

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

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

"The Lord said to Moses: Tell Aaron and his sons, 'Thus shall you bless the Israelites. Say to them: May Lord bless you and protect you; / May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; / May the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.' Let them set My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." (Num. 6:23-27)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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on her 21st yartzeit

נפטרת יז סיון תשנ"ד

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me among the crowd."

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

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

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

That we call G-d Hashem is the transcendental confirmation of our significance in the scheme of things. We matter as individuals because G-d cares for us as a parent for a child. That, incidentally, is one reason why the priestly blessings are all in the singular, to emphasize that G-d blesses us not only collectively but also individually. One life, said the sages, is like a universe.

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

testify not to faith but to a profound failure of faith.

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

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

One further detail of the priestly blessings is unique, namely the blessing that the sages instituted to be said by the cohanim over the mitzvah: "Blessed are you... who has made us holy with the holiness of Aaron and has commanded us to bless His people Israel with love."

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

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

However, it seems to me that the explanation is this: the Torah explicitly says that though the cohanim say the words, it is G-d who sends the blessing. "Let them put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." Normally when we fulfill a mitzvah, we are doing something. But when the cohanim bless the people, they are not doing anything in and of themselves. Instead they are acting as channels through which

G-d's blessing flows into the world and into our lives. Only love does this. Love means that we are focused not on ourselves but on another. Love is selflessness. And only selflessness allows us to be a channel through which flows a force greater than ourselves, the love that as Dante said, "moves the sun and the other stars", the love that brings new life into the world.

To bless, we must love, and to be blessed is to know that we are loved by the One vaster than the universe who nonetheless turns His face toward us as a parent to a beloved child. To know that is to find true spiritual peace. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**"A**nd the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to Aaron and to his sons saying so shall you bless the children of Israel; say to them, may the Lord bless you and keep you...' (Numbers 6:22-27)

There are very few passages of the Bible which are as well known as the "Priestly Benediction". In Israel the kohanim – priests rise to bless the congregation every single morning. However in the Diaspora the Ashkenazi Jews include this special benediction only on the Festivals. Nevertheless there are many life-cycle celebrations, such as circumcisions, redemptions of the first born, bar & bat mitzvot and even weddings which are punctuated by this Priestly Blessing. In effect, the kohen-priest stands as G-d's representative, as the "agent of the Compassionate One", as the spiritual leader and as the Torah teacher – and in this function as teacher and guide- he calls upon G-d to bless the congregation. As Moses declares in his final blessing to the Israelites, "(The Priests and Levites) shall guard Your covenant, shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel..." (Deut. 33:9,10)

The Talmud (in the 9th chapter of Berachot) as well as our Prayer Liturgy declare "At the time of the priestly blessings, the congregation responds, 'Master of the Universe I am Yours and my dreams are Yours'. Apparently our Sages saw a profound connection between the dreams of the Congregation of Israel and the function of their priest leaders. Exactly what is the nature of that connection?

I would suggest that first and foremost a leader and an educator must inspire his students – congregants – nation, with a lofty vision, with an exalted dream. The Psalmist and sweet singer of Israel, King David declares in the Psalm which we recite each Sabbath and Festival before the reciting the Grace after Meals, "When the Lord returned with the restoration of Zion we were as dreamers"; after all, had the Jews not dreamt of the return to Israel throughout their long exiles, we never would have returned to our homeland.

One sees the same idea from the opposite

vantage point when one realizes the cause of the great tragedy of the Book of Numbers. In Numbers, the Jewish people descends from the great heights of the Revelation at Sinai to the disastrous depths of the sin of the scouts, the rebellion of Korah, the sin of Moses and the destruction of that entire generation in the desert. What caused such a mighty fall? The Bible itself begins its account of the descent with the words, "And it happened that the nation kvetched (mitonenim) evily." (Numbers 11:1) The 18th century Netziv explains the difficult Hebrew word mitonenim as meaning "wandering hither and thither" aimlessly and without purpose or direction, from the Hebrew *anna*. Simply put, this great Torah leader was saying that the Israelites had lost the dream and the vision which they felt at Sinai when they had cried out "We shall do and we shall internalize," when they accepted upon themselves the Divine mission of being a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation." They descended into destruction because they lost the dream.

Secondly, the Hebrew word for dream is *halom*, and – with a simple switch of letters, it spells *hamal* which means love and compassion. The priest leader who inspires with his dream must first and foremost love his nation; only if he loves the Israelites will they believe themselves worthy of being loved, will they believe in their ability to realize the dream and achieve the vision. Great leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and David Ben Gurion lifted their respective nations to unheard of heights because they helped make them believe in themselves.

