



Parashat Naso



English version

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THE ART OF LIVING TORAH

After reaccepting the Torah anew on Shavuot, we are to relearn the Torah as if G-d is speaking to us in 2021, relating it to what we are presently going through and accept the 613, with 2021 vision.

Just this week, I received an email. "Rabbi Farhi, I am so grateful for your Parasha sheets! They are so unique, for they are not just about learning Torah. They are about living Torah, a constant work in progress. So many people learn and love Torah, but don't live it. עמלות בתורה, toiling in Torah, that one is blessed with all the blessings of the Torah for, is about building yourself, your character, living by the Torah. **אם בחוקותי תלכו ואת מצוותי תשמרו ועשיתם אותם** א"ר חנינא בר פפי: אמר להם, אם שמרתם את התורה, **הריני מעלה עליכם כאילו עשיתם עצמכם ועשיתם אותם.** If you keep the Torah, G-d considers it that you *made yourself*. (Vayikra 26; Vayikra R. 35:7) A person is created as a beast, **וְעֵיִר פָּרָא אָדָם יוֹלֵד**, (Iyob 11:12) and G-d wants building your character to be your goal. G-d wants your Torah *learning* to be parallel to your Torah *living*."

I am so grateful when I get feedback like that! One of the fundamentals of Judaism is that G-d created Man and His world incomplete, in a way, so that man can perfect himself and G-d's world. G-d created the world incomplete, specifically, because He wanted man to complete it, **אשר ברא אלוקים לעשות**. (See Rashi B.R. 11) G-d created man incomplete, uncircumcised, and He wants Man to perfect himself and circumcise himself. (Midrash T. Tazriah 8) G-d wants us to partner with Him in

creating ourselves, and He begs us in His Torah, **ונעשה אדם**, Let US create man.

The question is, always, how. How do I know what the Torah is telling me? Of course, you need a Rabbi, your personal **זבא-ות ה' צלאך**, your G-d-fearing "angel," who has no agenda or personal interest, a Rabbi who you can trust that can tell you what G-d is telling you. (See Hagigah 15b) But how do I connect when learning, myself, to what G-d is telling me in His Torah?

When G-d gave the Torah, the whole universe was silent. No donkey brayed, no cow mooed, no bird chirped. This is a condition to accept the Torah. Because the only way for one to learn Torah is to silence all F3, fears, frustrations, failures, and all other "inner voices." G-d turned the mountain over the people, warning that if they do not accept the Torah, Har Sinai would be their grave. (Shabbat 88a) Why did G-d need to warn them in such a way, by turning the mountain over their heads, if they already said, **ונעשה ונשמע**? Because G-d wanted no cellphone service, no phones ringing or vibrating, no access to the internet. A condition for connecting to Torah is disconnecting from everything and everyone else.

When a person can quiet everything, he can receive the Torah on a new level, on a personal level. One of the most amazing things about Torah, when Moshe "brought it down to earth," is that everyone can learn it, connect to it, on any level. This makes Torah very different from any other wisdom. You



won't find another book that is studied both by first graders and top professors.

After Pesach, a certain first grade Rebbi, reached out to me from an out-of-town Yeshiva in U.S. "Rabbi Farhi, I just put in Geniza the Thinkingaboutme.org parasha sheets I saved from ten years ago and brought with me to America from Israel, from the time I learned in Mir Yeshiva. I am reaching out to you now: how can I be the best first grade Rebbi possible?".

I responded, "First of all, you don't need to save the sheets. You can go on Yoseffarhi.com, and almost everything I ever wrote is there. Second, regarding the first grade, the main thing in education is to engage, not entertain. Make sure that you bring everything you teach to life. When you teach them about G-d creating the world and using the Torah as His blueprint, teach the first graders about planning and executing, and how words can create and destroy. When you teach them the story of the Forbidden Fruit, teach them that there are things that we just don't know or can't have, and if we wait just a little more, we could find out what we don't know, or have what we want. (The forbidden fruit was permitted on Shabbat, just three hours after the sin.) Teach them that no matter how much a person has, his inner inclination always tells him to crave what he does not have. (Haman's mistake, *המן העץ*)

When you teach them how Adam was sent out of Gan Eden, teach them how a person is supposed to act when he goes through a punishment, hard times, when things in life go sour. Every person has, at some time in life, someone that he is jealous of, like Kayin was jealous of Hevel, G-d's "favorite". Teach them how to overcome jealousy of "Teacher's pet." Every person goes through a time when he realizes how crazy the world is becoming – a time when he is given the opportunity to save himself, by building "an ark" for his own family to protect himself and what is most dear to him. Every person leaves his "father's home" at some point and goes on to building his independent self. Every person goes through an

inner conflict of sacrificing what is most important to him for something even more important, like Avraham at the Akeda. Every person, like Yosef, has a dream that his own brothers don't believe in, and everyone has a time that people he loved and respected most threw him into a pit. Every girl has, inside her, a queen like Queen Esther, and has times when she lives a life alone in a marriage or relationship, and alone in a beautiful palace, and needs to reach out to a Rabbi or Rebbetzin for assistance. Every girl has things she cries about, that no one else understands except for G-d, like Rachel and Chana. And every Jew can take all this and turn it into a song like David Hamelech.

Don't judge a book by its cover, even though I once did. I saw a book called "Daven your Age", and bought it on the spot. In his coaching course, Rabbi Geisler taught us to "Learn your Age" to reexamine and relearn everything we learned as a child. Every Shavuot, you are a year older, and G-d wants you to relearn everything you learned, age-appropriate.

