

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS NASO**

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS NASO

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Naso* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our

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understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *Galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

* * *

The tread that runs through Parshas Naso appears to be the ideal of shalom-peace. It is explicitly mentioned and highlighted in the priestly blessing, which concludes with the word Shalom.

Moshiach's introduction to the Jewish people will be with the announcement of true Shalom.

ESSAY ONE

ONE WHO LAUGHS LAST LAUGHS BEST

To appreciate the value of the soul and its pre-eminence over the body and its needs, it takes a person who is future oriented and not concerned exclusively with the here and now; to accentuate the needs of the soul over the needs and wants of the body

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ESSAY ONE

ONE WHO LAUGHS LAST LAUGHS BEST

The Priestly Blessing

Of all the blessings that are mentioned in the Torah, the one that stands out for its simple eloquence is the Priestly blessing in our Parsha. This blessing, known in Hebrew as *Birkat Kohanim*, is recited by the *Kohanim* (descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother) during the Jewish Festival services. In Israel it is recited more frequently. It is obvious that every word of this blessing is replete with meaning.

In this essay we will focus on one (Hebrew) word that appears in the very first verse of this blessing: "*v'yishmirecha*-May He protect you." While most people would understand the meaning of protection, our Sages found it necessary to expound on it.

Threefold Protection

Our Sages in the Midrash called *Sifri*, provide us with three interpretations of protection:

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(A) May G-d bless you with possessions and **protect your possessions.**

(B) Rabbi *Noson* said, May G-d bless you with possessions and **protect your body.**

(C) Rabbi *Yitzchak* said, “May G-d **protect you from the evil inclination.**”

We have thus three forms of protection that is invoked in this blessing: protection of our property, our bodies and our souls.

We know that every nuance of Torah — both the Written Torah (Biblical literature) and the Oral Torah (Talmud, Midrash, Kabbalah, etc.) — is precise. In light of this belief, one is entitled to ask why is the first opinion stated anonymously, while the second and third opinions of protection are stated with the names of their respective authors, Rabbi *Natan* and *Yitzchak*?

The first form of protection is stated anonymously because it is a universally acknowledged need and blessing. Protecting our property is a need that most people can relate to and will go to great lengths to procure. Most people will insure their belongings, put locks on their doors, put their valuables in safes and safety deposit boxes, build fences around their yards, post “No trespassing signs,” but relatively few will engage in habits that are not harmful to their bodies. People, who spend fortunes on

protecting and preserving their property, will think nothing of smoking, driving recklessly and other hazardous practices that undermine the protection of their bodies.

Protecting our property is a more prevalent concern because it is one of the strongest human needs. It is a response to the ingrained human trait of envy, responsible for most conflicts between nations and individuals that was around since the days of Cain and Abel and will only disappear in the Messianic Age. We are therefore always so conscious of the threat that exists with respect to our possessions that result from envy.

To protect our bodies requires a more sophisticated sense of appreciation for the integrity of our bodies. The struggle to maintain our body's integrity is weakened by our body's desire to satisfy its urges and desires. One must have a sense of the reason why our bodies are here. It therefore takes a Rabbi "*Nasan*" to appreciate our body's importance. The word *Nasan* means "He gave" an allusion to the gift that G-d gave us. We must realize that the body is a G-d given treasure that should be preserved and protected.

But even if we learn to appreciate the value of our bodies and we seek and receive G-d's blessing for its protection, we will still tend to neglect our souls.

To appreciate the value of the soul and its pre-eminence over the body and its needs, one must be a "[Rabbi]

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Yitzchak." The word *Yitzchak* means "He **will** (future tense) laugh." It takes a person who is future oriented and not concerned exclusively with the here and now to accentuate the needs of the soul over the needs and wants of the body. Only one who looks forward to the days of Moshiach for the true and ultimate laughter, and who realizes the bliss for the soul and body that will come in the future, will realize the great blessing there is in G-d protecting not only our property and bodies, but also, and, more importantly, our souls. By orienting our lives now in the spirit of the joy and laughter of the future, we will experience the full measure of G-d's blessings.

ESSAY TWO

REPEAT PERFORMANCE

G-d does not create anything that does not have a purpose.

The fact that He created us with different personalities and potentials is an indication that our differences are important.

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ESSAY TWO

REPEAT PERFORMANCE

Twelve Tribes; Twelve Offerings

Twelve are the number of tribes that comprise the entire Jewish nation. This week's Torah portion features the special role each of the leaders of these twelve tribes played in the dedication of one of the most important structures ever built – the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary.

From the first day the Sanctuary was built, the leaders of each and every tribe brought an offering on behalf of his tribe.

One would have imagined that if each tribe had its own individual character, that each of these dedicatory offerings would have been different. In fact, all of the twelve offerings were identical!

This raises two obvious questions:

Firstly, if the twelve offerings were to represent the diverse roles of the twelve tribes, why did they not bring varied offerings?

Secondly, and conversely, if these twelve offerings were all the same, why does the Torah divide them into twelve

narratives? Couldn't the Torah have just written that the leaders of the twelve tribes each brought the following offering? Why the need for repetition of the same details of their offerings?

The Paradox of the Jewish People

The answer to these two questions will shed light on the dynamics of the Jewish people. The Jewish people are paradoxically a unified people and a multi-dimensional people. On the one hand, the Torah teaches us that no matter how different one Jew looks to be from his/her fellow Jew, there is a profound, intrinsic and inexplicable connection between them. In times of crises, Jews would risk their lives for one another despite their inability to agree on anything in times of peace.

A story is told of a zookeeper who lost his lion. He found a poor Jew who volunteered to wear a lion's skin and play the role of lion for a tidy sum. Everything went well until, the Jew/lion saw a ferocious bear approaching him with a menacing look. Thinking this would be his last moments on this earth, he declared the Shema, "Hear o Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is one!" Without missing a beat, the bear stopped in his tracks and responded with the second verse of the Shema, "*Baruch shem k'vod malchusto l'olam va'ed*"-Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom for ever

and ever!"

No matter what is our outer appearance, or our language differences, cultural diversity, intellectual shades, personality clashes and even religious divisions, a Jew is a Jew is a Jew.

Vive la Difference

On the other hand, G-d does not create anything that does not have a purpose. The fact that He created us with different personalities and potentials is an indication that our differences are important. As long as we recognize that despite our differences there is an underlying unity that makes us all one, it is a positive thing that we are different. To not utilize our individual talents and capabilities because we don't want to be different is a waste of one's G-dly potential.

This is the reason why the twelve leaders of the tribes each brought the identical offering, but the Torah nevertheless records them as twelve separate offerings. Because they appreciated the inherent unity of the Jewish people, their differences possessed a unifying character. Yes there were twelve different offerings — because each leader had a different approach to the same sacrifice — but they did not affect the essential unity.

Galus: Loss of unity and Individuality

Because we live in time known as Galus or exile, which can also be translated as “alienation,” we do not live up to either side of the equation. We often do not recognize or appreciate our oneness, with all forms of discord and strife being the order of the day. Conversely, we frequently ignore our individual roles under the guise of universalism. Both unity and individuality suffer as a result of our state of alienation from G-d Whose unity He has instilled within us and Whose multi-dimension (read: infinite) nature he endowed us with.

It is for this reason, among many others, that the Jewish people have yearned for the coming of Moshiach. He will usher in an age that will allow both our unity and individuality to flourish simultaneously.

ESSAY THREE

GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN!

**When one is focused on the goal, all the preparatory work
acquires the status and stature of the final end.**

ESSAY THREE

GETTING THERE IS HALF THE FUN!

Wagon Donations

When the Mishkan — the portable Sanctuary the Jews built in the desert — was completed, this week's Parsha recounts how the *nesi'im*, the leaders of the Twelve Tribes, brought six wagons — for the purpose of transporting the Mishkan — to Moses. G-d, in turn, instructed Moses to accept these wagons, and stressed "They shall be for the service of the Mishkan."

One may ask, why did G-d have to authorize Moses to accept these wagons? Why would Moses hesitate to accept them on his own?

Our Sages in the Midrash, offer a rather cryptic observation concerning this contribution:

"This parallels the verse 'And it shall come to pass on the sixth day that they shall prepare that which they bring in,'"

This is a reference to the need to prepare one's food on Friday for the Sabbath.

What possible connection is there between the preparation for the Sabbath and the contribution of wagons? And what

possible lesson is the Midrash trying to impart to us with this association?

The Role of Preparation

Upon reflection, it seems that the focus of the Midrash is on the concept of preparation. Moses was concerned that it was not befitting men of the stature of the Leaders of the tribes to be concerned with wagons, which have no intrinsic purpose. They are only good to help deliver the Sanctuary to its destination, but do not actually help in the construction of or the service in the Temple. It would be much better, perhaps, Moses thought, that these wagons should be contributed by people who are not so “high up” in the hierarchy of the Jewish people.

G-d disagreed. These wagons were not of secondary or tertiary importance. Indeed, “They shall be!” G-d stated emphatically to Moses, “for the service of the Mishkan.” They are as important and beloved by G-d as any other component of the service. G-d’s simple message was: Do not denigrate the role of preparation.

To cite an analogy to this theme of the importance of the role of preparation in Judaism, the Midrash quotes the verse concerning the preparation for the Shabbat. One cannot just jump into the Shabbat without preparation. For six days we prepare for just one day! Why?

Focused on the Goal

Contrary to what one might think, it is not that the six days of the week are of secondary importance. Rather, when the six days of the week are imbued with a sense of direction; they all point to the Sabbath, they too become Sabbath-like and possess intrinsic value.

Similarly, G-d taught Moses and the Jewish people. Do not think that the wagons are of secondary importance, though their purpose is merely to transport the Sanctuary. When one is focused on the goal, all the preparatory work acquires the status and stature of the final end.

The application to our lives is now readily apparent.

When one reflects about the amount of time we spend on preparing for important events and milestones in our lives, we often wonder, why is it that perhaps the majority of our life is devoted to preparing for those things that count.

We sleep in order to be rejuvenated to function the next day. We spend time bathing, dressing and preparing for work. Most of what we do at work might be preliminary research and legwork that will only be meaningful when all the pieces come together.

People in the fund-raising community know all too well how many telephone calls, meetings and how much paper

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work is needed before one gets the contribution to fund a worthwhile cause.

Now, while everyone agrees that all of this work would be futile if it does not lead to the intended outcome, we often wonder, why is the system set up so that so much time and energy is expended on the preparations? To which the Torah in this week's Parsha answers, "They shall be for the service of the Sanctuary." As long as we are focused on the "service of the Sanctuary," every minute detail in the preparation is imbued with the significance of the end.

Solace for all Our Waiting

We can also take some solace from the above in dealing with the fact that history has given us thousands of years of preparation for the final outcome, the coming of the Moshiach. To some these painful years of waiting appear to be devoid of real meaning. However, in light of the above, it can be stated that when our hearts, minds and actions are focused on the end — on making the world a dwelling place for G-d, the ultimate goal of the Messianic Age — all of this time we spend waiting, albeit impatiently, for the end result acquires the character and status of the Messianic Age, the Age of ultimate meaning.

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ESSAY FOUR

SPREADING OUT THE HAND

Moshiach transcends other souls because he is G-d's messenger to inspire and activate all of the five levels of the soul including the one called Yechidah; the essence of the soul.

When this level is revealed, there can be no obstacles or walls of separation between G-d and our world, or between one nation and another.

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ESSAY FOUR

SPREADING OUT THE HAND

Five Separations

A *kohain*, or priest, was responsible for performing all of the rituals in the Holy Temple. Now that the Temple no longer stands, the only ritual still performed by a Kohain is “*Birchas Kohanim*—the Priestly Blessing. The Kohain did not really give his own blessing, but rather he served as a conduit for G-d’s blessing to reach us.

The Talmud describes the manner the Kohain gives his blessing. He holds his hands up and makes a separation between the first two fingers of each hand and the next two fingers and another separation between the thumb and the other fingers. When the Kohain spreads out his hands, he makes one more separation between the thumbs of each hand. In all there are five separations.

What is the basis for this procedure?

According to this ritual of spreading out the hand and creating spaces is based on the Biblical verse in the Song of Songs, which describes, metaphorically, G-d’s love for His people:

“The voice of My beloved! Here he comes, leaping over

`the mountains, skipping over the hills. My beloved is like a hart, a young deer; here He stands behind our wall, watching through the windows, peering through the crevices.”

The words: “the windows” in Hebrew can also be rendered “five windows.” Hence the custom of creating five spaces between the Kohain's fingers.

Windows 613

Obviously, there is more to this custom than just a play on words. The entire concept of G-d giving His blessing is analogous to someone looking through a window. But, what precisely is the spiritual meaning of this metaphor and why five windows?

