



Parshat Nasso 5785: Joy

Integrating Torah into one's life through reflection and conversation can be an incredibly fun and engaging experience. It's a journey of discovery, where ancient wisdom and timeless teachings come to life in our daily experiences. Through reflection, we have the opportunity to dive deep into the rich tapestry of Torah, extracting profound insights and lessons that resonate with our modern lives. The joy lies in the 'aha' moments, those instances when a Torah verse or story suddenly connects with our personal challenges, aspirations, and values. And when we engage in conversations about Torah with others, it becomes an interactive exploration, where diverse perspectives and interpretations enhance our understanding. These dialogues often spark excitement and intellectual curiosity, making the learning process both enjoyable and fulfilling. Torah becomes a vibrant and dynamic part of our lives, offering not just guidance but also a source of endless fascination, connection, and growth.

NOTE: Don't feel obligated to go through every source or answer all the questions—unless you want to. Even one source, or one question will give you plenty of material for discussion and meditation. Enjoy this!

Some thoughts about Parshat Nasso (and Pirkei Avot)

Parshat Nasso: Peace, Joy, and the Power of Service

“When a man or woman shall commit any sin... then they shall confess their sin which they have done...” (Numbers 5:6–7)

The Torah portion of *Nasso* opens a wide window into the moral and emotional life of the individual. At its heart is a deeply human moment: when someone recognizes that they've done wrong and speaks it aloud. This verbal confession is not just an inner feeling of regret—it is a spoken act of truth. The act of confession (*vidui*) is the first step in a larger spiritual process known as *teshuvah*, or return.

While *teshuvah* in its full halachic structure applies to Jews, its essential elements—honesty, responsibility, and the desire to repair what was broken—are universally relevant. Every person can practice this moral courage. A Noahide who violates the universal laws incumbent upon all humankind can likewise strive to correct the harm caused, seek reconciliation, and grow in spiritual dignity. The Torah even makes provision for when there is no one to receive restitution: it goes to G-d, through the priest. This emphasizes the ultimate accountability of every moral being to their Creator, even in unseen matters.

The Music of Service

Later in the parsha, we encounter a peculiar phrase: *“avodat avoda”*—“the service of the service.” The sages explain this refers not to the core Temple rituals themselves, but to the musical accompaniment provided by the Levites during the Temple offerings. What an idea! That joyful music is not ornamental, but essential to sacred service. The Levites did not merely sing; they facilitated joy—bringing it into a space of awe and structure.

This resonates with a theme found in the Book of Deuteronomy, where the punishments for national disobedience are ultimately traced back to one core issue: *“Because you did not serve the L-rd your*



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G-d with joy and goodness of heart” (Deut. 28:47). The Arizal taught that this verse is the key to understanding the rebuke: that joy is not optional. G-d desires joyful service.

For Noahides, this is a profound message. You are not commanded to offer sacrifices or perform the intricate rituals of the Temple, but you are invited to live in joyful service—to infuse your everyday life with reverence, gratitude, and purpose. Your music might be the way you greet others with warmth, the way you elevate your work with integrity, or the way you bring peace into your home and community. This is your “avodas avoda.”

Love, Discipline, and Human Dignity

The ethical teachings of Hillel and Shammai, which appear in *Pirkei Avot*, offer complementary views of what spiritual life entails. Hillel teaches us to pursue peace, love others, and bring them closer to truth. Shammai teaches restraint, consistency, and a cheerful demeanor rooted in awe of the divine image within each person.

These are not conflicting views—they are two sides of a complete moral personality. One must have love and mercy, but also firmness and discipline. These teachings reinforce that spirituality is not merely vertical (between us and G-d) but also horizontal—between us and our fellow creatures.

For Noahides, the takeaway is clear: treating others with dignity is not just ethics—it is part of your spiritual service. When you restrain your anger, smile at others, seek peace even when it costs you, you are honoring the One who made us all.

Now, reflect on the following questions:

1. How can I express spiritual responsibility through honest self-reflection and acts of repair?
2. What does it mean for me to "serve G-d with joy" in my current life circumstances?
3. Do I approach others with both warmth and respect, as creatures made in G-d's image?
4. When I've been wronged, can I pursue peace without compromising integrity?
5. What forms of “music” do I bring into my spiritual practice—what brings joy and harmony into my relationship with the divine?