

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

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 exploited by rulers as a means to wealth and power rather than treated as people with individual rights -- a concept born only in the seventeenth century. At times they formed a corvee, a vast conscripted labour 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 they were considered children of the gods or even 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, class or creed, are in the image and likeness of God. In the Torah, God summons His special people, Israel, to take the first steps towards 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.

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by
Mr. & Mrs. Itzy Weisberg
לעלוי נשמת
Mrs. Ida Weisberg ע"ה
חיה פייגא בת יעקב יוסף ז"ל
on her 27th yartzeit
נפטרת יז סיון תשנ"ד
תנצב"ה

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 of eved Hashem, "a servant of God" (Deut. 34:5). 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 even that we are within striking distance. The people Moses led, like many of us today, were still prone to fixate on ambition, aspiration, vanity, and self-indulgence. They still had the human desire for honour and status. 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 God and to whom God 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 only one tribe, Levi, and one family within that tribe, the Kohanim, 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 honour without envy a friend who has prospered." (Agamemnon l.832) 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 has that envy 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 Moses confronting three potential sources of envy. The first lay within the tribe of Levi. Its members 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 God in the way that the priests 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.

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 and place in the solemn procession as the house of God was carried through the desert.

Next, Moses 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, Hilchot Shemittah ve-Yovel 13:13.)

Lastly, Moses turns to the leadership of the tribes. The highly repetitive chapter 7 of our parsha itemises 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 emphasising the fact that each tribe had its moment of glory. Each, by giving to the house of God, acquired its own share of honour.

These episodes are not the whole of Naso but they consist of enough of it to signal a principle that every leader and every group needs to take seriously. Even when people accept, in theory, 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 HaKappar 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. They 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 troublemaker driven by a sense of injury to their 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 minimising it, and our parsha is an object lesson in how to do so. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What is the real meaning of love? And why is it that the Priest-Kohanim, the ministers of the Holy Temple and Torah teachers of the nation, must administer their priestly benediction "with love"? What has "love" to do with their specific leadership role?

In our Biblical portion, the Almighty tells Moses to command Aaron (the High Priest-Kohen) and his sons, "... 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 unto you; May the Lord lift His face towards (forgive) you and grant you peace'. And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:22-27).

This priestly benediction was a regular part of the daily Temple service. To this very day, here in Israel, every morning during the repetition of the Amidah, the descendants of Aaron bestow this blessing upon the congregation. Prior to blessing the congregation, the Priest-Kohanim recite the following benediction; "Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with the sanctity of

Aaron, and commanded us to bestow a blessing upon His nation Israel with love". What is the significance of these last two words, "with love"? And if the Priest-Kohen does not feel love in his heart for every member of the congregation, does this disqualify his blessing?

A Midrash asks why the command to bless Israel is prefaced by the words "say to them". It answers that this teaches that the Cantor, the representative of the congregation who repeats the Amidah for all the congregants, must say each word of the benediction, which is then repeated word by word by the Priest-Kohen (Midrash Sifrei 6, 143).

Rashi points out that the Hebrew Amor (say) is vocalized with a Kametz, as in Zakhor: Remember the Sabbath day, Remember the day you came out of Egypt). This implies an active form of the verb, as in remembering the Sabbath by our weekly repetition of the Divine primordial week of creation in which we too actively work for six days and creatively rest on the Sabbath, or in our re-experiencing the Egyptian servitude and exodus on the seder night. Apparently, the Kohen-priest must "actively" bless. Rashi adds that the Hebrew amor is spelled in the longest and fullest form possible, in order to teach us that the Priest-Kohen "must not bestow his blessing hastily but rather with intense concentration and with a full, lovi ngeheart" (Rashi, ad loc). There is even a French, Hassidic interpretation of the word which claims that the Hebrew amor is akin to the French amour, meaning with love!

Our God is a God of unconditional love, both before and after we sin, thus, the very opening of the Ten Commandments, God's introduction to His Revelation of His laws, is "I am the Lord who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the House of bondage". The Almighty is telling His nation that by taking them out of difficult straits of Egyptian slavery, He removed our pain thus demonstrating His love for us! It is almost as if he is explaining that His right to command them is based upon His having demonstrated His love for them.

A religious wedding ceremony is fundamentally a ritual acceptance of the mutual responsibilities of husband and wife. The marriage document, or Ketubah, is all about the groom's financial obligations to his bride. And yet, our Talmudic Sages teach us that the young couple must love each other in order to get married, that the over-arching basis for every wedding ceremony is "You shall love your friend like yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The nuptial blessings refer to bride and groom as "loving and beloved friends" (B.T. Kidushin, 41a). Our Sages are telling us that there can be no real love without the assumption of responsibility; when I declare my love for you, I must take a certain degree of responsibility for easing your life and sharing your challenges.

