**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Naso – Vol. 12, Issue 31**

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**וזאת תורת הנזיר ביום מלאת ימי נזרו יביא אתו אל פתח אהל מועד והקריב את קרבנו לד' כבש בן שנתו תמים אחד לעלה וכבשה אחת בת שנתה תמימה לחטאת ואיל אחד תמים לשלמים (6:13-14)**

A nazir is a person who voluntarily accepts upon himself three restrictions: not to cut his hair, not to come into contact with the dead, and not to consume wine or other grape products. At the conclusion of the period of his nazirite vow, which lasts thirty days unless he specifies otherwise, he is required to bring several offerings: a Korban Olah (Elevation-Offering), a Korban Chatas (Sin-Offering), and a Korban Shelamim (Peace-Offering).

The need for the Korban Olah is understandable, as the nazir accepted upon himself additional holiness in order to bring himself closer to Hashem, which fits the theme of the Elevation-Offering. Similarly, the Ibn Ezra explains that the Peace-Offering connotes satisfaction and happiness, and therefore the nazir brings it to express his joy at successfully completing his vow. However, the requirement to offer a Korban Chatas seems puzzling. What sin did the nazir commit for which the Torah obligates him to bring a Sin-Offering?

The Ramban posits that the reason the nazir must offer the Korban Chatas is for the very “sin” of ending his term as a nazir. After elevating himself through voluntarily relinquishing physical pleasures, he should have elected to maintain his lofty state, and it is for the “sin” of leaving this sanctified atmosphere behind in order to reenter the world of mundane earthly pleasures that the Torah requires him to bring a Sin-Offering.

As fascinating as the Ramban’s explanation is, it presents a major difficulty: It seems to contradict the explanation given by Chazal. The Gemora (Nedorim 10a) also questions why the nazir must offer a Korban Chatas, and it answers שציער עצמו מן היין – the sin that he committed was his original decision to needlessly cause himself suffering by abstaining from wine. After the Gemora states clearly that voluntarily refraining from physical enjoyment is considered sinful, how can the Ramban write that the nazir’s sin is his decision to return to those pleasures?

Rav Simcha Zissel Broide, who was the head of the Chevron yeshiva, explains that when the person initially elected to become a nazir, he was an average person, and as such, his decision was painful for him and was therefore viewed as sinful. However, during the course of his time as a nazir, he became uplifted. At the conclusion of his nazirite vow, he is no longer the same person who began it. The Torah’s criticism of ordinary people who deny themselves items that Hashem permitted no longer applies to him in his new, elevated state, in which it is completely appropriate to abstain from physical enjoyment in order to live a more spiritual existence and bring oneself closer to Hashem. He has grown so much that the Ramban teaches us that it is now a sin to return to the level that it was originally a sin to leave, and leaving this lifestyle of heightened sanctity to revert to being an ordinary person requires atonement.

Most of us will never become a nazir or even meet a nazir. Nevertheless, the lesson of the nazir is still relevant to each of us. As we go through life, we are expected to grow and strive to reach higher levels of spiritual accomplishment. As we do so, we may find that certain activities or interests that we used to enjoy no longer seem appropriate for our new levels. When the power of our ingrained habits attempts to pull us back, it is important to be cognizant of the Ramban’s message that as we grow and become more spiritually sensitive, we are judged according to our new states and more is expected of us.

**יברכך ד' וישמרך יאר ד' פניו אליך ויחנך ישא ד' פניו אליך וישם לך שלום (6:24-26)**

Parshas Naso contains Birkas Kohanim, the Priestly Blessing which is recited daily in Eretz Yisroel and on Yom Tov outside the land of Israel. Birkas Kohanim is comprised of three berachos (blessings), and in his sefer Iyun Tefillah (pg. 402-3), Rav Shimon Schwab explains the intention and meaning of each of them. The first blessing is יברכך ד' וישמרך – May Hashem bless you and safeguard you. Commenting on this blessing, Chazal elucidate that its intention is that Hashem should bless you with wealth, and He should protect you from thieves who seek to steal your money and possessions. Accordingly, the first beracha of Birkas Kohanim is a blessing for success in gashmiyus (physical needs).

