

PENINIM ON THE TORAH **PARSHA BOOKLET**

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PARASHAT NASSO

A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a nazirite of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

The nazir is a unique individual, who takes upon himself a vow of abstinence from: wine and grape derivatives; cutting his hair; and contact with a corpse. These are three areas that seem to have no common denominator. The three regulations are that he may not drink wine, cut his hair, or defile himself by contact with the dead. These restrictions apparently elevate him above the rest of Klal Yisrael, as well as enhance every aspect of his personal life. What is the relationship of one to the other? The Shem MiShmuel explains that three areas define all of human activity: thought, speech, and action. How are these three areas of human endeavor enhanced by the laws of the nazir?

The nazir may not cut the hair "on his head." The head is the seat of the brain and intellect. The hair, which covers the cranium and thus surrounds the brain, is, at least symbolically, an outgrowth and development of the perspicacity which lies within. The hair, when cut, represents a boundary, a limit. By abstaining from cutting his hair, the nazir manifests a presence that permits his intellect to burst forth beyond its usual parameters.

When one abstains from wine, he has greater control over the power of speech. Indeed, Chazal teach us, *Nichnas yayin yatzah sod*, "When wine goes in, secrets come out." During the period of nezirus, the nazir learns self-control; he learns to restrain his speech by abstaining from wine. Last, death, the cessation of life, represents the failure and demise of the physical world. By avoiding contact with a corpse, one consecrates the physical, active components of man. Distancing oneself from death ennobles life and its potential.

The Shem MiShmuel goes on to draw a parallel between the three areas from which the nazir must abstain, and the three korbanos, sacrifices, that he offers at the end of his period of

nezirus. This is part of his reentry into society, marking an end to his restrictive period. For a person to have undergone such a sanctified period of abstinence and not take some portion of it with him would be a waste. He has achieved an exalted status with which he must now continue life. He accomplishes this through the three sacrifices which he offers. He brings a Korban Olah, Elevation /Burnt offering, a Korban Chatas, Sin offering; a Korban Shelamim, Peace offering.

The Olah is a korban brought to atone for inappropriate thoughts. It reflects the nazir's intellect. The Chatas is an offering brought for sinful activities. The Shelamim is a sacrifice that is brought for the purpose of promoting peace between people, because it brings harmony between the owner and the Kohanim who share in this korban. It represents the positive relationship between two generally opposing forces. Likewise, speech is the product of a conjunction between the powers of the intellect and the body. The lips produce what the brain wills. Hence, the Korban Shelamim corresponds with the speech aspect of the nazir's ritual.

The nazir had taken great strides to ensure his spiritual ennoblement. The korbanos aim to provide a tangible and spiritual reminder of his ascension, so that once he has completed his period of nezirus, he will continue in his spiritual ascension with the appropriate resolve necessary for this drive upward and forward.

As an individual who has invoked upon himself a level of kedushah, holiness, akin to that of a Kohen Gadol, High Priest, the nazir must realize that responsibility accompanies the position. The greatest responsibility is that he must maintain what he has achieved. All too often, we obtain a spiritual achievement only to allow it to slip through our fingers because we lack the fortitude and resolution to hold on in order to keep fighting for it.

As a caveat to better understand the nazir's lofty spiritual perch, we cite the Avnei Nezer who explains why the nazir's level of kedushah, in a sense, is even greater than of a Kohen Hedyot, common Kohen, who may defile himself to his closest relatives. The nazir, as mentioned previously, may not even do that. Why?

He explains that a Kohen receives his holiness, his exalted position, from his ancestors. His father was a Kohen; therefore, he is also a Kohen. Since he draws his spirituality from his family relationships, he becomes closely related to his family. When family members die, the laws that usually prohibit a Kohen from defiling himself to the dead are suspended. One is permitted to contaminate himself to close relatives, since they are the source of his holiness. The father symbolizes the concept of "close relatives." The nazir, however, acquires his holiness through his personal initiative, which is sanctioned by the Almighty. As such, his holiness has no relationship with close family at all. He may not defile himself to close relatives, because they are no different to him in this respect than common Jews.

The Kohen Gadol is different because his position is by appointment, based solely upon his personal qualifications as a spiritually refined and holy kohen. Without his self-developed

eminence, he would have remained a Kohen Hedyot. Once again, his position is not a consequence of his family connections, but is self-merited. As in all things, however, one must work at what he has achieved, in order to be able to retain the moments of greatness that have impacted his life.

To his father or to his mother, to his brother or to his sister - he shall not contaminate himself to death upon their death. (6:7)

The nazir has accepted upon himself to be completely devoted to the Almighty. Nothing may interrupt this devotion - not even the passing of his closest relatives. Chazal derive from this pasuk that a nazir may contaminate himself to a meis mitzvah, a corpse who has no one to bury him. This applies, likewise, to a Kohen Gadol. If a Jewish body is laying in degradation with no one to arrange its burial, then the nearest Jew, regardless of his spiritual devotion and hallowed position, must address the needs of this corpse. Veritably, the corpse does not feel the bizayon, humiliation; nonetheless, it is there, and we, as Jews, must see to it that it is immediately handled appropriately. How much more so we should be concerned with the needs and feelings of the living! When we see that the Torah insists upon sparing embarrassment for a corpse, it should be a lesson for us in how to interact with a living person, making sure to go out of our way to spare him any humiliation.

With this idea in mind, Horav Aizik Ausband, Shlita, explains an earlier law regarding the sotah, wayward wife. The Torah writes, "But if the woman had not become defiled, and she is pure, then she shall be proven innocent and she shall bear seed (Bamidbar 5:28)." Chazal tell us that this woman, who had been under suspicion from her husband and had agreed to drink the bitter waters-- which would have killed her had she been guilty-- will now bear children successfully. If she had previously suffered difficult labor, she will now give birth more easily; if her babies were dark skinned, they will now be fair. Hashem will compensate her for the ordeal which she underwent. We wonder why she is entitled to receive a reward. Against the advice of her husband, this woman had secluded herself with another man to the point that there was considerable reason to believe that she had acted immorally. She clearly acted inappropriately. Just because it has been confirmed that she did not participate in an immoral act, she certainly did nothing to earn a reward. She acted in a manner unbecoming to a Jewish wife and mother.

We understand from here that the humiliation one sustains - regardless of its source- serves as an incredible therapeutic and atoning force. This woman went through overwhelming embarrassment in order to prove her innocence. Hashem rewards a person for his humiliation, because He understands the mental anguish that is caused by disgrace. I am not sure if this will calm anyone during a period in which he is experiencing humiliation, but the mere fact that it is a

form of yisurim, troubles, that has a silver-lining should in itself elicit a positive response. We have only to look around with a perceptive eye at individuals who for various reasons have been subject to painful humiliation, noting the subsequent rewards they have seen - be it in tremendous nachas, satisfaction, from their children, or in other areas of life - to accept the verity of this fact.

What may be included in the category of personal disgrace is a situation in which one experiences a challenging ordeal and does not respond to aggression. Even though the person did not sustain embarrassment, the mere fact that he did not retaliate when it was the "normal" thing to do, is in itself worthy of merit. The following story is a classic, but, at times, even classics are forgotten. Let this serve as a reminder.

Over ninety years ago in the small town of Shavil, Lithuania, a woman was walking home and noticed that her neighbor had hung out two large sheets to dry. This was the norm for the day, but this lady was having a bad day. The sheets were flapping in the wind, and she would have to go a few feet out of her way to reach her apartment. This was unacceptable, especially in her current foul mood. In a burst of anger, she tore them off the clothesline and threw them onto the muddy ground. She did all of this under the watchful and shocked eye of the laundry's owner. Instead of reacting to this outrageous act, she quietly picked up her muddy sheets, washed them again and hung them up to dry.

A few days later, the son of the lady who had tossed the laundry suddenly became seriously ill. A devout woman, she understood that nothing in this world just happens, there had to be a reason. She went to a tzaddik, righteous man known as the Leshem, Horav Shlomo, zl, known for his classic work, Leshem Shevo V'achlama, and cried hysterically, begging for a blessing for her son. "I have done nothing wrong. Why would my son become so ill?" she cried.

The Leshem calmed her down, but said, "You must think. Nothing happens in a vacuum. You must have done something to warrant this Heavenly response." She then remembered the two sheets flapping in the wind and her irresponsible reaction. "Do you know whose sheets they were?" he asked. "Yes," she replied. "Then you must go and ask forgiveness before Hashem can forgive you," the Rav said.

The lady immediately went to the home of the woman whose sheets she had soiled and, when the husband answered the door, she asked to see his wife. "I must speak to your wife immediately," she said. "I must apologize to her for something terrible I did to her."

The husband said, "First of all, my wife is not in. I cannot believe, however, that you did anything to offend her, because she did not mention anything to me about it."

This was not enough to dissuade the woman, who burst into tears as she related to him what she had done. The husband once again told the woman, "You must have the

wrong house. My wife never said a word to me about any sheets. You have no reason to apologize."

The woman was confused and returned to the rav to relate her dialogue with the husband. "I know that family quite well. That woman is very righteous. She wanted to preserve your dignity and not tell anyone what you did - not even her husband. She has had numerous miscarriages. I gave her a brachah, blessing, that Hashem should grant her a child that will illuminate the hearts and minds of the Jewish People."

A short while later, the rav's blessing was fulfilled when the woman gave birth to a little boy. She named him Yosef Shalom. Yes, the venerable gadol hador, pre-eminent Torah leader of our generation, Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Shlita, was the product of that blessing - a blessing warranted because his mother preserved the dignity of a woman who had brought her grief. Humiliation, even when one might conjure up a reason to justify it, is still pain, and emotional pain hurts deeper than physical pain.

And he shall atone for him for having sinned against the soul. (6:11)

By becoming a nazir, the individual accepts upon himself three restrictions: he is forbidden from partaking of wine or grape products; he may not contaminate himself by contact with a corpse; and he may not cut his hair. At the completion of his nezirus term, he brings three sacrifices: a Korban Olah, Elevation/Burnt offering; a Korban Chatas, Sin offering; and a Korban Shlemim, Peace offering. In the Talmud Bava Kamma 91b, Chazal wonder why a nazir who has just completed a period of holy spiritual devotion should be relegated to bring a Sin offering? What did he do that was sinful? They answer that since he deprived himself of wine, he is considered to have sinned against his soul. This statement causes Tosfos to comment that taking a vow of nezirus is not something one should take upon himself. It is a vow that one should not take lightly. Nonetheless, the Talmud does stipulate that a person who sees a sotah, wayward wife, during her degradation, should take a nazirite vow. This is because wine in excess can cause a person to act immorally, as the sotah has done. In this case, the preventative barrier against sin outweighs the more minor infraction of depriving oneself of wine. Rabbeinu Tam compares this to an individual who fasts in response to a troubling dream. By doing this form of penance, he hopes to counter the dream's unfortunate foreboding. This fasting may even take place on Shabbos for a dream that occurred on Friday night. He must, however, fast an additional day because of the sin of fasting on Shabbos, which deprives him of oneg, enjoyment, on Shabbos.

In conclusion, certain behaviors are necessary, albeit, "sinful." Therefore, even though the behavior was necessary and commendable, since it involved a behavior that was blameworthy, the former nazir must offer a Sin-offering as a form of atonement. In Rabbi Sholom Smith's anthology of the Rosh Yeshivah's shmuessen, ethical discourse, he cites

Horav Avrohom Pam, zl, who derives an insightful lesson from this. The Torah has placed restrictions on a Jew, and Chazal have supplemented these restrictions with constraints of their own. A Jew is clearly allowed to prohibit certain foods or behaviors to himself by making a vow. Nonetheless, whatever impositions a person makes upon himself, they must be within the parameters set by the Torah and Chazal. To impose prohibitions that are counter to one's Biblical and Rabbinic obligations makes no sense. How can one supplement if he has not yet fulfilled that which is already required of him?

The Maggid, zl, m'Dubno explains this with an analogy. Two poor Jews lived in a town. They were friends, and both had daughters of marriageable age. This is where the similarity ceased. It was in their vocation that they differed sharply. One was a thief, while the other was a woodchopper. When it was time for the woodchopper to marry off his daughter, he did so respectably. The thief, who knew how poor his woodchopper friend was, wondered how he could afford such a wedding. The woodchopper explained, "When my daughter was born, I made a small box and put a lock on it. Every week, I would take one or two coins and place them in the box. True, there were many times, during these past years that I would have wanted to "raid the box," but it was locked. During the course of years, I had saved a significant amount of money, enough to marry off my daughter. Why do you not do the same?"

The thief responded, "Are you a fool? Do you think that a simple lock will prevent me from gaining access to the money? Did you forget what my profession is? A flimsy lock will not prevent me from reaching the money!"

The Maggid concludes by saying that while the Torah does allow a person to make a vow as a way of obtaining greater spirituality, this is only effective for the individual who honors the original "locks" of the Torah. For one who has a difficult time keeping up with the prohibitions imposed by the Torah and Chazal, however, what value is there in extra mitzvos, more prohibitions? "Locks" mean nothing to him anyway. Is not what the Torah has imposed upon him sufficient?

Everybody wants to establish a name for himself as a pious and righteous man of integrity, upright with a balanced moral character. If one follows the Torah in accordance with the interpretation of Chazal and the Shulchan Aruch, he will succeed in becoming this unique specimen which is referred to as a "normal Jew." Indeed, that is how one of the Torah luminaries of the previous generation described the Chafetz Chaim: A normal Jew! This was because he did not demonstrate any unusual display of piety or strictness in mitzvah performance. He did what the Shulchan Aruch detailed a Jew should do, and he did not call attention to himself. He was just a normal Jew. He lived with joy, at peace, without intensity - just as a normal Jew should live.

Hashem wants us to enjoy this world. We should neither get carried away with frivolity, nor should we abstain from deriving any pleasure in life. Live normally; follow the Torah; enjoy life when it is proper; be sad when sadness is appropriate. In short: be normal!

