

**Naso**                      **Elevate**                      **Dedicated and Ready to Move**

**Torah:**                      Numbers 4:21-7:89

This passage deals with four categories of instructions. First, the Levites who are qualified to carry holy things are counted and told what they were to carry, once the most Holy Things had been covered by the sons of Aaron. Then chapter five deals with three kinds of infections. First, all of those with a leprous infection were moved out of the camp (and kept in seclusion until they were healed). Then, the infection of theft or breach of trust is mentioned with an additional 20% penalty. Lastly, there is the law of jealousy where a husband suspects his wife of infidelity and an elaborate ceremony is given to either prove her innocence or discover her guilt. These were given so that the camp would not carry physical or moral infections with it when they left the mountain.

The third category deals with the Nazirite vow, where someone would separate themselves unto the L-rd for a specific time. They were to dwell apart and not cut their hair until their time was done, then they were to offer this hair along with specified sacrifices, because in a real sense they were offering themselves as a sacrifice. The reason someone would take a Nazirite vow is not given, nor is the length of time, but it was a holy time when the person would dwell apart and seek the L-rd.

The last category of instructions deal with the offerings made by the 12 princes so that the various parts of the tabernacle could be transported in carts and that various ritual objects would be given by those who could afford to make such offerings. No cart was given to the Kohathites (the group to which Aaron and his sons belonged) because the holy things were to be carried on their shoulders. The passage ends with a note about Moses now going into the tent of meeting to meet with the L-rd and no longer using his own tent or climbing the mountain. Everything had to be ready for them to move on with decency and order, ready to walk and to live as a holy people. May the L-rd grant us to always deal with our journey with the same commitment to decency and order.

**Haftarah:**                      Judges 13:2-25

Samson is the last judge before Samuel and like Samuel, he is the product of a miraculous birth and is given the potential to perform great exploits for the people and to bring them back to a close walk with the L-rd. His life is a checkered life, but we see that when we walk with the L-rd, no enemy can stand in our way. He could have been the greatest of the judges and though he wasted his life, he died well. We need to learn from this and live well and not waste our lives through moral or spiritual compromise.

**Brit Chadashah:**        John 12:20-36

This passage in John occurs just before our L-rd begins the process of suffering and dying for us, even though He must go through it all alone with not even His closest friends fully

understanding what He was doing. It was a kind of Nazirite experience, but instead of offering just His hair, He was offering Himself in order to begin to draw all men to Himself. The thundering voice was a confirmation that He was on the right track with the appropriate timing even if no one else got it until it was all over.

The camp was dedicated and ready to move. Samson was dedicated and ready to move. Our Saviour was dedicated and ready to move down the lonely road to Calvary. In our lives we need to make sure that we are on track with the L-rd and His purposes, everything else doesn't matter in His grand scheme of things.

(John B. p. 153) **Ps. 67** Jewish hero: Jehojada. Torah carrier: Colette **Yizkor**

Sermon: **Spiritual Nurturing: Feeding Your Soul**

***We have many things to say about this which are difficult to explain and you have become slow in your understanding. For a long time you should have been teachers, but you still need to be taught the elementary principles of the oracles of G-d. For the one who is still on milk has not yet had experience with the Word of righteousness and is still a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those whose judgment has been trained to discern between that which is good and that which is evil.*** (Hebrews 5:11-14)

At first glance, this passage appears to be quite severe but it really indicates that there is a distinct difference between those believers who just skim the surface of the divine truth which the Scriptures teach and others who plunge into the depths of G-d's purposes for themselves and for all mankind. I find it interesting that the key to deeper spiritual knowledge is not given as some mystical experience or even as the product of deep learning.

Solid spiritual food belongs to those who have learned to discern between good and evil and who have got and kept their spiritual house in order. Over the last little while, I have been speaking about the growing darkness of our world and how it is going to be increasingly difficult to make a stand for truth in our secular society which is redefining that which is good and that which is evil. Increasingly, we are becoming the bad guys.

This last week some fifty people were slaughtered by a crazed gunman who attacked patrons of a gay bar. The outpouring of sympathy worldwide was amazing and believers were criticized on social media for not expressing their sympathy, with the unspoken suspicion that we would rejoice in the murder of homosexuals because their lifestyle is a clear violation of the Scriptures. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The man in question may not have acted alone, but we would never advocate the slaughter of sinners any more than we would cast the first stone at the lady caught in adultery. Under the commonwealth of Israel various sexually based crimes and abominable practices were punishable by death, but only after due process. In the New Testament, the same warning against sexual misconduct and perversion is clearly given, but the only punishment which is advocated is directed solely towards believers who are to shun them until they repent.

