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NDSO

JUNE 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

One of the great errors of our day is that we do not teach our children how to fail. Everyone in life ultimately fails. There will always be somebody who will run faster than we can, be smarter than we are, and be more successful than we are. Our very physical bodies will weaken and eventually fail. No doctor in the long run ever saves a patient. He may restore a patient's health for a few years but eventually the patient's body will cease to function. In our success-oriented society we have, by our undue stress on fleeting worldly success, maimed ourselves and our children. We have taught them that they can not be happy unless they always succeed. This is completely false.

Judaism does not measure the worth of a man's life based on the criteria of worldly success. Whether you are a successful doctor or lawyer or accountant or businessman is irrelevant. Whether you became a millionaire or big politician does not really count. What counts is whether you have tried your best and were able to expand the realm of the good and raise a family who, too, is interested in expanding the realm of the good in this world. If a person tries his best, raises good children, and does good ✓deeds, then, by Judaism's standards he is a very, very successful individual. That's why the greatest tribute that can be paid to a person after he is gone is for his children to light a yahrzeit lamp, come to the Synagogue, and conduct the service. This symbolizes that a person left behind children who are also interested in expanding the realm of the good in this world. Of course, if a person's children are complete bums and no-good-niks, saying Kaddish does not help. To raise a child who will follow in the path of the good and right is the greatest things that a person can do in Judaism.

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We believe in the conservation of morality. Just as there is a scientific law of the conservation of matter and energy which means that no matter or energy can ever be destroyed. (Since Einstein, we learned how to change matter into energy and not destroy it.) So, too, we believe that there is a law of the conservation of morality. No good deed that a person ~~ever~~ does in this life is ever lost. It continues and, based on it, the world can become better and better. A person who always tries his best and does ^{all} the good deeds ~~that come to his hand~~ ^{he can} and raises children who also recognize the importance of doing good deeds is, according to Judaism, a very successful person even though he may have failed at business, may never have gotten a college degree or any acclaim or money. By all the standards of today he might be a failure but, according to Judaism, he is a huge success.

Many of these thoughts are emphasized on the holiday of Shavuos. The Rabbis have arranged that almost always we will read the Torah portion Bamidbar before the holiday of Shavuos. Only exceptionally, like this year, do we read the next Torah portion, Noso. Both of these Torah portions have to do with ^{the} counting ^{of} the Jewish people. Bamidbar begins the count. In the Torah portion Noso we conclude the count. Over and over again we are told that the Jewish people were to be counted "by their families according to the house of their fathers". The expression "by their families according to the house of their fathers" recurs constantly. This repetition of the phrase "by their families according to the house of their fathers" was meant to teach us that the Jewish people could not receive the Torah until they demonstrated ^{that} they ^{had} ^{viable} ~~have valuable~~ families. Families are the basis of everything in our religion. Without families, the Torah cannot be implemented. Where are we to learn compassion, self-sacrifice, and the importance of the spiritual over the material except in a family? Where are ~~they~~ ^{we} to learn that relationships are more important than things? Only in a family.

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A family, in order to be effective, must have a father and a mother and children. That's why the expression "by their families according to the house of the fathers" is used over and over again.

In the Jewish tradition, we are taught that in many ways women are considered superior to men. It was the women who would not worship the golden calf. It was the women who paid no heed to the evil report of the spies who came back with a bad report of the land of Canaan. It was because of the moral strength of the women that the slavery in Egypt came to an end. The Rabbis teach that what was created later in the description of creation was on a higher level. Woman was created after man. They, also, say that when a woman thanks G-d for being created according to His will only she can make that blessing because she is closer to G-d's will than is man. A man has many more violent aggressive impulses than does a woman. The Rabbis, also, teach us that when G-d came to give the Torah to the Jewish people He said "thus shall you say to the ^House of Jacob and tell the Children of Israel". The House of Jacob refers to the women. - The Children of Israel to the men. The women were given the Torah first because G-d knew that if they would not accept it, the Torah would not endure in Judaism. A woman's unique moral courage is the necessary component to insure that the Torah will continue and be implemented.

Men do not have ^{to} ~~the~~ risk their lives to bring forth life. Men do not have to face death ~~in order~~ ^{to} to produce children and, because of this, men know that women are innately more courageous than men. Perhaps, this explains why men throughout the centuries have sought violence and war to demonstrate their own bravery. The bravery of men, though, in these circumstances does not produce life but the horrors of war. This is why the expression "the ^House of the Fathers" is used over and over again in discussing

families. We might think that the raising of children should be left exclusively to women. This is not so. The self-sacrifice and willingness on the part of the man to share what he has and work for his wife ^{and} children is an essential component in ~~the~~ teaching ~~of~~ compassion and the importance of relationships over things, ~~to the next generation~~. Households that are headed only by mothers, unfortunately, are not as effective in bringing up children as households of two parent families. It is very, very difficult to ~~raise~~ a child in a one parent family and to inculcate into him or her the correct values. The self-denying example of ~~the~~ ^a father ~~as well as~~ ^{and} the moral courage of ~~the~~ ^a mother ^{are} ~~is~~ required.

In nature almost always the father has ~~almost~~ nothing to do with raising children. His job just takes a few seconds and he is gone. In many animal species if the male has not ~~left~~ ^{left} already the female pushes the father away after children are born and attacks him if he comes near. When a child is born it is part of the mother and only very remotely of the father. The father does not have the same ties to it that the mother usually has. In the animal world this is very pronounced. We, though, are not animals. A father, by the very fact of his staying on and providing for his family, teaches his children through example the importance of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. The father does not just pick up and spend the money all on himself. He does not leave the mother. If he does, then the children are scared and it is very hard to teach them the values of the Torah. However, when a father is devoted and a child sees the unselfishness of both his parents then he learns how to be compassionate and concerned for relationships rather than things. Immediate self-gratification is not stressed in a family. The good of the total family is stressed. One family member is willing to sacrifice for another. The spiritual, the unseen, the family bond is stressed, not things. This is what is required before

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we could receive the Torah, a sense of the importance of relationships, of the spiritual over the material.

The Rabbis teach us that on Shavuos we received the Ten Commandments because of the merit of Jacob. It does not mention the other patriarchs. This is because only Jacob succeeded in raising a family who all stayed together, who in the end helped and supported each other. We ^{received} ~~recieved~~ the Ten Commandments on stone. The word for stone in Hebrew is "Even", which is a combination of the word Av and Ben, father and son. Only when father, son, mother, and daughter are together will the Ten Commandments endure. The family is the foundation stone upon which the Torah is based. Relationships are important, not things. Things may fail but relationships endure.

In the Torah portion, Noso, we have recounted the gifts of all the princes of Israel. Each prince brings the identical gift. It seems very strange that the Torah which is so careful with its words should spend so many sentences recounting the same gift over and over again. It could have just been said the twelve princes each gave this gift and let it go at that. Right before we learn about the gift of each of the heads of the tribes of Israel we learn about the priestly blessing, that beautiful blessing which is used throughout the world and which begins with the words "may the Lord bless you and keep you", etc. The priests before they say this blessing must lift up their hands and they repeat it word by word with the Cantor. This blessing is not their blessing. It is G-d's blessing. They are just the conduit through whom the blessing comes. Before they give the blessing they say a special Brocha which is different than any other Brocha that we say. We all know the blessing over bread, "Blessed O Lord, etc., who brings forth bread from the ground" or the blessing on wine "Who creates the fruit of the vine" or on the candles "Who has commanded us to light the Shabbos candles". The blessing that the priest should say here is "Who commanded us to bless his people Israel" but the blessing does not end there. The blessing ends "Who commanded us to bless His people Israel with love". It is the only blessing which ends with the words "with love". Why should this be so? What's more, since this blessing is not the priest's blessing but G-d's blessing, why do we need the blessing at all? In Judaism we do not need mediators between G-d and man. A Synagogue does not need a Rabbi, but do not tell the Board of Directors that, though. Almost every function in Judaism could be performed without a Rabbi, so why did G-d need the priests to bless the people? He should just do it Himself. The answer, I believe, is in this last word "with love". The priests were to bless the people with love which means that they were to bless the people even though they were not perfect, even though they had defects. The people were to look to the priests who had defects and were not perfect. In Judaism a priest is supposed to bless the people even if he does not fulfill completely all the commandments. The priests were to recognize that the people were worthy of blessing even if they had faults. G-d is telling us we have to learn how to accept each other and work with each other in spite of our faults if we want His blessing. In life all of us fail but this does not mean that

we should be thrown out or not loved. One of the things modern Jewish parents fail to teach their children is how to fail and each of us fails in life. No doctor ever saved a patient more than 120 years. Doctors can prolong life a little bit and this is important, but eventually they lose them. You can train very hard for a race and still lose. Failing does not mean that you forfeit love. Judaism is not an elite religion which says that only if you are a phi beta kappa or lawyer or accountant that you are a success in life. That's why I believe all the gifts of the princes are counted. Obviously, not all these princes made equal contributions to the Jewish people. How can you compare the contributions of Nachshon Ben Aminodav, the head of the tribe of Judah who jumped into the Red Sea up to his neck thereby assuring that it would split and many other accomplishments, to the much lesser accomplishments of the other princes, but in G-d's eyes they were all the same because they tried their best. Many times a retarded child learning to dress and feed himself is more worthy of recognition than a person getting a Ph.D. since it required more effort. G-d requires that we try not that we succeed. Three tribes led the Jewish people in their march; the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Yisachar, and the tribe of Zebulun. The tribe of Judah had a blue flag with a lion on it. Judah was a symbol of courage. He had courage because he was willing to admit his mistakes but he kept coming back. It was he who had the idea to sell his brother into Egypt. It was he who sinned with Tamar. He had the courage to come back from his failures. Yisachar's flag was a black flag with the moon and stars on it. He always had hope. He maintained an optimistic attitude. Zebulun's flag was a white flag with a ship of commerce. White is a symbol of honesty. How does a person do well? When does a person succeed? When he has courage, hope, and honesty. Then he does well. He may not succeed. He may be a failure in the world's terms but in Judaism's terms he is a great success. All the princes gave the same gift to demonstrate that each of their contributions were valuable even though, of course, they were different and on different levels. The story about the three people who met down below. Each of them found out they arrived there because of an automobile. The American said, "I was driving 100 miles an hour when I had a blowout". The Frenchman said, "I was in the car on the riverbank with my girlfriend when the brake gave away". The Russian said, "I saved for

ten years to buy a car and then I died of starvation". We each get to the same place not by what we do necessarily, but whether we have acted with courage, hope, and honesty. If we have then we have done well and our gifts are as good as anybody else's.

