



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת חיים

## MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

Parshas Nasso 5770 פרתשת נשא תש"ע

### THE LONGEST PARSHAH

Certain aspects of *parshas* Nasso make this *parshah* quite noteworthy and familiar. The *parshah* is unique due to its sheer length; and it is the final section of this *parshah* that primarily accounts for its substantial size.

This final part – dealing with the offerings brought by the twelve *nesi'im* (tribal leaders) on the occasion of the dedication of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) – is quite a curious section in and of itself. Perhaps its most noteworthy quality is the uncanny repetition of the same refrain. The Torah depicts all of the details of the offering brought by the first *nasi*, which include vessels, their value and their material (gold or silver); the meal-offerings; the spice-offering; and the various animal offerings, their types and number. Now, every *nasi* ended up bringing the exact same offering, and the Torah proceeds to enumerate all of these details – basically verbatim – twelve times! Hence (on the optimistic premise that the overwhelming majority of *shul*-goers pay relatively careful attention to the Torah reading) when the Ba'al Koreh (one who reads the Torah) arrives at this section, many in the audience are practically able to recite these *pesukim* along with him, as they hear the familiar words: "...*Par echad ben bakar, ayil echad, keves echad ben sh'naso l'olah...*"

The obvious question that preys on our subconscious whenever we hear this familiar refrain is what, exactly, is going on over here? We know the Torah never wastes an unnecessary letter; so why all the repetition? Wouldn't it have been simpler, shorter, and quicker to merely list the first offering and then

conclude with one phrase along the lines of: "And so it was with the other *nesi'im*"?

### THE PLAN OF NESANEL BEN TZUAR

The truth of the matter is that there was a lot more going on behind the scenes regarding this episode of the tribal offerings. Firstly, the numerous details and figures surrounding these offerings were by no means arbitrary or happenstance; the decision to bring this or that number and this or that type of offering was not based on the *nasi*'s mere whim. Numerous calculations and truly lofty intentions lay behind these offerings; the commentaries and Midrashic sources demonstrate how the details of these offerings actually correspond to various profound meanings and mystical allusions.

Another very significant factor at play here was a landmark joint decision at which the *nesi'im* arrived. The Chofetz Chaim (*Zechor L'Miriam, ch. 11*) cites the Medrash that Nesanel ben Tzuar, *nasi* of the tribe of Yissaschar, took stock of the situation at the very outset. He saw that each *nasi* was planning to bring his own type of offering, with his own calculations and reasons. Although these intentions were idealistic, he feared that a type of "competition" would ensue amongst the *nesi'im*, with each one trying to "outdo" the other in bringing the loftiest and most meaningful sacrifice. As occurred years before with Kayin and Hevel (*Bereishis, ch. 4*), this type of "sacrifice-rivalry" breeds jealousy and can lead to disastrous consequences.

And so Nesanel ben Tzuar submitted a proposal: let

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# משנת היום

all the *nesi'im* decide on a uniform offering, and each one would bring this type, without deviating one iota from the agreed-upon details. In this way, rivalry, jealousy, and hard-feelings would be avoided. The *nesi'im* agreed and kept to the deal to a “T.”

The *nesi'im*'s arrangement helps to account for the unique set-up of this *parshah*, as was mentioned above. They merited this immortal and unparalleled place of honor due to the careful consideration they displayed for each other.

This idea is reflected in the Mishnah in Avos (4:1). Many of us are familiar with the beginning of that Mishnah, which states: “Who is a rich man? One who is happy with his lot.” The Mishnah details some other virtues as well, and concludes:

איזהו מכבד, המכבד את הבריות, שנאמר כי מכבדי  
אכבד ובני יקלו.

“Who is honored? One who bestows honor on others, as the verse says, ‘For I shall honor those who honor Me (Hashem); but those who disparage Me, shall be degraded,’ (*Shmuel I, 2:30*).”

The *Tiferes Yisrael (ibid.)* explains: Most often, when a person treats others with earnest deference, he does so out of recognition of what the true essence of that individual is: he is created in the Image of Hashem and thus is deserving of respect. As such, when one accords his fellow with honor, he is actually bestowing honor to Hashem. In turn, Hashem will reward him by granting him honor.

The *nesi'im*, explains the Chofetz Chaim, showed true deference to each other. They relinquished the opportunity to “shine” and devise their own elaborate offerings, just to protect the honor of their colleagues and to prevent the eruption of a nasty rivalry. Because of this outstanding show of respect and consideration, they were granted the ultimate place of honor: Their noble deeds were forever

fixed in the Torah, replete with all the exact details, despite the fact that this episode of the offerings could have been recorded more succinctly. On the contrary; the details were specifically repeated, to reflect and emphasize the nature of their noble deed, how each one stuck to the exact plan, without adding or subtracting one detail.

The Chofetz Chaim concludes with a hopeful note: if we can learn this lesson from the *nesi'im* and likewise treat each other with such respect and consideration, we may also merit to be the beneficiaries of abundant kindness from the Almighty.

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