

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

As mentioned in a previous Covenant and Conversation, there was an ongoing debate between the sages as to whether the nazirite - whose laws are outlined in this week's parsha - was to be praised or not. Recall that the nazirite was someone who voluntarily, usually for a specified period, undertook a special form of holiness. This meant that he was forbidden to consume wine or any grape products, to have a haircut and to defile himself by contact with the dead.

Naziriteship was essentially a renunciation of desire. Why someone would choose to do this is not clear. It may be that wanted to protect himself against drunkenness or to cure himself of alcoholism. It could be that he wanted to experience a higher form of holiness. Forbidden as he was to have contact with the dead, even for a close relative, he was in this respect in the same position as the High Priest. Becoming a nazirite was one way in which a non-cohen could adopt cohen-like behaviour. Some sages argued that the juxtaposition of the law of the nazirite with that of the sotah, the woman suspected of adultery, hinted at the fact that there were people who became nazirites to protect themselves from sexual immorality. Alcohol suppresses inhibitions and increases sexual desire.

Be that as it may, there were mixed views on whether it was a good thing or a bad one to become a nazirite. On the one hand the Torah calls him "holy to G-d" (Num. 6: 8). On the other, at the completion of his period of abstinence, he is commanded to bring a sin offering (Num. 6: 13-14). From this, Rabbi Eliezer Hakappar Berebi, drew the following inference:

What is the meaning of the phrase (Num. 6: 11), and make atonement for him, because he sinned against the soul (usually translated as "by coming into contact with the dead"). Against which soul did he sin? We must conclude that it refers to denying himself the

enjoyment of wine. From this we may infer that if one who denies himself the enjoyment of wine is called a sinner, all the more so one who denies himself the enjoyment of other pleasures of life. It follows that one who keeps fasting is called a sinner. (Taanit 11a; Nedarim 10a)

Clearly R. Eliezer Hakappar is engaging in a polemic against asceticism in Jewish life. We do not know which groups he may have had in mind. Many of the early Christians were ascetics. So in some respects were the members of the Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls. Holy people in many faiths have chosen, in pursuit of spiritual purity, to withdraw from the world, its pleasures and temptations, fasting, afflicting themselves and living in caves, retreats or monasteries.

In the Middle Ages there were Jews who adopted self-denying practices - among them the Hassidei Ashkenaz, the Pietists of Northern Europe, as well as many Jews in Islamic lands. It is hard not to see in these patterns of behaviour at least some influence from the non-Jewish environment. The Hassidei Ashkenaz who flourished during the time of the Crusades lived among deeply pious, self-mortifying Christians. Their southern counterparts would have been familiar with Sufism, the mystical movement in Islam.

The ambivalence of Jews toward the life of self-denial may therefore lie in the suspicion that it entered Judaism from the outside. There were movements in the first centuries of the common Era in both the West (Greece) and the East (Iran) that saw the physical world as a place of corruption and strife. They were dualists, holding that the true G-d was not the creator of the universe and could not be reached within the universe. The physical world was the work of a lesser, and evil, deity. Hence holiness means withdrawing from the physical world, its pleasures, appetites and desires. The two best known movements to hold this view were Gnosticism in the West and Manichaeism in the East. So at least some of the negative evaluation of the nazirite may have been driven by a desire to discourage Jews from imitating non-Jewish tendencies in Christianity and Islam.

What is remarkable however is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative. In Hilkhot Deot, the Laws of Ethical Character, Maimonides adopts the negative position of R. Eliezer Hakappar: "A person may say: 'Desire, honour and the

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Mrs. Ida Weisberg

חיה פייגה בת ר' יעקב יוסף ז"ל

on her 18th yartzeit

נפטרה י"ז סיון תשנ"ד

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
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like are bad paths to follow and remove a person from the world, therefore I will completely separate myself from them and go to the other extreme.' As a result, he does not eat meat or drink wine or take a wife or live in a decent house or wear decent clothing . . . This too is bad, and it is forbidden to choose this way." (Hilkhot Deot 3:1)

Yet in the same book, the Mishneh Torah, he writes: "Whoever vows to G-d [to become a nazirite] by way of holiness, does well and is praiseworthy . . . Indeed Scripture considers him the equal of a prophet" (Hilkhot Nezirut 10: 14). How does any writer come to adopt so self-contradictory a position - let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer is profound. According to Maimonides, there is not one model of the virtuous life, but two. He calls them respectively the way of the saint (Hassid) and the sage (Hakham).

