



Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

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Parshat Nasso: Fighting Evil

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Herschel Reichman

Parshat Nasso begins with a continuation of the great census of the Jews in the desert. It particularly focuses on the families of the tribe of Levi. The spiritual concepts of Kohen and Levi represent *chessed* and *din*, the two pillars of Hashem's creation. Aharon Hakohen was the epitome of peace and *chessed*. The Leviim represent *din* and were at the forefront of avenging Hashem's honor after *cheit ha'egel*. The three families of Levi carried the vessels and components of the Mishkan. Kehat's children had the most exalted task. They carried the Aron, the Menorah, and the Mizbeach. Gershon had the second most holy task, carrying the cover and skins of the Mishkan. Merori had the lowest level task, transporting the heavy staves and pillars of the Mishkan. The Avnei Nezer explains that Shevet Levi, the tribe of justice, represents the challenge

within each of us against the evil inclination. The first and most righteous level is where evil does not exist. The second level is when evil tempts us but we are able to use our powers to drive it away. The third and lowest level is when evil emerges within us, yet we continuously struggle with it and successfully control it. This represents the spiritual idea of the three families of the tribe of Levi. The Kehat family represented the epitome of purity of character. Here evil could not even approach. The second level was Gershon from the root word *garush*- to drive away. Evil would enter their thoughts but they would banish it. The final level was *Merori*, from the root word *Mar*-bitter. They were *tzaddikim* embroiled in a bitter unending struggle between good and evil. Unfortunately many of us are in this category and we must continuously fight evil. The Baal Hatanya says that this level is very

precious to Hashem, perhaps even more so than the higher levels of Kehat and Gershon. There are three levels of spiritual energies- *chessed*-loving kindness, *din*-justice, and *rachamim*-compassion. *Chessed*, opening up, is action, while *din*, retracting, is reaction. The balance is *rachamim*, giving with a calculated limit. R'Chaim Vital notes that Kehat is pure holiness which represents *chessed*, *Merori* is the bitter struggle of *din*, and Gershon is the sweet kindness of *chessed* and *din* combined. Although he is tempted by evil, he drives it away. Life is a continuous battle of good and evil. At times the going gets rough but we must never give up. May our efforts to do Hashem's will help us attain the right balance within our souls.

The Makings of Mashiach

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

When Boaz married Ruth, the people blessed him, "May Hashem make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah." Rashi asks why did they mention Rachel? Wasn't Boaz a descendant of Yehuda, the son of Leah? The house of Israel has two aspects. The visionary, spiritual side and the practical worldly side. Leah was the visionary and Rachel was the practical one. Lavan was a sorcerer. He knew that Rachel should have married first. He wanted the spirituality of Leah to be missing the foundation Rachel could have provided. Therefore he switched Leah before Rachel in an attempt to destroy the house of Yaakov. We see that the initial physical conquest of the land had to happen through Yehoshua a descendant of Rachel. Shaul, the first king, was from Rachel too. However the final spiritual redeemer will be from Yehudah. When the people blessed Boaz, they intended that Ruth should take components of both aspects-the spiritual vision and the concrete ability to act, and meld it into a perfect union.. Ruth was from Moav. She validated the initial intent of Lot's daughter which was to repopulate the world with goodness. Both Boaz and

Ruth attained their purpose and the fulfillment and capacity of their ancestors. Boaz died the day after their marriage. If he would've procrastinated he would not have accomplished his destiny. We too must learn from this that we must not allow opportunities to slip by. David relived many aspects of Boaz and Ruth's life. His birth was clouded in suspicion. He was banished from the family and forced to be a shepherd. Almost anyone in his position would have rebelled against everything his father Yishai stood for. Instead he used these years of loneliness to create the book of Tehilim. He understood, like his ancestors, that Hashem was taking him on a circuitous path where he belonged and he never doubted that it was good. Why was David specifically chosen to be the ancestor of Mashiach? Mashiach's function is to find the part within each of us that is redeemable. Mashiach will tell everyone their story. He will understand everyone and everyone will feel understood by him. He will be a person of great spiritual depth. He had to have a complex history. Mashiach will give us the strength to recognize our own inherent capacity to rise. His ances-