The second beracha of Birkas Kohanim is יאר ד' פניו אליך ויחנך – May Hashem shine His countenance to you and favor you. This is a request for success in Torah study and ruchniyus (spiritual pursuits), in which we ask Hashem to enlighten us in understanding the Torah. Just as we say thrice daily אתה חונן לאדם דעת – You graciously endow man with wisdom, so too do the Kohanim bless us ויחנך, that we should find favor in Hashem’s eyes and merit that He bestow us with wisdom.

The third beracha is ישא ד' פניו אליך וישם לך שלום – May Hashem lift His countenance to you and give you peace? After the first two berachos cover success in both spiritual and earthly pursuits, what remains for this blessing? Rav Schwab explains that this is a beracha for internal peace and tranquility, as there are many people who prosper in their Torah study and business endeavors, but do so at the expense of constantly feeling stressed and anxious.

Therefore, the Kohanim add this additional beracha, asking Hashem to help us perceive His countenance turned toward us, so that we can go through life with calmness and serenity. The Gemora in Berachos (20b) derives from this beracha that Hashem shows favoritism to the Jewish people. If we go through life feeling Hashem’s partiality to us, sensing that He is looking down at us and proud of our efforts to draw close to Him, this will naturally create an internal sense of peace and serenity. This sentiment is so crucial to our happiness and well-being that it is the longest of the three blessings.

Rav Yisroel Reisman notes that Rav Schwab’s explanation can help us understand a perplexing Gemora. The Mishnah in Megillah (21a) teaches that three people are called to the Torah for Aliyos on a weekday (Monday and Thursday), five people are called up on Yom Tov, and there are seven Aliyos on Shabbos. What is the significance of these numbers? The Gemora (23a) explains that they are derived from the three berachos in Birkas Kohanim, as the first blessing contains three words, the second blessing has five words, and the third blessing is comprised of seven words.

At first glance, there does not appear to be any relationship between Birkas Kohanim and the number of Aliyos during the public Torah reading. However, according to Rav Schwab’s insight, the connection is quite straightforward. On weekdays we work to support our families and engage in physical pursuits, and it is therefore appropriate for the number of Aliyos to correspond to the first beracha, which is a blessing for wealth and prosperity. On Yom Tov we are intended to ascend to the Beis HaMikdash and draw close to Hashem, for Yom Tov is a time of spiritual growth. Accordingly, the number of Aliyos on Yom Tov parallels the five-word beracha for success in ruchniyus. Lastly, Shabbos is a time of rest, the day each week that Hashem gives us to help us recharge and attain inner peace. Thus, the number of Aliyos on Shabbos aligns with the seven-word beracha for calmness and serenity.

Rav Reisman adds that outside of Eretz Yisroel, where the Chazzan reads the words of Birkas Kohanim each day instead of the Kohanim, some people have the custom to reply to the first blessing, “In the merit of Avrohom Avinu,” to the second blessing, “In the merit of Yitzchok Avinu,” and to the third blessing, “In the merit of Yaakov Avinu.” What is the relationship between the three blessings of Birkas Kohanim and the Avos? In light of Rav Schwab’s explanation, these responses are quite understandable.

