



**CHANGING THE WORLD FOR GOOD**

**T**HE TEACHINGS OF THE TORAH ARE ETERNAL AND AL-WAYS HAVE RELEVANCE for our lives. We see this in all as-pects of the Torah, including the instructions and narratives which concern events which took place thousands of years ago. Thus our Sedra<sup>1</sup> begins by describing how the sacred Sanctuary would be carried by the Jewish people travelling through the desert. What relevance can this journey through the desert have for our lives to-day? Let us see.

First, consider the idea that the Sages tell us that the long journey of the Jewish people through the desert had a spiritual purpose, preparing for our entry into the Holy Land.

In our world, taken as a whole, there are positive, sacred spiritual forces which reveal the Divine. Conversely, there are also forces of evil which have the effect of concealing G-dliness and goodness. Everything emanates from G-d and He has set this interplay of forces in mo-tion. Yet G-d has also placed in the picture the members of humanity, and particularly the Jewish people. Our activities, guided by G-d, have an effect on the whole.

Thus G-d gave us the Torah at Sinai and instructed us in great de-tail about building the Sanctuary. Then He told us to travel through the desert towards the holy Land of Israel. The spiritual purpose of this

was to change the spiritual balance of the whole of existence<sup>2</sup>. By travelling in the desert with the sacred Sanctuary, we were bringing holiness to the realm of the unholy. There were two aspects to this: warding off and thus subduing the negative force of evil, which conceals G-d, and at the same time drawing the holiness of the Divine Presence into the world.

Thus, as the Torah describes, we followed the Pillar of Cloud across the desert. When this would stop, somewhere in the wilderness, we set up camp and erected the Sanctuary with its special curtains and its sacred golden objects, such as the Menorah and the Ark of the Covenant.

Our Sedra gives details about the way the different branches of the Tribe of Levi were responsible for the various aspects of this task, whether setting up the outer structure of the Sanctuary, or putting in place the sacred Menorah and the Ark. The outer structure of the Sanctuary expresses guarding from and warding off evil. Setting up the golden Menorah and the Ark expresses positively drawing holiness into the world.

This spiritually prepared the world for our eventual entry into the Land of Israel and building the Temple in Jerusalem.

This passage in the Torah has eternal relevance, because today too, we have a very similar task. Scattered through the world, often wandering, we have the spiritual task to ward off and subdue evil, and to express holiness in direct and positive ways. The laws of the Torah guide us in both areas: by avoiding what is forbidden by Jewish teaching we subdue the power of evil, and by fulfilling the positive commandments we reveal good.

This long task during our centuries of exile leads directly to the ultimate goal - the universal transformation which will reveal goodness and holiness and the rebuilding of the Temple as a spiritual centre for the world.

1. Numbers 4:21-7:89. 2. See R. Shneur Zalman's *Likkutei Torah*, Naso, 20a, 22b, and Zohar II 184a. 3. See Numbers 9:15-23. 4. Freely based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Likkutei Sichot* vol. 13 pp. 16-19.

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SEDRA NASO

**THE NAZIRITE**

“Mummy, I’ve decided I want to become a Nazir,” Benjy announced one day at the supper table. His family looked at him in surprise. “What’s a Nazir?” Dina asked.

Benjy explained. “We just learned about the Nazir in school today. A Nazir is a person who loves G-d so much that he wants to make himself or herself holy to G-d. Anyone can become a Nazir - you just have to make a vow that you won’t drink wine or eat grapes, or anything made from them, you won’t cut your hair, or go near a dead person”.

Benjy mused for a moment, thinking about never having a haircut, and his mother not complaining at all.

Then he continued. “You don’t have to be a Nazir forever, though, it can just be for a certain amount of time, and when that time is finished, like six months or a year, the Nazir has to bring some offerings to the Temple.”

“But why do you want to become a Nazir?” his mother asked him. She was wondering if what he really wanted was to have long hair.

“Well, you see, we had this speaker in our school last week who told us we should always be doing more good deeds. And, er, since I’m already doing all the Mitzvot which I can, what more can I do?”

Benjy's mother raised her eyebrows, ever so slightly. He went on. "So I was very pleased to hear about this new Mitzvah. I think I'm going to start today," he said complacently.

"But there's a problem," said his sister Rachel. "If the Temple is still in ruins, you cannot bring the offerings at the end of six months or a year. You would have to be a Nazir till the Temple is rebuilt!"

"Oh, I didn't think of that... But that might be any day, surely!"

Benjy's father smiled. "Benjy, I think it's a wonderful thing to want to be – but, actually, being a Nazir was not something people are encouraged to become. The Torah lays down these guidelines for a person who feels that this is how he wants to serve G-d - but it's not an ideal." "Why not?" asked Benjy.

"The Nazir is trying to remove himself from the world - what we should really be doing is trying to make the world itself into a more holy place. How do you think you can do that? Do you think there is something you might do, apart from becoming a Nazir....?"

"Well..." Benjy said grudgingly, "maybe I could give more charity instead." Then he admitted, "Actually, I don't really give very much at the moment. And maybe I could help you and Mummy more."

"That's an excellent idea. If you look, there's always something that you can do even better than you're doing at the moment," his mother said.

"OK, so I suppose I'm not becoming a Nazir yet," Benjy said, giving up hopes for long hair for the moment. "At least, not till the Temple is rebuilt."

"Well," said Rachel, "with all the good deeds you're doing, I'm sure that will be very soon!"

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