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

Fourthly, the Hebrew word *halom* also spells *lehem*; a dream must be nourished with the material necessities of program, tactics and strategy necessary to accomplish the dream.

Fifthly, the Hebrew word *halom* also spells *melah* or salt. Salt symbolizes tears – the tears of sacrifice and commitment – as well as eternity, since salt never putrefies. Salt is therefore the symbol of our Covenant with G-d, the Covenant which guarantees Jewish eternity and ultimate redemption.

And finally, *halom* is linguistically tied to *halon*, a window, a light to the outside world. The dream with which the priest – kohen must inspire the Israelites is a dream which encompasses the entire world, the dream of "Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth", the dream of , " They shall beat their saws into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks".

Those who believe in a G-d who is invisible may well dare to dream the dream which is impossible

but only those who dream the impossible will ever achieve the incredible. ©2016 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he role of the Levites in Jewish life was a very important one, even though it was not always completely delineated and defined. The essential task of the Levites was to serve as the caretakers in charge of the maintenance of the holy Temple. The Talmud called them "the gatekeepers." They were, so to speak, the maintenance staff of the Temple, assisting the priests in their tasks, though not actually performing the rituals of sacrifice and incense that made up the Temple service.

The Levites were also in charge of the melodious atmosphere that was present in the Temple on a daily basis. There was a presentation of instrumental and choir music in the Temple each day – including the Sabbath and the holidays – that attracted Jewish and non-Jewish visitors from near and far. This musical presentation was part of the glory of the Temple service and highlighted the emotional constituent of the service itself.

The Psalms of David and psalms authored by others constituted the basic theme of the musical presentation of the Levites and are remembered today in our daily morning prayers, sans musical instruments. The importance of melody to enhance the emotions and devotion of meaningful prayer cannot be overemphasized.

There are those who claim that there is still large vestiges of the Levites' melodies and musical compositions present in some of our traditional liturgical melodies today. As you can well imagine, this is a very difficult thing to assess accurately. But the mere fact that such an opinion can be advanced and accepted by many is sufficient to indicate to us the power of the songs and melodies of the Levites.

The individual Levite was assigned to duties in the Temple for only a few weeks out of the year. The Levites were divided into 24 families, as were the Priests themselves, and each family worked in the Temple two or three weeks per year, plus duties on the holidays. This left them a lot of free time in their lives and since Jewish tradition abhors sloth and wasted time, the Levites were assigned the task of being the teachers – the educational guides of the young and old of the Jewish people.

In a way one can say that this was an even more vital task than serving as the maintenance and musical component of the Temple staff. The Levites have jealously guarded their pedigree throughout the long Jewish exiles after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Some of the greatest scholars and teachers of Israel over those many centuries always identified

themselves as being descendants from the tribe of Levi.

Thus, the Levites were always granted special honors in the synagogue and in being called up to readings from the Torah. The Levites and the Priests remain our special link to the Temples in Jerusalem, keeping alive the memory and strengthening our belief and resolve in their and our future in the restoration of the glory and holiness of Israel and Jerusalem. ©2016 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**A**ccording to an old rabbinic joke, a young man 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 (Numbers 6:1-21) who, on a certain level, can be viewed as a person who decides to assume similar responsibilities to that of a Kohen. For example, much like a Kohen, the nazir is not permitted to have any contact with the dead, additionally, there are restrictions on his alcohol intake (Leviticus 10:9) and much like a High Priest, he has limitations on what he does with his hair. (Leviticus 21:10)

Central to our tradition are three dimensions: existence, location and time.

There is a realm of holiness in Judaism called kedushat gavra (holiness of person) which sanctifies our existence. This realm of holiness can be divided into two-the holiness of a person which is given by G-d, like a Kohen, and, on the other hand, the holiness of a person which comes from the self-like a nazir who decides to assume priestly type responsibilities.

This pattern continues with respect to holiness of place (kedushat makom). There is a place, the Holy Temple (and for that matter, all of Jerusalem) which is holy because its sanctity comes from G-d, from the Shekhinah itself. As the Shekhinah is eternal, so is the Temple's holiness forever. Yet, there are other places whose holiness emanates from, not divine, but human input-like the holiness of a synagogue. It is as holy as

we make it.

So, too, with holiness of time (kedushat zeman). There is a holy day, the Shabbat, whose holiness comes from G-d, irrespective of human contribution. And there is a holiness of time by which human beings can transform every "ordinary" day into one as holy as the Shabbat. This will reach its crescendo in the Messianic era when everyday will be like the day of Shabbat.

