

Parashat Nasso: Vessels of Blessing

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Bemidbar 6:21-27	
<p>זאת תורת הנזיר אשר ידר קרבנו ליהוה על-נזרו מלבד אשר-תשיג ידו כפי נדרו אשר ידר בן יעשה על תורת נזרו: וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר: דבר אל-אהרן ואל-בניו לאמר כה תברכו את-בני ישראל אמור להם: יברכה יהוה וישמר: יאר יהוה פניו אליך ויחנה: ישא יהוה פניו אליך וישם לה שלום: ושמך את-שמי על-בני ישראל ואני אברכם:</p>	<p>Such is the obligation of a Nazirite; except that those who vow an offering to יהוה of what they can afford, beyond their Nazirite requirements, must do exactly according to the vow that they have made beyond their obligation as Nazirites. יהוה spoke to Moses: Speak to Aaron and his sons: Thus shall you bless the people of Israel. Say to them: יהוה bless you and protect you! יהוה deal kindly and graciously with you! יהוה bestow [divine] favor upon you and grant you peace! Thus, they shall link My name with the people of Israel, and I will bless them.</p>

1. The Laws of Nezirut

Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Nezirut 1:1	
<p>הנזירות הוא נדר מכלל נדרי אסר שנאמר (במדבר ו ב) "כי ידר נדר נזיר וגו'. ומצות עשה ש'גדל שער ראשו שנאמר (במדבר ו ה) "גדל פרע שער ראשו". ואם גלח בימי נזרו עובר בלא תעשה שנאמר (במדבר ו ה) "תער לא יעבר על ראשו". וכן אסור להטמא למתים או לאכל דברים שאסרן הכתוב עליו (במדבר ו ד) "מגפן היין" (במדבר ו ד) (במדבר ו ח) "כל ימי נזרו":</p>	<p>A Nazirite vow is one of the types of vows involving prohibitions, as stated: "When one will take a Nazirite vow..." It is a positive commandment for [a nazirite] to let the hair of his head grow, as [ibid.:5] states: "He shall let the mane of the hair of his head grow." If he cuts [his hair] in the midst of the days of his Nazirite vow, he violates a negative commandment, as [ibid.] states: "A razor shall not pass over his head." Similarly, he is forbidden to contract ritual impurity from a corpse or eat those products of a grapevine, which the Torah forbids him from eating throughout the entire span of his Nazirite vow.</p>

Ramban on Bemidbar 6:11	
<p>וטעם החטאת שיקריב הנזיר ביום מלאת ימי נזרו לא נתפרש. ועל דרך הפשט כי האיש הזה חוטא נפשו במלאת הנזירות כי הוא עתה נזור מקדושתו ועבודת השם וראוי היה לו שיזיר לעולם ויעמוד כל ימיו נזיר וקדוש לאלהיו כענין שאמר (עמוס ב יא) ואקים מבניכם לנביאים ומבחורכם לנזירים. השוה אותו הכתוב לנביא וכדכתיב (במדבר ו:ח')</p>	<p>The reason why a Nazirite must bring a sin-offering <i>when the days of his Naziritehood are fulfilled</i> has not been explained. In accordance with the plain meaning of Scripture, [it is because] this man sins against his soul on the day of completion of his Naziritehood; for until now he was separated in sanctity and the service of God, and he should therefore have remained separated forever, continuing all his life consecrated and sanctified to his God, as it is said, <i>And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites</i>, where Scripture compares the Nazirite to a</p>

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

כל ימי נזרו קדוש הוא לה' והנה הוא צריך כפרה בשובו להטמא בתאוות העולם:	prophet, and as it is written, <i>All the days of his Naziritehood he is holy unto the Eternal</i> . Thus [when he completes his Naziritehood and returns to his normal life] he requires atonement, since he goes back to be defiled by [material] desires of the world.
---	---

Seforno on Bemidbar 6:2	
להזיר לה'. להפריש עצמו מכל אלה למען יהיה כלו לה' להתעסק בתורתו וללכת בדרכיו ולדבקה בו:	'להזיר לה', to separate himself from all the pleasures to devote himself exclusively to the service of the Lord, to study His Torah, and practice walking in His ways.

Rabbi Toba Spitzer, "From Impurity to Blessing: Parashat Naso," <i>Torah Queeries</i>
What are we to make of this abrupt transition from the law of the Nazirite to the priestly blessing? Perhaps this: the dedication of the Nazirite's claiming of his identity for himself by taking the "queer" path as a path to holiness leads to blessing for the entire community. The priest...becomes a vessel of blessing, not judgment.

2. Priestly Blessing

Sefat Emet- Parashat Nasso 5654 (1894)	
והנה איתא "איזהו חסיד המתחסד עם קונו" (זוהר חלק ב קיד:). פי' (פירוש) שמביא בעולם התגלות חסדיו של הקב"ה (הקדוש ברוך הוא), כמ"ש (כמו שכתבו) ז"ל (זכרונם לברכה) על אברהם אע"ה (אבינו עליו השלום) שהחסד מתגלגל בעולם בשבילו. והוא מכח השלשה מדות שמנו חכמים במשנה "עין טובה כו" (משנה אבות ה:יט). פי' "עין טובה": שכל מה שהוא רואה מכיר בו חסד וטובת הבורא ית"ש (יתברך שמו), והכל טוב בעיניו. ובכח זה נעשה טובו. וכדאיתא גבי נחום איש גז.	Now, we learn, "Who is a gracious one (<i>Hasid</i>)? Those who act graciously and lovingly with their Creator" (Zohar II 114b). This refers to the one who can make the love of the blessed Holy One visible in the world. This would surely apply to Abraham: the Sages taught that love flowed in the world because of him. This came about through the three qualities [of the students of Abraham] about which the Sages taught: "a gracious eye, [a humble spirit, and a lowly soul]" (Mish. Avot 5:19). What is the sense of "a gracious eye"? In all that we see, we recognize the love and goodness of the blessed Creator. Thus, all is good in our sight – and through this power, all is made good. This is what we learn about Nachum of Gamzu.

Rabbi Shai Held, "An Open Letter to People Who Are LGBTQ"
When your parents reject you, God loves you; when your friends or classmates make fun of you, God loves you; when your priest, minister, imam, or rabbi tells you that you are an abomination, God loves you; when politicians cater to people's basest prejudices, God loves you. No matter how many times and in how many ways people make you feel less than human, God knows otherwise, and God loves you. When you feel frightened, or abandoned, or humiliated, I hope the unshakeable conviction that God loves you can help hold you and enable you to persevere.

3. From Expulsion to Dedication

Rabbi Toba Spitzer, "From Impurity to Blessing: Parashat Naso," <i>Torah Queeries</i>
In moving from the ostracization and expulsion of the deviant "other" to the dedication of difference as sacred service, we allow the blessings of <i>shalom</i> , of wholeness, to flow to the entire community."