

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 214

**Nasso** | Self Discipline and Honoring Torah Scholars

# MESILOT

## *Pathways to the Soul*

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly Parsha  
of **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel Zt"l**

From the weekly lessons of his son  
**Rabbi Yisrael Abargel Shlita**

# ...PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL...

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## Parshat Nasso

### Honoring Torah Study

Soft knocks were heard. The door opened, and Yossi entered the room.

The Rosh Yeshiva received him warmly: “How are you, Yossi? How are you feeling?”

Yossi sat down on the chair and wiped away a tear. “Rabbi, I have a big question that’s weighing down upon me.”

“What is your question?” asked the rabbi.

“Our Sages revealed that there are seven people who have no share in the World to Come” (Sanhedrin 10:2):

“Three kings and four commoners have no share in the World to Come. The three kings are: Jeroboam, Ahab, and Manasseh.

The four commoners are: Balaam, Doeg, Ahitophel, and Gehazi.”

What I don’t understand, said Yossi, “is how could they write that only seven people have no share in the World to Come, when I, too, deserve to have no share in the World to Come?”

After all, our Sages were endowed with divine spirit and could see all the way to the end of the generations. How could they write that only seven people have no share in the World to Come, when I, too, utterly am undeserving of having any share in the World to Come?”

Warm tears, evoking great self-pity, slipped down his cheeks. The Rosh Yeshiva cupped his head in his hands as his thoughts wandered.

“May G-d have mercy on His people Israel — what terrible despair you’re in.”

The Rosh Yeshiva did not become flustered; he knew that

this feeling of despair stemmed from a distorted view of reality and that in order to lift someone out of despair, one must simply straighten out their perspective.

He turned to Yossi and asked: “Why do you think you have no share in the World to Come?”

Yossi let out a heavy sigh and began his story:

“Yesterday, I left the yeshiva and traveled to visit my parents.

On my way back, I sat down on the bus, opened a Gemara, and started to learn.

At one of the stops, a secular Jewish man in his forties got on and sat down next to me, and when he saw me studying Gemara, he lost his composure.

He opened his mouth wide and began to degrade the Torah and uttered profanities against those who study it. I was very startled by him and found myself nodding my head as if I agreed with what he was saying.

Ever since then, my heart has been feeling great unrest. ‘How

could I have nodded my head in agreement with him? Does this mean I, too, am subconsciously stuck in spiritual depths?’

I further recalled the Gemara (Sanhedrin 99a):

“The Rabbis taught: “Because he has despised the word of the L-rd and breached His commandment, that soul shall be utterly cut off; its iniquity is upon it” (Numbers 15:31) — this refers to a heretic, an epikoros.’

Further on, the Gemara states (Sanhedrin 99b): ‘An Epikoros — Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Rabbi Chanina both said: This refers to one who demeans a Torah scholar.’

“Since then,” Yossi continued, “my heart has been torn. If I heard his disrespectful words with equanimity, surely there is some small element of heresy within me, and ultimately, I am not deserving of the World to Come.”

The Rosh Yeshiva was appalled and hardly at ease.

“You mean to tell me that you heard the Torah and its scholars

**Parshat Nasso - What is the Meaning of Epikoros**

being belittled and shamed and you sat there calmly, and simply accepted it?! What can I say to you — your situation must be truly in need of improvement!”<sup>1</sup>

What follows was written in contactation with the above account.

Before we continue, however, let us pose two questions:

## **What is the Meaning of Epikoros**

As we know, in the Mussaf prayer of the Festivals, we sing and praise the Holy One, Blessed be He and declare: “Master of the universe, ‘You have chosen us

from among all nations; You have loved us and desired us, You have exalted us above all tongues, and sanctified us through Your commandments; You drew us

### *Wellsprings of Wisdom*

1. The renowned maggid, Rabbi Shalom Shwadron, shared this story as he heard it from a grandson of the great Rabbi Baruch Ber, (‘Emek HaParshah’ — Vayikra I, p. 308):

A young Torah scholar, well-versed in Torah knowledge and fear of Heaven, traveled to Kaminetz to receive rabbinical ordination from Rabbi Baruch Ber.

Though receiving semicha from him was rare, Rabbi Baruch Ber recognized his scholarliness and wished to grant it. However, he was preoccupied with yeshivah matters and couldn’t test him at the time. Apologizing, he asked the scholar to return in a month.

The young man accepted the delay and left, but as soon as he departed, Rabbi Baruch Ber’s face filled with distress.

“Oy vey, I have disgraced a Torah scholar,” he lamented.

His family, having heard the conversation, was puzzled. “What disgrace? You were simply busy and asked him to return.”

Rabbi Baruch Ber explained:

“This young man left home for the sole purpose of receiving semicha. His wife is surely waiting for him to return with it.

Now, he will come home empty-handed, and although he’ll explain the reason for the delay, and she will understand it, nonetheless, during those moments — before she fully hears him out — doubt might creep in her mind that ‘maybe the Rav didn’t really want to grant it.’

And in that brief time, he might lose esteem in her eyes, and I will have caused the disgrace of a Torah scholar.”

## Parshat Nasso - What is the Meaning of Epikoros

near, our King, to Your service, and You have proclaimed Your great and holy name upon us.”

With this praise, we extol G-d for having loved us so much that He gave us the 613 mitzvot, and, consequently, it is only natural for us to fulfill His commandments with passion and enthusiasm.

Therefore, it stands to reason that a person who denies the goodness G-d has granted us and desecrates one of His commandments puts himself in an undesirable and lowly position.

