

NDSO

JUNE 1981
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

One of the great errors of our day is that we do not teach our children how to fail. Everyone in life ultimately fails. There will always be somebody who will run faster than we can, be smarter than we are, and be more successful than we are. Our very physical bodies will weaken and eventually fail. No doctor in the long run ever saves a patient. He may restore a patient's health for a few years but eventually the patient's body will cease to function. In our success-oriented society we have, by our undue stress on fleeting worldly success, maimed ourselves and our children. We have taught them that they can not be happy unless they always succeed. This is completely false.

Judaism does not measure the worth of a man's life based on the criteria of worldly success. Whether you are a successful doctor or lawyer or accountant or businessman is irrelevant. Whether you became a millionaire or big politician does not really count. What counts is whether you have tried your best and were able to expand the realm of the good and raise a family who, too, is interested in expanding the realm of the good in this world. If a person tries his best, raises good children, and does good deeds, then, by Judaism's standards he is a very, very successful individual. That's why the greatest tribute that can be paid to a person after he is gone is for his children to light a yahrzeit lamp, come to the Synagogue, and conduct the service. This symbolizes that a person left behind children who are also interested in expanding the realm of the good in this world. Of course, if a person's children are complete bums and no-good-niks, saying Kaddish does not help. To raise a child who will follow in the path of the good and right is the greatest things that a person can do in Judaism.

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We believe in the conservation of morality. Just as there is a scientific law of the conservation of matter and energy which means that no matter or energy can ever be destroyed. (Since Einstein, we learned how to change matter into energy and not destroy it.) So, too, we believe that there is a law of the conservation of morality. No good deed that a person ~~ever~~ does in this life is ever lost. It continues and, based on it, the world can become better and better. A person who always tries his best and does ^{all} the good deeds ~~that come to his hand~~ ^{he can} and raises children who also recognize the importance of doing good deeds is, according to Judaism, a very successful person even though he may have failed at business, may never have gotten a college degree or any acclaim or money. By all the standards of today he might be a failure but, according to Judaism, he is a huge success.

Many of these thoughts are emphasized on the holiday of Shavuot. The Rabbis have arranged that almost always we will read the Torah portion Bamidbar before the holiday of Shavuot. Only exceptionally, like this year, do we read the next Torah portion, Naso. Both of these Torah portions have to do with ^{the} counting ^{of} the Jewish people. Bamidbar begins the count. In the Torah portion Naso we conclude the count. Over and over again we are told that the Jewish people were to be counted "by their families according to the house of their fathers". The expression "by their families according to the house of their fathers" recurs constantly. This repetition of the phrase "by their families according to the house of their fathers" was meant to teach us that the Jewish people could not receive the Torah until they demonstrated ^{that} they ^{had} ^{viable} ~~have valuable~~ families. Families are the basis of everything in our religion. Without families, the Torah cannot be implemented. Where are we to learn compassion, self-sacrifice, and the importance of the spiritual over the material except in a family? Where are ~~they~~ ^{we} to learn that relationships are more important than things? Only in a family.

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A family, in order to be effective, must have a father and a mother and children. That's why the expression "by their families according to the house of the fathers" is used over and over again.

In the Jewish tradition, we are taught that in many ways women are considered superior to men. It was the women who would not worship the golden calf. It was the women who paid no heed to the evil report of the spies who came back with a bad report of the land of Canaan. It was because of the moral strength of the women that the slavery in Egypt came to an end. The Rabbis teach that what was created later in the description of creation was on a higher level. Woman was created after man. They, also, say that when a woman thanks G-d for being created according to His will only she can make that blessing because she is closer to G-d's will than is man. A man has many more violent aggressive impulses than does a woman. The Rabbis, also, teach us that when G-d came to give the Torah to the Jewish people He said "thus shall you say to the house of Jacob and tell the Children of Israel". The House of Jacob refers to the women. - The Children of Israel to the men. The women were given the Torah first because G-d knew that if they would not accept it, the Torah would not endure in Judaism. A woman's unique moral courage is the necessary component to insure that the Torah will continue and be implemented.

