

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The parsha of Naso contains the laws relating to the nazirite -- an individual who undertook, usually for a limited period of time, to observe special rules of holiness and abstinence: not to drink wine or other intoxicants (including anything made from grapes), not to have his hair cut and not to defile himself by contact with the dead.

The Torah does not make a direct evaluation of the nazirite. On the one hand it calls him "holy to G-d" (Num. 6:8). On the other, it rules that when the period comes to an end the nazirite has to bring a sin offering (Num. 6:13-14), as if he had done something wrong.

This led to a fundamental disagreement between the rabbis in Mishnaic, Talmudic and medieval times. According to Rabbi Elazar, and later to Nahmanides, the nazirite is worthy of praise. He has voluntarily chosen a higher level of holiness. The prophet Amos (2:11) says, "I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and your young men for nazirites," suggesting that the nazirite, like the prophet, is a person especially close to G-d. The reason he had to bring a sin offering was that he was now returning to ordinary life. The sin lay in ceasing to be a nazirite.

Rabbi Eliezer ha-Kappar and Shmuel held the opposite opinion. The sin lay in becoming a nazirite in the first place, thereby denying himself some of the pleasures of the world G-d created and declared good. Rabbi Eliezer added: "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." (Taanit 11a; Nedarim 10a)

Clearly the argument is not merely textual. It is substantive. It is about asceticism, the life of self-denial. Almost every religion knows the phenomenon of people who, in pursuit of spiritual purity, withdraw from the pleasures and temptations of the world. They live in

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caves, retreats, hermitages, monasteries. The Qumran sect known to us through the Dead Sea Scrolls may have been such a movement.

In the Middle Ages there were Jews who adopted similar self-denial -- among them the Hassidei Ashkenaz, the Pietists of Northern Europe, as well as many Jews in Islamic lands. In retrospect 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 self-mortifying Christians. Their southern counterparts may 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 ascetic 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, in fact, dualists, holding that the true G-d was not the creator of the universe. The physical world was the work of a lesser, and evil, deity. 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 practices.

What is more puzzling is the position of Maimonides, who holds both views, positive and negative, in the same book, his law code the Mishneh Torah. In The Laws of Ethical Character, he adopts the negative position of R. Eliezer ha-Kappar: "A person may say: 'Desire, honour and the 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 Laws of the Nazirite he rules in accordance with the positive evaluation of Rabbi Elazar: "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 contradictory positions in a single book, let alone one as resolutely logical as Maimonides?

The answer lies in one of Maimonides' most

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original insights. He holds that there are two quite different ways of living the moral life. He calls them respectively the way of the saint (hassid) and the sage (hakham).

The sage follows the "golden mean," the "middle way." The moral life is a matter of moderation and balance, charting a course between too much and too little. Courage, for example, lies midway between cowardice and recklessness. Generosity lies between profligacy and miserliness. This is very similar to the vision of the moral life as set out by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The saint, by contrast, does not follow the middle way. He or she tends to extremes, fasting rather than simply eating in moderation, embracing poverty rather than acquiring modest wealth, and so on.

At various points in his writings, Maimonides explains why people might embrace extremes. One reason is repentance and character transformation. (See his *Eight Chapters* [the introduction to his commentary on *Mishnah, Avot*], ch. 4, and *Hilkhot Deot*, chapters 1, 2, 5 and 6.) So a person might cure himself of pride by practicing, for a while, extreme self-abasement. Another is the asymmetry of the human personality. The extremes do not exert an equal pull. Cowardice is more common than recklessness, and miserliness than over-generosity, which is why the hassid leans in the opposite direction. A third reason is the lure of the surrounding culture. This may be so opposed to religious values that pious people choose to separate themselves from the wider society, "clothing themselves in woolen and hairy garments, dwelling in the mountains and wandering about in the wilderness," differentiating themselves by their extreme behavior.

