

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

NASO

Haftarah: Shoftim 13:2-25
MAY 25-26, 2018 12 SIVAN 5778

DEDICATION: In memory of Morris Dabah. Sr. (Moshe ben Gilsom) 'A"H.

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EDITORS NOTES

On Saturday night L'el Shavuot as we were studying the tikun and chasot or halachic midnight was approaching, Rabbi Miller paused the reading reminding everyone who may have not yet said Shema to do so. He quoted King David who writes in Tehillim, "At midnight I will rise to give thanks to you."

We discussed this idea of rising at midnight and Rabbi Miller quoted the talmud: "Rabbi Shim'on Hasida said: 'David hung his harp above his bed and when midnight would arrive the north wind would blow upon the harp (vibrating the strings) and causing music to emanate. David would immediately rise and begin studying Torah. He would continue his studies even as the first light of dawn appeared in the sky.'"

We wondered how this occurred. The Midrash tells us that at midnight in heaven music plays. Perhaps the vibrations of heavenly music caused David's harp to vibrate with the same notes.

Can a musical instrument play on its own? We know that if you hold down the sustain pedal on a piano (thus releasing the strings to vibrate freely), any instrument nearby playing a tone that is matched by one of the piano strings will cause that string to vibrate in sympathy. Force from these waves of air compression is imparted to the piano string. Because the resonant frequency of the piano string is the same as the frequency of the air compression waves, the piano string responds by absorbing this kinetic energy and amplifying its own vibration.

Were there in fact physical sound waves emanating from Heaven? If so, we can understand why the harp might play. Perhaps we can suggest they were spiritual musical sound waves which caused the Harp in David's mind to play and awaken him at midnight.

But were these sounds meant only for David or could anyone have heard them?

This reminded me of what I wrote some years back. The Netivot Shalom states, that Hashem calls out to every person through the events that happen to him or her during his or her lifetime. In every situation in which a person finds himself, he can "hear" Hashem speak to him if he wishes. Even though God's calling is not blatantly obvious the voice is there for us to tune into.

Rabbi Abittan z'sl often taught us that through technology we can better understand the sodot, the secrets of the Torah. He would explain that we live in a world of constant radio, television and cellular transmissions. They are whizzing by us, near us and around us. Thousands of conversations are taking place, millions of words and images are floating by yet we neither hear nor see anything unless we have a device which can pick up those electronic waves.

In the same vein how difficult must it have been for our ancestors to conceptualize what the rabbis meant when they taught a similar concept. The Torah relates that the revelation at Matan Torah which we celebrated earlier this week was with a "Kol gadol ve'lo yassaf" – a great voice – "ve'lo yassaf". Rashi quotes Unkelos' interpretation of ve'lo yassaf – "which did not stop". The Shelah HaKadosh explains that there is a continuous Kol or voice emanating from Har Sinai.

But one would certainly wonder then, "If there is a continuous voice, why do we not hear it?" Imagine trying to explain the concept of cell phones and voices traveling through the air unseen, a hundred years ago. Today, we can readily understand. The voice is constant, never ending. Maybe more than voice, maybe images too or perhaps holograms or virtual reality. But if we don't tune in, we remain oblivious to the voice and to the message; a communal message and even more mystifying an individual message for our ears only.

The Torah begins the chapter on the Ten Commandments by telling us that, "In the third month from the Exodus of the children of Israel

from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the Sinai Desert". The obvious question is that we would expect the verse to read bayom hahu, "on that" day. Why then is it written "bayom hazeh", "this" day? Rashi answers that this is another reminder that we should look at the Torah as if it is being given today, every day or always.

If we truly contemplate, we can relate to the meaning of the Mishna in Pirkei Avot which teaches us just this. Everyday a Bat Kol – a Heavenly Voice – emanating from Mount Sinai cries out – "Woe to man because of the shame of the Torah".

Every day the Torah is given at Mount Sinai. The rabbis wanted to remind us that we can adjust the dial and listen to the Voice or we can ignore the Voice and live under the illusion that the world is silent. It is this wasted opportunity that the Heavenly Voice bemoans. That is indeed a shame to the Torah. Imagine the Torah crying out, "Can you hear me now?"

The Rabbi would quote the famous gemara that says, if you reach into your pocket to take out three coins and only pull out two, it is considered yisurim, some sort of reprimand from Heaven. The Baal Shem Tov adds one very important detail in explaining that this applies only if we acknowledge that it was from Hashem. And the rabbis caution us that we may as well or else Hashem will need to send us a stronger wake up call.

Commenting on the story of Ruth, the rabbis tell us that after EliMelech dies, his sons should have heard the message and returned home. When they begin to lose their wealth, Hashem was telling them again. When their animals died the voice was louder and when they lost their land, it was loudest. Ignoring the call, Machlon and Chilyon die.

Rabbi Abittan would tell us how important it was to pay attention and even to find a quiet place and talk back to Hashem. Communicate!

Rabbi Joey Haber gave a class recently. He spoke of Heavenly messages.

He was preparing for the wedding of his daughter when an email went out from the school for a collection to assist a young couple with their wedding. The solicitation which the rabbi never saw noted that the request was being made under the auspices of Rabbi Haber. Many people did not

understand the word auspices. And many people approached the rabbi telling him how happy they were to help him pay for his daughter's wedding. The rabbi was mortified. He wondered why did Hashem subject him to this embarrassment and considered that perhaps when he was collecting money for people for a wedding he did not fully appreciate their emotions. He felt it a message to better consider the feelings of even those he is helping.