Take a census of the Bnei Gershon, as well. (4:22)

The word *naso*, which is usually defined as "raise up" or "elevate" is translated here at "count." Why is *naso* used when *pakod* or *sefor*, both words meaning to count, could have been used? Horav Baruch M. Ezrachi, Shlita, asserts that, indeed, here the word *naso* has a dual connotation. They were counted, but they were also elevated. He first draws a distinction between one who elevates himself to serve Hashem, as we find regarding Yehoshafat HaMelech, "His heart was elevated in the ways of Hashem" (Divrei Hayamim 2, 17:6) and one who is just plain arrogant. Quite possibly, the one who is smitten with arrogance may even be involved in a lofty spiritual endeavor, but it is more about him than about the endeavor. The endeavor is something external to him. He is the important factor, and the endeavor itself is secondary. Thus, one can toil in the field of spirituality and yet remain nothing more than a haughty person. He does not connect with what he is doing. *Vayigba libo*, "His heart was elevated," however, means that his very essence, his heart, his total being, grew together with his endeavor in "the ways of Hashem."

We have established that true distinction is accorded to one whose actions represent his essence, and an endeavor which carries out the will of Hashem is a true elevation of one's spirit. Now, let us attempt to give meaning to the words *gam heim* (Bnei Gershon were counted) "as well." The words "as well" imply that this is a novel idea, almost as if we might have assumed that Bnei Gershon had not been counted. Why? Rav Ezrachi explains that Bnei Kehas, who carried the Aron Hakodesh, were counted first. Their function demanded that they be given precedence. Thus, although Gershon was the Levi's firstborn, the sons of Kehas were counted first. They carried the Aron. The question that glares at us is: Why were Bnei Gershon not selected to carry the Aron? After all, the firstborn does have some intrinsic rights.

The Kli Yakar explains that had Bnei Gershon been selected to carry the Aron, it would have detracted from the distinction of this endeavor. People would assume that the reason Bnei Gershon were counted first was that Gershon was the *b'chor* - not because he carried the Aron. Therefore, the role of carrying the Aron was assigned to Bnei Kehas. Because they carried the Aron, they were counted first. In this manner, the eminence of the "carriers of the Aron" was duly noted.

We wonder if this is the proper way. Is it appropriate to arrogate the function of carrying the Aron from the ones who, by virtue of their sequence in birth, should have been accorded this privilege, just to prove a point - that carrying the Aron was a holy and privileged endeavor, worthy of distinction? Rav Ezrachi derives from here a powerful lesson. For Bnei Gershon to be counted second, so that Bnei Kehas who carried the Aron could precede them, is in itself a kavod, honor, for Bnei Gershon. They were being distinguished by being counted second, since being second means that they were giving honor to the Aron. In other words, Bnei Gershon did not lose distinction by being counted second. In fact, they benefited from this position. Their status was raised as a result of what they had relinquished! This act of abdication elevated them and made them a nesui rosh.

This is the meaning of naso, elevate/count, Bnei Gershon. This elevation came as a result of their being counted second, thereby demonstrating that they were giving honor to the Aron Hakodesh. Ironically, being the background was what brought them to the foreground.

A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

Ibn Ezra offers an alternative interpretation for the word yafl'i: "who shall do something astounding." One who takes a vow to abstain from physical pleasure that society finds desirable is doing something that is unique. His actions evoke amazement. This endeavor is worthy of pel'e, wonderment. The Rambam writes that one who makes a Nazirite vow for the sole purpose of sanctifying himself for the sake of Hashem, so that he can serve Him better, is truly deserving of the accolade, "the crown of G-d is upon his head" (Ibid 6:6).

The Baal HaTurin asserts that the Nazir is prohibited from coming in contact with a corpse because people should not think that one upon whose head the Shechinah rests is a doreish el ha'meisim, one who seeks out the dead. Horav Yosef S. Elyashiv, Shlita, explains this in the following manner. A Navi, prophet, or any spiritual leader is permitted to come in contact with a corpse despite his lofty spiritual plane. Everybody is acutely aware of the Navi's spiritual preeminence, his lofty mission, his pure intentions and his Divinely inspired endeavors. No one would think for a moment that he is an individual who is a chameleon, who seeks out the dead and the powers of ritual contamination. Therefore, he may come in contact with a corpse. People will think nothing of it.

The Nazir, however, is an average person who has decided to create a change in his life. He seeks to ascend the ladder of spirituality, to abstain from the physical pleasures which enslave the average person. He seeks to purify himself from the filth that prevails in this world. In other words, he wants to be different. This is cause for amazement. It is a pel'e, wonderment, for

someone to seek to rise above his peers to choose a life of total commitment. People begin to talk. No one is prepared to accept the truth: that he is making a change for the better. They will say that he must be surely seeking out the dead, acting in a "strange" manner because he is divining. Therefore, to circumvent any unnecessary foolish envy, the Torah prohibits him from coming in contact with a corpse. This way, people will have to face the truth: this Nazir is for real. He has broken out of the mold of complacency. He seeks spiritual growth. This awareness might even spur others to follow suit.

May Hashem bless you and safeguard you... and establish peace for you. (6:24,26)

The Midrash Tanchuma interprets yevarechecha, "May (Hashem) bless you," to mean, "may Hashem grant you wealth." V'yishmeracha, "and (Hashem) should safeguard you," is interpreted as, you should perform mitzvos. Last, we entreat Hashem to establish peace among us. This is a reference to peace with our enemies as well as peace within our own camp. We wonder why the Torah chose a sequence in which a physical blessing for wealth and prosperity precedes a spiritual blessing for being safeguarded through mitzvah performance. One would think that the spiritual blessing is of primary significance and should, therefore, precede the physical blessing of material wealth.

Horav Simchah Hakohen Shepps, zl, explains that we must first understand the underlying foundation of the blessing of material wealth. Simply, it means more and more of everything. Veritably, this is not the meaning of true wealth, for if one is not satisfied with what he has, then winning the mega millions lottery will not fulfill his needs. Furthermore, even if someone has an enormous amount of wealth, he will not be happy unless he has more than everybody else. Therefore, we must say that the blessing of wealth is a reference to the solitude and satisfaction, the sense of fulfillment and contentment, that one sustains when he realizes that he has no financial worries.

Chazal teach us in Pirkei Avos 4:1, "Who is a rich man? He who is happy with his portion." Only one who is happy and satisfied with what he has can be considered a wealthy man. Otherwise, whatever he has is not enough. One who does not have enough is not wealthy. Indeed, as Rav Shepps adds, the yesod ha'chaim, principle of life, is that one should feel that he never has enough yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, but that he has more than enough material wealth. Regrettably, many of us settle for the opposite.

We now understand the sequence of the blessings. First, one should be blessed with enough wealth. He should feel that Hashem has blessed him with sufficient wealth. He is satisfied and content. His mind is at rest. Then, he can maintain a positive attitude towards mitzvah performance. One whose mind is at ease can absorb himself in mitzvos. Only then can he be at peace, for, if he does not merit the blessing of contentment with regard to his

monetary needs, then his mitzvah performance will be lacking. His attitude will be deficient, and his mitzvah observance will suffer. One whose gashmius, physical/material needs seems lacking - and, consequently his ruchniyos, spirituality, is also substandard - cannot truly be at peace. Thus, the sequence that the Torah has selected is not only practical, but it is critical.

On the second day, Nesanel ben Tzuar offered, the leader of Yissachar. (7:18)

The Torah clearly does not try to save words in detailing the korbanos offered by each of the Nesiim. After recording the individual offering, the Torah gives a sum of all twelve offerings. Why does the Torah, which is usually brief and concise, make a point of prolongating its account of the korbanos haNesiim? The Alter, zl, m'Kelm, explains that the Torah's intention is to teach us how to relate to the individual when he is incorporated into the general public. For instance, when the community at large contributes towards a specific charity or organizational endeavor, one would suggest that the entire community is viewed as a single unit. In such a situation, the individual is integrated into the whole and is not accorded singular recognition. The parshas haNesiim teaches us otherwise. We derive herein that in Heaven Above the attitude towards a group is that each individual member plays a leading role, while maintaining his own individuality to the point that Hashem reacts to each individual as if he were the only one involved. Hashem's love for the individual Jew is not diminished as a result of his involvement in a group in which others are also performing the same mitzvah as he is.

Therefore, in the same measure that Hashem was happy with the korban of Nachshon ben Aminadav, He was happy with the korban of Nesanel ben Tzuar and all of the other Nesiim. This is why the Torah repeats the korban of each Nasi in detail.

Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, explains that Hashem's love for us is different than human love. A human being who has many children is compelled to divide his love among all of his children. Certainly, each individual child does not receive the same singular attention as an only child would receive. Hashem's love is without limitation. Thus, there is no variance if one acts alone or as part of a large group. He always receives individual attention.

On the second day, Nesanel ben Tzuar offered, the leader of Yissachar. He brought his offering. (7:18,19)

The pasuk seems redundant. It mentions Nesanel's "offering" twice. Why? It does not do this concerning any of the other Nesiim. The Kesav Sofer explains that it was Nesanel who advised the other Nesiim to offer korbanos in honor of the dedication of the Mizbayach. Chazal teach us that one who brings merit for the masses by motivating others to perform mitzvos has the z'chus, merit, of their mitzvos counted for him. Thus, he has a portion in each and every mitzvah that they perform as a result of his impetus. Nesanel ben Tzuar had a chelek, share, in every korban offered by the Nesiim, since he was the one who inspired their actions. Therefore, his "offering" is mentioned twice, referring both to his personal offering and to the interest he had in all the other korbanos.

The Chovas HaLevavos writes that even if one were to achieve the zenith of perfection in correcting his neshamah, soul, even if he is on the spiritual plane of a Navi, prophet - regardless of his spiritual accomplishments - his merits do not compare to those of someone who is mezakeh es harabim, reaches out to the masses and inspires them to return to serve Hashem. For the latter's z'chusim, merits, multiply each day through the mitzvos that his students' perform. He cites a simple analogy. Two businessmen came to the market to sell their wares. One businessman had a single item for sale, which was worth ten gold coins. The other businessman had a large amount of merchandise, valued at five thousand gold coins. Both men sold their merchandise. The one who had not much to sell did very well, earning ten times the value of his original merchandise. The second merchant did not fare as well, earning only the usual markup, but he sold everything. When the totals were added up, the first businessman earned a total of one hundred gold coins, while the second businessman, whose markup was not as great, walked away with only seventy five hundred coins. This indicates that the greater one's principle, the more his profit will extend. He does not need the same markup or profit margin as the individual whose principle is more limited.

Likewise, in the spiritual dimension, the one who focuses only on himself will invariably reap impressive benefits for himself, but they will pale by comparison to the benefits that one who has shared himself with others will accrue. The Zohar Hakadosh in Parashas Terumah extols the merit of those who make it their business to persuade and encourage assimilated Jews to return to the beliefs of their ancestors. He writes that one who does this will merit to see his son's sons studying Torah. In closing, he writes that if people could only fathom the incredible reward in store for one who brings back another Jew, they would not stop pursuing their alienated brethren to help them return to a life of observance.

The Chafetz Chaim, zl, wrote a public declaration to all rabbanim to establish yeshivos in their communities, regardless of size, so that Torah would be available to everyone. In the event a suitable rebbe is not to be found, then it becomes the rav's responsibility to teach and nurture these students. He cited the Tanna D'vei Eliyahu who

placed the onus of guilt for the 70,000 deaths that occurred in Givaas Binyam during the pilegsh b'Givaah incident on the Sanhedrin of that day. Had they taken a more aggressive stand with regard to teaching Torah to the masses, this tragedy would not have occurred. Had these people studied Torah and ethics, the tragedy that engulfed them would never have taken place.

Horav Yehudah Tzedakah, zl, cites Chazal in the Talmud Bava Metzia 85, who state that one who teaches Torah to his friend's son will merit a seat in the Heavenly Academy. Is this the only mitzvah one may perform that grants him access to Olam Habah, the World to Come? Rav Tzedakah explains that one who is himself studying Torah and is able to achieve lofty heights, might think that by taking time off to study with others, with students who are weaker than he is, he loses out. Chazal assure him that whatever he loses in This World, will be reimbursed to him in Olam Habah.

Furthermore, he explains Chazal's comparison of matzdikei harabim, those who reach out and teach the masses, to the stars of the sky. People think that melamdei tinokos, teachers of young children, are inconsequential. Their vocation is an insignificant one; their status in the community is regrettably commensurate with the small-mindedness of its members. Hashem does not view them in the same perspective. Indeed, He values and appreciates their work, holding it very dear to Him. They are, thus, compared to the stars of the sky, who - due to their great distance - seem small and insignificant. This is hardly true, since every star is a world of its own - amazing in size and power.

A young man who taught a daily shiur in Ramat Gan to a group of lay people once approached the Chazon Ish on a day that the weather was very inclement. It was dreary, cold and pouring torrential rain. Did he have to go teach the class, or would the extenuating circumstances permit him otherwise? The Chazon Ish asked, "How many men attend the shiur?" "Usually ten men attend," replied the young man. "How many do you think will appear today?" The Chazon Ish asked. "One man will certainly come, since he lives next to the shul where I teach," the young man said. "Then you must go," declared the Chazon Ish. Limud ha'Torah is like no other mitzvah. You cannot compare a person who learned Torah one day to a person who did not learn that day. They are two different people. Therefore, you must go and teach your shiur, even for one person!"

The roshei yeshivah of Yeshivas Novordhok would send students around to the small villages seeking young potential students for their yeshivah. This was their recruitment program. One of the bachurim, yeshivah students, returned one day with a young orphan named Yaakov Yisrael, whom he picked up in a small town. He began to teach him Torah, and, after a while, this young boy began to demonstrate his uncanny brilliance. This happenstance, coupled with an unparalleled diligence borne of a thirst and love for Torah, produced Horav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, zl, the Steipler Rav. All of this

occurred because a yeshivah bachur went out of his way to reach out and share Torah with a young orphan.

Last, I present an addendum to a story which found its way into these pages a short while ago about Horav Shlomo Kluger, zl, who became the illustrious Torah giant that he was as a result of the efforts of the Maggid, zl, m'Dubno. It is related that when the Maggid left this world and ascended to his rightful place in the World of Truth, he was shown the fifty Seforim, volumes of Torah exegesis, that "he" had authored. "But, I never wrote these seforim. They are not mine," he protested.

The Heavenly response was, "Veritably, these seforim were authored by Horav Shlomo Kluger, but since you raised him and gave him the opportunity to study Torah, you were the one that catalyzed his spiritual success. Therefore, it is all considered as if you have written them."

