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LA VOIE  
A SUIVRE

## CAN SOMEONE BE A NAZIR IN OUR TIME? (BY RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA)

**A** Chassidic story tells of a simple man who went to see the saintly Rabbi Aaron Zatzal, the Rebbe of Karlin. The man told the Rebbe of his great anguish, caused by the fact that he did not have a revelation of Eliyahu HaNavi. Upon hearing this, the Rebbe smiled and asked the man: “Who told you that you’re worthy of receiving a visit by Eliyahu HaNavi?” The man almost became angry: “What kind of question is that?” he asked. “It’s obvious that I’m worthy of it, since I conduct myself like a Nazir: I don’t shave, I don’t drink wine, and I never go to funerals!” The Rebbe continued his questioning: “And who told you that a Nazir merits the revelation of Eliyahu HaNavi?” The man immediately replied, “It’s obvious that he does! We see it with the valiant Samson, who was a Nazir. The spirit of Hashem began to stir in him, which means that he merited the revelation of Eliyahu.”

The end of this story does not concern us. However it is certain that the thinking of this simple Jew – who believed that he was a holy Nazir because he refrained from shaving, drinking wine, and going to funerals – should make us think, for really what is a Nazir? What does his holiness consist of, and does the concept of a Nazir as described in our parsha apply in our time? On the verse, “You shall be holy, for I Hashem your G-d am holy” (Vayikra 19:2), the Ramban gives an explanation according to what the Sages said (Yevamot 20a), namely that it consists of restraining (lehitnazer) and distancing oneself from certain things, even non-prohibited things, and to sanctify oneself “in what is permitted.” This means that in our era as well, and for each of us, there are things that are truly permissible, things that carry no prohibition whatsoever and are in no way forbidden. They consist of neither transgressions nor sins, yet they encompass the area of pleasure, things that we can easily live without, for they really change nothing. It is precisely concerning such things that Scripture says, “You shall be holy.” Even if these things are permissible, you – a

Jew – are not to engage in them if you really want to serve G-d and elevate yourself a little above this material world. Instead, distance yourself from them and sanctify yourself even in things that are permitted.

This is the nature of the Nazir. Who does not cut their hair? Just about everyone gets their hair cut when it becomes cumbersome. Furthermore, we know from books of Kabbalah that hair is compared to kelipot (forces of impurity), which evoke sin. It is therefore obvious that they must be removed by cutting, especially when they create problems for placing tefillin on the head, as mentioned in the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim. It states that it is forbidden to place the head tefillin on a thick tuft of hair. Yet what should a man do if he wants to sanctify himself, to become a Nazir? He refrains from cutting his hair, and for 30 days he lets them grow, thus deciding to become a Nazir devoted to G-d. In this way he sanctifies himself in what is permitted; he distances himself even from things that are allowed. Consequently, his nature does not reside in the fact that he does not cut his hair, but rather in the holiness and the distance between himself and permitted things. His intention is not to refrain from cutting his hair, but rather to separate and sanctify himself with great holiness.

There is more. As we know, drinking wine makes a person cheerful, as the verse states: “Wine that gladdens the heart of man” (Tehillim 104:15). The Sages have also said, “There is no rejoicing except with wine” (Pesachim 109a). It is therefore obvious that a person can become joyful by drinking wine. By drinking wine, he can arrive at serving the Creator with greater joy, and is there anything loftier than joy? We know that all the rebukes addressed to the Children of Israel came about because they “did not serve Hashem your G-d amid gladness and goodness of heart” (Devarim 28:47). We therefore see that joy is a great principle in serving Hashem, and we received the commandment to serve G-d in joy.

However the Nazir sanctifies himself by what is permitted. He avoids drinking wine, and he even separates himself from the vine in order not to arouse any desire to drink wine. This means that he serves Hashem in joy without drinking wine, but instead by studying Torah, for “the orders of Hashem are upright, rejoicing the heart” (Tehillim 19:9). We find this idea alluded to in the word nazir, which is formed by the letters of the word ner and the letters yud and zayin. Ner (“lamp”) – these are the mitzvot, for “a mitzvah is a ner [lamp] and the Torah is light” (Mishlei 6:23) – and the letters yud and zayin have the same numerical value as the word tov (“good”). Now tov refers to the Torah, for there is nothing good other than Torah (Pirkei Avot 6:3). This means that the Nazir sanctifies himself by performing mitzvot and studying Torah.

