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**Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog**

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

This question has troubled all of the commentators to the Torah and many divergent answers and opinions have been advanced to help explain the matter. All seem agree that the Torah wishes to emphasize the individual worth and contribution of each of these leaders of Israel and gave each one recognition by listing his offering individually. While this explanation and insight is undoubtedly true, it seems not to be wholly satisfactory considering the great length that the Torah goes to in its detail of every offering. Each of the leaders could have been mentioned by name without having to repeat the entire paragraph detailing his offering. And yet as the length of the parsha indicates, the Torah took no shortcuts regarding this matter. Even in kabbalistic thought and works, no clear explanation emerges regarding this anomaly of Torah writing.

Though space has been left for every generation of Jews to add their insights into the Torah, there are areas where even angels should fear to tread. Just as with the parsha of the red heifer, the Torah purposely offers up to us a rule that defies our rational powers of logic and explanation. And there are other areas of the Torah that defy our sense of proportion and human understanding.

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

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

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

Shabat shalom  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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**Nasso: Why is peace like a suitcase?**  
**Chief Rabbi Mirvis**

Transcript:

Peace is a suitcase. Now why do I say that? In Parshat Nasso we're given the Birkat Kohanim – the 'duchaning' – the blessing that the Kohanim bring from Hashem to the people, and the entire blessing leads to a crescendo with the words (Bamidbar 6:26),

"Veyaseim lecha shalom," – "May Hashem give you peace."

The impression given here is that peace means everything.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 21:1) on this verse and the Talmud Yerushalmi both tell us, that from here we learn,

"Ein kli machzik bracha eila shalom." – "Peace is a vessel that contains blessings within it like none other."

Why is peace described in this particular way?

Let's say you're going on a train journey. You're going somewhere for the weekend, and you take an old suitcase with you and in the suitcase you've got your clothes and many valuable possessions. When you

arrive at the station, lo and behold your old suitcase falls apart! You have to pick up all of your valuable possessions and hold them in your arms, and you have to schlepp them like this until you get to your hotel. I can guarantee you that by the time you reach your destination there'll be hardly anything left because they'll all slip from your arms. That's the reason why our sages tell us, "Ein kli machzik bracha eilah shalom." – "Peace is a vessel that contains your blessings within it, like none other."

It's like that suitcase. Because without being able to hold onto your blessings they'll all slip away. It is for this reason that when, in Parshat Bechukotai, the Torah gives us the promise (Vayikra 26:6), "Venatati shalom ba'aretz," – "I will give peace in the land,"

Rashi comments as follows: What happens if people say, "But we've got everything already! You've promised us the lot! Why is peace necessary?" Rashi answers, "Magid shehashalom shakul kenegeid hakol." – "From here we learn that peace equals everything."

How true it is. One can be blessed with enormous material wealth. One can have relationships. One can have all types of blessings. But if one's life is full of tension, if there is divisiveness, if there is a poisonous atmosphere without peace, you actually end up having hardly anything at all.

That is why in our daily prayers we say,

"Oseh shalom uvoreih et hakol," – "Hashem makes peace and He creates everything."

Let's never forget that peace is like a suitcase and without it, we end up having nothing at all.

Shabbat shalom.

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

**By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

RSR Head Shot Gershon Ellinson creditEfrat, Israel – Few passages in the Bible are as well-known as the Priestly Benediction.

In Israel, the kohanim (priests) rise to bless the congregation every morning, while in the Diaspora Ashkenazi Jews are permitted to include this special benediction only on festivals. Nevertheless, there are many life-cycle celebrations such as circumcisions, redemptions of the first born, bnei mitzva and even weddings which are punctuated by this blessing. In effect, the kohen stands as God's representative, as the "agent of the Compassionate One," as the spiritual leader and as the Torah teacher, and in this role of teacher and guide he calls on 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!" (Deuteronomy 33:9-10).

Both the Talmud (the ninth chapter of Berachot) and 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 nation and the function of its priest-leaders. What is the nature of this connection?

I would suggest that, first and foremost, true leaders and educators must inspire their students, congregants and/or nation with a lofty vision. The Psalmist of Israel, King David, declares in the Psalm which we recite each Sabbath and festival before reciting the Grace after Meals: "When the Lord returned with the restoration of Zion, we were as dreamers" (Psalms 126:1). After all, if the Jews had not dreamt of the return to Israel throughout their long exiles, we never would have come back.

One recognizes the very same idea – but from an opposite vantage point – when one understands the cause behind the tragedy of the Book of Numbers. In Numbers, the Jewish people descend 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) in an evil fashion"

(Numbers 11:1). The Netziv, an 18th-century commentator, explains the difficult word mitonenim as meaning “wandering hither and thither” aimlessly, from the Hebrew *anna* (literally “where to”). Simply put, this great Torah leader was saying that the Israelites had lost the dream which they had at Sinai, when they accepted the Divine mission of being “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Secondly, the Hebrew word for dream is *halom*, and – with a simple switch of letters – it spells *hamal*, which means love and compassion. The 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, and believe in their ability to realize the dream. 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.

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

Fourth, the word *halom* can also be rearranged to spell *lehem*, or bread; a dream must be nourished with the material necessities of programs, tactics and strategy.

Fifth, the word *halom* is also an anagram for *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, which guarantees Jewish eternity and ultimate redemption.

And finally, *halom* is linguistically tied to *halon* or window, a light to the outside world. The dream with which the kohen must inspire the Israelites is a dream which encompasses the entire world, the dream that “Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth,” the dream that “They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.” Yes, the Jewish people – as well as its leaders – must be dreamers.

And perhaps only those who believe in a God who is invisible will dare to dream the impossible, and only those who dream the impossible will ever achieve the incredible.

Shabbat Shalom

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In Parshas Naso, the Torah requires the banishing of a *metzora* from the camp. Chazal understand this to mean that he is not permitted to be within any city that was walled from the time of Yehoshua (Keilim 1:7).

### Red, White and Green

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Red

“I was told that some *nega'im* are red or pink. What color are they really, since pink is about the color of our usual Caucasian skin?”

Question #2: White

“I saw someone who had a discoloration on his arm that was white as snow. Is it possible that he could be a *metzora*, even though we do not yet have the *Beis Hamikdash*?”

Question #3: Green or Blue?

“Does the word *yarok* mean green, yellow or blue?”

Introduction:

Contrary to many Biblical translations, *tzaraas* is not leprosy. The symptoms described by the Torah do not fit Hansen’s disease, which is another term for the condition more commonly called leprosy (see Rav Hirsch’s Commentary, *Vayikra* 13:59). *Tzaraas* is a miraculous occurrence that strikes members of the Jewish people as a punishment, but more so, as a Divine admonition to improve our behavior. The root of the word *nega* means to be “touched” – in this instance, to be touched by Hashem and reminded of the need to improve and do *teshuvah*. It occurred when the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel were on a high spiritual level. That it does not occur today is because we are not on the spiritual level to receive these kinds of direct messages from Hashem (Sefer Hachinuch, *Mitzvah* 169), just as we no longer experience prophecy or obvious miracles for the same reason. (However, see *Tiferes Yisrael*, *Mar’ei Kohein* introduction to *Nega'im*, #39). This may very well be the reason why only someone Jewish is susceptible to *tzaraas*, and cloth or houses are susceptible to *tzaraas* only when owned by someone Jewish.

All instances of *tzaraas* require that a kohein declare them *tamei*, and to become *tahor* afterwards also requires the declaration of a kohein. In other words, the

symptoms do not make the person, cloth or house *tamei* -- it is the declaration of the kohein that does.

*Tzaraas* blemishes must be a minimum size to be *tamei*, but I will not be focusing on these requirements, nor on others, such as that the entire blemish must be visible, the details of what lighting is used to view a *nega*, and how and when these *nega'im* are *metamei* everything in the same room as they are.

We should also note that there is no difference between a man and a woman regarding the laws of *tzaraas*: both can become *tamei* any time after they are born. For simplicity’s sake, I will refer to the person with *nega* symptoms in the masculine.

