Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

תורת אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshat Nasso
The Twelve Tribes: A Model of Diversity

Based on a Naaleh.com class by Mrs. Shira Smiles
Summarized by Channie Koplowitz Stein

Parshat Naso is the exception to the rule that the Torah always uses terse language. The Torah devotes seventy-two verses to what could easily be said in six. The Torah could have listed the names of the heads of each tribe, and then stated that each one brought the same offering for the dedication of the Tabernacle. Instead, the Torah devotes six verses to each tribe. The first states the name of the tribe and its leader. But then the Torah recounts the exact same offering for each tribe for an additional five verses per tribe. The Torah goes one step further; it summarizes in five more verses the total gifts received.

This verbosity seems to contrast and also complement another time the twelve tribes are listed individually, in Parshat Vayechi. There Jacob blesses his twelve sons, the progenitors of the twelve tribes in our current discussion. Jacob starts by giving an umbrella blessing that covers all the tribes, "Let me tell you what will be at the end of days." But he then individualizes the blessings so that each son receives a different blessing. By comparing these two parts of the Torah, we will gain insight into some of the values the Torah teaches.

The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. However, each part is important. Without any given part the whole would be incomplete, and possibly even useless. In our study of these two sections of the Torah, we will understand how this duality expresses itself within Bnei Yisrael.
Let us start with the story of Jacob blessing his sons. Each son seems to receive an individualized blessing. But did Jacob really bestow twelve different blessings? Are they rather twelve interpretations of one blessing?

A blessing is the wish that an innate potential become realized. If we are each unique, then each of us must be blessed differently. But Jacob understood that when an individual knows his talents and shortcomings, he can contribute effectively to the collective. So while the particular trait Jacob focused on for each tribe was different, his message to each was the same: "Embrace your unique nature. Now, utilize these distinct characteristics to serve the larger community." Our diversity gives each of us a special place and makes each of us a unique component of the whole.

This idea, but in reverse, explains the repetitions of the tribal offerings. While physically the offerings were identical, each man brought his own thoughts and emotions to the process. Each offering was brought with the same mindset of contributing to the service, yet each was unique.

There was one more important aspect to these offerings. While each leader brought one ox for a total of twelve oxen, each contributed to only half a wagon for a total of six wagons. The message is clear. Each offering was incomplete without partnering with another. Each tribe had to hitch his ox to a wagon in partnership with another tribe's ox. Otherwise his own gift would be useless. No one tribe has everything necessary for the fulfillment of our mission. No one Jew can complete the task of Judaism on his own. We must join together with our fellow Jews.

We are all individual parts of the greater entity of Knesset Yisrael, the collective Jewish Soul. Instead of looking askance at a fellow Jew whose customs differ from our own, who wears a different head covering, or dresses differently, or makes a different cholent, we should embrace the beauty of the diversity of our heritage. We each serve the same God, but with our own unique history and talents.

We are one, emanating from one holy place, and emerging as many individuals. We should not be judgmental, but embrace and respect our diversity. As the offerings of the tribal leaders teach us, and as Jacob our forefather understood, we can only achieve unity through loving our diversity. Only then can all our offerings be dedicated to His service.

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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 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. *Chesed*, 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.

Sage Guidance: Avos D'Rabbi Nosson – Introduction #1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Avot d'Rebbe Natan is an explanation of the tractate Avot, which is a part of Seder Nezikin. It consists of eight chapters that discusses topics of *middot* and *derech eretz*. The Torah does not begin with the first *mitzvah* of sanctifying the new moon but rather with the story of creation. The Torah wanted to begin with the *middot tovot* that we can learn from our forefathers. Avraham personified *chesed* (kindness) and concern for others. Yitzchak represented *gevurah* (strength) and self sacrifice to live a Torah way of life. Yaakov was *emet* (truth). The book of Bereishit is not just a collection of simple Bible stories. It teaches us *middot* that are crucial preparation for accepting the Torah. We can find a hint to this in Parshat Bereishit. After Adam and Chava ate from the tree of Knowledge, they were sent out of Gan Eden "*lishmor et derech etz hachaim,* to guard the way of the tree of life." The Binyan Yehoshua, a commentary on Avot D'Rebbe Natan, explains that *derech* refers to *derech eretz* and *etz chaim* refers to Torah. *Derech eretz* is a prerequisite to Torah.

The Gemara in Moed Katan mentions a certain student who would ask many questions while his Rebbe gave his lectures. However, when the Rebbe gave a public lecture to the masses the student kept quiet. He understood that if he asked a question and the Rebbe wouldn't know the answer he would embarrass him.

The Mashgiach of Slabodka taught that *derech eretz* is a prerequisite that prepares a person to learn Torah. The Binyan Yehoshua cites the Yalkut, Bar Kapara asked, "Where is the entire Torah encapsulated in a few words?" He answers, in the area of *derech eretz,* which is summed up in the verse, "*B'chol derachecha d'heyahu.* In All your ways you shall know God." Avot d'Rebbe Natan brings out this point in a potent way. Chazal say, "*Yesh chochma b'goyim.* There is wisdom among the non-Jewish nations." The nations build great edifices and advance in technology. Our purpose is *derech eretz*, *middot*, *chesed* and living a full Torah life.

The first chapter of Avot d'Rebbe Natan begins like Pirkei Avot. "*Moshe kibel Torah m'Sinai*." Avot d'Rebbe Natan mentions that Moshe had to be at Har Sinai six days before the giving of the Torah. He had to go through preparation and purify himself of all physicality before he could accept the Torah. Ma'amad Har Sinai was not just a historical event but it is something we relive every day. Moshe had to accept the Torah with *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice) to teach us that self-discipline is a prerequisite to accepting Torah.

It says in Devarim, "*V'yadata hayom v'hashevota el levavcha.* You shall know today and you shall set it firmly in your heart." It does not say, *el sichlecha* (in your mind). In Ahava Rabbah we ask Hashem, "*V'ten b'libeinu bina*. Put understanding into our hearts." It does not say *V'ten b'sichlenu,* and put in our minds. Avot d'Rebbe Natan emphasizes that the Torah we study must penetrate our hearts. Our learning has to impact our essence. It must affect our *middot tovot*, the way we deal with others, and how we think. Torah brings out the divine presence inside us. By studying *Avot d'rebbe Natan*, we can actualize Hashem's directive of, "*V'halachta b'drachav,*" to follow in His ways.

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