

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

I confess to a thrill every time I read these words: "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to 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 grant you peace.'" "Let them put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." (Numbers 6:23-27)

These are among the oldest continuously-used words of blessing ever. We recite them daily at the beginning of the morning service. Some say them last thing at night. We use them to bless our children on Friday nights. They are often used to bless the bride and groom at weddings. They are widely used by non-Jews also. Their simplicity, their cumulative three-word, five-word, seven-word structure, their ascending movement from protection to grace to peace, all make them a miniature gem of prayer whose radiance has not diminished in the more than three thousand years since their formulation.

In previous years I have written about the meaning of the blessings. This time I ask three different questions: First, why Priests? Why not Prophets, Kings, Sages or saints?

Second, why the unique form of the birkat hamitzvah, the blessing made by the Priests over the commandment to bless the people? The blessing is, "who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron and commanded us to bless His people with love." (Sotah 39a, Sefer ha-Chinnuch.) No other blessing over a command specifies that it be done with love.

There is an argument in the Talmud as to whether commands must be performed with the proper intent, kavannah, or whether the deed itself is enough. But intent is different from motive. Intent merely means that I am performing the command because it is a

command. I am acting consciously, knowingly, deliberately, in obedience to the Divine will. It has nothing to do with an emotion like love. Why does this command and no other require love?

Third, why have human beings bless the people at all? It is God who blesses humanity and His people Israel. He needs no human intermediary. Our passage says just this: "Let them put My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." The blessings come not from the Priests but from God Himself. So why require the Priests to "put His name" on the people?

In answer to the first, Sefer ha-Hinnuch (Section 378) says simply that the Priests were the sacred group within the people. They ministered in the House of God. They spent their lives in Divine service. Their life's work was sacred. So was their habitat. They were the guardians of holiness. They were therefore the obvious choice for the sacred rite of bringing down God's blessings upon the people.

Rabbi Aharon Walkin, in the preface to his *Matsa Aharon*, offered a more prosaic explanation. The Priests had no share in the land. Their sole income was from the mattenot kehunah, the gifts of the Priests, that was their due from the people as a whole. It followed that they had an interest in the people prospering, because then they, too, would prosper. They would bless the people with a full heart, seeking their good, because they would benefit thereby.

Rabbi Avraham Gafni offered a third explanation. (Be-Inyan Birkat Cohanim, *Zachor le Avraham*, 1996, 523-531) We read that on the consecration of the Tabernacle, "Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them" (Lev. 9:22). Rashi says that the blessing he gave the people on that occasion was indeed the priestly blessing as specified in our parsha. However, Ramban suggests that perhaps Aaron's blessing was spontaneous, and because he showed such generosity of spirit, he was given by God the reward that it would be his descendants who would bless Israel in future.

What then about the reference in the blessing to love? There are two different interpretations: that the reference is to the Priests, or that the reference is to God.

The second reverses the word order of the blessing and reads it not as "who commanded us to bless His people with love," but rather, "who in love commanded us to bless His people." The blessing

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לעלוי נשמת
Mrs. Ida Weisberg ע"ה
חיה פייגא בת יעקב יוסף ז"ל
on her 26th yartzeit
נפטרת יז סיון תשנ"ד
תנצב"ה

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speaks of God's love, not that of the Priests. Because God loves His people, He commands the Priests to bless them. (Rabbi Yerucham Perla, commentary to R Saadia Gaon, Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, 16.)

The first reading, grammatically more plausible, is that it is the Priests who must love. This is the basis of the statement in the Zohar that "a Priest who does not love the people, or a Priest who is not loved by the people, may not bless." (Zohar III, 147b; see Magen Avraham, 128:18) We can only bless what we love. Recall how the blind and aged Isaac said to Esau, "Prepare me the tasty food that I love and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die" (Gen. 27:4). Whether it was the food that Isaac loved, or what it represented about Esau's character -- that he cared enough for his father to find him the food he liked -- Isaac needed the presence of love to be able to make the blessing.

