



Daf Hashavua

15 June 2019
Shabbat ends

12 Sivan 5779
London 10.25pm
Jerusalem 8.28pm

Volume 31
No. 41

Nasso

נָסָא

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In loving memory of Harav Yitzchak Yoel ben Shlomo Halevi



Priestly Blessing at the Western Wall, Jerusalem
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“God spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying: So shall you bless the Children of Israel, saying to them: “May God bless you and safeguard you. May God illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you. May God lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you”’ (Bemidbar 6:22-26).

Sidrah Summary: Nasso

1st Aliya (Kohen) – Bemidbar 4:21-37

Last week's sidrah concluded with the detailing of the particular role of the descendants of Kehat, one of Levi's three sons, in taking down, transporting and re-assembling parts of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). The Torah now details the same for the descendants of Levi's other two sons, Gershon and Merari. A census is taken of each of these three families, counting men aged 30 to 50. The family of Kehat numbers 2,750.

2nd Aliya (Levi) – 4:38-49

The family of Gershon numbers 2,630. The family of Merari numbers 3,200.

3rd Aliya (Shlishi) – 5:1-10

The narrative switches back to the day that the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) began to function (Rosh Chodesh Nissan), as first discussed in parashat Shemini (Rashi). God tells Moshe to instruct the people to maintain the spiritual purity of the main camp, in which the *Mishkan* was situated, by sending away anyone who is ritually impure. The nation complies.

A person who steals and then takes an oath denying the crime, before eventually admitting to the theft, must bring an offering and add a fifth to the amount stolen when paying back the victim.

4th Aliya (Revi'i) – 5:11-7:1

A married woman who secludes herself in a suspicious fashion with another man, and is warned by her husband not to seclude herself again but ignores the warning, is known as a Sotah (see p.3 article). She brings a barley offering to the Temple, where a Kohen gives her water to drink. This miraculously proves her innocence or guilt. If she is guilty, the waters cause her (and the adulterer) to die. If she is innocent, the water will cause her to become more fertile than before (Rashi).

Point to Consider: *Why does the Sotah's offering not have oil poured on it or frankincense put over it? (see Rashi to 5:15)*

A person can decide to take a vow to become a Nazir and abstain from wine and other produce of the vine.

A Nazir is also prohibited from having a haircut and from coming into contact with a dead person, including a close relative. The Torah details the procedure if a Nazir mistakenly comes into contact with a dead person in the middle of the Nazirite term. At the end of the Nazirite term (whose length can vary), the Nazir shaves his hair, brings unleavened bread offerings and three animal offerings (see p.4 article).

Aharon and his sons are commanded to bless the nation with the priestly blessing (*birkat kohanim*).

5th Aliya (Chamishi) – 7:1-41

On Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the leaders of all of the tribes bring gifts of six wagons and twelve oxen to help the Levi'im transport the *Mishkan*. These leaders also take turns to bring voluntary offerings, which are sacrificed on the first 12 days of the *Mishkan's* functioning. The leader of the tribe of Yehuda gives a silver bowl and a silver basin filled with fine flour and oil for a meal offering; a gold ladle filled with incense; a bull, a ram and a sheep as elevation offerings (*olah*); a goat as a sin offering (*chatah*) and two cattle, five rams, five goats and five sheep as peace offerings (*shelamim*). The Torah lists the identical offerings of the other 11 leaders, starting with Yisachar, Zevulun, Reuven and Shimon.

Question: *What was the name of the leader of the tribe of Yisachar? (7:18) Answer on bottom of p.6.*

6th Aliya (Shishi) – 7:42-71

The offerings of the leaders of Gad, Ephraim, Menashe, Binyamin and Dan are listed.

7th Aliya (Shevi'i) – 7:72-89

The offerings of the leaders of Asher and Naftali are detailed. The total value of all the items offered is given at the end of the sidrah.

Haftarah

An angel of God appears to the wife of Manoach and tells her that she will bear a son who will be a Nazir and will help save Israel from the Pelishtim (Philistines). She names him Shimshon (Samson).



United Synagogue Daf Hashavua

Produced by US Living & Learning together with the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue

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Available also via email US website www.theus.org.uk @United Synagogue

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Not Just a Bystander

by Rabbi Akiva Rosenblatt, Assistant Rabbi, Woodside Park United Synagogue



This week's sidrah discusses the laws of a Sotah, a woman who is suspected of adultery. The dramatic process which she must go through in the *Beit Hamikdash* in order to prove her innocence or expose

her guilt is described in detail.