This is a very nuanced presentation. There are times, for Maimonides, when self-denial is therapeutic, others when it is factored into Torah law itself, and yet others when it is a response to an excessively hedonistic age. In general, though, Maimonides rules that we are commanded to follow the middle way, whereas the way of the saint is *lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*, beyond the strict requirement of the law. (*Hilkhot Deot* 1:5)

Moshe Halbertal, in his recent, impressive study of Maimonides, (*Maimonides: Life and Thought*,

Princeton University Press, 2014, 154-163) sees him as finessing the fundamental tension between the civic ideal of the Greek political tradition and the spiritual ideal of the religious radical for whom, as the Kotzker Rebbe said, "The middle of the road is for horses." To the hassid, Maimonides' sage can look like a "self-satisfied bourgeois."

Essentially, these are two ways of understanding the moral life itself. Is the aim of the moral life to achieve personal perfection? Or is it to create a decent, just and 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. 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 own country? 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. Yet you cannot build a society out of saints alone. Ultimately, saints are not really interested in society. Their concern is the salvation of the soul.

This deep insight is what 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 and exemplary.

But it is not the way of the sage -- and you need sages if you seek to perfect society. The sage is not an extremist, because he or she realises that there are other people at stake. There are the members of one's own family and the others within one's own community. There is a country to defend and an economy to sustain. The sage knows he or she cannot 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.

Maimonides lived the life he preached. We know from his writings that he longed for seclusion. There were years when he worked day and night to write his *Commentary to the Mishnah*, and later the *Mishneh Torah*. Yet he also recognised his responsibilities to his family and to the community. In his famous letter to his would-be translator Ibn Tibbon, he gives him an account of his typical day and week, in which he had to carry a double burden as a world-

renowned physician and an internationally sought halakhist and sage. He worked to exhaustion. There were times when he was almost too busy to study from one week to the next. Maimonides was a sage who longed to be a saint -- but knew he could not be, if he was to honour his responsibilities to his people. That seems to me a profound judgment, and one still relevant to Jewish life today. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Few passages in the Bible are as well known as the Priestly Benediction. In Israel, the kohanim (priests) rise to bless the congregation every morning, while in the Diaspora Ashkenazi Jews are permitted to include this special benediction only on festivals. Nevertheless, there are many life-cycle celebrations such as circumcisions, redemptions of the first born, bnei mitzva and even weddings which are punctuated by this blessing. In effect, the kohen stands as G-d's representative, as the "agent of the Compassionate One," as the spiritual leader and as the Torah teacher, and in this role of teacher and guide he calls on G-d to bless the congregation. As Moses declares in his final blessing to the Israelites: "[the Priests and Levites] shall guard Your covenant, shall teach Your laws to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel!" (Deut. 33:9-10).

Both the Talmud (the ninth chapter of Berachot) and our prayer liturgy declare: "At the time of the priestly blessings, the congregation responds: 'Master of the Universe, I am Yours and my dreams are Yours.'" Apparently our sages saw a profound connection between the dreams of the nation and the function of its priest-leaders. What is the nature of this connection? I would suggest that, first and foremost, true leaders and educators must inspire their students, congregants and/or nation with a lofty vision. The Psalmist of Israel, King David, declares in the Psalm which we recite each Sabbath and festival before reciting the Grace after Meals: "When the Lord returned with the restoration of Zion, we were as dreamers" (Ps. 126:1). After all, if the Jews had not dreamt of the return to Israel throughout their long exiles, we never would have come back.

One recognizes the very same idea-but from an opposite vantage point-when one understands the cause behind the tragedy of the Book of Numbers. In Numbers, the Jewish people descend from the great heights of the Revelation at Sinai to the disastrous depths of the sin of the scouts, the rebellion of Korah, the sin of Moses and the destruction of that entire generation in the desert. What caused such a mighty fall? The Bible itself begins its account of the descent with the words: "And it happened that the nation 'kvetched' (mitonenim) in an evil fashion" (Num. 11:1). The Netziv, an 18th-century commentator, explains the

difficult word mitonenim as meaning "wandering hither and thither" aimlessly, from the Hebrew *anna* (literally "where to"). Simply put, this great Torah leader was saying that the Israelites had lost the dream which they had at Sinai, when they accepted the Divine mission of being "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Secondly, the Hebrew word for dream is *halom*, and-with a simple switch of letters-it spells *hamal*, which means love and compassion. The leader who inspires with his dream must first and foremost love his nation; only if he loves the Israelites will they believe themselves worthy of being loved, and believe in their ability to realize the dream. Great leaders such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and David Ben-Gurion lifted their respective nations to unheard-of heights because they helped make them believe in themselves.

