

One of the laws in this week's *Parashah* is that of the "Nazir." This section is introduced with the words: "*Ish oh ishah ki yafli*" / "A man or a woman who shall disassociate himself..." R' Avraham ibn Ezra z"l (1089-1164) observes that the word "Yafli" also can mean: "Who does wonders." He explains that a *Nazir*, who disassociates him or herself from wine, is doing something wondrous--unlike the typical person, who is controlled by the pursuit of pleasure.

R' Simcha Bunim Alter z"l (1898-1992; fifth *Gerrer Rebbe*) adds that the section of *Nazir* teaches us how G-d helps one who undertakes to improve himself. Becoming a *Nazir* is a wondrous thing--indeed, it is nearly impossible to be around people who are enjoying normal pleasures and to refrain from partaking. Nevertheless, because the *Nazir* undertakes sincerely to be different, *Hashem* helps him. The *Gerrer Rebbe* adds: The same thing is true of any person who wants to change himself. Once one makes a sincere commitment to change--even if change appears impossible--*Hashem* will help.

This week's *Parashah* is always read on either the *Shabbat* before or--more commonly--the *Shabbat* after *Shavuot*. The idea that *Hashem* desires our sincere commitments is closely tied to the holiday of the Giving of the Torah. How so? The *Tosafot* to *Avodah Zarah* (3a) teach that, although our Sages say that the heavens and earth can exist only if we study Torah, in fact it is our sincere commitment to study, rather than the actual study, that keeps the world going. (*Pardes Yosef*)

Letters from Our Sages

This letter was written by R' Shlomo Brevda z"l (1931-2013), a *maggid* / traveling preacher and prolific author. The letter excerpted here was written in 5722 (1962).

After inquiring of your welfare with great love -- Your dear letter, which brings joy to G-d and man, reached me. There are no words in my mouth, and certainly not in my pen, to convey how moved I am by the lofty thing to which you and your honorable wife have merited [the letter does not say what news the letter's recipient had shared with R' Brevda, but it appears to have been that the couple fulfilled some mission suggested by R' Brevda]--the two of you, who opened your home so wide, making it a gathering place for Torah scholars, where men spoke to their friends about matters that stand at the pinnacle of the world, a gathering for the sake of Heaven, where the *Shechinah* resided; how good and how pleasant it is when brethren sit together. In our troubled and dark times, one cannot evaluate the resulting sanctification of G-d's Name nor describe the importance of what you have done [by opening your home thus].

In my opinion, the fact that you, my beloved friend, wrote to me immediately, that very night, to tell me the [unspecified] good news, is greater than any of the other good things you did that day and that night. This is an example of an action which, by itself, seems trivial, but which, in fact, demonstrates hidden greatness. About this our Sages say, "There are those who acquire their world in one hour."

There is a trait about which *mussar* scholars speak that is called being a "*Bar Samcha*" / "a person of responsibility." This is a person on whom the Torah can rely. Such a person is qualitatively different from other people, and about him our Sages say: "There is a presumption that a *Shaliach* / agent accomplishes his *Shelichut* / mission." Although many people perform good deeds, only the smallest minority merit the title "*Bar Samcha*." These are people who fulfill every minute detail of what is asked of them and who get back with *Zerizut* / promptly to those who assigned them their mission. To be such a person, one must very nearly accept a yoke of slavery, the very opposite of the feeling that one is free to do as he wishes. (*Igrot Shlomo* p.196)

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“His offering was one silver bowl, its weight a hundred and thirty [Shekalim]; and one silver basin of seventy Shekalim of the sacred Shekel; the two of them filled with fine flour mixed with oil for a meal-offering.” (7:13)

The Aramaic translation and commentary *Targum Yonatan* writes that the “silver bowl” had thick walls, while the “silver basin” had thin walls.

R' Eliyahu z"l (1720-1797; the *Vilna Gaon*) asks: How did the *Targum Yonatan* know this? He answers:

The verse says, “the two of them [were] filled with fine flour,” but it does not say how much fine flour was in each. This implies that the two utensils held equal amounts of flour; in other words, their interior volumes were the same. But, their weights were different -- one weighed 130 *Shekalim*, while the other weighed only 70 *Shekalim*. Thus, we can infer that the heavier one had thick walls, while the lighter one had thin walls.

The *Vilna Gaon* notes that there are other verses in which the Torah mentions “two” of something, and our Sages understand it to mean that the two things are equal (as the two utensils here had equal volumes). For example, in connection with the *Yom Kippur* service in the *Mishkan* and *Bet Hamikdash*, we read (*Vayikra* 16:7), “He shall take the two he-goats . . .,” and our Sages understand that they had to be equal in height, appearance, etc. In light of this, we understand why our Sages say that the sun and the moon originally were of the same size, for we read (*Bereishit* 1:16), “*Elokim* made the two great luminaries . . .”

(*Kol Eliyahu: Bereishit #2*)

“On the seventh day, the leader of the children of Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud.” (7:48)

R' Shalom Rokeach z"l (1781-1855; first *Belzer Rebbe*) comments: The tribe of Ephraim, descendants of Yosef, merited to bring its offering on the seventh day of the inauguration, which fell on *Shabbat*, because Yosef kept *Shabbat* before the Torah was given. This is alluded to in the words spoken by Yosef (*Bereishit* 43:16), “Have meat slaughtered, and prepare it.” Regarding *Shabbat* we also read (*Shmot* 16:5), “It shall be that on the sixth day when they prepare what they bring.”

(*Lekket Imrei Kodesh*)

“When Moshe arrived at the Ohel Mo'ed to speak with Him [Hashem], he heard the Voice speaking to him from atop the Cover that was upon the Ark of the Testimony, from between the two Keruvim, and He spoke to him.” (7:89)

R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of *Enayim La'mishpat*) writes: It is fitting that the *Mishkan* was dedicated in the month of *Nissan*, the month in which the Patriarch Avraham was born. As our verse indicates, the *Mishkan* was the place from which prophecy emanated. Avraham was the first person to demonstrate the “legitimacy” of prophecy -- to the extent that he was willing to offer his son Yitzchak as a sacrificial offering at the behest of a prophecy. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'geulah* p.5)

“They brought their offering before Hashem -- six covered wagons and twelve oxen -- a wagon for each two leaders and an ox for each -- and they brought them before the Mishkan.” (7:3)

Midrash Bemidbar Rabbah teaches: “Until now, these oxen are still alive; they are not blemished, they have not aged, and they are not injured. They are alive and well. Now, learn from a ‘*Kal Va'chomer*’: Man brought these oxen close to *Hashem* to serve the *Mishkan* [through no initiative on the oxen’s part], yet the oxen live forever as a result. All the more so, the Jewish people, who [voluntarily] cling to *Hashem* [i.e., they merit eternal life]!” [Until here from *Bemidbar Rabbah*]

Midrash Shocher Tov adds: “These oxen exist until the future in order to collect from the wicked through them, as it is written (*Tehilim* 101:8), ‘*La'bekarim* I will cut down all the wicked of the land.’” [Until here from *Midrash Shocher Tov*; “*La'bekarim*” literally means “every morning,” but it also can mean “on account of the *Bakar* / cattle.”]

R' Yeshayah Horowitz z"l (the *Shelah Ha'kadosh*; rabbi of Prague and Yerushalayim; died 1630) explains: The oxen referred to in our verse “collect from the wicked,” i.e., they indict the wicked. How so? Oxen are not commanded to perform any *Mitzvot*; nevertheless, because Man brought the oxen in our verse close to *Hashem* to serve the *Mishkan*, they merited eternal life. How much more so does man have the potential for immortality, if not for his sins. (*Shnei Luchot Ha'brit: Bet David* No.9)

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) notes that the immortality that man can attain is inherently different that which an ox can attain. Oxen have no intellect and no soul; therefore, they have no possibility of an afterlife. An ox that becomes attached to spirituality can only be “rewarded” with eternal life in a physical form.

In contrast, man’s essence is his intellectual soul. Therefore, when man attains eternal life, it is his soul that lives, not his body. In fact, the separation of the soul and the body is a necessary step in man’s “completion.” Only at the time of *Techiyat Ha'meitim*, when man’s body will be have been completely purified, will the soul and body be reunited, after which they will live together forever. (*Tiferet Tziyon*)

The oxen that the leaders of the Tribes brought were remarkable in other ways as well. R' Shalom Meir Wallach *shlita* (Bnei Brak, Israel) writes: Two of the wagons mentioned in our verse, drawn by four oxen, transported the *Kerashim* and *Adanim* / the walls of the *Mishkan* across the desert. By estimating the weight of these items, we can determine that each ox pulled a load of at least 25 tons [four or five times the load a normal ox pulls]. Such were the oxen the leaders brought! (*Ma'ayan Ha'aggadah* p.83)