followed by the Communist Soviets, then Hitler and now the Islamic nations. The UN is trying, as is the EU, and in a subtle way the US is backing a two-state solution in the hope that the Arabs will destroy the Jewish state. They too will fail, with none learning the fundamental law of HaShem's world – the Jewish nation is eternal.

So, what is it about these nations that they do not read the lessons of history? If It's not stupidity, what is it?

Albert Einstein once gave an example of insanity: it is when one repeats the same act or process in the expectation of achieving a different result.

Age old anti-Semitism is a spiritual disease that initially attacks the soul, evolves into mental illness that paralyzes the brain's thought process and destroys the conscience. It is terminally incurable.

Shavuot: The holiday of Shavuot is the day when the scattered families of Israel entered nationhood. It was not the gradual, normal process covering hundreds of years during which families merge into tribes, tribes into local affiliates and then the ties of custom, language and intermarriage seal the common commitments to function as a nation.

Our nationhood was forged the moment HaShem called out the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am The Lord your God who has taken you out of Egypt". And appointed Moshe Rabbeinu to receive and transmit the Torah to Am Yisrael as the eternal bond between the Creator and His unique chosen people.

So, remember JLMM – Jewish Lives Matter More.

Shabbat shalom

We probably just performed the mitzvah of...

Kiddush Levanah

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Cloud cover

"Can I be mekadeish the levanah when there is just a slight cloud cover?"

Question #2: Northern lights

"I live very far north, and in the summer months, there is only a short period of time from when it gets dark until it begins becoming light, and that period of time is in the middle of the night. Am I permitted to be mekadeish the levanah either before it gets fully dark or during the post-dawn, pre-sunrise morning hours?"

Question #3: Where's the Rif?

"My chavrusa and I were studying Mesechta Sanhedrin and found the fascinating topic of kiddush levanah there. When we went to look at the Rif and Rosh on the topic, we easily discovered the comments of the Rosh, but could not find the Rif? Did he not write on this topic? Why not?"

Introduction:

The Gemara introduces us to a mitzvah, created by Chazal, which we usually call kiddush levanah, which literally translates as sanctifying the moon. Although today Ashkenazim always refer to the mitzvah by this name, this term is of relatively late origin and is confusing for several reasons. First of all, we are not sanctifying the moon. Rather, this is a mitzvah to praise Hashem for the moon's regular cycle. As we will soon see, there are other hashkafos related to this mitzvah, but these relate to the relationship of the Jewish people and our royal family, the malchus beis Dovid, to Hashem.

Another difficulty is that the expression kiddush levanah creates confusion with a different mitzvah, kiddush hachodesh, which translates into English as sanctifying the month. Kiddush hachodesh is a mitzvah min haTorah that Hashem gave in parshas Bo and requires the Sanhedrin, or its specially appointed committee, to calculate when the new moon will be visible, to receive witnesses who may have seen the first crescent of the newly visible moon, and to declare Rosh Chodesh. Unfortunately, since we no longer have a Sanhedrin, our calendar is set up differently. Hillel Hanasi (a distant descendant of his more famous ancestor Hillel Hazakein) created the calendar that we currently use, because the Sanhedrin could no longer function in Eretz Yisroel, a halachic requirement for fulfilling this mitzvah. But the mitzvah of kiddush hachodesh is not the mitzvah of kiddush levanah.

Therefore, it is somewhat unusual that we refer to the mitzvah by this name, kiddush levanah. The earliest use of the term kiddush levanah that I found was by the Mahar"i Bruno, a talmid of the Terumas Hadeshen, a prominent Ashkenazi posek in the fifteenth century.

Notwithstanding that the term kiddush levanah does not surface in the Gemara or the early authorities, the mitzvah most certainly does. It is called birkas halevanah by Rav Amram Gaon, the rishonim and the Shulchan Aruch, which is what the Sefardim call the mitzvah and is also the way the mitzvah is identified in the siddur of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch. In this article, I will use both terms, kiddush levanah and birkas halevanah.

Background The background to the mitzvah of kiddush levanah, or birkas levanah, begins with the following passage of Gemara: One who blesses the moon in its correct time is as if he received the Shechinah... In Rabbi Yishmael's beis midrash, they taught that, if the only merit the Jews have is that they received Hashem every month when they recited the birkas halevanah, this would be sufficient. (The Gemara does not explain -- enough merit for what?) Abayei explained that, because birkas halevanah is such an important mitzvah, it should be recited standing. Mareimar and Mar Zutra used to lean on one another when they recited it (Sanhedrin 42a).

The reason why Abayei required people to stand when being mekadeish the levanah is because this is considered equivalent to receiving a monarch, which you would certainly do standing (Yad Ramah ad

locum). Clearly, we are not sanctifying the moon; we are praising Hashem and using the moon's cycles as our means of doing so (Pri Megadim, Eishel Avraham 426:9). There is much more to this idea, and we will shortly explain some of its basics.

Leaning on one another?

What does the Gemara mean that these two great amora'im, Mareimar and Mar Zutra, used to lean on one another when they recited the birkas halevanah? I found two explanations to this practice. According to the first, it was very difficult for either of them to stand, but they felt it important as a demonstration of proper respect for this brocha. They leaned on one another to be able to stand up.

