

# Parashas: Naso

The Parshah of Naso opens with G-d's instruction to Moses to "raise the heads" (the Torah's idiom for "take a count") of the Levite families of Gershon, who were charged with the task of transporting the doorway curtains, tent coverings and tapestries of the Tabernacle (the portable Sanctuary which the children of Israel erected in their encampments in the desert). The Gershonites were one of the three Levite clans, which carried the names of Levi's three sons: Gershon, Kohath and Merari.

The previous Parshah of Bamidbar recorded the figures for the census taken of all Levite males from the age of one month and up (altogether, they numbered 22,300). In Naso a second count is taken, of those who will be doing the actual work of transporting the Sanctuary—the Levite men between the ages of 30 and 50.

The results of this census were: Kohath—2,750; Gershon—2,630; Merari—3,200. Total of the Levite "workforce": 8,580.

Having thus concluded its census of the families and tribes of Israel and its designation of their camping places around the Sanctuary, the Torah now commands, "Send out of the camp all who are afflicted with tzaraat, who are contaminated by a bodily discharge, and those contaminated by contact with the dead" until such time as they are cleansed of their ritual impurity.

## The Wayward Wife

The *sotah* is a woman who acts in a way that causes her to be suspected of adultery (i.e., she is warned by her husband regarding her relations with another man, and subsequently secludes herself with that man, before witnesses). The Torah instructs that she be tested with "bitter waters":

*If a man's wife go astray, and commit a betrayal against him . . . and the spirit of jealousy come upon him . . .*

*Then shall the man bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense on it, for it is an offering of jealousy, an offering bringing iniquity to remembrance . . .*

*The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the earth that is on the floor of the Tabernacle shall the priest take, and put it into the water.*

*Then the kohen shall stand the woman up before the L-rd and expose the [hair on the] head of the woman; he shall place into her hands the remembrance meal offering . . .*

The following oath is then administered to the *sotah*:

*“If no man has lain with you and you have not gone astray to become defiled [to another] in place of your husband, then [you will] be absolved through the bitter waters which cause the curse.*

*“But if you have gone astray to another instead of your husband, and you have been defiled . . . may G-d make you for a curse and an oath among your people. . . . These curse-bearing waters shall enter your innards, causing the belly to swell and the thigh to rupture.”*

*The woman shall say: “Amen, amen.”*

The oath is then inscribed in a parchment scroll, and the scroll is placed in the “bitter waters” until the writing is erased. The wayward wife is then given the water to drink.

*It shall come to pass: if she had been defiled and was unfaithful to her husband, the curse-bearing waters shall enter her to become bitter, and her belly will swell and her thigh will rupture. The woman will be a curse among her people.*

*But if the woman had not become defiled and she is clean, she shall be exempted and bear seed.*

## **The Nazir**

A *nazir* is a man or woman who, out of a desire to “separate themselves to G-d,” takes a vow of *nezirut* (“abstinence”) from certain worldly pleasures and involvements, either for a set period of time or for their entire lifetime. One who takes this vow is forbidden to drink wine, cut his or her hair, or to become *tamei* (ritually impure) through contact with a dead body—even for a close relative—for the duration of the *nezirut*.

The prohibition against wine is all-encompassing:

*He shall abstain from wine and wine-brandy, and shall drink no vinegar . . . nor shall he drink any beverage of grapes, nor eat grapes, moist or dried. . . . He shall eat nothing that is made of the grapevine, from the seeds to the skin.*

At the conclusion of the period of *nezirut*, the *nazir* brings a series of offerings—a male lamb as an “ascending offering,” an ewe lamb as a “sin offering,” and a ram as a “peace offering” (for the definitions of the different types of offerings, see summary for the Parshah of Vayikra). The *nazir*’s hair, which had grown freely throughout the *nezirut*, is now completely shorn and burnt in the fire beneath the peace offering.