When G-d created the world, He invested His Divine energy into every creature. Not even a rock exists independently from its Divine power that keeps it from reverting to its original state of non-existence.

However, despite G-d's presence in every creature, He also created a wall that creates a separation between the reality of G-d's presence in our world and the perception of the world's independence. The ultimate goal is for us to remove this wall of separation. This we can accomplish every time we perform a mitzvah.

However, there are times that G-d Himself creates His own breach in the wall of separation that He erected. These crevices or windows enable the Divine energy to be felt and with this feeling comes G-d's many blessings.

But why five windows?

Five Worlds

One explanation that can be given is that according to Kabbalah there are five spiritual worlds. A spiritual world is not a geographic location, but a spiritual mindset. In the highest world of *Atzilus*- emanation, the perception of G-d is absolute and untainted. *Atzilus* is a world where the G-dly light that transcends even this sublime world is generated without much of a screen and filter. The lower worlds—known as *Beriah*-Creation, *Yetzirah*-Formation, *asiyah*-Action—represent levels where the G-dly light is progressively screened.

When the *Kohain* recites the priestly benediction, the Divine light surges through all of the four worlds and enters even our physical realm. Hence the five windows or crevices represent the five openings that materialize during this priestly function.

Another way of explaining the significance of five windows with respect to the priestly blessing can be provide based

on the statement in the Midrash that reveals the existence of five dimensions of the soul. And while we are all in possession of all five levels, there are those who are in touch with only several of them, one of them or neither of them.

When the Kohain makes the priestly blessing, he actually helps to open up windows that allow the five levels of our soul to be revealed.

Moshiach Standing Behind the Wall

According to another Midrashic account the one who stands behind the wall and watches through the windows and peers through the cracks is Moshiach.

According to the teachings of Kabbalah, there were/are five individuals whose souls are connected to one of the five levels of our individual souls. The five in ascending order are: King David, Elijah the Prophet, Moses, Adam and Moshiach.

Moshiach transcends the other souls because he is G-d's messenger to inspire and activate all of the five levels of the soul including the one called Yechidah-unique. When this level is revealed, there can be no obstacles or walls of separation between G-d and our world, or between one nation and another. That is why the Messianic Age is

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characterized as the age when there will be no war and all of the nations of the earth will serve G-d in unison.

But, as with regard to everything in Judaism, we are the catalysts that make everything happen. For Moshiach do his job, we are told to do ours by emphasizing a way of life that removes barriers that separate between us and G-d and also the undesirable barriers that separate between ourselves and others.

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ESSAY FIVE

RETURNING HOME

For close to 2,000 years we have been waiting for the coming of Moshiach when the soul will finally return home and no longer feel alienated.

However, we must first acknowledge that the soul exists, that it feels out of place and that its resources have been squandered for the wrong purposes.

Once we have that recognition we reach the conclusion that we must return these “soul-posessions” to its rightful owner.

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ESSAY FIVE

RETURNING HOME

To be Human is to Correct our Mistakes

Being human, we are often reminded, means that we make mistakes. The Torah has a different take on this. In this week's Parsha, the Torah states: "If a man or a woman shall commit any sin... they shall confess their sin." While making mistakes is certainly consistent with the human condition, the ultimate test of our humanity is the recognition that we've erred and are prepared to confess ours sins.

It is curious, however, that the Torah teaches us this lesson in the context of the specific crime of stealing from a convert. Of all the crimes that one could commit, one can think of many more likely things that we do and must acknowledge. What lesson can be derived from the need to acknowledge the theft of a convert?

Stealing from a convert?

Upon some reflection it is apparent that all of life's moral struggles can be characterized as "stealing from a convert." Who is this convert and how does it relate to us?

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We are all in possession of a soul, which is a part of G-d that was “sent” away from its celestial abode to animate our physical bodies. The soul is immortal. It existed before we were born and will live forever. Its presence in our physical world is but a temporary sojourn into a foreign universe. The soul, no matter how long it is in this world, always feels like a foreigner, a stranger. The Hebrew word for convert, Ger, actually means stranger or foreigner.

Both the body and the soul have possessions. Among the soul's possessions are its intellect and emotions. The soul's intellect is interested in understanding the G-dly wisdom that is the Torah. The soul's passions are ignited when we pray to G-d and show kindness to others. The soul feels nourished when we think, speak and act in a manner that is compatible with its spiritual makeup. Whenever one learns Torah, performs acts of kindness or observes a Jewish Holiday, to cite just a few examples, the soul's possessions are safe and secure.

When we take these intellectual talents, for example, and use them for criminal, or even selfish interests, we are then guilty of stealing from the “convert,” the visitor— the soul.

This explains why the law of acknowledging one's shortcomings is mentioned in conjunction with the crime of stealing from a convert. While it is important that we

acknowledge all of our mistakes, specifically, it is crucial that we also understand the full extent of our errors.

Stealing from Your Own Soul

For example, if one were to have squandered one's intellect on devising some scheme that will hurt another person, one should not only acknowledge what he did to the other; one must also recognize that he had just injured his own soul by stealing and abusing the precious G-d given resource of intellect and diverting it for undesirable ends. If the purpose of the confession is to make amends, the confession must also include the realization as to how one's very soul had just been victimized.

While this characterization of the soul as a convert and foreigner to our world is appropriate for everyone and in all periods of history, it is even a more poignant description of the period of exile.

The Jewish people were given the Land of Israel as their homeland, not just as a haven and refuge, or even to provide them with a national identity. Our possession of the Land of Israel was intended, primarily, to give us a spiritual identity. To put it more precisely, the Land of Israel—and more specifically, the city of Jerusalem and the Holy Temple—is where our soul is at home and not a stranger or alien.

When the Jewish people lost their Holy temple and were exiled from the Land of Israel, that is when the soul has become exposed to a strange and foreign environment, where spiritual values appear radical and secular values and mores become commonplace. This is the root of all of the problems we have in our spiritual lives.

Coming Home

For close to 2,000 years Jews have been waiting for the coming of Moshiach when the soul will finally return home and no longer feel alienated. To bring about this return of the soul to its home and sense of security, we must first acknowledge that the soul exists, that it feels out of place, that its resources have been squandered for the wrong purposes and that we must return these “soul-posessions” to its rightful owner.

Once we make this “confession” we can help the soul find its way home.

Interestingly, the word for confession in Hebrew—*viduy*—has the same root as the word gratitude. From the awareness of where we are and where we ought to go, we get our souls and bodies out of exile and bring the entire world to the ultimate state of peace, at which time we will express our profound gratitude to G-d.

ESSAY SIX

YOU COULD HAVE YOUR WINE AND DRINK IT TOO

The distinction between known as Kabbalah and Chassidus is that Chassidus mines and elicits the positive in ourselves and in others.

Chassidus is the part of Torah that digs into the deepest recesses of our soul, where no negativity can exist. Chassidus relates to the Yechidah, the essence that is intimately tied up with G-d's essence.

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ESSAY SIX

YOU COULD HAVE YOUR WINE AND DRINK IT TOO

The Paradox

Judaism's paradoxical view of wine is highlighted in this week's parsha. The Torah speaks of a Nazir, one who makes a vow to refrain from wine. The Torah introduces this subject with the words: "If a man or woman sets himself apart by making a nazirite vow to abstain for the sake of G-d..." The Torah then lists the various forms of wine or grape products forbidden to the Nazir.

In the preceding section of the same parsha, the Torah speaks of a woman who is suspected of adultery. This woman, referred to as a *sotah* - one who has strayed - is put through an elaborate ritual to determine whether she is guilty.

Rashi, asks why is this section, dealing with the Nazir, placed next to the section dealing with the errant woman?

Rashi's question may be better understood if we analyze the difference between these two personalities. The Sotah represents a person who allows herself (as well as the man

with whom she consorted, who is likewise guilty of adultery) to indulge her prohibited desires. The Nazir is one who goes to the opposite extreme, rejecting even those desires that are permissible. Why are these two diametrically opposed archetypes be presented to us in one sequence?

Rashi's answer is: "It is to teach you that whoever sees a sotah in her disgrace will make a nazirite vow to abstain from wine, for it leads a person to adultery."

In other words, the juxtaposition of these two themes is purposeful, precisely because they are opposites. The way we can avoid deviating from the norm of morality and holiness, we are told, is to go the other extreme and pursue an ascetic approach to life, specifically as it pertains to drinking of wine.

This analysis leaves us with a rather grim view of wine. Since we are all vulnerable to the pressures of society to conform to mores and values antithetical to the Torah's values, it behooves us to go to the opposite extreme.

The "Contradiction"

This is not the last word on wine, however. Rashi seems to contradict himself, when in a subsequent verse of this section, he quotes the Talmudic Sage Rabbi Elazar, who

says that the reason the Nazir was required to bring a sin offering was to atone for the sin of causing himself distress by abstaining from wine.

Asceticism, it now appears, particularly abstinence from wine, is not such a good idea after all. How can we reconcile this approach with the earlier notion that it is a positive thing to abstain, and thereby escape from degenerating into immorality?

This question has already been asked by Rabenu Tam (Rashi's grandson, the great French 12th century Sage), recorded in the Tosphos commentary on the Talmud (Bava Kamma 91b). Rabenu Tam's approach is that while it is a slight sin to deny oneself the pleasure of drinking wine, it is a necessary "evil." The Mitzvah to protect one's morals overrides the sin of ascetic behavior.

What Do You See?

There is a Chassidic approach stated in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov's disciple, Rabbi Dovid Forkus. Once, at a lively and joyous gathering of Chassidim, he was challenged by some onlookers. "How could you celebrate when the Jewish people are suffering in exile?"

He replied by citing the above-mentioned contradiction. "Is abstaining from wine a virtue or a vice?" The answer, he

said, lies in the Talmud's statement (cited by Rashi, mentioned above): "Whoever sees a sotah in her disgrace will make a nazirite vow to abstain from wine, for it leads a person to adultery." At this point, Rabbi Dovid Forkus offered a novel interpretation: "One who has a predilection to see the negative in others, by exposing their sins and deficiencies must abstain from wine." Wine has the capacity to enhance one's obsession with investigating the behaviors of others and discovering their vices.

(This does not mean to preclude assisting people who want to change and mend their ways. It merely suggests that one's motive should not be a negative one. To see the other's faults as a way of helping them is not focusing on the negative when it is based on one's concern for the other. That, too, is a positive approach.)

However, the Jew who views others with a "good eye" and sees only the good in others and therefore does not see "a sotah in her disgrace" may not deny himself the joy that comes from wine. The joy that it can generate is a positive result because the Divine presence dwells in our midst only when we are in a state of joy.

One could add to the above that, just as the negative person who drinks will only become more negative, so too the positive person who drinks (obviously it does not mean

drinking to excess) will discover that his positive impression of others has been enhanced.

The “Wine of Torah”

The above can also be interpreted figuratively.

The term “wine” is associated with the deeper and hidden meanings of the Torah. This description of wine is based on the Talmud’s association of wine with secrets. The numerical value of wine, which is 70, is the same as the word sod, which means secret. Hence, the “wine of Torah” alludes to the mystical dimension of Judaism.

For centuries, these teachings have been kept secret, but in recent times, these esoteric teachings of Torah have been disseminated widely to all segments of the Jewish community.

What was it that allowed these secret teachings — the “Wine of Torah”— previously reserved for the spiritual elite, to become popularized?

If the reason to abstain from wine is due to our negative approach to life (either because, as Rabenu Tam stated, we are morally challenged, or as Rabbi Dovid Forkus explained, due to our tainted and jaded vision of others) then why shouldn’t the rules of abstinence apply to the “Wine of Torah” too? If, in the distant past, it was considered

dangerous to teach these secrets without restriction, what has changed today?

Two Approaches: The Sick Prince and the Preparation for Redemption

There are two approaches to answer this question.

The first was given by the Alter Rebbe (R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the Chassidic classic, the Tanya), who was responsible for initiating a new and expansive approach to disseminating the mystical teachings of Judaism. This, he said, could be compared to the crown prince who was deathly ill. The only cure, his father the king was told, was to take the crown jewel, pulverize it and dilute it in water and give the sick prince some of it to drink. Most of it will go to waste, but if even one drop gets into his system it will save his life.

So too, the Jewish people have suffered so much in exile. They have been crushed physically, emotionally and spiritually. The only thing that can save their sunken spirits and revive them is a dose of the powerful teachings of Torah.

Wine can be destructive to people who are in a compromised emotional and spiritual state as was explained above, nevertheless, there are times when those

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whose illness becomes life threatening must take a strong medicine to save their lives

If we were to divide Jewish history or personalities into different periods based on their ability or right to imbibe the “Wine of Torah,” one could make the following observation:

For the holiest of people, such as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (the author of the classic work on Kabbalah, the Zohar) there was no restriction. These people were not tainted by exile conditions and were thus incapable of being harmed by the powerful teachings.

