

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Naso

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חיליני

UNIQUE POTENTIAL

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"Take a census of the sons of Gershon as well..." (4:22)

The commentators notes that the words "as well" appear to be redundant. After all, since Hashem had previously instructed Moshe to count the sons of Kehas (Bamidbar 4:1), we automatically know that now He is instructing Moshe to count the sons of Gershon, that they are to be counted "as well." What are we being taught from these seemingly superfluous words which stress that the sons of Gershon are also to be counted?

Whereas the sons of Kehas had the privilege of carrying the holy Ark, the sons of Gershon were entrusted with carrying seemingly less significant items: the curtains, coverings, and screens of the Mishkan. As such, Rav Moshe Feinstein writes that the Torah stresses that the sons of Gershon are to be counted "also" like sons of Kehas, meaning that they are to be counted together - in the same way - for they are equally fulfilling their unique purpose. And even though carrying the fabric of the Mishkan involved less fanfare than the holy Ark, it was no less crucial in any way.

Everyone is created differently: physically, mentally, and emotionally. Our strengths and weaknesses are different from one another, as are our experiences and struggles. As such, our success in life cannot be determined by being compared to those around us. Our only measurement to determine success is whether we could have done better based on our own potential.

To illustrate this: Reuven and Shimon are carrying bottles of water. Reuven's bottle has the capacity to hold half a liter, and his bottle is filled right to the top. Shimon is holding a bottle that can hold two liters, but it is only filled half-way. Whose bottle contains more water? Shimon's, because he is carrying a liter of water. But whose bottle is "full"? Reuven's, even though he is only carrying half a liter. The same is true with all of us; we each have different skills, tools, resources, and limitations (see Sefer Chassidim, 162). Our goal, however, is to take our bottle, whatever the size, and fill it to the top, for this is the only factor that determines our success.

THE GREAT ASCENT

Rabbi Gamliel Rabinowitz

We read Parshas Naso after Shavuot to indicate that after Kabbalas HaTorah and our sincere acceptance and devotion to the performance of Torah and mitzvos, we will have attained a new level of "נשיאה" - elevation from the level we were on before Yom Tov. This grand ascent is the entire purpose of Kabbalas HaTorah.

MAKING ROOM FOR LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Take a census of the sons of Gershon as well..." (4:22)

Ever since the Giving of the Torah, each of us possesses an innate, subconscious love of G-d. This love of G-d is far more intense than any love of G-d that we can achieve on our own, by using our conscious intellect to focus on some reason to love G-d.

When this innate love of G-d is revealed, it can "sanctify" us, i.e., re-orient us toward fulfilling G-d's positive, wholesome desires for us rather than satisfying our self-serving, negative material drives.

These two effects of the Giving of the Torah are alluded to in the name "Gershon." This name is derived from the Hebrew verb le'gareh, which means both "to drive out" and "to bring out" (i.e., "to reveal"; as in Devarim 33:14). By revealing our innate love of G-d, we drive out our former negative, self-serving orientation. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 8, pp. 57-60) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SELFLESS PRIORITIES

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Take a census of the sons of Gershon as well, following their fathers' household, according to their families." (4:22)

Moshe is instructed to "take a census of the sons of Gershon, of them too, following their fathers' houses, according to their families." This instruction raises several questions:

(1) Why is the family of Gershon counted second, after Kehas, if Gershon was the oldest, (2) why is there an extra phrase “of them too,” and (3) instructions typically end with “according to their families, following their fathers’ houses”; why is the order reversed here?

Rav Hirsch posits that Kehas was listed first because their responsibility was to assemble and disassemble the objects of the Mishkan, a role that preceded all others logistically. Being listed first isn’t meant to diminish anyone else’s roles, so the Torah tells us “of them too,” to highlight that they are all equal.

The fact that the families do not feel offended by their position in comparison to others is evidence of their prioritizing their general roles over their specific roles within the family. It is this selflessness that the Torah spotlights for us and is for us to emulate.

TWO STEP PROCESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Take a census of the sons of Gershon as well...” (4:22)

There are two steps in preparing one’s home for an esteemed guest. First the rooms are scrubbed clean; then they are decorated with beautiful furnishings and works of art. The same two steps apply to how we make our lives and ourselves into a home for G-d. First we rid our lives of what is negative and undesirable and then we do what is good and right.

The clan of Gershon carried the outer coverings of the Tabernacle, which protected it from undesirable elements. This corresponds to our job of avoiding harmful activities and influences. The clan of Kehas, on the other hand, carried the furnishings of the Tabernacle, each of which represents a particular positive attribute and activity.

Just as Gershon was born before Kehas, it is necessary to first cleanse oneself of negative behavior in order to be able to properly pursue good. Nonetheless, the clan of Kehas was counted before that of Gershon, since cleansing oneself of negativity is only a preparation for the true work: pursuing good. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 13, p. 19) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ELEVATED CONSCIOUSNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You must count the clan of Merari...” (4:29)

The Hebrew idiom for “taking a census” is “raising the head,” which allegorically means “elevating our consciousness.”

Studying the Torah, prayer, and performing G-d’s commandments elevate our consciousness to varying degrees. These three activities are personified by the three Levite clans. G-d therefore used three different expressions for these clans:

- G-d said: “Take a census of the clan of Kehat...” (Numbers 4:2) for they personified the study of the Torah - through which we meld our consciousness with G-d’s, so to speak.

- G-d said: “Take a census of the clan of Gershon, too...” (ibid., v. 22) for they personified prayer. The word “too” indicates that prayer is an adjunct to the study of the Torah, purifying our motives so we can meld our consciousness with G-d’s fully.

- Finally, G-d said: “You must count the clan of Merari...” (ibid., v. 29) not using the idiom of “raising the head” at all, for this clan personified the performance of the commandments, which is based on our simple devotion to G-d.

All three components working together enable us to achieve our Divine purpose and promote our spiritual development. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“You shall designate them by name to the utensils that they will carry on their watch.” (4:32)

The Ramban notes that instead of instructing each family - as a unit - what they needed to carry, Moshe tasked each individual family member with the responsibility of a specific utensil. This, explains the Ramban, is so that no one would shirk their obligation assuming - or hoping - that someone else will literally carry their burden. The utensils were therefore designated to each individual to ensure that everyone had an active role in serving Hashem.

We see this crucial concept in the realm of learning Torah. One who shirks his responsibility to learn Torah - even temporarily - is referred to as a mevatel Torah, literally meaning that he invalidates the Torah. This wordage seems very problematic. After all, can the Torah possibly be invalidated by anyone? How, through failing to learn Torah, can someone nullify any aspect of the Torah which was in existence before the world’s creation (Zohar, Terumah 161a)? And finally, if one did not shake the lulav, or blow the shofar, for example, we do not relate to this as invalidating the lulav or shofar; what is it about forgoing Torah learning that causes such a detriment to the Torah itself?

While of course the Torah is perfect and will always remain perfect, this is in respect to the reality of Torah that forms the fabric of the world. However, regarding the novella of Torah that were given to us at Sinai, there is an aspect which can, indeed, be considered as being invalidated in the following sense: Every Jewish soul stood at Sinai and received the Torah. (This applies also to future converts (Shavuos 39a).) Through this, each individual received a unique portion of the Torah that is his life’s mission to reveal. Should he fail to bring forth that aspect of Torah, no one else would be able to, and it would become lost to the world.