The saint is a person of extremes. Maimonides defines hessed as extreme behaviour - good behaviour, to be sure, but conduct in excess of what strict justice requires (Guide for the Perplexed III, 52). So, for example, "If one avoids haughtiness to the utmost extent and becomes exceedingly humble, he is termed a saint (hassid)" (Hilkhot Deot 1: 5).

The sage is a completely different kind of person. He follows the "golden mean", the "middle way" of moderation and balance. He or she avoids the extremes of cowardice on the one hand, recklessness on the other, and thus acquires the virtue of courage. The sage avoids both miserliness and renunciation of wealth, hoarding or giving away all he has, and thus becomes neither stingy nor foolhardy but generous. He or she knows the twin dangers of too much and too little - excess and deficiency. The sage weighs conflicting pressures and avoids extremes.

These are not just two types of person but two ways of understanding the moral life itself. Is the aim of morality to achieve personal perfection? Or is it to create gracious relationships and a decent, just, compassionate society? The intuitive answer of most people would be to say: both. That is what makes Maimonides so acute a thinker. He realises that you can't have both - that they are in fact different enterprises.

A saint may give all his money away to the poor. But what about the members of the saint's own

family? A saint may refuse to fight in battle. But what about the saint's fellow citizens? A saint may forgive all crimes committed against him. But what about the rule of law, and justice? Saints are supremely virtuous people, considered as individuals. But you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Indeed, saints are not really interested in society. They have chosen a different, lonely, self-segregating path. They are seeking personal salvation rather than collective redemption.

It is this deep insight that led Maimonides to his seemingly contradictory evaluations of the nazirite. The nazirite has chosen, at least for a period, to adopt a life of extreme self-denial. He is a saint, a hassid. He has adopted the path of personal perfection. That is noble, commendable, a high ideal.

But it is not the way of the sage - and you need sages if you seek to perfect society. The reason the sage is not an extremist is because he or she realises that there are other people at stake. There are the members of one's own family; the others within one's own community; there are colleagues at work; there is a country to defend and a nation to help build. The sage knows it is dangerous, even morally self-indulgent, to leave all these commitments behind to pursue a life of solitary virtue. For we are called on by G-d to live in the world, not escape from it; in society not seclusion; to strive to create a balance among the conflicting pressures on us, not to focus on some while neglecting the others. Hence, while from a personal perspective the nazirite is a saint, from a societal perspective he is, at least figuratively, a "sinner" who has to bring an atonement offering.

Judaism makes room for individuals to escape from the temptations of the world. The supreme example is the nazirite. But this is an exception, not the norm. To be a chakham, a sage, is to have the courage to engage with the world, despite all the spiritual risks, and to help bring a fragment of the Divine presence into the shared spaces of our collective life. © 2012 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The longest parsha of the Torah is the parsha of Nasso, which we read publicly this Shabat. A great part of its length is due to the repetition of the offerings and gifts of the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel at the dedication of the Mishkan. Since each one of the twelve leaders brought the identical offering to the occasion and, furthermore, since the Torah itself at the conclusion of the parsha gives us a total summation of their offerings, the question naturally begs itself as to why the Torah should expend so many words and so much detail on this matter.

This question has troubled all of the commentators to the Torah and many divergent

answers and opinions have been advanced to help explain the matter. All seem to be in agreement that the Torah wishes to emphasize the individual worth and contribution of each of these leaders of Israel and gave each one recognition by listing his offering individually.

While this explanation and insight is undoubtedly true, it seems not to be wholly satisfactory in light of the great length that the Torah goes to in its detail of every offering. Each of the leaders could have been mentioned by name without having to repeat the entire paragraph detailing his offering. And yet as the length of the parsha indicates, the Torah took no shortcuts regarding this matter. Even in kabbalistic thought and works, no clear explanation emerges regarding this anomaly of Torah writing.

It would be arrogant and foolish of me to advance any personal explanation of mine to address this difficulty. Though space has been left for every generation of Jews to add their insights into the Torah there are areas where even angels should fear to tread. Just as with parsha of the red heifer, the Torah purposely offers up to us a rule that defies our rational powers of logic and explanation, so too are there are other areas of the Torah that defy our sense of proportion and human understanding.

I have always felt that this alone - the mystery of it all - is in itself a portion of what the Torah wishes to communicate to us with the repetition of the offerings of the leaders of Israel in this week's parsha. A Torah that makes perfect sense to the human mind can never be a Divine Torah. The mystery, even call it the illogic of certain sections of the Torah is itself the sign of its Divine origin.