Difference between *musgar* and *muchlat*

To begin with, we need an overview of the basic rules of *tzaraas*. All types of *tzaraas*, whether they affect people, cloth or houses, are divided into two general categories: *metzora musgar*, literally a “closed” *metzora*, and *metzora muchlat*, literally, “decided” or “definite” *metzora*. In the case of a person, a *metzora musgar* can be *tamei* for up to two weeks (actually thirteen days, because the seventh day of the first week is also the first day of the second week), after which, if no new symptoms develop, the person immerses himself in a *mikveh* or spring and becomes completely *tahor* at the next nightfall. (All immersions germane to *tzaraas* may be either in a *mikveh*, which usually consists of rainwater, or in a spring. Throughout the article, I will refer to a *mikveh*, but in each of these instances, it could also be a spring.) However, someone with *nega* symptoms that are ruled *tahor* must remain vigilant that his *nega* not grow any larger in the future or develop any other *tamei* symptoms. Should this happen, he will become *tamei* as a *metzora muchlat*, which means that he could remain *tamei* forever, if his *tamei* symptoms do not go away.

It is a *lo saaseh* of the Torah for someone to remove the symptoms of a *nega*, even when he has already been ruled *tahor* (*Tosefta*, *Nega'im* 3:1; Rambam, *Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas* 10:1). The Torah forbids this in *parshas Ki Seitzei*, where it says *Hishameir benega hatzaraas*, “Be careful concerning a *tzaraas* affliction” (*Devorim* 24:8).

This *lo saaseh* is a bit unusual since it is not worded in the more common way of a *lo saaseh* with the words *lo* or *al* but, rather, with the word *hishameir*. The *Gemara* teaches that a *lo saaseh* can also be worded either with the word *hishameir* or the word *pen*, which means “lest” (*Shabbos* 132b; *Eiruvim* 96a; *Makkos* 13b).

In all instances of *tzaraas*, the *tumah* generated by a *metzora musgar* is the same as that of a *metzora muchlat*. Therefore, one could describe a *musgar* as someone who is temporarily *tamei*, and a *muchlat* as someone who remains *tamei* until the symptoms that made him *tamei* disappear. The procedure for becoming *tahor* after being *muchlat* are those described in the beginning of *parshas Metzora* and are far more expensive, more complicated and take longer to perform than for someone becoming *tahor* after being *musgar*.

*Tzaraas* on a person

At this point, we need to explain the basic categories of *tzaraas*. There are three types of *tzaraas* that can affect a person:

- (1) *Tzaraas* on healthy skin
- (2) *Tzaraas* on injured skin
- (3) *Tzaraas* on the scalp or beard

In the case of *tzaraas* on healthy skin, a *nega* appears, meaning that someone finds on his skin a blemish that is of a color that is very white, at least as bright as the membrane of an egg. The *Mishnah* (*Nega'im* 1:1) explains that there are four shades of white that can make someone *tamei* as a *metzora*. In order of increasing intensity, they are:

- White as the membrane of an egg
- White as a whitewashed wall
- White as the cleaned, bleached wool of a newborn lamb (*Shavuos* 6b)
- White as fresh clean snow

By the way, there is an unusual shade of white, called *bohak* by the Torah, that is not a symptom of *tumah*. Simply explained, although it is a bright white, a blemish this shade is completely *tahor*, since it is duller than the color of the membrane of an egg, and certainly than the other *nega'im* colors (*Vayikra* 13:39). *Pinks*

In a few places, the Torah refers to *nega'im* that are reddish in color (*13:19*, *24*, *43*). The halacha is that all *nega'im* on people that are *tamei'im* if they are white are also *te'mei'im* if they are reddish or pinkish, and that there are four shades of red, or more accurately, pink, that are *tamei*, just as there are four shades of white, as I mentioned above. However, the commentaries dispute exactly which four shades are *tamei'im*, with a wide difference of opinion among them, ranging from a very light pink, to shades that are much redder (*Ravad* to *Sifra* 13:19; *Kesef Mishneh*, *Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas* 1:4; *Eliyahu Rabbah* and *Tiferes Yisroel*, *Nega'im* 1:2; *Aruch Hashulchan He'asid* 80:6-7).

To the kohein

Contrary to popular opinion, there is no requirement that there be a *Beis Hamikdash* for someone to become *tamei* with *tzaraas*. In point of fact, should a kohein be knowledgeable about the laws of *tzaraas* and declare someone with a

proper nega shade to be tamei, the person would become tamei (She'eilas Yavetz #136). However, this last scenario would be highly unlikely, since ruling someone tamei for tzaraas requires that an individual have extensive training in all the details of the laws of tzaraas, including personal experience in identifying the differences among the four white shades mentioned above (Rambam, Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 1:3).

#### Musgar

Any of the types of tzaraas, whether on a person, garment, or house, must be shown to a kohein, who rules on the status of the nega (Nega'im 3:1). If he rules that the color is tahor, the person is tahor, and no further steps are necessary. If the kohein rules that the nega is musgar, then in the case of a person, he is fully tamei for seven days, counting the day that the kohein ruled on it as the first day. Anything he touches becomes tamei, and, in addition, if he enters a room or building during this week, everything in the room capable of becoming tamei will become tamei. It will require being immersed in a mikveh and will become tahor the nightfall following.

On the seventh day, the metzora must go to the same kohein for him to rule on the nega again (Tosefta, Nega'im 1:12; Rambam, Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 9:4; 11:6). If the kohein rules that the nega is muchlat, the metzora must go outside of the city (if it is a walled city) and live by himself until the symptoms that created the ruling that it is muchlat disappear.

A person can be tamei musgar for a total of two weeks, which is actually thirteen days, as I explained above. On the thirteenth day, the metzora shows the nega to the kohein. If no symptoms have appeared to make the nega tamei, the person becomes tahor, notwithstanding that he still has the nega symptoms (see below). He immerses in a mikveh and becomes completely tahor the nightfall after his immersion.

#### Muchlat

What makes a metzora muchlat?

There are three symptoms that can make a metzora muchlat:

- (1) His tzaraas spreads.
- (2) Two dark or other non-white hairs that are within the nega turn white.
- (3) There is a healthy-looking area of skin with a certain minimal size inside of the white nega.

Obviously, the first time the kohein sees the nega, he can rule muchlat only because of either the second or third symptom; ruling a nega muchlat because it spread can be only for a person who has been seen previously by the kohein.

#### Injuries, scalps and beards

I mentioned above that there are two other types of nega'im that can affect a person, tzaraas on injured skin and tzaraas on the scalp or beard. Each of these categories has two subcategories.

#### Injured skin

The Torah mentions two types of nega'im on injured skin, one in which the injury was the result of a blow and the other in which it was the result of a burn or other heat. There is no difference in halacha between these two types of nega'im. Whether someone finds a nega on an injury received through a burn or on an injury received as a result of a blow, both have almost the same rules as regular nega'im on healthy skin, with two exceptions, both of them leniencies.

- (1) A nega musgar on injured skin is tamei for only one week. If, on the seventh day, the nega has not changed, the kohein rules the nega to be tahor. The metzora then immerses himself in a mikveh and becomes tahor at the next nightfall.
- (2) The second lenience is that healthy skin inside the nega is not a muchlat sign. In other words, a nega on injured skin that has healthy skin inside will either be musgar or tahor, depending on the size and shape of the nega.

#### Scalp and beard

There are three types of nega'im that can affect the scalp or beard areas. In two of these situations -- karachas, baldness on the back of the head, and gabachas, baldness on the front and top of the head -- the halacha is that once someone's hair falls out to the extent that part of the scalp is completely bald, it is treated the same as other areas of the body germane to nega'im. In other words, when someone becomes bald, that area that once had hair and now does not has the same halacha for nega'im purposes as other parts of the body. There is one exception, again a leniency. In this instance, white hairs inside the nega are not symptoms of tumah.

The other type of nega on the scalp or beard areas is called nesek, which is described at length both in the Torah and the Mishnah. Unfortunately, nowhere in Tanach or Chazal is it clarified how this is halachically different from bald areas. As a result, the rishonim dispute exactly what is the difference (see Rambam, Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 5:8-11, 8:1; Rash, Nega'im 10:10; Ramban, Vayikra 13:30). Since the halachic conclusion is unclear, I will not discuss this issue.

#### Nega'im on clothing and houses

In addition to tzaraas on a person, there can be tzaraas on cloth, thread, or leather, and also on houses. In this instance, the indication of tzaraas is not a white discoloration, but adamdom, which is deep red, or yerakrak (Vayikra 13:49; 14:37). The color yarok in Tanach and Chazal can mean blue, green, gold or yellow (Tosafos, Chullin 47b s.v. Ela; Sukkah 31b s.v. Hayarok; Niddah 19b s.v.

