

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Of all the memorable historical occurrences in the Torah, none is more significant than the day of the revelation at Sinai, when Israel received the Torah from G-d. Nevertheless, unlike the date of the exodus from Egypt (Passover, celebrated on the 15th day of Nissan) and the date of the clouds of glory (Sukkot, 15th of Tishrei), the date of the Revelation is never specifically recorded within the Bible itself. Why not?

Moreover, although our Sages in the Talmud inform us that the Biblical festival of Shevuot (Weeks) is actually the commemoration of the day of the revelation - the "Festival of the Giving of the Torah", as we say in the prayers of that day - when we go to the trouble of checking this out precisely with a calendar and Midrash, something doesn't quite add up.

As we know, Passover commemorates the Exodus from Egypt, which took place on the 15th of Nissan. To find out which day of the week it happened on, all we have to do is remember that the 10th of Nissan, the day on which the paschal lamb was taken in preparation for the redemption, fell on Shabbat - which is why the Sabbath before Passover is called Shabbat HaGadol (the Great Sabbath). Therefore five days later, the 15th, had to have been a Thursday.

Now, given that the only guidelines the Torah provides for designating the festival of Shevuot is to count seven full weeks (49 days) from "the day following the festival"

[Lev. 23:15], if the first Passover in history fell on a Thursday (Wednesday night), the count of 49 took place on a Wednesday night; hence the 50th day - when the festival of Shevuot was celebrated - had to have been a Thursday night and Friday. This would be fine except for the fact that the Sages all agree that the Revelation at Sinai took place on Shabbat and not on Friday! (Indeed, the Amidah of Shabbat morning features the words, "Moses rejoiced in the gift of his portion" - a reference to the gift of Torah which he received on the Sabbath.) Therefore how can the Festival of Shevuot, which comes exactly fifty days after the first day of Passover, be celebrating the giving of the Torah, which was in fact given on the fifty-first day of our count?

Let's consider several different approaches. The Magen Avraham (Rabbi Abraham Gombiner, 1637-1683), in his commentary to the Orach Chaim section of the Shulchan Aruch [Siman 263], explains that this seeming discrepancy 50th and 51st days of our count (the 6th and 7th days of Sivan) serves as our source that 'yom tov sheni of galut' (the second day of the festival in the diaspora) actually has its roots in the Torah. After all, throughout the Diaspora we have a second day of Shevuot - the seventh of Sivan, and the 51st day from Passover - which turns out to be when the Torah was actually given. When we remember that the Torah was indeed given in the desert and not in Israel, it makes sense that we received it on the second day of the Festival, celebrated throughout the Jewish diaspora. Hence we have an ingenious source - a Biblical source, no less - for the institution of the second day of the festival in the diaspora (the Talmud in Beitza, 2b and 3a, explains the second day in terms of the Jews of Babylon not always knowing when the month began and when the Festival was supposed to be celebrated).

Fascinatingly enough, the Shelah HaKadosh (R. Isaiah Horowitz, 1565-1630) gave a reason for the second day of the Festival in the diaspora which fits in very nicely with the Shevuot reckoning. He argues that life in the diaspora - because it is based upon gentile customs and a gentile calendar - is far more removed from Jewishness than is life in Israel. Hence it is twice as difficult in the diaspora to feel the exodus, to experience Divine Protection, to sense the revelation, than it is in Israel.

From this perspective, the Book of Ruth which we read on Shevuot merely confirms the hardships of remaining Jewish outside of Israel, and thus silently confirms the need for a second day of the Festival outside of Israel. After all, the story of Ruth is not only the tale of a sincere Jew-by-choice who becomes grandmother to King David, progenitor of the Messiah. The book opens when Elimelech (a nobleman in Israel whose name means, "G-d is my King") leaves famine-ridden Bethlehem in search of greener pastures in Moab. He soon discovers that his decision to leave Israel was a disaster. His two sons, Machlon and Kilyon (whose names mean "illness"

and "destruction") marry Moabite women and die before producing any heirs. He may have saved some money, but he sacrificed Jewish continuity. And

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so this not untypical family that leaves the 'house of bread' ends up encountering a 'world of death and illusion'.

The tale of Elimelech can be seen as a description of what happens to a Jewish family when they attempt to embrace the Diaspora's values. Ironically, if not for Ruth it would have been the end of Elimelech's line forever, the Jew who left Israel doomed to historic oblivion. Ruth's decision is the mirror-image of that of Elimelech, her ill-fated father-in-law. He left his homeland to embrace Moab, Ruth leaves Moab to embrace the people and the G-d of Israel.