The error of the "enlightened ones," the schools of biblical criticism and of many who deem themselves to be scholars in these matters is that they approach the Torah as they would approach any human work of wisdom or prose. If one approaches the Torah from the vantage point of it being a Divine document, mysterious and wondrous, greater than what the human mind can encompass, then the Torah takes on a different dimension in one's thoughts and life.

Perhaps this parsha is one of the many places where Jews can only stand back and wonder in awe as to the Divine wisdom that the Torah blesses us with even when we are unable to discern that wisdom clearly. © 2012 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“So shall you bless the children of Israel: Say unto them, 'May the Lord bless you and keep you; May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; May the Lord lift

His face towards you and grant you peace.' And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them." (Numbers 7:23-27)

What is the real meaning of love?

And why is it, as will be explained further on, that the Priest-Kohen in Israel, the ministers of the Holy Temple and the Torah teachers of the nation, must administer their priestly benediction "with love"?

And what has "love" to do with the specific leadership role assumed by the Priest-Kohanim?

Our Biblical portion has the Almighty tell Moses to command Aaron [the High Priest - Kohen] and his sons, "... So shall you bless the children of Israel: Say [Amor, in Hebrew] unto them, 'May the Lord bless you and keep you; May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; May the Lord lift His face towards [forgive] you and grant you peace.' And they shall place My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numbers 7:23-27).

This Priestly Benediction was a regular part of the daily service in the Holy Temple, and the descendants of Aaron to this very day bestow this blessing upon the congregation every morning during the repetition of the Amidah (in the Diaspora, Ashkenazi synagogues include the Priestly Benediction only during Festival services). The Priest - Kohanim themselves recite the following introductory blessing to the benediction they bestow upon the assemblage: "Blessed art thou O Lord our G-d, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron, and has commanded us to bestow a benediction upon His Nation Israel with love." What is the meaning of these last two words, "with love"? And if the priest-Kohen does not feel love in his heart for every member of the congregation, does this disqualify his benediction? Is there any other commandment which has a "love" requirement for its fulfillment?

There seem to be two superfluous words in the passage of the priestly benediction which may point towards the solution of our problem. "So shall you bless the children of Israel, Say (amor, Hebrew) unto them..." (Numbers 6:23) why "say unto them"? The Midrash teaches that the cantor, - the representative of the congregation who repeats the Amidah for all the congregants, especially for those who may not know how to pray - must first say each word of the benediction, which is then repeated word by word by the Priest - Kohen (Midrash Sifrei 6, 143). The classical commentator Rashi points out that the Hebrew amor (say) is vocalized with a kametz, as in zakhor (Remember the Sabbath day, Remember the day you came out of Egypt), not the usual vocalization of an imperative form; the "kametz" usually means an active form of the verb, as in remembering the Sabbath by our weekly repetition of the Divine primordial week of creation in which we too actively work for six days and creatively rest on the Sabbath, or in our re-experiencing the Egyptian servitude and exodus on the Seder night.

Apparently the Kohen-priest must "actively" bless. And Rashi further comments that the Hebrew amor is written in the fullest form possible in order to tell us that the priest-Kohen "must not bestow his benediction hastily or in a hurry, but rather with intense concentration and with a full (loving) heart" (Rashi, ad loc). There is even a French, Hassidic interpretation of the word which claims that the Hebrew - amor is akin to the French amour, which means with love!

A few more insights surrounding the Torah's understanding of love will enable us to understand these commentaries. Our G-d is described as a G-d of unconditional love, both before and after we sin, who bestows love with no strings attached (Y-HVH, Rahum, Hanun). The very opening of the Ten Commandments, G-d's introduction to the revelation of His laws, is "I am the Lord who took you out of the Land of Egypt, the House of Bondage."

In effect, the Almighty is telling his nation that He took them out of difficult straits (metzarim, akin to the Hebrew Mitzraim, Egypt means narrow straits). He demonstrated His love for them by acting on their behalf to remove their pain! It is almost as if he is explaining His right to command them based upon His having demonstrated His love for them.

A further point: our religious wedding ceremony is fundamentally a ritual of the acceptance of responsibility, husband to wife and wife to husband. The marriage document, or Ketubah, is all about the groom's financial responsibility to the bride. Yet, our Talmudic sages teach us that the young couple must love each other in order to get married, that the overarching basis for every wedding ceremony is "You shall love your friend like yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). The nuptial blessings refer to bride and groom as "loving and beloved friends" (B.T. Kidushin, 41a). Our sages are teaching us that there can be no real love without the assumption of responsibility; if I declare my love for you, I must take a certain degree of responsibility for easing your life and sharing your challenges.

