

Parsha Nasso

Presented By Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky Shlita, Dean

1. The Need to Actualize Inspiration

The Torah tells us that if a woman had been forewarned by her husband not to sequester herself with a man and she subsequently defies his warning and secludes herself with this individual, the woman is established as a *sotah* (an adulteress) until proven otherwise. Since it is unknown what transpired during the period of seclusion, the only verification that can determine if she is truly the adulteress or not is the administering of the *mai sotah* (*the sotah water*). If the suspected adulteress claims her innocence, and the husband is interested in verifying her innocence, he must take his wife to the Kohane at the Temple Mount to drink the *mai sotah*. If in fact the woman committed adultery, after drinking the water she would swell and bloat to a point until every vein in her body erupts and her lower extremities become dismembered. If the woman is found innocent she will conceive and have beautiful children.

The Torah juxtaposes the portion of the *nazir* (the nazerite) to the portion of the *sotah*. The Gemara asks – why does the Torah juxtapose the portion pertaining to the *nazir* with the portion pertaining to the *sotah*? The Gemara answers- to teach us that if a person had witnessed the demise of the adulteress as a result of drinking the *mai sotah* one should accept upon himself nazeritehood. It is important to note that the relationship, which precipitated the tragic end of the *sotah*, only began with socializing over a glass of wine. Therefore understanding the far-reaching consequences of wine, one should accept upon himself a sate of nazeritehood (a *nazir* is not permitted to drink wine or eat the grape or any of its derivatives).

One would think that just witnessing such revealed Divine retribution as the demise of the *sotah*, would be sufficient in itself to cause the person to be vigilant and responsible in this area of his own behavior. Nevertheless the Torah suggests that one who witnesses the gruesome end of the *sotah* to accept upon himself nazeritehood to fully appreciate the negative consequences of drinking wine. The question is why is this seemingly drastic prescription necessary? [The Ramban explains that even at the time of the Second Bais HaMikdash (the Second Temple) when there were no longer revealed miracles, the miracle of the *sotah* was still in effect for the purpose of guaranteeing and maintaining the purity of the Jewish People.]

We see from this that the Torah is telling us that even if one witnesses a miracle, such as the demise of the *sotah*, it is not sufficient to leave an indelible effect upon a person that would cause him to be vigilant in this area of his behavior. One must actualize and concretize the feeling and inspiration that one gains from this traumatic event. Without the internalization of this event one's sense of accountability will quickly dissipate and fade into the recesses of his memory. Therefore the Torah tells us in order for this experience to leave an everlasting effect on one's life, one must accept upon himself nazeritehood.

The difficulty with this principle is that when the Torah tells us that Aaron the High Priest must enter into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur he is not permitted to enter into this inner sanctum at any other time. Juxtaposed to the service of Yom Kippur the Torah mentions the death of the two sons of Aaron. The Midrash asks – what relevance does the death of Aaron's sons have with his officiating in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur? The Midrash explains that this juxtaposition with an allegory.

A doctor prescribed a remedy for two individuals who had the identical illness; however, when the doctor prescribed the remedy to one patient he only tells him that if he wants to live he must follow the prescription. The patient did not adhere to the instructions of the doctor and he died. The second patient, when being instructed by the doctor, is told that if he wants to live he must

follow the prescription as instructed or else he will die as the first patient had for not following the prescription. To which patient is the warning more effective? The first or the second?

It is evident that advice given to the second patient who has a real test-case of the consequence of not adhering to the doctor is much more effective. Similarly regarding Aaron, he is only permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies at certain designated times and not at any other time. If Aaron would enter at other times he would die as his children died. This is the significance of the juxtaposition of the death of Aaron's sons to the service in the Holy of Holies. This juxtaposition, contrary to that of the sotah, indicates that witnessing the Hand of G-d is in itself sufficient to impact on a person not to repeat a wrong. How do we reconcile these two concepts?

One may say the reason why the Torah prescribes an action to internalize the effect of the demise of the sotah upon the observer is because the obviousness of the cause is not evident in the demise of the sotah. Meaning, the sotah's demise is a result of her committing adultery; however, what precipitated the relationship, which ended in adultery, was the drinking of the wine. Therefore in order to associate the Divine retribution to the initial drinking of the wine (which led to the transgression), the Torah suggests that if one witnesses the demise of the sotah, he accept upon himself nazeritehood. Regarding the death of the sons of Aaron, Hashem punished them immediately after they transgressed. Since there was no delay between the transgression and the death of the sons of Aaron, witnessing their demise in itself was sufficient warning to cause the Kohane only to enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur.

