

ODE TO JOY

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Naso

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Today's Learning:
Nach: Tehilim 73-74
Mishnah: Negaim 1:6-2:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Nedarim 6
Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 590:7-9

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Zaragoza, Spain; 1255-1340) opens his commentary on this week's parashah with a verse from Mishlei (21:15), "Performance of justice is a joy to the righteous." He writes: King Shlomo informs us in this verse that a person is obligated to feel joy when he sees a mitzvah being performed, not only when he is the one performing it, but also when someone else is. This is indicated by the fact that the verse says, "Performance of justice is a joy," not, "Performing justice . . ." It is known, Rabbeinu Bachya adds, that the joy one experiences when performing a mitzvah is itself

a mitzvah. Just as performing a mitzvah is a form of serving Hashem, so the joy one experiences because of mitzvot is a form of serving Hashem.

Rabbeinu Bachya continues: We read (Devarim 28:47) that the curses in Parashat Ki Tavo will come to pass "because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, with joy and goodness of heart." We also are commanded (Tehilim 100:2), "Serve Hashem with joy." Joy makes our service complete. This is why the Temple service was accompanied by music--both vocal and instrumental--for music puts man's soul on the path to joy. In our parashah (4:47), the Levi'im are commanded to perform "the service of service." The Gemara (Arachin 11a) explains: "What service serves the Temple service? The musical accompaniment!" The Levi'im are commanded to sing so that the mitzvah of the sacrificial service will be performed joyously.

"Uplift the sons of Kehat . . ." (4:2--last week's parashah)

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

"The sons of Merari, . . . 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 "nasso" / "uplift" in connection with two of them, but not the third? R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (Yerushalayim; died 1951) explains as follows:

We read in Bereishit (2:15), "He put him [Adam] in the Garden of Eden, to work it and to guard it." Our Sages interpret "to work it" as a reference to keeping positive commandments and "to guard it" as a reference to observing negative commandments. The idea, writes R' Charlap, 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 to that purpose. If we lived (as Adam briefly did) in the ideal world which Hashem envisioned, this would still be true. No activities would fall into the neutral category of "reshut" / "optional."

Unfortunately, we live in a world where the force of spirituality is diminished. Some of our actions are neither mitzvot nor sins, 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 the various jobs in the Mishkan to the Levi'im. The Mishkan was where our ancestors got a taste of the spirituality which will again be revealed when the world reaches its ideal state. The Mishkan had three parts: the courtyard, "Holy," and "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, work is a reshut / optional. [Each set of three parallels the other set: (a) Torah, Kohanim and Holy of Holies (where the Torah was kept); (b) prayer, Levi'im (who sang in the Temple), and the Holy; (c) 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 level of holiness of the three--his 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 necessarily spiritually uplifting, the Torah did not use the expression "nasso" / "uplift" in connection with Merari. (Mei Marom Vol. 11, No. 11)

"May Hashem illuminate His 'face' for you . . ." (6:25)

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) comments (citing the Arizal): There are two ways in which we feel Hashem's influence. One, alluded to in our verse, is "hashpa'at panim" / "the influence of the face." The second, alluded to in Shmot (33:23), "You will see My back, but My face may not be seen," is "hashpa'at oref" / "the influence of the nape (or back)."

R' Soloveitchik continues: These two concepts may be understood through the following illustrations: In summertime, a river flows in its bed, kept within its banks and its path. Water comes to those who have prepared for it by digging canals, building dams, pumping water, etc. In contrast, in the spring, when the snow melts and the river rises, the river flows and overflows, flooding and damaging fields on all sides.

The river in summertime is the symbol of hashpa'at panim--a flow that is measured and precise. This is alluded to in the verse (Yeshayah 66:12), "Behold, I will incline to you like a river of peace." The wild river of springtime represents hashpa'at oref--an uncontrolled flow. Our Sages say that when we are deserving, rain will flow exactly where and when it is needed. This is hashpa'at panim. When we are not deserving, rain will fall in greater quantity, but with an offsetting loss of quality. For example, the rain will fall where it is not needed and when it is not wanted.

Another illustration: A reading lamp gives off a small amount of light, but focuses it where it is needed. This is hashpa'at panim--quality over quantity. In contrast, an overhead bulb bathes the room in light, not discriminating between the person reading in one corner and the person sleeping in the other corner. That is hashpa'at oref--quantity over quality.

The mahn in the desert is a perfect example of hashpa'at panim. It was given in precise measure, and no matter how hard one tried, he could not gather more than one omer's measure per member of his household. But, having a hashpa'at panim relationship with G-d comes with a price: it calls upon one to distinguish between the sacred and the profane. Thus, for example, the mahn came

with the command (Shmot 16:25-26): "Today [Shabbat] you will not find it in the field. You may gather it for six days, and on the seventh day it is Shabbat, it will not appear."

Our Sages say that the verse, "You will see My back, but My face may not be seen," was taught to Moshe Rabbeinu in response to Moshe's question: "Why do the righteous suffer?" R' Soloveitchik explains that the answer to this question lies in the difference between hashpa'at panim and hashpa'at oref. A righteous person receives goodness in a precise, targeted manner—quality over quantity. The wicked, on the other hand, experience unrestrained, overflowing goodness—quantity over quality. (Festival of Freedom p.75)

Shemittah

This week we continue discussing the laws of shemittah, again focusing on the mitzvah of "biur." As explained last week, each species of the produce of shemittah may be kept in one's home only so long as that species is still available in the wild. Thereafter, it is subject to biur.

The halachot below are from Sefer Ha'shemittah (chapter 9) by R' Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky z"l.

How is biur accomplished? According to Rambam z"l, one must actually destroy the left-over produce and not eat it anymore. However, the majority of poskim / halachic authorities rule that the mitzvah of biur merely requires eliminating the left-over produce from one's possession. One does this by carrying all of the produce of the affected species out of his house into a public place and declaring in front of three people that the produce is hefker / ownerless. Thereafter, anyone, including the original owner, may take possession of the hefker produce and eat it.

When choosing the three people before whom he declares the produce ownerless, one is permitted to select three friends who he knows will not lay claim to the hefker produce.

If the time for biur passes and one has not declared his produce hefker, the produce may no longer be eaten. Accordingly, one should not purchase produce or accept produce to eat from a person who is suspected of not observing the laws of biur.

Those produce items whose time of biur is in doubt [i.e., it is not clear when that species disappears in the wild] should be declared hefker at the earliest date which may be the applicable time of biur and should be left hefker until the latest date which may be the applicable time of biur, at which time one may claim them.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with

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