

Toronto Torah

Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Naso

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Society on the Move

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

Parshat Naso seems to include a variety of unconnected topics. It begins with the counting of families from the tribe of Levi and the descriptions of their work in transporting the Mishkan. It continues with the commandment to remove the impure from the camp of the Mishkan. It then discusses the law of repaying an object stolen from a convert, the laws of the unfaithful wife, and the laws of the nazir, and it ends with the blessing by the kohanim. Is there a thread that connects all of these different topics, or is this just a list of miscellaneous laws which don't fit anywhere else?

Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah HaKohen Kook, son of the famous Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, suggests that our parshah focuses on the laws needed for a journey. In a collection of his sermons on the weekly parshah, he says: "There is a fundamental difference between home and the road ... While traveling there are many complications, troubles and fears, and also spiritual confusions... Thus, when travelling on the road, there is a need for meticulous preparations" (*Sichot Haratzit* a, Bamidbar, P. 45-46).

Based on this, Rabbi Tzvi Yehudah explains why the laws of the unfaithful wife and the nazir are located together with the detailed account of the Jews' journey in the desert. Moving from place to place puts great strain on social frameworks; both family and individuals find themselves in uncharted territory, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. That calls

for a strengthening of these frameworks. It is to this end that the Torah includes the laws which settle differences and restore peace between husband and wife, as well as the law of nazir, to provide a framework for those who feel they need to set stricter limits.

While this explanation is compelling, we are left wondering about the place of the other elements mentioned in the parshah: the removal of the impure from the camp, theft from a convert, and the blessing by the kohanim.

We might suggest an extension of – and perhaps a slight revision to – the explanation offered by Rav Tzvi Yehudah. The journey through the desert was not merely made up of a series of geographical shifts; the Jews were going through a fundamental change in all aspects of life. Just months after accepting the Torah, and a little more than a year after their exodus from Egypt, they were required to stand as a firm and resolute nation, divided efficiently into tribes and families, each one knowing its place and role – and ready to take on the mission of conquering the land of Israel. This transformation is far from easy, especially for a people that was enslaved for more than two hundred years. This great reformation of society was bound to leave behind some individuals who were less capable – for objective or subjective reasons – of finding their place in the new social structure; it is these men and women whom our parshah addresses, those who struggle

behind as society moves forward.

When looking at our parshah with this view in mind, we may identify two themes that the Torah conveys to us:

- From the perspective of society, we must find the delicate balance between defending society from the dangers posed by those who intentionally oppose its norms – such as the impure metzora and zav (see Sefer HaChinuch 178), and the need to protect and help those on the outskirts of society who are often not fully integrated – such as the childless convert.
- From the viewpoint of the individual, the Torah recognizes that some people look for the unique, special and sometimes adventurous side of life. In times of shifting and change, these personalities may be inclined to explore the boundaries of social frameworks, and sometimes to break them. Through the laws of the wayward wife and the nazir, the Torah indicates that while there is room for individuality and personal uniqueness, as with the nazir, these inclinations must be channeled in a way that upholds society and does not break it, as in the case of the sotah.

Finally, the parshah ends with the blessing by the kohanim, blessing us all with Shalom: the coming together of the whole nation, to build a better, healthier, holier society, living in G-d's light.

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Will we see you on June 22 at our Annual Dinner?

For information: Call 416-783-6960 or go to www.torontotorah.com/june22

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Two Scholars Who Were in Our Town and Other Novellas

S. Y. Agnon

Toby Press, English (2014)

Edited by R' Jeffrey Saks

Note: We received a free reviewer's copy.

About the Author

Shemuel Yosef Czaczkes was born in Buczac, Galicia, in 1888. His father, an ordained rabbi and Tchortkover chasid, worked in the fur trade. Shemuel Yosef received Jewish and secular education, and he began to publish his writing in his teens.

In 1908, Czaczkes made aliyah to Yafo; he took a new Hebrew surname: *Agnon*, from a story of his, *Agunot*. He would come to be known by his initials, as "S.Y. Agnon". While in Yafo, Agnon became close with Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, despite ceasing careful observance of mitzvot. Five years later he moved to Germany, where he met his wife, Esther. He gained Zalman Schocken as a patron, and he became close with writers Chaim Nachman Bialik and Achad ha'Am. In 1924 Agnon returned to Israel, moving to Talpiyot, and he returned to the full practice of Judaism.

Agnon soon became a leading figure in modern Hebrew literature. He published in many genres: novels and short stories, from drama to political satire to fantasy. In 1966, four years before his death, Agnon was awarded the Nobel

Prize for Literature. His Nobel Banquet speech, loaded with citations from Tanach, Talmud, halachah, and the siddur, is probably the only Nobel speech to mention "poskim" and to pray for "a redeemer [to] come to Zion". The text is available at <http://bit.ly/1YoGfRv>.