Hayarok). In a Tosefta (Nega'im 1:3), we find a dispute between tana'im what color is yerakrak that renders a garment tamei:

According to Rabbi Elazar, it is a yellow shade -- the color of wax, egg yolk, or a variety of yellow gourd (dependent on varying texts to the Tosefta). According to Sumchus, it is the color of the wing of a peacock or the leaf of a palm tree, both shades of deep green. The color is the indication that the nega is musgar. Nega'im on cloth and houses can never become muchlat the first time they are seen by a kohein.

#### Yarok

How can so many different shades of color -- blue, green, gold or yellow -- all be called by the same word yarok? One answer is that the Torah's descriptions refer to the various shades of the refracted light spectrum that is visible to humans, which range from violet to red (see Rav Hirsch, Collected Writings, Volume III, page 127). Yarok would refer to the middle of the spectrum, "techeiles" to the violet and blue-violet part, which are the shorter waves of light, and adom to the red, or longer waves. (According to this approach, the gold color here probably means a yellowish gold, rather than reddish.)

Differences between cloth and people Aside from the differences in the color of the nega, there are several other distinctions between the laws of nega'im germane to garments and those germane to people.

In all types of nega'im, a nega that appears without any muchlat signs is musgar for the first week, and then examined by the kohein on the seventh day. A nega on cloth that appears the same after a week has passed is removed from the cloth, and the area of the cloth that became torn when the nega was excised is sewn closed. A similar halacha is true in the case of a nega on a house -- the nega area and the stones on which it appears are removed to a tamei place, the area is replaced with stone and mortar and becomes musgar for a second week.

This halacha is the exact opposite from a nega on a person, in which case it is prohibited min haTorah to excise the nega, and the person continues in the state of musgar for another six days.

A person whose nega remains the same for two weeks becomes tahor. However, a garment whose nega remains the same for two weeks has the status of tamei muchlat. Another critical difference is what is done to the person or item that becomes muchlat. As explained before, a person who becomes muchlat remains tamei until the symptoms of his nega change. A garment that becomes muchlat is burnt.

There are other halachos that apply to a nega on cloth that do not apply to nega'im on people. A person whose nega is musgar is not banished from the city -- this halacha is reserved for a person whose nega is muchlat. However, cloth that is tamei tzaraas must be removed from the city -- even when it is only musgar. A related strict ruling that applies to a cloth nega (and does not apply to nega'im on people) is that a cloth that has tzaraas must be removed from any city -- whether or not the city is walled, whereas a person who is muchlat is banished from a walled city (Keilim 1:7), but is not required to leave an unwalled city (Tosefta Nega'im, 7:14; Rambam, Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 13:15).

#### Nega'im on houses

In addition to the laws of tzaraas on people and on cloth, the Torah presents the laws of nega'im on the inside of a house. Tzaraas applies only to a house built from wood, clay and earth (Nega'im 12:2) and only to a house in Eretz Yisroel. The color of the nega is, as the law of nega'im on cloth, adamdom, bright red, or yerakrak, as explained above.

There are several unique features about the laws of nega'im on houses. One is obvious: whereas the person with a nega or the owner of cloth with a nega goes to the kohein to show him the nega, in the case of a nega on a house, the kohein comes to the house to see the nega. Whereas other nega'im are always ruled on outdoors, in sunlight, nega'im on a house are ruled as the light can be seen through the windows and open doors of the house.

A nega on a house can have the status of musgar for up to three weeks, something not possible with any other nega (Nega'im 3:8, see also 13:1).

According to many authorities, nega'im on houses can render tamei even items inside the house that can never otherwise become tamei (Rambam, Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 14:4; Rashi and Tosafos, Mo'ed Katan 8a s.v. Deha; Eliyahu Rabbah, Mishnah Acharonah and Tiferes Yisroel, Nega'im 12:5 in explanation of Rabbi Yehudah; however, cf. Bartenura who disagrees).

#### Conclusion

The Gemara mentions tzaraas as a punishment for many types of prohibited behavior, which all share a common thread that they are antisocial activities. In other words, they all violate both mitzvos bein adam lamakom and bein adam lachaveiro. To quote the Rambam, "Tzaraas is a generic term comprising many things that are not comparable to one another... These changes that the Torah collectively calls tzaraas are not within what normally happens in the world. They are miraculous things that happen to the Jews to warn them away from loshon hora. Someone who speaks loshon hora -- the walls of his house change color. If he changes his actions, the house becomes tahor. If he persists in his evil actions, his house will be destroyed, and then the leather items in his house that he sits and lies upon change color. If he changes his actions, they become tahor. If he

persists in his evil actions until they are burnt, then the clothes that he wears change color. If he changes his actions, they become tahor. If he persists in his evil actions, until they are burnt, then his skin changes color, and he himself becomes a metzora. Therefore, someone who wants to develop himself spiritually should distance himself from these types of people, not to be influenced by their foolishness” (Hilchos Tumas Tzaraas 16:10).

Unfortunately, we no longer have these Divine reminders to keep us on the straight and narrow. Instead, we must try to inspire ourselves to grow in these areas.

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## Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Naso

Small Talk

This week’s parsha contains a number of exciting episodes. It details the sordid tale of the adulterous woman, her fate and that of her illicit adulterer. It illustrates the rules and regulations of the nazir, one who has abstained from worldly pleasures by eschewing wine in addition to leaving his hair unshorn.

However, tucked away in the midst of the controversial episodes are the priestly blessings — five verses that shine an encouraging light in the midst of a difficult portion. Those verses contain the priestly blessings that are well known to many of us. “May Hashem bless you and keep you. May Hashem shine his countenance on you and be gracious to you. May Hashem lift his countenance upon you and establish you in peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)”

Less celebrated, however, are the verses that appear immediately before and after the actual blessings. “Thus shall you bless the children of Israel, speak to them.” What is the importance — even the meaning — of the extra words, “speak to them”? After Hashem charges the priests with the actual verses of blessing, He ends with an additional command. “Place My name upon the children of Israel and I shall bless them.” Again, the verse leaves us wondering — of course, it is Hashem that will bless them but what does His name have to do with it? Didn’t He just prescribe the formula? Why aren’t the three verses enough to spur G-d’s blessings?

A few months after moving to Woodmere, a lovely young Israeli couple with two young children moved next door to us. After conversing with them, my wife and I realized that in Israel they had not been the least bit observant of Jewish tradition. They had not even observed Yom Kippur, let alone kept Shabbat or kosher. It seemed that the reason they moved to America because Israel was becoming too Jewish for them. My wife and I felt a responsibility to bring these fine people closer to the Torah, yet we also did not feel comfortable telling them about laws that they must have known about, but chose not to observe.

Fortunately in our neighborhood lived the great Rosh Yeshiva who brought thousands of people close to Torah, Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld, of blessed memory. I explained our situation to him and basically asked him, “Rebbe, what do you in order to make someone frum (religious)?” He smiled and put his large hand on my shoulder. “Do absolutely nothing!” I stood shocked and confused as he continued. “Be a mensch: Never miss a ‘good morning’ or a ‘good afternoon’. Make sure your lawn is neat and your children are well behaved. And just be friendly.” Then he quoted the words of our sages, ‘make sure that the name of Hashem is cherished through you.’

He paused, looked me in the eye, and proclaimed confidently, “follow that advice and you will not have to do a thing. They will get closer to the Torah.”

We followed his advice. We invited them for meals, and our children played together. I talked politics with him while my wife discussed gardening with her. We spoke about everything — except religion. I was therefore shocked, when, in October, our neighbors asked us where the closest synagogue was. They decided to go to shul for Yom Kippur. I was even more surprised when days later they asked for my help in building a Sukkah. I am sad to relate that recently we lost some very good neighbors. After 5 years of living in the US, they decided to move back to Israel. America was becoming too goyish (gentile) for them.

Before it enumerates the actual blessings, the Torah teaches us the true way to bless Jews — speak to them. The words, “speak to them” may be more important than the actual blessing. The saintly Chofetz Chaim charged my wife’s grandfather Rabbi Laizer Levin, who was Rabbi of Detroit for 50 years, with a simple message. “Laizer, gei rehd tzoo Yidden.” (Reb Laizer go and speak to Jews.) And the actual priestly blessings do not end much differently. “Place My name upon the children of Israel and I shall bless them.” (Numbers 6:27) When Hashem’s name is placed upon His nation, then blessing is sure to follow.

A smile, a hello, a Good Shabbos, or Shabbat Shalom may be the key to forging a different attitude to an otherwise skeptical Jew. To paraphrase a man who reached great heights, “One small word to man can produce giants for mankind.” The true blessing does not come from theological incantations; it comes from the simple smiles of the heart.

Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Elliot Lauer HaRav Eliezer ben Rav Ahron Dovid of blessed memory

Good Shabbos

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## COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Blessing of Love

NASO

At 176 verses, Naso is the longest of the parshiyot. Yet one of its most moving passages, and the one that has had the greatest impact over the course of history, is very short indeed and is known by almost every Jew, namely the priestly blessings:

The Lord said to Moses:

“Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘Thus shall you bless the Israelites. Say to them “May the Lord bless you and protect you; May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.” Let them set My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

Num. 6:23–27

This is among the oldest of all prayer texts. It was used by the priests in the Temple. It is said today by the Kohanim in the reader’s repetition of the Amidah, in Israel every day, in most of the Diaspora only on festivals. It is used by parents as they bless their children on Friday night. It is often said to the bride and groom under the chupah. It is the simplest and most beautiful of all blessings.

It also appears in the oldest of all biblical texts that have physically survived till today. In 1979 the archaeologist Gabriel Barkay was examining ancient burial caves at Ketef Hinnom, outside the walls of Jerusalem in the area now occupied by the Menachem Begin Heritage Center. A thirteen-year-old boy who was assisting Barkay discovered that beneath the floor of one of the caves was a hidden chamber. There the group discovered almost one thousand ancient artefacts including two tiny silver scrolls no more than an inch long.

They were so fragile that it took three years to work out a way of unrolling them without causing them to disintegrate. Eventually the scrolls turned out to be kemayot, amulets, containing, among other texts, the priestly blessings. Scientifically dated to the sixth century BCE, the age of Jeremiah and the last days of the First Temple, they are four centuries older than the most ancient of biblical texts known hitherto, the Dead Sea Scrolls. Today the amulets can be seen in the Israel Museum, testimony to the ancient connection of Jews to the land and the continuity of Jewish faith itself.

What gives the priestly blessings their power is their simplicity and beauty. They have a strong rhythmic structure. The lines contain three, five, and seven words respectively. In each, the second word is “the Lord”. In all three verses the first part refers to an activity on the part of God — “bless”, “make His face shine”, and “turn His face toward”. The second part describes the effect of the blessing on us, giving us protection, grace, and peace.

They also travel inward, as it were. The first verse, “May the Lord bless you and protect you” refers, as the commentators note, to material blessings: sustenance, physical health, and so on. The second, “May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you” refers to moral blessing. Chen, grace, is what we show to other people and they to us. It is interpersonal. Here we are asking God to give some of His grace to us and others so that we can live together without the strife and envy that can so easily poison relationships.

The third is the most inward of all. There is a lovely story about a crowd of people who have gathered on a hill by the sea to watch a great ship pass by. A young child is waving vigorously. One of the men in the crowd asks him why. He says, “I am waving so the captain of the ship can see me and wave back.” “But,” said the man, “the ship is far away, and there is a crowd of us here. What makes you think that the captain can see you?” “Because,” said the boy, “the captain of the ship is my father. He will be looking for me among the crowd.”

That is roughly what we mean when we say, “May the Lord turn His face toward you”. There are over seven billion people now living on this earth. What makes any of us more than a face in the crowd, a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore? The fact that we are God’s children. He is our parent. He turns His face toward us. He cares.

The God of Abraham is not a mere force of nature, or even all the forces of nature combined. A tsunami does not pause to ask who its victims will be. There is nothing personal about an earthquake or a tornado. The word Elokim means something like “the force of forces, cause of causes, the totality of all scientifically-discoverable laws.” It refers to those aspects of God that are impersonal. It also refers to God in His attribute of justice, since justice is essentially impersonal.

But the name we call Hashem – the name used in the priestly blessings, and in almost all the priestly texts – is God as He relates to us as individuals, each with our unique configuration of hopes and fears, gifts and possibilities. Hashem is the aspect of God that allows us to use the word “You”. He is the God who speaks to us and who listens when we speak to Him. How this happens, we do not know, but that it happens is central to Jewish faith.

That we call God ‘Hashem’ is the transcendental confirmation of our significance in the scheme of things. We matter as individuals because God cares for us as a parent for a child. That, incidentally, is one reason why the priestly blessings are all in the singular, to emphasise that God blesses us not only collectively but also individually. One life, said the Sages, is like a universe.[1]

Hence the meaning of the last of the priestly blessings. The knowledge that God turns His face toward us – that we are not just an indiscernible face in a crowd, but that God relates to us in our uniqueness and singularity – is the most profound and ultimate source of peace. Competition, strife, lawlessness, and violence come from the psychological need to prove that we matter. We do things to prove that I am more powerful, or richer, or more successful than you. I can make you fear. I can bend you to my will. I can turn you into my victim, my subject, my slave. All of these things testify not to faith, but to a profound failure of faith.

Faith means that I believe that God cares about me. I am here because He wanted me to be. The soul He gave me is pure. Even though I am like the child on the hill watching the ship pass by, I know that God is looking for me, waving to me as I wave to Him. That is the most profound inner source of peace. We do not need to prove ourselves in order to receive a blessing from God. All we need to know is that His face is turned toward us. When we are at peace with ourselves, we can begin to make peace with the world.

So the blessings become longer and deeper: from the external blessing of material goods to the interpersonal blessing of grace between ourselves and others, to the most inward of them all, the peace of mind that comes when we feel that God sees us, hears us, holds us in His everlasting arms.

One further detail of the priestly blessings is unique, namely the blessing that the Sages instituted to be said by the Kohanim over the mitzva:

“Blessed are You... who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His people Israel with love.”

It is the last word, *be’ahavah*, that is unusual. It appears in no other blessing over the performance of a command. It seems to make no sense. Ideally, we should fulfill all the commands with love. But an absence of love does not invalidate any other command. In any case, the blessing over the performance of a command is a way of showing that we are acting intentionally. There was an argument between the Sages as to whether mitzvot in general require intention (*kavanah*) or not.[2] But whether they do or not, making a blessing beforehand shows that we do have the intention to fulfill the command. But intention is one thing, emotion is another. Surely what matters is that the Kohanim recite the blessing and God will do the rest. What difference does it make whether they do so in love or not?

The commentators wrestle with this question. Some say that the fact that the Kohanim are facing the people when they bless means that they are like the cherubim in the Tabernacle, whose faces “were turned to one another” as a sign of love. Others change the word order. They say that the blessing really means, “who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and with love has commanded us to bless His people Israel.” “Love” here refers to God’s love for Israel, not that of the Kohanim.

However, it seems to me that the explanation is this: The Torah explicitly says that though the Kohanim say the words, it is God who sends the blessing. “Let them put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” Normally when we fulfil a mitzva, we are doing something. But when the Kohanim bless the people, they are not doing anything in and of themselves. Instead they are acting as channels through which God’s blessing flows into the world and into our lives. Only love does this. Love means that we are focused not on ourselves but on another. Love is selflessness. And only selflessness allows us to be a channel through which flows a force greater than ourselves, the love that as Dante said, “moves the sun and the other stars,”[3] the love that brings new life into the world.

To bless, we must love, and to be blessed is to know that we are loved by the One vaster than the universe who nonetheless turns His face toward us as a parent to a beloved child. To know that is to find true spiritual peace.

[1] See Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5.

[2] See Rosh Hashanah 28b.

[3] Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, Paradiso p. 33.

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### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand Parshas Naso**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s *Commuter Chavrusah Series* on the weekly portion: #1251 *Sitting Next to a Woman on an Airplane. Good Shabbos!*

*People Need Protection From Their Own Wealth*

The Sifrei on the pasuk in Birkas Kohanim – “May Hashem Bless you and Guard you” (Bamidbar 6:24) – analyzes the blessing (*Yevarechecha*) and the guarding (*V’Yishmerecha*) that Hashem provides. The Medrash provides an entire listing of opinions as to what each of these terms represent.

One opinion in the Sifrei is that *Yevarechecha* refers to acquiring property (i.e., wealth) and *V’Yishmerecha* refers to Hashem saving you from all the potential hazards that might take away your property. However, the first opinion in the Sifrei is that both *Yevarechecha* and *V’Yishmerecha* simply refer to a person’s property. We readily understand the opinion that *Yevarechecha* refers to acquisition of wealth and *V’Yishmerecha* refers to preservation of that wealth. However, what exactly is meant by saying that both *Yevarechecha* and *V’Yishmerecha* just refer to wealth?