The Hassidic Rebbe, Reb Zushia told of how inspired he was by a marvelous conversation he overheard between two drunks at an inn. "I love you,

Igor", said one drunkard to the other. "You don't love me", said his friend. "I do love you," protested the first. "You don't love me," insisted Igor. "How do you know that I don't love you?" shouted the first in exasperation. "Because you can't tell me what hurts me," answered Igor. "If you can't tell me what hurts me, you can't try to make it better. And if you don't try to make it better, you certainly don't love me."

Love and responsibility are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, the very Hebrew word ahavah is based on the Aramaic word for giving. The Kohen-Priest who is a Jewish teacher and a Jewish leader, simultaneously functions as the agent of the Almighty and of the nation. He must take responsibility for his nation, he must attempt to "brand" them with God's name, with God's love, and with God's justice. He must communicate with his nation, symbolized by the cantor or shaliah tzibbur, he must know what hurts his nation and what his nation needs, and then he must actively try to assuage that pain while raising the nation closer to the realm of the Divine. In short, he must love his people and take responsibility for them, as the benediction before the blessing explains so very well!

Post Script

The Sages of the Talmud ordained that at the time of the priestly benediction, the congregation should think of their dreams – individual and corporate – crying out "Master of the Universe, I am yours and my dreams are yours..." The Hebrew word dream, halom, has the same letters as hamal, love, compassion, as well as laham, fight, struggle, wage war. Dreams which continue to engage us when we are awake are dreams of love and passion, such as the return to Zion which was "as in a dream" (Psalms 126:1). Dreams, as loves, are the beginning of responsibility, a responsibility which often means struggle and even war. Kohen-Teachers must love their student-congregants and take responsibility for them teaching them likewise to take responsibility for each other and for the dream. Only then will our dreams and God's dreams be one dream: the perfection of the world, Tikkun Olam. ©2021 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**S**peak to Aharon and to his sons saying, "So shall you bless the Children of Israel, say to them:" (Bamidbar 6:23) The Kohanim here are given a special mitzvah to bless the Jewish People. This is not their own blessing, but rather the Kohanim are Hashem's emissaries to bless the people. This mitzvah was not given as permission to bless the Jews in Hashem's name, but as an obligation to do so. Moreover, it was not just given to Aharon and his sons who were there at that time, but it was an eternal mitzvah for all generations.

The Midrash Tanchuma comments on the

words, "say to them," that the blessing should be complete. Do not bless them hurriedly or without clarity. Rather, it should be with focus and a full heart.

This mitzvah follows on the heels of two very striking concepts. First, the Torah discussed the Sotah, a woman who was suspected of infidelity. There is a lengthy and possibly gruesome procedure to either elicit a confession or prove her innocence.

Immediately after that comes the Nazir, one who chooses to elevate himself by abstaining from wine and grape products, and by avoiding impurity. Chazal say that one who witnesses the Sotah procedure should abstain from wine, as he can see its potential negative effects.

We would imagine that this woman of ill repute should be shunned and cast away much as the metzora, yet the Torah goes to great lengths to clear her name. Hashem mandates that His Own name be erased in the furtherance of reconciling her and her husband.

The one who sees the Sotah, who becomes a Nazir, is also a person more likely to give in to his desires, which is why this sight was shown to him as a warning. Nevertheless, if he makes the decision to sanctify himself, Hashem offers a way to do it with exacting standards that make the person a "kadosh," a holy person.

These two people, who were subject to temptation and may even have given in to it, are the segue to the blessing of the Jewish People. This is because Hashem loves us all and wants us to love each other as He does. He tells the Kohanim, "Even if you don't see the reason to bless these people, you are My messengers, and I know why they deserve to be blessed. Don't do it grudgingly, but do it with feeling and love because that is how I feel."

What a fantastic lesson for us to learn about life and our relationship with others! Chazal say, "Even the "empty" among you are filled with good deeds like the pomegranate." Though we may not see the good in others, it is there. The message of the Kohanic blessing is that we don't need to find reasons to love others (though it helps) in order to do so. Simply because one is our Jewish brother or sister, we should love, appreciate, and bless them, regardless of whether we can see all the greatness that lies within them.