Why then does the blessing for this mitzvah and no other specify that it must be done with love? Because in every other case it is the agent who performs the ma'aseh mitzvah, the act that constitutes the command. Uniquely in the case of the priestly blessings, the Priest is merely a machshir mitzvah -- an enabler, not a doer. The doer is God Himself: "Let them place My name on the children of Israel and I will bless them." The Kohanim are merely channels through which God's blessings flow.

This means that they must be selfless while uttering the blessings. We let God into the world and ourselves to the degree that we forget ourselves and focus on others. (Sotah 5a: "Any person who has arrogance within him, the Holy One, Blessed be He, said: He and I cannot dwell together in the world.")

That is what love is. We see this in the passage in which Jacob, having fallen in love with Rachel, agrees to Laban's terms: seven years of work. We read: "So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:20). The commentators ask the obvious question: precisely because he was so much in love, the seven years should have felt like a century. The answer is equally obvious: he was thinking of her, not him. There was nothing selfish in his love. He was focused on her presence, not his impatient desire.

There is, though, perhaps an alternative explanation for all these things. As I explained in

Covenant and Conversation Acharei Mot -- Kedoshim, the ethic of character.

The key text of the holiness ethic is Leviticus 19: "Be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy." It is this chapter that teaches the two great commands of interpersonal love, of the neighbour and the stranger. The ethic of holiness, taught by the Priests, is the ethic of love. This surely is the basis of Hillel's statement, "Be like the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving people and bringing them close to Torah." (Mishnah Avot 1:12)

That ethic belongs to the specific vision of the Priest, set out in Genesis 1, which sees the world as God's work and the human person as God's image. Our very existence, and the existence of the universe, are the result of God's love.

By blessing the people, the Priests showed them what love of one's fellow is. Here is Rambam's definition of what it is to 'love your neighbour as yourself': "One should speak in praise of his neighbour, and be considerate of his money, even as he is considerate of his own money, or desires to preserve his own honour." (Rambam, Hilchot Deot 6:3) Blessing the people showed that you sought their good -- and seeking their good is what loving them means.

Thus the Kohanim set an example to the people by this public display of love -- or what we would call today "the common good." They thus encouraged a society in which each sought the welfare of all -- and such a society is blessed, because the bonds between its members are strong, and because people put the interests of the nation as a whole before their own private advantage. Such a society is blessed by God, whereas a selfish society is not, and cannot, be blessed by God. No selfish society has survived for long.

Hence our answers to the questions: why the Kohanim? Because their ethic emphasised love -- of neighbour and stranger -- and we need love before we can bless. Love is mentioned in the blessing over the commandment, because love is how blessings enter the world. And why have human beings bestow the blessing, instead of God doing so Himself? Because the Kohanim were to be role models of what it is for humans to care for the welfare of others. I believe that Birkat Kohanim contains a vital message for us today: A society whose members seek one another's welfare is holy, and blessed. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l © 2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

This week's reading of Naso describes the "Sota," the woman who acts immodestly. At the very least, she sequesters herself alone with a man despite the fact that her husband warned her against seeing

that person. She therefore undergoes the test of the bitter waters. However, during the spring holiday period, we saw two other women – great heroines of our people, Esther (Purim) and Ruth (Shavuot) who also commit immodest acts, for which they are ultimately praised and through which salvation and redemption are brought about. Let us revisit their stories to see how they differ from that of the Sota.

Both heroines compromise their modesty and perhaps even their chastity, Esther with Ahasuerus in the palace of the king and Ruth with Boaz on the threshing floor in Efrat. Moreover, both of these outstanding women hail from gentile countries of exile and one even from gentile stock: Esther from Persia and Ruth from Moab.

But here is where the comparisons end. Although each of these two women undergoes a profound, existential change, a switch in direction with profound ramifications, they part company in very significant ways.

Esther seems to have been an assimilating Jewess who was eager to become the Queen of Persia. She used her Persian name – from the pagan goddess Astarte – rather than her Hebrew name Hadassah; she is taken for the nighttime beauty contest and undergoes a 12-month preparatory beauty treatment without protest. She even concurs with Mordecai (her cousin, or even perhaps her husband as the midrash suggests) not to reveal her national heritage (lest she be rejected on the grounds that she is Jewish – see the suggestion, albeit rejected by the Ibn Ezra).