Men do not have ~~to~~^{to} risk their lives to bring forth life. Men do not have to face death ~~in order~~^{to} to produce children and, because of this, men know that women are innately more courageous than men. Perhaps, this explains why men throughout the centuries have sought violence and war to demonstrate their own bravery. The bravery of men, though, in these circumstances does not produce life but the horrors of war. This is why the expression "the House of the Fathers" is used over and over again in discussing

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families. We might think that the raising of children should be left exclusively to women. This is not so. The self-sacrifice and willingness on the part of the man to share what he has and work for his wife ^{and} children is an essential component in ~~the~~ teaching ~~of~~ compassion and the importance of relationships over things, ~~to the next generation~~. Households that are headed only by mothers, unfortunately, are not as effective in bringing up children as households of two parent families. It is very, very difficult to ~~raise~~ a child in a one parent family and to inculcate into him or her the correct values. The self-denying example of ~~the~~ ^{the} father ~~as well as~~ ^{and} the moral courage of ~~the~~ ^{the} mother ^{are} ~~is~~ required.

In nature almost always the father has ~~almost~~ nothing to do with raising children. His job just takes a few seconds and he is gone. In many animal species if the male has not ~~left~~ ^{left} already the female pushes the father away after children are born and attacks him if he comes near. When a child is born it is part of the mother and only very remotely of the father. The father does not have the same ties to it that the mother usually has. In the animal world this is very pronounced. We, though, are not animals. A father, by the very fact of his staying on and providing for his family, teaches his children through example the importance of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation. The father does not just pick up and spend the money all on himself. He does not leave the mother. If he does, then the children are scared and it is very hard to teach them the values of the Torah. However, when a father is devoted and a child sees the unselfishness of both his parents then he learns how to be compassionate and concerned for relationships rather than things. Immediate self-gratification is not stressed in a family. The good of the total family is stressed. One family member is willing to sacrifice for another. The spiritual, the unseen, the family bond is stressed, not things. This is what is required before

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we could receive the Torah, a sense of the importance of relationships, of the spiritual over the material.

The Rabbis teach us that on Shavuos we received the Ten Commandments because of the merit of Jacob. It does not mention the other patriarchs. This is because only Jacob succeeded in raising a family who all stayed together, who in the end helped and supported each other. We received the Ten Commandments on stone. The word for stone in Hebrew is "Even", which is a combination of the word Av and Ben, father and son. Only when father, son, mother, and daughter are together will the Ten Commandments endure. The family is the foundation stone upon which the Torah is based. Relationships are important, not things. Things may fail but relationships endure.

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In the Torah portion, Noso, we have recounted the gifts of all the princes of Israel. Each prince brings the identical gift. It seems very strange that the Torah which is so careful with its words should spend so many sentences recounting the same gift over and over again. It could have just been said the twelve princes each gave this gift and let it go at that. Right before we learn about the gift of each of the heads of the tribes of Israel we learn about the priestly blessing, that beautiful blessing which is used throughout the world and which begins with the words "may the Lord bless you and keep you", etc. The priests before they say this blessing must lift up their hands and they repeat it word by word with the Cantor. This blessing is not their blessing. It is G-d's blessing. They are just the conduit through whom the blessing comes. Before they give the blessing they say a special Brocha which is different than any other Brocha that we say. We all know the blessing over bread, "Blessed O Lord, etc., who brings forth bread from the ground" or the blessing on wine "Who creates the fruit of the vine" or on the candles "Who has commanded us to light the Shabbos candles". The blessing that the priest should say here is "Who commanded us to bless his people Israel" but the blessing does not end there. The blessing ends "Who commanded us to bless His people Israel with love". It is the only blessing which ends with the words "with love". Why should this be so? What's more, since this blessing is not the priest's blessing but G-d's blessing, why do we need the blessing at all? In Judaism we do not need mediators between G-d and man. A Synagogue does not need a Rabbi, but do not tell the Board of Directors that, though. Almost every function in Judaism could be performed without a Rabbi, so why did G-d need the priests to bless the people? He should just do it Himself. The answer, I believe, is in this last word "with love". The priests were to bless the people with love which means that they were to bless the people even though they were not perfect, even though they had defects. The people were to look to the priests who had defects and were not perfect. In Judaism a priest is supposed to bless the people even if he does not fulfill completely all the commandments. The priests were to recognize that the people were worthy of blessing even if they had faults. G-d is telling us we have to learn how to accept each other and work with each other in spite of our faults if we want His blessing. In life all of us fail but this does not mean that