Yet in spite of this, although someone who disgraces any one of G-d's commandments (like tefillin or Shabbat) certainly puts himself in a lowly state, we do not find anywhere in the words of our Sages that such a person is called an “epikoros,” except that is, in the case of

someone who demeans a Torah scholar.

A Jew who despises a Torah scholar and, out of hatred, demeans him is specifically called with the derogatory term of “epikoros.”<sup>2</sup>

But what we must understand is why is this mitzvah different from any of the other mitzvot?

Secondly, we find many terms in the words of our Sages for a person who transgresses the Torah: sinner, evildoer, wrongdoer, one who has defiled his soul, and more.

But why, from all these many terms, do the sages call one who demeans a Torah scholar specifically with the term of “epikoros.”

We must understand the connection between the term “epikoros” and the sin of belittling a scholar.

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### Wellsprings of Wisdom

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2. To quote the Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh De'ah, 243:6):

“It is a great sin to belittle Torah scholars or to despise them. Anyone who belittles

the sages has no share in the World to Come; such a person is included in the verse, ‘For he has despised the word of the L-rd’ (Numbers 15:31).”

## The Beauty of Venice

One of the majestic Torah figures of the previous generation was Rabbi Shalom Shwadron, of blessed memory.

Endowed by Heaven with a gift for sweet and graceful speech, he did not neglect this gift; he traveled from place to place, and wherever he went, he reminded Jews that there is a Creator of the world who watches, observes, and looks upon all their deeds.

Rabbi Shalom journeyed far and wide to endear the Torah upon the masses. He began in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Shaarei Chesed and soon continued proclaiming his wisdom across the world — from the neighborhoods of Zichron Moshe and Bucharim, he soon was invited to Tel Aviv, and further out in Boro Park, Brooklyn, and the cities of London and Antwerp in Europe.

From those trips abroad, a large number of stories, anecdotes, and

lessons have been preserved, and here is one of them, as told by Rabbi Shalom Shwadron himself:<sup>3</sup>

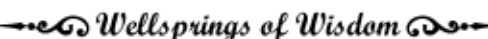
“On one of my journeys abroad, which in those days was made by ship, the vessel passed by the city of Venice.

Several days beforehand,” Rabbi Shalom related, “I heard people on the ship speaking with anticipation about the wonderful city of Venice, describing to one another how beautiful it was — a city on the water, where everyone travels by boat.

Naturally, I did not get caught up in the general excitement. Of what real concern was Venice to me?

A few days went by and then one morning, I noticed a commotion on the ship and people hurrying and heading briskly up to the deck.

I had no idea what was happening until I heard someone



3. ‘U’Matok HaOr’ — Megillat Rut (p. 377).

## Parshat Nasso - The Beauty of Venice

rushing a slower-paced friend:  
‘What are you daydreaming  
about ? It’s Venice !’

In a matter of moments, I was  
found alone on the lower deck —  
which had emptied out.

‘Well,’ I thought to myself,  
‘could it be that I, too, will be swept  
along with everyone else ? There’s  
no chance; it’s impossible for me to  
simply follow the masses.’

But upon a second thought, I  
said, ‘It might be interesting to see  
what it is that captivates everyone  
and stirs such intense curiosity.’  
And I, too, went up on deck.

The first thing that struck me  
was the onlookers themselves. I  
saw the entire crowd pressed  
against the railing, as close  
together as possible, their heads  
practically leaning on each other,  
their feet raised on tiptoe to get a  
slightly better view. Moreover,  
the most enthusiastic among them  
were equipped with binoculars  
and were excitedly using them.

Everyone’s eyes were fixed on  
some distant point on the horizon  
— all of their senses were

laser-focused, as though nothing  
else existed in the world except  
for whatever their eyes were now  
beholding.

If some unscrupulous individual  
were to take advantage of the  
moment, they could easily slip a  
hand into people’s pockets and  
steal money, and no one would  
even notice.

In truth, there was no shortage  
of pickpockets on board, but even  
they forgot everything at that  
moment and joined the throng  
gazing at the marvelous scenic  
view that appeared before them.

Having finished taking in the  
scene (which was quite a spectacle), I  
turned my attention to behold  
Venice itself.

My spirits sank. The city that  
was reputed to be so  
exceptionally beautiful seemed  
to be just the opposite.

The view before my eyes was  
dirty and grimy, much like other  
substandard shorelines. The only  
difference was that in many port  
cities, you see grand hotels and  
high-rises, whereas here, on



**Parshat Nasso - The Beauty of Venice**

Venice's coast, there weren't any.  
There was nothing particularly  
beautiful there — truly nothing.  
So what were all these people so  
intensely staring at?

The single-story houses that  
replaced the tall buildings?

The boats that replace the  
BMW?

Is that what was driving all  
this excitement?

I looked again and noticed  
some crosses that were visible  
from afar. 'Ugh,' I spat and  
recited the verse "You shall  
utterly detest it and utterly abhor  
it, for it is banned" (Deuteronomy  
7:26), in frustration, and quickly  
returned to my place on the ship.

A few months later, I boarded  
another ship heading home via  
the same route. One morning, I  
heard that same familiar noise  
and commotion and immediately  
remembered — Venice.

Passengers began rushing up  
the stairs again, just as before. For  
whatever reason, this time, I didn't  
hesitate about whether to go up or  
not; I followed them without

thinking. True, just as before, I  
was the last to make my way up,  
walking slowly and once again  
taking in the scene of onlookers  
transfixed, their eyes nearly  
popping out of their sockets.

But after I finished watching  
them and glanced over at the city of  
Venice, my earlier fury subsided.