We are repeatedly instructed to proclaim the mercy of G-d and call for sinners to repent and never to cut them down in cold blood or advocate any form of violence against them. We

believe in both the great mercy of G-d and in His final judgment on those who do not avail themselves of His mercy through repentance. Ezekiel says that what the L-rd desires is not that the sinning soul should die, but that it should repent and live. This should also be our desire. You do not fight fire with fire, nor do you deal with one sin by committing another.

I posted on Facebook and on our prayer line a call to prayer for the families of the victims who lost their lives and for comfort and healing upon those who were wounded in this mass shooting. It has not softened my approach to homosexuality or towards any other sexual sin our society may now feel is acceptable, but understanding the judgment of G-d against sin does not make me lose my humanity to the point of wanting to harm sinners in anyway.

I will still be criticized for calling them sinners but my objective remains their salvation and never their destruction. This is the kind of discernment or judgment which needs to be exercised to distinguish between good and evil. Homosexuality is still punishable by death in the Muslim world but the Gospel offers them mercy and calls for them to repent and be healed and not to sink deeper into their brokenness because they have nothing to parade around and be proud of. They are the victims of spiritual deception we want to reach out to.

As we grow in our faith and learn to feed our souls with good solid spiritual nurturing, we need to balance the often prickly job of relating to our world from a solid biblical framework with our equally great need to work on our own issues and experience healing and grace in our own lives. The Bible is not just a book of judgment; it is also a book of mercy, and of love, and of joy, and of peace. However, you do not foster peace, joy, love and mercy by dismantling the judgments which this book pronounces on sinful behaviour of every kind.

Our politically correct modern world wants us to accept everybody and anybody and to decriminalize all kinds of sexual behaviour which they feel everybody should be free to practise. They also do not want us to say that salvation is only available to those who believe in the only true G-d and in His Son who died for them. Their real agenda is to marginalize all religion as a form of well-intentioned myth that mature, clear thinking people will grow out of. They may still enjoy stories about Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny, but they teach that serious faith in the Bible is childish and is something more and more people will grow out of.

Now while I believe that we need to be able to answer every serious challenge which rises up against our faith, we do not have to put our faith on hold until we have answered these challenges. We can still nurture our souls even when they are gunning for us!

Spiritual nurturing also means spending time with G-d privately and publicly, no matter how loud the heathen rage and no matter how many mass shootings and suicide bombings occur as the sexually perverted cavort and prance around during their shame parades and innocent babies continue to be slaughtered in their mother's wombs.

We need to draw a distinction between what is going on in the world before which we need to be salt and light and what is going on between us and the only true source of salt and light, which is a devotional relationship with our Saviour through His Word and prayer. Fellowship, worship and outreach are also means whereby we can reach up to the L-rd and allow His grace to reach down and into us, because walking with the shepherd sets us free from the pull of the world, the flesh, and the enemy.

Social media has transformed the news into a kind of Chicken Little escapade where people always seem to feel like the sky is falling, while they listen to the fox and not to the voice of the L-rd. I am quite amazed with the peaceful words of our L-rd which He spoke to the apostles in the garden while He waited to be arrested, tried and crucified.

As long as the peaceful purposes of G-d are where we draw our strength and inspiration from, nothing, no matter how horrendous or stupendous, which is happening in this world will be able to overcome our faith and pull us into the cave to be eaten by the fox or his henchmen. We truly live in a world which is steadily growing sillier and stranger as it tries to redefine what is acceptable and wrap everyone in its secular, humanistic tentacles and enact legislation to punish those who are not willing come on board with their foolishness.

Our response should be to dig deeper into the Word of our King and learn to distinguish right and wrong from His unchanging perspective as we discover how merciful and compassionate and slow to anger He is, as well as being abundantly faithful and good and loving. The great prophet Elijah was overwhelmed by an evil queen and thought that his days were done because she would hunt him down to the ends of the earth and kill him.

He needed some spiritual nurturing and he was first fed by angels on his way to the holy mountain and there he had a spectacular epiphany with the almighty G-d who is over and above all the storms and plots and evil imagination which sinful humanity can generate and try to fill the world with. Since the days when the children of Noah came down out of the ark and G-d scattered their foolish descendants, there has been a generational spiritual struggle which is only now entering its final stages.

I do not want us to get all panicked and worried because we may no longer have the favour of our government or our society – I once said to be despised by the despicable is better than being worshipped by fools. I want us to learn good solid personal spiritual nurturing, so that even if the boat sinks, we can walk on the water with the King who has already triumphed over all the powers and principalities of this burgeoning present darkness.

The Psalmist said his soul was as peaceful as a baby snuggled in its mother's arms. We need to learn to live lives snuggled in the arms of our Messiah and Saviour.