Reb Zusia (the brother of the great Rav Elimelekh of Lizhensk, known as the second Baal Shem Tov) told of a marvelous conversation he overheard at an inn between two drunks. "I love you, Yvonne," said one drunkard to the other. "You don't love me," said his friend. "I do love you," repeated the first. "You don't love me," insisted Yvonne. "How do you know that I don't love you?" shouted the first in exasperation. "Because you can't tell me what hurts me," answered Yvonne. "If you can't tell me what hurts me, you can't try to make it better. And if you don't try to make it better, you certainly don't love me."

Love and responsibility are inextricably intertwined. Indeed, the very Hebrew word ahavah is built upon hav, the Aramaic word for giving. The Kohen - Priest is a Jewish teacher and a Jewish leader, the agent of the Almighty and the agent of the nation at one and the same time. He must take responsibility for his

nation, he must attempt to "brand" his nation with G-d's name, with G-d's love, with G-d's justice. He must communicate with his nation, symbolized by shaliah tzibbur (cantor). He must know what hurts his nation and what his nation needs, and then he must actively try to assuage that hurt and lift up the nation closer to the realm of the Divine. In short, he must love his people and take responsibility for them as the blessing before the benediction explains so very well!

The Sages of the Talmud ordained that at the time of the priestly benediction, the congregation should think of their dreams - individual and corporate, crying out "Master of the Universe, I am yours and my dreams are yours..." The Hebrew word dream, halom, has the same letters as hamal, love, compassion, as well as laham, fight, struggle, wage war. Dreams which involve us when we are awake are dreams of passion, dreams of love, as the return to Zion was as in a dream. Dreams, as loves, are the beginning of responsibility, a responsibility which often means struggle and even war. Teachers must give their people a dream, must love their people, must take responsibility for their people and must teach them to take responsibility for each other and for the dream. Only then will our dream and G-d's dream be one dream: the perfection of the world, Tikkun Olam. © 2012 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the Children of Israel did so-they sent [those who were ritually impure] to the area outside the camp; as G-d had spoken to Moshe, so did the Children of Israel do" (Bamidbar 5:4). The wording used by the Torah telling us that the nation followed G-d's instructions differs from the way their fulfillment of His commandments are usually described. As Meshech Chochmoh points out, the typical formulation, employed as each part of the Mishkan was completed (Sh'mos 39), when the census was taken (Bamidbar 1:54), when the Tribes were arranged around the Mishkan (2:34), and when the firstborn were redeemed (3:51), is "as G-d commanded Moshe." Why does the Torah describe the fulfillment of the commandment to "send all [who are ritually impure] from the camp" (5:2) differently?

The Mishkan was built on the first day of Nisan in 2449, and the Tribes took their places around the Mishkan after the census was taken, which was in Iyar of that year. It makes sense for the commandment to remove those who were ritually impure from the camp to be made after the arrangement of that camp was commanded. Once the camp was set up, and there was an "outside the camp" for those who needed to be there to go (i.e. those with tzora'as; other impurities only needed to be outside the camp of the Levi'im and/or outside the Mishkan complex), the commandment to

send them there could be made and fulfilled. This is how Ramban, Midrash Lekach Tov and Midrash HaCheifetz explains the placement of this commandment; after the camp was set up, they were told to remove those with impurities from the camp(s).

Rashi references the Talmud (Gitin 60a), where Rabbi Levi is quoted as saying that there were eight sections of the Torah that were commanded on the first day of the Mishkan (Rosh Chodesh Nisan 2449); the commandment to remove those who are ritually impure from the camp was one of those sections. The obvious question is how/why this was commanded before the camp itself was commanded. Mizrachi suggests that even though the exact setup of the camp was not commanded until Iyar, as soon as the Mishkan was built the Levi'im camped around it, and the rest of the Tribes set up their tents around them. They weren't set up in the arrangement that would be commanded in Iyar, with a specific family of Levi on a particular side, and with three specific tribes forming a group that would reside on a particular side, but there were still three discernable areas: the Mishkan complex, the area where the Levi'im lived, and where the rest of the nation lived. Therefore, since there were "camps," the requirement for the ritually impure to vacate certain areas applied right away, and the commandment to do so was issued then. Rashi's commentary on the Talmud supports this suggestion, as he explains (d"h Parashas T'mayim) that "on that day (Rosh Chodesh Nisan) three camps were established; the camp of the Divine Presence and the camp of the Levi'im and the camp of Israel." Since the real camps weren't set up until over a month later, it is fair to assume that Rashi meant that the nation set up camp around the Mishkan in a way that allowed there to be an area that had the status of the camp of Levi'im and an area that had the status of the camp of the other Tribes, even if they weren't set up the way they eventually would be.

Although there is no hint about these camps being set up (besides Rabbi Levi's assertion that the commandment to send anyone ritually impure outside the camp was given on Rosh Chodesh Nisan), it does address one issue that Ramban's approach doesn't deal with-if the commandment to keep those who are ritually impure wasn't given until the camps were fully set up, why wasn't there a concern that people would enter the already operational Mishkan complex while ritually impure? It can be suggested that the commandment was made on Rosh Chodesh Nisan in order to keep the Mishkan ritually pure, even though the aspects regarding the other two camps wouldn't be relevant until after the census was taken and the Tribes took their places around the Mishkan. There is no explicit mention of any specific camp in the commandment, only the generic term "camp;" the Talmud derives the three separate camps from the multiple times the word "camp" is used (see Pesachim 67a). Until the other camps were set up, this

commandment could only apply to the Mishkan complex.

Tashbatz (3:137) takes it as a given that when the commandment was given (on Rosh Chodesh Nisan) it only referred to the Mishkan complex (baruch she'kivanti), but goes a step further, assuming that this is what Rashi really meant as well. Even though Rashi mentions the three camps explicitly, Tashbatz doesn't think Rashi meant that all three camps were set up on Rosh Chodesh Nisan. Nevertheless, if the commandment was given on Rosh Chodesh Nisan in order to keep the Mishkan ritually pure, and the information regarding the two future camps were included in that commandment to be used/applied when it became relevant, then the three camps were, conceptually at least, established on Rosh Chodesh Nisan.

After the census was completed and the Tribes took their places around the Mishkan, all three aspects of the commandment (those impurities that only required keeping away from the Mishkan complex, those that required staying out of the camp of the Levi'im, and those that required leaving the encampment completely) took affect. "And the Children of Israel did so-sending those who were ritually impure out of the camp," i.e. whichever camp was off limits for that impurity. However, this was not a new commandment, issued after the camps were fully set up, but had been included in the original commandment given on Rosh Chodesh Nisan. In other words, "that which G-d had spoken to Moshe" over a month earlier, "the Children of Israel fulfilled" now, after the camps were set up. In order to highlight this sequence, and that this commandment wasn't first being issued now, the Torah changed the way it described the nation fulfilling it. © 2012 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

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According to the Sefer haChinuch, ten of the eighteen mitzvos found in Parshas Naso deal with the nazir. As such, it is understandable that the haftorah chosen for this parsha would focus on the laws of nazir as found in the book of Shoftim. We are taught that an angel of Hashem appears to the wife of Manoach and informs her that she will conceive and give birth to a son. The prophecy continues, and she is told that this son is to be (Shoftim 13:5), "a Nazarite of G-D from the womb", till the day of his death.

When she relates the prophecy to her husband he prays to Hashem that the angel should reappear and "teach us what we should do to the child who will be born" (13:8). At first glance this is most challenging-what didn't Manoach understand that he needed clarification from the angel? The laws of the nazir are stated explicitly in Parshas Naso and there were no lack

of rabbis and teachers who could guide him with any questions.

Moreover, when Hashem accedes to his request and the angel reappears, he repeats to Manoach the same set of instructions as before. What has been accomplished with the second visit of the angel? Rav Schwab zt"l, in his *Mayan Beis Ha-Shoeva*, introduces a novel and insightful message in the form of additional component to the prophecy. The malach tells the father-to-be, (13:13-14), "whatever I have told your wife tishmor-you shall observe." On the surface he is simply restating the rules. However, this may be understood to mean that the malach told Manoach that he himself shall also observe what he had told his wife, namely the laws of the nazir.

What was troubling Manoach, and what caused him to talk to the angel directly, was not that he did not trust his wife's account of the initial prophecy. Rather, Manoach was troubled by a father who is not a nazir himself raising a child to be a nazir. The angel affirmed his concern, and agreed that the only way to raise a nazir is for the father as well to practice and observe the laws of nezirus. If Manoach would drink wine and cut his own hair, his effectiveness as a mentor would be severely compromised. Thus, the preamble to the birth of Shimshon contains a most valuable pedagogical lesson: "Do as I say not as I do" is not effective parenting.