A certain therapy happens when you connect your life story to the stories of the Torah and the Aggadot of the Talmud. Therapy through storytelling and relating to the stories of others has turned into a type of therapy called Bibliotherapy. As I always mention, a person does not think how he wants to think. A person thinks in line with his four S's. Social, Structure, State of mind, and Story. If you alter someone's story, you change the way they think. The greatest authors and orators are great, because they are great at just this. They know how to make you feel that the story they communicate relates to your life story.

In this week's Haftara, Shimshon's story is mentioned. Someone asked me what there is in the story of Shimshon that we can relate to in 2021?

The answer is clear. G-d wanted to show the Jewish people, forever, that He does not need an army to fight the people in Gaza. If He wants to, He can send one man, a disabled man (Shimshon was crippled in both legs, Sanhedrin 105a), to fight, singlehandedly, the people of Gaza.



(ironically, Shimshon also fought the "Philistine" people in Gaza) Contrary to non-religious opinion, Shimshon was not a burly man but an extraordinarily holy and spiritual man. He was almost Mashiach! It is a story of a G-dly man who did everything he did fearlessly, with G-d's spirit directing him.

With the IDF doing such a great job, with the Iron Dome doing such a good job, we could come to rely on them. What a mistake! G-d doesn't need an iron dome or an IDF with good tactics to protect His People. G-d wants us to rely on Him, always, and ONLY on Him. He wants us to know that He can save us by sending us His Mashiach, a one-man show, so that everyone will know that it's all HIM! In our shul, after Mincha last Shabbat, we all said Nishmat for the successful operations of the IDF against the terrorists in the tunnels, and G-d kept sending us miracles, all week long!

Selfie Steps to learn Torah in a relatable way.

1. Set aside time to disconnect in order to connect. See what your problems are and how they relate to the problems of the great Men and Women of the Torah, on an emotional level. Study the solutions they used to solve their issues, and see how it relates to solving your problem.

2. Bibliotherapy is a real thing. It is the art of telling a story in a way that can solve real issues. Try telling your kids bed-time stories of the issues they are going through and the creative solutions the hero of your made-up story used to solve "his" problems.
3. Bibliotherapy is great for solving problems in a group session. It is excellent in helping people to discover how to overcome issues like perfectionism, all-or-nothing thinking, depression that comes from helplessness and hopelessness.
4. When learning whatever you learn, make sure to see how it plays out in Halacha, down to the most recent-day Halachic discussions.
5. Every time you have a question in Halacha, look it up "inside", and study it from its source.
6. Most importantly, learn the sefarim of Chafetz Chaim. His sefarim, more than any others, relate to our everyday situations.

The Self-Help Addict

There is an obvious question regarding *Birkat Kohanim*. If G-d wants to bless the people, why does He need to do so through the *Kohanim*? Why does He need messengers? How could it be that a *Gadol HaDor*, who is a Yisrael, needs to be blessed by a *Kohen* who is a simpleton?

The answer is in the words of the *Kohanim*: "May Hashem bless you and watch over you." The *Kohanim* are teaching us two things. They are telling us that we are blessed. And they are telling us that our blessings are from G-d. There is so much of G-d's blessing in our lives that we are not even taking notice of.

Recently, my mother sent me a *chizuk* quote: *Remember the days when you prayed for the things you have now.* That is a great suggestion because it really makes one realize that he *is* really blessed! We get so used to what we have. We get so used to asking, wishing and praying for what we don't have. We get so used to wanting to be who we are *not* instead of being thankful for and accepting who we actually are, that we forget about all the blessings we have. We forget that G-d loves us. We need to internalize that peace; we need to realize that we are blessed, that we are loved.

Our Rabbis teach that the best vessel to contain and retain *beracha* is shalom, peace. (*Uktzin* 3;12) In order to hold on to a *beracha* that you are given, you need to have a “container.” Blessing is not a one-way street: the one being blessed must have – or, more accurately *be* – a vessel that can contain the blessing. He must be at peace with himself. This is a very deep and tricky concept. The reason ~~why~~ people don’t access G-d’s blessing in their lives is because when a person does not accept himself as he is, when his inner voice says, “I don’t like myself, or what I have” he cannot accept the blessing.

I have a relative who is anti-self-help. I used to think of them as “old-school,” but this anti-self-help person is actually living a life of inner peace. She is not constantly busying herself with self-help information. I never understood her. What could possibly be wrong with making an effort to be smarter, more successful, thinner, healthier, more productive, richer, and more satisfied with life? But recently, some new books came out with studies that the self-improvement industry can sometimes ~~do~~ more harm than good. They believe that many self-help searchers are setting up unrealistic expectations of themselves, which leads to bitter disappointment. Contrary to the message in Yaakov Shwekey's amazing song, “I Can Be,” you can’t be just anything you want to be. We have limitations, and all this is part of G-d’s blessing.

Why be hard on yourself? Who says you are not okay the way you are, right now? Who says you are not blessed? Even working on self-acceptance is something that we need to question, if that is making a person feel that he is not okay. Even working on self-acceptance is making inner noise - that can be blocking out the words of the *Kohanim*, You are blessed!

Let me ask you a question. If we did not split the Kotel with a *Mechitzah* between the genders, but rather between the people who come to ask for what they lack and the people who come to express their thanks for what they got... which side would have more people on it? I’ll bet it is the people who

are coming to ask! Why is it like that?!!! Why are we like that?!! Because we have too much noise in our heads of what we want, and not enough echo of the words of the Kohanim: *You are blessed*.

