

# PARSHAS NASO

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari*

Included in this parsha are two situations that even though they are separate technically, nevertheless they are linked spiritually; this is the reason for their inclusion in the same parsha. The first one, continuing the census of the Levitical families, mentions the numbering of the Merari, while the second presents the laws regarding the sending out of the camp, of those people who became impure, 'tamei'. There were three separate camps in the Mishkan; the camp of the Divine Presence, that of the Levites, and that of the People of Israel. In the same way there were the three camps of the Levites; the Family of Kehat, the Family of Gershon and the Family of the Merari. Within the camps of the Mishkan, each camp had a specific spiritual purpose, one that is shown in the description of the laws of impurity mentioned in the parsha. In the same way each of the families of the Levites had a special spiritual role, as we see in the tasks allotted to them regarding the transporting of the Mishkan. In both cases, the spiritual purposes represent the body, the mind and the soul, nefesh, and how they are to be effective in our religious lives. In all their wanderings in the desert, the Tribes of Israel both pitch camp and journey in a formation in which they surround the Mishkan, while the Families of the Levites separated the Machaneh Shechinah [The Tent of the Testimony, containing the Ark], from the Camp of Israel.

The discussion of people in a state of 'Tumah', impurity, must always bear in mind that this impurity is a punishment for social sins. A person who was guilty of gossip and tale bearing was punished with 'tzara'at', leprosy, and they had to be sent out of all three camps surrounding the Mishkan. 'Tzara'at affected and distorted the body, just as gossip and tale bearing - 'Lashon Harah', distort and affect the social body and interpersonal relations. The camp of Israel represents the corporate body of the nation so that one who speaks 'Lashon Harah' has to be sent out even from the camp of Israel, as they have damaged the corporate body. One who had become impure as a result of emissions from their bodies, had to be expelled from the camp of the Levites until they had purified themselves. They could, however, remain in the Camp of Israel. This type of impurity flows from the individual soul, nefesh, and is the result of the imagination, lusts and yearnings that are seated in the heart. 'You shall not seek out the dictates of your heart' (Bamidbar, 15: 39). As the purpose of the Levites was to teach and to demonstrate 'Sur Mirah, the avoidance of evil and impurity, their camp is unable to retain impurity and therefore these people had to leave their camp. One who was a Tumat Met, impure from contact with a dead person, was sent out only from the Camp of the Divine Presence, Machaneh Shechinah. A dead person is like a casing or a covering from which the essence or the essential has been removed. The mind is the essence of a living person even as it is

written, 'and Wisdom shall make its owners alive' (Kohelet, 7). When the mind and their wisdom are removed from the person, their free choice is also removed and so only the outer crust remains. In the camp of the Divine Presence was housed the Ark together with the Torah that is the ultimate knowledge and wisdom flowing as it does from the Heavens above. So one who is impure from contact with a dead body, the greatest example of a lack of knowledge and wisdom, was not allowed within that camp. Each of the clans of the Levites had a particular task allotted to it in the transport of the Mishkan as described at the end of Parshat Bamidbar and the beginning of Parshat Naso. The whole purpose of the Levites was the education and inculcation of 'sur mirah', so that each of these tasks reflected a different aspect of this purpose. They corresponded to the mind, body and nefesh of the human being that need to be enlisted in this struggle. The family of Kehat carried the Ark and their purpose was to instill purity in the mind that flowed from the Divine Wisdom contained therein. Purity of the mind and of wisdom permit one to achieve a state wherein evil has no place nor is it able to even influence our thoughts. Carrying the Mishkan was the job of the family of Gershon. They carried only the tent itself, not including the infrastructure, the wrapping so to speak of the Mishkan, representing 'nefesh'. Sometimes, despite our wisdom and learning, the 'Yetzer Harah' is able to penetrate our lives. Still, the nefesh is able to chase this 'yetzer' away; Gershon translates 'to chase away'. Merari carried the physical structure of the Mishkan corresponding to the human body. 'Merari' is from the root 'bitter' and refers to one who even though they are affected by their 'yetzer', nevertheless struggle and battle against it with all their strength.

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