

# Taking Initiative

## Parasha Naso

Stem Mishnah - pg 315

1 On the seventh day, the prince of the children of Efraim — Elishama ben Amihud.

(Bamidbar 7:48)

Efraim is the strength of my head... (Tehillim 60:9) — this refers to the prince of Efraim, who brought his offering at the dedication of the altar on Shabbos, as the verse says, *On the seventh day, the prince of the children of Efraim*. We know that it was Shabbos, for we have earlier<sup>1</sup> demonstrated that the princes started to bring their offerings on Sunday...

(Bamidbar Rabbah 14:1)

2

The verse quoted at the start of this *midrash*, "Efraim is the strength of my head," refers to the incident at the end of Yaakov's life when he blessed his grandsons, Menasheh and Efraim. He chose to bless Efraim before Menasheh, even though Menasheh was older. Thus "Efraim is the strength of my head" — Efraim was given precedence over Menasheh. This *midrash* implies that it was only because Yaakov favored Efraim that Elishama could offer his gift on Shabbos. For ordinarily the offering could not override the laws of Shabbos, but somehow the power which Yaakov had invested in the tribe of Efraim enabled their offering to be an exception.

4

The name *Menasheh* finds its root meaning in *forgetting*, or distancing oneself from the past. This represents a particular sort of Divine service, in which one divests oneself of all manner of bad traits, hoping to achieve perfection in their stead. *Efraim*, on the other hand, finds its root meaning in *fruitfulness*. This is a different style of progression toward spiritual goals, in which one focuses on developing good traits and performing mitzvos. These two distinct types of service are concisely described by the verse:

*Depart from evil and do good...*

(Tehillim 34:15)

In our context, Menasheh is "depart from evil," whereas Efraim is "do good."

5 If we recall the episode mentioned earlier, when Yaakov blessed Efraim and Menasheh, we remember that in actual fact Yosef, the father of the two brothers, wanted them to be blessed in order of age — Menasheh before Efraim. But Yaakov refused, instead blessing the younger before the older. Understanding this apparent dispute between Yosef and Yaakov will be crucial to the whole of our study.

\* Yosef wanted Menasheh to precede Efraim; that is, he wanted events to follow the order described by the verse: first "depart from evil" and only then "do good." This, as we would expect, reflected the character of Yosef, who had spent his whole life struggling against bad to achieve greatness.

3

To begin our study, we must examine the natures of the two sons of Yosef, Menasheh and Efraim. As always, the name of a person reveals much about his essence, and in these two cases, we are given this information explicitly:

*Yosef named the firstborn Menasheh, "for God has made me forget all of my trouble and all of my father's house." He named the second Efraim, "for God has made me fruitful in the land of my oppression."*

(Bereishis 41:51-52)

6

Yaakov, however, chose to bless Efraim before Menasheh. Within the context we have defined, this represents a lifestyle in which one first concentrates on performing good deeds. Then, due to the influx of holiness generated by one's new mode of life, any evil traits will automatically dissipate. In Yaakov's view, this approach to life was preferable to his son's mode of waiting until the bad has been destroyed before worrying about good deeds. In Yaakov's opinion (which we may assume is the norm) this is the general rule in Jewish life: we must begin our observance of the Torah by seeking mitzvos and learning, assigning a secondary role to eliminating evil. This will follow later, for as the holiness of a Torah lifestyle enters our beings, any bad will be consumed or expelled.

7

The problem with Yosef's approach to life is evident from examining its application to Shabbos. The Shabbos is very holy, and, as such, perhaps we should engage in great spiritual preparations to be ready to accept its holiness. The trouble with this is, who could ever say that he is ready? Surely, still more preparations could be performed. The inevitable result of this is that we would never consider ourselves ready, and hence, we would never have Shabbos! Instead, we each do our best during the week, and Shabbos just comes; somehow, we are ready to receive its majesty. This means that an ordinary person who follows Yosef's approach will spend his whole life attempting to eliminate bad traits from his personality, but will never reach the point when he feels that he is finished with that stage and ready to move on. As such, he will always remain stuck at the "depart from evil" stage, unable to "do good" at all. Instead, we follow Yaakov's view — getting on with a life of mitzvos and Torah study, confident that we will ultimately achieve success both as *doers* and *deparaters*.



Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: When a man or woman will express themselves to vow the vow of a nazir, to consecrate themselves to Hashem (6:2).

Parashas Naso discusses the laws of the nazir, a person who, by making a vow, has willingly accepted upon himself a status which prohibits one from partaking of any grape derivative, from cutting his hair and from contracting tumas meis, defilement through contact with a human corpse. A number of commentators see the word יָפְלָא in the above verse as expressing the essence of the nazir's achievement. Sforno, who understands the word as connoting separation, comments:

He separates himself from the vanities and [earthly] indulgences of humanity. — לְגַדֵּר נָזִיר נָזִיר — To be removed and separated from common indulgences... in order to be committed to God, to occupy himself in His Torah, to walk in His ways and to cleave to Him.

Ibn Ezra relates the word יָפְלָא to פָּלָא, wonder:

He [the nazir] will do something wondrous, for most people pursue their physical desires.

Thus, the goal of the nazir is to become a master over himself. His

means of accomplishing this is by abstaining from that which is permissible but unnecessary. In truth, the nazir's goal should be that of every Jew, as is summed up in the famous comment of Ramban to the words קְדָשִׁים תִּהְיוּ, You shall be holy (Vayikra 19:2): קְדַשׁ עֲצֻמְךָ, Sanctify yourself with that which is permitted to you. Ramban explains that it is possible for a person to be lustful and overindulgent while technically staying within the confines of Halachah. Such a person is considered a נָבֵל בְּרִשׁוֹת הַתּוֹרָה, a despicable person within the framework of Torah, for such behavior is contrary to the refined conduct expected of Hashem's people. Thus we are commanded: קְדָשִׁים תִּהְיוּ.

Through avoidance of תַּעֲנוּגִים, earthly indulgences, a person can attain lofty levels of spirituality. Regarding the nazir, the Torah writes: בִּי נָזִיר אֶלְקֵינוּ עַל רֵאשׁוֹ הַיְּתוֹד (6:7). Ba'al HaTurim offers an amazing comment: Through being a nazir, one can merit that the Divine Presence will come to rest upon him. However, some might misconstrue the nazir's Ruach HaKodesh, Divine inspiration, as a manifestation of the forbidden practice of communicating with the dead (see Devarim 18:11). Therefore, the Torah prohibited the nazir from having any contact with the dead for the duration of his nezirus.

By restraining one's earthly desires, one can attain Ruach HaKodesh!

21

והבי' בזה דהנה תכלית קבלת התורה היא כמאה"כ (שמות יט) ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש. וענין גוי קדוש ישנו בב' דרגות. האחת, שיהודי עושה את כל עניני העולם בקדושה בלתי לה' לבדו, שכל מה שברא הקב"ה מעניני העולם, אותם הענינים שצריך לעשותם, הם אצלו ככהן האוכל קדשים שכהנים אוכלים ובעלים מתכפרים (פסחים נט:), שהוא אוכל בשר ושותה יין והכל בלתי לה' לבדו, וזוהי המדרגה העליונה של קדוש כמו שמבאר זאת בספר מסילת ישרים. אמנם מי שעדיין אינו בדרגה זו, שפחו עליו יצרו ואינו יכול לעשות כל עניני עוה"ו בלתי לה' לבדו, לגביי הדרך היא שיפרוש לגמרי מכל הנאות עוה"ו. והרי דזה שבידו לקדש את עניני עוה"ו אם הוא פורש מהם נקרא חושא, כיון שזוהי תכלית בריאת העולם, שהיה רצון העליון שמכל עניני עוה"ו יקריב יהודי קרבן לה'. אך זה שאינו מסוגל לכך שכל עניני עוה"ו יהיו בקדושה, צריך הוא כדי לכונן דעותיו ולתקן את מעשיו לפרוש לגמרי מהנאות.