Third, the same Hebrew word *halom*, with another switch of letters spells *lohem*, which means fighting-if need be-to achieve the necessary goals. A great measure of imparting a dream is to sanctify idealistic sacrifice on behalf of that dream. Fourth, the word *halom* can also be rearranged to *spellehem* or bread; a dream must be nourished with the material necessities of programs, tactics and strategy. Fifth, the word *halom* is also an anagram for *melah*, or salt. Salt symbolizes tears-the tears of sacrifice and commitment-as well as eternity, since salt never putrefies. Salt is therefore the symbol of our covenant with G-d, which guarantees Jewish eternity and ultimate redemption. And finally, *halom* is linguistically tied to *halon* or window, a light to the outside world. The dream with which the kohen must inspire the Israelites is a dream which encompasses the entire world, the dream that "Through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth," the dream that "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." Yes, the Jewish people-as well as its leaders-must be dreamers. And perhaps only those who believe in a G-d who is invisible will dare to dream the impossible, and only those who dream the impossible will ever achieve the incredible. ©2015 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The very name of our portion *Naso*, encapsulates a central Jewish idea which resonates, especially during the difficult times in Israel today. On the one hand, the word *naso* may be related to *masa*, which means "burden." From this perspective, *naso* means to be weighted down, to feel the pressure of the world. *Naso* could also mean to lift or to be above.

While these definitions may be viewed as conflicting, they actually encompass a common message.

As a rabbi, I am constantly awed by individuals

who seem to be so average, and yet, when faced with adversity, are able to reach beyond and overcome. This amazing phenomenon gives me strength to continue to believe, despite the fact that there is so much pain and suffering in the world.

This may be the confluence of *naso* as burden and *naso* as to lift. It is often the case that precisely when one feels burdened and weighted down, one finds the inner strength to rise above and to exceed one's grasp.

The ability of people, to do that which they never ever thought they could is an expression of the image of G-d in all of us. As G-d is infinite and endless, so too do we, created in the image of G-d, have the power to do the extraordinary.

We, here in America, should learn through our sisters and brothers in Israel. As they face adversity, we cannot allow ourselves to become the Jews of silence. We must learn from them the message of courage and fortitude, and in the face of crisis, speak out.

Sometimes I think that there are no great people in this world. Rather there are only great challenges. When they arise, ordinary people reach deep down to accomplish the extraordinary. The word *naso* reflects this most incredible phenomenon. © 2006 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The tribe of Levi always seemed to have special responsibilities and privileges within the Jewish people. Our father Jacob spoke harshly of their father's tendency to be impetuous and even violent, albeit for what was believed to be a holy and necessary cause. As a result of this admonition of Jacob, the tribe of Levi first assigned for itself a roll of service to the community of Israel and of scholarship and education.

Early on in the history of the Jewish people, even before we were redeemed from Egyptian bondage, the tribe of Levi was seen as being the clergy, so to speak, of Israel. According to Jewish tradition, the tribe of Levi was not subject to physical enslavement and harsh labor as were the other tribes of Israel during the period of Egyptian bondage.

The leadership of the Jewish people in Egypt, in the personages of Aaron and Moshe, were members of the tribe of Levi. The tribe of Levi was relatively small in number in comparison to the other tribes of Israel. The rabbis ascribe this to the blessing that the Lord bestowed upon the Jewish people, that in spite of their affliction they would nevertheless increase in their numbers. This did not apply to the tribe of Levi since they were not involved in any forced labor. It was from

the tribe of Levi that the priestly line of Aaron was created and until today the special, unique character and respect bestowed upon the tribe of Levi is part of the social and religious fabric of the church society.

