

Weekly Internet Parsha Sheet Shabbos Parshas Naso

Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein

Nasso

In this week's parsha the Torah highlights the special role and status of the tribe of Levi. They are counted separately from the rest of the tribes of Israel. Their status in society is that they are engaged in work in the Temple, have their own separate cities distributed throughout the Land of Israel and are to be supported by the tithes (ten percent of the crop produced from the agriculturally based economy of the Jewish society) contributed to their upkeep and economic well being. They are, so to speak, the elite class of the Jewish people, the beneficiaries of the apparently unearned largesse of the working class.

Now, why would the Torah countenance and even prescribe such an uneven societal status? Especially in our time when the current, yet always fleeting, political correctness of society strives for the ultimately equal distribution of wealth and national responsibilities, this Levite exceptionalism seems anachronistic. I imagine that in the current particular expression of demonization, the tribe of Levi would be labeled as being "parasites." And yet the Torah ordains and demands such a societal condition.

The tribe of Levi, which included the descendants of Aharon – the *kohanim*, was the smallest of all of the tribes of Israel numerically. Their exceptionalism began already in the land of Egypt when they were exempted from the hard labor that was endured by their fellow Jews. Yet we find that there was little opposition recorded in the Torah to this special treatment of the tribe of Levi.

Even Korach, who claimed to be the champion of equal treatment for all Jews, really only wanted to replace Moshe and Aharon with himself and other Levites. I think that all of this has basic relevance to our current Jewish society and its vexing challenges.

Not every one has the opportunity to devote one's self to full-time Torah study or to constant public or religious service. Not everyone has the ability to create a start-up technological company. Not everyone has the ability or inclination to be a university professor or a medical doctor or technician. Not everyone can be a successful storekeeper or business manager. Yet there is no doubt that our Jewish society here in the state of Israel needs full-time Torah students, religious and social service volunteers and professionals, start-up geniuses and computer geeks, professors, physicians, auto mechanics and all sorts of technicians, plumbers and builders, storekeepers and even rabbis.

In the times of the Temples, the Torah made it easy by classifying, so to speak, who was who and specifically identified the tribe of Levi for constant Torah study and teaching and full-time Temple service. In our current society this process of identification is more difficult, inexact and even confusing. Yet it is basically one of the most important issues that we must successfully deal with.

In the current society we certainly need "Levites" – Jews who are exclusively devoted to Torah study, teaching and public religious service. The problem is in identifying these "Levites" and nurturing them. That is really the core of the issue after all of the political smoke dissipates and wafts into the passing air.

Shabat shalom

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Nasso

For the week ending 31 May 2014 / 2 Sivan 5774

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Insights

Stop Thief!

"...they shall confess their sin that they committed" (5:7)

If I were to ask you: "What's the worst crime in the world?" — what would you reply? "Murder? Concentration Camps? Kidnapping? Pornography? Torture?"

Certainly we know the Torah identifies three sins as more severe than all others: Idol worship, Immorality, and Murder.

In one way, however, theft is a more serious sin than any of these. How come?

At the beginning of his Laws of Repentance, the Rambam cites as the source in the Torah for the commandment of Vidui (confession of sins) a verse from this week's Torah portion dealing with the obligation to confess stealing from a convert - Gezel Ha'ger.

The first appearance in the Torah of the mitzvah of Vidui, however, is much earlier in the Torah in Parshat Vayikra, as it says: "When one shall become guilty...he shall confess what he has sinned." (5:5)

When the Torah mentions a certain mitzvah more than once, the way of the Rambam is to cite the first appearance of that mitzvah in the Torah. Why then does he omit the first occurrences of Vidui in the Torah and choose this instance instead?

The prohibition of theft extends much further than a bank heist, more than a Brink's van break-in, more than a cat burglar shimmying his way up a narrow chimney.

Everything in the world belongs to G-d.

When we do anything against G-d's will we have stolen from him. We have distorted the way the world is supposed to be and have misappropriated it to serve our own purposes.

Theft is the root of all sins.

When someone murders, he not only kills, but he steals the potential that life had and the purpose for which that soul was sent to the world. He has "stolen" from G-d.

When someone worships an idol or ascribes power to anything other than the Almighty, he has stolen the honor that belongs to the Creator alone.

When someone indulges in a relationship that the Torah prohibits, he has stolen the true likeness to his Creator in Whose Image he was created.

The world and its purpose belongs only to G-d.

Every evil act is in essence stealing from Him.

Sources: The Sfat Emet as heard from Rabbi Mordechai Perlman

© 2014 Ohr Somayach International - all rights reserved

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Nasso

If a man or woman commit any sin that people commit... then they shall confess their sin... and he shall make restitution for his guilt. (5:6,7)

The Rambam rules that vidui, confession, is a mitzvah, positive commandment, which is an integral component of the teshuvah, repentance, process. Interestingly, the Rambam does not list teshuvah as a mitzvah - only vidui. Given the crucial significance of teshuvah, we wonder why the Rambam does not include it in his minyan ha'mitzvos, detailed count of the 613 commandments. Vidui - yes. Teshuvah - no? It does not sound right. What makes the question more demanding is the fact that vidui is, in fact, part of the teshuvah process.

The Nesivos Shalom explains that teshuvah essentially is comprised of regretting the act of committing the sin. This applies whether the sin was committed intentionally or unintentionally. The fact is that the individual sinned, and, in order to expunge the spiritual taint created by his sinful behavior, he must repent. Without teshuvah, one remains distant from Hashem. He has offended the Almighty and refuses to acknowledge his infraction. Therefore, by refusing to repent, he is perpetuating his sinful behavior and maintaining his distance from Hashem. Accordingly, teshuvah, repentance, is part and parcel of the mitzvah to abstain from sin, for, by not repenting, he prolongs the sin. What is the difference between one who sins and one who perpetuates his sin? Regardless, he is offending

Hashem. Thus, the Rambam writes that when one does teshuvah, he has an additional mitzvah of vidui.

We now have a new insight concerning the mitzvah of teshuvah. One who sins may think that while he did something wrong, that was then; now, it is over and done with: "One does not cry over spilled milk." If he repents - good; if he does not repent - it is not the end of the world. After all, his mind is made up, and he will not sin again. What happened - happened. He cannot rewrite the past.

We now see that this is a faulty perspective. Every day that passes by without teshuvah is a continuation of the sin. He sins every moment that he does not repent. Therefore, when one finally acknowledges his sin and regrets its commission, he must not only regret the actual violation that he committed, but he must also do teshuvah for not coming to his senses and repenting earlier. To delay one's teshuvah is to perpetuate his sin. It is that simple.

The pasuk ends with the Torah's admonition that the sinner repay his victim. Teshuvah is not complete until the victim has been placated. The Torah begins with the words *ki yaasu*, "will commit," in the plural; then *v'hisvadu es chatasam*, "then they shall confess their sin," also in the plural; but ends with, *v'heishiv es ashamo*, "and he shall make restitution," in the singular. What changes between the beginning of the pasuk and its conclusion? Did someone "drop out"?

Horav Zalman Sorotzkin, zl, gives a practical explanation that, sadly has become quite true. When it comes to confessing one's guilt, the offenders are prepared (after some pressure) to concede that they have made "mistakes"; the "investments" did not turn out as expected; "things" go wrong; "things" happen. Thus, the Torah writes the confession in the plural. This part is easy to extract. It is when it comes to compensation, when the thief has to reimburse the victim, that the pasuk changes into the singular. Sadly, the thieves do not wait in line to offer restitution. They erred; they are sorry. Now, the money is gone. Too bad. That's life.

A tenth eiphah of barley flour; he shall not pour oil over it and shall not put frankincense upon it. (5:15)

The composition of the korban brought on behalf of the sotah, wayward wife, is indicative of its purpose and symbolism. Coarse barley is used instead of fine flour. She acted coarsely, thus her sacrifice reflects her behavior. Likewise, she offers barley, which is a grain most often reserved for animal feed. She acted in a base manner, a behavior suitable for an animal. Last, the korban does not have the usual accompaniment of oil and frankincense, because incense recalls the spiritual fragrance of the Imahos, Matriarchs, and oil symbolizes light. She acted in darkness to conceal her sin, and she is far-removed from the example of the Matriarchs - whom she should have sought to emulate.

At first glance, what we expect of this woman is incredulous. She acted like an animal; yet, we blame her for turning away from the example set by our holy Matriarchs. Is this not a bit inconsistent? Do we expect a woman who acted so basely to think about the Matriarchs? Do we demand of the drunken derelict lying in his own vomit in the Bowery why he did not become President of the United States?

The Chachmei haMussar, Ethicists, explain that one of the primary causes for this woman's downfall is precisely that she had no set goals in life, no role model to emulate - so what else should one expect from her? Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, was wont to compare striving for greatness to a bird flapping its wings as it soars into the sky. If for one moment it halts its flapping of the wings - it falls to the ground. Likewise, one must have a defined set of realistic goals and never swerve from their realization - even for a moment.

It was General Napoleon Bonaparte who said, "A soldier who does not aspire to be a general - will not even be a soldier." A young Jewish woman should view the Imahos as the apex of Jewish womanhood. If one sets high goals, then there is hope that, even if these standards are not met, the individual's life will always be one of striving. Conversely, if there are no goals, life is one static, unchanging, wandering in space affair, which can only lead to depression and sin. It is up to us to make the correct choice.

A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

When we first set eyes on an individual who has chosen a life of crime, human nature tends to focus on the present; he is a criminal, with little or no redeeming value. Rarely do we take the time to question his or her origins: What was his or her family life like as they were growing up? Did he or she go to school? Did he or she have good friends? In other words, we rarely ask where and when he or she went wrong? For the most part, this is due to a preconceived notion that all criminals had a miserable childhood, no parents to speak of, no clear set of values, etc. We could be no further from the truth.

Let us take a look at our parsha, peruse the halachos of the nazir, and ask ourselves about the origin of this saintly person, the nazir who has taken a vow upon himself to abstain from worldly pleasure, to live an ascetic life fully devoted to spiritual ascendance. Surely, this must be a person to whom sin and moral turpitude must be an anathema. Clearly, this is a person to whom the very notion of sin is something very distant. Our sages take a different look at this person - and, indeed, at all of us.

Rashi notes the juxtaposition of the laws of nazir upon those of the sotah, wayward wife. He explains that we derive from here that one who sees a sotah b'Kilkulah, in her degradation, should abstain from wine. Often, the result of inebriation is a clouding of the senses. No longer are the parameters of right and wrong clearly demarcated. People try to become lax with previously ordained moors of morality. The result is a total breakdown of the structure of morality. Infidelity is no longer taboo, and everything else that sadly follows is the stuff we read about on an almost daily basis.