There is an important halachic principle implicit here. In general, halacha considers leaning on something to be akin to sitting, not to standing. Yet, for fulfilling the mitzvah of kiddush levanah, these two great scholars, Mareimar and Mar Zutra, treated leaning as standing, since it was difficult for them to stand (Bi'ur Halacha, 426:2 s.v. Umevoreich).

A practical, but not overwhelming, difficulty with this approach is that it is uncommon for two people who have difficulty standing to be able to help one another remain standing. Usually, they would have people who are sturdy provide them assistance.

An answer to the above question is found in the Yad Ramah, who explains that these two amora'im each had a servant prop them up to recite the birkas halevanah.

An alternative approach is that of the Tur, who understands that the two amora'im were both steady, but that the Aramaic expression used, mekasfei ahadadi, describes a very respectful way of presenting yourself in the honor of a special guest – in this instance, the Shechinah.

Receiving the Shechinah

What does the Gemara mean when it says that reciting this monthly brocha on the new moon is the equivalent of receiving the Shechinah? Did we suddenly become moon worshippers, G-d forbid?!

Use the phase to praise!

The Pri Megadim (Mishbetzos Zahav 426:4) explains this to mean that the monthly phases of the moon teach us many things for which to praise Hashem, including that He decreased the size of the moon when it complained (see Rashi, Bereishis 1:16). The moon's phases are also reminiscent of the royal family of David Hamelech, whose prominence has gone through many periods of waxing and waning. As the Pri

Megadim concludes: “The entire brocha is praise to Hashem and it is always inappropriate to bless anything other than Hashem. We use the moon as a means for structuring a prayer to Hashem, for His greatness.”

Aleinu

Based on this explanation of the Pri Megadim, the Bi'ur Halacha explains the custom, common predominantly among those whose minhagim originate in Eastern Europe, of reciting Aleinu at the end of the kiddush levanah ceremony. The Bi'ur Halacha explains that to prevent anyone from thinking that this blessing is directed toward the moon, we clearly close the procedure with the prayer of Aleinu, which emphasizes that all our praises are only to Hashem.

What is the brocha?

The Gemara records a dispute as to what brocha one recites on the new moon. According to one opinion, the brocha is very simple: Boruch Attah Hashem Elokeinu Melech Ha'olam Mechadeish Chadoshim, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who renews the months.”

The Gemara concludes that this is not a sufficient text of the brocha, but that the correct text is much longer.

There are several versions with slightly variant readings, but these slight variations have major differences in nuance. Our standard accepted version translates as follows: Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who with His Word created the Heavens and, with the breath of His mouth, all the Hosts. He established rules and a time that they not change their roles. They rejoice and are happy to fulfill the Will of their Owner.

At this point, there are two variant texts, one which says in Hebrew, po'alei emes she'pe'ulasam emes, which translates as They are actors in the truth whose actions are true. This version means that these words refer to the moon and the other heavenly bodies, whose movements are highly predictable. The Pri Megadim prefers the following version, which is the most accepted text of this brocha: po'eil emes she'pe'uloso emes. I found two approaches how to translate these words. According to the Pri Megadim (Eishel Avraham 426:9), this text also refers to the moon, and means the moon's path follows the dictates of Hashem and demonstrates to us Hashem's greatness. Another approach is that it refers to Hashem and is a continuation of the previous sentence, meaning, They are happy to fulfill the Will

of their Owner, the Worker of truth, Whose work is true (Hirsch Siddur).

Continuing the rest of the text of the brocha: And to the moon, He said that it should renew itself, a crown of glory to those (the Jewish people) who are burdened from birth, who, in the future, will renew themselves like the moon does, and to glorify their Creator in the Name of the glory of His kingdom. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who renews the months.

There are several versions of the closing text. For example, the Mesechta Sofrim (20:1) closes Boruch Attah Hashem, Mekadeish Roshei Chadoshim, He Who Sanctifies the new months.

What else do we say?

Practice has developed that we add many prayers to the procedure, including quoting many pesukim; in the Sefardic version, there are piyutim included. Many of these pesukim and short prayers are already mentioned by Chazal. For example, Mesechta Sofrim cites several of the passages that are customarily recited after the brocha. This passage of Mesechta Sofrim is quoted by rishonim and poskim, such as the Tur (Orach Chayim 426), Rabbeinu Bachya (Shemos 12), and the Rema (Orach Chayim 426).

Motza'ei Shabbos

Mesechta Sofrim (20:1) adds that one should recite birkas levanah when in a festive mood and while wearing nice clothes. According to the text of Mesechta Sofrim that we have, it also recommends that kiddush levanah be recited on motza'ei Shabbos. However, it is apparent from several rishonim that their editions of Mesechta Sofrim did not include mention of this practice. Nevertheless, most, but not all, poskim reached the same conclusion: it is preferable to recite kiddush levanah on motza'ei Shabbos (Terumas Hadeshen #35). It is well known that the Vilna Gaon disagreed, contending that it is better to perform the mitzvah at the first opportunity (Maaseh Rav #159). Most communities follow the practice of the Terumas Hadeshen.

Three or seven?