He told the story of a man who writes a column for Community Magazine titled Ask Gido, I guess the Dear Abby of the community. Years back, the man had a payment due to the bank of \$12,000. Unable to make this payment he saw his credit line being revoked, and his business really crashing. He had one client who owed him \$4000, but even if he could collect that today, he needed three times that amount. So he walked to nearby Bryant Park, sat on a bench and pleaded with Hashem. He pleaded that he understood that perhaps Hashem needed him to go through this, but begged that perhaps Hashem who certainly could, would bail him out. After a while he walked back to his office. A few moments later a messenger showed up from the client who owed him the \$4000. Gido opened the envelope and there was a check for \$4000, but behind it was another check for \$4000 and behind that was a third check for \$4000. This was too good to be true and it was also unexplainable. He called the client who clarified that the \$4000 was for the amount he had been late on and as he was late, he felt bad so he paid early for next month. But Gido asked about the third check. The client said it was a bookkeepers mistake, but he could deposit it and apply it to his account going forward. Small miracles!

Rabbi Abittan would say that Hashem is always speaking to us. And nothing is beyond what Hashem can do for us, although sometimes the answer is no. But we need to ask again and again and again.

Rabbi Haber closed with an amazing story which brought me to tears. Many of you know Nathan and Erica Dweck. Nathan is the son of my son Jonah's in laws, Morris and Penny and Erica is the daughter of our wonderful friends Lawrence and Sherry Lynn Jemal. About two years ago, Erica lost her sister Stephanie to cancer. And after the year was planning a trip to Israel with the family when they found out their five year old daughter was diagnosed with cancer. For nine months, the community again came together and

prayed and beseeched Hashem. For nine months our dedication read for a Refuah Shelema for Elisheva Bat Esther and with Hashem's help she was declared cancer free and Erica and Nathan threw an amazing Seudah Hodaah with hundreds and hundreds of people and many speakers thanking Hashem. Over the course of their daughters treatment they literally changed the mood of the children's treatment floor at Sloan Kettering and their emotions and their faith inspired countless people. A few weeks ago they were on a chesed trip to Israel. On Friday they took a walk through the old city and stopped by Hadaya, known for its "One of a Kind, Hand Made Jewelry".

When Stephanie passed away, Erica commissioned Hadaya to make 13 bracelets with Erica's pasook – biblical verse. Each of us has a biblical verse associated with our name. The verse begins with the first letter of our name and ends with the last letter of our name. So for example my wife Chantelle is Shulamit and that starts with a Shin and ends with a Taf. So her pasuk taken from the Az Yashir we read each day is ... Shameu Amim YirGazun Chil Achaz Yohvey Pelashet

Erica distributed the bracelet's to Stephanie's children, her siblings and friends. Wearing it is a daily reminder of an outstanding daughter, sibling, wife and mother who will always be remembered.

So in the store that day, Erica selected a ring she wished to purchase. But the clerk explained that although the ring was in the showcase, it wasn't for sale. Hadaya had passed away a few months before, so they were for the moment not selling any of the pieces he personally created. Had they allowed her to buy the ring Nathan and Erica would have left, but they decided to keep looking. Erica then spotted an unusual heart and inscribed on the face of it was, Eleh BaRechev, V'Eileh BaSusim, Va'Anachnu B'Shem Hashem Elokeinu Nazkir, a verse from Psalms which happens to be Erica's verse. She asked to see the heart and turned it over. On the back were three lines.

At Tamid BeLibi
You are always in my heart

At Tamid Iti
You are always with me

Achoti

My sister

Even typing this brings me to tears.

Hashem is asking each and every one of us, "Can you hear me now"? Let's try our best to listen!

Shabbat Shalom,

David

A Young Billionaire's Priorities

Adam Neumann is one of the most successful Israeli entrepreneurs in the world. He founded an American company worth \$20 billion, and his capital was recently estimated at \$2.6 billion. He tops Fortune Magazine's list of the world's most influential business people under the age of 40. But despite all that, he is a Sabbath observer who does not work nor take phone calls on the seventh day of the week.

"In the past two years, I have begun to observe Shabbat," Neumann, who now lives in New York with his wife Rebekah and their five children, told the Yediot Aharonot Israeli Hebrew daily in an interview.

"During Shabbat I am completely cut off, there is no one to talk to, and I do not compromise about it," he said. "At first it felt like a tough commitment, but it gives me time with my children, my wife, my friends. Last week I had a crazy week in which I was flying and working a lot. But on Friday morning we got up and said to each other, 'We are ready for Shabbat.'

"Shabbat arrives, we light candles, relax, friends come over, we eat a meal that we cooked beforehand. We are cut off from the rest of the world, but in reality connecting with each other. I spend more time than I ever did with my family and even phone and see my mother more during the week. And the real magic is that the more I do it, the more successful the company is. Go figure."

Neumann is the head of WeWork, an American company which provides shared workspace, community, and services for entrepreneurs, freelancers, startups and small businesses. He founded the company in 2010, along with Miguel Mckelvey. WeWork has more than 2,000 employees and has locations in 23 United States cities and 16 countries including Australia, Canada, India, China, Hong Kong, France, United Kingdom, Israel, South Korea, Mexico, Netherlands and Germany. WeWorks chief brand director is Neumann's wife, Rebekah Paltrow Neumann, who was part of the company from its inception.

Neumann, now 38, grew up in Kibbutz Nir Am, which is located in southern Israel, near Sederot. He served in the Israeli navy before moving to New York in 2001 to be with his sister Adi, an Israeli model. He founded WeWork after several failed ventures.