It is only when Mordecai publicly demonstrates in front of the king's gate in sackcloth and ashes against Haman's decree to annihilate the Jews of Persia, bidding Esther to "come out of the closet," as it were, and go before the king on behalf of her people, that Esther puts her life on the line. By doing so, she becomes one of the greatest penitents of Jewish history.

The words Mordecai uses to convince Esther have reverberated throughout Jewish history: "Do not imagine in your soul that you will be able to escape in the king's palace any more than the rest of the Jews. For if you persist in keeping silent at a time like this, relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether it was just for a time such as this that you attained the royal position" (Esther 5:13,14).

The Jews in Shushan gather for three days of prayer and fasting, Esther persuades the king to allow the Jews to protect themselves during the Persian "pogrom" against them, Haman and his sons are killed, and the Jewish community survives.

The Talmud (B.T. Megila 14a) rules that despite all the other festivities, Hallel (psalms of praise)

is not to be chanted on Purim; since "we still remained slaves to Ahasuerus" – and an Ahmadinejad can still become a replacement for Haman.

Esther, was born of Jewish parents but married the gentile Ahasuerus: Ruth was a Moabite, she followed Naomi to the Land of Israel, changing geographically and existentially by converting to Judaism. Her ancestor Lot had defected from Abraham when he left Israel and moved to Sodom, now she repaired this by becoming a second Abraham.

Like our forefather, she left her birthplace and homeland for the Land of Israel, a strange nation and the God of ethical monotheism. In her own words, "Where you go, I will go" (to the Land of Israel) – "your nation will be my nation, your God shall be my God" (Ruth 1:16).

In the deepest sense, Ruth entered Abraham's "Covenant between the Parts" (Genesis 15). God promised Abraham that he would be an eternal nation, his seed would never be destroyed and his descendants would live in their homeland, Israel and through this nation, "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:1). This is far more than the survival of the Jews in Persia; this is world redemption.

Hence Naomi sends Ruth to the threshing floor to seduce Boaz, to bear his Jewish seed, just as Tamar, the widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi's ancestor Judah the son of Jacob, had seduced her father-in-law in order to bear his seed (Gen. 38).

But Ruth is not satisfied. She understands that Jewish eternity is linked to two crucial components: Jewish seed in the land of Israel. She doesn't consummate their relationship on the threshing floor; she asks him to "redeem" her, to buy back Naomi's familial inheritance and to marry her "in accordance with the law of Moses and Israel" so that her descendants can be Jews in the Jewish homeland.

Through their actions, Esther succeeded in gaining a respite in persecution, which is the most we can hope for in galut (exile). Ruth succeeded in entering Jewish eternity, the Abrahamic Covenant, and due to her compassionate righteousness and loving-kindness toward Naomi she became the herald of Jewish redemption. Her journey leads to the day when the nations of the world will join the family of Abraham, father of a multitude of nations. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Naso delineates the Terumah (tithe) that goes to the Kohen, and that the tithe "brought to the Kohen shall be his" (5:9-10). However, the word "his" is ambiguous, as it can refer to the Kohen or the donor. While it's clear from the context and commentaries that the tithe does belong to the Kohen, why would the Torah use a vague term to express this

rule?

While Rashi quotes an explanation that the donor has the discretion to whom the tithe goes (hence the term "his" to control), Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky suggests a fantastic and relevant perspective. He explains that while the donation belongs to the Kohen, the act of giving is forever the donor's. The more we give to others, not only do we benefit them, but we ourselves become better people as givers, and the self-improvement is everlasting. ©2020 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

When the Torah describes the count of the tribe of Levi, at the onset of this week's reading, it uses the expression "raise the head of the tribe of Levi." At first glance this is a strange way of to present the matter. The Torah should say directly, "count the tribe of Levi." By using the expression "raise the head" the Torah communicates to us a subtle but vital lesson. And that is that pure numbers by themselves are insufficient when we wish to appreciate the value of tribes, groups, or individuals. For if that group or individual does not have a sense of pride, a sense of mission and purpose, then numbers alone, in the long run, are almost worthless.