Another possible explanation is because of Aaron's own spiritual dimension, it was not necessary for him to actualize and concretize the feeling through action. He was able to immediately internalize the event, which left an everlasting effect. However, for the ordinary person who is not as spiritually attuned as Aaron, he must take action to be profoundly affected by what he witnesses. Therefore the Torah provides a method to concretize the inspiration, which is nazeritehood.

When we are inspired to learn Torah we should not delay, but rather actualize that feeling immediately through action. By immediately actualizing one's inspiration it will become concretized and have a lasting effect. However if one does not immediately actualize inspiration it will dissipate regardless of how strong it is. This is true with any positive action that we intend to perform.

2. The Ambiguity of Life Guarantees Free Choice

The Torah states regarding the various tithes given to the Kohane, **“The person who does not give the Kohane his Tithe will not receive.”** Rashi cites the Chazal explaining that if a person withholds the tithe from the Levi and the Kohane (10% tithe) then the person's entire harvest will be reduced to be ten percent of what the initial harvest would have been. The Torah continues, **“If a person gives the tithes to the Kohane he will have.”**

The Gemara in *Tractate Taanis* tells us that regarding the laws of tithing the Torah states, *“asaier t' asaier (tithe you shall tithe)”*. The Gemara asks why does the Torah reiterate the word *asaier* for the act of giving? It would have been sufficient to state “tithe (asaier)”. The Gemara answers that the Torah is teaching us that if one tithes the proper amount then this tithing will generate wealth (even if his intent was for personal gain). It is interesting to note that regarding all proper choices in life the outcome is not obvious or evident; however, regarding tithes and charity Hashem guarantees us that if we tithe properly we will have wealth. It would be logical to say that if we saw that everyone who gave charity became wealthy, who would not hesitate to give charity? It would seem that the correlation between the consequence and the act would diminish and rob us of our free choice in this area of charity. Nevertheless we see that our free choice is not diminished in the case of charity although Hashem tells us that we are allowed to test Him regarding his guarantee. The question is -why is our free choice not undermined?

Rabbeinu Peretz (one of the Tosafists) explains that if one is the Sandik (the one who holds the

child in his lap) at a Bris (Circumcision) it is the equivalent of a Kohane participating in the incense offering. The Gemara in *Tractate Yomah* tells us that the Kohanim would draw lots in order to determine who would participate in the bringing of the incense offering. Once a Kohane had officiated in this capacity, he was no longer allowed to perform the incense offering again until all of the other Kohanim had their turn. The reason for this rotation is that the Gemara tells us that any Kohane who participated in the incense offering became wealthy. Therefore if a Kohane had already participated he must give another Kohane the opportunity to become wealthy. According to Rabbeinu Peretz's statement that being a Sandik is the equivalent of the incense offering, then if one had been a Sandik for a particular family at a Bris, he should not be a Sandik a second time in order to give other people the opportunity to be Sandik which brings about wealth.

The Rav Yechezkel Landau zt'l has difficulty accepting the position of Rabbeinu Peretz for two reasons. Firstly, we see that the rabbi of a community is the Sandik at many *brissim* (circumcisions) of the same family without offering the opportunity to others. Secondly, we have seen community rabbis that have been Sandik and not become wealthy. Therefore there is no correlation between Sandik and the incense offering.

The Chasam Sofer zt'l in his responsa responds to the difficulties Rav Yechezkel Landau zt'l. Regarding the rabbi of the community repeatedly being Sandik does not refute the position of Rabbeinu Peretz because the rabbi of the community is the equivalent of the High Priest (Kohane Gadol). Just as the Kohane Gadol was able to take for himself any service that he chose without entering into the rotation system, so too can the rabbi of a community because of his special stature.

Secondly, regarding the test of wealth- that we do not see the rabbis of the community becoming wealthy as a result of being Sandik, again this is not a basis for refutation. If one merits great wealth and at the same time that same person has a financial debt that is past due and would diminish that wealth – what would that person prefer? To receive the wealth and have it taken from him by his creditor? Or the wealth should not be given to him and the debt cancelled? The obvious choice would be the latter to protect the person from experiencing the loss of something of great value. Even in the time of the Temple when the incense offering gave the Kohane the potential to becoming wealthy, if that Kohane was deserving of punishment (which would cause the Kohane to lose his wealth), Hashem would simply have one offset the other. The reason why the Rabbis do not become wealthy despite their participation as Sandik in many *brissim* (circumcisions) is only because there are other mitigating circumstances that balance out the calculation.