tors were fighters who transformed themselves and earned all the spirituality they received through toil and travail. Moav embodied hatred, the source of cruelty. Lot's daughters used their passion in a depraved way. When we look at ourselves and see cruelty and passion we must think of Mashiach whose soul comes from these very roots. It should give us hope that we too can be redeemed. Mashiach stems from Leah who altered her destiny through prayer. We must not say we are tired of fighting, we must carry on and pray. A *tzaddik* falls seven times and rises. David was the seventh generation tracing back to Aminadav, the father of Nachshon. Why seven? We share seven attributes in common with Hashem. We can fail in each one of them but we can rise again from the depths. This is what Mashiach and Messianic hope is about. Each one of us has a spark of Mashiach within us. The story of Ruth is our own story too. May we be worthy of a collective and personal redemption speedily in our days.

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Shavuot: The True Acceptance of Torah

Based on a Naalah.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The common denominator of the *Shalosh Regalim* is that there is a commandment to be joyous on each of the holidays. What does the Torah mean to be *b'simcha*? The Gemara in Pesachim notes that there is a disagreement between Rav Yehoshua and Rav Elazar in understanding the two verses, "*Atzeret tehiye l'Hashem Elokecha*" and "*Atzeret tiyeh lachem*." One verse means that the holiday should be spiritual and the other verse tells us to rejoice with physical pleasures. Rav Eliezer says there is a choice on how to fulfill the mitzvah of *simcha* on Yom Tov. Either one can devote time to *tefilah* and *limud hatorah* or to physical enjoyment. Rav Yehoshua says *Chetzi l'Hashem v'chetzi lachem*-divide the day between the two pleasures. However the

Gemara says this disagreement doesn't apply to all the holidays.

Regarding Shavuot all opinions agree, "*Chetzi l'chem v'chetzi l'Hashem*." It needs both aspects. One would think that Shavuot would be a day to devote more time to Torah and *tefilah* because it is the anniversary of the day when the Torah was given. Yet this day must also have "*lachem*," it must be experienced physically. This teaches us that the Torah wasn't given to us as a means of restricting, obligating, or restraining us from worldly pleasures. Rather in *Birchat Hatorah*, we ask Hashem, "*Vaherev na*..."-make it sweet, make it something that we will enjoy. The Kli Yakar writes on the verse, "*Vehikravtem mincha chadasha*." Every day a person should have a

tremendous desire for Torah as if he had just received it the first time. There should be a fresh newness and joy when studying Torah. "*V'samchta l'hashem Elokecha*"-your whole body should be *b'simcha* when learning Torah as if sampling a delectable new dish. This is the *koach* of Torah, the pleasure it can give a person.

Why is Torah called *Torat Emet*? Is there another Torah which is false? Torah is not about living for oneself or losing oneself in physical pleasures. It is Hashem's instructions on how to live. If we follow its precise directions, we will perceive the world with a different perspective. Indeed it is only through Torah that we can come to see the truth of life.

Achieving Balance Class #10

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

In your lecture series on Megilat Rut you mentioned that a person who disassociates himself from his family is called wicked because he does not recognize Hashem's Providence in giving him these relatives. I have distanced myself from various family members because I feel that they bring in too much of the "outside" world into my home and to my children. Am I right for doing this?

Answer:

There is no reason not to try and draw relatives that are traditional, but not religious, closer to Judaism. Do this by inviting them to your home rather than going to their home. Teach your children that you have something to give these relatives. Even if it appears somewhat

patronizing, hand them a bentcher, bring little halachot into the discussion, and tell over inspirational stories of tzaddikim to pique their interest. If they are reasonably well mannered guests, they will probably go along with you, and your children will sense the satisfying feeling of being *mashpiah* (influencing) on others. Traditional relatives may raise many questions in your children's minds. Are they like us or not? You have to handle this very carefully. You could say, "Yes they're traditional, they feel Jewish and connected, but unfortunately they don't know as much as we do, we have to help them."

Relatives who aren't religious at all may in some ways be easier. It's obvious to your children that they don't know anything and that they don't keep the same lifestyle as you do. Adapt the style and status of, "I'm the *mashpiah*, you're the *mekabel*," and do this in *gashmiut* too, so they'll

want to come. Your children will be ok.