The Rema rules that one should not be mekadeish the levanah until 72 hours have passed since the molad, the exact moment calculated for the new moon. Sefardim and some Chassidim follow the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 426:2), who contends that one should wait until seven days after the molad to recite the birkas halevanah. This is one of the unusual places where the Shulchan Aruch's ruling is based on kabbalistic sources (see Beis Yosef ad

locum). The Shulchan Aruch rules, also, in accordance with the opinion of the Terumas Hadeshen that one should wait until motza'ei Shabbos to recite birkas halevanah. The Rema stipulates that this is true only when motza'ei Shabbos is before the tenth of the month. If one needs to be mekadeish the levanah on weekdays, first change into Shabbos clothes.

The light of the moon

The Zohar (parshas Ki Sissa) adds another insight and halachic requirement to the mitzvah: we should be able to benefit from the moonlight. Based on this Zohar, the Rema (Orach Chayim 426:1) rules that the mitzvah of kiddush levanah can be performed only at night, when you can benefit from the moon.

The early poskim discuss whether you can be mekadeish the levanah when there is a mild cloud cover. They conclude that when the outline of the moon can be seen clearly and some of its light shines through, you can be mekadeish the levanah.

There is a dispute concerning whether you can recite kiddush levanah when the moon is visible, but you estimate that, in the course of your reciting the brocha, it will slide behind a cloud cover. Some authorities rule that you can recite kiddush levanah under these circumstances, just as you can recite the brocha on seeing lightning or hearing thunder, and there is no concern that you will not hear or see them after you recite the brocha (Rav Chayim Sanzer's notes to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 426). However, the consensus of opinion is that the rules for kiddush levanah are different from the rules for the other brochos mentioned. Proof of this is the halacha that you are not to recite kiddush levanah just for seeing the moon, but only when you can receive some benefit from its light (see Mishnah Berurah 426:3 and Bi'ur Halacha 426:1 s. v. Asher). There is no requirement that you benefit from thunder or lightning before reciting the brocha.

Before sunrise?

At this point, let us examine one of our opening questions: I live very far north, and in the summer months there is only a short period of time from when it gets dark until it begins becoming light, and that period of time is in the middle of the night. Am I permitted to be mekadeish the levanah either before it gets fully dark or during the post-dawn, pre-sunrise morning hours?

In other words, is it permitted to recite birkas halevanah when the moon is clearly visible, even when it is halachically considered daytime?

Halachically, the day begins at alos hashachar (Brachos 2b), when there is some light across the entire eastern horizon. How long this is before sunrise depends primarily on the latitude you are at and the time of the year, although humidity, elevation, amount of light pollution and other details also factor. In Yerushalayim, it usually varies from between 72 to 96 minutes before sunrise.

Whether you can recite kiddush levanah when it is halachically daytime is debated by late authorities (see Hisorarus Teshuvah 1:199, authored by Rav Shimon Sofer, Erlau Rebbe; Shu"t Yaskil Avdi 8:20:53, by Rav Ovadiah Hadayah, a Sefardic mekubal and posek who lived in Yerushalayim; Chut Shani, Yom Tov, Shu"t #12 by Rav Nissim Karelitz). Those who need a definitive answer to this question should discuss it with their rav or posek.

Where's the Rif?

At this point, let us discuss the last of our opening questions:

"My chavrusa and I were studying Mesechta Sanhedrin and found the fascinating topic of kiddush levanah there. When we went to look at the Rif and Rosh on the topic, we easily discovered the comments of the Rosh, but could not find the Rif? Did he not write on this topic? Why not?"

Of the three major halachic authorities upon which Rav Yosef Karo, author of Beis Yosef and Shulchan Aruch, heavily relied, the Rif, the Rambam, and the Rosh, the works of the Rif and the Rosh are organized following the layout of the Gemara. As a rule of thumb, they discuss the halachic topic in the same place that the Gemara discusses it, but eliminate all but the final halachic conclusion. Nevertheless, there are a few places where their discussion is not in the same place that the Gemara discusses the topic, but placed elsewhere, where it fits more smoothly.

In general, the Rosh follows the system set up by the Rif, who preceded him by several hundred years. However, there are a few exceptions, one of which is the mitzvah of kiddush levanah. Although the Gemara discusses the topic in Mesechta Sanhedrin, the Rif chose not to discuss this within his comments to that mesechta, but, instead, to quote it among his comments on Mesechta Brachos. The Rosh chose not to follow the Rif in this instance, but to place his comments in Mesechta Sanhedrin, where the Gemara's discussion is located. Thus, this question really should be why the Rosh chose not to follow the Rif in this instance. Since the Rosh never explains

why he organizes his material as he does, it will be completely conjecture on our part to suggest an answer.

Conclusion

We understand well why our calendar involves use of the solar year – after all, our seasons, and the appropriate times for our holidays, are based on the sun. But why did the Torah insist that our months follow the moon? It seems that we could live just fine without months that are dependent on the moon’s rotation around the earth! The accepted calendar for all world commerce is the western calendar, which is completely solar, and all farmers use this calendar almost exclusively.