And he shall provide him atonement for having sinned regarding the person. (6:11)

Rashi cites two opinions of Chazal to explain why the nazir is called a sinner. First, he should have taken greater precautions to avoid becoming tamei, ritually contaminated. Second, he deprived himself of the pleasure of drinking wine. The Kli Yakir supplements the second reason, explaining that a Jew should serve the Almighty amidst joy. Had the nazir truly been happy with his choice to become a nazir, he would have been more careful with regard to contact with tumah. His yetzer hora, evil-inclination, found an "in," an opportunity to bring him down, when it noticed that his whole heart was not into the nezirus.

The rationale behind the failing of tzieir atzmo min ha'yayin, "he deprived himself the pleasure of wine," is that a Jew should realize his good fortune in being able to serve Hashem. We err when we think that we are doing something for Hashem when we perform a mitzvah. On the contrary, it is a privilege to perform a mitzvah, an awesome opportunity to get closer to Hashem. Chazal tell us that Moshe Rabbeinu received great reward for taking Yosef HaTzaddik's bones out of Egypt. They cite the pasuk in Mishlei 10:8, Chacham lev yikach mitzvos, "The wise of heart takes mitzvos," as a reference to Moshe. Why is Moshe called a chacham, wise man? Rather, he should be called a tzaddik, righteous person. The Avnei Nezer explains that two mitzvos were presented before the Jewish people: Bizas Mitzrayim, collecting the spoils of Egypt; and gathering Yosef's bones. Klal Yisrael occupied themselves with the mitzvah of collecting Egyptian spoils, while Moshe saw to Yosef's bones. Does that mean he was wise? The difference is that bizas Mitzrayim had a negia, personal benefit, integral to the mitzvah, while taking Yosef's

bones was "pure" mitzvah. Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, explains that a wise man understands that when he performs a mitzvah, he is not giving Hashem anything; rather, he is taking for himself a great spiritual benefit.

Torah protects a person when he views it from the proper perspective. If the study of Torah is nothing more than an intellectual pursuit, it will not have the same effect on the individual as when he focuses on the sweetness of Torah. Torah transforms the one who studies it if the lomaid, student, senses its sweetness and spiritual flavor. One who studies Torah like the nazir who "deprives himself of wine," who thinks that by learning Torah he is relinquishing fun and other frivolities, might develop intellectually, but he will remain spiritually deprived and stagnant. At the first sign of a challenge, he will quickly abdicate his commitment to Torah study.

Horav Avraham Schorr, Shlita, posits that this is the reason that a distinct minority of today's youth are at risk for becoming totally alienated from a Torah way of life. The wonderful education that they have received focused on scholastic achievement, on covering more ground, on a more profound level of understanding, but not on the love one should manifest for the Torah and the joy inherent in learning Hashem's Torah. The excitement, the sweetness, the passion and love are simply not there, because their teachers were not able to transmit these feelings. We are too busy creating lomdim, scholars, and not focusing on the ahavas Torah, love for Torah, that should be the crowning point of their learning. Torah learned with love creates a bond between the lomaid and the Torah.

When the founders of the cheder for young children in Bnei Brak were ready to open their school, they approached the Brisker Rav, zl, for his blessing. They showed the Rav their superior curriculum, indicating the amount of time that was to be devoted to each subject. The Rav listened and then replied, "If I did not know for certain that you are fine upstanding bnei Torah, I would eject you from my home. You sound like maskilim, heretics, whose only concern is mastery of the subject matter. What about inculcating our children with ahavas Torah, middos tovos, character refinement, and raising their level of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven? The problem today is that children do not sense the mesikus, sweetness, of Torah." Torah must be taught and studied with joy, not as a deprivation from the "good life." Our heritage, the Torah, has been transmitted throughout the generations by individuals who have studied it in this manner, infusing themselves with its sweetness, inculcating themselves with its qualities and developing a profound appreciation of its value. I take the liberty of citing two inspirational episodes from Rabbi Yechiel Spero's, *Touched by a Story*; one about a Torah leader and one about a "common" Jew, that convey this appreciation of Torah.

Horav Chaim Zaitchick, zl, Novardoker Rosh Hayeshivah, was exiled to a Soviet labor camp in Siberia for the "grave" sin of learning and teaching Torah. We do not need a

description of life in Siberia. Food was at a bare minimum, and work was back breaking and brutal. Even the water they drank was brought from a spring located three kilometers from camp. Bringing the water was a difficult and thankless job. The pails were heavy, and the road was treacherous. One day, Rav Chaim asked to be the water carrier, because he had heard that there was a village near the spring where there lived another Jew.

He made his way along the difficult path, carrying the heavy pails until he came to a small ramshackle hut at the edge of the village. His heart began to pound when he saw the mezuzah on the door. He knocked softly, and a poor woman opened the door. The home was sparse and obviously poverty stricken. Yet, the woman gave Rav Chaim a small slice of bread, saying, "I am sorry, but this is all I can spare."

"I am not looking for food," replied Rav Chaim. "I am looking for a sefer, volume of Torah literature, anything - even one page, so that I can learn. I am starving for Torah - not for food."

The woman went back inside and called her husband, who responded, "I have only one sefer which I am not going to part with. I am sorry that I cannot help you."

"Please, I beg of you," Rav Chaim pleaded. "I will take anything, but I must learn." The sincerity of Rav Chaim's pleas moved the man, and he offered, "I have a volume of the Talmud of Nedarim/Nazir which I will split with you."

With tears and trembling hands, Rav Chaim tore the Talmud in half and took Meseches Nedarim for himself. He returned to his quarters, filled with joy at having obtained an entire Mesechta to quench his thirst for Torah.

The second story took place in Eretz Yisrael, shortly after the European Holocaust, as a young teenager came to the Ponovez Yeshivah in search of the Rosh Hayeshivah, Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl, the Ponevezer Rav. When he located the Rav, the boy introduced himself as a survivor of Auschwitz, the dreaded Nazi death camp.

"Do you have any family?" the Rav asked. Silence was the answer. Obviously, this boy was left alone in the world to fend for himself and see to his future.

"Where did you learn before the war?" the Rav asked. The response was "a Hungarian yeshivah - four and a half years ago." "Do you remember which Mesechta you learned at the time?" The boy closed his eyes and thought. He momentarily returned to those idyllic days when studying Torah was a way of life. He saw his friends in the bais ha'medrash poring over the folios of Talmud and the commentaries. A smile emerged on his face. "Yes, I remember that we were studying Mesechta Chullin shortly before we were sent to Auschwitz," he replied.

"Can you remember anything from the last sugya, topic, that you learned?" Once again, the young boy went back in time to see if he had retained anything from his yeshivah days. He was lost in thought for a few moments, and then his eyes lit up as he exclaimed, "Yes! I remember a machlokes, dispute, between Rashi and Tosfos on Daf mem cheis, page 48." He related the machlokes as if it were a testament to his determination to retain that spark of Torah which had been ignited before the war.

As the young boy finished speaking, the Rav embraced him, and, with tears in his eyes, kissed him lovingly, repeating his name over and over again. He then took the boy by the hand and ran with him from the Ponovez bais ha'medrash. Through the streets of Bnei Brak, they ran to the home of the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, the Chazon Ish, zl. As they entered his home, the Ponevezer Rav shouted, "Rebbe, Netzach Yisrael lo yeshaker! Klal Yisrael and the Torah will survive forever! This boy has lost everything to Hitler; he has no mother, no father, no brothers and sisters; everybody is gone. One thing survived, the machlokes Rashi and Tosfos that he learned four and a half years ago in the yeshivah. He held onto the Rashi and Tosfos throughout the terror of Auschwitz." And then all three began to weep: the Rav, the gadol hador and the young boy who was Klal Yisrael's future.

When Torah is learned in the right manner, with areivus, sweetness, it can endure and sustain us through the darkest moments of our lives. Tomorrow, when we say the Tefillah of V'haarev na, we should take the meaning of these words into consideration.

It was the day that Moshe finished erecting the Mishkan. (7:1)

Recently, someone remarked to me that it takes a greater person to find a kula, a way to be lenient in halachah, than it takes to find a chumra, a way to be stringent. I can see where someone who is always seeking the easy way out would develop such a distorted view of halachah. I think our Parshah indicates otherwise. Rashi teaches that it took Moshe Rabbeinu seven days to erect the Mishkan. He would erect it and then take it apart until it was precisely in accordance with the exact dimensions. Finally, on Rosh Chodesh Nissan it remained erect and was then dedicated. Chazal tell us that although it was Betzalel, Ohaliav and their associates who built the Mishkan, the Torah attributes it to Moshe because of his extreme dedication to making sure that everything was executed with perfection according to Hashem's instructions. Moshe did not look for the easy way out; he did not search for kulos, leniencies. He followed the letter of the law in accordance with the will of Hashem.

This has been the practice of our Torah leaders throughout the millennia: strict adherence to halachah. The Brisker Rav, zl, was in excruciating pain as a result of his final illness, shortly before his passing. Yet, he insisted on following every halachah, every minhag, custom, according to the letter of the law and in accordance with the mesorah, tradition, that had been transmitted throughout the generations. He insisted on dressing himself in accordance with the prescribed halachah, although this caused him terrible pain. One night, he could not fall asleep because of the intense pain. As morning was nearing, the pain was finally subsiding and he could have now fallen asleep, but he refused. The reason for this was that it was already daylight and he had not yet recited bircas haTorah, since he had been awake all night. He feared that he might think in divrei Torah while he slept and this was inappropriate to do without first reciting a brachah. After his son cited Rav Akiva Eiger, zl, whose opinion it was that sleeping during the day was sufficient for a bircas haTorah, he could now rely on the short nap that he had taken earlier in the day. It was only then that the Brisker Rav gave into his pain and fell asleep.

Adherence to halachah defines one's level of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. One who is knowledgeable of halachah, but is not meticulous in its observance, is deficient in his yiraas Shomayim. Consequently, he is lacking in his personal development as a talmid chacham, Torah scholar. He might be a scholar - but without the Torah.

And to the sons of Kehas he did not give; since the sacred service was upon them, they carried it on the shoulder. (7:9)

In the Talmud Sotah 35a, Chazal ask why David Hamelech was punished such that Uzzah died because of him. They cite the pasuk in Tehillim 119:54, "Your statutes were music to me in the house of pilgrimage." Hashem said to David, "Words of Torah...you recite as songs! I will cause you to err in a matter in which even schoolchildren are proficient." It is written (Ibid) "And to the sons of Kehas, he did not give; since the sacred service was upon them, they carried it on the shoulder." David Hamelech placed the Aron Hakodesh in a wagon, rather than have it carried by hand. For this, he was punished.

In an attempt to sort out the meaning of Chazal and the degree of middah k'neged middah, measure for measure, in the punishment in which Uzzah died and David was critiqued thereby for referring to Torah as music to his ears, we cite from Horav Yehonasan Eibeshitz, zl, in his Ahavas Yehonasan. He explains that Hashem instructed that the Aron be personally carried on one's shoulder as a lesson concerning the manner in which one acquires Torah as a part of himself. Torah must be studied with amal and yegia, labor and toil. One must exert himself physically and emotionally to attain Torah. When David

likened Torah to music, he indicated that it was not difficult to grasp. Thus, he erred in an area that was simple knowledge for even a schoolchild.

In his preface to the *Avi Ezri*, Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, raises a compelling question. If, in fact, David erred when he referred to Torah as music, why is this pasuk included in *Sefer Tehillim*? It is *Tehillim*; it is Torah; when one recites it, he receives reward. According to the Talmud, however, it is wrong. Rav Shach explains that *zemiros*, comparing Torah to music/song reflects two misconceptions. First, it suggests that observing Hashem's mitzvos is as easy as music. Performing mitzvos is like singing a song; there is no strain. This was David Hamelech's error. He did not attribute enough significance to mitzvah performance. He did not take into consideration that as one grows spiritually, so does his *yetzer hora*, evil-inclination, creating newer and more difficult obstacles for him to overcome.

Second, the spiritual pleasure and ultimate reward one experiences through Torah study are so great that nothing on this world can compare to it. Torah is sweet; it is rich; it is pleasant. This is the meaning of comparing Torah to a song. Hence, it was designated to have a place in *Sefer Tehillim*.

Rav Shach relates that, as a young boy, he was very poor. He was sent to yeshivah where he had no food, no drink and no clothes. He had only Torah. When the First World War broke out, the Jews of Lithuania were exiled and dispersed throughout Europe. The students of Yeshivas Slutzk where Rav Shach was a student were sent home. Rav Shach had nowhere to go. Having no idea where his parents were, he was left alone to fend for himself. Hungry, with no clothing and no home, he made the town shul his home, sleeping on the benches and living off whatever food he could beg. His wardrobe consisted of one change of clothes which he washed every Friday on the roof, waiting for them to dry. No one saw him; no one really cared. His hair grew long and coarse. This went on for a number of years until the Rosh Hayeshivah, Horav Isser Zalmen Meltzer, zl, discovered his plight and took him into his home. Rav Isser Zalmen said that to survive this war, one needed an amulet, a special merit: "This young boy would be his amulet."

Rav Shach concluded his memoirs, saying, "If I were to write down all the agony and misery that has been my lot throughout my life, I would fill volumes that would be much thicker than my *Avi Ezri*. I can honestly say that I never had a good day in my life. I never had any pleasure in this world. Nonetheless, I consider myself the most fortunate man in the world. There has never been a moment in my life that I have not been *b'simchah*, filled with joy. Why? Because I learn Torah!"

The man shall bring his wife to the Kohen. (5:15)

Rashi notes that the Torah presents the laws of sotah, whereby the man is compelled to bring his wayward wife to the Kohen, following the laws of Matnos Kehunah, gifts to the Kohen. This teaches us that one who refrains from giving the Kohen his due, will end up coming to him with his wife. To quote the words of the Midrash, "A door which is not open for charity is open for the doctor." One close student of Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl brought him five thousand dollars to be dispersed for charity. When Rav Shach queried him concerning the source of the funds, the man related the following story.

