

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Naso
May 30, 2026 *** 14 Sivan, 5786

Naso in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2166/jewish/Naso-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Naso," means "Count" and it is found in Numbers 4:22.

Completing the headcount of the Children of Israel taken in the Sinai Desert, a total of 8,580 Levite men between the ages of 30 and 50 are counted in a tally of those who will be doing the actual work of transporting the Tabernacle.

G-d communicates to Moses the law of the sotah, the wayward wife suspected of unfaithfulness to her husband. Also given is the law of the nazir, who forswears wine, lets his or her hair grow long, and is forbidden to become contaminated through contact with a dead body. Aaron and his descendants, the kohanim, are instructed on how to bless the people of Israel.

The leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel each bring their offerings for the inauguration of the altar. Although their gifts are identical, each is brought on a different day and is individually described by the Torah.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Judges 13: 2-25

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/681090/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftorah describes the birth of Samson, a lifetime nazirite. A condign haftorah for this week's reading, which discusses all the laws of the nazirite.

Manoah and his wife, members of the Tribe of Dan, were childless. One day an angel appeared to Manoah's wife, informing her that she will give birth to a child. This child, the angel instructed, was to be a lifetime Nazirite. In addition, the angel instructed her to abstain from all foods forbidden to a nazirite — such as wine or ritually impure foods — from the moment she would conceive. The angel further informed the woman that her son will save the Jewish people from the Philistine oppression they were enduring at that time.

The soon-to-be-mother told her husband the good news. He entreated G-d to send His messenger again — they were unaware at the time that the messenger was an angel. G-d sent the angel again, and he repeated his instructions. Manoah and his wife then invited the angel to partake of a special meal they would prepare, but he declined. Instead he encouraged Manoah to offer the goat he wished to slaughter for the meal as a sacrifice to G-d. The angel then ascended to the heavens in the flame that devoured the sacrifice.

The haftorah ends with the birth of Samson: "And the lad grew, and G-d blessed him."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[What Counts? By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l \(5773\)](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/naso/what-counts/)

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/naso/what-counts/>

This week's sedra begins with a continuation of the census begun in last week's — the act that gives the entire book its English name: the book of

“Numbers.” Two things, though, are puzzling. The first is the very act of numbering the people. Jewish tradition conveys two quite different - apparently contradictory - attitudes toward the taking of a census.

Rashi notes that this is not the first time the people had been counted. Their number (“about six hundred thousand men on foot, not including women and children”) had already been given as they prepared to leave Egypt (Ex. 12:37). A more precise calculation had been made when the adult males each gave a half shekel toward the building of the Sanctuary (yielding a total of 603,550; Ex. 38:26). Now a third count was taking place. Why the repeated calculations?

Rashi’s answer is simple and moving:

Because they (the children of Israel) are dear to Him, God counts them often. He counted them when they were about to leave Egypt. He counted them after the Golden Calf to establish how many were left. And now that He was about to cause His Presence to rest on them (with the inauguration of the Sanctuary), He counted them again. Rashi on Bamidbar 1:1

For Rashi, the counting of the people was an act of Divine love. Yet this is not the impression we receive elsewhere. To the contrary, the Torah sees the taking of a census as profoundly dangerous:

Then the Lord said to Moshe, “When you take the census of the Israelites, as you count, each must give ransom for his life to the Lord, so that no plague strikes them when you count them. Ex. 30:11-12

Centuries later, when King David counted the people, there was a moment of Divine anger, during which 70,000 died. It seems hard to reconcile the idea of counting as an act of love with the fact that counting involves great risk.

The second source of perplexity is the phrase the Torah uses to describe the act of counting: *naso/se'u et rosh*, literally, “lift the head.” There are many verbs available in classical Hebrew to indicate the act of counting: *limnot*, *lifkod*, *lispor*, *lachshov*. Why, in the books of Exodus and Numbers, does the Torah resort to the strange circumlocution, “lift the heads” of the Israelites?

