

"Think not that I come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17

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"And When he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" John 10:4

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## *Sermons by Rabbi Frank*

### LEVI GENES

Date - June 7, 2008

Scripture - Numbers 6:1 - 3, 8

"ADONAI said to Moshe, "Tell the people of Isra'el, 'When either a man or a woman makes a special kind of vow, the vow of a nazir, consecrating himself to ADONAI; he is to abstain from wine and other intoxicating liquor, he is not to drink vinegar from either source, he is not to drink grape juice, and he is not to eat grapes or raisins.

Throughout the time of his being a nazir he is holy for ADONAI."

In the world of sports it is very common to question the decisions of owners, coaches, and players. Owners and coaches often have to make personnel decisions based on performance, the public and profits. In every walk of life, decisions are always fair game for second guessing.

Even God is second guessed for the choices He makes. Like the arm chair quarterback we seem to believe we have a better idea, that we can somehow make a better choice. Whereas people make decisions not knowing the full outcome, God does not. He has a purpose for everything and our challenge is to accept His purposes, accept His decisions and learn from our mistakes.

From the Talmud, Shavuot 39a is this simple statement: "*All Israelites are mutually accountable to each other.*" Whereas the world is obsessed with one's "rights", God is more concerned with our responsibility. With every responsibility comes accountability. The wholeness of one contributes to the wholeness of the group and the sickness of one reflects the sickness of the whole.

God had made a sovereign choice to set apart the tribe of Levi from all the other tribes. What made Levi so special? Levi himself was one of the chief instigators of the rift between Joseph and the brothers. Also too, in an act of deceit and murder, he led the assault against the city of Shechem.

Israel was commanded to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" but within Israel was a separate "kingdom of priests." Following the sin of the Golden Calf in the desert, Moses called out, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me!" From there it is written, "And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him."

On the surface, all you needed to be a Levite was proper genes. Being a Levite was thus a distinction and an honor but it carried with it grave responsibilities, high expectations and constant demands. In the eyes of the

rest of Israel, a Levi had to behave as a Levi. Failure to do so, was deemed to be a desecration of the holy name of God itself.

After the destruction of the Temple, the tribe of Levi lost much of its unique role in the Jewish world, but there remained vestiges of its preferred status. Even though there is no longer a Temple, a Levi still had to behave as a Levi.

Our Torah and Haftorah portions speak of another unique role of spiritual leadership. This unique role of demonstrating spiritual life and leadership could be performed by anyone! You did not have to have “Levi Genes” to serve the Lord and come into His presence! To consecrate oneself to God was made possible through the taking of a Nazirite vow.

With every challenge comes fresh opportunity. Through the Nazirite vow, all Israel could once again grasp hold of God’s calling on them to be a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Moses Maimonides) in his monumental Mishnah Torah, makes it very clear that everybody can take on the role of a Levi. In his own words: *“Every person who enters this world, whose spirit moves him and his intellect instructs him, to separate himself from the pettiness of the world in order to stand before God, to truly serve Him, to be responsible to Him, to know Him, and to walk upright and straight in His paths as God created him: and he has freed himself from the yoke of petty human considerations that other people pursue—such a person has sanctified himself as being holy of holies, and the Lord is his share and inheritance for all time and all worlds, and he will receive in the World to Come his proper and fulfilling reward as God has given such to the Priests and the Levites.”*

In short, there are “Levi Genes” custom fit for everyone! And let me say you look good in those genes!

What was required of a person wishing to undertake a Nazirite vow? For a period of time established by the worshipper, the person would have to separate themselves from any strong drink, and from any and all products derived from grapes. In essence, this was a way of abstaining from things that symbolized the luxuries of life. It was a separation from everything that stirs the heart of man in the natural. For this time of consecration joy was to come from a divine source.

Secondly, one had to let their hair grow long and wild. The hair perhaps was as a crown of glory to him. And thirdly, the Nazirite could not come near a dead body. Like the High Priest in Israel, he was holy to the Lord and was not to defile himself with a dead body.

While I do not know the full meaning or purpose for this, it is reasonable to presume that the purpose was to bring about a greater nearness of man to God. God had appointed the people of Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” and it seems fitting that this vow was something that an individual in Israel could do to approximate this ideal! The High Priest, and therefore the Levites in general, had this special position by inheritance. The Nazirite vowed his vow spontaneously as a matter of personal choice!

There were also cases when God chose a man for an exalted purpose and made Naziritehood obligatory for him from the time of his birth. Such is the case with Samson, who from birth was dedicated to the Lord as a Nazirite. Samson was appointed to be the savior of Israel from the hands of the Philistines. He was endowed with extraordinary strength which would enable him to fulfill his divine appointment. God had appointed Samson for great things and he indeed did do great things! But what a tragic ending! All because he failed to fully appreciate his divine appointment.

This is a great man! A man enshrined in the Hall of Faith (Heb. 11). Let us not be so hard and judgmental with Samson. The Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 2:8 rightly describes Samson among the greatest of all Jewish judges paralleling him, in some ways, to Moses himself. Sotah 9b says of him; *“Shimshon also merited that the Divine Presence of Hashem preceded him to secure his every step with success. And it was solely in Shimshon’s merit that Hashem constantly protected the Jewish nation.”*

I want you to do some comparative analysis with yourself. His shortcomings are also ours. When we think of Samson we think of his attraction to Philistine woman. But I submit to you that this was not his sin, in fact it was not sin at all! Scripture tells us this was not his sin, rather it was God’s will for him. His parents were not pleased with his choice, but Judges 14:4 says: “However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines.”

