

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The words of the rabbis that "One who sees the shame of the woman who was unfaithful should thereupon abstain from consuming wine" are well known and oft-repeated. The obvious meaning of this message is that in life everyone must drive defensively. Let no one allow one's self to be found in compromising circumstances and to think that somehow one is immune from its consequences.

In our current world there are numerous shameful and sad examples of people in high office and great achievement who have been brought to shame and grief by the revelations of their indiscretions. The rabbis in Avot stated that there always is "an eye that sees us"- a constantly recording surveillance camera, if you will, that captures our movements and behavior.

The public revelation of another's sin should serve as a reminder to all of the consequences of that sin. The Torah that ordinarily is very protective of one's right to privacy, even the rights of a sinner, chose to publicize the fate of the unfaithful woman in order to impress upon others the necessity of care and probity in all matters of life.

One should never say that this can never happen to me. When it comes to the areas of human appetites and desires there are no automatic safeguards. Rather, only care, vigilance and avoidance of risk and compromising situations are the unique tools of prevention readily available. Hence the clear connection that the rabbis make between witnessing sin and imbibing too much wine. Just as driving an automobile under the influence of alcohol and drugs is legally forbidden, so is life generally to be lived free those types of influences.

Addiction to alcohol was a rather rare occurrence in Jewish society over the ages. However acculturation and assimilation over the past century have made alcohol a problem in our current Jewish world. The idea of abstinence from wine as described in the parsha regarding the regimen of the nazir is meant to be taken generally as a message of moderation and good sense.

Like many other things in life, a little alcohol can be pleasurable and beneficial but a lot can be harmful and even lethal. The Torah holds up the faithless woman and the nazir as examples of the dangers that

lie lurking in everyday life. It is essentially foolish for any human being to ignore these omnipresent temptations and dangers.

Again, we read in Avot that one should not trust one's self even until the final moment of life. An abundance of over-confidence in one's ability to withstand temptations of all sorts will always lead to unforeseen problems and sad consequences. All of human experience testifies to this conclusion.

Much of the modern world, including much of the current Jewish world as well, mocks and derides any type of defensive driving in personal life matters. The concept of personal freedom has morphed into a lifestyle where any restraints on personal behavior, reasonable as they may be, are attacked and derided. Well, fashions and mores may change with the times but human behavior does not and therefore the moral restraints the Torah imposes on us remain eternally valid and cogent. © 2011 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

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The very name of our portion Naso, encapsulates a central Jewish idea which resonates, especially during the difficult times in Israel today.

On the one hand, the word naso may be related to masa, which means "burden." From this perspective, naso means to be weighted down, to feel the pressure of the world. Naso could also mean to lift or to be above.

While these definitions may be viewed as conflicting, they actually encompass a common message.

As a rabbi, I am constantly awed by individuals who seem to be so average, and yet, when faced with adversity, are able to reach beyond and overcome. This amazing phenomenon gives me strength to continue to believe, despite the fact that there is so much pain and suffering in the world.

This may be the confluence of naso as burden and naso as to lift. It is often the case that precisely when one feels burdened and weighted down, one finds the inner strength to rise above and to exceed one's grasp.

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The ability of people, to do that which they never ever thought they could is an expression of the image of G-d in all of us. As G-d is infinite and endless, so too do we, created in the image of G-d, have the power to do the extraordinary.

We, here in America, should learn through our sisters and brothers in Israel. As they face adversity, we cannot allow ourselves to become the Jews of silence. We must learn from them the message of courage and fortitude, and in the face of crisis, speak out.

Sometimes I think that there are no great people in this world. Rather there are only great challenges. When they arise, ordinary people reach deep down to accomplish the extraordinary. The word *naso* reflects this most incredible phenomenon. © 2006 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the Kohain will administer to the woman the oath that contains the curse,” (Bamidbar 5:21) “and the woman shall say, ‘amen, amen’” (5:22). Numerous laws regarding oaths are learned from the process of the oath taken by the accused adulterer (see Netziv’s commentary on the Sifre), including answering “amen” (when the oath is administered) being considered as if the oath was said explicitly, and the ability to add additional oaths (“gilgul sh’vuah”) In this case, even though the husband can only make her swear that, while they were married, she did not commit adultery with a particular person, once that oath can be made, it can be extended to include being unfaithful with anyone, being unfaithful when they were engaged, and even that she will never be unfaithful in the future (see Rambam, Hilchos Sotah 4:17).