To understand the revolution the Hebrew Bible brought to the world, we have first to enter imaginatively into the consequences for humanity of the birth of civilisation. In the earliest hunter-gatherer societies, people lived together in small groups. There were, as yet, no cities, no states, no large concentrations of population. The Torah attributes the building of the first city to Cain.[1] Cities emerged with the birth of agriculture – in the fertile alluvial plain in Mesopotamia between the Tigris and Euphrates, and the well-irrigated Nile delta.

Twice in the book of Genesis the Torah sketches a portrait of urban culture: first, the Tower of Babel, second, the Egypt to which Joseph is brought as a slave. They are both highly critical accounts. In Babel, human life was cheap (*when the Tower was being built, said the Sages, if a person fell and died, no one noticed. If a brick fell, they wept*). In Egypt, entire populations – among them, eventually, the children of Israel – could be pressed into service as a labour force to build pyramids, temples and monuments, many of which still stand today.

The birth of agriculture and the growth of towns had huge social implications. For the first time, surplus wealth was possible and could be stored in the form of money (initially, precious metals such as silver and gold). So too, as populations expanded and the division of labour became more elaborate, social stratification began. Inequality – deep,

pervasive, and systemic – became one of the universal features of the earliest societies. At the top was the king, emperor, or pharaoh, seen as no less than a god or child of the gods, who held a massive concentration of power. Below him or her were the various ranks of privilege: court circles, military chiefs, administrators and priests. The mass of the people – poor, illiterate, expendable – was significant, whether as an army or a construction force, as a mass, by sheer weight of numbers. Hence the significance of censuses in the ancient world (and in this respect, little has changed from then to now). Size meant strength, military or economic. Population counts gave rulers information about the size of the army they could muster, or of the income they could raise by taxation.

The religion of Israel is a sustained protest against this view – military, political, and economic – of the human situation. At this distance in time, it is hard fully to appreciate the breathtaking novelty, the transformative potential, of the cluster of ideas generated by a single revelation – that the human person as such, man or woman, rich or poor, powerful or powerless, is the image of God and therefore of non-negotiable, unquantifiable value. We are each equally in the image of God, therefore we stand equal in the presence of God. Much of Torah, Jewish history, and the development of Western civilisation is about the slow translation of this idea into institutions, social structures, and ethical codes.

It should now be clear why the taking of a census is fraught with spiritual risk. The numbering of a people is the most potent symbol of humankind-in-the-mass, of a society in which the individual is not valued in and for him- or herself but as part of a totality whose power lies in numbers. That is precisely what Israel is not. The God of Israel, who is the God of all humankind, sets His special love on a people whose strength has nothing to do with numbers, a people that never sets itself to become an

empire, that is never commanded to wage holy war in order to convert populations, that was and remains tiny in both absolute terms and relative to the empires with which it was and is surrounded, standing as it does at the vulnerable crossroad between three continents.

Both questions with which we began are now answered. There is a difference between a human census and one commanded by God. David's was a human census. As Israel's second king, he had laid the foundations of a nation. He had waged successful wars, united the tribes, and established Jerusalem as his capital. Shortly after his death, Israel reached its zenith as a power in the Middle East. Under Solomon, through strategic alliances, it became a centre of trade and scholarship. The Temple was built. It must have seemed at the time as if, after many centuries of wandering and war, Israel had become a power to rival any other. It was a short-lived, cruelly-shattered illusion. Almost immediately after Solomon's reign, the kingdom split in two, and from then on its this-worldly fate was sealed. A history of defeats, exiles and destructions began, which has no parallel in the annals of any other nation. The Hebrew Bible is not wrong in seeing the starting-point of this decline in the moment at which David acted like any other king and ordered a census of the people.

A Divine census is utterly different. It has nothing to do with strength-in-numbers. It has to do, instead, with conveying to every member of the nation that he or she counts; that every person, family, household is held precious by God; that distinctions between great and small, ruler and ruled, leader and led, are irrelevant; that we are each God's image and the object of His love. A Divine census is, as Rashi says, a gesture of endearment. That is why it cannot be described by the usual verbs of counting — *limnot*, *lifkod*, *lispor*, *lachshov*. Only the phrase *naso/se'u et rosh*, "lift the head", does justice to this kind of enumeration, in which

those entrusted with the task are commanded to “lift the head” of those they count, making every individual stand tall in the knowledge that they are loved, cherished, held special by God, and not merely a number, a cipher, among the thousands and millions.

