

LESSONS LEARNED FROM GIFTS OF THE NESIIM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Rav Shlomo Breur on Lessons Learned from Gifts of The Nesiim

Parshas Naso is the longest parsha in the Torah. When I was a little boy, reaching my Bar Mitzvah age, I used to take note of how many pesukim each parsha contained. I always had sympathy for boys whose Bar Mitzvah parsha was Parshas Naso -- 176 verses -- a major task to learn. But as I grew a little older, I became less sympathetic, because so much of it is apparently just repetition.

In Parshas Naso, the Torah describes the offerings of the Princes at the dedication of the Mishkan. There were 12 Princes, one from each Tribe. Each of the Princes basically donated the exact same thing. Therefore, as a Ba'al Koreh all you have to learn is one set of donations and you are all set.

The truth of the matter is that this in itself presents a problem for us. We who know the teachings of Chaza"l and know the style of Chumash know that from just one extra letter sometimes we learn out many significant legal principles. [There is not one extra letter in the Torah.] By the offerings of the Princes however, the Torah apparently, needlessly goes ahead and says over and over again (12 times) the exact same thing. This itself is a difficulty. Would it not have been all right to say Nachshon ben Aminadav offered such and such and so too the representatives of the eleven other tribes?

A second problem is the following: We find in a Medrash in this week's parsha "Beloved are the offerings of the Princes like the Song sung by the Jewish People at the Red Sea." The Medrash learns this out from a type of Gezerah Shava: By the Song of the Sea it says "ZEH Keli v'anveihu" (THIS is my G-d and I will glorify Him) [Shemos 15:2] and by the offerings of the Princes it says "ZEH Korban Nachshon ben Aminadav" (THIS is the offering of Nachshon son of Aminadav) [Bamidbar 7:17].

The Medrash extends this Gezerah Shava and says that the offering of the Princes are as beloved as the Two Tablets of the Covenant (on which the 10 Commandments were inscribed) about which it is

written "m'ZEH u-m'ZEH hem kesuvim" (on THIS side and on THIS side were they written) [Shemos 32:15]. These seem to be rather arbitrary expositions. What does the Medrash really mean?

Rav Shlomo Breur offers a beautiful interpretation of both these teachings of the Medrash and uses the interpretation to answer our original question.

The Torah does not repeat the description of the offerings 12 times in order to teach us that each Prince brought exactly the same as every other Prince. On the contrary, the Torah is telling us just the opposite -- they were 12 different offerings. They were 12 different offerings because *what* a person gives is not important, *how* a person gives is important.

One can ask a person for \$1000 for a Yeshiva and for that person the \$1000 is a major contribution. On the other hand, one can ask another person for that same \$1000 and for him that sum is a mere pittance. We see that two people, who give the exact same amount, may, in truth, actually perform two different types of giving.

This is what the Torah is telling us. The fact that the Torah has to repeat 12 times what the Princes gave, perforce means that these 12 gifts were not exactly alike. Each Prince put his own special stamp on his gift, making it unique and special.

The Medrash says that we see this concept from the Song of the Sea. What happened by the Song of the Sea? There were 600,000 people, each singing praises to G-d. So what should the verse say? ZEH Keleinu -- This is OUR (collective) G-d. How can 600,000 people say ZEH Keli -- This is MY (personal) G-d?

This is the very point. Six hundred thousand people at the Red Sea saw the same thing, but each one experienced it differently -- to the extent that later on they were able to say "This is MY (personal) G-d".

This is where the Medrash draws the comparison between the ZEH korban Nachshon and the ZEH Keli v'anvehu. Just as over there at the Red Sea, it was a singular experience, so too over here, each gift offering was different.

Then, the Medrash continues and says that the Princes' gifts were like the Two Tablets of the Covenant about which it is written "m'ZEH u-m'ZEH hem kesuvim". Rav Shlomo Breur asks, what do Chaza"l learn out from the expression "m'ZEH u-m'ZEH hem Kesuvim"? The Gemara in Shabbos teaches that the commandments were written on the tablets with a miraculous script. It was not, as we would imagine that they were inscribed on one side and came through on the backside, backwards; rather, you could read the writing just the same from either side -- even though the writing penetrated all the way through the stone. There was no "reverse" side to the tablets. Both sides were miraculously readable in exactly the same fashion.

There is a tremendous symbolism in this. Our Rabbis are telling us something about Torah. Every commodity in the world, even those that are very positive, has a "flip side". There is always the

negative side to consider. The Torah however, has no reverse side. "There is no Good, other than Torah", our Rabbis tell us. Torah is a commodity which is totally good; no flip sides; no drawbacks.

This is what Chaza"l mean to convey by linking the Tablets to the gifts of the Princes. There is a "Good" in the world which everybody says is Good, but we all know its drawbacks. This is Wealth. Wealth is wonderful, one can accomplish so much with wealth. However, we all know that wealth has its flip side.

The verse tells us "With pain (b'etsev) you will give birth" [Bereishis 3:16] -- the curse of labor pains, for women. But there is something even worse -- the curse that G-d gave mankind -- "With strong pain (b'etsavon) you will eat" [Bereishis 3:17] -- this is the curse of having to make a living (Parnasah).

A woman has a baby and the labor pains cease; but the pains of Parnasah never stop! You make money, you need more money. One who has \$100, wishes \$200. You make your first million, you want to make your second million. "No one dies having achieved even half of his desires". You make your second million, you have to make 10 million. You have 10 million, you sit and worry if the prime is going to go up or down one-half percent. To me, it does not matter that much if the prime goes up or down a half percent. But if one has \$10,000,000, a quarter of a point makes all the difference in the world. This is what the verse means "With strong pain (b'etsavon) you will eat". It is not like labor pains that come and then stop. The pain of Parnasah goes on and on.

There is one type of Wealth, however, that has no flip side. What type of wealth is that? "The Wealth of the L-rd, that will enrich" [Mishlei 10:22]. When G-d gives you wealth, this will make you wealthy. And the verse concludes "v'lo yosif etzev". Meaning that there is such a Wealth that does not have this Etzavon (pain) attached to it. That is the Blessing of G-d. When a person perceives his wealth as coming directly from G-d and the person therefore realizes that he must use this wealth for the sake of G-d, that is a Blessing from G-d, that will truly enrich him.

Where do we see such wealth that does not have a flip-side? We see this wealth by the chapter of the Princes. Princes who are blessed with wealth but who turn around and donate it to the Service of G-d, to the Mishkan, they truly possessed a Wealth with no flip-side. This is the linkage of the Medrash between the gifts of the Princes and the Tablets of the Covenant -- Through and through the same thing, totally positive, with no flip-side.

Glossary

Nesiim -- Princes

Mishkan -- Tabernacle

Ba'al Koreh -- Public Torah Reader

Chaza"l -- acronym for Sages of Blessed Memory

Gezerah Shava -- one of the "13 rules by which the Torah is elucidated" based on common word

usage in different contexts.

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