A certain talmid chacham, Torah scholar, was to undergo a surgical procedure. The surgeon's fee was five-thousand dollars. One of the friends of the talmid chacham was able to appeal to the Kupas Cholim, organization for the sick and needy, to underwrite the surgery. After the procedure, the talmid chacham gave his friend one hundred dollars to give to Rav Shach for the benefit of charity. After about an hour, he returned with another forty nine hundred dollars, explaining, "When I came home and related to my wife that I was giving one hundred dollars to charity, she felt I was wrong. In truth, I had saved five-thousand dollars. Therefore, I should contribute the entire amount of the surgery to tzedakah."

When Rav Shach heard this, he said, "Please invite this couple to my home. If this is the way they act, I would like to bless them."

*A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence
(6:2)*

Rashi explains the juxtaposition of the laws of Nazir upon the laws of sotah, the wayward wife. This juxtaposition teaches us that one who sees a sotah in her degradation should take a vow to abstain from wine, since wine can stimulate immorality. There is a far cry between the Nazir, who signifies kedushah, sanctity, at its zenith, and the sotah, who reflects spiritual degeneracy at its nadir. Yet, one who sees this degradation should accept upon himself the vow of Nezirus. Is this not an extreme reaction? Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, looks at this pragmatically. There is no absolute in regard to good or evil, no area that is strictly black or white. There is a lot of gray. Ever since the sin of Adam Ha'Rishon, our perception of good and evil has been distorted. One's perception depends on one's objective. For example, wine can be, and is frequently, used as a symbol of kedushah. It is used for Kiddush, for any joyous occasion and was used extensively in the Bais Hamikdash. On the other hand, it is also associated with evil. It causes one to forget himself and do things that he would never consider doing had he not been inebriated. It

leads to debauchery and other sinful behavior. Where do you draw the line? Is wine good or evil?

The answer depends on how much, when and for what purpose the wine is used. It can raise one's feelings of joy, so that he can thereby elevate himself spiritually. He can drink like a sot and act like one, too. Interestingly, when Yitzchak Avinu blessed his sons, both Yaakov and Eisav brought him tasty food. Yaakov included wine, while Eisav did not. Why? When Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, he added that his vineyards should be blessed. He did not share this blessing with Eisav. Why?

Yaakov was acutely aware of the spiritual benefits which he derived from wine. He sensed that when his father was about to bless him, he should bring wine, so that it would elevate his father's spirit and heighten his emotions. This would catalyze a sense of joy that would permeate his essence, bringing about greater blessing from the recesses of his neshamah, soul. Yitzchak, concomitantly blessed Yaakov with vineyards, because he understood their advantage for Yaakov. Eisav, on the other hand, had an exclusive perspective on wine: it was evil and catalyzed sinful behavior. Yitzchak knew what wine would do to his errant son. He, therefore, did not bless him with vineyards.

One who sees a sotah in her degradation, who witnesses the negative effect of wine, should wonder whether it could happen to him. There must be a hidden message if Hashem has caused him to take notice. He should be concerned that the ugly consequences of wine could take him captive, as it did the sotah.

The Nazir is obligated to respond to the message. He should sense that he has a shortcoming within his psyche that must be addressed before he falls prey to his yetzer hora, evil-inclination. The Rosh Hayeshivah cites the Sifri that distinguishes between one who eats food on Yom Kippur and the Nazir who is prohibited from eating the skins and pips of the grapes. The individual who eats food on Yom Kippur does so in a manner that causes him pain. Alternatively, the food is of such a nature that he is pained by eating it. The Nazir also has an unnatural and painful eating experience when he eats the forbidden food. In the former case, the individual is not in violation of Torah law. In contrast, the Torah informs us that such a Nazir is in violation of his own nezirus, just as if he had eaten the main part of the grape. The Nazir realizes that he has a serious problem. He has no control over himself. Therefore, he frequently and easily submits to his yetzer hora. He must distance himself from anything that is even remotely derivative of grapes. Once he indulges, however slightly, he is unable to assert himself. He is a person who will believe that darkness is light and bitter is sweet. He cannot permit the yetzer hora to have any access to him whatsoever.

A man or a woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

Chazal teach us that one who witnesses the sotah, wayward wife, during her degradation, should take upon himself the vow of a Nazir and abstain from drinking wine. The yetzer hora, evil-inclination, takes hold of a person during his weak moments - a situation that can be brought about through drinking wine. The yetzer hora does not distinguish between victims. Immorality is only one of the many pitfalls to which he leads an unsuspecting victim. What about the Nazir who falls into the clutches of the yetzer hora? Chazal tell us about Shimon HaTzaddik who met a shepherd who was so impressed with the beautiful locks of his hair that he took a Nazirite vow so that he could cut them off l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven. This is the Nazir that controlled his yetzer hora that would lead him to gaavah, arrogance. In the Talmud Sotah 10b, Chazal tell us about another Nazir, one who fell into the abyss of arrogance. In the end, he was hung by his locks. We return to our original question: What do we do when we witness a Nazir in his degradation?

Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl, suggests that we follow the proven antidote for overcoming the blandishments of one's yetzer hora - Torah study. Therefore, we should go to the bais hamedrash, take out a Gemara and learn! Yet, we find that even Torah study does not always protect us from haughtiness. David Hamelech's son, Avshalom, was certainly a talmid chacham, Torah scholar, whose Torah did not protect him from falling into the nadir of sin. If Torah is the ultimate weapon to counteract the yetzer hora, why do Chazal not simply say that one who sees a sotah in her degradation should study Torah?

We derive from here, explains the Mashgiach of Slabodka, that at times, the yetzer hora masquerades itself as a mitzvah. In these situations, the mitzvah is being fulfilled at the behest of - and being sustained by - the yetzer hora. Therefore, Chazal have instructed us that one must study Torah with fear, trepidation and sweat, implying that casual study has no place in the Torah milieu. While Torah study certainly engenders yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, this applies only if the student is serious about his learning. One who approaches Torah study for the wrong reason - for example, to derive honor from his scholarship - will only exacerbate his arrogance. He will not become a better person as a result of his learning. In this case, the yetzer hora becomes his chavrusa, study partner.

One can accept the Nazirite vow for a number of reasons. If he is doing it to overwhelm the yetzer hora within himself, he will succeed. If he seeks to elevate himself to become like a Kohen, but, in truth, in the recesses of his heart he simply wants to be superior to his peers, then the Nazirite vow will have a negative effect on him.

The yetzer hora has incredible powers. It can ensnare a person and convince him that he is performing a mitzvah when, in reality, he is descending to the depths of sin. Avshalom was great, so great that he had a strong and distinguished following; yet, despite all of his Torah scholarship, he died a sinner, banished from his home and his People. One must always make sure that his intentions are noble and that he remains focused on his goal.

A man or a woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

Rashi explains the juxtaposition of Nazir upon the incident of sotah as teaching us a lesson that one who witnesses a sotah during her degradation should become a Nazir. First, by abstaining from wine, he will be distancing himself from one of the media which catalyze a breakdown in one's defenses against immoral behavior. This advice is rendered to everyone, regardless of how removed he is from personally falling into a similar situation. This is a powerful demand. Second, it is not the sin that he sees; it is not even her miserable gut-wrenching death that he sees; it is the humiliation of her hair exposed and her clothes torn. Why is witnessing the punishment not a sufficient deterrent? Why does he have to become a Nazir? I suggest that after witnessing the painful death that the sotah suffers, one would be seriously moved.

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, derives from here that a person must protect himself by placing a barrier between himself and the opportunity for sin. Inspiration and various stimuli affect a person up to a point. When the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, takes hold of him, however, all of the stimuli become irrelevant. Inspiration becomes a thing of the past as one is engulfed by the fire and passion of the yetzer hora. The only protection is the fence that one has erected to guard himself from falling into the realm of sin. Therefore, Chazal say: Become a Nazir; abstain from wine, so that you will never fall into the clutches of the yetzer hora.

The Alter, zl, m'Kelm posits that nothing will halt a baal taavah, one who is lustful, from deferring to his desires. Even if he sees the ugly consequences of his submission to his heart's cravings, he will nonetheless act out his infatuations. He relates the famous story about the wise man whose father was a drunkard. This caused much humiliation for the distinguished son. He often attempted to convince his father not to fall prey to the bottle - to no avail.

They were once walking together when they chanced upon a man who was clearly inebriated, rolling in the sewer amid his own stench. The son turned to his father and asked, "Do you now see the horrible consequences of drink?"

Instead of a reply, the father bent over the drunk and whispered into his ear, "Tell me, my friend, where did you purchase such powerful whiskey?"

The baal taavoh is obsessed with his desires, and reason is not effective. He must erect fences around himself to protect himself from falling into the abyss of sinful desire.

So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael. (6:23)

The Midrash comments that Klal Yisrael complained to Hashem, "You instruct the Kohanim to bless us. We need nothing but Your blessing." Hashem responded, "Even though I instruct the Kohanim to bless you, I still stand over them and bless you." The statement, "We need nothing but your blessing," is enigmatic. It implies that Hashem's blessing "suffices" and we need nothing else. Is this true? Our attitude should be that we desire no other blessing but Hashem's! The Ksav Sofer explains that Hashem's blessing is unlike that of mortal man. A human being's blessing invariably focuses on areas of a material nature, regardless of whether these blessings are inherently good for the person. Some people would be better off with less material abundance. For others, honor and distinction can produce a negative result. Do we really know what is good for us? How many people supplicate the Almighty for specific blessings which, in the long term, might not be favorable?

This is what Klal Yisrael meant when they implied that Hashem's blessing was "sufficient." If the Kohanim bless us, how will they know what is good for us and what is not? We only need Your brachah, because only what You consider to be a brachah for us is truly a brachah. Otherwise, it is not a blessing. We do not need blessings from human beings, since they do not know what is truly a blessing for us.

Hashem, therefore, instructed the Kohanim to give a general blessing with no specifics, a blessing that has a number of connotations. Hashem decides what is best for us. This is what is meant by Hashem's reply that He stands over the Kohanim. He determines each person's blessing. The Kohanim say, "Hashem should watch over you" - He decides what that means. Everyone is protected in accordance to what is best for him.

The Shomer Emunim cites the Baal Shem Tov who gives the following explanation for the pasuk in Tehillim (145:19), "The will of those who fear Him He will do; and their cry He will hear, and save them." Two questions come to mind upon reading this pasuk;

First, once Hashem carries out the will of those who fear Him, what need is there to listen to their pleas again? Has He not already done what they ask? Second, should it not have been the other way around: First Hashem listens, and then He performs what they ask? The Baal Shem Tov explains that, initially Hashem listens to the pleas of all who cry out to Him - regardless if it is for a positive or a negative purpose. Even a thief who cries out for assistance may receive an affirmative response. The difference is that once the thief is caught, and he once again makes his plea, Hashem will not listen. The tzaddik, righteous Jew, who has prayed for something which, unbeknownst to him, was to his detriment can once again beseech Hashem when he realizes his error. Hashem will listen to him. He performs the will of those who fear Him and demonstrates His compassion by listening again to their pleas when they realize that they were in error.

The Chafetz Chaim suggests that when a person entreats Hashem, he should not say, "Please grant me this," since a person does not know what is inherently good for him and what is not. He should instead say, "Hashem, if this is good for me, please grant it to me - and if it is not good for me, I do not want it." A depressed man, who lived in abject poverty, once came to the Chafetz Chaim to pour out his heart to the sage. During the course of the conversation, the man revealed that for years, he had just eked out a living. It was not extravagant, but he provided for his family in a manner in which they managed from year to year, covering their basic necessities. The problem was that he was greedy, he wanted to be wealthy. He purchased a lottery ticket and prayed. He poured out his heart to Hashem, begging Him for this one big win. Hashem listened and the man won the jackpot, twenty thousand rubles. Not being much of a businessman, it did not take long before a few bad investments quickly depleted his newly-gotten wealth. He was now destitute with no means of supporting his family. What could he do?

The Chafetz Chaim looked at the man and sighed heavily, "I cannot help you," he said. "Chazal state that Hashem decrees about each person whether he will be wealthy or poor. The Chesed L'Avraham adds that He also decrees how much a person will earn each week. Now, since you were basically earning a living each week, why did you "bother" Hashem to allow you to win the lottery? Do you realize that winnings from the lottery was your livelihood for the next few years? Hashem just gave it to you earlier!"

We do not know what is best for us. Only Hashem knows. So why not "allow" Him to make the decision without our assistance? The Chafetz Chaim once asked a Jew concerning his well-being. The person answered with the typical response, "A little better would not hurt." The Chafetz Chaim immediately countered, "How do you know that? Hashem knows what is best for you. He is compassionate and merciful. Surely, He wants you to have the best - the very best - for you. If 'better' was 'best' for you - He would grant it. Apparently, it is not best for you, so do not complain."

Last, we cite a powerful thought from Horav Shimshon Pinkus, zl. He cites the pasuk in Bereishis (48:22) in which Yaakov Avinu gives Shechem to Yosef "which I took from the hand of the Emori with my sword and my bow." Targum Onkelos interprets "sword" and "bow" as prayer and supplication. This teaches us that prayer is a form of weaponry. If one shoots enough arrows, something should hit its mark. A prayer, if it is said often enough, resolutely, with fervor and passion, will have an effect. In fact, Rav Pinkus says, that every time he was adamant in prayer, Hashem answered his request. He learned the hard way, however, that persistence may not always be the correct approach. At times, Heaven has other plans.

He once had to reclaim a car in Cyprus for a friend who was heavily involved in Jewish outreach. His vehicle was absolutely a major part of his work, since he would go to places off the beaten path in search of young people to bring closer to Yiddishkeit. When Rav Shimshon arrived at the tax office, he realized that he had forgotten to bring along the necessary documents. He decided to rely on his "weaponry," and he prayed to Hashem to help him retrieve the car for his friend. As he approached the official, he took out some official papers that were in English. When the official asked him what the papers were, Rav Shimshon looked at him incredulously and asked, "What do you mean? Do you not know what these papers represent?" The official, not wanting to concede that he could not read English, was taken aback, but quickly proceeded to release the car. With the help of the Almighty, Rav Shimshon's friend received the car and was now able to continue his work.

The very first time he took the car out, he was in an accident which tragically claimed his life. Rav Shimshon concluded by saying that this episode taught him a lesson: If Heaven delays you, if, for some reason, it seems that this is not the time, do not be stubborn, do not push on. It is just not yet the time.

