



Parashat Naso



English version

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OUT OF CONTROL

Why does the Torah put the Nazirite laws immediately after the laws of the Sotah? For if one sees a Sotah in her disgraceful state, he should become a Nazir [abstaining] from wine, so that he does not follow in her ways of immorality. (Berachot 63a, Nazir 2a) Wine, the chase for extras in life, can bring to immoral conduct. (Meiri)

Shimon Hatzaddik, a Kohen Gadol and the Gadol Hador, would not partake of any Nazirite atonement sacrifice. (That was because most of the Nezirim were not genuine Nezirim. When they would realize the difficulty of the Nazirite laws, they would regret their Nezirut.) There was, however, one exception - that of a "goldilocks" shepherd from the south. Shimon Hatzadik said, "I asked him what brought him to cut such beautiful hair, and he told me: I was shepherding my father's sheep, and I went to draw water from the spring. I gazed at my own reflection, and my Yetzer Hara jumped up at me and tried to drive me out of my world. I said to him, Rasha! Why do you look with conceit at a world that is not yours?! Why should you be ruled by conceit, when you are going to be consumed by worms and maggots in the grave?! I swear that I will cut you (my hair), for the Sake of Heaven!" Shimon Hatzaddik immediately stood up for this Nazir, and kissed him on his head, saying, "My son! May there be more like you in the Jewish Nation." (Nedarim 9b)

There are a number of questions on this piece of Talmud. The commentators explain that the way the Nazir's Yetzer Hara was going to "drive him out of his world", out of his Olam Haba, was by

making him "believe that he is god." What does this mean? Also, it seems from the words of the Nazir above, that a prerequisite for losing self control is haughtiness. What is the connection between self control and haughtiness? And one more point to ponder. R' B. M. Ezrachi, in his sefer Birkat Mordechai, asks: If Mr. Goldilocks from the south wanted to fight his Yetzer Hara by nullifying his good looks, cutting off his beautiful curls, wouldn't it have made more sense just to shave his head bald, right then and there? Why did he need to go through the process of becoming a Nazir, and only upon finishing his Nazirite days, shave his head for G-d's honor?

R' B. M. Ezrachi Shlita explains that there are two ways for one to fight his Yetzer Hara, to exhibit self control. One is immediate, but doesn't last. It should be used only in case of emergency. In this case, it would have been to go to the other extreme, to cut off his hair, right then and there. (R' Ezrachi coins this as "the Novarodock way") But this tactic does not last long, because it is not the stunning hair that is the problem. The hair is just a trigger that activates a deeper problem. Hair grows back, and Mr. Handsome from the south would then have been in the same vulnerable position that he was before.

The Nazir from the south wanted to make a lasting change. So, he needed to change his identity, to become a different type of person, a person who would not sin. Nazir comes from the word Nezer, or crown. The man from the south decided to wear a G-dly crown. What does that mean, to become a



more G-dly person? It doesn't mean "shaving off" the beautiful things that G-d has given you. It means to be proud that you are using the good that G-d has given you for the sake of bringing G-dliness to the world. To be a role model of holiness, by being proud of your holy lifestyle. And that you dress your best, because you are G-d's representative to the world you live in. (R Ezrachi coins this as "the Slabodka way")

The best way to change your identity to become a more G-dly person, the place where it all begins, is from the first words of the Nazir from the south. Stop. Close your eyes, and let the words of the Nazir sink in. *Why do you feel haughty about a world that is not yours?* This is the secret to self discipline, self control. It is all about whose world you live in. Is it your world, or is it G-d's world? Do you honestly believe that G-d owes it to you, to give you good looks? For that matter, does G-d owe you anything, at all?

The world that you live in is not the world that *you* deserve, for better or for worse. If G-d gave you power, looks, money, family, love, honor, happiness, wisdom, or, if G-d decided that you should not have one of these, it is the world G-d knows is best for you, to enable you to bring G-

A Jew on a Unicycle

In Temple times, if a woman was accused of adultery by her husband and there were serious grounds for suspicion, she was given a choice: accept a divorce, or stand up to a strange test. The test, if she opted for it, required her to drink "bitter waters" into which the name of G-d had been dissolved. If she was guilty, she died instantaneously. Before the Sotah drank the bitter waters, she was commanded to bring a unique Mincha, a flour offering. This offering was unique, for it was the only flour offering that did not consist of wheat flour, but barley flour. It was a Grade B Korban, a cheap sacrifice, as barley is cheaper than wheat. And, no "toppings", no oil and no frankincense. *For it is a Minchat Knaot, Minchat Zikaron, Mazkeret Avon...* (Bamidbar 5; 15) *A flour offering of jealousy and zealousness, a flour offering of remembrance, and a reminder of sin.* Rashi explains that the word Knaot, zealousness, is in the plural, referring to the

dliness into it. This is an elevated life, a life with meaning. G-d wants us to bring G-dliness to the world through the presents he gives you, and He does not want you to disregard the good looks He gave you, the nice car, the nice house. Rather, He wants you to dedicate it all to Him. If you look at what you have as a gift from G-d, you become a different person.