The *Birkat Kohanim* is an introduction to the downfall of our people in the upcoming *Parashiot* of Sefer Bamidbar. All of the problems begin when we don’t realize that G-d is telling us, I love you. I bless you. You are blessed. There is a double meaning to the letters of the word Midbar. It means desert. But it also means that G-d is *Medaber* (talking). In the desert, you can hear G-d talking to you, because G-d is heard only in silence. When there is silence, you can hear your mind think. And you can hear G-d’s voice saying that you are blessed. But this sound can only be heard when you silence all other sounds. When you are in a desert, when you don’t see anything, you do not want anything. You do not want to be anyone else.

After 8 years of writing on self-help concepts from the Torah, I realize that we need a balance of self-help - not an overdose. If you cannot shut off the self-help switch in your brain, it could be that it is hurting you more than it is helping you. Because self-help is something that is constructive only after you realize that you are blessed by G-d. Many people who are very effective in life, very happy and very successful, do not spend more than 20 minutes a day on *Mussar* and self-help.

Remember the days you prayed for the things you have now. The best way to help people who complain about problems is to first ask them to count their blessings. Then we can hear all about the problems. How many things are going right? Do you trust G-d that He has been taking care of you all your life, even when you were not able to take care of yourself? G-d does not need you to self-help. He helped you, even when you were not self-helping yourself.

People who are too busy with self-help are too often oblivious to the people in their lives. Sometimes self-help is just a way for a person to give himself a lot of attention, an expression of

haughtiness. Humility dictates that instead of being busy with so much self-help, realize that there are people out there who can use your help.

happy now? Isn't now the then of yesterday?! So, how much longer do we need to wait to feel blessed?

Why do we need to live life with the mantra that I will be happy when...? Why can't we just be

SELFIE STEPS to break away from Self-Help Addiction and to contain G-d's blessings.

1. Write down all that you have in life. (This is something that *Gedolim* actually take out time to do!) Enjoy the simple things. Be grateful for them.
2. Write down the names of all the people that you love in life. Make time for them. Accept them for who they are. Write them thank-you notes, even if you can't bring yourself to hand the note over. Even if you just read them out loud to yourself. When someone benefits you, say out loud, "Hey, so and so did something for me."
3. Stop the "I'll be happy when" thinking. And start remembering the day you prayed for the things you have today.
4. Become deeply engaged in work, family life or other activities, but don't multi-task. Become devoted to an institution or a cause greater than yourself. Pray with fire. Learn with an unquenchable thirst for G-d's word.
5. Write down the good years in your life, and why they were so good. When you achieved, when you received, when you enjoyed, when you realized the truth.
6. Most of all, be present and focused during *Birkat Kohanim*.

BLESSINGS OF LOVE

Notice the language of the *brachah* recited before *Birkat Kohanim*, the blessing given by the *Kohanim* to the rest of the congregation. It is utterly unique: "וְצִוְנוּ לְבָרֵךְ אֶת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה...and He commanded us to bless His people, Israel, with love." In no other blessing before a mitzvah do we add that we are commanded to do it with love. How are we to understand this? I'd like to share the approach of one of my colleagues.

The truth is that a person is expected to do all of G-d's mitzvot with love. If he or she falls short, however – and fulfills the mitzvah without love – it is still considered done. (Of course, the fulfillment leaves something to be desired.) But with regard to the mitzvah of the *Kohanim* to bless others, the matter is entirely different. No one wants a half-

hearted blessing. The only way for the *Kohanim* to give a blessing is out of love. If it is not given with love, it does not qualify as a blessing.

A warm blessing can melt even the coldest of hearts. People used to cherish blessings of the ordinary, mainly because of the love they invested in it. Indeed, we see this reflected even in English: Good-bye is actually a shortened version of what used to be the blessing "G-d be with you." People often make the effort and go to great rabbis for a blessing for the sole reason that they will be blessed lovingly out of the rabbis' true love for every Jew.

As my own rabbi pointed out, one common, severe, parenting mistake is committed in this very area

that we are discussing – giving blessings. When fathers bless their children on Friday night, they too often perceive themselves as ordinary people giving an ordinary blessing. Whether they are right or wrong, it would be a shame to waste this opportunity, to simply mouth the words because it is traditional to do so. Even if the father is not particularly special in his own eyes, when he blesses his children out of true love, he bestows on his children much more than he can ever imagine.

Each day, good mothers send their children off to school with the blessing: “Have a great day!” Now, the fact is that even a child feels how much of his mother’s heart and focus are in those words before he faces the world. Let us try to visualize such a child in school a few hours later at break time, noticing that no one wants to play with him. Just then, immersed in his loneliness, he will sense in

the deepest parts of his subconscious - *at least my mother cares for me*. If his mother is prepared in the morning rush to take a moment to gaze at him and say her “Have a great day!” with love, it will make a world of a difference. And that difference may determine whether or not this child feels alone in the world.

If we think about it, we will realize that there are so many moments during the day where we have an opportunity to give a heartfelt blessing. The Torah tells us that one who blesses a Jew, any Jew, will be blessed by G-d "ואברכה מברכך." But let us keep in mind that the way we bless others is the way we ourselves will be blessed by G-d. As the Baal Shem Tov would say on the *passuk* ה' צלך ("G-d is your shadow"): G-d shadows or mirrors whatever we do. If we bless others and care for others with our whole heart, G-d will do the same to us.

LESSONS FROM THE BOXING RING

מאויבי תחכמי. Joe Frazier, one of the most famous boxers in history, became a boxing coach when he got too old for the ring. He was asked why he could not train boxers to box like he did. He said, “I could teach ‘em how to throw a punch, but I couldn’t teach ‘em how to take a punch.