There is no reason to have any connection with non-Jewish relatives. If you need to, then make it clear to your children that they are not Jewish and that they have a different role. Your children should understand that Hashem chose the Jews, exalted them, gave them the privileged position to be the spiritual movers and shakers of the world. Certainly if someone is not Jewish they have a purpose, but nowhere near our purpose. And again limit your children's exposure to these relatives to your turf only.



Making Ourselves A Vessel For Receiving The Torah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shoshi Nissenbaum

Shavuot means weeks. It also means promises. It is the holiday when Hashem's pledged to the Jewish people, "V'atem tehiyu li mamlechet kohanim..."-You will be to me my precious privileged nation. And it was then when we promised Hashem, "Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu..." We will be Hashem's holy nation forever. The Gemara in Taanis explains the verse in Shir Hashirim, "B'yom chasunoso..." to refer to Matan Torah. *Shavuot* is the anniversary of our wedding day when we once again renew our commitment to Hashem and the Torah.

How can we integrate the holy Torah into our lives? The first medium is *ratzon*, we must desire it very much. Indeed the seven weeks of counting, express our deep yearning for the precious gift of Torah. Torah is Hashem's way of expressing Himself to us. Likutei Moharan writes that Hashem wanted us to know him in a very intimate way and therefore He gave us the Torah.

The first and last letters of the Torah spell *lev*-heart. The Torah is the heart of Hashem where He reveals His innermost essence. Hashem desires that we learn His Torah with a full heart, He wants our *ratzon*. Very often, when a person is stirred by a wonderful piece of inspiration he might say, "Now I'll be a *tzaddik*." But one cannot automatically jump to be one. Looking at too much light can blind a person. Or a person could immediately give up and say, "It's not for me." He could however choose the right way of reacting by saying, "I want to really absorb the Torah into my life but it is so difficult, help me Hashem."

Tefilah expresses our *ratzon*. We can transform our Torah learning into prayer and ask Hashem to help us live what we've learned.

Shavuot is the anniversary of the death of King David. He left us the precious book of Tehilim, filled with supplications and personal prayers to Hashem. When King David asks Hashem to save him from his enemies, they are not only physical but also spiritual. The five books of Tehilim correspond to the five books of the Torah to teach us that learning Torah must be coupled with *Tefilah*. Torah learning alone as an intellectual pursuit leaves Hashem out of the picture and will not last. Meeting our creator on an intimate level must come with *ratzon*, which is expressed through *tefillah*.

The second way to attain Torah is through *Ahavat Yisrael*. Before *Matan Torah*, the Jews were as one person with one heart, united for one purpose. It is not accidental that the Baal Shem Tov's *yartzeit* is on Shavuot too. He said of himself that he came down to this world to teach us *Ahavat Yisrael*. What does it mean to love another Jew? The Baal Hatanya in Maamar Lamed Bet explains that the Jewish nation is one soul. Our physical bodies are just a border separating us from each other. Therefore if we focus more on our spiritual selves, our love for our fellow Jews will grow. The Baal Shem Tov said that every Jew is like an only child to Hashem. Each Jew has a letter in the Torah that spiritually represents him. We must not speak negatively about others for if we invalidate one letter in the Torah, we invalidate the entire Torah.

Conversely if we focus on the qualities of another Jew we can tap into his power of Torah. We say every day, "V'tein chelkeinu b'toratecha" We all have a personal portion in Torah. The Piacezner Rebbe taught that no doubt every Jew has a unique refreshing way to view the Torah and Hashem invested within each of us the potential to create something new through our learning. Our Creator believes in us. He fashioned us in His Divine Image and He loves us dearly. When we acknowledge this about ourselves, we can then begin to give to others. Sometimes the hardest people to love are the people closest to us. Giving to our spouses and children and to all of Am Yisrael is in a sense really giving to ourselves. When we focus on the good in others, we enable them to tap into their innate strength and become better people.

We read Megilat Rut on Shavuot. Ruth was born into a depraved society. Yet she had *ratzon*, she believed in *chiddush*, she had tremendous *Ahavat Yisrael*, she saw the good in everyone around her, and that is why she was able to be mekabel the Torah and mother the ancestor of Mashiach.

May we be *zoche* this Shavuot to ignite within ourselves the *ratzon* to know Hashem, to transform our learning into *tefillah*, to love Hashem and to love His children, and in this way we will truly be a fitting vessel to once again accept the Torah.