



TORAH 4 TEENS

BY TEENS NCSY ISRAEL



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TRUE PEACE

In Parshat Naso, the Torah presents a wide range of seemingly unrelated topics, and in the center of it all is Birkat Kohanim. Rav Jonathan Sacks, in his article “The Pursuit of Peace,” explains that the placement of these blessings is not accidental. The final words of the blessing, “May Hashem lift His face toward you and grant you peace,” are key to understanding the entire parsha.

Rav Sacks explains that peace in Judaism is more than the absence of conflict. True peace is harmony: a state in which different people, roles, and ideas are able to exist together with mutual respect. The Torah recognizes that human beings are naturally different, and that those differences can easily lead to jealousy, resentment, or division. The challenge is to create a society in which every person feels valued and included.

Each section of the parsha reflects this

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idea. The Sotah ritual seeks to restore peace between husband and wife. The detailed repetition of the princes’ offerings teaches the importance of giving honor and recognition to every tribe equally. The Levitical families are each assigned their own meaningful role, while the Nazirite allows an ordinary person to aspire to greater holiness. Together, these laws create a framework for harmony within the nation.

Parshat Naso teaches us that peace is not something we simply hope for, it is something we must actively build through respect, sensitivity, and care for one another every day. According to the Rambam, it is for this purpose that the whole Torah was given: to create peace in the world.

As we transition from the beautiful holiday of Shavuot, when we receive the Torah, into the holiness of Shabbat, may we remember to continue the work of the final bracha of Birkat Kohanim. Shabbat Shalom!



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NOT OUR GIFTS, ONLY OUR CHOICES

The parsha introduces the laws of compensation and teshuvah with the words “When a man or woman sins...”. Bamidbar Rabbah states that “a man or woman” refers to tzadikim, “whom God loves,” because unlike the Kohanim and Leviim, whose status is a birthright, tzadikim are defined by an active choice to follow God. Although their situation is not

ideal, they are on a path of improvement.

Converts are described as those “whom God especially loves.” Why is this so? Bamidbar Rabbah brings a metaphor: A gazelle joined the king’s flock of sheep, and when asked why he favored it, he explained that although the sheep behave just as well as the gazelle, they are only acting on instinct, while the gazelle went against its nature to join the king’s flock.

A person’s value is not in their gifts; it is in how they apply them. When we act within our comfort zone, even if it is a good place, we remain static. Possessing a good quality can feel like success, but progress only happens when we use and develop it.

Later in the parsha, in Birkat Kohanim, we see an emphasis on personal growth over societal hierarchy.

Bamidbar Rabbah discusses the thoughts of a non-Kohen, who may feel that because of his lower status, he will not receive the same blessings. His answer lies in the verse: “When you eat the labor of your hands... it is good for you in this world and the next.” Our merit is in our work. It is earned. A Kohen and a non-Kohen have different roles, but they can both receive equal reward for reaching their unique potential.

Rabbi Sacks speaks about the right way to compliment a person. We should applaud not perfection, but effort. When people receive

positive feedback for things out of their control, such as beauty or talent, it creates a fear of failure. However, celebrating a person’s effort to become a new version of themselves, even if incomplete, motivates them to keep trying and keep moving toward the goalpost of their life’s mission.

“A righteous person cannot stand in the place of someone who has done teshuvah.” A person’s position is not what defines them; it is the distance they have traveled to arrive there.

Hashem is infinite and does not need quantitative measures of success to see how far we have come. The only true benchmark for progress is who we were yesterday. May we all merit to be the tzadikim described in Parshat Naso, who are not handed greatness on a silver platter, but choose, struggle, grow, and transform themselves in their journey toward Hashem. ■

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