The consequences of taking this oath (if she was unfaithful) are pretty severe; her belly inflates until it explodes, and her thigh falls out of its socket (5:22). This could happen right away, or, if she has certain merits, could be delayed for one, two, or three years (Sotah 20a). Rabbi Eli Steinberg, sh”lita (Minchas Elyahu) quotes a question he saw (in “Ibayay L’hu”

regarding how her punishment could be delayed, if elsewhere (Sh’vuos 39a) the Talmud says that even though having merits can delay the punishment for other sins for two or three generations, the punishment for making a false oath is enacted right away. Since this adulteress swore falsely, how could her punishment be delayed?

Rabbi Steinberg suggests a very straightforward answer; the punishment for a Sotah is distinct from the punishment for swearing falsely. She was guilty of both, and will therefore receive both punishments. However, whereas the punishment for swearing falsely will come right away, the punishment brought about through the Sotah waters could be delayed (depending on her merits). Another possibility is that the term “right away” (or “immediately”) is relative; compared to being delayed for “generations,” being punished within a few years would be considered “right away.” There might be another possibility as well.

Ramban discusses the uniqueness of the Sotah process: “There are no other laws of the Torah that are reliant on a miracle besides this, which (referring to the Sotah miracle) is astounding and a set miracle that is done within Israel (the nation) when the majority are doing G-d’s will.” (Ramban then tells us that this “miracle” stopped after the nation was no longer as righteous, when adultery wasn’t as uncommon.) This is likely one of the reasons care was taken to protect the “reputation” of the miraculous nature of the Sotah waters. After we are taught that having a merit could delay the implementation of the punishment for years, Ben Azai says that because of this we must teach Torah to our daughters, so that if they ever have to drink the Sotah waters and their belly doesn’t explode/thigh doesn’t fall right away, they will attribute it to having a merit, not to the Sotah waters not working. For a similar reason, before the woman drinks the Sotah waters, the limits of whom the waters test are spelled out (for example, it only affects those who were willingly unfaithful, and only if the husband did not have any improper relations either), so that no one thinks the punishment not occurring is a reflection on the veracity of the Sotah waters (see Sotah 32b).

If there is such concern about people possibly disparaging the miraculous nature of the Sotah waters, including the sin of swearing falsely in the process is counterproductive; seeing an unfaithful woman getting her immediate punishment for swearing falsely while her thigh and stomach remain intact might mislead some into thinking that the Torah was exaggerating when it described the Sotah’s punishment, and that what was really a punishment for swearing falsely was the punishment for being unfaithful. An oath is necessary for the Sotah process, yet problematic.

There is another issue with the Sotah’s oath. Normally, after an oath is made, the person making the oath is taken at his word. If someone is accused of owing money and the procedure calls for an oath, after

he swears that he doesn't owe any money, we accept it and he doesn't have to pay. If the procedure calls for making an oath before being able to collect money, after the oath he collects it. If even after making the oath we didn't believe him, we couldn't have him utter G-d's name in a falsehood. Not accepting the oath would not only demean G-d, but undermines the validity and value of the oath itself. How can the Sotah swear that she was not unfaithful, and then drink the Sotah waters anyway? Making her drink indicates that despite making the oath, we do not believe her. If we don't believe her, how can we make her swear?

The oath taken by the Sotah is unlike others oaths. She doesn't swear that she was not unfaithful, nor does she say "amen" to the Kohain saying that she was faithful. She accepts the consequences of being unfaithful, but never explicitly denies being unfaithful. Implicit in her acceptance of the consequences is that she was never unfaithful, to the extent that we learn certain laws about other oaths from hers. Just as we can extend her acceptance of the consequences to being unfaithful with anyone (not just with the person suspected by her husband), which extends her implication to include that she wasn't unfaithful with anyone, we can extend other oaths to include additional things ("gilgul sh'vuah"). Rashi (5:19) is very clear that she never swears that she remained faithful. Rather, she is told that if she did not commit adultery, she will be exonerated. If, on the other hand, she was not faithful, her "thigh will fall" and her "belly will blow up" (5:21). Again Rashi goes out of his way to tell us what the Torah means by "curse" and "oath;" she will be used as an example of someone to whom bad things happened ("cursed") and others will "swear" that they won't do the things she did. Not that she swears about what she did or didn't do, or will or won't do, but others will swear about what they won't do, referencing her in their oath.