I still felt that nothing here was  
truly beautiful — it was all rather  
dirty — but still, there was  
something unique about the  
buildings and lifestyle that differed  
from what we were used to.

There's no obvious or glaring  
beauty here — I concluded to  
myself — but there is a  
uniqueness, and that's certainly  
worth something.

This time, I understood better  
why people were so intrigued, but  
personally, I wasn't impressed by  
the sight; I didn't linger.

As soon as it got boring, I  
turned around and went back to  
my cabin.

But then I paused for a  
moment to wonder, 'Why didn't  
I get as frustrated this time like I

did the first time we came here?’ After all, one can’t deny that this place is unusual and distinctive.

Perhaps the first time I was just too exhausted to be impressed? I thought about it a bit and then put the question away in the recess of my mind.

More than half a year passed, and once again I needed to travel, and again, I took the same route.

The same scene played out precisely, but this time, I suddenly felt myself rushing to the deck with everyone else, practically running along with them to

behold the sights of Venice.

This time, when I looked up, I was genuinely amazed — and found myself asking the person beside me, ‘May I please use your binoculars?’

At that moment, I felt ashamed of myself — but I also found the solution to the question I had on my previous voyage: Why hadn’t I become frustrated on the second visit as I had in the first time?’<sup>4</sup>

But before we share Rabbi Shalom’s insight, let us add an introduction.

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### Wellsprings of Wisdom

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4. We share another story on this topic:

Rabbi Chaim Ephraim Zaitchik, related  
(‘Or Chadash’, vol. 2, p. 937):

The Chafetz Chaim, during the First World War was exiled with his yeshivah to a region of Russia with few Jewish residents — fewer still who were observant.

One Shabbat, as he was walking down the street, he saw someone publicly desecrating Shabbat.

He returned immediately to the yeshivah and delivered a talk, in which he burst into sobs, crying out, ‘Woe

is me for having seen the Shabbat desecrated.’

A few weeks later, he again happened upon a Shabbat desecration, and upon returning to the yeshivah, gave another talk on the subject, and once again broke down in tears.

He noted, in the midst of weeping, that he could sense that, compared to his first time seeing Shabbat desecration, his tears were now less ardent.

At first, he had been deeply shaken by the severity of the sin, but its impact had been dulled by it being routinely committed.

## Torah Waters Out of the Flintstone

In the Talmud (Chagigah 14b), it is related that four holy Sages of the Mishnah entered the “Pardes” and “ascended to the heavens through a sacred Name of G-d in order to witness hidden divine matters.”<sup>5</sup>

The Arizal explains<sup>6</sup> that their purpose was to repair and rectify the sins of the generations and thereby bring redemption.

These four Tannaim were: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Elisha ben Avuyah, and Rabbi Akiva.

Surely, one who studies these passages in the Gemara feels a sense of longing: “If only the Master of the Universe would grant me, too, the merit to be among those who know His Name and seek His Unity.”

But after some consideration for a few moments, a person might come to believe that these are merely fantasies. The common

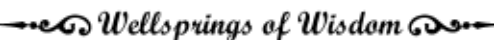
man has slight chances of spiritual ascension and rising above the mundane matters of this world.

Yet, if we study the words of the following Midrash, we will realize that if one truly wants something, it is possible:<sup>7</sup>

“In the beginning of their path of Torah learning, Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azzai were as barren as flint rock, and yet, by exerting themselves greatly in Torah study, G-d opened a pathway to Torah for them.

And soon, matters that Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel could not resolve as forbidden or permitted — Ben Azzai arose and explained,” as the verse says: “He sets his hand against the flint rock” (Job 28:9).

“Matters that had been sealed in the world until that day — Rabbi Akiva arose and explained them,” as the verse says: “He



5. Rashi, ibid.

6. Likkutei Torah, Parshat Bereshit.

7. Otzar Midrashim (Eisenstein — “Midrash Hillel”).

**Parshat Nasso - Two Adjacent Torah Sections**

bound up the sources of the rivers; and what was hidden, he brought forth to light” (ibid. 28:11). This teaches that Rabbi Akiva’s eye beheld the mysteries of the Divine Chariot in the same way that the prophet Ezekiel did.

Concerning them, the verse states: “Who turns the rock into a pool of water” (Psalms 114:8) — meaning, the hearts of stone that Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azzai once had was transformed into a ‘pool of water’ of Torah, for ‘water’ refers to the Torah.

From this Midrash, we see that two of those who entered the Pardes had once started out with minds like solid rock and were unable to absorb easily — yet, because they truly wanted it, they ultimately succeeded.

With this introduction in mind, let us quote the words of Ben Azzai (Avot 4:2):

“Ben Azzai says: ‘Run to perform a minor mitzvah and flee from sin, for one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one sin leads to another sin. For the reward of a mitzvah is (the opportunity for another) mitzvah, and the reward of a sin is (the downward pull of another) sin.’”

At first glance, Ben Azzai is simply explaining how vital it is that we perform mitzvot and avoid transgressions.

But we must understand: the entire essence of a Jew’s service is to fulfill mitzvot and flee from sin — that much is obvious. What then exactly is Ben Azzai adding with his teaching?

We will address this further on in our talk.