A fellow was working hard, delivering Jewish magazines and newspapers to a supermarket. As he unloaded the heavy bundles from his truck, a man leaving the store paused to watch. Seeing him doing such heavy labor, the fellow spoke up, and what he said made the delivery person break out in a big grin: "What a wonderful job you have, delivering Oneg Shabbos for people!"

Contrast this to the engaged fellow who was asked by his bride-to-be's mother if he would like a silver cup to make Kiddush with, when he joined them

for the Shabbos meal. He demurred, saying he would hear Kiddush from his future father-in-law.

In pure "mother-in-law" fashion, the woman turned to her daughter and asked incredulously, "He has semicha but he doesn't know how to make Kiddush?!" - Which person would you like to be? ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah reading of this week continues with the count of the different families within the tribe of Levi. We are aware that this tribe has been chosen for public service in the Temple and, generally, on behalf of the Jewish people. They do not own land, and their financial support is based upon the tithe that the Jewish people contributed from their produce.

The Levites serve at special functions in the Temple service and are worthy guardians who maintain the physical aspects of the Temple, as well as the talented artists who provided song and melody during the Temple services. The Torah guaranteed that there would be a special cadre within the general Jewish public that would be devoted to the spiritual needs of the people, with responsibilities in caring for the Temple. The Levites also provided the necessary atmosphere through song and melody that would provide impetus for the spiritual experience when visiting the Temple in Jerusalem and participating in its services.

Apparently, it is necessary to have such an elite group function amongst the public, for the great masses of Israel to be directed towards noble goals, high ideals and, in their own way, the service of heaven and the Jewish people. The Levites were a living spiritual force that taught the people and inspired the spiritual goals and the fulfillment of the mission entrusted to Israel at Mount Sinai. In this three-family group, the Levites were the vanguard of Jewish spirituality and defined the purpose of the Jewish people and of the Temple service in Jerusalem.

The problem with being a special elite group within a general larger population is that the group often becomes discouraged when it fails to see the results that are desired taking hold in the general population. There is, therefore, a tendency amongst elitist groups and institutions to separate themselves from the population that they are to serve, and eventually to look askance, and even in disappointment, upon the masses that somehow fall below the expectations set for it by this elitist group.

We then have a situation where the elitist group either gives up on its mission or withdraws in splendid isolation into its own world and institutions. The Torah created 48 cities for the Levites to be scattered throughout the land of Israel, where they would intersperse with the population and become part of the

general makeup of the country. By so doing, they served as role models and examples. Through instruction they would guide the Jewish people in becoming a holy nation that would continually aspire for spiritual greatness and a more just society. The Levites were meant not only to be teachers, but moral examples of the type of Jew that the Torah envisioned. The Levites were not to be hermits living in their own splendid isolation in faraway caves, divorced from the lives and problems of the average worker and member of Jewish society. Rather, they were to be the living leaders and examples of a society steeped in Torah, in the service of God and Israel. ©2021 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

If a thief robs, swears falsely that he did not steal, and then confesses his guilt, the Torah tells us that he is liable to return the value of the object plus an additional one-fifth to the plaintiff (Numbers 5:6, 7). If, however, the plaintiff dies leaving no relatives, the money is returned to the priest, the emissary of God. In the words of the Torah, "if the person has no kinsmen to whom restitution may be made for the guilt, the restitution for guilt which is made shall be the Lord's, even the priest's" (5:8).

An obvious question emerges: Is it possible that the plaintiff does not have any relatives? In the words of Rashi, "Is there anyone in Israel who has no next of kin...or distant relation going back to Jacob?" Rashi concludes that the text, therefore, must refer to a ger, a proselyte, who has died leaving no next of kin among the Jewish People. If the ger passes away, the law is that the money must be restored to the Kohen (Rashi, based on Sifrei).

In order to understand this idea, the special relationship between God and the proselyte must be examined. Nechama Leibowitz notes the following Midrash: "Proselytes are what they are, not by virtue of a family title, but simply through their own free will they have come to love God. He [God] therefore responds by loving them, as it is written, 'The Lord loves the righteous'" [Psalms 146:8; Bamidbar Rabbah 8:2]. According to the Midrash, the righteous are converts for whom God feels a special love. Having accepted God through their own volition, they have in return earned unique love from God.

Hence, in our text, theft against a ger results in payment to God, as God is the closest kin of the convert. The money is then given to the Kohen, God's emissary.

It is often the case in our community that the convert is mistreated and not embraced equally in the

fold. Here the Torah is teaching that the ger, far from being cast aside, is the most important. Just as God especially loves converts, we in that same spirit should have special love for them.