Since she never explicitly swears that she remained faithful, it is not a contradiction to make her drink the Sotah waters after the oath; if she is innocent, nothing will happen. And since she is never given the opportunity to swear falsely, there is no possibility of her being punished for doing so (only for being unfaithful). And without any possibility of swearing falsely, there is no issue of the consequences of swearing falsely interfering with the consequences of drinking the Sotah waters. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd in the hand of the Kohen shall be the bitter waters that bring about the curse” (Numbers 5:18).

One of the strangest passages in the Bible is the law of the woman suspected of adultery recorded in this week's portion. The text says that if a woman is

suspected by her husband of having an affair, and he warns her before two valid witnesses not to be alone in a secluded place with that particular individual, and nevertheless she does so, the woman becomes subject to an eerie sort of "trial" to establish her innocence.

The husband must bring his wife to the kohen, together with an offering of barley flour. The kohen then takes sacred water mixed with earth from the floor of the Sanctuary and dissolves within this mixture a parchment scroll inscribed with the curses. He then recites the curses to his doubted wife: "May the Lord render you as a curse and as an oath amidst your people when the Lord causes your thigh to collapse and your stomach to distend. These waters, which bring about a curse, shall enter your insides to cause your stomach to distend and your thigh to collapse" (Numbers 5:21-22).

The accused woman responds "Amen, Amen," after which she is given the bitter water to drink. The kohen then takes the meal offering from the hand of the woman, waves it before G-d, and offers it on the altar. The woman then drinks the water. If no symptoms of the curses occur, the woman is considered innocent and the couple can resume their marital relationship (Numbers 5:11-31). What is the significance of this procedure? It sounds almost like some sort of black magic, not in consonance with biblical rationality.

"Trial by bitter waters" was limited to the period of the First Temple (until 586 BCE). The Talmudic sages insist that beyond the first commonwealth, the test was no longer efficacious because an increasing number of men were having extramarital affairs. Their proof text is the closing verse of this chapter (5:31), which reads, "And the man shall be clear innocent of iniquity, and that woman shall bear her iniquity." The sages take this to mean that it is only when the husband is innocent that we can condemn the wife. But the procedure still jars modern sensibilities.

An incident occurred in Efrat about a decade ago which gave me an insight into the meaning of this ritual. Due to the positive relationships we enjoy with many local Arab villages, as the local chief rabbi I am often called upon to adjudicate disputes between Palestinians and Israelis, and sometimes even between Palestinians and Palestinians. In this case, two Palestinian cousins from different villages were suspected of having a sexual relationship. The family of the young woman spoke of an honor killing. The family of the young man persuaded the woman's relatives to come to me for arbitration and to abide by my ruling. I interviewed the two cousins separately and together, listened to the testimonies of witnesses who had seen unseemly behavior but had not witnessed any sexual activity. Based on this, I ruled that there was no legitimate proof that cohabitation had taken place. I insisted that the two get married, which they did with alacrity.

Judaism emerged from the Middle East, where jealousy is rampant and women are often considered the chattel of their husbands. A jealous husband can easily persuade himself to harm the wife whom he suspects of adultery. I therefore believe this trial of the bitter waters provided a marvelous psychological ploy to protect the woman from a husband's wrath.

To the best of my knowledge, there is no record of a woman whose thighs collapsed or whose stomach distended after drinking the bitter waters; hence, the woman would be declared innocent and her husband would take her back. And if her fear of the consequences resulted in a confession then the marriage deserved to be terminated with a payment of a fine by the adulteress. In any case, a murder in the name of family honor would be avoided. ©2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Gifts are not worth much if the recipient cannot keep them. In fact, that is the very meaning of the word "gift," something that is given, something that may be used in any way the recipient sees fit. If so, how do we explain the Torah's choice of words when describing the mitzvah of giving tithes and gifts to the Kohein, the one who performs the priestly duties for the community? Listen closely to the words of the Torah. "And all that a man gives to the Kohein shall be his." (5:10) Well, if he gives it to the Kohein, then it is obviously his, isn't it?