**Two Adjacent Torah Sections**

This week’s Torah portion, Parshat Nasso, is the longest in the Torah, with 176 verses. It contains ten topics, namely:

The work of the Mishkan assigned to the sons of Gershon; the work that was assigned to the sons of Merari; the census of the

**Parshat Nasso - The Influence of Society on Man**

tribe of Levi in detail and generally; The law of sending away those who are impure from the camp; The law of one who steals and swears falsely; The section of the Sotah (suspected adulteress); The section of the Nazirite at length; The Priestly Blessing; at great length, the offerings of the Nesi'im at the inauguration of the Mishkan (described in chapter 7 — the longest chapter in the Torah, with 89 verses); and the Parshah concludes with G-d's revelation to Moses.

Regarding two of these sections, we find in Gemara (Sotah 2a), the following question being raised:

“Why is the section of the Nazir located adjacent and following the section of the Sotah?

To teach us that anyone who sees a Sotah disgraced should take upon himself to be a Nazirite and abstain from wine.”

Rashi explains (ibid.) that wine was the cause of her frivolous behavior. This however raises a question:

If indeed drinking wine has the capacity to lead a person to lightheadedness and can bring about immoral behavior and the like, then our Sages should have issued a clear ruling that every person must abstain from wine altogether. Why did they specifically instruct only the person who “sees a Sotah disgraced” to abstain from wine?

And the truth is that the answer lies hidden in the term used in the Gemara — “one who sees” a Sotah in her disgrace. This term teaches the difference between one who sees a Sotah and must abstain from wine, versus all other people who need not take upon themselves this abstention.

But before delving into this subject, let us introduce another idea.

**The Influence of Society on Man**

In the summer of 5695 (1935), Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler

traveled for health reasons to the seaside town of Margate in England.

He didn't spend a long time there; after a short period of time, he left, and he later described his experience in a letter he wrote:<sup>8</sup>

“When I arrived in Margate, I immediately noticed that I needed to find a place to be secluded so as not to be exposed to the immodesty and permissiveness that were pervasive everywhere.

Naturally, I sought to distance myself; such brazenness was abominable in my eyes.

But as I sat alone, I thought to myself: ‘Is there really a concern that I might learn, G-d forbid, from their vile ways? Should I worry that I’d be drawn to enjoy the insolence and wildness of these people whose actions prove that their spiritual level is lowly and whose sensitivities are quite base and animalistic?’”

Some time later, Rabbi Dessler came upon a letter

among his archives that his father, Rabbi Reuven Dessler, had once sent him, and in it, he found an answer to his question.

The letter explained that even a great individual can be negatively influenced by a corrupt environment. Therefore, anyone who can escape such an environment must do so without delay, not lingering in a place of danger.

To quote this letter:

In Parshat Re’eh, the Torah warns us yet once again about the terrible sin of idolatry.

It warns specifically about the idolatry known as Molech, whose worship involved burning children in fire. As it is written: “For they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their g-ds” (Deuteronomy 12:31).

In the preceding verse, the Torah cautions:

“Be careful not to be ensnared by them (the nations), after they

**Parshat Nasso - The Influence of Society on Man**

have been destroyed before you; and do not inquire about their g-ds, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their g-ds? I, too, will do the same’” (ibid. 12:30).

At first glance, this verse is puzzling. Burning one’s children in fire is utter madness — a complete mental and emotional aberration. Who would possibly do such a thing? And yet, the Torah is concerned that Jews themselves might come along and say: “I, too, will do the same.”

How is this possible? Why is the Torah afraid that sensible Jews might want to do this as well?

The Torah here reveals to us a hidden truth about human nature — that the source of terrifying corruption is a person who witnesses others’ depravity, and it can lead to a desire awakening within him to emulate that particular wrongdoing.

Even if he fully understands how evil and destructive the deed is — and even though he knows

the tremendous spiritual harm it brings — this is simply human nature. It may sound unbelievable, but it is indeed so.

We have a principle regarding the soul’s faculties: we cannot always ask, “How could it be?” Rather, we must recognize and clarify if it is so. Even if we cannot see any logical explanation for how it happens, we must take into account that, in fact, such situations and occurrences do happen.

Therefore G-d turns to His beloved people, the Jewish people and He tells them: “Soon, you will enter the Holy Land, and there you will encounter all sorts of strange and bizarre ‘characters’ — people utterly numb of heart and feeling, corrupt and cruel, who take their children and burn them in the fire for their g-ds.

I caution you to beware of these dangers. Do not get drawn into these lowly and dark places. Be careful not to follow the masses

## Parshat Nasso - The Influence of Society on Man

and say, ‘Everyone’s doing it; I, too, will do the same.’”<sup>9</sup>

When a person sees a bad action, he is placed in great

### Wellsprings of Wisdom

**9.** In this context, we quote a story from ‘Rabbeinu HaOr LeTzion’ (Part 3, p. 298):

Rabbi Yosef Netanyan related:

I knew a wealthy, respected man whose entire world collapsed upon him when his twins were born severely disabled — unable to move, eat, or care for themselves. Overwhelmed by the burden, he turned to alcohol. His friends urged me to help, so I invited him to visit Rabbi Bentzion Abba Shaul.

At first, the man refused, doubting what the Rav could do. After much persuasion, he finally agreed.

Rav Bentzion, as if expecting him, seated him warmly and asked, “What is the problem?”

The man broke down, crying: “I have everything, but nonetheless have no life. Either the Rav must heal at least one of my children or pray for my death.”

To my surprise, Rav Bentzion rebuked him sternly: “Shame on you. Any sin can be atoned for — except suicide, which leaves one no share in the World to Come.

Life is a battlefield; a soldier who fights with courage earns honor, but a deserter is punished. Giving up on life is desertion.”

Silenced, the man listened intently as Rav Bentzion shared a chilling tale:

Three hundred years ago in Izmir, Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen (author of ‘Shevet Mussar’) arrived at a seudat mitzvah where the hostess screamed at him to leave.