Perhaps the thought is that a person should be blessed with wealth, but that this wealth should not ruin him—something which is an all-too-common situation. We see repeatedly that money does something to a person. Someone can be the most wonderful and generous of individuals, and yet when he makes a few bucks, he turns into a different type of person.

This opinion in the Sifrei is teaching that Hashem should protect us from our own money – that it shouldn’t ruin us. In one of his books, Dr. Abraham Twerski, ob”m, wrote that when he was growing up in Milwaukee, there was a Jew who was a very poor man, but anytime he had any money whatsoever, he would give it to charity. Even when he could not afford it, he would give his money to *tzedaka* – to such an extent that Dr. Twerski’s father, Rav Yaakov Twerski – the patriarch of the family – had to tell this person NOT to give away his money!

One day, the man became wealthy. He made a lot of money. At that point, he became a cheapskate. It was crazy. When he had no money, he gave it away and when he had money, he couldn’t give it away! That is what the *bracha* means to protect against when it teaches “*Yevarechecha HaShem, v’Yishmerecha.*” May your wealth not come and corrupt you, which unfortunately is not an uncommon occurrence.

*The Husband Who Withholds Priestly Gifts May One Day Need the Kohen’s Services*

In *Parshas Nasso*, the Torah teaches, “And all that is raised up of all the holy things that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohen, it shall be his. A man’s holy things shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen, it shall be his.” (Bamidbar 5:9-10). In effect, a person must give all his “Priestly Gifts” to the Kohen.

This is immediately followed by the laws of Sotah, a man who suspects his wife of being unfaithful. Rashi comments on the juxtaposition of these two parshios: If someone holds back that which he is obligated to give to the Kohen – “By your life, you will need to come to him to bring your wife for the Sotah ritual.”

This fellow is stingy. He does not want to give to the Kohen what he is supposed to give. The Torah says, as it were, “Guess what fella: One day you will need to depend on this Kohen because you will suspect your wife of infidelity and you will need to bring her to him in order for her to once again be permitted to live with you.”

The problem with this drasha is, how does it happen that just because I am stingy, my wife is going to turn into the type of woman that will potentially engage in adulterous relations? Where is the cause and effect? What is the connection between my stinginess and my wife’s infidelity?

I would like to suggest the following answer: There are two types of women who can wind up being a Sotah. There is a woman who is in fact guilty as charged, and was indeed unfaithful to her husband. She suffers the consequence of the Sotah. The “Bitter Waters” that she drinks do their work and she explodes from this potion. However, there is also another type of woman who is falsely accused of being unfaithful.

If we think about the type of male personality who does not give his Priestly Gifts to the Kohen, we are talking about a person who is a cheapskate. We are talking about the type of person who holds onto his money. We are talking about the type of person who is not generous, who is not giving. This is the type of person who often has a jealous personality. There is a personality profile here which combines the traits of cheapness, jealousy, and an uncompromising nature.

This is the type of person who, when he sees his wife having an innocent and innocuous conversation with another man, because of his perspective on life—always viewing people in a negative light—jumps to conclusions and asks: “What is my wife doing with this guy?” Therefore, he right away makes a kinui on her (warning her not to be seen in private with this fellow) and if there happens to be steerah (where the woman is subsequently seen in private with him), he will drag her to the Kohen. The truth of the matter may very well be that this woman has done nothing evil. But because of her husband’s negativity and his outlook on life, he sees sinister events where no such events have transpired.

So it does not automatically follow that a stingy person has a wife who is a run-around. She in fact may be perfectly innocent, but such a person views his wife with his negative perception which may lead to kinui and steerah, and eventually may necessitate him needing to bring his wife to the Kohen.

**The Singular Individual Who Accepted Nezirus Was Usually Single**

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky shares a very interesting idea in his sefer, which is most appropriate for the person who wrote it!

A Nazir can raise his personal sanctity up to the level of a Kohen Gadol. Just like a Kohen Gadol is forbidden to become tameh by contact even with dead relatives, so too a person who is a Nazir has the law of a Kohen Gadol and cannot defile himself, even to become involved in the burial of his father or mother!

Rav Yaakov notes something unique in the pasuk that states that a Nazir cannot become tameh “to his father, his mother, his brother, or his sister.” Rav Yaakov points out that there is a difference between what the Torah says by a Kohen Gadol and what the Torah says by a Nazir. By the list of relatives for which a Nazir is forbidden to defile himself, the Torah omits “his son or his daughter,” which are both included in the list of relatives for which a Kohen Gadol may not contaminate himself. The halacha, of course, is that a Nazir CANNOT become tameh for his son or daughter, just like a Kohen Gadol cannot do so. Why then does the Torah not mention them by the Nazir?

Rav Yaakov suggests a novel idea. Generally speaking, the only people who became Nezirim were bochurim, unmarried young men. Unmarried young men did not have sons or daughters, so there was no need to mention them. Rav Yaakov asks, why is it that, generally speaking, it

was only bochurim who became Nezirim? He offers the following theory:

The Gemara—in explaining the juxtaposition of the laws of Sotah with that of Nazir—says that someone who sees the disgrace of a Sotah should take a vow to abstain from wine. The type of people, Rav Yaakov says, who when they see something dramatic are likely to become inspired and change the directions of their lives are typically bochurim.

The unfortunate reality is that the older we get, the more set in our ways we become, and the harder it is for us to change. This does not mean it is impossible. We see that people do change all the time, and we see people who are in their thirties, forties, and fifties – and even in their sixties – who become Baalei Teshuva. But the reality is that the older we are, the harder it is for us to change.

It is the bochur who is not yet set in his ways who can more easily be inspired and take dramatic action to alter his life behavior and take himself to a higher spiritual level. That is why the majority of Nezirim were in fact bochurim, and so when the Torah enumerates the dead relatives whose contact the Nazir must avoid, it omits “his son and his daughter.”

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### **Parshat Beha'Alotcha**

**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - [www.seasonsofthemoon.com](http://www.seasonsofthemoon.com)**

#### **PARSHA OVERVIEW**

Aharon is taught the method for kindling the Menorah. Moshe sanctifies the levi'im to work in the Mishkan. They replace the firstborn, who were disqualified after sinning through the golden calf. The levi'im are commanded that after five years of training they are to serve in the Mishkan from ages 30 to 50. Afterwards, they are to engage in less strenuous work.

One year after the Exodus from Egypt, Hashem commands Moshe concerning the korban Pesach. Those ineligible for this offering request a remedy, and the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini — allowing them a "second chance" to offer the korban Pesach, one month later — is detailed. Miraculous clouds that hover near the Mishkan signal when to travel and when to camp. Two silver trumpets summon the princes or the entire nation for announcements. The trumpets also signal travel plans, war or festivals. The order in which the tribes march is specified.

Moshe invites his father-in-law, Yitro, to join the Jewish People, but Yitro returns to Midian. At the instigation of the eruv rav — the mixed Egyptian multitude who joined the Jewish People in the Exodus — some people complain about the manna. Moshe protests that he is unable to govern the nation alone. Hashem tells him to select 70 elders, the first Sanhedrin, to assist him, and informs him that the people will be given meat until they will be sickened by it. Two candidates for the group of elders prophesy beyond their mandate, foretelling that Yehoshua instead of Moshe will bring the people to Canaan. Some protest, including Yehoshua, but Moshe is pleased that others have become prophets. Hashem sends an incessant supply of quail for those who complained that they lacked meat. A plague punishes those who complained.

Miriam tries to make a constructive remark to Aharon, which also implies that Moshe is only like other prophets. Hashem explains that Moshe's prophecy is superior to that of any other prophet and punishes Miriam with tzara'at, as if she had gossiped about her brother. (Because Miriam is so righteous, she is held to an incredibly high standard.) Moshe prays for Miriam to be healed, and the nation waits until she is cured before traveling.

#### **PARSHA INSIGHTS**

“Rabbi” Bob Dylan

“When you kindle the lamps...” (8:2)

It is the late 1800's.

We're a stiff-necked people. It says so in the Torah. When I think back over many of the non-observant Jews I have met in my life, I see how their youthful questioning was often met by a “Shut up and just do it” attitude that turned them into unwilling atheists. I've often thought that the highest paid teachers in the Jewish educational system should be the first grade rebbes. A child's entire future spirituality may rest in their

sometimes-incapable hands. Who cares if the Rosh Yeshiva novel idea gets shot down five minutes into his mind-twisting hermeneutical exegesis? But if a young child's question, "How we know that there is Hashem?" is met by red-faced lathering and a scream of "Apikorus," that response may lead the child to believe that there is no answer. How many super-talented Jews are so over-represented in the arts and the sciences! And how many of them might have used those talents to sanctify the name of Heaven had they been given the right answer and the right encouragement at the right time.