Naturally, with rewards and benefits, the Torah always imposes duties and responsibilities. The tribe of Levi was excluded from ownership of land in the Land of Israel and from most general commercial activities as well. Its role was to serve in the Temple, to be the educators and teachers of Torah to the Jewish people and to be moral personal examples of the values involved in living a truly Jewish life.

The tribe of Levi lived in forty eight cities scattered throughout the boundaries of the land of Israel. They were the spiritual soldiers, so to speak, who were on the ground engaging and influencing Jewish society. They were entitled to be supported by the Jewish people as a whole through the system of tithing but they were seen to be an elite group given over to G-d, so to speak, in order to serve their fellow Jews spiritually and in many cases even physically.

Even after the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people throughout the nations of the world, the Levites have retained certain special privileges and honors and have a unique role in the Jewish religious world. They are the symbol of national and religious service in the realm of the obligations upon all Jews to work for the common benefit of all of their brethren. Because of their special role in Jewish life they are entitled to be counted separately and uniquely, as it appears in these sections of the Torah. There is a lesson in that for all of us, whether we are of the tribe of Levi or not. © 2015 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And each man's sanctified things shall be his; a man who gives it to the Kohain, it shall be his" (Bamidbar 5:10). There are numerous meanings embedded into this verse, including the one Rashi quotes from the Talmud (B'rachos 63a), that giving those items that are supposed to be given to a Kohain (e.g. T'rumah and Bikurim) to him will ultimately bring the giver financial prosperity; "whomever gives them to a Kohain, will have [much money]." Just prior to this, the Talmud tells us that whomever doesn't give these things to a Kohain (despite being required to) will eventually need a Kohain for the Sotah process. This connection is also made in several Midrashim (e.g. Vayikrah Rabbah 15:6 and Bamidbar Rabbah 9:13), and is quoted by Rashi (on 5:12). However, the husband, who was the one

who didn't give the Kohain what he was supposed to, isn't the only one affected by having to go to the Kohain for a different reason instead. Why does a wife have to suffer by also being brought to the Kohain to go through the Sotah process just because her husband was negligent in doing what he was supposed to do?

This question is posed in Iyun HaParasha (#24), and, to be honest, when I first saw it, I thought it was a "klutz kasha" (as I will explain). Nevertheless, if they thought it was worthy of asking, I thought it might be worthwhile to explain why the question didn't bother me. Imagine my surprise, then, when I found some commentators who discuss the issue, even if they don't fully address it. [Part of the question asked and discussed is why she also has to be brought to the Kohain for his sins if there are other ways of requiring him to go to a Kohain without impacting her as severely. Their answers address this issue more effectively.]

Tzeidah La'derech suggests that the decision to withhold the Priestly "gifts" is often a joint decision, so they share the guilt. However, the verbiage of the Talmud (that he will need a Kohain through his wife) and Rashi and some of the Midrashim (that "you," in the singular, will need to bring "your wife" because "you" didn't bring what you were supposed to the Kohain), strongly indicates that he is the focus, not both of them.

B'er Ba'sadeh suggests that as punishment for withholding the fruits of his labor from the Kohain, G-d will withhold the "fruits of the womb" from him, and they will not have any children. In order to combat this, the wife will pretend she is interested in someone else so that her husband will put her through the Sotah process, and, because she is innocent, will be promised children (see Bamidbar 5:28). However, this doesn't really answer the question, as she is also being prevented from having children, and has to go through this process, because of his sin. In addition, her "having children" after going through the process (when innocent) doesn't necessarily mean having children she otherwise wouldn't have had; Rashi says it refers to having an easier childbirth, or to the kind of children she will now have.

