

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The 364th Biblical commandment (according to the numbering of the Sefer Hachinuch) is to confess one's sins to G-d as part of the process of repentance. This applies to all sins, even those that require an offering, as it says, "a man or a woman that commits any type of sin" (Bamidbar 5:6), "shall confess the sin that they committed" (5:7). Our sages, of blessed memory, have taught us how the wording of the verses teaches us many details about this confession; I would like to take a closer look at one of these details.

After learning from the verse that all cases of capital punishment require a confession, the Chinuch adds, "I might think that this also applies to those killed via 'zomamin' (a term referring to witnesses whose testimony was undermined by other witnesses). Which means to say, even though he (the accused) knows that he did not sin, as they had given false testimony about him, [I would think] that he should also give a confession for this. [Therefore], the Torah says, 'and the soul is guilty' (5:6); I (G-d) only said [that a confession is mandated] when there is guilt, but not when he knows that there is no sin, as they had testified falsely about him." This law was taught by our sages in the Sfri Zuta, and is quoted in the Midrash Hagadol and by the Rambam (Sefer Hamitzvos, Mitzvas Asay #73). The obvious question is why we would think someone who knows he is innocent should confess anyway; if he didn't commit the sin, how can he say that he did?

Most understand this law to be tied into a dispute brought in the Mishnah in Sanhedrin (6:2, corresponding to 43b in the Talmud) regarding the confession said before someone found guilty is put to death. Ideally, one would confess by saying, "I have sinned, and I did such and such," mentioning the specific sin (or sins) committed. However, "if one does not know how to confess, they tell him to say, 'my death should atone for all of my sins.' Rabbi Yehudah says [that] if he knows that they testified against him falsely,

he says, 'my death should atone for all of my sins except for this iniquity.' They (the Rabbanan, who had stated that he shouldn't exclude "this iniquity" from his confession) said to him (Rabbi Yehudah), 'if that would be so, everyone would say this, in order to acquit himself (in the eyes of others).' Rabbi Yehudah allows someone who maintains his innocence to state that he did not do what he is accused of doing, while the Rabbanan say that no one can state such a thing before being executed, as if it were allowed, all would do so, which, while acquitting themselves, implicates the witnesses as being liars (and/or the judges as being incompetent). Rabbi Yehudah would be following the Sifri Zuta, as he doesn't allow the accused to confess a sin he insists he did not commit, while the Rabbanan would disagree with it. How the Rabbanan would explain the words the Sifri Zuta bases the law on is unclear, but at least we have a possible explanation as to why we would think one who is not guilty must confess anyway; otherwise, no one would confess, and a mockery would be made of the whole system. This reason is so strong, that (according to the many commentators that connect the Sifri Zuta with Rabbi Yehudah's opinion) the Rabbanan force a confession despite his insistence that he is innocent of the charges.

However, there are several problems with this approach. For one thing, doesn't the fact that we force someone who insists he is innocent to confess anyway itself make a mockery of the system? Additionally, the Rambam (Hilchos Sanhedrin 13:1) "paskins" like the Rabbanan, saying that we do not allow the accused to add the words "except for this iniquity" even when he insists that the witnesses lied. How can the Rambam follow the opinion of the Rabbanan, forcing him to confess even when he maintains his innocence, if the Rambam had quoted the Sifri Zuta that tells us that someone who knows he is not guilty should not confess? [It would be difficult to suggest that this confession was a Rabbinical decree, as the Sifri Zuta is telling us that there is a Biblical prohibition against confessing when innocent; while a Rabbinical decree can, under certain conditions, circumvent a Biblical law, this one would be going directly against it.]

When the brothers were falsely accused by the Egyptian Viceroy of being spies and put into prison, their response was not "how could this happen to us," but that even though we are innocent of these charges, "we are guilty regarding our brother, whose pain we saw as he begged us [to let him be] and we didn't listen;