In parshas Bereishis, the Torah states that the moon will serve as an *os*, a “sign.” In what way is the moon an *os*? Rabbeinu Bachya (Bereishis 1:18) explains that this refers to *birkas halevanah*, when we have the opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvah*. As far as I understand, he means that the waxing and waning of the moon is symbolic of our own relationship with Hashem – which is sometimes better and, sometimes, less so. However, we know that we can always improve that relationship, just as the moon renews itself after waning and nearly disappearing.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Naso

For Him the Bell Tolls

There is a verse in this week’s portion which seems to have a misplaced possessive. But on closer analysis every noun and pronoun lend powerful meaning. “And every portion of *Holies* that the Children of Israel bring to a *Kohen* shall be his. A man’s *holies* shall be his, and what he gives to a *kohen* shall be his” (Numbers 5:9-10). The question is obvious: if the *holies* shall be his then why are they the *Kohen*’s; and if they are the *Kohen*’s, as the Torah tells us, then why are they his?

Rashi sheds some light by explaining the verse with a *Medrash*: The man who gives to a *Kohen* shall surely not lose, as whatever he gives shall ultimately be returned they will be his. On the other hand, one who wants to keep his *holies*, they shall be his. The only properties left to him shall be the small percent that he was supposed to allot to the *Kohen*. That is what will be his.

These two diverse explications seem in contradiction. Does what he gives to the *Kohen* remain “his” or does only what he want to keep remain “his”? How does

the word “his” play two different roles, one telling us of fortune, the other of adversity?

Many years ago, my father told me the following story: Before the turn of the century, Reb Dovid, a talented worker, decided that he had had enough of the *shtetl*. There was no money to be made, and he decided to travel to America in search of even a small fragment of the fabled streets that were paved with gold.

Before he set off, he appointed his friend, Yankel, a prominent businessman, to receive the monies that would soon be pouring in from his successful overseas ventures. After taking a small fee for his services, Yankel would deliver the remaining money to the man’s family.

“How much should I take, and how much should I give your wife?” asked Yankel.

The America-bound traveler put his full faith in the friend and simply told him to use his own discretion.

After a few months, Dovid’s efforts began to bear fruit, and he sent a respectable sum of money to Yankel’s bank account in Kovno to be distributed to his wife and family. Yankel, however, had different plans. He kept almost the entire sum for himself, while allotting only a fraction of the cash to Dovid’s wife and family. They, in turn, dejectedly, falsely assumed that Dovid was still not able to make ends meet.

A few months went by and Dovid’s wife received a letter from him assuring her that things were going well and soon he would be able to move the entire family to the United States. “Meanwhile,” he concluded, “I am sure that the sums you are receiving enable you to live in extreme comfort.”

Dovid’s wife was flabbergasted. She had hardly received enough to feed her family!

She ran to the Kovno Rav, Rabbi Isaac Elchonon Spector, and cried her heart out.

“Yankel is cheating us! My husband is sending him a fortune, but he is giving us a pittance!”

Immediately, the Rav summoned Yankel to his study, “Is it true,” asked Rabbi Spector, “that you were supposed to give the monies received to Dovid’s wife?”

“Yes,” the man declared smugly. “But I was allowed to take my fair share.”

And what were you supposed to give her?” the rabbi asked, almost incredulously.

“Dovid told me, ‘Give her what you want.’ So,” he continued, a broad smirk on his face, “I took 90

percent of the money and gave her what I wanted. And that was 10 percent.”

Immediately Rabbi Spector stood up and asked the man to repeat himself. “Can you repeat yourself? What did Reb Dovid tell you to give her?”

“He told me to give her exactly what I want.”

“Good,” declared Rabbi Spector, knowing fully what Dovid’s true intention was.

“As Rabbi of Kovno, I command you to give her the ninety percent portion that you had kept for yourself.”

“But why?” stammered the man.

“Because that is exactly what you want. You are to give her exactly what you wanted!”

The Torah tells us that a man whose holies are to him will remain his. There are many Heavenly ways to delineate what a man is meant to receive. The words “will belong to him” may ring with plenty or with poverty. If one’s eyes are filled with greed then only his holies will be his. The tithe becomes his only want and Hashem assures him that that is what he will get. But if he gives with generosity than what he gives shall be his in addition to what he already has. Because the One who interprets man’s heart interprets the verse. He fills the meaning in accordance with the man’s intent. And then He interprets the reward.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Dedicated in memory of Irving Adelsberg — Yitzchak Eizik ben Gedalia of blessed memory whose Yartzeit is 12 Sivan by the Adelsberg Family

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week’s Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Robert Lipton, Reuven Leib ben Mordechai HaLevi.

Jealousy vs. Envy

And a spirit of jealousy passed over him and he warned his wife and she became defiled [...] (5:14).

In this week’s parsha the Torah discusses the laws regarding a suspected adulteress. Essentially, this refers to a situation where a husband is concerned that his wife may be beginning a relationship with another man and he warns her in front of witnesses not to go into seclusion with that person. If she does indeed go into seclusion with that man, then the husband can charge her with being an adulteress.

If she claims that she was never intimate with the other man, then the husband can bring her before the kohen to test her fidelity by undergoing the Sotah test that, among other things, consists of drinking “bitter water.” If she is guilty her body begins to “explode”

(she dies gruesomely and so does her paramour); if she is innocent then she is blessed with fertility. It is important to note that a woman can avoid going through the process by confessing and merely forgoing her kesuvah to receive her divorce.

