

CAN SOMEONE BE A NAZIR IN OUR TIME?

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 the L-RD your G-d am holy" (Leviticus 19:2), the Ramban gives an explanation according to what the Sages said (Yebamot 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" (Psalms 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 the L-RD your G-d amid gladness and goodness of heart" (Deuteronomy 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 the L-RD are upright, rejoicing the heart" (Psalms 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" (Proverbs 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 (Perkei 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 to our cravings for material things, all while broadening the extent of our holiness. Then we will truly be like a Nazir devoted to Hashem.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Returning With Good Merchandise

“A man’s holies shall be his” (Numbers 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, however 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 country, 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.

All Sin Have its Root in Theft

“He shall confess his sin...and he shall make restitution” (Numbers 5:7).

Rabbi Yitzchak Meir of Ger, the Chiddushei HaRim, noted that since confession is an element of teshuvah in every sin, why does it appear here in the context of theft? He replied by saying that every sin contains an element of theft. The Holy One, blessed be He, gives people life and strength to carry out His will, and if they use it to transgress His will, they are stealing the inheritance of the Holy One, blessed be He. This lies at the root of all confession and teshuvah.

You Shall Make Peace Between a Man and His Wife

“The priest shall inscribe these curses on a scroll and erase it in the bitter waters” (Numbers 5:23).

Our Sages have said, “Great is the peace between man and wife, for the Torah has permitted the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, which is to be written in all sanctity, to be washed away in bitter waters” (Chullin 141a). With respect to this subject, the Maharal of Prague noted something amazing. The Holy One, blessed be He, negated His honor and allowed His holy Name to be erased in the water that the Sotah drinks, for by doing so peace is restored between man and wife, with the result being that the Shechinah rests between them. As Rabbi Akiva said, “When husband and wife are worthy, the Shechinah abides with them” (Sotah 17a).

We find in the Midrash that Hashem’s Name is Shalom (peace). Consequently, when Hashem’s Name is erased, the Name following the Tetragrammaton – the Name Shalom – comes and makes peaces between husband and wife. Thus Hashem’s Name Y–H designates husband and wife, yud with the man (ish) and hei with the woman (isha).

Days Gone By

“The former days shall be void” (Numbers 6:12).

Many people commit the mistake of thinking that days gone by are completely over and done with. The truth of the matter is that after 120 years a person will rediscover all his days – everything he did in this world – and those days will testify concerning him and his deeds. If he filled his days with spiritual endeavors, he will not be ashamed to rediscover them. King David said, “Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days” (Psalms 34:13). He loves the days of his life, for he filled them with Torah, good deeds, and mitzvot.

We also say something similar to this in the morning blessings: “My G-d, the soul that You have given within me is pure...You will eventually take it from me and restore it within me in time to come.” We say u’lehachazirah (“and restore it”) with a mapik in the letter hei (which indicates a direct object), because it consists of the same soul. That is, the very soul that we were initially given is the one that we will receive. This is why we must protect it and not let it get damaged.

It is said that the Chafetz Chaim worried enormously over people who spent their time pursuing trivial things (such as reading newspapers and so on), telling them that of all the valuable things in the world, time was the most precious. The proof is that when a person falls sick, many people pray for his healing, even if he will only survive for a single hour more. This means that a single hour of repentance and good deeds in this world is more valuable than all the life of the World to Come. May the wise take heed and learn!

For the Priests: A Special Responsibility to Bless

“Thus shall you bless the Children of Israel, saying: ‘The L-RD bless you...’” (Numbers 6:23-24).

The heart can break by listening to Jews who complain about their problems of sustenance from morning to night. For example, people may have problems

paying their income tax, or they may have damaged expensive objects or property, with the result being that they cannot escape from their financial straits.

There exists sound advice that such people can follow. It consists of listening to the priestly blessing with heartfelt concentration, since it is a good segula for all kinds of blessings and benefits in the financial realm. As the Chida wrote, the priests merited from Hashem to be those who bring benefits and material goods to the Jewish people.

Just how did the priests merit this? It was by the upright conduct of the Levites in Egypt. In his book *Petach Einayim*, the Chida cites the Shach in saying that when the Children of Israel borrowed vessels of gold and silver from the Egyptians as part of the spoils of Egypt, the Levites decided not to take anything. This is because these spoils were owed to the Children of Israel for the work they did during their 210 years of bondage. However since they, the Levites, had not been enslaved in Egypt, they had no right to partake of these spoils. When the Holy One, blessed be He, saw that they controlled themselves when it came to money, which is not an easy thing to do, He found them worthy of transmitting an abundance of material blessings to the Jewish people. This is why the kohanim are those who, today, bless the Jewish people that they should experience an abundance of blessings and success.

