

## Parsha Halacha – Nasso

# Nachshon ben Aminadav

### Lessons in Courage

**Sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Elbogen le'iluy nishmas his mother,  
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In the Torah portion of Nasso we find the sacrifices which the twelve princes of the tribes brought on the first 12 days after the consecration of the Mishkan. The first one to bring his sacrifice was Nachshon, the son of Aminadav, from the tribe of Yehudah.<sup>1</sup>

#### Why First?

The commentaries offer various explanations as to why Nachshon went first:

- **First in Many Matters**

The [Daat Zekeinim](#) explains why Nachshon brought his sacrifice first, despite the fact that his tribe, Yehudah, was the fourth-born son of Yaakov. It was because his tribe went first in many matters, specifically, when the Jews traveled in the desert,<sup>2</sup> when they camped,<sup>3</sup> and when they went to war to conquer Israel after Yehoshua passed away.<sup>4</sup> Not only that, but when Moshiach comes, the tribe of Yehudah will be the first to be informed of his arrival, as the verse says, “Behold on the hills, the footsteps of a herald, announcing good fortune! ‘Celebrate your festivals, O Yehudah!’”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [Bamidbar 7:12](#)

<sup>2</sup> See [Bamidbar 2:9](#) and [Rabeinu Bachaye](#).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid [verse 3](#) (i.e., he and his group camped in the most important side – the east side.)

<sup>4</sup> See [Shoftim 1:2](#).

<sup>5</sup> [Nachum 2:1](#). See [Rabeinu Bachaye](#) on 7:12 and [Yalkut Shimoni al HaTorah 687](#).

- **Aharon's Brother-in-Law**

In addition, he was the brother-in-law of Aharon (his sister Elisheva was married to Aharon), whose inauguration as the Kohen Gadol took place on that day.<sup>6</sup>

- **First in Humility**

According to the Midrash, the tribe of Yehudah merited to have their leader bring his sacrifice first because their ancestor Yehudah spoke humbly to Yosef and offered himself as a slave in order to protect Binyanim.<sup>7</sup>

- **First into the Sea**

According to our sages, Nachshon was the first one to enter into the Sea of Reeds even before it split. (The Talmud says<sup>8</sup> that when the Jewish people were at the sea no one wanted to go forward until Nachshon jumped into the sea. When the water level reached his neck, the sea split.<sup>9</sup> His name alludes to this act, see below.) As a reward for his bravery, he was chosen to sacrifice first.<sup>10</sup>

### **Why No Mention of his Being a Tribal Leader?**

The commentaries point out that the verses refer to most of the leaders as the Nasi (prince) of their respective tribes (נָשִׂיא וְשָׁפֵר, נָשִׂיא לְבָנֵי צְבָאָלָן) and so on). Regarding Nachshon, however, the verse says, **וַיְהִי הַמִּקְרֵב בַּיּוֹם הַרְאֵשׁ אֶת קָרְבָּנוּ בְּנֵשְׁׁנָוּ בְּעַמִּיכְדָּבָר** – “The one who sacrificed his offering on the first day was Nachshon, son of Aminadav, of the tribe of Yehudah,” leaving out his title.<sup>11</sup> They offer several explanations:

- **He Was Humble**

The [Ohr HaChaim](#) writes that this teaches us that Nachshon was humble and did not consider himself an important leader. King David was similarly humble as it says,

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<sup>6</sup> Da'at Zekeinim and [Pirush HaRosh](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Bamidbar Rabbah 13:3](#) see Gen. 44:33

<sup>8</sup> [Sotah 37a](#)

<sup>9</sup> At that time, Nachshon was praying and saying “Save me G-d because the waters have reached my neck” ([Tehillim 69:2](#)).

<sup>10</sup> [Pesikta Rabati 7:1](#)

<sup>11</sup> See [Bamidbar 2:3](#) that he was, in fact, the Nassi of Yehudah.

“David was the youngest.<sup>12</sup>” The subsequent tribal leaders are given the title “Nasi,” for they humbled themselves and (willingly) did not sacrifice first.<sup>13</sup>

- **Deserved It**

In addition, Nachshon deserved to bring a sacrifice because he was personally righteous and not only because he was the leader of his tribe. His very name suggests his righteousness as it alludes to his descending into the sea. (נַחַשׁוֹן) can become נַחֲשׁוֹל – a torrent of water – since the letters נ and ח are interchangeable as they are both pronounced with the teeth.<sup>14</sup>)

- **It Was for the Tribe**

Some suggest<sup>15</sup> the opposite interpretation – that Nachshon only sacrificed first in honor of his tribe (see above) and not because of his personal stature. Thus, all honorific titles are left out.

