

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The word Naso that gives its name to this week's parsha is a verb of an extraordinary range of meanings, among them: to lift, to carry, and to forgive. Here though, and elsewhere in the wilderness years, it is used, in conjunction with the phrase et rosh ("the head") to mean "to count." This is an odd way of speaking, because biblical Hebrew is not short of other verbs meaning to count, among them limnot, lispor, lifkod, and lachshov. Why then not use one of these verbs? Why not simply say "count" instead of "lift the head"?

The answer takes us into one of the most revolutionary of all Jewish beliefs. If we are each in the image of God, then every one of us has infinite value. We are each unique. Even genetically identical twins share only approximately 50 percent of their attributes. None of us is substitutable for any other. This may well be the single most important consequence of monotheism. Discovering God, singular and alone, our ancestors discovered the human individual, singular and alone.

This was simply not a value in the ancient world, nor is it one in tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. The ruler might be deemed to have infinite value; so might some of the members of his or her court; but certainly not the masses -- as the word "mass" itself implies. Most people were simply regarded as part of a mass: an army, a work force or a gang of slaves. What mattered was their total number, not their individual lives, their hopes and fears, their loves and dreams.

That is the image we have of Egypt of the Pharaohs. It is how the sages understood the builders of Babel. They said that if a brick fell from the tower they wept. If a worker fell and died, they paid no attention. (Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 24) Almost a hundred million people died in the twentieth century in Stalin's Russia, Mao's Communist China and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. We say of such regimes that people became "just numbers." (As Jews were in Auschwitz.) That is what the Torah is rejecting as a matter of supreme religious principle. At the very moment when one might be maximally tempted to see people as "just numbers" -- namely, when taking a census, as here -- the Israelites were commanded to "lift people's heads," to raise their spirits, to make them

feel they counted as individuals, not numbers in a mass, ciphers in a crowd.

In the course of my life I have had several deep conversations with Christians, and there is one aspect of Judaism that they find very difficult to understand. The conversation usually turns to the central figure of Christianity, and I am often asked, do I believe that he was the son of God. "I do indeed," I reply, "because we believe that every Jew is a son or daughter of God." What Christianity applies to one figure in its faith, we apply to all. Where Christianity transcendentalises, Judaism democratizes. My conversation partners often think I am being evasive, finding a polite way to avoid answering the question. In fact, though, the opposite is true.

The first words God commands Moses to say to Pharaoh were, "My child, My firstborn, Israel" (Ex. 4:22). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Israelites, "You are children of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1). "Beloved are Israel," said Rabbi Akiva, "for they are called God's children." (Mishnah Avot 3:14) One of the key phrases of prayer, Avinu malkenu, "Our Father, our King," encapsulates this in two simple words. We are all royalty. We are each children of the King.

To be sure, this is not the only metaphor for our relationship with God. He is also our Sovereign and we are His servants. He is our shepherd and we are His sheep. These evoke more humility than the image of parent-and-child. What is more, when God saw the first human without a partner He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." The Torah is thus signalling one of the defining tensions of all human life: we are independent but we are also interdependent. Our thoughts and feelings belong to the "I," but much of our existence depends on being part of a "We." Despite its unprecedented estimate of the individual, Judaism is at the same time an irreducibly communal faith. There is no "I" without the "we."

The Hassidic master Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Przysucha nicely summed up the Jewish approach to the value of a life. He said that we should each have



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two pockets. In one we should place a piece of paper with the words: "For my sake was the world created." (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5) In the other should be the words: "I am but dust and ashes." (Genesis 18:27) We are unique. We each have non-negotiable dignity and inalienable rights. But in and of ourselves we are nothing. Our greatness comes not from us but from God. That is the dialectic of life in the conscious presence of our mortality and God's eternity.

The point being made by the Torah, though, is that what matters is not how we see ourselves but how we see, and treat, and behave toward others. The world is not short of self-important people. What it is short of is those who make other people feel important - who "lift their heads."