His first departure from the Nazirite vow came when he gave in to a craving of his flesh. It was not sex, it was his appetite. He had a “sweet tooth” if you will. How many know what that’s all about?

Illustration: The other night Margaret and I were watching T.D. Jakes, what an awesome preacher he is! He told

his audience that they were all a bunch of hypocrites. That all of them have areas of their lives for which they are hypocrites. Of himself he admitted that during the day he will eat green salads and boiled chicken but at night will sneak downstairs half naked and raid the refrigerator. When his wife inquires where the food went he says “we must have many hungry mice.”

Samson consumed honey from the carcass of a lion he had earlier slain. Coming that close to a dead body was a violation of the Nazarite vow.

Rabbi Yisrael Ciner, sounding like Rabbi Shaul, offers this insight: *“People in every generation are lured with temptations to throw themselves after the physical. They know what’s right but find it difficult to constantly maintain those standards. The pleasures of this world can be so tempting. The mission of man is to see through that illusory smoke screen and recognize the true bankruptcy of the temptations and pleasures that beckon. But, as we’d readily agree, it can be an extremely difficult task.”*

This wonderfully points out the necessity of both Spirit and Law! Torah establishes boundaries and the Ruach empowers us to maintain those boundaries! One without the other exposes weakness.

Samson, like all of us, are glad to be in possession of the blessing that come with knowing the Lord. Samson enjoyed his incomparable strength in the same way we enjoy the authority we have in Yeshua, but we come up short on the inner aspect of things—namely the uniqueness of our responsibility to behave as a “kingdom of priests!” The critical mass of Samson’s lack of discipline caused him to eventually become bound, beaten, blinded, and put to burdensome labor!

And where and how has it left us? I could take this in so many directions! Just consider the shalom we forfeit because we choose the path of least resistance. Rather than tackling and confronting a matter that robs us of our spiritual power and potential, we choose to put it out of mind.

W.A. Poovey writes: *“Mere longing for a better world can be a lazy person’s way to face life. There is an old story of a farmer who said lightning struck an old shed and thus saved him the trouble of tearing it down, and rain washed off his car and saved him that chore too. When asked what he was doing now, he replied, “Waiting for an earthquake to shake the potatoes out of the ground.”*

Great things only happen when we apply ourselves! Having “Levi Genes” was never a guarantee for success, just ask Nadab and Abihu! We have a very high calling, a supreme privilege, but it’s “borsht” if it is in dormancy or neglect. In such cases, when the alarm is sounded “The Philistines are upon you”, you are a goner!

As a “kingdom of priests”, how is that being lived out? Israel was not to be like the nations but the temptation to be like the nations was an overwhelming force! Dedication to God’s service is what distinguishes first and foremost a true “kingdom of priests.”

I hate to use the term “religion”, it connotes too much negative. We may have a belief system, but do we really have a knowledge of God? We have tradition but do we have a devotion to the will of God? We have a tradition of Shavuot, but is that all we have? Don’t we want more? There is a “kingdom of priests” that today is just functioning when it could be thriving in the fullness of the Shekinah!

The disciplines of a Nazirite vow were for a short period of time. A strut in your “Levi Genes” is a lifelong commitment! We are brought close to Yeshua and to the most holy place via covenant and a covenant has no expiration date—it is permanent! We have an obligation through covenant to be separate for a lifetime!

In closing, Torah instructs us not to stray after our eyes. The things we see in the natural can be deceiving. Our perception is often skewed and God cautions us to see things through His eyes. Concerning this week’s parsha, I believe there is so much more that meets the eye. On the surface it seems to offer another strange and belabored repetition. The leaders of each tribe all brought the very same exact offering! Yet, the Torah spells it out, in its full identical detail twelve times! Do you wonder what Moses was thinking, he was the scribe!

Every leader brought the same “cookie cutter” offering. How crazy is that? Doesn’t it make each offering rather insignificant? Doesn’t it make it difficult for any of the tribes to offer more or better? But let’s try to see this through God’s eyes! To Him, each was special, separate, significant, sizable and sincere. Each leader is afforded the same courtesy of an eternal remembrance—the mention of their name and gift in a verse of Torah!

Illustration: All across our society private organizations will put your name in their published materials if you will make a contribution to their cause. Your gift will be remembered and you will receive something to inflate your ego.

In this listing that God orders we have a wonderful illustration of the importance of each member of a group is

viewed by God. Attention is being paid to the individual. It is through the collective strength, the sum of all individuals, that makes a people strong, vibrant, and prosperous!

When you pray, you can be the catalyst for change. When others are praying with you, agreeing together with you, your request has some added clout! The bible has countless examples of great things being accomplished because a people collectively moved toward a common vision! We all matter! Each person is special and treasured. And too, when others join alongside us in our “avodah”, our service to God, our work, we get energized, encouraged, and excited!

“And when the day of Shavuot had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.”

Our generation was not at Sinai. We are to imagine as if we were in the same way we would see ourselves too being delivered out of Egypt. We did not experience personally all of the mystifying, electrifying, death defying exploits of the prophets, kings, apostles, or the Messiah. But we are here now with one vision, one goal, and one calling, and one desire for a fresh move of God’s Spirit! When we as a group purpose to properly position our hearts toward God as a “kingdom of priests”, nothing is off limits!

The good news is that Samson’s hair grew back! How many here can use a new pair of Genes? Allow the Lord to outfit you today. Separate yourself today for His purposes.

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