There is a wonderful verse in Psalm 147 which we say every morning in our prayers: “He counts the number of the stars and calls them each by name.” A name is a marker of uniqueness. Collective nouns group things together; proper names distinguish them as individuals. Only what we value, do we name (One of the most chilling acts of dehumanisation in the extermination camps of Nazi Germany was that those who entered were never addressed by their names. Instead they were given, inscribed on their skin, a number).

God gives even the stars their names, all the more so human beings – on whom He has set His image. God counts to signal to us that each of us counts, for what we are as individuals, not en masse. He “lifts our head” in the most profound way known to humankind, by assuring each of us of His special, enduring, unquantifiable love.

That is the nature of the census in the book of Numbers. As the Israelites prepared to become a society with the Sanctuary - visible home of the Divine Presence - at its centre, they had to be reminded that they were to become the pioneers of a new and revolutionary social order, whose most famous definition was given by the Prophet Zechariah as the Israelites prepared to rebuild the ruined Temple:

“Not by might, nor by strength, but by My spirit, says the Lord.”

Zechariah 4:6

[1] See Gen. 4:17.

Towards the end of Parashat Bemidbar, God commands Aaron and Moses to undertake a census of the Levitical clans (Numbers 4:2). They begin the census with the Kohathites, which is odd for three reasons:

- 1) Elsewhere the Levites are listed in birth order—Gershon, Kohath, Merari (Genesis 46:11, Numbers 3:17)—but here Kohath is given priority.
- 2) The Kohathites are set apart from the other two clans by the division between Parashat Bemidbar and Parashat Naso, the latter of which begins with the enumeration of the other two clans.
- 3) The labor assigned to the Kohathites is described, without elaboration, as “Most Holy” (Numbers 4:4). Rashi explicates this as responsibility for the “the ark, the table, the candelabrum, the altars, the curtain, and the accompanying vessels.”

Some commentators attribute this foregrounding to the fact that Moses and Aaron were Kohathites themselves, their clan thus meriting extra distinction (Leqah Tov; Ibn Ezra). Whatever the reason, their singularity comes to the fore in the Torah’s description in Numbers 7:6-9 of how the respective clans were supposed to carry out their work:

6 Moses took the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites. 7 Two carts and four oxen he gave to the Gershonites, ... 8 and four carts and eight oxen he gave to the Merarites,

9 But to the Kohathites he did not give any; since theirs was the service of the [most] sacred objects, their portage was by shoulder.[i]

Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344) observes, “They are commanded here to carry their load by shoulder because of the sanctity of the ark and the other items they were carrying.” He goes on to discuss two later occasions when the ark was transported at King David’s behest. In 2 Samuel 6:3-8, the ark was mounted on a cart and disaster ensued (see the haftarah for Parashat Shemini). That David learned his lesson from the incident is clear from 1 Chronicles 15:11-15, when he orders the priests and Levites to bring the ark to Jerusalem:

11 David sent for Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and for the Levites cf. 2 Samuel 6:7] 15The Levites carried the Ark of God by means of poles on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded in accordance with the word of the Lord.

Levi concludes, “Nowhere else but here [in Numbers 7:9] does God command that they carry their load by shoulder. David erred in this respect by having the ark mounted on a new cart. That was the reason God burst out in Uzza (2 Samuel 6:3-8), and that was why David reverted to having it carried by shoulder by the Levites.”

The special privilege and responsibility of the Levites in general and of the Kohathites in particular is elaborated in the midrash Numbers Rabba 5:8:

How superior was the tribe of Levi to the other Israelites! For the Israelites would walk about wearing sandals; the tribe of Levi, who would bear the vessels of the Tabernacle, would walk barefooted.[ii] Thus we learn that the tribe of Levi was superior to all the other tribes. And pre-eminent within the tribe of Levi was the family of Kohath. An ordinary Levite would place his burden, whether it was the boards or the bars or the sockets or anything else, upon carts. The families of Kohath,

however, bore their burdens on their shoulders: they were not allowed to place the ark upon a wagon as it says, “But to the Kohathites he did not give any... their portage was by shoulder.”