I will never forget the occasion when Prince Charles, at a banquet given by the Jewish community, spent as much time talking to the young schoolchildren who came to sing in a choir as he did to the great and good among the guests, or when he came to a Jewish primary school and lit Chanukah candles with the children, giving each the chance to tell him who they were and what the festival meant to them. That, at least in Britain, is what royalty is and does. Members of the royal family make other people feel important. That is their work, their service, their role. It is the true meaning of royalty. Watching them, you understand Rabbi Yohanan's fine insight that "greatness is humility." (Megillah 31a) You understand also Ben Zoma's axiom: "Who is honoured? One who honours others." (Mishnah Avot 4:1)

The challenge that emerges from the way the Torah describes taking a census is that we must "lift people's heads." Never let them feel merely a number. Make those you meet feel important, especially the people whom others tend to take for granted: the waiters at a communal meal; the woman who takes your coat in a cloakroom; the shammas in the synagogue; the people doing security duty; the caretaker; the most junior member of the office team, and so on. Make eye contact. Smile. Let them know you do not take them for granted. You appreciate them. They matter as individuals.

For this is the life-changing idea: We are as important as we make other people feel. *Covenant and*

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Our Biblical portion this week speaks of the ongoing voice of the Divine, which continues to be heard from within the Sanctuary (Mishkan) on a continual basis after the Divine Revelation, which has just been heard by the entire nation at Sinai. It is clear from the text that G-d will be speaking to Moses – and only to Moses – from between the two cherubs. (Numbers 7:89) The revelations that Moses will receive in the Sanctuary would later be communicated to the rest of Israel in the form of the Pentateuch (and perhaps even major principles of the Oral Law) which we have today. This is in contrast to the Ten Commandments (or at least the first two of the Ten Commandments) which – at least according to the majority of our Biblical commentaries – were initially revealed by G-d to the entire Israelite nation at Sinai (Exodus 20:1). It seems rather obvious that the subsequent Sanctuary revelations were targeted specifically to the Jewish people with the necessity of Moses' serving as intermediary; after all, many if not all of those commandments deal with the activities of the Israelites after they enter the promised Land of Israel. But what of the Ten Commandments? Were they initially meant for Israel – or, perhaps, were they, and are they, really meant for the entire world, for all of humanity?

The Midrash certainly seems to think that G-d initially was desirous of making His revelation a universal one, directed at all of civilization. In Moses' farewell message to the Israelites at the conclusion of his earthly life (and at the conclusion of the Pentateuch), he declares: "The Lord came from Sinai and above from Seir to them; He appeared from Mt. Paran...." (Deut 33:2). Rashi (ad loc) cites the Midrash, "He began with the children of Seir (Edom or Esau, and, in the Midrashic tradition, the progenitor of Rome and Christianity), offering that they accept the Torah (of the Decalogue), but they did not desire it, he then went on and offered it to the children of Ishmael (Midrashically, the Arab Moslem world), but they did not want it..." the famous Midrash goes on to describe how the entire world was not yet ready to accept the moral strictness and limitations of "Thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery," whereas the Israelites declared, "We shall carry out (initially) and (only later attempt to) understand" the laws of the Decalogue, but we now accept them "wholesale" and in their entirety (Exodus 24:7). But in the first instance, according to the Midrash, G-d intended the Ten Commandments for everyone! It is

also fascinating to note that even within the Biblical text itself the all-inclusive nature of G-d's revelation seems evident; the introductory verse of the Decalogue reads "And G-d spoke all these words saying..." without any specific object or nation He was addressing (Exodus 20:1), whereas the very previous verse states, "And Moses descended to the nation and spoke to them..." (Ex 19:25). Moses' audience may have been Israel, but G-d's audience was – and is – the world!

And indeed each of the laws of the Decalogue are universally relevant and even critical for the preservation of humanity. The introductory statement, "I am the Lord your G-d who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the house of bondage" refers not only to G-d's concern that Israel be free but also to G-d's concern that every human being – created in the Divine image be free; had G-d only been parochially concerned for the Israelites, He could have air-lifted them out of Egypt as we Israelis airlifted the Beta Yisrael Jewish community out of Ethiopia in Operations Moses and Solomon, and there would have been no necessity for all the ten plagues and the splitting of the Reed Sea. These miracles clearly meant to teach Pharaoh – and all would-be totalitarian, enslaving despots of the future – that G-d demands freedom for each of His children; this lesson was meant to be learned by the entire world, so that the Israelites could justifiably sing at the Reed Sea: "The Nations heard and they became terrified, trembling grabbed hold of the inhabitants of Philistia; the generals of Edom were frightened... all inhabitants of Canaan melted... The Lord (and not any Pharaoh) shall reign forever and ever" (Exodus 15:14-18).