And so to counter the threat of assimilation that always hangs over a family in the Diaspora, the Torah has provided an extra protective measure, the second day of yom tov.

A second reason why the exact date for the revelation is not revealed - and perhaps not even celebrated - is to save the Jews embarrassment for a failed experience. We know that only two days after the miraculous events of Sinai the Israelites soon succumbed to the temptations of the golden calf and returned to the heat of idolatry.

Apparently G-d gave them His gift too soon - before they were really equipped to adequately appreciate it. The Bible, therefore, does not eternalize the day of the Revelation. Shevuot is merely an agricultural Festival - the celebration of the first fruits - and Biblically speaking it only coincidentally works out to fall on the day before the Revelation at Sinai.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch gives a third reason suggesting that the Torah specifically wants us to purposefully celebrate the Revelation a day before it actually occurred - in order to emphasize the cardinal importance of "the day before".

Ordinarily when an important event is about to take place, only those behind the scenes know how much preparation has gone into the event. For the guest, all that matters is what he experiences at the moment the invitation told him to appear.

But for the families and all those involved in preparing a 'great event', the months of careful planning are what truly counts and will determine the proceedings of the evening. This is especially true with regarding to the receiving of the Torah: without adequate preparation, without going through the forty-

nine steps of purification leading up to the final climax of the day before, the Torah that descends from Sinai won't find an adequate vessel to contain its infinite blessings. Lack of adequate preparation caused a tragic foul-up the first time. It is crucial that it never happen that way again. © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha deals with the positive and negative sides of wine - the most important liquid drink in Jewish tradition and life. Wine is one of the main libations mentioned in the Torah regarding the sacrificial offerings in the Temple service.

Wine is the drink of Kiddush on Shabat, it is the four cups of the Pesach Seder, it is present at every circumcision ceremony, the redemption of the first born son and at wedding ceremonies. In short, wine is the most consecrated drink in Jewish law, tradition and life.

On the other hand, in this week's parsha we find wine as a negative force. It plays a destructive role in the tragedy of the unfaithful wife in the sotah parsha. It is one of the things that a nazir must abstain from during his attempt to achieve greater sanctity and purity of body and soul. We find in the Torah that it was the contributing factor in the downfall of Noach and his family after the great flood.

In Mishlei, King Solomon devotes many words to warn of the dangers and downside of drinking wine. It appears to be a villainous player in the scheme of Jewish life. So how are we to view this oldest of all human drinks, the fruit of the grape vine?

Is it a drink of holiness and consecration or is it the drink that leads to debauchery and destruction, both physical and spiritual? This is essentially a general question that governs all of Jewish life in very many areas of human behavior. What is good for us and what is not good - that is the question.

I believe that the answer to the above questions and the seemingly inconsistent positions lies in the necessity for implementing the Torah's main rule in living life - a sense of balance and proportion. Wine, when joined to an act of consecration and holy mitzvah - Shabat Kiddush, a circumcision, a wedding, etc. - is a fitting and holy drink. When disassociated from such positive events, when it becomes purely "recreational" drinking, it becomes a potentially dangerous potion.

In Judaism, all events in life, no matter how seemingly trivial they may first appear to be, must have some positive purpose associated with them. Without that sense of positive purpose, these actions, though they may appear to be innocuous at their onset, can lead to sin and moral failings.

The Torah presents to us this double edged sword using wine as an example of this rule of life and living. Circumstances, intent, the influence of one's

actions on others, are all factors that figure into the probity of one's behavior. Nothing in life occurs in a vacuum. Wine, like many other things in this world, is essentially a neutral item. What one does with it determines its status, whether it is a drink of holiness and consecration or one that can lead to debauchery and personal tragedy. This is an important lesson as to how to treat all matters that appear in our lives. © 2008 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the minhagim (customs) prevalent on Shavuos is eating dairy products. There are numerous reasons given for this minhag, with several of them possibly impacting how this custom is observed.

The Ramuh (O"C 494:3) records the minhag as being observed on the first day of Shavuos. Others also refer to it as a minhag observed "on the day of the holiday of Shavuos" (Rebbe Avraham Azulai, the grandfather of the Chida, in his comments on the Levush 494:3; see also Toras Chayim on Chulin 83a). Although it might be more convenient to serve dairy at night (in order to be able to put milk in the coffee when staying up all night learning), it seems pretty clear (for reasons we shall soon see) that the minhag was to have dairy during the day, not at night. And it seems that this minhag was only on the first day of Shavuos, not both days.