NOSO

How Can We Feel Life's High

NOSO - MAY 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Many times people will come to me and say, "Rabbi, I just can't go on. I just do not have the strength to continue. Where can I get the strength to overcome my problems? Why am I in this situation? I have a good job, a good family, but I just cannot seem to cope." To these people, every little problem is a mountain. Life to them is difficult. They cannot seem to make it. They are crying out for help and they do not know where to turn to get it.

These people either have expectations of themselves which are unrealistic or they have been brainwashed to feel that they should feel something special in life immediately and they aren't feeling it. They are looking for some sort of high or some sort of mystical experience of some sort of sudden surge of energy which will make them feel really alive. Many of them are very disappointed when they do not feel this. This is the reason that many people now are turning to drugs. They want an instant mind-expanding spiritual experience. They want to feel that they are in control and can handle life and overcome it.

Many of these people are like Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, who brought strange fire to G-d on the very day that the Tabernacle was dedicated and Aaron, their father, was installed as High Priest. They could not wait for the fire to come down from heaven and consume the sacrifices. They wanted a shortcut to feel life's happinesses and spiritual glow. Some Rabbis say that they got drunk so that they could feel this. Others say that they really were looking for a genuine spiritual experience, but they did not want to put in any effort to obtain it. They did not want to commit themselves to anything. They just wanted to be able to tap into spiritual experiences without any real effort. They did not want to do what our religion demands in order to receive life's blessings and feel life's happinesses. They did not want to work at it day in and day out. They did not want to get married. They did not want to have a family. They did not want to establish relationships with G-d and man that were lasting and which required day in and day out commitment. This our religion teaches us is the only way we can gain the strength to overcome our problems and, also, to feel life's satisfactions.

In the Torah portion, Noso, we have many of these ideas spelled out. We have enumerated the offerings of the Head of each of the twelve tribes of Israel who brought them on the days the Tabernacle was dedicated. There is something very strange about these offerings. What is strange about them is that they are all identical. The Torah, which is usually so terse in its language, repeats twelve times the same offering of silver dishes and gold pans and sacrifices. Why couldn't the Torah have just said that the twelve princes each brought the same offering on twelve different days and this was their offering. Instead, it enumerated everyone's offering. Even its placing of this description of these prince's offerings right after we have the priestly blessing of "May the Lord bless thee and keep thee, may the Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious to thee and may the Lord lift up His countenance to thee and give thee peace" seems strange.

We, in life, all want the same basic thing^s; to accomplish self-set goals, to be loved and accepted and to cause other people joy and happiness. We all, though, do not start from the same place. We each are born with different talents and different strengths and different weaknesses. Each of us wants these same basic things but in order to achieve these same basic things we must know ourselves. To achieve goals, to be accepted and to cause other people joy do not require the same approach from each of us. So many people in life are unhappy today because they concentrate on what they are not, not on what they are. Each of us can contribute so much to the world, but instead of looking at who we really are and what we really are, so many people think that in order to feel life's high they have to be a movie queen or a millionaire or a lawyer or a doctor, etc. They feel that they have to concentrate on what they are, not, instead of what they are. They do not realize that in being what they are, by doing their daily tasks, by loving their family and by being loved by them they will feel what life is all about. It is a slow tedious process but it will yield the desired results.

All the princes were not equal in their talents, but they were all able to achieve the same desired results because they knew what their talents were and what was really important

in life. The princes offered their gifts not in chronological order but in the order they marched. Judah was first. Judah had a blue flag with a lion on it. His flag stood for courage. He was worthy for leadership because he knew how to admit when he was wrong, he had courage. He made mistakes but he did not blame them on others. The next flag was that of Isachar. His flag was a black flag which had the moon and stars on it. His flag stood for hope. On the darkest night, the moon and the stars are always there. The third flag was that of Zevulun. It was a white flag with a ship on it. The ship stood for commerce and the white background stood for honesty. Honesty in business was his contribution. All the other princes, too, offered their gifts. All these gifts were equal even though their individual talents were not. Their gifts symbolized the fact that they each had felt life's natural high, they each had had a spiritual experience by achieving the goals in life that were right for them and by knowing that they were accepted and loved by G-d and others, and that they could bring others and G-d joy and happiness. This is the way we merit the priestly blessing. That is how we merit to feel G-d's countenance shining upon us. This is the way we get life's high. Our religion does not promise us that we will have no problems, no setbacks or tragedies. All it promises us is that if we live by its teachings sincerely, day in and day out, we will be given the strength to overcome our problems.

Right immediately before the priestly blessing, we learn about the Nazarite, the man who took upon himself special obligations not to cut his hair, not to drink wine, in order to have a spiritual experience. After he completed his Nazariteship, which was a minimum of thirty days, the Torah tells us he had to bring a sin offering. The Rabbis ask, why did he have to bring a sin offering? They say that he had to bring a sin offering because he tried to have a spiritual experience by denying part of life. This is not the way that we Jews look or aspire for spiritual experiences. Spiritual experiences come from the inside out, from doing Mitzvahs day by day and from being true to family and friends. In the Haphtorah, we learn about the most famous Nazarite of them all, Samson. In the end he was a complete failure. Gimmicks, trying to live a spiritual life through some outside

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strength helped him not at all. He ended up blind and a captive, unfortunately the same way that those who rely on drugs and fads to feel life's meaning, also, do today. In the end, this type of strange fire destroys them as it destroyed Aaron's son^s, Nadav and Avihu.

The holiday of Shavuos, also, proclaims this same message. Shavuos is a holiday without any real pageantry. There are no special rituals. You might think that there should be. After all, this was the greatest day in Jewish history, the day when we got the Torah. The way we celebrate Shavuos is by counting the ⁴⁹ days before it, by preparing ourselves every day to receive the Torah. Only if a person prepares himself for ~~fifty~~ ^{forty-nine} days before Shavuos, can he appreciate Shavuos. The Torah and life cannot be appreciated by one-shot gimmickry-type of activities. It can only be appreciated by day-in and day-out quiet labor, by living an honest, decent life day-in and day-out, by doing as many Mitzvahs as we can, and by loving and being loved by our family and friends. In this way, we are assured not that we will have no problems, but that we will have the strength to overcome them and that we will always know that life is worth living.

How Can We Feel Life's High

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The way we celebrate Shavuot is by counting the 49 days before it, by preparing ourselves every day to receive the Torah. Only if a person prepares himself for ~~fifty~~ ^{forty-nine} days before Shavuot, can he appreciate Shavuot. The Torah and life cannot be appreciated by one-shot gimmicky-type of activities. It can only be appreciated by day-in and day-out quiet labor, by living an honest, decent life day-in and day-out, by doing as many Mitzvot as we can, and by loving and being loved by our family and friends. In this way, we are assured not that we will have no problems, but that we will have the strength to overcome them and that we will always know that life is worth living.

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Noso is the longest Torah portion. It contains 176 verses. The longest Gemorah also has 176 Dafee, or folios. Usually we read the portion Noso after Shavuos. This shows how the Jewish people loved both the written and oral Torah, that after Shavuos we study it even more. In the beginning of the Torah portion Noso we have a continuation of the census of the clans of the Tribe of Levi. When it is a leap year we read Noso before the holiday of Shavuos, and the rabbis have made it a point that we should always read about the census of the Jewish people before Shavuos. Normally, we read the Torah portion Bamidbar. In it we have a complete census of the Jewish people except for these two clans of the Tribe of Levi. There is a peculiar expression which is used throughout the census. It is "Lavais Havosom." There is a prerequisite to receiving the Torah. There must be families so the Torah will touch not only the mind but also the heart, the emotions, and the soul. (Importance about mother and father.)

NASSO 1985

BLESSINGS REQUIRE LOVE
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

We are all acquainted with the beautiful priesthood blessing found in the Torah portion Naso which is used throughout the whole world:

"May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up His face to you and give you peace." The rabbis teach us that this blessing was not the priest's blessing to give to the Jewish people, but it was G-d's blessing.

The question then can be asked, why do we need the priest? What is the priest doing here? If it is G-d's blessing, why do we need the priest? We learn that it is G-d's blessing because it says "Ko Tevorchu - So you should bless the Jewish people." The rabbis tell us that the priest must face the people, and he must bless them with his arms outstretched using these words in Hebrew, and he must bless them with love.