The next two actual commandments prohibit idolatry, which is similarly prohibited by the seven Noahide laws of morality. I strongly subscribe to Rabbi Menahem Meiri's definition of idolatry, which has nothing to do with theology and everything to do with the ethically and morally repugnant sexual orgiastic excesses and child sacrifice –murders associated with idolatry (see Moshe Halbertal's important book, *Idolatry*). The third commandment prohibiting the taking of the Lord's name in vain (or to further falsehood or trickery) parallels the Noahide prohibition of blaspheming G-d; note that nowhere is belief in G-d explicitly mentioned as either one of the Noahide laws or one of the Ten Commandments. This is reminiscent of the trenchant midrashic comment, "Would that you forget Me, says G-d, but remember My laws of morality,"

The fifth commandment deals with respecting parents – who give life and usually sustaining nurture – with the final five forbidding murder, adultery, theft, false testimony and coveting that which does not belong to you. All of these are certainly universal in import and attribution.

The only commandment which may be seen as referring only to the Israelites is the fourth, "Remember

the Sabbath day to keep it holy... The seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your G-d; you shall not do any creative physical activity, neither you nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your Gentile manservant nor your Gentile maid-servant, nor your animal, nor the stranger who is within your gates' (Exodus 20:8-10). Here, too, the work prohibition includes the stranger, the Gentile and even the animal, with the very next verse stressing the most universal of reasons for this Sabbath law: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth and everything which is in them, and He rested on the seventh day" (20:11). Apparently the message of the Sabbath is that there is only one Creator, everyone and everything else is a creature, and so the Sabbath work prohibition comes to remind us to value every Divine creation and for one human being never to "lord" over any other human being – who is a creature just like he is a creature. All humans must together and separately only serve the single and singular Lord of the Universe. This idea is strengthened in second version of the Decalogue in the Book of Deuteronomy which stresses the reason for the Sabbath as being "in order that your male servant and your female servant may rest like you" (Dt. 5:14).

Although it is true that our Sabbath Amidah specifies the fact of the Sabbath as a sign between G-d and Israel forever, a day which G-d "did not give to the Gentiles of the earth but (only) to Israel did He give it with love," this may either refer to the fact that the Gentiles chose not to take it, or that the details of our Sabbath laws and the all-encompassing Divine Service which defines Jewish Sabbath observance does not apply to the Gentile world. But the ever-arching notion of a general day of rest for all creatures under the one Creator may well be necessary and crucial for Gentile as well as Jew.

In any event, the Ten Commandments is probably Judaism's greatest gift to the world, and our best chance at world peace were they ever to be universally adopted. And the fact that we read the Book of the convert Ruth on the Festival commemorating the Revelation at Sinai, is the best proof of the universal import of that revelation! ©2018 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The almost endless repetition of the gifts of the elders of the tribes of Israel, at the time of the dedication of the Tabernacle in the desert, has presented a problem to all the commentators to the Torah over the ages. Why does the Torah, that is often so sparing with words even when discussing important and eternal commandments and issues, allow itself to be so expansive and repetitive in this matter?

As can be imagined, there are numerous discussions of this matter by the scholars of Israel over

the centuries, though it is difficult to find an answer that proves to be both emotionally and intellectually satisfying. Even I am loath to tread in areas where even the great angels of Israel have found difficulty, nevertheless there is an observation that I feel can and should be made that does have relevance and importance to us.

Nothing in the Torah should be treated cavalierly. There is a message to all that is written within its holy words and it is incumbent upon us to find and absorb that message in our own lifestyle and society. Often-times in life people are deterred from taking certain actions or developing certain ideas or programs simply because someone has already advanced that idea.

People feel that if they are not the first to propose an idea, if someone, so to speak, has beaten them to the punch, then they withdraw completely from the arena and have nothing to say or contribute to the matter. The repetition of the same identical gifts that each of the 12 elders of the tribes of Israel donated to the Tabernacle teaches us that just because someone else has originally done a great thing, one should not be deterred from repeating that exact same deed.

