

Naso (take a census), Numbers 4:21-7-89  
May 18, 2013

***This week's Parshat Naso contains a census and a description of who does the work of transporting the Tabernacle, the law of the wayward wife, the law of Nazirite, and the priestly blessing. The leaders bring their offerings for the inauguration of the altar--identical gifts brought on different days. It also includes the description of how God would talk with Moses, His voice emanating from between the two Cherubim atop of the Ark. (RR)***

When I work with Jewish text, sometimes I like to take a passage or a prayer and turn it inside out, actually, outside in. I am absolutely tickled to take something, which, when pointed outward looks and sounds really offensive, but when I turn it inward, it becomes revelatory.

An example of this comes from the weekday Amidah, which includes the blessings of petition. "Against Heretics". In one translation it reads as follows:

"May there be no hope for slanderers, and may all wickedness instantly perish, and may all Your enemies quickly be destroyed. May You quickly uproot, smash, destroy, and humble the insolent quickly in our day. Blessed are You, Adonai, who smashes his enemies and humbles the insolent."

Oh, my...

So, what happens when we turn this inward? *I am* that Heretic. *I am* the one who I mistake for being God-like in my judgment of others, in my judgment of myself. *I can* be arrogant. *I can* be insolent. *I* cling to my view of the world as if it were the only one. *I* put my petty, small self as the King, as the God of Judgment. That is true. I do all that on occasion.

What happens if this insolence were highlighted, made conscious? What if my judgmental mind were open for review, quickly, immediately in the moment the thought came to mind, before it became a spoken word or an action? What if I had a choice whether

or not to believe that thought to be an unchallenged truth? What a liberation from the tyranny of my own mind that would be!

It is a conscious act of practice to remember that my habitual, reflexive, judgmental nature is only a relative truth, open for re-evaluation.

What if this awareness of the judgmental self were tied to a conscious act of practice to remember mercy and loving kindness?

What if the petty, judgmental mind was tied to a practice of remembering that it is not king, that it lives within a context that is much larger than itself?

With this, the prayer Against Heretics becomes alive. It is a means to become accountable. When it becomes a prayer of petition, then the commitment to quickly uproot the mental habits becomes earnest, vital. Then humility is automatically included in the intention. Grace can more easily follow.

It is in this spirit of transformation that I want to draw from the Zohar on this week's parsha: Naso.

This week's portion contains a census and a description of who does the work of transporting the Tabernacle, the law of the wayward wife, the law of Nazirite, and the priestly blessing. The leaders bring their offerings for the inauguration of the alter--identical gifts brought on different days. And the description of how God would talk with Moses, His voice emanating from between the two Cherubim atop of the Arc. And in our calendar, it is in this week that we receive our Torah.

So, for this contemplation, I would like to consider a way of holding the ideas from from taking a count to the priestly blessing.

In the Zohar we move from the idea of counting to taking an *account* of all our words and deeds

to blessing through teshuvah, and a commitment to holiness.

That is a commitment to living consciously, and working on a path of purification, and blessing.

At this time in our calendar--when we receive Torah and when the Tabernacle is complete, we are ready to begin the work of living well, living consciously with all our inclinations.

This guided contemplation will be in three parts, based on my reading of the Zohar on this portion, Naso. The first will be the “accounting”, the review of functioning self. The second will be the raising up, the cultivation of a path of Holiness. The third is the giving and receiving of the priestly blessing.

### **Part 1...the accounting**

In Jewish cosmology, quoting from the Zohar:

“...when mankind lies asleep, he experiences a foretaste of death...The soul of each ascends on high to an assigned region. There she is examined concerning all the actions she has performed during the day. These are recoded on a tablet. Indeed, the soul then gives evidence concerning man’s works, and concerning each word that issued from his mouth.

Should that word be an appropriate word, a holy word of Torah Study or of prayer, it will cleave its way through the heavens until it reaches its assigned place. There it halts until night falls, when the soul ascends, seizes that word and presents it to the King. An improper word, however, a word uttered by an evil tongue, goes up to its assigned spot, where it is put on record, charging the man with a commission of a sin.” (p. 178, Vol 5, Soncino Press)

From the portion:

“When a man or woman shall commit any sin...then they shall confess their wrong and he shall make restitution.”

This is simple teshuvah: a wrong identified, followed by restitution and repentance, and the fault becomes wisdom. There is no sin.

From the Zohar:

“The truth, however, is that through man’s teshuvah the Almighty Himself, as it were, rectifies on high the wrong committed, and the world it put right again.” (p. 179)

And how often does life this seem this simple?

Naso discusses the subject of a jealous husband. Jealousy is one of those primary passions which demands rectification. And in the portion, it is not the supposed infidelity of the wife which is the main issue, but the emotional storm that jealous uncertainty brings to the husband and to the family.

The jealous husband is instructed to bring his wife to the priest for a complex ritual which is designed to bring peace back to the family.