No wonder this law is always read close to the holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot celebrates God's giving of the Torah. The law of *gezel hager* (stealing from a proselyte) reminds us that the Torah was given to all Jews – including converts.

Shavuot also features the reading of the Book of Ruth. Ruth is the convert par excellence. Not coincidentally, from her the Messiah will one day come, teaching once again that while born Jews may be holy, the convert is the holy of holies. ©2021 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 AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

One Nation, Under G-d

There are many categorizations of the 613 mitzvot, commandments. Perhaps the most common is the division between those commandments that are between Humans and G-d (Bein Adam Lamakom) and those which are interpersonal- between people (Bein Adam Lachavero).

There is no distinction between the 2 in regard to importance. Living a true Torah life requires one to be aware of and careful in the performance of commandments without regard with whom (or Whom) we are interacting.

This principle of faith is underscored in Parshat Naso: דבר אל בני ישראל איש או אשה כי יעשו מכל חטאת האדם למעל מעל בה

"Speak to the children of Israel: When a man or woman commits any of the sins against man to act treacherously against God."

This refers to one who steals or withholds money from another. While such an act would be a severe trespass of a mitzvah Bein Adom Lachavero (and it is), it is also called a "treachery against G-d".

Taking from others or denying them their due is as much a sin against G-d Himself as it is against people. It as if he or she is challenging what G-d has decided to bestow on another.

This idea, however, is not limited to matters of money. The wording is clear. One who commits any of the sins against another is being treacherous towards HaShem.

Our purpose in this world to make it a better place through our observance of the entire Torah. In addition to our duties to G-d, we must coexist with others, be it our relatives, friends, neighbors or strangers. The Mitzvot Bein Adom Lachavero sanctify that coexistence.

A Godly person is one who works for

excellence in all of his/ her actions. Shabbat, Kashrut, Prayer, etc. are no more important than honesty, integrity, kindness and compassion (to name but a few).

While sinning against G-d is terrible, it is called just that, a sin. When the infraction is toward another person, it becomes treachery against G-d.

Yet, there is a common thread throughout the events a of the parsha- relationships. Different types of relationships on all levels. Between the tribe of Levi and HaShem/the nation, husband and wife, between people and their Creator, between the mundane and the holy, and between each other.

The message is clear. No matter what or with whom the relationship is, we should strive to make it the best, and holiest, it can be. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Sotah, the Adulterous (?) Wife

Parashat Naso discusses the Sotah, a woman who has secluded herself with a specific man after being specifically warned by her husband, and is suspected of having relations with this man. This is not an easy section to discuss, and we will not be able to deal with most of the aspects of the Sotah, but it is important that every aspect of the Torah, and especially the more difficult ones, should be investigated and understood if we are to grasp all aspects of the Torah and comprehend how each law is part of that whole.

Our section begins with the pasuk, "Speak to the B'nei Yisrael and say to them, any man whose wife shall go astray and commit treachery against him; and a man could have lain with her carnally, but it was hidden from the eyes of her husband, and she became secluded and could have been defiled – but there was no witness against her – and she had not been forced; and a spirit of jealousy had passed over him and he warned his wife, and she had become defiled, or a spirit of jealousy had passed over him and he had warned his wife and she had not become defiled. The man shall bring his wife to the Kohein and he shall bring her offering for her, a tenth-ephah of barley flour; he shall not pour oil over it and shall not put frankincense upon it, for it is a meal-offering of jealousies, a meal-offering of remembrance, a reminder of iniquity."

It is interesting that the term ma'al is used in the context of the sotah, the woman who strays, as this word is more often used to describe using an object for personal use which was designated for the Temple as holy. We find the term also used a few sentences before this, "a man or woman who commits any of man's sins by committing a trespass against Hashem, and that person shall become guilty." Rashi explains

that this is a repetition of the law of one who robs and then swears falsely with regard to the robbery. The sin here is greater than the sin of robbery, as this is a deceitful swearing something which is untrue in Hashem's name. Here we are speaking specifically of a case where two witnesses cannot be found. If the thief will confess, he makes restitution and is forgiven without bringing an extra fifth and an offering. If instead he waits and witnesses are found, he receives the punishment of paying back an extra fifth and he must bring an offering. Here we see that the word ma'al, trespass, carries with it the concept that witnesses are not found and the person will go unpunished unless he confesses.

