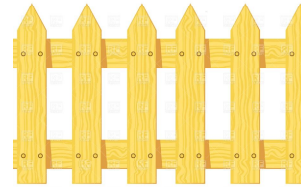
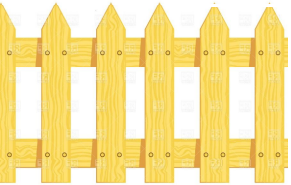


PARSHAS NASO

Adapted from the discourses of *Rabbi Henschel Lebowitz ZT"l*
by Rabbi Avi Rubin



Rabbeinu Yonah (שערי שובה שער ג' אות פ') teaches us the importance of making a *geder*, a fence, around a mitzvah. This does not mean we should go out and buy wood to start building fences. It means we should make (and follow) rules that help us keep the mitzvos. An example of this is when some people sitting at a table are eating meat and there are other people eating dairy. The people eating meat have to be careful not to share their food with the people eating dairy and visa versa. In order to make sure that they remember, the halacha is that they should place their plates on separate tablecloths or put something on the table that will remind them not to eat each other's food. Another example would be the rules of muktzeh on Shabbos. We are not allowed to move items that are not needed for Shabbos, such as a flashlight. You might think that you would never turn on the flashlight on Shabbos. But, the rabbis did not want to take a chance that you might turn it on. They decreed that we may not move it. If it is not in our hands to begin with, we are less likely to forget and turn it on. These halachos are 'fences' in that they stop us from coming into a situation where we might violate a mitzvah.

Rabbeinu Yonah explains that this concept of making a fence around a mitzvah actually comes from the Torah itself. "And in case you don't believe it," he says, "I will prove it to you. We learn it from the nazir, in parshas Naso." A nazir is a person who has decided that he or she would like to be closer to Hashem. To do so, they make a promise that for certain amount of time they will follow the rules of a nazir. A nazir is not allowed to cut his hair. He is not allowed to come in contact with a dead body. He is also not allowed to drink wine. The Torah tells us that not only should a nazir not drink wine, he also should not drink grape juice, eat grapes or raisins. A nazir should not even use the oil made from grape seeds. Why? So that he does not come to drink wine!

Why does Rabbeinu Yonah think that we will not believe him that we are supposed to make fences around mitzvos? The answer is that many people have trouble believing that they are not reliable. They might say to themselves, "If the Torah says to not eat meat and milk together, so I won't. I would never violate the Torah like that! I do not need a special reminder. Why should the rabbis insist that I use a reminder?" Many of us do not realize that we are not as reliable as we might think. Therefore, Rabbeinu Yonah feels it is necessary to prove that the Torah wants the rabbis to make rules to protect the mitzvos.

We should be very careful to follow the words of the rabbis. They understood human nature and how people are likely to make mistakes. By following their rules, we are much less likely to violate the Torah. Not only that, but listening to the rabbis is also a mitzvah!

Have a good Shabbos!!

Rabbi Rubin

In Naso we find the source for...

"וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל בְּנָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה תְבָרְכוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמֹר לָהֶם." (במדבר ו', כ"ג)

“Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying: So you shall
bless Bnei Yisroel, saying to them:”

There is a mitzvah for the Kohanim to bless Bnei Yisroel, known as Birkas Kohanim. The Ashkenazi tradition for outside of Eretz Yisroel is that the Kohanim recite Birkas Kohanim on Yom Tov. It is usually recited at the end of the Mussaf prayer. A Kohen who is present in shul during Mussaf when the Kohanim are called up for Birkas Kohanim must go up. If he does not go up to recite Birkas Kohanim, he violates a positive commandment. “So you shall bless,” implies a command to the Kohanim, “You shall bless them (Bnei Yisroel)!” For this reason, a Kohen who is unable to recite Birkas Kohanim should step outside of the shul when the Kohanim are called up. If he is present when the Kohanim are called up, he would have to join them. (סוטה לח: וש"ע אור"ח סימן קכ"ח סעיף ד')

A Kohen has not violated this mitzvah until a Yisroel calls him to say Birkas Kohanim. We learn this from the words, “אָמֹר לָהֶם,” which means, ‘Go tell them (the Kohanim) to go bless the nation.’ The words, “Go tell them!” is a command for the chazan to call the Kohanim to come bless the nation. Only when they are told to go bless the nation are the Kohanim required to do so. This is why the chazan calls out “Kohanim!” during Mussaf when it is time for Birkas Kohanim. (ספרי)

The person who calls the Kohanim to recite Birkas Kohanim should not be a Kohen. The command, “אָמֹר לָהֶם,” “Go tell them,” implies that the person talking to the Kohanim is not a Kohen. The non-Kohen tells them, the Kohanim, to say Birkas Kohanim. Usually the chazan calls out “Kohanim!” If the chazan is a Kohen, then he should remain silent while a Yisroel stands near him and calls out, “Kohanim!” (ירושלמי גיטין פ"ה ה"טט)

The mitzvah is for the Kohanim to bless the nation, using the blessing found in the next few pesukim. The Torah says, “So you shall bless Bnei Yisroel.” This implies the Kohanim should recite the blessing and not someone who is not a Kohen. From here we learn that a non-Kohen may not bless someone using the words of Birkas Kohanim. If a Yisroel or Levi do so, they have violated a positive commandment. (כתובות כד: ברש"י)