Most other Jews, for close to two millennia since the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, were considered too spiritually weak and vulnerable to be able to drink the “Wine of Torah.” It was, therefore, kept hidden from them. And those who tried to imbibe were tragically harmed.

The third period, includes all who have lived through the worst possible persecution and threats of assimilation in the last two centuries; we have been so sickened by the galus conditions that we desperately require some of the most potent medicine to survive.

There is, however, a second and more positive, approach to the recent “explosion” of mystical knowledge. This approach sees the popularization of the mystical teachings

as a totally positive phenomenon; it is a taste of the teachings that we will be privileged to hear from Moshiach.

No Side Effects

To better understand this second approach, a cautionary question must be answered. If wine causes a negative person to become more negative, how can we, the products of so much negativity, be receptive to the powerful Messianic teachings? How can we now permit ourselves to become intoxicated with the “Wine of Torah?”

The answer lies in the distinction between mystical teachings in general, known as Kabbalah, and the mystical teachings in Chassidic literature. While both are powerful “drinks,” Chassidus represents the part of Torah that focuses on, mines and elicits the positive in ourselves and in others. Chassidus is the part of Torah that digs into the deepest recesses of our soul, where no negativity can exist. Chassidus relates to the part of our soul that is referred to as the Yechidah, the part that is intimately tied up with G-d’s essence. This level will be fully revealed in the Messianic Age, but even now, as we get closer to the Geulah - we can, through these teachings, get in touch with that untainted positive light. As such, we can have our proverbial wine and drink it too. The “Wine of Torah,” as it

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is revealed through Chassidus, has all the benefits of wine with none of its negative side effects.

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ESSAY SEVEN

DANCING WITH MYRTLES

Irrational and destructive behavior can undermine our marriage (both the literal human union and the figurative marriage with G-d).

We can also engage in *supra-rational* behavior to enhance our relationships and take it to an incredibly high level.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY SEVEN

DANCING WITH MYRTLES

The Fidelity Test

Certain Torah readings coincide with special occasions. This week's parsha, entitled Naso, is always read in proximity to the Festival of Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

It is no accident that the very name of the Torah portion alludes to the underlying dynamic of this unprecedented event.

Our Sages describe the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai as the wedding between G-d and the Jewish people. The Hebrew word for marriage is *nesu'in* and the name of the parsha is Naso, both of which share the same linguistic root.

Although the Parsha does not specifically speak about entering into a marriage, it does discuss one way a marriage can go wrong. It involves a *sotah*, a woman suspected by her husband of infidelity. He would bring her to the Bais Hamikdash, where she would be required to

drink a harmless potion consisting of ink from the words of this Parsha erased into a jug of water. If she were guilty, the potion would miraculously cause her demise; but if she were innocent, her life would make a turn for the better.

The Talmud makes a very strong argument for the sanctity of peace within marriage based on this Torah portion. The fact that G-d allowed His name, which appears in this section of the Torah, to be erased for this purpose demonstrates how precious peace is in a marriage. G-d, in effect, says, "I don't mind the erasure of My name as long as it can restore the peace between husband and wife."

G-d's greatest wish is for us to live in peace and harmony with our spouses. This includes a peaceful relationship with G-d whom we were wed to at Sinai; the ultimate form of this relationship is what we will enjoy in the Messianic Age.

A Key Word

A significant word introduces this section, which, when examined in depth, will contribute to our understanding of how to maximize the love and fidelity within our marriage on the physical, emotional and spiritual levels.

The Torah introduces the section of the *sotah* with the words: "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: If any man's wife goes **astray**..."

The Hebrew word for astray-*sisteh* (which has the same root as the word *sotah*) is associated in the Talmud with the word *shtus*-folly. The Talmud (Tractate *Sotah* 3a) observes: "One does not transgress unless a spirit of folly enters him."

Chassidic thought adapts this concept of folly and reapplies it in a positive vein. Just as irrational and destructive behavior can take a person away from his or her marriage (both the literal human union and the figurative marriage with G-d), one can also engage in supra-rational behavior to enhance the relationship and take it to an incredibly high level.

As the Previous Rebbe explains in his classic Discourse, *Basi L'Gani*, there is a mean or norm in all things, and going either beneath it or above it is *shtus*-folly. The way to undo the negative form of foolishness is by going above and beyond the norm.

Dancing with the Myrtles

To illustrate this point, the Previous Rebbe cites a story in the Talmud (*Kesubos* 18a):

It was said of R. Yehudah the son of R. Ilai that at weddings he would twirl a sprig of myrtle as he danced before the bride.... Rav Shmuel bar Rav

Yitzchak would dance with three ("He would juggle with three twigs of myrtle."-- Rashi).

When Rav Shmuel bar Rav Yitzchak passed away, "a pillar of fire appeared, separating him from all those who were near him."

R. Zeira thereupon stated: "The venerable sage has been well served by his folly."

Dancing while juggling myrtle sprigs and behaving in a manner contrary to the standard rational approach of Torah scholars, ultimately led to "a pillar of fire that separated him from all those who were near him" upon his passing. This was a manifestation that he was "head and shoulders" above the others precisely because of his unconventional behavior.

Myrtle or Hirduf?

What significance is there in knowing that these venerable Sages danced and juggled with a **myrtle** sprig at a wedding?

One answer that can be offered is based on the Talmud's discussion of the use of the myrtle in the Festival of Sukkot. The Torah describes this branch as a "branch of plaited leaves." The Talmud (*Sukkah* 32b) queries whether the Torah is referring to the *hirduf*, another plant that also

has a thick covering of leaves? Rava answered with the verse: "Love truth and peace." The poisonous *hirduf* contributes to neither peace nor truth, for it is a destructive plant.

In other words, the myrtle was chosen over the *hirduf* plant because it symbolizes the twin traits of truth and peace.

The process of testing the *sotah* was entwined with both peace and truth. It involved an attempt to verify the *sotah's* claim of innocence so that peace could be restored between the spouses. It is here where these two traits, truth and peace, come together.

Thus, by dancing with the myrtle sprigs, these great Sages were attempting to highlight the two governing principles of a good marriage: truth and peace. A marriage in which there is deception cannot last and a marriage without peace is unhealthy indeed.

However, by acting in an irreverent fashion, dancing and juggling with the myrtle, the very symbol of truth and peace, at the beginning of a marriage these great Sages intended to teach us that we must not settle for a rational and normal level of peace and truth in our relationships. We must take these two values to an extreme; all the way to a supra-rational level.

Futuristic Peace and Truth

We must try to understand what constitutes a supra-rational level of truth and peace.

One may suggest the following explanation:

In Galus-exile we also can have both truth and peace but only in a Galus compromised fashion.

One who enjoys peace because he lacks truth, knows only a lesser form of peace. To be sure, it beats conflict, but it leaves much to be desired. In Galus, truth and peace are not always compatible. There are times when peace trumps truth. An example of this is the Talmud's description of how Aaron, Moses' brother, would make peace between husband and wife or two erstwhile but alienated friends, by telling each side that the other was sorry and really cared for the other.

Just as there are situations that require bending the truth to restore peace, there are, conversely, occasions when one must bend the peace to uphold the truth. The case of the *sotah* is a prime example. When a husband takes his wife to Jerusalem because he suspects her of infidelity it is a huge breach of their peace. But he does it anyhow to ascertain the truth about her behavior. Only in the end do these traits merge. The truth of her innocence is determined and peace is restored.

Even the simple marriage celebration can illustrate the tension between the two ideals of truth and peace that exist in an imperfect world.

Beauty in the Eyes of the Beholder

The Talmud (*Kesubos* 18a) discusses the dispute between the School of Shammai and the School of Hillel concerning the praise that we may offer up to a bride. The School of Hillel maintains that we may praise her as being beautiful and gracious even if it is objectively clear that she is not. The School of Shammai considers this to be dissembling and forbids it. The School of Hillel's rationale is that to the husband she is indeed beautiful. This is akin to the saying "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder."

This idea can have application beyond the wedding celebration: When we see a Jew who does not seem to be beautiful in his or her Judaism, we must recognize that G-d (the ultimate Husband) sees the inner beauty of every Jew. But, from our limited vantage point, description of the person as beautiful when it does not seem that way on the surface is inconsistent with truth. Nevertheless, to cultivate peace we tolerate the compromised state of truth.

The opinion of the School of Hillel is the prevailing view in the present day and age. However, the Arizal informs us

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that in the Messianic Age, we will follow the School of Shammai in their disputes with the School of Hillel.

It can be said about the School of Shammai that they chose a more radical, uncompromising, and supra-rational form of truth and peace. Shammai says an adamant “no” to the adulteration of standards. One must always strive, dance and juggle for the higher, unadulterated form of the myrtle, where truth and peace are absolutely compatible. Shammai and his students were able to see the future, messianic marriage of G-d and Israel, at which time these ideals will be complete.

In the Messianic version, the bride (read: the Jewish people) will indeed look beautiful inside and out. There will be no discrepancy between the inside and the outside as we can see now in our Galus state of existence.

Thus, when the Sages danced at the wedding with their myrtles, which symbolized the traits of truth and peace in their coexisting and harmonious state, they were trying to teach us something. Their important lesson was that although one is permitted to compromise truth for the sake of peace, and in some tragic situations one must also compromise peace for truth, this is **not** the ideal. That might be the norm or a necessary evil while we are in Galus, but it is not what we strive for.

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When we pray for Redemption through Moshiach, who possesses the twin traits of truth and peace, our most heartfelt prayer is for G-d to be fully revealed so that we see the unvarnished **truth** of existence. We also, simultaneously, plead with G-d to cover us with His Sukkah of unmitigated and unqualified **Peace**.

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ESSAY EIGHT

TOPSY-TURVY PRIORITIES

Torah is the primary and absolute reality.

In order for us to exist as reality our being must be preceded, created and animated by the primary reality of Torah.

Only after the primacy of Torah is established do we have any basis to exist and also enjoy the material world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY EIGHT

TOPSY-TURVY PRIORITIES

What's the Connection?

The parsha that we read immediately after the Holiday of Shavuos, the anniversary and the reenactment of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, is the longest parsha in the Torah. Likewise the Midrashic material on this parsha is far more extensive than for any other parsha. Commentators point out that the reason for the substantial amount of knowledge imparted in this parsha, in the Written as well as in the Oral Torah, is precisely because it comes on the heels of Shavuos. To be sure, in some years it is the parsha read before Shavuos; nevertheless its close proximity to Shavuos, before or after, is an indication that these two events are intertwined.

Surprisingly enough, a cursory examination of the topics discussed in this parsha yields no direct connection to Shavuos.

In this essay we will focus on one subject discussed briefly in this parsha:

The First Fruits

The Torah commands us to give certain offerings to a Kohain. At first glance, it is hard to understand what connection this commandment has with the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

The answer perhaps lies in the Hebrew word for these offerings, which is *Terumah*. The Zohar comments on this word and states that it is actually a composite of the word Torah and the letter mem, which is also the number 40. Hence *Terumah* actually contains within it the idea that the Torah was given to us at Sinai after which Moses ascended onto the mountain and stayed there for 40 days and nights to receive the balance of the Torah as well as the two Tablets into which were engraved the Ten Commandments (or more accurately: the Ten Statements).

This does not fully answer the question as to the connection between giving tithes to the Kohain and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. It only finds a hint to the word Torah in the word Terumah.

A closer connection can be found in Rashi's citation from the Midrash that the term Terumah here is not the standard tithe that came from one's crops (grain, wine and oil) that the Kohain would come and collect at the granary. Rather it refers to the Bikkurim, the first fruits one

would bring to the Bais Hamikdash and give to the Kohanim there.

The season for bringing the Bikkurim begins at the time Jews would come to celebrate the Festival of Shavuos. Indeed, one of the Biblical names ascribed to Shavuos is *Chag Habikkurim*, the Festival of the First Fruits. This refers to the Two Loaves that were offered on this Holiday (baked from the first harvest of wheat), as well as to the first fruits that were brought to the Kohain at this time.

This verse establishes a more specific connection to Shavuos.

But we now have to examine the conceptual relationship between bringing one's first fruits to the Temple and the giving of the Torah.

Whose Produce is it?

To discover the connection let us cite the verse that discusses the obligation of giving the tithes in full:

“And any portion [*Terumah*] from any of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohain shall be his. A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohain shall be his.”

The underlying message in this verse is that what we give to the Kohain is truly his and what we retain for ourselves is truly ours. At first glance, this statement is not earth shattering or even necessary. Why would anyone think that what we give away to a Kohain is not his and that which we retain is not ours?