The first beracha focuses on gashmiyus, which corresponds to Avrohom and his attribute of chesed. In the merit of Avrohom using his possessions to help others, we ask Hashem to grant us success so that we can similarly use our belongings to do chesed. The second beracha is for success in spiritual matters, and it is therefore matched to Yitzchok, who represents Divine service and whose Yom Tov is Shavuos, when we received the Torah. The final beracha is for inner calm, which corresponds to Yaakov, who desired to dwell in tranquility (Rashi Bereishis 37:2) and whose Yom Tov is Sukkos, when we leave our permanent dwellings behind to spend a week in a temporary hut, which promotes feelings of serenity by teaching us to be content with our lots. Just as the Kohanim are required to concentrate on each word of the blessings that they give, so too the non-Kohanim who receive the blessings should focus on the intent of each beracha, tasks which Rav Schwab’s beautiful insight will make easier.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. The Gemora in Kesuvos (72a) derives from 5:18 that a married woman is obligated to cover her hair. Is a bride required to cover her hair at her wedding, and if not, at what point does the obligation begin? (Shu”t Rav Akiva Eiger 2:79, Shu”t Shevus Yaakov 1:103, Mishnah Berurah 75:11, Shu”t Yechaveh Daas 2:62, Halichos Bas Yisroel 5:8)
2. The Torah promises (5:28) that a suspected adulteress who is innocent will be blessed to bear children. The Gemora (Berachos 31b) relates that the barren Chana beseeched Hashem for a child, threatening that if she didn’t conceive, she would seclude herself with another man without having relations with him in order to conceive a child as promised by the Torah. How could she threaten to transgress the prohibition again yichud – seclusion between a man and woman – even if she wouldn’t have relations? (Mussar HaNevi'im, M’rafsin Igri)
3. May an unmarried Kohen recite the Priestly Blessing? (Mordechai Sotah 815, Shu”t Rashba 1:85, Darkei Moshe and Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 128, Mishnah Berurah 128:162)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) The **Mishnah Berurah** quotes the opinion of **Rav Akiva Eiger**, who rules that a betrothed woman is required to cover her hair. Because we perform the legal equivalent of betrothal under the chuppah, this would require a woman to cover her hair prior to the wedding ceremony so that it will be covered at this time. **Rav Ovadiah Yosef** notes that the Rema maintains that the most important part of the wedding ceremony is yichud and suggests that according to this opinion, the bride only needs to cover her hair after she emerges from the yichud room. However, many women are lenient and follow the ruling of the **Shevus Yaakov**, who maintains that the obligation doesn’t begin until after the couple has had relations. For all questions of practical halacha, a competent Rav should be consulted.

2) The **M'rafsin Igri** answers that Chana would seclude herself with somebody with whom she wasn't forbidden to be alone, such as her brother, but who can still make a woman into a sotah if her husband warns her not to seclude herself with him. The **Mussar HaNevi’im** explains that Chana was worried that if she didn’t have any kids, over time her husband might come to hate her. She knew that the Torah says that even though it’s normally forbidden to erase Hashem’s name, we are allowed to do it if a woman becomes a sotah to make peace between her and her husband by proving whether she sinned. Chana reasoned that the sin of secluding herself with another man is less severe than the prohibition against erasing Hashem’s name and should certainly be permitted to ensure peace between her and her husband.

3) The **Mordechai** writes that a Kohen who isn’t married should not say the Priestly Blessing. The Gemora in Yevamos (62b) teaches that an unmarried person lacks joy, and it is appropriate for one giving a blessing to be happy. The **Darkei Moshe** questions this opinion in light of the law that a minor may not say the Priestly Blessing. It should be unnecessary to exempt a minor since he is already exempt for the reason that a minor cannot get married. He answers that a minor does not yet feel sad over the fact that he is unmarried and therefore needs his own unique exemption. The **Rashba** writes that he never heard this opinion from any of his teachers or saw it in any work. Although it may have roots in Aggadic teachings, its omission from the Gemora means that this is not normative law. As a matter of practical law, the **Shulchan Aruch** rules that an unmarried Kohen should say the Priestly Blessing. The **Rema** quotes the dissenting opinion but writes that the practice is to say it, although he adds that it is permitted to leave the synagogue before the Kohanim are called. The **Mishnah Berurah** explains that although an unmarried Kohen may lack joy, he is still not sad and can therefore bless.

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