Fighting the *Yetzer Hara* is not about winning. It is about standing up and to keep on fighting. This tournament is not over until you die, or until you are not willing to get back up and go for more. To fight the *Yetzer Hara* in this world, you have to know how to take a punch, not just how to throw a punch. Yes, sometimes we fail, sometimes we make mistakes, sometimes we fall prey to the *Yetzer’s* scheme; sometimes we go through painful tests, loss, and other difficulties, that are harder than we could have ever imagined. Sometimes, it is not as much the test itself that presents the main challenge as it is our ability to get up and go for another round.

One of the 48 characteristics necessary to attain Torah wisdom is קבלת יסוריך, accepting pain. Why is the ability to handle the pain in life a prerequisite

for attaining Torah wisdom? What does one have to do with the other?

We live in a world where people are full of pain. It is the same world that our grandparents and great grandparents lived in. The average Jew, then, went through much more pain than the average Jew does today, but then, they knew how to deal with pain by ignoring it and focused on helping others and by living with ideals. Think about going through a painful dental procedure. It is easier to deal with the pain when focusing on the end result, when the mouth is in order, and the pain is gone. You feel pain the most when focusing on it. When you live by ideals, goals and ambitions, your life is focused on purpose, so you can handle the pain. You can take the punches.

A few nights before Shavuoth in the Osher Ad supermarket in Givat Shaul, the checkout lines were backed up into the food aisles. Looking for the shortest line, I noticed a simple-looking, low-income-bracket, older Sephardic woman, with her two young, simple daughters, waiting in line at the cashier. What caught my eye was not her shopping cart, but her shopping carts. She had four

overflowing shopping carts, each one with a different ingredient for making cheese cake. Graham crackers (for crust), cream cheese, sour cream, whipping cream, sugar, etc.

Sometimes, my mouth works faster than my mind, and I asked them, "Are you sure you are going to be able to finish all that cheese cake in just two days?"

The answer sent chills down my spine. "זה בשביל זה אלמות." The cheesecakes are for widows. Oh. I asked them, "Is this some sort of organization?" The answer was, "No. We just make cheesecakes and deliver them to widows for Shavuot."

I guess that doing kindness, thinking of others, and living by ideals, goes along with living a simple life style. It is ironic how often simple people, who have so little, are looking to do kindness more than people who are high line. As long as we keep trying to be high line, it is harder for us to come down and think about others. And as long as we think about ourselves, we do not know how to ignore pain. We do not know how to serve anyone except ourselves, as we try to get as much pleasure out of this world as we can. It is harder for us to deal with discomfort or hurt, as we – at the center of our attention – are too intensely focused on our own pain. Our ancestors, who dealt with pain better than we do, were simple people, who knew how to focus on others, and not on themselves. So, pain was not the center of their focus.

To acquire Torah wisdom, one needs to know how to deal with pain, nuisances, frustration, loss, etc., because to acquire Torah wisdom, we cannot be focused on ourselves. We need to be goal-oriented

people, loving others, and loving G-d. Not concerned mainly with ourselves.

And, through the fog of pain, come tears of connection to G-d. King David was born from pain. His mother suffered to have him. He was the descendant of three great women, each of whom suffered tremendously during their lives: Tamar, Miriam, and Ruth. Tamar's first two husbands remained childless, put to death by G-d. Tamar was sentenced to death by her father-in-law, Yehuda, and G-d saved her life. Miriam was afflicted with leprosy; no one wanted to marry her. And she accepted her pain, and G-d made her beautiful, as she was married to Kalev (see *Sotah* 11b). Ruth, a princess who converted, who left behind all the riches of monarchy, cared only for her mother-in-law's wellbeing. These three women had the power to accept pain and developed an even deeper relationship with G-d, because of it. And that is what made them deserving of being the forebears of the Master of Psalms, the book of hope in darkness, the book of tears of joy, and the book of faith. Because the connection a person has with G-d in times of pain is far deeper and more intimate than the connection one has when things are going smoothly. All that pain became the catalyst to the book of Psalms, the eternal script of Man talking to G-d.

Our ancestors needed to go through the pain and the trials of the desert, for that was the only place where they could acquire the Torah. That was the only place they could learn to focus outward, not inward. That was the only place they could forge a deep and lasting connection with G-d. And the only place they could learn how to take the punches.

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 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 *Nezirim*. When they would realize the difficulty of the Nazirite laws, they would regret their *Nezirut*.) *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 eventually be 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 gave 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 and 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 the 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 us, and He does not want us 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. 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 losing self-control. But when you believe that what you have is not yours, לה' הארץ ומלואה, it all belongs to G-d and it is there for you to bring G-dliness to the world, then you can take control of your haughtiness, your diet, and ultimately, your spiritual life.

A JEW ON A UNICYCLE

In Temple times, if a woman was accused of adultery by her husband and there were serious grounds for suspicion, she was given a choice: accept a divorce, or stand up to a strange test. The test, if she opted for it, required her to drink “bitter waters” into which the name of G-d had been dissolved. If she was guilty, she died instantaneously. Before the Sotah drank the bitter waters, she was commanded to bring a unique Mincha, a flour offering. This offering was unique, for it was the only flour offering that did not consist of wheat flour, but barley flour. It was a Grade B Korban, a cheap sacrifice, as barley is cheaper than wheat. And, no “toppings”, no oil and no frankincense. *For it is a Minchat Knaot, Minchat Zikaron, Mazkeret Avon...* (Bamidbar 5; 15) *A flour offering of jealousy and zealousness, a flour offering of remembrance, and a reminder of sin.* Rashi explains that the word Knaot, zealousness, is in the plural, referring to the zealousness of both G-d and her husband. But, what do the words *remembrance, and a reminder of sin* refer to? A remembrance of what? A reminder of what sin? She cannot be proven guilty until after she drinks the waters!?

