

PARSHAT NASO

Part I - Questions for the 'Shabbat Table'

1. In Parshat Naso, we find the famous psukim of "birkat kohanim" [the priestly blessing; see 6:22-27] 'sandwiched' between the laws of Nazir (chapter 6) and the story of the dedication of the Mishkan (chapter 7).

Can you suggest a thematic reason for the juxtaposition of these three parshiot?

[After trying on your own], see Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Chizkuni on 6:23!

[See also Rashi and Rashbam for important halachot that they learn from these psukim.]

2. Now that you've had a 'warm-up' with "smichut parshiot," can you suggest a thematic connection between the laws of "sotah" (5:11-31) and the laws of "nazir" (6:1-21)?

After trying on your own (again), see Rashi and Ibn Ezra on 6:2. [See also Chizkuni (like Ibn Ezra). What important "musar" can we learn from this Ibn Ezra?]

3. Recall that Chumash had already recorded the story of the dedication of the Mishkan in Shmot chapter 40 and in Vayikra chapters 8-9.

Why do you think that yet another aspect of that event are recorded here in Sefer Bamidbar?

In your answer, relate to 7:3-9 in relation to the general topic in chapters 1-4! [Relate as well to the theme of 'leadership' in Sefer Bamidbar.]

4. In regard to "nedarim" [vows, in relation to the laws of "nazir" in chapter 6] Chazal make a very interesting statement:

"He who makes a vow - it is as though he builds a bamah [an altar on a high place]; when he fulfills that vow - it is as though he offers a sacrifice on that bamah..." [See Mesechet Yevamot 109a.]

In your opinion, is this a positive or negative statement concerning one who makes a vow [or possibly both]?

[Recall that a bamah is an altar built for God, but one is permitted to set up a bamah only when a permanent Mikdash does not exist. However, once the permanent Mikdash was built by Shlomo HaMelech in Yerushalayim, bamot became forbidden forever. See Rambam Hilchot Beit Ha'bechira 1:1 thru 1:4.]

Why do you think that Chazal chose specifically this comparison to a bamah rather than simply say that "nedarim" are not advisable?

Is there a time when "nedarim" are advisable?

How does this compare to the times when a bamah is permitted?! [Relate to Rambam Hilchot Day'ot chapter 1.]

5. Sefer Bamidbar opens on the 1st of Iyar, as God commands Moshe to take a census.

Note the order the tribes as they are organized by camps in chapter 2. [See last week's shiur for discussion of the reason for this order.]

Now, note the tribal order of the n'si'im, as they offer their korbanot during the twelve day dedication ceremony in chapter 7.

Is the order the same or different? Can you explain why?

Note the date of when these korbanot were offered a month before the census was taken!

What does this tell you about reason for the order by which the n'si'im offered their korbanot? [See Ramban 7:12]

Part II - Questions for Preparation (for weekly shiur)

1. Take a careful look at the last pasuk in Parshat Naso (7:89), and its relation to the entire chapter that precedes it.

Would you say that this pasuk simply doesn't belong here?! Explain why yes, or why not.

2. Based on Shmot 25:21-22 and Vayikra 1:1, is this pasuk at all necessary? If so, where should it have been written?

Why do you think that it is written here at the conclusion of the korbanot of the n'si'im?

3. Based on chapter 7, can you determine on what date this pasuk 'takes place'?

[Is it after the 12 n'si'im offer their korbanot?]

4. Now, take a careful look at 7:1-11, especially 7:10!

Based on 7:10-11, what did all of the n'si'im bring on the first day of the dedication ceremony? Why did they only offer those korbanot over twelve days instead of all together on the first day?

How does this help explain the reason for the Torah's summary of all of their korbanot in 7:84-88? [Note the date that is implicit from 7:84 and its connection to 7:10!]

Now, answer question #3 again.

5. Based on Shmot 33:7 (and its context), from where did God speak to Moshe in the aftermath of Chet Ha'Egel?

How does this relate to the purpose of the Mishkan and especially to Shmot 25:7-8 ["v'shachanti b'tocham"]?

After Chet Ha'Egel, when is the first time that God speaks to Moshe from within the camp of Israel again?

In other words, on what day is the Mishkan dedicated?

According to Bamidbar 7:89, after what event did God begin to speak to Moshe from the Mishkan?

Can you relate this to the above questions?

6. What can you conclude from these sources concerning the importance of unity among the tribes?

Can you explain now why the last pasuk in Parshat Naso belongs exactly where it is?

How (and why) can it be considered the climax of the entire chapter?

[Now that you've prepared, go to the shiur titled "The Nsiim"].

Part III - Parshanut

1. In regard to 7:89 (and the questions in Part II above), see:

Rashi -

What question in pshat does Rashi address?

Does he relate to why this pasuk is placed here?

Ibn Ezra (and Chizkuni) -

What question in pshat do they address.

Can this help you answer the questions in Part II?

Seforno -

What point does Seforno come to add?

How does he relate this pasuk to chet ha'egel?