Maskil L'Dovid suggests that the two things don't occur in the same lifetime. Rather, someone who didn't bring the Kohain what he was supposed to is reincarnated in order to be able to compensate for having withheld it in a previous life. To make sure that he has to go to a Kohain (at which point he will bring what he owes), it is decreed in heaven that (in this second lifetime) he will marry someone who will be unfaithful (or at least consider being unfaithful enough to disregard the warnings not to spend time alone with another man), thereby causing him to bring her to a Kohain to undergo the Sotah process. Difficulties with this approach abound, starting with limiting it to reincarnated souls, and continuing with her free will

(choosing to become a Sotah well after he was reincarnated and they got married) being ignored. Besides, the implication of the Talmudic teaching is that he will need a Kohain for a different reason (the Sotah process), not that the Sotah process will be the means for him to fulfill his obligation of giving a Kohain what was owed. Additionally, the Talmud finishes the scenario by saying that because he withheld the "gifts" from the Kohain, not only will he need the Kohain for something else, but he will become poor. If he gave the Kohain what he owed him when he went with his wife, why would he still become poor?

G'vul Binyamin (1:4:4, quoted by Shitah M'kubetses Ha'chadash on B'rachos) suggests that since one who withholds these "gifts" from the Kohanim becomes poor, and not having enough to eat (or to pay the bills) is a major cause of tension in the home, his not giving the "gifts" led to her being unfaithful (or to consider being unfaithful). In a similar vein, R' Yonasan Eybeshitz suggests that upon seeing their fortunes decline, she will suspect it's because he spent their money on other women, and no longer fears the "Sotah waters" (since they only work if he is sin-free), and will therefore more easily consider cheating on him. Although these suggestions may help us understand why it is specifically this he will need a Kohain for (as the likelihood of his wife considering being unfaithful increases), they do not explain why she is put in a position to be more tempted to do so because of his sin. And, as previously mentioned, the Talmud indicates that becoming poor occurs after the Sotah process has occurred, not beforehand.

Nachalas Yaakov suggests that the wife had sinned independently of her husband's sin, and so deserves to be punished as well. Because of his sin, though, rather than her being punished by being caught with someone else and then being executed by the court, she has to go through the Sotah process and die a much harsher death instead, with her innards exploding. Or, if she was innocent of adultery and only guilty of spending time alone with another man, she has to go through the Sotah process before being exonerated rather than "just" having people talk about her being with someone else. I don't understand what he thinks is gained through this suggestion, as either way her punishment becomes much worse because of what he did.

The question of what she did wrong is built on the assumption that it was his sin of withholding the "gifts" from the Kohanim that caused both of them to have to go to a Kohain for the Sotah process. Let's turn the question around, and look at the situation as we would have understood it before the Talmud (et al) associated it with his not giving a Kohain the "gifts." If she was unfaithful (and therefore deserving of having to drink the Sotah waters), why should he suffer by having to bring her to a Kohain for the process? Even if she

wasn't unfaithful, but ignored his warning not to spend time alone with someone, why should he suffer based on her lack of modesty (see Rashi on 5:12)? In his overview of how people are matched up, Meiri (Sotah 2a) takes it for granted that who a person marries is included in the concept of reward and punishment; even if the choice to sin is made after they were married, how a spouse is affected by it would be included in this concept as well. The concept of how others can be affected by our actions, and how we can be affected by the actions of others, is not a simple one, but generally speaking, when a punishment is meted out on one person, or one group, how others are affected by it is taken into account as well. [When discussing how Moshe's prayer after the sin of the golden calf could help save the nation, Ralbag explains that by showing how their destruction would impact him, G-d spared them in order to spare Moshe the anguish their destruction would have caused him. Even though the nation deserved to be destroyed, because doing so would adversely impact Moshe, and he didn't deserve that adverse impact, they were spared.]