20 נתיבות שלום - כ"ה - ט

והיינו שכאשר עומדת בפני האדם השאלה באיזה דרך יבחר לעבוד את ה', אם להתנער ולפרוש לגמרי מכל עניני עוה"ו, ולא יהנה במאומה מעוה"ו, או שיעסוק בעניני הנאות עוה"ו ויגביהם להשי"ת, מה עדיף טפי. הרי ממאמר זה בתו"א עולה כי תכלית הבריאה ותכלית עבודת ה' היא שיהודי יעסוק בכל הענינים הגשמיים וירם את הכל לשם ה', שאו הריהו מתבר תחוננים בעליונים. אמנם הדרך לפרוש ולהתנער מעניני עוה"ו היא דרך יותר קלה, אבל המדרגה היותר גבוהה היא להעלות את כל עניני עוה"ו להשי"ת שזוהי התכלית הנרצית. ולכן הסודר הוא בתחלה פרשת נזיר שמקבל עליו לפרוש ולהתנער מכל הנאות עוה"ו, נזיר להזיר לה', ואח"כ מוסיף והולך במדרגה יותר גבוהה, פרשת ברכת כהנים ופרשת הנשיאים, שירים את כל הענינים הגשמיים להשי"ת וישמרך מן המזיקין.

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Thus said the princes, 'Let the community volunteer what they will volunteer, and we will make up the remainder.' Since they saw that the community had then brought everything, they were now the first to volunteer.

It seems that the princes felt they had been wrong in waiting to complete whatever would be missing from the Sanctuary. Yet it still remains to understand what was wrong with this approach, that at least had the advantage of assuring that every essential object would be found for the Sanctuary. In fact they donated the precious stones for the High Priest's vestments thus providing the last essential item. Was this not better than donating things that others might also donate?

In the second book of Samuel, we read of King David's desire to build a permanent Temple in place of the Tabernacle that had until then served as the Sanctuary.

*And the King said to the prophet Nathan, "See, now, I am dwelling in a house of Cedars, and the Ark of God dwells within a curtain".<sup>2</sup>*

King David felt that it was not fitting that the Ark of God should be in a tent while the king dwelt in a palace. However, the prophet tells him that he will not build the Temple, since he has waged many wars and shed much blood. In his son's reign there would be peace, and his son would build the Temple of God. The Midrash notes an additional implication in Nathan's words to David:

*"It is not YOU who will build." You gave precedence to your honour over My honour, for it was only when you saw yourself dwelling in a house of cedars that you demanded the construction of the Beth HaMikdash. But your son Solomon will give precedence to My honour over his honour, as it is said, "The Temple was completed" and only later "His house did, Solomon build".<sup>3</sup>*

24 The very fact that prompted David to request the construction of the Divine Temple caused God to refuse it to him. For he felt the lack of an appropriate Sanctuary only when there was his opulent palace with which to compare it. Had his desire to glorify the House of God been spontaneous he would not have needed the construction of another edifice to show him what was lacking.

This same shortcoming can be seen in the original attitude of the tribal princes towards their own donations to the Sanctuary in the wilderness. When a demand is felt, we will supply it. If there is a shortage, we will make up for it. Had the princes shown a spontaneous and instinctive desire to offer some of their wealth to God, then, instead of waiting to find out the demand and the shortage, they would immediately have volunteered to contribute.

The Torah required this spontaneity, as Moses is told:

דבר אל בני ישראל ויקחו לי תרומה מאת כל איש אשר ידבנו לבו תקחו את תרומתי.

*Speak to the Israelites that they take for Me a donation; from each man whose heart prompts him shall you take the donation for Me.<sup>4</sup>*

✦ Hence in our Sidra we find the princes changing their approach and bringing their offerings immediately, thereby showing to all the tribes the right attitude.

Maharal<sup>12</sup> continues his exposition and explains a further Talmudic passage on this topic.