This question seems to be the basis for Rashi's statement, quoting the Midrash, that the words "any portion (*Terumah*) from any of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohain **shall be his**" implies that the one who gives his gift to the Kohain retains the right to decide to which Kohain he should give it, and the words "what a man gives to the Kohain **shall be his**" also refers to the belief that one who gives the tithes to the Kohain will be rewarded with an abundance of wealth.

One may suggest that the following explanation will also shed light on the connection to Shavuos.

In truth, *Terumah* is referred to as the first of one's produce and so is the Torah referred to as "the first of G-d's ways."

In other words, when a Jew would separate a portion of his produce and designate it as a holy offering to be given to the Kohain it was his way of indicating that in G-d's world there are primary and secondary resources and they are

not necessarily identified the way society tends to identify them.

A person who grows produce will naturally feel that his main reason for farming is to get food for himself, his family and the rest of society. By the Torah mandating that he first gives Terumah (and particularly Bikkurim) from his choicest produce he was quickly disabused of this notion. The ostensible owner of the produce is thereby informed that, on the contrary, the primary reason one grows food is to give it away to G-d. This one does by giving it to the Kohain, G-d's representative. Once a Jew executes the main function and responsibility vis-à-vis the produce he can then also enjoy the fruit of his labor. Only then can he claim that it is truly his produce.

This then is the deeper meaning of the words, "any portion [Terumah] from any of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohain shall be his... what a man gives to the Kohain shall be his." Only after one gives the offering to the Kohain can one legitimately claim ownership. Without first acknowledging the primary owner, there is no room for secondary ownership.

Primary and Secondary Reality

What occurred every time a person gave his produce to the Kohain is also a metaphor for the way we look at creation in general vis-à-vis the Torah.

Without the metaphor of Terumah, conventional wisdom would view the relationship among ourselves, our world and Torah in the following manner:

We see ourselves living in a predominantly physical world governed by the immutable laws of nature. In this world, G-d gave us a metaphysical Torah to teach us how to best live our lives within the reality of physical existence. From this perspective, the world is truth, real, and primary, and the Torah is a secondary influence to enhance existence the way we know it. In this formulation, nature is primary and Torah is secondary and is only real to the extent that it conforms to physical reality.

When we follow the lesson of Terumah we reach the opposite conclusion. Torah, in truth, is the primary and absolute reality. In order for us to exist as reality our existence must be preceded, created and animated by the primary reality of Torah. Only after the primacy of Torah is established do we have any basis to exist and also enjoy the material world.

In other words, nature has no legitimacy without Torah. As Divine wisdom, Torah can exist without a universe; the universe cannot exist without the Torah.

In the words of our Sages, “Torah is the very blueprint of creation.” Just as complex human structures are first represented by a blueprint, there is no world that is not preceded by and contained within Torah. This also explains another saying of our Sages: “The Torah preceded the world by 2,000 years.” Chassidic thought explains that it is not referring to chronological time because before creation there was no time. It refers rather to cause and effect. Torah is 2,000 levels removed from the world, which means that Torah is the primal cause of a cascade of many subsequent effects and causes that ultimately devolved into a physical world.

Once we recognize that Torah is the primary form of existence we reach a crucial conclusion. Nothing in nature can possibly pose an inherent contradiction to the teachings and practice of Torah. Any discrepancy between Torah and science is either proof that the scientific theory is wrong, or that it was misconstrued. Of course, the person who responds to an apparent contradiction must also make sure that he does not misrepresent the true meaning of Torah.

Bringing the Future into the Present

While Torah's primacy and inviolability is clear, human nature militates against our feeling this way intuitively. The fact that we are in Galus-exile adds to the smokescreen that cloaks the reality of Torah. All those objects and ideas that we consider "real" acquire the imprimatur of legitimacy and reality only to the extent that they conform to Torah.

When Moshiach ushers in the true and complete Redemption the entire world will be exposed to this reality. Today, our task is to introduce the future by focusing our attention on the Torah's teachings concerning the Redemption. That will provide us with a paradigm shift and condition us to see the true relationship between Torah and everything else in a refreshingly new and liberating fashion.

ESSAY NINE

THE JEWISH THEORY OF RELATIVITY

One way of preparing for Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption, is to view others with the three approaches alluded to by the three Priestly Blessings:

We ought to see the essential bond every Jew has with G-d.

We must also seek the beautiful, intrinsic qualities the other possesses.

At the very least, we must appreciate the contrast between the other and the alien values of the “enemy that comes from afar.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY NINE

THE JEWISH THEORY OF RELATIVITY

Shavuos Preparation

This year, we read the Parsha Naso **before** the Festival of Shavuos, which marks the day that G-d revealed Himself to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai and gave them the Torah. In most years, however, this parsha is read on the Shabbos immediately **after** Shavuos. The juxtaposition of this parsha with the Festival of Shavuos suggests a connection between the two. When Naso precedes Shavuos, though, it implies that the way to prepare for the giving of the Torah is to internalize the lessons from this parsha.

One section of Naso that stands out for its eloquence is the Priestly Blessing, which comprises three separate blessings.

The immediate general lesson taught by these blessings is that to be receptive to the Torah we ought to engage in blessing the Jewish people. As we say in our daily prayers: "Bless us, our Father, all as one, with the light of Your countenance. For by the light of Your countenance, G-d our G-d, You gave us a Torah of life..." To receive the Torah we need to come to G-d "all as one," as is so dramatically underscored in the Priestly Blessings.

When we probe more deeply into the Priestly Blessings we can find a specific lesson pertaining to our preparation for the Giving of the Torah.

Connecting the Two Phrases: “G-d Will Raise”

The third blessing reads: “G-d will raise His face towards you and grant you peace.” The phrase “...G-d will raise...” parallels language in Deuteronomy, where Moses delivers harsh words of rebuke to the Jewish people for their errant ways:

“G-d will raise upon you a nation from afar, from the end of the earth...”

There is no obvious connection between these two phrases despite the use of the same words, “G-d will raise...” Indeed, they deal with diametrically opposite responses from G-d. In the former, G-d “will raise His face” towards the Jewish people and bless them; in the latter, G-d “will raise...” an adversarial nation against the Jewish people. One is a powerful blessing and the other a painful and dire prediction. How can these words, used in utterly different contexts, be reconciled and connected?

The Chosen People

To answer this question we must first understand what occurred at Mount Sinai in terms of the way G-d relates to us. Upon reflection, we can see that two distinct connections were made at Sinai.

First and foremost, the Jewish people were chosen by G-d at Mount Sinai.

What do we mean by the word “chosen” here?

Chassidic thought explains that to truly choose between two items, they must be equal. If a person is thirsty and chooses to drink rather than eat he has not made a true choice.

As we shall see below, if G-d chose the Jewish people because of any of their positive qualities it could not be considered a real choice. Human beings can never freely choose, in the fullest sense of the word, because our biases and predilections, some conscious and some subconscious, compel our choice. When we think we are freely choosing something we are actually responding to a conscious or subconscious attraction to that particular thing. G-d, by contrast, transcends any and every reason to select one thing over another. Regardless of the qualities that we possess, His choice of us at Sinai represented His true choice, not influenced or prejudiced by any secondary consideration.

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One is entitled to ask, what difference does it really make if G-d arbitrarily chose us or that He chose us because we possessed certain qualities?

The answer is threefold:

First, if His choice of us was the result of our possessing a particular quality or set of qualities, our relationship with G-d would fall apart when our behavior proved wanting and the quality for which we were chosen no longer existed. However, His choosing us transcended any consideration of our qualities, the relationship could never cease.

Second, a relationship based on a consideration of the other's virtues is, by definition, limited. By G-d choosing us irrespective of our qualities or lack thereof, it means that G-d's choice derived from His Essence and not from one of His attributes such as His intellect.

The closest we can come to understanding the nature of this relationship is through consideration of the institution of marriage. It's no coincidence that our Sages compared the experience at Sinai to the chuppah ceremony. One may choose to marry someone because of the virtues displayed by his or her spouse-to-be. But the marriage commitment and union is not truly based on or limited by the rational evaluation of the other's qualities. Marriage represents the commitment of two people devoting their

entire being to the other, thus transcending any particular consideration.

Similarly, with G-d and the Jewish people: While G-d took “notice” of the Jewish people because of their Patriarchs and Matriarchs, as well as their own positive qualities, nevertheless, His choosing of them transcended all those qualities. G-d connected His very Essence with our Essence, not just by matching His attributes with our positive attributes and virtues.

A third corollary of the concept of G-d freely choosing us (as opposed to choosing us because of our qualities), is that G-d chose our bodies not just our souls. Indeed, our souls did not need to be chosen in the first place; they already enjoyed an intimate relationship with G-d. It was our bodies, no different from the bodies of all others, that were chosen by G-d when He gave us the Torah at Mount Sinai. Indeed, the Sinai revelation was not directed at our souls at all but at our bodies. Our souls definitely benefit from the Mitzvos that we perform, but the objective of the Mitzvos is to involve our bodies in the most intimate relationship with G-d.

Particular Qualities do Count

Having said that Sinai created an essential bond between G-d and the Jewish people that transcends particular

qualities, it turns out that specific qualities are also an important part of our relationship with G-d, though they are of a secondary status. Despite the fact that G-d chose us and loves us indiscriminately, nevertheless, He also cherishes those individual secondary qualities that we possess. Once again the analogy of a marriage is useful. Notwithstanding the fact that a marriage goes beyond the appreciation each spouse has for the other, transcending their specific qualities, their love and their essential bond must also manifest itself in and through their specific qualities. Each spouse must endeavor to see the specific qualities the other possesses and not just rely on a more profound essential bond that outstrips any particular virtue.

Thus, we find many references in the Torah and in the writings of our Sages where G-d extols specific virtues of the Jewish people. He expresses His love for us not only in and through His choosing of and marriage to us, but also in and through our virtuous secondary qualities.

Intrinsic and Relative Qualities

This two tiered relationship—i.e., the transcendent connection generated by free choice supplemented by appreciation for specific qualities—can be further divided

into two additional categories: essential, intrinsic qualities versus relativistic qualities.

There were times in our history when we shone because of our great spiritual achievements, as, for example, in the times of King Solomon and the glorious period of Torah renaissance in the Talmudic period. In those periods, we did not have to be contrasted with other nations for G-d to appreciate our uniqueness.

However, there were other times that, notwithstanding our periodic spiritual decline, G-d would still be able to see our virtues in relative terms. Compared to the surrounding nations we still looked virtuous.

When G-d gave us the Torah we enjoyed all three levels of G-d's appreciation for us: He chose us and created an essential bond with us. He appreciated our virtue in the way we declared "We will do" even before we heard what G-d was going to offer us. And we also came out looking good in comparison to all the other nations of the world who, according to our Sages, refused to accept the Torah and did not even respect the Seven Noahide Commandments they had previously observed.

The Three Tiered Relationship of Shavuos and the Three Blessings

We can now understand the deeper significance of the Three Priestly Blessings which serve as a preparation for Shavuos.

We may suggest that these three blessings parallel the three dimensions of our relationship with G-d at Sinai, and the third blessing “G-d will raise” relates to the way G-d views us relative to the other nations.

As was mentioned above, this phrase parallels the one which speaks of how G-d will raise a foreign nation to conquer the Jews. This association intimates that even if we were to hit rock bottom, necessitating tough love, G-d will still make it clear that the Jewish people are an exalted and “raised” people by comparing them to the nations that come from afar to conquer them.

Indeed, when one reflects on the evil of the nations which conquered Israel—Assyrians, Babylonians, Romans and Greeks among others—one is compelled to declare the Biblical words “Who is like Your people, like Israel, one nation on earth!”

Prelude to Moshiach

Tanya explains how everything that occurred temporarily at Sinai will become a permanent fixture with the advent of the Messianic Age.

Thus, one way of preparing for Moshiach and the ultimate Redemption, is to view the other with the three approaches alluded to by the three Priestly Blessings: We ought to see the essential bond every Jew has with G-d; seek the beautiful, intrinsic qualities the other possesses; and even if hard-pressed to find these overt qualities, we must nevertheless try to appreciate the contrast between the other and the alien values of the “enemy that comes from afar.” At the very least, the “theory of relativity,” enables us to see the good in everyone.

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ESSAY TEN

INFINITE BLESSINGS

Even when our destination throughout our long journey in exile was not clear—“*ko/so*”—we knew that we will always be accompanied by G-d, and we will ultimately return whole.

