

He Did Not Know **Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

פ"ג

Parshat Naso

Traditionally, there is a connection between the Torah portion which we read on Shabbat and the Prophetic portion which accompanies it. This week's Torah portion contains the rules for the *nazir*, the "nazirite," who refrains from certain (otherwise perfectly permitted) actions as a discipline to holiness. The Prophetic portion, the *haftarah*, is taken from the Book of Judges, Chapter 13, and it tells of the events leading up to the birth of Samson, who was dedicated as a *nazir* from the womb. Samson is the classic example of the lifelong *nazir*, as distinguished from the typical *nazir*, for usually one who took the vows of a nazir did so for a limited period of time. This, of course, is the traditional link between the Torah portion and its *haftarah*. There is, however, another connection, one not nearly so obvious, and it is to this connection that we speak.

We read this week of the offerings that were brought by the leaders of the tribes of Israel when the Tabernacle in the Wilderness was dedicated. The tribe of Levi was not required to bring an offering, since the tribe of Levi had charge of the Tabernacle, but, to bring the number to twelve, Manasseh and Ephraim are counted as separate tribes rather than being brought together into a single tribe, as sons of Joseph.

The leader of each tribe brought his tribe's offering, and the offerings are described in detail. Strangely, however, each tribe's offering is described in exactly the same words. Not just the same style, but the very same words. Physically, each tribe's offering was exactly the same as that of the tribe before it and that of the tribe after it; all twelve tribal offerings were seemingly identical. Why, then, does the Torah feel the need to describe each one in full detail? Could not the Torah have said, after describing the first tribal offering, that of Judah, that Issachar's offering was the same as Judah's and then that Zebulun's offering was again the same, and so on?

It would seem that, while the physical substances of all the offerings were identical – after all, no tribe should be permitted to "upstage" any of the others – there was something distinct, something unique, about each one. And what might that have been? There are only three differences in the descriptions of the tribal offerings. Each is identified as to the day, the tribe, and the name of the leader of the tribe. The day provides us with information about the sequence; it is relevant to the story. The tribe's name tells us which tribe brought each offering; it is relevant to the story. But the story could proceed just as well if the names of the tribal leaders were omitted, and it is therefore to the names of the leaders that we look for the distinctions between and among the twelve tribal offerings.

Each offering was unique – despite their identical physical content – because each was brought by a different, a unique, individual. Each tribal leader put something of himself

into the offering – his substance, his energy, his devotion. And this it is that provides us with another connection to the *haftarah*.

There was a man named Mano'ah, whose wife, the *haftarah* text tells us, was unable to bear him children. (Scripture seems to have no conception that a couple's inability to have children could be due to any cause but the "barrenness" of the wife.) It came to pass that an angel of G*d came to her and told her that she would bear a son and that her son was to be a *nazir*, dedicated to G*d from his conception. The angel then warned her against consuming wine, strong drink, and any food that might disrupt her spirituality, anything *tamei* (traditionally, but perhaps inaccurately, rendered as "impure"). She told Mano'ah, describing the angel as **a man of G*d . . . with the appearance like that of an angel of G*d**, and Mano'ah asked G*d to send the man again.

Mano'ah's prayer was granted, but again the angel appeared only to Mrs. Mano'ah (as it does with so many of the women in Scripture, the text leaves her nameless) and not to Mano'ah himself. She hastened to tell him, and he followed her to the field, where he confronted the angel and said, "Are you the man who has been speaking with my wife?"

