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Parashat Naso, Shabbat 4 June 2011 2 Sivan 5771

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NEWS

THOUSAND OAKS

I had the privilege to be in Beth Shalom congregation, Thousand Oaks (California) on Shabbat May 28. This congregation has been working on Jewish ministry for several years but a new start began on September 2010 when they hired Pastor Paul Lippi to lead this work. I preached for the Havdala, and I tried to give them some advice for a successful Jewish ministry. Let's pray for Pastor Lippi and his group.

SHAVUOT

Shavuot will be on June 8 and 9 starting on the 7th evening. The Torah reading on Wednesday 8 morning (first day of Shavuot) is about the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai and the Ten Commandments. It is important to bring the children to the service to hear the reading of the Ten Commandments and experience the wonderful event of receiving the Torah. Children and Torah are very deeply connected. Children played a very important role in the giving of the Torah. Our Sages say that before G-d gave the Torah, he demanded guarantors that the Torah will be studied and cherished. The people made a number of suggestions which were rejected by G-d. Only when they declared, "Our children will be our guarantors," did G-d agree to give the Torah. We remember also that the Shema Israel says "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:6-7)

SHAVUOT IN BUENOS AIRES

David Barzola is working very hard to reach the Jewish people in Buenos Aires (Argentina). Each feast is a time to organize a celebration and to invite Jews to enjoy a happy celebration. He is just communicating with us his advertisement, a beautiful poster:

Shabuot

Martes 07/06 20:00 hs.

Vigilia Música Estudio

Actividades Grupales Lunch

Una Velada Espiritual

4857-5628, 4761-3327, 4856-2238, 15-5876-4923

Comunidad Hebrea Adventista Bet Bnei Tzion Frías 275 (entre Drago y Vera)

Don't hesitate to send us your news and advertisement for the feast. Shavuot which is centered around the law and the Holy Spirit, it is a great feast to make connection between Adventist and Jews.

OVERVIEW

NASO

Numbers 4:21-7:89

The Torah assigns the exact Mishkan-related tasks to be performed by the families of Gershon, Kehat, and Merari, the sons of Levi. A census reveals that over 8,000 men are ready for such service. All those ritually impure are to be sent out of the encampments. If a person, after having sworn in court to the contrary, confesses that he wrongfully retained his neighbors property, he has to pay an additional fifth of the base-price of the object and bring a guilt offering as atonement. If the claimant has already passed away without heirs, the payments are made to a kohen. In certain circumstances, a husband who suspects that his wife had been unfaithful brings her to the Temple.

A kohen prepares a drink of water mixed with dust from the Temple floor and a special ink that was used for inscribing G-d's Name on a piece of parchment. If she is innocent, the potion does not harm her; rather it brings a blessing of children. If she is guilty, she suffers a supernatural death. A nazir is one who vows to dedicate himself to G-d for a specific period of time. He must abstain from all grape products, grow his hair and avoid contact with corpses. At the end of this period he shaves his head and brings special offerings. The kohanim are commanded to bless the people. The Mishkan is completed and dedicated on the first day of Nisan in the second year after the Exodus. The prince of each tribe makes a communal gift to help transport the Mishkan, as well as donating identical individual gifts of gold, silver, animal and meal offerings.

BIRKAT KOHANIM

In this Parasha, G-d commands the Kohanim (Priests) to bless the people of Israel with a "three-fold" blessing: **"May the L-rd bless you and keep you. May the L-rd make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the L-rd lift up His countenance unto you**

and give you peace." (Numbers 6:24-26). This blessing is called "Birkat Kohanim" (priestly blessing). There are various customs as to when the Kohanim chant the priestly blessing. In some places it is recited every day. Others recite it on Shabbat, while in many communities the Kohanim recite this blessing only on holidays. This blessing is also recited each day during the repetition of the morning Amidah service.

The Jewish tradition says that these blessings are in connection with the patriarchs: **"May the L-rd bless you and keep you."** is about Abraham. **"May the L-rd make His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you."** is about Isaac and **"May the L-rd lift up His countenance unto you and give you peace"** is about Jacob.

Rabbi Zalmen Marozov says that "the priestly blessing contains fifteen Hebrew words. This number corresponds to the amount of years that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob lived together (Jacob was 15 when his grandfather Abraham passed away)."

Another explanation is in the Midrash, it is said that these blessings refer to children. It is a blessing to parents to have many children and that G-d will protect them so that they will bring peace and graciousness to their family. The first blessing which G-d blessed mankind was the blessing He gave Adam and Eve; **"And G-d blessed them and G-d said to them, be fruitful and multiply."** (Genesis 1:28). We find this blessing repeated over and over in the Torah.