Rabbi Saks, editor of this edition, lectures frequently on Agnon; his classes are available at www.webyeshiva.org.

About this book

Two Scholars presents highly readable English translations of the following stories:

- *Two Scholars*, here in English for the first time, depicts a clash between two Torah scholars, based on a talmudic passage (Ta'anit 8a) which describes scholars who are not at peace with each other.
- *In the Heart of the Seas* describes a chassidic group's lengthy journey from Galicia to the Land of Israel. Beyond the particular trip it describes, this is a story of love of the land of Israel.
- *In the Prime of Her Life* is a story of frustrated love. Rabbi Saks notes that the story contains many parallels and allusions to the Book of Ruth.
- *Tehilla* features the life story of a 104-year old Jerusalemite woman, as told in retrospect in the 1920's.

As Rabbi Saks writes, it is also a "love story for the Old City of Jerusalem."

Is this Torah study?

S. Y. Agnon's Nobel-winning writing cites Tanach and midrash, and his images draw on classic Jewish texts as well as the stories of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov. His themes often come from the world of Eastern Europe in which he grew up, and quite a few of his stories include Torah scholars and take place in and around *batei midrash* (study halls). It is clear why Dr. Chaim Chamiel recommended the work of Agnon for the education of observant Jewish youth; this is very worth reading.

In the *Toby Press* edition, Rabbi Saks adds endnotes to the text, flagging and at times explaining Agnon's references to biblical verses, midrashic imagery and historical figures. These will enable deeper study of his references. But all of this notwithstanding, the *Toby Press Agnon Library* edition is not yet the one which will turn reading Agnon into Torah study for the average reader. We may draw important lessons from these powerful stories, and significant Torah scholarship went into writing them, but we will need a more thoroughly annotated edition in order to truly appreciate the Torah messages found within.

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613 Mitzvot: 521: Show No Mercy

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

In a lecture to his Herut Party in 1951, Menachem Begin observed that the supremacy of law is, "a characteristic of our nation's *esprit*, that in an entire historical period [that of the שופטים] the nation's leaders and rescuers have been awarded the crown of 'judge of all things'." And indeed, the Torah presents many mitzvot ensuring that justice will be applied fairly, and criminals will be punished.

According to the Torah's mitzvot, all litigants are entitled to equal treatment under the law (Sefer haChinuch #81), and judges are required to take practical steps to ensure that each trial operates fairly (#233, 234, 235). All accused parties are to be treated impartially, regardless of social and economic status (#409, 411), and we are taught to ensure access to justice for all who have claims (#491). Our judges are warned, though, not to mix mercy with judgment (#79), and to carry out sentenced penalties without hesitation. This last law is stated in Devarim 19:21, "And your eye shall not have mercy," and it is recorded by Sefer haChinuch as the Torah's 521st mitzvah.

As Sefer haChinuch presents it, this 521st mitzvah is, "To refrain from having mercy upon a person who killed another or removed one of his limbs. The judge may not say, 'This pauper who cut off someone's hand or blinded his eye did not do so intentionally,' having compassion and mercy for him so that he will not pay for his crime... For if we will not punish vandals and eradicate evil from our midst, each person will

swallow up the next, and our lands will not be civilized."

A similar theme is found in Sefer haChinuch #49, where the anonymous author notes that our courts are not responsible to mete out Divinely perfect justice. Rather, they are commissioned to create laws of punishment so that civilized society will be able to function and flourish, without fear of aggression.

Rambam records this mitzvah in his list of mitzvot, writing, "The Torah's 279th prohibition is an instruction to judges not to have mercy upon someone who killed another, or removed one of his limbs." Nonetheless, strangely, Ramban (Added prohibition #13) wrote that Rambam omitted the mitzvah "of not sparing the life of an intentional murderer"!

Some suggest that Ramban simply possessed a different edition of Rambam's text, without this mitzvah. (Tashbetz, Zohar haRakia on the 613 mitzvot) However, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (Hilchot Rotzeiach) suggested that Rambam's formulation emphasized the prohibition against having mercy, which is why Rambam did not distinguish between the penalties for murder and maiming. Ramban, on the other hand, emphasized carrying out the actual penalty, and so he enumerated separate mitzvot for punishing the murderer with death, and punishing the one who maims with financial penalties.