Furthermore, who among us does not know that escorting the dead is a great mitzvah? This mitzvah is among those whose fruits are eaten in this world, while the principle is reserved for the World to Come (Peah 1:1). If the deceased has nobody to take care of him, if he has no heirs, the mitzvah is dozens of times greater. However the Nazir, once again, sanctifies himself in what is permitted and does not allow himself to become impure for a corpse. He does not participate in a funeral, but instead elevates himself with supreme holiness.

Consequently, in our time each person can also resemble a Nazir. However this does not mean that he is already a Nazir and deserving of its rewards if he refrains from drinking wine, cutting his hair, and participating in funerals. Absolutely not! These are only meant to teach us that the essential thing is to “sanctify yourself in what is permitted,” meaning that we must become holy by distancing ourselves from permitted things as well. Let us inflict a little damage upon our cravings for material things, all while broadening the extent of our holiness. Then we will truly be like a Nazir devoted to Hashem.

# CONCERNING THE PARSHA BRINGING BACK HOLY THINGS

*It is written, “A man’s holies shall be his” (Bamidbar 5:10).*

The Chafetz Chaim said that this verse alludes to a principle of capital importance that a person must think about constantly in life, namely that his true possessions consist only of the fruits of his spiritual labors. The holy things that he occupies himself with, such as study, prayer, and the performance of mitzvot, are his eternal possessions, accompanying him both in life and in death. As the verse states, only “a man’s holies shall be his.” On the other hand, all the actions that he does by the power of the evil inclination and its accomplices do not constitute true acquisitions. Deceitful ones appear as friends, but they do not help a person when he needs it.

We can understand this with a parable. There was once a Jew who lost his possessions and could not feed his family. He realized that he could not remain doing nothing while his children were starving to death. What did he do? He took a boat and traveled to a far off country in Africa, and in his new home he began to sell milk products. Now it is extremely hot in these countries, and burning winds blow throughout the year. There is very little pastureland for cattle, and therefore there are very few herds, hence the reason why milk is precious there. As a result, this man’s business served the entire region, and in little time he amassed a great deal of money.

Years passed, until one day he received a letter from his wife. She described her difficulties and suffering, and asked him to return home. The man therefore prepared to go back, yet as he did he wondered: “Is it worth it to return home with all my earnings in hard cash? If I do that, then I’ll have gained nothing, for a thousand dollars will remain a thousand dollars, not more. However if I take my money and purchase merchandise that I trade in – milk – I can resell it back home at a good price, and in that way I’ll increase the money that I’ve already made.” The man therefore purchased thousands of gallons of milk, had it stored in containers, and loaded it onto a boat. That same day, he sent his wife a letter in which he told her that he was coming home, and that he was bringing back a great deal of precious merchandise that was very valuable. He also asked her to meet him upon his arrival at the port.

As he was making his final preparations to leave Africa, he encountered someone he knew. The person asked the man, “If you’re returning home, why not bring back some gifts for your wife and children? You could bring them gold rings or a few gems.” The man replied, “That’s nothing! I can buy gems there too, so why bother buying them here?” In the end, however, his friend managed to persuade him to buy a few rings with precious stones inlaid, and a few gems at a fair price, for in Africa gold and silver were not considered valuable.

When the man arrived home, the residents of his town came to welcome him, something that was altogether appropriate to do for someone as wealthy as he. However when the dockworkers began to unload his cargo, the enormity of the disaster awaiting the man was discovered: During the time that the milk was in the ship’s cargo hold, it had gone rancid, and now a horrendous stench was coming from the ship. In fact the smell was so bad that nobody wanted to remain nearby. All the man’s money had therefore been lost. His wife, who was standing next to him, began to wring her hands and scream: “You idiot! Was it for this that I suffered all these years? Did I send you to

Africa to buy milk? We can buy milk in huge amounts here! Couldn’t you just buy a few precious stones?” The man was embarrassed and ashamed of his incredible foolishness. He had left home a poor man, and now he had returned even poorer. However he remembered that just before leaving he had purchased some rings and gems in Africa, and therefore he went and sold them. He and his family were able to live on the money for a few months.