The Kohen shall inscribe these curses on a scroll and erase it into the bitter waters. (5:23)

Ordinarily, the Torah prohibits us from erasing Hashem's Name. In this circumstance, in order to promote marital harmony, Hashem allows His name to be erased. Interestingly, much of the discord that is manifest in a marriage originates in foolishness. The following story, which occurred with Horav Elazar Menachem M. Schach, zl, is anecdotal and certainly not the standard. Nonetheless, it demonstrates how far some people will go to propagate nonsense. Once, a young married student approached Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, regarding a marital problem. Rav Stern was a man who was not only a great talmid chacham, Torah scholar, and tzaddik, he was also known for his unique ability to reconcile discord between husband and wife. The young man complained that he had not

had a moment's peace since he had gotten married. Every night he would study practical halachah in the Mishnah Berurah. His wife, however, did not agree with this practice, claiming that this is not what she had expected when she married him. She had sought a yeshivah student who devoted himself totally to lomdus, in-depth analysis, of the Talmud and its commentaries.

The young man explained that since he spent an entire day engrossed in such study, he wanted to delve in halacha l'maaseh, practical law, at night. Unfortunately, this dispute was destroying the very foundation of their marriage.

Thinking that he had "heard it all," Rav Stern naively assumed that a simple conversation with the young woman would solve the problem. Therefore, he went to the young couple's house and endeavored to explain to the woman the significance of practical halachah. The young woman listened patiently and respectfully, but was unmoved by the Rav's words. "Rebbe, it might all be true, but this is not what I expected of him. I sought a lamdin, not a posek!" Her ideal was not in halachic arbitering; it was in in-depth analysis. Rav Stern left the home in a deep quandary. How could he help this couple?

A short time afterward, Rav Stern was speaking with Rav Shach and shared this troubling incident with the venerable sage. Rav Shach told him to send the young woman to him, asking, if possible, for Rav Stern to join them. Rav Stern immediately notified the young woman that Rav Shach wanted to see her. She was, of course, flustered and nervous, but one cannot say no to the gadol hador, preeminent leader of the generation.

They went to Rav Shach's home and were immediately ushered into his private study. Although the anteroom was filled with many people seeking an audience with the Rosh Hayeshivah, this young lady took precedence. As the two entered the study, Rav Shach dispatched his attendant to bring in refreshments, specifying that the serving plate should have two types of pastry on it. When the cake was brought in, Rav Shach directed the young woman to eat from the first piece. He then told her to eat from the second slice of cake. The young woman was a bit taken aback by this strange request, but respectfully complied.

As she finished the second piece of cake, Rav Shach asked her to tell him the difference between the two slices. As she stared back incredulously, Rav Shach explained, "I assume you know how to bake, so I want you to tell me the ingredients that comprise each piece of cake." Very timidly, she responded, "It seems to me that the piece on the left has a bit more cocoa, while the piece on the right has more sugar than its counterpart." "Very good," Rav Shach said, "Please continue. What other differences do you notice between these pieces?" The discussion continued about baking and the various techniques for making delicious pastry, with the young woman demonstrating a broad knowledge of the subject. Rav Shach finally concluded the conversation, saying to the young woman, "I

see that you have expert knowledge of baking. I suggest that you return home and direct all of your attention to cooking and baking - and leave the decisions regarding your husband's learning to him." It did not take long for the Rosh Hayeshivah's words to penetrate her mind. She covered her face as she suddenly sensed the truth behind his words. From that time onward, the couple's relationship changed drastically, as respect, peace and harmony began to reign in their home.

I am sure that Rav Shach's response to the young woman might "rattle" a few people - both men and women. When you think about it, however, he dealt with the issue in a most brilliant manner. His practical approach to their differences was the catalyst for resolving them.

Rav Stern posits that the foremost requisite for marital tranquility is treating one's wife with respect. The words and tone that exit one's mouth have a great influence in shaping his household. Indeed, when Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl, eulogized his wife, he commented, "It is customary for an individual to beg forgiveness of the deceased. However, in my circumstance it is unnecessary to do so, for I never once offended her during our life together." Incredible! What a remarkable statement to make. Sixty years of marriage, and never once did they do anything that would warrant asking forgiveness of one another. What a role model to emulate!

A couple once approached Horav Chaim Mordechai Katz, zl, and asked him to guide them through some marital "issues." Apparently, one source of tension stemmed from the husband's refusal to take out the garbage on his way to yeshivah. He claimed that as a ben Torah it did not "poss," it was beneath his dignity to perform such a degrading and menial task. Early the next morning, the Rosh Hayeshivah appeared at the couple's doorstep and asked, "Perhaps you have some garbage that needs to be thrown out. I am not a ben Torah, and it does not bother me to do such work." Actions speak louder than words.

A man's wife should be the focal point of his household. Indeed, as Rav Stern notes, Rabbi Yosi states in the Talmud Shabbos 118b, "My entire life, I never referred to my wife simply as my wife...but as my house." Rashi explains that one's wife is the essence of his house. We may add that Rabbi Yosi used the phrase "my entire life." Surely he did not spend his entire life with his wife. Perhaps he is intimating that his "life," his complete essence, began when he married his wife. In support of the above, we conclude with a remark from Horav Aryeh Levine, zl, which succinctly puts the ideal of marriage into perspective. Rav Aryeh Levine was once riding in a taxi, and the driver asked, "Rebbe, where is your home?" Rav Aryeh did not respond. It was only when the driver rephrased his question and asked, "On which street do you live?" did he give him his address. He explained, "Since my wife passed away, I no longer have a home. I may have an address, but it is not a home."

So you shall bless Bnei Yisrael. (6:23)

The heart breaks to listen to the sad stories related by the many who are not financially solvent. We are not referring to those who are too lazy to work, but to those who work long and hard to eke out a living to support their family -with little success. Some of us find it difficult to empathize. I think it is because one must experience this problem in order to be sensitive to another's financial woes. Someone who has no problem paying his bills every month, simply cannot understand the meaning of juggling bills to determine who is fortunate enough to be paid this month.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, gives a practical eitzah, bit of advice, for those whose financial straits overwhelm them: Listen to the Birkas Kohanim, apply yourself to the blessing of Yevarechecha, concentrate upon its meaning and message. The Chida, zl, writes that the Kohanim are Divinely inspired to be the individuals through whom the blessing of financial success flows forth to Klal Yisrael.

The Chida adds that the members of Shevet Levi are appropriately suited to be the individuals through whom the Divine blessing of financial stability should flow. He cites the Shach, who writes in his commentary to the Torah that when Klal Yisrael was instructed to divest the Egyptians of their gold, silver, and fine garments, Shevet Levi assembled together and decided that they should not be included. They felt that the dispensation for this activity was based on the fact that Klal Yisrael had been subject to demeaning, back-breaking labor in Egypt, so they had a right to the treasures. But Shevet Levi was not included in the decree. They, therefore, felt that they had no claim to the Egyptian fortune.

Hashem responded to this incredible strength of character by deeming Shevet Levi to be a catalyst in material blessing for the Jewish People for generations to come. We may add that to receive blessing one should be a *kli machazik brachah*, vessel/receptacle, that is predisposed to sustaining blessing. It would then make sense that we develop a similar strength of character whereby material benefits do not control our lives.

There is yet another area in which inner fortitude plays a dominant role - satisfaction. Rashi explains the concept of *v'yishmerecha*, "and guard you," as an assurance that robbers will not steal the gift that Hashem bestows upon you. Horav Elyakim Schlesinger, Shlita, explains that the term "robbers" can have another meaning. One may have an item and not enjoy it due to a deficient character trait. He is never happy, never satisfied, always complaining. Whatever he accumulates is not enough. Whatever he has is insufficient. Such a person is being robbed by his own poisoned personality. "Who is a

wealthy man? He who rejoices with his lot." One who lacks this character trait leads a miserable life. What good is all of his wealth if he does not enjoy it, if he is never satisfied?

When Hashem bestows blessing He also adds a safeguard that we will not lose it to ourselves. This is true blessing!

So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael...Let them place My Name upon Bnei Yisrael, and I shall bless them. (6:23, 27)

The Kohanim are instructed to bless Klal Yisrael at specific intervals. If one peruses the above pesukim, we find an apparent contradiction. The pasuk begins by saying that the Kohanim shall bless the people, and ends by saying, "and I shall bless them." Is Hashem blessing Klal Yisrael, or does the blessing emanate from the Kohanim? The Chasam Sofer gives the following explanation of Bircas Kohanim, its application to us, and Hashem's "involvement" in the blessing.

By its very nature, Bircas Kohanim is a brachah gashmis, physical blessing, pertaining to the wealth one accumulates in this world.

Yevarechecha Hashem: "May Hashem bless you and safeguard you." He shall bless you with material abundance and safeguard you from any evil.

Ya'er Hashem: "May Hashem illuminate His countenance for you and be gracious to you." Ordinarily, one who is successful in the field of commerce, who has achieved material success, is envied. This form of jealousy can be most damaging. We are herein blessed that we will find favor in the eyes of our friends and neighbors and that they will rejoice in our success. Yisa Hashem: "May Hashem lift His countenance to you and establish peace for you." One who is wealthy, who has achieved material success, will quite often be weighed down by various worries. One may exhibit anxiety over losing what he has amassed, and he may manifest the drive to accumulate even more. He may never be satisfied. Regrettably, without the unique blessing of peace, the individual who is wealthy has very little peace. He is driven by fear and anxiety. He is hereby blessed with satisfaction.

One would think that he has it all. He has achieved the ultimate blessing. But wait! Something is missing - something which can suddenly transform the brachah into a klalah, curse. A person must have a sheifah, ambition, a desire to grow, to achieve, to accomplish specific goals. One who has no ambition, who is complacent, who has no worries, who leads a carefree, smug life, is really not blessed. In fact, I am not sure if we can call this living! Quite possibly, one can breeze through life without realizing that he is missing its

essence. He arises in the morning, takes his time getting dressed in his finery, goes to shul and davens, followed by a nice, leisurely breakfast. He goes to work in a comfortable car, puts in his few hours and goes home to complete his uneventful and meaningless day. Is this living? One might agree that, indeed, this person has attained success. He has raised a family and imbued another generation with values. He has the wonderful nachas of seeing grandchildren, of sharing in their joy and watching them grow up. Is this really blessing? Has he taught his children to follow in his footsteps and live a vacuous, unfulfilled life? If this is so, our query surfaces again: What is the meaning of the blessing of the Kohanim?

The Chasam Sofer explains that the Torah has sort of "sandwiched" Bircas Kohanim between two pesukim. The lesson implied is that only through the fulfillment of the terms of this context does the real blessing apply. First, the blessing begins, "So shall you bless Bnei Yisrael." You, the Kohanim, the spiritual mentors and standard of the Jewish People, should bless Bnei Yisrael with this brachah. When the people see who it is that is blessing them, they will understand that this blessing is basically the precursor for the real treasure, the true blessing: the ability to serve Hashem and study His Torah. When one takes his material abundance and uses it to enhance his ability to serve Hashem, to elevate his spiritual relationship with the Almighty, then the blessing is truly a blessing - and not a curse. The difference between the blessing of wealth and the curse of wealth is how one utilizes his gift. If it furthers his spiritual development - it is a blessing. If it does not - it is not a blessing and, regrettably, he has failed the test.

The Torah closes with, "Let them place My Name upon Bnei Yisrael." If the Kohanim understand the compelling significance of infusing Klal Yisrael with the Shechinah, Divine Presence, catalyzing the name Yisrael to become synonymous with the Name of Hashem, then I (Hashem) will bless them. Klal Yisrael will be the recipients of an added blessing - the Divine blessing in conjunction with the Kohanim's blessing.

Indeed, this is what we pray for daily, V'chayei olam nota b'socheinu, "and (and He, Hashem has) implanted eternal life within us." After Hashem has granted us the blessing of life, we entreat Him, "May He open our heart through His Torah and imbue our heart with love and awe of Him." We are acutely aware that without Torah and fear of Heaven, all of our toil on this world is for naught. Furthermore, if we have no Torah, can we expect any better from our offspring? L'maan lo niga larik, "So that we do not struggle in vain or produce for futility."

Take a census of the Bnei Gershon, as well. (4:22)

Part of Bnei Gershon's responsibility was to participate in the musical accompaniment of some of the Korbanos Tzibur, communal offerings, a duty that in the Talmud Arachin 11a, Chazal characterize as labor. Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, explains the significance of "gam heim", also them, or, as well, as the Torah's way of demonstrating to us that no difference existed between the work performed by Bnei Kehas, who carried the Aron HaKodesh, and the work of Bnei Gershon, who were seemingly not involved in such a holy endeavor. Exactly what one does is not significant, it is how and why one performs Hashem's command. They were all carrying out Hashem's will.

The same idea, says Rav Moshe, applies to the area of Torah chinuch, education. There is no difference between the Rosh HaYeshiva who lectures to erudite young laymen and the rebbe who teaches young children. If they act l'shem Shomayim, for the sake of Heaven, if they view their work as carrying out Hashem's will to disseminate Torah, they are both equally praiseworthy. Perhaps if more prospective educators would keep this idea in mind, Torah chinuch would build a new image.

Any man, if his wife will go astray and commit a trespass against him. (5:12)

Rashi explains the juxtaposition of the laws of sotah, the errant wife, upon the preceding passage, which addresses the laws of Matnos Kehunah, the Priestly gifts. The connection between the two passages is that if one withholds the gifts that rightfully belong to the Kohen, he will have to confront the Kohen when he is required to bring his wife, the sotah, to him. Simply, this means that if one does not go to the Kohen out of his own free-will, he will be compelled to go out of a sense of urgency and necessity. This makes sense in regard to the husband. His obstinacy in refusing to give the Kohen his due is the catalyst for the husband to go to the Kohen against his will. What about his wife? She certainly should have a choice in the matter: whether to sin or not. It seems that because of the husband's non-action, she ends up as a sotah. Why is this?

Horav Baruch Shimon Schneerson, Shlita, Rosh HaYeshivah of Yeshivas Tchebin offers a practical response. He posits that the husband is not refusing the Kohen his due out of a sense of evil. It is not as if he steals the Kohen's gifts by refusing to give them Terumah. In fact, this man views himself as a tzaddik, a righteous man, who is acting correctly, even righteously, by not giving the Kohen the Terumah. He ascribes to Chazal's statement criticizing one who gives Terumah to an illiterate Kohen. He refuses to give the Kohen his due because he feels the Kohen is not worthy to receive this gift.