Immediately afterwards, the Torah discusses the laws of a Nazir, a person who accepts upon themselves a temporary abstention from (amongst other things) wine, in order to be focused and dedicated to their relationship with God and service of Him. Why are these two seemingly unrelated chapters juxtaposed? Rashi (1040-1105), citing the Talmud, offers the following connection:

“Why is the parasha of Sotah [taught] next to the parasha of Nazir? To teach you that anyone who sees the Sotah's terrible ordeal should separate themselves from wine (i.e. become a Nazir) because it [often] leads one to immorality”. We need to see the consequences of our actions; one thing may lead to another.

The ordeal which the Sotah had to endure was a stark reminder of the terrible consequences of immorality. The Torah, albeit subtly through this juxtaposition, shows what we should learn from witnessing it.

We often hear insights into how we could better our lives by making wiser choices. More often than not, we accept them as nice ideas but do not take any direct action. As we see from the juxtaposition of the Sotah and the Nazir, the Torah advises that we take immediate action, especially in areas of morality, in order to really learn the lesson.

Rabbi Noach Weinberg (d. 2009) makes a different observation about the Talmud's

teaching: surely one who did **not** witness the Sotah should be the one to take the extra precautions in areas of morality; for such a person, the dramatic events would not be in the forefront of their minds.

Rabbi Weinberg continues, based on a Mishah in Pirkei Avot: “[Rabbi Chanina] used to say: ‘Anyone whose actions exceed his wisdom, his wisdom will endure. And anyone whose wisdom exceeds his actions, his wisdom will not endure’ (The Ethics of our Fathers 3:12 – see green siddur, p. 540).

Rabbi Chanina is teaching that, without putting what we believe to be true into action, we do not internalise it. Not only that, but we convince ourselves (often subconsciously) that it can't really be true and thus we learn to resent it. We cannot recognise that *lashon hara* (damaging speech) is negative if we always speak it; we do not realise that our friend is deserving of respect if we carry on disrespecting them.

True wisdom is not just an understanding but a way of living. Therefore, explains Rabbi Weinberg, the Torah is warning the onlooker not to be fooled into thinking that just witnessing the Sotah's traumatic episode will prevent them from making the same mistake. Unless we put that new understanding into action and live it, we will reject it and it ‘will not endure’.



A Temporary Re-Boot

by Rebbetzen Shoshana Landau, Ma'ayan



This week's sidra discusses becoming a Nazirite. A Nazirite takes a specific vow of abstinence: to refrain from consuming wine or any grape derivatives, from cutting his or her hair, and from coming into

contact with a corpse. Shimshon (Samson) was the most famous Nazirite in Jewish history.

Commentators vary between perceiving the Nazir as an ideal, spiritual individual and those who disapprove of this extreme form of conduct, citing the sin-offering that is brought at the end of the self-inflicted Nazirite period. In his *magnum opus* Mishnah Torah, the Rambam (Maimonides 1138-1204) suggests that the Nazirite vow is taken by someone who is naturally inclined to an extreme, and the vow is a means to moderate that nature.

The Nazir teaches an important lesson about the pursuit of spirituality. Normally, Judaism certainly does not require us to divorce ourselves from the world or from life's pleasures. Rather, what is permitted should be enjoyed within appropriate boundaries and a broader spiritual context. Removing ourselves from the world, from wider society and from enjoyable activities is not the key to attaining spirituality.

However, when these enjoyments become all-encompassing, when we become too passionate about our physical pleasures and pursuits and lose sight of the bigger picture of how it fits in with our pursuit of the spiritual, it may be time to veer to the other extreme in order to gain balance.

Therefore, in keeping with the Rambam's analysis, one way to understand the Nazir's motives is the attempt to rectify something. By adopting a new set of extreme behaviours – abstinence – the Nazir is attempting to recalibrate his or her own equilibrium. The Nazir may have over-indulged in alcohol consumption,

self-beauty or materialism. This self-imposed exile from certain elements of physicality allows a re-balancing of their equilibrium.

Seen in this light, the Nazir becomes a flag-bearer for moderation and balance. This may also give us a clue to understanding the sin-offering that the Nazir brings upon completion of the vow. The Talmud (Nedarim 10a) identifies the sin as having restricted himself from otherwise permitted things (in this case, wine). This seems to recognise that there is something inherently not ideal about unnecessary abstention. Indeed, it is a short-term tactic to re-align priorities and gain focus.

