

במדבר ד':כ"ד
(כד) זאת עבֹלֹת מִשְׁפָּחֹת הַגֵּרְשֹׁנִי לַעֲבֹד וּלְמַשָּׂא:

Numbers 4:24

(24) *These are the duties of the Gershonite clans as to labor and portage:* There were three Levitical ‘clans’: the Gershonites, the Merarites, and the Kehatites. Each clan had a specific set of responsibilities for the transportation of the mishkan. The Gershonites carted the coverings, all of the skins and cloths that made the tent; the Merarites carted the beams and hardware, all of the clasps and attachments that held it together; the Kehatites had their obligations listed at the end of last week’s parasha. They carried the holy objects like the ark, the table, the menorah and the altars. With each clan assigned to its respective area, the transportation of the mishkan could proceed without the need to re-assign roles every time the camp moved. Each clan was defined by its area of specialty and thereby contributed to the whole. No doubt, each clan took pride in its particular contribution of labor. The picture that emerges is one of teamwork and unity.

במדבר ו':ו'
(ו) כָּל־יְמֵי הַזִּירוֹ לֹהֵ' עַל־גִּפְשׁוֹ מִתּ לֹא יָבֹא:

Numbers 6:6

(6) *Throughout the term that he has set apart for the LORD, he shall not go in where there is a dead person.* The Nazir is an individual who takes upon a vow of piety. Man or woman, this individual seized by zeal and religious fervor takes upon a set of restrictions including no consumption of any grape product, no cutting of hair and no contact with the dead. While not a Kohen, this individual has Kohen-like behaviors and lives in this pseudo-Kohen state until the completion of the term of the vow. It is fascinating that the Torah has this institution. It recognizes that a community consists of a range of individual valences towards the spiritual life. For some that life is a bothersome chore, and for others that life is the central focus, rendering all other aspects of life almost insignificant. We would argue that Judaism provides an outlet for the extreme zeal of the person inclined only to piety and exerts a constant pull on the individual who seeks detachment from anything religious.

The Torah, and rabbinic Judaism by extension, constructs a world in which everyday, “normal” piety is demonstrated by the observance of mitzvot and acts of *hesed*, a world punctuated by the rhythm of Shabbat and Festivals, and in which the relationship with God is mediated through the study of Torah and living as a sacred community; a world in which Israel is a vessel of God’s name and a source of blessing to the world.

במדבר ו':כ"ג
(כג) דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה תְבָרְכוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֲמֹר לָהֶם: {ס}

Numbers 6:23

(23) *Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them:* We spent the entire book of Leviticus going through the functions of the Kohanim in great detail. They administered the sacrifices, tended to the people in their various states of disease and wellness, purity and impurity. They maintained the sacred center of the people and were the agents designated to secure God’s presence in the midst of the community. And here they have a crucial role: they bless the people. They are the instrument through which God’s blessing flows to the people. Today we experience this through the ritual of Birkat Kohanim or “duchaning”, which is one of the strongest links remaining to Temple ritual. *Thus shall you bless* is more than just a set of statements; it is a prescription for a state of mind. A kohen needs to be in a state of joy and love to be a vessel of God’s blessing.

במדבר ו':כ"ד
(כד) יְבָרְכֶךָ ה' וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ: {ס}

Numbers 6:24

(24) *The LORD bless you and protect you!* What constitutes blessing? Rashi focuses here on material blessing. *שְׁיִתְבָּרְכוּ נְכֹסֶיךָ – that your property be blessed.* In other words, acquiring property and wealth is understood as a fundamental element in well-being. People don’t need much and property can become a burden but a life of poverty and destitution is not desirable. As we learn elsewhere, wealth is being happy with what you have. Midrash adds that you should be “protected from the evil inclination,” which is to say that a person constantly making