In addition to the reason given by the Chasam Sofer, we should consider the definition of wealth stated in the Pirkei Avos “A wealthy man is one who is satisfied with his portion.” A person may have a great amount of physical wealth but due to his own deficiencies of character he may not consider himself wealthy. There are many ways in which wealth can manifest itself- either as the Chasam Sofer suggests as an offset to financial loss or through various states of mind. In any case free choice is not undermined by the guaranteed of becoming wealthy as a result of giving charity. The question one should ask if they are wealthy is – if we know that we have much debt to pay “Why was I given this wealth?” The wealth should have been denied to settle the debt. “Why do I merit more physical wealth than the tzaddik?” The answer is that the physical success may not have anything to do with one's merits but rather it may be relevant to one's mission in life. Therefore, it is incumbent on the wealthy person to understand why he was given this wealth because the wealth is not a reward but only a means to a spiritual end.

3. The Same Action Takes on Many Hues and Colors

The Torah tells us that every day over a twelve-day period, the prince of each tribe (*Neseim*, brought gifts in honor of the inauguration of the Mishkan. The Torah delineates each of the gifts and offerings. The Torah repeats itself twelve times verbatim regarding every one of the gifts of the twelve princes. Each prince brought on his day the identical gift, which the other princes brought on their days. We know that there is nothing in the Torah that is superfluous- every word was written with a specific intent and purpose. Whenever the Torah repeats itself, Chazal explain

the reason why this repetition is not superfluous. For example, we find that the Torah repeats the discussion of Eliezer several times when he was in search of a wife for Yitzchak. In contrast, the Torah teaches us the contamination relating to the carcass of a dead animal (*neveilah*) from the letter “vav”. Chazal explain that the Torah is teaching us, “Hashem values the ordinary talk of the slaves of the Patriarchs more than the Torah of the Children.”

In the case of the gifts of the *Neseim* (*Princes*), the Torah repeats itself word for word describing each gift given by each prince. If each gift were identical, one would think that the Torah should have simply stated one time that each prince gave **“One silver bowl, its weight a hundred and thirty [shekels] etc ...”** If there is nothing superfluous in the Torah why does it repeat itself regarding the gifts of the *Neseim*?

The Ramban explains that although each gift given by the *Neseim* was identical in its physical sense, each gift of each prince had a different spiritual dimension. Each gift was infused with a unique intent of the prince, thus causing the gift to have its own spiritual make-up based on that of each individual tribe. Therefore although on the surface the gifts were identical, they were worlds apart because of their individualized spiritual dimension.

If two Jews perform the same mitzvah do they bring about the identical spiritual result? Or do each of us individually infuse the mitzvah with our own uniqueness? From the gifts of the *Neseim*, we are able to understand that different spiritual results are achieved even by performing the same physical act. At one moment we may perform a mitzvah with a high level of intent and commitment to Hashem and at another time we may perform the identical mitzvah while being distracted. One moment we may selflessly wear tefillin and at another moment we may wear the tefillin with the intent that that Hashem will in some way help us in our livelihood because we are performing a mitzvah. Although in both instances one is fulfilling the positive Commandment of wearing tefillin, the fact is that in each case the tefillin bring about a different result. Our contribution to activating spiritual forces is different in each instance.

The Torah is teaching us that we will achieve a different degree of spiritual accomplishment depending on the level of spirituality we infuse in our actions. The Gemara in *Tractate Sanhedrin* states, “Hashem wants our heart.” Meaning, Hashem wants us to be dedicated and committed in any mitzvah act that we perform. The question we need to ask ourselves is – how dedicated are we when we perform mitzvos?

The Torah states that the sin offering of the poor man in certain instances is a bird that is burnt with its feathers and exudes a foul smell. Nevertheless the Torah states that it brings “great pleasure” to Hashem. The Torah tells us that the sin offering of the wealthy man, which is a meat offering, that it too brings “great pleasure” to Hashem. Although there is no comparison between the smell of burnt feathers and meat being roasted, the Torah nevertheless states that they both bring “great pleasure” to Hashem. The Gemara states that this teaches us that as much as we do or as little as we do, as long as our heart and our feeling is dedicated to Hashem, He will value our actions equally. However even though two people may perform at the same level of dedication, the Torah tells us that based on the individual’s spiritual make-up the action itself will assume a different spiritual reality – as we see from the gifts of the princes.