Often in life, it is the repetition of an act or declaration that solidifies the original pioneering act or statement. It is the fact that others have chosen to imitate and repeat the same act that gives the original act its validity and value. Had there been only one gift of one of the elders of Israel to the Tabernacle, cynics would say that this was merely a formal gesture of public display but did not really reflect the true intent, emotions and relationship of the tribes of Israel towards this holy structure.

It is only when this act is repeated over and over and each of the elders of the tribe of Israel demands its own right and turn to express its appreciation for the godly gift of the Tabernacle to the Jewish people that the true attitude and emotion of the people is honestly and openly reflected.

Throughout the Torah we are aware that there is an underlying idea that people do not want to be excluded from participation in a godly commandment and holy mission. This is abundantly evident in the case of the gifts of the elders of the tribes of Israel as outlined in this week's Torah reading. ©2018 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 DAVID S. LEVIN

Passing Over the Firstborn

The concept of the b'chor, the firstborn, is very important in Jewish Law. In Parashat Ki Teitzei we learn, "If a man has two wives one who is loved and one who is hated and they both, the one who is

loved and the one who is hated give birth to a son, if the firstborn son belongs to the hated (wife). Then it will be that on the day that he causes his sons to inherit that which he has, he may not make the firstborn of the son of the beloved wife come before the firstborn of the hated wife as the b'chor." In spite of this halacha, we find that the Chumash is filled with instances in which the younger son is given leadership and sometimes inheritance over the "rightful" firstborn. In each case the rabbis go to great lengths to explain the reasons why these decisions were correct and lawful, yet the law is still clear that we may not make that kind of a decision ourselves. It is even clear that Hashem also makes these same choices as we see in His dealings within the tribe of Levi.

Our parasha begins with the words, "Raise up the head (count) of the children of Gershon also them according to their fathers' house, according to their families." Many of the commentators immediately focus on the unusual words "gam heim, also them" in this pasuk. Rashi comments, "as I commanded you about the children of Kahat to see how many would be eligible for the work of the Temple." Rashi appears to be answering the question of why the Levi'im are counted twice using two different standards for the count. In Parashat Bamidbar we see that the Levi'im are counted "from the age of one month upwards" yet at the end of the parasha and the beginning of this week's parasha we find that they are counted "from the age of thirty on up to the age of fifty." The first count was for the purpose of determining the number of Levi'im that were alive to redeem the firstborn who were replaced in their service to Hashem in the Temple because of their sin of the Golden Calf. The count now of the Levi'im was to determine those who were of an appropriate age to serve Hashem in the Temple (30-50 years old). Rashi explains that the words "gam heim" had no other significance than to tell us that we are continuing this type of count now with Gershon just as we had done with Kahat, namely, strictly for the purpose of determining the numbers eligible for service in the Temple.

Chizkuni appears to touch on the problem but does not spell it out. "Even though I (Hashem) commanded you to count the children of Kahat first since the important service like the Aron, the Shulchan (Table of the Breads), the Menorah, and the altars were carried by them, as it says the Holy objects were on them, do not refrain from counting the children of Gershon after them even though they do not carry anything as their service was with the wagons (their items were placed on wagons for transport), because they are the older of the sons of Levi and it is their law to be counted second." Gershon is the oldest of the three sons of Levi and should have been counted first except for the fact that the sons of Kahat were carrying the holier objects.

HaRav Zalman Sorotskin, the Aznayim L'Torah, takes Chizkuni one step further. "According to the order of birth it should have been necessary to count Gershon first, but Kahat was counted first both because of his importance and because of the importance of the holy objects that were assigned to him by Hashem to carry. When the sons of Gershon saw that they were passed over they thought that they would not be counted in the group and so the Torah said 'gam heim' to say that also they were to be counted in the assembly." The B'nei Gershon were concerned that they would be excluded from the special count that would include them as part of those who were beloved by Hashem. That is also why the words "lift up the head" were used instead of the word limnot to mean count. This term indicated that Hashem raised them up as He did with the rest of the B'nei Yisrael. This also answers why the term was unnecessary in counting the B'nei M'rari as they were counted in the proper order and did not have any of those same fears.

