



Parshas Naso

For the week ending 12 Sivan 5758
5-6 June 1998

Overview

The Torah assigns the exact *Mishkan*-related tasks to be performed by the sons of Gershon, Kehas, and Merari, the *Bnei Levi*.

A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those who are ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments. If a person confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbor's property after having sworn in court to the contrary, he has to pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object, and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a *kohen*. In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple. A *kohen* prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from the Temple floor and a special ink that was used for inscribing Hashem's Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her; rather it brings a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death. A *nazir* is one who vows to dedicate himself to Hashem for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The *kohanim* are commanded to bless the people. The *Mishkan* is completed and dedicated on the first day of *Nissan* in the second year after the Exodus. The Prince of each Tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the *Mishkan*, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

Insights

THE SAME OLD SONG

"His offering was: 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" (7:13-14)

An imaginary conversation. "Wow! What a concert! I've never heard the London Symphony play like that. Their Brahms' First was absolutely superb!"

"I dunno. I heard the Boston Pops last week. They played the same tunes..."

Or how about...

"Ian McKellen's *Iago* must rate as one of the definitive Shakespearean interpretations of the century..."

"Yeah, but didn't Shakespeare write any other tragedies? I mean, they do *Othello*, followed by *Hamlet*, followed by *Macbeth* followed by *King Lear* and then back to *Othello* again. Occasionally they throw in *Timon of Athens* or *Antony and Cleopatra* for a change, but then it's back to the same old stuff over and over and over..."

After Moshe finished building the *Mishkan*, he sanctified it and all its vessels and utensils. Then, the Princes of Israel brought offerings to inaugurate the *Mizbe'ach* (altar). Each prince, representing his tribe, brought his offerings one day after another. For twelve days they brought their offerings. The Torah faithfully describes each of the offerings of each of the princes and they are all identical. Absolutely identical: "...one silver bowl, its weight a hundred and thirty (shekalim); and one silver basin of seventy shekalim in the sacred shekel, both of them filled with fine flour mixed with oil for a meal-offering; one gold ladle of ten (shekalim) filled with incense; one young bull, one ram, one sheep in its first year for an elevation-offering; one he-goat for

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☎ 22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

☎ 972-2-581-0315

fax: 972-2-581-2890

✉ info@ohr.org.il

☎ 38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

☎ 1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

✉ RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

☎ 613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

☎ 1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

✉ Somayach@MSN.com

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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

Production Design: Eli Ballon

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a sin-offering; and for a peace-offering: Two cattle, five rams, five he-goats, five sheep in their first year."

Not a short list. The Torah records this list over and over again. Twelve times.

Why couldn't the Torah have just written that all the princes brought identical offerings? The Torah never wastes a word, a letter or even a dot. If the Torah wrote a seeming redundancy twelve times, there must be a good reason.

The answer is that the offerings *weren't* identical. Each one was infused with the individual enthusiasm of the prince who brought it. Each one was permeated with the unique personality of its owner, his own personal devotion, his own spiritual striving.

Like two performers who can take an identical piece of music and imbue it with an individuality that makes both performances unique; like an actor who can wring from lines which have been said for hundreds of years a new and original interpretation, so too each of the twelve princes of the tribes of Israel brought the spiritual uniqueness of himself and his tribe as an offering to his Creator.

THE HOLLOW "O"

"So Moshe took the wagons and the oxen and gave them to the Levi'im... And to the sons of Kehas he did not give; since the sacred service was upon them, they carried on the shoulder." (6:6-9)

Imagine you're sitting in the front row of Carnegie Hall. The orchestra is about to strike up the instantly recognizable opening bars of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. "Da, da, da, Dah ... Da, da, da — and then to your horror, the entire orchestra lands on a note exactly one semitone higher than Beethoven wrote: "Dah!" The sound is like someone dragging his fingernails across a classroom blackboard, excruciating beyond words.

Music is an unforgiving thing. It works totally encased within a closed system. One step outside the scale, outside the system, and our teeth are set on edge.

Arguably, the greatest musician who ever lived was King David. In Psalm 119, David Hamelech praises Hashem. He says "*Your chukim* (laws which surpass human understanding) *were to me songs.*" What a beautiful sentiment! King David praising Hashem by telling him that the mysteries of Hashem's laws — the *chukim* — sang to him like songs.

And yet the Talmud (*Sotah 35a*) tells us that because of that sentiment, Hashem allowed King David to falter by making a mistake that a child in

kindergarten wouldn't make. A mistake that led to the death of Uzza, the son of Avinadav.

King David's mistake was to bring the Holy Ark up to Jerusalem in a wagon. This week's *Parsha* tells us that the reason *Bnei Kehas* did not receive any wagons from Moshe was that they had no need of them. The *Bnei Kehas* were charged with carrying the Holy Ark on their shoulders. It was never to be moved around in a wagon.

So what was inappropriate about King David's praise of Hashem that led him to such an error, and what was appropriate about his punishment? What do songs have to do with a wagon?

