

JUNE 2, 2008

## Parashat Nasso

### Financial Security

**Yevarechecha Hashem v'yishmerecha** – “*May the Lord bless you and keep you*” (Numbers 6:24)

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*Birchat Kohanim* – the Priestly Blessing – carries great importance in Jewish life. The *Kohanim* convey this blessing to the Jewish people daily in Israel and on holidays in the Diaspora, and many parents also utilize these beautiful words when blessing their children each week. But when the *Kohanim* transmit God’s blessing, what exactly are they blessing us with? In what way does God guard us? Rashi (6:24) explains that God’s blessing refers first and foremost to financial well-being and security. According to Rashi, when the *Kohanim* give us God’s blessing they ask, “That your property be blessed.” And they also bless us “that thieves not come to take your money. For if one gives a gift to his servant, [that servant] cannot protect the gift from others. When thieves come and take it from him, what benefit did he have from the gift? But God – He is both the Giver and the Guard.” Rashi’s comments impress upon us the fact that only with financial security and well-being can one truly enjoy God’s blessings.

Without that safety and peace of mind to know that one’s money is well-guarded, one could never enjoy the benefits of that money or use it to continue to grow and prosper. We must remember Rashi’s critical lesson as a call to action against Iran’s continued pursuit of nuclear technology in defiance of the international community.

One of the United States’ most potent tools to combat Iranian nuclear proliferation is the imposition of financial sanctions on companies aiding Iran, making it more difficult for them to continue to support Iran’s nuclear ambition. The United States should implement existing law and sanction foreign energy companies investing in Iran’s energy sector. The United States has not imposed sanctions on a dozen foreign companies that have invested more than \$20 million in Iran’s energy sector despite the prohibition of such investment under the Iran Sanctions Act (ISA). While this law has discouraged many foreign companies from investing in Iran, other firms, seeing that no sanctions have been imposed, continue to seek major investments in Iran’s oil and gas sector. Because they have no reason to believe that their investment brings them any financial consequences, they continue to flout United States law by investing in the Iranian energy sector.

Rashi reminds us that the key to stopping Iran’s nuclear ambitions lies first and foremost in removing the financial security of the regime and the companies that support her pursuit of nuclear technology. ■

### Two-Faced

**Yisa Hashem panav elecha** – “*May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you*” (Numbers 6:26)

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The third blessing of the *Birkat Kohanim*, the Priestly Blessing, calls upon God to lift up His face towards the Jewish people. But how can a non-physical God have a face? What does it mean for Him to lift up His face towards us, and how does this bring a blessing upon the Jewish nation? The Hebrew word for face, *panim*, shares the root with the Hebrew word for inside, *p’nim*, giving us a hint to understanding this mystery. Rabbi Naphtali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv) of Volozhin goes even further to explain in *Ha’amek Davar* on the Torah (on 6:26), that while God has no form and therefore no face, the face of a being refers to its attributes and attitudes. A person’s face reflects his inner thoughts and when one becomes angered or embarrassed his face reveals his feelings through his scowl or blush.

Thus, we ask God to lift up His attributes of forgiveness, kindness and compassion to bring blessings to the Jewish people. The Talmud (Baba Metzia 49a) further teaches us that, “Your ‘yes’ should be righteous and your ‘no’ righteous...from this we learn that one may not speak one way with the mouth and another way with the heart.”

The Torah prohibits us from acting two-faced, saying one thing while meaning another, essentially warning us not to act duplicitously. Today Israel is wary of this very concept while engaging in talks with Syria.

With the recent announcement of indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria, which began in February, 2007, we are witnessing a renewed effort to bring stability and peace to Israel’s northern border. Seeking peace has always been an Israeli value and as Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, recently said, “The renewal of negotiations with Syria, after eight years of stagnation, is certainly an exciting topic, but beyond this it is a national obligation which must be exhausted.” While Israel is considering making painful concessions for peace so too must Syria begin the process of forswearing terrorism and cut ties with Iran, Hamas and Hizballah. However, there is a fear that Syria is speaking from both sides of its mouth. In fact the United States is pressing U.N. inspectors to broaden their search for secret nuclear sites in Syria, hinting that Damascus’ nuclear program might be more expansive than the reactor destroyed by Israel last year, according to a Washington Post report.

Peace will only come when the enemies of Israel negotiate with the Jewish State not with two faces, but with one, that both speaks and truly desires peace in the region. ■

## The Power of Unity of Purpose

**V’yakrivu hanesi’im et chanukat hamizbeach** – “*And the princes brought the dedication offering of the altar*”  
(*Numbers 7:10*)

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*Nasso* is well-known for its extraordinary length due to the exceptional, eighty-nine verse long, seventh chapter that concludes the Torah portion. Perhaps more vexing than the sheer length of the chapter is its subject matter: the sacrifices offered by each of the twelve *nesi'im*, the Princes of the tribes of Israel. The Torah painstakingly lists each detail of each sacrifice offered by the tribal leaders, yet what’s most striking is the fact that every one of the sacrifices is identical to the others. Simply put, each of the princes brings the same sacrifice as his colleagues. Ramban (7:12) teaches us that they all agreed to offer precisely the same sacrifice so that no one prince would stand out as better or worse than another. If so, why does the Torah specifically delineate each sacrifice? The beauty of the gifts of the Princes lies precisely in the unity of their cause and the cumulative nature of their gifts. The Torah lists each gift because each gift carries great import in God’s eyes not despite its lack of uniqueness, but because of the unity of purpose and power these gifts represent.

By using so many verses to teach us about the offerings of the princes, the Torah conveys to us a critical lesson about the unique contribution each person can make to his community.

This week we saw over seven thousand activists, students and scholars from all 50 states convene in the nation’s capitol for AIPAC’s annual Policy Conference, the pro-Israel community’s premier annual event. Those participants realize that AIPAC’s strength lies both in their numbers and unity. The devotion and dedication of the thousands of members and friends of AIPAC and their willingness to work together to ensure the friendship of the United States and the State of Israel has been and will continue to be the backbone of AIPAC’s continued success. By working with both Democratic and Republican political leaders to enact public policy that strengthens the vital U.S.-Israel relationship AIPAC has been at work on numerous critical initiatives -- from securing vital foreign aid for Israel to stopping Iran’s illicit nuclear program.

Together our impact on the community becomes amplified as we work together to make a difference. Just as the princes understood that their contributions had great importance by being homogenous so too can we appreciate the power of unity of purpose. ■

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