The Kli Yakar asks the real question here: "Why was the responsibility of the Aron not given to the b'chor Gershon to give greater honor and to increase the strength of the Torah and the Law of the B'chor?" It is easy to say that Kahat was counted first because he carried the Aron and the other holy objects, but the real question must be why this task was given to Kahat over the b'chor Gershon. The Kli Yakar explains that the first answer revolves around the study of Torah. Moshe and Aharon were sons of Kahat. Moshe's direct involvement in the presentation of the Torah to the B'nei Yisrael and teaching it first to Aharon and his sons before teaching it to the Elders indicated the special relationship that Kahat's sons had to the idea of the study of Torah. Hashem wanted to emphasize the importance of limud Torah by raising up the B'nei Kahat over the other sons of Levi.

The Kli Yakar also brings the concept of the Keter (Crown) of Torah which the Aron represented. The B'nei Yisrael did not qualify for the Keter Kehuna, the Crown of the Priesthood. They did not qualify for the Keter Malchut, the Crown of Kingship, as this was reserved for the Tribe of Yehuda. The only Crown left was the Keter Torah. Had Hashem given the responsibility of carrying the Aron to Gershon because he was the b'chor, we might be forced to say that this Crown was reserved for the firstborn only. By giving this responsibility to those who learned Torah and taught Torah, we are told that everyone is eligible to wear the Keter Torah, the Crown of Torah.

Each of us in our own way can approach the Torah to study it. We each will have different limits in our approach to Torah based on our uniqueness and our unique gifts and skills. But we are all capable to receive this beautiful gift, and the more time that we devote to our study of Torah the greater that gift can become. That is the beauty of the Torah. The more we

put into the Torah the more we are able to take out. That is the mark of a true gift; the more one uses it the more there is. We must learn to understand that everything else is secondary; everything else is ours only so that we will be able to bring to the Torah our uniqueness and from that unique approach will come our unique gift from the Torah. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The story of Ruth is one of a family in dissolution. Naomi's husband and two sons die leaving her with her two daughters in law, Orpah and Ruth. By the end of the book, family is found once again. Ruth marries Boaz and they have a child Obed, who is raised by Naomi. (Ruth 4: 17)

From this perspective, the book of Ruth parallels the story of Judah and Tamar in the book of Bereishit. There, too, the family of Judah was in disarray. Two of his sons, Er and Onan, had died. Judah was reluctant to have his third son, Sheilah marry Tamar, the widow of his older two sons.

At the conclusion of the story, Judah's family also comes together after he has relations with Tamar from whom twins were born.

Interestingly, the mechanism used to reunite the fragmented family in both stories is a form of yibum-the Levirate marriage. In the yibum process, a man is directed to marry the widow of his brother who had been childless. In the case of Ruth, she marries Boaz; Judah does the same when he marries Tamar.

Rabbi David Silber points out similarities in the yibum of the two stories. In both, a double yibum is performed. Judah marries Tamar since both of his deceased sons to whom Tamar had been married, had no children. Boaz marries Ruth, but through Ruth, the line of Naomi, was perpetuated.

In both stories, the second in line performs the levirate marriage. There was a closer relative to Ruth than Boaz (ploni almoni); and Sheilah, not Judah, had the primary responsibility to marry Tamar.

In both stories as well, the man performing the redemption is reluctant to perform the good deed. Judah hesitates to allow Tamar to marry into his family; Boaz also seems reluctant to marry Ruth.

Another common feature in each of these stories is that a woman teaches the reluctant man his responsibility to bring the family together. Tamar does this by reminding Judah of his responsibility to marry her and Ruth does the same, reminding Boaz of his responsibility.

Finally, it can be suggested that both stories are segues to our nationhood. Soon after Judah's family is reunited, the story of our becoming a nation unfolds as the book of Exodus begins. Soon after, Ruth and Boaz marry they have a child, from whom ultimately the Messiah will come – marking the

redemption of the Jewish people.

Both of these stories remind us all of the confluence between family and nation. In this time, may we feel the pain and joy of what is happening in Israel, not merely as fellow members of the Jewish nation, but in the deepest way, as members of our own family. ©2018 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 BENJAMIN YUDIN

TorahWeb

The Ponevezher Rav z"tl after the Shoah, started Yeshivos for the many orphans and called them Batei Avos as he was looking to raise a new generation of fathers. Once, when visiting the boys, he asked if anyone knew a reason for the custom of reciting at the end of Shemoneh Esrei a verse from Tanach wherein the opening letter of the verse is the first letter of one's name, and the last letter of the verse is the last letter of one's name. (This practice is found in Sefer Ha'Kavanot Ha'ari, it is said to be helpful in preventing chibut ha'kever, is attributed to the Kitzur Shelah, and is found in the Aruch HaShulchan [Orach Chaim 122:8].)