Some commentators perceive a novel insight in this verse. The Torah, they explain, is addressing the instinctive defiant reaction of a person who is required to give some of his hard-earned money to the Kohein or to the poor. "Why should I give him my money? He didn't work for it. I did. Why shouldn't I be allowed to keep it?" The Torah reassures this person that he is mistaken, that the money given to the Kohein is indeed money well spent, that it is actually the best by far of all his diversified investments.

A person never really has his possessions firmly in his grasp. If he uses them up, he may have derived some enjoyment from them, but they are now forever gone. If he hoards them, he can never be assured that they will stay with him. They may be stolen. He may suffer financial reverses. Nothing is guaranteed.

The only way a person can safeguard his money and make sure he always retains it is by using it in a way that will bring him eternal reward. When he gives some of his to a beggar who cannot feed his family. He has earned himself eternal reward. When he gives to the Kohein who ministers to the spiritual needs of the community, he has earned himself eternal reward. When he supports institutions of Torah, he has earned himself eternal reward. This is what the Torah

is saying. "And all that a man gives to the Kohein shall be his." Only when he uses his money for a higher purpose does it become truly "his." Only then is his investment guaranteed.

A great sage once visited a very wealthy man. "They say you are very rich," said the sage. "Is it true?"

"I'm afraid it is," said the man. "I am one of the wealthiest men in the country."

"Indeed?" said the sage. "Can you prove it to me?"

The man smiled. "I could take you on a tour of my properties, but we would have to travel for days on end. I could show you my storehouses of treasures, but you would become weary climbing from one floor to the next. But I can show you my account books. Would you like to see them?"

"Please," said the sage.

The man took the sage into his back room and opened some of his account books for him.

"I am not convinced," said the sage. "Show me more."

The man opened more and more account books for the sage, but he was still unconvinced.

"I have no more account books," the man finally said in frustration. "What is that little book up on that shelf?" said the sage.

"That is the ledger of my charitable donations," said the man.

"Show it to me!" said the sage. He leafed through the little ledger and closed it with a smile on his face. "I see that you are indeed a wealthy man," said the sage. "Very few people have given as much to charity as you have. You see, all those other account books mean nothing. Tomorrow, you can be penniless, and then what would you be worth? But the charity you gave can never be taken from you. Your good deeds are yours forever."

In our own lives, we often feel pressured by the communal charities and all those worthy institutions who are always so desperately in need of funds. And there is no end to it. If we give to them this year, we know they will be back next year for more. But let us look at them from a different perspective. Let us see them as an opportunity to make an investment that will bear dividends for ourselves and our families for all eternity, in this world and the next. Let us be thankful that we are fortunate to be on the giving end and that by doing so we enrich our own lives beyond measure. ©2011 *Rabbi N. Reich & Project Genesis, Inc.*

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

It can be energizing, exhilarating, making one feel part of something much greater than oneself. It can be dispiriting, depressing, making one feel insignificant, inconsequential and lost. As always, it is our perception of a situation that creates our reality.

We are instructed in the Shma prayer, "not to stray after our eyes." This can be understood as a warning: being that our perception is often skewed, Hashem cautions us to see things through His eyes, His perception, in order to attain true clarity.

In this week's parsha, Naso, we find a rather strange and belabored repetition. With the induction of the Mishkan {Tabernacle}, the Nesiim, the leaders of each tribe, brought an offering. Each brought exactly the same offering. Yet, the Torah spells it out, in its full identical detail, twelve times. Going beyond the fact that it certainly made the laining easier for my son's bar mitzvah parsha last year, we must understand what lesson Hashem is teaching us through this repetition.

One of a crowd. Just like the other twelve. Nothing special. Same exact gift. Humiliating. Insignificant. Not leaving my mark. That's how it would be viewed through our eyes. Through Hashem's eyes? Unique. Special. Significant. Treasured. Each Nasi deserving his own passukim. The Saba of Kelem writes that this episode of the Nesiim shows that each member of a crowd is viewed by Hashem with the love and joy normally directed to a unique and exceptional individual.

