

PURSUE POSITIVE OR SIDESTEP SIN

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Naso

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Today's Learning
Parah 9:2-3
Kitzur 151:4-152:1
Eruvin 33
Yerushalmi Shabbat 55

This coming Tuesday, the 15th of Sivan, is both the birthday anniversary and yahrzeit of Yehuda, the fourth son of the Patriarch Yaakov. (Shalshet Hakabalah; Melitzi Esh). Regarding Yehuda, R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l taught: Of all of Yaakov's sons, it was Yehuda who earned the right to be the forebearer of the Davidic dynasty and of mashiach. The Torah portrays Yehuda as a person whose righteousness was tested many times; unlike his brother Yosef, whose behavior was the model of consistency, Yehuda sometimes struggled and fell. Yosef and Yehuda are examples of what the Rambam calls the "chassid me'uleh" and "moshel b'nafsho," respectively.

Rambam explains (Shemoneh Perakim, ch.6) that a "chassid me'uleh" is a person who is innately righteous. He wants to do what is right, and he does it without any obvious internal struggle. Rashi suggests (Shmot 1:4) that Yosef was such a person; "The same Yosef who shepherded his father's flocks is the righteous Yosef who ruled Egypt."

The "moshel b'nafsho," on the other hand, is a person who feels the pull of the evil inclination, even if only to the slightest degree, but overcomes these challenges. This is what Yehuda did in saving Tamar, what he failed to do completely (see Rashi, Breishit 38:1) when given the opportunity to save Yosef, an error which he in turn corrected by risking his own life to save Binyamin.

This is why Yehuda, not Yosef, was chosen as the ancestor of kings. The Torah concept of a king is not someone who is "better than" his subjects, but someone who has experienced and overcome spiritual struggles. Only then can he lead them in conquering their own evil inclinations and fulfilling G-d's will. (Yemei Zikaron, pp. 70-75)

"Uplift the sons of Kehat . . ." (4:2)

"Uplift the sons of Gershon also . . ." (4:22)

"The sons of Merari, according to their families you should count them." (4:29)

In these verses, Moshe was told to count the descendants of each of the three sons of Levi. Why did Hashem use the expression "naso"/"uplift" in connection with two of them, but not the third? R' Yaakov Moshe Charlop z"l (died 1951) explains as follows:

We read in Breishit (2:15), "He put him [Adam] in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it," and Chazal interpret that "to work it" refers to keeping positive commandments and "to guard it" refers to observing negative commandments. The idea [writes R' Charlop] is that in Adam's state before his sin, any action that he might have taken would have been either a mitzvah or a sin. [It either would have contributed to furthering G-d's purpose in creating the world or it would not have contributed.] If we lived in the ideal world which Hashem envisioned (as Adam briefly did), this would still be true. No activities would fall into the neutral category of "reshut"/"optional."

However, we live in a world where the force of spirituality is diminished. Some of our actions are neither mitzvot nor sins, they are only "reshut." (Nevertheless, a memory of the "old world" exists in Eretz Yisrael, where "optional" activities such as planting and harvesting are intimately bound up with numerous mitzvot.) In the future, we will again live in the ideal state where all of our actions have a spiritual effect.

In last week's and this week's parashot, Hashem assigns jobs in the mishkan/Tabernacle to the levi'im. The mishkan was the place where our ancestors got a taste of the spirituality which will again be revealed when the world reaches its ideal state. That mishkan had three parts: the courtyard, the Holy, and the Holy of Holies. So, too, Bnei Yisrael have three parts: kohanim, levi'im and yisraelim. There are also three ways of serving Hashem: through Torah, through prayer, and through work. However, "work" is only a service to G-d in the ideal world (such as in Adam's world). For us, it is a reshut/optional. [Each set of threes parallels the other set - Torah, Holy of Holies (where the Torah was kept) and kohanim; prayer, levi'im (who sang/prayed in the Temple), and the Holy; work,

yisraelim, and the public courtyard.]

There were also three parts to the tribe of Levi, i.e., the families of Kehat, Gershon and Merari. Kehat attained the greatest holiness of the three - that family carried the holiest vessels of the mishkan, including the Holy Ark. Gershon achieved the second highest level. Merari was third, and he thus paralleled service of Hashem through work. However, since, until the time of mashiach, work is not spiritually uplifting, the Torah did not use the expression "Naso"/"Uplift" in connection with Merari. (Mei Marom Vol. 11, No. 11)

"Thus you shall bless Bnei Yisrael . . ." (6:23)

The midrash relates that when Hashem told Aharon and his sons to bless Bnei Yisrael, the nation said, "Master of the Universe, why do You tell the kohanim to bless us? We want only Your blessing!"