Shocked, he asked why. She replied: “It is not me — but the spirit inside me cannot bear your holiness.”

Speaking to the spirit, the rabbi learned it was once a young Jew in Germany who strayed into sin. Rejected by his community and mocked by his former friends, he despaired and took his own life. In Heaven, he was cast back into the world to wander endlessly, tormented by destructive angels. Only Rabbi Eliyahu’s prayers allowed him entry into Gehinnom — for a soul who ends its own life has no remedy.

“But that young man was under unbearable pressure,” the listener murmured.

Rav Bentzion remained firm: “No one is given a test they cannot overcome. Just as Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah endured the fiery furnace but would have faltered under torture, so too, G-d tailors challenges to each person’s capacity.

You were given this trial because you can withstand it. Even drinking is an unacceptable form of desertion.”



**Parshat Nasso - The Destructive Influence of Sight**

peril of eventually wanting to imitate it.

Although it may seem inconceivable, that the Torah and the Divine wisdom was concerned that someone might be drawn after idol worship, knowing full well the falsehood of these idols; it sounds as absurd

as someone who sees pigs in a sty, wallowing in filth, and then longs to do the same;

Nonetheless, the Torah, which knows the hidden recesses of the animalistic side of man's soul, revealed to us this secret of the human psyche and the enormous pull of: "I, too, will do the same."

**The Destructive Influence of Sight**

Let us discuss a concept that we have written about on several occasions:

King Solomon wrote: "For man goes to dwell in his world" (Ecclesiastes 12:5).

These words are deep and have many interpretations. We

will explain them from a particular angle:

When it arose in G-d's will to create human beings, He first created a place where they could live — our planet, Earth, and after creating this "globe," He created mankind and placed them upon it.

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*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

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The man paled. "Why was I chosen for this?" he asked.

Rav Bentzion's face flushed. "You wish to know? Fine. I won't reveal who these souls that were born to you are, but why they were sent to you, I will tell."

A hush fell over the room. The Rav began, "In a previous incarnation, you did thus and thus."

Know that everything is measured and just. This is your full portion of suffering — no more. You will have no health related or financial woes, and your other children will be healthy and bring you great joy."

The man left transformed — stronger, accepting his fate with love.

And indeed, he later had several healthy children, and his family remains blessed and healthy to this day.

**Parshat Nasso - The Destructive Influence of Sight**

At first glance, it appears that all people inhabit the same world, breathe the same air, see the same sights, and taste the same flavors. That is how it appears to our material eyes, at least.

King Solomon comes and reveals to us: “Know that this is not so; each and every person has his own private world where he ‘dwells’, and one’s character traits and way of thinking are what create this world.”

A person’s life does not primarily take place in the external world visible to us but rather in his internal world. A person resides within his internal world; that is where he truly is, and that is where he lives.

A person’s inner world is a complete universe with its own atmosphere, landscapes, and places, and with the figures that populate it.

The air one breathes is the air found in the space of his inner world; the sights he sees are the vistas of this world; and his

relationship with the individuals around him is shaped by how they are depicted in the perception of his inner world.

No two people live in the very same world. People may stand right next to each other yet exist in entirely different places.

In Parshat Re’eh, the Torah reveals a mystery about this inner world that exists within each person:

“Be careful not to be ensnared by them (the nations), after they have been destroyed before you; and do not inquire about their g-ds, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their g-ds? I, too, will do the same.’” (Deuteronomy 12:30)

This verse teaches us that the power of ‘sight’ and surrounding influences can change a person’s inner world.

When someone sees a certain reality — even if, intellectually, he knows that this reality is warped — what he sees seeps into him against his will and can cause fluctuations in one’s internal world.

## The Power of Sight

Returning to Rabbi Shwadron's experience, he shared an answer to his question: "Why hadn't I become frustrated on the second visit as I had in the first time?"<sup>10</sup>

and we quote his words:

"I then remembered what the Rav of Brisk and Rabbi Leib Chasman taught regarding the verse: 'You saw their abominations and their idols — wood and stone, silver and gold — that were with them' (Deuteronomy 29:16).

They explained: 'You saw their abominations and their idols' — the Jewish people passed through Egypt and saw non-Jews steeped in idolatry and filth, and Moses stood and warned them, "Perhaps there is among you a root producing gall and wormwood" (ibid. 29:17).

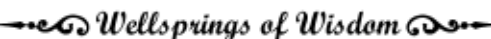
He did not rely on man's nature to despise such things on his own, because they saw and beheld

them, as it says: 'And you saw their abominations and their idols.'

It is man's nature to become desensitized. Those idols that may have disgusted them the first time are now merely "wood and stone" — one may with time no longer be repulsed, and while still uninterested, be no longer stirred to rejection. It may now be simply seen as something different, something 'unique.'

On a third encounter, these same idols may become "silver and gold that were with them"; people start asking for binoculars to get a better look. And when things have reached this point, there is no choice but to rebuke the nation with the rod of discipline, so that none will be lost - "Perhaps there is among you a root producing gall and wormwood."

A person who arrives in India is surely at first revolted by all the idol worship he sees there. It



likely utterly disgusts him — these are primitive people, he thinks. But after a few months there, he grows accustomed.

Indeed, it may still seem primitive to him, but now he will claim that everyone is entitled to live by their own beliefs, and they all cannot just be condemned.

Another few months then go by, and now those same abominations will have become “silver and gold.” He will have gotten to know them and sees that “they too have beautiful things,” G-d forbid. Such is the dangerous power of familiarity and getting used to something.