Let us ask ourselves whether this holy nazir has anything to do with this repulsive woman. She has lost all sense of morality. She left her husband, her family, her friends and her parents; she shamed them all - why? A momentary fling; a lapse in moral decency; a selfish deference to base nature. Why would the nazir even dream that this woman, who represents his complete opposite, has any lesson to impart to him? He surely does not lead such a degenerate lifestyle.

This is specifically the Torah's lesson. It takes one mistake, one diversion from the straight and proven path, one uncontrolled glass of wine, and suddenly the individual is no longer the same. This is why he must immediately abstain from wine. Hashem has shown him something very important. It was no simple sojourn that he took that day. If it led him past an islah sotah, there must have been a reason for it.

I once met a fellow who was doing his third "tour" in the department of corrections. At first glance, he appeared to look like a common person - nothing special - nothing overly negative about his appearance. After speaking with him for a while, I discovered that he had graduated Harvard Law School magna cum laude, and had immediately been hired as a White House intern during the Clinton administration. His future was very promising; his life appeared to be moving forward on a positive note.

Then he discovered the allure of narcotics. First, it was pain killers, followed by anti-depressants, until, as they say in contemporary vernacular, he was hooked. One thing led to another. He lost his prestigious position. After great difficulty, he found another job in a law firm. This, too, did not last long. He was an emotional and physical wreck - all the product of his own foolish delinquency. He had no one to blame but himself. Now he sits incarcerated, with time to mull over a life gone bad. He has repented - numerous times. Each time he makes up his mind - no more - until the next time. This is the sotah b'kilkulah. We think it can never happen to us. The Torah, thus, encourages us to abstain from wine. No protection against sin is too much.

All the days of the vow of his nezirus... holy shall he be. (6:5)

The Nazir is unique in that his body becomes consecrated to Hashem. He becomes kadosh, holy, b'kedushas ha'guf, his actual body becomes holy. He is not permitted to become ritually impure to a corpse, even to his closest seven relatives. Why? Ki neizar Elokav al Rosho, "For the crown of his G-d is upon his head" (ibid 6:7). What is the meaning of being the "receptacle" for Hashem's crown? Why would this be a reason for

prohibiting him from becoming contaminated to a corpse? Is he holier than the Kohen who is permitted to become tamei, contaminated, to his seven close relatives?

Chazal teach that the prohibition is only concerning ritual defilement due to actual contact with the corpse. He is, however, allowed to attend the eulogy and to stand in line with the mourners. This law is applicable whether the Nazir has a growth of hair on his head or whether it has already been shorn.

In a masterfully crafted thesis, Horav Nissan Alpert, zl, distinguishes between the various loves that exist between parent and child, mother and newborn infant, child and parent who has passed away. He delineates between love for the human body of either parent or child, versus a deeper, more profound and intellectual love for the character of the person.

The love of a parent toward his/her child, and child toward his/her parent, reaches its apex during variant, almost contrasting, stages. The love felt and expressed by a mother for her newborn infant is without peer and measure. Likewise, the pain felt and expressed by a child experiencing the demise of a parent is unparalleled. The intensity of emotion reaches its highest point during birth and death. During these experiences, a commonality is shared in that the emotion is unrestrained and unbounded. During the intervening period of "life" following the infant's growth until shortly before a parent's death, the parent/child relationship is more complex, requiring greater understanding.

In other words, to place it in a more present-day vernacular: there is a difference between emotional love, which is unconfined and inexhaustible, and intellectual love, which is bounded by intellect, common sense and an acute awareness of reality. Now that we have established these parameters, we ask ourselves why, according to the Torah's point of view, should this pattern exist? How are we to understand this?

Seichal ha'yashar is mechayev, common sense imperes that the older one gets, the greater intelligence that he possesses, the more "person" he becomes, it would give greater reason for a stronger, more balanced egalitarian and harmonious relationship. Logically, one would expect that parents relate better to offspring after such offspring has matured and reached a stage of greater intellectual and personal sophistication.

The flipside is just as reasonable and presents a strong argument. As a child matures, independence sets in. Anyone who has ever raised a teenager or chosson/kallah "type" knows that this transformation does not always lend itself to greater harmony. Independence, by its very essence, means to break away, to sever the relationship. The child is no longer an extension of the parents' bodies.

This state of independence which fluctuates up and down, back and forth, during the lifetime relationship between parent and child, is terminated upon death. The deceased is now completely reliant upon the kindness and love of the surviving loved one. At death, the relationship reverts to its status at birth, when the child is once again an extension of the mother's body. The love that has over the years been suppressed is now aroused and ready to once again be shared. Likewise, in death, the surviving relative can wail more easily and, without inhibition, declare, "Woe, for what I have lost! Woe, for the part of me that has left me!"

When Chavah gave birth to Kayin, she exclaimed, Kanisi ish es Hashem, "I have acquired a man with Hashem" (Bereishis 4:1). She had more than an emotional bond with her newborn child. She acquired something special. The connection was physical, as well as emotional. Mother and child develop a relationship unlike any other relationship between two human beings, other than husband and wife, concerning which it is written, V'hayu l'basar echad, "They shall become one flesh" (Bereishis 2:24). There is a physical, as well as emotional, bond.

There is another area of commonality to be addressed - that of the birthing mother who becomes tamei, ritually unclean, with birth, and a corpse, which is the avi avos ba'tumah, highest level of ritual impurity. Rav Alpert explains that when a person takes leave of his mortal surroundings, there is an outburst of love which is purely physical in nature. People who were close to the niftar, deceased, yearn for the physical entity - not the Tzelem Elokim, Image of G-d, spiritual essence of the individual, but his physical aspect, the one to which we related, we loved. When death occurs, the

mourners grieve over the "body" without the soul. Likewise, when a child is born, the attachment that is generated by its birth is physical. The mother focuses on the physical entity which is an extension of herself. Thus, there is tumah, ritual impurity.

This, explains Rav Alpert, is the idea behind our supplication that Hashem be merciful to us, k'racheim av al banim, "Like a father is merciful toward his children" (Tehillim103:13). David Hamelech underscores father, rather than mother. A mother's love stems from her physical bond with the child who is an extension of herself. The father's love is more focused on his child's being a Tzelem Elokim. It is a deeper, perhaps less traumatic, sort of love.

Attraction to physicality can be somewhat dangerous. Inordinate fascination to the physical can be manifest in one's excessive interest in base earthly pleasures, or by being overly impressed and impacted by the purely physical external aspects of people, such as beauty. Additionally, one becomes obsessed with what he lacks - physically - rather than by what he has.

Kinah, envy; taavah, lust; kavod, honor: are the three primary physical drives which our sages consider to be the most harmful negative character traits that can drive a person to forfeit his portion in the World to Come. These are all obsessions with physicality, seeking what another person possesses, feeling a personal sense of inadequacy, always mulling over how one appears in the eyes of others.

This is what prompts the nazir to take an extreme approach to life, to make an about face, to remove himself dramatically from the pursuits of the flesh. He is prepared to live a life focused on spirituality, idealism, character refinement and closeness to Hashem. By being a nazir, he embarks on a radical path that circumvents the passions of the flesh and brings him into greater proximity to Hashem.

A nazir may not drink wine, cut his hair, or contaminate himself to a corpse. Basically, we can say that he has severed his relationship with all externality, superficiality, from the flesh - which represents the outer layer of a person. His outward appearance is of no significance to him. He neglects himself by growing his hair long. He eschews physicality.

We now understand why, although the nazir may not come in proximity of a corpse, he may, attend the hesped, eulogy. The human corpse represents the flesh/external aspect of a human being. The eulogy focuses on his essence, his character, achievements - not his physical dimension. The nazir may attend the "intellectual" aspect of death, because it enhances his goals. While it is true that at a funeral we mourn the "body" of the friend, relative, with whom we will no longer share our experiences; but more so, we grieve over the vacuum left by the return of his neshamah, soul, to its Heavenly source.

In closing, Rav Alpert returns to the pasuk, "For the crown of his G-d is upon his head." Hashem is the primary influence on the nazir. He is guided by his "head," looking up to G-d for guidance. He has outgrown the passions of his heart, the desires of the flesh. He is guided by Elokav, his G-d, employing the Divine Name which reflects Middas HaDin, the Attribute of Strict Justice. Hashem judges a man through the spectrum of justice, clarity unclouded by emotion. Likewise, the nazir is guided by the "crown of his G-d on his head"; his thought process, his "head," referring to his seichel, common sense, wisdom, ability to view situations cogently, is not distorted by his heart. He is kadosh l'Hashem, holy to G-d.

How fitting it is that the parsha of nazir follows immediately after that of the sotah, wayward wife. This woman represents all that can go wrong when the passions of the heart, the desires of the flesh, distort one's ability to think rationally. The nazir sees where too much wine can lead to more than inebriation. It can lead to the destruction of one's self, family, and future. The nazir knows what he must do; he understands the immediate course of action that he must take. He must place his head in "gear" before his heart goes into "overdrive."

So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael, saying to them. (6:23)

The Kohen who blesses the people has an "approved text" to which he must adhere verbatim. There is no room for the Kohen to supplement the prescribed text stated in the Torah. The Kohen who adds blessing

transgresses the prohibition of Es kol hadavar asher Anochi metzaveh eschem oso tishmoru laasos, lo soseif alav v'lo sigra mimenu, "The entire word that I command you, that you shall observe to do; you shall not add to it, and you shall not subtract from it" (Devarim 13:1). In his commentary to the pasuk, Rashi cites examples of Bal Tosif, do not add: five tosafos, compartments for Tefillim; five species for a Lulav; four blessings for Bircas Kohanim, Priestly Blessings.

Bearing the above in mind, let us look to Parashas Pinchas as Moshe Rabbeinu prepares to transfer the reins of leadership to his primary disciple and successor, Yehoshua. The first step in the process was semichah d'Oraisa, Biblical ordination, whereby Moshe conferred "rabbinic" status on his student. This was the beginning of a chain of tradition that went on for generations, through the era of the Amoraim. There was an attempt to revive semichah in the early sixteenth century in Tzfas, but it failed to germinate.

In Parashas Pinchas, the Torah relates that Moshe placed both hands on Yehoshua - despite being instructed by Hashem to lay only one hand on him. Rashi explains that Moshe ordained Yehoshua b'ayin yafeh, "good eye," with both hands. How could Moshe amend Hashem's instructions and add to the mitzvah? Why was he not in transgression of Bal Tosif? The Kli Yakar asks this question, wondering why semichah should be any different than the other classic mitzvos cited by Rashi.

Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl, distinguishes between mitzvos ben adam laMakom, between man and the Almighty, and mitzvos ben adam lachaveiro, between man and his fellow man. The prohibition against adding to a mitzvah applies to those mitzvos between man and G-d. Hashem has given strict instructions concerning the parameters of the mitzvah. When it comes to performing various acts of loving kindness to our fellowman, there are no restrictions concerning doing more. Kol ha'mosif, mosifin lo, "Whoever adds, it will be added to him." He will be blessed for going beyond the call of duty.

Apparently, the Priestly Blessing is a mitzvah which is bein adam laMakom. Thus, there is no allowance for addition of any sort. Rav Heyman supports this with a statement found in the Sifri's commentary to our parsha. The Torah writes, V'aani avaracheim, "And I will bless them." The Torah underscores that the blessing is derived from Hashem, so that people should not erroneously think that their blessings are contingent upon the Kohanim. The blessings come from Hashem. The Kohanim are the medium for deliverance. Hashem - and only Hashem - can confer blessing. Thus, it is clear that the mitzvah is bein adam laMakom.

The Biur Halachah wonders how a parent may confer blessing on his child, employing the exact text reserved for the Kohanim's blessing. Does the Talmud not derive from the words koh sevarachem, "So, shall you bless," that a zar, Yisrael or Levi, who are not members of the Priestly family, may not bless? Rav Heyman explains that a Yisrael is considered a zar only with regard to ascending the Duchan in the Sanctuary and conferring an official blessing in a place reserved for Kohanim. Under such circumstances, the zar partners with other Kohanim in a blessing through which Hashem bestows His favor on those who are the subjects of the blessing. Since the zar is not part of this august group of Kohanim, he transgresses koh sevarachu, by bestowing blessing using the Biblical vernacular. However, a father who blesses his son with a personal blessing - not as a Bircas Kohanim - is acting bein adam lachaveiro. Thus, there is no reason to prohibit his blessing - even if he uses biblical language. As long as he is not acting bein adam laMakom, it is not a mitzvah, per se.

***V'sartem va'avaditem elohim acheirim.
And turn astray and serve gods of others.***

V'sartem, one turns away from Hashem by being poreish min haTorah, removing Torah study from his religious practice. In other words, he serves Hashem, performs mitzvos, carried out acts of loving kindness - just does not study Torah. This person is considered an oveid elohim acheirim, worshipping "another G-d." He thinks that he worships Hashem, but he does not. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, puts it very succinctly, "Judaism without Torah is another religion." Other religions have a prayer service, religious rituals, observances and prohibitions. We have one thing which

they do not have: Limud haTorah, Torah study. That makes all the difference.

Rashi explains it further when he says, she'heim acheirim l'ovdeihem, "They are called other gods, because they are strangers to those who serve them." One pleads with his god - no answer. Thus, the other god becomes estranged to the supplicant. A person may believe in Hashem Echad and, certainly, he is not an idol worshipper, but he does not have anyone listening to his tefillos. Rav Schwab adds that, even when one says all of the right words, bows when necessary, even gives a shuckle, body movement, here and there, if he does not have the proper kavanah, intention and devotion, that he is standing before the Ribono Shel Olam, then he is praying to elohim acheirim, a stranger who does not hear his tefillos. Prayer without kavanah is not talking to anyone in particular.

Sponsored b"gk R' Alter Chaim Dovid by R' Menachem Shmuel z"l nifter 28 Iyar5767 t.n.tz.v.h. By Menachem Shmuel and Roiza Devora Salamon In memory of Mr. David Salamon

**Orthodox Union / www.ou.org
Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column
*Naso: Distinctly Different***

The term is one that I first heard back in high school. There are times that I find it helpful, and there are times I find myself resistant to using it. The term is "Judeo-Christian."

I understand that this term was first used back in the early-19th century to refer to the fact that the roots of the religion of Christianity are to be found in the Jewish religion and culture. Much later the term came to be used as it is commonly used nowadays; namely, as a way of referring to the mores, beliefs, and ethical norms which our religion has in common with Christianity.

Long before my career in the rabbinate, in fact even quite early in my childhood, I was acquainted with Christians and fascinated by both the differences and similarities between our faiths and our lifestyles. I may have shared with readers of this column my family's exposure to a devout Irish Catholic family. When my siblings and I were quite young, we spent our summers in a cottage in Rockaway Beach that was owned by an elderly Catholic couple. We became familiar with their entire family and indeed my mother, whose yahrzeit we commemorated just a few days ago, maintained a lifelong correspondence with the couple's daughter, Mrs. Eleanor McElroy.

Much more recently, I have been representing the Orthodox Union in a regular forum in which leaders of the Jewish community meet with their counterparts in the Catholic community to work on various social issues in which we have common interests. Following the guidelines of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik regarding interreligious dialogue, we carefully avoid discussing theological matters, and confine our discussions to ways in which we can cooperate in achieving various shared goals.

Often we encounter striking similarities in the problems that we face; for example, difficulties in funding our respective parochial schools. Then, we speak the same language. But quite frequently, we discover that even when we use the same terminology we are referring to very different experiences. Indeed, these differences frequently make it almost impossible for us to understand each other.

In a recent such forum, for example, the Catholic group, having read so much about the "Charedim" and their involvement in Israeli politics, asked me to define for them just who the Charedim were. I tried my best to do so, but they remained confounded as how a group of fervently pious believers in the literal meaning of the Bible could be anti-Zionist in their politics.

Just as the Catholic group had difficulty understanding such Jewish phenomena, so the members of our Jewish group found some Christian religious concepts practices alien, and even unacceptable. Thus, in one of our conversations, one of the Catholic clergyman wished aloud that he could retreat from the pressures of contemporary society and spend the rest of his years in a monastery. I was just one of our group who immediately protested that for us Jews there were no monasteries, and that we did not see the monastic life as a positive religious alternative.

The response of members of the Catholic group to that remark finally bring us to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Naso (Numbers 4:21-7:89). "How can you not view monasticism positively? After all, the practice has biblical roots, in the Hebrew Bible," they insisted.

They were referring to the following verses in this week's parsha: "The Lord spoke to Moses, saying...If anyone, man or woman, explicitly utters a Nazirite's vow, to set himself apart for the Lord, he shall abstain from wine...He may not eat anything that is obtained from the grape vine... No razor shall touch his head...He shall not go in where there is a dead person" (Numbers 6:1-7).

Of course, any one of the Jewish members of the group could easily have referred to the numerous opinions, already recorded in the Talmud, as to the non-desirability of the practice of nezirut. There are certainly forceful statements against taking the Nazirite vow, and even those who consider it a sin.

But I found myself taking a different tack in this discussion. "It is wrong to equate the Nazir with the monk" I said. "Granted, the Nazir must be guided by certain very stringent prohibitions. But he does not absent himself from society. He is neither a hermit, nor a member of some ascetic sect. This is very different from one who undertakes monastic vows, as I understand them."

One of my companions rallied to my side after reaching for a volume of the set of encyclopedias, which was in easy reach in the library where the meeting was taking place. He read out this definition of "monasticism:"

"It is an institutionalized religious practice whose members live by a rule that requires works that goes beyond those of the laity...The monastic is commonly celibate and universally ascetic, and separates himself from society either by living as a hermit or by joining a community of others who profess similar intentions."

Another good friend simply consulted his pocket dictionary which stated: "The word 'monasticism' is derived from the Greek monachos, which means 'living alone.'"

Our Jewish group, which consisted of several diverse individuals who regularly disagree vociferously with each other, were united in our response to the Catholic gentlemen on that day. The Nazirite was not a monk, certainly not in the common understanding of that term.

The interreligious group did not persist in this particular discussion. Afterwards, however, some of us from the Jewish group continued our discussion over coffee.

We were struck by the fact that three individuals are understood by our tradition as having been Nazirites, or at least partial Nazirites. They include the heroic warrior Samson, the prophet Samuel, and Absalom, the son of David who rebelled against his father. No question about it: these men were not celibate, not hermits, and not men who refrained from the legitimate pleasures of life. Quite the contrary, they played active roles in the life of the Jewish people, albeit each in very different ways.

The distinct difference between our Torah's concept of the Nazirite and the Christian concept of the monastic is perhaps best expressed in a passage in the third chapter of Maimonides' *Hilchot De'ot*, which I will allow myself to paraphrase:

"Lest a person mislead himself into thinking that since envy, lust, and vainglory are such negatives, I will therefore separate myself from them; forcefully distance myself from them to the extreme; eat no meat and drink no wine; practice celibacy; shun a finely furnished home; desist from wearing attractive clothing, and instead don sackcloth and coarse wool, and similar such ascetic practices. Let him be aware that this is the manner of Gentile priests!

"Let me make clear that a person who pursues such a path is a sinner. Even the Nazirite, who merely refrains from products of the vine, requires atonement. How much more so the one who deprives himself of the many pleasures of life, which are not prohibited by the Torah. He is simply misguided."

Almost nine hundred years ago, Maimonides recognized the distinct difference between the concept of holiness as practiced by the Gentile priests whom he knew and the model of holiness which is held up to us by our Torah. The Nazirite, in Maimonides' view, is not the paradigm of

holiness. The truly holy man must not refrain from living a normal family life, must share in the joys and woes of his friends and neighbors, and must exercise the leadership skills with which he has been uniquely blessed.

It is doubtful, given the sacrificial Temple rituals which conclude the Nazirite's term and which are detailed in this week's parsha, that one can practically be a Nazirite nowadays. But the lessons of this week's Torah portion are clear: there are guidelines for those who wish to be holier than the rest of us. But those guidelines rule out separating oneself from family and community.

In this regard, we cannot speak of a common Judeo-Christian norm. The Jewish norm and the Christian norm are distinctly different.

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

The Politics of Envy

Few things in the Torah are more revolutionary than its conception of leadership.

Ancient societies were hierarchical. The masses were poor and prone to hunger and disease. They were usually illiterate. They were used by rulers as a means to wealth and power rather than people with individual rights – a concept born only in the seventeenth century. At times they formed a corvée, a vast conscripted labor force, often used to construct monumental buildings intended to glorify kings. At others they were dragooned into the army to further the ruler's imperial designs.

Rulers often had absolute power of life and death over their subjects. Not only were kings and pharaohs heads of state. They also held the highest religious rank, as children of the gods or demigods themselves. Their power had nothing to do with the consent of the governed. It was seen as written into the fabric of the universe. Just as the sun ruled the sky and the lion ruled the animal realm so kings ruled their populations. That was how things were in nature, and nature itself was sacrosanct.

The Torah is a sustained polemic against this way of seeing things. Not just kings but all of us, regardless of colour, culture, creed or class, are in the image and likeness of God. In the Torah God summons his special people, Israel, to take the first steps to what might eventually become a truly egalitarian society – or to put it more precisely, a society in which dignity – *kavod* – does not depend on power or wealth or an accident of birth.