In fact, in the Brocha, or blessing, which the priest makes before he blesses the people with the priestly blessing, we have something very unusual. This Brocha is not like the normal Jewish blessing. The text of this Brocha is: "Blessed are You, O G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with the holiness of Aaron and commanded to bless His people, Israel, with love." Usually when we make a Brocha we do not use the word "with love." We say "Hamotzi Lechem Meen HaOretz - Who brought forth bread from the ground." We do not say "with love" and we do not mention the holiness of Aaron. When we light the Shabbos candles we say "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to light the Shabbos candles." We do not say "with love" or "with the holiness of Aaron."

Every Kohen who is eligible to bless the people can come on the bema and bless the people even though he, himself, has made mistakes and does not fulfill all the commandments. With very few exceptions,

a Kohen is never disqualified from "Duchaning." The major exception is if he killed somebody. The Kohen, though, must bless the people with love. It is true that in our prayers in the evening and the morning we say "Blessed be You, O G-d, Who chose His People Israel with love" or "Blessed are You, O G-d, Who loves His People Israel." We mention love, but there it refers to G-d. We thank G-d for His love of the Jewish people. We thank Him for giving us His Torah which is a sign of love. ^{The Torah} ~~It~~ is not a burden, a terrible handicap, *it is a wonderful gift.* But, in this case, we are not referring to G-d but to the Kohen, and he must bless the people with love. The Kohen, if he cannot bless the people with love, is not supposed to Duchan. He is supposed to reach out to the people and understand that, just as he is not perfect, they are not perfect, ^{even though he knows that they are not perfect.} ~~but~~ He should still bless them. He should still tell them that they are worthy of G-d's blessing.

Why, though, do we say "with the holiness of Aaron?" Why don't we say "with the holiness of Moshe?" Aaron, though, was a different type of religious leader than Moshe. There are two basic types of religious leadership. There is the Moshe type who sets standards, who is the teacher, who admonishes people to live more elevated lives and castigates them when they fall short. The other type of religious leader is the Aaron type. He tells the people, "I know that you have failed. I know that you have sinned, but G-d still loves you and cares for you. You should not feel worthless or unredeemable. You can do better, and G-d still loves you even though you have failed."

In Europe the Mishnagdeem emphasized the teacher role in Judaism while the Chasideem emphasized the consoling and comforting role in Judaism. The Rav is the teacher and the Rebbe was the dispenser

of hope. Aaron understood the people. Aaron sympathized with them and the people responded with unbounded love ^{to him}. The Kohen, when he blesses the people, is not only blessing them. He is telling them, "G-d still loves you. G-d still cares for you even though you are not perfect, even though you may have failed." That is the message the Kohaneem are to give us.

The rabbis say that the word "Ko" or "thus" also stands for the many deeds of loving kindness that Abraham performed. We find this word Ko with Abraham when it says "Ko Yeeya Zarecha - So will be your children." We also find this word Ko with Yitzchak. When we read about the binding of Isaac the Torah says "Nail-Cho A Ko - We will go until thus." It stands for Isaac's willingness to sacrifice ^{for his religion}. We also learn about the word Ko with Jacob. When it says "Ko Somar ~~U'Ba~~is Yaacov - So you shall say to the House of Jacob." It stood for Jacob's devotion to his family. A Jew, if he still wants to do deeds of loving kindness, and he still is devoted to his religion and to his family, is worthy of G-d's love even if he has failed. The Kohen was told to tell the people, "Try to do better. You can. G-d still loves you and cares for you."

In the last Torah portion in the Torah it says "Zos HaBrocha - This is the blessing which Moshe blessed the Jewish people - Eesh Eloheem - a man of G-d." The rabbis ask, why did Moshe have to be referred to here as Eesh Eloheem, a man of G-d? Didn't the Jewish people know that already? However, this was to teach us that Moshe was both an Eesh and an Eloheem. Eloheem in Hebrew also means "judges." Moshe was a judge. He was a teacher of the people. He set very high standards, but even a Moshe was an Eesh, was a man. He had

all of mankind's foibles. He was a great man, but only a man. The rabbis tell us he had a temper, and we know that he, too, sinned like every other man. He, too, needed a blessing. He, too, needed sometimes to know that G-d loved him and cared for him in spite of his faults. His primary role was to be the teacher and the standard setter for Israel.

In the second to last Torah portion, HaAzinu, he delivers a song which is an admonition depicting the calamities that will befall a wayward and disloyal Israel. In the last Torah portion, though, he leaves his role as a teacher and becomes a messenger of hope and blessing. He, too, tells the tribes that in spite of their weaknesses G-d loves them and cares for them. They are not to despair when things are bleak and when they know they have failed, but they should improve. Therefore, the last words of his blessing are: "Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee a people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help." Moshe reassures the people that G-d will always love them and care for them.

In our day, unfortunately, there are many people who only look on religion as a castigating, prodding force which only tells them how bad they are. This is not Judaism's view. It is true that our religion sets standards and wants us to try to live by these standards, but the main thrust of our religion is not to try to frighten or improve people by telling them how bad they are, but, instead, it is to tell them that they can never forfeit G-d's love, and that because they each have a piece of G-d in them, they can achieve and do great things. We have always stressed the positive and not the negative. That's why when the priests blessed the people, when Jewish religious leadership

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talks to the people, it should always talk to the people "Beek-Du-
Shaso Shel Aron - With the holiness of Aaron." They are not to get
up and berate the people and call them names. That, many rabbis
say, is even "Loshan Horah - evil slander." They should instead
encourage them, give them hope and point out how much they can do
because they are all children of G-d.

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In the Torah portion Noso we learn about the priestly blessing, the blessing which now is uttered every day throughout the world. It has been taken over by many religions and is recognized as the greatest of all blessings. "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto thee. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." This is, all told, fifteen words: 3 in the first blessing, 5 in the second blessing, and 7 in the last blessing, a rising crescendo of blessings. The rabbis interpret the first blessing, "May the Lord bless you and keep you," to mean may G-d bless you with material things and may He keep you from them. Unfortunately, there are many people who are blessed with material things, but they do not know how to handle them. Because they do not know how to handle them, these material things destroy them. We see this in rock stars and basketball players who come from very poor families and all of a sudden they are showered with riches. They do not know how to deal with it, and it quickly destroys them. Look at Elvis Presley, a man who had everything, but he died filled with drugs shooting out television sets. This is a common occurrence with basketball players who squander their proceeds on drugs, etc. It is not enough to be blessed with material things. We have to be guarded against them and from them. We have to know how to handle them. We have to make sure, too, that we are not the objects of envy and hatred of others. G-d, in this first blessing, is giving us material things and allowing us to use them well.

The second blessing, "May G-d make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee," refers to a person's personality, to interpersonal relationships. A person should be able to love and be loved by others. A person should have an empathetic, intuitive personality who is able to get along with everyone, who is able to fathom other people's personalities

and understand them and also be understood himself. That is what the word "Chain" means, "favor". G-d should give you a certain kind of graciousness and charm, a certain kind of intuitive ability to get along well with everyone.

Then we have the last blessing, "May G-d lift up His face to you and give you peace," which is a spiritual blessing in which we ask that we have the spiritual things of life. Of course, the question could be asked, why do we need this last blessing at all? After all, the first blessing in which we ask for material things and to be guarded against the evil effect of material things, and the second blessing, which asks for a good personality that is beloved by everyone and is able to love everyone, then what else is there left? What do we mean by a spiritual blessing? The key, of course, to understanding what a spiritual blessing is is in the last word, shalom, peace. Spiritual blessing has to do with being connected with others and being connected to G-d, to have a certain amount of wholeness, to not be a fragmented personality. In Hebrew shalom does not mean peace but harmony. In English the word peace can also stand for the peace of the grave, for quietness, for stillness, but in Hebrew the word shalom means harmony. It means that everything is working at full capacity but in harmony with everything else. In the Jewish conception of things everyone is supposed to fulfill their individuality but in harmony with everyone else. It is like the body. When we ask people in Hebrew how they are feeling we do not ask how they are feeling. We ask, how is your harmony? All the parts of the body have to be working at their capacity and working together in complete harmony. If one part of the body is working exceptionally well but the others are only working in their normal way, the person is sick and probably suffering from cancer. In life we must be connected to others and have an inner wholeness and

equilibrium. If we do not have this wholeness and equilibrium we will not be able to actually enjoy life. We will be a fragmented personality.

Unfortunately, today there are many people who have fragmented personalities. They have a self-image of themselves which is usually wrong and which does not conform to reality at all. It is like the self-image that Samson had. We learn about Samson in the Haphtorah. Samson was a man who conceived of himself as a holy man, although he did all sorts of things that holy people should not do. Of course, when he lost his hair, which was the symbol of holiness, he also lost his vision. He no longer could conceive who he was and what he was. Unfortunately, we have the same kind of people today who pretend that they are holy individuals, but then they do things that are beneath them. It is like people who pretend that they are pillars of the community and stand for certain values until they go away to convention and then they do other things. Then there are other people who pretend they are standing for good ethics and sound business practices while they are cheating and slum lording and doing all sorts of sharp business practices. People's self-image and what they really are are so many times two different things. When a person loses his self-image many times he cracks. There is an image that we present to the world, there is an image that we have of ourselves, there is an image that our friends and family have of us, and sometimes they are not exactly the same. In order for us to really have a spiritual aspect to our character we have to have a certain wholeness. We have to be connected to family and to others.