This occurs in regard to every Kohen. "Our" husband finds fault in every Kohen. This one is illiterate, the other one is not pious enough, while yet a third is not virtuous,

and so on and so forth. In short, he denigrates the Priesthood. Anyone living in a house where the honor of Torah is vilified, in which Torah scholars become a mockery and their lifestyle disparaged, will certainly develop a disdain for Torah and its commandments. It is no wonder that this person's wife violated the boundaries of matrimony and was disloyal to her husband. Chazal teach us that "aveirah goreres aveirah," a sin causes another sin. One who falls into the stranglehold of sin will regrettably compound his transgressions with continued sin, because one sin leads to another. This is especially true when one attempts to justify his evil by considering it to be a mitzvah.

And a man will have lain with her...and she became secluded and she was defiled...and a spirit of jealousy had passed over him and he warned his wife. (5:13,14)

Regarding the phrase, "and a spirit of jealousy had passed over him," Rashi explains that this occurred prior to the seclusion. If he had become jealous after the seclusion, however, this law would not apply. In other words, the Torah writes about the seclusion and defilement prior to the jealousy, even though, in reality, the jealousy must precede the seclusion. We must endeavor to understand why the Torah changes the sequence of events. Why not record the events in their sequence: first kinui, jealousy and warning, followed by setirah, seclusion? Horav Yitzchok Goldwasser, Shlita, cites Chazal in the Talmud Sotah 3 who say, "Rabbi Meir says, since a man (or woman) sins in private (such as a promiscuous woman who secludes herself with a man other than her husband), Hashem will exact punishment in public." The sotah attempts to conceal her infidelity; Hashem exposes her licentiousness.

We derive from here that although the husband's jealousy and warning preceded the wife's seclusion, chronologically, from the perspective of cause and effect, the seclusion and subsequent defilement preceded the jealousy. Since this woman was destined to sin, Hashem preempted her defilement and put the notion of jealousy into the mind of her husband, causing him to warn her concerning her inappropriate behavior. The Torah is teaching a lesson regarding the reality of the sequence: What occurs is not reality; it only seems that way. One does not escape punishment by concealing his sin. Hashem prepares the scenario for the sin's exposure even before it has occurred. To sin is wrong; to think that one can get away with it is foolish.

But if the woman had not become defiled, and she is pure, then she shall be proven innocent and she shall bear seed. (5:28)

Rabbi Akiva, cited in the Talmud Sotah 26a says, "Then she shall be proven innocent and she shall bear seed." What does this mean? It refers to a circumstance in which a woman who previously had been unable to conceive, who had been wrongly accused of infidelity, will now be blessed with conception. Rabbi Yishmael questioned this, suggesting that every barren woman, therefore, will seclude herself. After being wrongly accused, she will be blessed with a child. A virtuous woman, who nonetheless remains loyal to her husband and avoids all suspicion, however, will continue to be barren! Is this fair? Thus, he interprets the pasuk to mean that if she previously had borne children in pain, she will now bear with ease; if she formerly had given birth to girls, she will henceforth give birth to boys; if previously her children had been short, they will now be tall; if formerly her children had been dark, she will now have fair children. In short, the woman who had wrongly been suspected of infidelity by her husband, such that this suspicion is broadcast throughout the community and she has undergone a process of public humiliation whereby her innocence is unequivocally proven, is rewarded. Indeed, she is a recipient of a miraculous reward from Hashem for her ordeal.

Humiliation is a terrible experience to undergo. Hashem recognizes the ordeal of one who suffers embarrassment, and He repays the victim in accordance with the extent of his personal suffering. Nachalas Tzvi cites a story that Horav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zl, related concerning Horav Yechiel Michel Heller, zl. Horav Heller would sign his name, "he'aluv, the lowly, Yechiel Michel ben Aharon." Why did he preface his name with such a shameful title?

It seems that Rav Yechiel Michel's grandfather was a very wealthy man. Whenever he left on a business trip, he would leave his business in the care of his daughter. Rumors began to slowly spread regarding her virtue. Indeed, it did not take long before her innocent name was besmirched. When she reached marriageable age, her parents could not find any prospective suitors for her. Everyone was "turned off" by her reputation. As she aged, her father decided that he must lower her standards and seek a simple young man from a common home. There was a young man in the community who fit the bill. His name was "Aharon Shmeisser," because he worked as an assistant to one of the wagon drivers, whereby he would "shmeiss," hit, the horses to get them to move. Understandably, this position did not require great acumen, and this young man "qualified" for the job.

Broken-hearted, the father attempted to convince his daughter to accept such a shidduch, match - if the young man would agree. It was not easy, but she finally acceded to her father's request. At first, the young man was not interested in the shidduch. Indeed, even his mind was poisoned by the vicious slander. After some convincing, he agreed to marry this "young" woman. As she stood beneath the chupah, the kallah looked Heavenward. In a proud, but broken voice she quietly said, "Ribono Shel Olam, You know the truth, that all of the rumors that were said about me were not true. They were nothing

more than the work of evil people who envied my father's wealth. I am tahor, pure and chaste. Therefore, Ribono Shel Olam, I ask of You a special favor. Since I compromised and accepted this shidduch, in this merit, I implore that You grant me sons who will be righteous Torah scholars."

Rav Yechiel Michel's mother merited to have four sons whose Torah scholarship and virtue illuminated Klal Yisrael, all because of the humiliation she sustained. Hashem concerns Himself with the emotions and feelings of a human being. Should we not do the same?

This is the law of the Nazir on the day of the completion of his vow. (6:13)

At the conclusion of the Nazir's term he brings a sacrifice. The reason for this korban is enigmatic. Usually a sacrifice of this sort is a sin-offering, but how did the Nazir sin? One would think that at the completion of such a mitzvah, whereby the Nazir dedicates himself to Hashem on such a lofty spiritual plateau, that a Korban Chatas, sin-offering, would certainly not be necessary. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that since it appears that the Nazir is distancing himself from Hashem, he must bring a korban. Actually, he is only returning to his original state, but perception is what counts. If people might perceive him as faltering in his spiritual progression, he is to offer a korban as penance. Apparently, appearances are significant in regard to spiritual matters.

Horav A. Henach Leibowitz, Shlita, maintains that although our actions may very well be within the parameters of halachah, the mere appearance of impropriety is in itself a sin. Indeed, everything we do, regardless of its nature, has an impact on us. Because of our position as Klal Yisrael, we have a certain status to uphold, a specific standard to which to adhere. The way we eat, speak, or dress must be consistent to standards for an individual who is a member of Klal Yisrael. If it even seems that we are acting inappropriately, then we have sinned.

We may add that this is especially true in regard to parents and their relationship vis` a `vis their children. At times, we act in a manner that might fit into our "comfort zone" of respectability. Our children do not always realize this, however, and will either derive the wrong message from our actions or lose respect for us. Unknowingly, we continue along our merry way, blatantly disregarding what might be misconstrued by those nearest and dearest to us. Parents must bear in mind that they are constantly on the public stage with their children serving as the captive audience. We should seek their applause, not criticism.

*The Princes of Yisrael brought offerings...they were those who stood over the counted.
(7:2)*

The Nesiim, Princes, each offered sacrifices in honor of the inauguration of the Mizbayach. They each brought an identical offering. Yet, the Torah records each one's offering, emphasizing the individuality of each. The Ramban adds that each Nasi maintained a different kavanah, intention, in his offering. Hence, the Torah records each Nasi's korban separately, to underscore his individual thoughts. Horav Simcha Zissel Broide, zl, derives from here that two actions, albeit identical, which are the result of two different machshavos, thoughts/intentions, are considered two distinct actions. In other words, since the Nesiim each had different intentions, the korbanos are viewed as being distinct from any other. It is all in the mind. Every individual thinks in his own unique manner. Even if the result of two individual's way of thinking coincides, their thoughts are not analogous, thus creating two different representations of thought. This is to be noted from a statement made by Chazal in Zevachim 7a. According to Rav Chisda, if one slaughters a Korban Todah, thanks-offering, in the name of his fellow's Korban Todah, it is deemed invalid, because it falls under the rule of Shinui Kodesh, transferred holiness. Although both animals were holy and destined to be slaughtered as a Korban Todah, my Korban Todah is not my friend's Korban Todah and vice versa. Each person possesses his own individual faculties which creates a distinction in actions. Hence, it is as if he slaughtered the animal for a completely different korban.

We should add that this type of individuality should be respected in all people. A mechanech, educator, is mandated to recognize each student's individuality and uniqueness: "Chanoch l'naar al pi darko," "Raise a child according to his way" (Mishlei 22:6). Shlomo HaMelech teaches us the most important maxim in education: every child must be raised and taught as an individual. The overall objective is the same: the child should grow up to be a G-d-fearing observant Jew whose actions will be pleasing to his Maker and to the society in which he lives. The practical method by which we are to guide each individual to reach the intended goal, is not the same. There are varied proclivities and temperaments, as well as intellectual and emotional potential that must be considered. Each student, or siblings in a family, must be guided commensurate with his own unique qualities. Only then can we hope to achieve success in this noble endeavor.

They shall expel from the camp everyone with tzaraas, everyone who has had a zav emission, and everyone contaminated by a human corpse. (5:2)

Hashem instructed Klal Yisrael to remove all contamination from its camp. In its commentary on this parsha, the Midrash opens its discussion with the pasuk in Mishlei 25:4, "Remove the dross from the silver as the refiner does in producing a vessel." The camp in which Klal Yisrael was situated surrounded the Mishkan, the place where the Shechinah reposed. Around the Mishkan were three zones, each representing a higher plateau of sanctity: The first camp was Machne Shechinah, the encampment of the Divine Presence. Surrounding it was Machne Leviah, where Shevet Levi encamped. Last, in the outermost zone, was the camp of the ordinary Yisraelim.

The Torah admonished Klal Yisrael to send out from the camp those individuals who had become spiritually contaminated; the more serious the tumah, contamination, the greater the exclusion from the premises.

The first class of tumah, the most serious level of contamination, is that of a metzora, who is to be expelled from all three camps. The zav, who is tamei as a result of a bodily emission, is second. He was to be sent out of both Machne Shechinah and Leviah. Yet, he was still free to enter the outer camp of Yisrael. Last, the Torah mentions the tamei meis, one who had been contaminated by contact with a corpse, or had been in a room where a corpse was present. Such a person was only to be removed from the Machne Shechinah.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, draws a parallel between the three classes of tumah and the different zones from which they were banned. Tzaraas is an affliction which is the result of a social failing, disparaging words and slander against one's fellow man. Before the afflicted person could enter any camp, he has to reinstate his social rectitude. Until that time, he was to be expelled from all three camps. The zav, whose source of contamination resulted from a deficiency in his sexual morality, was kept out of two camps. Shevet Levi is characterized by a pure and noble pedigree. The spirit of a community whose lineage is so exemplary cannot tolerate such a lapse in morality. The zav was, thus, removed from the Machne Leviah and, all the more so, from the Machne Shechinah. The tamei meis was to be distanced only from the Machne Shechinah. Life and the living are a tribute to the Almighty. One can serve Him in life; one can glorify and exalt Him in life. Death is the antithesis of the Jew's function in life.

Horav Eli Munk, zl, derives from this chapter that holiness and tumah are relative. They do not constitute two distinct zones, but, rather, develop in concentric circles of ever-diminishing intensity. As the degree of tumah decreases, the opportunity for holiness increases.

He shall be holy, the growth of hair on his head shall grow. (6:6)

In quoting the Sifri, Rashi explains that "kadosh," holy, is a reference to the hair of the nazir's head which becomes holy through being allowed to grow long specifically for this purpose. The Leviim were instructed to remove all body hair prior to being inducted into service. This requirement, which was the opposite of that for the nazir, only made them tahor, pure, but not kadosh, holy. The nazir was to remain in his holy state for thirty days, the minimum number of days for nezirus stam, a non-specific nazirite vow. In the Talmud Nazir 5a, Chazal derive the number thirty from the word "yiheyeh," the numerical equivalent of thirty.

Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains the concept of holiness as it relates to the nazir within a greater context. The Torah directs itself toward the totality of human life - with its high moments of grandeur and joy, as well as its bleak moments of grief and misery. Thus it also focuses upon the disparate personalities of people and their distinct approaches toward serving the Divine. One person may choose to serve Hashem in a practical format, in constant action, in productive and constructive relationships with his fellowman and in dominion over nature. He does not escape the reality of this world. In contrast, his counterpart who may be more inclined to contemplation, welcoming seclusion, seeks to concentrate on more intellectual pursuits. He may relegate mundane, materialistic concerns to the far background of his life's endeavor.

The Torah ostensibly views the man of action, the "doer", as the model for the Jew to emulate. One who serves Hashem within the context of daily life, who worships Him within the excitement and confusion that is so much a part of our world, is our paradigm to follow. Yet, the Torah does not ignore he whose proclivity directs him to inner peace and meditation. He is availed the opportunity to devote himself to these qualities for a limited time. The Torah provides him with the appropriate framework and rules for achieving his goals, while still protecting him from harmful excesses.

One who so wishes, can take upon himself the nazirite vow for a standard period of thirty days. During this period, he divorces himself from physical pleasures that run counter to his spiritual goals. He lives a life of holiness, separated from people because of his altered physical appearance, specifically letting his hair grow long. He neither drinks wine nor eats related foods, and he does not come in contact with a corpse. He is like the member of an elite group, striving to come nearer to the Almighty by renouncing ordinary life.

The one drawback to the life of a nazir - is that this lifestyle does not represent man's ultimate means of attaining holiness. The nazir never serves as an example for others to emulate. Indeed, when his period of nezirus is complete, he brings an atonement, sacrifice, because, to a certain extent, he has gone too far. While the Torah does not

discourage this mystical form of spiritual uplifting, it is not the ideal. The Torah grants him this dispensation to live a hermit-like existence for a short period of time. He must adhere to the ground rules and a limited time frame. When the period is over, he returns to the same avodas Hashem, service of the Almighty, that everybody else seems to accept enthusiastically. To consecrate the mundane, to live life and elevate this existence, represents the Jewish way. Judaism needs life. The Jew can achieve fulfillment by dominating over the material aspects of life, not by repressing or denying them.