This positive lesson is gleaned by the Chasam Sofer in his understanding of the verse, (Shemos 12:24), regarding the laws of Peasach, "you shall observe this matter as a decree for yourself and for your children forever." He notes that only when the example has been set by the parent, can there be expectation for continuity by children.

Indeed, the same lesson can be derived from the familiar passage of v'shomru (Shemos 31:16), "the children of Israel shall observe the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos an eternal covenant for their generations." If Shabbos is positive and spiritually uplifting in addition to restful and socially engaging, the reverence and respect for Shabbos by one's children will hopefully follow. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l noted that the generation that sacrificed for Shabbos, often losing their jobs to keep Shabbos, but complained at the Shabbos table "vi shver tzu zein a yid" it is difficult to be a Jew"could not transmit a Shabbos to their children that would be everlasting. Their children, while proud of their parents, were not prepared to make that sacrifice. When Shabbos is observed with pleasantness and sweetness, there is greater likelihood for perpetuity.

The first beracha of Birkas Hatorah recited daily speaks of the sweetness of Torah and asks Hashem for His assistance in experiencing and imbibing this sweetness. What follows next is the prayer that our children and children's children will be immersed and accomplished in the study of Torah. The beracha itself provides the best method of insurance: if you show your

children by your studying Torah with excitement and enthusiasm for Torah, there is a much greater chance they will wish to emulate your ways.

Good Jewish parenting begins with the father of our people, Avraham Avinu. We are told that Hashem loved him (Bereishis 18:19), "because he commands his children and his household after him-acharav that they keep the way of Hashem, doing charity and justice." "Acharav" denotes that Avraham taught by example and hence his lessons live on. © 2012 Rabbi B. Yudin and the TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

If a thief robs by violence, swears falsely and then confesses his guilt, the Torah tells us that he is liable to return the value of the object plus an additional one-fifth to the plaintiff. (Numbers 5:6, 7) If, however, the plaintiff dies leaving no relatives, the money is returned to the Priest, the emissary of G-d. In the words of the Torah, "if the person has no kinsmen to whom restitution may be made for the guilt, the restitution for guilt which is made shall be the Lord's, even the Priest." (Numbers 5:8)

An obvious question emerges: Is it possible that the plaintiff does not have any relatives? In the words of the great Rashi, "is there anyone in Israel who has no next of kin...or distant relation going back to Yaakov (Jacob)?" Rashi concludes that the text, therefore, must refer to a ger, a proselyte, who has died leaving no next of kin among the Jewish people. If the ger passes away, the law is that the money must be restored to the kohen.

In order to understand this idea, the special relationship between G-d and the proselyte must be examined. Nechama Leibowitz points out the following Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 8:2), "Proselytes are what they are, not by virtue of a family title, but simply through their own free will they have come to love G-d. He [G-d] therefore, responds by loving them, as it is written 'the Lord loves the righteous.'" (Psalms 146:8) For the Midrash, the righteous are converts for whom G-d feels a special love. Having accepted G-d through their own volition, G-d, in return, feels a unique love for them. Hence, in our text, theft against a ger results in payment to G-d, as G-d is the closest kin of the convert. The money is then given to the kohen, G-d's emissary.

It is often the case in our community that the convert is mistreated and not embraced equally in the fold. Here the Torah is teaching that the ger, far from being cast aside, is the most important. Being especially loved by G-d, we in that same spirit should have special love for them.

No wonder this law is always read close to the holiday of Shavuot. Shavuot celebrates G-d's giving of the Torah. The law of gezel ha-ger (stealing from a

proselyte) reminds us that the Torah was given to all Jews-including converts.

Shavuot also features the reading of Megillat Rut, the Scroll of Ruth. Ruth is the convert par excellence. Not coincidentally, from her the Messiah will one day come, teaching once again that while we may be holy, the convert is the holy of holies. © 2009 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar with a pasuk (and a Medrash) that come well into the parsha.