Based on this, and using the following example, Rav Pincus answers our question:

Reuven's portion of Torah, and his life's mission, is to reveal a difficulty in a comment of Rebbe Akiva Eiger. If Reuven works hard in his learning, he will come to ask this question. Shimon's potential allows him to answer Reuven's question. If he learns as he should, he will develop a unique answer to Reuven's question. But if Reuven does not learn as he should, he will not come up with the question. And if he does not come up with the question, Shimon - even if he put in optimal effort in his learning - will not have the opportunity to come up with the answer. Therefore, we find that not only has Reuven negated the aspect of Torah that he was supposed to uncover, but he has also squandered the aspect of Torah that Shimon had the potential of revealing. Thus, through Reuven's lack of dedication to his learning, he has literally caused the revelation of Torah to be lost to the entire world.

Conversely, if we embrace the opportunities we have to exert ourselves in Torah - at whatever level we are capable of - we have the opportunity to reveal to the entire world an aspect of Torah that even the greatest of Torah learners would not be able produce. For we, and no one else, were given a unique piece of Torah at Sinai, and our mission is to try our best to reveal it!

UTILIZING OUR TALENTS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"All who enter to serve the duties of service and the service of carrying in the Ohel Moed." (4:47)

Mashal: The renowned Finnish composer, Jean Sibelius, was a prominent figure in the early 1900s who played an important role in the formation of the Finnish national identity. His mastery of the orchestra and his symphonic talents have been described as "prodigious."

Sibelius was once hosting a party at which many of those in attendance were businessmen. A close friend approached him and wondered aloud, "Why in the world would you invite so many businessmen to your party? You're a musician. What in the world could you possibly have to speak about with businessmen?"

Sibelius shook his head in wonder. "I don't understand. I talk to them about music!"

His friend was shocked. "Music? What do businessmen know about music? If you want to talk about music, why don't you invite musicians to your party?"

Sibelius laughed. "Musicians? I can't stand talking to musicians! All they ever want to talk about is money!"

Nimshal: The Torah clearly defines the role of the Leviim in the Mishkan and later in the Beis HaMikdash. Their avodah was to sing, play musical instruments and create an atmosphere of holiness through song and continuous praise of the Almighty. They were chosen for those tasks because that was where their talents lay.

They had no right to forgo this privilege if they were uninterested or unwilling to sing, like the musicians who wanted to do nothing but discuss money.

All of Bnei Yisrael should learn a lesson from this. If one has a talent, Hashem expects him to utilize it to its fullest. If one can sing, he should daven for the amud. If he can speak and communicate well, he should talk to others and assist them. If he can write, he should become a scribe. If you have a G-d-given talent, He expects you to maximize it and use it for the good. So don't waste it!

WING OF PROTECTION

Sforno

"When a man or woman commits any sin of mankind, to commit a trespass against G-d..." (5:6)

Rashi notes that this "trespass against G-d" refers to the sin of robbing a proselyte. This crime is considered a trespass against G-d because someone who robs a proselyte, which is someone who has come to seek shelter beneath the wing of Judaism, causes a grave desecration of the name of G-d and is therefore guilty of a trespass against the Holy One.

STEP ONE

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"If a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind... then that soul shall bear guilt. They shall confess the sin which they committed..." (5:6-7)

The Torah here addresses the case of somebody who committed a certain offense, stealing from a convert who did not beget children after his conversion, and then passed away after being victimized. Since the convert has no halachic heirs, the thief who now repents and wishes to rectify his crime cannot return the stolen goods to the victim's estate. The Torah here outlines the procedure whereby the thief can attain atonement.

This process begins with verbal confession – והתודו את עשׂו חטאתם אשר עשו. This pasuk is the source for the obligation of vidui, that after acting wrongly, one must verbally admit that he failed, and acknowledge that ואשמה הנפש ההיא, he is guilty of misconduct.

The first step to self-improvement is recognizing the need to improve, acknowledging that we have done something wrong...

The word חטא is commonly translated as "sin," but this is not the real meaning of the word. The verb להחטיא means "miss the mark." A חטא is when we miss an opportunity. Every mitzvah is an opportunity to connect with Hashem, and when we transgress, we have squandered a precious opportunity. The process of teshuva allows us to rectify this failure, but only if והתודו את חטאתם, if we recognize that we erred, that we transgressed, that we missed an opportunity to serve Hashem. This is the first critical step that we must take in order to grow.

COUNTERACTING NEGATIVITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind... then that soul shall bear guilt. They shall confess the sin which they committed..." (5:6-7)

If we have wronged a fellow human being in some way, we must first ask their forgiveness; then, we must restore the item or pay for any damage we caused. Then, we must "apologize" to G-d, through repentance. Repentance consists of three steps:

- regret for the past,
- positive resolution for the future, and
- verbal confession to G-d of the misdeed.

Every misdeed creates negative energy, which has a "body" and a "soul." The "body" of this energy is the misdeed itself, while its "soul" is the lust that caused the misdeed and the will that accompanied it.

Feeling regret for having committed a misdeed destroys the "soul" of the negative energy; confessing verbally - physically using our mouths - destroys the "body" of the negative energy. (Derech Mitzvotcha, Vidui, p. 38a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

STEALING FROM G-D

Chiddushei HaRim

"And they shall confess their sin that they committed; he shall make restitution." (5:7)

Why is confession needed when committing the transgression of theft? In essence, every transgression is in the category of theft. Hashem gives vitality and strength to every person so that he may follow the will of the Almighty. However, when one uses this gift of vitality and strength to transgress, then he is taking from Hashem's possessions. That warrants that one should confess his transgression.

MAKING RESTITUTION

Neshchizer Rebbe

"And they shall confess their sin that they committed; he shall make restitution." (5:7)

Why does this pasuk begin in the plural and end in the singular?

This is, unfortunately, the nature of man - he will beat his breast at the statements of confession and verbally confess all his transgressions; that he is ready to do. However, when "making restitution," changing his behavior, and not committing the transgressions - for this there are very few people, therefore the singular.

HOLY TONGUE

Kozahtzer Rebbe

"And every offering of all the holy things of the Children of Israel shall be his [the kohen's]..." (5:9)

Every Jew who distances himself from offensive language, talebearing, and telling lies is considered a "holy thing of the Children of Israel."

GIVING FROM OUR BEST

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And every offering of all the holy things of the Children of Israel shall be his [the kohen's]..." (5:9)

This principle applies to each of us, at all times, and in all locations. When needy people require our assistance, we should give them the "first fruits" - the first and best of our earnings, even before we take for ourselves.

Admittedly, this is not always easy. The first fruits to ripen are the pride and joy of every farmer, the first return for all the effort he invested. Similarly, we naturally feel the same about our hard-won wages or the returns on our investments.

We may therefore be tempted to argue, "I have no problem donating to public charitable causes from which everyone benefits - myself included. But why should the first fruits of my hard work become some other individual's personal property?"

The Torah therefore instructs us to bring our first fruits "to the house of G-d" (Shemos 23:19), meaning to acknowledge that they are not ours in the first place. Once we realize that our first fruits belong to G-d, we can give them away without seeking ways to benefit from them personally.

The Torah then promises us, in the very next verse (see Rashi) that if we indeed give our "first fruits" willingly, G-d will reward us with ample wealth. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 8, pp. 39-40) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

SACRED ITEMS

Baron Rothschild of Frankfurt

"A man's sacred objects shall be his; whatever a man gives to the kohen shall be his." (5:10)

What is the value of a man's wealth worth?

The pasuk tells us clearly: "A man's sacred objects shall be his." What is a man's "sacred items"? Only that which he has pledged to tzedakah.

This sacred money shall be his - an eternal merit that will always remain with him.

TRUE POSSESSIONS

Binah L'Ittim

"A man's sacred objects shall be his; whatever a man gives to the kohen shall be his." (5:10)

What bearing does this statement have on the portion dealing with robbery?

Those who are foolish believe the money that they have lying in their coffers is theirs, while the money that they give away to charity is no longer theirs. They therefore commit robbery, filling up their coffers with others' money.