Jerry Wexler (January 10, 1917 – August 15, 2008) was a major player in the music business from the fifties to the eighties. Think Ray Charles, the Allman Brothers, Chris Connor, Aretha Franklin, Led Zeppelin, Wilson Pickett, Dire Straits, Dusty Springfield and Bob Dylan. He coined the term "Rhythm and Blues," changing the title from "Race Music."

In 1979, Wexler agreed to produce an album by Bob Dylan. He was unaware of the nature of the material that awaited him. "Naturally, I wanted to do the album in Muscle Shoals, as Bob did, but we decided to 'prep' it in L.A. where Bob lived," recalled Wexler. "That's when I learned what the songs were about: born-again Christians in the old corral. ... I like the irony of Bob coming to me, the Wandering Jew, to get the Jesus feel ... But I had no idea he was on this born-again Christian trip until he started to evangelize me. I said, 'Bob, you're dealing with a sixty-two-year-old confirmed Jewish atheist. I'm hopeless. Let's just make an album.'"

"When you kindle the lamps..." The word 'to kindle' here is 'Behaalotecha,' which comes from the root l'a'lot, which means to go up. The Menorah represents the spirituality of the Jewish soul. It's not enough to just wave a match in the general direction of a child's spirituality, you have to hold that match there long enough and carefully enough until the flame can ascend by itself.

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**[CS - this is the updated essay from Rabbi Jacobson on Naso**

**Essay Parshas Naso**

**An Ode to the Survivors**

The 3 Families of the Levites & the 3 phases of Jewish History

**Rabbi YY Jacobson**

June 13, 2019 | 10 Sivan 5779

Comment

Class Summary:

In January 1776, as the American Revolutionary War was just about getting off the ground, the philosopher Thomas Paine ano...

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A Soldier for All Seasons

In January 1776, as the American Revolutionary War was just about getting off the ground, the philosopher Thomas Paine anonymously published the first of a series of pamphlets that would have an enormous impact on the fledgling nation. The pamphlets are known as the Crisis series, and were aimed to inspire and encourage the American colonists in their fight against the British. The pamphlet began with a memorable introduction, with a poignant reference to two different types of soldiers: These are the times that try men's souls: The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.

There are those, said Paine, who only stand by their people, their friends, and their ideals, when it's smooth sailing; when it's convenient, and enjoyable. They are fair-weather friends; summer soldiers; sunshine patriots. If the weather is fine, they will be here for you. The true patriot will bear any storm and stick around through any season.

In the story of our people, too, we have "summer Jews" and "sunshine supporters." But today I want to sing an ode to one group of Jews—whose numbers are sadly decreasing by the day and whose sacred memory we must forever keep alive.

Three Counts

Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, had three sons, Gershon, Kehas and Merari, and a daughter, Yocheved. While Yocheved mothered

Miriam, Moses and Aaron, the prophetess, leader and High Priest of Israel, her three brothers fathered the three constituent families of the tribe of Levi.[1] Eventually, the Levites were set apart from the rest of the Jewish people, dedicated to the Tabernacle and Temple service, assisting the Priests, the Kohanim—which was the family of Aaron.

While the national counting of Jewish men eligible for military service took place in last week's reading (Bamidbar), the census of Temple service-eligible Levites is spread out over these two weeks' portions. Towards the end of Bamidbar, and the beginning of Naso—which means 'count'—we read of the census of the three Levite families, and their induction into the Temple service.

Throughout the Israelite's 40 year sojourn in the desert, these families were charged with the mission of carrying the Tabernacle and its accessories: The Kehathites (the family of Kehos, the first son of Levi), carried the holiest items of the Tabernacle: the ark, candelabra, table, altars and all their utensils. The Gershonites (the family of Gershon, the second son of Levi) were given the job of carrying the coverings and curtains of the Tabernacle. The third of the Levite families, Merari, was responsible to carry the planks, bars, pillars and sockets of the Tabernacle structure.

But curiously, the language used for the command to count each of the three families is different each time. The first command from G-d to Moses to count, in Bamidbar reads thus:

נָשָׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי קֹהַת מֵתוֹךְ בְּנֵי לֵוִי לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם:

Make a count of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi by their families, according to their fathers' houses.[2]

The second reads thus:

נָשָׂא אֶת רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי גֵרְשׁוֹן גַּם הֵם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם:

Take a census of the sons of Gershon, of them too, following their fathers' houses, according to their families.[3]

Then you have the third one:

בְּנֵי מֵרָרִי לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם תִּקְקֹד אֹתָם:

[As for] the sons of Merari, you shall count them by their families, according to their fathers' houses.[4]

The first glaring difference is the use of the word 'naso.' The literal meaning of the word is to 'raise,' or 'lift.' In this context, it refers to 'taking' a census, as it is designed to accentuate the value of each individual counted, to lift up his head. Strangely, though, while the word is used for the first two families, when it comes to Merari, the standard word for counting, 'tifkod,' is used. With this family, no heads are uplifted!

But the first two families are still not quite the same either: When it comes to the family of Kehos Moses is told to count them. "Take a census of the children of Kehos." When it comes to the family of Gershon, Moses is told to count them "as well," "them too," as though they were almost an afterthought. What could be the meaning of this? Is the census taking of the Gershonites somehow secondary to that of the Kehathites? Why does it simply not say, "Take a census of the children of Gershon?"

The Insight by the Chasam Sofer

Today we will share a moving insight by one of the most illustrious Rabbis of the 19th century, Rabbi Moshe Sofer.

Rabbi Moses Schreiber (1762–1839), known to his own community and Jewish posterity in the Hebrew translation as Moshe Sofer, also known by his main work Chasam Sofer (translated "Seal of the Scribe" and acronym for "Chiddushei Toras Moshe Sofer"), was one of the leading rabbis of European Jewry in the first half of the nineteenth century. As Rabbi of Pressburg, today Bratislava, in the Austrian Empire, he established a yeshiva, the Pressburg Yeshiva, which became the most influential Yeshiva in Central Europe, producing hundreds of future leaders of Hungarian Jewry. (This Yeshiva continued to function until World War II; afterward, it was relocated to Jerusalem under the leadership of the Chasam Sofer's great-grandson, Rabbi Akiva Sofer, known as the Daas Sofer.)

The Chasam Sofer's published works include more than a thousand responsa, a commentary on the Torah titled "Toras Moshe," a commentary on the Talmud, sermons, and religious poetry. He is an oft-

quoted authority in Jewish scholarship and his Torah chiddushim (original Torah insights) sparked a new style in rabbinic commentary.

He died in 1839, one century before the destruction of European Jewry, yet his following insight is hauntingly relevant to the generation of our parents and grandparents, victims and survivors of the Holocaust.

#### Three State Solution

The dedicated servants of the Temple, the Levite tribe, are representative of the Jewish people as a whole. They were not numbered amongst the 12 Tribes, and had their census taken separately, because they are not associated with a particular part of the Jewish people, but as the agents of the entire nation.

The names and functions of the three families of Levi, Gershon, Kehos, and Merari, explains the Chasam Sofer, may be understood as alluding to three phases in the story of the Jewish people.

The name Kehos in Hebrew means “gathering.” [5]

The name Gershon means “expulsion.”

The name Merari means “bitterness.” [6]

#### Home and Away

The first to be counted, and the family charged with carrying the holy vessels of the Tabernacle, was the Kehos family. Kehos (meaning gathering) represents the Jewish people in their most idealized state; unified, and gathered in their own homeland, integrated and linked by a shared geographical and spiritual identity. “Kehos” symbolizes the times when our people were gathered together in the Holy Land, their deepest spiritual and national potential expressed in the spiritual epicenter of the world—the Holy Temple in Jerusalem.

Take a look at the names of all of the four children of Kehos—Amram, Yitzhar, Chevron and Uziel—and you will notice the same pattern: Am-Ram means an exalted nation; Yitzhar means a shining light; [7] Chevron means cohesion; Uziel means “My confidence from G-d.” They all embody one phase of Jewish history, glimmers of which we experience in our past, when our people were unified, exalted, glowing, connected, and confident—as G-d’s ambassadors to sanctify His world.