“Man is a weak creature,” Rabbi Shalom concluded, “and can be tempted easily. Three times — just three times seeing idolatry or gazing at some forbidden desire — and one’s intellect and better judgement can be sealed shut or at least altered negatively.

In just three times, the evil inclination can fit a person with an inner lens of materialism, bad character traits, and corrupt views through which he then sees the entire world. Worst of all, one may not even feel that he is facing a test; in his own eyes, he thinks he’s a free thinker and an open-minded individual.

One day, when coming to pray, one may see his neighbor holding a newspaper and take a quick peek at the headlines. The next day, he might take it a step further and remove the paper from the mailbox and glance at what’s going on, and on the third day, he might get caught up and start to miss the prayers.

That is how the evil inclination operates: on the first day it says, ‘Do this’ for the first time; the next day, it says, ‘Do it again’ for the second time, until finally it says, ‘Go — and serve idols.’”<sup>11</sup>

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*~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~*

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**11.** On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Nissan 5748 (1988), the Lubavitcher Rebbe declared (“Sefer HaSichot’ 5748, Part I, p. 355):

“In a talk delivered by the Rebbe Rayatz (Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn) fifty-nine years ago, he said: ‘The avodah (spiritual

## The Reward of a Sin Is Another Sin

This then is the meaning of the teaching of Ben Azzai (Avot 4:2):

“Run to perform a minor mitzvah and flee from sin, for one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah, and one sin leads to another sin. For the reward of a mitzvah is (the opportunity for

another) mitzvah, and the reward of a sin is (the downward pull of another) sin”: G-d demands of man that, with his free will, he open his mind, choose good, despise and turn away from evil, and to constantly seek to fulfill the commandments of the Torah.

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### Wellsprings of Wisdom

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task) to bring the redemption has already ended; all that remains is to polish the buttons’ (meaning, the Jewish people are already worthy of redemption, and the only thing preventing it is a small amount of work — akin to the final work of polishing buttons).

“Now” — continued the Lubavitcher Rebbe — “after an additional fifty-nine years of effort, we have already finished polishing the buttons. All that is left is to stand ready to greet Moshiach.”

We may ask: If everything has already been done, why haven’t we still been redeemed?

Recently, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Morgenstern shared a profound insight: In Heaven, anticipation for Moshiach grows, yet multitudes of souls weep, fearing they have not achieved full teshuvah.

Since true repentance requires facing the exact test that was experienced with past sins, souls who once fell into

idolatry, now struggle, as those temptations no longer exist.

In response, Heaven devised a final test — a system that would embody all forms of impurity, heresy, and sin, allowing people to “see from one end of the world to the other” but through the lens of impurity. By resisting its pull and overcoming this ultimate challenge, the Jewish people can be fully prepared for the redemption.

One year after the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s talk — namely, in 1989 — Tim Berners-Lee proposed a global hypertext system, enabling people to share information and link documents, and what is known today as the internet was born.

Souls now have the final task to rectify the sins of all previous of all generations which have reincarnated into souls of this generation, refining their vision to perceive divine truth, and behold the revelation of Moshiach.

In the words of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler:<sup>12</sup>

“Every person has the faculty of choice, the power to choose between good and evil. But although all men possess this power, the position and point of a person’s choice varies from individual to individual.

Some have their point of choice on a high spiritual level — for example, one who grew up in a Torah-based environment among the righteous and those who practice good deeds; His upbringing has assisted him so that his struggle is not between committing some forbidden act or neglecting a positive commandment, but rather in the finer aspects of divine service of the heart and proper intent.

Another might have been raised among the wicked, such as lowly thieves. For him, there may be no real choice about whether to steal — he’s accustomed to theft already. It could very well

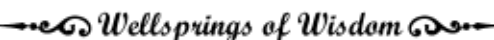
be that his point of choice will only come into play if, during a robbery, he is given the chance to resort to murder.

That is where his internal struggle will come to the fore; that is what he will recognize as wrong at his own spiritual level — despite his evil inclination trying to convince him otherwise.

Just as there is a difference from one person to another in their point of choice, there is likewise variance within the same individual over time.

A person’s point of choice is not fixed in one place. By making good choices, he ascends further upward — i.e., his inner world is elevated, and things that once seemed important to him now look like mere child’s play.

Conversely, through bad choices, one’s inner world is dragged downward, like ripe fruit falling into the arms of impurity, G-d forbid.



12. ‘Michtav M’Eliyahu’ (vol. 1, p. 113).

**Parshat Nasso - The Solution: Critique**

This is the meaning of Ben Azzai's statement: "For the reward of a mitzvah is a mitzvah."

The reward for doing a mitzvah is that one's inner world becomes holier, purer, and more elevated so that the next mitzvah he will perform will be on a totally different and higher level in quality and intensity.

By continually performing mitzvot on a progressively higher level, a person can reach such a state that holy and spiritual realities will shine clearly for them in all of their lofty essence; a refined light of wisdom and

intellect will then emerge within him, and sublime concepts will be absorbed into his consciousness.

Inevitably, he then merits to 'behold his world' of the highest realm during his lifetime.

On the other hand, "the 'reward' of a sin is another sin"; the punishment for a sin is that a person's inner world is dulled. Through committing many sins, one is punished by becoming "addicted" — he suffers the dreadful mental punishment of being compelled to sin further."

As such, who, in their right mind, would wish to commit sins?

**The Solution: Critique**

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's eyes continued to read the letter:

"My beloved son, know that there are only two ways to protect yourself from this terrible impurity: critique and mockery.