"When I met my wife 10 years ago, I thought money was the goal," he told Yediot Aharonot. "I had a difficult childhood, my parents divorced, my mother was a doctor and worked late hours, Adi and I were alone, and we moved apartments 13 different times.

"When I came to the U.S. I tried to take shortcuts to make money - but everything crashed. I was angry at people, I felt I deserved everything. Then, when I met my wife, she told me to stop complaining about the past. She made me stop smoking and told me that I was chasing the wrong things. She made me realize that the goal was to be happy, to do something that is meaningful to you."

The clean-living regime Rebekah instigated, combined with the study of spirituality, philosophy and the soul, eventually led to the young Jewish couple taking on Shabbat observance.

Adam Neumann exudes good health: tall, bright-eyed and with a glossy black mane of hair. He runs or skateboards to work, before breakfasting on a nutritious shake or water-based oatmeal. But it wasn't always the case. When 13 years ago he first met his wife-to-be, Mr Neumann was rakishly thin, 20 pounds lighter than today, getting through the day on two packs of cigarettes and a single meal.

"My hands were shaking, I couldn't hold my focus for more than five minutes," he recalls. "But Rebekah sorted me out quickly. She said: 'You have potential, but you are really going to have to work on yourself.'

"If you had asked me 10 years ago what my life would look like," continued Neumann, "I would not have believed that I would have such a relationship with my wife, and that I would be able to improve in the way I treat people. I would not have guessed how much I love being a father. As for my money? I may have dreamed I'd establish a company worth a hundred million dollars, but I did not even know the number billion; I would not have guessed [it was possible]."

Asked whether having so much money changed him, he replied, "I have more access to things today, but the most fun part is that I can help those who helped me in the past: the family, mom, dad and my grandmother, friends, and also return money to

investors who invested in me in the past and lost their money."

Source: Adapted by Yerachmiel Tilles from //israelnationalnews.com and //telegraph.co.uk; photo credit: //hitabroot.com

Summary of the Perasha

Nathan Dweck

Naso - The Leviim are counted, Korbanot for hakamat mishkan (year 2)

- 1- The special responsibilities of benei Gershon and Merari. Benei Kehat are counted
- 2- Benei Gershon and Merari are counted
- 3- Rules regarding a tameh and where he must stay, one who steals and swears falsely
- 4- Sotah , nazir, birkat kohanim
- 5- Korbanot offered by the leaders of each tribe on the first days of mishkan (days 1-5)
- 6- Korbanot offered by the leaders of each tribe on the first days of mishkan (days 6-10)
- 7- Korbanot offered by the leaders of each tribe on the first days of mishkan (days 11-12)

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE
"But if the woman had not forfeited her purity and is pure then she remains untouched and shall conceive seed." (Bemidbar 5:28)

In Parashat Naso we are taught a most encouraging lesson. The Torah tells us about a married woman who is suspected of being unfaithful. She is tested with a special drink prepared by the Kohen. If she was really unfaithful, she will die. If she was innocent she lives. However, not only does she live, but the Talmud (Berachot 31) says that one opinion says if she was unable to conceive and have children, now she will. Another opinion says that if she had difficulty giving birth up until now, she will give birth easily. All agree that she will be blessed.

There is a great question here. Why is she blessed? This is a woman whom the Torah says was warned by her husband not to go into private seclusion with this man. She went so far as to rebel against her husband by going into seclusion. We know this is so, because if she didn't, she is not even tested with the waters. So why is she blessed?

Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian says we have here a fundamental lesson. This woman was low enough that as a married woman she went so far as to go into seclusion despite being warned. It must be she had a great fire of desire burning in her! Why didn't she do the final sin? We must say that when it came to the moment of truth, she conquered her desire and "did not become impure" and "thv vruvy - she is pure!" What a great victory! She might be held accountable for disobeying her husband and must make teshubah. However, Hashem will reward her

fully for her great act of self-control. Hashem does not hold back reward for any good act we do, even if it is mixed in with something less than good. Rabbi Reuven Semah

In this week's haftarah, we read about Manoah and his wife, the parents of Shimshon (Samson). Before Shimshon's birth, an angel came to his parents and informed them that Shimshon would be a nazir from birth. After the angel left, Manoah prayed for Hashem to send the angel back so that he could "teach us what we should do with the boy." Rav Schach explains that Manoah was not simply asking for advice in how to raise his child. He was asking, "How will I be able to raise my child with all the restrictions that come with being a nazir if I myself will not be following these restrictions myself?" In fact, when the angel returned, he agreed with Manoah and told him that in order to raise his son as a nazir, he must conduct himself as a nazir as well.

The lesson is powerful. Manoah understood that he would not be able to raise his child with rules and restrictions that did not also apply to him. It doesn't work to say, "Do as I say, not as I do." Children learn far more from what their parents do than from what they say. We cannot expect our children to develop good character traits unless we exhibit those same traits ourselves.

We have countless opportunities to educate our children through our actions. When something doesn't go our way, do we moan and complain, or do we accept it and declare wholeheartedly that it is all good and that it is the will of Hashem? Are we careful to avoid speaking negatively about others, even if it just "an innocent joke"? Do we go the extra mile to fulfill a misvah that might be a little inconvenient? Whether we like it or not, our children are watching, and learning from everything we do and say. Let's work on setting the right example, so that we can enjoy seeing our children blossom into who we hope for them to become. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

Instant Gratification

"Do you like instant coffee?" Abraham asked.