This concept arose in a classroom conversation a few weeks ago. We were discussing the requirement to repeat the Amidah prayer if one mistakenly added a mention of the rain. 'What's the big deal?' some of my students asked. Just get it right the next time!

I related to them that in Israel, with the scarce rainfall, they sometimes resort to a process of 'seeding' the clouds in order to increase the precipitation. What would happen if they seeded the clouds and then realized that rainfall at that point would actually be detrimental, I asked. If there is a de-seeding process, they'd have to go back up there and de-seed, they conceded.

With the hundreds of thousands of Jews that pray, each one makes a difference. Each rain-mention seeds the clouds. If they said it when the rain would be harmful, it must be undone. Repeat that Amidah without those words. De-seed.

Each person is a ben-yachid {treasured, only-child}. We matter. The others that join us in our avodah {Divine service} must encourage and energize us. They don't detract in any way from our significance. That's how Hashem views it. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar with a pasuk (and a Medrash) that come well into the parsha. The fact that the Sfas Emes skipped over other potential topics means that he saw special significance in the subject that he did select. The pasuk that the Sfas Emes saw as especially meaningful comes in

Bemidbar (6:2): "ish oh isha ki yafli lindor neder nazir..." (ArtScroll:

"... a man or a woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow...").

The meaning of these words is not obvious, so the Sfas Emes elaborates. He explains that being a nazir means that a person separates himself from matters of olam hazeh (this world) even though in fact, he is involved in olam hazeh. That may sound like a contradiction. In fact, it is a contradiction. But the Sfas Emes does not hesitate to confront apparent cosmic inconsistencies. He explains that HaShem gives us the power to cling to the Source-of His Presence-which is present in all things. Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that this capacity to be part of-yet separate from-olam hazeh depends on our maintaining contact with the chiyus (vibrancy, vitality) that HaShem put into all Creation. The Sfas Emes calls this phenomenon "pehleh"- from the same root as a word in the pasuk-"yafli".

Clearly, the Sfas Emes regards the topic of the nazir as extremely important. And equally clearly, "pehleh" is a key word for understanding what nezirus is all about. How does the Sfas Emes arrive at his reading: namely, that the word "pehleh" refers to our capacity to maintain contact with the inner vitality that HaShem has placed in all Creation? A pasuk from the haftora of Parshas Naso (Shoftim, 13:18) provides some help. That pasuk contains the word "peli"-a word that all the commentaries render as "mechuseh" or "ne'ehlam"-i.e., hidden. That is to say: Our capacity to connect with ruchniyus even though we are involved in olam hazeh is a phenomenon beyond our understanding. Thus, we are dealing here with a familiar situation: our limited capacity to understand how the cosmos functions.

For further clarification of the word "yafli", the Sfas Emes sends us to an unexpected source. He directs us to a remark of the Rema in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chayim, Siman 6. The Rema there comments on a phrase in the berocha- the blessing-of asher yatzar". The Rema observes that the phrase "umafli la'asos" (HaShem, "Who does wondrous things") refers to a unique creature that HaShem has fashioned with His boundless creativity. What creature does the Rema have in mind?

Human beings, can, in principle, combine ruchniyus (spirituality) with gashmiyus (corporeality). Thus, following the Sfas Emes's approach, we can translate the pasuk with which he began this ma'amar as: "If a person commits to doing that wondrous thing-something whose feasibility is to us, with our limited knowledge, hidden-that is, to take a Nazarite vow...".

Notice what the Sfas Emes is doing here. Earlier he defined a nazir as a person who is not involved in olam hazeh even though in fact he is involved in olam hazeh. That sounds paradoxical. But by introducing us to the concept and halachos of nazir,

the Torah is telling us that such a combination is indeed feasible. And the Sfas Emes brings support for this view by citing a berocha that celebrates the reality of such a combination, which HaShem has built into all humankind. The take-home lesson is clear: being bahsar vedahm (flesh and blood) need not bar us from living a life of spirituality.