בשלשה דברים גדולה גמילות חסדים מן הצדקה שהצדקה בממונו גמילות חסדים בין בממונו בין בגופו צדקה לעניים גמילות חסדים בין לעניים ובין לעשירים צדקה לחיים גמילות חסדים בין לחיים ובין למתים.

*In these three respects acts of kindness are greater than charity. Charity is done with money, kindness either by bodily exertion or with money. Charity is for the poor, kindness either for the poor or for the rich. Charity is for the living, kindness either for the living or for the dead.<sup>13</sup>*

25 The idea that the Sanctuary and its vessels must be made with a spontaneous desire is seen by Maharal in the verse in the Torah:

ואם מזבח אבנים תעשה לי לא תבנה אתהו גוית.

*And, if you make a stone altar for Me do not build it of hewn stone.<sup>5</sup>*

R. Yishmael is quoted by the Mechilta and Rashi<sup>6</sup> as explaining that here the word **ואם** does not mean "and if" as translated above, but "and when" since the building of a stone altar was obligatory. R. Yishmael cites two other passages where the meaning of **אם** is not "if" but "when". They concern lending money to the poor<sup>7</sup> (**אם כסף תלוה את עמי**) and bringing the Omer offering, the first fruits of the annual barley crops, to the Sanctuary<sup>8</sup> (**ואם תקריב מנחת בכורים**). In these cases too, the meaning is not "If you lend money," and "If you offer the first crop offering" since lending money to the poor and bringing the offering are obligatory. The meaning, therefore, is "When you lend money" and "When you offer". The Maharal asks, in his commentary on Rashi,<sup>9</sup> why the Torah employs in these three cases a word that in all other instances signifies a voluntary act rather than the word

✦ **כי**. The Maharal answers that in these three cases, commandments though they are, fulfilment depends on this performance in a voluntary spirit as if they stemmed from man's own initiative. The building of the altar involves worship of God bringing offerings, which to be meaningful, must come from man's own free will. Similarly, loans to the poor must be inspired by compassion and the Omer, an offering of thankfulness for the new harvest, that must reflect the nation's heartfelt gratitude, in addition to its obedience to a command from Above. To say, "I thank you because I am commanded to do so," negates any feeling of thankfulness.

26 This theme is developed further by the Maharal in another work, *Nethivoh Olam*.<sup>10</sup> In a section devoted to *Gemilluth Chasadim* (kindly actions), he refers to the following Talmudic passage:

*R. Acha said, "What is the meaning of the verse, "After the Lord your God shall you go". Can man go after the Divine presence? The meaning is "Follow His ways". Just as He clothes the naked (as he clothed Adam and Eve), you too should clothe the naked. Just as He visits the sick (as He visited Abraham), you too should visit the sick. Just as He buries the dead (as He buried Moses), you too should act likewise. Just as He comforts mourners (as He comforted Isaac) you too should act likewise."<sup>11</sup>*

The Maharal asks why all R. Acha's illustrations of God's ways concern acts of kindness. Is not justice also one of God's attributes? The answer given by the Maharal is that the term **הלכו** ('go after' or 'follow' or 'walk') means moving of your own volition. Justice is a requirement independent of human

✦ volition, for the very circumstance demands justice. Hence it is the need for justice which moves man to carry out the act of justice. Acts of kindness, however, which are over and above the requirement of justice, derive from man's desire to be kind and to help his fellow. Therefore it is in respect of this attribute of kindness that man is said to be going (of his volition) in the ways of God.

The distinctions relate not only to the scope of these two virtues, explains the Maharal. They show a fundamental difference between them. Charity originates in the need of the recipient (the affliction of poverty) which is relieved by charity. If there were no poor, there would be no charity. But kindness stems from the bestower, from the innate goodness of human nature that seeks an outlet in acts of kindness. It is spontaneous, not the result of external pressures.

