

PARASHAH: Naso (Take)
ADDRESS: B'midbar (Numbers) 4:21-7:89
READING DATE: Shabbat
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam,
asher bachar banu m'kol ha-amim,
v'natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

This is **Parashat Naso**. The census of the first few chapters of B'midbar continues into chapter four of this portion. HaShem was masterfully preparing an army that would go into the Promised Land and take possession of it for him—and for themselves. The census also regulates certain chosen individuals who would be needed to disassemble, transport, and then reassemble the portable House of God, the Mishkan (Tabernacle). The Gershon and M'rari families were singled-out for these purposes.

The Sotah (the wife of suspect)

Chapter 5 spells out certain regulations concerning relationships between men and women, specifically between husband and wife. Interesting to note is the phenomenon of the “spirit of jealousy” that may come over the man (v. 14) in the event that his wife is unfaithful without his direct knowledge. What is this mysterious “jealousy” that the Torah mentions?

I believe that it testifies of the unique and mysterious “echad” (one-ness, unity) that even Sha'ul spoke of in the Renewed Covenant. When HaShem joins husband and wife, they share the same “basar,” that is “flesh.” I believe that the Holy One, Blessed be He, preserves the holy union of two individuals made one, by giving them divine insight in matters of fidelity. That the union of husband and wife is of great sanction is evidenced from a general examination of the **Talmud**. What the Torah had to say about marriage and faithfulness left an indelible mark in the minds of the sages.

The idea of matrimony, which is inculcated by the Talmud, is of the highest. The ordinary term for marriage is “kiddushin” (a whole tractate of the Talmud), and denotes ‘sanctification.’ It is so called because ‘the husband prohibits his wife to the whole world like an object which is dedicated to the Sanctuary’ (Kid. 2b). It implies the strictest chastity in both parties, hence the instructions in our current parashah. ‘Immorality in the house is like a worm on vegetables’ (Sot. 3b), and it holds good of the husband as well as the wife. ‘He among the full-grown pumpkins and she among the young ones’ (Ibid. 10a) ran a proverb, which indicates that infidelity on the husband’s part conduces to unfaithfulness in the wife.

What is the “jealousy” that comes over the partner of the unfaithful one? The Talmud goes on further to quote a clever saying:

“When husband and wife are worthy (faithful to each other), the Sh’khinah (manifest Glory of God) is with them; when they are not worthy (unfaithful) fire (i.e., jealousy) consumes them” (Sot. 17a).

We humans stand to learn a great deal about marital fidelity from the one who wrote the book on the topic: God himself. What sort of lessons do you suppose we could ascertain from the Torah’s dealings on idolatry and the jealousy that it drives our Husband to?

Our Jealous Husband

As I’ve stated in another parashah, idolatry is one of the most insulting sins against our God! Why? When we replace God with a lesser interest, we are not only turning our attention towards something other than our LORD, we are actually focusing our love and affection—things which were created to belong to HaShem alone—towards something which has no authority to even be identified as God! In essence, we transfer the glory due to HaShem, to another, less qualified object! It doesn’t have to have the name “Ba’al” to be a false god. Anything other than HaShem himself is an idol! No wonder our God is a “jealous” God!

The sages teach on the statement “jealous,” found in our Torah portion at Ki Tissa (Sh’mot 34:14). According to the Midrash (a homiletic application of Scripture), the term jealous only applies when we as his created subjects transfer our affection to something that is less qualified to receive it than God himself. As an example, they tell of a married couple, where the husband, who is royalty, becomes enamored with a woman who is not his wife. The story says that upon discovery of his lust, his wife, the queen, confronts him about the other woman. Her husband confesses that he is fascinated with another. His wife then wants to know about the other woman’s status. The king is puzzled. His wife explains that if he is lusting after someone of higher status than she is, then perhaps the

other rightfully ought to receive it—since the other is equal to or higher than the queen is. But if the other woman is of lower status, then the queen has a right to be jealous, since her husband the king is stooping low to transfer his affection!

Of course the literal aspects of this Midrash are ridiculous—no other woman, whether queen or commoner should be occupying the king's thoughts! No one but his wife deserves his affection. Yet the teaching principle remains valid: God becomes jealous when we transfer our attention to a lower, less qualified object! He wouldn't be jealous if the object of our affection was equal to or higher than he was. Of course since there exists no other person or thing in the known universe that is equal to or higher than HaShem—he then has a right to become jealous!! This is the “clincher!” We cannot serve anything else and expect him not to be jealous!

With all of the troubles that pervade married life, perhaps, it is supposed, that the single life is better than being consumed by a jealous fire over an unfaithful spouse. Concerning singleness, a reader once asked me the advantages. Here was my reply:

“I want you to read 1 Corinthians Chapter 7. In it you'll find some very good instructions given to the married and unmarried alike. It is true that the rabbis had, and still have, a high view of marriage. The Talmud stresses this view. ‘The unmarried person lives without joy, without blessing, and without good’ (Jeb. 62b); ‘An unmarried man is not a man in the full sense; as it is said, “Male and female created He them, and blessed them and called their name man” (Gen. 5:2)’ (Ibid. 63a). A wife meant a home; hence the saying, ‘A man's home is his wife’ (Joma 1.1), and ‘R. Jose said, Never have I called my wife by that word, but always “my home”’ (Shab. 118b). But don't let all this scare you. Remember this is commentary on the Torah, not the authoritative Torah itself! These are men's opinions. High remarks are made in the Torah, to the single individual who fully devotes himself to HaShem in his singleness! Pray about your potential mating. It is a very important decision to make! To be sure, the Torah designed it to be a lasting one.”