BLESSINGS

Blessings are a very important part of Judaism. They begin each day with blessings, thanking G-d for granting them the ability to wake up, to see, to move our limbs etc. They also end each day with a blessing, before going to sleep.

In fact, our sages say that, just as a person must bless G-d for the good things which happen to them, so too, they should bless G-d even for the bad things which happen to them.

The Torah is full of blessings. The Torah begins with G-d's blessings to Adam and Eve on the day they were created and the Torah ends with Moshe's blessings to the Jewish people before

his passing. In fact, the first letter of the Torah is the letter “Bet” (of the word Bereshit). Our sages say that the reason the Torah begins with the letter “Bet” is because “Bet” stands for the word “Beracha” which means blessing!

Shabbat is the only day, of the seven days of the week, which we find that G-d blessed that day! **“And G-d blessed the seventh day and made it holy.” (Genesis 2:3).** Thus, every Friday night and Shabbat day we recite the Kiddush over the wine, blessing G-d for giving us the holy day of Shabbat and its blessings.

G-D HELPS US TO ACHIEVE OUR SPIRITUAL GOALS

Moshe gave the wagons and oxen to the Levite families of Gershon and Merari, to be used for the transportation of the Tabernacle. But to the Kohathites family, whose job was to transport the Holiest objects of the Tabernacle, especially the Holy Ark (Aron), to them Moshe didn't give any of the wagons. (Numbers 4:15). The Torah states the reason why, “But to the Kohathites family he [Moshe] did not give any; because their's is holy work, they shall carry it on their shoulders.”

The holy Ark was made of three golden boxes which fit one into the other. Also the Ark cover, the Kaporet and Cherubim, were of pure gold. In the Ark were the broken First Tablets and the Second Tablets which were of stone. Thus, reminds us Rabbi Zalmen Marozov “the weight of the Aron was extraordinarily heavy.”

Yet, instead of giving them a wagon to transport the ark, which would make it easier for the Kohathites family to transport it, the Torah tells us that “because their's is holy work, they shall carry it on their shoulder!” How do we explain this?

Our Rabbi's explain that holiness doesn't usually go together with easiness. In fact, the holier the action we have to accomplish the more resistance one will encounter and the more effort we are required to put into it. Because the Ark was the holiest object in the Temple, much more human effort was required when transporting it as the Jewish people traveled through the

desert. But at the same time, once the Kohathites committed to making this great effort and carried the Holy Ark on their shoulders, our sages tell us that in reality it was, “the Ark which carried its carriers.” Every story we read in the Torah is a lesson. The mitzvah of carrying the Ark was only temporary. It applied only while the Jewish people traveled through the desert until the Beth Hamikdash (Holy Temple) was built.

Rabbi Zalmen Marozov gives us a lesson which he qualifies as “eternal”, and he says “G-d promises to help us achieve our spiritual goals, no matter how difficult they may be. But He requires one condition, that we be ready and willing to give it our best shot and effort no matter how impossible it may seem.”

SHALOM-PEACE

The priestly blessing concludes with, **“May the L-rd turn His countenance toward you and grant you Shalom-peace.”**

Thus, the above mentioned three-fold blessing begins with the word “blessing” (“Yevarech'cha”) and ends with the word “peace” (Shalom).

Indeed, our sages say that the greatest vessel that one can make to attract G-d's blessings is “Shalom - peace.” Peace within oneself, in the context of one's family and community draws G-d's blessings.

We are reminded of the importance of Shalom-peace three times daily in the Amidah prayer which concludes with our prayer for peace; “Bestow peace, goodness and blessing, life, graciousness, kindness and mercy upon us...”

Also the Kaddish, ends with Shalom; “He Who makes peace in His heavens, may He make peace [Shalom] for us and for all Israel.”

The traditional Hebrew greeting is “Shalom Aleichem,” which literally translates as, “peace unto you.” Peace encompasses everything - when there is peace there is blessing.

The first chapter of Pirkei Avot, which we will recite this Shabbat, concludes with the importance of peace: “Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says ‘the world endures on three things; justice, truth and peace.’”

REPEATED GRATITUDE

Rabbi Paysach Krohn, in the first book of his classic Maggid Series, relates the story of Rav Yitzchak Elchonon Spektor, the Kovno Rav. Under Russian law, all young men were obliged to enlist in the army. Besides the obvious ubiquitous threat of violent death, maintaining any semblance of religious observance in the army was virtually impossible. The only way out was an exemption from army service.

Yaakov, a student who was much beloved by his rav. Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, applied for an exemption. Moscow did not immediately respond to the request, and each day Yaakov's friends, together with their beloved Rabbi, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, waited to hear any news of whether Yaakov's exemption was accepted.

