



Around the Shabbat Table

**Naso 5764
June 2004**

This week's writer: Beryl Kwitkin, Principal, Rabbi Nathan Rosenbaum Religious School of Temple Beth El of North Bellmore, NY

Shabbat Shalom! / Gut Shabbos!

No matter how it is said, this phrase helps to usher in the most unique day of the Jewish week.

Introduction

Naso, the second *parasha* (weekly portion) in **Bamidbar** (Book of Numbers) focuses in upon the following ideas:

- 1) A census of the Levite families (the Gershonites and the Merarites) was taken and their duties concerning the caring for the Tent of Meeting was described (Numbers 4:21-49). These families were responsible for carrying the holy objects when campsites were changed. They would load the curtains, tapestries, and structural frames onto six wagons each of which was drawn by a pair of oxen. Each of the 8,500 Levities who did service in the Tent of Meeting had specific duties to perform.
- 2) Moses told the Israelites that God's criteria for determining which people are "impure." These people were to be removed from the camp so as not to defile the entire Israelite camp (Numbers 5:1-4). When the sanctity of the Israelite camp is maintained the spirit of God will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel.
- 3) Any Israelite man who believes that his wife has been unfaithful is instructed to go to the priest, who then conducts a ceremony with sacred water to determine the wife's fidelity (Number 5:11-29). The people of Israel believed that this ceremony would expose the guilty and exonerate the innocent.
- 4) The rules for men or women who wanted to dedicate themselves for a self-imposed specific period of time to do the "service of God" are given. These people are called Nazirites and they should a) not consume any wine or grape products, b) not cut the hair upon their heads with a razor, and c) not come into contact with a dead body (Numbers 6:1-21). Nazirites hoped that the sacred service they performed would help the larger Jewish community, as well as themselves, add more religious observance to their lives.
- 5) The Priestly Blessing, the words used by Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel, was given (Numbers 6:22-27). Fifteen Hebrew words, in three short sentences, five words

summarize the desires of the Israelites. As our Guardian, a) God should bless the people of Israel with life and health, b) God should give the people of Israel the understanding needed to live with others in harmony, c) God should grant the people of Israel the greatest of all gifts – PEACE!

- 6) Finally, during the course of 12 days, the 12 tribal chieftains each brought identical gifts to the Tabernacle. The Torah text describes each chieftain's gifts in the same exact words so as to maintain the equality of large / prosperous tribes with small / less prosperous tribes (Numbers 7:1-89). The twelve chieftains each brought silver bowls and basins filled with choice flour, golden ladles, and an array of animals (bulls, rams, lambs, goats, oxen) to God's Tent of Meeting.



Questions for Your Family's Discussion

As your family shares two **Shabbat** meals together, one on Friday night and one on Saturday afternoon, here are some questions for discussion and the sharing of ideas, opinions, attitudes, and feelings:

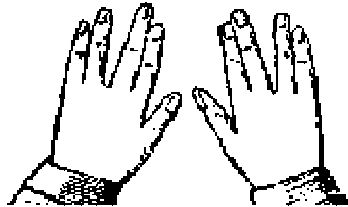
This week's Shabbat Table discussion will focus upon the ideas of becoming a Nazirite and upon the Priestly Blessing. (If your family would like additional topics to discuss, read the **Torah** verses for **Naso** indicated above.)

The Nazirite Vow:

- 1) What would motivate a person to become a Nazirite? Would you consider taking a vow to do a specific religious undertaking?
- 2) What degree of self-control did a Nazirite need to constantly demonstrate? Would you be able to be so disciplined?
- 3) How would the Israelite community react to having a Nazirite within their midst? How do you feel being in the presence of Jewish people who are more observant or more religious than you?

The Priestly Blessing:

- 1) If this blessing comes from God why do the priests have to act as an intermediary? Can people bless each other? How does your answer make you feel?
- 2) Of what importance to the people of Israel are life and health? How does good or poor health affect the way you live your Jewish life?
- 3) Of what importance to your family is living in harmony with each other? Explain. How do you or the members of your nuclear or extended family live in harmony with each other? How does your answer make you feel?
- 4) What are the qualities of “peace”? How are they demonstrated within families? Within the community? Within the world?



Some Texts to Wrestle With

- 1) Numbers 5:3 – “Remove male and female alike; put them outside the camp so that they do not defile the camp of those in whose midst I dwell.”
 - a) Should people with “problems” be removed from the community? Explain.
 - b) Can being part of a community be helpful to people who do wrong or who are in trouble?
 - c) Does God only dwell within a community of righteous people? How can a community of moral people deal with immoral people who live within their midst?
- 2) Numbers 6:22-27 – The Lord spoke to Moses: Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them:

The Lord bless you and protect you!
 The Lord deal kindly and graciously with you!
 The Lord bestow His favor upon you and grant you peace!
 Thus they shall link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them.

 - a) Why was it necessary for the Levite priests to bless the people of Israel? Do Jews today bless each other? Who? When? Why?
 - b) Is it necessary for Jews to receive God’s blessing? Can people today live and function without concern for God? Explain.
 - c) What could you add to this blessing?
 - d) Is the Priestly Blessing relevant for you and your family? Explain.

Towards an Action Agenda

- As Jewish parents, do you bless your children (on Friday night)? If so, how does it make you (and them) feel? If not, why not? Should you? As a Jewish spouse, should you bless your partner (on the Sabbath)? How do your answers make you feel?

- Make a commitment (take a vow) to do something to further develop your own Jewish personhood. What can you do to help your nuclear family do more Jewish things and live a more complete Jewish life?
- What specific duties do you have as a Jewish person?
- In our contemporary society, what rights, if any, do wrongly accused people have? When you determine that a person or event has been reported in a biased manner, would you write in support of the person or event?

Parashat Naso is the anniversary of my **Bar Mitzvah**. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my thoughts with you.



Shabbat Shalom

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

This project is supported through the generosity of Joyce & Fred Claar.

BJE is an agency of UJA-Federation of New York

© Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York, 2004