Aharonic Benediction

Easily the most notable feature of this week's portion is the “Aharonic Blessing” or “Priestly Benediction” of chapter six, verses 22-27. The blessing itself naturally falls into three parts: the first blessing (v. 24), the second blessing (v. 25), and the third blessing (v. 26). The ancients are not without their comments on this most beloved of Torah blessings. Quoting the Stone Edition TaNaKH:

“The First Blessing. May God give you the many blessings that are specified in the Torah (Sifre), and protect your newly gained blessing of prosperity so that bandits cannot take it away from you (Rashi).

“**The Second Blessing.** May God enable you to perceive the wondrous wisdom of the Torah (Sforno).

“**The Third Blessing.** One may have prosperity, health, food and drink, but if there is no peace it is all worthless (Sifra, Bechukosai) (p. 340).”

I personally believe that our sages had some wise things to say about the Torah, considering the fact that they lived in an era when the knowledge of the Messiah was either suppressed or rejected. However, we who know the Blessed Name of the Messiah Yeshua, and the power of his fellowship, can add further insight to this ancient benediction.

יְבָרַכְךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ
‘Y’varekh’kha ADONAI v’yishmerekha.
[May ADONAI bless you and keep you.]’

Before you found the Messiah, **God** sought for you! He sought to **bless** you, by bringing you into the fellowship of his beloved Son! When the time was right, and your heart was tender, he lovingly reached out to **you** and saved you from the death-grip that sin had you in! Once your tender heart accepted his covenant relationship, based on trusting faithfulness to his Only, Unique Son, his covenant love for you secured a place for you in his Kingdom to come! You were his for the **keeping!**

יָאֵר יְהוָה אֶל פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיִּחַנֶּךָ
‘Ya’er ADONAI panav eleikha vichunekka.
[May ADONAI make his face shine on you and show you his favor.]’

The Torah teaches us the wonderful, yet mysterious truth that the “saving” Name of **ADONAI** is **Yeshua!** The Mighty Name of **Yeshua** is the power of Salvation from the Father himself! When Yah’s Salvation walked the earth in bodily form, we beheld his k’vod (glory), and it was full of Grace and Truth! To attempt to look at the Eternal YHVH was to invite instantaneous death! To be sure, the Torah teaches us that no man has seen God and lived! Yet, **Yeshua** informed us that to look upon his **face** is to behold the face of the Father! The gracious expression of the Father’s **favor** was demonstrated most fully in his Son’s bloody sacrificial death, burial and miraculous resurrection! Through the sacrifice of the Son, the Father’s face **shines** down upon **us!**

יִשָּׂא יְהוָה אֶת פְּנֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַיַּשֵּׂם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם
‘Yissa ADONAI panav eleikha v’yasem l’kha shalom.
[May ADONAI lift up his face toward you and give you peace.]’

The Torah says, 'yissa ADONAI.' What is the meaning of 'yissa?' The root word is 'naw-sah,' which means to 'lift, raise up, furnish, magnify, pardon.' We gain the Hebrew word 'nasi,' which means 'prince, exalted one, chief' from this same root word. But we also get a little-known, more specialized meaning from the word 'nasi'; this Hebrew word also means 'rising wind, vapor.' Who is the magnificent **Rising Wind** which **uplifts** the **Face of ADONAI**? Who is that Exalted Vapor who testifies of all that Yeshua was and is and is to come, whose filling ushers in everlasting **Shalom**? Who is the Power of God to stand us on our feet and put a new song in our mouths? The **Ruach HaKodesh** is this person! He is the lifter of our souls! His miracle-working indwelling is the Power of God to lift up our countenance and usher in the genuine shalom that only comes from knowing the Messiah Yeshua in the pardon of our sins!

This blessing has many wonderful facets indeed! To be sure, HaShem says that the cohanim (priests) are to bless the people (read verse 22). Yet in verse 27 HaShem explicitly states:

וְשָׂמוּ אֶת-שְׁמִי עַל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲנִי אֲבָרְכֵם
 'V'samu eht-sh'mi al-b'ney Yisra'el va-ani avaracheym.
 [In this way they are to put my name on the people of Isra'el, so that I
 will bless them.]'

Who does the blessing? The priests are conduits. Only HaShem can truly provide the covenant power necessary to bring one into a right relationship with him, through his Son, bringing about a life that is changed as a result of the Spirit that comes to dwell within us!

This is true Shalom!

The closing blessing is as follows:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam,
 asher natan lanu Torah-emet,
 v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
 Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
 Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
 you have given us your Torah of truth,
 and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
 Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
 Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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