Finally, if we take the Rambam's view that the Nazirite vow is essentially a self-imposed sentence, who decides its length? The verse states that "he brings himself" to the *Mishkan* in order to bring the offerings signifying the end of the Nazir term (Bemidbar 6:13). Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (known as the Meshech Chochma, 1843-1926) suggests that the Nazir himself or herself is the only one suitable to determine the length of this vow. Through introspection and self-knowledge, the Nazir must determine whether the vow has achieved the necessary changes and self-growth that it set out to attain.

Perhaps a message for the contemporary Jew is that of seeking balance. Have our behaviours, needs, technology use or passions veered to such an extreme that we too need a period of abstinence to re-balance ourselves?



Jewish Contemporary Ethics Part 32: Ethical Issues in Tanach 10: The Seven Cana'anite Nations

by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman, New West End Synagogue



Despite the inevitable devastation, it is sometimes possible to posit halachic and moral justification for going to war to defend one's country, people and interests. Both the right to go to war (*jus ad bellum*)

and the correct conduct in war (*jus in bello*) can protect governments and armies from accusations of immoral military action. Nor is the resolution to wage war confined to one's own self-defence. Stating that their reasons and methods are ethically justifiable, Western governments have often considered it a moral duty to intervene with military action to save the oppressed from the oppressor and rescue innocents from tyrannical regimes.

Yet intervention is sometimes akin to the darker side of imperialism and colonialism. The governmental policy of extending a country's power, influence and wealth through the appropriation, colonisation and cultural subjugation of another land and its aboriginal people by use of military force, is rightly identified in contemporary times as a strategy of moral turpitude.

Some might therefore find it surprising to note that God commanded the Israelites to wage war with the seven Canaanite nations in order to eradicate them and appropriate their land (Devarim 7:1). The majority of the Book of Yehoshua (Joshua) details the various campaigns against these nations, including the famous story of the siege and ultimate destruction of Jericho (see chapter 6).

However, it is crucial to draw a distinction between this command and contemporary western imperialism, through understanding God's motive for destroying these nations. The objective was not the physical annihilation of these peoples, but rather the destruction of their idolatrous practices. God swore to Avraham that the Land of Israel would belong to his

descendants (Bereishit 15:18), in order to eliminate idolatrous practice from the world (Shemot 34:10-17).

This was morally significant, for idolatry is mankind's attributing of Divine authority and influence to something other than God. Apart from being wrong, it distracts humanity from recognising God's moral perfection and His universal system of ethical laws for both Jews and non-Jews alike. This wreaks enormous damage, for it obfuscates God's plan to engage and enfranchise all of mankind to become partners with Him in the mission to perfect the world through His ethical system. We also recall that the kind of idolatry that existed in Biblical times was not merely theologically different to monotheism, but contained the most barbaric and savage practices, such as child sacrifice to the Canaanite god Molech, mentioned no less than five times in the Torah (Vayikra 18:21 and 20:2-5).

This is why the Rambam (Maimonides 1138-1204) highlights that it was incumbent upon Yehoshua's armies to first offer the Canaanites peace by adopting the seven Noachide laws (see Yehoshua 11:19-20). These laws form the basis of natural ethics for all mankind (see part 10 of this series). If the Canaanite nations would have accepted, they would have joined the Israelites as partners in God's plan.

We still need to examine the commandment to eradicate the nation of Amalek, including men, women, children and livestock (see Shmuel I 15:14). The next two articles will discuss the roots of this mitzvah and the ethical issues at hand.



The Symbols of the Shevatim: Part 7: Gad and Asher

by Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence, Finchley United Synagogue



Gad and Asher were Yaakov's seventh and eighth sons. Their mother was Zilpah, Leah's maidservant. While their births are recorded in the Torah, unlike the other children, there is no mention

of their mother actually becoming pregnant. This leads the Midrash to suggest that Zilpah was the youngest mother, whose pregnancies were scarcely noticed.

Gad and Asher were named by Leah. The word 'Gad' means 'good fortune'. Although the verse in the Torah (Bereshit 30:11) is read "*ba gad*" (בא גַד) meaning "fortune has come", in the text it appears as one word – "*bagad*" (בגַד) – which suggests betrayal. Rashi (1040-1105) comments that even though it was Leah's own idea to give Zilpah to Yaakov, on a subtle level she still resented his acquiescence. Asher's name means 'happiness'. Leah saw his birth as a fulfilment and accomplishment, as other women would continue to see her in her role as a matriarch.