The same applies to us in this lower world. A person descends into this world “to do business,” and he spends most of his lifetime amassing material possessions. He is only interested in material things, whereas he has almost no interest in Torah and mitzvot, whose value in the World to Come is impossible to imagine. What does he bring with him upon his arrival in the World to Come? A body that is well-nourished and a stomach that is quite full. Such a Jew will mourn when he shows such pitiful “merchandise” to everyone, merchandise that has become rotten. Only the few mitzvot that he performed in this world will serve as his defenders in the World to Come, for instead of bringing precious stones with him, he returns with something that rots. This is why all Jews must personally fulfill the verse, “A man’s holies shall be his,” and bring back holy things.

## A TRUE STORY

### *The Sotah in Our Time*

*It is written, “Her stomach shall be distended and her thigh shall collapse, and the woman shall become a curse among her people” (Bamidbar 5:27).*

Our teacher the Chida, who for many years journeyed through the countries of Europe as an envoy for the poor of Eretz Israel, never lowered his head before the highest authorities or the richest community members while in exile. Whenever the rabbis of a town would call upon the Chida to give a ruling on a problem that was presented to him, he would consider only the facts of the case and the Halachah. Once when he arrived in a certain city, the Chida was presented with the case of a woman who had veered from the right path. After exhaustive halachic examinations were made, and after he heard established testimony, the Chida decided that there was no reason to allow this woman to remain with her husband.

The woman, who did not agree with his decision, had the audacity to announce that she would do everything she could to annul the ruling. Since people could not convince her otherwise, and since she maintained her rebellious attitude, the Chida took the book of Numbers and recited to her, with the cantillation, the passage of the “bitter waters.” He had barely finished reading it when the woman was overtaken with severe pain, and after a few minutes her abdomen swelled, her thigh withered, and she died on the spot. The episode had a profound impact on everyone who was aware of the facts in the case, and thus Hashem’s Name was sanctified among the people.

# AT THE SOURCE

## *Their Sin*

***It is written, “They shall confess their sin that they committed” (Bamidbar 5:7).***

We must ask why the Torah uses the plural here: “They shall confess their sin that they committed,” whereas the rest of the parsha uses singular expressions.

In his book *Melo HaOmer*, Rabbi Aryeh Leib Tzinz Zatzal explains this by noting that the Gemara states: “He who has money and lends it without witnesses infringes, ‘You shall not put a stumbling block before the blind’ [Vayikra 19:14]” (Bava Metzia 75a).

The reason behind this is that by doing so, the borrower may deny that he was ever given a loan, since there were no witnesses present. Therefore one who lends money in this way is participating in the sin of a borrower who denies that he received a loan, for he trusted him without witnesses.

This is why the verse uses the plural in stating, “They shall confess their sin.” That is, they must both confess; not just the borrower, but the lender as well.

## *A Bad Path to Take*

***It is written, “He shall make atonement for him [the Nazir] for having sinned” (Bamidbar 6:11).***

A person may say: “Since jealously, desire, honor, and similar things are a bad path to take and remove man from this world, I will completely separate and distance myself from them, to the point of no longer eating meat, drinking wine, etc.”

The Rambam writes that this also constitutes a bad path to take, one that is forbidden. A person who takes it is called a “sinner,” for in regards to the Nazir it is said: “He shall make atonement for him for having sinned.”

The Sages have said, “If a Nazir, who has only abstained from wine, requires atonement, how much more does one who has abstained from many things!”

This is why the Sages have commanded that we deprive ourselves only of things that the Torah explicitly prohibits, without adding permitted things through vows and oaths (Rambam, Hilchot Deot 3:1).

## *Allusions*

***It is written, “On the sixth day, the leader of the sons of Gad, Eliasaph ben Deuel” (Bamidbar 7:42).***

The holy “Ohev Israel” of Apt once found himself in the city of Berditchev, where he was collecting a large amount of money for a certain project.

It was a Friday, during the week of Parsha Nasso, and the holy Rav arose and said: “I will give you the blessing of the day.

“On the sixth day, the leader – may you grow and become leaders;

“of Gad – for people who are gomlei dalim;

“Eliasaph – may you not be removed (yesufu) from the world before your time;

“ben – and those who have no children should have a son (ben), who...