The Ponevezher Rav z"tl suggested the following answer: After 120 years when one is brought before the Divine throne of glory, one is going to forget their name. The fright is so great, as Abba Kohen Bardela taught (Bereishis Rabbah 93:10) that just as the brothers could not answer Yosef (Bereishis 45:3) because they were shocked to find that it was him before them, even more so when one will have to answer to Hashem he will not be able to reply. The Ponevezher Rav explained that the one thing you do take with you to the next world is the Torah and mitzvos that one studied and performed in this world. The recitation of one's name thrice daily in a passuk will accompany that individual (since reciting the passuk constitutes an act of learning Torah) and will remind him of his name.

The concept that one's spiritual wealth that they amassed in one's lifetime is the only possession one takes to the next world is found explicitly in Parshas Nasso according to the Chofetz Chaim. The Torah states, "ish es kadashav lo yehiyeh -- a man's holies shall be his, what a person gives to the Kohen shall be his" (Bamidbar 5:10.) All of one's material acquisitions are by nature transient and temporary, as the saying goes: there are no pockets in tachrichim (burial shrouds.)

This is found clearly in Talmud (Bava Basra 11a) regarding King Munbaz, who according to Rashi was the son of Queen Helena, one of the Hasmonean Kings. We are taught that during years of famine he opened his storehouses and treasuries and supported

the poor. He was severely criticized by family members because unlike the royalty before him that added to the family fortune, he was depleting the family fortune. He answered with three points: 1. My fathers hoarded wealth below, on Earth, while I have hoarded wealth above, in Heaven 2. My family gathered wealth in an insecure place, and I have accumulated wealth in a most secure environment 3. My forefathers stored something that does not produce fruits, but I have hoarded something that does produce fruit.

Moreover, this concept is explicitly taught in Avos (6:9) by Reb Yosi ben Kismah in explaining why he refused a lucrative rabbinic position in a not yet religious community. As part of his rejection, he explained that, "when a man departs from this world, neither silver, nor gold, nor precious stones, nor pearls escort him, but only Torah study, and good deeds, as it is said, (Proverbs 6:22) 'when you walk it shall guide you, when you lie down, it shall guard you, and when you are awake, it shall speak on your behalf.' When you walk it shall guide you in this world, when you lie down it shall guard you in the grave, and when you awake it shall speak on your behalf in the world to come."

The Chofetz Chaim zt"l presented the following parable in the name of our Sages: a man had 3 friends, the first he was closest with, loved him, and thought the feelings were mutual. The second he also considered close, but not like the first. The third he had associations with, but not as strong as his connections to the others. One day the man was summoned suddenly to the king. He was not told the reason for his urgent appearance before the king, but he was exceedingly frightened to go alone. He asked his first and closest friend to accompany him and to his great surprise, he was refused. The second closest friend agreed to go, but only to the palace gates. In desperation he approached the third friend, and much to his surprise he not only agreed willingly and cheerfully to accompany him to the king but agreed to vouch for and present a most complimentary presentation on his behalf before the king.

The meaning of the above is obvious. The fortune and all material possessions that one invests time and effort amassing are too often that first friend -- they flatly refuse to accompany a person to the next world. The second friend is representative of one's family -- they tearfully can only accompany a person until the grave. However, that last friend, whom he did not realize how loyal he is, is his Torah study, mitzvos, and good deeds, which excitedly accompany you and endorse on your behalf.