From the Zohar:

“The priest is forbidden to execute judgment. It is not judgment he executes in this matter, but on the contrary, he promotes peace in the world and increases loving kindness.” (p. 180-1)

This has inward significance: we are the hurt, angry, jealous, passionate husband. We are the accused wife. And we need the presence of the priest who brings loving kindness to the unresolvable emotional storm.

In the Zohar:

The bitter water she drinks “harks back to the days of slavery in Egypt—where both husband and wife could be accused of having relations with the Egyptians. Through the ceremony of the testing with water...all male and female were proved to be pure. The Holy One, Blessed be He, caused His name to dwell among them. Hence assuredly, it was by water that he proved them. Similarly, here it is through the waters that the priest proves the woman, through the Divine Name.”(p. 182)

The dust sprinkled in the water from the floor of the Tabernacle to add bitterness to the water, is like a sword of judgment made of dust, dissolved in the water. (p. 182)

The work of teshuvah is complex and can only take place between the individual with her words and deeds as her soul ascends to a relationship with her God, for accounting. Mercy will be present.

**Chant:**

**Chant: “B’shuvah vanachat teevashayun” (You will triumph through returning and stillness (Isaiah 30:15))**

**Silence**

## **Part 2....raising up**

“When either man or woman shall clearly utter a vow”

When either man or woman sets herself apart, to sanctify herself, all aspects of life are present, to be raised up into consciousness, from the good inclination to the evil inclination, to the most severe judgmental nature to the greatest capacity for loving kindness. All is raised up to Holiness. And

From the Zohar:

“for whoever sets about to purify himself is assisted from above.”  
(p. 185)

The path is laid out:

From the Zohar:

“Return, ye backsliding children.” (p. 186)

“Observe this: A man walks about in the world thinking that it is his perpetual possession and that he will abide therein from generation to generation. But even while he walks he is being put in chains...”  
(p. 186)

But when a Nazarite separates himself from his ordinary world, choosing a path of purification, marking the time by abstaining from wine, strong drink, and grapes, and does not cut his hair as a public sign, he takes on the commitment of becoming conscious of all that he hides from himself and raising it up to mercy and grace.

From the Zohar:

“If there be for him an angel, an intercessor, one among a thousand, to couch for man’s uprightness...then...Who is this advocate? It is man’s good works that stand by him at the moment of need... Should no advocate be found for him, he is declared guilty...observe that all a man’s works in this world are ready to testify against him; they do not vanish” (p. 186)

The task of the commitment is to bring all words and deeds in alignment with the good, through our accounting and our bringing them to mercy through understanding, through humility. All becomes Holy.

**Chant:**

**“Kedoshion ti’h’yu kidadosh ani” (You shall be Holy for I am Holy)**

**Silence**

### **Part 3 The Blessing**

From the portion—

The Priestly blessing:

“The Lord bless you and protect you!  
The Lord deal kindly and graciously with you!  
The Lord bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace!

Thus shall they shall link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

From the Zohar:

“As the angel of the Lord of hosts is a priest on high, so is the priest below an angel of the Lord of hosts.” (p. 190)

And the priest is also human.

From the Zohar:

“We are told that a priest not beloved by the people ought not to take part in blessing the people. On one occasion, when a priest went up and spread forth his hands, before he completed the blessing he turned into a heap of bones. This happened because there was no love between him and the people.” (p. 198)

Loving kindness must be present to give the blessing.

How do we get to loving kindness?

Once again we are told--

From the Zohar:

“Fear [and awe] embraces humility, and humility embraces a state of grace! Hence whoever is possessed of fear of sin is possessed of all those virtues; but whoever does not fear Heaven possesses neither humility nor the state of grace. (p.190)

“...whoever fears sin is called ‘Adam’...there is a teaching that the term Adam signifies the conjunction of male and female. He who achieves for himself the union of male and female is called Adam, and in this way has the fear of sin. He attains, moreover, to the virtue of humility, and even to the degree of grace.” (p. 191)

Being Adam includes both the conjunction of male and female, and the our highest spiritual aspirations and our earthly natures all receive blessing.

“When they are virtuous they are ‘Adam’...otherwise they are called ‘beast’, but both receive the blessing at one and the same time, the celestial Adam and the earthly beast.” (p. 196)

To bless we must be absent of judgment and filled with loving kindness. To receive blessing, we must be receptive with our whole being, all aspects of self coming to the fore, in their time, to be raised up to receive blessing.

Blessing and being blessed are one and the same.

**Chant: “Yvarch’cha...” (May the Lord Bless you and keep you)**

**Silence**

**Closing**

From the portion:

“On that day that Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle” and “it came to pass on the day that Moses had made an end.” (Zohar, p. 200)

We have received Torah. The Tabernacle is completed.

We have our assignments as to what part of the Tabernacle we must carry. We can only carry our small part. We all have our assignment of what our princely offering should be, and the requirements are all the same, each and every day.

We bring up our thoughts and our words and our deeds to the Light, practice teshuvah in awe, turn the pain of separation into the wisdom of understanding and mercy, and stand in grace whenever it is offered. To bless is to be blessed.

**Niggun**

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