In fact, that is actually what religion gives us. In life we can ask three different questions. We can ask why, but there is really no answer to the question why. Why did G-d create the world? Why are we here? Why did He have to create suffering and death? We do not know. We have faith that someday we will know, but there are no answers. If someones

tells you they understand why there is pain and suffering and death, he must be a fool because no one really knows why. We cannot answer the question why. Science, too, cannot answer the question why. Science only answers the question how. We do not know why water freezes at 32°. We just know that it does. I remember when I was a kid, I asked my teacher why when I threw a ball in the air does it come down? The teacher said because of gravity. I asked what was gravity, and the teacher said to turn to page 61. In other words, the teacher did not know. Science can only answer how things work, not why they should work this way. Science also can describe what things are but it cannot answer the question why.

Religion, on the other hand, answers the question, what does it do to us? How does it affect us? Many times we can argue and say that certain religious practices are not necessary. As long as we think about certain things, it is okay. We can disagree about why these things should work, how they work, but that is not important. The important thing is, what do these things do for us? These things do a lot for us. Unfortunately, many people have fallen onto the heretical idea that just because you understand something that, therefore, you are exempt from it. For example, just because you understand the laws of interpersonal relationships, therefore, you are exempt from any of these laws. Therefore, you can allow yourself to do all sorts of things and get involved in all sorts of temptations, and you will not be tempted. This is, of course, foolish because we are all human. If you get involved with a beautiful woman in very close intimate contact, even though you have a wonderful wife and a good relationship with her, you are going to be tempted. If you are involved with handling money with no supervision whatsoever, you are going to be tempted. You are a human being. When it comes to laws of interpersonal relationships, just because you understand the working of these laws does not mean that

you are not going to be subjected to them, too. It does not mean that you are not going to be jealous or envious or subjected to greed or any other human failing. In fact, we do not say that because you understand how the blood circulates in the body that when you cut your finger you will not bleed. We do not say that because you understand the laws of physics if you jump off a cliff you will not fall down. Of course you are going to fall down.

The same thing applies in the interpersonal sphere, too. Religion deals with what these things do to us. In fact, most of the rules and regulations in this Torah portion Noso have to do with what religion does for us. How does it shape us? How does it mold us? If you follow the rules of the Jewish tradition, you will turn out to be a certain type of individual. If a person will give up Shabbos they are usually giving up the family, too, because they do not want to be together on Friday night and shares each other's opinions and woes and sadnesses and joys. When they give up Shabbos they are giving up a lot. When people give up keeping kosher, they are also taking away one of the best defenses that their children have against drugs and alcohol. Children of people who keep kosher are not as susceptible to drugs and alcohol because they have had to learn how to say no. You cannot eat anything you want whenever you want however you want. You cannot even eat things that you are permitted to eat at the same time with other things that you are permitted to eat. Therefore, you learn something, a discipline that you cannot eat anything you want and to anything you want. By observing different rules and regulations, they have an effect upon us, and this effect is lasting. The most important effect is that it gives us a wholeness, an identity, a meaning. If we want to have this last blessing of harmony and wholeness so that we will be able to overcome our problems, then it is important that we adhere to our religious practices, which have been proven throughout the generations

to produce a certain type of stable individual who is family centered, who is not susceptible to many of the temptations of the world because he keeps away from them or handles them in a circumspect way so they do not affect him in a wrong way. That is why it says here, "May G-d lift up His face to you." "Lifting" in Hebrew means not only to lift up but to marry, to carry, to forgive. It has many, many meanings. In order for us to have this inner harmony we must have a certain connectedness with G-d and with human beings. When people give up a belief in G-d, when they give up a religion, they become fragmented. They no longer feel part of the whole, part of the family, and, therefore, they do not have the equilibrium to solve their problems. G-d never promised us that if we are religious we will not have problems. He never promised us that. All He promised us is that if we keep the religion He will give us the strength to overcome our problems. That, of course, is very important. You can have all the material things in the world but not be able to solve your problems. You can have the finest personality and be a lovable human being who is able to give love and receive love but you will not be able to solve your problems. In order to solve your problems you have to have an inner equilibrium and stability and harmony which will allow you not to be fazed by your problems but to have an inner confidence to overcome them with joy and optimism and hope. This only comes from a religious perspective. Let us all hope and pray that we will truly be blessed with this last blessing which is essential. It is not enough just to have material things and a fine personality. We must also have this inner equilibrium.

I am reminded of the story of a man who just got a new job. As he was working on the job, he went to a fellow employee and asked him what made their boss tick. The employee said he did not have to know that. He

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said all you have to know is what makes the boss explode. Unfortunately, in life today there are many people who explode, who cannot handle their problems at all. They cannot handle them because they do not have the equilibrium they need, the inner confidence and strength to overcome their problems. Let us all hope and pray that we will all be blessed by all the blessings of the priestly blessing, especially the last one, so that we will be able to handle our problems. Amen.

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In the Torah portion Noso we have 176 sentences. We also have 176 sentences in the longest chapter of the Tenach, and we also have 176 pages in the longest tractate of the Talmud. One hundred and seventy six seems to be a number which has meaning in Jewish life since the longest Torah sedra and the longest chapter in the rest of the Tenach and the longest Talmud tractate all have 176 as the number of the biggest Torah portion, the biggest chapter, and the biggest tractate. It is also interesting to note in the Torah the Torah is not based on chronological order, so that means that the paragraphs of the Torah are put together for a reason.

In the Torah portion Noso we seem to have many paragraphs which are put together for no seemingly good reason. In other words, their subject matter does not seem to go together. We first start off by learning about the different duties and responsibilities of the different sub-clans of the Tribe of Levi. Then we learn who is in the camp and who is out of the camp. Then we learn about trust. We learn about people embezzling money, and we also learn about trust between husband and wife. If a husband suspects that a wife has been unfaithful, then we learn about the Nazerite, and after we learn about the Nazerite we learn about the priestly blessing which the priests bestow upon the Jewish people and which has been taken over by almost all the peoples of the world. Then we learn about the different offerings which were offered by the different princes of Israel on the day the Tabernacle was dedicated. In other words, we learn about the gifts that they brought to the inauguration of the Tabernacle. What do all these subject matters have to do one with another? Obviously, they must have something to do one with another otherwise they would not be juxtaposed, and they, themselves, make up the 176. One hundred and seventy six in Hebrew is spelled Kuf Ayin Vahv, and, of course, the first letter stands for Kedusha, for wholeness. The Ayin can stand for Ayin

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Tov, for generosity, and the Vahv can stand for being attached, for being able to make good relationships with other people and with G-d. The very basis of Judaism is to seek holiness, to be generous, and to want to have a relationship with others and with G-d.

But I think that the key element here in showing how all these things fit together is the very first significant word which gives its name to the Torah portion, which is the word Noso. The word Noso in Hebrew has the meaning of lifting up, carrying, marrying, and forgiving. In fact, the marriage ceremony, itself, in Hebrew is known as Nisuee, and we can see from here that the Jewish concept of marriage has within it the idea of uplifting, of carrying, and also of forgiving. We know that this is different in English. The word "marriage" in English, or to marry, does not have that connotation at all. That is why it is so difficult to translate from one language to another. When you translate from one language to another you can only translate the primary meaning. The secondary, tertiary and other meanings of the word you cannot get. It is also interesting to note that the very first part of the marriage ceremony in Judaism is called the Kedushin. An engagement is called the Kedushin, holiness, and the second part of the marriage ceremony, the marriage itself, is called Nisuim, which again means to uplift or carry or to forgive. If we look throughout this whole sedra we will see that this theme recurs over and over again.

What this first part of the Torah portion is teaching us is responsibility. It teaches us that these sub-clans were meant to work and to bear the burden. When a person wants to establish a relationship he has to realize that he is assuming a burden. It is a joyous and wonderful burden but nevertheless it is a burden. It is a responsibility. Unfortunately,

in our day and age we have failed to teach our youngsters responsibility and that, of course, is one of the failings of our age. In a previous age when most Jewish people were poor children had to assume responsibility otherwise there would not be bread on the table. Youngsters went out and got paper routes and did other odd jobs and turned the money over to their mother otherwise they would not have food on the table. The mother may have given them back a nickel a week or something to spend on themselves, but they knew they had to be responsible. They knew they had to get good grades for the family. They knew they had to do things for the family. Today children are not taught at all about responsibility, and the parents say, "Oh, don't worry, I'll give charity for you. You don't have to give charity." Or they will say, "Oh, don't worry, I'll keep the Sabbath for you. You don't have to be here Friday night. You can go to the dance." Or they will tell older children, "Oh, you can't make the rent on your apartment? Don't worry, I'll make the rent for you. Just go out and have a good time." In other words, they think they are doing their children a favor, but by failing to teach their children responsibility, by failing to teach them their acts have consequences they are really maiming their children. Therefore, many times when certain young people get married and they find that marriage is a responsibility. It is also an Avoda, a work, a service, and, of course, we use that same word when we talk about services between man and G-d, and it is really a joyous and wonderful thing to know that you are needed and wanted and can be counted on. Many young people, when they find they have a responsibility, run away because they are not used to shouldering responsibilities. So the very first element in any type of relationship, especially a marriage relationship, is a willingness to assume the burden of responsibility, and unless you are willing to assume responsibility then you can never

have a successful relationship. If you want to have a successful marriage one partner has to feel responsible for the other. You must be willing to do for the other and be willing to be counted on and know that they can be counted on and, therefore, that the other person has an anchor in the world, just as you have an anchor in the world. That is a wonderful feeling.