After reporting the minhag, the Ramuh suggests a possible reason for it: to commemorate the two loaves of bread brought as part of the offering in the Temple on Shavuos (Vayikra 23:16-17). Since bread eaten with dairy can't be eaten with meat (and vice versa), by first having milchigs (dairy) followed by fleishigs (meat) we need to use two separate loaves of bread. There are several things we can learn from the Ramuh's suggestion. First of all, we understand why the minhag is to have it during the day, as that was when the offering was brought. Secondly, since the Ramuh's suggestion is meant to explain an already existing minhag, we see that the minhag was to have a regular meat meal after having dairy. (Many others also indicate that a meat meal must follow. How we separate the milk from the meat when fulfilling this minhag will be discussed shortly.) We also see that both loaves of bread (of the "lechem mishneh") were not usually cut, as otherwise we always have two loaves of bread with every Shabbos or Yom Tov meal. This is consistent with the Rambam (Hilchos Berachos 7:4), Rif (Berachos 39b), Tur (O"C 274) and Shulchan Aruch, who tells us that we must hold both loaves while

making the blessing, but only need to cut one of them. Therefore, in order to make sure we cut into two loaves on Shavuos, the minhag was/is to first eat dairy and then meat. However, according to the Vilna Gaon (O"C 274:1), following the Maharshal and based on the Rashba's understanding of Berachos 39b, both loaves are cut at every Shabbos and Yom Tov meal, seeming to preclude the Ramuh's suggestion of why we eat dairy on Shavuos. (It should be noted that the Rashba understands there to be two opinions in the Talmud, one requiring that both loaves be cut and the other requiring only that both be held during the blessing - as opposed to Rashi who understands both opinions in the Talmud to only require the latter. The Rashba then quotes Rav Hai Gaon who says that either way is fine. If the Vilna Gaon's cutting both loaves was meant not as a requirement, but as a means of fulfilling both opinions, it is possible that the minhag developed on Shavuos in order to make sure that everybody cut two loaves - even those that didn't the rest of the year.) According to this reason for the minhag, the loaves of bread eaten on the first day of Shavuos should be made of wheat, just as the loaves of the offering were (Mogen Avrohom 494:9).

The Mishna Berurah (494:12) reports another reason as to why we eat dairy on the first day of Shavuos, based on our only knowing about having to (and how to) keep kosher after the Torah was given. Since the nation was not able to prepare meat dishes right away after returning home, they were only able to eat dairy items. There are several implications inherent in this reason as well. First of all, it also only applies to the day meal, since they returned home on the day the Torah was given. Second, if the problem was preparing a kosher fleishig meal, they weren't forced to eat a milchig one; they could have had a parve one. They may have wanted to eat milchigs, but didn't have to. The point would be to not eat fleishigs, not to eat milchigs. I think it's safe to assume that the Chofetz Chayim was not arguing on the minhag that the Ramuh reported, only providing an additional reason. Therefore, he would agree that the milchigs is followed by fleishigs. Once fleishigs is being served, having a parve appetizer doesn't indicate anything (as we often have a parve appetizer). Therefore, it has to be milchigs that is eaten first to make the point. Additionally, we see from this reason that the mun (manna) that was eaten daily in the desert wasn't the only thing they ate, as (at least at this point) they would have also eaten meat if they could have.

According to both of these reasons, anything that is dairy would qualify to fulfill the minhag (e.g. cheese, butter, et al). Numerous other reasons given, however, indicate that the minhag is specifically to drink milk. Rebbe Avraham Azulai (494:3) is among those that mention that one of the verses that refer to the offerings brought on Shavuos (Bamidbar 28:26)

contains words whose first letters spell out the Hebrew word for milk (chalav). Nevertheless, the Pardes is quoted in Mekoray Minhagim as including the word before these three, which starts with a "mem." This spells out "may'chalav," or "from milk," i.e. anything that comes from milk. The Nezirus Shimshon (on O"C 494) points out that the numerical value of "chalav" is 40, the amount of days Moshe spent on Mt. Sinai learning the Torah from G-d. Although we could stretch things to include the two periods of 40 days (one for each set of "luchos"), both of which happened after the public revelation that occurred on Shavuos, and make the "gematriya" of "may'chalav" 80, I doubt we want to reference the second time Moshe learned with G-d on Mt. Sinai, since it came about as a result of the golden calf. The Pri Chadash (494:3) attributes the minhag of eating things made with milk to the Talmud (Taanis 7a) comparing the Torah to milk. The Talmud also compares the Torah to water and wine, but it may have been assumed that we make Kiddush on wine and drink water with the meal. Shelomo Hamelech compared the Torah to (date) honey and wine (Shir Hashirim 4:11), and the Kolbo is quoted by many as saying the minhag is to have both on Shavuos. Other reasons for milk are also given (see Mogen Avraham 494:6 for a kabbalistic reason, and Sefer Hamatamim #89, where it is suggested that it was on Shavuos, three months after he was born, that the infant Moshe was rescued from the river, refused to be nursed by an Egyptian, and was returned to his mother, albeit temporarily), reasons that apply only to milk, not milk-products. Although one may propose that anything that comes from milk qualifies, see Shu"t Chasam Sofer Y"D 2:107, where the Chasam Sofer proves that even according to those of the opinion that the decree against unsupervised milk applies whether or not there is any concern about the milk being anything but kosher milk, once it changes form (such as becoming cheese) it is no longer included in the decree, since it is no longer "milk." If so, and the minhag is to have "milk" on Shavuos, it would seem that having a cheese danish wouldn't fulfill it. On the other hand, another reason given for having milchigs on Shavuos is based on the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 1:8) calling Mt. Sinai "Har Givnonim," which sounds like the Hebrew word for "cheese" (gevina), making the cheese danish preferable to the glass of milk. It would seem, though, that this is more of an "after-the-fact" add-on for the minhag, not the reason why it was started.

The Toras Chayim (Bava Metzia 86b) and the Be'er Haitiv (494:8) suggest that the minhag to start with milchigs and then eat fleishigs stems from the angels that visited Avraham (Beraishis 18:2) to whom he served "cream, milk and meat" (18:8). In order to show that we, and not the angels, are worthy of receiving the Torah, we highlight the difference between what they did and what we do. Even though

Avraham brought them the milchigs first (see Bava Metzia 86b), they ate it together with the fleishigs. We, on the other hand, show that we know how to do it properly, first eating the milchigs, then cleaning out our mouths before having fleishigs (by chewing on something, such as bread, to wipe any remnant of dairy off of our teeth, gums, cheeks, etc, then rinsing our mouth by drinking something and swishing it around to clear away any loose pieces, the way we do after eating fish before meat).

This explanation is based on the halacha that we are allowed to eat milchigs and fleishigs in the same meal, provided that we eat the milchigs first and clean our mouths out in-between (see Mogen Avraham 494:6, who assumes that the Ramuh's suggestion also meant doing the same, without bentching after the milchigs). Kabbalistically, however, one is not supposed have milk and meat in the same meal under any circumstances. Because of this, the Toras Chayim (Chulin 83a) recommends not keeping this minhag at all. However, the Mogen Avrohom (494:6) says that "the custom of our ancestors is Torah," while warning us to be careful not to break any laws while keeping it. The Toras Chayim may have felt that the only way to contrast our behavior with that of the angels is to eat milk and meat in the same meal in a halachically-permitted way; it might be possible that if we make them into two separate meals we can accomplish the same thing, showing that we know to fully separate milk from meat. In fact, the Shiray Keneses Hagedola and the Shelah would eat a milchig meal, bentch, wait an hour, and then eat a fleishig meal. (See Isur veHeter haAruch 40:3, who forbids bentching just to make it two meals in order to eat meat in one and milk in the other.) Rav Moshe Feinstein, z"l (O"C 1:160) also seems to prefer bentching in-between, even though the minhag is more completely fulfilled if they're eaten within the same meal.

One option might be to wash, have milchigs, bentch, have a learning program with the family and guests (just as Shavuos isn't the only time we learn Torah, the first night of Shavuos isn't the only time on Shavuos to learn), then wash again and have fleishigs. Another option might be based on one of the other reasons for the minhag provided by the Sefer Hamatamim (#96): After staying up all night learning we get very hungry. However, since meat is harder to digest, we eat milchigs instead. The implication is that this meal is eaten before going to sleep, allowing for a second, fleishig, meal after getting some sleep. Perhaps it is (also) because a dairy meal is easier and quicker to prepare that it was served upon returning after being up all night.

In any case, for those who have stayed up all night, they can come home, make kiddush (on wine), wash, have bread from the first loaf (holding two while making Hamotzie), have a cup of (decaf) coffee made

from hot water, sweetened with date honey, with milk added as a creamer, along with a cheese danish, before bentching, going to sleep, and then having a fleishig meal (including the 2nd loaf) upon arising. Betayavon! © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

It was during the time of Shavuot that the Jews at Sinai declared to G-d, "na'aseh ve-nishma, we will do and we will listen (to the commandments)." (Exodus 24:7) This order is perplexing as one usually does the opposite, and listens before deciding to act.

In his Mikhtav M'Eliyahu, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler offers an understanding of love that may explain why doing can come before listening. Rabbi Dessler insists that the cornerstone of love is the capacity to give to the loved one. And, he adds, it's not necessarily the case that one first loves and from the loving comes the giving. The reverse is equally true and often even more powerful. One gives, and from the giving, love grows. The more one gives, the more one loves.

Years ago, there was an extraordinarily successful program known as Marriage Encounter. One of its basic teachings was that love is not only a feeling-"it's a decision." After all, feelings change. One morning I may wake up feeling like loving my spouse, child, parent, sibling or friend, and the next morning I may not. But if I've decided to love you-that is, if love is a decision-from the decision, from the action, the feeling will come. In fact, the real test of love is not simply what I feel toward you, but what I am prepared to do for you.

The idea that love is predicated on action is crucial to a primary expression of our love for G-d, ritual. Consider prayer: If prayer is an expression of love, why should we be mandated to pray? Why not pray only when we feel like it? It can be argued, however, that we may not feel like praying for long periods of time. But if we're obligated to pray-if, indeed, we make a decision to pray-from placing ourselves in a prayerful mode, feelings of prayer may surface.

This, in fact, is the basic idea of all religious observance. Perform the ritual and from the act, the feeling may come. Hence, Jews at Sinai first proclaimed "we will do." Only afterward did they say, "we will listen."

A favorite personal story reinforces this idea. My mother of blessed memory, and father made aliyah (emigrated to Israel) years ago. Whenever my parents flew to New York, it was my responsibility, as their only child living there, to meet them at the airport.

One time my father called me to inform me that at the last moment, their arrival was moved up by twenty-four hours. Professing my deep love for my parents, I insisted that I couldn't change my schedule on such short notice.

"You've become a hotshot Rabbi," my father responded, "and don't have time for your parents?" "I love you deeply," I protested, "but it's difficult to alter plans at the last minute."

"I'll never forget my father's response. "Don't love me so much, just pick me up at the airport."

My Abba's comments echoed the very essence of "we will do and we will listen" - actions are primary, they are the indicator, the inspiration for true love. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah shares with us an incredible perspective on sanctity and self control. The focus of the haftorah is the heavenly message sent to the pious Manoach and his wife informing them of her miraculous conception of a special son, Shimshon. Manoach's wife, a righteous woman who was barren for many years was suddenly informed by an angel that she would bear a child. She was also given specific instructions during pregnancy restricting her from all wine and wine-related products. She was informed that her son would be dedicated to Hashem from the day he was born and could never shave off his hair. The angel also stated that Hashem would bring much salvation to the Jewish people through this precious boy.

This is the first chapter in the life of the famous Jewish leader, Shimshon. However, in the subsequent chapters of his life we discover the life's trials of the most perplexing leader in all of Jewish history. On the one hand, Shimshon was a powerful and effective judge who maintained the highest ethical standard. In fact, our Chazal (Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana 2:8) place Shimshon amongst the greatest of all Jewish judges paralleling him, in some ways, to Moshe Rabbeinu himself. Shimshon also merited that the Divine Presence of Hashem preceded him to secure his every step with success. And it was solely in Shimshon's merit that Hashem constantly protected the Jewish nation (see Sota 9b, 10a). Yet, at the same time we discover a man succumbing to physical passions being constantly enticed by Philistine women. Eventually Shimshon fell prey to the persuasion of his Philistine wife Delila and forfeited all his sanctity and greatness. How can this glorious, yet so tragic life be understood and explained and what can be learned from this perplexing story? (See Derech Bina to Shoftim by Rabbi Avrohom Shoshana)

We begin with the words of the Midrash (Bamidbar Rabba 10:5) in explanation of Shimshon's unique experience of Nezirus (restriction from wine). In general, one accepts the abstentions of a Nazir for a period of a month or two but never for an entire lifetime.