we should be thrown out or not loved. One of the things modern Jewish parents fail to teach their children is how to fail and each of us fails in life. No doctor ever saved a patient more than 120 years. Doctors can prolong life a little bit and this is important, but eventually they lose them. You can train very hard for a race and still lose. Failing does not mean that you forfeit love. Judaism is not an elite religion which says that only if you are a phi beta kappa or lawyer or accountant that you are a success in life. That's why I believe all the gifts of the princes are counted. Obviously, not all these princes made equal contributions to the Jewish people. How can you compare the contributions of Nachshon Ben Aminodav, the head of the tribe of Judah who jumped into the Red Sea up to his neck thereby assuring that it would split and many other accomplishments, to the much lesser accomplishments of the other princes, but in G-d's eyes they were all the same because they tried their best. Many times a retarded child learning to dress and feed himself is more worthy of recognition than a person getting a Ph.D. since it required more effort. G-d requires that we try not that we succeed. Three tribes led the Jewish people in their march; the tribe of Judah, the tribe of Yisachar, and the tribe of Zebulun. The tribe of Judah had a blue flag with a lion on it. Judah was a symbol of courage. He had courage because he was willing to admit his mistakes but he kept coming back. It was he who had the idea to sell his brother into Egypt. It was he who sinned with Tamar. He had the courage to come back from his failures. Yisachar's flag was a black flag with the moon and stars on it. He always had hope. He maintained an optimistic attitude. Zebulun's flag was a white flag with a ship of commerce. White is a symbol of honesty. How does a person do well? When does a person succeed? When he has courage, hope, and honesty. Then he does well. He may not succeed. He may be a failure in the world's terms but in Judaism's terms he is a great success. All the princes gave the same gift to demonstrate that each of their contributions were valuable even though, of course, they were different and on different levels. The story about the three people who met down below. Each of them found out they arrived there because of an automobile. The American said, "I was driving 100 miles an hour when I had a blowout". The Frenchman said, "I was in the car on the riverbank with my girlfriend when the brake gave away". The Russian said, "I saved for

ten years to buy a car and then I died of starvation". We each get to the same place not by what we do necessarily, but whether we have acted with courage, hope, and honesty. If we have then we have done well and our gifts are as good as anybody else's.

NOSO

How Can We Feel LIFE'S HIGH

NOSO - MAY 1983
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Many times people will come to me and say, "Rabbi, I just can't go on. I just do not have the strength to continue. Where can I get the strength to overcome my problems? Why am I in this situation? I have a good job, a good family, but I just cannot seem to cope." To these people, every little problem is a mountain. Life to them is difficult. They cannot seem to make it. They are crying out for help and they do not know where to turn to get it.

These people either have expectations of themselves which are unrealistic or they have been brainwashed to feel that they should feel something special in life immediately and they aren't feeling it. They are looking for some sort of high or some sort of mystical experience of some sort of sudden surge of energy which will make them feel really alive. Many of them are very disappointed when they do not feel this. This is the reason that many people now are turning to drugs. They want an instant mind-expanding spiritual experience. They want to feel that they are in control and can handle life and overcome it.