- **Beyond the Title**

The ancient sages were known by their names only and were not given any appellation. (See the [first chapter of Pirkei Avot](#) where all the sages up until Raban Gamliel have no title.) This is because they were so great that no title could capture their true character. Similarly, Nachshon was beyond the title Nasi.<sup>16</sup>

- **A Sad Day**

In addition, this was a sad day for Nachshon since his two nephews passed away – Nadav and Avihu.<sup>17</sup> As such, he refused any extra honors, and so his title is therefore left out. We learn from this that, if one buries a close relative on a day when mourning is forbidden (e.g., Chol HaMoed), one should not show extra joy.<sup>18</sup>

## Why the “Vav”?

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<sup>12</sup> [I Samuel 17:14](#) See [Tur Ha’aruch](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Chizkuni](#)

<sup>14</sup> See Ohr HaChaim that the letters נַחַשׁוֹן can be interchanged.

<sup>15</sup> [Gur Aryeh](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Ha’amek Davar](#)

<sup>17</sup> See [Vayikra 10:1](#) and on.

<sup>18</sup> [Ha’amek Davar](#)

The verse about Nachshon's sacrifice begins with the words **וְקָרְבָּנוּ קָרְבָּתְּכָסֶף אֶחָת** - "And his sacrifice was one silver plate..." Since he was the first to sacrifice, the letter *vav*, "and," seems inappropriate. Several interpretations are offered:

- **A Humility Reminder**

The Midrash says<sup>19</sup> that this is to remind Nachshon to remain humble and always consider himself secondary even though he sacrificed first.

- **Second to Netanel**

Since it was Netanel, the Nassi of Yissachar, who suggested that these particular sacrifices be brought, Nachshon is considered secondary to him.<sup>20</sup>

- **Addition to the Wagons**

The leaders had already given a donation, namely the six wagons and the 12 oxen.<sup>21</sup> As such, these sacrifices were in addition to those donations which explains the "vav."<sup>22</sup>

- **Regaining the Six Blessings of Adam**

When Adam sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge, he was punished with the loss of six things – the shine of his face, his stature, his (diminished) life, the taste of what grows in the ground, the taste of the fruits and the departure of the Shechina (Divine Presence). All of these six things returned on the day that the Mishkan was consecrated, and this is alluded to by the letter "vav" whose numerical value is six.<sup>23</sup>

- **Six Great Descendants with Six Qualities Each**

The [Rosh](#) writes that the "vav" alludes to the following six great descendants of Nachshon each of whom was blessed with six exceptional qualities:<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> [Shir HaShirim Rabbh 4:7](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Tzror HaMor](#)

<sup>21</sup> See [Bamidbar 7:3](#),

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*. The Shechinah returned to this world on that day (see [Bamidbar Rabbah 13:2](#)), but I am not sure what the *Tzror HaMor* means that the shining faces, longevity and stature were returned as I am not aware of any change in these areas at that time. Indeed, the Midrash ([Bamidbar Rabbah 12:13](#)) says that these will only return in the Messianic era.

But see [Sotah 48b](#) that the taste of fruit was removed at the time of the destruction of the Bait HaMikdash, which may mean that beforehand, the special taste was restored to the fruit.

<sup>24</sup> [Sanhedrin 93b](#)

1. King David. He was “**a musician, a mighty warrior, a man of war, a person of understanding, a handsome man, and G-d was with him.**”<sup>25</sup>
2. Chananyah
3. Mishael
4. Azariah
5. Daniel. These last four people are described as “**having no blemish, good-looking, skillful in all wisdom, discerning in knowledge, perceptive in understanding, who had strength to stand in front of the king.**”<sup>26</sup>
6. Moshiach, who will be blessed with six qualities: “He will have the spirit of G-d rest upon him, a spirit of **wisdom and knowledge, counsel and strength, a spirit of understanding, and a fear of G-d.**”<sup>27</sup>

### A Paradigm of Mesirat Nefesh

The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains<sup>28</sup> that each of the tribal leaders excelled in a certain aspect of serving G-d and were an example for the Jewish people in that area. Nachshon was a paradigm of *Mesirat Nefesh* (self-sacrifice). He served as a role model to the Jewish people, many of whom followed him into the sea and from there followed Moshe into the desert, despite not knowing how they would survive there.<sup>29</sup> Nachshon’s being the first to sacrifice symbolizes that all of one’s aspects of Divine service should be infused with a sense of self-sacrifice and complete obedience to the Divine will.

**May G-d bless us with the great leaders and with the wisdom to follow their example!**

**Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom UMevorach!**

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<sup>25</sup> [I Samuel 16:18](#)

<sup>26</sup> [Daniel 1:4](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Isaiah 11:2](#)

<sup>28</sup> Torat Menachem, 5748 vol. 2 page 103

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 5725 vol. 3 page 372 and Sefer Hama’amarim 5729, page 190