"No. I only drink the real brew," replied Aharon.

"Same here," said Abe. "I don't understand how people eat microwave food either."

Many people would agree with Aharon and Abe, preferring the "real thing" to the instant variety of everything from soups to dinners.

The only problem with the "real thing" is that preparing it takes much longer.

Sometimes, however, fast is not good.

In the Torah (Debarim 23:2), Hashem states, about the enemy:

"I will not chase him out in [only] one year, lest the land become desolate and the [wild] animals will overpower you."

In life, we must find the proper balance. In a low-priority situation – such as when you don't have time to make fresh-brewed java – instant may not be the same, but the trade-off is worth it. However, when it comes to education and self-improvement, the long-term goal is best served by a step-by-step climb to success. Instant gratification is fine for frivolities, but when dealing with issues that really matter, "no pain no gain" is the way to go.

Put in the effort and reap the long-lasting benefits. Patience sometimes pays, even in a wireless, digital world. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

Footprints

"When a person walks on snow drifts, how does he sense he is slipping and how is he able to avoid falling without even thinking about it? It is one of the kindnesses of Hashem that He made it possible for us to function and enjoy the freedom of movement that our body gives us."

As one looks back on the footprints of his life, the only answer to his survival is that he was carried through the kindness of Hashem. (Norman D. Levy, based on Rabbi Miller's Duties of the Mind)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR A Warning Even To Us

The Torah in Parashat Naso discusses the law of Sota, a woman suspected of infidelity. This is a situation where a husband warns his wife in the presence of witnesses not to go into seclusion with a certain man, with whom the husband suspects she is having an inappropriate relationship. If witnesses later testify that she had been secluded with the man in question, then the husband brings her to the Bet Hamikdash where she is given special water to drink. If she is guilty of infidelity, then the water kills her. Of course, even if she is innocent of this offense and does not die as a result of drinking the water, she is not entirely innocent. She has already committed a certain form of infidelity by arousing her husband's suspicion and going into seclusion with another man. It goes without saying that this is strictly forbidden and wholly inappropriate, not to mention a grave betrayal of her husband's trust.

What kind of a woman is this, who engaged in some sort of inappropriate relationship with another man?

Intuitively, we might assume that we deal here with a very immodest and flirtatious woman, probably a woman without much religious background and who was not necessarily committed to the Torah way of life to begin with. But the Torah's description of the Sota ceremony makes it clear that this is not the case. The Torah instructs that when the woman arrives at the Bet Hamikdash, the Kohen uncovers her hair. The clear implication is that she had her hair covered, as Halacha requires. In other words, this is an otherwise religious woman, somebody who generally observed Torah law, but somehow found herself involved in an inappropriate relationship with another man.

The Yeser Hara does not discriminate or play favorites. It lures and applies pressure to everyone, regardless of their religious background or current religious standing. We tend to think that because we're observant, we are free from certain spiritual dangers, that the Torah's warnings don't apply to us. The story of the Sota teaches us that this is very far from the truth. Even a woman wearing a kerchief covering every strand of hair is susceptible to the machinations of the Yeser Hara. Regardless of what kind of Kippa, hat or whatever else a man has on his head, he is a target of the evil inclination that looks to ensnare all people. It might even be argued that religiously observant people must exercise even greater vigilance due to the natural tendency to assume that we are safe. Nobody has the luxury of resting on his or her laurels and assuming that he or she is safe from the clutches of the Yeser Hara.

The section of the Sota is followed by the laws of the Nazir, somebody who decides to take a vow to abstain from wine (in addition to other prohibitions). The Sages explain that the Torah juxtaposes these two sections because a person who sees what happens to a Sota should abstain from wine as a precaution to avoid improper behavior. We might have thought that to the contrary, somebody who witnesses the horrific scene of a Sota's death would be shaken to the core and naturally disinclined to such sins. In truth, however, the sight of the Sota, just seeing somebody who committed this grievous sin, desensitizes a person to the gravity of adultery. And thus one who sees a Sota, and whose sensitivity to the severity of sin has thus been compromised, needs to reinforce his defenses by abstaining from intoxicating beverages.

The message of the Nazir assumes particular importance in our times, when we live in a culture in which sin not only occurs, but is glorified. In today's entertainment industry, unrestrained conduct and adulterous relationships are not just tolerated, but celebrated. Exposure to this culture has a dangerous desensitizing effect, dulling our instinctive revulsion to such behavior. Especially in our day and age, we, like the Nazir, must be on guard and set safeguards in place to neutralize this influence. It is not enough that we are religiously observant; this alone does not grant us immunity from the Yeser Hara. The message of the Sota is relevant even to us, and, perhaps, especially to us, cautioning us to resist the influences of our society in order to maintain the standards of purity and holiness that the Torah demands.

**VICTOR BIBI
SOD HAPARASHA**

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**Rabbi Wein
GRATITUDE**

As I have often pointed out in these columns, Judaism is to be seen not only as a system of laws and commandments but, even more importantly, as a system of values and overriding attitudes. It really is the value system of Judaism that determines the application of the laws and commandments of the Torah. Without a true understanding of the underlying values and attitudes of the holy and eternal Torah, Judaism can often be misinterpreted and even distorted to represent ideas that are in reality antithetical to the Torah itself.

One of the most basic values and attitudes that underlie all Jewish thought and life is that of gratitude...to the creator for implanting within us eternal life, to our parents for having given us physical life, to our employers, and even to the governments that provide for our sustenance and safety. These are the basic components of the Jewish attitude towards life in society.