Actually, the reverse is true. Only those possessions given away for sacred purposes ("every man's sanctified things"), such as those given to kohanim and scholars ("whatever any man gives to the kohen"), remain the property of the original owner ("shall be his") forever. But those possessions that people greedily collect for themselves - not to speak of the money of others - are not theirs at all. Such gains will not be theirs for longer than a fleeting moment.

WORTHY INVESTMENT

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"A man's sacred objects shall be his; whatever a man gives to the kohen shall be his." (5:10)

What is the connection between the matnos kehunah - priestly gifts, and the previous pesukim in the same parshah that relate to gezel - theft?

Reb Azaryah Figo zt'l, in his sefer Binah L'Ittim, notes that although many people feel that the money that they save for themselves is truly their own, and the money they give to tzedakah - charity, does not belong to them anymore, the exact opposite is true. The money one gives for holy purposes - to kohanim, talmidei chachamim, yeshivos and chesed organizations - is truly his property for eternity, while the money stashed away in one's vaults, and even more so, the money obtained through prohibited transactions, can be lost in an instant. The Torah therefore places the concept of the Priestly gifts in the parshah of gezel to indicate that only the money given to causes designated by the Ribono Shel Olam can truly be called one's own.

There is a proof to this principle from the Gemara (Bava Basra 11). When King Munbaz disbursed the funds in his treasury during a famine, his family complained that his ancestors had accumulated those treasures over a long period of time, and here he was quickly dissolving them.

"My forebearers saved in a place where the money can be lost," he answered, "while I am saving in a place where the merit lasts for eternity. My forefathers saved for others, while I am saving for myself." When someone gives tzedakah, the merit is everlasting and he is the true and sole owner of his investment.

RECEIVING BY GIVING

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"A man's sacred objects shall be his; whatever a man gives to the kohen shall be his." (5:10)

The Torah describes the restitution to be made for any wrongdoing and ends with a general statement: "A man's holy things shall belong to him; whatever a man gives to the Kohen will be his." However, the statement is vague because it doesn't specify who the "his" is referring to. If it belongs to the Kohen, that seems obvious, and if it belongs to the donor, how is that possible if he gave it to the Kohen?

Oznayim LaTorah points out that "will be his" is in the future tense, which suggests that the subject is the donor, and explains that the Torah is insightfully observing that giving others, even when required to do so, creates a giving impression that benefits the giver. Although the object is transferred to the Kohen, the act of giving is the donor's forever. If required giving creates such lasting goodness, how much more valuable is voluntary kindness to others?

TRUE WEALTH

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"A man's sacred objects shall be his..." (5:10)

This verse comes to teach us that even though a person is obligated to give tithes to a Kohen and a Levi, the donor has every right to choose which Kohen and Levi receives them. (Rashi)

The Baalei Mussar point out that the words "shall be his" mean that one's offerings and the tzeddaka that he gives will "be his" - his forever. Unlike other worldly possessions which cannot be taken with after his death, the Mitzvah of tzeddaka stays with him for eternity. This message was brought to life in 19th Century England by the famous Jewish philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, who was a close confidant of the Royal Family.

During one of their meetings, Queen Victoria asked him, "Sir Moses, what is the true extent of your wealth?" He responded that it would take a few days to calculate the amount and he would reply then. A few days later, Sir Moses told the queen the amount that he owned. When she heard the figure, she became upset, saying, "Please do not mock me Sir Moses; that is indeed an exceptionally large sum of money, but everyone knows that your wealth is far greater." "But Your Majesty," Sir Moses responded, "the wealth that I have in my vaults and banks is not what I consider the true extent of my fortune. What I physically own in this world is only temporary and at any time it could be lost, stolen or confiscated. My true wealth is indeed the amount that I told you, for it is the amount that I have given to charitable causes in my lifetime. This money and its legacy are impossible to take away from me, it will stay with me forever and I therefore regard it as my true wealth!"

FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

The Torah (5:11-31) shares the rules and procedures related to a woman who is accused of being a Sotah. If a woman is secluded with a man who is not her husband after having been warned to not be seen with that man, her husband can require her to go to the Beis HaMikdash. After arriving at the Beis HaMikdash, the kohen administers a drink to her that includes a dissolved piece of parchment paper with Hashem's name on it. If the woman is guilty of adultery, the beverage will cause her to die a gruesome death. If she is innocent, the mixture will cause her to be fertile.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky zt'l (Emes L'Yaakov) asks why the Torah prescribes this method of determining her innocence or guilt. Why doesn't the Torah instruct us to follow the traditional judiciary protocols of gathering evidence and witnesses in order to ascertain whether she committed an act of immorality?

Rav Yaakov explains that were we to follow the more familiar judicial approach and find her innocent, her husband may still harbor some suspicions and resentment towards his wife. Therefore, Hashem is willing to allow His name to be erased for the sake of ensuring that the husband would be convinced of her innocence, and, as a result, become motivated to reconcile his marriage.

Rav Yaakov is teaching us an incredible lesson about the value of peace and shalom bayis. Hashem, in His infinite wisdom, understands the value of serenity and tranquility and is willing to go to great lengths to ensure that peace is reinstated, even at the expense of His Own honor. If Hashem is willing to forsake His Own glory for the sake of shalom bayis, how much more so is it incumbent upon us to invest all of our efforts into guaranteeing continued peace in our homes?

THE SOUL DOCTOR

Baal Shem Tov

"If a man's wife goes astray... he should bring his wife to the kohen... The kohen should take sacred water in an earthen vessel, and earth from the Tabernacle's floor... and put it into the water..." (5:12-17)

A body is the soul's wife, but its corporeal desires can lead us astray.

The wicked are busy satisfying physical cravings, whereas a tzaddik craves spirituality and shuns physicality by fasting and the like. We must strike a careful balance between them:

We may imitate the tzaddik, but if we sense ourselves growing weak or depressed, we must turn to the way of the wicked - caring for our bodily needs, but solely for the sake of heaven. If we grow overly fond of the material path, we must shift towards the tzaddik's abstinence and seriousness until we are out of danger.

If we do not strike the correct balance, our physicality has led us astray. We must seek a kohen - a Torah sage who is a doctor of souls. He will take sacred waters - the Torah's sublime teachings and place them in earthen vessels, converting them into parables and explanations to which we can relate, tailoring his guidance to cure our particular ailments.

Serving as a doctor of souls is satisfying, which can lead to pride. The sage must take earth from the Tabernacles floor - an extra dose of humility that he can "put into the waters" - offering Torah guidance with pure humility.

GROWING PAINS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Speak to the Jewish people and say to them, 'Any man whose wife goes astray and commits treachery against him...'" (5:12)

The suffering endured by the Jewish people parallels the suffering of the Sotah (wanton woman). The bitter waters that the Sotah must drink represent the Jews' suffering during the exiles (Zohar III, 124). The humiliation of being forced to drink the bitter waters that will prove her guilt or innocence is a means of forgiveness. If she is clean of sin, the waters she drinks (i.e., her suffering) will bring her relief from suffering and she will be blessed with fertility.

If she has sinned but confesses to her sin, then the humiliation alone will atone for her, and she will be forgiven. But if she refuses to admit to her sin, the waters will serve to increase her suffering. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 102a-204)

The same applies to the Jewish nation. Despite their suffering throughout the exiles, the "bitter waters" they have "drunk" serve to make the Jews "fertile" and to grow physically, financially and spiritually.

