

Parshas Naso

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Sefer Vayikra, called Toras Kohanim, or Leviticus, deals with kohanim, their roles and duties throughout. Sefer Shemos, or Exodus, deals with the Exodus and what followed. Sefer Bamidbar is known as Sefer Pikudim, the Book of Numbers. It is odd that the book takes its name of numbers, given that the numbers of the census after which it seemingly takes its name, appear only in Parshas Bamidbar and Pinchas.

So why is the whole book called Pikudim?

R' Matis Weinberg explains that Bamidbar is not about numbers or countings; but logistics, or context. All the sections discuss the formation, establishment, and development of society, the Machane.

But if Bamidbar tracks how to build society, there are bits that don't seem to fit.

Parshas Naso begins with the different families of Levi, and their respective roles. There are four interceding sections until the continuation of forming the camp, wherein the princes of each tribe bring the Korbanos for their tribe. The interceding mitzvos are about (1) how a metzora and zav, certain types of sick people, must leave the camp until rehabilitation, (2) what happens if a convert dies with no family, his assets are distributed to kohanim, (3) the law of Sotah and (4) the law of Nazir.

Why do these four mitzvos appear here, interrupting the flow of establishing the Machane?

R' Weinberg explains that in truth, they aren't. They help society deal with exceptions.

The laws of the metzora and zav appear in Parshas Metzora, but the laws appearing here don't pertain to him, so much as ourselves, society. Our society, the Machane, is deficient while he is a part of it, and that is why he must leave.

The convert with no family poses a difficulty. Jews tend to have an integrated community setup – with common ancestry, a large enough family tree shows everyone to be related. Yet the convert has no one. This is a system failure; how do we deal with it? The Torah explains how his assets are distributed, and no one slips through the gaps.

The Sotah has trampled on society's rules, and violated the sanctity of marriage by cavorting with men after

warnings not to. How does society respond to people tearing it apart from within? The Torah explains the procedure.

The Nazir, whilst displaying admirable commitment, has deviated from what the norm too. Drinking wine and cutting hair are normal things to do; abstaining is abnormal. Is there a place for odd people?

Hashem does not ask for homogeneity. The Torah tells us that in a developed society, everyone is part of the setup; even those who don't seem to fit. The logical continuation of the princes offering korbanos is interrupted specifically to include these people too; an imperfect but ultimately complete society.

Regarding the Korbanos, all the princes brought the same selection, yet the Torah saw fit to repeat each group on its own. Why, given that they were identical?

The principle of numbers in Sefer Bamidbar is that being part of a number generates a speciality.

Each set of korbanos ends with η – with a numerical value of 12, the number of tribes. Elsewhere, a number is impersonal; but here, the underlying theme is that speciality lies in being a part of the number, so much so that deviating from it is bad. η is the collective, the Klal. The Torah tallies the total number of korbanos brought, because the Torah appreciates the community, wherein the total has greater speciality than the number of individual parts.

This principle of standing out by being part of something bigger is true of Birchas Kohanim too – it does not originate from the kohen; but from Hashem. It is for the whole Klal, but personalised.

The halacha is that before the kohanim start they clench their fists, and once they start they open their palms. When the fists are clenched, the fist is flat – everything is the same. But when the fingers protrude, they are all different, much as we all are.

It is evident that the way to express individuality is from within the Klal. The parts of an engine are not remarkable. But put them together and it makes the machine – remove a bolt or wire and it's useless.

TORAH CONNOTATIONS

The silver bowls used for the blood management in the Beis HaMikdash are known to have had thin sides, despite this not being a requirement of the Torah. The silver basin is known to have had thick sides. How did Chazal know this to be the case, given that they had never seen them?

The Gra notes in the Gemara in Yuma that wherever the word שני – “two”, appears, a direct association is being drawn between the two articles under discussion, that they are the same. For example, the “two” goats on Yom Kippur had to be identical in appearance, height, and value, derived from the use of the word שני three times.

The Torah refers to the bowls as שניהם מלאים, implying that they were the same size. But this can't be; the listed weight of the basin is 130, whilst the bowl weighed 70. Therefore, if the two utensils had the same volume, but the weight parameters had to be different, Chazal deduced that the solution was to make one of them thicker. Ingenious!

DEEPER MEANINGS

A woman accused of adultery without evidence is put through an ordeal, wherein she is made to drink an odd

concoction:

וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן מֵמִים קְדוֹשִׁים בְּכֶלִי חֶרֶשׁ וּמִן הָעֶפְרָא אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בְּקִרְקַע הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִקַּח הַכֹּהֵן וְנָתַן אֶל הַמַּיִם
in an earthen vessel, some earth from the Mishkan floor, the kohen shall take and put it into the water. (5: 17)

וְכָתַב אֶת הָאֵלֶּת הָאֵלֶּה הַכֹּהֵן בְּסֵפֶר וַיְמַחֵה אֶל מֵי הַמָּרִים
Then the kohen shall write these curses (containing God's name) on a scroll and erase it in the bitter water. (5: 23)

To recap, the ingredients she is made to drink are water, earth, and the ink of God's name. Is there any significance to these components?

The Mishna in Avos (3: 1) says:

עֲקִבְיָה בֶן מַהֲלָאֵל אוֹמֵר, הַסְתַּכַּל בְּשְׁלוֹשָׁה דְבָרִים, וְאִין אַתָּה בָּא לְיַד עֵבִירָה—דַּע מֵאִיִּן בָּאת, וְלֵאִיִּן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, וְלִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עֹתִיד לֵיתֵן דִּין וְחִשְׁבוֹן: מֵאִיִּן בָּאת, מְלִיחָה סְרוּחָה. וְלֵאִיִּן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ, לְמִקּוֹם רִימָה וְתוֹלַעָה. וְלִפְנֵי מִי אַתָּה עֹתִיד לֵיתֵן דִּין וְחִשְׁבוֹן, לְפָנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמַּלְכִּים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא
Akavia the son of Mahalalel would say: Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know from where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting. You came from a putrid drop of liquid – correlating to water; where you are going – the grave, a place of earth; and before whom you are destined to give an accounting – before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

This clearly correlates to God's name. The Torah is like a prism – different parts reflect different levels, layers and sections, but they contain the same blueprint.

Thank you for using gTorah.com