The Orach Chaim explains this with an insight that reflects how people fall into sin and shows how sin can be avoided. This reminder of sin is a reminder of the first, cheap flour sacrifice brought by Kayin in the beginning of time. Kayin brought a cheap Mincha to the altar and was rejected by G-d, while

his younger brother, Hebel, offered the best quality sheep he had, which G-d “licked” with fire. What did Kayin do wrong? Why was his sacrifice not accepted? Didn’t his sacrifice pass quality inspection? How can this be referred to as a sin? And what’s the connection between the adulterous woman and Kayin’s having brought a cheap korban and then having killed his brother, Hebel?

Seforno explains the conversation between G-d and Kayin between and beyond the words. (Breishit 4; 4-8) *G-d accepted Hebel and his Korban, and refused Kayin and his flour sacrifice.* Seforno comments that when one brings a sacrifice, he is really bringing himself. This is the whole idea and the essence of the sacrifice. The *Kavana* one was to have as the Kohen slaughtered the animal was – *it is as if G-d is slaughtering me.* His thoughts should have been, “I am bringing myself to G-d”. This is how G-d perceives the sacrifice, as well. When G-d accepts your sacrifice, He is not only accepting the offering of the animal, *but He is accepting you.* A korban is the root of its word, *karov, getting close.* G-d does not want people to be offered on the altar, so we bring an animal, instead. We bring our best animal, because that is what is closest to the best thing I have, me. This explains why Kayin took it so personally. G-d did not refuse only Kayin’s sacrifice; G-d also refused Kayin.

And Kayin got angry, and his face fell. And G-d said to Kayin, why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you improve, you will be

uplifted; and if you do not improve, sin crouches at the threshold, ... The Seforno helps us understand these words as well. Kayin could not come to terms with the fact that G-d had accepted his brother and not him. G-d asked him, What's the big issue? There is nothing personal here. Why are you crestfallen? There is nothing here that can't be undone. If you better yourself, getting closer to G-d, you will also be accepted by G-d, like your brother, and you, also, will achieve great heights. And if you do not try to get closer to G-d, sin will lie in wait, passionately planning to lure you ever deeper and deeper into transgression. You can fight this inclination and release yourself from the clutches of sin only with special help from G-d, with the special powers of Repentance you will have by getting closer to G-d. But Kayin did not take this advice, and then, the result was the worst sin. Out of jealousy, he murdered Hebel, his only brother, the only other person in the world.

What is the moral of the story, the message G-d wants the Sotah, and all of us, to remember? When people sin, it is not only because they are not mindful of the safeguards preventing sin. (In the case of the adulterous woman, this means getting overly friendly with the neighbor, her boss, her

coworker, etc.) That is just a part of the problem. Usually, the main reason is underestimated. It is because the person is not bettering him / herself in an effort to get closer to G-d. When one is not proactive about his spiritual growth, when he is not constantly improving his spiritual level, lust and inclination to sin lie in ambush. A bored person is an easier target for the Evil Inclination, because he is not a "moving target". The adulterous woman fell to sin, primarily because she was not growing spiritually. *She is* a Grade B Korban, not one who devoted her "all" to forming her relationship with G-d. The worst scenarios – adultery or murdering one's brother – can take place when a person is not growing. Becoming a Sotah started when spiritual growth stopped, just as Kayin's becoming a murderer began when he decided to be satisfied with investing minimal effort in his spiritual growth.

This message leaves us no rest. This world is a two way street: you can be going only in one of two directions. There is no sidewalk, no shoulder of the road. A more accurate allegory is a unicycle. You've got to be moving forward, if you do not want to fall.

THE ART OF FINANCIAL SERENITY

Coronavirus has taught the world that real wealth is health, family, and safety. It has taught us that to be alive, to be able to breathe, is a blessing. Many perceive wealth as a blessing, but as the rich frequently confess, this is a mistake. Wealth and happiness are just not one and the same.

The wisest of men taught *יש רעה חולה ראייתי תחת השמש: There is a bad sickness that I saw under the sun, wealth that is reserved for its owner for his bad.* (Kohelet 5:12) Wealth is what made Korah haughty and ultimately led to his demise. Navot was killed because King Achab wanted his vineyard and wealth. Haman's wealth allowed him to plot to kill the Jews, which ultimately made him lose the lives of his entire

family and all of his property to Queen Esther. The tribes Gad and Reuven chose to live on the other side of the Jordan River to protect their wealth, which caused them to be the first to be exiled. Iyob's vast wealth in this world made it unnecessary to reward him in the next world. The Abarbanel confessed that it was his wife's precious stone that caused the jealousy of the Queen of Spain and brought about the Spanish Inquisition. (Peleh Yoetz 47, Galut)

Money can cause endless anxiety. No matter how much you have, you can never be sure that you will not somehow lose it all. And the inflation monster is continuously eating up your money, while it is "safe" in the bank. King Solomon equated

monetary anxiety with sickness because both sickness and money-related issues can cause you not to sleep or eat.

Therapists coined the term “MAD”: money anxiety disorder. Here are the six signs of MAD. **Overspending:** When people have such anxiety about money, the freedom of a shopping spree seems to offer temporary relief. **Hoarding:** Accumulating stuff they cannot let go of, or accumulating cash just to give them a feeling of control. **Frugal to a fault:** When people do not even spend the bare minimum on themselves. Thriftiness is a value, only as long as you do not miss out on life’s joys, serenity, or health. **Financial lies:** When people lie to others and themselves about what’s going on with their loans, debt, income, or expenses. **Financial enabling:** Overspending on your loved ones, preventing them from taking responsibility for their expenditures while putting your retirement, businesses, or serenity, in jeopardy. **Anxiety:** People who have anxiety about money have a distorted view of money, not differentiating between what is necessary and vital, and what needs to be put aside for retirement, emergency funds, or family Semahot.