THE POWER OF MODESTY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And he shall put no frankincense on it, for it is a meal-offering of jealousy, a meal-offering of remembrance, recalling an iniquity." (5:15)

A Sotah, a woman suspected of immorality, brings a Korban Minchah (meal-offering) without the usual frankincense, because this spice exemplifies purity and wholesomeness, whereas the Sotah appears to have behaved in an impure manner. Rashi, based on the midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 9:13), further enlightens us to the fact that our Imahos - Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel and Leah - are similarly referred to as "givas ha'livonah - hill of frankincense" (Shir HaShirim 4:6). Because of their purity and good deeds, they are compared to this fine, white, aromatic spice. Since a person's individual name and title personifies his most complete attribute, the Matriarchs, who were called levonah, personify the quality of purity and tznius (modesty) above all else.

Indeed, declares Rav Elya Svei zt'l, the Torah entrusts its greatest duty to the women of our nation: the task of tikkun ha'olam (repairing the world). Just as our holy mothers persevered in their extreme level of spirituality, expressed most representatively through their masterful mannerisms of tznius and modesty, so too, it is the purpose of Jewish women to build future generations by preserving the eternal purity of Klal Yisrael. Modesty must be the foundation of the Jewish home, for tznius is the antidote to the yetzer hara.

The holy Vilna Gaon zt'l, in his Iggeres HaGra, writes the following words:

"A man's neutralizing weapon [for the yetzer hara] is his engrossment in Torah study, and for women, it is their adherence to tznius." It is amazing to contemplate: In This World, a man's greatest accomplishment is his Torah study; for a woman, it is her pursuit of tznius!

ADMITTANCE LEADS TO FORGIVENESS

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And the kohen shall station the woman before Hashem and bare the woman's head, and place upon her hands the meal offering..." (5:18)

The Sotah, the woman whose fidelity is in doubt, is brought before the kohen and the Beis Din - High Court, not because it was necessary in a legal sense, but in order to frighten her into confessing.

She was well aware of the fate that awaited her if she did not confess her sin. She knew how she'd suffer a horrible death upon drinking the mayim ha'marim - bitter waters. Right then and there, she could have spared herself this fate by confessing the truth.

Why, then, does the Torah mandate going to such great lengths in an effort to convince her to confess? Wouldn't simple logic dictate that she would take any opportunity to spare herself such a horrible death?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt'l reveals the true nature of a human being. After a person has done something wrong, the tendency is not to admit it. A person will continue to sin rather than acknowledge his shortcomings. Thus, once this dishonorable woman has declared her innocence, she will find it unbearably difficult to go back on her word, even if it means paying the ultimate price. This is what Chazal tell us in the words "aveira goreres aveira," sin brings more sin in its wake.

On the other hand, the person who can rise above his natural obstinacy and admit his failure is able to extricate himself from the quagmire of sin in which he wallows.

As the Gemara (Berachos 12) states, "One who sins and is ashamed of it, all his sins are forgiven." The person who is true to himself and Hashem, and has the strength and conviction to overcome his natural inclination to rationalize his actions is forgiven all of his sins.

BEWARE OF EMBARRASSMENT

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"The Kohen shall make her take an oath..." (5:19)

According to Rashi, this verse teaches us that two women may not drink the Sotah waters at the same time. (In the Gemara (Sotah 8a), Reb Yehuda derives this law from the fact that the Torah writes "her" and not "them.")

The Gemara explains that the Torah prohibits two women from drinking together out of fear that perhaps the first woman has not committed adultery and would therefore readily agree to drink the Sotah waters knowing that she will receive a blessing from them. (If a woman drinks the Sotah waters who has not committed adultery, she will not be harmed; instead, she will receive great and miraculous blessings from it.) However, the second woman - who did commit adultery - after seeing the first woman so confidently declare her innocence, will be too embarrassed to admit her guilt, and she will consequently end up agreeing to drink the Sotah waters even though she knows that it will lead to her gruesome death.

With this law, the Torah stresses how far someone will go in order to avoid embarrassment. If so, how much further should we go in order not to embarrass someone else?

One of the most famous stories in recent times about this topic involved Rav Moshe Feinstein, and occurred when he was being escorted to his driver's car after leaving Yeshiva one afternoon. After the car had pulled away and was a significant distance from the Yeshiva, Rav Moshe let out an agonizing cry. His driver immediately stopped the car and turned around to see Rav Moshe holding his fingers in immense pain. Unbeknownst to everyone at the time, a student had unwittingly closed the car door on Rav Moshe's fingers. However, Rav Moshe had held himself back in order not to embarrass the student. "Could you imagine that poor student's pain if he would have known what he had done to me?" Rav Moshe explained afterwards.

From here we see not only the great importance of not embarrassing someone else, but also the greatness of Rav Moshe, whose natural instinct to cry out in pain was overruled by what was clearly an even stronger "natural instinct" - not to embarrass a fellow Jew.

PUTTING OTHERS FIRST

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The kohen must write these curses on a scroll and erase it in the bitter water..." (5:23)

(If a husband suspects his wife of adultery, he should first raise the issue with her privately; if her actions continue to arouse his suspicions, he may subject her to a test by which G-d would indicate whether she was innocent or guilty. As part of this test, the priest had to write a curse on parchment and then erase it by inserting the parchment into a container of water.)

The text of these curses contained G-d's holy Name, which it is ordinarily forbidden to erase (Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah 6:1-2). However, G-d was willing to have His Name erased in order to clear the name of the suspected adulteress and thereby restore peaceful relations between her and her husband. (Shabbat 116a; Mishneh Torah, Chanukah 4:14; Yerushalmi, Sotah 1:4)

Similarly, we should also be prepared to act selflessly on another's behalf, not only when doing so comes easily or when the other person deserves our efforts. Even when it is for a person of questionable morality and it involves personal, physical or spiritual sacrifice, we should be prepared to follow G-d's example. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, p. 83) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ETERNAL BOND

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If a man is overcome with a spirit of jealousy and he is jealous of his wife, then he shall have the woman stand before Hashem..." (5:30)

A famous question is asked: Why is Rabbeinu Gershom (renowned tenth-century scholar) the only Rishon who was given the distinguished title of Me'or HaGolah (The Light of the Diaspora)?

Rav Meir Yechiel of Ostrovtze zt'l answered as follows:

"I believe it is because of the two famous halachic enactments associated with his name. The first outlawed bigamy (marrying more than one wife) for Jews; the second modified the practical aspect of the laws of divorce. According to Biblical law, it is the husband who takes the initiative in a divorce proceeding. He has the bill of divorce written and delivered to his wife, with or without her consent. Rabbeinu Gershom ruled that the divorce can be effected only with the consent of both parties. The husband must agree to have the bill of divorce written, and the wife must be willing to accept it."

"Now, we find many times in Tanach and Midrashic literature that the relationship between Hashem and His nation is compared to that of a husband and wife. When Klal Yisrael sinned and went into exile, a danger existed that Hashem might decide to divorce His mate and find another nation! But, as we know, the Heavenly court must abide by the decisions handed down in the earthly beis din, and as Rabbeinu Gershom banned polygamy and forced divorce, Hashem is, so to speak, forever wed to us! And that is why Rabbeinu Gershom alone was granted the title of Me'or Hagolah."

In a similar vein, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev zt'l, the famous defender of Klal Yisrael, once declared, "Master of the World, do You think that You could ever exchange us for another nation? I swear by my beard, that no matter what faults You find in us, You could never change us for another! You will never get such a good deal with any other people!"