The blessings that we receive from G-d through the Kohain convey the message that even when our future appears uncertain, and the blessings seem elusive, nevertheless, we can rest assured that they will come true.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY TEN

INFINITE BLESSINGS

Priestly Blessings

In this week's parsha, G-d entrusted some very unique blessings to Aaron and his sons, with which they were to bless the Jewish people. One of the few priestly functions that have survived the destruction of the Temple and that is practiced throughout the world, is the Birkas Kohanim, the Priestly blessing, which is chanted by the Kohanim (descendants of Aaron) during every Jewish Holiday. In Israel, this ceremony is performed every Shabbos, and in Jerusalem, every day.

The blessings are:

“The L-rd bless you and guard you. The L-rd make His countenance shine upon you and be gracious to you. The L-rd turn His countenance toward you and grant you peace.”

These blessings are introduced with the words:

"Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: 'So you shall bless the Children of Israel; saying to them...'"

So, So, So

The question has been raised: The Hebrew word for “so”—*koh*—is not really necessary in this verse. It could have just stated: “Bless the Children of Israel,” why the emphasis “so?”

The Midrash finds three key places where the word “*koh-so*” is mentioned in the Torah. When G-d blessed Abraham that his children shall be as numerous as the “stars of heaven,” He added: “*Koh-So* shall be your children.”

The second place where the word “*Koh-so*” is mentioned is in the context of Isaac, when he was brought by his father Abraham to be sacrificed. Abraham said to his youths: “I and the lad will go yonder—“*koh*”—and we shall prostrate and return to you.”

The third reference to the word “*koh-so*” can be found in conjunction with Jacob. When G-d first introduced the Torah to the Jewish people, He said: “*Koh-So* shall you say to the House of Jacob.”

Since the three references relate to the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it follows that the power given to the Kohanim to bless the Jewish people derives from the Patriarchs in general and from the context in which the word “*koh-so*” is used.

Dispelling Doubts

When Abraham complained that he was childless, G-d told him, "Gaze toward the heavens and count the stars.... *koh-so* shall be your children."

This conveys the following lesson. When we survey the situations where we really need a blessing, we often find ourselves doubting whether it could really help. Our situation is so dire, that we despair whether it could really help.

By invoking the memory of the word "so"—in the context of the blessing Abraham received from G-d that his progeny would multiply like the stars of the heavens—it brings home the message not to take a blessing lightly. One blessing that issues forth from G-d through the Kohain, takes us from a state of nothingness and despair to the highest "stellar" state, in terms of both quantity and quality.

Blessings Not Elusive

The second lesson comes from the narrative of the *Akeidah*—the binding of Isaac. Abraham does not give his youths the exact location where he will be going with his son Isaac. The word *koh-so* implies an approximate

destination, as if to say, “I don’t know exactly where we are going, but I do know that I am going with this youth.” And presciently he added, “We shall prostrate ourselves and we shall return to you.”

Even when our destination throughout our long journey in exile was not clear—“*koh-so*”—we knew that we will always be accompanied by G-d, and we will ultimately return whole. The blessings that we receive from G-d through the Kohain convey the message that even when our future appears uncertain, and the blessings seem elusive, nevertheless, we can rest assured that they will come true.

Generalities

The third and final reference to “*koh-so*” involves the way Torah was introduced to the women, who are described as “the House of Jacob.”

Why does the Torah state “**So** shall you say to the House of Jacob,” rather than just, “Say to the House of Jacob?”

The answer is that when G-d spoke to the women about the importance of Torah, it was enough for Him to speak to them in generalities. The women were capable of extrapolating as to what G-d’s intentions were. Not everything has to be spelled out for them; a mere hint

suffices for the wise and sensitive. Although G-d communicated a finite number of words, they contained infinite knowledge. The women were better equipped than the men to appreciate this.

Indeed, this ability to draw inferences and to see more than what meets the eye, is a trait that is specifically ascribed to women, in the Talmudic passage: "Greater understanding was given to women than to men." They have a greater capacity to see the larger picture in the smaller frame.

This message of seeing beyond the surface applies to the G-dly blessings as well. When one surveys the blessings it can appear that they are limited. In truth, they contain infinite blessing.

In summary, the Priestly blessings can take us from the nadir to the stars, get us to where we are going even if it appears that we are going nowhere, and there is no limit as to their potential.

Messianic Age Accomplishments

In our last moments of Galus-exile we are especially in need of the Priestly Blessings and the messages they convey.

After so many years of our hopes being dashed, we need to be fortified with the realization that G-d's promise to us that we will be like the stars in heaven will come true.

If one surveys the world events, just in the last 25 years, one sees cataclysmic changes. The collapse of the Soviet Union was arguably one of the greatest miracles of all times. It brought an end to the last bastion of governmental persecution of Jews and Judaism. It was the last prison for Jews. It was, as the Rebbe said, a result from the efforts of Moshiach.

And while the Rebbe predicted the fall of the Soviet Union on numerous occasions, Jews were skeptical.

The same skepticism exists today about the final abolition of Galus. The first message of the word *koh-so* in the Priestly blessing is that G-d's promise will materialize in the fullest measure. We will reach for the stars.

Likewise all the uncertainties about our future will be dispelled. And like the *Akeidah* we will see the ultimate acts of devotion to G-d achieved without the need to sacrifice one iota of the physical benefits of life.

But the final implementation of the concept of *koh-so* will be the seeing beyond the surface of everything. We will be exposed to the infinite blessings of G-d, the infinite dimensions of Torah and the infinite G-d. The preeminent feminine quality that enables one to see beyond the obvious will become a fixture for the entire world.

ESSAY ELEVEN

JUMP NOW, ASK QUESTIONS LATER

When one approaches the service of G-d from a Nachshon perspective, there is no need to find meaning and symbolism in each detail of one's mission.

For a Nachshon personality it suffices to know that this is what G-d would want.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY ELEVEN

JUMP NOW, ASK QUESTIONS LATER

Twelve Jews, Twelve Approaches

Twelve leaders of the twelve tribes decide to bring an offering to dedicate the newly constructed Tabernacle (the portable sanctuary in the desert known in Hebrew as the Mishkan). Incredibly, each leader brings the identical sacrifice, down to the minutest detail. According to the Midrash, while the offerings were identical, the thoughts and intentions of all these leaders varied. No two leaders ascribed the same symbolism and meaning to their offering. Each leader connected the offering to the specific needs of his tribe.

Indeed, the Midrash provides us with twelve different approaches to the symbolism of each detail of their offerings.

Rashi—the Torah’s principal commentator—on the other hand only provides us with the symbolism of the offering of the second of the twelve leaders, Nesanel the leader of the tribe of Yissachar.

Commentators ask why Rashi does not provide us with the symbolism for the other eleven leaders. And if he is just giving us a sample of what these offerings are all about, why didn't he provide us with the symbolism of the very first offering brought by the leader of the tribe of Judah? Why wait for the second leader to suggest that each detail of the offering had significance?

Difference Between Judah and Yissachar

One approach that may be suggested lies in the difference between Judah and Yissachar the two first tribes to bring the offering.

Judah represents total devotion to a G-dly cause. Indeed, Nachshon the son of Aminadav, the leader of the tribe of Judah, was the first to jump into the turbulent waters of the Red Sea before it split. He didn't ask any questions. He knew that G-d wanted the Jewish nation to march forward in the direction of Sinai. He was not deterred by the sea.

If he had begun to reason, Nachson might have encountered strong rational resistance to that bold move. He might have thought that what he was doing was suicidal. He might have argued that if Moses himself did not enter the sea at that time, why then should he do so? Nachson just jumped; and only when the waters reached

his nostrils, our Sages tell us, did the sea split, thereby vindicating his rather unconventional approach.

A Nachson—a term used in modern Hebrew to describe a pioneer or maverick, who takes the plunge; a true leader—is not interested in the reason for things that he knows in his gut is right. He is a man of action and forges ahead.

Yissachar, on the other hand, is identified as the tribe with the greatest scholars, characterized in the book of Chronicles as those “who had an understanding of the times.” They were the experts in the calculations as to when the new moon will appear. They were in touch with the changes of the times and the nuances of life and knew what the Torah wanted us to do at any specific time.

With this difference between the attitudes of Nachson of the tribe of Judah and Nesanel the leader of the tribe of Yissachar we can appreciate the reason why Rashi provides us with the symbolism of Yissachar’s offering and not the one of Nachshon which preceded the one of Yissachar.

When one approaches the service of G-d from a Nachshon perspective, there is no need to find meaning and symbolism in each detail of one’s mission. For a Nachshon personality it suffices to know that this is what G-d would want. When Nachshon heard from the leader of Yissachar that these offerings were appropriate and desirable, he jumped and wasted no time offering to be the first to bring

the offering. He did not need to know why Yissachar the “theoretician” thought it would be good to bring these specific offerings. It was enough for him to hear that this was a way of expressing one’s devotion to G-d.

However, the more calculating and reasoned stance of Yissachar demanded of him to know precisely what each detail was all about. Yissachar cannot just do something impulsively, even if the impulse was motivated by a holy passion for G-d. One must apply one’s mind to every detail and nuance of our Judaism; attempting to understand as much as our minds allow us to understand.

“You’re Both Right!”

Who was right? Yissachar or Judah?

The answer is both!

One must begin with the zeal of Nachshon the leader of Judah, but it must be followed by the scrutiny and comprehension of Yissachar.

Indeed, in the ultimate manifestation of the Messianic Age is that then we will all **know** G-d to the extent that G-d can be known. We will reach the ultimate level of understanding of G-dliness. Even the most inscrutable features of G-d’s ways—why the good suffer etc.—which

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we cannot possibly fathom now, will become somewhat accessible to the human mind in the future Messianic Age.

Yet, in spite of the incredible growth of knowledge in the Messianic Age, Chassidic thought reveals (based on a novel interpretation of a Talmudic passage: “Moshiach comes when our minds are distracted.”) that the Messianic Age will transcend the outer bounds of knowledge.

The seeds for the fusion of knowledge and trans-knowledge was already sown when the first two leaders, Nachshon and Nesanel of the tribes of Yehudah and Yissachar, respectively, brought their dedicatory offerings to the Mishkan.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY TWELVE

AN UPLIFTING TORAH

With the revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai, every commandment — whether prescriptive or proscriptive — is endowed with equal holiness,

When a Jew thus desists from working on the Shabbos, it is nonetheless a mitzvah, which means both commandment as well as connection.

Every time a Jew refrains from a proscribed act, he or she is in compliance with the Divine will and is connected to G-d.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY TWELVE

AN UPLIFTING TORAH

Counting and Uplifting

This Shabbat is the first after the momentous occasion of receiving the Torah on Mount Sinai that we relived during the recent Festival of Shavuot.

One would imagine that the very first Torah reading following such a pivotal Torah event would also relate to the theme of Torah. One would also expect the name of the parsha to reflect its preeminent nature.

Indeed, the name of this week's parsha, *Naso*, is expressive of the effect the giving of the Torah had. *Naso* means to count, but it should also be translated literally as "raise." The lesson is obvious that the objective and inevitable effect of Torah is to raise and uplift every individual who studies it and by extension the entire world.

Also Count the Gershonites

Let us now analyze the particular context in which this

expression occurs. G-d is commanding Moses to “**also** count the sons of *Gershon*,” one of three families of the tribe of Levi.” In the preceding parsha, the Torah relates how the Levite family of *Kehot* should be counted. Now the Torah adds that the family of *Gershon* should also be counted.

Commentators raise the question: why was the counting of *Gershon* not mentioned earlier, together with the counting of *Kehos*?

With the insight that the word for counting “*Naso*” actually means to uplift, we can understand that there is a special message with regard to *Gershon* in particular.

Kehos is etymologically related to a word that means “gathering.” One of Torah’s functions is to affect one’s ability to bring together a people and unite them. When Jews are united, they are transformed from the status of individuals to the level of a nation. Unity, by definition, is uplifting.

Thus the Torah states in the preceding parsha that the family of *Kehos* should be counted, or uplifted. This means that their trait of unity should be singled out for special recognition.

Combatting Evil can Also Uplift

In this week's parsha, the Torah introduces us to an even more remarkable effect of Torah. Not only is the positive force of unity, engendered by the Torah, edifying and uplifting, but even, the more banal function of Torah that is associated with *Gershon*, which means to "drive away," can also be uplifting if it based on and follows the giving of the Torah at Sinai.

Combating evil is not viewed as a very romantic and holy function. Although someone has to take out the garbage, by way of analogy, it is not considered an honor or an uplifting experience. Similarly, had the Torah not given us the Divine commandments to negate evil, it would not be considered an uplifting experience.

Now that the Torah gave us 365 "*Gershon*" oriented commandments (of the total number 613), the "do not's," even these are considered Divine commands that are exciting and uplifting. With the revelation of G-d at Mount Sinai, **every** commandment — whether prescriptive or proscriptive — is endowed with equal holiness. When a Jew thus desists from working on the Shabbat, it is nonetheless a mitzvah, which means both commandment as well as connection. Every time a Jew refrains from a proscribed act, he or she is in compliance with the Divine will and is connected to G-d.