Gratitude is such a strong and powerful value that it often supplants our own wishes, judgments and perspective on life. It is very hard for human beings to feel gratitude towards parents when they might feel they were unkind or perhaps even abusive. Yet, we certainly can note that the Torah seems to make few, if any exceptions to this overriding value of honoring one's parents, even after they have departed from

this world. It is simply a matter of gratitude for the fact that they gave us life, nurtured us when we were helpless, and looked after us when we were unable to make our own way in life. In effect the Torah is teaching us that the two greatest words in the English language are "thank you."

The daily prayers of Judaism are replete with expressions of thanks and gratitude. The fault line in Judaism is when one feels that everything one has gained or achieved physically or spiritually is due solely to one's own efforts and wisdom. That type of hubris and arrogance leads to personal and national destruction, as the Torah itself proclaims.

Often times in life there is a very thin line between the necessary self-confidence and self-worth of a person and unwarranted hubris and arrogance. The Torah wants us to define that line, individually and nationally, and to abide by it under all circumstances and situations. It is only a sense of gratitude that keeps a person from overwhelming pride and unacceptable haughtiness. The Torah emphasizes that even the simplest and most basic physical act that our bodies perform is worthy of note and gratitude to the Creator.

A Jew blesses his Creator at least 100 times per day. This is a constant reminder of the value of gratitude that should dominate one's life and outlook. The tendency of humans is to complain about what we feel is missing and imperfect and to overlook what has been accomplished and achieved. The fact that the glass of life is never quite full, never justifies not appreciating the part of that glass which we can utilize and being grateful for it.

Our generation has been blessed to see events, both personal and national, that were practically undreamt of a half-century ago. I do not understand how one cannot be grateful for living in a time when the Jewish state in the Land of Israel has been miraculously established and successfully taken root. For many Jews, somehow this is not sufficient because of the religious, social and economic shortcomings of the state. Yet, any modicum of a sense of gratitude certainly teaches that we should be inordinately grateful for having seen before our very eyes the fulfillment of many of the predictions of the great prophets of Israel.

We should be grateful that the average lifespan of human beings in much of the Western world and certainly in the State of Israel has increased dramatically in just the past century. Jewish families, who a few short decades ago could only hope to see grandchildren, now can confidently expect not only to

see great-grandchildren but even to participate in their life cycle events.

Those of us who are fortunate enough to live in the city of Jerusalem with its hustle and bustle, traffic jams and crowded streets, should be especially grateful for this gift that the Lord has bestowed upon us in our time. In our prayers we beg the Lord to realize our good intents and not our failed behavior. This is a reciprocal prayer because for it to have meaning the Lord demands, so to speak, that we appreciate and treasure what we have and concentrate much less on what we think we are missing

The Sotah: A Cry for Help - Rabbi Meyer Laniado

Is the goal of the *Sotah* ritual for the wife to drink the 'bitter waters?' Who would want to have it known that they suspect their partner of being unfaithful? Imagine what others would think and say? Would people think that it was his fault? The public may ask: has he not supported his wife emotionally and/or physically where she would seek 'love' elsewhere? Both parties, the wife, and the husband would come out of this ordeal humiliated^[1]. That is why the *Sotah* procedure is only done out of desperation when the husband or the couple can find no other solution. Only then would they make their family situation public.

The process of the *Sotah* starts as the *Hakhamim* have instructed. First, if a man is suspicious or uncomfortable about what he perceives about his wife's behavior, he should speak with his wife calmly in private^[2]. If the couple has proper communication, trust, and respect, then the situation should be solvable. If not, then we reach the second stage where the husband feels the need to involve others. He calls two people from the outside, possibly his friends or community members, to bear witnesses as he warns his wife. At this point, he has expressed that he does not know how to relate to his wife and has made his issue public. The husband knows that this warning is his choice^[3], and with it he risks losing his wife^[4]. If he chooses not to warn her and she does indeed seclude herself with a man she would not drink 'the bitter waters' nor be restricted from her husband^[5]. Warning her comes with risks but the benefits are her heeding of his words, taking his feelings seriously, or involving others who could be of assistance in their communication^[6].

If he wanted a divorce, he could have written one. If his goal was to divorce her without giving her the money he agreed to in the *ketubah*, that could have been achieved as well without invoking the *Sotah*

procedure of warning her before two witnesses^[7]. He has taken steps to speak with her privately but has failed in his communication. He has called for the help of others, the two witnesses to stand by as he instructs his wife not be secluded with a particular man, but they too have failed in hearing his cry for help. They took on the job as witnesses to the warning but did not succeed in repairing the trust and communication whose breakdown led to them being brought into the relationship. At the next stage, the husband chooses not to divorce, but rather to approach the local court for their assistance. He still has the choice of divorce and thereby choosing to not have her go through the procedure. In that case, she would leave without the benefits of her *ketubah*. If he chooses to continue, and she pleads her innocence and desire to go through with the procedure to prove her virtue, she too has the choice of leaving. She could say: "I'm innocent, and I am not interested in going through this procedure." She would then leave the marriage, although, without the benefits of the money promised in the *ketubah*^[8].

The marriage is at a standstill. Their communication and trust have broken down, and they need the help of others to assist them^[9]. From the early stage where the husband feels the need to involve the witnesses, the public will quickly learn of the situation. These witnesses have a choice as do those who are close to the couple, as well as the local Rabbis and community leaders. They can either take on the role of incriminators or as counselors, hearing the desperation of this couple.