The fact that the Sfas Emes skipped over other potential topics means that he saw special significance in the subject that he did select. The pasuk that the Sfas Emes saw as especially meaningful comes in Bemidbar (6:2): "ish oh isha ki yafli lindor neder nazir..." (ArtScroll: "... a man or a woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow..."). The meaning of these words is not obvious, so the Sfas Emes elaborates. He explains that being a nazir means that a person separates himself from matters of olam hazeh (this world) even though in fact, he is involved in olam hazeh. That may sound like a contradiction. In fact, it is a contradiction. But the Sfas Emes does not hesitate to confront apparent cosmic inconsistencies. He explains that HaShem gives us the power to cling to the Source-of His Presence-which is present in all things. Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that this capacity to be part of-yet separate from-olam hazeh depends on our maintaining contact with the chiyus (vibrancy, vitality) that HaShem put into all Creation. The Sfas Emes calls this phenomenon "pehlel"- from the same root as a word in the pasuk-"yafli".

Clearly, the Sfas Emes regards the topic of the nazir as extremely important. And equally clearly, "pehlel" is a key word for understanding what nezirus is all about. How does the Sfas Emes arrive at his reading: namely, that the word "pehlel" refers to our capacity to maintain contact with the inner vitality that HaShem has placed in all Creation? A pasuk from the haftora of Parshas Naso (Shoftim, 13:18) provides some help. That pasuk contains the word "peli"-a word that all the commentaries render as "mechuseh" or "ne'ehlam"-i.e., hidden. That is to say: Our capacity to connect with ruchniyus even though we are involved in olam hazeh is a phenomenon beyond our understanding. Thus, we are dealing here with a familiar situation: our limited capacity to understand how the cosmos functions.

For further clarification of the word "yafli", the Sfas Emes sends us to an unexpected source. He directs us to a remark of the Rema in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim, Siman 6. The Rema there comments on

a phrase in the berocha- the blessing-of asher yatzar". The Rema observes that the phrase "umafli la'asos" (HaShem, "Who does wondrous things") refers to a unique creature that HaShem has fashioned with His boundless creativity. What creature does the Rema have in mind?

Human beings, can, in principle, combine ruchniyus (spirituality) with gashmiyus (corporeality). Thus, following the Sfas Emes's approach, we can translate the pasuk with which he began this ma'amar as: "If a person commits to doing that wondrous thing-something whose feasibility is to us, with our limited knowledge, hidden-that is, to take a Nazarite vow...".

Notice what the Sfas Emes is doing here. Earlier he defined a nazir as a person who is not involved in olam hazeh even though in fact he is involved in olam hazeh. That sounds paradoxical. But by introducing us to the concept and halachos of nazir, the Torah is telling us that such a combination is indeed feasible. And the Sfas Emes brings support for this view by citing a berocha that celebrates the reality of such a combination, which HaShem has built into all humankind. The take-home lesson is clear: being bahsar vedahm (flesh and blood) need not bar us from living a life of spirituality.

The Sfas Emes moves on now to another line of thought. He quotes the Medrash Rabba on our pasuk. The Medrash, in turn, brings a pasuk from Shir Hashirim (5:15): "Shokav amudei shesh..." ("The Torah's columns that support the world are marble..."). The Medrash (and the Sfas Emes) read "shokav" as coming from the same root as the Hebrew word "teshuka"-yearning. In other words, they read 'shokav' as "His yearning". Thus, the Medrash tells us that HaShem yearned to create the world. This perspective implies that the world is- or can be-a good thing.

The Medrash continues in the same vein, quoting a pasuk that we say in the Friday night kiddush (Bereishis, 2:1): "Va'yechu'lu ha'shamayim vеха'aretz..." In non-pshat mode, the Medrash chooses to read the word "va'yechulu" as coming from the root of another Hebrew word which also denotes yearning or longing. Thus we find a pasuk in (Tehillim, 74:3.) which says: 'nichsefa vegam kalsa nafshi...' (That is: 'My soul yearns for...') You see the link-by allusion-that connects "va'yechulu" and "kalsa".

So far, the Sfas Emes has had to add little to the discussion. The Medrash is so much in a Sfas Emes mode that he can let the Medrash say it all for him. But at this point, the Sfas Emes enters with comment on the pasuk (quoted above): "Shokav amudei sheish..." As noted above, the pshat (simple, literal) meaning of the word "sheish" in this context is: "marble". Hence, the literal meaning: "His columns that support the world are marble." But in non-pshat mode, the Sfas Emes reads the word "sheish" as "six." Hence, the Sfas Emes can now read the phrase as "The six support the world." Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us

that during the six yemei hama'aseh (workdays), our ma'aseh (work) can connect us with HaShem!

The picture that the Medrash (and the Sfas Emes) give us is a picture in which HaShem, as it were, yearned to create the world. Further, the way He built the world, we can reciprocate His feeling. As the pasuk in Shir Hashirim (7:11) says: "ve'ahlai teshukaso" ("And I yearn for Him"). Taking the relationship a step further, the Sfas Emes endows that pasuk with a secondary meaning, "And His yearning for me depends on my yearning for Him".