The next part of the Torah portion talks about who is in the camp and who is out of the camp. We learn that those who were without the camp, and of course there were different levels of the camp, is one who is speaks ill of other people, a Metzora. We also learn that someone is outside the camp if he does not act responsibly and does not want to allow peoples to have relationships with other people, and finally, one who is sad all the time. A good relationship cannot occur if this relationship brings out the worst in you. If you have a relationship with somebody and this relationship brings out the worst in you, brings out your mean streak, then something is wrong. Secondly, if that relationship that you have cuts you off from everyone else. It is true that your first responsibility has to be to your spouse, but if the relationship that you are in causes you to sever all your relationships with your parents and brothers and sisters and your cousins and your religion and your principles, then something is wrong with that relationship, too. A relationship cannot be exclusive so that everything is concentrated only in your spouse. That is not a good type of relationship either. If that relationship cuts you off from all contact with other people, then something is wrong with the relationship. Thirdly, too, if the relationship makes you sad, makes you cry all the time, then something is wrong with that relationship. We see then that in addition to assuming responsibility one for another a relationship should not bring out the mean streak in you. A relationship should not

be exclusive so that you cannot have any contact with your family and friends and your religion and principles. Finally, the relationship should not make you sad all the time. If it does, then something is wrong with that relationship.

Next we learn in this Torah portion about trust. If you cannot trust each other, even though the relationship is good and even though the relationship makes you feel good and allows you to have contact with other people, yet if there is no trust in the relationship, if you are afraid your spouse is going to swindle you out of all your money or you are afraid your spouse is going to be unfaithful to you, then, of course, it is a very difficult thing. The relationship is lost. It cannot be saved. That is why we have here recounted a ceremony which is to regain trust, because trust is not just something in the head. It is a psychological thing. It goes deep into your heart and emotions. Unless somehow trust can be regained then the relationship fails. The relationship cannot exist.

Then we learn something else. We learn that although when you go into a relationship you should not do so with the idea that you are going to change your partner because then the relationship will never work. You cannot change your partner. However, yet, if a person, himself, knows that something is wrong with himself he should change, not just for the sake of the relationship but because he should want to change himself, that those faults that he or she has they should want to change. That is why the next thing we learn about a Nazirite. A Nazirite was someone who had faults and wanted to change them so, therefore, he entered into this Naziriteship to change certain faults that he had. So if you really want to make your relationship a success you should work on your own faults to make them better, to make yourself better.

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Finally, we have the priestly blessing and the priestly blessing, of course, is a special type of blessing. The blessing really comes from G-d, but the priests extend their hands and they bless us, and the rabbis say that just as the priest themselves are not perfect, when they bless the people they have to bless them with love. They have to realize that their blessing goes to everyone, and that even though people that they are blessing are not perfect they still deserve to be blessed. In other words, a relationship should bless you, that you should have a loving and kind and wonderful relationship with your spouse even though they have faults. If you cannot love your spouse because of their faults then, of course, the relationship will not work. If you cannot bless your spouse even though you know your spouse has faults then the relationship cannot work because that means there is no forgiveness there, and unless there is forgiveness in a relationship the relationship cannot endure. Of course, you do not pretend there are no faults because it would be foolish to do that. If you have a spouse who just cannot handle money at all it would be foolish to pretend they can and give them all the responsibility for handling money because you know what the result is going to be, but you have to forgive them faults and you give them other responsibilities than taking care of the money. If we do all these things then we can rest assured that we can have a good relationship with ourselves, with our spouses, and with our G-d.

That, of course, is what the final part of this Torah portion is concerning, about the gifts of each prince who was separate and distinct and with different talents could still have with G-d because they knew that this relationship was based upon trust and forgiveness and assumption of responsibility and that it brought out the best in them. So, this Torah portion again reiterates something which is very important in the Jewish view, and that is that in

order to have any relationship it must uplift you and allow you to carry the burden of responsibility one for another, and it also must be based upon forgiveness. It must be a blessing to each of the parties, and it must be a blessing that is given with love. That, of course, is something that is very, very important. Unless we realize that, unless we have relationships which are based upon responsibility, based upon uplifting us and not making us feel bad or bringing out our mean streak or making us slaves to one spouse without allowing us to develop our talents or allowing us to have contact with others and unless we also have forgiveness in a relationship, a forgiveness, however, which does not destroy trust because you cannot really have a relationship even if you forgive somebody if you cannot regain trust. If we have these things then we will be assured to have lasting and wonderful good marriages.

I am reminded of the story of the couple who did not really have these things in their relationship and were having a terrible fight driving in the car. All of a sudden the man sees a mule outside and he looks at it, points at it, and turns to his wife and says, "Is this one of your relatives?" The wife said, "Yes, by marriage." That, of course, is not the way to have a good relationship, but we all hope and pray that our young couples will have this type of relationship because it will be a relationship which is based on Nisuim, which is based on the word Noso, a relationship which will uplift them, which will allow each spouse to feel responsible for the other, which will bring out the best in them, and which will also be based on love and blessing and forgiveness. May this come to pass soon so that all our marriages will be successful. Amen.

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The Torah portion Naso is always read right around Shavuos time, sometimes the week before Shavuos but usually it is read the week after Shavuos. On Shavuos we know that we have accepted the Torah, that the Jewish people had accepted responsibility for observing the Torah and keeping the Torah and making sure that the world will be blessed by the teachings of the Torah. The rabbis ask, why is it that the Torah portion Naso was chosen to be read most years immediately after Shavuos and some years right before Shavuos? They give many reasons for it but perhaps the reason that is most compelling is the reason that states because in the Torah portion Naso we have the priestly benediction, the benediction which has been adopted by all the world by many other religions besides the Jewish religion, the priestly blessing which goes, "May the Lord bless thee and keep thee. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto thee. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." This blessing contains 15 words in Hebrew. The first blessing contains 3 words, the second blessing contains 5 words, and the third blessing contains 7 words. These are the 3 holy numbers that exist in Judaism: 3, 5 and 7. In fact, we know that the Torah, itself, was given in the third month, and the Bible, itself, contains three parts, the Torah, the prophets, and the writings, and it was given in the third month to the third child of the marriage of Amnon and Yechever. There was first Miriam, then Aaron, then Moshe. It was given after three days of preparation, so the number 3 has a significance in Judaism. It has the significance of man interacting with G-d with the Torah or another type of blessing included. If you notice here we say, "May the Lord bless you and keep you." The rabbis say that this refers to material possessions. May G-d bless you with material possessions. You have G-d, the human being, and material things, and may He guard you from them because many times possessions can overcome it and we become slaves to our possessions rather than masters of our possessions. Our possessions should not possess us. In fact, there is such a thing as a possession addict just as a drug addict and alcohol addict. We know many times that people become so miserly

with their own possessions that they never even enjoy them. I just read recently in the paper about some panhandler who was found to have left 3 million dollars to a university. This man used to beg for food on the streets and he lived in a crummy rooming house. In this rooming house they found stocks and certificates worth over 3 million dollars. This man never knew how to possess his possessions instead his possessions possessed him.

Then you have, besides the blessing of material things because, after all, we need a certain amount of material things in order to exist, food, shelter, and clothing. We have to have enough material possessions so that we can devote our time to spiritual things, too. We come to the second of these three blessings which is, "May the Lord shine His face upon thee and be gracious unto thee". This, of course, is a blessing of the mind, of the intellect. May G-d enlighten our minds. We know that that is the first thing that we pray for actually in the weekly Shmonesreh when we say that G-d should give us knowledge, should give us understanding. Without knowledge and understanding life can become very boring and filled with ennui, but if we see the newness in everything, the beauty in everything, if our mind is open to all sorts of experiences and if we learn how to deepen these experiences we can get so much more out of life, so we ask G-d to enlighten our minds. What is it that distinguishes man from animal? It is the capacity to extract things, to learn things, to see below the surface, and we mention, "May G-d enlighten our eyes," because when G-d shines His face upon us it means that we should be blessed with Torah knowledge, too. We need to have knowledge of the Torah, ethics, morality, and how to get along with people and also we need to have secular knowledge, too, because we need to understand nature and through nature we can come to G-d. As the Psalmist says, "Through the study of Your handiwork, G-d, I can see You."