This week's parsha reveals that the purpose for the short restrictive period of Nazirus was to serve as a model lesson for life. Typically, the Nazir briefly abstained from certain mundane activities to gain control over his physical passions and cravings. This was obviously not the case for Shimshon who was obligated in Nezirus since his birth. The above Midrash clarifies this matter and states, "Hashem, knowing that Shimshon's nature would be to stray after his eyes, restricted him from wine which leads to immorality." Chazal continue, "And if Shimshon albeit a Nazir did stray after his eyes one could only imagine what would have happened without the restriction of wine." Our Chazal share with us an important insight into the life of Shimshon. Apparently, his nature and consequent role in life revolved around an attraction to women and it was intended for the Nezirus restriction to hold him back from sin.

To put this into perspective we refer to the words of the Radak (Shoftim13:4) which explain the setting of Shimshon's times. Radak explains that the Jewish people's devotion to Hashem had severely fallen during those times. Because of this they did not merit total salvation by Hashem and remained under Philistine rule throughout this entire era. However, the Philistines deserved to be revenged for their harsh rule over the Jews and for this reason Hashem sent Shimshon to the scene. The Scriptures indicate (see Shoftim 14:4) that it was the will of Hashem that Shimshon mingle with the Philistines to cause them pain and strife from within their very own camp. It can be understood that for this reason Hashem actually sanctioned, in principle, Shimshon's marriage to Philistine women, given their conversion to Judaism. Although they did actually convert (see Radak adloc. and Rambam Isurai Beiah 14:14) the potential did exist for Shimshon to be influenced by their foreign ideals and allegiances of their past.

In essence, Hashem provided Shimshon with the appropriate nature for his role and he was naturally attracted to the Philistine women he encountered. This allowed Shimshon to be regarded as one of the Philistines and set the stage for a perfect inside job. The Radak explains that Shimshon's motive of bonding with Philistine Jewish converts to secretly attack the Philistine nation was a proper motive. However, this powerful drive to marry Philistine women served as a double-edged sword. And when Shimshon added to his pure motive small degrees of attraction to beauty his actions were disqualified. Granted that the overwhelming percentage of his motivation was proper and pure, nonetheless a subtle attraction to Philistine women's beauty did accompany his thoughts. Eventually this soft physical drive overtook Shimshon, and after succumbing to his wife's seduction, lost his pure motives and forfeited all of his sanctity and greatness.

We now appreciate Shimshon's lifelong abstention period of Nezirus and its projected impact on his personal conduct. This perpetual state was intended to serve as an anchor for Shimshon to control and subdue his physical urges and steer him away from immorality. The comprehensive picture drawn from our haftorah is the following. Shimshon was ordained to live a life of sanctity from the moment of conception until the end of his life. His parents carefully protected him from all impurities and raised him in a perfect atmosphere of sanctity. This childhood groomed him to be a perfect candidate for the constant manifestation of the Divine Presence itself. However, as we painfully discover none of the above guarantees one from foreign immoral influences. And when, alongside the purest of motives, one includes physical drives and passions the result can be devastating. Even the pure Shimshon was then prone to plunging deeply into immorality and open to forfeiting all that life had in store for him. From this we learn the importance of pure motives and that any degree of intended personal gratification can undo all the good we seek to accomplish. © 2008 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The word "Nazir"? an ascetic who refrains from anything related to grapes or wine-might be linked to two different points of view which appear in this week's Torah portion. On one hand, the Torah says, "A man or a woman who makes a wondrous vow to become a nazir to G-d shall abstain from weak and strong wine. He shall not drink vinegar from weak wine or from strong wine." [Bamidbar 6:2-3]. This implies that the title nazir is related to the Hebrew root for keeping a distance, as is written with respect to a Kohen who has become ritually impure: "Speak to Aharon and his sons, and let them keep away from the holy materials of Bnei Yisrael, let them not desecrate My holy name." [Vayikra 22:2]. On the other hand, it is written, "Let him not become impure for his father, his mother, his brother, or his sister. He shall not become impure for them when they die because he has a crown ('nezer') of his G-d on his head." [Bamidbar 6:7]. This implies that the root of the word nazir is a crown. What is the true meaning of nazir as far as our faith is concerned?

Evidently the two concepts taken together are needed to understand the nazir. On one hand, this is an action of asceticism and keeping apart from the world, as is noted specifically in the Torah portion? that he must refrain from anything related to wine. As is well known, "Wine will make a person's heart happy" [Tehillim 104:15], and refraining from having wine restricts an important component in human life, in an effort to stay away from the other aspect of wine: drunken and wild behavior.

However, on the other hand, in principle the goal of the nazir is not to reject nature but rather to achieve a higher level of holiness, symbolized by letting his hair grow. The prohibition of cutting the hair with a razor specifically allows the nazir to grow a "crown" on his head. This brings him to a level of sanctity similar to that of the High Priest, about whom it is written, "Let him not approach any dead people, he shall not become impure even for his father and his mother. And let him not leave the Temple and not desecrate his G-d's Temple, for he has a crown of Divine anointing oil on his head." [Vayikra 21:11-12]. While the High Priest is anointed with holy oil which provides him with his "crown," the nazir creates his own "crown" by letting his hair grow.

Two specific cases of a nazir appear in the Torah, and they are different from one another. Shimshon is explicitly defined as a nazir, and his mother is told, "Let no razor touch his head, for he will be a nazir dedicated to G-d from the womb" [Shoftim 13:5]. Even before he was old enough to take a vow, he already had a crown, and he was therefore a nazir. Similarly, Shmuel's mother vowed, "a razor will not be put to his head" [Shmuel I 1:11]. But Shmuel was not forbidden to drink wine (as opposed to Shimshon!). Thus, Shmuel is a unique example of a person who can reach a high level of holiness as expressed in his "crown" of unshaven hair without any need to refrain from such substances as wine. Perhaps this explains why Shmuel is not referred to as a nazir? this title is reserved for the majority of people, who will not be able to reach a truly high state without abstaining from wine.

RABBI BORUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

Have you ever met permissive parents—the ones that worship the concept of "openness" so much that they don't mind exposing their kids to just about anything? "After all", they claim, "We teach our kids proper values, it doesn't really matter what the kids see or hear. Kids should be allowed to look into 'the real world' so they don't become naive. They'll simply reject foreign ideas antithetical to proper values."

Are these parents correct? Of course, not. A Rashi in this week's Torah portion, Nasso, tells us why.

"Why was the section of the nazirite laws placed next to the laws of sotah, the suspected adulterous wife? To tell us that anyone who sees the sotah in her disgrace, should abstain from wine (one of the nazirite laws), since wine leads to adultery." (Rashi, Bamidbar 6:2)

The common question on this Rashi is that we would have thought the opposite. Wouldn't someone who sees a sinner, like the sotah, being humiliated, become inspired to not dare come close to transgression? If you saw your co-worker being yelled at for coming late, wouldn't you be extra careful not to

come late yourself? So why does the Torah suggest that witnessing the sotah's embarrassment will make you more afraid that you'll sin? Why would one establish safeguards to avoid sin by refraining from wine, once he has seen a violation of the Torah in the sotah woman?

The answer is that our preconceived notion is not true. In reality, witnessing sin, no matter if we see the sinner being degraded or not, weakens our spirituality. Whenever someone "breaks the rules" in school, inevitably the rules become less hallowed and it's only a matter of time until "breaking the rules" becomes the rule. So too with the Torah. While G-d's "rules" and mitzvot will never cease, witnessing a breach in them automatically removes levels of respect and awe that we have for His commandments. We subconsciously feel that the transgression is no longer an untouchable and although we may never dream of doing it, it becomes a possibility. Once the slippery slope of possibility has been opened, terrible results will inevitably occur.

This is why Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes (Igrot Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:156) that just as it is a mitzvah to see and be involved in a mitzvah, so too it is a transgression to witness a transgression being performed where one can avoid it. By watching a violation of G-d's Torah, he writes, you are watching G-d being humiliated and disrespected. And this negatively affects your own service of G-d because, on some level, you lose respect for G-d as well.

So the nazir decides to enter the institution of the nazirite vows because he has seen the sinning sotah. He realizes that he temporarily needs special laws of holiness in order to return to his former state of awe for G-d's laws and commandments which have been breached.

Environment and nurture play vital roles in human development. There is no way of denying this fact. As Maimonides states (paraphrased): "It is the way of humankind to be drawn after the manners and actions of friends and countrymen. Therefore, one should connect with and befriend righteous people in order to learn from their ways and to distance oneself from wicked people." Maimonides uncharacteristically does not bring a source from a verse in the Torah as a proof. It is a simple fact of life.

What is not widely realized though is that anything and everything we see and experience becomes part of our nature. If we allow our kids to watch television and movies without any restraints, we open them up to potentially harmful influences. As Nicholas Johnson, former commissioner of the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, once said, "All television is educational. The question is what does it teach?"