Hence the concept, which we will explore more fully in parshat Korach, of leadership as service. The highest title accorded to Moses in the Torah is that he was *eved haShem*, "a servant of God." His highest praise is that he was "very humble, more so than anyone else on earth" (Num. 12: 3). To lead is to serve. Greatness is humility. As the book of Proverbs puts it, "A man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honour" (Prov. 29: 23).

The Torah points us in the direction of an ideal world, but it does not assume that we have reached it yet or are within striking distance. The people Moses led, like many of us today, were still prone to ambition, aspiration, vanity, and self-esteem. They still had the human desire for honour, status and respect. And Moses had to recognise that fact. It would be a major source of conflict in the months and years ahead. It is one of the primary themes of the book of Bamidbar.

Of whom were the Israelites jealous? Most of them did not aspire to be Moses. He was, after all, the man who spoke to God and to whom God spoke. He performed miracles, brought plagues against the Egyptians, divided the Red Sea, and gave the people water from a rock and manna from heaven. Few would have had the hubris to believe they could do any of these things.

But they did have reason to resent the fact that religious leadership seemed to be confined to one tribe, Levi, and one family within that tribe, the Cohanim, male descendants of Aaron. Now that the tabernacle was to be consecrated and the people were about to begin the second half of their journey, from Sinai to the Promised Land, there was a real risk of envy and animosity.

That is a constant throughout history. We desire, said Shakespeare, "this man's gift and that man's scope." Aeschylus said, "It is in the character of very few men to honor without envy a friend who has prospered." Goethe warned that although "Hatred is active, and envy passive dislike; there is but one step from envy to hate." Jews should know this in their very bones. We have often been envied, and all too frequently that envy has turned to hate with tragic consequences.

Leaders need to be aware of the perils of envy, especially within the people they lead. This is one of the unifying themes of the long and apparently disconnected parsha of Naso.

In it we see Moshe confronting three potential sources of envy. The first lay within the tribe of Levi. They had reason to resent the fact that priesthood had gone to just one man and his descendants, Aaron, Moses' brother.

The second had to do with individuals who were neither of the tribe of Levi nor of the family of Aaron but who felt that they had the right to be holy in the sense of having a special, intense relationship with God in the way that the Cohanim had.

The third had to do with the leadership of the other tribes who might have felt left out of the service of the Tabernacle. We see Moses dealing sequentially with all these potential dangers.

First he gives each Levitical clan a special role in carrying the vessels, furnishings and framework of the Tabernacle whenever the people journeyed from place to place. The most sacred objects were to be carried by the clan of Kohath. The Gershonites were to carry the cloths, coverings and drapes. The Merarites were to carry the planks, bars, posts and sockets that made up the Tabernacle's framework. Each clan was, in other words, to have a special role in place in the solemn procession as the House of God was carried through the desert.

Next he deals with individuals who aspire to a higher level of holiness. This, it seems, is the underlying logic of the Nazirite, the individual who vows to set himself apart for the Lord (Numbers 6:2). He was not to drink wine or any other grape product; he was not to have his hair cut; and he was not to defile himself through contact with the dead. Becoming a Nazirite was, it seems, a way of temporarily assuming the kind of set-apartness associated with the priesthood, a voluntary extra degree of holiness.[1]

Lastly, he turns to the leadership of the tribes. The highly repetitive chapter 7 of our parsha itemizes the offerings of each of the tribes on the occasion of the dedication of the altar. Their offerings were identical, and the Torah could have abbreviated its account by describing the gifts brought by one tribe and stating that each of the other tribes did likewise. Yet the sheer repetition has the effect of emphasizing the fact that each tribe had its moment of glory. Each, by giving to the house of God, acquired its own share of honour.

These episodes are not the whole of Naso but enough of it to signal something that every leader and every group needs to take seriously. Even when people accept in principle the equal dignity of all, and even when they see leadership as service, the old dysfunctional passions die hard. People still resent the success of others. They still feel that honour has gone to others when it should have gone to them. Rabbi Elazar Ha-Kappar said: "Envy, lust and the pursuit of honour drive a person out of the world." [2]

The fact that these are destructive emotions does not stop some people – perhaps most of us – feeling them from time to time, and nothing does more to put at risk the harmony of the group.

That is one reason why a leader must be humble. He or she should feel none of these things. But a leader must also be aware that not everyone is humble. Every Moses has a Korach, every Julius Caesar a Cassius, every Duncan a Macbeth, every Othello an Iago. In many groups there is a potential trouble-maker driven by a sense of injury to his self-esteem. These are often a leader's deadliest enemies and they can do great damage to the group.

There is no way of eliminating the danger entirely, but Moses in this week's parsha tells us how to behave. Honour everyone equally. Pay special attention to potentially disaffected groups. Make each feel valued. Give everyone a moment in the limelight if only in a ceremonial way. Set a

personal example of humility. Make it clear to all that leadership is service, not a form of status. Find ways in which those with a particular passion can express it, and ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute.

There is no failsafe way to avoid the politics of envy but there are ways of minimizing it, and our parsha is an object lesson in how to do so.

[1] See Maimonides, *Hilkhot Shemittah ve-Yovel* 13: 13.

[2] *Mishnah Avot* 4: 21.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

Drasha Parshas Naso

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Respectful Repeats

One of the most striking components of Parshas Naso is the listing of all the princes, the *nessi'im*, of the Children of Israel, and the gift offerings that they brought in conjunction with the dedication of the Mishkan.

Despite the fact that each and every *nasi* brought the same gift as his predecessor, the Torah details each offering with exactitude: it does not skimp on detail or abbreviate its significance.

Over and over again, the Torah meticulously states the name of the *nasi*, the tribe he headed, and the gift that he brought.

"He brought his offering - one silver bowl, its weight a hundred and thirty [shekels]; and one silver basin of seventy shekels in the sacred shekel; both of them filled with fine flour mixed with oil for a meal-offering, one gold ladle of ten [shekels] filled with incense. One young bull, one ram, one sheep in its first year for an elevation offering. One he-goat for a sin-offering. And for a feast peace-offering - two cattle, five rams, five he-goats, five sheep in their first year ... this is the offering of ..."

These verses are repeated in tandem for each and every prince -- their identical offerings exacted as if they were the only ones.

The Torah, which can consolidate laws that fill expansive Talmudic tomes into merely a few brief words, chose to elaborate expansively in order to give each *nasi* his place in the eternal spotlight of the Torah's wisdom. Why?

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, in the first book of his classic *Maggid Series*, relates the story of Rav Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor, the Kovno Rav. Under Russian law, all young men were obliged to enlist in the army. Besides the obvious ubiquitous threat of violent death, maintaining any semblance of religious observance in the army was virtually impossible. The only way out was an exemption from army service.

Yaakov, a student who was much beloved by his rebbi, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, applied for an exemption. Moscow did not immediately respond to the request, and each day Yaakov's friends, together with their beloved Rebbe, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, waited to hear any news of whether Yaakov's exemption was accepted.

One afternoon, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon was engrossed in a Rabbinic litigation. He sat together with Rav Elya Boruch Kamai, the Rav of Mir, and a third distinguished Rav. They were litigating a complex problem involving two wealthy businessmen. Both side was willing to compromise, and for hours the three Rabbis attempted to find an amicable yet halachically acceptable resolution.

Suddenly, the door opened and a young man stuck his head into the room. As soon as he saw Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, he excitedly addressed him. "Rebbi!" he exclaimed. "We just got the news, Yaakov was granted an exemption!" Rav Yitzchak Elchonon breathed a sigh of relief and said with a radiant smile, as he showered him with blessings. "May G-d bless you for bringing this wonderful news. May you merit long years and good health. Thank you ever so much!"

The boy left smiling, glad that he had made his rebbi so happy. Immediately the Rabbis resumed deliberations in an attempt to resolve the *din Torah*.

A few minutes later, another student opened the door. Not knowing that his rebbi already knew the news, he apologized for interrupting saying he had something very important to share. Then he announced with joy, "Rebbi, we've gotten word that Yaakov is exempt!"

Rav Yitzchak Elchonon replied with just as much enthusiasm as he had the first time. "How wonderful!" He showered him with blessings as well. "May G-d bless you for bringing this wonderful news. May you merit long years and good health. Thank you ever so much!"

The boy closed the door and left, beaming with joy that he had made his rebbi so happy.

Five minutes later, yet a third boy entered the room. "Rebbi, did you hear? Yaakov is exempt!" Once again Rav Yitzchak Elchonon smiled broadly and blessed the boy for the wonderful news. He thanked him and blessed him in the exact manner as with the previous boys.

Six times, different boys came in with the same news, each one anticipating the happiness their rebbi would feel at the news, each one not aware that others had preceded him. Rav Yitzchak Elchonon smiled at each boy, expressed his gratitude and made him feel as important as the first one.

The Ponovez Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Eliezer Schach, of blessed memory, once explained in a talk to his students that the attention to the honor of a fellow Jew is one of the most important lessons we can learn. Therefore the Torah repeated and repeated each and every Nasi with the same enthusiasm to teach us the importance of respect for the individual.

And now that the story of the repetitive princes was incorporated into the Torah, the lesson of individual attention, too, becomes not just a lesson in morality, but a portion of the Torah, whose study merits the same value as the most intricate laws that are contained in the most difficult portions. Because a lesson about honoring a fellow Jew is surely worth repeating.

Good Shabbos

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky is the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Toras Chaim at South Shore and the author of the Parsha Parables series.

Questions or comments? Email feedback@torah.org. Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Naso

One's Personal Kedusha Is Diminished When Witnessing An Adulteress

Immediately after the chapter of the "Unfaithful wife" – who if she is indeed unfaithful meets a very degrading end – the Torah relates the laws of the Nazir. Rashi quotes the famous Talmudic passage which explains this juxtaposition: "Why was the passage of Nazir put adjacent to the passage of Sotah? To tell you that anyone who sees a Sotah in her state of disgrace should take upon himself to abstain from wine for wine leads to adultery." [Sotah 2a]

Rav Weinberg, zt"l, once asked the following question on this Talmudic statement: I can understand why someone who witnessed the travails of a Sotah would ban from their thoughts any contemplation of committing adultery – because look at what happens to such a person! It is the equivalent of witnessing a horrific car accident in which the passenger flies through the windshield and is killed because he was not wearing a seatbelt. A person who witnesses such an accident would rightfully resolve to never ride in a car again without wearing a seatbelt. Why, however, does a person need to take the next step and vow to abstain from wine (by declaring oneself a Nazir)? Should it not suffice to be chastised enough from witnessing this scene that one will not want to commit adultery?