This concept of the Torah catering to a jealous husband requires some explanation. After all, Chazal find jealousy to be one of the more abominable character traits. We find in Pirkei Avos (4:28) Rabbi Elazar HaKappar said: “Jealousy, lust, and the [pursuit of] honor remove a person from the world.” Though the Sotah process is much more civilized and enlightened than other common practices in those times (or even than the pervasive present day practice of “honor killings”), conceding to a husband’s jealousy seems to be contrary to Jewish values.

In fact, we seemingly find a Torah prohibition against being jealous in a pretty prominent place: Thou shall not be envious of your friend’s home, wife, slaves, etc. – is the last of the Ten Commandments! Yet, according to one opinion in the Talmud, it is a mitzvah for a husband to begin this process. Why are we allowing a husband to give in to his jealousy?

In order to understand the concept of Sotah, it is important to recognize the distinction between envy and jealousy. Envy is that overwhelming desire for what someone else has. Envy is prohibited at all times. As Ibn Ezra points out in his comment on “thou shall not be envious” (Shemos 20:14), this prohibition applies even when one pays an exorbitant amount of money to coerce the other person to sell what he doesn’t really want to sell. The only antidote to envy is to know who you are and to understand that what someone else has is right for them and most likely not for you. The Ibn Ezra (ibid) gives the example: “this is similar to the notion that a common villager does not desire to marry the princess daughter of the king.” He knows she isn’t right for him.

Jealousy, on the other hand, is the overpowering feeling that comes with the realization that someone is trying to take something that is rightfully yours. In other words, jealousy is the primal instinct to protect what is yours. Jealousy can be experienced in many different situations; someone trying to take your love interest, your client, or even your car. It is acceptable to be jealous in any of these situations. After all, you are reacting to the fact that someone is improperly trying to take something from you. Of course, jealousy can also be derived from a figment of one’s imagination and own insecurity. While we allow a

husband to act in a jealous manner, his wife still has to have gone into seclusion in the presence of two witnesses. In other words, his feelings have to be confirmed by facts in the real world, not just in a jealous fantasy.

Perhaps the most prevalent issues of both envy and jealousy occur in family dynamics. The role of a parent is to give each child a feeling that they have a special place in their hearts, a place that no one can ever take away from them. This gives the child a sense of security as to their place in the family, and alleviates many jealousies. Perhaps as important, a parent must make sure every child is actualized and feels accomplished in their area of specialty. After all, if Hashem saw fit to create them, there is something special and unique about them. Once children are comfortable with themselves and happy with who they are, they won't desire what others have.

Brotherhood of Man

On the second day Nesanel ben Tzu'ar the leader of Yissachar brought his offering; one silver tray that weighed one hundred and thirty (shekolim), one silver bowl that weighed seventy shekalim (7:18-19).

This week's parsha discusses in seemingly repetitive detail the very specific gifts that the head of each tribe contributed to the Mishkan on the day of the inauguration of the altar. On this verse, Rashi comments that numerical value of the words "silver tray" is equivalent to 930, which corresponds to the amount of years that Adam lived. The one hundred and thirty shekalim that the tray weighed refers to the age that Adam was when he fathered to his son Seth (Bereishis 5:3). The numerical value of "one silver bowl" is equal to 520, which was the age when Noah fathered his children (500) and the twenty years that preceded it when Hashem informed him that a flood was coming. The seventy shekalim weight of the tray refers to the seventy nations of the world who descended from Noah.

All of these allusions to non-Jews during the inauguration of the altar seems very strange. This event was celebrating the altar of our Mishkan; what does our altar have to do with the non-Jewish world?

Maimonides (Yad Hilchos Beis Habechira 2:2) states, "we have a tradition that the place that the altar was constructed (in the temple) was the place that Avraham built an altar and bound Yitzchak upon it; this was the place that Noah built his altar when he exited the ark; this was the exact spot that the children of Adam, Kayin and Hevel, brought their sacrifices;

and was the very spot that Adam was created from. Our Rabbis have taught 'Adam was created from the spot that he receives atonement.'"

Maimonides is teaching us something truly remarkable. All of mankind is connected to this specific place in the universe. We tend to look at our Beis Hamikdosh as being something that is only for the Jewish people. Our natural discomfort and distrust of the non-Jewish world, borne out of thousands of years of oppression and suffering at their hands, makes it difficult to comprehend that they too have a connection to the place of our Beis Hamikdosh, our capital, our home.

Yet, we conveniently forget that the terrible suffering at their hands was really just Hashem punishing us for our wrongdoings. It goes without saying that many of them enjoyed the process of torturing and killing us a little too much. But we must never lose sight of the fact that we brought these painful retributions on ourselves. All of it was because we failed in our primary responsibility of bringing the awareness of Hashem into this world. This is the job that Avraham Avinu took upon himself and why he is considered the first Jew. He went on a crusade to make sure that people were aware of Hashem and understood that we owed Him our fealty.

The place of the altar is the place where all of mankind connects with Hashem and is empowered to serve Hashem through sacrifices. In fact, it is our responsibility to make sure that the entire world is aware of Hashem and is able to connect to Him. It is no wonder, then, that the main religions of the western world all feel intensely connected to Yerushalayim. We must remember that, as caretakers appointed by Hashem, it is our responsibility to give the entire world a place to worship Hashem and connect to Him.

[CS added this

<https://peninim.org/> RAV A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM
BIRCHAS KOHANIM ...