Finally we have the third blessing, which is the highest of all. The second blessing contained 5 words similar to the five books of the Torah, the 5 books of knowledge, of understanding. Then we have also, "May G-d lift up His face to you and may He give you peace." Notice that this blessing is seven and seven is a holy number in Judaism because we live in 7 dimentions. Six of them are physical. We live north, east, west, south, up, and down, six physical dimensions, but we also live in a seventh dimension, in a spiritual dimension, and that, of course, is what Shabbos is all about. The most important things in life we cannot measure. We cannot measure love and devotion and feelings of compassion and caring and concern. You can see their effects but you cannot actually see them, themselves. In fact, that is why it is easy to fool people sometimes because we do acts which seem to be kind acts but really we are just behind a mask and when the appropriate time comes we are going to strike out and hurt the person whom we seem to be loving. That, of course, is what we know swindlers do. We know that some people pretend that they are kind and compassionate and caring and all they want to do is find out where they money is and then they abscond with the money. Feelings of love and care and compassion cannot be measured. The most important things in life cannot be measured. This talks about the spiritual now. You can have all the material possessions you like and all the knowledge you like and still not be able to feel life's spiritual purpose because you do not know how to relate to anybody. You can become a hermit. You can become a loner and be alienated, as many highly educated people are. They are alienated from others because they do not know how to relate. In addition to material goods and knowledge we must know how to relate to people. That's why it says, "May the Lord lift up His face to you." The word in Hebrew Yeesofer, lift up, also means to be married, to have a relationship. It is important that we are able to relate to people in an intimate and close way. That's why the rabbis are so much in favor of marriage, that a man needs to be married and a woman

needs to be married in order to reach their spiritual nature. When it says G-d should life up His face to you it also refers to other types of relationships. We should have friends. We should relate to the community. We should relate to others. "And He should give you peace." The word in Hebrew "Shalom" does not really mean peace. That is the way it is translated into English. The word "Shalom" in Hebrew really does not mean peace. In English peace can mean the peace of the grave. It can mean quiet. It can mean absolute stillness. We know that in Hebrew that is not what that word means. In Hebrew the word means harmony. The word means that everyone is working at his capacity, that we are working together one with another like in a symphony orchestra.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a lion whose claim to the conclave of all the animals in the animal kingdom that the reason he was the king of the beasts was because when he roared it was quiet within a mile of his roar. The little thrust got up and said, "Well, maybe that is true, Sir Lion, but they will only stay quiet for a very short time, but when I chirp the whole forest chirps for miles around." That is what we mean when we talk about peace, where everybody is working in harmony, where everybody is working together, where everybody is fulfilling themselves by being part of the group. That, of course, is one of the problems with our modern era, and that is, of course, why we read, too, about Samson in this Haphtorah because Samson was a person who did not have inner harmony. He did not know whether he was a Philistine or a Jew or a holy man or a Don Juan. He was a man who did not have a unified image of who he was or what he should be. In fact, when he lost his hair he lost his vision. He was a man who even when he pulled down the Temple on the Philistines did not ask G-d that he should do it in order to save the Jewish people but he asked G-d to do it so that he could take vengeance for the loss of his son. Samson was indicative of a person who is not whole, a person who has many wonderful qualities. He had high intellect. He had material possessions. He had an idea that he

wanted to help his people but he could not integrate everything. He could not relate well to either his own people or to the Philistines. He did not know exactly what he was or who he was, so, therefore, the greatest gift of all is the spiritual gift of being able to relate, to relate to others and to relate to your community.

That is why when we look at the blessings that people strive for today many times they are struggling for the wrong blessings. They are struggling only for material wealth, but that in the long run is not going to be a total blessing. In fact, if it ends up by possessing them it is going to be a curse. Many people strive for knowledge and it is important to strive for knowledge, for Torah knowledge, for secular knowledge. It is very important, but the highest blessing of all which encompasses and, in a certain sense, is based upon the other blessings is the ability to relate, to relate to yourself as a whole person, to relate to others, to relate in a marriage, to relate to your community. If a person has that type of a blessing he has the summit of all the blessings. If he has encompassed his ability to relate he will find that he will be able to have material possessions and he will be able to have knowledge and insight and he will also be able to have inner harmony. In fact, this is known, that when a person has a family, and Judaism is based on the family, that wealth will naturally flow to the family because if you do not spend all your money on foolishness, if you do not spend all your money on wine, women, and song, you are eventually going to accumulate money. In fact, in the Far East where the Chinese are known as the Jews of the Far East, you can see, too, that the Chinese also have a similar family structure. When they maintain their families wealth just flows to them. The same thing is true here in the United States. When Jews maintain a family structure then wealth flows to them and they are able to have the resources in order to obtain knowledge and understanding and they are able, of course, then

to relate to each other in a wonderful and loving way and they are able to form good communities. However, when there is no ability to relate and no ability to make a family, then the other blessings dissipate and people are left with nothing.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who noticed that there was a job opening for a night watchman. He applied for the job. He came before the personnel direction who asked him, "What makes you think that you are qualified to be a night watchman?" The man said, "Because G-d has blessed me." The director said, "What do you mean, G-d has blessed you?" The man replied, "He has made me a very light sleeper." Of course, that is not the type of blessing that we are talking about. We are not talking about blessings which allow you to evade responsibilities or do a half hearted job. We are talking about blessings which allow you to be whole. We are talking about blessings which allow you to relate to a community, which allow you to relate to your family, which allow you to be a whole person, and that, of course, is an extremely great blessing. Let us all hope that we will all have this blessing, that we will be able to relate to each other in a loving and caring way, that we will be able to relate to our families and strengthen our families, and that we will be able to relate to each other so that we will have a strong and a thriving and a growing community. Let us all hope that we will have such relationships so that the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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In the Torah portion Naso we have the very famous priestly blessing, "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto thee. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." This blessing is situated right after we learn the laws of the Nazerite. The rabbis all ask, why is it that it is situated here in this particular place?

Also, in the Haphtorah we learn about one of the most famous of all Nazerites and that was Samson. Samson was a very unique individual. He had such a great future in store for him, but he muffed his opportunity. He could not make up his mind what he was. Was he a Jew or was he a Philistine? Was he a holy man or a lover? Was he a person who was dedicated to his people or only a person who was dedicated to fulfilling his own desires? A wag once said that Samson was the greatest writer who ever lived because with just two columns he brought the whole house down. Samson was a person who had different visions of himself. He was a fragmented personality, like we find so often today. He could not make up his mind who he was or what he was. He felt that he was a holy man, and only when his hair was cut off did he lose his visions of himself. He felt that everything that he did that was not in accordance with his own principles was only an exception, like people feel today who feel that they can be religious and do everything. They feel that they can represent the Jewish religion and keep kosher at home maybe and then maybe not keep kosher, that they can have a successful marriage and still have a mistress on the side. They feel that they can represent Jewish moral values and perhaps cheat in business. They feel that they can have everything but at the same time they can intermarry and have their children raised in another faith but they can still be considered to be a good Jew. Samson actually intermarried not once but actually twice. If we look at his name his name really means son, and Delilah, his nemesis, his love, the one who really betrayed him, her name really means night. It is true that there are gray areas in life. We are not always totally consistent and maybe there is twilight, a hour and a half in the

evening and an hour and a half in the morning, but out of 24 hours that is only 3 hours, but there is a right and a wrong. There is not all 24 hours a gray area. Unfortunately, many people in our day seem to think that everything is a gray area. Therefore, they can pick and choose any way they want and still be considered good Jews.

Why was this law of the Nazerite put close to the blessings of the priest? The reason for that is that there is something very unique about the blessings of the priest. We know the blessings. We know that no blessing ends with the word Ahava, with love. We just say, "Blessed are You, O G-d, King of the Universe, Who brings forth bread from the ground." We do not say "with love", but when the priests made their blessings they make the blessing in which they state, "Blessed are You, O Lord, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with the sanctity of Aaron who commanded us to bless His people Israel with love." The Kohen, when he blesses the people, have to do it with love. The rabbis say that if they cannot love the people then they should not really bless. That is the reason why they stretch out their arms to the people to show that they really love the people. We all know that they must hold their fingers in a special way, too. This has been popularized by Leonard Nimoy and the Star Trek program. Of course, this is known as a Vulcan salute, but this is actually the way that the Kohanim were to bless the people, and this signifies the two different aspects of religion. We know that religion really has two different aspects that are really portrayed by two different people, Moshe and Aaron. Religion stands for a set of standards, a demanding set of standards, and Moshe was the epitome of the rod that demanded that the Torah standards be met, and that if people did not keep the Torah standards that they be castigated. This, of course, could cause people a lot of guilt and could cause people to feel that they can never achieve these type of standards and that it would be very difficult and it is very forbidding. Then there is another aspect of religion which is very loving

and very caring and very understanding and very forgiving. We all know that this is part of our religion, too, and this is what Aaron stood for. Aaron stood for that aspect of religion which is loving and caring and forgiving and when a person makes a mistake he is understanding. He says, "Yes, I can understand how that can be but you can do better now. You can overcome it." We know in our current judicial system in America somehow the juries have gotten involved in mitigating all sorts of punishments and letting people go because they take into account all sorts of circumstances that normally should not be taken into account, like the Mendez Brothers and other cases where it is clear that these people knew what they were doing and they violated the law but the jury seemed to think that their circumstances were such that they should not be meted out any punishment. Aaron was a person who was trying to work with the people to bring them up to a higher standard. He loved them and understood them. It is like Lev Berdeichis when he saw a Jew who was greasing the wheels of his wagon with his tallis and tephillin and he was walking with the Rav of the city and the Rav said, "How terrible he is. He is desecrating the tephillin and the tallis." Rev Berdeichis instead looked up the G-d and said, "Oh, what a wonderful Jew he is. Even when he is working he is thinking about G-d and religion." We can look at things from two different levels and we have to look at them both simultaneously. Aaron and Moshe were both leaders of the Jewish people and when the Kohanim blessed the people they had to bless the people with the Kedusha. What is the Kedusha? With this aspect of religion which is forgiving and understanding and which tries to lift people up and to make them arrive at a higher standard, but it does it with love. That, of course, was the essence of the Chassidic movement when it started because the religious establishment, the elite, was too demanding and was not understanding and was too castigating. It did not understand the poverty of the people and the problems of the people. The Chassidim came in and just about swept over all over Eastern Europe because they were understanding and