While there is kedushah which emanates from G-d, 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 merely requires a commitment to reach high and to reach for kedushah. ©2016 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.

#### **RAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L**

### **Bais Hamussar**

In this week's parsha Moshe requests of his father-in-law, Chovov, that he join Bnei Yisrael on their journey to the Promised Land. Rashi (Bamidbar 10:29) explains that Chovov was just another name of Yisro, and he adds that Yisro had numerous names.

Rav Wolbe (Shiurei Chumash) elaborates on Rashi's comment. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (4:17) states, "There are three crowns -- the crown of Torah, the crown of Kehuna and the crown of kingship -- but the crown of a good name surpasses them all." A good name is acquired by way of one's actions. More specifically, when one takes a potential quality and transforms it into concrete actions, he defines his character and thereby creates a reputation and good name for himself. Yisro maximized his numerous qualities and created many names for himself. For example, he cherished the Torah and was therefore called Chovov. He gave good advice to Moshe thereby adding a section to the Torah, and therefore he was named Yisro.

Conversely, it is possible that a person will have no name whatsoever. The Chida quotes Rav Chaim Vital as saying that after a person passes away he is met by three angels. One of them asks the deceased person for his name. If in response he swears that he does not know his name he is duly punished. How could it be that a person forgets his own name? A name defines one's essence and it is quite possible that a person was not in touch with his true essence over the course of his entire life.

While he certainly fulfilled many mitzvos and performed many actions, nevertheless, he might not have developed and actualized his personal potential, and thus lost the opportunity of acquiring a name for

himself.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz would say that every person is born with an underlying positive middah. One does not need to work on perfecting this middah since it was given to him without a flaw. He must merely be careful that this perfect quality does not get eroded by negative behavior. Moreover, this middah is the key to his self perfection. By taking advantage of his specific middah he has the ability to rectify the rest of his middos which need refinement.

Rav Wolbe adds that the opposite is also true. Each person was created with a single underlying negative middah that needs much rectification. It stands to reason that a person's underlying positive middah is directly aligned to combat his underlying negative middah. One who is not in touch with himself is simply clueless as to what Hashem wants from him and how he is supposed to get there.

We all have the opportunity to make a name for ourselves. While society in general looks outward in their attempt to create a name for themselves, a Jew's avodah is to focus inward in order to achieve this goal. Get to know yourself and you will be on your way to acquiring "the crown of a good name" which surpasses all else. ©2016 Rav S. Wolbe z"l and AishDas Foundation

#### **RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

### **Shabbat Shalom Weekly**

The Torah states: "And afterwards the Nazir may drink wine" (Numbers 6:20). After the Nazir completed the entire process described by the Torah, he may drink wine once again. Why does the Torah still call the person a Nazir in this verse since he is no longer in the state of being a Nazir? The Alshich explains that when a person goes through a period of thirty days of being a Nazir, he elevates himself to a high level of spirituality. He is now on such a level that even if he drinks wine it is the drinking of a person on the spiritual level of a Nazir.

Two people can drink wine and the meaning behind their behavior can be totally different. The following two incidents illustrate this clearly: Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, former Rosh Hayeshiva of Telz, was on an airplane. One of the engines caught on fire and the captain announced an emergency landing in a nearby city. One passenger called out to the flight attendant, "Give me one last drink before I die!" A person who identifies himself entirely with his body and not with his soul keeps this attitude even at the very last minute of his life. (The plane landed safely and no one died.)

Second story: A very righteous Torah scholar lived an ascetic life and denied himself many of life's pleasures. When he was on his deathbed he asked, "Please bring me a glass of wine before I die. My entire life I denied my body physical pleasures. Now I want to ask my body forgiveness and I wish to appease it with a

glass of wine." The righteous man identified himself entirely with his soul. His request for a final drink of wine was with the spirituality of a Nazir. Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2016 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**T**hese are the numbers of the families of K'has, [of] all who work in the Tent of Meeting, which were counted by Moshe and Aharon, by G-d's instruction, through Moshe" (Bamidbar 4:37). For the families of M'rari (4:45), the same exact wording is used, "which were counted by Moshe and Aharon, by G-d's instructions, through Moshe." However, for the families of Gershon (4:41), the words "through Moshe" aren't there, only "which were counted by Moshe and Aharon, by G-d's instructions." Why were these two words omitted by Gershon?

It is also a bit curious that a similar expression (using the same words in a slightly different order), including the words "through Moshe," is repeated when summing up the counting of all three families of Levi'im (4:49), so that it applies to all three families. Why is it left off by Gershon if it applies to them too, or, if it doesn't, why is it included in the summation if it was already said by the families it applies to, and doesn't really apply to the third?