So how does G-d expect us to stop being MAD? He blesses us with the most powerful blessing in the world, His *Birkat Kohanim*, each day. The blessing is referred to as *ברכה המשולשת*, the ‘triple blessing’. All three blessings of *Birkat Kohanim* have G-d’s Name of YKVK. Why is *Birkat Kohanim* unique, in that it is a triple blessing? And why is G-d’s Name mentioned three times?

The Targum Yonatan tells us that the words of each blessing dictate a different blessing. The first blessing is that your finances and material needs be taken care of. The second blessing is that you will be connected to Torah, blessed with wisdom and understanding, and the grace that comes with Torah. The third blessing is that you will be connected to G-d through prayer and that G-d will answer your prayers.

In what way are these three blessings connected? King Solomon taught, ‘*בדעת חדרים ימלאו*’ (Mishlei 24,4). *With wisdom, rooms will be filled* (with wealth). Our Rabbis explain this to mean that anyone who has wisdom will end up being wealthy. (Sanhedrin 92a) Our Rabbis teach that without financial stability, one cannot learn Torah properly, *אם אין קמה אין תורה*. And our Torah is filled with wisdom on how to manage our finances in such a way that wealth will equal blessing. Real blessing is threefold, wealth, wisdom, and a relationship with G-d; all are interconnected and work hand in hand to fight MAD and add blessing to our lives. Being connected to G-d through prayer is the best way to fight MAD. The *Birkat Kohanim* is teaching us that real blessing is never wealth alone, prayer alone, or even Torah alone. And to be blessed with all three, wealth, wisdom, and prayer, we need G-d’s Name of mercy, YKVK. Why?

We know that the Name of יקוק is representing *היה יהיה יהיה*. He was, He is, and He will be. Rabeinu Bachye points to something profound in the number of letters of each passuk of the three blessings. The first passuk has in it 15 letters, like the Name of G-d *יה* which represents present tense *היה* (numerical value of 16, one off is still considered the same gematriah), He is. The second passuk has in it 20 letters, corresponding G-d’s Name of *היה* (numerical value of 20), He was. The third passuk has 25 letters corresponding G-d’s Name, *יהי* (numerical value of 25), and He will be. He is, He was, and He will be. The first blessing of material plenty corresponds G-d in the present. The blessing of wisdom corresponds with G-d in the past. The blessing of prayers answered corresponds with the future.

G-d’s Name in the three blessings is telling us that He is in the present, past and future, all at the same time. Why is this important to fight MAD, and bring you serenity? When you realize that your anxiety is the outcome of your 1-dimensional vision, of focusing only on your present, only on your future, or only your past, you will realize that your financial anxiety is just anxiety. G-d is always above, and He always sees 3D. Difficult times are



just a part of a bigger overall picture that we can't see or understand yet. Anxiety for the future, regret for the past, are thoughts that have no place in your mind when your mind accepts and embraces the fact that the merciful G-d is in total control of what you are not.

Selfie Steps to financial serenity:

1. Control. Learn to have self-constraint on your short-term financial goals for the sake of your long-term financial goals. Consider your more significant, long-term financial goals like serenity, debt-free life, family semahot, safe investments for your retirement, your education, and the education of your children.
2. Stop! Stop worrying about impressing people you don't actually care about. Stop buying things you do not actually need. Stop spending more than you are earning.
3. Start getting organized, and get your finances in order. Start being more grateful for what you have, and trust G-d for what you don't.
4. Associate yourself with those who live with a proper balance of frugality and thriftiness, while at the same time live happy lives, and lives of meaning.
5. More money will never create financial serenity; only *you* can create financial serenity through proper balance and prayer.

Pray the serenity prayer, each day. Meditate on it. G-d, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.

6. When all of the above does not work, when you mess up again and again in your finances, *fire yourself*. Put someone else in charge, someone you have to be accountable to, and can take direction from, like an experienced business coach or financial adviser with many success stories, testimonials, and recommendations.
7. Eat well, sleep well, and exercise. Practice just breathing. Inhale, hold in that air, and then exhale it slowly while imagining all your fear, frustrations, and failures exiting your being with that breath of air.
8. Last, and not at all least, bring blessing into your life: Attend *Birkat Kohanim*. Recite *Birkat Hamazon* slowly, and from a siddur. Be on top of your *Maaser*. Respect your wife, spoil her. Read *Parashat HaMan*. Be honest in business. Start saying "*Im Yirzeh Hashem*", or G-d willing. Read Ketoret each day, better from parchment. Keep Shabbat with all its laws. Eat *Melaveh Malka*. Put some *havdalah* wine drops in your pockets. And then, when your finances are in order, sponsor some more of my *parasha* articles!

DEFINING HOLINESS

כל ימי נזרו קדש לה *As long as he is a nazir, he is holy unto G-d.* (BeMidbar 6:8)

Once, while traveling by cab in Jerusalem, I was listening to a thought-provoking discussion by Rabbi Noach Weinberg zt"l on the importance of defining to ourselves terms that we often misinterpret. One of these terms was holiness.

Interested in pursuing this topic with someone, I posed the question to my non-religious cab driver in a way that I hoped would pique his attention.

"Sir, I will bet you 25 shekels that there is something every tourist visiting Jerusalem comes to look for, and you don't know what it is!" He laughed and replied: "I know every attraction and

building in Jerusalem! You're going to lose your money!" I challenged him: "Everyone comes to Jerusalem searching for holiness. Can you define holiness for me?"

The cabbie promptly exclaimed that holiness means the holy sites, such as the Western Wall and the graves of the holy Rabbis. Now, from his non-religious perspective, my driver was not totally off the wall.

