The Blessing of Wholeness: Thoughts for Parashat Naso

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Angel for Shabbat, Parashat Naso

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Many people feel the need to be noticed. They dye their hair neon green, or they wear immodest clothing, or they say things that are intended to shock. They will do anything to keep the limelight focused on themselves: they will tell a stream of jokes, they will speak without listening to others, they will take “selfies” and send them to anyone and everyone they can think of.

The message they convey is: NOTICE ME. Underlying this thirst for attention is the deep feeling of unworthiness, the fear of not being noticed. Also underlying this exhibitionism is the desire to stand above the crowd, to be distinguished in some way from the normal run of humanity.

Human beings are often (always?) frail and insecure. They need to be reassured that their lives mean something to others. They dread being ignored or forgotten. It is as though they evaluate the worthiness of their lives by how others respond to them. Their feelings of success or failure in life are determined by others. The ancient Chinese philosopher, Confucius, taught: “What the Noble Person seeks is in himself. What the petty person seeks is in others.” The challenge is to be the Noble Person.

The Torah portion this week includes the Priestly Blessing. The Cohanim are commanded to bless the people, serving as the conduits for God’s blessings. The third line of the blessing states: May God shine His countenance upon you and give you shalom. Shalom, usually translated as peace, has the connotation of wholeness. The blessing is recited in the singular (lekha, not lakhem), meaning that it is aimed at each particular person, not at the people at large. The blessing is for each individual to feel a sense of completeness within him/herself, to feel secure and unafraid. The blessing is to understand that the value of our lives is dependent on ourselves, not on the opinions of others. When God shines His

countenance upon an individual, that person comes to understand that life is ultimately defined by the relationship of one's self with God. God's light eliminates the shadows and doubts.

The kabbalists and musar writers have long emphasized the virtue of "hitbodedut," being alone with oneself. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan translated "hitbodedut" as meditation. A person needs time to think deeply and alone, to separate inner reality from outer illusions, to receive God's light and move out of the shadows. "Hitbodedut" helps a person develop the inner wisdom and inner poise that lead to internal shalom. "Hitbodedut" is a means of seeking the self and, at the same time, transcending the self.

Albert Einstein wrote: "The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that stands at the cradle of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead, a snuffed out candle. To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is something that our minds cannot grasp, whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly: this is religiousness…."

May God shine His countenance upon you and give you shalom.

Angel for Shabbat