

## Naso – 5782

Last week, I outlined the ways in which the Sages tried to see the Five Books of Moses and each of their major themes. You might recall that Bamidbar, the book we are now reading through, week to week, they saw as being all about the role of HaShem in the lives of the Israelites. It is important to remember that it documents events within the first several years after the Exodus from Egypt. The Israelites were essentially still getting used to the idea that they were no longer slaves, but their memories of life in Egypt would also still be haunting them. That idea that life in Egypt was never far from their living memory helps to explain the themes covered in this week's parsha. After several verses left over from last week's parsha and the roles defined for the Levites and the efficient moving from place to place, we read, as if out of the blue, about the laws relating to sexual impropriety amongst married couples. Then the Torah turns to the life of the Nazirite or ascetic who has removed him or herself from the camp for whatever reason.

One might very well ask what the connection is between these two VERY different kinds of human interaction and behaviour. As I was trying to figure it out myself in terms of my Davar Torah for this morning, I thought about why, all of a sudden, in the middle of everything else, we read what Rabbinic Judaism refers to as Birkhat HaKohanim. Of course, there was a time when I witnessed the ceremony in which the Kohanim blessed the members of the congregation using the words from this very section of the parsha. I remember participating in the decision-making process that went in to voiding its inclusion in the Yom Kippur service especially, but it was part of the services for each of the three harvest festivals, Sukkot, Pesach, and Shavuot. I also remember the bitter disappointment on the part of some that

it was no longer recited. Some of you will realize that it is not gone completely because we recite it during the repetition of the Amidah during Shacharit and Musaf services on Shabbat. But I have digressed here from my main argument, and I will now try to connect the dots. The organizing theme of the Book of Numbers is the role of HaShem in the life of Am Yisrael as they grew to understand what it meant to be free people and not slaves. But we must also understand that our eternal Torah operates on two planes in time..... that of the Biblical times and the meaning for the succeeding generations.

We accepted a covenant from HaShem to be a holy people and obey his commandments for all time. These Children of Israel in those times, but we today, all have to learn what it means to be holy and what our reward is for being holy. So, it is easy to understand that sexual profligacy or licentiousness has to detract from the holy way of life. Both of those are clearly breaches in propriety, and of morality. Both would have been okay in the eyes of the Egyptians but not in the eyes of HaShem and his people. We are commanded not to Covet in the Ten Commandments and covet can also mean lust after someone else, not just something else. So, the punishment of the Sotah, the unfaithful wife, fits with the theme.

But what about the Nazirite. Our tradition teaches us over and over again that life is good, and it is to be enjoyed, not rejected. We sit shiva for seven days and then have to get up and leave the house and return to normal life. The Torah tells us in no uncertain terms that we must choose life. The Blessings of the Kohanim whether we recite them during the repetition of the Amidah or witness it or participate in it at other more religious congregations is meant to wish for a life lived under the protection of HaShem and with his blessings. BUT...that life is not meant to be one of extremes. Judaism does

not see the world as being one of good and evil, but rather filled with humans with human failings. The section of today's parsha that describes what the Nazirite can or cannot do, with acceptance that some people might choose to take themselves out of the life of society for a short period only, but it clearly talks about the end of that period because life cannot be lived and enjoyed in splendid isolation. We are the People of Israel, Am Yisrael. We pray together in the presence of a minyan; we bury one another within the community, and we live our lives constantly praying for HaShem's guidance and protection. King David, the author of most of the psalms that we read throughout our religious services whether in synagogue, at home, or at the cemetery, prayed to live out the end of his life under the protection and shade provided by HaShem. The Nazirite can be accepted by the Israelite camp and tolerated for a short period of time, but Parshat Naso clearly implies that it ought to be a short-term thing only.

Now of course, I hope you can see how the themes of the Sotah, and the Nazirite are brought together in the same parsha. The Sotah obviously gives in to temptation, the Nazirite rejects all temptation. That's why he or she is forbidden to drink wine. He or she must be in total control but afterwards, must go back to living normally and learn how to accept the challenge of aspiring to live a life in which the Lord will bless us and guard over us, show us favor and be gracious towards us, show us kindness and grant us peace. And we can all say first Kayn Yehi Ratzon and then Amen.