"This was the offering of Nachson the son of Aminadav" (7:17) "This was the offering of Nesanel the son of Tzuar." (7:23)

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The Torah concludes each of the twelve paragraphs which describe the dedication offerings of the Nesiim with the above pesukim. We should note the Torah's

refrain in its description of these offerings. Indeed, Chazal expound upon the preciousness of these offerings before Hashem. “The offering of the Nesiim is as precious to Hashem as the “song” Bnei Yisrael sang by the Red Sea, for there it says: This is my G-d; and here it says, “this is the sacrifice of Nachson.” Horav Shlomo Breuer Z”l suggests that this reference by Chazal to the “Shira” is intended to clarify the apparent redundancy of these pesukim. Indeed, if one takes into account that not one letter of the Torah is superfluous and that numerous laws are derived from one single letter, it is almost incomprehensible that the Torah reserves a complete paragraph for each of the Nesiim’s offering! He states that this ostensibly pointless repetition of the contribution of each tribe is used by the Torah to express a fundamental truth. Twelve different men may offer an equal contribution, but each individual gift carries its own value before Hashem. The actual gift does not determine its significance. Rather, it is the individual who contributes, the spirit in which he gives, and the joy which emanates from this act. Twelve Nesiim may offer the same contribution, but each performs a unique act.

So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael, saying to them. (6:23)
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The Kohen who blesses the people has an “approved text” to which he must adhere verbatim. There is no room for the Kohen to supplement the prescribed text stated in the Torah. The Kohen who adds blessing transgresses the prohibition of Es kol hadavar asher Anochi metzaveh eschem oso tishmoru laasos, lo soseif alav v’lo sigra mimenu, “The entire word that I command you, that you shall observe to do; you shall not add to it, and you shall not subtract from it” (Devarim 13:1). In his commentary to the pasuk, Rashi cites examples of Bal Tosif, do not add: five tosafos, compartments for Tefillim; five species for a Lulav; four blessings for Bircas Kohanim, Priestly Blessings.

Bearing the above in mind, let us look to Parashas Pinchas as Moshe Rabbeinu prepares to transfer the reins of leadership to his primary disciple and successor, Yehoshua. The first step in the process was semichah d’Oraisa, Biblical ordination, whereby Moshe conferred “rabbinic” status on his student. This was the beginning of a chain of tradition that went on for generations, through the era of the Amoraim.

There was an attempt to revive semichah in the early sixteenth century in Tzfas, but it failed to germinate. In Parashas Pinchas, the Torah relates that Moshe placed both hands on Yehoshua – despite being instructed by Hashem to lay only one hand on him. Rashi explains that Moshe ordained Yehoshua b’ayin yafeh, “good eye,” with both hands. How could Moshe amend Hashem’s instructions and add to the mitzvah? Why was he not in transgression of Bal Tosif? The Kli Yakar asks this question, wondering why semichah should be any different than the other classic mitzvos cited by Rashi.

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, distinguishes between mitzvos ben adam laMakom, between man and the Almighty, and mitzvos ben adam lachaveiro, between man and his fellow man. The prohibition against adding to a mitzvah applies to those mitzvos between man and G-d. Hashem has given strict instructions concerning the parameters of the mitzvah. When it comes to performing various acts of loving kindness to our fellowman, there are no restrictions concerning doing more. Kol ha’mosif, mosifin lo, ‘Whoever adds, it will be added to him.’ He will be blessed for going beyond the call of duty.

Apparently, the Priestly Blessing is a mitzvah which is bein adam laMakom. Thus, there is no allowance for addition of any sort. Rav Heyman supports this with a statement found in the Sifri’s commentary to our parsha. The Torah writes, V’aani avaracheim, “And I will bless them.” The Torah underscores that the blessing is derived from Hashem, so that people should not erroneously think that their blessings are contingent upon the Kohanim. The blessings come from Hashem. The Kohanim are the medium for deliverance. Hashem – and only Hashem – can confer blessing. Thus, it is clear that the mitzvah is bein adam laMakom.

The Biur Halachah wonders how a parent may confer blessing on his child, employing the exact text reserved for the Kohanim’s blessing. Does the Talmud not derive from the words koh sevarachem, “So, shall you bless,” that a zar, Yisrael or Levi, who are not members of the Priestly family, may not bless?

Rav Heyman explains that a Yisrael is considered a zar only with regard to ascending the Duchan in the Sanctuary and conferring an official blessing in a place reserved for Kohanim. Under such circumstances, the zar partners with other Kohanim in a blessing through which Hashem bestows His favor on those who are the subjects of the blessing. Since

the zar is not part of this august group of Kohanim, he transgresses koh sevarachu, by bestowing blessing using the Biblical vernacular. However, a father who blesses his son with a personal blessing – not as a Bircas Kohanim – is acting bein adam lachaveiro. Thus, there is no reason to prohibit his blessing – even if he uses biblical language. As long as he is not acting bein adam laMakom, it is not a mitzvah, per se.

“Speak unto Aharon and unto his sons saying, so you shall bless the Bnei Yisrael.” (6:23)

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Hashem commands that His blessing be conferred only by the kohanim. Horav Moshe Shternbuch, Shlita, suggests a practical reason for this. Regrettably, many people posit that the kohen and his present day counterpart, the Torah scholar are supported by the community without any reciprocation.