PROPORTIONATE HOLINESS

Reb Alexander Zusia Friedman

"If a man or a woman sets apart a vow, a Nazirite vow to set himself apart for Hashem..." (6:2)

Why is the portion dealing with the Nazirite put in juxtaposition with the portion dealing with the faithless wife? To teach that a person who beholds a faithless wife in her disgrace should abstain from drinking wine. (Rashi, Sotah 2)

The sin of the faithless wife runs counter to all reason and human nature but so does the abstinence practiced by the Nazirite. It was Rashi's intention to point out that as long as there are individuals in the world whose immoral conduct is contrary to reason and custom, there must be others who will exceed the bounds of reason in saintly conduct and keep far away from immorality by imposing all manner of legal safeguards on their own behavior.

ANYTHING BUT ORDINARY

Koźnitzer Rebbe

"If a man or a woman sets apart a vow, a Nazirite vow to set himself apart for Hashem..." (6:2)

The verse uses the word yaphlee (set apart), since a person who is willing to separate himself from the pleasures of the world is a peleh, an extraordinary individual.

DANGER ZONE – PROTECT YOUR EYES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If a man or a woman sets apart a vow, a Nazirite vow to set himself apart for Hashem..." (6:2)

The topic of nezirus immediately follows the topic of Sotah, "the unfaithful wife," to teach us: "One who sees a Sotah in her disgrace, should abstain himself from wine" (Sotah 2a). Chazal impart an important lesson to every member of Klal Yisrael: no matter how vigilant a person may act to avoid immodesty and impurity, no one is totally impervious to the sights and sounds of profanity and corruption. All it takes is merely to "see a Sotah in her disgrace" and the chain reaction can be disastrous and destructive to the middos and character of a Jew in his personal and family life. One needs to "abstain himself from wine" - from any activity that may bring him to sin.

Certainly, in today's day and age, warns Rav Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz shlita, how vigilant we must be in our efforts to abstain from sin. Everywhere we turn, every place we go, we are faced with the "Sotah in her disgrace" syndrome - sights and sounds of immodesty and character corruption... If Chazal make it clear that even a tzaddik is not impervious and must "abstain himself from wine," we, who live on a much lower spiritual plane, must work even harder to avoid the negative influence that fills the streets.

The holy Chafetz Chaim, Rav Yisrael Meir Hakohen Kagan zt'l, was once at a meeting with other rabbanim and leaders in the town of Grodna, when a young female helper walked right past them while dressed inappropriately. Noticing this, the Chafetz Chaim reacted angrily. "Vos maint zie? As mir zenen malachim? - What does she think? That we are angels?"

A further incident, involving the tzaddik Rav Elya Lopian zt'l, is related as follows: Rav Elya was once approached by a student in his yeshivah for permission to attend the wedding of a relative in a different town. When Rav Elya asked him if there would be any pritzus (immodesty) at the wedding, the bachur responded, "Mir vert dos nisht shuten - It will not harm me."

Rav Elya shuddered at this response and said to the bachur, "Dos vert nisht shuten? - It will not harm you? I am over eighty years old and blind in one eye, and yet, when I walk in the street, I worry lest I stumble and look at what I may not look at. And you, a young bachur with two healthy eyes, tell me that you are convinced that being at such a wedding will do you no harm?"

ONE SMALL STEP AT A TIME

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"From new and old wine he must abstain... anything steeped in grapes he shall not drink." (6:3)

The Gemara in Masseches Sotah takes note of the fact that the Torah in Parshas Naso juxtaposes the halachos of the Sotah (suspected adulteress) and those of the nazir (person who voluntarily commits to abstain from wine and other restrictions). Immediately after presenting at length the laws that apply in the situation of a Sotah, the Torah proceeds to discuss the halachos of somebody who takes upon himself the status of nazir. The Gemara explains that this juxtaposition teaches us, הרואה סוטה בקלקולה יזיר עצמו מן היין - somebody who sees the tragic fate of the Sotah should respond by vowing to abstain from wine for a period of time. If the Sotah was, in fact, guilty of infidelity, then she would die after drinking the special water that she was given. One who witnesses this tragedy will be frightened, and will thus be motivated to undertake measures to protect himself from sinful lures and temptations. This person is thus advised to become a nazir and refrain from wine.

The question arises, is this really all that a person needs to protect himself from temptation? Is this single measure sufficient? Shouldn't the Torah be encouraging people to do more to safeguard against wrongful behavior?

The work U'l'sitcha Elyon explains that when we want to change, when we seek to grow and lift ourselves, it is unwise to take on too many things all at once. This is not likely to have much of a lasting effect. Instead, we should make one small, not especially difficult, change, and this change will serve as a constant reminder that now we are trying to be different.

True, committing to abstain of wine will not, in itself, protect a person from sin. But it will remind the person every time he is offered a glass of wine, or feels like taking a glass of wine, that he has embarked on a journey of growth and self-improvement. He will thus gradually begin to see himself differently, and will, day-by-day, undergo the desired process of change. We should begin with one simple measure, and this will lead us to slowly experience the kind of transformation that we want.

DRINK RESPONSIBLY

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"From new and old wine he must abstain, vinegar made from new wine and vinegar made from old wine he shall not drink; anything steeped in grapes he shall not drink." (6:3)

The nazir is commanded to refrain and restrain himself from drinking anything associated with wine. He must abstain from, "weak and strong wine, vinegar of weak and strong wine, and anything from which grapes were steeped." What is it about wine in particular that is so repellent to a nazir that the Torah warns him again and again about it?

Rav Baruch Sorotzkin zt'l, rosh yeshivah of Telshe Yeshivah, delivers a brilliant insight. Wine is a unique drink. It contains both positive and negative qualities. Wine is used for Kiddush, for Birkas Hamazon, at a simchah celebration; it was even poured on the altar in the Beis HaMikdash. It is spiritual in nature and can elevate a Jewish soul when drunk in moderation and joy. On the other hand, wine can bring out the worst attributes in a human being. It causes one to lose himself in lustful pleasure, to use foul language and to speak of sinful ideas. When a person becomes drunk from wine, he will say and do things that he would never even consider if he were sober. Wine is the ultimate "double-edged sword."

We find this concept earlier in Parshas Toldos, when Yaakov and Esav each brought food to their father, Yitzchak, before he was to deliver the blessings of the bechorah, the firstborn. Yaakov brought a full meal of delicacies, and with it, he brought wine. For Yaakov was coming from a spiritual perspective whereby he recognized that for an auspicious occasion as receiving the bechorah blessing, wine would elevate the proceedings and add joy to his father as he delivered the blessing. Esav, on the other hand, was familiar with wine in only one way; as an addictive alcoholic beverage which causes men to swear, curse, kill and act in shameful ways. In Esav's mind, this drink had no place at his father's table, while his father would be in the midst of performing such a meaningful ceremony on his behalf.

Thus, a nazir is warned to refrain from wine. Since he is vulnerable and can easily come to sin, and wine is a drink that can "go both ways" and possibly turn him the wrong way, he must remove himself from wine at all costs.

NEVER GIVE UP

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

“And the kohen shall... make atonement for him, for the guilt incurred through the corpse...” (6:11)

Regarding the Nazir who brings two korbanos for inadvertently becoming tamei (impure), the Torah (Bamidbar 6:11-12) tells us: He shall sanctify his head on that day... the previous days shall be void (lit. will fall).

The Bais Yisrael would emphasize from these pesukim that a person who has sinned should never give up hope of returning to Hashem.

After the nazir accidentally became tamei, it would be natural for him to have thoughts of hopelessness; “Hashem obviously doesn’t appreciate my attempts to grow in ruchnios (spirituality) if this happened to me.” The Torah therefore tells us, “He shall sanctify his head on that day... the previous days shall be void.”

Forget all your “cheshbonos” (calculations) and cry out to Hashem, “I am starting fresh today.” Never give up after a fall.

