



The Ideal of Equality and Peace

Parashat Naso (Num. 4:21-7:89) starts with the continuation of the census of the different clans of Levites and their respective duties. It ends with the description of the identical gifts each of the twelve tribal leaders brought at the dedication of the Altar of the Tabernacle. In between, we get a few other passages with laws and stories which are hard to connect together, although some of the common threads make the Parasha remarkable.

The most remarkable section, perhaps, is the end. As the bar-mitzvah students I've taught this Parasha say: It's so boring! Why should the Torah have repeated the same identical gift, with the same words and even the same tunes twelve times? There is only one answer possible, in my mind: The Torah is going out of its way here to emphasize the equality of each of the tribes. The tribal element of leadership in Israel was, no doubt, the most equalizing and democratizing element in its governance. Later on in Israelite history, it was tribal conflict which tore the monarchy apart. The upcoming story of Korah's rebellion and the spy story are stories of tribal conflict. That is the bad side of too much equalization and democratization. But the equalization and democratization obviously also had its good points, and the Torah seems to be emphasizing that explicitly here. Equality between the tribes is a crucially important ideal. And at official ceremonial moments it is especially important to avoid the slightest implication of favoritism.

It is especially interesting that the Priestly Blessing comes right before the tribal leaders' equal gifts, and of course, the blessing's conclusion is a blessing of שלום, peace. Peace and equality are linked. Perhaps there does not have to be equality in every respect, but to have peace, a certain ideal of equality must be present to avoid the rivalries which lead to strife. An ideal of equality can bring peace and blessing in its wake. Giving an appointed duty to each clan of Levites and recognizing each tribe for its contribution of manpower in the army keeps them from quarreling among themselves and jockeying for importance and favor. At the same time, too much thinking of themselves as equals and hence equally entitled to lead can also bring on strife, as in Korah's rebellion. So peace requires a delicate balance of equal treatment as well as humbly "knowing one's place" and not exceeding one's authority.

Why the laws of the Nazirite vow belong here is hard to fathom! Perhaps, after the previous contexts which emphasized the duties of the Levites, this, too, is a democratization, as Maimonides seems to notice in one of his famous remarks. As he says, not just Levites are called to the service of God, but even any individual Israelite can dedicate part of his own life to the service of God in some way and become a "holy man."

The middle section of the Parasha has several laws which use the key-word מעל which has the general sense of "treachery" or "perfidy." It is difficult to understand in the different contexts in which it is applied here. I mean, obviously, the accusations of marital infidelity we have here in the story of the Sotah are a prime example of a crime where good-faith is recompensed with faithlessness, and that is treacherousness. In the tribal, clan-based context, it breaks down the very basis of tribal organization, the family. Peace in the family leads to tribal and national peace. But another "treachery" mentioned in 5:5-10 apparently (it's not really fully understandable on its own in the context here) is a partial repeat of laws found at the end of Chapter 5 in Leviticus, Verses 20-26. These are laws about swearing falsely with regard to the taking or keeping of property. The taking of someone else's property is a crime; the lying and swearing falsely and thus covering-it-up is treachery and perfidy, against one's fellow-man and against God. Lying and swearing falsely about crimes shows a complete lack of respect for the ideal of law and equality among men. That is why, if it is to be atoned for, it must include a complete confession of wrongdoing and a verbal assent to the ideals of the law.

Yet another short passage (Num. 5:1-4) deals very briefly with issues of sending off the contagious and the impure to the outskirts of the camp. Everyone in the camp has to be collectively protected if there is to be peace. There has to be a degree of equality in protection.

Today I reflect on the need for an ideal of equality and an ideal of protecting everyone equally and collectively in a world which sorely needs to strengthen those ideals. Tribal division can lead to strife, but it can also be a backbone of democratization and equality and lead to peace. May God guard all of the disparate elements of our society and lead us once again to the ideal of equality and peace.