Our Rabbis have tried to determine the cause of the Sotah's straying. The ibn Ezra implies that originally, she strayed from Hashem. She first used something that belonged to the Temple. We know that "mitzvah goreret mitzvah v'aveirah goreret aveirah, doing a mitzvah brings about doing another mitzvah, and doing a sin causes one to sin further." Once she discovered that she could not be punished, since there were no witnesses, she then became tempted to stray even more, feeling that she could not be punished again. Here, however since she was first warned by her husband not to seclude herself with this particular man, she is now subject to the laws of Sotah even without the proper number of witnesses to this seclusion. The Kli Yakar explains that the use of something holy that belongs to the Kohein most often comes in the form of not giving the special gifts to the Kohein of one's produce, namely terumah. This may happen if a man chooses not to share his food with the Kohein. The Kli Yakar reminds us that if a man sleeps with a promiscuous woman, or if he retains the gifts he is supposed to give to the Kohein, he will eventually become poor, which may then lead to bringing his own wife before the Kohein as a suspected adulteress. The Kli Yakar explains that the reason for the barley for the minchah offering of the Sotah is that this is what a poor man can afford. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the husband is the one who withholds the gifts of terumah and ma'aser from the Kohein because he is reluctant to share what he has worked to produce. He is only willing to give to the Kohein the barley which is normally the food for animals but is also a gift given to the poor. For this reason, he will bring his wife before the Kohein and his gift of barley will be part of the offering for his wife.

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch reminds us that the wife's actions have demonstrated some form of clandestine act only because the husband has warned her about her actions. A woman was supposed to conduct her interactions with other men in a way which indicated that she was maintaining a proper distance even in private. Still, her actions would mean nothing if the husband had not warned her. The proof of her

infidelity does not require actually witnessing of this adultery. The simple fact that she has defied the specific warning of her husband not to isolate herself with this man, is sufficient to accuse her.

The woman has several choices after she is found to disobey her husband. She can admit what she did wrong, in which case she will be punished with death. This is better than the painful death of the Sotah test, and the punishment will atone for her sin. She could decide that she will not undergo the test, nor will she admit to her sin. Here the wife is immediately separated from her husband. Her third option, if she is innocent, is to undergo the Sotah test in order to remain married to her husband. If she is guilty, the Sotah water will cause her insides to burst and she will die a painful death. If she is not guilty, then she will become fertile and become pregnant from her husband who then is never permitted to divorce her.

This drasha has barely been able to touch on some aspects of the Sotah. We have seen that both the husband and the wife play a part in this tragedy. They were both perhaps guilty of sinning before Hashem which brought them to the events of this current sin. Not every sin is so complex and disturbing, but the smaller, less complicated sins can bring about the greater sins if one does not regain control and change his ways.

Each couple has a responsibility to keep a marriage functioning well. It is not an easy task. When two people grow up in different environments, there is bound to be a difference in how they approach even simple tasks. Couples must learn to communicate with each other and compromise, or the marriage will be in trouble. Even a minor discord can lead to a more serious problem. This does not mean that any discord will lead to infidelity, but it can lead to an irreparable problem unless both are willing to find a solution. When husband and wife both work to keep a marriage strong, the tragic circumstances of our parasha will stand a much greater chance of never occurring.

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Outside Eretz Yisrael, we only say Birkas Kohanim on limited occasions -- the Shalosh Regalim, Rosh HaShanah, and Yom Kippur. Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his sefer Oznayim L'Torah, stresses that when the Kohanim recite the three Priestly Blessings mentioned in Parshas Naso, they should realize that they have vast power in their hands. Every word of the Birkas Kohanim can make tremendous differences in a person's life.

The pesukim in the beginning of Parshas Bechukosai, prior to the Tochacha, contain the

blessings of "Im Bechukosai Teileichu." The Rokeach writes that throughout all those pesukim, which describe the blessings that will come our way if we keep the Torah's laws, [Vayikra 26:3-13], the letter Samech does not appear. The Rokeach explains that the blessings of Parshas Bechukosai are all conditional, as implied by the word 'Im' ('if you will follow My laws). However, he says, the blessings of Birkas Kohanim, which contain sixty letters are unconditional. The letter Samech, with a numerical value of 60, represents the Birkas Kohanim. Those blessings do not have strings attached. Therefore, we do not find the letter Samech in the conditional blessings of Parshas Bechukosai.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin quotes an idea from Rav Yaakov Gezuntheit, who wrote a sefer on Maseches Chullin and other masechtos as well. The end of Parshas Shoftim contains the parsha of Eglah Arufah (the Decapitated Calf). When a dead body is found whose murderer is unknown, there is a whole ceremony which must be performed, involving the Elders of the closest city, to achieve communal atonement for this tragedy. The pasuk there [Devorim 21:5] singles out "the Kohanim, sons of Levi, who were chosen by G-d to serve Him and to bless in the Name of Hashem". They need to participate in that ceremony. Following that, representatives of the Court come and proclaim "Our hands have not spilled this blood..." [Bamidbar 21:7]