If we would only understand the value of our individual actions we would be able to affect the entire world. For example, if we prayed with the proper level of dedication and intent, we may in fact help the difficult situation in Israel more than any number of meetings between the Israeli Prime Minister and the President of the United States. We cannot even fathom the infinite value and effect of one single Jew performing a mitzvah with the proper level of intent and commitment.

(Last two commentaries are from Shavuos)

4. The Innate Value of Being the First

The Torah tells us that the Leviyim were designated to be the officiants of G-d in the place of the Bachorim (The First Born). **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Behold! I have taken the Levites from among the Children of Israel, in place of every firstborn, the first issue of every womb among the Children of Israel; and the Levites shall be Mine.’**” The First Born were originally designated by Hashem to be His officiants; however, because they were involved with the Chet Ha’ Eigil (The Sin of the Golden Calf) they were disqualified. Since the Leviyim were not tainted with the Chet Ha’Eigil they maintained their level of spiritual purity and were the only members of the Jewish people qualified to be the officiants of Hashem.

The question is why the First Born were considered naturally more spiritual to be qualified to be the Kohane, officiant of Hashem? What is the innate characteristic of the First Born that makes him special? The Torah states that on the Festival of Shavuot one must begin bringing the first of the newly ripened fruits (Bekurim – from the same word as Bachorim) to the Temple Mount for Hashem. At the Temple Mount the Bekurim must be given to the Kohane. At the time of this ceremony, the one who brings the new fruits must declare his gratitude to Hashem for the land that was given to him to produce these fruits. Subsequently prostrating himself before Hashem to indicate his subservience and recognition of who Hashem is.

Rabbeinu Bachya in his introduction to the Portion of Ki Savo (where the Mitzvah of Bikurim is mentioned) explains that the process of bringing the new fruits is bringing the fruits that are *Reishis* (*first*), to the location that is *Reishis* (*the most special location*) [The Temple Mount], and giving it to the Kohane (who is *Reishis- the most special of the tribes*) and bringing it to G-d who is the *Reishis* (Beginning of everything). Rabbeinu Bachya is saying that there is a single thread which weaves through the entire Bikurim ritual which reflects the concept of Reishis.

The Torah is revealing to us that anything which reflects the characteristic of Reishis has an innate holiness and special status because it mirrors that same characteristic of Hashem- who is the beginning of everything. The reason for this is that anything that has a commonality with Hashem can be associated with Him. The Bachor (the First Born) innately shares the characteristic of being **the** first, since he is the child that opened his mother’s womb. Therefore the Bachor sharing this innate firstness with Hashem can have a special relationship with Hashem. However, because the Bechorim became tainted with the Chet Ha’Eigil they no longer qualified to have that special relationship. The Leviyim who were unique because they did not succumb to the Chet Ha’Eigil assumed the status of Reishis (unique and one of kind). Thus, establishing themselves with the characteristic of Hashem which is unique and one of a kind.

The Midrash tells us that the letters of the word “B’Heboram” are the same letters as Avraham. The word “B’Heboram” which means “And He (Hashem) created them (existence)” has the same letters as Avraham to indicate that he is the equivalent of a new existence within creation. The Gemara in *Tractate Berachos* tells us that Avraham was the first human being to refer to Hashem as “Master” (*Adni*). The commentators point out that although Adam had referred to Hashem as “Master” (*Adni*) it was only because he was the handiwork of G-d and therefore recognized Hashem as the Master. Avraham on the other hand was born into a pagan world, where G-d’s existence was unknown, he nevertheless was able to recognize that G-d is the Master. According to this understanding Avraham also possesses a uniqueness regarding being the first to recognize Hashem – Reishis. This is why Hashem refers to Avraham as, “My beloved” because he had this commonality with Hashem.

Reb Meir Simcha z’tl cites a verse that refers to Avraham as the “Navone” (Perceptive and insightful) and Yitzchak and Yaakov are referred to as “Chacham” (One who is a repository of knowledge). Reb Meir Simcha z’tl explains that Avraham is referred to as Navone because he was able to perceive G-d’s Omnipotence despite the lack of His obvious presence. However Yitzchok and Yaakov were initially made aware of G-d’s presence through the teaching of their father and were only able to advance themselves spiritually on that foundation. Therefore they are referred to as “Chacham”.

After Avraham was victorious in his battle against the four kings, Malki Tzedek (Shem, the son of Noach who is referred to as Kohane) came to offer Avraham bread and wine to replenish

Avraham's strength after the battle. Malki Tzedek then blessed Avraham. At this moment the Midrash tells us that Hashem transferred the Kohane status (the Priesthood) from the descendents of Shem to the descendents of Avraham because he possessed the characteristic of Reishis. He was the only human being in all existence to go to battle in the name of Hashem and proclaim His Omnipotents.