This shall be the law of the Nazir; on the day his abstinence is complete, he shall bring himself to the entrance of the Ohel Moed. (6:13)

The word "oso," himself, is rarely used in such a manner. Usually, it refers to "him," as a direct object of an action. The word "oso" is based upon the preposition "es," which has no translation in English. It merely introduces the object of a verb. Indeed, as Sforno explains, the nazir brings himself, since no one is worthy of accompanying him. Presumably, one who escorts the nazir -- as is suggested by the metzora -- is on a higher spiritual plane than the subject of his accompaniment. Who is worthy enough to escort the nazir, an individual who has successfully completed a voluntary period of self sanctification? The nazir has achieved a lofty goal. This is why no one may accompany him.

Rashi cited the Sifri who observes that this is only one of those instances in the Torah in which this preposition is used in a reflective construction - referring back to the subject. The second case is found in the laws concerning he who mistakenly eats a food that is holy. "They will cause themselves to bear the sin of guilt" (Vayikra 22:16). The third instance concerns the death of Moshe Rabbeinu wherein it is written, "And he buried himself." (Devarim 34:6)

Horav Zalmen Sorotzkin, zl, draws a connection between these three cases, in that each requires a special precaution to avoid falling into a trap. The nazir is one who chooses to take a vow of abstinence. He must make a judgement call as to how long he feels he can bear this abstinence. When the allotted time has passed, he must go by himself to offer his sacrifice. In the situation of the one who has erred and eaten holy food, he has separated the tithe for the Kohen and Levi and must immediately give it to them, so that he not be tempted to eat them himself. Precaution precludes error. The third case involves Moshe Rabbeinu's death and burial. Hashem had made known the day Moshe would leave this

world. Moshe buried himself, so that the people would not be tempted to make a shrine of his tomb.

The lesson we glean from here is important: At times we must make decisions that are difficult and demanding. They are, however, a necessary precaution to guard against a serious downfall in the future. The decisions we are compelled to make are not always comfortable. If we do not take precautionary measures, however, the results could be far more destructive/damaging.

One leader each day, one leader each day shall they bring their offering...one young steer...one ram, one lamb. (7:11,14)

The Torah records the fact that each Nasi brought the exact same offering the dedication of the Mizbayach. The Midrash explains that the various sacrifices correspond to the Avos, Patriarchs: A steer, corresponding to Avraham Avinu, of whom it is said, "He took a young steer (to feed his guests)"; a ram, of whom it is said, "(Avraham) took the ram (instead of Yitzchak); a lamb, corresponding to Yaakov, of whom it is said, "Then Yaakov separated the lambs (out of Lavan's flock)." This Midrash begs elucidation. We can understand why a bullock represents Avraham Avinu's merit for his overwhelming sense of devotion to his fellow man. He exemplified the middah of chesed, kindness. He fed his guests a young steer, emphasizing the quality of his hospitality. A ram also suggests Yitzvchak Avinu, as it recalls his willingness to become a sacrifice to Hashem. Indeed, Hashem accepted the ram, which served as his replacement, as if it had been Yitzchak himself. We must understand, however, how Yaakov Avinu is symbolized by a lamb. Separating the lambs out of Lavan's flock was truly a fine thing to do, but was it so worthy of merit?

Horav Meir Bergman, shlita, suggests that the Midrash is teaching us the overriding value of integrity. Yaakov Avinu signifies the middah, attribute, of emes, truth. He teaches us that a lack of integrity -- regardless of its seeming insignificance or its subject -- is harmful and antiethical to Torah dictate. He exercised extreme care to avoid harming others or deriving any ill-begotten benefits, however minute. If it had anything of illegitimacy, it was wrong.

Yaakov Avinu was compelled to have long and troublesome dealings with the corrupt Lavan, the paradigm of dishonesty. Yet, Yaakov never once bent the rules or wavered from his absolute moral principle. He would not resort to the cheating and duplicity that was a way of life in Lavan's home. After twenty years of treachery, Lavan switched Yaakov's wages, his going away present, for the spotted, speckled and black

sheep - the less desirable ones of the flock. Did Yaakov complain? Did he resort to the underhandedness to which he had been subjected for all these years? No! He maintained his fidelity to the agreement with the integrity that was his hallmark character trait. If Yaakov's wages were to be a specific type of sheep - so be it. He would take only what was his - nothing else.

This was the greatness of the b'chir ha'Avos, chosen one of the Patriarchs - integrity. Yaakov Avinu was the embodiment of truth. Indeed, he knew only too well that truth is measured not only in absolute terms, but also in accordance with the way others perceive it. This should serve as a wake-up call for us. Does it make a difference whom we cheat, to whom we tell a lie - whether it is blatant, or one of those innocent "white" lies? Surely, Yaakov had every reason to take his due from Lavan for the twenty years of treachery to which he was subjected. That would have been cheating, however, and Yaakov Avinu could never lie or cheat to anyone because that would not be emes. Can we say that? If we cannot, it would serve us well to learn a lesson from our Patriarch.

The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nachshon ben Aminadav, of the tribe of Yehudah. And his korban was... (7:12,13)

Interestingly, Nachshon ben Aminadav was the only Nasi for whom the korban begins with the prefix "vov" "v'korbano," and his korban. This seems especially notable due to the fact that he was the first Nasi to bring a korban, so there was no previous Nasi to which the "vov" could link. Tzor HaMor derives from here that Nachshon was to preserve his humility despite his lofty position. The "vov" is added as a reminder that his korban is, in fact, linked with others. He could bring his korban only because others brought theirs.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, offers a novel explanation for the added "vov" and also for the fact that Nachshon is the only Nasi to whom the Torah does not refer to by his title. The others are all called "Nasi," while Nachshon is just called by his name. Elisheva, Aharon HaKohen's wife, mother of Nadav and Avihu, whose lives were tragically cut short, was Nachshon's sister. Nachshon was a unique individual in the sense that he empathized with his sister's overwhelming pain in losing two such special sons. She mourned for them; he mourned for her. He felt her grief and sorrow. Because of this, the Torah does not call attention to his noble position. He was just another Jew from the tribe of Yehudah. The distinction accorded to a Nasi is less significant as a result of his shared grief. This also explains the added "vov." When one is b'simchah, filled with joy, he becomes so involved with his korban that it becomes a part of him. He and his korban are connected; they are one. Nachshon could not integrate himself with his korban, with the inherent joy which emanates from this act, because of his sister's grief. Hence, it was

considered as if Nachshon's korban was distinct from its owner. The Torah connects these two, owner and korban, with the letter "vov."

This demonstrates the remarkable sensitivity Nachshon had for his sister. If she grieved - he also grieved. If she was in mourning - he was also in mourning. On the greatest day of his tenure as Nasi, as he led the Nesiim in dedicating the Mizbayach, Nachshon's thoughts were of his griefstricken sister. His heart went out to her. We now understand why Nachshon was selected to lead the Nesiim. He exemplified gadlus, greatness, gadlus b'Torah u'b'middos - greatness in Torah and character refinement.

A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

The laws of Nazir are juxtaposed upon the previous chapter that dealt with the sotah, wayward wife. Chazal derive from here that he who witnesses a sotah in her degradation should prohibit wine to himself by becoming a Nazir. The sotah had given in to her sensual passions and let her pursuit of physical pleasure overwhelm her responsibility as a wife, her obligation as a Jewess and her mandate as a human being. Her experience indicates that when one is under the influence of the yetzer hora, evil inclination, he becomes easy prey to all forms of degeneracy. Wine intoxicates one's mind. It has the power to justify the most base behavior and legitimize actions which under normal circumstances would be viewed as vile and depraved. Seeing a sotah in a circumstance that was probably the result of wine or an intoxicating lifestyle, should arouse an individual to choose to adopt a spiritual life, one that transcends the physical impulses that led to sin.

The Nazir symbolizes holiness. He sanctifies himself in an area that in itself is permissible. He chooses to go one step further. On the other extreme is the sotah, a woman who follows her heart's passion and commits a sin that is the epitome of depravity. The Torah draws a relationship between these two extreme types of people. Indeed, one who sees a sotah during her degradation should take the Nazirite vow. How are we to understand this?

Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, explains that once Adam HaRishon sinned, the concept of absolute bad or good disappeared. Every phenomenon has two perspectives. It can be good; it can also be bad. It depends upon one's attitude and intention. Let us take wine for example. On the one hand, it is the symbol of kedushah, holiness. It is used for Kiddush, for every gathering of simchah shel mitzvah, and for the Nesachim, libations, in the Bais HaMikdash. On the other hand, it symbolizes sin, causing intoxication, memory loss, and lack of self-control that can lead to grave sin. So, what is it, bad or good? It is neither - it is

both. One who drinks wine for the appropriate purpose, according to the proper measurement, will arouse within himself emotions of joy that can lead to such spiritual ascendancy as Ruach HaKodesh, Divine Inspiration. If one has the wrong intentions, however, if his base desires take hold of him and control his mind, then wine can lead to the most perverse transgressions.

Interestingly, when Yaakov and Eisav vied for their father's blessing, Yaakov brought along wine with his sacrifice, while Eisav did not. Moreover, when Yitzchak blessed Yaakov he blessed him with tirosh, vineyards. He did not give this blessing to Eisav. Why not? Horav Sorotzkin explains that Yaakov recognized the value of wine, the incredible opportunities that wine could engender. He, therefore, felt that at a time of blessing, when his father would be inspired to transmit to him the lofty blessings from Hashem, what better stimulant than wine to bring out the inherent joy that would accompany this moment. Yitzchak, likewise, blessed Yaakov with vineyards. Conversely, Eisav looked at the downside of wine, the debauchery and degeneracy that it could catalyze. At a time of blessing, the last thing he sought to bring would be wine. Yitzchak, recognizing well his son Eisav's nature, steered clear of wine when he blessed him.

One who sees a sotah in her degradation, witnessing the evil wine can catalyze, must isolate himself from wine. He must take a Nazirite vow because he might stumble and fall into the evil pit of wine. Witnessing degradation creates a problem in the individual. He must immediately address that problem and limit its growth.

*From new or aged wine he shall abstain...all the days of his abstinence he is holy to Hashem.
(6:3,8)*

The Nazir is described as one who is "kadosh hu l'Hashem," "holy to Hashem." He has the diadem of Hashem upon his head. Why? What did he do that is considered so significant that he warrants such exceptional praise? True; he has prohibited himself from the pleasure of wine, but is that sufficient basis to elevate him to such a lofty level? It is not as if he has accepted any sort of self-affliction upon himself, such as fasting, etc., just abstaining from wine. Is that so impressive? Horav Mordechai Gifter, Shlita, offers a profound response which we would do well to consider. Man has the option to go through life in one of two ways. He can be a creature of habit, following the whims and fancies of his heart's desire, never stopping to think: Who am I? What am I? Why am I here? He simply runs on the impetus of established routine.

Alternatively, he can be an individual who thinks, who uses his G-d-given cognitive ability to control his actions with forethought. He never acts automatically, always striving

to maintain control over his life. Living aimlessly, as his counterpart chooses to live, is for him the antithesis of life. The Nazir is called a kadosh because he has chosen to live with seichel, with forethought, with consideration of the ramifications of his actions. He may not have accepted a great deal upon himself, but what he has done is the fruit of his consideration and thought. Sforno describes the Nazir's abstention from wine as a thoughtful way to gain control over his evil-inclination. He does not go to the extreme by fasting, or self-infliction by torturing his body. He simply makes a voluntary act of abstention, whereby he indicates his self-control. He is not acting automatically. Every action is the product of a well-thought-out consideration. When one makes use of his G-d-given faculty of thought to better serve Hashem, he is performing a holy endeavor. Hence, the Nazir is termed kadosh.

On the seventh day, the Nasi of Bnei Efraim, Elishama ben Amihud. (7:48)

The Torah devotes the end of the parsha to detailing the korbanos and gifts brought by the Nesiim for the Chanukas Ha'Mizbayach, dedication of the Altar. Each of the twelve Nesiim brought an identical set of presents. The Midrash addresses the connotations of each of the gifts. Chazal make an intriguing statement concerning the gift of Elishama, the Nasi of Shevet Efraim. They cite the pasuk in Tehillim 60:9, in which it is stated, "Efraim is the strength of my head." This is considered a reference to the Nasi of Shevet Efraim who brought his offering on Shabbos. The Shem Mishmuel explains that the pasuk relates to the incident at the end of Yaakov Avinu's life, when he blessed Efraim before Menashe, the older brother. The pasuk implies that in favoring Efraim over Menashe, Yaakov legitimized Elishama for offering his korban on Shabbos. Under normal circumstances, no korban yachid, offering of an individual, could override the laws of Shabbos. Somehow, Yaakov invested Efraim with a power so unique that it enabled his descendant to offer his korban on Shabbos. What was that power?

What makes this Midrash even more enigmatic is the fact that the Sifri claims that any of the Nesiim had the ability to "push aside" the laws of Shabbos or tumah, ritual contamination, and offer his korban. How are we to understand this? What was the attribute of Yaakov Avinu's blessings that gave such strength to Efraim -- and to all the tribes -- that their korbanos superceded Shabbos?

The Shem MiShmuel begins by analyzing the characters of Menashe and Efraim, as well as the symbolism of their names. One's name reveals his essence. Thus, the name Menashe, which was given to him, "for Hashem has made me forget all of my trouble and all of my father's house," denotes forgetting or distancing oneself from the past. This represents a form of serving Hashem in which one divests himself of his prior bad habits in his quest towards achieving perfection before the Almighty. Efraim's name has another

implication: "For Hashem has made me fruitful in the land of my oppression." With its root in the concept of fruitfulness, Efraim's name denotes a positive approach towards serving Hashem, in which one focuses upon developing good character traits and takes a more affirmative attitude toward mitzvah observance.

David Ha'Melech in Sefer Tehillim (34:15) says, "Sur meira va'asei tov," "Depart from evil and do good." In the context of Menashe and Efraim's names, Menashe alludes to "departing from evil," while Efraim will signifies the more positive act of "doing good."