Rav Gezuntheit asks -- What do the Kohanim have to do with all this? We understand that the Beis Din represents the city. They need to proclaim the innocence of the population. They state that they did not do anything wrong. "We did not send this victim away without food and accompaniment, etc." But what is the role of the Kohanim? More pointed, why does the pasuk need to say that the Kohanim are "the sons of Levy, for G-d has chosen them to serve him and to bless in the Name of G-d?"

Why is that germane to this parsha? What does this mean?

The Tiferes Yaakov explains that if the Kohanim would have had proper Kavana (intent) when uttering the blessing "And He will place upon you Peace" (v'Yasem Lecha Shalom) this would have never happened. If a Jew kills another Jew, it is because there is no Shalom. That is why the Torah mentions the Kohanim and singles out their role in blessing in the Name of G-d.

The Rokeach writes that the congregants should face the Kohanim with open arms and make personal requests for whatever their needs are during Birkas Kohanim. This is a most propitious time for making such requests, which then have an increased potential for being answered. If someone has pressing needs, a most fitting time to ask for Help is during Birkas Kohanim -- a point in the liturgy that is particularly ripe for Heavenly dispensation of blessing.

This is something worth keeping in mind when listening to Birkas Kohanim.



Why Didn't Manoach's Wife Tell Her Husband the Rest of the Story?

Parshas Naso's Haftorah contains the story of the birth of Shimshon. Shimshon's mother was childless. The Angel of Hashem appeared to her and told her that she was going to become pregnant and give birth to a son. That son turned out to be Shimshon haGibor. However, the pasuk does not only say she would become pregnant and have a son. It begins by saying "Behold you are barren and have not given birth." [Shoftim 13:3]

The Medrash asks -- why was it necessary for the Angel to tell Manoach's wife that she was barren and had not given birth. This was a fact of which she was obviously aware! The Medrash answers "This teaches that there had been a dispute between Manoach and his wife." In Biblical times, they did not possess the medical knowledge or technology that we have today to determine when a couple is infertile, whether the cause lay with the husband or the wife. Manoach had told his wife "Our childlessness is your problem! You are the barren one." She argued back to her husband, "No. The problem comes from you. You are the infertile one and the reason we do not have children."

According to the Medrash, this was part of the Angel's message to the woman. The Medrash first says that Manoach's wife was a Tzadekes (a righteous woman) and for that reason the Malach appeared to her with this Divine message rather than to her husband. The Medrash says that the Malach came to make peace between husband and wife, by presenting them with the "Divine diagnosis" of the source of the problem. "It is indeed your "fault" that you have not had

children with your husband. Stop fighting about that. But you should know that now, you are going to become pregnant!"

Manoach's wife told him, "An Angel told me that we are going to have a baby." [Shoftim 13:7] However, she conveniently left out from her statement to her husband the fact that the Malach confirmed that he

had been right all those years in their argument regarding the cause of their inability to have children.

Now this seems somewhat odd. The Medrash says that she was a Tzadekes, and that in her merit, the Angel appeared. We are not talking here about just your average woman on the street. We are talking about a woman who merited speaking with a Malach, and whom the Medrash calls a Tzadekes! So then why does she not confess to Manoach that she had been wrong? Why doesn't she tell him "You know, after all these years that we have been fighting with each other about this matter, the Angel revealed to me that you were right and I was wrong!"?

The reason is that one of the hardest things to do in life is to say "I am wrong. It is my fault." The novel idea here is that a person can be a Tzadekes, and a person can be on the level where they merit speaking with a Malach, but to say the words "It is my fault. I am wrong" is a very difficult challenge.

I once gave a drasha entitled "The Three Most Important Words in Marriage." I began my speech by asking "What are the three most important words in a marriage?" Some suggested "You look beautiful." Others suggested "I love you." I maintain that the three most important words in a marriage are "It's my fault." This is very hard to do. One can be a Tzadekes, one can speak with an Angel, and one can announce that "we are going to have a baby." But to say "You were right. I was wrong. It was my problem" -- that is very difficult. © 2021 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

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.