When we see a vile form of behavior — conduct that contradicts the Torah — we must criticize it and make a mockery of it.

It is imperative to delve into the recognition of the foolishness of unbecoming and lowly conduct and to recognize its wickedness and disgrace. Heaven forbid one should apply 'the benefit of the doubt' in such a case, for that itself poses the danger of one contracting this 'disease' themselves."

Nevertheless, the letter goes on to teach that we must differentiate

**Parshat Nasso - The Danger of the Sixth Exile**

between the actor and the action — between the person who behaves in a certain negative way and the behavior itself.

The person as a human being must be judged favorably and be seen with kindness and mercy.

But the behavior itself — we must denounce and subject to criticism.”

This is the heart of the letter by Rabbi Reuven Dessler to his famous son.

On this basis, the words of the Gemara (Sotah 2a) become quite clear and easy to understand:

“Whoever sees a Sotah in her disgrace should abstain from wine” — since the wine caused her frivolity.

A person, including even someone of high stature — who has seen a Sotah in her disgrace, even if the act alone revolts him,

will inevitably sustain some degree of harm to his inner world simply by seeing her lowly spiritual state.

To protect himself from this harm, one must subject the act to critique and ridicule.

He must explain to himself: “This woman drank wine and lost her mind, are you going to allow yourself to be impressed and influenced by what a mindless and heartless woman did?”

To reinforce his recollection of that fact, the sages advised that he refrain from drinking wine.

Each time he avoids wine, it reminds him of the lowliness of the base and shallow deed that he saw, and thus, his inner world, his personal world, will remain preserved and unharmed.

Having discussed all of the above, we can now continue our discussion.

**The Danger of the Sixth Exile**

From time immemorial, it was decreed upon the Jewish people to

endure five exiles: Egypt, Babylonia, Medea, Greece, and Edom.



Parshat Nasso - The Danger of the Sixth Exile

For the first four exiles, the Holy One established a fixed time and end date, and when this time came, the Jewish people returned to their land.

But for the fifth exile — the Edomite exile — G-d did not set any limit or deadline for its end.

G-d had showed Yaakov our forefather, when he reached Beit El, the “progression” of the exiles, as it is written: “And he dreamed, and behold, a ladder set upon the earth, whose top reached to heaven, and angels of G-d were ascending and descending upon it” (Genesis 28:12).

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 29:2) states:

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said: “At that moment, the Holy One, blessed be He, showed Yaakov our forefather, the angel appointed over Babylonia ascending seventy steps (corresponding to seventy years that

Babylonia would rule over the Jewish people) and then descending.

Next, the angel appointed over Medea ascended fifty-two steps and then descended.

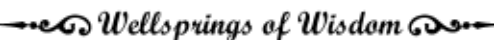
Then, the angel of Greece ascended one hundred and eighty steps and descended.

Finally, G-d showed him the angel of Edom, who kept ascending higher and higher.”

Yaakov, our forefather, observed the angel of Edom’s ongoing ascent and was frightened: “When will he fall and recede; when will that wicked nation fall with him?”

The Vilna Gaon explains that from that moment and on, Yaakov our forefather began taking actions to shorten and constrain Edom’s rule.<sup>13</sup> His activity is hinted at in the verses:

“Yaakov lifted his eyes and saw Esav approaching with four hundred men, so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel,



13. See extensive discussion on this in ‘HaTekufah B’Saarat Eliyahu’

(p. 5) by Rabbi Yisrael Eliyahu Weintraub.

## Parshat Nasso - Corrupting the Inner Realm

and the two maidservants. He placed the maidservants and their children first, then Leah and her children behind them, and Rachel and Yosef last” (Genesis 33:1–2).

Once Yaakov saw the length of Edom’s reign, he realized that in order to shorten it, a ‘sixth exile’ was necessary — a special and unique exile unlike anything the Jewish people had experienced in their wanderings among the nations.

This extended form of exile would be meant and experienced specifically by Torah scholars, who would suffer from it the most; it would be an exile of those who study Torah.

This exile would be one in which “scholars’ wisdom will be rejected, and those who fear sin will be despised; they will wander from city to city and receive no mercy.”

Through this suffering and hardship of Torah scholars, the exile is hastened even more toward its end, for “the distress upon Torah scholars speeds the redemption, just as it is said, ‘The reward of gatherings at the large Torah assemblies is the distress and pressure’”.<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, this sixth exile will ultimately bring about the downfall of Esav’s heavenly minister.

However, even though this sixth exile was brought about to hasten the downfall of Esav’s descendants, every Jew must take great care not to be among those who bring hardship and suffering upon Torah scholars.

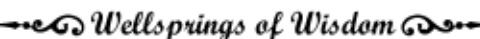
For one who causes them suffering is punished, may G-d protect us.

Let us move on to answer the final questions we asked.

## Corrupting the Inner Realm

In the previous pages, we explained that every Jew

lives in his own inner world. That is where he



**Parshat Nasso - Corrupting the Inner Realm**

resides, breathes, and perceives reality.

That inner world is a person's true reality — yet it is, for the time being, covered by a body of flesh.

After he passes from this world, the body of flesh will be buried in the ground, and his inner world will stand in judgment before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.

We also explained that one's inner world experiences constant changes and fluctuation. When one acts according to the Torah's will, his inner world becomes sanctified, purified, and elevated, enabling him to conquer new spiritual heights; but if, Heaven forbid, one sins, he defiles his inner world, submerging and losing his true being to the domains of the forces of impurity.

When one's inner world sinks into the chambers of impurity, the Divine illumination withdraws from him, leaving a kind of internal void that makes it difficult for him to connect to G-dliness.

