

Parshas Naso

This week's Parsha is Naso, the second Parsha in Chumash Bamidbar. My father-in-law notes the explanation at 6:23, where it says, "speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: so, shall you bless the Children of Israel, and say to them." The word "say" is spelled uniquely, which sounds like the Italian word "amore," meaning love. Rashi explains that the word is spelled fully (i.e., with a vov, as opposed to just aleph mem raysh), not to bless in haste or distraction, but rather with concentration and a whole heart... and, drawing on its pronunciation, which sounds like love, that is, with loving kindness. That is, there is a Halacha that a Kohen should not recite the blessing if he is angry. Furthermore, his blessing should be granted only with love. Which is why the Bracha recited before the priestly blessing is "Hamivorech Es Amo Yisrael B'Ahava" (who blesses the nation of Israel with love). The fact that there must be no animosity or hate also intentionally follows from a few related topics.

The first is the counting of the Leviim: even though they were not counted amongst the rest of the nation (as in the last Parsha), they were not forgotten, and counting is a sign of Hashem's love for the Jews. This is the first love, eternal and forever bound to every Jew. Even the Leviim, who were not part of the first census, are included, as are their jobs and the act of taking the count. This

underscores that Hashem is our first love and serves as the model for how we must act in this world. In the third Aliya, the rules for sending someone out of the camp who has Tzara's (an affliction caused by speaking Lashon Hora) are retold. This is a reminder that a person who acts ill-willed towards their friend will be punished and sent from the camp, i.e., they are not showing love to their neighbour.

The next Aliya (Revii) discusses the wayward wife (Sotah, b'lashon shtus), which results from jealousy and other interpersonal issues that arise when one isn't acting as a yid toward one's fellow. Rashi points out a few things: 1) a person who commits adultery has no heart, i.e., is hateful to whomever he is punishing through that act, i.e., destroying a family, his own family, etc. 2) Part of the laws of this passage concern the suspicion of such behaviours, that is, from jealousy, actual wayward behaviour, or people spreading rumours about someone. In all those cases, it is due to interpersonal failures. (This results in a potentially painful punishment that is put in effect by the Kohanim (with the water). After these passages, the Torah continues to discuss the Nazir, which is both lauded and opposed. On one hand, living abstinently and being restricted due to needing to control one's behaviours is laudable, but abstinence (and therefore reduction in certain services for Mitzvos) is not the way one ought to be all their life.

Specifically bound to the promise of being a Nazir, not the idea of aspiring to be a holy person. This passage, according to Rashi, follows the wayward wife: if a person sees the Sotah punishment, they should abstain from wine, since wine leads to adultery. The idea here is to instill in people the belief that we must aspire to greatness and holiness, and sometimes we must act with a specific promise to achieve that goal. Our baseline ought to be the pursuit of this existence, not through bound (temporary) promises such as the rules around a Nazir. Also, drawing on Tanya (Chapter 3), the person is not meant to find love for Hashem in Chochma alone; they must cultivate Ahava and Yirah through Bina and Daas so that they manifest in actions, not just in the mind. Which is part of the Avoda of a Yid.)

Now, these passages can convey the bleakness of interpersonal relationships, suggesting that it is better to live “off grid” than to engage with people and the potential sins they can bring, such as hate or jealousy, all of which can strain a person’s emotional and mental faculties and lead to despair, or, heaven forbid, to making a mistake. People can also hate the Kohanim, who are part of the process of determining the status of a Tzarua or the wayward wife, and come to hate them. At the end of Perek 6:22, Hashem reminds us of the priestly blessing, which, as explained, must come from love. More importantly, it is a blessing of Hashem's

love. In the physical domain, if a king sends his servant to a distant land and gives him treasures to live on, those treasures can be stolen, since the king is distant and may be unable to protect him. Unlike our King of Kings, who sends his servants to a “distant” land, the blessing goes on to provide us with protection over the treasures. This is further alluded to when Rashi explains 6:26, noting that Hashem’s anger should be suppressed.

Ultimately, this blessing is about love between Hashem and the Jews, and the need for love among Jews themselves; otherwise, issues arise. The remainder of the Parsha talks about the “day that Moshe finished erecting the Mishkan” (7:1). This follows, because, like the Torah at the time of the exodus, which resulted in the building of the Mishkan, so too, we will rebuild our temple, but this comes out of the love one must show his fellow “Veahavta L’Reiacha Kamocha” (much like Hashem’s eternal love for us).

The Kohanim must draw this blessing from their love for the community; the community must show that love in return, and in this way, we will usher in the era of building our Mishkan.

Good Shabbos