Many of these people are like Aaron's sons, Nadab and Avihu, who brought strange fire to G-d on the very day that the Tabernacle was dedicated and Aaron, their father, was installed as High Priest. They could not wait for the fire to come down from heaven and consume the sacrifices. They wanted a shortcut to feel life's happinesses and spiritual glow. Some Rabbis say that they got drunk so that they could feel this. Others say that they really were looking for a genuine spiritual experience, but they did not want to put in any effort to obtain it. They did not want to commit themselves to anything. They just wanted to be able to tap into spiritual experiences without any real effort. They did not want to do what our religion demands in order to receive life's blessings and feel life's happinesses. They did not want to work at it day in and day out. They did not want to get married. They did not want to have a family. They did not want to establish relationships with G-d and man that were lasting and which required day in and day out commitment. This our religion teaches us is the only way we can gain the strength to overcome our problems and, also, to feel life's satisfactions.

In the Torah portion, Noso, we have many of these ideas spelled out. We have enumerated the offerings of the Head of each of the twelve tribes of Israel who brought them on the days the Tabernacle was dedicated. There is something very strange about these offerings. What is strange about them is that they are all identical. The Torah, which is usually so terse in its language, repeats twelve times the same offering of silver dishes and gold pans and sacrifices. Why couldn't the Torah have just said that the twelve princes each brought the same offering on twelve different days and this was their offering. Instead, it enumerated everyone's offering. Even its placing of this description of these prince's offerings right after we have the priestly blessing of "May the Lord bless thee and keep thee, may the Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious to thee and may the Lord lift up His countenance to thee and give thee peace" seems strange.

We, in life, all want the same basic thing; to accomplish self-set goals, to be loved and accepted and to cause other people joy and happiness. We all, though, do not start from the same place. We each are born with different talents and different strengths and different weaknesses. Each of us wants these same basic things but in order to achieve these same basic things we must know ourselves. To achieve goals, to be accepted and to cause other people joy do not require the same approach from each of us. So many people in life are unhappy today because they concentrate on what they are not, not on what they are. Each of us can contribute so much to the world, but instead of looking at who we really are and what we really are, so many people think that in order to feel life's high they have to be a movie queen or a millionaire or a lawyer or a doctor, etc. They feel that they have to concentrate on what they are, not, instead of what they are. They do not realize that in being what they are, by doing their daily tasks, by loving their family and by being loved by them they will feel what life is all about. It is a slow tedious process but it will yield the desired results.

All the princes were not equal in their talents, but they were all able to achieve the same desired results because they knew what their talents were and what was really important

in life. The princes offered their gifts not in chronological order but in the order they marched. Judah was first. Judah had a blue flag with a lion on it. His flag stood for courage. He was worthy for leadership because he knew how to admit when he was wrong, he had courage. He made mistakes but he did not blame them on others. The next flag was that of Isachar. His flag was a black flag which had the moon and stars on it. His flag stood for hope. On the darkest night, the moon and the stars are always there. The third flag was that of Zevulun. It was a white flag with a ship on it. The ship stood for commerce and the white background stood for honesty. Honesty in business was his contribution. All the other princes, too, offered their gifts. All these gifts were equal even though their individual talents were not. Their gifts symbolized the fact that they each had felt life's natural high, they each had had a spiritual experience by achieving the goals in life that were right for them and by knowing that they were accepted and loved by G-d and others, and that they could bring others and G-d joy and happiness. This is the way we merit the priestly blessing. That is how we merit to feel G-d's countenance shining upon us. This is the way we get life's high. Our religion does not promise us that we will have no problems, no setbacks or tragedies. All it promises us is that if we live by its teachings sincerely, day in and day out, we will be given the strength to overcome our problems.