The Levites were assigned a special role in Jewish society and temple service. They were also to be the teachers of Israel and, perhaps just as importantly, the role models for Jewish generations and public service. It is no accident of random choice that the greatest public servant the world has ever known, our teacher Moshe, was a Levite. Because, unless leadership feels the impetus of mission and exalted responsibility upon itself, it can never achieve the fulfillment of its assigned task.

This can only be accomplished by raising one's head, by having a sense of pride and self-worth and an individual commitment to excellence in the performance of one's duties and obligations, be they personal or societal. By using the phrase, "raise the head," the Torah emphasizes to us the correct and eternal way of assessing human numbers and accomplishments.

Modesty and humility are necessary traits for all of us and they are extremely necessary for those who find themselves in positions of public leadership, spiritual guidance, and education. Yet, in these areas of human character, like in all other areas of thought and behavior, a proper sense of balance is required. Our teacher Moshe is the most humble and self-effacing of all human beings, yet he realizes that he is Moshe, that his face shines with Godly eternity and that upon him lies the responsibility for preserving the Jewish people and their loyalty to Torah. Therefore, his head is raised while at the same time his inner self retains the humility that characterizes his nature. This is

a very delicate balancing act and many a potentially great leader has failed because of an excess of pride, on one hand, and meekness on the other.

We find for instance that King Saul was reprimanded by the prophet Samuel for being overly modest and therefore weak in his response to public pressure. The prophet said to him, "You may be small in your own eyes, but you are the head and leader of the tribes of Israel." Throughout history all of us, and especially those that find themselves in roles of familial, social, educational, and religious leadership are challenged by this exquisite balancing act -- how to have a humble heart and a raised head at one and the same time, a demand that the Torah places upon us. ©2020 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

An old rabbinic joke tells of a young man who requested to become a Kohen (Jewish priest). When the board of the congregation refused, the young man offered several million dollars to attain this important status. The board gave in. Days later, the congregation's rabbi approached the young man, "I know you wanted to become a Kohen, but a million dollars, isn't that a bit much? Why were you so desperate to become a Kohen?" "I'll tell you," the young man said, "my father was a Kohen, my grandfather was a Kohen – so I figured why shouldn't I become a Kohen as well!"

Of course, being a Kohen is built in. You're either born a Kohen or not. But in this week's portion, the Torah discusses the laws of the nazir who, on a certain level, can be viewed as a person who decides to assume similar responsibilities to that of a Kohen. (Numbers 6:1-21)

For example, much like a Kohen, the nazir is not permitted to have any contact with the dead. Additionally, as there are restrictions on a Kohen's alcohol intake while serving in the Temple, a nazir is enjoined from drinking wine. And, much like a High Priest is restricted from doing with his hair as he wishes (i.e., he may not dishevel his hair), a nazir is forbidden to cut his hair. (Leviticus 10:9; 21:1,2,10,11)

Life in many ways is the sum total of our being in a particular place at a particular time. Corresponding to these realms there surfaces in Judaism three categories of holiness, sometimes coming from God, and sometimes initiated by humans:

Kedushat gavra – holiness of person: This realm of holiness can be divided into two—the holiness of a person endowed by God, like a Kohen. There is also the holiness of the person which emerges from the self – like a nazir who decides to assume priestly type

responsibilities.

Kedushat makom – holiness of place: There is a place, the Holy Temple (and for that matter, all of Jerusalem) which is holy because its sanctity comes from God, from the Shechinah itself. As the Shechinah is eternal, so the Temple's holiness forever. Yet, there are other places whose holiness stems from human input like the holiness of a synagogue. It is as holy as we make it.

Kedushat Zman – holiness of time: There is a holy day, the Shabbat, made holy by God, irrespective of human contribution. And there is the holiness of the holidays whose dates are declared by humans, by the Jewish court.