Finally, I'd like to suggest that this is further communicated by King David, (Tehillim 139:5), "achor vakedem tzartani -- back and front have you formed me." The Radak understands kedem -- back, to refer to the formation of the embryo in the mother's womb. The Talmud (Niddah 30b) teaches that the baby in utero is

taught Torah. The neshama of man is surrounded by Torah prior to birth, and the many sources cited above affirm that the soul is protected by Torah in the next world. It is thus understood that the Talmud (Pesachim 54a) lists Torah as the first of the seven supernatural phenomena created prior to this world, as it truly is beyond this world in every sense of the word. ©2018 Rabbi B. Yudin & TorahWeb.org

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The Holiday of Shavuot

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

When the Jewish people received the first tablets the Torah states "Beware of ascending the mountain or touching its edge" (Shmot19;12). Similarly this warning appears again when the Jewish people receive the second set of tablets "No man shall ascend with you nor may anyone be seen on the entire mountain. Even the flock and the cattle may not graze facing the mountain (Shmot 34;3). Thus the second warning was harsher than the first in that no one, even the cattle, was allowed to approach the mountain, while in the first giving of the tablets the elders were permitted to ascend the mountain with Moshe.

From the sentence "Thou shalt not touch" (Lo Tiga Bo Yad) the Michilta deduces that this excludes the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and the Temple. Thus according to this view one may touch the Kotel wall. Though it is forbidden for a defiled (Tamei) person to enter the perimeter of the Temple, touching the outside is permitted. There are however views that one should not place their hand into the Kotel walls for that would constitute entering its perimeter. Thus there are those who do not come near the Kotel wall.

Just to note that there are those who posit that when it states 'Thou shall not touch' it comes to include-not exclude- the Mishkan and the Temple. However this is not the dominant view. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Play it Again, Schloomiel

Naso is the longest portion in the Torah. It did not have to be that way, but the Torah chose to include seventy verses that say the same thing -- over and over again.

The end of the parsha discusses the dedication of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). It describes the offerings that every Nasi (prince) brought in honor of the auspicious occasion. Each Nasi brought the same items.

Numbers 7:12: "On the first day, Nachshon the son of Aminadav brought his offering. It was (comprised of) one silver bowl that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels; one silver basin that weighed seventy shekels. Both were filled with fine flour and oil. One golden ladle filled with incense. A young bull, a ram, a sheep, and so

on." The Torah uses six verses to expound, in precise detail, the exact measurements and components of the offering.

On the second day, Nesanel ben Tzuar of the tribe of Yissachar brought the exact same offering. On the third day Eliyav of Zevulun performed the same ceremony. Elitzoor ben Shdayoor of Reuvain repeated the same ritual on the fourth day, and on the fifth day of the dedication, Shimon's prince Schloomiel, repeated the same. This was repeated twelve separate days, by twelve different N'siim (princes). And each day the Torah repeats verbatim the entire offering, changing only the name of the presenter and his tribe.

Normally, the Torah is concise and abbreviated. It leaves us to expound the hidden and to deduce the conclusions. In fact, the two Talmudic Tractates that explain the intricate laws of marriage and divorce are derived from only a handful of verses in Deuteronomy. Why, if all twelve brought the exact same gifts, is each and every Nasi's offering detailed over and over?

The Torah should simply say the following: the daily offering was brought on twelve consecutive days. It consisted of the following: "one silver bowl that weighed a hundred and thirty shekels one silver basin that weighed seventy shekels filled with fine flour and oil. One golden ladle filled with incense a young bull, a ram, a sheep, and so on."

Next, the Torah should list the names of the twelve princes who brought the offerings. The first day... Nachshon of Yehudah; the second day... Nesanel of Yissachar; and so on. That way, seventy verses would be compacted into no more than ten or fifteen! And Parshas Naso would be fifty verses shorter.

A noted American Rabbi was invited to address two major cities in South Africa. Since the cities were hundreds of miles apart, he only prepared one speech for both events. It was a wonderful lecture. It encompassed a wide spectrum of Jewish ideas and was filled with Midrash and Jewish law. Informative, enlightening and entertaining, it was the best speech he had ever prepared.

The first night's audience attested to that. They sat with their mouths open, taking in every nuance and motion of the dramatic presentation. After the lecture a crowd gathered around the Rabbi to both praise him and hear variations on his poignant theme.

After such a wonderful reception, the Rabbi thought that the second evening on the other side of the country should be a breeze. As he walked up to the podium to deliver his magnum opus he looked at the crowd and froze. He spotted at least fifty faces of people he was sure had attended the previous night's speech.

Stunned, he quickly ruffled through the index cards of his mind. He pieced together parts of an old High Holy Day speech, added little from Chanuka,

Purim, and the Hagadah. What resulted was a scattered array of varying thoughts. To say the least, it was not his best performance.