When the census and mission of Kehos is introduced in the Torah, it is unsurprising that the word “Naso”—lift up—Is used for this elevated state of the people.

#### Phase Two

But Jewish history was not one long glow. Phase two of our narrative is encapsulated in the name of the second family of Levi, Gershon, which means expulsion. (In the Talmud a divorce, creating separation between two people, is titled “gerushin.”)

Gershon symbolizes the era when the Jewish people were banished from their homeland, separated from G-d’s home and His sacred Temple. The destruction of the Temple and the expulsion of our people occurred because the lack of “Kehos,” because our lack of unity and respect for each other, and because of our estrangement from our unified moral and spiritual mission. [8]

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks put it thus: [9] It is hard to understand the depth of the crisis into which the destruction of the First Temple plunged the Jewish people. Their very existence was predicated on a relationship with G-d symbolized by the worship that took place daily in Jerusalem. With the Babylonian conquest, Jews lost not only their land and sovereignty. In losing the Temple it was as if they had lost hope itself. For their hope lay in G-d, and how could they turn to G-d if the very place where they served Him was in ruins?

It was then that an answer began to take shape. The Temple no longer stood, but its memory remained, and this was strong enough to bring Jews together in collective worship. In exile, in Babylon, Jews began to gather to expound Torah, articulate a collective hope of return, and recall the Temple and its service.

The prophet Ezekiel was one of those who shaped a vision of return and restoration, and it is to him we owe the first oblique reference to a radically new institution that eventually became known as the Beit HaKnesset, the synagogue, or the shul: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Although I sent them far away among the nations and scattered them among the countries, yet I have become to them a small sanctuary

[mikdash me’at] in the countries where they have gone’.[10] The central sanctuary had been destroyed, but a small echo, a miniature, remained.

The synagogue is one of the most remarkable icons of the Jewish story. The synagogue became Jerusalem in exile, the home of the Jewish heart. It is the ultimate expression of faith—that wherever we gather to turn our hearts towards heaven, there the Divine presence can be found, for G-d is everywhere. Psalm 139 states:

Where can I go from Your Spirit?

Where can I flee from Your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, You are there;

If I make my bed in the depths, You are there.

This is the story of Gershon—the Jewish story in exile. Despite physical expulsion, military defeat, loss of political and spiritual sovereignty, our people succeeded in keeping the memory of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple alive.

#### On the Rivers of Babylon

The experience—the crisis and the solution—is so movingly expressed in Psalms chapter 137:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat, we also wept when we remembered Zion.

On willows in its midst we hung our harps.

For there our captors asked us for words of song and our tormentors [asked of us] mirth, “Sing for us of the song of Zion.”

“How shall we sing the song of the Lord on foreign soil?”

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget [its skill].

May my tongue cling to my palate, if I do not remember you, if I do not bring up Jerusalem at the beginning of my joy.

For these Jews, “Yom Yerushalayim” was every day—each day, three times a day, they gathered to pray, facing Jerusalem, remembering Jerusalem, praying for its rebuilding and our return to Zion.

#### A Portable Homeland

One of the prophets who lived during that time, Malachi, made a fascinating and disturbing statement:

מלאכי א, יא: ממזרח שמש ועד מבואו גדול שמי בגוים ובכל מקום מוקטר מוגש לשמי ומנחה טהורה...

Malachi 1:11: For, from the rising of the sun until its setting, My Name is great among the nations, and everywhere offerings are burnt and offered up to My Name.

מנחות קי, ב: בכל מקום סלקא דעתך? אמר רבי שמואל בר נחמני אמר ר' יוחנן אלו תלמידי חכמים העוסקים בתורה בכל מקום מעלה אני עליהן כאילו מקטירין ומגישין לשמי. מאי דכתיב (ויקרא ז, לז) זאת התורה לעולה ולמנחה ולחטאת ולאשם... אמר רבא כל העוסק בתורה אינו צריך לא עולה ולא חטאת ולא מנחה ולא אשם. אמר רבי יצחק מאי דכתיב (ויקרא ו, יח) זאת תורת החטאת וזאת תורת האשם כל העוסק בתורת חטאת כאילו הקריב חטאת וכל העוסק בתורת אשם כאילו הקריב אשם:

The Talmud [11] is disturbed by the statement of Malachi that “everywhere offerings are offered up to my name.” This, ostensibly, is contrary to Jewish law. Offerings may be brought only in the Holy Temple.

The solution of the Talmud—a solution that has shaped Jewish identity throughout the last 2500 years—is that the prophet is referring to the study of Torah. When I study about the offerings it is as though I have brought them. And the study of Torah is not limited to geography, just as prayer and good deeds bring G-d into our heart and into the world wherever we may be.

Our people committed themselves to study the laws of the offerings, of the service in the Temple, and the laws governing the land of Israel, wherever they were, and the flame of hope continued to burn. Torah, said the German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, was the “portable homeland” of the Jew.

#### The Link to the Past

This glorious notion, “the portable homeland,” is symbolized by the family and name of Gershon. Hence the words of the Torah:

בְּשֵׁם אֵת רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי גֵרְשׁוֹן גַּם הֵם לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם לְמִשְׁפָּחָתָם:

Take a census of the sons of Gershon, of them too, following their fathers' houses, according to their families.

Gershon’s introduction now is understood: “Naso—lift up--Gershon as well, to their fathers’ house...”



The implication here is that even in the state of exile, if it is properly contended with, and if a link to the Torah tradition is preserved, the Gershonites can also be elevated to the state and consciousness of earlier generations, just as though they were still at home; just like Kehos. With the living link to the past, through Torah, prayer, and mitzvos, tradition and faith, we may be geographically expelled, but not internally displaced.

So too, do the names of Gershon's children—Livni and Shimi—reflect this struggle, and the ability to contend with it: Livni means to become cleansed and whitened; Shimi means to listen. True, when the Jews are expelled they do not have the Temple and the offerings to cleanse them, yet the same cleansing may still occur as long as there is "Shimi"—they are attuned, they are listening and absorbing, the words and teachings of the Torah and its sages who carry it in each generation.

#### The Third Phase

But there was a third phase in Jewish history, too painful to even address, but one experienced by our people eighty years ago. This is the milieu of Merari.

The name Merari, as you recall, means bitter, like the word Maror. The names of Merari's children—Machli and Mushi—reflect this reality: Machli means an ailment (as the term Machalah), and Mushi means removed. Merari represents the Jewish people at their nadir: not only banished from their homeland, but hunted down. Merari represents the darkest chapters in our history, known as "dor hashmad"—when our foes wanted nothing more than the utter destruction of G-d's people. From Pharaoh to Anteyachus, through the cruel fist of Roman persecution, Crusades, Inquisitions, massacres, pogroms, Soviet oppression, the Nazi holocaust, Islamist wars and terror —Merari symbolizes the bitterest, most painful moments in our story when our foes aspired to put an end to the Jewish people and the Jewish faith.

When it comes to Merari, there is no uplifting introduction, as signaled by the word "Naso." Unlike Gershon, we do not "lift them up" and link them to their fathers, to their past. Why? Says the Chasam Sofer—because they are infinitely higher than their fathers! They do not need to be uplifted, since they can't reach any higher. As the Talmud puts it as far as the martyrs of Lud,[12] "no man can stand within their spiritual realm." These Jews who have drunk from the cup of bitterness are the greatest and holiest of all. They have no equal. To be in their presence is holy, to gaze at their eyes is sacred, to listen to their words is a privilege. For these are the Jews who instead of witnessing Exodus they witnessed Auschwitz. Instead of the splitting of the sea, they endured Treblinka. Instead of Manna from heaven, they lived through Dachau, Bergen Belzen, and Mauthausen.

These are the Jewish soldiers who protected their people and their homeland in consecutive wars attempted to destroy our people—watching so many of their brothers and sisters struck down. These are the victims of terror and their families, who suffered so much agony only because they are Jewish.

As such, their very bodies, their very existence is the holiest of the holy. The sanctity of the greatest scholars and most pious Jews cannot be compared to them—for their very being is one big "Kiddush Hashem," their very existence carries the eternal flame of the Jewish people, its Torah and its G-d.

That is why when it came to the family of Merari the Torah does not say "Lift up their heads too to their fathers' families"—as they transcend all previous generations of Jews. The very blood flowing in their sinews, for which they have been targeted, projects unparalleled holiness, G-dliness and goodness.

#### A Blessing

When the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, came to Israel, a Jew came and asked him for a blessing before his departure. This Jew expressed the fear that after the Satmar Rebbe returned to America, there would be no one worthy to ask for a blessing.