## The Priestly Blessing

*G-d spoke to Moses, saying:*

*Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying: Thus shall you bless the children of Israel; say to them:*

*“May G-d bless you and keep you. May G-d make His face shine upon you, and give you grace. May G-d lift up Hisface to you and give you peace.”*

*They shall set My name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.*

## Wagons and Oxen

The Torah now resumes its account (which it left off in the 10th chapter of Leviticus, back in the Parshah of Shemini) of the dedication of the Sanctuary on the first of Nissan, one year (minus two weeks) after the Exodus.

*It came to pass on the day that Moses had finished setting up the Tabernacle, and had anointed and sanctified it, and all its vessels, and the altar and all its vessels . . .*

*The nesi'im of Israel, heads of the house of their fathers, who were the princes of the tribes . . . approached; and they brought their offering before G-d.*

The first gift brought by the tribal heads was “six covered wagons and twelve oxen, a wagon for each two *nesi'im*, and an ox for each one.” G-d instructs Moses to accept this gift, and that the wagons and oxen should be used by the Levites to transport the Sanctuary.

Two wagons and four oxen were given to the Gershonites, who transported the Sanctuary’s tent coverings and tapestries. The remaining four wagons and eight oxen were given to the Levite families of Merari, who transported the Sanctuary’s 48 wall panels, 165 foundation sockets, 69 posts and other structural components. “But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because the service of the most holy belonged to them: they bore [the Sanctuary’s vessels] on their shoulders.”

## Twelve Times Thirty-Five

In addition, each *nasi* brought a separate offering of his own as “a dedication of the altar.” Regarding these offerings, G-d instructed: “One *nasi* each day, one *nasi* each day, shall bring near his offering for the dedication of the altar.”

*He that offered his offering the first day was Nachshon the son of Aminadav, of the tribe of Judah.*

*His offering was: One silver dish, the weight of which was a hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meal offering. One spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense. One young bullock, one ram, one yearling lamb, for a burnt offering. One kid of the goats for a sin offering. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs of the first year. This was the offering of Nachshon the son of Aminadav.*

The same gift was brought the next day, by Nethanel the son of Zuar, prince of the tribe of Issachar:

*One silver dish, the weight of which was a hundred and thirty shekels, and one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary; both of them were full of fine flour mingled with oil for a meal offering. One spoon of ten shekels of gold, full of incense. One young bullock, one ram, one yearling lamb, for a burnt offering. One kid of the goats for a sin offering. And for a sacrifice of peace offerings: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, five lambs of the first year. This was the offering of Nethanel the son of Zuar.*

The Torah then proceeds to itemize each tribe’s gift separately, although each *nasi* brought the very same 35 items as his offering.

After listing the twelve tribes’ offerings on the first twelve days of Nissan, the Torah summarizes:

*This was the dedication of the altar, on the day when it was anointed, by the princes of Israel: twelve dishes of silver, twelve silver bowls, twelve spoons of gold. . . . All the silver vessels weighed two thousand four hundred shekels. . . . All the gold of the spoons was a hundred and twenty shekels.*

*All the oxen for the burnt offerings were twelve bullocks, the rams twelve, the yearling lambs twelve, with their meal offering. The kids of the goats for sin offerings, twelve. And all the oxen for the sacrifice of the peace offerings were twenty-four bullocks, the rams sixty, the he-goats sixty, the yearling lambs sixty.*

“When Moses would go into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Him, then he heard the voice speaking to him from off the covering that was upon the Ark of Testimony, from between the two cherubim; and it spoke to him.”

metry and explain what a triangle is, am I expected to be a triangle myself? Of course not. I am only the one explaining. So too here — I am only explaining what proper manners are. What each person actually does is up to him.”

And he added: "When I am teaching, I am Aristotle the philosopher. But right now, while I am eating, I am not Aristotle the philosopher. I am just an ordinary man, living his private life according to the cravings of his heart."

### Lofty Words, Brutal Lives

This is something that has been seen in every generation among the wise men of the nations who follow in Aristotle's footsteps. Even when they would lecture and preach about good middos and lofty ideals, and outwardly appeared to be exceptional people of refined character — in their private lives, in their actual conduct, they could behave as utterly corrupt people, slaves to the lowest of desires.

