

In *Pirkei Avot* (3:21), Rabbi *Elazar ben Azaryah* makes a statement reminiscent of the “chicken and egg” debate: *Im ain kemach, ain Torah; Im ain Torah, ain kemach* – If there is no flour (sustenance) there is no Torah, and if there is no Torah, there is no flour.

At first glance, this statement seems impossible to reconcile – where are we to begin (which came first – the flour or the Torah?) However, we can use an idea from *parshat Naso* to resolve the apparent conflict in this *Mishna*.

Generally, a *parsha* is named after one or two of the words in the first few *pesukim* of the *parsha*. This seems to be somewhat arbitrary. After all, how many popular works of literature can you think of that are named after their first few words? However, our sages of blessed memory have taught that, contrary to being arbitrary, each *parsha*'s name sums up an important unifying theme within the *parsha*.

The word *Naso* (root *nun-sin-alef*) has several meanings: raise, carry, marry, or endure. A careful reading of the *parsha* shows that this root is used in a variety of ways: The *parsha* begins with the instructions for how the *Leviim* are to carry the components of the *mishkan* (*v'nas'u; masa'am.*) The *parsha* goes on to discuss the case of a suspected adultress – an *isha sotah* – which is a law that applies to a married (*nasui*) couple. The *parsha* concludes with the *korbanot* of the tribal leaders (*nesi'im.*) Leaders are individuals who are raised above their peers.

I suggest that the theme of *parshat Naso* is achieving a sense of *shalom* – of balance and harmony. To give a few examples: The procedure described involving the *isha sotah* is intended to restore the balance (*shalom bayit*) to a marriage that is out of balance. The *korbanot* of the *nesi'im* were all identical – a state of perfect balance (*korbanot shelamim.*)

As anyone who has ever learned to walk, to ride a bike or to skate knows, learning how to balance is a key to success. Even accomplished walkers, bikers or skaters can lose their balance when confronted with obstacles or non-ideal conditions. I discussed this with my father, who spent many happy hours running behind my bike while I was learning to ride it. He pointed out that learning how to balance is something that people must do for themselves – his role in running behind my bike was only as a “picker upper” when I began to fall.

Perhaps Rabbi *Elazar ben Azaryah* is talking about achieving a sense of balance. Neither *kemach* nor Torah needs to come first – both need to come at the same time and need to be in balance for us to be successful. In other words, the goal of Judaism is to combine the physical and spiritual in a harmonious manner. This is evident in many of the *mitzvot* that we perform, where both

physical and spiritual activities are necessary to fulfill the *mitzvah*. For example, with the *mitzvot* of *arba minim* and *kiddush*, we take physical objects and use them for spiritual purposes. In prayer, we take a spiritual activity and tie it to physical activities such as reciting words audibly and bowing.

There is an interesting parallel to the balancing of physical and spiritual in *birkat kohanim*, which is also in *parshat Naso* (it is interesting to note that another term for *birkat kohanim* is *nesiat kapaim*, again using the *nun-sin-alef* root.) The *bracha* consists of three parts. The first, “*yevarechecha Hashem v’yishmerecha*,” may *Hashem* bless and guard you, refers to physical blessings (*kemach*). “*Yaer Hashem panav ailecha viychuneka*,” may *Hashem* shine his face on you and favor you, refers to spiritual blessings (Torah). “*Yisa* (same root, again!) *Hashem panav ailecha v’yasem lecha shalom*,” may *Hashem* raise his face to you and give you peace. It is through this third blessing, with the help of *Hashem* as a “picker upper,” that we are able to achieve a sense of harmony between our physical and spiritual needs.

It is also noteworthy that *birkat kohanim* itself – a spiritual action whereby *Hashem* blesses us – can only be accomplished through a physical means – the *Kohanim* raising their hands and reciting the words audibly.

May *Hashem* bless all of us both physically and spiritually, and may He aid each of us in finding our own, unique balance between the physical and spiritual and thereby achieve *shalom*.

*Shabbat Shalom*

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<i>arba minim</i>	Waving the four species ( <i>lulav, etrog, hadasim, aravot</i> ) on <i>Sukkot</i>
<i>birkat kohanim</i>	Blessing recited by the priests
<i>bracha</i>	Blessing
<i>kiddush</i>	Sanctification recited at the beginning of <i>Shabbat</i> and <i>Yom Tov</i>
<i>Kohanim</i>	Priests
<i>korbanot</i>	Offerings, sacrifices
<i>Levi'im</i>	Members of the tribe of Levi
<i>mishkan</i>	Portable sanctuary
<i>Mishna</i>	Written recording of the oral law, redacted circa 200 CE, also used to refer to a single paragraph of the work itself
<i>mitzvah, mitzvot</i>	Commandment
<i>parsha(t)</i>	Weekly Torah portion
<i>pasuk, pesukim</i>	Biblical verse (sentence)
<i>Pirkei Avot</i>	Precepts of the Ancestors