Yosef's desire to have Menashe, the older brother, blessed first, and Yaakov's confusing choice to bless Efraim first, is symbolic of the continuing dialogue between father and son concerning the most correct manner to approach the Divine and serve the Almighty. Yosef wanted to follow the pattern of the pasuk in which a departure from evil precedes mitzvah performance. Hence, he felt that Menashe, the symbol of "sur meira," should be blessed first. Indeed, Yosef's entire life was a struggle with evil, constantly battling to ward off the obstacles set before him by his yetzer hora, evil inclination.

Yaakov Avinu's perspective was different. He felt one should concentrate on performing mitzvos, rather than waiting for the evil from within to dissipate. The holiness engendered by mitzvah performance would serve as the vehicle for the evil to be expunged. Yaakov's approach is the accepted path. The general rule in Jewish life is to begin by serving Hashem, performing mitzvos, doing good deeds and assigning a secondary role to eradicating evil. If the mitzvah observance is truly sincere, the evil will self-destruct.

It is evident from the mitzvah of Shabbos observance that Yosef's approach, first dispelling evil, is not effective. Shabbos is the epitome of kedushah, holiness. Consequently, one might never feel "competent" enough to observe it. Is one ever truly ready to greet kedushas Shabbos? The inevitable result of this perspective is that one would never observe Shabbos! According to Yaakov's approach, we just do whatever we can during the week to prepare ourselves as well as possible to greet the holy Shabbos - and it just comes! If we follow Yosef's approach, we will be stuck in the "sur meira" mode and never observe Shabbos. Yaakov instructs us to get on with a life of Torah and mitzvos, and the rest will just happen.

Yaakov's selection of Efraim over Menashe constituted a statement. He was telling us that the emphasis in Jewish life must be on the "asei tov," doing good. It was, therefore, appropriate that the Nasi of Shevet Efraim offered his korban on Shabbos. By doing this, he underscored the significance of starting the Divine worship of one's tribe with a positive act. Even though it was Shabbos, the Divine imperative guided this departure from halachah in order to emphasize the importance of the "asei tov" perspective in Jewish life.

The Sifri supplements this idea by saying that any tribe could have taken the initiative and brought the korban on Shabbos. Once Yaakov had administered the blessings, it became a universal rule for all of Klal Yisrael. Once the correct path for serving Hashem had been established, any one of them could have brought the korban on Shabbos.

And when Moshe went into the Ohel Moed that he might speak with Him, and he heard the voice speaking to him. (7:89)

Rashi notes that the word "medaber," "speaking," is similar to "misdaber," in the hispa'el, reflexive form of the verb, implying that Moshe heard the voice of Hashem speaking to Himself. Sforno expands on this idea, suggesting that actually Hashem "makes it known to Himself." Thus, the voice that Moshe heard was actually an "overflow" of Hashem's words. In other words, the concept of Hashem "speaking" to Moshe is not of the same nature as that of conversation as between two people. Hashem Yisborach "speaks" to Himself, so to speak, and Moshe "overhears" what is said.

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, states a profound appreciation based upon this concept. Hashem is the cause of everything. His will is what gives "life" to everything and every action. Chazal say that "one does not stub his finger on this world unless it has been previously decreed by the Heavenly Tribunal." When we undertake an endeavor or simply carry out a task, we are performing the will of Hashem. Hashem speaks; we do not hear Him because we are not on that level. Avraham Avinu left his home at the enjoinder, "Lech lecha me'artzecha," "Go from your land." He heard Hashem.

Every person should keep this in mind, so that when he acts he realizes that he is performing the will of Hashem. Horav Feinstein suggests that this idea is especially true when one marries. Exclusive of the mitzvah of Kiddushin, in which everyone is commanded to take a wife, he is fulfilling the will and mandate of Hashem by taking this specific woman as his wife. He fulfills the Heavenly decree that was issued many years prior when Hashem decreed "bas ploni l'ploni," "the daughter of this man will marry that man." When one keeps in mind that the particular woman who became his wife is Hashem's choice for him, he will have a greater appreciation of, and deeper commitment to, the marriage bond. Ultimately, this sensitivity will lead to increased blessing from Hashem Yisborach.

And they shall confess their sins which they perpetrated, and he shall make restitution for his sin. (5:7)

The Torah does not frequently mention Vidui, confession. Indeed, this is one of the few places in which the Torah expresses the obligation to confess. Interestingly, the Torah mentions confession here specifically in reference to theft. Why? The Chidushei Ha'Rim responds that theft is the "avi avos," primary category, of sin. Hashem has given us every organ and limb of our body for a particular purpose-to serve Him. When we veer from that goal we are guilty of theft - not simply petty theft, but stealing from Hashem. When we violate the "terms" of our "loan" from Hashem, we are acting as thieves. In other words, every sin, regardless whether it is manifest against man or Hashem, is by its very nature an act of theft.

Many people consider themselves to be virtuous and ethical. They would never take anything that did not belong to them. Yet, they fail to realize that unauthorized use of their G-d-given faculties is tantamount to stealing. We must remember that "we" do not have ultimate possession of "ourselves". Our entire being is on loan for the express purpose of serving Hashem. Some individuals either forget this fact or are unable to focus upon achieving this goal.

*For it is a meal-offering of resentments, a meal-offering of remembrance, a reminder of iniquity.
(5:15)*

The Midrash notes that while the word, "zikaron", remembrance, usually indicates a memorial for good, in this pasuk it serves as a reminder of evil. This reflects Rabbi Tarfon's view. Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, disagrees, contending that this meal-offering can also be considered a remembrance of something good, invoking the memory of the woman's good deeds. Rabbi Yishmael gives an example of the category of good deeds that could possibly delay the woman's punishment for up to a period of twelve months. Indeed, she may drink bitter waters and appear to be innocent, when actually she is not. What unique merit can delay her punishment? We are taught that a woman may accumulate merit because she is accustomed to accompanying her children to their Torah studies -- or awaits her husband until he returns from learning Torah. This seems absolutely incredible! A woman enables her husband to study Torah and her children to go to yeshivah, yet she has no qualms about committing adultery! Is there a greater double-standard than this? Obviously, her attitude towards Torah study had been sincere, because it is applied as a merit in her behalf. How are we to rationalize her hypocritical behavior?

We suggest that, regrettably, the prevalent attitude towards infidelity was not as negative as it should have been. When society denigrates, the first institutions the people debase are those that address morality. We have only to look around in contemporary

society to see how promiscuity, adultery and licentiousness have become a way of life from the common citizen all the way up to those officials who sit in the citadels of power. Does anyone believe that it will not be transmitted to us? Reading and hearing about the immoral escapades of those who live a secular lifestyle will have its effect in due time. This woman probably felt justified in her extra-marital attraction. She accepted the usual excuses expounded by those who maintain a hedonistic existence. Yet, it did not influence her established spiritual values. By all means, her husband should study Torah; she even encourages him by waiting for him to come home. Her children should study in yeshivah and become talmidei chachamim. She, however, deserves a life of her own!

This inane sense of ethics, this erosion of values, is the result of over-exposure to secularism and an insincere attitude to Torah. Perhaps this is why the punishment for the sotah, wayward wife, is so terrifying and demeaning. By reflecting upon the punishment incurred by the sotah, one can realize the ultimate evil of adultery.

He shall bring his offering to Hashem one unblemished sheep in its first year as an elevation offering, one unblemished ewe.....for a sin offering (6:14)

The Ramban explains why a nazir, who has taken it upon himself to live a limited period of time in sanctity and devotion, brings a sin-offering. One who has the ability to live appropriately should continue his abstinence from worldly pursuits and pleasure by lengthening his vow of nezirus. His decision to return to the world of the mundane, to physical pleasures and transitory aspirations, earns him the epithet of sinner. Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl, questions Ramban's statement. If one is considered a sinner for not extending his vow of nezirus, how much more so should one - who had never even risen to accept the challenge of nezirus- be mandated to bring a sin-offering?

Horav Shmuel Truvitz, Shlita, gives a practical response to this question. Achieving the spiritual plateau of nezirus is not a simple feat. It requires a special person with a tenacious spirit and a unique attitude toward Judaism. Not everyone has the capacity for such an accomplishment. Therefore, we should not blame those who do not rise to the occasion, who lack the fortitude to accept the challenge. On the other hand, he who has demonstrated the necessary forbearance and self-control to become a nazir, demonstrates his individuality by the very nature of his achievement. He has worn the tiara of nezirus. One who has worn the crown, who has been clothed in the raiment of monarchy, sins when he removes the kesser malchus, crown of kingship. To achieve spiritual distinction, and then to reject it, denigrates the entire process and demeans the concept of nezirus.

May Hashem bless you and keep watch over you. (6:24)

The various commentators render their interpretations of the Birkas Kohanim, priestly blessing. Rashi cites the Sifri that views the blessing as a reference to material bounty. "May Hashem grant that you be triumphant over your enemies and that your crops and business ventures succeed. May your possessions increase, and may Hashem guard these possessions from thieves."

In short, the blessing of "Yevarechecha," May (Hashem) bless you, refers to receiving abundance, while the blessing of "Veyishmerecha" is a prayer that we be able to retain our blessing. The Midrash Tanchuma supplements the blessing with an invocation that our increase in material wealth be used properly and that it not be the cause of our own self-destruction. "May He protect you from temptation, lest the material aspects of the blessing lead you into sin".

The greatest blessing, when in the hands of a simple or weak person, can easily turn into a curse. One can lose -- or even worse -- if he uses his blessing improperly. Money can be the primary motivating factor catalyzing an individual to sin. There is a reason for material abundance. It certainly is not sent to us for self-indulgence and self-gratification.

The Midrash offers a second interpretation that contends that the blessing of "increase" refers to progeny. Hashem will bless us with children who will devote themselves to the Torah. Horav Boruch Sorotzkin, zl, suggests that the Midrash Tanchuma's interpretation of "Veyishmerecha," that we should make use of our "increase" for the correct and proper purpose, applies similarly to the blessing of offspring. Indeed, the blessing of children is a very special one, but it is also a challenge. It demands that one accept the enormous responsibility of raising a child according to Torah dictate. How often do parents impose their own shortcomings on their children? The father who unfortunately feels he has not succeeded in life, may try to relive his life through his son, at times inflicting his own idiosyncrasies upon his child. An alternative approach is demonstrated by the parent who wants to see his child "get ahead in the world", devoting the majority of his educational endeavor to secular pursuits, relegating Torah study to a distant second place. Finally, there is the parent who is simply incompetent as a parent and probably not much better as a human being. He reneges his responsibility as he lives a lifestyle that reeks of double-standard. Then he "wonders" why his child "goes off the derech," becomes alienated from Torah Judaism. This dual blessing has so much meaning. If we are blessed with children, we must rise to the challenge, accepting the responsibility that accompanies the territory called Jewish parenting.

One, nasi, prince, each day shall they bring their offering... The one who brought his offering on the first day was Nachshon ben Aminadav, of the tribe of Yehudah. (7:11,12) The words "es korbono" are not found regarding the korbanos of any of the other

nesiim. Nachshon was unique among the nesiim. Along with his korban, he brought himself, his devotion, his spirit of sanctity, his mitzvos and maasim tovim, good deeds. The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh says that while all the nesiim brought "themselves" along with their korbanos, Nachshon was the most outstanding. Consequently, the Torah emphasizes "es korbano, his korban, himself. The Torah does not refer to Nachshon as a nasi. Why? Ohr Hachayim explains that he viewed himself as just another Jew, not as the greatest of the nesiim. His unique nature earned him the distinction of being the first nasi to offer a korban for the Chanukas HaMizbayach, dedication of the Altar.

Nachshon had two seemingly disparate qualities. On the one hand, he was the one that jumped first into the Yam Suf. His action encouraged the rest of Klal Yisrael to follow. He took the initiative. He made the first step. This act makes him appear to be a "take charge" personality, someone who believes in himself, rather than one who considers himself to be just another Jew.

Horav Zaidel Epstein, Shlita, contends that actually these qualities complement one another. The true leader is one who does not seek the leadership role, who views himself as a common citizen, but takes the proper action when necessary. A leader is available when the community needs his leadership ability. Otherwise, he remains in the background as a collective member of the community. This describes Nachshon. When Klal Yisrael stood at the banks of the Red Sea, when fear and anxiety overwhelmed the nation, he was the one who made the necessary move: he jumped in. When they were about to offer sacrifices for the dedication of the Mizbayach, he faded into the "scenery". Moshe Rabbeinu called him forward to lead the nesiim in dedicating the Altar. Even though he was the first to offer a korban, he viewed himself as just another nasi who was offering his korban. This may be inferred from the prefix, "vov", "and", of "v'korbano". He viewed his korban as a part of the collective offering - "and his korban" - not - "his korban". He did not distinguish himself. He was first, but in his eyes he just followed along with the others. He was the kind of person who was always at the head of the line.

Nesanel ben Tzuar, the nasi of shevet Yissachar, followed right behind Nachshon. The Midrash relates that the tribe of Reuven, the first-born of the tribes, came forward and said: "The tribe of Yehudah has precedence over us. Yehudah is the king of the tribes; he should, therefore, be first to dedicate the Altar. We would like to follow him." Moshe told them, "Hashem has determined the order of succession according to the encampments and their banners.

The tribe of Yissacher will offer next, followed by the tribe of Zevulun". The Ohr Ha'Chaim adds that Yissacher followed Yehudah because of his distinction in Torah study. They represented the paradigm of the ben Torah, the one who devotes himself to constant

Torah study. Zevulun, the supporter of Torah, the one who made sure that Yissacher had no material concerns to distract him from his studies, followed closely behind.

What is the significance of this tripartite group who led the sacrifices? Horav Eliyahu Schlesinger, Shlita, explains that Yehudah was foremost because of his position as monarch. Malchus takes precedence. What value does monarchy hold if it is short-lived, if there is no future to his reign, if there will not be anyone over whom to rule? Who can guarantee the future of Klal Yisrael? Who can ensure that the people over whom Yehudah is to rule will adhere to his monarchy, that they will subordinate themselves to the dictates of the heritage he represents? It is the power of Torah.

Its truth and Divine origin will sustain the malchus of shevet Yehudah. Shevet Yissacher and his partner/supporter, shevet Zevulun, will educate Klal Yisrael. They will assure the development of mosdos ha'chinuch, Torah institutions, for educating ensuing generations. Thus, they will secure Klal Yisrael's future. Only a malchus, monarchy, that is committed to the total education of its young, has a right to rule and to endure.