Applying this to a Sotah, even though she sinned, if he has to go through the process of bringing her to a Kohain and having her drink the Sotah waters, he must, on some level, deserve to be punished as well. It is this aspect that is being discussed. Not why she deserves to go through the process; she deserves to go through the process because of her own actions. (He may have contributed to her actions through his own actions or inactions, but ultimately she sinned by being with someone else.) The Talmud (et al) is teaching us that one of the things that could cause him to deserve to go through this is not giving the Kohain his "gifts." As a matter of fact, the Torah starts the Sotah section by mentioning "a man whose wife did something wrong," not (as we would have expected) "a woman who did something wrong" (see Gur Aryeh on 5:12). The focus, at least as far as the connection between not giving the Kohain his "gifts" and having to bring his wife to a Kohain because she is a Sotah, is on him, and what he did wrong. It has little bearing on what she did wrong, and why she is being punished. What she did wrong is rather obvious; the point is what he did wrong to deserve to have to go through the process too. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Respectful Repeats

One of the most striking components of Parshas Naso is the listing of all the princes, the nesi'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. ©2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI YAKOV HABER

TorahWeb

Rav Chaim Ya'akov Goldwicht zt"l, founding Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, often gave the following parable. A maggid once came to town, delivering an inspiring talk. One of the listeners, enraptured by his elevating words, decided to transform his life, elevate his mediocre prayers, devote more time to Torah study, and disburse more funds to charitable causes. Alas, all of these exalted commitments were "spilled out with the havdala wine"! The scenario repeated itself many times. How can we hold on to religious inspiration?

The parasha of nazir provides one answer to this question. In a famous explanation of the

juxtaposition of the parasha of nazir to that of the sota, Rashi explains that one who sees a sota b'kilkula should abstain via the nazirite vow from wine. Clearly the sight of the dire consequences of sin naturally leads to inspiration not to fall prey to the yetzer hara of desire. But, the Torah tells us, that inspiration is insufficient. The inspiration must immediately lead to action. Only through this will the inspiration not be lost.

Shlomo HaMelech writes in Shir HaShirim (2:7) "Im ta'iru v'im t'or'ru es ha'hava ad shetechpatz -- if you will awaken and if you will arouse the love until it is desired." The root of the word shetechpatz is CH-F-Ts which means desire or will but also means an object, as in the word cheifetz. Hence, the word shetechpatz can be translated as: until you make it into an object. Based on this reading, Ramban (Emuna uBitachon 19) writes that the verse is instructing us that when love is awakened, when religious inspiration occurs, one must translate that awakening into some physical act of movement toward Hashem in order to solidify the gain. He should immediately perform some mitzvah act to give the feeling expression which in turn helps prevent its dissipation. (See also Kedushas Leivi [Ma'amarei Shavuos] and Agra d'Pirka [226].)

In the prophecy of Yechezkel we just read on Shavuos morning, the angels in the "Chariot vision" are described (1:14) as rushing "ratzo vashov -- running forth and returning." I once saw a Chassidic teaching explaining that the malachim rush toward the Divine Presence and then "return" applying the new level attained to their Divine connection. Human beings too must emulate the angels in this way whereby every "ratzo", every inspirational moment, must be followed by a "shov", an application to "ordinary" life. (Many other interpretations of "ratzo vashov" have been given and, it being part of the Merkava prophecy, is obviously a very deep concept. Here, we presented a practical interpretation.)

Perhaps this indicates a connection between the parasha of the nazir and the subsequent parasha of the offerings of the n'si'im. The Torah relates that the n'si'im brought wagons and korbanos to the Mishkan area awaiting Divine approval to offer them. After Moshe received this approval, they brought their offerings to Hashem (Chapter 7 ff.). Even without being commanded specifically to do so, the n'si'im, inspired by the great event of the revelation of the Shechina on the Mishkan, wished to encapsulate these lofty feelings into action. Without even knowing if it would be accepted, they instinctively wished to offer their gift to Hashem. However, it had to await Divine approval to assure that this individual expression was an appropriate form of Divine service. (This motif shares in common one theme of the nazir who, as mentioned above, utilizes the vow to translate inspiration into action.)