After the speech the same faces of the previous evening gathered once again around the Rabbi. "I'm sorry," he stammered to them, "I had originally planned to repeat last night's speech. Seeing your faces, I hastily arranged a piecemeal lecture based on some previous talks. Had I known you were coming, I would have prepared a totally new talk. I am sorry for my poor performance."

"But, Rabbi," they replied. "That is exactly why we came! Last night's talk was the most fascinating we had ever heard. We expected you to repeat it. We came all the way to hear it over again word for word!"

The Torah, in repeating the twelve offerings, and spending six verses on each one, leaves us with a message that is as powerful as it is pertinent. Many of our deeds are repeats of generations passed. Many are repeats from yesterday. They are all beloved and cherished. Day after day after day... Hashem wants to hear and see the exact same prayer, blessing charitable action over and over again. It is as dear as the first time. ©2018 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

What is the greatest blessing to which a person can aspire in this world? For Jewish people, at least, the answer seems to be peace. How do people in Israel greet and take leave of each other? Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace. What is the traditional Jewish greeting? Shalom aleichem, let there be peace unto you. Peace, always peace. Jewish people know full well that without peace there is nothing. The roots of this awareness go back thousands of years. In this week's Torah portion, we read about the priestly blessing, whose climactic words are, "Let Him establish peace for you." Peace is the ultimate blessing. But let us take a closer look at these words. What is the significance of Hashem's "establishing peace for you"? Would it not have been simpler to say, "Let Him give you peace"?

Perhaps we can find the answer in the topic that immediately precedes the presentation of the priestly blessing -- the laws of the Nazir. At certain times, when a man feels himself drawn by worldly temptations, the Torah allows him to make a Nazirite vow whereby he accepts upon himself an abstemious life style for a specified period of time. He may not drink wine or cut his hair, and he must maintain himself on a high level of ritual purity. When the term of the vow expires, these restrictions are removed, and then, the Torah says, "the Nazir shall drink wine."

"The Nazir shall drink wine." It almost seems as if the Torah is instructing him to drink wine, not just permitting it. But why? Furthermore, the Torah tells us

that at the end of the Nazirite period he is required to bring certain sacrifices, one of which is a sin offering. What was his sin? Our Sages explain that his sin was his voluntary abstention from wine. What is so important about drinking wine? The answer touches on one of the most fundamental tenets of Judaism. The Torah does not want us to withdraw from the physical world and pursue a monastic life. On the contrary, the Torah insists that we find a harmonious balance between our spiritual and physical sides. The Torah does not want us to shun the gorgeous world Hashem created but rather to enjoy it in a civilized manner, to integrate our physical pleasure into our spiritual connection to our Creator. That is the ideal mode of living. The Nazir felt himself out of balance, drawn to worldly temptations to an inappropriate degree. Therefore, the Torah allows him to go temporarily to the opposite extreme in order to regain his balance. Once that period is over, once he recaptures his inner harmony, he "should drink wine."

This is the essence of peace. True peace is not achieved by hiding from the disruptive forces of life but by finding an inner harmony which integrates physical needs and spiritual aspirations. This sort of peace is not just the absence of conflict but the positive presence of harmony, a state that Hashem helps us "establish" so that we can truly benefit from all His other blessings. As our Sages tell us, "Hashem found no vessel capable of containing and preserving blessings other than peace."

A teacher and his principal were discussing a young troublemaker who consistently disrupted the class.

"I would like to have him removed from my class," said the teacher. "Maybe then we could have some peace."

"Indeed?" said the principal. "Do you think removing him will bring you peace?"

"Of course it will," said the teacher.

The principal shook his head. "I'm afraid you are wrong. Removing this troublemaker from your class will bring you silence. Making him a functioning, contributing member of the class would bring you peace."

In our own lives, we all crave that moment of peace. We dream of the time when our lives will become peaceful and happy. But more often than not, our concept of peace is the removal of irritating factors. The obnoxious co-worker will hopefully find a different job. The troublesome teenager will mercifully grow up and get married. And so on. But that is not true peace. It is escape. Why hitch our happiness to the shallow satisfactions of an illusive escape that may never come? But if we learn to live in harmony with the people and the circumstances in the here and now, we will surely find happiness in the profound satisfactions of inner peace. ©2018 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org