“Deuel – will constitute for them the knowledge (yedia) of Hashem.”

***It is written, “Take a census...” (Bamidbar 4:22).***

Parsha Nasso is the longest parsha in the Torah, consisting of 176 verses. This is also the number of verses in the longest chapter of Tehillim (119), as well as the number of folios in Bava Batra, the longest tractate in the Gemara.

The Midrash and Zohar delve deeply into Parsha Nasso, more than into any other Torah parsha, for it is read close to the festival of Shavuot, the time of the giving of the Torah. The Sages have shown that when the Children of Israel received the Torah, they benefited from a spiritual awakening and expansion that were a manifestation of their great love for Torah.

– Iturei Torah

## *Rewards for Giving*

***It is written, “One spoon of ten [shekels of] gold, filled with incense” (Bamidbar 7:14).***

One who eats even one spoonful less in order to give it to the poor, his reward is worth “ten [shekels of] gold,” meaning spiritual gold, whose value no one can know.

And if one gives an entire bowl of food to a poor person, his reward will be “one hundred and thirty [shekels]” (v.13).

– Avnei HaShoham

# THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS FROM THE TEACHINGS OF THE TSADDIK RABBI DAVID PINTO SHLITA

## *All are Equal Before the Blessing*

The Torah goes into great detail as it lists the offerings of each tribal leader, even though they were all the same. It does this in order to teach us that the kohen must not say, “If I bless this wealthy person, he will bring me many gifts. I will therefore go and bless him, but not this poor person, who brings me few gifts.”

The Torah states, “They shall place My Name upon the Children of Israel, and I will bless them” (Bamidbar 6:27). In other words, the kohen does not have the right to say: “I will bless this person, but not that person because he does not give me much.” This is because it is the Holy One, blessed be He, Who grants blessings to the Children of Israel. The kohen does nothing but to place His Name upon them.

This is why the passage on the tribal leaders is juxtaposed to the blessing of the kohanim. It teaches us that just as the Torah goes into great detail on the offerings of each tribal leader – even though they were all the same, doing so in order to show us that they were all equal – so too must the kohen consider all the Children of Israel as equal before the blessing, taking nothing else into consideration when he blesses. This is why the kohen must say the blessing, “Who blesses His people Israel with love,” for just as the Holy One, blessed be He, blesses the Children of Israel with love and all are equal before Him, without any distinction on His part, so too must the kohen bless everyone with love, not favoring one over the other.

# REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

## The Priestly Blessing

It is written, “Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying: ‘Thus shall you bless the Children of Israel’ ” (Bamidbar 6:23).

With regards to this mitzvah, the Sefer HaChinuch states that the kohanim received the order to bless the Children of Israel every day. This mitzvah is founded upon the fact that in His great goodness, Hashem desires to bless His people by means of His servants, who continually stand before Him in His sanctuary, servants whose every thought is devoted to serving Him. Their souls are constantly connected to the fear of Heaven, and by their merit the blessings they utter are fulfilled, and the Children of Israel are blessed in all their endeavors. Why is the passage on the priestly blessing juxtaposed to the account of the Nazir? It is to warn the kohen not to be intoxicated when he gives the priestly blessing, which is why it is not given during Mincha, for at that time people normally have wine to drink.

We must ask why Hashem desired that the kohanim bless the Children of Israel, rather than Hashem Himself blessing them. There are several answers to this, one of them being that, in principle, Hashem wanted the blessing to occur precisely through the kohanim because they are constantly involved in the service of G-d, and therefore this merit will aid the Jewish people at the time of the blessing. The kohanim are but a conduit through which Hashem passes His blessings on to the Jewish people. The Midrash states, “The Holy One answered them, saying: ‘Even though I instructed the kohanim to bless you, I will be standing there with them to bless you.’ This is why the kohanim spread forth their hands when they make the blessing, as if to say that G-d is right behind us. Also, this is the meaning of the verse: ‘Behold, He stands behind our wall, gazing through the window, peering through the latticework’ [Shir HaShirim 2:9]. G-d peers through the latticework made by the fingers of the kohanim when they extend their hands to offer the blessing” (Tanchuma, Nasso 8).

