

Some Comments on Naso
Rabbi Eliot Malomet 12 Sivan 5782 June 11, 2022

במדבר ד' ד': **זאת עבודת בני־קהת** באהל מועד קדש הקדשים:

Numbers 4:4 *This is the work of the sons of Kehat in the Tent of Meeting: the most sacred objects.*

במדבר ד' כ"ד: **זאת עבודת משפחת הגרשני** לעבד ולמשא:
Numbers 4:24 *This is the work of the Gershonite clans as to labor and portorage:*

במדבר ד' ל"ג: **זאת עבודת משפחת בני מררי** לקל־עבדתם באהל מועד ביד איתמר בן־אהרן הכהן:

Numbers 4:33 *This is the work of the clans of the sons of Merari pertaining to their various duties in the Tent of Meeting under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron the priest.* While 4:4 is from last week's parasha, we note that the duties of the Levites are divided into the three Levitical clans: the Kohatites, the Gershonites and the Merarites. The Kohatites tended to the holy vessels, the Gershonites, the coverings and all the textiles, and the Merarites carried all the beams and fasteners. The Levites were the "roadies" of the sanctuary. They break down the structure, they pack everything up, they load up the wagons and they transport everything to the next venue.

במדבר ה' י"ד: **ועבר עליי ריס־קנאה** וקנא את־אשתו והיא נטמאה או־עבר עליי ריס־קנאה וקנא את־אשתו והיא לא נטמאה:

Numbers 5:14 but **a fit of jealousy** comes over him and he is wrought up about the wife who has defiled herself—or if a fit of jealousy comes over him and he is wrought up about his wife although she has not defiled herself— A troubling passage on many levels. Here a husband who suspects his wife of adultery subjects her to an ordeal administered by the Kohen in the sanctuary. Outside of the ritual structure, one can only imagine what could have happened to this woman. Perhaps the Torah was trying to channel the **ריס־קנאה** (jealousy) from the possibility of violence and even murder, to the structured ritual setting where the verdict is attributed to God.

במדבר ו' ב': **דבר אל־בני ישראל** ואמרת אליהם איש או־אשה כי יפלא לנגד גדר נזיר להזיר לה:

Numbers 6:2 *Speak to the Israelites and say to them: If any men or women explicitly utter a nazirite's vow, to set themselves apart for ה'.* Who is the Nazir/Nezira? Simply put, this is an individual who wants to live closer to God. He or

she possesses fervor for a particular kind of piety. The Torah channels that zeal into a set of restrictions that resemble the restrictions on the Kohen especially with regard to impurity. But this individual also has to abstain from wine and any grape product, and from any haircutting or shaving throughout the duration of the vow. Why wine? Why hair? See next year's Parasha Sheet!

במדבר ו' כ"ג: **דבר אל־אהרן ואל־בניו** לאמור **פה תברכו** את־בני ישראל אמור להם:

Numbers 6:23 *Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them...* The Kohanim play an extraordinary role in the life of the people. In administering the sanctuary, offering the sacrifices, adjudicators of purity and impurity, the Kohanim are agents of God's holiness, that is, they are a **family** of priests to the people of Israel in the way that the entire people of Israel is to be a "kingdom of priests" for the world. The ritual life of Israel is practiced in silence in the holy areas of the sanctuary. But with the *birkat kohanim* - the Priestly Blessing, the Kohanim have a chance to break through and verbally "place God's name" on the people. In pronouncing these blessings the Kohanim become the channel through which God blesses Israel, with the promise of divine protection, light, kindness and peace.

במדבר ז' א': **ויהי ביום** כלות משה להקים את־המשכן וימשח אתו ויבדש אתו ואת־כל־כליו ואת־המזבח ואת־כל־כליו וימשחם ויבדשם ואת־הם:

Numbers 7:1 *On the day that Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle, he anointed and consecrated it and all its furnishings, as well as the altar and its utensils. When he had anointed and consecrated them...* What day was this? The Torah tells us elsewhere that the sanctuary was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year of the exodus. But we also know that prior to its inauguration, Aaron and the Kohanim spent eight days sequestered inside the sanctuary, and that on the eighth day, Aaron's two sons Nadav and Avihu were incinerated upon bringing a "strange fire". What was intended to be celebratory ended up being catastrophic. Was the eighth day of the inauguration the first day of the first month? Possibly. What follows on the next twelve successive days is that each day a tribal

chieftain presents a set of gifts to the sanctuary.