Difference between Prescriptive and Proscriptive Commandments

Moreover, according to the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus, when one performs any mitzvah they generate spiritual energy throughout the world.

There are, however, two differences between a positive commandment and a negative one.

Firstly, when one exercises restraint in the observance of a proscriptive commandment, the energy generated is even greater than the energy channeled through a pro-active observance of a mitzvah.

Secondly, because these energies are so sublime they may not necessarily be absorbed and internalized by us as easily as they are when we observe a “positive” mitzvah, where the very act of the mitzvah serves as the instrument to internalize the energies..

Post Sinai Message

The Torah, in the first parsha read after Shavuot, thus declares: after Sinai, even the *Gershon* modality of Judaism — the negation of evil — can uplift the person, no less so than the “*Kehos*-unifying” elements of Judaism. Negating evil is a thoroughly spiritual experience.

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And while the energy generated by the “negative” commandments might be somewhat elusive, with the coming of Moshiach, however, even that will be remedied.

At that time, even the most transcendent of Divine energies will be absorbed and appreciated by all. By observing all the commandments, including the *Gershon* ones, with joy and enthusiasm, we prepare ourselves and the entire world for that age.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY THIRTEEN

UPLIFTING THE INTELLECT

Not only can the study of Torah inspire and uplift us, it
can even raise up our head.

Even our intellect, the most exalted part of our being, can
rise to even greater heights.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

UPLIFTING THE INTELLECT

Taking a Census or Uplifting?

This week's parsha, Naso, always occurs in the same week as the Festival of Shavuos. In most years it is the first Shabbos after Shavuos; in some years it is the Shabbos before the Holiday.

This suggests that there is an intrinsic connection between the theme of Torah, the giving of which we observe during Shavuos, and this week's parsha, which begins with G-d's commandment to Moses to count the members of the Gershonite family, one of the three families within the tribe of Levi. However, the word the Torah uses for taking a census is "Naso," which also means to "uplift." The opening phrase "*Naso es rosh*" can thus be rendered literally as "Lift up the heads."

Connection to Shavuos

The connection to the giving of the Torah is now evident: When Rabbi Yosef, the great Talmudic Sage would reflect on the importance of the Holiday of Shavuot, the

anniversary of the giving of the Torah, he would say: "If not for this day, there would have been many "Joes" in the marketplace." Rashi, the principle commentator of the Talmud explains that Rav Yosef meant, "If not for the Torah that I studied and that uplifted me, there are many people with the name Yosef."

In other words, the study of Torah has the capacity to uplift a person to a level that makes him unique.

And that is the obvious connection to the opening word Naso, which conveys the idea of uplifting. The very name of this parsha describes the effect Torah can have on those who study it.

Even the Intellect can be Raised

This idea can be taken a step further. The Torah speaks of uplifting the "head." In the context of Torah study this can be understood to mean that not only can the study of Torah inspire and uplift us, it can even raise up our head. Even our intellect, the most exalted part of our being, can rise to even greater heights.

At this point three points need to be clarified:

First, what does it mean to have our intellect uplifted when we study Torah?

Second, why does the uplifting of our intellect not occur when we study other worthwhile subjects?

Third, wouldn't it have been more appropriate to have stated that Torah study "increases," "expands" or "enhances," our intellect? What message does the term "uplifts" convey?

The Limits of the Human Mind

A human being, as a part of Creation, is, by definition, a finite being. Hence, the human mind, as brilliant as it may be, has its limits. Contrary to the antiquated and discredited 19th century view that the human mind will someday grasp all there is to know and find the solution to every problem, we now have a more sober view of our limited capabilities. Intellect, as great as it is, has its built in limitations.

And while the more we learn and acquire knowledge the greater our intellect becomes, we can never leave the parameters and confines of finite human reasoning. We can increase, broaden and deepen our knowledge, but we cannot break out of the realm of finite human intellect.

Torah, by contrast, is not human reasoning but Divine wisdom. And since Maimonides stated that "G-d and His wisdom are one," both G-d and His Torah are infinite.

When G-d gave us the Torah at Sinai, G-d did more than just impart to us a set of instructions as to how we should live righteously (although that would have been sufficient a reason to celebrate). In this revelation/revolution that occurred at Sinai, G-d did the impossible. He enabled His infinite wisdom to enter into our finite minds. The inherently unfathomable Torah was made accessible to the finite world. Indeed, this was clearly one of the greatest miracles of all times.

We can now appreciate what Rav Yosef meant when he said that Torah study uplifted him. Not only did the study of the Torah increase, expand and enhance his knowledge, it actually uplifted him to a level beyond. Before he studied Torah, Rav Yosef was part of the “marketplace,” part of the finite creation. After studying Torah, Rav Yosef was raised to another plane. He became a part of Divine infinity.

The Uniqueness of Rav Yosef

The question may still be asked: Why is Rav Yosef singled out among countless others who have studied Torah over the ages? Why, of all people, did Rav Yosef appreciate how he had become exalted through Torah study?

The answer is that in order for Torah to uplift us, it has to penetrate into us. The only obstacle to that penetration is our own ego and arrogance. Rav Yosef, the Talmud records,

was known especially for his humility. And it was his humility that made him receptive to the boundless G-dly energy contained within the Torah that uplifted him.

Hence, the expression with which our parsha begins: “Uplift the head” is a reference to the process of making ourselves fitting vessels to absorb the infinite energy of Torah. That process, in turn, enables us to uplift our intellect to a level that transcends the human and finite.

Humility makes Us Receptive to the Infinite

When the Midrash speaks of Moshiach’s coming who will introduce new dimensions of Torah knowledge, the announcement to the Jewish people is: “Humble ones, the time for your redemption has arrived!” It is humility that will enable us to be receptive to the unprecedented infinite G-dly revelations of Torah that will be revealed to us.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE PEACE PROCESS

Torah can bring about peace between husband and wife, body and soul, one person and another, because Torah has the capacity to bring about peace between G-d and the world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE PEACE PROCESS

First Post Shavuos Message

The first Torah portion that is read after the Holiday of Shavuos, is this week's portion, Naso. Our sages have taught us, time and again, that nothing occurs by chance. This is especially true with respect to occurrences associated with Torah matters.

Accordingly, the fact that we read this Torah portion immediately after the Holiday of Shavuos, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, must have significance.

Uplifting

The name Naso, which means, literally, to uplift, tells us that Torah is more than just knowledge and a code of behavior. It has the capacity to uplift us and the physical world around us. Torah is not just geared to our souls,

enabling it express itself more easily, but is directed to our bodies as well. Torah has the capacity to elevate and transform even the most physical aspect of our existence.

Beyond the general theme of “uplifting” that characterizes this Torah portion, there are, at least, four distinct themes discussed in the parsha that revolve around the singular ideal of peace, shalom. This, too, is associated with Torah, as our sages declared: “The Torah was given to bring peace to the world.”

Peace between Us and G-d

There are four applications of peace in our lives that all derive from the peace the Torah provides:

The first level of peace is the peace that must exist between ourselves and G-d. This peace is highlighted in the efforts the Jewish people made to build the Mishkan, the desert Sanctuary, oversee it, preserve its sanctity and dedicate it, discussed at the beginning and the end of this week’s Torah portion.

Only the Torah and its Mitzvos can bring about this unity between G-d and His world. Every Mitzvah – a Divinely instructed physical act – we do, because it is a composite of both the Divine and the material. Therefore only a

Mitzvah can bridge the gulf that exists between an Infinite Creator and a finite being.

Peace Between Husband and Wife

Peace between G-d and His world is also reflected in the peace between husband and wife, the second theme the Torah discusses in this parsha. When there is a threat to domestic harmony, it undermines G-d's very relationship with His world.

In the words of the Talmud: The word for man and woman is *ish* and *isha*, respectively. Each of these words contains the word *aish*, fire. In addition, *ish* has the letter *yud* and *isha* the letter *hay*, two of the letters that form G-d's name. When a husband and wife invite G-d into their marriage, there is peace. Otherwise, the powerful fires within them can bring about their destruction.

Peace between Body and Soul

The third form of unity is the one between one's body and soul. Thus the third theme of the parsha is the Nazir, the person who seeks to distance himself from wine and other pleasures. Although this is occasionally necessary to help curb powerful desires, the Torah requires this individual to bring a sin offering, to atone for his act of self-deprivation.

The Torah's ideal of peace extends to the body and soul, to ensure that they live in total harmony with one another, not by scorning the body, but by making the body and its needs vehicles for spiritual growth..

Peace between one Jew and Another

The fourth theme in this week's portion is the Priestly blessing, which underscores the sentiment of love and concern for the well-being of others. Appropriately, this blessing concludes with the word: shalom. This blessing is a most dramatic way of expressing the fourth crucial form of peace: peace between one person and another.

In the words of Rabbi Akiva, the mitzvah to love one another is a major principle of the Torah. In the words of Hillel it is the essence of the whole Torah, because, the ultimate objective of Torah to bring peace between G-d and His world, can only be realized within a community of peace.

Torah can bring about peace between husband and wife, body and soul, one person and another, because Torah has the capacity to bring about peace between G-d and the world.

Messianic Peace

One of the most vaunted benefits of the Messianic Age is the state of peace between nations that will prevail. The Biblical reference to the world and the lamb coexisting, according to Maimonides, is a metaphor for the peaceful state of coexistence of the Jewish people with all other nations.

How does Moshiach accomplish this unprecedented feat? Does it happen by the waving of a magic wand?

The answer is that in the Messianic Age, Torah will have its desired effect of solidifying G-d's relationship with us and therefore, then and only then, will we realize true and lasting peace in all other areas of life.

Division and fragmentation is not the default position of the world. It came after there was absolute unity on day one of creation. The division between the upper and lower waters occurred on day two.

Moshiach will only have to restore the world to its original state. He is empowered to do this and to empower us to be part of this process by revealing the innermost and most unifying aspects of Torah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY FIFTEEN

LONG HAIREN MEN: A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

The inner strength it takes to resist temptation and to control one's passion is far greater than the strength it takes to conquer a city.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

LONG HAIREN MEN: A JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

Samson and Delilah

Who is not familiar with the story of Samson and Delilah? Which child is not aware of the secret behind Samson's super-human strength? We all know that it was his hair; his long hair that provided him with unnatural physical abilities. And when his Philistine wife Delilah had his hair cut, Samson's strength was no more. Only during the final tragic moments of Samson's life, when he asked G-d for one final burst of energy so that he can bring down the structure he was in together with thousands of Philistines, did his strength return.

What is the connection between Samson's long hair and his extraordinary physical power?

This week's prophetic reading (*Haftarah*) discusses the incident of the angel who visited *Manoach* and his wife – Samson's parents. The angel informed them that they will bear a son who will save the Jewish people from their enemies, but that he had to be a *nazir* all his life. A *nazir* (the laws of which are discussed in this week's Torah

portion) is one who may not drink wine and who cannot cut his hair.

The Power of Long Hair

Our sages explain that the purpose of and the benefit in making such a vow to become a *nazir* was to fortify one's inner strength. When a person was likely to go astray and follow his eyes and heart's desires, the Torah gave a person an unconventional method to assist him to not succumb to temptation.

The growing of the hair, Kabbalah teaches us, enables the *nazir* to elicit extraordinary spiritual energies from a most transcendent aspect of G-d. This, in turn, provides him with greater inner strength to overcome any temptation.

Samson's physical power was not a product of some magical force the angel of G-d gave him. His strength was directly linked to his ability to respond to the extra spiritual powers he was given to resist temptation. His external strength, in other words, was a manifestation of and commensurate with his inner strength.

In truth, the inner strength it takes to resist temptation and to control one's passion is far greater than the strength it takes to conquer a city. Our sages have so stated in the

famous *Mishnah* (Ethics of the Fathers) “Who is a strong person? One who conquers his evil inclination.”

In the pursuit of his G-dly mission to protect the Jews from their “external” enemies, Samson, had to mingle with the Philistines. His marriage to Philistine women (after conversion, Maimonides writes) was a tactic to better know his enemy. When this association proved to be a more formidable challenge than he was able to meet, and his inner strength did not prevail, he no longer possessed the secret to his outer physical strength as well.

We will all Be Samsons

The Messianic Age is described by our prophets as a time when a *nazir* will be a common occurrence. This is to be understood as a reference to the inner strength that emanates from G-d’s energy, we will possess.