The priestly blessing that was given to the kohanim comes in addition to the 24 things that are their due. It is therefore their twenty-fifth gift. The verse says, “Ko [Thus] shall you bless the Children of Israel” (Bamidbar 6:23), with the word ko having a numerical value of 25, the twenty-fifth privilege of the kohanim. Why is the priestly blessing referred to as the Beracha Meshuleshet (“triple blessing”)? It is because it contains three verses, and also because at that point the Children of Israel receive blessings from three sources: Hashem, the kohanim, and the shaliach tzibur. There are three words in the first verse of the priestly blessing, corresponding to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for Hashem blesses us by their merit. There are five words in the second verse, corresponding to the five books of the Torah. Finally there are seven words in the third verse, corresponding to the seven Heavens. In addition to this, we note that the three words of the first verse correspond to the three who are called to the Sefer Torah during the weekdays, the five words of the second verse correspond to the five who are called to the Sefer Torah during the holidays, and the seven words of the third verse correspond to the seven who are called to the Sefer Torah on Shabbat.

In Yalkut Reuveni (Parsha Beshalach) and in Rabbeinu Bechaye, it is said that the priestly blessing contains a sign. If the kohen feels that his hands are weak as he raises them to give the blessing, this is an indication that there are sins in that generation, or in the kohen himself. Alternatively, if he feels that his hands are light, this is a sign of favor from Hashem, that He takes delight in the blessing of the kohanim. Why is the priestly blessing given in the singular (“Hashem bless you [singular] and keep you [singular]”), rather than in the plural? It is to teach us that the priestly blessing only has an effect when the Jewish people are united, like a single

person with a single heart, as the Sages have said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, found no vessel that could contain blessing for Israel, save that of peace” (Uktzin 3:12). When the kohanim bless the people, everyone should be standing in reverential fear and respect. Only one who is sick or aged, who cannot remain standing, has the right to be seated during the blessing. Similarly, everyone must carefully listen to each term in the blessing, not diverting their attention from it, with their eyes turned to the ground and their faces to the kohanim. It is forbidden to look at the hands of the kohanim, for the Shechinah rests between their fingers.

For more information on this subject, please refer to She’erit Yosef, Minchat Chinuch 278 and Yalkut Me’am Loez, Parsha Nasso.

## YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER THE SAINTLY RABBI ISRAEL MORGENSTERN – THE REBBE OF PILOV

Rabbi Israel Morgenstern Zatzal was born in Kotzk, Poland to the saintly Rabbi David Zatzal (the son of the Seraph of Kotzk) in the year 5600. Rabbi Israel was famous for his remarkable talents while still in his youth, and although he later married and his father-in-law lived in the Polish town of Zgierz, he remained studying with his saintly grandfather, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk (the Seraph, may his merit protect us), for he never imagined leaving the town of his birth.

In 5633 his father the saintly Rabbi David left this world, and Rabbi Israel took upon himself the yoke of leading the community. A large number of chassidim began to flock to the Kotzk Beit HaMidrash, and there he delivered words of Torah and Chassidut to them. He did this even at unusual times – not just when the table was set – but on every Shabbat before Shacharit. Most of his words were based on the ideas of the Maharal of Prague.

Rabbi Israel was known for his great love for Eretz Israel. He even wrote an entire booklet entitled Shalom Yerushalayim on the duty to live there. He sent this booklet to numerous Rebbes and Rabbis who supported this movement, but unfortunately his plans were not fulfilled. During his final years he settled in the town of Pilov, where he was buried after passing away on Sivan 12, 5665. May his merit protect us all.

## GUARD YOUR TONGUE

### *Repeating Lashon Harah Said to Three People*

Some say that if a person has spoken ill of another before three people, he has of course transgressed the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah. Yet if one of the three listeners then goes and repeats what he heard to others, he is not guilty of speaking Lashon Harah. This is because when three people are aware of something, it is assumed that it will definitely spread and become known by all. Now something that will become common knowledge is not prohibited by the Torah as Lashon Harah.

This only applies, however, when the information is spread incidentally, without an intention to spread it. Even if the listener does not say who told him, but simply repeats that he heard something about a given person, he has still transgressed the prohibition against speaking Lashon Harah.