Nothing can help you toward self-discipline more than the realization that your world is not yours. Why is this such a powerful tool? Because there is a prerequisite for every materialistic desire you succumb to. And that is the feeling of ownership. The feeling works with an inner voice of "if-then". "If the food is on my plate, then I must finish it"(even if I am already full). "If the food is in my house, then I must eat it" (even if I am not hungry). "If the money is in my pocket, then I must spend it" (even if I do not need the item). When we undo the false "if-then" thinking, we have more self control. Feeling ownership is the root of lack of self control. But when you believe that what you have is not yours, לה' הארץ ומלואה, it all belongs to G-d and it is there for you to bring G-dliness to the world, you can take control of your haughtiness, your diet, and ultimately, your spiritual life.

zealousness of both G-d and her husband. But, what do the words *remembrance, and a reminder of sin* refer to? A remembrance of what? A reminder of what sin? She cannot be proven guilty until after she drinks the waters!?

The Orach Chaim explains this with an insight that reflects how people fall into sin and shows how sin can be avoided. This reminder of sin is a reminder of the first, cheap flour sacrifice brought by Kayin in the beginning of time. Kayin brought a cheap Mincha to the altar and was rejected by G-d, while his younger brother, Hebel, offered the best quality sheep he had, which G-d "licked" with fire. What did Kayin do wrong? Why was his sacrifice not accepted? Didn't his sacrifice pass quality inspection? How can this be referred to as a sin? And what's the connection between the adulterous woman and Kayin's having brought a cheap korban and then having killed his brother, Hebel?

The Seforno explains the conversation between G-d and Kayin between and beyond the words. (Breishit 4; 4-8) *G-d accepted **Hebel** and his Korban, and refused **Kayin** and his flour sacrifice.* Seforno comments that when one brings a sacrifice, he is really bringing himself. This is the whole idea and the essence of the sacrifice. The Kavvana one was to have as the Kohen slaughtered the animal was - *it is as if G-d is slaughtering me.* His thoughts should have been, "I am bringing myself to G-d". This is how G-d perceives the sacrifice, as well. When G-d accepts your sacrifice, He is not only accepting the offering of the animal, *but He is accepting you.* A korban is the root of its word, karov, *getting close.* G-d does not want people to be offered on the altar, so we bring an animal, instead. We bring our best animal, because that is what is closest to the best thing I have, me. This explains why Kayin took it so personally. G-d did not refuse only Kayin's sacrifice; G-d also refused Kayin.

And Kayin got angry, and his face fell. And G-d said to Kayin, why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you improve, you will be uplifted, and if you do not improve, sin crouches at the threshold, and towards you he (sin) is passionate, and you will rule over him (sin). The Seforno helps us understand these words as well. Kayin could not come to terms with the fact that G-d had accepted his brother and not him. G-d asked him, What's the big issue? There is nothing personal here. Why are you "down"? There is nothing here that can't be undone. If you better yourself, getting closer to G-d, you will also be accepted by G-d, like your brother, and you, also, will achieve great heights. And if you do not try to improve yourself, and get closer to G-d, sin will lie in wait, passionately planning to lure you ever deeper and deeper into transgression. You can fight

this inclination and release yourself from the clutches of sin only with special help from G-d, with the special powers of Repentance you will have by getting closer to G-d. But Kayin did not take this advice, and then, the result was the worst sin. Out of jealousy, he murdered Hebel, his only brother, the only other person in his world.

What is the moral of the story, the message G-d wanted the Sotah, and all of us, to remember? When people sin, it is not only because they are not mindful of the safeguards preventing sin. In the case of the adulterous woman, this means getting overly casual with the neighbor, her boss, her coworker, etc. That is just a part of the problem. Usually, the main reason is underestimated. It is because the person is not bettering him / herself in an effort to get closer to G-d. When one is not proactive about his spiritual growth, when he is not constantly improving his spiritual level, lust and inclination to sin lie in ambush. A bored person is an easier target for the Evil Inclination, because he is not a "moving target". The adulterous woman fell to sin, primarily because she was not growing spiritually. **She is** a Grade B Korban, not one who devoted her "all" to forming her relationship with G-d. The worst scenarios - adultery or murdering one's brother - can take place when a person is not growing. Becoming a Sotah started when spiritual growth stopped, just as Kayin's becoming a murderer began when he decided to be satisfied with investing minimal effort in his spiritual growth.

This message leaves us no rest. This world is a two way street: you can be going only in one of two directions. There is no sidewalk, no shoulder of the road. A more accurate allegory is a unicycle. You've got to be moving forward, if you do not want to fall.

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