Right immediately before the priestly blessing, we learn about the Nazarite, the man who took upon himself special obligations not to cut his hair, not to drink wine, in order to have a spiritual experience. After he completed his Nazariteship, which was a minimum of thirty days, the Torah tells us he had to bring a sin offering. The Rabbis ask, why did he have to bring a sin offering? They say that he had to bring a sin offering because he tried to have a spiritual experience by denying part of life. This is not the way that we Jews look or aspire for spiritual experiences. Spiritual experiences come from the inside out, from doing Mitzvahs day by day and from being true to family and friends. In the Haphtorah, we learn about the most famous Nazarite of them all, Samson. In the end he was a complete failure. Gimmicks, trying to live a spiritual life through some outside

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strength helped him not at all. He ended up blind and a captive, unfortunately the same way that those who rely on drugs and fads to feel life's meaning, also, do today. In the end, this type of strange fire destroys them as it destroyed Aaron's son^s; Nadav and Avihu.

The holiday of Shavuos, also, proclaims this same message. Shavuos is a holiday without any real pageantry. There are no special rituals. You might think that there should be. After all, this was the greatest day in Jewish history, the day when we got the Torah. The way we celebrate Shavuos is by counting the ⁴⁹ days before it, by preparing ourselves every day to receive the Torah. Only if a person prepares himself for ^{forty-nine} ~~fifty~~ days before Shavuos, can he appreciate Shavuos. The Torah and life cannot be appreciated by one-shot gimmickry-type of activities. It can only be appreciated by day-in and day-out quiet labor, by living an honest, decent life day-in and day-out, by doing as many Mitzvahs as we can, and by loving and being loved by our family and friends. In this way, we are assured not that we will have no problems, but that we will have the strength to overcome them and that we will always know that life is worth living.

How Can We Feel Life's High

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Noso is the longest Torah portion. It contains 176 verses. The longest Gemorah also has 176 Dafee, or folios. Usually we read the portion Noso after Shavuos. This shows how the Jewish people loved both the written and oral Torah, that after Shavuos we study it even more. In the beginning of the Torah portion Noso we have a continuation of the census of the clans of the Tribe of Levi. When it is a leap year we read Noso before the holiday of Shavuos, and the rabbis have made it a point that we should always read about the census of the Jewish people before Shavuos. Normally, we read the Torah portion Bamidbar. It it we have a complete census of the Jewish people except for these two clans of the Tribe of Levi. There is a peculiar expression which is used throughout the census. It is "Lavais Havosom." There is a prerequisite to receiving the Torah. There must be families so the Torah will touch not only the mind but also the heart, the emotions, and the soul. (Importance about mother and father.)

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BLESSINGS REQUIRE LOVE
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

We are all acquainted with the beautiful priesthood blessing found in the Torah portion Naso which is used throughout the whole world: "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up His face to you and give you peace." The rabbis teach us that this blessing was not the priest's blessing to give to the Jewish people, but it was G-d's blessing.

The question then can be asked, why do we need the priest? What is the priest doing here? If it is G-d's blessing, why do we need the priest? We learn that it is G-d's blessing because it says "Ko Tevorchu - So you should bless the Jewish people." The rabbis tell us that the priest must face the people, and he must bless them with his arms outstretched using these words in Hebrew, and he must bless them with love.

In fact, in the Brocha, or blessing, which the priest makes before he blesses the people with the priestly blessing, we have something very unusual. This Brocha is not like the normal Jewish blessing. The text of this Brocha is: "Blessed are You, O G-d, King of the Universe, Who has sanctified us with the holiness of Aaron and commanded to bless His people, Israel, with love." Usually when we make a Brocha we do not use the word "with love." We say "Hamotzi Lechem Meen HaOretz - Who brought forth bread from the ground." We do not say "with love" and we do not mention the holiness of Aaron. When we light the Shabbos candles we say "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to light the Shabbos candles." We do not say "with love" or "with the holiness of Aaron."

Every Kohen who is eligible to bless the people can come on the bema and bless the people even though he, himself, has made mistakes and does not fulfill all the commandments. With very few exceptions,

a Kohen is never disqualified from "Duchaning." The major exception is if he killed somebody. The Kohen, though, must bless the people with love. It is true that in our prayers in the evening and the morning we say "Blessed be You, O G-d, Who chose His People Israel with love" or "Blessed are You, O G-d, Who loves His People Israel."

We mention love, but there it refers to G-d. We thank G-d for His love of the Jewish people. We thank Him for giving us His Torah which is a sign of love. ^{The Torah} ~~It~~ is not a burden, a terrible handicap, *it is a wonderful gift.*

But, in this case, we are not referring to G-d but to the Kohen, and he must bless the people with love. The Kohen, if he cannot bless the people with love, is not supposed to Duchan. He is supposed to reach out to the people and understand that, just as he is not perfect, they are not perfect, ~~but~~ ^{even though he knows that they are not perfect.} He should still tell them that they are worthy of G-d's blessing.

Why, though, do we say "with the holiness of Aaron?" Why don't we say "with the holiness of Moshe?" Aaron, though, was a different type of religious leader than Moshe. There are two basic types of religious leadership. There is the Moshe type who sets standards, who is the teacher, who admonishes people to live more elevated lives and castigates them when they fall short. The other type of religious leader is the Aaron type. He tells the people, "I know that you have failed. I know that you have sinned, but G-d still loves you and cares for you. You should not feel worthless or unredeemable. You can do better, and G-d still loves you even though you have failed."

In Europe the Mishnagdeem emphasized the teacher role in Judaism while the Chasideem emphasized the consoling and comforting role in Judaism. The Rav is the teacher and the Rebbe was the dispenser

of hope. Aaron understood the people. Aaron sympathized with them and the people responded with unbounded love ^{to him}. The Kohen, when he blesses the people, is not only blessing them. He is telling them, "G-d still loves you. G-d still cares for you even though you are not perfect, even though you may have failed." That is the message the Kohaneem are to give us.

The rabbis say that the word "Ko" or "thus" also stands for the many deeds of loving kindness that Abraham performed. We find this word Ko with Abraham when it says "Ko Yeeya Zarecha - So will be your children." We also find this word Ko with Yitzchak. When we read about the binding of Isaac the Torah says "Nail-Cho A Ko - We will go until thus." It stands for Isaac's willingness to sacrifice ^{for his religion}. We also learn about the word Ko with Jacob. When it says "Ko Somar ^{V'B}ais Yaacov - So you shall say to the House of Jacob." It stood for Jacob's devotion to his family. A Jew, if he still wants to do deeds of loving kindness, and he still is devoted to his religion and to his family, is worthy of G-d's love even if he has failed. The Kohen was told to tell the people, "Try to do better. You can. G-d still loves you and cares for you."

In the last Torah portion in the Torah it says "Zos HaBrocha - This is the blessing which Moshe blessed the Jewish people - Eesh Eloheem - a man of G-d." The rabbis ask, why did Moshe have to be referred to here as Eesh Eloheem, a man of G-d? Didn't the Jewish people know that already? However, this was to teach us that Moshe was both an Eesh and an Eloheem. Eloheem in Hebrew also means "judges." Moshe was a judge. He was a teacher of the people. He set very high standards, but even a Moshe was an Eesh, was a man. He had

all of mankind's foibles. He was a great man, but only a man. The rabbis tell us he had a temper, and we know that he, too, sinned like every other man. He, too, needed a blessing. He, too, needed sometimes to know that G-d loved him and cared for him in spite of his faults. His primary role was to be the teacher and the standard setter for Israel.

In the second to last Torah portion, HaAzinu, he delivers a song which is an admonition depicting the calamities that will befall a wayward and disloyal Israel. In the last Torah portion, though, he leaves his role as a teacher and becomes a messenger of hope and blessing. He, too, tells the tribes that in spite of their weaknesses G-d loves them and cares for them. They are not to despair when things are bleak and when they know they have failed, but they should improve. Therefore, the last words of his blessing are: "Happy art thou, O Israel, who is like unto thee a people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help." Moshe reassures the people that G-d will always love them and care for them.

In our day, unfortunately, there are many people who only look on religion as a castigating, prodding force which only tells them how bad they are. This is not Judaism's view. It is true that our religion sets standards and wants us to try to live by these standards, but the main thrust of our religion is not to try to frighten or improve people by telling them how bad they are, but, instead, it is to tell them that they can never forfeit G-d's love, and that because they each have a piece of G-d in them, they can achieve and do great things. We have always stressed the positive and not the negative. That's why when the priests blessed the people, when Jewish religious leadership

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talks to the people, it should always talk to the people "Beek-Du-
Shaso Shel Aron - With the holiness of Aaron." They are not to get
up and berate the people and call them names. That, many rabbis
say, is even "Loshan Horah - evil slander." They should instead
encourage them, give them hope and point out how much they can do
because they are all children of G-d.

NOSO 1989
Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

In the Torah portion Noso we learn about the priestly blessing, the blessing which now is uttered every day throughout the world. It has been taken over by many religions and is recognized as the greatest of all blessings. "May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto thee. May the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace." This is, all told, fifteen words: 3 in the first blessing, 5 in the second blessing, and 7 in the last blessing, a rising crescendo of blessings. The rabbis interpret the first blessing, "May the Lord bless you and keep you," to mean may G-d bless you with material things and may He keep you from them. Unfortunately, there are many people who are blessed with material things, but they do not know how to handle them. Because they do not know how to handle them, these material things destroy them. We see this in rock stars and basketball players who come from very poor families and all of a sudden they are showered with riches. They do not know how to deal with it, and it quickly destroys them. Look at Elvis Presley, a man who had everything, but he died filled with drugs shooting out television sets. This is a common occurrence with basketball players who squander their proceeds on drugs, etc. It is not enough to be blessed with material things. We have to be guarded against them and from them. We have to know how to handle them. We have to make sure, too, that we are not the objects of envy and hatred of others. G-d, in this first blessing, is giving us material things and allowing us to use them well.

The second blessing, "May G-d make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious unto thee," refers to a person's personality, to interpersonal relationships. A person should be able to love and be loved by others. A person should have an empathetic, intuitive personality who is able to get along with everyone, who is able to fathom other people's personalities

and understand them and also be understood himself. That is what the word "Chain" means, "favor". G-d should give you a certain kind of graciousness and charm, a certain kind of intuitive ability to get along well with everyone.

Then we have the last blessing, "May G-d lift up His face to you and give you peace," which is a spiritual blessing in which we ask that we have the spiritual things of life. Of course, the question could be asked, why do we need this last blessing at all? After all, the first blessing in which we ask for material things and to be guarded against the evil effect of material things, and the second blessing, which asks for a good personality that is beloved by everyone and is able to love everyone, then what else is there left? What do we mean by a spiritual blessing? The key, of course, to understanding what a spiritual blessing is is in the last word, shalom, peace. Spiritual blessing has to do with being connected with others and being connected to G-d, to have a certain amount of wholeness, to not be a fragmented personality. In Hebrew shalom does not mean peace but harmony. In English the word peace can also stand for the peace of the grave, for quietness, for stillness, but in Hebrew the word shalom means harmony. It means that everything is working at full capacity but in harmony with everything else. In the Jewish conception of things everyone is supposed to fulfill their individuality but in harmony with everyone else. It is like the body. When we ask people in Hebrew how they are feeling we do not ask how they are feeling. We ask, how is your harmony? All the parts of the body have to be working at their capacity and working together in complete harmony. If one part of the body is working exceptionally well but the others are only working in their normal way, the person is sick and probably suffering from cancer. In life we must be connected to others and have an inner wholeness and

equilibrium. If we do not have this wholeness and equilibrium we will not be able to actually enjoy life. We will be a fragmented personality.

Unfortunately, today there are many people who have fragmented personalities. They have a self-image of themselves which is usually wrong and which does not conform to reality at all. It is like the self-image that Samson had. We learn about Samson in the Haphtorah. Samson was a man who conceived of himself as a holy man, although he did all sorts of things that holy people should not do. Of course, when he lost his hair, which was the symbol of holiness, he also lost his vision. He no longer could conceive who he was and what he was. Unfortunately, we have the same kind of people today who pretend that they are holy individuals, but then they do things that are beneath them. It is like people who pretend that they are pillars of the community and stand for certain values until they go away to convention and then they do other things. Then there are other people who pretend they are standing for good ethics and sound business practices while they are cheating and slum lording and doing all sorts of sharp business practices. People's self-image and what they really are are so many times two different things. When a person loses his self-image many times he cracks. There is an image that we present to the world, there is an image that we have of ourselves, there is an image that our friends and family have of us, and sometimes they are not exactly the same. In order for us to really have a spiritual aspect to our character we have to have a certain wholeness. We have to be connected to family and to others.

In fact, that is actually what religion gives us. In life we can ask three different questions. We can ask why, but there is really no answer to the question why. Why did G-d create the world? Why are we here? Why did He have to create suffering and death? We do not know. We have faith that someday we will know, but there are no answers. If someones

tells you they understand why there is pain and suffering and death, he must be a fool because no one really knows why. We cannot answer the question why. Science, too, cannot answer the question why. Science only answers the question how. We do not know why water freezes at 32°. We just know that it does. I remember when I was a kid, I asked my teacher why when I threw a ball in the air does it come down? The teacher said because of gravity. I asked what was gravity, and the teacher said to turn to page 61. In other words, the teacher did not know. Science can only answer how things work, not why they should work this way. Science also can describe what things are but it cannot answer the question why. Religion, on the other hand, answers the question, what does it do to us? How does it affect us? Many times we can argue and say that certain religious practices are not necessary. As long as we think about certain things, it is okay. We can disagree about why these things should work, how they work, but that is not important. The important thing is, what do these things do for us? These things do a lot for us. Unfortunately, many people have fallen onto the heretical idea that just because you understand something that, therefore, you are exempt from it. For example, just because you understand the laws of interpersonal relationships, therefore, you are exempt from any of these laws. Therefore, you can allow yourself to do all sorts of things and get involved in all sorts of temptations, and you will not be tempted. This is, of course, foolish because we are all human. If you get involved with a beautiful woman in very close intimate contact, even though you have a wonderful wife and a good relationship with her, you are going to be tempted. If you are involved with handling money with no supervision whatsoever, you are going to be tempted. You are a human being. When it comes to laws of interpersonal relationships, just because you understand the working of these laws does not mean that

you are not going to be subjected to them, too. It does not mean that you are not going to be jealous or envious or subjected to greed or any other human failing. In fact, we do not say that because you understand how the blood circulates in the body that when you cut your finger you will not bleed. We do not say that because you understand the laws of physics if you jump off a cliff you will not fall down. Of course you are going to fall down.

The same thing applies in the interpersonal sphere, too. Religion deals with what these things do to us. In fact, most of the rules and regulations in this Torah portion Noso have to do with what religion does for us. How does it shape us? How does it mold us? If you follow the rules of the Jewish tradition, you will turn out to be a certain type of individual. If a person will give up Shabbos they are usually giving up the family, too, because they do not want to be together on Friday night and shares each other's opinions and woes and sadnesses and joys. When they give up Shabbos they are giving up a lot. When people give up keeping kosher, they are also taking away one of the best defenses that their children have against drugs and alcohol. Children of people who keep kosher are not as susceptible to drugs and alcohol because they have had to learn how to say no. You cannot eat anything you want whenever you want however you want. You cannot even eat things that you are permitted to eat at the same time with other things that you are permitted to eat. Therefore, you learn something, a discipline that you cannot eat anything you want and to anything you want. By observing different rules and regulations, they have an effect upon us, and this effect is lasting. The most important effect is that it gives us a wholeness, an identity, a meaning. If we want to have this last blessing of harmony and wholeness so that we will be able to overcome our problems, then it is important that we adhere to our religious practices, which have been proven throughout the generations

