



# Shabbat Table Talk Page

## Overview

- **Parashah: Naso (נשא, "Lift up")**
- **Chapters: Numbers 4:21-7:89**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעִסוֹק בְּדַרְבְּרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

## Synopsis

Last week's Torah portion (Bamidbar) counted the three clans of the tribe of Levi that would assist the priests perform the work of the Tabernacle. Of the three clans, the Kohathites were given prominence, both because they were responsible for carrying the most sacred objects of the Tabernacle, and also because Aaron and his sons (i.e., the priests) were the leaders of that clan. In order to serve, however, a Levite was required to be between the ages of 30 and 50, and an additional census was taken that listed 2,750 Kohathites eligible for service.

This week's Torah portion begins with God telling Moses to likewise count all qualified males of the two other clans, the Gershonites and Merarites, who would be responsible for maintaining and moving the Tabernacle structure during the desert journey. The additional census revealed that there were 2,630 men of Gershon who would care for the woven materials of the Tabernacle (i.e., the curtains, roof coverings, wall hangings, etc.), and 3,200 of Merari who would care for the wooden framework as well as the courtyard posts and its sockets. In total there were 8,580 Levites who were under the direct supervision of Aaron's son Ithamar.

Moses then instructed the Israelites to remove all those who were ritually unclean from the camp. These included all who were afflicted with tzara'at ("leprosy"), all who had an "issue" (zav), and those who were defiled by contact with a corpse. In addition, the people were commanded to confess their sins, make restitution to those they had harmed, and make guilt offerings.

The portion continues with a special law concerning a "suspected wife" (i.e., sotah) who could be tested for infidelity by a ritual that involved drinking a goblet of water specially prepared by a priest and saying "amen" to a curse upon her if she was guilty of adultery. This is followed by the law of the "nazir," or someone who makes a special vow of consecration for a specific period of time (called the "nazirite vow"). During the time of separation, the nazirite must abstain from consuming any alcohol or grape products, give up cutting their hair, and not come near a corpse. At the end of the vow period, the nazirite was required to give offerings at the Tabernacle.

God then tells Moses to teach Aaron and his sons a special threefold blessing, the "priestly blessing," to use when they bless the people of Israel. The portion ends with a list of gifts given by the leaders of the twelve tribes at the inauguration of the altar at the Tabernacle.



## Basic Questions

1. What does the word “naso” (נָסָה) mean? <sup>1</sup>
2. What were the names of the three families of Levi that were to serve the Tabernacle? <sup>2</sup>
3. What clan was Aaron from? <sup>3</sup>
4. Who was put in charge of all the Levites? <sup>4</sup>
5. What were the age requirements for service at the Tabernacle? <sup>5</sup>
6. How many men were counted from these three families that were within this age range? <sup>6</sup>
7. What were the three camps of Israel? <sup>7</sup>
8. What was Moses told to do with lepers (ha-metzorim), and why? <sup>8</sup>
9. Who else was to be sent outside the camp? <sup>9</sup>
10. What were the people required to do before the desert journey began? <sup>10</sup>
11. What is a nazirite vow? <sup>11</sup>
12. From what were nazirites to abstain during the time of their vow? <sup>12</sup>
13. Name some nazirites from the Scriptures. <sup>13</sup>
14. Does the word “Nazirite” have a connection with the word Nazareth? <sup>14</sup>
15. Was Yeshua a nazirite? <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> To “lift up” or “take.”

<sup>2</sup> The Gershonites, Merarites, and Kohathites.

<sup>3</sup> Aaron was the grandson of Kohath (and the son of Amram). Aaron’s family represented a subset of the Kohathites. Note that Aaron was the seventh generation from Abraham (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, Aaron).

<sup>4</sup> Aaron’s sons Ithamar and Eleazar.

<sup>5</sup> A Levite must be between the ages of 30 and 50 years of age.

<sup>6</sup> 8,580. 2,630 of Gershon (the firstborn), 2,750 of Kohath, and 3,200 of Merari (the youngest son).

<sup>7</sup> The Tabernacle (central camp) was surrounded by the (fourfold) camp of the Levites, who were surrounded by the (fourfold) camp of the twelve tribes. Outside the camp were cattle, *gerim* (strangers), and the ritually unclean.

<sup>8</sup> To put them outside the three camps so as not to defile the people and the sanctuary. The camp was to be holy.

<sup>9</sup> Those who were unclean by reason of an “issue” and those who were defiled by contact with the dead.

<sup>10</sup> To confess their sin, make full restitution (plus one-fifth), and offer a guilt offering for atonement.

<sup>11</sup> A voluntary vow (*neder*) that required consecration for a specified season. The nature of the vow is not described.

<sup>12</sup> From wine (and fermented drink); vinegar; all grape products; cutting their hair; coming near a dead body.

<sup>13</sup> Samson (Jud. 13:7), Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11), Absalom, John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), Paul (Acts 18:18, 21:22-26).

<sup>14</sup> No, they are two different words. The word “nazir” comes from the verb *nazar* (נָזַר), which means to “consecrate,” whereas the word Nazarene comes from either the word *netzer* (branch) or from the verb meaning to “guard” or “watch.” Nazareth was the name of a town (located in the north of Israel) where Yeshua lived. When the gospels say, “He shall be called a Nazarene,” they are not saying that Yeshua would be an “oath taker” but rather that he is the promised “Branch of the LORD” (Isa. 11:1).

<sup>15</sup> He may have taken the vow at some point, but he was not a lifelong nazirite, since he touched the coffin of the widow’s dead son (Luke 7:14), visited Lazarus’ grave, and presumably drank wine (Matt. 11:19).



16. What was the procedure if a man suspected his wife of infidelity? <sup>16</sup>
17. When the Tabernacle was completed, the princes of the tribes brought gifts for the Levites. What were these gifts and who received them? <sup>17</sup>
18. The princes also brought a “dedication offering” to the Tabernacle. What was this? <sup>18</sup>

## Advanced Questions

19. Why did God allow His Holy Name to be dissolved in water for a sotah to drink? <sup>19</sup>
20. From where did the priests get the water for the sotah to drink? <sup>20</sup>
21. Why did God want the priests to bless the people in His Name? <sup>21</sup>
22. Why is the law of the nazir written just before the priestly blessing? <sup>22</sup>
23. What does the word “nazir” mean? <sup>23</sup>
24. Why must a nazir not cut his or her hair, and what was finally done with it? <sup>24</sup>
25. Why was the nazir required to give a sin offering after he or she completed their vow? <sup>25</sup>
26. Why is the confession (viduy) mentioned in connection with stealing? <sup>26</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The husband would bring his wife to the priest with a plain barley offering (called a “grain offering of jealousy”). The priest would take holy water and put it in a cup and mix it with the dust of the Tabernacle floor to make it “bitter water.” He then would write on a scroll a curse that described the woman’s punishment - written with the sacred Name of God - and then immersed it in the water so that the words of the oath dissolved into the cup. The woman then was given the option of confessing her sin or affirming her innocence by saying “Amen” to the curse. If she insisted on her innocence, she was forced to drink the waters. If she was guilty, she (and her lover) would die a painful death, but if she were innocent, God would vindicate her with a future child and an easy childbirth.

<sup>17</sup> Six covered wagons and twelve oxen that were then divided among the Gershonites and Merarites. The Kohathites did not receive these gifts because they were required to carry the sacred objects on their shoulders.

<sup>18</sup> Each prince gave one silver plate and one silver basin filled with fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, one golden dish full of incense, and several animals for whole burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings.

<sup>19</sup> Even God allows His Name to be dishonored for the sake of peace between a husband and wife.

<sup>20</sup> From the kiyor (bronze basin). Jewish tradition says the metal was donated by the virtuous women of Israel who foreswore vanity and preserved the purity of the family while in Egypt.

<sup>21</sup> The Levites (and kohanim) were Israel’s Torah teachers who were given no inheritance but required *terumah* (contributions) from the community. God gave them the honor of conferring blessing upon the people in His Name as “repayment” for the people’s care of the Levites. Just as they needed support, so Israel needed their blessing.

<sup>22</sup> A nazir separated himself in consecration to God by avoiding things that lead to vanity. Therefore he will be rewarded with the blessings of the Birkat Kohanim.

<sup>23</sup> Nazir is related to the word crown (i.e., netzer, נֶזֶר). Ibn Ezra says the nazir wears a figurative crown, for his mane of long hair singles him out as one who has broken the bonds of passion for the fleeting pleasures of this world.

<sup>24</sup> To indicate disinterest in the pursuit of physical beauty, but only the inward soul. The hair was later shorn off and burned upon the altar with his peace offering.

<sup>25</sup> Perhaps because he/she is choosing to return to a less holy state, or perhaps because the initial motive for the vow had to do with dealing with the evil inclination of the heart in the first place, and this needed to be cleansed.

<sup>26</sup> Because all manner of sin is essentially stealing from God.



27. What are the basic steps of *teshuvah* (repentance)?<sup>27</sup>
28. How is being seduced (or led astray) similar to going insane?<sup>28</sup>
29. How do we see that one who sins in private will be exposed publicly?<sup>29</sup>
30. How do the rabbis justify the idea of “putting a fence around the Torah”?<sup>30</sup>
31. Where do we see from the Torah that a married woman must cover her hair in public?<sup>31</sup>
32. Why does the Torah repeat over and over the list of gifts that the princes donated to the Tabernacle, since they were all the same?<sup>32</sup>
33. Why was Aaron chosen to confer the blessing of peace (*shalom*)?<sup>33</sup>
34. How do the priests bless the people today in most synagogues?<sup>34</sup>
35. In what ways is the nazir similar to the High Priest?<sup>35</sup>
36. How could Samson have been a nazir and yet touch a corpse?<sup>36</sup>

## Discussion Topics

1. How might the law of the sotah have protected women in ancient times? Was this law meant to provide due process for a woman in an otherwise patriarchal society? *Discuss.*
2. The Torah prescribed that only the descendants of Aaron (i.e., the kohanim) were allowed to officially bless people in the Name of the LORD, though later the blessing was adopted for use during Shabbat and various life-cycle ceremonies. Does a person need some special power or authority to bless others, or can anyone bless others at any time? *Discuss.*

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<sup>27</sup> Acknowledgment of the sin (oral confession), sincere regret for the misdeed with a resolve to not to repeat it, and restitution to the person(s) harmed (i.e., apologizing for the harm caused, asking for *mechilah*).

<sup>28</sup> The sages say that the word used to describe the woman who “goes astray” (*sotah*) is related to the word for “crazy.” Sinning is a form of insanity, and yielding to the evil impulse (*yetzer hara*) leads people to madness.

<sup>29</sup> Although the sotah sinned in private, she was humiliated in public. Your sin will find you out! The converse is also true: Doing righteousness in private leads to being honored. “Your Father who sees in secret will reward you.”

<sup>30</sup> From the prohibition that a *nazir* – who was forbidden fermented drink – was to eat no grapes or even raisins.

<sup>31</sup> Because the Torah commands that the hair of the sotah (unfaithful woman) was to be uncovered to shame her during her interrogation (Num. 5:18).

<sup>32</sup> To show that they were equally precious to Him.

<sup>33</sup> Aaron was known as a man “who loved peace, pursued peace, and created peace between man and his friend” (Sanhedrin 6b). Because of this, he was given the honor of blessing the people with peace.

<sup>34</sup> They remove their shoes and have their hands ritually washed by Levites (if present). They then ascend to stand before the Ark while each one covers his head and arms with a tallit (prayer shawl) while each privately recites a blessing. When the cantor says, “Kohanim...” each priest raises his hands, with the palms facing downward and the thumbs of his outspread hands touching while singing the 15 words found in Numbers 6:24-26.

<sup>35</sup> They are both forbidden to have contact with death and both were entirely consecrated to God.

<sup>36</sup> He is “Nazir Shimshon” in Jewish tradition, which means he had some sort of exemption from the restriction.



3. The nazir was someone who essentially withdrew from the world, like an ascetic or monk, in order to attain a higher level of holiness – or perhaps to escape from various temptations found in the world. Nevertheless, Jewish tradition tends to focus on service to the community, not on seclusion from others. Discuss why “separation” from prevailing culture might help a person walk in holiness. On the other hand, discuss why living in a state of “enhanced holiness” can be a pitfall.
4. The text of the priestly blessing (Num. 6:24-26) is in three parts and is therefore called “the threefold blessing”:
  - a. The LORD
    - i. bless you (יְבָרֶכֶךָ יְהוָה)
    - ii. and keep you (וַיִּשְׁמְרֶכָה)
  - b. The LORD
    - i. make his face to shine upon you (יֵשֵׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ)
    - ii. and be gracious to you (וַיְהַנֶּכֶךָ)
  - c. The LORD
    - i. lift up his countenance upon you (יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ)
    - ii. and give you peace (וַיִּשְׁלַם לְךָ שְׁלוֹמִים)

Notice that the blessing is phrased in the *singular* rather than plural because it is meant to have personal application, not to be a general benediction over a crowd of people.

There are various interpretations for these words. For example, the first phrase “Yevarekhekha Adonai v’yishmerekha” has been variously interpreted as:

- May God help you do the commandments / and save you from sins
- May God give you many sons / and many daughters
- May God give you wealth / and watch over it on your behalf
- May God lead you to heaven / and save you from hell
- May God give you a long life / and the health to enjoy it

It has been sometimes noted that the first section consists of three words, the second of five, and the third of seven, and various speculations have been offered as to why the blessing is structured this way (e.g., 3+5 is the number of grace, 7 marks completion, etc.) Notice that the phrase, “The LORD lift up His face toward you...” (יֵשֵׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ) pictures the beaming face of a parent as he lifts up his beloved child in joy... The repeated construction of God “lifting up His face” (יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ) suggests that God’s justice has been fully satisfied and His compassion now flows outward to the child in loving grace. The goal of this blessing is peace (shalom).

Undoubtedly Yeshua recited the “priestly blessing” over his disciples when he ascended back to heaven, though of course He would have spoken it in the *first* person: “I bless you and keep you; I shine upon you and am gracious to you; I lift up my countenance upon you, and give you my peace” (Luke 24:50-51). Discuss the significance of this blessing in your life...



# The Priestly Blessing

The LORD gave these words to the kohanim (priests) to bless the children of Israel.  
The blessing is also used to bless members of your family on special occasions.

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וְיִשְׁמְרֶךָ:  
יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחֲנֶךָ:  
יֵשָׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וְיִשֵּׁם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם:

ye·va·re·khe·kha Adonai ve·yish·me·re·kha  
ya·eir Adonai pa·nav e·ley·kha vi·chun·ne·ka  
yis·sa Adonai pa·nav e·ley·kha ve·ya·seim le·kha sha·lom

## For Next Week:

- Read **Beha'alotkha** (Numbers 8:1-12:16)
- Read the Haftarah (Zech. 2:14-4:7)
- Read the NT (1 Cor. 10:6-13; Rev. 11:1-19)

