



Naso: A Head Above the Rest

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

This week's Parsha continues with the theme of counting the tribal families and enumerating their responsibilities and tasks. The Torah begins with what appears to be a simple phrase, "*Naso Es Rosh Bnai Gershon, Count the sons of Gershon (Bamidbar 4:22).*" It is interesting that this mirrors the verbiage found in last week's Parsha, "*Se'u Es Rosh Kol Adas Bnai Yisroel, Count all the congregation of the Children of Israel (Bamidbar 1:2).*" In each of these instances, the Torah uses the word, *Rosh, head*. The *Shelah HaKadosh* (Rav Yishaya Horowitz, 1565-1630), explains that in the eyes of God we are each considered a *Rosh, a head*, someone exceptionally significant. Society has many metrics by which it measures the success, value, and worth of an individual. Some may measure the quality of a person based on their level of education, earning ability, or material possessions. Others may measure individual greatness through the prism of pedigree and *yichus*. The Torah is teaching us that in the eyes of God, we each possess personal greatness; each of us is a *Rosh*. This personal greatness is inherent and innate.

But how do we activate this personal greatness? The answer to this question can be found in *Pirkei Avos*, Ethics of our Fathers. The great sage *Yehuda ben Teyma* states, "*Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, strong as a lion, to carry out the will of your Father in Heaven (5:23).*" The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (Rav Shlomo Ganzfried, 1804-1886) explains, *Be bold as a leopard* – Don't be afraid to perform the *mitzvos* (commandments) even if others will mock you. Doing what is right is often difficult and can raise the ire of those around you. Stand up for your ideas and ideals, and don't compromise on the fundamental tenants of your faith. Be bold and do what needs to be done. *Light as an eagle* – The eagle flies high and directs its sights to the heavens above. The eagle can't spend its time constantly looking downward or it will fail to reach its intended destination. In life there are many things which hold us down. Failure, broken relationships, and shattered dreams tether us to our current reality and prevent us from achieving growth. It is easy to be pulled down by the negativity which often surrounds us. If you are always looking down, you can't move forward. Set your sights above, dream new dreams, create new goals, forge new relationships, and learn to soar. Identify the factors and realities that are holding you back, and devise the strategy to transcend and soar above them. *Swift as a deer* - One should always run to do good. Run swiftly and grab the opportunities to accomplish something great. Don't wait for the perfect moment, make the current moment perfect. Take advantage of beautiful life opportunities while they are still yours for the taking. *Strong like a lion* – Be committed in your service of God. Develop the strength to honor your obligations towards God and your fellow man on an ongoing basis. There may be times when you "don't feel it," there may be times when you don't feel inspired, in those moments find your lion-like strength to fulfill your responsibilities. Consistency and continuity are the cornerstones of religious identity.

It is here, in this seemingly simple statement, that *Yehuda ben Teyma* gives us the key to activating our personal greatness. Stand up for what you believe in, even if the world mocks you. Focus on upward growth, and don't get mired in downward negativity. Run to seize your life opportunities. Live a life of committed and continuous service to your God and your people.

Yehuda ben Teyma looks to the animal kingdom for examples of character traits that we are to emulate. The comparison to the leopard, eagle, and lion are clear. But why the deer? The fastest animal is not the deer – it is the cheetah. If *Yehuda ben Teyma* wanted to convey the need for speed in our performance of *mitzvos* and in the seizing of life opportunities, why doesn't he instruct us to be "*swift like the cheetah?*"

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) explains that the deer is unique within the animal kingdom. Whenever the deer takes flight, whenever it moves forward to a new destination, it always looks back. It looks back to see if the herd is safe. It looks back to make sure its fellow deer are settled and secure. No matter how long the journey forward – the deer continues to look back.

Yehuda ben Teyma intentionally chose the deer to teach us an important lesson. As we strive for self-actualization, as we try to become bold, committed, and soar to the heavens – we must always remember to look back. We must remember our responsibility to our people. I cannot focus on self-growth to the exclusion of my national responsibilities. If I am growing but not keeping an eye as to what is happening with my brothers and sisters, my growth is deficient. If I move forward but don't look back and figure out how to help the rest of the herd – then I am not serving God, I am serving myself. We must learn to grow as individuals while simultaneously doing what we can to help the other and care for our nation.

We are each a *Rosh*, we are each important and significant. We have so much to offer, so much we can become, and so much we can accomplish. But I can only be a *Rosh* if I maintain the connection to *Kol Adas Bnai Yisroel, the nation of the Children of Israel (Bamidbar 1:2)*. We must grow as individuals, but we must always remember to look back.