As if that were not distinction enough, the midrash continues,

In another respect also the [Kohathites] were elevated above all the other Levites. The other Levites carried the vessels of the Tabernacle and walked in the normal way, facing in the direction they were going, but the sons of Kohath walked backwards,[iii] with their faces towards the ark, in order not to turn their backs on the ark.

This form of portage, the midrash states, is a mark of humility. The Kohathites were “subdued in the presence of the ark. Why so? Because there is no place for greatness in the presence of God. So you must conclude that, though the family of Kohath was aristocratic, nevertheless when they carried the ark, they did so like ordinary slaves.”

And why is that? The midrash continues, “God said, The Torah is life, as it says, ‘She is a tree of life to those who grasp her’ (Proverbs 3:18); ‘They are life to him who finds them, healing for his whole body’ (Proverbs 4:22). Now the sons of Kohath have charge of the Torah, synonymous with life—namely the ark that they carry, in which the Torah is contained.” They carry it in this unique manner “that they may live and not die” (Numbers 4:19).

In the first sermon on Parashat Naso in his Torah commentary, Keli hemdah,[iv] Samuel Laniado (a leading rabbi in Aleppo at the turn of the seventeenth century) quotes the midrash and then adds a striking idea of his own. He writes,

Since all living things are capable of carrying themselves, holy things, which undoubtedly are imbued with the spirit of God, certainly would carry themselves. It is as the sages say [in B. Sukka 35a], “the ark bears its bearers (הארון נושא את נושאייו),” so naturally it carries itself.

Laniado presents a tour de force in which he imputes a double meaning—literal and metaphoric—to several key terms in both the midrash and the biblical text that it quotes. When the midrash says that the Levites were “elevated” (מעולים) above the Israelites, that means that they were both superior in stature, and also literally raised up by the nature of their service. When the midrash depicts the Levites as “barefoot” (יהפיים), the term is to be taken both literally and as a metaphor for their self-abasement and devotion to service (ההכנעה והשתעבדות). They were, paradoxically, elevated by their humility.

Laniado cites a variant version of the midrash[*v*] that says that the Levites were “borne by the vessels of the Tabernacle (טעונים בכלי המשכן).” The variant substitutes the passive form טעונים/te`unim for the active טוענים/to`anim. Instead of being “burdened” with the vessels, then, the Levites are “borne” by them! He continues:

The reason for the use of טעונים is to teach that according to the grammar, the ark was carrying them.... In like manner, I explain the verse [Numbers 7:9], כִּי עֲבַדְתָּ הַקֹּדֶשׁ עֲלֵהֶם בְּכַתֵּף יִשָּׂאוּ, to mean that the ark carries them, and that is why it does not say בְּכַתֵּף נושאים or יִשָּׂאוּ with a shva.

The form יִשָּׂאוּ/yissa’u, in Laniado’s view, is a passive Niphal (not an active Qal pausal form), indicating that the Kohathites literally were carried along by the ark (נשואים מהארון).

The image of the ark-bearers floating alongside their “burden” as it carries them through the wilderness is charming, but it also has a serious side. Laniado’s discussion boils down to something like a riddle: *When is a burden not a burden? The answer: when it is the burden of Torah.* The biblical Levites humbly assumed the burden of the Tabernacle and they, in turn, were elevated in stature and literally transported for doing so. Their ancient work was represented in Laniado’s day, and may be emulated nowadays, by what Laniado calls *הטורה בעמל התורה*, “*exertion in the toil of Torah.*” For those who dedicate their full vigor to learning and practice, the Torah is a burden that is not a burden; she is the Tree of Life that sustains them. *(Alan Cooper is the Elaine Ravich Professor of Jewish Studies Emeritus at JTS)*

[i] Note the final placement of the second-born Kohathites, again out of birth order. [ii] See Exodus Rabba 2:6 on Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:5; cf. Joshua 5:15): כל מקום שהשכינה נגלית אסור בנעילת הסנדל, “Wherever the Divine Presence appears it is forbidden to wear shoes.” [iii] Jacob Zvi Meklenburg painstakingly explains that they actually walked “sideways” (Ha-ketav ve-ha-qabbalah). For an elaborate discussion of walking backwards from the Presence, see Rabbeinu Chananel on Exodus 32:15. In principle (with exceptions), in synagogue one should not turn one’s back to the Torah scroll (Rambam, Laws of Tefillin etc. 10:10; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De`ah 282:1). [iv] Jerusalem, 5743 (1983), pp. 14-21. [v] See Israel al-Nakawa (d. 1391), Menorat ha-Ma’or, ed. Enelow, part 3, p. 237.