In the L-rd of the Rings, the steward of Gondor was overcome when he was shown the might and majesty of the forces of the Dark Tower – too many believers are in danger of the same sorry fate because they spend too much time contemplating the works of darkness and not enough time feasting on the Presence. One of my favourite Bible characters is Joshua, but it is not because he was one of the faithful spies or because he led the victorious hosts of Israel in the conquest of Canaan.

When Moses went up the mountain and entered the mighty Presence of G-d, Joshua lingered with Moses, resting as close to the Presence as he could, unruffled by the ups and downs of the camp and unconcerned by the size of the mighty task which was soon to become his. David echoed this positive approach to spiritual nurturing when he said he would rather be a doorman in the house of G-d than to dwell in the tents of wickedness, because one day in His courts is better than a thousand anywhere else.

I do not want to minimize the trials and tribulations many of us have gone through, are going through or have yet to go through, but as we linger in the Presence and avoid the tents of wickedness, even with the screeching of our perverted world which has a hate on for the Bible, we will be more than conquerors as we learn to listen to the still small voice when it tells us to turn to the left and to the right. How good are you at nurturing your soul?

We will also be shown the thoughts He has for us because of His everlasting love, thoughts of peace and hope with both a solid future in this life and in the one which is to come. Spending time pouring out our hearts to Him and letting Him pour His Word into us is the bottom line key to spiritual survival and growth in our wild, wild world where too many of our leaders are growing more foolish (dumb and dumber or dim and dimmer) and where greed, corruption, lust and violence are running rampant globally. And don't get me started about pollution!

I find it very sad that so many believers are being dragged away from biblical faith and that radical Islam is giving deep religious faith a bad name. And the time may soon be coming when what we believe and how we live become illegal and our faith is driven back underground as worldwide iniquity gains momentum and targets all and any who stand for the light – and the book which proclaims it. Are you ready to pay this price for your faith?

We need to be digging daily into His Word and learning more about Him and His purposes so that we can walk with satisfied, nurtured souls and not be troubled by any Egyptians, or Philistines or Babylonians who may be plotting our demise. The One who experienced death on a cross and rose and ascended will always be able to help us overcome any distress or darkness as long as we rest in Him and learn to sit at His feet and nurture our souls from His Word. His Word will always be a certain, secure shelter in the time of storm.

How is your soul doing? Do the things of this age trouble you to the point of exasperation and depression or do you let the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune fall where they may because you are resting under the shadow of the Almighty and learning to use His Word to discern between good and evil – safe and secure from all alarms? Spiritual nurturing which feeds our soul is our foremost calling as we let everything else sort itself out.

Over the summer, I want to examine various aspects of spiritual nurture with you so that your soul is well fed, well rested and able to stand against all the floods and all the winds and all the rain which beats against it. I want us to get a firm handle on the Word so that we can find help in times of need and satisfy our soul with its treasures, some old and some new.

I want us to learn how to pray and how to both manage the baggage we brought with us when we came to faith, and all and any other baggage we acquire along the way. I want us to understand prayer as both a vital communication with our King and as a vital means of calming our soul and not being shipwrecked or sidetracked by the scenery we encounter on our way home to our Father's Home in glory. Spiritual understanding will help us rise above the storms of life and not be shut down by the lies and the deceit of this present age.

Having good, strong, regular fellowship with believers where we talk things over and reach a biblical consensus makes us a healthy, growing flock and not one which scatters at the first sign of trouble or disagreement. A healthy flock life will ensure our souls are nurtured and not traumatized as the L-rd spreads a table for us in the presence of our enemies.

Worship unites our voices and reminds us to keep our eyes on the King and not on the world and also keeps reminding us of spiritual truths we have forgotten when we let the voice of the world drown out the voice of the L-rd. It also helps us to keep a solid, community perspective so that we focus on that which really matters and do not lose sight of our final destiny.

Outreach is an interesting endeavour which is both by proclamations and by example and influence. We may come across serious challenges to our faith (Al Buzzard in the student lounge), but as we seek Him and bring our concerns to Him, He will use everything we encounter and all the challenges we run across to build up our faith and increase our confidence in Him and His word.

Being a good example is not a show we put on when we know people are watching us, it is more a lifestyle we adopt unconsciously which will draw people who are watching to ask us questions and consider the faith which our peaceful, righteous lifestyle is built upon.

It is going to be an amazing summer and a time of rest and nurturing as we let the cycles of our lives turn around the L-rd, His Word and His festival cycle, day by day, month by month and year by year until the Kingdom comes. It is the news of His Kingdom which should be our focus and not the nonsense which the world is so enamoured with.

Let's pray.