The Satmar Rebbe told him "Go to any Jew that has a number tattooed on his arm and ask him for a blessing! If you are looking for a tzaddik, go to a Jew with a number..."

#### The Tattoo

There's a story about a young returnee to the ways of Judaism who had a humongous tattoo etched on to his body, a reminder of his "wild" days. He avoided all situations where it might be seen, as in Judaism tattoos are not a way to define your body. On the eve of Yom Kippur when so many are visiting the local Mikvah (ritual bath) he adopted the strategy to arrive early and jump in swiftly to avoid the rush and the risk of being seen by many observant Jews who are not accustomed to the sight of a large tattoo.

His worst fears were realized when one year, while hurrying on the slippery tiles down into the Mikvah, his feet flew out from underneath him, and he slipped. Trying to get himself together, people started to enter the mikvah and could not help but notice his tattoo. The shameful symbol of his ill-spent youth became exposed to all. The embarrassment was deep. Then an elderly man entering the mikvah approached him.

Pointing to his arm, the man said: Here, I also have a tattoo. These numbers were needled into my arm when I entered the gates of Auschwitz. As he lifted the fellow from the floor, he said: "This was my taste of hell. Each of us had his challenging past. Now let us go into the water together to begin a new future!"

#### You Inspire Us

To me, this story sums up the generation of the survivors. With their very existence, they inspired us in extraordinary ways. With their determination to open a new chapter in their turbulent lives, to build families, to create memories, to construct successful lives, they have taught us all how we can uplift ourselves, under all circumstances, and kindle a flame of hope, love and faith.

To be sure, many of them suffered untold trauma, and their children and even grandchildren are often victims of that trauma. But that, exactly, is the point. Despite this unfathomable agony and suffering, most of the Holocaust survivors did all they could to rebuild their lives and give their children some sense of safety they never had. With the tools they had, they were the best of men and women.

No! Says the Chasam Sofer, the survivors need not be uplifted to the spiritual state of their ancestors, for it is their ancestors who crave to be uplifted to their state. It is hundreds of generations of Jews of the past who look at the survivors and have only one word to say:

Wow!

You have created life out of six million piles of ashes. You have managed to find love in your hearts—hearts which have observed endless hate and cruelty. You have managed to still believe in the promise of human dignity and majesty, when you have seen what humans are capable of. So all of Jewish history, all past generations of Jews, melt away in awe and reverence before the generation we all were privileged to be part of—the generation of "shearit hapleita," the survivors of the Nazi death camps, who were dragged into the abyss, who saw and heard things none of us will ever fathom, and yet, with an unbelievable and incredible zest which will be recounted for eternity, went on to live and love. We are privileged to know you. We are lucky to be your children, your grandchildren, your great-grandchildren, your friends, your students, and your admirers. A nation comprised of individuals like you, we know, will not only continue to thrive, but will witness our ultimate redemption, through Moshiach Tzidkenu, speedily in our days, Amen![13]

[1] Yocheved married her nephew, Amram, the son of Kehos.

[2] Bamidbar 4:2 [3] 4:22 [4] 4:29 [5] See Bereishis 49:10

[6] These three interpretations of the names are found one generation earlier in Likkutei Torah (By Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi) Parshas Naso. [7] As in Genesis 6:16 [8] See Yuma 9b [9] Essay published here: [www.ouradio.org/torah/article/a\\_portable\\_home#.U4izZPldWwM](http://www.ouradio.org/torah/article/a_portable_home#.U4izZPldWwM)

[10] Ezek. 11: 16 [11] Menachos 110b [12] Pesachim 50a [13] My thanks to Boruch Werdiger for his assistance.

Essay Parshas Naso Dedicated by Michael Brand ]

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[CS – this was sent in by a colleague.

from: Michael Hoenig <MHoenig@herzfeld-rubin.com>

to: CShulman <cshulman@gmail.com>  
date: May 24, 2023, 5:46 PM  
subject: Re: Mitzvah Connections -- Parshas Naso -- KEHAS -- MERARI

The following are Mitzvah Connections from Parshas Naso :  
KEHAS ---

Parshas Naso opens with a directive to count the number of Levite men, ages 30 to 50, who are assigned to service in connection with the Mishkan, Ohel Moed, their constituent parts, and the Klei Kodesh, holy vessels and instrumentalities of Avodah. (Naso 4:21-46)

The counting is according to family membership, respectively, descendants of the three B'nai Levi : Gershon, KEHAS and Merari. The numbers of each grouping are specified . (4:36, 4:40, 4:44) Specialized tasks were assigned per family . B'nai Gershon would work and carry external components of the Mishkan, Ohel Moed, their curtains, covers and skins . (4:24-28) The B'nai Merari had responsibility for the planks (or beams), staves, pillars, sockets, pegs and ropes . (4:31-32) As the foregoing were physically difficult assignments -- for example, the beams were large and heavy-- , four transport wagons were allocated to B'nai Merari and two wagons to B'nai Gershon (7:7).

The B'nai KEHAS were in charge of the noblest and most delicate objects (see BaMidbar 4:16). Aharon and his sons came from the KEHAS family . Thus, B'nai KEHAS were chosen to transport the internal objects of the Mishkan, such as the Holy Ark (Aron), the Shulchan, the Menorah, the Altars and holy vessels . These were to be carried by KEHAS members on their shoulders. Accordingly, they were not allocated any transport wagons.

The B'nai KEHAS assignment to carry the Holy Ark and other internal utensils marked them as profoundly associated with Torah since the Aron represents (and symbolizes) Torah then and through the ages.

Indeed, collectively, all the B'nai Levi were connected to Torah and Avodah . B'nai Levi also sang during certain offerings and proceedings in the Beis HaMikdash -- a task Chazal say was instrumental in achieving atonement .

Given B'nai Levi's special status, they were not to share in the tribal inheritance of Eretz Yisrael along with the other tribes . As they were to be totally dedicated to Temple service and study of Torah, instead of a Yerushah share, they were allocated 48 cities which included six cities of refuge for unintentional manslaughter .

Their professional kinship to Torah and Avodah meant that, not only would they not inherit a tribal territory, they also would not fight in wars . They WERE NOT PERMITTED TO SHARE IN THE BOOTY CAPTURED DURING THE CONQUEST OR OF THAT TAKEN FROM THE ENEMY LATER . Nor were they to be burdened by agricultural labor and other worldly efforts . They were set apart to serve

and worship Hashem and TO TEACH TORAH through the ages, as symbolized by the assignment to B'nai KEHAS the responsibility for carrying the Holy Ark, which is the symbol of Torah . Presently, the Torah carries us as it has done for millennia of Golus.

KEHAS equals 505 . Mitzvah Number 505 is : LO YIHYE... CHEILEK... IM YISRAEL (Devorim 18:1) -- They Shall Have ... No Portion ... Yisrael . The tribe of Levi IS FORBIDDEN TO SHARE IN THE BOOTY ATTAINED DURING CONQUEST OF THE HOLY LAND OR CAPTURED FROM THE ENEMY LATER . Mitzvah 505 follows Mitzvah 504 (Devorim 18:1) that the " Kohanim, Leviim, And All The Tribe Of Levi Shall Have No Portion Or Inheritance With Yisrael." ( Except for the 48 specified cities mentioned in Mitzvos 342 and 408.) KEHAS, the Aron, and Torah : What a grand, enduring legacy !

MERARI --- MERARI equals 450 . Mitzvah Number 450 (from Devorim 12:19) is : Hishomer Lecha Pen Ta'Azov Es HaLevi Kol Yomecha Al Admosecha . --

Take Heed To Yourself That You Forsake Not The Levi All Your Days That You Are On Your Land.

It is forbidden to neglect THE LEVI'IM by failing to give them their gifts, as specified in the Torah; and on the Shalosh Regalim, the Pilgrimage Festivals, as we are especially obligated to bring them joy.

The Levi'im were designated by Hashem to be totally devoted to His Torah and service -- which is also the reason why they did not receive an equal share in the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael . Thus Hashem "strictly adjured the rest of Klal Yisrael not to neglect the needs of the Levi'im, so they need not be anxious and worry about meeting their family's needs." A.Y. Kahan,

The Taryag Mitzvos, Mitzvah 450.

Two Levi family names, each producing a Mitzvah Connection with a Remez, clue, directly applying to the Levi'im. Powerful ! The depth and intricacies of Torah !!!

MH]

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לע"נ

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