Thus, the Sfas Emes views this world in a very positive light. HaShem had a yearning to create this world. (In fact, the Medrash uses a word much stronger than 'yearning': "ta'ava"). As you see, what we have here is a deep, heartfelt relationship between HaShem and the world that He has created- that is, with us.

I suggest that this heartfelt relationship also brings with it a potential danger. HaShem yearns for us. But what if we do not yearn for Him? As we know, spurned love leads to frustration, and frustration leads to anger. And anger can lead to acts of anger. Sad to say, Tanach recounts many such episodes. So too does our people's history in the post-Tanach years.

In any case, the Sfas Emes reminds us that on Shabbos we can come closer to HaShem. And our coming closer gives HaShem nachas (joy). We are told in Shemos, 20:1: "va'yanach ba'yom hashevi'i." (ArtScroll: "And He rested on the seventh day."). The Sfas Emes reads this pasuk as: "And He had nachas [joy] on the seventh day". When we say this pasuk in kiddush on Shabbos morning, let us try to have in mind that on Shabbos we can give HaShem nachas. © 2012 Rabbi N.C. Leff and torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Possessive Nouns

There is a seemingly mysterious, if not cryptic, set of verses in this week's portion. "And every portion from any of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohen shall be his. A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen shall be his" (Numbers 5:9-10). The posuk prompts so many homiletic and Midrashic interpretations. Even after Rashi, the Master of Torah explanation, clarifies a simple meaning to the verse, he affirms that "there are varying interpretation from Midrashic sources." Obviously Rashi foreshadows a need for deeper interpretation. To that end I will lend my take. What does the Torah mean that "a man's holies shall be his"? How are holies, his? And what are holies anyway?

After all, when one dedicates items to the Temple, they are no longer his holies, they belong to the Temple. A plaque may afford recognition, but it surely is not a certificate of title. If the verse is referring to holy items owned by an individual, then it seems redundant as well. A man's possessions are of course his!

About five years ago, we had the honor of having Senator Joseph Biden of Delaware deliver a commencement address at our Yeshiva's graduation. The senator, who was at the time Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, was a guest of his good friend and well-known philanthropist, Joel Boyarsky, a member of our local community and dear friend of our school. After the ceremony, I had the privilege of riding together with the Senator in Mr. Boyarsky's stretch limousine, a fully apportioned vehicle that was truly befitting its prestigious passengers, among them many dignitaries and businessmen, who frequented its inner chambers. As we rode for a while, discussing everything from politics to Israel, and issues surrounding Jewish education, something in the back corner of the limousine caught the corner of my eye.

There was a tefillin zeckel, a velvet case that hold sacred Jewish phylacteries tucked away in the corner of the back windshield. Protruding from the corner of the purple-velvet case were the retzuos, the sacred straps that bind a people to their rituals.

I was both amazed and perplexed at the same time. Mr. Boyarsky, as I knew him, was not a very observant Jew. I was not even sure if he kept kosher. Yet the tefillin were right there, almost displayed in open view, in the same limousine in which he closed multi-million dollar deals with prominent businessmen, and discussed sensitive issues with the most prominent statesman. A few weeks later, I visited Mr. Boyarsky in his office. It was there that I popped the question. "I don't get it. As far as I understand, you are not observant, and your car is hardly a home to Rabbis. But yet you keep your tefillin in your car, in open view for everyone to see? Why?"

His terse answer remains with me until today. "When I travel I take my things. Those tefillin are my things."

The Torah issues a profound decree that defines not only what we have, but who we are. Those of us who understand that life as fulfilling as it may appear, how succulent the courses that it serves may taste, is but a fleeting moment in the grand scale of endless eternity. Who are we and what do we have.

I saw a bumper sticker that seemed to have survived the NASDAQ plunge the other week, "The guy with the most toys at the end wins." Wins what? What are the toys? The Torah tells us that after all the innings are pitched and the crowd walks from the packed stadium, we only have one thing. We have our holies. They are ours. Cars break. Computers crash. Satellites explode. Fortunes diminish and fame is as good as yesterday's newspaper.

Only the holy things that we do, only our acts of spirituality, whether manifested in relationships with our fellow man or with our Creator, remain. Those holies are ours! They will always belong to us. That is what we travel with and that is what we take along. In this world and the next. © 2000 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org