במדבר ז: י"ב נָהִישׁ הַמִּקְרִיב בַּיּוֹם הָרִאשׁוֹן אֶת־קַרְבָּנוֹ נַחֲשׁוֹן
בְּרֵעֵמִינָדָב לַמִּטָּה יְהוָה:

Numbers 7:12 *The one who presented his offering on the first day was Nahshon son of Amminadab of the tribe of Judah.* Considering that the Nadav and Avihu catastrophe had just taken place, the procession of gifts takes on greater significance. It signals that the "show must go on." There is no public or private mourning for Nadav and Avihu, and no suspension of communal festivities. As the first in the series of twelve tribal leaders, Nahshon ben Aminadav (according to midrash, the first to go in the Red Sea) has the task of representing the people and possibly also comforting the Kohanim. He is

Nahshon
Salmah
Boaz-Ruth
Oved
Yishai
David

uniquely positioned to do so because his sister, Elisheva, is married to Aaron, making him Aaron's brother-in-law and also Nadav and Avihu's uncle. The tribe of Judah will go on to become the predominant tribe of Israel, and, as we just saw at the end of the book of Ruth, Nahshon was the father of Salmah, the grandfather of Boaz, the great-grandfather of Oved, the great-great grandfather of Yishai and the great-great-great Grandfather of David. The first gift to the Tabernacle can be seen then, as a foreshadowing of the partnership between Israel's future monarchy and future priesthood.

במדבר ז: י"ג-י"ז וְקַרְבָּנוֹ קֶעֱרַת־כֶּסֶף אַחַת שְׁלֹשִׁים וּמֵאָה מִשְׁקָלָהּ מִזָּרֶק אֶחָד לְכֶסֶף שִׁבְעִים שֶׁקֶל בְּשֶׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ שְׁנֵיהֶם | מְלֵאִים סֶלֶת בְּלוּלָה בְשֶׁמֶן לַמִּנְחָה: כֹּף אַתָּת עֲשָׂרָה זָהָב מְלֵאָה קִטְרֶת: כֹּף אֶחָד בְּרֵבְבָר אֵיל אֶחָד כֶּבֶשׂ־אֶחָד בְּרֵשְׁנָתוֹ לְעֹלָה: שְׁעִיר־עִזִּים אֶחָד לַחֲטָאת: וְלִזְבַּח הַשְּׁלָמִים כֶּבֶר שְׁנַיִם אֵילִם חֲמִשָּׁה עֲתוּדִים חֲמִשָּׁה כֶּבֶשִׁים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה חֲמִשָּׁה זֶה קַרְבָּנוֹ נַחֲשׁוֹן בְּרֵעֵמִינָדָב:

His offering: one silver bowl weighing 130 shekels and one silver basin of 70 shekels by the sanctuary weight, both filled with choice flour with oil mixed in, for a meal offering; one gold ladle of 10 shekels, filled with incense; one bull of the herd, one ram, and one lamb in its first year, for a burnt offering; one goat for a sin offering; and for his sacrifice of well-being: two oxen, five rams, five he-goats, and five yearling lambs. That was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab.

1 silver bowl	130 shekels	filled with flour/oil
1 silver basin	70 shekels	filled with flour/oil
1 gold ladle	10 shekels	filled with incense
Total: 210 shekels		
1 bull	olah - burnt offering	
1 ram		
1 lamb		
1 goat	hataf - sin offering	
2 oxen	zevach shelamim - well-being offering	
5 rams		
5 he-goats		
5 yearling lambs		
Total: 21 animals		

Some observations: the total number of animals is 21; the total weight of the gold and silver gifts is 21x10=210 shekels. Nice. Both are multiples of 7. The quantity of flour/oil is not specified but we can speculate that it was probably enough to constitute the *minha* offering. Same with incense but again, we can speculate that it was probably enough for a single use. 17 of the 21 animals would have been consumed, probably not enough to feed the whole tribe, unless each person got a tiny slice of meat! When Solomon dedicated the Temple he offered 120,000 sheep and 22,000 oxen which was probably enough to feed the thousands of people in attendance! The contrast is instructive: here, the tribes are key players; there the tribes are subsumed by the role of the king. Compared to Solomon, the tribal gifts seem almost primitive. But we cannot underestimate their symbolic value. As we have pointed out, the Torah devotes an unusual amount of space to delineate each of the identical offerings, as if to say that each and every tribe had a share in the dedication and each was precious. The Torah trope is identical for each paragraph which makes this an unusual piece of Torah reading. We are familiar with the singing of lists: Passover alone has the *Signs of the Seder*, the *Plagues*, *Day-yenu*, *Ehad Mi Yodea* and *Had Gadya*, and there are many more examples in Jewish culture.* It shouldn't surprise that the Torah takes up significant parchment with these lists. They constitute one great song, and rather than a tedious repetition they are ultimately an expression of gratitude, peoplehood and joy!

* Songs with lists are found in every culture including our own popular culture: California Girls, by the Beach Boys; Paul Simon's 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover, Billy Joel's

We Didn't Start the Fire. See also Avro Part *Which Was the Son Of...* which is a genealogy set to music.

This week's Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Cindy Patrych-Brotman and David Brotman in honor of the Aufruf and upcoming marriage of their daughter, Jen Brotman to Andrew Leiner. Mazel Tov!

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