Why does he compare this pasuk to Bayit Rishon and Sheni?

2. Finally, see Ramban on 7:12 and his argument with Rashi.

In your opinion, which approach seems to be closer to "pshat"? How do the points raised by Ramban relate to the questions in Part II above?

See also questions 1 and 2 in Part I above.

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Questions for preparation for shiur relating to the overall structure of Sefer Bamidbar

1. Before we begin, attempt to compose a Table of Contents (or outline) for Sefer Bamidbar based solely on your previous knowledge of the book. Be as concise as possible, i.e. it shouldn't be more than 15-20 lines long. Based on your outline, can you identify an overall theme?

2. Next, we will construct this same outline, but this time a bit more carefully. To do so, start with a blank sheet of paper, on which we will dedicate one line for each chapter (and when necessary - sometimes two or three lines).

Quickly scan each chapter, and attempt to write a short phrase that summarizes its primary topic. Note as well if the primary topic is a story (narrative) or a mitzva. [For example, for chapter one, you could write - counting the tribes; for chapter six - the laws of Nazir; for chapter 16 - the story of Korach's rebellion.] Be as brief as possible; the idea is not to read the entire book, rather just to review it to get the general picture.

[Ideally, it would best to dedicate one line for each 'parshia', but as that would probably take too long, one line for chapter will usually suffice. However, for chapters 5,6, 9,10,15, and 27 it is recommended that you dedicate one line for each parshia instead of one line for the entire chapter.]

3. When you have completed your list for all 36 chapters, take your list and group together any chapters that share a common topic, and give a name for that common topic. For example: chapters 1 thru 4 could be 'counting & organizing the camp', while for chapters 22 thru 24 you could simply write the story of Bil'am.

Those common topics now become the 'headers' of each section of your outline. If several of these 'common topics' can group together, then you've found a general topic - which can become a sub-title for a certain section of your outline.

If possible, continue this process in an attempt to identify a title for your entire outline - if so, you've found the primary theme of the Sefer.

4. As you review your outline, attempt to identify the progression of topic. Can you explain where (and why) there are certain sections where the topic does not seem to flow logically?

Notice in your outline how there are several transitions from 'stories' to 'mitzvot'. In those transitions, does the flow of topic usually make sense? If not, can you explain why?

5. To clarify the point raised by the last question, review your outline once again, this time paying careful attention to whether each topic is either a narrative (story) or a mitzva (a commandment).

Then, if it is a mitzva, make note if it is a 'mitzva le-dorot' - i.e. a commandment that applies to future generations, or a 'mitzva le-sha'a' - i.e. a one-time commandment given only for that generation in the desert.

Then, make a new list, this time writing down **only** the narratives and the mitzvot le-sha'a, while **leaving out** any topic that is a mitzva le-dorot, i.e. which does not form an integral part of the ongoing narrative.

Now, take this second list (i.e. the one without the mitzvot le-dorot) and turn it into an outline (as before), and identify its primary topics.

Does the flow of topic in this outline make more sense than the flow of topic in your first outline? If so, can you explain why?

How would you title this new outline?

6. Next, construct a separate list for all of the parshiot of mitzvot le-dorot - i.e. the ones which you 'filtered' out of your original list.

In your opinion, are these mitzvot in any way connected to one another? Are any of these mitzvot thematically connected in any matter to the narrative in Sefer Bamidbar? If so, explain how.

Can you find any similarities between these mitzvot and the mitzvot found in either Sefer Shmot or Sefer Vayikra?

7. In your opinion, when do you think that these mitzvot were first given to Moshe Rabbeinu? In other words, were they given early, when Moshe was on (or at) Har Sinai; or were they given at different times during the journey through the desert, i.e. at the same time that they are recorded in Sefer Bamidbar?

Do any of these mitzvot seem to continue topics that had already been discussed earlier in Chumash? Are any of these mitzvot 'repeats' from earlier in Chumash?

Is there one category that seems to be common to most of these mitzvot? If so, where else in Chumash have we found mitzvot relating to that category? Can you suggest a reason why these mitzvot are recorded in Sefer Bamidbar instead?

8. Finally, see Ramban's introduction to Sefer Bamidbar (before his commentary to Bamidbar 1:1). At first glance, some of Ramban's conclusions appear to be rather strange. Based on your analysis of the Sefer, attempt to explain how (and why) Ramban reached those conclusions. What question does Ramban leave unanswered?

See also Seforno's introduction to Sefer Bamidbar (usually found in his introduction to Chumash, before Sefer Breishit).

9. Based on your answers to the above questions, can you explain why we find so many 'drashot' that attempt to explain the juxtaposition between certain parshiot in Sefer Bamidbar?

[For example, why the laws of 'para aduma' (chapter 19) were recorded before the story of the death of Miriam (chapter 20), or the questions that Korach asked re: the need for 'tzizit' in a garment that was made out of pure 'techelet' (see end of chapter 15).

b'hatzlacha,
menachem