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Biography

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

Based on a biography by Russell Levy

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz was born in 1782 in Posen, where his father, Rabbi Gedaliah Lipschitz, was the Chief Rabbi. In his service as the Chief Rabbi of Dessau and then Danzig, both part of the nascent Prussian Empire, Rabbi Lipschitz had a great deal of contact with modern science and dealt with apparent conflicts between Judaism and new scientific theories. In his *Drush Or haChaim*, a transcription of a sermon he delivered in 1842, Rabbi Lipschitz addressed the possibility that the universe might be older than 6000 years old. This thought was based on modern advances in geological stratigraphy and fossil discoveries. (Charles Lyell's groundbreaking book on geology, *Principles of Geology*, was published in 1830 and translated to German shortly thereafter; scientists began searching for dinosaur fossils in earnest in 1815, and the term dinosaur was coined in 1842.) Rabbi Lipschitz also wrote about evolution, describing how traits endowed to the first donkey were expressed in its descendant, the donkey of Bilaam.

Rabbi Lipschitz was known to lead an ascetic life. He wrote extensively; his most celebrated work is his commentary on the mishnah, *Tiferet Yisrael*. Also identified as *Mishnayot Yachin uBoaz*, this commentary is subdivided into two parts: Yachin, which is a more general commentary, and Boaz, which is more analytic (see Melachim I 7:21 for the origin of the names Yachin and Boaz). Rabbi Lipschitz also wrote *Shevilei haRakia* on astronomy, commentaries to Shulchan Aruch and Mishneh Torah, and many responsa.

Perhaps one of his most interesting essays is (Avot 3:1, Boaz) is about the value of all human beings, where he identifies specific non-Jews who benefitted the world in profound ways. Specifically, he praises Johannes Gutenberg for inventing the printing press, Edward Jenner for inventing the smallpox vaccine, Johann Reuchlin who protected the Jews from Emperor Maximilian II, and Sir Francis Drake for saving Europe from starvation by introducing the potato (this claim is a bit tenuous historically).

Rabbi Lipschitz passed away on September 19, 1860. Among his children was the famed Rabbi Baruch Isaac Lipschitz.

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Torah and Translation

Four Destructive Necessities

Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz, Tiferet Yisrael to Avot 3:1

Translated from the Hebrew by Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

[משנה אבות ג': רבי דוסא בן הרכינס אומר שינה של שחרית ויין של צהרים ושיחת ילדים ושיבת בתי כנסיות של עמי הארץ מוציאים את האדם מן העולם]:

ר' דוסא בן הרכינס אומר. זכר ד' דברים שצריכים מאוד לבריאות הגוף ולהשלמת האדם, ואפ"ה כשלא יזהר בהן יאבד על ידן עולמו:

סה) שינה של שחרית. משל לכל כובד ועצלות, והרי מיעוטו יפה וצריך מאוד לבריאות הגוף שינוח אחר גייעתו, אבל מי שישן כל הלילה, אין לו שום התנצלות, דהרי כבר נח כל הלילה:

סו) ויין של צהרים. משל לרדיפת התענוגים, כשהוא בלי צורך לחזק הגוף, דהנה היין הוא מבחר התענוגים, מדנותו כח חיות לגוף, אבל רק מיעוטו יפה, לשמח הנפש, אבל רובו קשה, דמבלבל השכל...

סז) ושיחת ילדים. הוא משל לשחוק והתלות, שג"כ מיעוטו יפה, להבליג ולשמח הנפש [פסחים ק"ז א'], אבל רק עם אנשים גדולים, שיש במילי דבדיותא עמהם דברי השכל, וכמ"ש ועלהו לא יבול [וכסוכה כ"א ב'], אמנם שיחת ילדים, הן מסתמא דברי צחוק והתול בלי לחלוחית תבונה ודעת, לא ישמחו הנפש, רק יבלבלו תהלוכות השכל:

סח) ושיבת בתי כנסיות של עמי הארץ. משל לשיחה בטילה, הוא ג"כ מיעוטו יפה, אחר שהתעמל האדם בחכמה, ראוי לו להשתעשע קצת בין רעיו בדברים של מה בכך, דמדא"צ לזה התחזקות השכל, תנוח הנפש על ידן כמו שינוח הגוף ע"י השינה, אבל זה רק בין אנשים נכבדים שגם שיחת חולין שלהן צריך לימוד [כסוכה כ"א ב'], משא"כ בבית שמתכנסין שם ע"ה, וידברו שם לה"ר ונבול פה, וכדומה מהדברים שאין בהן שכל ויראת שמים או שום תועלת אחר, מוסר או חכמה, שם לא תנוח הנפש, אבל יבערו בה אש זרה.

ועל אלה הד' דברים יפה אמר התנא, שמוציאים את האדם מעולמו ונצחיותו, ר"ל אף על פי שהוא כבר שם:

[Avot 3:10: Rabbi Dosa ben Harkinas says: Morning sleep, afternoon wine, children's chatter and gatherings of the ignorant remove a person from this world.]

He mentioned four things that are very necessary for the health of the body and perfection of man. Nevertheless, if one isn't careful concerning them, he will lose his world through them.

Morning sleep is an example of general lethargy and laziness. A bit of it is good and much needed for the body's health, for one to rest after exertion. However, one who sleeps all night has no excuse, for he has already rested the whole night.