The symbol for Gad is a military encampment or tents.

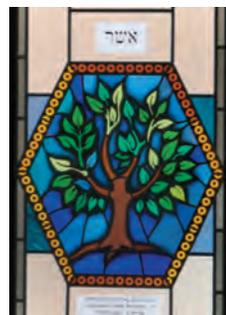
In parashat Vayechi, Gad received an alliterative blessing from Yaakov (Bereshit 49:16-19) in which the word *gad* suggests fighting strength, a battalion slashing its foe or returning safely along the same tracks after battle (Rashi). Moshe also praised Gad's military strength. Their land was on the east of the Jordan. As part of the deal brokered with the tribes of Reuven, Gad and (part of) Menashe, those who wanted to remain on the east had first to cross into the Land to assist in the conquest and only afterwards return. Moshe prophesied that Gad would fulfil their obligation and succeed. Moshe added that Gad is the "hidden portion of the lawgiver", an allusion to his own concealed grave in Gad's land (Devarim 33:20-21 with Rashi).

Asher is depicted as an olive tree. Yaakov's blessing was that Asher's "bread should be rich" and full of olive groves (see Rashi to Bereishit 49:20). Moshe foretold that Asher would be "the most blessed of children, pleasing to others and dipping his feet in oil" (33:24).

Asher was the largest tribe. Rashi notes that in both progeny and land, Asher was particularly fertile. He adds that Asher's daughters were beautiful (in both looks and qualities) and were much sought after for illustrious and priestly marriages.

Asher's own daughter, Serach, is identified in the Midrash as the person who broke the news to Yaakov that Yosef was still alive. The Talmud says that it was Serach who located Yosef's bones to bring them out of Egypt (Sotah 13a).

The *Kli Yakar* (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz 1550-1619) observes the theme of celebration and praise that runs from Leah's naming of Asher to Moshe's blessing. Leah invoked her validation in the eyes of the women of her era. Moshe anticipated Asher's praise from the generations to follow. With purposeful happiness, the tribe is a provider of bounty, a guardian of memory and a champion of family.



Answer: Netanel ben Tsuar

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THE TRIBE SCRIBE

NASSO: PLAY YOUR PART!

CHECK OUT ALL THE DIFFERENT INSTRUMENTS! I'M GOING UP CLOSE SO I CAN HEAR BETTER.



WOAH! WHAT A RACKET! THAT IS NOT PLEASANT TO LISTEN TO!

CAN YOU PLEASE PLAY A BIT QUIETER? I'M TRYING TO ENJOY THE MUSIC BUT YOU'RE MAKING A HUGE RACKET AND I CAN'T HEAR THE BAND.

MINOR DETAIL, BUT THE TREBLE IS THAT YOU'RE STANDING RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE TUBA! IF YOU WANT TO ENJOY THE MUSIC, YOU NEED TO STAND FURTHER BACK WHERE YOU CAN HEAR ALL THE INSTRUMENTS.

NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL MUSIC! JUST LISTEN TO THAT AWESOME SOUND.

YOU'RE RIGHT DINA, LISTENING OVER HERE NOT ONLY MAKES THE MUSIC SOUND MUCH BETTER BUT WE CAN HEAR THE VALUE OF EVERY INSTRUMENT IN THE BAND.



IN THIS WEEK'S PARASHA, THE TORAH DESCRIBES THE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE NASSI (PRINCE) OF EACH TRIBE TO THE MISHKAN. IT LISTS EVERY SINGLE ONE EVEN THOUGH THEY ALL BROUGHT THE SAME THING! THIS IS SURPRISING AS THE TORAH IS CAREFUL TO ONLY INCLUDE WHAT IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

BY LISTING EVERY NASSI (PRINCE) AND HIS GIFT, THE TORAH IS SHOWING US THAT WE ALL HAVE A PART TO PLAY AND WE ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE. THE MESSAGE IS THAT EVERYONE'S CONTRIBUTION IS VALUABLE.

- 1 silver plate
- 1 silver sprinkling bowl
- 1 gold dish
- 1 young bull
- 1 ram
- 1 male lamb
- 1 male goat
- 2 oxen
- 5 rams
- 5 male goats
- 5 male lambs



AND JUST LIKE THE INSTRUMENTS IN THE BAND, WE CAN ALL PLAY OUR PART IN HELPING EACH OTHER.



Page Editor: Rabbi Nicky Goldmeier Writer: Shira Chalk Cartoonist: Paul Solomon



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