Rav Weinberg said the reason that a person should vow to abstain from wine is because when a sin seems to us to be incomprehensible, the mere fact that we saw someone do it makes it "more doable" in our eyes. Despite the dire consequences of what they did, the sin becomes less unthinkable to us. This is the natural effect of witnessing sin. It makes the possibility of committing such a sin ourselves more plausible in our minds. The personal level of sanctity of the person witnessing sin has been affected. It has been lowered. He has experienced a breach in his personal level of kedusha.

The holiness of the Jewish people is based on the fidelity of the Jewish home. It is based on the faithfulness of a Jewish husband to his wife and the fidelity of a Jewish wife to her husband. When one sees this

faithfulness violated, his own personal sanctity has been contaminated. It becomes necessary for him to do something about it. Therefore he must take the "next step" and vow to abstain from wine.

The Chofetz Chaim lived in Radin, a small hamlet in Poland. In Radin, there were no Sabbath desecrators. The Chofetz Chaim never witnessed Chillul Shabbos in his entire life in Radin. During World War I, when the battlefield shifted and Radin was in danger of becoming engulfed in the war, the entire village picked themselves up and they moved into interior Russia for the duration of the war. The first Shabbos that the Chofetz Chaim was thus "in exile," he witnessed Sabbath desecration for the first time in his life. He broke down crying and he cried for an extended period of time.

The next week, the Chofetz Chaim saw Sabbath desecration again. He cried even longer than he did the first Shabbos. Those who were with him asked him to explain his behavior. "We can understand last week, it was the first time you witnessed Chillul Shabbos. It was shocking to you and you cried. However, this week, you should have expected it already. Why did you cry again – and cry even longer and more intensely the second week?"

The Chofetz Chaim answered, the first week I saw Chillul Shabbos, I cried that I saw another Jew breach the holy Sabbath. This week it's true, it did not bother me as much. I did not cry this week for the Shabbos. I cried for myself because I have been impacted negatively on a spiritual level. I saw what happened to me – I have become somewhat callous regarding the offense I feel to the honor of Shabbos when it is violated.

This is why someone who has seen a Sotah should vow to abstain from wine. One who has witnessed a woman of loose morals, who has committed adultery has himself had his sanctity diminished. He needs to take affirmative action to reestablish his prior level of personal kedusha. Therefore, let him become a Nazir.

Even The Greatest Are Vulnerable To The Yetzer Hara of Kavod and Gayvah

Parshas Nasso contains the offerings of the 12 princes as part of the Mizbayach dedication service. Although the offerings are identical, the Torah lists their description 12 times, once by the offering of each and every prince.

The first person to bring an offering was Nachshon son of Aminadav. The pasuk, in describing Nachshon's offering, begins somewhat surprisingly with the conjunctive 'vov' (v'Korbano) – AND his offering was. We would normally not expect the first set of offerings in a list of 12 princes to begin with the word 'AND'.

The Daas Zekeinim m'Baalei haTosofos note this anomaly. The reason for utilizing the introductory 'vov', they write, is so that Nachshon should not get swell-headed by virtue of the fact that he went first. The Torah writes "AND his offering" as if to say "Do not think you are anyone so special; consider it as if you were NOT the first to bring an offering!"

Must we worry about someone like Nachshon getting a swelled head?? Nachshon ben Aminadav was the Prince of the most populous Tribe. He was the brother-in-law of Aharon the Kohen Gadol. It was he who was the first one to enter the Yam Suf – he went in literally up to his neck until the sea was split. This man was righteous – a spiritual pillar of the world!

The lesson is that anyone can be affected by haughtiness (gayvah). There is nothing here to really brag about. Someone had to be first. It is not necessarily because he was so special – perhaps he was first because he travelled first in the formation of the camps. But such is human nature – we love 'kavod' [honor].

It starts early on. Little children already enjoy 'kavod'. Honor and haughtiness are such an integral part of the human psyche that no matter who a person is and no matter what stage of life a person is in, a person is always vulnerable to be ensnared by the pitfalls of becoming vainglory. It starts in childhood and it goes all the way to a person's deathbed.

When my granddaughter was 8 years old, she was in a Jewish store with her mother in Brooklyn and someone asked my daughter what her name was. My daughter responded "Mrs. So and So" using her married name.

My little granddaughter whispered to my daughter, "Mommy, tell her your maiden name is Frand."

Something that is such an integral part of the human personality – the drive to seek personal honor – is very hard to uproot.

The sefer Ikvei Erev has a very interesting observation, which I have never seen before. There are prayers from the Tanna Rav Nechunya ben haKaneh [Brachos 28b] that, technically speaking, a person is supposed to recite daily before one enters and after one exits the Study Hall. The prayer before entry is as follows: "May it be your will, Hashem, that a mishap not come about through me and may I not stumble in a matter of law and cause my colleagues to rejoice over me, and may I not say regarding something which is tamei t hat it is tahor and not regarding something which is tahor that it is tamei and may my colleagues not stumble in a matter of law and I would be led to rejoice over them."

In essence, we pray that we do not make a mistake because if we do, our colleagues will be happy at our expense and we pray that our friends not make a mistake, because we will be happy at their expense. This was written by Rav Nechunya ben haKaneh. He and his colleagues are all Tanaaim. It seems they were not above the possibility of gloating feelings at hearing each other say something stupid so that they could feel "I can learn so much better than him"! This is the sin of taking personal honor at the shame of his friend (miskabed b'klon chaveiro) – enjoying somebody else's downfall.

These are terrible personality faults, which begin with honor and haughtiness. The G-dly Tanna himself Rav Nechunya ben haKaneh knows human beings and human foibles. Human beings enjoy kavod. They love kavod. Ma ny times, we receive kavod because our friends fall and we rise relative to them. People are people and human beings are human beings.

Even Rav Nechunya ben haKaneh had to worry and pray that he not stumble into the trap of "my friends will fail and I will rejoice over them." So too, even by Nachshon ben Aminadav, the Torah needs to write "AND his offering," lest it get to his head that he is Number one. Such is our evil inclination regarding pride and honor.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

RavFrand, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yisrocher Frand and Torah.org.

Parshat Naso: Humanism as a basic condition

By Shmuel Rabinowitz

May 29, 2014 Thursday 29 Iyyar 5774

The basic requirement that Judaism sets up for everyone is humanism - a term including proper treatment of others.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Naso, we encounter the source of the commandment familiar to anyone who goes to synagogue – Birkat Kohanim, the Priestly Blessing. Toward the end of the prayer service, the kohanim go to the front of the synagogue, face the congregation, and bless them with the following verses: "May the Lord bless you and watch over you.

"May the Lord cause His countenance to shine to you and favor you.

"May the Lord raise His countenance toward you and grant you peace." (Numbers 6, 24-26) With these few words, this blessing summarizes the peak of every person's aspirations: G-d's blessing and safekeeping; His countenance and favor; and peace.

The last part of the blessing raised an interesting question that brought about an understanding of the importance of proper relationships among people.

The Talmud says the following: "Bluria the proselyte put this question to Rabban Gamliel: It is written in your Law, [she said], who lifts not up the countenance, and it is also written, The Lord shall lift up his countenance upon you.

"Rabbi Jose the priest joined the conversation and said to her: I will give you a parable which will illustrate the matter.

A man lent his neighbor a maneh [sum of money] and fixed a time for payment in the presence of the king, while the other swore to pay him by

the life of the king. When the time arrived he did not pay him, and he went to excuse himself to the king.

The king, however, said to him: The wrong done to me I excuse you, but go and obtain forgiveness from your neighbor. So here: One text speaks of offenses committed by a man against God, the other of offenses committed by a man against his fellow man." (Talmud Bavli, Masechet Rosh Hashana, daf 17) Bluria, a wealthy non-Jew who chose to join the Jewish nation, turns to the head of the Sanhedrin, the top religious leader of the nation, Rabban Gamliel, and questions him about a contradiction between two verses, a contradiction that implies two theological approaches to G-d's attitude toward the sins of humans.

In one verse, we find the following description of G-d – "Who will show no favor, nor will He take a bribe" (Deuteronomy 10, 17), which means that G-d does not give up and is not easily reconciled. While in Birkat Kohanim, "May the Lord raise His countenance toward you," the meaning is that G-d waives our deeds and forgives for undesired actions.

Rabban Gamliel did not even have time to answer Bluria's question when his friend Rabbi Yossi the priest stood and bravely resolved the contradiction. According to his explanation, G-d does indeed forgive and pardon people for their sins. When a man regrets his actions, he is entitled to expect pardon. But when a man harms another man, whether it is financially, verbally or any other way, G-d conditions His forgiveness on appeasing the victim.

With this answer, Rabbi Yossi defined the area known as "between man and man" (relationships between man and society) as preempting the area known as "between man and G-d." Thus, he bestowed an additional meaning to the verse "Who will show no favor, nor will He take a bribe," which comes to teach that man cannot fulfill commandments, to pray or study Torah, while at the same time harming a fellow man, stealing from him or causing him grief. This kind of behavior is a vain attempt to "bribe" G-d; a bribery that has no chance of being accepted.

Elsewhere, the sages of the Mishna expressed this stand in a clearer way when they stated: "One who is pleasing to his fellow men, is pleasing to G-d. But one who is not pleasing to his fellow men, is not pleasing to G-d." (Masechet Avot 3, 10) Rabbi Chaim Vital (of the great kabbalists in the Land of Israel in the 16th century, a student of the Holy Ari) poses a challenging question in his book Shaarei Kdusha ("Gates of Holiness"): Why doesn't the Torah explicitly state the requirement that people have to behave to one another humanely and morally?

His answer is that humanism is a basic condition for fulfilling the Torah, so much so that there is no need to explicitly write it in the Torah. A man who lacks proper relationships with his fellow man has not stepped into the doorway of Torah – Derech eretz kadma laTorah – "Good deeds and character come before Torah."

The basic requirement that Judaism sets up for everyone is humanism. And the term includes proper treatment of others, the understanding that just as I have needs and desires so do others, and I must respect them to the extent that I would want my needs and desires respected.

Only when we internalize this are we worthy of the blessing of G-d and His protection; His countenance and favor; and His countenance and peace.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

All rights reserved © 1995 - 2012 The Jerusalem Post.

Orthodox Union / www.ou.org

The Nazir: Turning Away or Turning Toward Man's Desire for Meaning

Rabbi Elyahu Safran

"I just want it to mean something..."

Meaning is a central, though often elusive, goal. Whether the "it" is a particular task, a relationship or, indeed, life itself, we want – need – our effort, our existence to mean something. In a fragmented age of Tweets and Facebook postings, of five hundred television stations and nothing to watch, or contradictory messages about learning, love, faith and relationships, how is one to find that elusive "meaning"?

When Job, tested so severely by God, demanded a witness, he was demanding nothing less than meaning for his suffering. Ultimately, meaning is found in the certainty that we are not alone, in our lives or in existence.

Rav Soloveitchik described this hunger for meaning when he spoke of the Lonely Man of Faith. In his description, I pictured the existentially troubled Nazir, a man of faith whose religious experience is necessarily fraught with inner conflicts. He feels ecstasy in God's companionship – meaning – and despair – loneliness – when he feels abandoned by God.

His conflict is a mirror raised to our own experience of the modern world. How does one make sense – find meaning – lost in a seemingly senseless, impersonal and narcissistic society? How does one not feel like a stranger, alone?

How does one not feel like a cipher, a mere numerical smudge in a never-ending cascade of demographics, data and statistics? 51,280 people in Scandinavia, Europe and the Soviet Union will develop cancer as a result of Chernobyl but only 5,128 will die. 7,294 men and 3,954 women in New York above the age of 20 die each year from causes directly attributable to smoking. Lost in these numbers is the simple truth that each of these numbers represent a real person!

People are not statistics. I am not a statistic. But in a world seemingly defined by pornography, alcohol, drugs and violence, how is my voice heard? How do I not become a statistic, a cipher; cut off from my fellow and from God?

Perhaps the answer is to take the route of the Nazir, to withdraw from the impersonal and profane world. The desire to achieve a state of ecstatic transcendentalism seems to demand abstinence and complete withdrawal.

But 'turning away' does not solve the problem of aloneness. "Turning toward" does.

Yet the religious personality often believes that in turning away – through afflictions, fasts and solitude – he has done enough. Doesn't this describe the method and goal of the Nazir? The Nazir seeks a thirty-day period to separate, to abstain from wine, from having contact with the dead, and he does not cut his hair. By setting himself apart, he presumes to be closer to the holiness of the Lord.

Certainly the goal of holiness is cherished by Jews. And the inherent nobility of each and every person is fundamental to Jewish thought. But is the Nazir a model or cautionary tale in our modern search for meaning and holiness?

Does the Torah hold the Nazir in high esteem or is it critical of his methods? Even as we applaud one who consciously turns his back on the madness of the world, we are confronted by the implications of the choice.

The Nazir refuses wine, yet wine is central to every joyous event in Jewish life. He turns away from death and yet the reality of death is also fundamental to who we are. As T.S. Eliot wrote, "In my beginning is my end." The joyful cry of the newborn reminds us not only of the joy of life, but also the inevitable cry of mourning. Even the refusal to cut his hair runs counter to our mores. Halachah ordains that prior to the onset of Sabbath and Yom Tov we should cut and, particularly, groom our hair. Furthermore, Halachah teaches that hair not be too long, lest it interfere with the proper donning of the tefillin.

In choosing a different path, the Nazir turns away from normative Torah practice. He is recognized as a kadosh, yet his methods are also held to account in the Parasha, "And the priest shall offer one for a sin-offering and one for a burnt-offering and make an atonement for him." (6:11) When his days of separation are over, he has to bring his sacrifices for a sin offering.

If the Nazir is to be commended, why a sin-offering? If he is condemned, why refer to him as holy?

The Ramban held that the Nazir is completely and genuinely holy. In his view, that the Torah requires a sin offering from him is solely because after thirty days he returns to the world of defilement and passions. It is the return to the profane world that demands atonement. Ramban then seems to suggest that the Nazir is a good model for us in seeking meaning in the world.

But before embracing the Nazir's way, we must further explore what a life of *perishut* – separation, asceticism – actually means. Rabenu Bachya in the Sha'ar HaPerishut of his Chovot Halevavot gives several definitions of *perishut*, "... special abstinence is the renunciation of everything that disturbs one from the service of God. . . . it means holding this world in abhorrence and curtailing desires . . . quietude of the soul and curbing its musings . . . it means limiting oneself to the minimum of clothing required for decency, taking of food only as much as is needed to still hunger . . . denying oneself of all relaxation and physical pleasure, limiting oneself to mere satisfaction of natural needs without which one could not exist, and excluding everything else from the mind."

Bachya holds that as the world grew in complexity, wealth and power, the need for asceticism increased. For the ancients – Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job – their souls were led to follow their understanding; they did not need asceticism. However, as the generations increased, and the world sank deeper into the fragmentation and depravity we experience in the modern world, people have become more focused on the secular and profane, losing their interest in the holy. A life of *perishut* may be necessary to regain perspective and reaffirm proper values. Rav Saadiah Gaon agrees, viewing *perishut* as a necessary attitude and method when confronted by a world defined by excess and sin. He teaches, "Use it when necessary."

While *perishut* might be an appropriate technique to overcome moral and ethical inadequacies, religious and personal deficiencies, Rambam recognizes that it is possible – and dangerous – to become lost in the extremity of the technique. He counsels moderation – *mida beinonit*. The right way is the middle way.

Rambam notes that the Nazir was only commanded to abstain in order to achieve a good purpose. When he "turned away" he was also "turning toward" – turning toward God and holiness. Only God provides the way to achieve meaning and overcome loneliness. That being the case, it is easy to be critical of the ascetic who claims that since envy, cupidity, and ambition are evil, "I will avoid them to the uttermost, and seek their contraries", and therefore concludes that he will not eat meat, or drink wine, or marry or dwell in a decent home, or wear comely apparel. For this separatist and ascetic the Rambam has only condemnation. "Whoever persists in such a course is termed a sinner."

A sinner? Yes. If the Nazir, who only abstained from wine, requires atonement, say the Sages, how much more so one who deprives himself of all legitimate enjoyment? The Sages ask, "Do not the prohibitions of the Torah, say our Sages, suffice you, that you add others for yourself?"

This suggests that while it is valuable to "turn away from" those things that demean, "turning toward" offers greater meaning. The Torah system of *mitzvot* is sufficient to guide and govern a normal life, which includes full enjoyment of the world which He created for our benefit, pleasure of the flesh which He provided, and satisfaction from the foods, drinks, and nature which He placed at our disposal. Otherwise, we sin just as the Nazir sins, by denying himself the enjoyment of wine.

The Nazir's condemnation of the physical world results from his inability to function within the norm and the revealed. If he finds meaning, it is only in the extreme. The Rama holds that the abstention of the Nazir is evil in itself, since all extremes are bad. For seeking meaning in life and attempting to make sense out of a chaotic, senseless, and impersonal society, he is a kadosh. But his methods render him a sinner.

The Nazir personifies the ultimate search for truth, integrity, and faith. Ironically, on his path seeking meaning, he may abandon principles and behaviors governing the very life he seeks to find. That is unfortunate, and therefore he will have to offer a sin-offering; for the search for moderation is the ultimate struggle in the search for meaning.

The Ropshitzer declared that before his birth an angel showed him a tablet divided into two columns.

On the right, "In order to know the Torah, a man must have no compassion for his wife and children. If he works to satisfy their needs, he will have no time to study the Torah." On the left, "He who pities people is pitied in Heaven. A man must care for his family even beyond his strength, for their lives are dependent upon his."

On the right, "The learned man should be like unto a fiery flame." The left, "Who will inherit the world to come? The meek and lowly, who bows when entering and leaving."

The Ropshitzer struggled with many other examples. "I was deep in thought on how difficult it is to find a way of behavior which will reconcile these contradictions when suddenly I heard a voice say, 'Mazal Tov, a male child is born!'"

Like him, I continue to struggle to find a way that weds left and right. It is the struggle for moderation. Such is the struggle between Nazir, the sinner, and Nazir, the holy. Turning toward and turning away.

On that middle path, I will find meaning and know I am never alone.

Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Jerusalem Day: The City of One Gate

Rabbi Moshe Zvi Neriah, a student of Rav Kook and noted author and educator, posed the following question shortly after the Old City of Jerusalem was liberated in 1967:

Why is it that only now we merited conquering the Old City? Why did our efforts during the 1948 War of Independence fail?

A City "Joined Together"

The psalmist describes Jerusalem as a "city that was joined together" (122:3). What is this "joining" quality of Jerusalem? The Jerusalem Talmud (Baba Kama 7:7) explains that Jerusalem "joins each Jew to the other." Jerusalem is meant to be a focal point of unity and cohesion for the Jewish people.

The Sages in Zevachim 114b used a peculiar phrase when teaching that the Passover offering may only be brought in the city of Jerusalem. For this offering, the Talmud explains, it is necessary that "all of Israel enter through one gate." This unusual expression of unity - "entering through one gate" - rings with an amazing prophetic resonance.

During the 1948 War of Independence, the Palmach forces broke through Zion Gate, while the Etzel forces were ready to break through Damascus Gate. At that point in time, we were divided and disunited. Had we succeeded then in conquering the city, there would have been arguments about who had captured the city and to whom does she belong. Jerusalem would have become a cause for conflict and dissension.

But Jerusalem was given to the entire Jewish people. As the Talmud (Yoma 12a) says, the city was not portioned out to any particular tribe. For this reason, it was only in 1967, when we approached the Old City united, with one army - and entering through one gate - that we merited regaining the city. The IDF, an army representing the national unity government of Israel, and the Jewish people all over the world, entered via Jerusalem's Lions Gate and liberated the city.

Interestingly, we find a similar idea when the Jewish people first conquered Jerusalem. Jerusalem - our holiest city, the eternal home for the Holy Temple - was not conquered during Joshua's conquest of the Eretz Yisrael. Nor was it secured during the time of the Judges, a period lasting 400 years. Nor did King Saul capture it. Only when the Jewish people were united under the permanent dynasty of King David was Jerusalem delivered.

The medieval biblical commentator Rabbi David Kimchi noted that the text supports this idea. Immediately following David's coronation in Hebron by the elders of Israel, it emphasizes:

"Then David and all of Israel went to Jerusalem" (I Chronicles 11:4).

Pragmatic Reason

In a footnote, Rabbi Neriah added a second, political explanation for delaying the liberation of the Old City until 1967. According to the UN partition plan, Jerusalem was meant to be an international city under UN auspices. Had Jerusalem been captured in 1948, the newly formed state would have been forced to bow to pressure from the UN. (During the

nineteen years that the Old City was under Jordanian occupation, for some reason no such pressure was placed on Jordan.)

In 1967, the situation had changed greatly. The State of Israel was much stronger and less susceptible to international pressure. The UN was a weaker institution, and it was difficult to suddenly initiate a diplomatic effort for the internationalization of Jerusalem after the issue had lain dormant for nineteen years.

(Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, pp. 480-482)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com

Parshas Naso

R' Netanel Gertner

gTorah | The Dvar Torah Service (ng@gtorah.com)

Social context

Sefer Vayikra, called Toras Kohanim, or Leviticus, deals with kohanim, their roles and duties throughout. Sefer Shemos, or Exodus, deals with the Exodus and what followed. Sefer Bamidbar is known as Sefer Pikudim, the Book of Numbers. It is odd that the book takes its name of numbers, given that the numbers of the census after which it seemingly takes its name, appear only in Parshas Bamidbar and Pinchas.