30-27 דף 78 (א)

29

The classic example of *Gemilluth Chasadim* in the Torah is our Patriarch Abraham. Even though there were no hungry people at hand, and even though he was sick, he sat at the entrance of his tent in the midday sun looking for wayfarers to feed. The fact that he was sent angels to feed, though they were actually not in need of anything, comes to teach us the value of this desire to do good to others as part of man's

nature, and from this intrinsic desire true *Gemilluth Chasadim* derives.

31

This was the virtue required for the building of the Sanctuary and for the building of the Beth Hamikdash; the spontaneous urge to give, not prompted externally by the needs of the Sanctuary or by the sense of shame stemming from the opulence of one's own abode. These were the points of criticism levelled at the princes and at King David.

חוכו רצוף אהבה.

*Its midst was paved with love.*<sup>14</sup>

32 Stan Hiskewal

Returning to our original subject, we can now appreciate why Efraim's offering pushed aside the Shabbos prohibitions. Yaakov's special se-

lection of Efraim over Menasheh meant that the emphasis in Jewish life was forever placed on "doing good." When the prince of Efraim brought his offering, this was an act of great generosity and a shining example of the preference for starting the Divine worship of one's tribe with a positive act. This is indicated by the fact that Elishama brought his offering even though it was Shabbos. The Divine wisdom underscored the rationale behind this departure from normative halachah by arranging it that Efraim and no other tribe was scheduled to bring their offering on Shabbos.

Of course, this emphasis on doing good does not apply only to the members of Efraim — it is, since the blessings administered by Yaakov, a universal rule, applicable to every member of *klal Yisrael*. This is what is meant by the *Sifri*, which claims that any one of the tribes could have offered on Shabbos had it been necessary. Once Yaakov had determined the suitable path for all of his descendants, any one of them could have and would have brought their offerings on Shabbos.

הווא יושב פתח האהל כחום היזב. פרשיי  
לפי שראוה מצטער שלא היו אורחים  
באים הברא המלאכים וכו'. הא דהצטער אברהם  
על שלא היו אורחים ולא יכול לקיים מצוה  
הכנסת אורחים, הוא המטה לכאורה, דוא ליכא  
שום מעלה בצער זה כיון דלא שייך חיוב  
כשליכא אורחים, ועדיף מאנוס כשהיה חיוב  
אבל נאנס מלקיימה שיש דאי להצטער, אבל  
הכא ליכא חיוב כלל, דמי לכאורה לאחד  
שצטער בימי החול על שאין היום שבת, שלא  
שייך זה כלל. וצ"ל דהוא מצד עצם האהבה  
לחסד כדבארתי בקרא דאם כסף תלה דאיכא  
מצוה מיוחדת שהאדם יתאזה לעשות חסד, ולכן  
הוא כמו שכשארם מתאזה לאכול וכדומה  
מדברים גשמיים, שאף כשלא יהיו לו ולא יוכל  
להשיגם נמי לא יסגי ליה להסיר תאוהו כיון  
שלא ימלא תאוהו, ובמדרגה כזה היה רצון  
אברהם לקיים מצוה החסד, שכן הוא מצוה  
התורה. ומצינו עוד אהבה כזו במשה בקיום הג'  
ערי מקלט שאף שעדיין לא נתקיים המצוה עד  
שפירשו כל הששה [מכות ט ב], מ"מ מצד  
אהבה עשה, אף שלכאורה אין בזה מצוה, אבל  
עכ"פ שייכות וקשר להמצוה איכא בזה. וכן הא  
דטמאים לגפש שבקשו בדבר הפסח שישחטו  
עבורם [במדבר ט ז], אף שא"א ממש כיון דהם  
טמאים ורק שלא יפסל משום לטהורים ולטמאים  
אבל הם אין להם כלום, אבל מצד אהבה צריך  
לעשות איזה שייכות אף שפטור וא"א לצאת  
בהמעשה.

- Summary:  
Model of Ephraim and Menashe  
Aspect of sin  
Stealing- removes oneself completely from sin  
Sotah- Everlasting and fruitful bond with Hashem  
Aspect of Holiness  
Nazir – removal from physical pleasures  
Princes- taking positive imitative  
Lesson:  
Be proactive, rather than reactive.