The Sfas Emes moves on now to another line of thought. He quotes the Medrash Rabba on our pasuk. The Medrash, in turn, brings a pasuk from Shir Hashirim (5:15): "Shokav amudei shesh..." ("The Torah's columns that support the world are marble..."). The Medrash (and the Sfas Emes) read "shokav" as coming from the same root as the Hebrew word "teshuka"-yearning. In other words, they read 'shokav' as "His yearning". Thus, the Medrash tells us that HaShem yearned to create the world. This perspective implies that the world is- or can be-a good thing.

The Medrash continues in the same vein, quoting a pasuk that we say in the Friday night kiddush (Bereishis, 2:1): "Va'yechu'lu ha'shamayim vеха'aretz..."

In non-pshat mode, the Medrash chooses to read the word "va'yechulu" as coming from the root of another Hebrew word which also denotes yearning or longing. Thus we find a pasuk in (Tehillim, 74:3.) which says: 'nichsefa vegam kalsa nafshi...' (That is: 'My soul yearns for...') You see the link- by allusion-that connects "va'yechulu" and "kalsa".

So far, the Sfas Emes has had to add little to the discussion. The Medrash is so much in a Sfas Emes mode that he can let the Medrash say it all for him. But at this point, the Sfas Emes enters with comment on the pasuk (quoted above): "Shokav amudei sheish..." As noted above, the pshat (simple, literal) meaning of the word "sheish" in this context is: "marble". Hence, the literal meaning: "His columns that support the world are marble." But in non-pshat mode, the Sfas Emes reads the word "sheish" as "six." Hence, the Sfas Emes can now read the phrase as "The six support the world." Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that during the six yemei hama'aseh (workdays), our ma'aseh (work) can connect us with HaShem!

The picture that the Medrash (and the Sfas Emes) give us is a picture in which HaShem, as it were, yearned to create the world. Further, the way He built the world, we can reciprocate His feeling. As the pasuk in Shir Hashirim (7:11) says: "ve'ahlai teshukaso" ("And I yearn for Him"). Taking the relationship a step further, the Sfas Emes endows that pasuk with a secondary meaning, "And His yearning for me depends on my yearning for Him".

Thus, the Sfas Emes views this world in a very positive light. HaShem had a yearning to create this world. (In fact, the Medrash uses a word much stronger than 'yearning': "ta'ava"). As you see, what we have here is a deep, heartfelt relationship between HaShem and the world that He has created- that is, with us.

I suggest that this heartfelt relationship also brings with it a potential danger. HaShem yearns for us. But what if we do not yearn for Him? As we know, spurned love leads to frustration, and frustration leads to anger. And anger can lead to acts of anger. Sad to say, Tanach recounts many such episodes. So too does our people's history in the post-Tanach years.

In any case, the Sfas Emes reminds us that on Shabbos we can come closer to HaShem. And our coming closer gives HaShem nachas (joy). We are told in Shemos, 20:1: "va'yanach ba'yom hashevi'i." (ArtScroll: "And He rested on the seventh day."). The Sfas Emes reads this pasuk as: "And He had nachas [joy] on the seventh day". When we say this pasuk in kiddush on Shabbos morning, let us try to have in mind that on Shabbos we can give HaShem nachas. © 2011 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

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 Hashana2:8) 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 (Shoftim 13:4) 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. © 2011 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Small Talk

This week's parsha contains a number of exciting episodes. It details the sordid tale of the adulterous woman, her fate and that of her illicit adulterer. It illustrates the rules and regulations of the nazir, one who has abstained from worldly pleasures by eschewing wine in addition to leaving his hair unshorn.

However, tucked away in the midst of the controversial episodes are the priestly blessings—five verses that shine an encouraging light in the midst of a difficult portion. Those verses contain the priestly blessings that are well known to many of us. "May Hashem bless you and keep you. May Hashem shine his countenance on you and be gracious to you. May Hashem lift his countenance upon you and establish you in peace. (Numbers 6:24-26)"

Less celebrated, however, are the verses that appear immediately before and after the actual blessings. "Thus shall you bless the children of Israel, speak to them." What is the importance - even the meaning—of the extra words, "speak to them"? After Hashem charges the priests with the actual verses of blessing, He ends with an additional command. "Place My name upon the children of Israel and I shall bless them." Again, the verse leaves us wondering - of course, it is Hashem that will bless them but what does His name have to do with it? Didn't He just prescribe

the formula? Why aren't the three verses enough to spur G-d's blessings?