RESTRICT WITH CAUTION

Kesav Sofer

“And the kohen shall... make atonement for him, for the guilt incurred through the corpse...” (6:11)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: “for he sinned against his soul.” Because he denied himself wine. (Rashi)

The Sages say that one who “sits and fasts,” i.e., one who fasts longer than the Torah requires, is regarded as a sinner. If one “sits still” while one fasts, i.e., if one fasts but makes no spiritual progress, if the fast had no deeper effect on someone, then this person has afflicted himself without purpose and is therefore considered a sinner.

INTENDED PURPOSE

Meshech Chochmah

“When the days of his consecration are fulfilled, he shall bring it to the door of the Tent of Meeting.” (6:13)

He shall bring himself (to the door of the Tent of Meeting). (Rashi)

If it is intended that the Nazirite should come alone, why should the wording of the Hebrew text be such that it can be interpreted to read “he shall bring himself” (as if another person had to bring him)?

The Nazirite’s vow is primarily a kind of cure that someone undergoes in order to set bounds to his baser lusts and appetites and fight against his selfishness. If the fulfillment of this vow has taught the person to view his own concerns with the same objectivity as he would look upon those of another person, and be able to resist his selfish lusts, then the Nazirite’s vow has served its purpose and he can cease afflicting himself.

For this reason, the pasuk implies that once the Nazirite is able to “bring himself” to the door of the tent of meeting, just as if he were bringing another person, when he can be entirely objective about his own purpose, it is a sign that “the days of his consecration are fulfilled” and that his Nezirus has served the purpose for which it was intended.

PEACEFUL BLESSINGS

Reb Meir Shapiro of Lublin

“Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying, ‘In this manner shall you bless the Children of Israel...’” (6:23)

Aharon’s forte was “Loving peace and pursuing peace...” (Avos 1:12). “So shall you” - with your character - “bless the Children of Israel,” that among them there shall be harmony and peace.

FIT FOR BLESSING

Rebbe Nachman

“In this manner shall you bless the Children of Israel. You shall say to them...” (6:23)

The blessing must be pronounced in the Holy Tongue. (Sotah 38a)

Blessing comes about only through a holy tongue (Likutey Moharan II, 2:5) - meaning, a tongue that does not engage in speaking vulgarity, slander, mockery, and so forth. Only a person with such a tongue can bring about blessing.

When the Kohanim blessed the Jews in the Sanctuary, they extended their hands. The blessing they recited is composed of sixty letters. These sixty letters correspond to the “sixty men of strength” (Shir HaShirim 3:7). “Strength” indicates bounty, in that rain, which brings material abundance, is referred to by the phrase “strong rains” (Berakhot 33a). Therefore, the Priestly Blessings bring bounty and blessing. (See Likutey Moharan I, 4:10)

SELFLESS BLESSINGS

Kesav Sofer

“In this manner shall you bless the Children of Israel. You shall say to them...” (6:23)

“You shall say to them” - In this manner shall you speak to them. (Onkelos)

If the Jews receive blessings, the kohanim also benefit, for they will receive more priestly gifts. As a result, when the kohanim bless their fellow Jews they may also think of their own advantage as they recite the blessing. To forestall this possibility, the Torah says: “You shall say to them”; implying, in the words of Rashi: “Bless them not hurriedly and hastily but devoutly and with a whole heart.” As you bless the people, your thoughts should be only of them and not of yourselves.

This thought is stressed by Onkelos' translation: "In this manner shall you speak to them," implying that "your blessing will be accepted and fulfilled only if you'll bless the people for their sake, without thought of selfish gain."

Aharon is mentioned by name in this pasuk because when he officiated as Kohen Gadol the Jews were still in the wilderness and the law concerning the priestly gifts was not in operation. Hence, when he blessed them, his thoughts must have been solely of the welfare of his people, unmotivated by any prospects of selfish gain. The Torah, by recalling Aharon, implies that once the Jews will be in the Promised Land and obligated to observe the commandment concerning the priestly gifts, Aharon's sons must continue to bless them "in this manner," i.e., in the same selfless spirit in which Aharon had blessed them in the wilderness.

PRIESTLY BLESSINGS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"May G-d bless you and protect you..." (6:24)

"May G-d bless you and protect you" - He should bless you with holy wealth (for which you do not have to work hard, so that you are free to engage in spiritual pursuits), and protect you from harm and other fears. Instead, you should merit to fear of G-d.

"May G-d shine His Countenance upon you and show you favor" - this represents Divine Favor.

"May G-d show you His Countenance and grant you peace" - the revelation of G-d's Countenance is aroused through charity. By giving charity, we merit to peace, as in "The more charity, the more peace" (Avot 2:7). (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 185a)

The three blessings of the Birkhat Kohanim (Priestly Blessing) allude to the three basic "points" that a person must arouse each day in order to experience G-dliness. One is the person's own "point," which is unique to him. The second is his friend's point, which is unique to his friend. The third is that of the tzaddik, whose point is an encompassing one for all people.

Receiving the first blessing, "May G-d bless you," corresponds to receiving the tzaddik's point. The tzaddik is the channel for all blessings, since all bounty flows through the sefirah of Yesod (which corresponds to the tzaddik).

Receiving the second blessing, "May G-d shine His Countenance upon you," corresponds to receiving one's friend's point, since whatever love develops between people reveals more of G-d's Countenance in the world.

Receiving the third blessing, "May G-d... grant you peace," corresponds to receiving the benefits of one's own point, which, when developed properly, brings inner peace. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 189a)

BLESSINGS AND PROTECTION

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"May G-d bless you and protect you..." (6:24)

One could certainly wonder what these words mean. Why would we need protection when Hashem blesses us? Wouldn't we be safe by virtue of Hashem's brachos?

The Netziv (HaEmek Davar) explains that even when Hashem showers us with His generosity, we also need His protection. If one were to be the beneficiary of tremendous intellect that would be used for Torah, it could lead to arrogance. If one were to become very wealthy, it could lead to using those resources for the wrong reasons. Therefore, we ask Hashem to bring all of our dreams to reality but to also protect us in ensuring that they do not have a detrimental effect on who we are and what we are trying to become.

This insight of the Netziv is something that must be placed at the forefront of our tefillos. While we are certainly permitted to daven for whatever we need and want, we must make sure to also ask Hashem to protect us from ourselves and only provide that which will have a positive influence on our families and ourselves.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOURCE

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"May G-d shine His countenance toward you and show you favor..." (6:25)

The ministering angels asked the Holy One, blessed be He: "Why do You lift up Your countenance toward Israel? Is it not written in Your Torah: 'He will not lift up His countenance?'" The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: "Why shouldn't I lift up My countenance toward them, when I wrote in My Torah: 'And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless G-d, your G-d,' and they are particular to fulfill My commandment, regardless of whether the amount of nourishment they have taken was the size of an olive or whether it was the size of an egg?" (Berachos 20 and Midrash)

Can this intense zeal in performing the commandment to bless G-d after partaking even of small amounts of nourishment be regarded as a "lifting up of the countenance toward G-d" on the part of the Jewish people, so that they are truly deserving of having G-d, in His turn, lift up His countenance toward them?

A gift from someone of importance, even if it is only trifling, assumes added significance by virtue of the importance of the giver. The Jewish people "lift up their countenance toward G-d" by their act of gratitude, in that even if G-d will give them only little nourishment, they consider His gift an occasion for reciting blessings, because the Giver is immensely dear to them and they enjoy even the little He has given them, knowing that it is from Him.

For this reason, G-d, in His turn, lifts up His countenance toward them and attaches immense importance even to this act of worship. For although the blessings the Jews recite are not of a lot of significance in themselves, He cherishes them since His people, who recite them, are acting to the best of their limited possibilities of showing gratitude. It is “measure for measure.”

BLESSED WITH UNITY

Lenchener Rebbe

“May G-d shine His countenance toward you...” (6:25)

The priestly blessing is said in the singular, since the greatest blessing that the Jews need is one of unity.

ATTAINING PEACE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“May G-d shine His countenance toward you and show you favor...” (6:25)

He will give you grace and favor. (Sifri 41)

The main favor a person can attain is the favor that Moshe found in the eyes of G-d (Shemos 33:17). From this favor come the Thirteen Attributes of Compassion. When a person attains this level, he merits to peace. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 298)

RAISING HIS COUNTENANCE

Rabbi Chaim Volozhin

“May G-d shine His countenance toward you and show you favor...” (6:25)

The ministering angels asked the Holy One, blessed be He: “Why do You lift up Your countenance toward Israel? Is it not written in Your Torah: ‘He will not lift up His countenance?’” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “Why shouldn’t I lift up My countenance toward them, when I wrote in My Torah: ‘And you shall eat and be satisfied and bless G-d, your G-d,’ and they are particular to fulfill My commandment, regardless of whether the amount of nourishment they have taken was the size of an olive or whether it was the size of an egg?” (Berachos 20 and Midrash)

The Jewish people are particular, for themselves, to be satisfied with little nourishment. However, when they give charity in the form of food to a poor person they let the person eat until satisfied. This is their way of “lifting up their countenance toward G-d.”

UNIFYING THOUGHT AND SPEECH

Rebbe Nachman

“Let them place My Name upon the Jewish people, and I will bless them...” (6:27)

When a person is blessed, he receives the blessing in a spiritual vessel called Ani (אני, I). This word is composed of the letters aleph, nun, yod.

Aleph (א), which means “teach” or “study,” represents the tzaddik. Every Jew is conceptually a tzaddik, as the verse states: “Your people are all tzaddikim” (Yeshayahu 60:21). And the tzaddik is referred to as Aleph, as in “Our great ones (Alupheinu) are acceptable” (Psalms 144:14).

Nun (נ) connotes Malkhut, which corresponds to speech.

Yod (י) indicates Chokhmah, which refers to thought.

When a Jew unifies his thought and speech (in particular, when he concentrates on the words of prayer that he is reciting), he creates Ani - אני, a vessel with which to receive blessing. (See Likutey Moharan I, 73)

AVOIDING STRIFE

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“They brought their offering before Hashem, six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon per two princes and an ox for each one...” (7:3)

On the day that the Mishkan is inaugurated, the Nesiim bring individual gifts; six wagons were used to transport twelve oxen, one ox per tribe. Why does the Torah specify how the oxen were transported with their respective configuration, and why are we told about the wagons before we’re told about the oxen themselves?

The Ozneyim LaTorah suggests that the tribes’ sharing the wagons to bring their offerings was more significant in the eyes of G-d than even the offerings themselves. Furthermore, the tribes got along with each other enough to not only share resources but also agree to each bring the same offering, avoiding the potential for competition or disagreement. The leaders’ identical gifts and their shared transport demonstrate that we are at our best, as a people, when our resolve and actions are united.

SIEZE THE MOMENT

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“They brought their offering before Hashem, six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon per two princes and an ox for each one, and they brought them before the Mishkan.” (7:3)

The Torah describes the donations made by the Nesiim of each tribe in celebration of the sanctification of the Mishkan. Rashi comments that the Nesiim took a more active approach by making their donations first, before the rest of Klal Yisrael.

This was in response to the mistake they had previously made when Hashem had instructed Moshe to gather the materials for the construction of the Mishkan. At that time, the Nesiim decided to wait and allow the rest of Bnei Yisrael to make their contributions first.

Their intention was to take care of donating whatever was still needed at the end, be it a large or small portion. However, due to the excitement of Bnei Yisrael, there was not much left to pledge, as Klal Yisrael had given almost all that was needed. The Nesiim were left to give just the avnei shoham and avnei miluim, which would be used for the clothing of the Kohen Gadol. We learn that the Nesiim were criticized for waiting to donate. Therefore, this time around, the Nesiim did not want to make the same mistake. Accordingly, they took charge and were the first to donate when it came to celebrating the dedication of the Mishkan...

In life, we often find ourselves inspired and motivated to want to take on something new that will help to intensify our relationship with Hashem. Yet, we begin to think of all the reasons we should not actively pursue the opportunity, and, as result, those powerful moments dissipate without us acting upon them. Instead, we should sensitize ourselves to those times of inspiration and not allow them to go to waste. With this approach in mind, we will ensure that when we are moved by a conversation, shiur (class) or meaningful experience, we will rise to the occasion and use it to springboard us to greater heights in our avodas Hashem.

FULFILLING OUR PURPOSE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“They brought their offering before Hashem, six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon per two princes and an ox for each one...” (7:3)

The princes donated the minimum number of wagons that was needed to carry the designated load, although more wagons would have made the Levites' job easier (see Shabbat 99a). The princes understood that providing “extra” wagons would clash with the Tabernacle's essence - which was to express G-d's approach to creation, namely, that everything has a purpose. Since it was possible to carry the Tabernacle with six wagons, a seventh one would have meant that the other six would be partially wasted.

This concept is also true in the personal Tabernacle that we make for G-d out of our lives. Since G-d created everything for a purpose, if we are not using (or are under-using) some aspect of our lives for holy purposes, its purpose is not being fulfilled.

By fully utilizing everything at our disposal and fully living up to our own potential, we can indeed fashion our lives in particular and the world in general into the “Tabernacle” that G-d wants them to be. In this way, we fulfill G-d's plan, spreading Divine consciousness throughout the world and hastening the advent of the Messianic Redemption, when the whole world will be transformed into G-d's true home. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 28, pp. 40-48) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

REALIZING OUR UNIQUE MISSION

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘One leader each day, one leader each day, they shall bring forth their offering...’” (7:11)

The Mishnah in Avos (1:14) states: Im ein ani li mi li - “If I don't care for myself, who will care for me?” Uch'she'ani l'atzmi mah ani - “But if all I care about is myself, then what am I?” V'im lo achshav eimasai - “And if not now, when?”

Rabbi Moshe Goldberger shlit'a gives us a fascinating and unique understanding of this Mishnah: Im ein ani li mi li - If I do not become all that I can be and use all the talents and attributes that Hashem has bestowed upon me, then what good am I? However, uch'she'ani l'atzmi, when I express my atzmiyus - my uniqueness, my inner being by becoming all that I can possibly be, mah ani - how great am I! (Mah is translated here in the same way that it is translated in the pasuk: Mah rabu ma'asecha Hashem - “How great are Your works, Hashem” [Tehillim 104:24].) How great is the power of the individual when he utilizes his talents for the service of Hashem!

But this begs the obvious question: How can we live up to our fullest potential? How do we know how far we have to go to achieve this level of greatness? The end of the Mishnah answers the question: If not now, when? When a person utilizes every opportunity available to him for growth, when he maximizes every chance to learn, to do chessed, to express himself, then he will come to actualize his true potential.

The second half of Parshas Naso, a full eighty-nine pesukim, consists of the Torah's lengthy and detailed account of the sacrifices offered by the Nesiim (princes). As all the Nesiim brought the same exact korban, many seek to understand the reason why the Torah repeats the details of each offering individually. Couldn't the Torah have simply written the words one time and included the offerings of all twelve Nesiim?

The Torah is teaching us the power of individuality, atzmiyus. Each nasi, on his own accord, chose to bring this korban which, as it turned out, was identical to that of his fellow Nesiim! Yet, the Torah is impressing upon us the beauty and importance of every single individual, even if on the outside he looks no different than anyone else.