It is clear that the high increase among children of sexual promiscuousness and activity, violence and

guns in schools, and the trend of reduced achievement and intelligence have its roots in the effects of television and movies. (See Lawrence Keleman's 'To Kindle a Soul' for detailed scientific studies and research.)

So much for openness in parenting. It is an experiment that has failed miserably. If we are responsible parents we must try our best to shield bad influences from our kids as much as possible. They should not witness thousands of killings and violence on TV year after precious year in their youth. If they are allowed to, they will lose sensitivity toward hurting others and become more vicious people.

What we see becomes part of us. We must try to avoid exposing our children to the evils of the world. Society recognizes that the 'movie ratings system' for kids is a positive thing. Although, as a result of the moral descent of this country, what used to be a relatively acceptable and tame PG rating, now probably is the equivalent of a severe 'R' rating, there are still some things that we deem inappropriate for children.

What we should be asking ourselves is: if we agree that it is inappropriate for children, why is it any more appropriate for us? We must be extremely careful with what we see and experience, as well.

Remember, what you see is what you get inside your mind and soul. © 2008 Rabbi B. Leff and aish.com

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Eternal Gifts

What a person gives away seems forever lost. The Torah, in cryptic fashion, uses proper nouns and pronouns in a mysterious medley that teaches us a little about real property, about what you give and what one really has. The Torah tells us about tithing. "And every portion from any of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohen shall be his. A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen shall be his." What the Torah seems to tell us is that the donor has no further right to item given to the Kohen. So why not say it clearly? "What a man gives to the Kohen belongs to the Kohen." Obviously, there is a dual reference attached to the pronoun. What lies within that double allusion?

Rabbi Betzalel Zolty, Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, of blessed memory, related the following story: The Rosh Yeshiva of Slobodka Yeshiva, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein was in America in 1924, raising much-needed funds for his Yeshiva. During his visit, he received an urgent telegram. The Lithuanian authorities were going to conscript the Slobodka students into the army. Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel, the founder and Dean of the Yeshiva, made a decision to open a branch of Slobodka Yeshiva in the ancient city of Chevron in Eretz Israel. He would send 150 students to Palestine to establish the Yeshiva, and in this way free them from service in the apostatizing, ruthless Lithuanian army.

That monumental undertaking would require a sum of \$25,000 to transport, house, and establish the Yeshiva.

Rabbi Epstein was put to the task. He discussed the program with a dear friend of the Yeshiva, Mr. Schiff, who immediately decided to contribute the massive sum in its entirety.

Years later, in the early 1930s, the tide turned for Mr. Schiff. With the crash of the stock market, and plummeting real estate prices, it took only a few months before he was forced out of his own apartment, and was relegated to the cellar of a building that was once his, existing on meager rations.

At the same time, the health of Rabbi Epstein was failing, and he no longer had the strength to travel. His son-in-law, Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna, made the trip to America, in his stead, to raise funds for the Slobodka Yeshiva. He did not know of Mr. Schiff's situation until the man got up to speak at a parlor meeting on behalf of the Yeshiva.

"My dear friends," he began. "I do not wish my business misfortunes on anyone. I invested literally millions of dollars in all sorts of businesses, and they all failed. I have absolutely nothing to show for them. But there is one investment I made that continues to bear fruit. I gave \$25,000 to establish a Yeshiva in Chevron, and that investment is the best one I ever made. One must know where to invest."

When Rabbi Sarna, heard that Mr. Schiff was literally bankrupt, he cabled Rabbi Epstein, who quickly responded to arrange to give him a \$5,000 loan, in order to get him back on his feet and begin doing business again. Through some generous benefactors, Rabbi Sarna got a hold of the cash and went directly to the basement apartment where Mr. Schiff now resided. He explained to him that Rabbi Epstein insisted he take this money as a loan.

Mr. Schiff jumped up in horror, "What do you want from my life? The only money I have left is the \$25,000 that I gave the Yeshiva. Do you want to take that from me as well?"

In its mystical manner, the Torah teaches us the power of the eternal gift. "A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the Kohen shall be his." We invest much in this world. We work. We buy. We build. We spend. But what do we really have? At the end of the hopefully long day, we call life, what can we say is eternally ours? Stocks crash, and buildings crumble. How real is our estate?

The Torah tells us, what the man gives to the Kohen shall be his. It does not say, "... will belong to the Kohen. It says, it shall be his! What we invest in the eternity of spirituality, in order to proliferate Hashem's eternal message, will never be relinquished. For what we invest for eternity, will be eternally invested. It shall always remain ours. © 2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.