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by
Mr. & Mrs. Itzy Weisberg

לעלי נשמת

Mrs. Ida Weisberg

חיה פייגה בת ר' יעקב יוסף ז"ל
on her 15th yartzeit

נפטרה י"ז סיו תשנ"ד

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therefore this trouble has befallen us" (Beraishis 42:21). Similarly, despite knowing that they did not steal the Viceroy's goblet, Yehudah offered that all the brothers would be his slaves, for "G-d has found (is punishing them for) the sin of your servants" (44:16). Sometimes punishment is meted out for the crime one is accused of; but there are also times that one can be punished by being accused of a crime that was not committed (or is usually overlooked by the human authorities). That doesn't mean we shouldn't fight such allegations, as it is possible that the punishment is only the accusation, or the aggravation and bother of having to fight it. Nevertheless, the response of a G-d-fearing Jew to adversity is always to search within to try to discover what message is being sent, and what must be improved. Even if one was falsely accused of a sin, and he knows that the witnesses were lying, besides trying to fight the charges, the accused must do a self-examination to try to determine why G-d allowed this accusation to proceed. If a death sentence is handed down (and will be followed through with), there must have been, on some level, something that this punishment is being given for.

As with all sins, confession is necessary for this sin (after it has been determined) too. Just as one on his deathbed recites a full confession ("viduy") before leaving this world and going to the next one, someone on death row must say a full "viduy" as well. Ideally, each sin would be mentioned explicitly (see Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1). But, as with our "viduy" on Yom Kippur, besides enumerating the sins we are aware of, we make a general confession to try to cover those we are not. This is the formula suggested by the Mishnah for those who "do not know how to confess," either because there is a lack of knowledge about the process or a lack of knowledge about which specific sins were committed (and should be mentioned). When we are not prompted to confess, this "general viduy" does not indicate any specific sin. However, in the context of a death sentence, when it is announced publicly what the accused was found guilty of, even a general confession implies guilt of that specific sin. Since one who knows he is innocent cannot confess, Rabbi Yehudah says that, when making his final confession before being executed, the accused must be allowed to add "but not this one." The Rabbanan felt that since the actual words being said do not have to mean an admission of guilt for

this specific sin, rather than risk making a mockery of the justice system, allowing him to make a general confession was enough.

If a general confession was never made, the Rabbanan might agree that making one would imply guilt of these charges. But one who "does not know how to confess" always makes this general confession, and even those who can (and do) list known sins add this general confession just in case there was a sin that was overlooked. One who knows he was guilty of what he was accused of would ideally include this in his list, but even if he was unwilling to admit it publicly, could have it in mind when making his general confession. There is no mockery of the justice system, as there is a confession, and he does not admit committing a sin that he knows he did not commit.

Both The Rabbanan and Rabbi Yehudah follow the Sifri Zuta; they only differ as far as how it is fulfilled. And because we are not allowed to confess to a sin we did not commit, a way was found to allow for a confession that does not knock the justice system while not being untruthful. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha begins with the description of the duties imposed on the families of Gershon and Mrori in the mishkan. At the conclusion of last week's parsha the duties of the family of Kehat were detailed. The parsha states that Gershon and Mrori are also to be valued and counted. The obvious inference is that if the Torah did not somehow here emphasize this equality of Gershon and Mrori to Kehat we may have thought differently.

The reason for this potential misunderstanding is clear. Kehat had the most glamorous of the tasks of the Levites. It dealt with the holy ark and the tablets of stone of Sinai, among the other holy artifacts of the Mishkan which were in its charge. It did not carry those vessels in wagons drawn by oxen but rather on their shoulders on poles slung over their shoulders. The ark in fact carried the children of Kehat and not vice versa.

It would then be easy to denigrate the more mundane work of Gershon and Mrori, the fact that they used wagons and oxen to transport the boards and hooks and curtains and other basic parts of the Mishkan. After all, the work that they did may be basic and necessary but perhaps it is less inspiring and holy than the work of Kehat.

The Torah comes to warn us not to think in those terms. Gershon and Mrori and their contribution to the Levite family and to the service of the Mishkan ranks equal to that of Kehat and they are also worthy of their special mention and count in the Torah.

There is a wise message contained in this idea of the Torah. Even those who seemingly serve in the most mundane fashion in the synagogues and schools

of the Jewish people are to be treasured and appreciated. It is related by legend that one of the teachers of Rashi when becoming aged and no longer able to teach in the yeshiva nevertheless remained there and served as a helper to clean the building and the ark of the law contained therein.

For there are no mundane tasks when it comes to holiness and spiritual improvement. Household chores, workplace behavior, social interaction are all part of the matrix of Jewish Torah life. The small things, carrying the boards and placing them on wagons drawn by oxen are part of the same overall picture of Mishkan holiness as is the hoisting of the holy ark itself on the shoulders of Kehat. Not everyone is privileged to carry the holy ark. But everyone has the opportunity to be connected to the Mishkan and to do positive things on behalf of G-d and Israel.

Even the menial tasks in Judaism carry with them cosmic importance. It is up to the people who perform those tasks to invest in them the will and frame of mind that will elevate them and the work that they do the proper level of holiness and dedication. All Levites are equal in their potential to do good. And as Maimonides points out, all of us have the potential to be Levites in spirit as well. © 2009 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

“Rabbi Yishmael said, Peace is a great thing. We find that the Almighty has allowed His name, written in holiness, to be erased into water so that a man and his wife will live in peace.” Somebody with a light illness has no need for a great physician. A doctor who is not a specialist or even a medic or a pharmacist may be able to treat him. On the other hand, somebody who is close to death must make his way to the greatest physicians in order to find a possible cure. The same is true not only of physicians but of medicine itself. A strong drug always causes great damage and is very dangerous? the possible harm may outweigh any benefit. Because of this, we use strong medicines only for patients who are in great danger, and only in a carefully controlled dose.

There can be no doubt that erasing the holy name of the Almighty is a strong medicine which does great harm and entails great danger. This is therefore only used in a case of mortal danger? a possibly adulterous woman? which is administered by the proper physician, a Kohen. Unfortunately, it can happen that relatively inexperienced physicians may try to give the same cure to everybody, even healthy people, claiming

that the mitzvot between one man and another are so important that they take precedence over the holy name of G-d.

It is true that the mitzvot between man and man are very important, but any claim that they are more important than mitzvot between man and G-d casts a cloud over the main principle of the Torah? requiring careful observance of G-d's commands which provide guidance to mankind. Other nations, which asked, "What is written in the Torah?" were found unworthy of receiving it. They gave the highest precedence to human judgment and natural feelings of wisdom and morality. The main virtue of Yisrael, on the other hand? because of which they were privileged to receive the Torah? was that they first promised to do the mitzvot, even before they understood them. They dedicated themselves to the performance of all the mitzvot, both those between man and G-d and those between one man and another. Even in the realm of human relations there are Torah decrees that can only be understood as Divine commandments, such as the fine of repaying four or five times the value of a theft under certain circumstances.

In view of these considerations, why indeed should the name of G-d be erased in order to bring about peace between a man and his wife? The answer is that this is not just a matter "between man and man," with a desire that everybody should feel comfortable and not get into any disputes. The sanctity of a Jewish home and the faith within the home are in the balance, and this holiness is so special that it is indeed worthy of the use of a very strong medicine. We should remember that even in this case the best cure would be for the woman to listen to the admonition of the Kohen and not be forced to drink the water. Only if there is no other alternative to deciding the doubt and to returning the peace to the house does she drink the bitter water which seals her fate and that of her home for better or worse.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

During the twelve days of the dedication of the Tabernacle the heads of the twelve tribes each brought an offering. Although the offerings of the leaders were the same, the Torah repeats each gift with all of its details. The Torah never uses an extra word or letter unless it is coming to teach us a lesson about life. What lesson can we learn here?

The Rambam, a 14th century French Biblical commentator, informs us that the lesson for us to learn is that we should not try to outdo another person in order to boast or feel superior to him. We should keep our focus on the accomplishment, not on our egos.

The goal in spiritual matters is to serve the Almighty, to grow as a person and not to seek honor or to compete with anyone else. Competition has its

motivating factor, but one-upmanship has no place in fulfilling Torah principles. One should fulfill mitzvos with pure intentions. *based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2009 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Although I've been publishing columns, articles and books all my adult years, my first publication goes back to my pre-adolescence in 1953 --or at least the first article with my name on it. The credit really goes to my father, who submitted an anecdote to the Jewish Digest describing the concluding moments in one of the most important days in the life of a young Jewish boy in Brooklyn: the day when he goes out with his parents to buy his first suit in honor of his impending Bar Mitzvah...

We had traveled by bus and by train from Bedford-Stuyvesant to Chinatown, where Louis Levy, one of the famed low priced clothing establishments ran his business on Elizabeth Street. They were having a special sale and we spent what seemed the entire afternoon, exhausting the inventory as well as the salespeople, until my mother was finally convinced that the perfect suit - for her son who was not quite a perfect fit - had indeed been found. Heading home, we passed a well-known knish place, and my father suggested we stop for a bite.

Now, since I was a yeshiva boy already studying Talmud, I saw it as my religious duty to make inquiries about the kashrut of the restaurant. Without hesitating, the cashier directed me to a door in the rear where I could find the boss. I immediately noted that the room had no mezuzah, and the tall man sitting behind an official looking desk sported a baldpate, bereft of any head-covering.

After repeating my question about the existence of a Kashrut certification, he looked at me sharply. "Young man, you see that picture hanging on the wall?" he said, pointing to a black and white photo of an elderly Jew, with a long white beard, a large black hat, and a long rabbinic coat. "That man," he continued, "was my father. He started this business, working very hard, making knishes right here on the lower east side. Do you still dare to ask your insolent question?"

I was feeling very sure of myself, very important with my brand new bar mitzvah suit. Without hesitating I replied, "If you were hanging on the wall, and your father was sitting in front of me, I wouldn't ask any questions. But since your father is hanging on the wall, and you are sitting in front of me as you are - unless you have kashrut certification, I am afraid I can't eat here."

Perhaps I was a little glib, but the point being made is a crucial one: far more important than who or what our ancestors were is who and what we and our children shall become! This is likewise one of the most important lessons of our Torah reading.

Early in the Book of Numbers, the Torah records the first census in the history of the Jewish people: "Take you the sum of all the congregations of the children of Israel, by their families, by their parents' houses... [Num. 1:2]" Certainly a census is a momentous event - not only as a profile of a nation's most important natural resource, its people, but it also enhances each national with a sense of pride in his newly acquired significance as a member of an important nation.

At the end of the day, when all the counts of the various tribes were added up, the total number of those twenty years and above was 603,550 [Num. 1:46]. The census tells us-in more ways than one-that each person counts. Again and again we encounter the phrase in connection with the census: "by their families (l'mishpechotam) and by their parents' houses (l'vet avotam)."

This particular term is repeated with each of the tribes, and families - except for two instances wherein the phrase is inverted: in the case of the Levites, as well as the Gersonites (sons of Levi), instead of the usual "by their families" and "by their parents' house" we find "by their parents' house and by their families" [Num. 3:15].

In contrast, Levi's other sons, Kehat [4:2] and Merari [4:27] are presented in the Book of Numbers similar to the presentation of the rest of the tribes: first by their "families" and by their "fathers' houses." Why should there be such a reversal in phraseology in the case of Levi and the Gersonites?

Perhaps the Targum Onkelos provides a direction for us to take. If we look at his translation of the word 'l'mishpechotam' - by their family, we find that he renders it 'l'zarayaton,' which means 'the children.' Thus the usual formulation, found no less than seventeen times in our passage, is rendered to mean that each individual is counted by his children (l'mishpehotam), and then by their parents' house. An individual is to be judged as to who he/she is first by the children whom he/she has produced; only afterwards and secondarily do we pay attention to his/her forbears, to the "yichus" which comes from one's ancestry.

From the perspective of this definition, we can readily understand the reversal of phrase regarding the Tribe of Levi. A Kohen-priest or Levite serves in the Temple and performs special ritual duties not by virtue of merit but only by virtue of ancestry: I am a Kohen only because my father was a Kohen. Hence in accordance with this reality, the Bible insists that their census is "by their parents' house and by their children" - the parents coming first!

And in addition to special ritual functions, the care and maintenance of the Sanctuary (during the years of wandering in the desert) was divided amongst the three scions of the House of Levi. The duty of Gershon, as described in last week's portion, focused on the curtains, the hangings, the various coverings

inside the Tabernacle. According to the Midrash, this was the easiest job in the Sanctuary. It is therefore assumed that the Gershonites were satisfied to rest on their laurels; they remained in essence Levites, dependent on their "parents house" for their status and function.

In contrast, the children of Kehat were in charge of the much heavier items such as the menorah and the Ark. In Bamidbar Rabbah [5:1], we read the following description: "When the Jews were traveling, two sparks of flame came out from the two poles of the Ark of the Tablets of Law". The Kehatites volunteered to put their lives on the line and risk the fire in order to bear the Holy Ark. And their brothers the Merarites learned from their example, volunteering to transport the heaviest wood and metals. These children of Levi were anxious to be their own people, to establish their own "yichus," not to rely first on their parents. As a result, the Torah counts them in accord with "their children and their parents' house" - their children products of their homes and their education, coming first!

What we've gathered from this overview is that a seemingly slight difference in the word order may reveal a world of attitude and psychology. When each of us is counted and assessed when the Almighty conducts His census, the most important criterion in our judgment will not be who our parents were, but who and what we and our children developed into. All too often, the descendant has descended too far down! © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

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 mentsch: 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. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The very name of our portion Naso, encapsulates a central Jewish idea which resonates, especially during the difficult times in Israel today. On the one hand, the word naso may be related to masa, which means "burden." From this perspective, naso means to be weighted down, to feel the pressure of the world. Naso could also mean to lift or to be above. While these definitions may be viewed as conflicting, they actually encompass a common message.

As a rabbi, I am constantly awed by individuals who seem to be so average, and yet, when faced with adversity, are able to reach beyond and overcome. This amazing phenomenon gives me strength to continue to believe, despite the fact that there is so much pain and suffering in the world.

This may be the confluence of naso as burden and naso as to lift. It is often the case that precisely when one feels burdened and weighted down, one finds the inner strength to rise above and to exceed one's grasp.

The ability of people, to do that which they never ever thought they could is an expression of the image of G-d in all of us. As G-d is infinite and endless, so too do we, created in the image of G-d, have the power to do the extraordinary.

We, here in America, should learn through our sisters and brothers in Israel. As they face adversity, we cannot allow ourselves to become the Jews of silence. We must learn from them the message of courage and fortitude, and in the face of crisis, speak out.

Sometimes I think that there are no great people in this world. Rather there are only great challenges. When they arise, ordinary people reach deep down to accomplish the extraordinary. The word naso reflects this most incredible phenomenon. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

Sandwiched between the Leviim (Levites) and the Nasiim (Princes) we find the three odd guests seated at the same table. 1) The Sota, 2) The Nazir, and 3) The Priestly Blessing! Why are these

fellows clustered together? How is our life improved by appreciating their proximity to each other?

The first part of the question is partially explained by Rashi, "Why is the subject of the Nazir juxtaposed to the subject of the Sota? In order to teach you that whoever sees the Sota in her hour of disgrace should become a Nazir!" The wondrous question is, "Why should a person need to accept a more strict spiritual regimen if they had witnessed justice being meted out to someone who had misbehaved?"

Just the opposite is true. The one who saw with his own eyes the tragic results of devious and defiant behavior should be automatically strengthened and less in need of the spiritual enrichment program of the Nazir.

To begin with, here are four approaches:

1) If they saw it, it relates to them. Whatever we see is like a heavenly E-Mail. Who can afford to ignore that? If one hears about a divorce, it is at least a clear warning to others to reinforce their marriages.

2) When we hear that a criminal is caught, what is learned is something more than the lesson that "crime doesn't pay!" That "fools get caught" is another valid voice competing in the dark part of our psyche.

3) That such a barrier has been broken and sacred ground encroached leaves us all diminished and at risk. A behavior once perceived as impossible to approach is now seen as real and negotiable.

4) We are sensitive and affected by our environment and we wish to remain so. If we become overly toughened to events that offend our sensibilities then we risk being callous to the healthy experiences of our lives. Maybe now we can try to understand why the "Priestly Blessing" follows and fits so well.

One of my teachers was happily skipping home on Simchas Torah with his then young family. They were singing a lively tune to the words, "Olam Haba is a guta zach...Learning Torah is a besser zach..." (The next world is a good thing...Learning Torah is a better thing...) His four-year old daughter interrupted the parade and asked her father in all earnest, "Abba, what's Olam Haba-The Next World?"

He knew he had to address her question on a level she could comprehend. He asked her what the most delicious thing in the world was, thinking that if she said chocolate, then he would tell her it's tons of chocolate and if she said marshmallows then he'd tell her how many marshmallows. She gave a most surprising answer, though. "Davening-Praying!" He asked her where she had learned that. She was not yet in school and all she said was, "Mommy!"

He was then able to piece the puzzle together. Where and how had she learned such a noble thing? After the morning rush, when all the older brothers and sisters are sent off to the bus, the mother sits with her daughter to eat some breakfast. The mother has her coffee and honey bun and the daughter, her chocolate milk and the same. This is a scrumptious moment.

Afterward, the mother approaches a blank wall, siddur in hand and prays. The child notices the looks of excruciating and sublime joy on her face as she turns her heart to The Creator. The child measures, intuitively, remembering the sweetness of the breakfast goodies comparing the facial expressions when it was only food and not prayerful words in her mom's mouth. Naturally she concludes one experience must be far superior to the other. "Davening"

The "Priestly Blessing" finds itself in the company of the lessons of the Sota and the Nazir? (i.e. the dangers of undisciplined living and the urgent need to recover.) Happy are those who don't spend their lives reacting only to negative stimuli but rather place themselves in the nurturing and inspiring company of those who living up to their leadership role, bring blessings to the Children of Israel. © 2003 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Adapted by Zvi Shimon

Parashat Naso continues the general census begun in Parashat Bemidbar, culminating with the sacrifices of the nesi'im (princes) and the sanctification of the Mishkan (tabernacle). However, interrupting these events are several parashiot, among them: Parashat "Ha-mo'el Ma'al ba-Hashem" (Bemidbar 5:5-10), Parashat Sota (5:11-31), and Parashat Nazir (6:1-21). What are these parashiot doing here? Why do they break the flow of events?

Let us start with Parashat "Ha-mo'el Ma'al ba-Hashem," which deals with laws of theft. This entire parasha would seem to be superfluous, since we have already been taught the laws of theft at the end of Parashat Vayikra (5:20-26). Rashi explains that two new points are added in our parasha, one regarding confession, and one regarding gezel ha-ger (theft from a foreigner, or proselyte). According to the Midrash (Bemidbar Rabba 8:1), we learn here that theft from a ger is just as serious as theft from an Israelite, while according to Rashi, we learn that restitution must be handed over to the priests when the ger has no inheritors.

But why must the laws of gezel ha-ger appear in Parashat Naso? The underlying idea, the motto which appears again and again throughout the first two parashiot of the book of Bemidbar is "le-mishpechotam le-beit avotam"—"according to their families and by the house of their fathers." The beginning of the book of Bemidbar is filled with the idea of family and tribal roots. However, there is a psychological danger stemming from feelings of tribal rootedness and connection; it can lead to disregard and even hostility towards all outsiders, towards all those not belonging to the clan.

While Judaism sees the family and the nation as central to Jewish identity and consciousness, it is well aware of the danger to which these loyalties can lead when taken to an extreme. It is for this reason that we are commanded with regard to gezel ha-ger in the middle of Parashat Naso. It is precisely the ger, the foreigner, lacking the sense of familial, tribal and national roots, who is most vulnerable to the atmosphere pervading the beginning of Sefer Bemidbar. Therefore, the Torah commands us here to deal with the ger exactly as we would with our fellow Israelites.

Another question remains: why are the laws of gezel ha-ger planted in the middle of Parashat Naso, thus interrupting the flow of events? Why not place it at the end of the parasha?

Parashat Naso deals with some of the most central aspects of the collective destiny and historical mission of the people of Israel: the sanctification of the Mishkan, the dwelling of the Shekhinah therein, and the preparation of the Nation of Israel for the conquest of the Land of Israel. When dealing with such vast issues of historical significance, there is a danger that many of the smaller issues, pertaining not to the nation but rather to the individual, might find themselves on the periphery or even totally ignored. Moral issues relating to the individual might be totally eclipsed by issues of national significance.

This is precisely the reason why, in the midst of the descriptions of Am Yisrael's preparations for their historical march forward, the Torah commands us with regard to the ger, the individual who stands completely alone. It is only on the basis of moral laws such as gezel ha-ger that Am Yisrael as a people can accomplish its destiny.

This is also the reason for the location of the laws of Sota and Nazir in the middle of Parashat Naso. Only on the basis of family fidelity and a proper relationship to the materialistic world can Am Yisrael march forward towards its national goals and aspirations.

A similar phenomenon of "displacement" can be found in Parashiot Yitro and Mishpatim. There, the narrative describing the giving of the Torah is interrupted by a long series of laws (see Rashi and Ramban, who disagree about the chronology of the events). Why? Before the long list of laws, the Jews tell Moshe, "Kol asher diber Hashem na'aseh"—"All that which G-d has spoken we will do" (Shemot 19:8). But afterwards, they add, "Na'aseh ve-nishma"—"We will do and we will hear" (ibid. 24:7). Only after the process of learning and understanding the precepts of Parashat Mishpatim can they respond with "ve-nishma." The overwhelming, awe-inspiring experience of G-d descending on Mount Sinai must be accompanied by the process of learning many specific commandments. It is only through the combination of the two that proper kabbalat ha-Torah can occur.

From these two examples, Parashat Naso and Parashiot Yitro and Mishpatim, we see that hidden behind the apparent "disorder" of the parashiot are some of the fundamental principles of Judaism. (*This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat parashat Naso 5755 [1995].*)

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

The twelfth of Sivan is both the birthday anniversary and *yahrzeit* of Yehuda, the fourth son of the Patriarch Yaakov (Shalsholet Hakabalah; Melitzei Esh). R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l taught: Of all of Yaakov's sons, it was Yehuda who earned the right to be the forebearer of the Davidic dynasty and of *mashiach*. The Torah portrays Yehuda as a person whose righteousness was tested many times; unlike his brother Yosef, whose behavior was the model of consistency, Yehuda sometimes struggled and fell. Yosef and Yehuda are examples of what the Rambam calls the "chassid me'uleh" and "moshail b'nafsho," respectively.

Rambam explains (Shemonah Perakim, ch.6) that a *chassid me'uleh* is a person who is innately righteous. He wants to do what is right, and he does it without any obvious internal struggle. Rashi suggests (Shmot 1:4) that Yosef was such a person; "The same Yosef who shepherded his father's flocks is the righteous Yosef who ruled Egypt." The *moshail b'nafsho*, on the other hand, is a person who feels the pull of the evil inclination, even if only to the slightest degree, but overcomes the challenges. This is what Yehuda did in saving Tamar, and what he failed to do completely (see Rashi, Bereishit 38:1) when given the opportunity to save Yosef—an error which he in turn corrected by risking his own life to save Binyamin.

This is why Yehuda, not Yosef, was chosen as the ancestor of kings. The Torah concept of a king is not someone who is "better than" his subjects, but someone who has experienced their spiritual struggles, and has overcome them. Only then can he lead them in conquering their own evil inclinations and fulfilling G-d's will. (Yemei Zikaron, pp. 70-75)

"Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying: 'So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael, 'amor lahem' / saying to them: "'yevarechecha Hashem' / May Hashem bless you (singular)...' ." (6:23- 24)

The midrash states: How did Bnei Yisrael merit to receive Birkat Kohanim / the priestly blessing? It was because of Matan Torah / the Giving of the Torah.

What does this midrash mean? R' Chaim Zvi Teitelbaum z"l (the "Sighetter Rebbe"; died 1926) explains, after noting another question: Why does the

Torah change in mid-verse from plural-"saying to them"-to singular-"May Hashem bless you"?

There are many substances, for example, salt and some spices, which are not edible on their own but which enhance the flavors of other foods. Similarly, there are people who seem to have no redeeming qualities on their own, but they contribute to society as part of a group.

Thus we read later in the Torah (Bemidbar 23:13) that Balak told Bilam (after the latter had failed to curse Bnei Yisrael): "Go now with me to a different place from which you will see [Bnei Yisrael]; however, you will see [the camp's] edge but you will not see all of it." Balak thought that the merit of Bnei Yisrael as a whole prevented Bilam from cursing the Jewish people. However, Balak believed, if Bilam focused on only part of the nation, he would succeed. (Balak would have been correct if not for the special protection that Hashem gave Bnei Yisrael at the time.)

Such is the power of a group. Our Sages teach that whenever ten Jews are present, the Shechinah is present. An individual, however, cannot presume that he is worthy of Hashem's presence. Thus, Birkat Kohanim may be recited only in the presence of a *minyan*. An individual may not merit the blessings of Birkat Kohanim, but, as part of a congregation, he can receive that blessing. This is the message of our verse: Say to them that they can receive the blessing only if they are united as one.

When did Bnei Yisrael demonstrate their unity as a people? At Matan Torah, as we read (19:2), "va'yeechan / Yisrael encamped (singular) there, opposite the mountain." Why is the word "encamped" singular in number? Because, the Sages explain, Bnei Yisrael were "as one man with one heart." Thus, how did Bnei Yisrael merit to receive Birkat Kohanim? It was because of the feeling of unity they achieved at Matan Torah. (Atzei Chaim)

R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (the "Klausenberger Rebbe"; son-in-law of R' Teitelbaum; died 1994) explained our verse similarly, and added: The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that there are three things worthy of our love: Bnei Yisrael, the Torah, and Hashem, and they are dependent on each other. Only one who loves his fellow Jews can love the Torah, and only one who loves the Torah can love Hashem. (Shefa Chaim IV, p. 85) © 2001 Rabbi S. Katz & Project Genesis, Inc.



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