The challenge is to make all of life holy: for every day to become like Shabbat, for all places to become holy; and for every person to become priestly.

Unlike our rabbinic anecdote, it doesn't cost anything. It requires a commitment to reach spiritually high, to reach for kedushah. ©2020 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 DAVID LEVIN

The Blessing Through the Kohanim

Whenever I see the Birkat Kohanim in Parashas Naso I remember my dear father-in-law, Tzvi Hirsch ben Yaakov Yosef HaKohen, a"h, and the excitement he had as every Yomtov approached in anticipation of his opportunity to serve Hashem in the performance of this mitzvah. Living outside of Israel did not afford him the opportunity of blessing the congregation every day as we do in Eretz Yisrael. I would like to dedicate this drasha in his memory and may his neshama have an aliyah.

Many questions are asked about Birkat Kohanim and the role of the Kohen in this mitzvah. First one could question the purpose of the brachot. Perhaps it is to serve as a blessing for the Tzadikim, the righteous. But they are already blessed in Parashat Bechukotai where those that keep the mitzvot are promised a reward by Hashem. Is the bracha then for the Resha'im, the evil ones? But we are already told in Bechukotai that those who do not perform the mitzvot will be punished. How can they then be blessed? But even those who sin can be forgiven by Hashem as we shall see in the third blessing. The blessings and curses that we find in Bechukotai refer to the nation as a whole and to the nation which serves Hashem or rejects this responsibility. The blessings of the Birkat Kohanim are blessings on the individual.

Is the Kohen free to choose to bless or not to bless the people? There are three commandments

involved in the process of blessing the people. The Torah states, "Like this you will bless the Children of Israel." The Torah continues, "It is to be said to them". After the three b'rachot the Torah states, "And they will place my name on the Children of Israel". Any Kohen who refuses to bless the people has therefore sinned three times. The Gemara Sotah (38b) says that a Kohen who never blesses the people has created in people's minds that he is a disqualified Kohen (married to a divorcee or damaged physically that would prohibit him from serving while damaged in the Temple). But the Kohen is not the one who blesses the people; it is Hashem. The Kohen is not permitted to bless the people in any way other than as prescribed by Hashem.

Harav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch described the special responsibility of the Kohen in this process. "It is not the authority to bless the children of Israel which is here conferred to the Kohanim, but a duty which is given them to perform. The blessing of the priests does not flow from their well-wishing, their benevolence, but it is part and parcel of their service to the Sanctuary." It is considered part of the avodah (service), and for that reason the Gemara brings down the halacha that any Kohen who does not begin moving towards the "duchan, raised platform" before the bracha of R'tzei, the bracha of avodah, may not participate in the blessing of the people. In addition, the Kohen is not the initiator of the blessing. The people to be blessed are an essential element in this process. The Kohen cannot begin his bracha until he is summoned by the chazzan hakeneset, the person in the shul who has the leadership role of calling the Kohanim. An exception to this rule is when a single Kohen is present, since calling him out alone might imply that he has a certain power or influence in the bracha itself. In Ashkenazic shuls, each word is recited by the shaliach tzibur before it is said by the Kohanim. The Kohanim appear to be no more than a passive group carrying out the dictates of the people.

The blessing itself consists of three separate blessings. The first bracha is "May Hashem bless you and guard you." This blessing is generally described as a blessing on the material things that we possess. Hashem blesses us with the skills we need to do our jobs well and the livelihood which we need to survive. Hashem can give us these gifts but they must be guarded so that they are not lost or stolen. The second bracha is, "May Hashem make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you." This is generally interpreted to be a blessing on a person's spiritual being. Hashem shines his light on you so that you will have knowledge of Him and become closer to Him. You should also understand the importance of the laws which He has given in order to serve Him. The third bracha is, "May Hashem raise up His face unto you and give you Peace." This bracha is a combination of the two previous brachot. Hashem raises up His face in