Many individuals believe that if an individual is not “working” in the way that they are, he is not contributing to the community. This notion is, of course, categorically wrong. The sustaining power of Klal Yisrael is manifest only through Torah and Torah scholars who devote their lives to its study and dissemination. This also applies to each individual Jew’s material success. Bnei Torah should be viewed as vehicles for channelling blessing to Klal Yisrael. Consequently, they share as equal contributors to our material success. They should be recognized accordingly.

Horav Shternbuch indicates that the text of the bracha, “And He commanded us to bless His nation Yisrael, with love,” which is recited by the kohanim prior to bircas kohanim, enhances this idea. The blessing is contingent upon the love and harmony that exists between the kohanim and the rest of the people. If there exists no mutual respect, then the blessing will not thrive. The kohanim must recognize those who support and sustain them, and the people must, in turn, pay tribute to the kohanim who are responsible for their blessing.

Let them place My name upon Bnei Yisrael, and I shall bless them. (6:27)

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Chazal, at the end of Meseches Uktzin, say, “There is no greater container to hold Klal Yisrael’s blessings than peace.” One may have everything – health, prosperity, and fame – but without peace these gifts

have no significance. Consequently, the blessings which the Kohanim are to impart upon Bnei Yisrael are sealed with the hope for peace.

A community can catalyze peace in one of two ways. The first way is the positive approach, in which people work towards ironing out their differences, seeking ways to increase harmony and good will. Discord is viewed as taboo, so the slightest infraction into the amity of a community is immediately quelled. Another path, one that is regrettably negative, quite often serves as a vehicle to induce unity. Within a community, when we do not take the initiative to engender peace and cooperation, Hashem causes us to become unified in the face of persecution. Then we band together, regardless of our personal beliefs, to face the challenge to our nation – collectively. Each group offers advice, each one seeks solace from the other, as we face our common enemy – together. Who creates this peace? It is Hashem Who must intervene into our discord and bring us together using a destructive medium. How fortunate would we have been had we maintained harmony among ourselves. Instead, we require the tzaros, persecutions, to bring us closer to one to another.

Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, comments the Kohanim, the spiritual mentors of Klal Yisrael, have the responsibility to influence the people, to sensitize them to the compelling importance of shalom. They must see to it that harmony and peace reign within Klal Yisrael, lest it become necessary to effect this peace via “outside” sources.

This is the pasuk’s message: “Let them place My Name among Bnei Yisrael” Hashem’s Name is Shalom, for He is the essence of peace. Let the Kohanim see to it that My Name, peace, reigns among the Jews while they are in a circumstance of “blessing” and good fortune. If the Kohanim inspire the people, then peace and harmony will emanate from within.

“Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying, so shall you bless the Bnei Yisrael.” (6:23)

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The Kohanim are to serve as the vehicles through which Hashem’s blessing is bestowed upon Klal Yisrael. In order to transmit blessing one must maintain a harmonious relationship with the people. Indeed, Chazal teach us that a Kohen who does not “get along” with the people should not bless them. The Maharsham, zl, was bothered by the brachah

which the Kohen recites prior to the blessing. He says, "And He commanded us to bless His nation Yisrael with love." How does one express himself lovingly to all Jews? Does this "love" apply also to the rasha, wicked Jew, who has a distorted view of Klal Yisrael's destiny? Does the "ba'havah" apply equally to him?

He cited Rav Shmelke, zl, M'Nicholsberg, who said that we are enjoined to love all Jews, even reshaim. Rav Shmelke explained that all Jews, regardless of their spiritual alienation, have good within them. We are enjoined to focus our love towards that "concealed" good. Likewise, the Kohanim are to direct their blessing to the good in every Jew.

May Hashem bless you and keep watch over you. (6:24)

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The various commentators render their interpretations of the Birkas Kohanim, priestly blessing. Rashi cites the Sifri that views the blessing as a reference to material bounty. "May Hashem grant that you be triumphant over your enemies and that your crops and business ventures succeed. May your possessions increase, and may Hashem guard these possessions from thieves."

In short, the blessing of "Yevarchecha," May (Hashem) bless you, refers to receiving abundance, while the blessing of "Veyishmerecha" is a prayer that we be able to retain our blessing. The Midrash Tanchuma supplements the blessing with an invocation that our increase in material wealth be used properly and that it not be the cause of our own self-destruction. "May He protect you from temptation, lest the material aspects of the blessing lead you into sin".

The greatest blessing, when in the hands of a simple or weak person, can easily turn into a curse. One can lose — or even worse — if he uses his blessing improperly. Money can be the primary motivating factor catalyzing an individual to sin. There is a reason for material abundance. It certainly is not sent to us for self-indulgence and self-gratification.