Although Maharil Diskin says the term "through Moshe" applies to all three families (indicating that Moshe was allowed to have others help him conduct the census of the Levi'im), with there being no need to say so explicitly by the "middle" family discussed between the other two once it was said by the two "surrounding" families, the commentators give numerous reasons why it was specifically omitted by Gershon.

Bamidbar Rabbah (6:8-9) says that G-d had told Moshe to have Aharon join him in the counting, indicated by his being included in the original instructions (4:1), but Moshe misunderstood, and thought it only applied to the counting of the family of K'has. Nevertheless, out of respect for his older brother, Moshe included Aharon when counting Gershon too, even though he didn't think he was included in G-d's original instructions. Because Moshe made this mistake, before the family of M'rari was counted G-d told him that He meant that Aharon should help count all three families, not just K'has. Since the full expression of "by G-d's instruction through Moshe" only applies where Moshe did things exactly as he was commanded, and this wasn't true regarding the counting of Gershon, the words "through Moshe" were omitted there. [The Midrash (in 6:11) says the summation doesn't refer to the counting, but the assigning of jobs to each member of each family (see also Or Hachayim on 4:49), which was done exactly as

G-d had instructed. This notion can be applied to other approaches as well.]

There are several important things we can glean from this Midrash. First of all, we see that it's possible for Moshe to have misunderstood G-d's instructions (which some go to great lengths to avoid). Secondly, we see that even though it didn't impact the end result, since Moshe did in fact ask Aharon to help him count Gershon, because he didn't realize it was what G-d had instructed him to do, it is not considered following G-d's instructions (see Netziv on 4:41). Third, we see that the expression "by G-d's instruction through Moshe" means that the instructions were followed exactly, including knowing exactly what G-d wanted done, as opposed to either getting it right without realizing it's what G-d wanted or G-d just going along with what Moshe wanted (see, for example, Bamidbar 9:23, 17:5 and 27:23).

Tiferes Y'honasan (building on the Midrash without quoting it) references 17:5, where it was proven once and for all that it was G-d who chose Aharon to be the Kohain Gadol, and who decided that the firstborn were not supposed to serve in the Temple. He says that the expression "through Moshe" (which is used there too) counters those who complained that it didn't come from G-d, telling us that it really did. Therefore, when the roles of the Levi'im were described, this term ("through Moshe") was used, sending a message to the firstborn (whose role the Levi'im took over) not to claim that it wasn't from G-d. Gershon, though, was Levi's firstborn, so this message wasn't needed for him, only the other two.

Although this is a cute answer, since not everyone in Gershon's family was a firstborn son (and there were likely as many firstborn sons in the other two families), the patriarch of the family being a firstborn has very little relevance to any potential complaints from any firstborn sons who were not Levi'im.

Tosfos (in numerous editions) says that the expression "through Moshe" teaches us that Moshe was the main person in the process. By K'has, where the original communication was said to both Moshe and Aharon (4:1 and 4:17), we might have thought they were equally involved, so the Torah adds "through Moshe" to make it clear who was in charge. For Gershon, only Moshe was mentioned in the original communication (4:21), so this clarification was unnecessary. There is no "opening line" for M'rari, leaving it unclear if it was said just to Moshe or also to Aharon, so "through Moshe" clarifies that Moshe was in charge there too. However, since M'rari was part of the same communication as Gershon (albeit in a separate paragraph), there should be no need for additional clarification there. Additionally, this does not explain why the summation, which applies to all three families, also includes the words "through Moshe."

Chasam Sofer, based on the Mishkan being too

heavy to be lifted by humans if not for G-d helping Moshe put it up (see Rashi on Sh'mos 39:33), says that it wasn't just the pillars/beams that needed miraculous help to be lifted and carried, but the vessels too, and it was only because Moshe had done so originally that the Levi'im were able to take the Mishkan down and put it back up at every stop. But this only applied to the heavy materials, which K'has and M'rari were responsible for. Gershon, on the other hand, took care of the embroidered items (such as the curtains and the tent coverings), and didn't need "the hands of Moshe" to have put the Mishkan together the first time in order to be able to do so again afterwards. Therefore, the expression "through Moshe" (literally "through Moshe's hand") did not apply to Gershon.