knew the problems the people had and they asked them just to do one more mitzvah and one more mitzvah, and we see this in the Lubavitch movement. Of course, I do not agree with a lot of things in the Lubavitch movement, but the Lubavitch movement is the epitome of the Chassidic approach, that you confirm that the people are trying their best and get them just to improve a little bit and a little bit and a little bit, one more mitzvah at a time. This, of course, is why I remember in Hebrew school they used to tell us that you should not look at the Kohen when they Duchan. Of course, you are not supposed to turn your back on them either. That is a terrible disgrace and a terrible shame. We are just supposed to bow our heads when the Kohanim bless us, but we are not supposed to look at them. Why? They told us in Hebrew School that if you look at the Kohanim the first time you get blind in one eye. If you look at him the second time you get blind in the second eye. If you look at him a third time you will die. I was sort of a chutzpah kid in school and I said, "That's impossible." The teacher asked why. I said, "If you look at him the second time and you lose sight in both eyes, how can you look at him a third time?" Of course, this statement was not meant to be taken literally. This was meant to tell people that when they look at the Kohanim they have to realize that the Kohanim has taken his fingers and put them in the shape of only two fingers instead of four fingers to teach us that these two aspects of religion must be taken care of and looked at together, that the setting of standards and the love and the encouragement and the forgiveness and getting people to come back, but when the Kohen extends his hands with love many people misunderstand what's going on here. They say whatever my children do it is okay. I understand it. That was, of course, the great trouble with American Jewry. Parents said, "Oh, you don't want to go to shul. I'll go to shul for you. You don't want to give charity? I'll give charity for you. Whatever you do is fine. Just be happy." Even if a person would marry out of the faith without a conversion, just be happy, or if a person would actually

indulge in sexual deviant behavior, that's fine. Just be happy. Then, of course, it was destructive because we have to balance both the love of the people with the standards. You had both a Moshe and a Aaron. You need both a Rav and a Rebbe. If you have too much setting standards without understanding anything of the circumstances of the people you are going to discourage them and turn them off and alienate them. On the other hand, if you are understanding of everything then you have no standards, no morality, nothing for people to work for, nothing to make people to want to be better than they are right now. Therefore, we need both. We need to have the head and the heart. Moshe stood for the head and Aaron stood for the heart.

That's what we learn in this Haphtorah that when the angel first came to Noah's wife and the angel told her that she was going to have a son and she was barren and did not have any children, this angel told her that she should not drink wine anymore and that she should stay away from forbidden foods. She then told her husband about it. Her husband did not believe her and prayed that the angel would come back again. The angel did come back again and then he did not even actually believe that this was an angel, too, until the angel proved that he was an angel, and the rabbis say that Noach was an ignoramus because he asked the angel not what his wife and he should do for the baby but what the baby, as a Nazerite, should do. This, of course, was laid out in the Torah, so he should have just known this from the Torah, but the rabbis say that he was also an ignoramus because all he was interested in is what the angel should tell him that he should teach this boy and not what a home environment he should give him because he would think that the only thing that was important is what he would teach the boy, and actually you have to have a Péeahbota Neshoma to the soul and you have to appeal to the mind and the home environment is very, very important and Noach did not understand that. There are many Jews who came from wonderful home environments that influenced them greatly. However, their minds

were not filled. They did not have a good Jewish education so they wandered away from Judaism. On the other hand, there are certain individuals who had a good Jewish education but they had no practices at home. I remember meeting somebody who spent a lot of time teaching his son Talmud because he wanted his son to appreciate Talmud but they practiced nothing at home. There was no kashruth, no Shabbos, no shul even on Yom Kippur, so, of course, that learning fell by the wayside. You have to have learning that appeals both to the heart and the mind. The Jewish Neshoma and the Jewish head have to be filled with Jewish experiences if the Jewish people are to survive. Samson was a failure because Noach talked about the importance of Jewish education he was in Yomanes and could not even give his son a Jewish education so all he had was the nostalgia and good feeling that he got from his home. He had the love and concern of Aaron in his home but that was not enough to keep him Jewish.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a young man who was looking through a yearbook. There he saw one of the seniors, a guy who was noted for his social graces and how he was involved in everything, but it said underneath him that this is the man most likely to be in next year's yearbook. Of course, what it meant by that is he did not study and did not use his mind. That is why, too, when we talk about the people looking at the Kohanim they would make a mistake. They would think that they were only dealing with the Kedusha of Aaron, with the love of Aaron and not dealing also with the rigors of the mind. Jewish education must be there as well as a warm environment. That's why when we introduce the Kohen we say that this is the threefold blessing that is written in the Torah through Moshe, Your servant. What does Moshe have to do with this? Moshe, of course, has to be mentioned when there is Aaron because Moshe and Aaron go together. We need both the head and the heart, and without the head and the heart together we cannot have a Jewish future, but if you have both the head and heart together then rest assured we can have a Jewish future. Let us all hope and pray that

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we will fill the heads and hearts of our children with good Jewish education
and good Jewish experiences and with warmth and love so that our children will
want to be Jewish so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.

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In the Torah portion Naso, we have the priestly blessing. This is the most famous blessing in the whole world. It is used by many religions throughout the world. It consists of three verses: the first one has three words; the second five words; and the third seven words. The rabbis explain that the first blessing, which says, "May the Lord bless you and keep you," refers to material possessions. May G-d bless you with them, and may you possess them, and may they not possess you. So often it happens that the possessions which we have end up possessing us. We will do anything to maintain our possessions.

The second blessing, "May G-d shine His face upon you and be gracious unto you," speaks about intellectual attainments and having a pleasing personality.

The third blessing, "May G-d lift up His face to you and give you peace," speaks about wholeness and spirituality and feeling attached to others. It is strange that this priestly blessing is found in this Torah portion. After all, this Torah portion starts out by teaching us about two subclans of the Levites, how they were counted and what their duties were in taking apart the Tabernacle and putting it back together again. It also speaks about the importance of confessing

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our sins, and we learn about the wayward wife who was suspected of adultery. Then we learn about the Nazerite, and then we have the priestly blessing, and then, finally, we have the offerings of all the princes, the chiefs of every tribe of Israel on the day the Tabernacle was dedicated. Why should, right in the middle of all these things, the priestly blessing be plopped, so to speak?

There are three main reasons why we need to believe in G-d. The first one is ethical monotheism. Without a belief in G-d there really cannot be any ethics in the world. Cant was wrong; ethics do not flow from the autonomous man. Each person independently will not come up with an identical set of ethics. Hitler proved that to us all. His cabinet was composed of geniuses except for one. Everyone had a Ph.D. in his cabinet except for one person. The hotbed of Naziism was not the red necked community but the university community. We need G-d to anchor morality. We can rationalize everything away if we want, but the Ten Commandments stand outside a man. That's why the rubs say they were given on stone because stone you chisel from the outside. Metal is molded and shaped by heat from the inside. In fact, Spinoza calls his book on religion Ethics, and, by and large, in America that is how we define

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religion. We have adopted the civic religion of Spinoza where the purpose of religion is not to bring us closer to G-d, but to make us ethical and moral. The first of these lessons teach us that we have to be ethical. Our possessions should not possess us so that we are willing to do unethical things to keep them. There are three words in the first blessing because any time we have a business transaction we are involved, another person is involved, and G-d is there.

The second reason we need G-d is because we are never alone if G-d is with us. I am reminded of the story they tell about a young boy who went sailing with his father. They were shipwrecked. The boy was knocked unconscious. The father made it to the shore and carried the boy to a safe haven on the beach. When the boy recovered, he asked his father to show him the beach. His father did, but he could only find one set of footprints. The boy asked his father, "How did I make it to this grassy place since my footsteps are not on the beach?" The father answered, "Because I carried you, my son." G-d always carries us. No matter what problems we have, He is always there with us. When a person goes into the operating room, his family can only go so far, but he is not alone; G-d is with him. One of the reasons why I believe that these

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tragic shootings are taking place in our high schools is that our youngsters cannot stand to be alone. They cannot stand to be rejected by their peers.

They do not realize that they are never alone. If they are right with G-d, that is all that counts. It is curious to note that Judaism, which does not believe that suffering is redemptive but only instructive, has, by and large, not been affected by these type of problems. We believe that G-d sometimes make us suffer to show us that we made a mistake, and we must correct what we are doing.

Suffering is instructive, like the brilliant young man I met who decided he was not going to study this past year, and although he had very high SAT's, he could not get into college because he had such bad grades this last year. He was crestfallen. However, he has the opportunity now of studying at summer school, and I believe he will do well. His suffering was very instructive. Other religions which believe you cannot approach G-d unless you suffer belief that suffering is redemptive. It is curious to note that many Christian churches who teach this obviously are not teaching this lesson to these youngsters who are shooting up schools because they cannot stand any suffering at all. They do not realize that they are never alone. G-d is always with them. G-d shines His face upon us and make us gracious. Even if others do not see it, G-d sees it.

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There are five letters in the second blessing, which stand for the five books of Moses. If we uphold the five books of Moses, if we feel we are right with G-d, that is all that counts. G-d will never desert us. G-d tells us, "Don't be afraid of the barbs of your peers. Don't be afraid of persecution or discrimination. You know that G-d loves you and cares for you, and that is all that counts."