Another crucial element in preserving religious

inspiration entails reminding oneself of the event causing the inspiration. Rav Goldwicht zt"l, when he would visit his students in the United States would comment: "Ani k'mo degel -- I am like a flag." Just as a flag reminds someone of the exalted, lofty ideals of the nation, so too does the very presence of the head of a yeshiva remind someone of the inspiration reached in and through the yeshiva. By reminding himself of that experience, the person is able to connect to that which caused the inspiration in the first place and recommit to the changes it motivated him to make. An allusion to this idea is found in the K'tav v'HaKabala quoting Rav Moshe Alshich on a verse, not surprisingly, in the parasha of nazir as well. "V'achar yishte hanazir yayin -- and afterward [after the bringing of the various korbanos and the shaving of the head at the end of the nazirite vow], the nazir may drink wine" (6:20). Why is he called a nazir now after he already completed his vow? Rather, the elevated state achieved is to remain with him forever. But how is this to be accomplished? Perhaps we can suggest, as above, by reminding himself of the feelings of exaltedness reached during the period of the vow. A parallel to this nowadays would be to visit Eretz Yisrael often to be inspired by its holiness especially for those who were privileged to study there. Or revisiting the yeshiva that influenced one's life greatly. Or by visiting and listening to shiurim given by the teachers who inspired the students in the earlier stages of their lives.

Rav Goldwicht zt"l himself stressed the need for constantly remaining receptive to new ideas and even lifestyle changes in order to facilitate spiritual movement upward. He would often state that even though the expression goes: "in one ear out the other", but he would like to add "aval mashehu nish'ar! -- something, however small, remains!" When enough of these residual bits aggregate together, lasting change can occur.

(This, he explained is the reason the eved ivri who refuses to go free has his ear pierced rather than any other organ. By insisting to remain a slave, he is forfeiting his "ko'ach hash'miya", his ability to be receptive to change, represented by the ear.)

Utilizing these methods of translation into action, "recharging the batteries" by reconnecting to the source of our change, and always being receptive to new ideas even if we are not ready yet to adopt them, hopefully, b'ezras Hashem, should assist us in making meaningful strides in our avodas Hashem. ©2015 Rabbi Y. Haber & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

Part of the blessing which the Cohanim, the priests, bless the Jewish people is: "The Lord shall make His face shine upon you." (Numbers 6:25)

One of the 613 commandments is to emulate

the Almighty. What can we learn from this verse to emulate the Almighty?

The great sage Shamai said, "Greet every man with a pleasant expression of countenance" (Pirke Avos, 1:15) -- in this manner, we are "shining our countenance upon others". How can we have a "shining" countenance?

Look at the Person -- The minimum is to turn your face towards your fellow man; don't greet anyone with the side of your face. Turn your face towards him/her.

Express Interest -- Don't look bored or distracted.

Feel Happy -- to see the person and let your face show it!

Since G-d deals with us measure for measure, G-d makes His face shine upon those whose faces shine to their fellow human being! *Dvar Torah based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2015 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Zaragoza, Spain; 1255-1340) opens his commentary on this week's parashah with a verse from Mishlei (21:15), "Performance of justice is a joy to the righteous." He writes: King Shlomo informs us in this verse that a person is obligated to feel joy when he sees a mitzvah being performed, not only when he is the one performing it, but also when someone else is. This is indicated by the fact that the verse says, "Performance of justice is a joy," not, "Performing justice..." It is known, Rabbeinu Bachya adds, that the joy one experiences when performing a mitzvah is itself a mitzvah. Just as performing a mitzvah is a form of serving Hashem, so the joy one experiences because of mitzvot is a form of serving Hashem.

Rabbeinu Bachya continues: We read (Devarim 28:47) that the curses in Parashat Ki Tavo will come to pass "because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, with joy and goodness of heart." We also are commanded (Tehilim 100:2), "Serve Hashem with joy." Joy makes our service complete. This is why the Temple service was accompanied by music--both vocal and instrumental--for music puts man's soul on the path to joy. In our parashah (4:47), the Levi'im are commanded to perform "the service of service." The Gemara (Arachin 11a) explains: "What service serves the Temple service? The musical accompaniment!" The Levi'im are commanded to sing so that the mitzvah of the sacrificial service will be performed joyously. ©2015 S. Katz & torah.org