[Naso by Rabbi Scott “Shalom” Klein](https://ajr.edu/parashat-naso-5786/)

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Parashat Naso opens with the command “Naso et rosh”—to “lift the head” of the sons of Gershon (Numbers 4:22). While the text begins with a census of those carrying the physical burdens of the Sanctuary, it culminates in the Birkat Kohanim, the Priestly Blessing, which provides the spiritual “lifting” for the entire nation. This transition from the labor of

the Levites to the grace of the Kohanim offers a masterclass in leadership: *the sustainability of any mission depends on a leader's ability to not only manage the logistics of the "heavy lift" but to actively invoke a culture of protection, clarity, and peace.*

The Sfat Emet (Sfat Emet, Naso 1) explains that "lifting the head" is a prerequisite for service. He suggests that every individual possesses a unique spark that can only be activated when they recognize their specific role as a Sacred Purpose. In any demanding environment, the "burden" of daily tasks can easily lead to burnout or a loss of perspective. Naso teaches us that a leader's primary role is to ensure that those they influence do not just carry the load, but do so with an "elevated head"—fully aware of how their individual contribution sustains the sanctity of the whole.

This elevation is formalized through the Birkat Kohanim (Numbers 6:24-26), which provides a three-tiered framework for success: **protection (Yevarekhekha), clarity (Ya'er), and peace (Shalom).** The Netivot Shalom (Netivot Shalom, Naso, Section 4) notes that the blessing begins in the singular. This indicates that the Divine blessing is tailored to the specific needs and temperament of every individual. **A true leader understands that "peace" is not a generic, one-size-fits-all outcome; it is the result of seeing each person's unique challenges and providing the specific cover they need to flourish.**

The Maharal of Prague (Netivot Olam, Netiv HaAvodah 12) offers a critical insight into the delivery of this blessing: the Kohanim are commanded to bless the people **"with love" (B'ahava).** He explains that the blessing cannot "rest" upon the people unless there is a vessel of unity and genuine care to receive it. Technical proficiency and strict discipline are the "hardware" of an organization, but the "software" is the

intentional cultivation of trust and mutual respect. When we bless those we lead—whether through formal words or supportive actions—we are creating the psychological and spiritual safety necessary for them to excel.

This leads us to an important call to action for this Shabbat. We often think of “blessing” others as a passive wish, but Naso presents it as an active responsibility. I challenge you to move beyond the “seeing” and into the “showing” by identifying one person this week whose “head needs lifting.” Do not wait for a formal ceremony. Step into your Sacred Purpose by providing the specific “protection” or “clarity” they need to succeed. Whether it is through a word of genuine encouragement, a moment of mentorship, or simply standing in the gap for them during a difficult task, you are performing the work of the Kohen. True leadership is only realized when it is shared, turning a group of individuals into a unified community that dwells in peace. *(Rabbi Scott “Shalom” Klein serves as a U.S. Army Chaplain within the 82nd Airborne Division and the Garrison Rabbi at Fort Bragg, NC. A champion of communication, education and leadership, Rabbi Klein holds a doctorate in educational leadership and a master’s degree in Jewish professional studies with a focus on non-profit management.)*

[Naso: The Light Reflected by Shoshana Ruerup](https://yeshivatmaharat.org/parshat-naso-the-light-reflected/)

<https://yeshivatmaharat.org/parshat-naso-the-light-reflected/>

[The Blessing](#)

The priestly blessing is one of the most familiar passages in our tradition. In Numbers 6:24–26, Hashem instructs Moshe to have Aaron bless the children of Israel with these words:

May Hashem bless you and keep you.

May Hashem make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May Hashem lift up His countenance toward you and grant you peace.

We encounter these lines in the Torah; we hear them in the synagogue as the Kohanim extend their hands over the congregation; and we cherish them in the home, when parents bless their children at the beginning of Shabbat.

The Talmud (Sota 38a) teaches that the Kohanim must recite the blessing standing, loudly and clearly, in its original Hebrew, as it is prompted to them by the representative of the synagogue. Their hands are stretched upward toward Hashem—as if they themselves were receiving the blessing at that very moment.

The power of direct relationship is emphasized: the priests bless the congregation panim ke'neged panim—face to face. Those who stand behind the Kohanim are not included in the blessing (Rashi on Sota 38b), for by turning away they signal that the blessing does not matter to them (Mishneh Torah, Prayer and the Priestly Blessing 15).

Presence and Perception

The phrase “may His face shine upon you” is often explained to mean that Hashem shows us a “friendly countenance” (Rashi), or that He accepts and fulfills our prayers without delay (Ibn Ezra). Genesis 33:10 provides the most direct biblical precedent for the idea of encountering the Divine in the face of another human being: “For seeing your face is like seeing the face of Hashem” says Yaakov to Esav.

The Sefat Emet wrestles with the word panav—“His face”—in the blessing. Does the Holy One, blessed be He, have any form or face at all? He concludes that the face in the blessing refers not to Hashem’s face, but to the face of the one receiving the blessing. Each human being imagines and receives divine light to the extent that their own clarity and

understanding allow. The relationship between Hashem and the human being creates the condition of illumination and reflection.

Rav Hirsch, in his Torah commentary, tries to explain the word “shine”—“ya’er” of “may His face shine upon you” through the power of light itself. He explains the corresponding verb “he’ir” of “he’iru berakav tevel”—“His lightning lightened the world” (Psalm 97:4)—to mean “to illuminate, to make something visible.” Rav Hirsch understands that this illumination makes Hashem perceptible to the world.

For Rav Hirsch, the radiance in the priestly blessing expresses a principle of reciprocity: Hashem’s actions in the world cast their rays back toward their Source, revealing His greatness and power. “Enlightened understanding” is inseparable from justice, righteousness, love, and truth—values taught by the Torah and the Prophets.

Human beings, acting freely to learn and to act in harmony with Hashem’s will, make the Divine visible. When we allow Torah to guide our choices, we ourselves make Hashem radiantly visible.

Freedom and Responsibility

The Gemara (Chagiga 12a) teaches that the primordial light of creation was hidden away during the generation of the Flood because of their loss of purpose and responsibility. The Gemara asks: “And for whom did He conceal it?” And the Gemara answers: “For the righteous people in the future.”

The priestly blessing, therefore, is not about a one-directional divine act. It is about relationships—between Hashem and humanity, and among human beings themselves. In a web of mutual presence, with a balance

of self-revelation and communal responsibility, the divine will becomes visible in human action.

Human beings have been entrusted with the task of shaping the world according to Hashem's will. Hashem granted us the freedom to choose between good and evil (Genesis 2:7), right and wrong (Deuteronomy 30:1).

The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas teaches that moral responsibility is what makes freedom possible. Freedom—especially freedom of choice—arises through our relationships with others. The moral imperative to choose the good, he writes, “can be heard only by an I that is free from the will to assert itself and that is aware of its own mortality and vulnerability” (Entre nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre, 1991).

Becoming a Source of Blessing

Through our actions—for one another and with one another—Hashem's presence becomes visible in the world.

May we face and bless one another and bring light to one another's lives. May we illuminate the world and make Hashem perceptible, so that together we may make it a better place. *(Shoshana Ruerup is an artist and educator. She earned an MA in Fine Arts and a Montessori Diploma. Shoshana finished four years of study at the International Halacha Scholars Program at Midreshet Lindenbaum/ Ohr Torah Stone)*

Yahrtzeits

*Erwin Mevorah remembers his father Chaim Mevorah on Sun. May 31

*Russet Feldman and Nikki Pusin remember their mother Mildred Monheit Pusin on Tues. June 2.