Accordingly, we will be free from all temptations and we will be able to devote ourselves to the “higher” aspects of life, without the distractions that are so prevalent today in exile.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

COMING IN SECOND

Through Torah study one is empowered to leave the stifling atmosphere of our world and travel into an environment of spiritual “weightlessness,” where we are not weighted down by the gravitational pull of the material world.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY SIXTEEN

COMING IN SECOND

Nachshon on First

This week's parsha, Naso, records in detail the twelve dedicatory offerings brought by the Nesi'im, the princes, or leaders, of each of the twelve tribes. These offerings commenced on the first of Nissan—the day of the inauguration of the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary the Jews built in the desert—and continued for twelve days.

The first to bring the offering was Nachshon ben Aminadav representing the tribe of Yehudah. Its prince and leader, Nachshon's claim to fame was his jumping into the Red Sea before it parted. Our Sages tell us that only after he made the plunge into the sea and the waters reached his nostrils did the waters part, enabling everyone else to cross on dry land.

The tribe of Yehudah and its Nasi thus exemplified leadership in its most self-sacrificing and noble form. It is no surprise that King David and his descendent Moshiach are scions of the tribe of Yehudah. Moshiach, like his

ancestor Nachshon, is a leader *par excellence* who takes the initiative even when the entire world insists that it is impossible. Moshiach plunges into the turbulent waters of exile and ultimately causes these threatening waters to recede and be transformed into secure dry land.

Nachshon, as the first leader to bring his dedicatory offering, alludes to the ultimate goal of building and dedicating the future Sanctuary, which the entire world will eventually become in the days of Moshiach, whose illustrious ancestor was Nachshon.

Yisachar on Second

If Nachshon and the tribe of Yehudah came first because they represented the ideal of leadership that leads to Geulah-Redemption, what role does the follow up leader and tribe of Yisachar play?

To answer this question we must address a question raised by many of the commentators concerning the choice of Yisachar to go second instead of one of the more senior tribes. One would have thought that this honor would have gone to the tribe that descended from the oldest son of Jacob, Reuvein. Indeed, the tribe of Reuvein did protest that it was overlooked and relegated to a lower level of importance, as Rashi informs us. It is therefore surprising

that it was the junior tribe of Yisachar that was accorded the honor of bringing the prestigious second offering.

There is also another difficulty in the Biblical text concerning Yisachar, as noted by Rashi. Why does the Torah repeat the words “brought his sacrifice” when discussing Yisachar’s offering?

Rashi answers both questions by stating that Yisachar’s selection to bring its offering ahead of all the other tribes (except Yehudah) can be attributed to **two** factors:

First, the Yisacharites were known for their extraordinary knowledge of Torah.

Second, this tribe was the one to propose to the other tribes the idea of making these offerings. All of the other offerings were inspired and instigated by the members of the tribe of Yisachar; primarily by their leader, Nesanel ben Tzuar.

The Torah therefore repeats the fact that the tribe of Yisachar brought its offering to underscore that its privilege to bring an offering ahead of the other ten tribes was based on these two considerations: their devotion to Torah study and, secondly, to their role as the inspiration and impetus for the other tribes to bring their own offerings.

Propelled Out of the Marketplace

A question may be raised: Why did they need **two** merits to be accorded the distinction of bringing their offering before the other ten tribes? Why wouldn't Torah study itself suffice? Alternatively, why wasn't their role in inspiring others sufficient to merit the honor of bringing their offering before the others?

Upon reflection, we will see that the need for both merits provides us with a twofold lesson about our ability to follow the offering of Nachshon, which was "a tough act to follow."

On the one hand, it exposes us to the preeminent role of Torah study. Notwithstanding their originally low ranking vis-a-vis the other tribes, the devotion to Torah study by the Yisacharites catapulted them to the penultimate level of significance. This mirrors the Talmudic statement (Horiyos 13a) that even an illegitimate person who is a Torah scholar takes precedence over the High Priest who is an ignoramus.

Rav Yoseph, one of the great Talmudic Sages, stated in regard to Torah study and the holiday of Shavuot, the anniversary of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai: "If not for this day, there would have been many Josephs in the marketplace." (Pesachim 68b) Rashi, in his commentary to the Talmud there add, "And I have been uplifted." Thus we see that proper Torah study has the capacity to raise us

to a higher level. Torah study can transform us from mere non-descript “Joes” that inhabit, and identify with, the fragmented and tumultuous “marketplace” into elevated “Josephs” within the Jewish community.

The name Joseph, the Rebbe writes (Likkutei Sichos vol. 16), possesses the connotation of increased spirituality. But there are two types of increases. The first occurs when the increase is incremental and is not capable of propelling us out of the confining atmosphere of the galut-defined “Marketplace.” However, through Torah study one is empowered to leave this stifling atmosphere and travel into an environment of spiritual “weightlessness,” where we are not weighted down by the gravitational pull of the material world.

Conversely, Torah study, in and of itself, does not suffice. Although Torah elevates us and puts us on a pedestal, we cannot be detached from the rest of the community even if it is for the purposes of unhampered Torah study. Simultaneously one must also be involved with others, helping to inspire them to bring their offerings to the Temple.

This second message is also echoed in the Talmudic statement: “Whoever says, ‘I have Torah exclusively, does not even have Torah.’” (Yevamot 109b)

In order for Torah to be able to lift us off the marketplace it must not be weighted down by our own egos. The extra weight we carry, i.e., our swollen egos and self-centered obsessions, will prevent the Torah study from getting us “off the ground.”

Application to Moshiach

As was noted at the beginning of this article, the first offering of Nachshon of the tribe of Yehudah alludes to the Messianic Redemption. It stands to reason that the second offering, that of Yisachar—with its dual message of Torah study and the focus on others—provides us with the methodology to make Moshiach a reality. In our preparation for Moshiach, there are also two focuses that correspond to the two aforementioned virtues of Yisachar.

On the one hand, the Rebbe told us that “the straightforward path to bringing the Geulah/Redemption is the study of Torah, specifically the teachings of the Torah that concern Moshiach and Geulah.”(Sefer Hasichos 5751, Parshas Balak). This Torah exercise empowers us to rise above the galut/exile tainted perspectives we have. Rav Yosef realized that without Torah he would have been part of the “marketplace” galut mentality. Torah is what transports us into a higher spiritual sphere where we see the world from an elevated perch. Instead of the confusion

that occurs when we are in the “marketplace” with its multiplicity of ideas, ideologies and influences, we develop a G-dly and therefore a unified view of the world. We are no longer torn asunder by the competing influences which disturb our peace. Torah, when approached properly, is therefore the most tranquil and liberating of experiences.

However, Torah alone does not suffice to prepare us for the Geulah. The purpose of Torah study is to alter our way of thinking so that we begin to live in a spiritually liberated fashion. Living in a Moshiach oriented way means that we don't view everything and everyone from our narrow and self-centered vantage point. Divisions among people ought to break down as a consequence of the paradigm shift we experience when we study Torah with humility. Equipped with the right view of the world and of others, we then share with others our own excitement at our liberated and elevated status that we achieved through proper Torah study. If we don't “get out of our own cocoon,” we must question the integrity of our Torah study.

Our efforts at dedicating the third Temple must follow the model we read in this week's parsha. We first recognize the centrality of Moshiach and Redemption—the Nachshon offering. This is followed by the two-pronged approach of Yisachar: Torah study coupled with the sense of responsibility to, in the Rebbe's words, “prepare ourselves and the entire world for the coming of Moshiach.”

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

CONSISTENT AND PERSISTENT WORDS

A person who is careful to keep his or her word is a person whose speech carries much more weight and credibility in all areas of life.

When a person is known for the integrity of his or her speech, he or she is trusted and respected.

This pays off with immediate dividends with greater success in business and better relationships.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

CONSISTENT AND PERSISTENT WORDS

The Introduction

This week's parsha features the commandment to the Kohanim (Priests) to bless the Jewish people with *Birkas Kohanim*, the Priestly Blessing. G-d entrusted the Kohanim with the special responsibility to shower G-d's blessings on their fellow Jews.

The Priestly Blessing is divided into three separate blessings and is recited by Jews every morning. The blessings read:

"May G-d bless you and protect you."

"May G-d show His countenance to shine to you and favor you."

May G-d raise His face towards you and grant you peace."

What concerns us in this essay are the prefatory words with which these three blessings are introduced:

G-d spoke to Moses, "speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is how you should bless the children of Israel, say to them...'"

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

The question can be raised: why the need for the final words, “say to them”? Wouldn’t it have sufficed to have simply stated, “This is how you should bless the children of Israel”?

The following answer is based on an exposition by a nineteenth century Hungarian scholar, Rabbi Naftali Stern, who died very young and left no children. His father published his commentary on the Torah, posthumously. His intriguing explanation will help to provide us with some inspiration about the power of consistent speech that is especially relevant in our day and age.

Bless!

The Talmud (Shabbos 118b) relates that the great Sage Rabbi Yosi spoke about several things that he was conscientious about.

Rabbi Yosi said, “In all my days I have never disobeyed the words of my colleagues. I know about myself that I am not a Kohain, but if my colleagues would tell me ‘go up to the platform [to bless the congregation], I would go up.’”

These words are then followed with what seems to be a completely unrelated virtue of Rabbi Yosi:

“In all my days I have never said something and had to retreat.”

What do these two attributes of Rabbi Yosi—that he would go bless the Jewish people at the behest of his colleagues and that he would never retreat from his words—have in common?

Every Jew can be a Kohain

Blessing the Jewish people is a mission that was given specifically to the Kohanim. Although[,] every Jew has the capacity to bless others, only the Kohain was given the express commandment to bless them. And only the Kohain was given the guarantee that his blessings would be effective and that they would come to fruition without delay.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Yosi's colleagues believed that Rabbi Yosi had the power of blessing others that approximated the power vested in the Kohanim, despite the fact that he was not a Kohain. Indeed, Maimonides writes (End of Laws of Shemittah) that every Jew can endeavor to become a Kohain, at least in terms of his or her spiritual levels. It follows, then, that every one of us can generate blessings that are in line with the priestly blessings.

Creating Channels

To better understand the mechanism for the Kohain's blessing, it is necessary to understand the concept of a blessing in general.

A blessing, or its Hebrew name, *beracha* is more than just good wishes from one to another. A *beracha*, Chassidic philosophy teaches, is a conduit for the good that already exists on another plane to be channeled into our lives. G-d's positive energy is often elusive and its flow from the Source of blessing can be obstructed. The *beracha*, particularly the Priestly blessing, removes those obstructions and allows for a smooth flow of good energy from the Source into the recipients of the blessing.

The Kohain, whose entire life, was to be dedicated towards transmitting G-d's energy to the world and who is engaged in spiritual pursuits, was the most suited individual to transmit G-d's blessings to the entire Jewish people. His purity and involvement with spirituality rendered him a transparent vehicle to channel the G-dly blessing. The Kohain was, therefore, eminently qualified to bless us.

The Kohain Substitute

Rabbi Yosi, despite not being a Kohain, was as spiritually elevated as a Kohain. All of the stories recorded in the

Talmud point to Rabbi Yosi's obsession with holiness and a single-minded devotion to G-d.

His colleagues, therefore, insisted that he, too, could and should channel G-d's blessings to the Jewish people. In their estimation, Rabbi Yosi's blessings would possess the same formidable, positive and unobstructed energy as those of a Kohain.

Consistency

Rabbi Yosi, in his humility, would not attribute his ability to bless to a greater holiness or spiritual level. Instead, he reasoned that his colleagues were impressed with one trait that qualified him to bestow blessings: his consistency. He would never retreat from his word.

In Rabbi Yosi's mind this was but a simple and modest accomplishment that endowed his blessings with greater power. Rabbi Yosi believed that anyone could adhere to this virtue and he did not consider himself to be unique.

Rabbi Yosi was partially correct. He was not average in terms of spirituality; he was head and shoulders above all others. But he was right in suggesting that the power of his blessings emanated from his consistent speech and that this ability was in everyone's reach.

The Power of Consistent Speech

A person who is careful to keep his or her word is a person whose speech carries much more weight and credibility in all areas of life. When a person is known for the integrity of his or her speech, he or she is trusted and respected. This pays off with immediate dividends with greater success in business and better relationships.

What occurs in the social and economic sphere mirrors the enhanced spirituality that comes from the integrity of one's speech. Pure, truthful and consistent verbiage contains positive energy and endows the person who speaks with the power to bless others and have those blessings materialize. Good, pure, positive and consistent speech endows all of the words we use to bless others with unobstructed power to change the world for the good.

Thus, Rabbi Yosi attributed his success in bestowing blessings on others to the consistency of his speech.

The Deeper Meaning of "Say to Them."

With this introduction, we can understand why the Torah adds the apparently redundant words "and say to them" in the verse: "G-d spoke to Moses, speak to Aaron and his sons saying, 'this is how you should bless the children of Israel, **say to them.**'"

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

The message conveyed by this seemingly superfluous expression, “say to them”, is that if you want your blessings to match those of the exalted Kohain, you must “say to them”, meaning that your speech must be consistent; you must continually say the same thing. Do not change the message to suit your audience. Keep on saying to them that which you have said to them yesterday and the day before.