The Midrash offers a second interpretation that contends that the blessing of "increase" refers to progeny. Hashem will bless us with children who will devote themselves to the Torah. Horav Boruch Sorotzkin, zl, suggests that the Midrash Tanchuma's interpretation of "Veyishmerecha," that we should make use of our "increase" for the correct and proper

purpose, applies similarly to the blessing of offspring. Indeed, the blessing of children is a very special one, but it is also a challenge. It demands that one accept the enormous responsibility of raising a child according to Torah dictate. How often do parents impose their own shortcomings on their children? The father who unfortunately feels he has not succeeded in life, may try to relive his life through his son, at times inflicting his own idiosyncrasies upon his child. An alternative approach is demonstrated by the parent who wants to see his child "get ahead in the world", devoting the majority of his educational endeavor to secular pursuits, relegating Torah study to a distant second place. Finally, there is the parent who is simply incompetent as a parent and probably not much better as a human being. He reneges his responsibility as he lives a lifestyle that reeks of double-standard. Then he "wonders" why his child "goes off the derech," becomes alienated from Torah Judaism. This dual blessing has so much meaning. If we are blessed with children, we must rise to the challenge, accepting the responsibility that accompanies the territory called Jewish parenting.

May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. May Hashem illuminate His Countenance... and be gracious to you... May Hashem lift His Countenance... and establish peace for you. (6:24,25,26)

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The Kohanim are enjoined with blessing the Jewish People with a three-fold blessing, petitioning Hashem: to safeguard the nation (shemirah); to shine His Countenance on them and grant them chein, graciousness and favor (v'yechuneka); and to grant the third, and greatest blessing of peace (shalom). Obviously, the sequence teaches us an important principle; peace follows after one is protected, both from without and within, from internal enemies and even from himself. Favor is the result of Hashem's blessing which we earn through the light of Torah. Without Torah, life is very dim; we do nothing but grope from one obstacle to another. Last, once we are secure and embrace the Torah, we are worthy and capable of true peace. One cannot be at peace with others unless he is first at peace with himself. Unless one adheres to a Torah lifestyle and is subservient to Hashem, he is neither safe, nor is he capable of achieving a life of harmony, satisfaction and peace.

V'yishmirecha, "and safeguard you." Chazal add: Min ha'mazikin, from those who would injure you. Targum Yonasan does not accept the usual definition of mazikin as referring to demons and injurious spirits. He explains that there are two forms of mazikin: bnei tihareirei, the sons of dusk; and bnei tzafrirei, the sons of dawn. There are two kinds of demons, those who present themselves in their true colors: either black as night, or those who camouflage themselves to appear as light as day. Have no fear, they are one and the same. The harsh mazik who comes at us with his true colors showing is an evil and injurious mazik. Is he worse, however, than he who disguises his injurious character beneath a façade of fake sweetness? He may conceal his evil intention, but he is no less injurious. Both of these mazikin are dangerous, and, without Hashem's protection, we are unable to protect ourselves from their malevolence.

We have enemies who brook no compromise concerning their evil intentions. They neither have shame, nor do they have true intentions. They hate; they vilify. At least, they come at us with a frontal attack. We can prepare ourselves by moving out of harm's way. What about those who appear as sweet as the early morning rays of sun, breaking through the dark night? Are they for real, or is it all a disguise? They posture themselves as our friends, but, in truth, they would turn against us the moment that they could derive benefit from such a move.

Perhaps we might take this analogy a step further. By their very natures as harbingers of change, dusk and dawn present themselves as periods of ambiguity. At dusk, the sky is beginning to darken, as the rays of sunshine begin to wane. Nonetheless, the sky still has rays of light left; it is not yet black and bleak. Dawn presents a similar scenario, as the first rays of the morning sunshine begin to pierce the darkness of night. The dark night gives way to daylight, with its hope for a new beginning.

A negative attitude can bring about a most self-destructive downfall. Success requires positivity and self-esteem. One who is negative tends to be downbeat, disagreeable and skeptical. He always expects the worst, and he is surprised when it does not occur. The flipside is positivity, which could be equally damaging when misplaced in opposition to a realistic vision of a person's attitudes and potential for

success. In other words, expecting too much can be equally as destructive as expecting nothing at all.

Let me demonstrate how the mazik of misplaced (light) positivity or its contrasting ambiguity (represented by dusk) plays itself out by subtly putting down one's passion for success, under the guise of "I do not want him to get hurt."

A fellow aspires for success in a given field of endeavor. He has potential, but is not eminently capable of achieving his dream. Life is not a bed of roses, and one must be prepared to surmount various obstacles in his rise to success. A positive attitude is not only helpful, it is an absolute requisite if one is successfully to address the various crises which can – and often do – arise. On the other hand, optimistic bias might cause one to view things in a less than objective manner, often ignoring the warning signs to which our own negative emotions are pointing. Thus, we cause ourselves to lose our grip on reality. Psychologists refer to this as "illusion of control," when, as the result of the natural outcome of optimistic bias, one begins to delude himself into thinking he has greater control over the outcomes of events than is the reality. Psyching ourselves with positive thinking can cause us to become overly optimistic, to the point that we overestimate our ability to succeed. Hence, the mazik of "dawn," the ambiguity that comes with misplaced positivity, is acting in full force.

The ambiguity of dusk is more subtle, as it seeks to pour cold water on the fiery passion and drive of he who is driven to succeed. This mazik can present itself as a "friend" who does not want us to "fail." The mere mention of failure to a person who is driven to succeed can destroy his drive. It creates doubt: "Can I really make it?" "Do I have a chance?" "What if I fail?" This covert mazik with its "well-meaning" intentions has destroyed many people, causing them to give up before they ever start. One can fight the mazik that presents its true colors. It is the more nuanced, "well-intentioned" mazik that is so difficult to overcome, because it is difficult to detect.]

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה