

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Few things in the Torah are more revolutionary than its conception of leadership. Ancient societies were hierarchical. The masses were poor and prone to hunger and disease. They were usually illiterate. They were used by rulers as a means to wealth and power rather than people with individual rights -- a concept born only in the seventeenth century. At times they formed a corvee, a vast conscripted labor force, often used to construct monumental buildings intended to glorify kings. At others they were dragooned into the army to further the ruler's imperial designs.

Rulers often had absolute power of life and death over their subjects. Not only were kings and pharaohs heads of state. They also held the highest religious rank, as children of the gods or demigods themselves. Their power had nothing to do with the consent of the governed. It was seen as written into the fabric of the universe. Just as the sun ruled the sky and the lion ruled the animal realm so kings ruled their populations. That was how things were in nature, and nature itself was sacrosanct.

The Torah is a sustained polemic against this way of seeing things. Not just kings but all of us, regardless of colour, culture, creed or class, are in the image and likeness of G-d. In the Torah G-d summons his special people, Israel, to take the first steps to what might eventually become a truly egalitarian society -- or to put it more precisely, a society in which dignity -- kavod -- does not depend on power or wealth or an accident of birth.

Hence the concept, which we will explore more fully in parshat Korach, of leadership as service. The highest title accorded to Moses in the Torah is that he was eved haShem, "a servant of G-d." His highest praise is that he was "very humble, more so than anyone else on earth" (Num. 12:3). To lead is to serve. Greatness is humility. As the book of Proverbs puts it, "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour" (Prov. 29:23).

The Torah points us in the direction of an ideal world, but it does not assume that we have reached it yet or are within striking distance. The people Moses led, like many of us today, were still prone to ambition, aspiration, vanity, and self-esteem. They still had the

human desire for honour, status and respect. And Moses had to recognise that fact. It would be a major source of conflict in the months and years ahead. It is one of the primary themes of the book of Bamidbar.

Of whom were the Israelites jealous? Most of them did not aspire to be Moses. He was, after all, the man who spoke to G-d and to whom G-d spoke. He performed miracles, brought plagues against the Egyptians, divided the Red Sea, and gave the people water from a rock and manna from heaven. Few would have had the hubris to believe they could do any of these things.

But they did have reason to resent the fact that religious leadership seemed to be confined to one tribe, Levi, and one family within that tribe, the Cohanim, male descendants of Aaron. Now that the tabernacle was to be consecrated and the people were about to begin the second half of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land, there was a real risk of envy and animosity.

That is a constant throughout history. We desire, said Shakespeare, "this man's gift and that man's scope." Aeschylus said, "It is in the character of very few men to honor without envy a friend who has prospered." Goethe warned that although "Hatred is active, and envy passive dislike; there is but one step from envy to hate." Jews should know this in their very bones. We have often been envied, and all too frequently that envy has turned to hate with tragic consequences.

Leaders need to be aware of the perils of envy, especially within the people they lead. This is one of the unifying themes of the long and apparently disconnected parsha of Naso.

In it we see Moshe confronting three potential sources of envy. The first lay within the tribe of Levi. They had reason to resent the fact that priesthood had gone to just one man and his descendants, Aaron, Moses' brother.

The second had to do with individuals who were neither of the tribe of Levi nor of the family of Aaron but who felt that they had the right to be holy in the sense of having a special, intense relationship with G-d in the way that the Cohanim had.

The third had to do with the leadership of the other tribes who might have felt left out of the service of the Tabernacle. We see Moses dealing sequentially with all these potential dangers.

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First he gives each Levitical clan a special role in carrying the vessels, furnishings and framework of the Tabernacle whenever the people journeyed from place to place. The most sacred objects were to be carried by the clan of Kohath. The Gershonites were to carry the cloths, coverings and drapes. The Merarites were to carry the planks, bars, posts and sockets that made up the Tabernacle's framework. Each clan was, in other words, to have a special role in place in the solemn procession as the House of G-d was carried through the desert.

Next he deals with individuals who aspire to a higher level of holiness. This, it seems, is the underlying logic of the Nazirite, the individual who vows to set himself apart for the Lord (Numbers 6:2). He was not to drink wine or any other grape product; he was not to have his hair cut; and he was not defile himself through contact with the dead. Becoming a Nazirite was, it seems, a way of temporarily assuming the kind of set-apartness associated with the priesthood, a voluntary extra degree of holiness. (See Maimonides, *Hilkhot Shemittah ve-Yovel* 13:13.)

Lastly, he turns to the leadership of the tribes. The highly repetitive chapter 7 of our parsha itemizes the offerings of each of the tribes on the occasion of the dedication of the altar. Their offerings were identical, and the Torah could have abbreviated its account by describing the gifts brought by one tribe and stating that each of the other tribes did likewise. Yet the sheer repetition has the effect of emphasizing the fact that each tribe had its moment of glory. Each, by giving to the house of G-d, acquired its own share of honour.

These episodes are not the whole of Naso but enough of it to signal something that every leader and every group needs to take seriously. Even when people accept in principle the equal dignity of all, and even when they see leadership as service, the old dysfunctional passions die hard. People still resent the success of others. They still feel that honour has gone to others when it should have gone to them. Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kappar said: "Envy, lust and the pursuit of honour drive a person out of the world." (*Mishnah Avot* 4:21)

The fact that these are destructive emotions does not stop some people -- perhaps most of us --

feeling them from time to time, and nothing does more to put at risk the harmony of the group.

That is one reason why a leader must be humble. He or she should feel none of these things. But a leader must also be aware that not everyone is humble. Every Moses has a Korach, every Julius Caesar a Cassius, every Duncan a Macbeth, every Othello an Iago. In many groups there is a potential trouble-maker driven by a sense of injury to his self-esteem. These are often a leader's deadliest enemies and they can do great damage to the group.

There is no way of eliminating the danger entirely, but Moses in this week's parsha tells us how to behave. Honour everyone equally. Pay special attention to potentially disaffected groups. Make each feel valued. Give everyone a moment in the limelight if only in a ceremonial way. Set a personal example of humility. Make it clear to all that leadership is service, not a form of status. Find ways in which those with a particular passion can express it, and ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute.

There is no failsafe way to avoid the politics of envy but there are ways of minimizing it, and our parsha is an object lesson in how to do so. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**S**peak to Aaron and his sons saying so shall you bless the children of Israel, say to them: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord cause His Face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord forgive you and grant you peace... And I (the Lord) shall bless them." (Numbers 6:22-27)

In this stirring Biblical passage, the Kohen-Priest, descendants of Aaron the first High Priest are instructed to raise their hands, spread out their fingers in a manner to form the Hebrew letter "shin" for the Divine Name Sha-ddai (Almighty G-d) and so to bless the congregation of praying Israelites.

Here in Israel, the Kohen-Priests rise to fulfill this function every day and in Ashkenazi congregations in the diaspora, every festival service (Rabbi Moshe Isserles, sixteenth century Polish decisor rules that in the Diaspora it is only possible for Jews to feel joy on the Festivals, when the Bible commands us to be joyous, and since the Divine Presence can only be felt in places of joy, the Priestly benediction is limited in the Diaspora to festival prayer services).

As a Kohen-Priest myself, whenever I join my fellow Kohanim to bestow the blessing (and especially when I am joined by some of my children or grandchildren), I am filled with emotions of sanctity and privilege to be participating in a four thousand year old tradition expressing an unbroken DNA lineage which extends backwards to the very first Sanctuary

(Mishkan) service in the desert and will hopefully continue forwards to the Messiah and the long awaited period of world redemption.

But what if a Kohen-Priest has a bodily blemish, caused by a birth defect or the result of an accident or war injury? It would seem from our Torah reading of about a month ago (Emor, Lev.21:15-25), that this would disqualify the Kohen-Priest from officiating in the Sanctuary, which would logically include disqualification from the priestly benediction. Is this fair? Is the Kohen to be punished because he is blind or club-footed?

The Talmud and the Code of Jewish Law explain that the people receiving the blessing must understand that it is G-d and not the Kohen who is giving the blessing. G-d's "presence" is alongside the Kohen, who merely expresses what G-d is doing, so the people must be focused on G-d and not on the individual Kohen (see Avishai David, Rav Soloveitchik on the weekly portion of Naso).

Hence, if the blemish of the Kohen-Priest will distract people from concentrating on G-d, the Kohen-priest must abdicate his function. At the same time, however, the halakhah (Orah Haim 128:30) maintains that if the Kohen is known in the community, if the people are used to seeing people with blemishes, or if the Kohen's blemish is covered with a prayer shawl, the Kohen would certainly be allowed to give the benediction. And this means that in modern times, when our society is endeavoring to integrate people with blemishes and we have become much more accustomed to them, blemished kohanim would not be disqualified.

Many years ago, when I was the young rabbi of a fledgling apartment-synagogue in the Lincoln Center area of Manhattan, a very tall gentleman named Adolph Katz and his two tall sons came for our Passover morning service. Since the last name Katz is usually derived from the two Hebrew words "Kohen tzedek", Righteous Kohen-priest, we offered him the Kohen aliyah, which he accepted with alacrity. But when I then asked him to join us in giving the congregation the Priestly benediction during the repetition of the Mussaf Amidah, he sadly responded that that would be impossible.

"When I first came to America as a very young man, I began my career making and selling toilet bowls", he explained. "As a result of a soldering accident, I lost two fingers. My rabbi at the time told me that I could no longer bless the congregation..." He showed me his hand which was missing the two central fingers. When I explained to him that since he would be covering his fingers with the prayer shawl, he was obligated to join with me in granting the Priestly benediction, he smiled broadly, but then his eyes welled up with tears. "When I left Czechoslovakia, and saw my father for what I knew would be the last time,

he gave me a final blessing. 'Remember, you are a Kohen-priest', he reminded me, 'and you are entrusted with asking G-d to bless Israel with peace. To truly be worthy of such a privilege, you must always keep the Sabbath holy'. And so I was careful never to work on the Sabbath day. But once I was told that I could no longer give the benediction invoking G-d, I began to work on the Sabbath - so in my father's eyes, I'm no longer worthy to participate in the benediction."

I stood up on my tip-toes and hugged him. "Of course you are worthy. You will join me in the blessing and from now on you will keep the Sabbath day holy". We shook hands and for the next eighteen years Adolph Katz served as the "Kohen Gadol" of our congregation. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha the Torah highlights the special role and status of the tribe of Levi. They are counted separately from the rest of the tribes of Israel. Their status in society is that they are engaged in work in the Temple, have their own separate cities distributed throughout the Land of Israel and are to be supported by the tithe (ten percent of the crop produced from the agriculturally based economy of the Jewish society) contributed to their upkeep and economic well being. They are, so to speak, the elite class of the Jewish people, the beneficiaries of the apparently unearned largesse of the working class.

Now, why would the Torah countenance and even prescribe such an uneven societal status? Especially in our time when the current, yet always fleeting, political correctness of society strives for the ultimately equal distribution of wealth and national responsibilities, this Levite exceptionalism seems anachronistic. I imagine that in the current particular expression of demonization, the tribe of Levi would be labeled as being "parasites." And yet the Torah ordains and demands such a societal condition.

The tribe of Levi, which included the descendants of Aharon – the kohanim, was the smallest of all of the tribes of Israel numerically. Their exceptionalism began already in the land of Egypt when they were exempted from the hard labor that was endured by their fellow Jews. Yet we find that there was little opposition recorded in the Torah to this special treatment of the tribe of Levi.

Even Korach, who claimed to be the champion of equal treatment for all Jews, really only wanted to replace Moshe and Aharon with himself and other Levites. I think that all of this has basic relevance to our current Jewish society and its vexing challenges.

Not every one has the opportunity to devote one's self to full-time Torah study or to constant public or religious service. Not everyone has the ability to

create a start-up technological company. Not everyone has the ability or inclination to be a university professor or a medical doctor or technician. Not everyone can be a successful storekeeper or business manager. Yet there is no doubt that our Jewish society here in the state of Israel needs full-time Torah students, religious and social service volunteers and professionals, start-up geniuses and computer geeks, professors, physicians, auto mechanics and all sorts of technicians, plumbers and builders, storekeepers and even rabbis.

In the times of the Temples, the Torah made it easy by classifying, so to speak, who was who and specifically identified the tribe of Levi for constant Torah study and teaching and full-time Temple service. In our current society this process of identification is more difficult, inexact and even confusing. Yet it is basically one of the most important issues that we must successfully deal with.

In the current society we certainly need "Levites" – Jews who are exclusively devoted to Torah study, teaching and public religious service. The problem is in identifying these "Levites" and nurturing them. That is really the core of the issue after all of the political smoke dissipates and wafts into the passing air. ©2014 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The enigmatic process of the sotah (Numbers 5:11-31) is found in this portion of the Torah. Many rationales have been used to explain this concept, but this week I would like to show how the sotah laws (which, actually, due to rampant immorality, soon after the destruction of the Second Temple, were suspended by Rabbi Yohanan Ben Zakki) can explain a comment made by Rabbi Eliezer in Talmud tractate Sotah: "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah teaches her tiflut (sometimes translated as 'obscenity')." (Sotah 3:4)

Although Rabbi Eliezer's dictum is often quoted as a primary source for excluding women from Torah study, an analysis of the talmudic context of Rabbi Eliezer's comment could yield a different conclusion.

A sotah, a woman suspected by her husband of infidelity, was forced to drink bitter waters. If she was guilty, these waters had a devastating physical effect upon her. If she was innocent, the waters had no effect. In fact, if the sotah's husband had himself acted immorally, the bitter waters were inoperative.

Concerning the laws of sotah, the Mishnah states: "If she (the woman accused) has merit, that merit [causes the water] to suspend its effect upon her. Some merit suspends the effect for one year, another for two years, and another for three years. Hence,

declared Ben Azzai, a man is under the obligation to teach his daughter Torah, so that if she has to drink [the waters of bitterness], she may know that the merit of her learning suspends its effect. Then Rabbi Eliezer says: Whoever teaches his daughter Torah teaches her tiflut."

The first three chapters of Tractate Sotah describe how the rabbis use every legal means at their disposal to make it unnecessary for an accused woman to drink the bitter waters for it is preferable that women not drink the sotah waters due to the fact that they may actually be irrelevant to deciding the case of accused adultery.

Ben Azzai feels that this ability to use Torah to ward off the devastation of the bitter waters is advantageous. Therefore he declares that every father should teach his daughter Torah. With that merit, the waters, if ever tasted, would be rendered null and void.

Rabbi Eliezer responds by saying that Torah should not be used for such a purpose. Firstly, it would give women carte blanche to commit immoral acts, knowing that their Torah learning would make them immune to the effects of the bitter waters. Secondly, Rabbi Eliezer may have been saying that using Torah for this type of personal insurance policy would be an outrage and an abuse of the power of Torah.

From this perspective, Rabbi Eliezer's statement is not a sweeping restriction of woman's place in Torah study. The statement rather teaches us the important lesson that while all of us should continue to strive to learn more and reach higher, any Torah learning is valueless unless it is used to enhance our personal morality and foster a closer relationship to G-d. ©2011 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 SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Naso lists the commandment of confessing our sins as part of our Teshuva (repentance) (5:6-7). However, when the Rambam (Maimonides) lists the 613 commandments, this commandment of confession doesn't appear. Why isn't such a seemingly crucial commandment included, according to the Rambam?

Rabbi Twerski quotes the Nesivot Shalom, who explains that not confessing to a sin is in essence perpetuating the sin itself. It's wrong to assume that the act is already done, because if we don't regret it, we're continuously guilty of it. This understanding has far-reaching implications in our lives. If we ever did something wrong, it's not enough to just put it behind us and move on. Rather, we must (1) confront our actions; or (2) decide if it was proper or not. If it wasn't proper, we need to (3) apologize for it, and (4) pledge to never

do it again. Amazingly (but not surprisingly), this very formula works for business relationships, as well as personal relationships between family, friends and even with our inner selves. When we learn to face and embrace our past, we will have learned to deal with our future! © 2014 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd these cursed waters will enter your innards to inflate the stomach and collapse the thigh" (Bamidbar 5:22). Not a pretty sight, to be sure, and one that seems to go against the laws of nature. So much so that the Ramban (5:20) writes: "And behold in all of the Torah's laws there is nothing that depends on a miracle besides this one, which (referring to this miracle) is astonishing and a set miracle that will occur for (the nation of) Israel when most of them are doing the will of G-d."

Ramban's understanding of the consequences of a adulteress drinking the "Sotah waters" follows the traditional approach that if the process is followed through, she (and her paramour, see Rashi on 5:22) will die a horrible death, while if innocent she will be blessed with children from her husband or have an easier or more productive childbirth (see Sotah 26a). There are non-traditional scholars who strip the verses of any miraculous implications, understanding the Sotah process as a means of avoiding or minimizing the long-term consequences of a child being born to a mother whose husband is not confident that he is the father. Rather than the results of the "test" of the "Sotah waters" being whether any unnatural death occurs, the expression "inflated stomach and fallen thigh" refers to a miscarriage and the expression "she will produce seed" (5:28) means that she will give birth. In other words, if there was any infidelity, the child she is carrying will not survive, while if the only person she was intimate with was her husband, it will. This way, any child born to a woman whose husband suspects that the child is not his can now be confident that it really is. It also prevents any horrific treatment of a suspected adulteress by providing a sanctioned process for the husband (and/or the community) to vent his anger. (This last point is true of the traditional approach as well.)

As with much of the overly simplistic suggestions of non-traditional scholars and so-called bible critics, this explanation doesn't stand up to closer scrutiny. If the "inflated stomach" refers to pregnancy and the "fallen thigh" refers to a miscarriage, then the pregnancy must obviously come first, yet the first time the expression is used (5:21), the "fallen thigh" precedes the "inflated stomach." Even if the "inflated stomach" refers to something happening inside her that causes the miscarriage, it would still have to come before the "thigh falls," i.e. the miscarriage. Although it

is laudable to provide a more humane way of dealing with suspected adulterers than might have been the prevailing custom in ancient civilization (and unfortunately still practiced in some cultures), if the consequence of not admitting to having sinned is "only" the loss of an inappropriately conceived child, there is little motivation to avoid getting into such a predicament, or to admit wrongdoing so that the Sotah process can be avoided. Nor are there any consequences for her paramour (whereas according to the traditional understanding, they both would suffer embarrassing and severely painful deaths). Additionally, if the process was not divinely designed and the results divinely administered, even if the husband would now think the child is his, the wife would know whether or not she was faithful; a successful childbirth would make the religion a mockery in her eyes. Even if some would keep it to themselves rather than admit they were unfaithful just to dispel disproved religious myths, eventually the truth would come out. Therefore, as appealing as such an explanation of the text might be, the traditional understanding of the severe, frighteningly miraculous consequences (under the right circumstances) is much more palatable.

There is one aspect of the miraculous nature of the Sotah process, at least the way it's described by the Ramban, that deserves a closer look. How can the Ramban say that "in all of the Torah's laws there is nothing that depends on a miracle besides this one," if he himself, describing the "tzora'as" that afflicts clothing and houses (Vayikra 13:47), says "this does not appear in nature at all." That "the rain coming in its proper time" when we keep the Torah (Vayikra 26:4) or not coming at all if we don't (26:19) is also miraculous is not an issue, as these are what the Ramban describes (B'reishis 17:1 and elsewhere) as "hidden miracles," because rain (and lack of rain) occurs naturally, so even though it is "miraculous" when it occurs as a matter of reward or punishment via divine intervention, it is not an obvious miracle. What happens to a guilty Sotah, on the other hand, is an obvious miracle. However, if the "tzora'as" that afflicts clothing and houses does not occur naturally, why isn't it in the same category as the Sotah process?

Although Ramban categorizes these forms of "tzora'as" as miraculous (since they "do not occur naturally"), their appearance is not part of a "test" regarding the righteousness of the garment/homeowner. It may be the result of sin, but it did not occur as part of a process to test whether or not there was sin. When Sh'muel called for a thunderstorm during the wheat harvest (during which time it never rains) to prove that the people had sinned by asking for a king (Sh'muel I 12:17-18), and when the fire came down on Eliyahu's altar on Mt. Carmel (M'lachim 18:38) to prove Who is the One True G-d, they were not only miraculous, but were also done within the context of a

test. This is not the case regarding "tzora'as," so aside from the possibility of being able to attribute it to mold, or to some naturally-occurring phenomenon that we were previously unaware of (thereby minimizing the impact of it "not occurring in nature"), its appearance in a non-test environment precludes it from being considered a "set miracle." It might be miraculous, and it might be supernatural, but it is not a miracle that can be reliably repeated (i.e. testing to see if the house of a sinner gets it). The Sotah process, on the other hand, when it is followed through, does include a "set miracle," and depends on it as the basis for the Sotah process, setting it apart from every other "Torah law."

As I have previously discussed (<http://rabbidmk.wordpress.com/2012/10/11/parashas-bereishis-5773/>), the Creator avoids doing anything outside the laws of nature whenever possible. The Talmud (Shabbos 116a, and elsewhere) discusses how important "shalom bayis," harmony between husband and wife, is, as indicated by G-d allowing His name to be erased (dissolved in the Sotah waters) in order to make peace between them. Resorting to a "set miracle" for the Sotah process, something not done anywhere else in the Torah, further illustrates how high a priority it is. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah shares with us an incredible perspective on sanctity and self control. The focus of the haftarah is the heavenly message sent to the pious Manoach and his wife informing them of her miraculous conception of a special son, Shimshon. Manoach's wife, a righteous woman who was barren for many years was suddenly informed by an angel that she would bear a child. She was also given specific instructions during pregnancy restricting her from all wine and wine-related products. She was informed that her son would be dedicated to Hashem from the day he was born and could never shave off his hair. The angel also stated that Hashem would bring much salvation to the Jewish people through this precious boy.

This is the first chapter in the life of the famous Jewish leader, Shimshon. However, in the subsequent chapters of his life we discover the life's trials of the most perplexing leader in all of Jewish history. On the one hand, Shimshon was a powerful and effective judge who maintained the highest ethical standard. In fact, our Chazal (Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana 2:8) place Shimshon amongst the greatest of all Jewish judges paralleling him, in some ways, to Moshe Rabbeinu himself. Shimshon also merited that the Divine Presence of Hashem preceded him to secure his every step with success. And it was solely in Shimshon's merit that Hashem constantly protected the Jewish nation (see Sota 9b, 10a). Yet, at the same time we discover a man succumbing to physical passions being

constantly enticed by Philistine women. Eventually Shimshon fell prey to the persuasion of his Philistine wife Delila and forfeited all his sanctity and greatness. How can this glorious, yet so tragic life be understood and explained and what can be learned from this perplexing story? (See Derech Bina to Shoftim by Rabbi Avrohom Shoshana)

We begin with the words of the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 10:5) in explanation of Shimshon's unique experience of Nezirus (restriction from wine). In general, one accepts the abstentions of a Nazir for a period of a month or two but never for an entire lifetime. This week's parsha reveals that the purpose for the short restrictive period of Nazirus was to serve as a model lesson for life. Typically, the Nazir briefly abstained from certain mundane activities to gain control over his physical passions and cravings. This was obviously not the case for Shimshon who was obligated in Nezirus since his birth. The above Midrash clarifies this matter and states, "Hashem, knowing that Shimshon's nature would be to stray after his eyes, restricted him from wine which leads to immorality." Chazal continue, "And if Shimshon albeit a Nazir did stray after his eyes one could only imagine what would have happened without the restriction of wine." Our Chazal share with us an important insight into the life of Shimshon. Apparently, his nature and consequent role in life revolved around an attraction to women and it was intended for the Nezirus restriction to hold him back from sin.

To put this into perspective we refer to the words of the Radak (Shoftim 13:4) which explain the setting of Shimshon's times. Radak explains that the Jewish people's devotion to Hashem had severely fallen during those times. Because of this they did not merit total salvation by Hashem and remained under Philistine rule throughout this entire era. However, the Philistines deserved to be revenged for their harsh rule over the Jews and for this reason Hashem sent Shimshon to the scene. The Scriptures indicate (see Shoftim 14:4) that it was the will of Hashem that Shimshon mingle with the Philistines to cause them pain and strife from within their very own camp. It can be understood that for this reason Hashem actually sanctioned, in principle, Shimshon's marriage to Philistine women, given their conversion to Judaism. Although they did actually convert (see Radak adloc. and Rambam Isurai Beiah 14:14) the potential did exist for Shimshon to be influenced by their foreign ideals and allegiances of their past.

In essence, Hashem provided Shimshon with the appropriate nature for his role and he was naturally attracted to the Philistine women he encountered. This allowed Shimshon to be regarded as one of the Philistines and set the stage for a perfect inside job. The Radak explains that Shimshon's motive of bonding with Philistine Jewish converts to secretly attack the

Philistine nation was a proper motive. However, this powerful drive to marry Philistine women served as a double-edged sword. And when Shimshon added to his pure motive small degrees of attraction to beauty his actions were disqualified. Granted that the overwhelming percentage of his motivation was proper and pure, nonetheless a subtle attraction to Philistine women's beauty did accompany his thoughts. Eventually this soft physical drive overtook Shimshon, and after succumbing to his wife's seduction, lost his pure motives and forfeited all of his sanctity and greatness.

We now appreciate Shimshon's lifelong abstention period of Nezirus and its projected impact on his personal conduct. This perpetual state was intended to serve as an anchor for Shimshon to control and subdue his physical urges and steer him away from immorality. The comprehensive picture drawn from our haftorah is the following. Shimshon was ordained to live a life of sanctity from the moment of conception until the end of his life. His parents carefully protected him from all impurities and raised him in a perfect atmosphere of sanctity. This childhood groomed him to be a perfect candidate for the constant manifestation of the Divine Presence itself. However, as we painfully discover none of the above guarantees one from foreign immoral influences. And when, alongside the purest of motives, one includes physical drives and passions the result can be devastating. Even the pure Shimshon was then prone to plunging deeply into immorality and open to forfeiting all that life had in store for him. From this we learn the importance of pure motives and that any degree of intended personal gratification can undo all the good we seek to accomplish. ©2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Respectful Repeats

One of the most striking components of Parshas Naso is the listing of all the princes, the nesi'im, of the Children of Israel, and the gift offerings that they brought in conjunction with the dedication of the Mishkan.

Despite the fact that each and every nasi brought the same gift as his predecessor, the Torah details each offering with exactitude: it does not skimp on detail or abbreviate its significance.

Over and over again, the Torah meticulously states the name of the nasi, the tribe he headed, and the gift that he brought.

"He brought his offering -- one silver bowl, its weight a hundred and thirty [shekels]; and one silver basin of seventy shekels in the sacred shekel; both of them filled with fine flour mixed with oil for a meal-offering, one gold ladle of ten [shekels] filled with incense. One young bull, one ram, one sheep in its first year for an elevation offering. One he-goat for a sin-

offering. And for a feast peace-offering -- two cattle, five rams, five he-goats, five sheep in their first year... this is the offering of..."

These verses are repeated in tandem for each and every prince -- their identical offerings exacted as if they were the only ones.

The Torah, which can consolidate laws that fill expansive Talmudic tomes into merely a few brief words, chose to elaborate expansively in order to give each nasi his place in the eternal spotlight of the Torah's wisdom. Why?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, in the first book of his classic Maggid Series, relates the story of Rav Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor, the Kovno Rav. Under Russian law, all young men were obliged to enlist in the army. Besides the obvious ubiquitous threat of violent death, maintaining any semblance of religious observance in the army was virtually impossible. The only way out was an exemption from army service.

Yaakov, a student who was much beloved by his rebbi, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, applied for an exemption. Moscow did not immediately respond to the request, and each day Yaakov's friends, together with their beloved Rebbe, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, waited to hear any news of whether Yaakov's exemption was accepted.

One afternoon, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon was engrossed in a Rabbinic litigation. He sat together with Rav Elya Boruch Kamai, the Rav of Mir, and a third distinguished Rav. They were litigating a complex problem involving two wealthy businessmen. Both side was willing to compromise, and for hours the three Rabbis attempted to find an amicable yet halachically acceptable resolution.

Suddenly, the door opened and a young man stuck his head into the room. As soon as he saw Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, he excitedly addressed him. "Rebbi!" he exclaimed. "We just got the news, Yaakov was granted an exemption!" Rav Yitzchak Elchonon breathed a sigh of relief and said with a radiant smile, as he showered him with blessings. "May G-d bless you for bringing this wonderful news. May you merit long years and good health. Thank you ever so much!"

The boy left smiling, glad that he had made his rebbi so happy. Immediately the Rabbis resumed deliberations in an attempt to resolve the din Torah.

A few minutes later, another student opened the door. Not knowing that his rebbi already knew the news, he apologized for interrupting saying he had something very important to share. Then he announced with joy, "Rebbi, we've gotten word that Yaakov is exempt!"

Rav Yitzchak Elchonon replied with just as much enthusiasm as he had the first time. "How wonderful!" He showered him with blessings as well. "May G-d bless you for bringing this wonderful news. May you merit long years and good health. Thank you

ever so much!"

The boy closed the door and left, beaming with joy that he had made his rebbi so happy.

Five minutes later, yet a third boy entered the room. "Rebbi, did you hear? Yaakov is exempt!" Once again Rav Yitzchak Elchonon smiled broadly and blessed the boy for the wonderful news. He thanked him and blessed him in the exact manner as with the previous boys.

Six times, different boys came in with the same news, each one anticipating the happiness their rebbi would feel at the news, each one not aware that others had preceded him. Rav Yitzchak Elchonon smiled at each boy, expressed his gratitude and made him feel as important as the first one.

The Ponovez Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Eliezer Schach, of blessed memory, once explained in a talk to his students that the attention to the honor of a fellow Jew is one of the most important lessons we can learn. Therefore the Torah repeated and repeated each and every Nasi with the same enthusiasm to teach us the importance of respect for the individual.

And now that the story of the repetitive princes was incorporated into the Torah, the lesson of individual attention, too, becomes not just a lesson in morality, but a portion of the Torah, whose study merits the same value as the most intricate laws that are contained in the most difficult portions. Because a lesson about honoring a fellow Jew is surely worth repeating. © 2014 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

One of the laws in this week's parashah is that of the "Nazir." This section is introduced with the words: "Ish or ishah ki yafli" / "A man or a woman who shall disassociate himself..." R' Avraham ibn Ezra z"l (1089-1164) observes that the word "yafli" also can mean: "Who does wonders." He explains that a nazir, who disassociates him or herself from wine, is doing something wondrous--unlike the typical person, who is controlled by the pursuit of pleasure.

R' Simcha Bunim Alter z"l (1898-1992; fifth Gerrer Rebbe) adds that the section of nazir teaches us how G-d helps one who undertakes to improve himself. Becoming a nazir is a wondrous thing--indeed, it is nearly impossible to be around people who are enjoying normal pleasures and to refrain from partaking. Nevertheless, because the nazir undertakes sincerely to be different, Hashem helps him. The Gerrer Rebbe adds: The same thing is true of any person who wants to change himself. Once one makes a sincere commitment to change--even if change appears impossible--Hashem will help.

This week's parashah is always read on either the Shabbat before or (more commonly) the Shabbat after Shavuot. The idea that Hashem desires our

sincere commitments is closely tied to the holiday of the Giving of the Torah. How so? The Tosafot to Avodah Zarah (3a) teach that, although we are taught that the heavens and earth can exist only if we study Torah, in fact it is our sincere commitment to study, rather than the actual study itself, that keeps the world going. (Pardes Yosef)

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"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'A man or woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem'." (6:2)

Rashi z"l writes: "Why is the section dealing with the Nazirite placed adjacent to the section dealing with the sotah? To teach that one who sees a sotah in her disgrace should abstain from wine, because wine may lead to immoral behavior."

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) writes that there is broader lesson here: Everything that we see

Parsha Puns!

**U may think I'm NA ZIRious but
NASO fast-it iZ AVery serious
thing & DIS TEND\$ 2 get a bit
HAIRy! Take my adVOICE &
have a PEACEful Shabbos!**

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during our lives is a mirror placed there by Divine Providence in which to see ourselves. If a person happens to be in the Bet Hamikdash at just the right moment to see a sotah's disgrace, he should know that he was sent there to witness that event as warning to him that he is at risk of behaving immorally and needs to take precautions. The same is true any time one Jew sees another Jew commit any sin. (AleI Shur I p.137) © 2014 S. Katz & torah.org