I persisted: "Are you sure that this is an adequate definition of holiness? Isn't it true that the holy places you've mentioned sometimes have unholy things going on there as well?"

At that point, the cabbie asked me how I define holiness. If we take a glance at this week's Torah portion, I think we will all be able to answer this question.

In this week's Parashah, Naso, the laws of the nazir are spelled out. If one takes on the status of nazir, he or she is strictly forbidden to drink wine, take a haircut, or get close to a dead body. The nazir is labeled holy by the Torah – "holy unto G-d." According to Rabeinu Bachye, the nazir is even holier than the Kohen Gadol. How can we understand this?

A Kohen Gadol is there to help gain atonement *after* sin has been committed. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Aharon was to serve in the Mishkan on behalf of the sinners. *After* the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam HaRishon brought a sacrifice. The Midrash calls him a *Kohen Gadol*. But the nazir is aiming to *avoid sin altogether* – not just neutralizing its effects after it has come into his life. If we think about it, we see that the common denominator between the first two nazirite laws is gaining distance from materialistic drives. No haircuts means not being obsessed with one's appearance. Not drinking wine means no parties. Disengaging and separating himself from worldly pleasures benefits the nazir not only with regard to keeping away from sin, but also in moving towards spiritual perfection. Keeping away from the dead is meant to insure that he does not engage in any

form of witchcraft. This is of importance because the holy nazir is a candidate for רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ – the privilege of receiving the Divine spirit. To keep his name clean of suspicion of witchcraft, he needs to refrain from contact with the dead (Baal HaTurim).

Putting it all together, we see that one who distances himself from sin can reach a level of holiness higher than the one who engages in penitence after a sin has been committed. Holiness is a concept which involves being "beyond and separated." (See Rashi at the beginning of Parashat Kedoshim.) G-d is referred to by the angels as קדוש קדוש קדוש – the epitome of holiness. The angels try three times to understand G-d and His ways, but He is beyond them. The Holy Temple was separate from the rest of the world – a place where materialism was superseded, and spirituality was tangible. Holy people are separated in a sense from materialistic or worldly desires. One who dedicates himself to a life of spirituality and meaning, strictly limiting materialistic instincts and egoistic impulses, can be classified holy as well.

This definition of holiness can seem, at first glance, a bit overwhelming for a citizen of the 21st Century. But if we think about it, we will realize that keeping materialism in check is actually an ideal remedy for today's major threat to our spiritual growth.

It has been noted that the modern period is an era of *ism's*: communism, socialism, fascism... An *ism* is a belief by people of any given culture in the most effective and beneficial lifestyle or system. As the generations pass, however, it becomes crystal clear that the reigning *ism* does not really solve humanity's problems, and a new "ism" develops in its stead. Our time has a major "ism" as well: *materialism*.

What could be a more fitting way to keep materialism in check than the concept of holiness?

While actually becoming a nazir in our generation is strongly opposed by our Rabbis, we can apply the concept to our own lives. Do we really need the latest cell phones or luxury car? Are the expensive

brand name clothes really so necessary for our happiness?... We might find more time for spirituality if we would properly define to

ourselves the difference between need and want – and use the concept of holiness and spirituality as our compass.

A Key To Marital Harmony

וּכְתַב אֶת הָאֵלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה... וּמָחָה אֶל מִי מְרִים
The priest shall write these curses on a parchment,
and erase into the bitter waters. (BeMidbar 5:23)

between man and his suspect wife (the *sotah*), surely the honor of R' Meir can be disgraced for this purpose! (Midrash Rabbah 9:20)

The Midrash tells the story of a certain woman who used to attend the Friday night classes of the great Tanna Rebbi Meir. Upon her late return home one Friday night, her husband (who was a scoffer with deep animosity to rabbis) asked her where she had been. When she told him, the angry man responded with the following ultimatum: You may not enter the house until you spit in the face of R' Meir! Obviously, the pious woman rejected this outrageous ultimatum, and did not sleep at home that night. But that was not the end of the story.

In truth, the Torah's prescription for testing the *sotah* is quite perplexing. In an attempt to check if she actually sinned, the *Kohanim* in the Beit Hamikdash give her to drink "bitter waters" into which G-d's holy Name is erased from parchment. If she did not sin and was not guilty of her husband's suspicions, she is blessed with beautiful children. If, however, she did indeed commit adultery, she swells up and dies in disgrace. But we cannot help but ask the obvious question: Is there no other way to check to see if she did indeed sin except by means of erasing G-d's Name?

Eliyahu Hanavi appeared to R' Meir, and made him aware that he had indirectly been the cause of marital strife. After he learned what had transpired, he went over to this woman in shul, and pretended that he had a problem with his eye, causing it to twitch. He asked her if she knew the widely known "home remedy" commonly practiced in those days to cure this condition. Embarrassed, she said she did not. He thus instructed her: "Please, spit in my eye seven times." After the poor woman reluctantly complied, he told her: "Now go home and report to your husband that you obeyed his request. He requested that you spit in Rebbi Meir's eye only once, but you added another six!"

The answer can teach us a powerful lesson, which is actually the lesson that R' Meir wanted to teach his students. The most common reason for conflict in nearly every relationship is a lack of respect, or an inability to control one's pride. Although the disputes take different forms – pride and respect are almost always at the root of the problem. The details are simply the way respect and pride manifest themselves in any given situation. Therefore, G-d Himself has us erase His Holy Name for the sake of giving the suspected errant wife, the *sotah*, an opportunity to exonerate herself and to demonstrate the importance of restoring marital harmony.