The ideal role of a Rabbi of the court is not as a disciplinarian, but rather as an educator, a conflict negotiator^[10]. Rambam describes these judges as expert doctors who seek a cure to an ailment^[11]. As long as they are able to heal the person through natural means, such as altering their diet or exercise that is what they will suggest. They will only resort to harsher treatments if absolutely necessary. Similarly, these expert judges should try working with the couple to try and help them to save their marriage.

The *sota*, like the *ben sorer umore*, is not supposed to take place. The law was established to allow families to seek assistance for familial issues. A parent would only bring their wayward son when they see no other option. They realize that they risk losing him, but cannot figure out how to guide their son back to the right path. The point there is not for the son to be punished, as we know no parent would hope for that, the purpose is to seek help and council from the *dayanim*, the Rabbis of the court. Similarly, the *Sotah* only takes place out of desperation of the couple, and most importantly, the lack of the community's ability

to respond to their request for assistance.

^[1] For this derasha I am reading this with a modern western lens. The mindset of those during *matan Torah*, or *bayit rishon/Sheni*, may have been very different.

^[2] Mishne Torah Sotah 4:19

^[3] Rambam lists this warning as a *misva deoraita*, but it is not a *misva* like eating *massa* on *Pesah* where one must perform the *misva*. There are numerous reasons for this reading. For one note his introduction to the halakha, it is a description of how as opposed to stating: '*misvat ase min haTorah le...*' Later Rambam states: "*misvat hakhamim...*" So it is encouraged but not necessarily a must (also note his heading with the listing of the *misvat*). Also note that the *Hakhamim* advise to not jump to warning first, but rather speak softly and communicate with her. As well, a husband can retract his warning up to the point that she is witnessed alone with the man she was warned about.

^[4] If she will be seen alone with the man she has been warned about.

^[5] Note that in a case where the woman is seen in seclusion with a man without being warned she would not need to go through the *Sotah* ritual, nor be restricted from her husband. In contrast one who warns his wife and she is witnessed in seclusion with the person she was warned about she is restricted from her husband for up to a year before the trial. If she admits to guilt, she would be forbidden to her husband for eternity, and if she is found guilty through the drinking of the 'bitter waters' God will take her from this world. This only occurs when the husband makes a choice to warn her.

^[6] The view being presented here is that the husband's warning comes out of a desire to repair the relationship.

^[7] Mishne Torah Ishut 24:10

^[8] Keep in mind, although she may not have 'been with the man,' she was secluded with him after she was warned. She is not completely innocent.

^[9] Note the court warns the wife if the husband is in jail or is not capable of warning her. Viewing this halakha through the lens of the *sotah* ritual being a call for help, the court is coming in to assist when the husband cannot help himself.

^[10] This is discussed specifically in disputes between two litigants but may be applied here as well

^[11] Rambam Introduction to Commentary on Mishna כללו של דבר צריך השופט להיות כרופא הבקי, כי הרופא הבקי כל זמן שהוא יכול ואפשר לו לרפואת במיני מזון לא ירפא על ידי סמים, ואם יראה שהמחלה כבדה מכדי לרפואת במיני מזון אז מרפא בסמים קרובים למזונות כגון מיני משקאות ותערובות ריחניים מתוקים, ואם ראה שהחולי כבד יותר ושדברים אלו לא יתגברו עליו וירפאוהו ישתמש בסמים יותר חזקים ומשקה את החולה את ה"סקמוניה" וחלב הפקעותוה "צבר" וכיוצא בהן מהרפואות המרות הנגלות. כך הדין ישתדל לפשר, ואם לא יוכל אז ישפוט בנחת וישפיל עצמו וידבר עם בעלי הדין דברים רכים, ואם לא יוכל מפני קשיות אחד היריבים הרוצה לנצח את חבירו שלא כדין אז יתגבר עליו ויכביד עולו כמו שאמרנו

Rabbi Yosef Farhi OUT OF CONTROL

Why does the Torah put the Nazirite laws immediately after the laws of the *Sotah*? For if one sees a *Sotah* in her disgraceful state, he should become a *Nazir* [abstaining] from wine, so that he does not follow in her ways of immorality. (Berachot 63a, Nazir 2a) Wine, the chase for extras in life, can bring to immoral conduct. (Meiri)

Shimon Hatzaddik, a Kohen Gadol and the Gadol Hador, would not partake of any Nazirite atonement sacrifice. (That was because most of the *Nezirim*

were not genuine Nazirim. When they would realize the difficulty of the Nazirite laws, they would regret their Nazirut.) There was, however, one exception - that of a "goldilocks" shepherd from the south. Shimon Hatzadik said, "I asked him what brought him to cut such beautiful hair, and he told me: I was shepherding my father's sheep, and I went to draw water from the spring. I gazed at my own reflection, and my Yetzer Hara jumped up at me and tried to drive me out of my world. I said to him, Rasha! Why do you look with conceit at a world that is not yours?! Why should you be ruled by conceit, when you are going to be consumed by worms and maggots in the grave?! I swear that I will cut you (my hair), for the Sake of Heaven!" Shimon Hatzaddik immediately stood up for this Nazir, and kissed him on his head, saying, "My son! May there be more like you in the Jewish Nation." (Nedarim 9b)

There are a number of questions on this piece of Talmud. The commentators explain that the way the Nazir's Yetzer Hara was going to "drive him out of his world", out of his Olam Haba, was by making him "believe that he is god." What does this mean? Also, it seems from the words of the Nazir above, that a prerequisite for losing self control is haughtiness. What is the connection between self control and haughtiness? And one more point to ponder. R' B. M. Ezrachi, in his sefer Birkat Mordechai, asks: If Mr. Goldilocks from the south wanted to fight his Yetzer Hara by nullifying his good looks, cutting off his beautiful curls, wouldn't it have made more sense just to shave his head bald, right then and there? Why did he need to go through the process of becoming a Nazir, and only upon finishing his Nazirite days, shave his head for G-d's honor?

