



## GEULAS YISRAEL

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This article was originally composed for Parshat Naso and reflects on the gifts of the Nesi'im. Its central theme - the need to balance eternal values with immediate needs - continues to resonate in Parshat Beha'alotcha, as we struggled on our desert journey toward Eretz Yisrael.

# Balancing Eternity and the Moment

Everything was set. The Mishkan had been inaugurated. The camp had been carefully arranged, each shevet assigned its flag, its color, and its place within the encampment. Clear boundaries demarcated the different sectors of the Jewish encampment. We stood ready to march toward Eretz Yisrael, to enter the promised land and establish the kingdom of Hashem.

The Leviim had replaced the firstborn and

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were entrusted, among other responsibilities, with protecting the sanctity of the Mishkan and guarding its boundaries, ensuring that the unauthorized would not cross beyond them.

Before proceeding, the Torah records the gifts brought by the head of each tribe, or the Nesi'im. These gifts were likely delivered much earlier in the timeline, during the events of Parshat Shemini, which correspond to Rosh Chodesh Nissan and the inauguration of the Mishkan. Yet the Torah chooses to record these gifts only later, in Parshat Naso.

### DIVERSITY WITHIN CONFORMITY

The gifts are striking in their similarity. Each nasi delivered the exact same collection of gifts: korbanot, utensils that would serve as klei sharet, and wagons drawn by bulls. Chazal explain that although the gifts were physically identical, each nasi invested them with a different vision, seeing within them an allusion to the future destiny and character of his own shevet.

For this reason, and to stress that identical actions can carry profoundly different meanings, the Torah records each gift separately rather than summarizing them collectively. Though externally identical, the offerings reflected different intentions and different spiritual worlds.

The gifts of the Nesi'im are then a paradigm for diversity, especially within a religious world that demands conformity. We all daven with the same words, composed thousands of years ago by the Anshei Knesset Hagedolah. Yet no two tefillot are identical, each is shaped by different emotions, hopes, fears, and

experiences. Likewise, we all perform the same mitzvot, but ideally those mitzvot are animated by deeply personal intentions and inner worlds. Shared ritual should not erase spiritual individuality.

But the gifts of the Nesi'im symbolized more than individuality within conformity. They also reflected the balance between enduring impact and immediate utility.

### ETERNAL GIFTS

The korbanot the Nesi'im offered were timeless. This was the inauguration of the Mishkan, and it was only fitting to launch the site of korbanot with special offerings. By bringing korbanot during that first week of inauguration, the Nesi'im established the Mishkan's central identity. From that moment onward, korbanot became the enduring rhythm of the Mishkan and later of the Mikdash.

Similarly, the plates, cups, and ladles they donated initially served a practical purpose. The ke'arot and mizrakim carried flour offerings, while the ladles held ketoret gifts. Yet even after those inaugural offerings had been brought, the vessels themselves were incorporated into the Mishkan as klei sharet. Presumably, these original utensils delivered by the Nesi'im continued to serve throughout the history of the Mishkan and perhaps even later in the Mikdash built by Shlomo Hamel-ech. Like the korbanot, these vessels became part of the enduring life of the Mishkan and later the Mikdash.

### WAGONS FOR THE JOURNEY

The third component of the Nesi'im's gifts were the wagons. These wagons, drawn by bulls, were given to the Leviim to help transport the massive structure of the Mishkan from location to location throughout the desert journey. Unlike the korbanot and the klei

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sharet, these wagons were purely functional. They addressed an immediate logistical need, one that would eventually disappear.

Presumably, once the Jewish people entered Eretz Yisrael, these wagons were no longer necessary. Certainly, once the Mishkan reached Shiloh, where it stood for 369 years, the wagons no longer served any purpose. Eventually they were discarded. These wagons served only a temporary function. They served an important role during the journey through the desert, but not beyond it.

By combining these different elements within their package of gifts, the Nesi'im symbolized the dual importance of both long-term and short-term needs. Public servants such as Nesi'im are responsible not only for eternal values, but also for immediate and practical concerns.

We must first learn to distinguish between transience and eternity. The gravest sins

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occur when we lose sight of eternity because of the pressures of the moment. We surrender to temporary fears, desires, or pressures without sufficiently considering the impact those choices have upon our eternal neshamah.

Even when we do not sin, we often blur the distinction between the world of netzach and the world of transience. I still remember the best advice I received as a college student struggling under the dual curriculum of Yeshiva University, unsure how to budget my time between Torah study and the computer science courses required for my degree. An older student told me: "Always remember the difference between chaye olam and chaye sha'ah."

This adage served me well throughout college, helping me focus upon my Torah studies even under academic pressures. My classes, important as they were, belonged to the world of chaye sha'ah. They were necessary for the profession I imagined pursuing at that stage of life. But my Torah study belonged to the world of netzach, shaping a neshamah whose significance would long outlast the practical value of any degree.

Sometimes we overinvest in a world of transience, in accomplishments that quickly fade and are replaced, while neglecting the quieter investments which endure eternally.

Just the same, we sometimes trivialize the transient and fleeting precisely because it is not permanent. We naturally prefer investing in things that endure rather than in things that quickly pass. People of long-term vision can sometimes dismiss short-term needs, so captivated are they by sweeping and lasting ideals. Yet temporary needs are still real needs. A wagon which serves only for a brief desert journey may not possess the permanence of a korban or a kli sharet,

but without it the Mishkan remains frozen in place.

The Nesi'im assigned importance to both. They brought gifts that would last eternally, such as the korbanot and the klei sharet, but they also contributed wagons whose value was entirely temporary.

Not every meaningful contribution must endure forever. Some acts are important precisely because they answer the needs of a particular moment. The wagons did not survive into the era of Shiloh or the Mikdash, but without them the Mishkan could not move forward through the desert. ■



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