

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Parashat Naso**  
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**פרשת נשא**  
**י"ב בסיון תשע"ח**

Torah Reading: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 4:21-7:89

In this *parasha*, Hashem outlines the service of the Gershon family of *Levi'im* (Levites), gives the laws relating to the *sotah* (suspected adulteress) and the *nazir* (nazirite), and describes to Moshe and Aharon the *birkat cohanim* (priestly blessing); the heads of tribes bring gifts to the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle).

An interesting mitzvah, derived from this *parasha*, addresses not the *cohanim* or *levi'im* alone, but all of us. Chapter 5, verses 6 and 7 state:

דַּבֵּר, אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אִישׁ אֹו-אִשָּׁה כִּי יַעֲשׂוּ מִכָּל-חַטָּאת הָאָדָם, לְמַעַל מֵעַל  
בָּהּ; וְאָשָׁמָה, הַנִּפְשׁ הַהוּא. וְהִתְנַדוּ, אֶת-חַטָּאתָם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ, וְהָשִׁיב אֶת-  
אֲשָׁמוֹ בְּרֵאשׁוֹ...  
...אָשָׁמוֹ בְּרֵאשׁוֹ...

Speak to Bnei Yisrael: When a man or woman shall commit any sin that the human commits, to commit a trespass against Hashem, and that soul be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have done; and he shall make restitution for his guilt in full...

The Rabbis of the Talmud derive from the phraseology of these verses that we must confess “trespasses against Hashem” and sins against other people “that the human commits.” Confession is the first part of repentance, followed, according to many sources, by regret, abandonment of the sin, and commitment not to repeat it. Rambam (Maimonides – 12<sup>th</sup> century Egypt/Spain) seems to indicate that *vidui* (confession) alone comprises the mitzvah; the rest of repentance involves a process rather than the fulfillment of a commandment.

For sins committed against God, this process of repentance suffices for forgiveness. But for sins committed against fellow humans, “he shall make restitution for his guilt

in full.” Sins against fellow humans cannot be forgiven until one gives the injured party what is owed to him or her, and until forgiveness has been sought from the injured party. Only then can the process of confession, regret, abandonment of sin, and commitment not to repeat the sin, lead to forgiveness.

How does one accomplish *vidui* (confession)? One must say it aloud. The Talmud even has a formula for it: *Chatati, Aviti, Pashati*. “I have sinned inadvertently, I have sinned purposely, I have rebelled against God.” The sinner then articulates out loud to God the description of the sin. Why? To quote *Sefer Hachinuch* (probably 13<sup>th</sup> century Spain), “by the avowal of sin by one’s own mouth, the thought and perception of the sinner is revealed – that in truth he believes that his every action is known and revealed before God... Moreover, by mentioning the sin in detail and expressing remorse over it, he will be more careful another time that it should not bring him to grief.”

Two specific times for confession that the Talmud addresses are during Yom Kippur and on one’s death bed. But confession is not limited to those times – it is required whenever and as soon as we have realized that we have sinned. The idea that we might be required to ask forgiveness from another person, and that we might need to state our sin out loud, may, among other things, serve as a deterrent to our sinning.

We often speak of the wrongs we can commit with our speech. Here we have a positive mitzvah giving us an opportunity, through speech, to right a wrong.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- If someone steals something from someone else, what three things does the thief need to do to be forgiven for his sin?
- If we wrong someone, is an apology enough to make it right? Why or why not? If not, what else must be done? If yes, how should the apology be given?
- If you were the victim of a wrong brought about by someone else, how would you want the person to make it right?