The word in Hebrew for a wagon is "*agala.*" It is related to another word "*igul,*" meaning circle. Music exists in a limited system, encircled by the strictures of tonality. Every octave, it essentially repeats itself. Music may be "the deepest of the arts and deep beneath the arts" (E.M. Forster), but it nevertheless exists within a finite structure. A note outside the scale is an excruciating impossibility. Fingernails on a blackboard. A violation beyond the boundaries of the musical sphere. Like a circle outside of which nothing can exist, music is a fixed system.

The essence of a *chok*, statute, is that it exists *outside* of the systems that we can ever understand. It exists outside the tightly-drawn, all-encompassing "O" of this world. It is forever beyond the grasp of man, outside his system of recognition.

King David, on his level, thought that he could relate to the *chukim* as though they were songs: "*Your chukim were to me songs.*" Songs, however greatly they praise Hashem, can only exist within the finite tonality of music; songs can never break through the hollow "O."

Now we can understand the aptness of the punishment that he received. King David stumbled by putting the Holy Ark, the quintessential representation in this world of the *chok*, the supernal wisdom, on a wagon. He tried to make it ride on an *agala*, on an *igul*. On a circle. On the musical scale. He tried to make the infinite mysteries of the *chok* ride on the circle of this finite world.

"ARE YOU RECEIVING ME? OVER."

"May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you..." (2:22)

The largest radio transmitter in town can be blasting out 50,000 watts of power, but if the radio at the other end isn't turned on you won't hear a thing.

In the above verse, "*be(ing) gracious*" means finding grace in the eyes of others. But the question arises — if Hashem illuminates His countenance for us, surely there can be no question that we will find favor in the eyes of others. So what can the additional *bracha* of Hashem being gracious — of giving us favor in the eyes of others — mean?

We can have all the best qualities, but they can still go unrecognized. Our good qualities can live like a princess locked in the top of a castle.

When Yosef was in prison in Egypt, Hashem gave Yosef grace in the eyes of the prison guard. Yosef is called *Yosef Hatzadik* — Yosef the righteous. Not Yosef *a tzaddik*, but Yosef *the tzaddik*. Yosef was the essence of righteousness, and yet Hashem still had to give him favor in the eyes of the prison guard.

Some people are unable to see the true virtue of a person, often perceiving the very opposite of the person's true self. It needs a special *bracha* for a person's virtues to be recognized by the world. That's the *bracha* of finding favor in the eyes of others — that their receiver will be turned on.

Sources:

The Same Old Song - The Ramban as heard from Michael Treblow

The Hollow "O" - Talmud Sotah 35, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro as heard from Rabbi Yosef Brown

"Are You Receiving Me? Over." - Degel Machane Ephraim

Haftorah: Shoftim 13:2-25

Shimson (Samson) was the most famous *nazir* in Tanach, and thus this week's *Parsha*, which describes the laws of the *nazir*, is complemented by the story of the birth of Shimson.

SMOKE GETS IN YOUR EYES

"...and now, be careful not to drink wine or intoxicant, and not to eat anything prohibited (to a nazir), for the lad shall be a nazir of G-d from the womb until the day of his death."

(13:7)

Medical research has proven that there is a graduated fetal response to maternal inhaled smoke — *i.e.*, the more cigarettes the mother smokes in pregnancy, the greater the risk for the fetus.

There is no cutoff point below which it can be said not to affect the unborn child. The best advice is no smoking during pregnancy (or at all for that matter). The more cigarettes the mother smokes, the more dangerous it is for the fetus. Not only does smoking have repercussions on the unborn child, but research has demonstrated that the mother's entire physical and emotional state directly influence the unborn child.

It should therefore come as no surprise that our spiritual state also has a tremendous impact on our children-to-be. From the moment of conception and onwards, thoughts and feelings mold the personality of the unborn child.

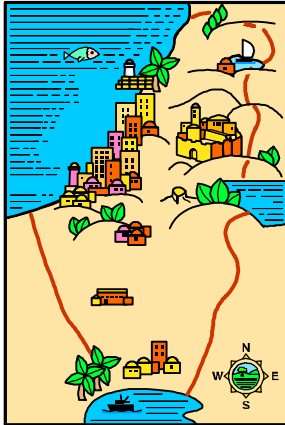
If we want our children to be holy people, we would be well advised to start their education at an early age — a very early age. Long before they emerge into this world, we have already given them the matrix of their spirituality. Who we are — our spiritual level — has an impact on our children even before the time when the first cell divides.

Mayana shel Torah

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THE MISSING INGREDIENT



“Let my tongue cleave to my palate if I do not remember you, if I do not bring up the memory of Jerusalem at the peak of my joy.” (Tehillim 137:6)

This is the source for breaking a glass at a wedding. It reminds us that our joy is not complete as long as the *Beis Hamikdash* has not yet been rebuilt. Another dimension is added by the great eighteenth century scholar, Rabbi Yonason Eybshutz of Prague, in his classic “*Ya’arot Devash*” (*Drush 14*).

Even if a Jew should have achieved all his heart’s desires, he writes, it is incumbent on him to remember that he is still missing the most important ingredient for success as long as he is not in *Eretz Yisrael*, where he can achieve ultimate fulfillment and happiness.