



Weekly Clergy Message

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The Royal Wedding Challenge
Naso
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If you weren't one of the nearly 2 billion people around the world to have watched the Royal Wedding live, by now you've probably discovered that after the bride and groom, Prince Harry and Meghan Markle (now Duchess), the next biggest star was the wedding sermon. Reverend Michael Curry nearly stole the show with his passionate and moving words about the power of love. Reverend Curry began by quoting the Song of Songs, "Set me as a seal upon your heart...love is as strong as death..." With wedding season now in full swing, many a wedding officiant will be hoping to motivate their audiences with similarly inspiring messages of hope and faith. Two of my favorites come from this week's parasha, *Naso*.

The second portion in the Book of Numbers, *Naso*, begins with a fairly unremarkable topic – the job of transporting the *mishkan*/Tabernacle through the desert, which was assigned to two Levitical clans – the Gershonites and the Merarites. Within the portion are three of the most often quoted verses of the Torah – the *Birkat Kohanim* (Blessing of the Priests), words which rabbis and cantors invoke when offering blessings to a bar or bat mitzvah or a bride and groom. This passage is also used by parents to bless their children every Friday evening.

The Hebrew verb *naso* which connotes "lifting, carrying, or bearing" is a *leitmotif* for this entire portion. The priestly blessing notably employs the verb in the phrase "May God lift up God's face to you." The root for "lifting up" occurs in a number of special contexts with Torah and might be seen as the core spiritual practice of Judaism. Just last week in reading about the census, we learned, as we did in Exodus (*parashat Ki Tissa*), that the process of counting individuals for a sacred task is called "lifting up" heads. In the context of a wedding, the *Nissu'in*, translated as "marriage," is the second stage of the ceremony and contains the *Sheva B'rachot*, the Seven Blessings which consecrate the marriage.

I often explain to brides and grooms that within the nuance of the various meanings of the Hebrew root *nun-sin-aleph* one can learn a great deal about marriage. In choosing our spouses we elevate our relationship with them beyond all other relationships. By "lifting them up" and making them the center of our lives, we are often made more whole and complete. In periods of hardship, a true partner may need to "carry" or even "bear the burden" of another as that person struggles to lift themselves back onto their feet. *Nasa* can also have the sense of "forgive." God, in God's steadfast love for the Jewish people, understands our imperfections and forgives our mistakes. Similarly, in a mature relationship, people are able to forgive and even forget when the situation calls for it. The language of *nasa* teaches that when all of these components are present, marriage will be a source of unending "uplift," strength and inspiration.