The third blessing is, "May G-d lift up His countenance to you and give you peace," seven letters. Seven, of course, is the number of spirituality in Judaism. We live in six physical dimensions: north, east, south, west, up, down, but we need a spiritual dimension because we also live in a spiritual dimension. That's why the seventh day is holy, and that is why the seventh month has Rosh Hashonna, Yom Kippur, Succot, Shmini Atzeres, and Simchat Torah. We are not alone, and we also are part of a greater whole. We are a link in a chain which is going to bring ultimate redemption to the world. Our life spans are very short. We cannot solve all the problems of the world as individuals, but working together with others, we can make a big difference. We have to always realize that we may not be able to accomplish everything, but as long as we try our best, that is all that counts. We must make sure that

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our link in the chain is strong, and that the next generation is trained to take up the reins from us, that they will be a strong link in a chain also.

The priestly blessing is placed in this Torah portion because this Torah portion teaches us the three reasons we need G-d. We learn how we are to confess our sins, especially if we have robbed and cheated someone. G-d gives us possessions, but He also wants to guard us from these possessions. We must be ethical. We also learn about the Nazerite, who the rabbis say many times became a Nazerite to overcome different character defects. We learn about the wayward wife, who was found alone with a man, although there were not sufficient witnesses to prove that she had done anything wrong. She does not even have to go through the process of drinking bitter waters. She could just get a divorce, but she knows she has done nothing wrong, and even though others may accuse her, she knows G-d is with her and nothing will happen to her. There are many steps along the way before she drinks the bitter water. She could just say she wants a divorce. G-d is always with us, and if we feel we are right, we do not have to worry about what other people say.

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In the beginning of the Torah portion, we learn about the duties of the Levites, how everybody had a job to do, and at the end we learn about the offerings of the princes to teach us that we are all part of a greater whole. We all need each other. Spirituality binds us to each other and elevates us. The priestly blessing teaches us that we have to be ethical, that we are never alone no matter what the world says about us, and that we are always part of a greater whole. It is important that we realize it, that we always have our priorities straight, otherwise our frustration can mount and we will lose sight of our real goals of life.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a famous professor who went to the train station to catch a train. He was accompanied by two students. They became engaged in an animated conversation. They suddenly noticed the train pulling out of the station. The young man ran and jumped on the train. He held out his hand and grabbed the hand of the young woman who was talking with them and swung her onto the train. Unfortunately, the professor missed the train. He grew very despondent and downcast. A woman standing beside him told him not to worry. After all, there would be another train in an hour.

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He looked at her and said, "Lady, you don't understand. These two students of mine just came down to the train station to see me off." Sometimes, too, we get carried away. We forget that the purpose of life is to help G-d redeem this world. This we can only do if we are ethical, if we realize that G-d is always with us, and if we realize we are all part of a greater whole. Let us hope and pray we will all realize this so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day.

Amen.

NOSO 2000
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion, Noso, we find many disparate elements. It seems strange that in this Torah portion we start out by learning about the requirements of the subclan of the Tribe of Levi. Then we learn about who can stay inside the camp. We learn about an embezzler who confesses his sin, and what he has to do. Then we learn about the wayward wife, and afterwards, we learn about the Nazerite, and stuck into all of this, we have the priestly blessing, the most famous blessing in the whole world. Then we have the offerings of the princes. It seems strange that all these things would be put together in one Torah portion.

What's more, if we look at Revii, the portion that is read for the fourth person called to the Torah, we will see that it is extra long. It has within it the story of the wayward wife, and Nazeriteship, and the priestly blessing. Why is it so long?

I think if we look carefully at all the parts of this Torah portion, we will notice that they are held together by one thing, and that is the Kohen, the priest. In the first portions, which deal with the responsibilities of two of the Levi subclans, we see that they were guided by Itamar, the son of Aaron. We also learn that the Kohen was the one who would determine whether a person was a leper or not and could return to the camp, and it was to the Kohen that the embezzler would come when he confessed his sin and brought his sacrifice and added a fifth to the principle which he had to repay.

In the fourth Torah reading, we learn how the Kohen was there to oversee the ceremony concerning the wayward wife. This ceremony of the wayward wife could not be forced upon

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a woman by any jealous husband. She had to be found in a compromising position with another man, with only one witness present. Jewish law demands two witnesses. If she was found in a hotel room with another man, she could claim she went there to interview for a job or something. Her husband had a right to be suspicious. However, the woman did not have to go through this ordeal. She could just say, "I want out of this marriage." This ceremony was to save the marriage, to calm the husband's jealous fears.

The Kohen also received the sacrifices of the Nazir when he returned back to daily life. The rabbis frowned on Naziriteships because the Nazirite agreed not to cut his hair or drink wine for a minimum of 30 days. He also could not come into contact with the dead. At the end of this period, the Nazirite was to bring sacrifices, and one of them was a sin offering. The rabbis explain that the reason a person became a Nazirite was because he could not control his appetites, and, therefore, took these special steps to rid himself of bad habits, especially drinking. The Kohen was there to help him to repair his bad inclinations.

Immediately afterwards, we learn about the priestly blessing. In this part of the Torah portion, we learn the main duties of the Kohen. The Kohen was to allow people to shed their guilt, and after they have done Teshuva, to regain their sense of self-worth and equilibrium. One of the principle reasons why people need religion is they need to be able to feel pure again after they have slipped, after they have sinned. In the beginning of the Torah portion, we learn about just routine ritual requirements of maintaining a Tabernacle, just like the rabbi

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involved in maintaining the synagogue. However, the main job of a Kohen was to make people whole again, to restore their self-esteem, to repair the damage they had done to themselves by sinning. The Kohen is to gain forgiveness for them, to allow them to once again regain a feeling of wholeness, but this again is only part of the Kohen's job. This is reactive. The Kohen is there to help raise up people who have fallen, but the main part of the Kohen's job should be proactive. That's why the priestly blessing is attached to the reading of the wayward wife and of the Nazerite. The Kohen should be proactive. He should be instilling in the people spirituality and the desire to elevate themselves so they will not stumble. He should bless them and cause them to bless others. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. He should teach people how to anticipate each other's needs, how to be understanding and sympathetic. He should encourage people to achieve high spiritual levels, even if they have not actually fallen yet, but they can all rise higher.

The last part of the Torah portion deals with the twelve princes of each tribe, how they each brought identical offerings. This indeed seems strange. Why should the Torah mention the same offerings over and over again? The answer is that although it looked like identical offerings, and objectively they were, each prince had to work hard to come to the same spiritual level. The sea looks level, but actually the sea has varying depths. It has hills and valleys, and although it looks level, to maintain this level different quantities of water must be beneath it. The princes each had to work on their own characters to make sure they lived elevated lives. Some people are born with terrible tempers, like Moshe Rabbeinu, and they

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have to learn how to change their tempers into righteous indignation, etc. Each human being is different, and to reach a high spiritual level, each of them has to do different things and work on their characters in different ways.

This is also true of marriage. Every marriage is unique and special. In fact, one of the biggest mistakes that young couples make when they get married is they try to replicate their parents' marriage. After all, the only marriage a bride knows is that of her parents, so she expects her husband to act like her father, and the only marriage a husband knows is that of his parents, so he expects his wife to act like his mother. They never do, and, therefore, there are problems from the very beginning. Each couple has to realize that each marriage is unique and special, and that they should not try to reconstitute their parents' marriage. In some marriages, the wife does the bookkeeping, and in some the husband does. In some marriages, the husband does the cooking; in others, the wife does. How the duties are arranged depends, but the husband and wife have to be there for each other. They have to help each other over the hard spots in life. Love is composed of sexual and emotional attraction. Introverts marry extroverts, and extroverts marry introverts. Givers marry takers. A marriage is never 50/50. Sometimes it is 60/40 or maybe maximum 75/25, but each party must give to the marriage. They must be there for each other, and they must be there not only reacting to problems. True, it is fun to make up after a spat, but that should not be what the marriage is about, having spats so you can make up. Each one should try to lift each other up, as the Kohen does for all the Jewish people. The Kohen is not just there to

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help people regain their self-esteem, but he is there to help elevate each of us so each spouse should try to elevate the other and be sensitive to each others' needs. A spouse should not be so oblivious to the other spouse's needs that he or she never wants to be there for them.

Some spouses are so afraid of losing their independence that they are not willing to do anything for the other spouse unless they feel like it. That's a sure prescription for divorce.

I rarely counsel divorce, but if there is violence or one spouse has no regard for the other spouse, then there is no hope for that marriage, and divorce would be the only answer. We know that if one spouse thinks everything is due to him and nothing is due to his or her partner, then that marriage is also doomed, or if one spouse tries to completely control the other, then that marriage is doomed also. It is important that the partners in a marriage help each other overcome life's hard spots, and they should be there for their spouse always, always elevating each other so they always know they are much better married than they would ever be apart.

I am reminded of the story they tell about Al Gore, George W. Bush, and Bill Gates, who went out in a rowboat. The boat sank and they all drowned. They came before G-d sitting on His throne. G-d looked at Al Gore and said, "What do you believe?" Al Gore replied, "I believe in education and in the environment." G-d said, "Come sit near Me." G-d then said to George W. Bush, "What do you believe?" George Bush replied, "I believe in a balanced budget and a strong military." G-d said, "Come sit near Me." G-d then said to Bill Gates, "What do you believe?" Bill Gates replied, "I believe You are sitting in my chair."

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If all one of the spouses wants to do is lord it over the other, that marriage will not work, but if each spouse is there for each other, if each spouse is always trying to help fulfill the emotional needs of the other, and they are both trying to elevate each other, then that marriage will be a good marriage. Let us hope that all our marriages will be good so the Mashiach will come quickly in our day. Amen.