Afternoon wine is an example of chasing pleasures when it is unnecessary for the strengthening of the body. For wine is the choicest of pleasures, as it gives life force to the body...but only a bit of it is good, to make the soul rejoice, but too much is harmful as it confuses the intellect...

The chatter of children is an example of humor and levity, a bit of which is also good to strengthen and make the soul rejoice, but only with great men, who have wise words within their jokes, as it says "whose leaf does not wither" (see Succah 21b), but children's chatter is presumably levity and ridicule without a moistness of wisdom and understanding, [which] won't cause the soul to rejoice, but rather will just confuse the paths of the intellect.

The gatherings are an example of idle chatter, a bit of which is also good. After one has toiled in wisdom, he should be playful with his friends a bit with unimportant things which do not require the strengthening of the mind, so that the soul will rest through them like the body rests with sleep. However, this is only among distinguished people, for even their idle chatter must be studied. (Sukkah 21b) However, this is not the case in a house where ignorant people gather, and speak gossip, foul language, and similar things that have no wisdom, fear of G-d, or any other benefit, [neither] ethics nor wisdom – there the soul shall not rest. Rather, a foreign fire will burn in it.

On these four things the sage said well, that they take a person out from his world and eternity, meaning even if he had already earned it.

This Week in Israeli History: 15 Sivan 1099

The Siege of Jerusalem

Rabbi Yisroel M. Rosenzweig

15 Sivan is Tuesday

The First Crusade was officially launched by Pope Urban II in 1095 as a response to a request for assistance from Byzantine Emperor Alexios I Komnenos in defending Anatolia from Seljuk Turk invaders. The secondary goal of capturing Jerusalem was a later addition to the Crusade, but it quickly became its primary focus. At the time, Jerusalem was in the hands of the Fatimid Caliphate.

The Crusaders began launching assaults against Jerusalem on 15 Sivan, 1099. These initial attempts were not successful, as the Fatimid Caliphate had bolstered the city's defense. Nearly a month after the siege began, news broke that a Fatimid army was marching from Egypt to reinforce the city's defense, resulting in redoubled efforts by the Crusaders. The fall of Jerusalem to the Crusaders brought widespread bloodshed for Muslim and Jewish inhabitants of the city alike.

Beyond the immediate impact of the siege and capture of Jerusalem, the First Crusade brought with it a new form of anti-Semitism. In addition to being blamed and subsequently punished for the death of Jesus, Jews were now being persecuted for their openly denying Christianity even though their ancestors had purportedly witnessed the miracles it preached. Paul Johnson describes this new anti-Semitism succinctly, writing, "That Jews could *know* the truth of Christianity and still reject it seemed such extraordinary behavior that it could scarcely be human. Hence the notion that the Jews were quite different to ordinary people, an idea reinforced by their laws about food, slaughtering, cooking, and circumcision." (A History Of The Jews, 206-207)

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Weekly Highlights: June 18 — June 24 / 12 Sivan - 18 Sivan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
Shabbat June 18				
Shabbaton at Shaarei Shomayim: Jews, Christians, Muslims				
10:00 AM	R' Yisroel M. Rosenzweig	The Disputation	Shaarei Shomayim	After Hashkamah
Derashah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	From York to York U	Shaarei Shomayim	Downstairs Minyan
Derashah	R' Jonathan Ziring	Sibling Rivalry	Shaarei Shomayim	Main Shul
After minchah	R' Aaron Greenberg	Demonstrating Against Shabbat Desecration	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Sun. June 19				
8:45 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	Hebrew
8:45 AM	R' Josh Gutenberg	Contemporary Halachah	BAYT	
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	Book of Shemuel	Associated North	Hebrew
Mon. June 20				
7:30 PM	R' David Ely Grundland	Daf Yomi Highlights	Shaarei Shomayim	Final Week!
8:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Authority in Israel 1 of 4: Civil Courts and Erkaot	Shomrai Shabbos	Men
Tue. June 21				
8:00 AM to Noon	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Bnai Brith Seminar on Trusts and Estates	Shaarei Shomayim	egruenspan@bnaibrith.ca
9:30 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Chabura: Bishul Akum	Yeshivat Or Chaim	University Chaverim
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Iyov: Was Job Jewish?	Shaarei Shomayim	
Wed. June 22				
10:00 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Intro to Kabbalah 1: Origins of Kabbalah	Yeshivat Or Chaim	For beginners
11:00 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	A History of Conversion 1: Can a Jew Quit?	Yeshivat Or Chaim	For beginners
6:00 PM Our Annual Dinner! At Shaarei Shomayim				
Thu. June 23				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Yael's War	49 Michael Ct.	Women
Fri. June 24				
10:30 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Eruvin	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced