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## Naso – Bamidbar/Numbers 4:21-7:89

### The Text – Key verses in this parasha

6:1-3 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites and say to them: If anyone, man or woman, explicitly utters a nazirite's vow, to set himself apart for the Lord, he shall abstain from wine and any other intoxicant; he shall not drink vinegar of wine or of any other intoxicant, neither shall he drink anything in which grapes have been steeped, nor eat grapes fresh or dried.

6:13-15 This is the ritual for the nazirite: On the day that his term as nazirite is completed, he shall be brought to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. As his offering to the Lord he shall present: one male lamb in its first year, without blemish, for a burnt offering; one ewe lamb in its first year, without blemish, for a sin offering; one ram without blemish for an offering of well-being; a basket of unleavened cakes of choice flour with oil mixed in, and unleavened wafers spread with oil; and the proper meal offerings and libations.

6:20 The priest shall elevate them as an elevation offering before the Lord; and this shall be a sacred donation for the priest, in addition to the breast of the elevation offering and the thigh of gift offering. After that the nazirite may drink wine.

### The Context – The verses in plain English

In Naso, God lays out for Moses the rules to be followed by Nazirites, people who, in devotion to God, abstain from drinking wine, let their hair grow long and avoid all contact with dead bodies.

### For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) What is the connection between holiness, divine service and limiting our consumption of certain natural resources?
- 2) After all that he has given up in service to God, why must a Nazirite dedicate still more of his precious resources before ending his sacred vow? How does sacrifice both strengthen our position as advocates and increase the likelihood that we will find workable solutions to difficult problems?

# Beha'alotecha – Bamidbar/Numbers 8:1-12:16

## The Text – Key verses in this parasha

11:1 The people took to complaining bitterly before the Lord. The Lord heard and was incensed: a fire of the Lord broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp.

11:4-5 The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous raving; and then the Israelites wept and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic. Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!"

11:18-20 And say to the people: Purify yourselves for tomorrow and you shall eat meat, for you have kept whining before the Lord and saying, "If only we had meat to eat! Indeed, we were better off in Egypt!" The Lord will give you meat and you shall eat. You shall eat not one day, not two, not even five days or ten or twenty, but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you. For you have rejected the Lord who is among you, by whining before Him and saying, 'Oh, why did we ever leave Egypt!'"

## The Context – The verses in plain English

As they continue their wandering in the desert, the Israelites are unhappy that they only have manna to eat, and demand that Moses supply them with meat. God is displeased with their ingratitude, and, as a punishment, agrees to give them what they wish for – but to give them so much of it that meat becomes repulsive to them.

## For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) How does excessive consumption, and its resulting effects on our bodies and our natural environment, both violate our covenant with God and serve as a barrier to reducing global poverty?
- 2) The Israelites cry out to Moses and to God, bemoaning their situation and fantasizing – falsely – about how idyllic life was in Egypt. How is being trapped in the past (real or imagined) a danger to making progress in the present? How do complaints without accompanying action undermine our effectiveness as advocates?

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## Shelach Lecha – Bamidbar/Numbers 13:1-15:41

The Text – Key verses in this parasha

13:17 When Moses sent them to scout the land of Canaan, he said to them, “Go up there into the Negeb and on into the hill country, and see what kind of country it is. Are the people who dwell in it strong or weak, few or many? Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? Are the towns they live in open or fortified? Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not? And take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land.” – Now it happened to be the season of the first ripe grapes.

13:25-27 At the end of 40 days they returned from scouting the land. They went straight to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran, and they made their report to them and to the whole community, as they showed them the fruit of the land. This is what they told him: “We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.”

15:17-21 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land to which I am taking you and you eat of the bread of the land, you shall set some aside as a gift to the Lord: as the first yield of your baking, you shall set aside a loaf as a gift; you shall set it aside as a gift like the gift from the threshing floor. You shall make a gift to the Lord from the first yield of your baking, throughout the ages.

The Context – The verses in plain English

At God’s command, Moses sends 12 spies to investigate the land of Canaan. When they return, they report on a beautiful and bountiful land – though they also warn that Canaan’s current inhabitants are fierce and powerful people.

God instructs Moses and the Israelites that, once he brings them into Canaan, they are to dedicate a portion of dough to Him when they are baking.

For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) What do “milk” and “honey” represent for the Israelites? As outsiders looking to inherit a land of plenty, the Israelites understand the hardship and suffering that go hand-in-hand with not having adequate resources. What does God’s promise to them represent for all people facing poverty and dreaming of a better life? How can we, as God’s partners, help make this promise a reality for poor and struggling communities today?

- 2) How do we honor God by sharing our bread? What does “bread” encompass? How does our willingness to give (of our time, energy and resources) directly impact our ability to effect meaningful change, both here at home and around the world?