R' B. M. Ezrachi Shlita explains that there are two ways for one to fight his Yetzer Hara, to exhibit self control. One is immediate, but doesn't last. It should be used only in case of emergency. In this case, it would have been to go to the other extreme, to cut off his hair, right then and there. (R' Ezrachi coins this as "the Novarodock way") But this tactic does not last long, because it is not the stunning hair that is the problem. The hair is just a trigger that activates a deeper problem. Hair grows back, and Mr. Handsome from the south would then have been in the same vulnerable position that he was before.

The Nazir from the south wanted to make a lasting change. So, he needed to change his identity, to become a different type of person, a person who would not sin. Nazir comes from the word Nezer, or crown. The man from the south decided to wear a G-dly crown. What does that mean, to become a more G-dly person? It doesn't mean "shaving off" the

beautiful things that G-d has given you. It means to be proud that you are using the good that G-d has given you for the sake of bringing G-dliness to the world. To be a role model of holiness, by being proud of your holy lifestyle. And that you dress your best, because you are G-d's representative to the world you live in. (R Ezrachi coins this as "the Slabodka way")

The best way to change your identity to become a more G-dly person, the place where it all begins, is from the first words of the Nazir from the south. Stop. Close your eyes, and let the words of the Nazir sink in. Why do you feel haughty about a world that is not yours? This is the secret to self discipline, self control. It is all about whose world you live in. Is it your world, or is it G-d's world? Do you honestly believe that G-d owes it to you, to give you good looks? For that matter, does G-d owe you anything, at all?

The world that you live in is not the world that you deserve, for better or for worse. If G-d gave you power, looks, money, family, love, honor, happiness, wisdom, or, if G-d decided that you should not have one of these, it is the world G-d knows is best for you, to enable you to bring G-dliness into it. This is an elevated life, a life with meaning. G-d wants us to bring G-dliness to the world through the presents he gives you, and He does not want you to disregard the good looks He gave you, the nice car, the nice house. Rather, He wants you to dedicate it all to Him. If you look at what you have as a gift from G-d, you become a different person.

Nothing can help you toward self-discipline more than the realization that your world is not yours. Why is this such a powerful tool? Because there is a prerequisite for every materialistic desire you succumb to. And that is the feeling of ownership. The feeling works with an inner voice of "if-then". "If the food is on my plate, then I must finish it"(even if I am already full). "If the food is in my house, then I must eat it" (even if I am not hungry). "If the money is in my pocket, then I must spend it" (even if I do not need the item). When we undo the false "if-then" thinking, we have more self control. Feeling ownership is the root of lack of self control. But when you believe that what you have is not yours, האולמו צראה' ה, it all belongs to G-d and it is there for you to bring G-dliness to the world, you can take control of your haughtiness, your diet, and ultimately, your spiritual life.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Lifting Heads

The word Naso that gives its name to this week's parsha is a verb of an extraordinary range of meanings, among them: to lift, to carry, and to forgive. Here though, and elsewhere in the wilderness years, it is used, in conjunction with the phrase et rosh ("the head") to mean "to count." This is an odd way of speaking, because biblical Hebrew is not short of other verbs meaning to count, among them limnot, lispor, lifkod, and lachshov. Why then not use one of these verbs? Why not simply say "count" instead of "lift the head"?

The answer takes us into one of the most revolutionary of all Jewish beliefs. If we are each in the image of God, then every one of us has infinite value. We are each unique. Even genetically identical twins share only approximately 50 percent of their attributes. None of us is substitutable for any other. This may well be the single most important consequence of monotheism. Discovering God, singular and alone, our ancestors discovered the human individual, singular and alone.

This was simply not a value in the ancient world, nor is it one in tyrannical or totalitarian societies today. The ruler might be deemed to have infinite value; so might some of the members of his or her court; but certainly not the masses – as the word "mass" itself implies. Most people were simply regarded as part of a mass: an army, a work force or a gang of slaves. What mattered was their total number, not their individual lives, their hopes and fears, their loves and dreams.

That is the image we have of Egypt of the Pharaohs. It is how the sages understood the builders of Babel. They said that if a brick fell from the tower they wept. If a worker fell and died, they paid no attention.[1] Almost a hundred million people died in the twentieth century in Stalin's Russia, Mao's Communist China and Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge. We say of such regimes that people became "just numbers." [2] That is what the Torah is rejecting as a matter of supreme religious principle. At the very moment when one might be maximally tempted to see people as "just numbers" – namely, when taking a census, as here – the Israelites were commanded to "lift people's heads," to raise their spirits, to make them feel they counted as individuals, not numbers in a mass, ciphers in a crowd.

In the course of my life I have had several deep conversations with Christians, and there is one aspect of Judaism that they find very difficult to

understand. The conversation usually turns to the central figure of Christianity, and I am often asked, do I believe that he was the son of God. "I do indeed," I reply, "because we believe that every Jew is a son or daughter of God." What Christianity applies to one figure in its faith, we apply to all. Where Christianity transcendentalises, Judaism democratizes. My conversation partners often think I am being evasive, finding a polite way to avoid answering the question. In fact, though, the opposite is true.