Shabbat Naso

June 14-15, 2024 | 9 Sivan, 5784

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

Kaplan: p. 676 | Haftarah: p. 1184 // Hertz: p. 586 | Haftarah: p. 602

Candle Lighting | 8:10 pm

Evening Services | 7:00 pm

Zemirot | 8:30 am | Main Sanctuary

Shahrit | 9:10 am | Main Sanctuary

Shabbat Morning Talk | At Morning Services | Rabbi Soloveichik

Tot Shabbat | 10:00 am | Fidanque Youth Room

Youth Groups | 10:00 am | Elias Room

Jr. Congregation | 10:30 am | Little Synagogue

Kiddush | following services | *Sponsored by Stephanie & Jonathan Freilich in celebration of the upcoming marriage of their son Sam to Eliana Elikan, daughter of Sara and Jeff Elikan of Silver Spring, Maryland. Sam is the grandson of Thelma & Herb Loring and Estelle Freilich and our former Parnas Dennis B Freilich, z"l.*

Shabbat Afternoon Class | 7:25 pm | Rabbi Soloveichik | Main Sanctuary

Teen Shiur | 7:25 pm | Baruch-Lev Kelman | Elias Room

Evening Services | 8:10 pm

Habdala | 9:11 pm

Weekday Service Times

Sunday Morning: 8:05 am

Monday-Friday Mornings: 7:05 am

Sunday-Thursday Evenings (Minha & Arbit): 6:45 pm

COMING UP

Registration & additional details at shearithisrael.org

Share your news – **DEADLINE: Midnight on Wednesday!**

Graduation Kiddush & Scroll of Honor

NEXT Shabbat, June 22 | Following Services

Featuring our annual ice cream cake tradition!

NEW:

At the kiddush, we will be hearing from some of our own college students -- **Louis and Rafi Nahon** (University of Chicago), **Jacob Seligson** (NYU), and **Emma Vorchheimer** (Barnard) -- about their experiences on campus since October 7, and how they have navigated the challenges.

To submit your graduate's info or sponsor kiddush, visit shearithisrael.org/graduation2024

The Sisterhood presents

Stitch & Fix

Next session: **THIS Tuesday, June 18 | 1-3 pm | Elias Room**

More Dates To Be Announced

Drop in, select an item from our synagogue vestments that need mending, then stitch and fix. *RSVP to rgedinger@gmail.com*

New Thursday Class!

1001 Galilean Nights: Tales from the Jerusalem Talmud

Resumes **THIS Thursday, June 20, following 6:30 pm Evening Services**

With Baruch-Lev Kelman, Rabbinic Intern

In ancient times, the land of Israel was home to wise sages, vengeful emperors, and fearsome knights. Join Baruch-Lev as we explore the rich sagas of the oft overlooked Jerusalem Talmud.

Summer Schedule

We are transitioning to our summer season

Throughout the summer, Shabbat morning services will begin with Zemirot at **8:30 am**, and beginning next Shabbat, services will be held in Levy Auditorium, our Summer Sanctuary, followed by a congenial *kiddush* outdoors on Paved Paradise.

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mazal tob to **Stephanie & Jonathan Freilich**, upon the upcoming marriage of their son **Sam** to Eliana Elikan, daughter of Sara & Jeff Elikan of Silver Spring, Maryland. Sam is the grandson of Thelma & Herb Loring and **Estelle Freilich** and our former Parnas Dennis B Freilich, z"l.

Mazal tob to **Sofi & Alexander Daar** on the birth of a baby boy. Mazal tob also to proud grandparents **Karen** (Trustee/Segan) & **Jack Daar**.

Congratulations to **Rabbi Soloveichik**, who is a recipient of Tablet Magazine's Sinai Award, given to 36 people who have, in recent years, made the world freer for the rest of us. Read about it at: tabletmag.com/feature/sinai-awards-2024

Hazakot u'Berukhot to the **Ruth Readers** and thank you to **Mrs. Lisa Rohde** and **Rabbi Rohde** for organizing and preparing them.

Thank you to **the Sisterhood** for once again adorning our sanctuary with beautiful flowers for the Shabuot holiday.

In the Press – Read at shearithisrael.org/resources/press

- In the aftermath of the occupation of Columbia campus' Hamilton Hall this past Spring, Rabbi Soloveichik ponders the Jewish legacy of its namesake, Alexander Hamilton, in a Commentary essay.

Of Interest to the Community

- West Side Hatzolah is having its annual online fundraising campaign as part of the **Global Chevra HatzalahThon**. West Side Hatzolah provides essential services to our community. Their volunteers are always on the front lines that heed the call 24/7 for us, our families and our community. **Please let Hatzolah know that the Shearith Israel community cares!**
Please donate at: hatzalahthon.com/westside/sp.