Hashem responded, the midrash continues, "I will bless you." The midrash concludes: This is why the kohanim raise their hands above their heads and spread their fingers, thereby creating apertures through which Hashem can peek over their shoulders.

R' Shaul Brach z"l (early 19th century) asks: If Hashem blesses Bnei Yisrael, what role do the kohanim play? He answers:

The gemara (Yoma 66b) states: "When the Name of G-d would emanate from the Kohen Gadol's mouth, everyone would bow and fall on their faces." The gemara does not say that the Kohen Gadol said the Name, only that it emanated from his mouth. Hashem, so-to-speak, spoke through the Kohen Gadol's lips. The Arizal explains that although the Kohen Gadol was not an active participant in the recitation of G-d's Name, his (the Kohen Gadol's) holiness made it possible. So, too, says R' Brach, the sanctity of the kohanim makes it possible for Hashem to look over their shoulders and bless Bnei Yisrael. (K'hayom Timtza'un)

An Astonishing Midrash

"Ye'varechecha Hashem"/"May Hashem bless you" - this refers to "Remember the day of Shabbat . . ."

"Ve'yishmerecha"/"May Hashem guard you" - this refers to "Guard the day of Shabbat . . ."

There are two aspects to Shabbat - "Remembering the day" involves keeping the positive commandments associated with Shabbat, e.g. reciting kiddush. "Guarding the day" involves not transgressing the negative commandments associated with Shabbat.

Paralleling these two aspects, there are two types of people when it comes to serving Hashem. Some people focus on the positive commandments. These people tend to be outgoing; they try to

influence others and to include them in numerous spiritual projects and activities. Other people focus on not transgressing the negative commandments. These people tend to be more more reticent and less involved in various projects.

When the kohanim recite Birkat Kohanim/The Priestly Blessings, they address both types of people. To those whose service of Hashem parallels "Remember the day" (i.e., those who focus on the positive commandments), the kohanim say, "Ye'vearechecha Hashem"/"May Hashem bless you and your activities." [Ed. Note: Rashba writes that the word "le'vearech," which we translate imprecisely as "to bless," means, "to cause to spread out." Thus, "Ye'vearechecha Hashem" could aptly be translated as a blessing to the one who is involved, and involves others, in many good deeds: "May Hashem cause your good deeds to be widespread."]

To those whose service of Hashem parallels "Guard the day" (i.e., they focus on negative commandments), the kohanim say, "May Hashem guard you." (Binat Nevonim)

Rabbenu Gershom Me'or Hagolah a"h
born approx. 960 - died 1040

A noted leader of Ashkenazic Jewry during its formative years, Rabbenu Gershom ben Yehuda Me'or Hagolah was probably born in Metz, in the Rhineland, but spent most of his life in nearby Mainz. He studied under R' Yehuda Leontin and, some say, in Babylon, under R' Hai Gaon

R' Gershom's yeshivah in Mainz was the major center of Torah study in its day, and the students of this academy produced many important commentaries on the Talmud. The most famous of these was written by Rashi, who studied under two of R' Gershom's disciples, R' Yaakov ben Yakar and R' Yitzchak ben Yehuda. R' Gershom was greatly revered throughout the generations, as evidenced by his title "Me'or Hagolah"/"The Light of the Exile."

R' Gershom corrected the text of the Talmud from reliable manuscripts, thereby clarifying many obscure passages. (Rashi had access to a Talmud written in R' Gershom's own hand.) R' Gershom also wrote a Talmud commentary and it is printed in some volumes of the standard Vilna edition of the Talmud.

R' Gershom is best known for the enactments which were enacted by rabbinic synods at his behest. These include a prohibition on polygamy and a prohibition on divorcing one's wife against her will. These decrees are accepted by Ashkenazic Jews throughout the world. R' Gershom's responsa, too, were considered authoritative by Ashkenazic Jewry. He also composed liturgical poetry which was noted for its depth, power, and simplicity. One of these is Zechor Brit Avraham, which is recited during Ne'ilah of Yom Kippur. (Sources: The Artscroll Rishonim, p.118; Rashi to Sukkah 40a; Machzor Korban Aharon: Mavo Hapiyutim.)

Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Edeson and family in honor of the birthdays of Nathan, Helene, Ian Hillel, Samuel

Hirsch Edeson

The Siegel family in memory of Jamie Lehmann a"h brother of Barbie Lehmann Siegel

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at Project Genesis start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