5. *Having the Proper Perspective*

The Torah states, "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying' **Command the Children of Israel that they shall expel from the camp everyone with tzaraas (leprosy), everyone who has had a zav-emission, and everyone contaminated by a human corpse. Male and female alike shall you expel to the outside of the camp shall you expel them, so that they should not contaminate their camps, among which I dwell' The Children of Israel did so: They expelled them to the outside of the camp...**" The Torah does not attest to the level of commitment regarding other Mitzvos as it does regarding the expulsion of the contaminated person from the various camps. As the Torah states "**The Children of Israel did so...**" Seemingly if the Torah needs to attest to the fact that the Jews adhered to this Mitzvah of expelling the contaminated person it is evident that this Mitzvah must be especially difficult. The question is why is this Mitzvah more difficult than other Mitzvos?

To expel one from the community at large is not only difficult for the person being expelled but also for the community who must uproot one of their own and disrupt his life. Unlike the person who becomes contaminated from the dead (whose reinstatement comes about through the Parah Dumah ritual), the Metzora and the person with the zav-emission remain contaminated for an undetermined amount of time during which they must remain outside of the camps (the leper outside of all the camps and the zav is permitted to remain within the third camp). Nevertheless the Torah tells us "**The Children of Israel did so...**" Despite the difficulty of task from a human perspective, the Jews subjugated their will by negating their feelings to do the Will of Hashem.

When Adam was created he was placed in the Garden of Eden. Hashem told him that he may eat from every tree except from the tree of knowledge. On the day he would eat from that tree he would subject to death. Contrary to Hashem's Will, Adam ate from the tree of knowledge. Why did Adam transgress? The Talmud tells us that Adam had a level of clarity that enabled him to see from one end of the universe to another, and had the entire world available to him. Why was it so difficult for Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge?

The Mishna tells us that one must say (vis-à-vis existence), "**This world was created entirely for me.**". This concept could be understood within the context to what degree it is incumbent upon a person to dedicate his life to Hashem. Meaning if G-d created the entire universe for the individual, this definitely indicates that the dimension of mission one has to G-d. Another way of understanding "**This world was created for entirely for me**" is to view existence as one's private domain to utilize it as he chooses regardless of G-d's Will. "**This world was created entirely for me**" is a double-edged sword – on one side one needs to understand his importance and value vis-à-vis creation and on the other side one must remain humble. Adam had the ability to choose between right and wrong, but his sense of independence and freedom of choice to do as he pleases compelled him to transgress the Will of Hashem. Despite his dimension of spirituality and understanding he did not submit to the Will of G-d.

At Sinai the Jewish people were offered the Torah and if they would accept it they would have become G-d's people. Through the Torah the Jewish people would bond themselves to Hashem. Unlike the nations of the world, the Jews responded to Hashem's offer without any question. At Sinai, we said "*naaseh V'nishma* (We shall do and we shall listen)" - a level of negation of one's self that even astounded the angels. Regardless of the extent of obligation, they unquestionably submitted themselves to the Will of Hashem. The Gemara tells us in *Tractate Shabbos* that the consequence of the Jew's selfless dedication to Hashem was able to correct the deficiency that was brought about as a result of the Tree of Knowledge. The Jews would have lived eternally as Adam was initially meant to. If we had not failed at Sinai with the Golden Calf we would have been

reinstated to the level of spirituality of Adam before the sin.

We find a semblance of this level of submission in the case of expelling the contaminated person from the camps. The Torah states, "**The Children of Israel did so...**" as an indication that despite the difficulty of task of expelling a member of the community, the Jewish people negated themselves to do the Will of G-d.

The Gemara states that one should not say, "I detest non-Kosher food." But rather one should say, "It is only because G-d prohibited it from that I do not eat it. If G-d had permitted the non-kosher food, I would eat foods that are not kosher." This state of mind is an expression of one's submission to the Will of Hashem rather than one of ego and self-assertion. The same is true regarding the other Commandments. A Jew is not permitted to kill because Hashem said "Thou Shall not kill." It has nothing to do with our own sense of humanism that determines what is right or wrong. The fact that there are times when one is obliged to kill is proof that the prohibition of killing is only in effect as long as G-d deems it to be so.

We have experienced the Yom Tov of Shavuot, which is the time that the Klal Yisroel received the Torah at Sinai. In order to maximize on that experience, we must negate our own sense of right and wrong in order to benefit from that time of year.