One afternoon, Rav Yitzchak Elchonon was engrossed in a Rabbinic litigation. He sat together with Rav Elya Boruch Kamai, the Rav of Mir, and a third distinguished Rav. They were litigating a complex problem involving two wealthy businessmen. Both side was willing to compromise, and for hours the three Rabbis attempted to find an amicable yet halachically acceptable resolution.

Suddenly, the door opened and a young man stuck his head into the room. As soon as he saw Rav Yitzchak Elchonon, he excitedly addressed him. "Rabbi!" he exclaimed. "We just got the news, Yaakov was granted an exemption!" Rav Yitzchak Elchonon breathed a sigh of relief and said with a radiant smile, as he showered him with blessings. "May G-d bless you for bringing this wonderful news. May you merit long years and good health. Thank you ever so much!"

The boy left smiling, glad that he had made his rabbi so happy. Immediately the Rabbis resumed deliberations in an attempt to resolve the din Torah.

A few minutes later, another student opened the door. Not knowing that his rabbi already knew the news, he apologized for interrupting saying he had something very

important to share. Then he announced with joy, "Rabbi, we've gotten word that Yaakov is exempt!"

Rav Yitzchak Elchonon replied with just as much enthusiasm as he had the first time. "How wonderful!" He showered him with blessings as well. "May G-d bless you for bringing this wonderful news. May you merit long years and good health. Thank you ever so much!"

The boy closed the door and left, beaming with joy that he had made his rabbi so happy.

Five minutes later, yet a third boy entered the room. "Rabbi, did you hear? Yaakov is exempt!" Once again Rav Yitzchak Elchonon smiled broadly and blessed the boy for the wonderful news. He thanked him and blessed him in the exact manner as with the previous boys.

Six times, different boys came in with the same news, each one anticipating the happiness their rabbi would feel at the news, each one not aware that others had preceded him. Rav Yitzchak Elchonon smiled at each boy, expressed his gratitude and made him feel as important as the first one.

RESPECT FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

The Ponovez Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Eliezer Schach, of blessed memory, once explained in a talk to his students that the attention to the honor of a fellow Jew is one of the most important lessons we can learn. Therefore the Torah repeated and repeated each and every Nasi with the same enthusiasm to teach us the importance of respect for the individual.

EDITOR

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HAFTARA

Judges 13:2 - 25

PARASHA: In our text we have a long description of the Nazir: "The L-RD spoke to Moses, saying: ... When either men or women make a special vow, the vow of a nazirite, to separate themselves to the L-RD, they shall separate themselves from wine and strong drink; they shall drink no wine vinegar or other vinegar, and shall not drink any grape juice or eat grapes, fresh or dried. ... All the days of their nazirite vow no razor shall come upon the head; until the time is completed for which they separate themselves to the L-RD, they shall be holy..." (Num. 6:2,3,6).

HAFTARA: Our Haftara gives us an example of a Nazir, who did not decide to be a Nazir but who has been chosen by G-d to be a Nazir. It is the story of Samson. The text of the Haftara is about the announcement of his birth. "the angel of the L-RD appeared to the woman and said to her, "Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a nazirite to G-d from birth" (Judges 13:3-5).

A beautiful story, because in fact it is not one of the angels of the L-rd who appeared to Samson's mother, but the angel of the L-rd, that means a very special angel who is very close to the L-rd. This angel appeared to Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and in the text he is called in Hebrew "Adonai" (Genesis 18:1-3). This special angel was also the protector of Israel in the wilderness and had the power to forgive their sins (Exodus 23:20-22). This angel is called in the book of Daniel, Michael (Daniel 12:1) in Hebrew Mi-Ka-EL means the one "who (Mi) is like (Ka) G-d (EL)" and many theologians have seen in this angel the appearance of the Mashiach, the one who protects and saves Israel. "At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise... at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Dan. 12:1,2)

BRIT HACHADASHA

Matthew 5:1-11

This text of the Sermon on the Mount pronounced by Jesus has been many times compared to the giving of the Torah by Moshe. Indeed, in the book of Deuteronomy it is written "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him." (18:18). That is why Yeshua, the Mashiach has been compared to Moshe "a prophet like you". God put his words in his mouth.

In the parasha we have the birkat Cohanim which is a "three-fold" blessings and Yeshua gave a list of blessings which are one of the most popular of his words.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3)

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matt. 5:4)

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matt. 5:5)

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." (Matt. 5:6)

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy." (Matt. 5:7)

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." (Matt. 5:8)

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." (Matt. 5:9)

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:10)

"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." (Matt. 5:11).

These blessings are a description of the believer's lifestyle. Everyone who live for the Messiah has to be a "poor in spirit", a mourner, a meek, someone who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, a merciful, a pure in heart, a peacemaker, who is persecuted and insulted because of his beliefs. It could be a good idea to meditate in each congregation about these blessings in comparison with the birkat cohanim.