Tzofnas Pa'anaych (4:37) says that the family of K'has were singers (see Arachin 11a), while the family of Gershon were gatekeepers (keeping those who didn't belong out of the Temple), and a singer could not be a gatekeeper, or vice versa (Arachin 11b). Therefore, Moshe, who was from the family of K'has, couldn't be included with Gershon and their role. (He says the summation is not referring to these roles, so Moshe could be included there.)

Meshech Chuchmuh says that the term "hand of Moshe" refers to the "translator" who explained what Moshe was saying to the masses (see K'risus 13b), and adds that there was one "translator" assigned for each 50 people. The number of adult males between the ages of 30 and 50 in the families of K'has and M'rari was divisible by 50, so everyone was able to be part of a group of 50 that had their own translator. Gershon, on the other hand, was not divisible by 50, and had a "remainder" of 30, so not everyone had a "translator" assigned to them. This is hinted at by omitting the term that refers to the "translator."

In the summation (4:46), besides Moshe and Aharon counting the Levi'im, the Tribal Chiefs are mentioned as well. They weren't mentioned when the families were counted, only when the total of the three families is given. It would be difficult to say that the only role they played was to verify that the math ( $2,750+2,630+3,200=8,580$ ) was correct. Rather, they were present when each family was counted, but only had a secondary role, so weren't mentioned there. Similarly, even though Moshe and Aharon were mentioned when each family was counted, Moshe was primary, and Aharon was secondary, as indicated by the words "through Moshe" (as Tosfos says). When the role of each family is described, only Gershon is to be overseen "by Aharon and his sons" (4:27). True, Aharon and his sons had a primary role regarding K'has' tasks too, but that was not overseeing it, per se, but making sure they did their part (completely covering the vessels) before K'has started to do theirs. Gershon, on the other hand, started to take down the curtains and coverings after K'has had removed the vessels, yet

were still overseen by Aharon and his sons.

Since Aharon was more involved with Gershon's role in taking the Mishkan apart and putting it back together than the other two families, even when taking the census Moshe didn't assert himself as being more primary than Aharon was, letting Aharon take charge of Gershon's role from the time they were counted. Therefore, when the Torah describes the family of Gershon being counted, the words "through Moshe" are left out. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **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. "Rebbit!" 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 rebbit 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 rebbit already knew the news, he apologized for interrupting saying he had something very important to share. Then he announced with joy, "Rebbit, 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 rebbit so happy.

Five minutes later, yet a third boy entered the room. "Rebbit, 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 rebbit 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 and torah.org

**RABBI YISROEL CINER**

## Parsha Insights

It can be energizing, exhilarating, making one feel part of something much greater than oneself. It can be dispiriting, depressing, making one feel insignificant, inconsequential and lost. As always, it is our perception of a situation that creates our reality.

We are instructed in the Shma prayer, "not to stray after our eyes." This can be understood as a warning: being that our perception is often skewed, Hashem cautions us to see things through His eyes, His perception, in order to attain true clarity.

In this week's parsha, Naso, we find a rather strange and belabored repetition. With the induction of the Mishkan {Tabernacle}, the Nesiim, the leaders of each tribe, brought an offering. Each brought exactly the same offering. Yet, the Torah spells it out, in its full identical detail, twelve times. Going beyond the fact that it certainly made the learning easier for my son's bar mitzvah parsha last year, we must understand what lesson Hashem is teaching us through this repetition.

One of a crowd. Just like the other twelve. Nothing special. Same exact gift. Humiliating. Insignificant. Not leaving my mark. That's how it would be viewed through our eyes. Through Hashem's eyes? Unique. Special. Significant. Treasured. Each Nasi deserving his own passukim. The Saba of Kelem writes that this episode of the Nesiim shows that each member of a crowd is viewed by Hashem with the love and joy normally directed to a unique and exceptional individual.

This concept arose in a classroom conversation a few weeks ago. We were discussing the requirement to repeat the Amidah prayer if one mistakenly added a mention of the rain. 'What's the big deal?' some of my students asked. Just get it right the next time!

I related to them that in Israel, with the scarce rainfall, they sometimes resort to a process of 'seeding' the clouds in order to increase the precipitation. What would happen if they seeded the clouds and then realized that rainfall at that point would actually be detrimental, I asked. If there is a de-seeding process, they'd have to go back up there and de-seed, they conceded.

With the hundreds of thousands of Jews that pray, each one makes a difference. Each rain-mention seeds the clouds. If they said it when the rain would be harmful, it must be undone. Repeat that Amidah without those words. De-seed.

Each person is a ben-yachid {treasured, only-child}. We matter. The others that join us in our avodah {Divine service} must encourage and energize us. They don't detract in any way from our significance. That's how Hashem views it. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org