He then loses his taste for Torah study and for prayer, and the service of G-d becomes 'a burden' for him, may Heaven spare us.

But although this is a very low state to find oneself in, he can still return to G-d and purify his inner world with relative ease through repentance.

That is all on condition that one avoids the harmful habit of belittling Torah scholars.

This causes his inner world to fall into a much deeper impurity, into the realms of heresy and forgetting G-d.

Certainly, there is never a cause for one to fall into despair, and Torah scholars do have the power to elevate and pull him out of the depths.

However, because he scorns the Torah scholars, he may grow ever more distant from them, inevitably leaving his inner world brimming with heresy, hatred, and fury toward G-d and His people.

**Parshat Nasso - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

And while outwardly, a person who belittles Torah scholars can appear respectable — a well-dressed and

polished man, deep inside, deep within, everything is darkened and in need of repair.

**Summary and Practical Conclusions**

1. Every individual has free choice — the ability to choose between good and evil. Although this ability is common to all people, its point of application varies from person to person. For example, someone who received a proper and thorough Torah education and those who practice good deeds will benefit that their struggle is not about whether or not to transgress an actual sin or to neglect a practical mitzvah.

Rather, their free choice is exercised on a more subtle level — refining the intentions of the heart and the mind.

At the same time, another individual who was raised among the wicked experiences his point of choice on a lower level. For him, the point of question may be whether or not to steal.

2. Just as there is a difference from one person to another in the nature of their free choice, so too there may be a difference within the same person over time.

An individual's point of choice is never fixed in one spot; good choices elevate a person upward, causing his

inner world to ascend, and things he once considered difficult then come to look like child's play.

However, through bad decisions, a person's inner world deteriorates downward, like ripe fruit falling into the arms of impurity, G-d forbid.

3. The power of sight is tremendously potent and can alter a person's inner world. When one sees a certain reality — even if, on an intellectual level, he knows it is warped or evil — simply seeing it seeps into his conscience involuntarily and causes fluctuations and reverberations in his soul.

A human being is weak and easily tempted; even a few exposures — a few mere glimpses at a sinful act or lustful behavior — can block and darken his mind.

In just a few exposures, the evil inclination can alter a person with an inner lens tinted by materialism, bad character traits, and false perspectives through which he will view the entire world. Worst of all, he may even remain unaware of it.

**Parshat Nasso - Summary and Practical Conclusions**

4. A great way to be saved from this terrible impurity, and the impact of impure sight on a person's soul and inner world, is through critique and mockery. When we see disgraceful behavior and behavior contrary to the Torah, we must criticize it and make a mockery of it.

However, we must separate between the person performing the act and the act itself.

The person himself, as a human being, we must judge favorably and arouse kindness and mercy upon him for having transgressed and ridiculed the Torah and its sages. Yet, as for such behavior, we must denounce it and pass judgment on it.

5. We must know that someone who belittles Torah scholars lowers himself into a deep form of impurity — into

realms of heresy and forgetfulness of G-d — which is worse than any other impurity.

However, this is no cause for despair; Torah scholars possess the capacity to lift such an individual out of the deepest pit.

However, being that he mocks and belittles them, it becomes forbidden for them to come in contact with him, and as a result, his inner world remains filled with heresy and hatred toward G-d and His anointed.

From the outside, a person accustomed to belittling Torah scholars may appear dignified, impressive — decked out in a suit and emitting a pleasant fragrance — but inside, they are darker than soot.

May G-d protect us from the words of such people and place our lot with the righteous and holy. Amen !

**Shabbat Shalom!**



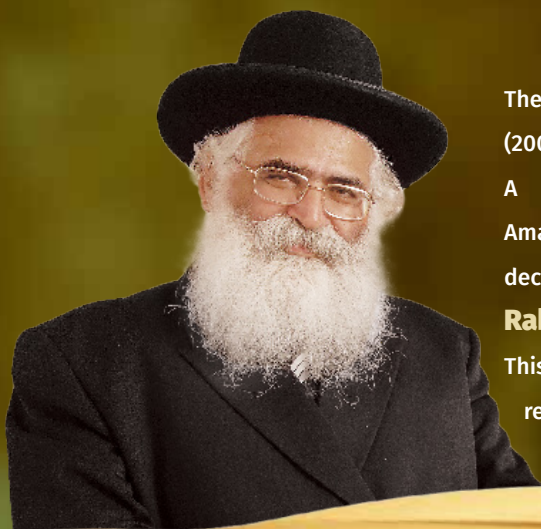
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City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	8:07 pm	9:15 pm	9:37 pm
Miami	7:52 pm	8:50 pm	9:23 pm
Los Angeles	7:45 pm	8:47 pm	9:15 pm
Montreal	8:22 pm	9:38 pm	9:53 pm
Toronto	8:38 pm	9:51 pm	10:09 pm
London	8:55 pm	10:27 pm	10:26 pm
Jerusalem	7:27 pm	8:18 pm	9:14 pm
Tel Aviv	7:25 pm	8:16 pm	9:11 pm
Haifa	7:26 pm	8:20 pm	9:15 pm
Be'er Sheva	7:22 pm	8:17 pm	9:11 pm

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*From the Words of*  
**HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l**

*When reward is given in Heaven, one is checked for their enthusiasm when performing the commandments.*

*When one is served a bowl of soup for example, if it hot it will be eaten happily, but if it is cold it may not be eaten at all; in the same manner, G-d observes and pays attention as to whether or not the commandments were done energetically and joyfully.*



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