## **Korach – Bamidbar/Numbers 16:1-18:32**

### **The Text – Key verses in this parasha**

18:8-9 The Lord spoke further to Aaron: I hereby give you charge of My gifts, all the sacred donations of the Israelites; I grant them to you and to your sons as a perquisite, a due for all time. This shall be yours from the most holy sacrifices, the offerings by fire: every such offering that they render to Me as most holy sacrifices, namely, every meal offering, sin offering and guilt offering of theirs, shall belong to you and your sons.

18:25-28 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Levites and say to them: When you receive from the Israelites their tithes, which I have assigned to you as your share, you shall set aside from them one-tenth of the tithe as a gift to the Lord. This shall be accounted to you as your gift. As with the new grain from the threshing floor or the flow from the vat, so shall you on your part set aside a gift for the Lord from all the tithes that you receive from the Israelites; and from them you shall bring the gift for the Lord to Aaron the priest.

### **The Context – The verses in plain English**

God grants the priesthood in perpetuity to Aaron and his descendants. Several hundred Israelites, led by Korach, protest this decision and threaten to mutiny against Moses' leadership; God causes the earth to open up and swallow the erstwhile mutineers.

God then decrees that the Israelites' sacrifices to Him be given to the priests as “payment” for their hard work. In addition, He commands the priests to ally themselves with the Levites, who will help them with their priestly duties. For their own labor, the Levites will receive tithes from their fellow Israelites; from these tithes, they must set aside a portion for God.

### **For Discussion – What it means for advocates**

- 1) Why does God decide to give His priests, for their own consumption, sacrifices intended for Him? Do we receive a similar reward for our efforts as God's partners in promoting social justice?

- 2) The Levites do not have means of their own; rather, in exchange for their work in God's service, they receive a donation from their fellow Israelites. Why must they sacrifice a portion of these donations to God? What is the value in encouraging people whose livelihoods depend on charity to share their resources with others? How does this empower them to serve as advocates on their own behalf?

## Chukat – Bamidbar/Numbers 19:1-22:1

### The Text – Key verses in this parasha

20:2-5 The community was without water, and they joined against Moses and Aaron. The people quarreled with Moses, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished at the instance of the Lord! Why have you brought the Lord's congregation into this wilderness for us and our beasts to die there? Why did you make us leave Egypt to bring us to this wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates? There is not even water to drink!"

20:9-11 Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as He had commanded him. Moses and Aaron assembled the congregation in front of the rock; and he said to them, "Listen, you rebels, shall we get water for you out of this rock?" And Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. Out came copious water, and the community and their beasts drank.

### The Context – The verses in plain English

Exhausted after 40 years of traveling through the desert, the Israelites fault Moses for their discomfort, and express their desperation for drinking water. God tells Moses to speak to a rock and command it to give water; Moses, furious at the Israelites' ingratitude, strikes the rock instead. Water bursts forth, satisfying the community, but Moses learns that, as a result of his failure to obey God's order, neither he nor Aaron will enter the Promised Land.

### For Discussion – What it means for advocates

- 1) Just as the Israelites feel they have spent years going nowhere, as advocates we frequently find ourselves disappointed with the pace of our progress to bring about social change. How can we channel these frustrations in a productive way? Are there benefits associated with incremental, rather than wholesale, progress?

- 2) Resources are often found in unexpected places. How can we apply this principle to our own social justice work? What are examples of innovative strategies we can use to achieve our policy goals?
- 3) As advocates focused on alleviating global poverty, we come across so many obstacles on our way to entering the “Promised Land.” What are some of these barriers? Are there ways that we can transform them into assets? If so, how?

## **Pinchas – Bamidbar/Numbers 25:10-30:1**

### **The Text – Key verses in this parasha**

28:1-2 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: Command the Israelite people and say to them: Be punctilious in presenting to Me at stated times the offerings of food due Me, as offerings by fire of pleasing odor to Me.

28:16-18 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, there shall be a passover sacrifice to the Lord, and on the fifteenth day of that month a festival. Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days. The first day shall be a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.

28:26 On the day of the first fruits, your Feast of Weeks, when you bring an offering of new grain to the Lord, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations.

### **The Context – The verses in plain English**

In this parasha, God offers a detailed list of daily and holiday ritual offerings, including those for Passover and Shavuot. Pinchas is also notable as the parasha in which Moses empowers Joshua to succeed him and lead the people into the Land of Israel, and for establishing the precedent of female inheritance.

### **For Discussion – What it means for advocates**

- 1) Of all His many concerns, why is God insistent on the Israelites’ punctuality? Why are consistency and timeliness so critical to fulfilling our commitments as advocates?
- 2) God’s instructions regarding ritual observance often combine the hard work of sacrifice with the commandment to rest. What do we learn from the juxtaposition of these two

seemingly opposite actions? How do they reinforce each other, and how does that strengthen the effectiveness of our social justice work?