Upon seeing how their great teacher, Rebbi Meir, put himself to shame for the sake of marital harmony, his students asked him how he could belittle his own honor which, in essence, is like degrading the honor of the Torah? Given permission, they could easily have forced the ludicrous husband into allowing his wife back into the house.

The Torah's procedure of erasing the Divine Name also hints to us about how we ourselves can help restore harmony in our relationships. We can erase our "name" by erasing our ego, and thus communicate to the other person that "my ego is of minute value compared with the great importance I attribute to our relationship." This was the lesson of R' Meir to his students, and the example that we are all to follow.

R' Meir told them that if G-d allows us to erase and dishonor His Name for the sake of tranquility

Post Script

I once had a close friend who suffered from marital strife in the early years of his marriage. Upon hearing his long list of complaints about his new wife, I suggested that he receive some counseling from my Rabbi. Not long afterwards, the young man returned to me with a look of new hope, and thanked me for my recommendation.

Now, although I respect my rabbi greatly, I know that he is not a prophet. I was amazed that he was able to assess the long-standing problem and come up with a solution so fast. My rabbi explained that

he noticed a thread of mutual lack of respect running through all the years of their marriage. Indeed, he said, in his many years of counseling experience, he has found that this is almost always the core problem. And thus, he usually suggests that the couple work on increasing their respect for another. My friend found this to be sound advice. I am happy to report that “they lived happily ever after!”

Defusing Disputes

After their very first disagreement, many newlyweds wonder if they really were meant for each other. For some couples, this disagreement can take place on their first Shabbat alone. Sooner or later, of course, it happens in every marriage. A newlywed who has had proper guidance from a competent mentor will be able to avoid grave mistakes when that first (or subsequent) disagreement happens, and keep things from getting out of hand.

Busy schedules often prevent couples from discussing their differences of opinion until late in the evening. This is a mistake. Because the mind is tired by then, and not functioning with clarity, this is a perfect recipe for a blowout. As a rule of thumb, it is best not to speak about issues in dispute after ten o'clock at night. Doing so can also risk going to sleep angry which will start the next day on the wrong side of the bed. No harm will be done by putting off the discussion until tomorrow. With a mind fresh and clear, one of the parties often realizes that the issue was trivial, or that the other spouse's point of view is legitimate.

Of course, having differences of opinion with a spouse is not necessarily a bad thing. Rabbi Akiva Eiger, for example, would have long discussions – even disagreements – with his beloved wife about

life values and principles. Through them, he benefited by sharpening and clarifying his own views. After her passing he mourned her greatly.

If disagreements and disputes can have a positive role to play in Jewish life, how are we to know which ones are productive, and which ones to stay away from? Indeed, how can we turn our differences of opinion and opposite points of views into something that is actually positive and productive? The secret of serenity is to be found in Pirkei Avot:

Any disagreement that **לשם שמים** (for the sake of Heaven) will endure – but if it is not **לשם שמים**, it will not. What is a disagreement that is **לשם שמים**? – one like that of Hillel and Shamaï. What is a disagreement that is not **לשם שמים**? – one like that of Korach and all his followers. (5:17)

As the Bartenurah explains, the disagreement between Hillel and Shamaï was for the purpose of gaining knowledge of the truth – which they ultimately achieved. In contrast, Korach's dispute with Moshe was an attempt to attain honor and power. In the end, it backfired, causing the opposite effect. Awareness of these two very different motives can help us when we analyze any dispute, as we shall soon see.

Korach approached Moshe with the following two questions:

* How can it be that an all blue (*tchelet*), four cornered garment still needs to have tzitzit (tchelet strings) and the whole garment being *tchelet* alone without strings does not yet suffice?

* How can a room filled with Torah scrolls need a mezuzah on the door if the Torah scrolls themselves contain the *parshiot* of the mezuzah?

Korach tried to use the power of these two questions to undermine Moshe's credibility in the eyes of the nation. Let us try to appreciate why Moshe did not feel that he should answer these questions. Moshe understood that they were not really intended as questions, but rather as a re-statement of Korach basic argument: "כל העם כולם ה' קדושים ולמה תתנשא על קהל ה' – all of G-d's Nation are holy, so why are you (Moshe and Aharon) behaving self-importantly over G-d's Nation? The questions about the tzitzit and the mezuzah stem from the same perspective: Does a nation where everyone is so high and close to G-d on a personal level need a representative of G-d?"

As noted above, there are two types of disagreements. One type of disagreement is where the two parties are arguing to clarify a subject, all the while showing mutual respect and not allowing self-pride to get in the way. This type of disagreement has great value because it helps us clarify things that are important to us. The more

important the subject, the more synergy is created. This is how Shamai and Hillel, who loved each other very much, would argue heatedly over Torah subjects that they valued more than anything on earth. Today, yeshiva study partners attempt to re-enact these disagreements while in the Beit Medrash – without mixing in any self-pride or personal element. But if the ego is unleashed by one chevruta, the other one may quickly become defensive – and sometimes even offensive.

Korach's questions were more about the validity of Moshe than about the matters Korach was ostensibly addressing. Moshe felt the ulterior motives behind the questions, and realized that if he answered them, other questions would quickly surface in their place. When ego is at stake in a disagreement, the matter being discussed does not endure because clarification can not be achieved.

Instead of arguing back, Moshe fell on his face. He did not want to be part of this disagreement. Hence, the mishnah we are discussing does not even mention Moshe, but speaks rather about the disagreement (לא לשם שמים) of Korach and his followers. Moshe responded to Korach only from a perspective that was "לשם שמים".

Whenever we feel affronted or slighted, we can learn from Moshe's shining example not to unleash our ego and respond. Rather, we should ask ourselves: "How does G-d want me to respond?"

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