After the angel again delivers G*d's message, this time to Mano'ah and his wife together, Mano'ah offers the angel some food. The text explains to us, ***Ki lo yada Mano'ah ki malach Ad'nai hu; for Mano'ah did not know that he was G*d's angel.***

After the angel declined the offer of food, Mano'ah offered a kid as a sacrifice to G*d, burning it on a makeshift altar, and we read, **Mano'ah took a kid with a meat offering and offered it upon a rock unto G*d. *Umafli la'asot uMano'ah v'ishto ro'im.*** The last Hebrew sentence is traditionally rendered as, **He [that is, the angel] did wondrously, and Mano'ah and his wife looked on.**

But the text will support another rendering. **Mano'ah took a kid and offered it upon a rock as a meat offering to G*d, and He performed a wonder, and Mano'ah and his wife saw.** *He* both because of the limitations of the English language (traditionally this is understood as referring to G*d) and also to emphasize that the text does not, in fact, tell us precisely who it was that was doing the wonder, the miracle. But Mano'ah and his wife saw. They saw! And immediately thereafter, we read, **The angel of G*d no longer appeared to Mano'ah and his wife. *Az yada Mano'ah ki malach Ad'nai hu;* then Mano'ah knew that he was an angel of G*d.**

Now, the Hebrew word (*mal'ach*) which we render as *angel* actually connotes a *messenger* (as, in fact, does the Greek word *angelos* from which our word *angel* is derived). Thus, we would not read *an angel of G*d*, but *a messenger of G*d*, one who carries G*d's Message into this world. And how do we now understand this passage?

When Mano'ah remains separate from his wife, feeling the need to protect and defend her, being suspicious of this "man" who was talking to her, when Mano'ah follows his wife to

the field and confronts the stranger, then Mano'ah does not know that he is G*d's messenger. Does not know that who is G*d's messenger? The angel? But Mrs. Mano'ah has already told him that the man had the appearance of an angel of G*d. Who, then? Mano'ah did not know that he – Mano'ah himself! – was G*d's messenger. Then, when Mano'ah and his wife act together, when they are joined, when Mano'ah offers a kid to G*d on the rock altar, He – that is, G*d – performs a miracle and Mano'ah and his wife – together – see! They fall on their faces to the ground. **And then Mano'ah knew that he** [– Mano'ah himself –] **was a messenger of G*d.**

Understanding the individuals portrayed in Scripture – regardless of their historicity (or lack thereof) – as aspects of each individual's own psyche, we may see Mano'ah and his wife as representative of the masculine and feminine aspects of each of us. So long as we maintain a distinction and a separation between our masculine and feminine parts, so long as we isolate our "other side," so long as men fear being seen as effeminate and women shun being called "mannish," we will be unable to see that we – each and every one of us – is truly G*d's messenger, placed on this earth to deliver a unique message. Only as we bring our feminine and masculine sides into a unified and integrated whole will G*d perform the miracle of allowing us to see, of opening our eyes to our true essence as G*d's messengers, each with a unique message to deliver.

And this brings us back to the Torah reading itself. The leaders of the twelve tribes were well-integrated personalities. Certainly, they had their faults, their issues, their rough edges – after all, they were only human – but they were essentially well-integrated. Thus, each one was able to see himself as G*d's messenger, and it is that which makes their respective offerings unique. The Jewish tradition tells us that an angel – a messenger – comes to earth with a specific task to perform and does nothing but fulfill that assignment. Furthermore, each task is assigned to just one angel, just one messenger. Thus, each angel, each messenger, is unique, and each task is unique.

Just so, the leaders of the twelve tribes put their own uniqueness into their respective offerings. By doing so, they acknowledged that they were aware of themselves as G*d's messengers, and they made the twelve offerings unique, even though they were all physically identical.

And each of us, each individual, each human, every sentient being, every *thing* in Creation, is a wholly unique messenger. Animals, it seems to us, do their Divine work through their instinctive behavior; plants and rocks, we believe, do it just by being there. "Where are the redwoods' philosophers?" it has been asked. Perhaps the lack is not in the redwoods' ability to philosophize but rather in our inability or unwillingness to hear them.

To the integration of our feminine and masculine sides, that we may be enabled to become aware of ourselves as messengers of G*d, may we all be drawn.

Shabbat Shalom.