The first words God commands Moses to say to Pharaoh were, "My child, My firstborn, Israel" (Ex. 4:22). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the Israelites, "You are children of the Lord your God" (Deut. 14:1). "Beloved are Israel," said Rabbi Akiva, "for they are called God's children." [3] One of the key phrases of prayer, Avinu malkenu, "Our Father, our King," encapsulates this in two simple words. We are all royalty. We are each children of the King.

To be sure, this is not the only metaphor for our relationship with God. He is also our Sovereign and we are His servants. He is our shepherd and we are His sheep. These evoke more humility than the image of parent-and-child. What is more, when God saw the first human without a partner He said, "It is not good for man to be alone." The Torah is thus signalling one of the defining tensions of all human life: we are independent but we are also interdependent. Our thoughts and feelings belong to the "I," but much of our existence depends on being part of a "We." Despite its unprecedented estimate of the individual, Judaism is at the same time an irreducibly communal faith. There is no "I" without the "we."

The Hassidic master Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Przysucha nicely summed up the Jewish approach to the value of a life. He said that we should each have two pockets. In one we should place a piece of paper with the words: "For my sake was the world created." [4] In the other should be the words: "I am but dust and ashes." [5] We are unique. We each have non-negotiable dignity and inalienable rights. But in and of ourselves we are nothing. Our greatness comes not from us but from God. That is the dialectic of life in the conscious presence of our mortality and God's eternity.

The point being made by the Torah, though, is that what matters is not how we see ourselves but how we see, and treat, and behave toward others. The world is not short of self-important people. What it is short of is those who make other people feel important – who "lift their heads."

I will never forget the occasion when Prince Charles, at a banquet given by the Jewish community, spent as much time talking to the young schoolchildren who came to sing in a choir as he did to the great and good among the guests, or when he came to a Jewish primary school and lit Chanukah candles with the children, giving each the chance to tell him who they were and what the festival meant to them. That, at least in Britain, is what royalty is and does. Members of the royal family make other people feel important. That is their work, their service, their role. It is the true meaning of royalty. Watching them, you understand Rabbi Yohanan's fine insight that "greatness is humility." [6] You understand also Ben Zoma's axiom: "Who is honoured? One who honours others." [7]

The challenge that emerges from the way the Torah describes taking a census is that we must "lift people's heads." Never let them feel merely a number. Make those you meet feel important, especially the people whom others tend to take for granted: the waiters at a communal meal; the woman who takes your coat in a cloakroom; the shammash in the synagogue; the people doing security duty; the caretaker; the most junior member of the office team, and so on. Make eye contact. Smile. Let them know you do not take them for granted. You appreciate them. They matter as individuals.

For this is the life-changing idea: We are as important as we make other people feel.
LIFE-CHANGING IDEA #31

You are as important as you make other people feel.

- [1] Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, 24.
- [2] As Jews were in Auschwitz.
- [3] Mishnah Avot 3:14.
- [4] Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5.
- [5] Genesis 18:27.
- [6] Megillah 31a.
- [7] Mishnah Avot 4:1.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
"And they shall put my name upon the Sons of Israel and I shall bless them" (6:27)

This was an extraordinary prerogative which Hashem conferred upon the Cohanim, that because of their pronouncing the blessings upon Israel these blessings would be fulfilled. But one important purpose of this arrangement by Hashem is clearly apparent: that the people should desire the approval of the Cohen. Of the Cohanim it was said: "They shall teach your judgments to Jacob, and your Torah to Israel; they shall put incense to your nose and

whole-burnt offering upon your Mizbeach (Alter)" (Devarim 33:10).

"And you shall come to the Cohanim, the Levites, or to the judge...and you shall do according to the word that they shall tell you...you shall not turn aside to the right or the left" (ibid. 17:10-11).

When Israel's blessings would depend on the utterances of the Cohen, the nation would certainly seek to find favor in the eyes of the Cohen and obey their teachings with more alacrity. We learn here the lesson that Hashem blesses those whom His servants favor. The Cohanim are singled out by the Torah, but in principle we perceive that Hashem hearkens to the blessings of all that serve Him: "He that has in his home someone that is ill, should go to a Torah Sage to pray for him" (Baba Batra 116A). Men are thereby induced to obey the Torah teachers because they understand that Hashem would hearken to blessings of His servants upon other men. Thus a father urged his son to go to the Sages that had come to town "so that they should bless you" (Moed Kattan 9B). We thereby seek to obey the Sages and to find favor in their eyes, for the Cohanim and the Sages are heard by Hashem when they utter blessings.

Question: "Israelites are blessed by Cohanim; who blesses the Cohanim?" (Hullin 49A). One answer (ibid.): "and I shall bless them" means "I shall bless the Cohanim" when they bless My people.

Another answer (ibid.) is that Hashem told Abraham "I shall bless those who bless you" (Beresheet 12:3).

Both answers teach an extremely valuable lesson: To Bless Jews is a deed which is richly rewarded by Hashem. Even when the blessing was said as a formality, as when a gentile encountered the Nasi, the Nasi declared that the gentile would receive Hashem's blessing in accordance with the declaration to Abraham "I shall bless those who bless you".

Then how much greater is the blessing of Hashem upon those that wholeheartedly bless a Jew! He that passes a Jewish home and utters blessings upon that household, although none but Hashem heard his words, has thereby gained a blessing from Hashem Himself. "For Hashem loves only those that love Israel" (Mesilat Yesharim Ch. 19). Quoted from "Journey into Greatness" by Rabbi Miller ZT'L