lovingness and forgiveness. Here the combination of spiritual gifts and material gifts are both directed to the Will of Hashem and used in the way in which He has revealed to us.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin brings a Midrash to explain the connection between the Kohanim and Avraham concerning the brachot of the Kohanim. HaRav Sorotzkin asks by what merit would the Kohanim bless the people rather than Hashem directly. There is a connection between the words said to Avraham, "like this (koh) will be your children" and the command to the Kohanim, "like this (koh) you will bless the B'nei Yisrael." Avraham had asked Hashem, "What will you give me, and I am going childless?" Avraham did not plead with Hashem for children as that promise had already been made to him. His plea concerned the quality of those children. Hashem had told him, "I will place your children like the dust of the land." Avraham said, "if my children will disappoint you and become like dust that others will walk over them and disperse them around the world, it would be better if I am going childless." Hashem then took Avraham outside and pointed to the stars and said, "like this will be your children." The blessing as stars was not only about the number of the B'nei Yisrael but its quality that they would be above all and shine on the world. This blessing is reflected in the blessing from the Kohanim. There the material and spiritual combine to serve the Will of Hashem, and it is through that blessing that Man can rise above and shine on the world.

We are often at a loss to comprehend how we can improve the world and fulfill our unique task for which we were created. We may not even understand what that task could possibly be. The blessings of the Kohanim are there to guide us. As we study the Torah, we become familiar with what Hashem desires from us. As we receive both material and spiritual blessings from Hashem, we understand that we must use both to serve Hashem. It is through our service to Hashem that we accomplish our unique task, for we each choose to emphasize our own strengths as we serve Him. Those strengths are our unique tasks. May we each find our own strengths and our special way of serving Hashem. © 2020 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Meshivas Nafesh

"On the second day, Nesanel ben Tzu'ar, the leader of Yissacher offered." (Bamidbar 7:18) The order in which the nesi'im brought their offerings points to an important principle. The Torah could have had them follow one after the other in birth order, after the initial offering of Yehuda. There would have been no room for jealousy between the tribes had this been the rule. (Beginning the order with Yehuda was not so much of an issue with the other shevatim. Yaakov had already designated Yehuda as the group

from which kingship and leadership would come. It made sense that pride of position would go to Yehudah.)

It would have been natural for the tribe of Reuven to offer their korban on the second day, as the oldest son among them, and then continue according to the chronological order of the founders of each shevet. Rashi says that Reuven in fact assumed that he was next, and Moshe had to inform him that they were going to use a different order, based on the assigned positions of the tribes as they marched through the wilderness. This, says Rashi, explains the anomaly regarding Nesanel ben Tzu'ar. Only in regard to his offering does the Torah append the word "offered." The word "הקרב" can be read both as a past tense and as an infinitive -- the latter as if to say that Nesanel received a special, unexpected command from on High: "Draw close and offer your offering!"

We still have to wonder why the Torah dismissed the chronological order, and substituted the marching order. I believe that the reason is that if the nesi'im would have brought their offerings according to the birth order, it would have been Menashe whose turn would fall out on Shabbos. By using the marching order, it was Ephraim who brought his korban on Shabbos.

Of Yosef's two sons, Menashe is identified with worldly affairs, of helping his father in his position by administrating Yosef's household. His brother Ephraim, however, is identified with Torah study. Now, generally only korbanos offered for the entire community override the laws of Shabbos. The offerings of individuals may not be brought on Shabbos, because they don't override those laws. Ephraim's korban was an exception to the rule. The Torah wished to make a point. For Ephraim, the Torah would grant some license to violate Shabbos -- but not for Menashe. The reason is fairly simple. Exceptions to halachic rules are dangerous. People have a tendency to take those exceptions and run with them. They irresponsibly turn exceptions into rules, applying them where they were not meant to apply. The talmid chacham / Ephraim-type can be trusted to understand the grounds for the exception, and not to wrongly apply it elsewhere. The baal-habayis / Menashe-type, however, cannot be given extra license, because it might be misused.

This is the meaning generally of the familiar verse from the haftorah of Shabbos Shuva, "Hashem's ways are straight. The righteous walk in them, and sinners will stumble over them." (Hoshea 14:10) Some actions are appropriate and proper for a righteous talmid chacham, but sinful for someone else.