The tzaddik R' Mordechai Chaim of Slonim zt"l once observed something striking. We see - he said - that during the very period when the wise men of the nations began to speak more and more about the importance of peace and unity, and to that end devised and spread new philosophies in the world about how every man can do as he pleases and live in tranquility — that was precisely the period when the world filled up with murder. They even invented the atomic bomb, with which entire cities can be obliterated in a moment.

The wicked Hitler yemach shemo also called for educating people in good middos for the benefit of mankind. Stalin yemach shemo also said that he had come to make the sun of communism shine for the good of the world. But when it came to action — when it suited their wills, in war or otherwise — they sowed destruction, murdering millions of human beings in horrific ways the likes of which the world had never seen.

Afterward, the nations of the world gathered and founded the "United Nations," with the stated goal of always seeking compromise and peace, and thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Yeshaya for the End of Days (2:4): "Lo yisa goy el goy cherev v'lo yilmedu od milchamah" — "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." And yet — we still witness wars and provocations between the nations growing fiercer, and a relentless arms race for ever more dangerous weapons of war.

### R' Yerucham and the Professor

On this subject, a story is told about the gaon R' Yerucham Levovitz zt"l, the mashgiach of Yeshivas Mir, who once explained to a fellow Jew how one ought to view the results of education in the schools and universities of the nations of the world.

R' Yerucham was traveling to recover his health in the resort town of Marienbad, where he met a Jewish professor who was far from Yiddishkeit. R' Yerucham wanted to do a chesed for him and bring him closer to the Torah.

When he opened a conversation with him about emunah, the professor asked him: "Have you read the writings of the German philosopher Kant?" R' Yerucham answered, "No, I haven't." He asked whether he had read the works of the German thinker Haeckel. Again the mashgiach answered no. He asked again about the work of yet another of the wise men of the nations — and the answer remained the same.

The professor was puzzled: "If you haven't read any of these great thinkers, how are you going to convince me that you are right? Perhaps the truth is to be found specifically in their words?"

R' Yerucham answered him: "Look, I know that from the study of our holy Torah have come people great in wisdom, in good deeds, and in lofty middos — the Tannaim and Amoraim and those who came after them, down to the Chofetz Chaim and the other gedolei Yisroel of our time. All of them grew and emerged from the study of the holy Torah. Now — from all those teachings you mentioned, has anyone of that caliber emerged? Of course not. So it is clear that those teachings are empty, and there is no need to investigate or examine them any further."

#### Lessons from the Shoah and Our Own Day

Indeed, we saw with our own eyes the conduct of the Germans yemach shemam in the days of the Shoah — that precisely the people of this "advanced" nation, including their professors and their students, behaved like the most savage of beasts of prey.

And we see in our own time, again and again, that progressive professors and teachers — those who call themselves "modern" and "progressive," the very ones who are supposed to be spreading values of good middos, of chesed and rachamim — turn a blind eye to cruel acts perpetrated by various murderers.

They fail to condemn them or those who support them. And at times they themselves carry out acts of murder.

The very breath of such people is profoundly damaging. We find this idea in the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 702): in Eretz Yisroel they would set up, every single mil along the roads, a special marker — a sign — that pointed the way to the nearest city of refuge for murderers.

The Chofetz Chaim zt"l explained: why did they go to such great lengths, rather than relying on the murderer to simply ask passersby for directions? Because the very breath of a murderer —

even an inadvertent one — is so contaminated and so dangerous, that even speaking with him can cause harm. And so they put up the markers and signs of direction, so that the murderer could find his own way to the city of refuge, without ever needing to speak to a fellow Yid.

Perhaps this is what is hinted at in the warning of the pasuk: "L'nefesh lo yitamah" — "He shall not defile himself for any soul." One must be careful not to defile the soul of any son or daughter of Yisroel through study in the schools of the nations, taught by teachers whose insides are corrupt.

Rather, "b'amav" — let them learn only "among his people," in the schools of Klal Yisroel, taught by teachers who live the deeds of Klal Yisroel.

And on this Rashi writes: "I'hazhir gedolim al haketanim" — "to caution the adults concerning the children." The adults must be careful and watchful in this regard over the little ones — for only then will they merit to see true nachas from them.