So why is the whole book called Pikudim?

R' Matis Weinberg explains that Bamidbar is not about numbers or countings; but logistics, or context. All the sections discuss the formation, establishment, and development of society, the Machane.

But if Bamidbar tracks how to build society, there are bits that don't seem to fit.

Parshas Naso begins with the different families of Levi, and their respective roles. There are four interceding sections until the continuation of forming the camp, wherein the princes of each tribe bring the Korbanos for their tribe. The interceding mitzvos are about (1) how a metzora and zav, certain types of sick people, must leave the camp until rehabilitation, (2) what happens if a convert dies with no family, his assets are distributed to kohanim, (3) the law of Sotah and (4) the law of Nazir.

Why do these four mitzvos appear here, interrupting the flow of establishing the Machane?

R' Weinberg explains that in truth, they aren't. They help society deal with exceptions.

The laws of the metzora and zav appear in Parshas Metzora, but the laws appearing here don't pertain to him, so much as ourselves, society. Our society, the Machane, is deficient while he is a part of it, and that is why he must leave.

The convert with no family poses a difficulty. Jews tend to have an integrated community setup - with common ancestry, a large enough family tree shows everyone to be related. Yet the convert has no one. This is a system failure; how do we deal with it? The Torah explains how his assets are distributed, and no one slips through the gaps.

The Sotah has trampled on society's rules, and violated the sanctity of marriage by cavorting with men after warnings not to. How does society respond to people tearing it apart from within? The Torah explains the procedure.

The Nazir, whilst displaying admirable commitment, has deviated from what the norm too. Drinking wine and cutting hair are normal things to do; abstaining is abnormal. Is there a place for odd people?

Hashem does not ask for homogeneity. The Torah tells us that in a developed society, everyone is part of the setup; even those who don't seem to fit. The logical continuation of the princes offering korbanos is interrupted specifically to include these people too; an imperfect but ultimately complete society.

Regarding the Korbanos, all the princes brought the same selection, yet the Torah saw fit to repeat each group on its own. Why, given that they were identical?

The principle of numbers in Sefer Bamidbar is that being part of a number generates a speciality.

Each set of korbanos ends with 12 – with a numerical value of 12, the number of tribes. Elsewhere, a number is impersonal; but here, the underlying theme is that speciality lies in being a part of the number, so much so that deviating from it is bad. 12 is the collective, the Klal. The Torah tallies the total number of korbanos brought, because the Torah appreciates the community, wherein the total has greater speciality than the number of individual parts.

This principle of standing out by being part of something bigger is true of Birchas Kohanim too – it does not originate from the kohen; but from Hashem. It is for the whole Klal, but personalised.

The halacha is that before the kohanim start they clench their fists, and once they start they open their palms. When the fists are clenched, the fist is flat – everything is the same. But when the fingers protrude, they are all different, much as we all are.

It is evident that the way to express individuality is from within the Klal. The parts of an engine are not remarkable. But put them together and it makes the machine – remove a bolt or wire and it's useless.

Torah Connotations

The silver bowls used for the blood management in the Beis HaMikdash are known to have had thin sides, despite this not being a requirement of the Torah. The silver basin is known to have had thick sides. How did Chazal know this to be the case, given that they had never seen them?

The Gra notes in the Gemara in Yuma that wherever the word שני – “two”, appears, a direct association is being drawn between the two articles under discussion, that they are the same. For example, the “two” goats on Yom Kippur had to be identical in appearance, height, and value, derived from the use of the word שני three times.

The Torah refers to the bowls as שניהם מלאים, implying that they were the same size. But this can't be; the listed weight of the basin is 130, whilst the bowl weighed 70. Therefore, if the two utensils had the same volume, but the weight parameters had to be different, Chazal deduced that the solution was to make one of them thicker. Ingenious!

Deeper meanings

A woman accused of adultery without evidence is put through an ordeal, wherein she is made to drink an odd concoction:

וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מִיָּמִים קְדוֹשִׁים בְּכֵלֵי תְּרֻשָׁה וּמֵן הַעֶפְרָא אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּקִרְבָּע הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִקַּח הַכֹּהֵן וְנָתַן אֵל הַמַּיִם – The cohen shall take water in an earthen vessel, some earth from the Mishkan floor, the kohen shall take and put it into the water. (5:17)

וְכָתַב אֶת הָאֱלֹת הַהֵלֵלָה בַּסֵּפֶר וּמָסָה אֵל מֵי הַמָּרִים – Then the kohen shall write these curses (containing God's name) on a scroll and erase it in the bitter water. (5:23)

To recap, the ingredients she is made to drink are water, earth, and the ink of God's name. Is there any significance to these components?

The Mishna in Avos (3:1) says:

עֲקִבְיָה בֶן מְהֻלָּל אָמַר, הַסֵּתֵכֵל בְּשִׁלּוּשָׁה דְבָרִים, וְאִין אַתָּה בָּא לִידֵי עֲבִירָה – דַּע מֵאִין בָּאת, וְלֵאִין אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, וְלִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עֹתִיד לִיתֵן דִּין וְחֻשְׁבוֹן: מֵאִין בָּאת, מִלִּיחָה סְרוּחָה. וְלֵאִין אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, לְמָקוֹם רִימָה וְתוֹלְעָה. וְלִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עֹתִיד לִיתֵן דִּין וְחֻשְׁבוֹן, לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ אַכָּוִיָּה – Akavia the son of Mahalalel would say: Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know from where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting. You came from a putrid drop of liquid – correlating to water; where you are going – the grave, a place of earth; and before whom you are destined to give an accounting – before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

This clearly correlates to God's name. The Torah is like a prism – different parts reflect different levels, layers and sections, but they contain the same blueprint.

Ohr Somayach :: Talmud Tips :: Rosh Hashana 23 - 28

For the week ending 31 May 2014 / 2 Sivan 5774

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

“One who learns Torah and doesn't teach it is like a myrtle in the desert; others say that one who learns Torah and teaches it in a place without

Torah scholars is like a myrtle in the desert, which is dear.” Rosh Hashana 23a

Rabbi Yochanan bases this statement of the importance of teaching Torah on a verse in the Prophet Yeshayahu. The first statement refers to one who learns Torah and is compared to a good fragrance (as in the Midrash about the Four Species on Succot), but since he doesn't share his Torah knowledge he is like a fragrant myrtle in a desert with no one else around to benefit. The second statement refers to a person who shares his Torah with others in a place where there are no other scholars normally found. He is like a lone myrtle in the desert that is very greatly appreciated. Since this person is learning and teaching in a “deserted” place, he is also appreciated and valued greater than he would be in a populated city, just as the lovely fragrance of a myrtle is more outstanding in the barren desert. (Maharsha)

“Like which opinion do we pray nowadays (on Rosh Hashana): This is the day of the beginning of Your deeds, a reminder of the first day? Like whom? Like Rabbi Eliezer who said that the world was created in Tishrei.” Rosh Hashana 27a

This statement in the gemara on our daf teaches that we say this prayer on Rosh Hashana according to the opinion of Rabbi Eliezer that the world was created in Tishrei, and not like the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua that it was created in Nissan. The Maharsha points out that the creation of the world actually began on Elul 25, and the sixth day of Creation when Man was created was on the 1st of Tishrei (according to this opinion). The prayer refers to Rosh Hashana as “the beginning of Your deeds” since Man was the purpose and fundamental reason of Creation, and it is as if nothing else was really created before Man.

2014 Ohr Somayach International - all rights reserved

Candidly Speaking: Jerusalem Day

By Isi Leibler

Jerusalem must return to its old destiny as “ir shalem,” meaning both “the city of peace” and “the city of completion.”

In the spirit of Yom Yerushalayim, Jerusalem Day, I would like to share with you a remarkable sermon I have just come across, which was delivered by my late father-in-law, Rabbi Israel Porush, at the Great Synagogue in Sydney one year after the Six Day War. The main message is as relevant today as it was then.

Israel stood alone in that hour of crisis, surrounded by a ring of modern armor of terrible deadliness, and beleaguered by the armies of seven nations who were united in their hatred of Israel and in their sinister plot to destroy it. The rest of the world cynically played a waiting game. Is it surprising that we view with a measure of cynicism the advice given us by our friends now?

And what of churches? Not a word of comfort in the hour of danger, not a sound of condemnation of the threats to our existence. The so-called ecumenical spirit, or the so-called dialogue between Church and Synagogue, which was promoted in some quarters, especially in the United States, has suffered a setback from which it will not so easily recover.

Did I say Israel stood alone? Israel never stands alone.

‘The Guardian of Israel never slumbers nor sleeps,’ and the people of Israel in all their dispersion were roused as never before in prayer and in action and stood united by the side of Medinat [the State of] Israel. The Jewish citizen-soldier knew what the stakes were, and he was ready for every sacrifice. And many hundreds of the cream of Israeli youth paid the supreme sacrifice upon the altar of Jewish survival.

We offer thanksgiving to the Almighty for the wonderful delivery of Israel from danger and fear, for the retreat of the enemy beyond wider and safer frontiers, and for the transformation that has taken place in the whole security situation of Medinat Israel.

But who can be unaware that our deepest emotions and our profoundest sensitivity revolve around the liberation of Jerusalem, which has been restored to its rightful owners after 19 centuries of dispossession?

Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) is a magic word for the Jew. It is pronounced in awe. It conjures up associations and feelings in our ears that no other word

does, and that no other nation or religion can remotely experience. To us, Yerushalayim personifies the presence of God in our midst, the shechinah. It is the soul of our people. It is the national and religious center of all Israel, whether in its glory or in its ruin. Jerusalem is eternal; it can never die or be destroyed. Wherever the Jew settles in the four corners of the earth, Jerusalem is alive in his heart and near to his life.

Jerusalem is mentioned 630 times in the Bible, as the city of God, the capital of the nation, the seat of the Temple, the center of piety and learning and also as the emblem of the Kingdom of God that will ultimately be established on earth.

When the captives of Judea sat by the rivers of Babylon weeping over their humiliation, and their captors invited them to sing one of the songs of Zion, they replied: "How can we sing the song of the Lord in a profane land?" and they swore, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I remember thee not; if I set not Jerusalem above my chiefest joy."

Throughout the 1,900 years of exile there was never a time, with the possible exception of two brief periods, when Jews did not live in Jerusalem, at times facing great peril, at times massacred by fanatics.

