



Parshas Naso

For the week ending 7 Sivan 5759 (Inside Israel) / 14 Sivan 5759 (Outside Israel)
21 & 22 May 1999 (Inside Israel) / 28 & 29 May 1999 (Inside Israel)

Overview

The Torah assigns the exact *Mishkan*-related tasks to be performed by the sons of Gershon, Kehas, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those 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 *Nisan* 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

ALL IN THE FAMILY

"Any man whose wife shall go astray..." (5:12)

A hundred years ago in a brilliant Jewish mind, an exciting idea was born. It went something like this: Man is separated from his neighbor by a huge division, an unbridgeable gulf called individual property. If I own something, it means you can't have it. In a sense, my owning something "steals" it from you. Property is theft. If we could make a society in which everyone owned everything, then no one would be jealous of anyone else. What we need to do is to redeem Capital from the hands of the ruling elite and return it to the people.

The Communist ideal spawned several social engineering experiments. The most notable of these was the collective farm. All property was owned by the collective. Everyone ate in a communal dining room. Every member of the collective was to give what he could and take only what he needed.

Probably the most famous and successful application of the commune concept was the kibbutz movement in Israel. However, there were other countries where the idea also took root. In China, every commune had an economic and administrative unit that controlled the labor force and all means of production. This unit provided central management of industry, commerce, education, agriculture, and military affairs. Living communally, workers performed both industrial and agricultural tasks and supported a military unit. There were communal nurseries, bathing facilities, barbershops, and the like. Wages and perquisites were controlled by the state. All products were marketed through state agencies.

It must have seemed at the time like a Utopian dream.

What happened to the dream? The last vestiges of the collective farm have either become Capitalist

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enterprises or are moribund. Why did such a noble sounding idea fail?

One inevitable aspect of collective living was a re-evaluation of the role of the family. Rather than sleeping under the same roof as their parents, children now slept in dormitories. One wonders who would answer a small child who might wake in the middle of the night and cry "Mommy, I want a glass of water!" How successful a mother-substitute could a dormitory supervisor be?

There's something very strange about this week's Parsha.

Right in the middle of the description of the organization of the *machane*, the Jewish encampment, there is a seemingly illogical interruption in which the Torah presents, along with other *mitzvos*, the mitzvah of the *sota*. The *sota* is a wife whose behavior has provoked her husband to suspect her fidelity. The Torah prescribes a miraculous process by which, if proven innocent, will restore her completely to her husband's trust. What does the *sota* have to do with the Jewish encampment?

The *machane* was the paradigm of the future social structure of the Jewish People. Not only did it mandate the placement of each individual tribe, but the *machane* represented Jewish Society as it was to be lived throughout the generations. The Torah puts the mitzvah of *sota* in the middle of the description of the *machane* to teach us that the harmony of society at large is predicated on the united and happy family.

The family is the basic building block of society. When you tamper with its delicate balance, when you try and engineer it to conform to man-made concepts of utopian life, inevitably those experiments will be short-lived and will eventually flounder.

Sources:

All In The Family - Ramban, Rabbi Moshe Eiseman,
as heard from Rabbi Moshe Zauderer

Haftarah: Judges 13:2 - 13:25

The main features of this week's Parsha are the laws of the *nazir*. This is why the portion dealing with Samson born a *nazir* was chosen for the *haftara*. The passage begins with a prophetic revelation to the wife of Manoach, in which an angel tells her she will bear a child who will be a *nazir* all his life. The angel also tells her to observe the laws of *nazir* herself until the baby is born. In addition, the angel says that this son will bring forth salvation to the Jewish people who were at the time oppressed by the Philistines. The mother of Samson relates this to her husband, who prays for the angel to reveal himself again to instruct them as to the child, and G-d answers his prayer. After the revelation of the angel he departs in a flame.

PROPER EDUCATION

The angel instructs the future mother of **T**ov, as her child is to be a nazir "from the womb" (13:5). This seems merely an excessive

However, we can learn from this episode that education for virtue and righteousness begins

the earliest stages of his existence as a scion of his parent. Exactly like an embryo is poisoned by a

of life and the moral traits she favors. Parents cannot lead a life without restrictions if they wish

cannot expect him to lead a life that differs from their own.