A few months after moving to Woodmere, a lovely young Israeli couple with two young children moved next door to us. After conversing with them, my wife and I realized that in Israel they had not been the least bit observant of Jewish tradition. They had not even observed Yom Kippur, let alone kept Shabbat or kosher. It seemed that the reason they moved to America because Israel was becoming to Jewish for them.

My wife and I felt a responsibility to bring these fine people closer to the Torah, yet we also did not feel comfortable telling them about laws that they must have known about, but chose not to observe.

Fortunately in our neighborhood lived the great Rosh Yeshiva who brought thousands of people close to Torah, Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld, of blessed memory. I explained our situation to him and basically asked him, "Rebbe, what do you in order to make someone frum (religious)?" He smiled and put his large hand on my shoulder. "Do absolutely nothing!" I stood shocked and confused as he continued. "Be a mentsch: Never miss a 'good morning' or a 'good afternoon'. Make sure your lawn is neat and your children are well behaved. And just be friendly." Then he quoted the words of our sages, 'make sure that the name of Hashem is cherished through you.'

He paused, looked me in the eye, and proclaimed confidently, "follow that advice and you will not have to do a thing. They will get closer to the Torah."

We followed his advice. We invited them for meals, and our children played together. I talked politics with him while my wife discussed gardening with her. We spoke about everything—except religion. I was therefore shocked, when, in October, our neighbors asked us where the closest synagogue was. They decided to go to shul for Yom Kippur. I was even more surprised when days later they asked for my help in building a Sukkah. I am sad to relate that recently we lost some very good neighbors. After 5 years of living in the US, they decided to move back to Israel. America was becoming too goyish (gentile) for them.

Before it enumerates the actual blessings, the Torah teaches us the true way to bless Jews - speak to them. The words, "speak to them" may be more important than the actual blessing. The saintly Chofetz Chaim charged my wife's grandfather Rabbi Laizer Levin, who was Rabbi of Detroit for 50 years, with a simple message. "Laizer, gei rehd tzoo Yidden." (Reb Laizer go and speak to Jews.) And the actual priestly blessings do not end much differently. "Place My name upon the children of Israel and I shall bless them." (Numbers 6:27). When Hashem's name is placed upon His nation, then blessing is sure to follow.

A smile, a hello, a Good Shabbos, or Shabbat Shalom may be the key to forging a different attitude to

an otherwise skeptical Jew. To paraphrase a man who reached great heights, "One small word to man can produce giants for mankind." The true blessing does not come from theological incantations; it comes from the simple smiles of the heart. ©1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

This week's parashah continues the census of the Levi'im begun in last week's parashah: In last week's parashah, the sons of Kehat, son of Levi, were counted. Now, our parashah opens, "take a census of the sons of Gershon, also, according to their fathers' households, according to their families."

The Midrash on the above verse cites Mishlei (3:15), "It is more precious than pearls." Says the Midrash: The Torah is more precious than anything. Therefore, although Gershon was older than Kehat, and the Torah usually accords honor to a firstborn, here the Torah mentioned Kehat before Gershon because the sons of Kehat carried the Holy Ark, which contained the Torah.

R' Yaakov Kaminetsky z"l (died 1986) observes that a similar lesson regarding the Torah's honor is learned from the Gemara (Eruvin 28b), which relates that when Rabbi Zera was too tired to study Torah, he would sit in a place where he knew Torah scholars would pass. He said, "Let me rise for them and earn reward that way." From this story we can learn how our predecessors loved the Torah, says R' Kaminetsky.

Surely the exhausted Rabbi Zera could have found a mitzvah to perform that did not involve physical exertion. Nevertheless, he chose to exert himself to honor Torah students, for this is part of the mitzvah of Torah study.

The Gemara continues, relating that as Rabbi Zera was sitting and waiting for scholars to pass, he entered into a Torah discussion with a young child. Moreover, that child taught Rabbi Zera a halachah regarding which Rabbi Zera had had a mistaken understanding. A true scholar, observes R' Kaminetsky, is one who is prepared to learn from every person, young or old, wise or simple. Such a willingness to learn from one's "inferiors" is a barometer of how much one loves the Torah. (Emet Le'Yaakov) ©2002 S. Katz & torah.org



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