Hashem's ways are straight -- that a talmid chacham should spend day and night diligently studying Torah, and have someone else oversee his parnasah.

Hashem's ways are straight -- It is proper that a

person should mollify his wife and keep her happy, and not force her to move from community to community without her consent. Yet -- the talmid chacham may leave home for two or three years to study Torah, even without her consent.

Hashem's ways are straight -- that a husband should zealously act against morally loose conduct of his wife -- but only if his own conduct is holy. When it is not, his zealotry against his wife is an aveirah.

Hashem's ways are straight -- that one who vows to abstain from wine is called "holy," but only if his intention is to prevent his spiritual decline into sin. If his intention is to simply afflict the flesh, it is an aveirah.

Hashem's ways are straight -- that when you see a man or woman violating Torah law, you must privately rebuke them. If instead you publicly spread the word about their misconduct, it is an aveirah. This is particularly the case when you speak about something that you did not see yourself. There is no greater aveirah than spreading false rumors about another's misdeeds. In some matters that affect the bond between husband and wife (that require two witnesses to be of halachic effect), even if you are an eyewitness - - but are the sole eyewitness -- speaking out is an aveirah.

While most halacha does not differentiate between people, there are activities whose propriety varies according to the person, the circumstances, the intention. There are things that are permissible to most people, but forbidden to the talmid chacham, because they will cheapen the regard people have for Torah. But there are also matters that are forbidden to the masses, and allowed to the talmid chacham, who will not abuse the privilege. (Based on Meshivas Nafesh by R Yochanan Luria, 15th cent.) ©2020 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

The total of herd animals for burnt offerings, 12 bulls; of rams, 12; of yearling lambs, 12 - with their proper meal offerings; of goats for sin offerings, 12..." (Bamidbar 7:87) Parshas Naso is the longest single Parsha in the Torah, at 176 pesukim. Many of these are the seemingly repetitive offerings of the Nesi'im, the tribal princes, on the day the Mishkan was anointed and they began to bring daily gifts.

Each prince chose what to bring and they all chose the same items as offerings. At this point, the Torah sums up the offerings by tabulating how many golden spoons and how much incense, along with how many animals, were brought in total. This is odd because we could simply do the math ourselves and know how much was brought.

The Malbim explains that there was a purpose in making the calculation and sharing with us. We might have thought that each Nasi brought his own personal

korban, and this is indeed what happened. Each Nasi represented himself, and he also represented his Tribe, but it was HIS offering.

However, when they had all completed their individual offerings, the sum represented a gift from the entire nation. Each person had a share in this communal offering in that he or she had participated in what was now a national project and they were to be rewarded for that.

The Haamek Davar adds that our posuk mentions meal offerings, and those were only brought for a Korban Tzibbur, a communal offering. This proves to us that these korbanos were not merely the individual offerings of the Nesi'im.

There is an expression that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and in Judaism this is very true. When one Jew does something that is great, but when he does his part and someone else does his, they combine to form a union of mitzvos being done. Each person doing his share gets credit for doing his part but also for being a part of the greater amount of good being done by each other person doing his part.

In the Tochacha read in Parshas Bechukosai two weeks ago, it says that when we go in Hashem's laws, "five of you will chase a hundred (enemies) and a hundred of you will chase 10,000."

The more of us who are involved, the greater the ability. This is the exponential power of Jewish unity. By doing our parts, each of us helps the other to complete great things and together we rise higher by lifting each other up.

When R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv z"l, the great sage and posek, recovered from one of his last surgeries, well into his 90's, he commented to a Rabbi that he felt a tremendous debt of gratitude to the entire Jewish People.

"I know that it is because of their prayers that I merited a successful operation, and I need to repay them somehow. But how can I repay everyone?" The Rav nodded sympathetically.

"What I can do, though," continued the gadol, with determination in his voice, "is get up earlier to learn Torah, for when one learns Torah, that helps everyone!" ©2020 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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