Rav Ezriel Tauber shlit'a said the following:

The first two thousand years of the world's existence were known as tohu (emptiness), since the Torah had not yet been given. The second two thousand years were called na'aseh (action), as Klal Yisrael received the Torah on Har Sinai and now knew what they had to do. The last two thousand years, the period we are in now, is known as nishma. This period commenced with Rabbi Akiva, who not only commented on the words of the Torah, but even on the crowns on the tops of the letters.

This is the era of self-expression, when the Mishnah, Gemara and thousands of commentaries shed their light, ideas and clarifications on the Torah. It is called nishma because every person hears things differently, and every person can add his own special spark and interpretation to the Torah. By remaining 100 percent true to halachah (law) and mesorah (tradition), we can look inside ourselves and find what we can achieve and contribute to our precious Torah and Yiddishkeit.

This is the lesson of mah ani. How great is the power of every single individual! We should never underestimate ourselves; each one of us has a unique mission that no one else in this world can fulfill!

HUMBLE SACRIFICE

Reb Kalmus Kalman Epstein of Krakow

"The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nachshon, son of Aminadav... His offering consisted of one silver bowl..." (7:12-13)

Why are the words "his offering" mentioned twice?

Hashem requested that Nachshon bring the first sacrifice, but he was embarrassed. He had a great deal of inner conflict and grief. He did not know why he merited being the first to sacrifice. His grief from embarrassment Hashem considered as self-sacrifice.

That is why the pasuk mentions "his offering" twice. The first was his self-sacrifice and the second was "one silver bowl."

DISTINCT AND ORIGINAL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"His [the first prince] offering consisted of one silver bowl, weighing 130 [shekels]..." (7:13)

The Torah could have simply given the details of one prince's offering and then stated that this same offering was brought by all 12 leaders. The reason that it does not is because each prince initiated the Altar into a different way of elevating the physical world and drew a different type of spiritual energy into the world, corresponding to the spiritual nature of his tribe.

Similarly, we all recite the same words in our prayers and perform more or less the same commandments. Yet, at the same time, we are individuals. We are not only permitted to express our own individual feelings and intent in our prayers and in our performance of the commandments - we are required to do so.

Furthermore, just as the Torah repeats the same words but each time the inner meaning is different, so are we intended to bring new meaning to the actions and words that we repeat daily. Every day's prayers and deeds should reflect the unique spiritual accomplishments we have made since the last time we prayed or performed them. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

OWN VOLITION

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"On the second day Nesanel the son of Zuar, prince of Yissachar, made an offering..." (7:18)

Given that the princes' offerings were all identical and in the same amount, why would the Torah mention the offerings of each prince separately?

Because each of them brought his offering of his own accord, not in order to ape the others, but solely of his own free will.

REVEALING DIVINE VITALITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"His [the sixth prince] offering consisted of one silver bowl, weighing 130 [shekels]..." (7:13)

The princes brought two types of offerings: objects (silver and gold vessels, flour, oil, and incense) and animals (bulls, sheep, and goats).

The lifeless objects were not consumed by the heavenly fire that descended onto the Altar, whereas the animals were consumed by this fire, either entirely or partially.

The lifeless objects thus symbolize the "lifeless" era before the Giving of the Torah, when physicality could not be infused with Divinity. The consumption of the animals by Divine fire symbolizes our present, post-Sinai era, in which physical objects - and the physical world in general - can be sanctified.

Through the Tabernacle and its successor - the holy Temple - and through the sanctuary for G-d that we all construct out of ourselves, our lives, and our sphere of influence, Divine vitality is revealed in the physical world. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 18, pp. 86-87) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

POWER OF UNITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"On the seventh day, it was the Nasi of the children of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud..." (7:48)

The Torah enumerates the gifts that each leader brought, including those that were brought on the seventh day, which, according to the Ozneyim LaTorah, was Shabbos. The rule is that voluntary offerings do not supersede Shabbos, so how was the voluntary offering on the seventh day handled on Shabbos?

Ozneyim LaTorah maintains that this voluntary contribution was promoted to a communal offering that supersedes Shabbos, even though it was neither a scripted offering nor described by G-d. The unity and brotherhood created by this collective offering was able to temporarily override the restrictions on such offerings. This phenomenon highlights the value that G-d places on harmony and solidarity among His people and the world.

MAINTAINING THE EXCITEMENT

Imrei Emes

“This was the dedication offering of the altar on the day when it was anointed... This was the dedication offering of the altar after it was anointed.” (7:84, 88)

We must make sure that the renewal that occurs on the dedication day remains with us and never loses its immense power. The spirit of dedication that marked the “day on which [the altar] was anointed” must remain with us even “after it was anointed.”

COLLECTIVE EFFORTS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“The weight of each silver bowl was 130 shekels, and that of each basin was 70 shekels; all the silver of the silver vessels weighed in total 2,400 shekels according to the value of the sacred shekel.” (7:85)

Even though the Torah is here giving the total of all the princes’ offerings together, it nonetheless repeats the unit weight of a single bowl, basin, and spoon. It does this in order to teach us that by joining together to form a collective totality, the unique, individual aspects of the princes’ offerings were also enhanced. Becoming part of the greater whole did not undermine their individuality; it enriched it.

Similarly, our individual goals and lives are enhanced by forming part of the greater, collective purpose of humanity. By playing our parts in the collective effort to make the world into G-d’s home, our individual roles in this process become consummately significant. (Hitva’aduyot 5743, vol. 3, pp. 1627-1628) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

THE HIDDEN VOICE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When Moshe would come into the Tent of Meeting so G-d could speak with him, he would hear His voice.” (7:89)

(After concluding its account of the princes’ offerings, the Torah describes how G-d spoke to Moshe inside the Tabernacle. Moshe would hear G-d’s voice as loud as it had been heard on Mount Sinai, but the sound miraculously stopped at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting; thus, no one outside could hear it.)

Much as we might wish it, we cannot be allowed to hear G-d’s voice everywhere and at all times. If we could, we would be deprived of our freedom of choice. A world in which G-d’s voice is constantly heard does not challenge its population. It was G-d’s desire to create a world of Divine silence, in which, through our efforts, we can uncover G-d’s concealed voice.

It is our task to take what we heard during that short period at Mount Sinai and within that small space of the Tabernacle - and each of us has heard G-d’s voice somewhere and at some time, however fleetingly - and transmit it to the rest of time and space. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 13, pp. 22-23) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HAFTORAH

SEEING PAST THE FACADE

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

“And the angel of Hashem said to him [Manoah], ‘Why do you ask after my name, seeing that it is hidden?’” (Shoftim 13:18)

The more one seeks to discover the name of an angel of holiness, the more one realizes that it remains hidden. But if one seeks to learn the name of Esav’s angel, one will discover that this angel (of evil) has no name at all. The evil impulse seems of consequence only as long as one does not attempt to inquire into its true nature. Once we have learned its true character, we will find that, actually, there is nothing worth knowing about the impulse of evil.

(Similarly, Rebbe Nachman teaches (Sichos HaRan # 6), “The Evil Inclination is like a prankster running through a crowd showing his tightly closed hand. No one knows what he is holding. He goes up to each one and asks, ‘What do you suppose I have in my hand!’ Each one imagines that the closed hand contains just what he desires most. They all hurry and run after the prankster. Then, when he has tricked them all into following him, he opens his hand. It is completely empty. The same is true of the Evil Inclination. He fools the world, tricking it into following him. All men think that his hand contains what they desire. But in the end, he opens his hand. There is nothing in it and no desire is ever fulfilled.”

“Worldly pleasures are like sunbeams in a dark room. They may seem solid, but one who tries to grasp a sunbeam finds nothing in his hand. The same is true of all worldly desires.” See also Sichos HaRan # 51 and Sichos HaRan # 308)

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