Our prayers were always directed toward Jerusalem. Already Daniel, we are told, recited his three daily services with his face toward Jerusalem, and so have done all Jews in the synagogue to this day. There is not a service, there is not a simchah (celebration), there is not a meal, when we do not remember Jerusalem and pray for its restoration. And when we sit in mourning over its destruction, we mingle sorrow with hope, and grief with glorification, and lament with pledges of eternal loyalty to Zion, as is reflected in the moving Ode of Judah Halevi:

"Thou art the house of royalty, thou art the throne of the Lord... O, who will make me wings, that I may fly afar and lay the ruins of my cleft heart among thy broken cliffs... Happy is he that waiteth, that cometh nigh and seeth the rising of the light, when on him thy dawn shall break – that he may see the welfare of thy chosen, and rejoice in the rejoicing when thou turnest back unto thine olden youth."

Jerusalem is the physical capital of the nation and at the same time the spiritual center of all Israel, wherever they live.

Yerushalayim is the emblem of the eternity of Israel as the people of God. We would indeed betray our *raison d'être* and our mission among men if we were to think of Yerushalayim in secular or political terms only.

Jerusalem must return to its old destiny as "ir shalem," which means on the one hand "the city of peace," but also on the other, "the city of completion, or unity." It is unthinkable that the unity between the people of Israel and its spiritual cradle will ever be allowed to be severed again.

The attachment of a people, for 3,000 years, as intense as that of the Jews to Yerushalayim cannot be set aside by international decree. None need be afraid that the Jews would deal ungenerously or restrictively with the holy places and legitimate interests of other religions and communities. We have proven that already.

Our rabbis also speak of Yerushalayim as the "metropolis of the world." There is undoubtedly also a universal facet to the image of Jerusalem, embracing the whole of humanity, and that goes back 2,500 years to the days of our prophets who prophesied in the name of God that the messianic order on earth would begin with the restoration of Jerusalem, and that Jerusalem would become then the fountainhead of a new mode of living which would lead the world out of the morass of strife, hate and division toward brotherhood, righteousness and peace:

"And many people shall go and say: Come ye, and let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the Law from Jerusalem. And he shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Jerusalem is more relevant to the ultimate salvation of humanity than Athens or Rome because it taught the world the supremacy of righteousness, brotherhood and charity. And even if the complete

fulfillment of this ideal state of affairs must wait for the fullness of time, the inspiration of this vision could stimulate now the troubled peoples of the earth toward a more just and peaceful order of life.

In our immediate context we could in our imagination envisage a Middle East in which goodwill, mutual respect and harmony would prevail between the Jews and the Arab nations, initiating an era of peace and prosperity that would be a blessing to all. We know that this is the constant aspiration and the constant yearning of the Yishuv, and that Israel's search for peace comes not only from practical considerations, but also from deep-seated convictions – the emblem of the Israeli army is, characteristically, a sword wreathed in an olive branch – and from the unshaken trust in the teachings of our prophets and the ideals of our tradition.

Rabbi Porush (1907-1991) was a fifth-generation Jerusalemite. His father was the first administrator of the Shaarei Zedek Hospital. Rabbi Porush received his *smicha* (rabbinical ordination) at the Hildesheimer Rabbinical Seminary in Berlin and also obtained a PhD in Mathematics. He was Minister at Finchley Synagogue in London before taking up his post as rabbi of Sydney's Great Synagogue (1940-1975) where he also served as the head of Beth Din.

The writer's website can be viewed at www.wordfromjerusalem.com
All rights reserved © 1995 - 2012 The Jerusalem Post.

BS"D Parashat Naso – Yom Yerushalayim 5774 **Rabbi Nachman Kahana**

National and Religious Honor

The Prophet Yirmiyahu said (13,17):

וְאֵם לֹא תִשְׁמְעוּנָהּ, בְּמִסְתָּרִים תִּבְכֶּה נַפְשִׁי מִפְּנֵי גוֹי, וְדָמַעַתְּ דָּמָעָה וְתִרְדַּע עֵינַי דְּמָעָה כִּי נִשְׁבַּח עֵדֶךָ

If you do not listen (to the warnings of the prophecy, and continue to sin, HaShem says) I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive.

The Gemara (Chagiga 5b) explains that there is a secret room off limits even to angels, called *Mistarim*, where HaShem is alone every day (as it would be) to weep for the suffering of the Jewish people, which we brought upon ourselves by our sins.

HaShem weeps for the exile of His people from the Holy Land. He weeps for the decline in understanding Torah caused by the exile. He weeps for the Holy Temples which were destroyed.

But above all, HaShem weeps for the national and religious honor of Am Yisrael, which was transferred from us to the *goyim*. The pomp and ceremony which was once Yerushalayim is now in Washington, in the Vatican and in other capitals of Aisav's lands.

This week, the Pope was in Yerushalayim. The honors granted him were exponentially greater than those shown (*lehavdil*) to our own Chief Rabbis – hundreds of police sealed off streets and intersections hours before he was scheduled to even arrive and closed the Old City even to pedestrian traffic.

The Pope met with the heads of the Eastern Churches who despise him, as well as with the Mufti of Yerushalayim, who sees him as a "Kofer" The only thing common among them is their hatred for the Jewish people, whose return to the Holy Land as sovereigns they cannot understand, nor bear.

The Pope saw the Star of David wherever he went. He was guarded by descendants of Spanish Jewry and the children and grandchildren of the survivors of Hitler's madness, which grew and flourished in their gentile hearts well fertilized by the teachings of Christianity.

He was brought to Yad VaShem to witness our great tragedy in the hope that he would vindicate our cause, while in reality he was surely thinking that this was just punishment to the Jews for denying the "saviour".

Were it up to me, I would have taken him to an air force base to witness a squadron of F-16s with the Star of David painted on each fuselage and to listen to our pilots talking in the language of the Torah. I would have taken him to my son's army base, where over his desk hangs the breathtaking photo of 3 Israeli jets flying over the Auschwitz death camp.

For 2000 years, HaShem has cried over the disgrace and dishonor of the Jewish people. Sixty-six years ago, in 1948, our Father in Heaven decided that He had cried enough and that we had paid enough for our sins; and the time had arrived to restore His chosen nation to the pinnacle of national and religious honor.

The process appears to be slow, but it is irreversible.

Tuma is attracted to Kedusha

As we approach the end of the 49-day sefira period from Pesach to Shevuot, one might ask if we should not be counting 99 days not just 49. How so? Chazal (our rabbis of blessed memory) bore witness to the fact that in Egypt the Jewish nation had descended to the 49th level of tuma (a negative spiritual state) and had to make their way up the ladder to the 50th rung of spirituality to be worthy of receiving God's Torah – 49 levels of tuma followed by 50 levels of kedusha require 99 days of preparation.

I submit:

HaShem created the world where certain things have an innate affinity for each other. The negatively charged electron seeks to attach itself to the positively charged proton. The positively charged element sodium bonds with the negatively charged element chloride to produce salt. And two positively charged atoms of hydrogen bond with the two outer negative electrons of an oxygen atom to form water.

And so, too, tuma has an innate attraction for kedusha.

Prior to the time we returned to Yerushalayim, the city was of little importance to anyone. It was a small town on the edge of the Judean desert with little to offer in the way of commerce or resources. I recall the Old City right after the liberation in 1967. The so called "Jewish Quarter" was destroyed, and the "Moslem Quarter" was an open sewer.

However, as soon as the holy Jewish people returned to Yerushalayim, the Moslems in whose unholy Koran Yerushalayim is not mentioned even once, and the Christians who staked out their fiefdom in Rome, Constantinople and other parts west, suddenly discovered that Yerushalayim is "their" holy city. Again an innate attachment of tuma to kedusha.

This serves to explain why the Pope arrived here in the week that we celebrate the unification of Yerushalayim during the Six Day War, which was the greatest miracle we have experienced since finalizing the Tanach in the time of Mordechai and Esther. Tuma is attracted to kedusha.

The Jewish people survived 2000 years of suffering and the bestial Shoah to return home and once again be sovereign over the holy city. In six days, Tzahal with minimum forces extended the land area under our control threefold. We returned to the Temple Mount and the Kotel, to Kever Rachel, to Mearat HaMachpela.

Every year at this time, the spirit of Jewish independence returns; just as the spirit of freedom returns to us with every holiday of Pesach. It is during this period of great kedusha that the tuma of Christianity is attracted to be present in Yerushalayim.

However, he came and he left. Am Yisrael Chai!

We shall not be reckoned among the nations

The majority of the world's 7 billion people negate Christianity, and there is integrity and some moral soundness to a majority. In the same token, the

majority of the world's 7 billion people negate Islam, and again there is integrity and some moral soundness to a majority. Now since the world's majority also negates Judaism, logic would dictate that Judaism is in the same category as the world's other religions!

No! Because the Jewish nation is not part of the world's consensus, and what applies to the nations does not apply to the Jewish nation.

Did HaShem not say through Bilaam (Bamidbar 23,9):

כי מראש צרים אראנו ומגבעות אשורנו הן עם לבדד ישכן ובגוים לא יתחשב:

For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: see, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.

According to every historic, social, religious, political and military yardstick, we Jews should not be alive today. Statistical data has no relevance in terms of the survival of the God's chosen people. We "shall not be reckoned among the nations" is the definitive statement of our uniqueness.

The arrival of Medinat Yisrael on the stage of history has propelled the Jewish people to a higher quantum level in God's world, while leaving the other religions behind. Did the prophet Yeshayahu not say (40,15):

הן גוים כמר מדלי וכשחק מאזנים נחשבו הן אים כדק יטול:

Surely the nations are like a drop in a pail;

they are regarded as dust on the scales;

He weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

An example of the religious "drop in a pail" the prophet was referring to. The Vatican is demanding ownership of the room above David's tomb, where they believe the "last supper" took place.

This is a very interesting claim. Firstly, because the building is not more than several hundred years old; its stones were not even hewn 2000 years ago. Moreover, if their saviour ate, it implies that he had to attend to his personal toilet needs. This is a rare idea for one who is god or part god.

The dogma of Islam or of the other religions are not any more rational or convincing, indeed like "dust on the scales".

The enlightened peoples of the world would do well to recognize the truth and uniqueness of the Jewish nation, and band together to help us rebuild the holy Temple, as it will eventually be, as stated by the prophet Yeshayahu (2,1-3):

הדבר אשר הזה ישעיהו בן אמוץ על יהודה וירושלם:

והיה באחרית הימים נכון יהיה הר בית ה' בראש ההרים ונשא מגבעות ונהרו אליו כל הגוים: (ג) והלכו עמים רבים ואמרו לנו ונעלה אל הר ה' אל בית א-להי יעקב וירנו מדרכיו ונלכה בארחתיו כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר ה' מירושלם:

The vision of Yeshayahu son of Amoz concerning Judah and Jerusalem:

In the future the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it.

Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."

The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5774/2014 Nachman Kahana