And though we may find it difficult to rise to higher spiritual levels of consciousness, Rabbi Yosi impresses upon us that we can all maintain a high caliber of speech.

For all of our history, we have been asking G-d to bestow His blessings on us. However, the way G-d's blessing are generated is by the blessings we bestow on one another. And, although the power to bless others was placed in the hands of the Kohain and the most righteous and spiritually advanced individuals, nevertheless, the Talmud states: “Do not underestimate the power of the blessing of even a simple person.” How much more so, a person whose speech is morally and spiritually sophisticated.

From the above analysis we derive the inspiration to make our blessings more potent by speaking consistently.

The definition of consistent speech is not limited to always speaking truthfully. It does not just mean that we should not dissemble. It is not just about delivering the Torah's

message to others without distorting for some elusive benefit.

It goes beyond that.

It means that we should never tire of repeating the same message until it is heard and absorbed by the listener.

The Lesson for Our Age

This lesson is especially pertinent in the present era, the last phase of exile, when we eagerly await the Redemption. We should not get tired of asking G-d to bring Moshiach. We should not tire transmitting the message the Rebbe told us to deliver to the entire world; that we are living in Messianic times and it is up to us to pray for, demand, anticipate and prepare for the final Redemption by increasing our performance of the Divine commandments. Among them is the command to bless one another with love and affection.

May our consistent and persistent words and prayers bear fruit imminently!

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

TORAH AND NATURE

In addition to being G-d's instructions how to live our lives,
Torah is also the very blueprint of creation.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

TORAH AND NATURE

The Priestly Blessing

One of the central sections in this week's parsha, which we read right after the Holiday of Shavuot, celebrating the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, is the Birchas Kohanim, the Priestly blessing.

Rabenu Bachye provides several explanations for the division of this blessing into three parts:

First, there are three categories of Jews: Kohanim, Levi'im and Yisraelim. These blessings were directed to all segments of Jewry.

Second, the first verse consists of three words which correspond to the three Patriarchs. This invokes the merit of the Patriarchs. The second verse contains five words which correspond to the Five Books of Moses, given in the merit of the Patriarchs. The third verse contains seven words which correspond to the seven heavens.

The Jewish Leap Year

Rabenu Bachye then quotes the Talmud's discussion of the procedure for declaring a Leap Year, in which there is also a division into three, five and seven.

The Jewish calendar is a lunar calendar. A lunar year is approximately 11 days shorter than a solar year, which can pose some problems. One example is the scheduling of the Holidays. Over the course of a few years the Holidays would revolve around the seasons absent a calendar adjustment. That would be untenable since the Holidays must conform to the seasons. For example, Passover must be in the Spring. To synchronize the two calendrical systems the courts periodically convened to decide whether the circumstances of that year warranted adding an extra month of Adar to bring parity between the lunar and solar calendars.

The Mishnah states that the court must begin its deliberations with three judges present. If the majority decides that the necessary circumstances are present the court adds another two judges to the panel, for a total of five. Once this larger panel agrees that the year should become a "Leap Year" the court adds on two more judges for a total of seven who then must declare that year to be a Leap Year.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 10b) states that the three, five and seven judges correspond to the three verses of the Priestly Blessings which contain three, five and seven words.

What's the Connection?

To understand the connection between the institution of the Leap Year with the Priestly Blessing we must first discuss the power of the courts to declare a Leap Year.

The Jerusalem Talmud makes an astounding claim in this regard. When the court added a month to the year, time itself was affected with a concomitant impact on the very physical nature of the world. A person's biological system would reverse itself when the court decided to add on another month thereby reducing the biological age of that person! This power wielded by the Sanhedrin is the power of Torah.

In addition to being G-d's instructions how to live our lives, Torah is also the very blueprint of creation. The Zohar and Midrash state that when G-d created the Universe He first consulted the blueprint of Torah and then created the world. If it is in the world, it must be in the blueprint. If the blueprint is changed then the world too must change.

Based on this premise we are left with a conundrum. On the one hand, Torah is the instrument of creation and thus

transcends the world and is not subject to its limits and constraints. This is why anyone, at any time of the year, who studies the laws pertaining to a Kohain serving in the Bais Hamikdash during Passover, for example, it is as if he were performing that very service. Torah resides beyond the parameters of time and space.

On the other hand, Torah was introduced into our realm and given to us to refine and enrich our lives and the world at large **within** the framework of our natural existence. And it is **our** reality, which is not necessarily the reality of Torah, towards which the Torah is directed. We therefore shouldn't try to perform a Mitzvah by way of miracles. Torah was "sent down" here to our world; to relate to and guide our world and experiences within their natural and limited parameters.

However, Torah itself remains above the natural world and occasionally makes its transcendent nature enter into our world and alter its pathways.

Prayer and Torah: Two Stories

There are two stories that contrast the difference between the power of prayer and the power of Torah. During a drought in Israel, the Jews sought out a saintly man named Choni. He drew a circle around himself and told G-d he would not leave until it rained. He stood in prayer for three days. Finally the rain descended in droplets. Choni argued

with G-d that the droplets were insufficient. The rain then descended in torrents. Again Choni protested the excessive rainfall. Finally the rain descended in the correct measure.

There is a contrasting story in the Zohar describing how Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai caused it to rain by simply delivering a Torah discourse on the words, "How good and pleasant when brother dwell together." The rain descended in the right measure without delay.

Chassidus explains that if one has the command over Torah, as Rabbi Shimon certainly did, he is empowered to alter nature just as he can do with prayer. Furthermore, Torah's power is superior to that of prayer as seen in the two foregoing stories.

Power of Torah Vested in the Declaration of the Leap Year

Torah's power to alter nature can also be found in the role of the courts to adjust the calendar by adding another month to the year thereby "stretching" time, as it were. And, as mentioned before, the decision to add the extra month actually alters the parameters of time and even a person's biological clock.

Where do we find precedent for the power of Torah to channel G-d's supernatural powers into this world? Where do we find that Torah itself occasionally allows its

transcendent nature to extend into and even override the world of nature?

The Parallel to the Priestly Blessing

The answer is the Priestly Blessing.

The Priestly Blessing is qualitatively different from all other blessings. In Chassidic literature it is taught that a blessing cannot alter nature. However it can clear the way for hidden resources to be channeled into a person who, for some reason, was not able to access those resources.

A Beracha, the Hebrew word for blessing, can also be translated as a channeling instrument that allows energy to flow unobstructed from one source to another. A blessing changes nothing. It simply enables the free flow of positive energy that has already been allocated.

Prayer, on the other hand, does have the power to create new channels. Many of our prayers are prefaced with the words, *Yehi Ratzon*, May it be the will..., which can also be rendered “may there be the creation of a new will.” We entreat G-d, “even if You previously expressed Your will for us to suffer, please change Your will and bring us relief.” In other words, we are asking G-d to change nature.

However, there are many conditions that the prayer must meet for it to be effective. A prayer must be heartfelt and

the person must be worthy and possess special merit so that his or her prayer will incline G-d to accede to the request and alter His will.

The Priestly blessing, however, enjoys the benefits of both worlds. It enjoys the power of a blessing that is not dependent on the worthiness of the recipient. It also possesses the power of prayer to change nature. This is the exact same power Torah possesses.

And it is this component of the Priestly Blessing that sheds light on the power of the courts to alter the nature of time.

The very same dynamic of the Priestly Blessing (divided as it is into three sections of 3, 5 and 7) applies to the Jewish court when engaged in determining the length of the year. They too plug into the transcendent source which allows them to exercise the power vested in them by the Torah to alter the year with all the profound changes that entails.

A New Alignment: The New Natural

The Messianic Age will see many changes. Even Maimonides, who declares that the Messianic Age will follow the rules of nature, concedes that a time will come when our world will become a different world. For example, Maimonides writes that all jealousy will cease. What, may we ask, is it that will alter the nature of the

world? If miracles were to be part of the Messianic Age dynamic then it would be clear that nature would change just as it did at the Exodus from Egypt. Even though Maimonides asserts that the Messianic Age will not change nature, he himself claims that certain natural traits will be forever altered.

The answer here is that Torah represents the true nature of reality. It is just that our reality and the reality of the Torah are not in perfect alignment during our state of exile. We therefore need Torah to refine us within **our** reality. Only in certain situations do we see the Torah's reality superimpose itself on our reality. We can see it with the Priestly Blessings, the institution of the Leap Year by the courts and by Sages of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's caliber who may summon rain through Torah study.

In the Messianic Age the world will finally be so refined and elevated by the cumulative effect of our Mitzvos that the way we experience nature will be fully aligned with the nature of Torah. The changes will not be from supernatural causes; instead, they will represent a reordering of things that will be the new natural.

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE NEW MATH

Psalm 119 contains 176 verses describing the beauty, grandeur, depth and joy of Torah.

King David's greatest love and passion was Torah study and conformance with its commandments.

Every single one of the 176 verses is profound praise and gratitude to G-d for the gift of Torah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

ESSAY NINETEEN

THE NEW MATH

The Longest Parsha

The single longest parsha is Naso. It contains 176 verses. It is no coincidence that the longest Psalm (119) also has 176 verses. It is also incredible that the longest volume of the Talmud has 176 pages.

That Naso is the longest parsha makes sense since by Divine Providence it is always read in close proximity to Shavuos the anniversary of the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The Midrashic material on this parsha is also the most extensive.

However, we must try to understand what is the significance of the number 176.

Psalm 119

The key to understanding the significance of this number and its relationship to the Holiday of Shavuos we must examine the 119th psalm, which, as mentioned also has 176 verses.

In this psalm there are eight verses that begin with the letter Aleph, followed by eight letters that begin with the letter Bais and so on. Since there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, it results in 176 verses.

However, now we have to understand the significance of having all the letters represented eight times. What is the significance of having verses that begin with all the letters of the alphabet and why eight times?

The Holy Tongue

When G-d created the world He did so with the letters of speech. The Hebrew alphabet is unlike any other language. According to Nachmanides the reason Hebrew is called the "holy tongue" is because it is the language of G-d. He used it to create the universe and He used it to communicate the Torah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

Each letter's meaning, sound, shape and numerical value is consistent with the Divine energy contained within that letter and the words these letters form.

So when we have a psalm that features verses that begin with every letter of the alphabet it embodies all of the Divine instruments that channeled G-d's creative energy into the world.

However, the content of Psalm 119 is the beauty, grandeur, depth and joy of Torah. King David's greatest love and passion was Torah study and conformance with its commandments. Every single one of the 176 verses is profound praise and gratitude to G-d for the gift of Torah.

Two Approaches to Torah

But Torah can be viewed in two ways.

The first is to see Torah as a discipline and philosophy along with all the others. One can find parallels between Torah and other systems of logic and law. To be sure, even when viewing Torah from this vantage point, one can easily recognize the superiority of Torah as a G-d given system over all the other ideologies.

In fact, one can see how one iota of Torah has the power to energize the entire world.

The deficiency in this approach is that Torah is viewed in the context and yardstick of the world; only far more sophisticated and inspirational.

The second approach to Torah is that Torah is Divine wisdom. By definition, Torah is unfathomable and infinitely higher than anything that relates to the world.

The difference between these two approaches is reflected in the difference between the number 7 and the number 8. The number 7 represents the cycle of nature, whereas eight is the number that transcends nature.

Vanity of Vanties

King Solomon in the beginning of the Biblical book of Ecclesiastes speaks of seven vanities. Rashi applies them to the seven days of creation, referring to the seven days of creation. Our Sages also state that the Torah we learn today is vanity compared to the Torah of Moshiach.

Now, among the seven days of creation that are characterized as vanity is Shabbos. And yet it is considered to be vanity compared to the Torah of the future.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS NASO

The difference is that the Torah that is associated with the world in the present is the dimension of Torah that fits into the frame of nature. The Torah of the future, however, will reflect Torah's higher and purely Divine character.

This is what King David had in mind when he composed Psalm 119 with Divine inspiration. He took the 22 letters of the Alphabet, the Divine letters of Torah, that are responsible for the world of nature, but he repeats each letter eight times to point to the higher, Messianic Era level of Torah.

Post Shavuot Torah Message

We can now understand why the parsha we read right after Shavuot (and in some years the Shabbos before Shavuot) is not only the longest but, more specifically, contains 176 verses. The 176 verses, as stated, allude to the transcendent dimension of Torah; the 22 letters as they are revealed through the number eight.

It is intended to remind us that no matter how much of the Torah we have received on Shavuot; it is vanity compared to the higher level, which will be revealed in the Messianic Age.