The gaon Rabbi Chaim of Brisk said: "I'm surprised at people who travel far to obtain blessings from tzaddikim, since they can get such blessings from the kohanim, those whom the Holy One, blessed be He, assigned to officially bless the Jewish people. This is the meaning of the first verse, 'The L-RD bless you and keep you': May Hashem send Israel an abundance of material goods and wisdom, and may He protect them from thieves, preventing them from taking their money. And if we are searching for blessings, the kohanim – Hashem's envoys – are the right place to look."

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" (Numbers 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.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

Denial and Desire are Idle Notions

Concerning the juxtaposition of the laws of the Nazir with those of the Sotah, the Sages have said that it is "to tell you that whoever witnesses a suspected woman in her disgrace should withhold himself from wine" (Sotah 2a). Many Mussar and Chassidut figures have raised the point that a person who sees the Sotah in her utter disgrace will also see the humiliation and punishment she endures, as the Sages have explained in tractate Sotah. Yet seeing all this is still not enough to ensure that a person will not be negatively influenced by the Sotah, for a person's desires are selective, choosing to be influenced solely by the sins of the Sotah. These sins can awaken a person's cravings, and he may not be affected by her punishment, which he does not desire. The Midrash speaks of a drunkard who saw another drunkard wallowing in the mud. However instead of deterring him, this spectacle only encouraged him to ask the one in the mud where he had obtained such strong wine (Midrash Tanhuma, end of Parsha Shemini)! In *Ma'aseh Rav* by Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, it is said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that if a person wants to protect himself from lewd and harmful sights when he goes outside, he should recite a prayer to obtain Hashem's help. He should not rely on his own abilities to successfully defeat his own desires. On the contrary, when a person decides to rely on his own abilities, this decision assumes a certain interest on his part, one that is valuable to the evil inclination. Such a decision is therefore liable to do more harm than good.

When we teach youngsters that there are obstacles to overcome in dealing with matters of faith and decency, we can present it in two ways: (1) There are dangers of denial and desire that lie in wait for our souls, and we must fight against them; or (2) At first a person is too weak to distinguish just at what point he is liable to become caught up in areas of faith and decency, and therefore it is preferable that he limit himself in order not to enter dangerous areas. Although these two approaches are directed toward the same thing, there is a great difference between their possible outcomes. By the first approach, it is as if denial and desire are a concrete reality, and that we must fight against them. From this assumption, one is more likely to conclude, "That's it – I don't have any more energy to continue fighting. I might as well give in to the reality that's before me." The second approach, however, highlights that the real danger lies in the fact that a person's understanding is still feeble, but nevertheless he is called, sooner or later, to understand that there is no reality behind denial and desire, for these are idle notions. In this way a student will be encouraged to not succumb to what he knows is complete falsehood.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

One Who Regularly Speaks Lashon Harah is Considered an Apostate

What is one of the greatest disasters? Rabbeinu Yona wrote that it is when a person commits a sin and repeats it to the point that it becomes permissible in his eyes. Someone who is constantly committing a sin, such that it seems "permitted" to him, is considered as if he had betrayed the entire Torah. A person who speaks Lashon Harah at one time or another, and then repeats it again and again, has the impression that it is acceptable, and he ends up feeling completely guiltless. In contrast to this, if a person were to eat just once on Yom Kippur – as his desires push him to do – he would be still be considered an upright Jew. Some say that the same applies for idolatry and the desecration of Shabbat in the presence of witnesses. Thus even if a person sins just once, he is not yet considered an apostate.

On the other hand, if a person regularly sins, he is considered an apostate with regards to that particular area, which would make him an apostate with regards to the entire Torah! Therein lies the power of the force of impurity, for each word of Lashon Harah empowers impurity, and that is disastrous!

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' " (Numbers 6:23).

With regards to this mitzvah, the Sefer HaChinuch states that the priests 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 priest 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 priests 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 priests 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 priests 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 priests to bless you, I will be standing there with them to bless you.' This is why the priests 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' [Song of Songs 2: 9]. G-d peers through the latticework made by the fingers of the priests when they extend their hands to offer the blessing" (Tanhuma, Nasso 8).

The priestly blessing that was given to the priests 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" (Numbers 6:23), with the word ko having a numerical value of 25, the twenty-fifth privilege of the priests. 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 ("the L-RD 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.

EISHET CHAYIL

Modesty Draws the Shechinah Into the Home

Who doesn't need encouragement? Who doesn't need true joy? Which homemaker doesn't need a boost to lift her spirits from time to time, after all the hard work she does in raising her children and managing the home? Who doesn't yearn for the Shechinah to dwell in the home? The Sages have said that the Shechinah resides only in joy, hence joy brings the presence of the Shechinah.

A woman who conducts herself with modesty and holiness is worthy of drawing the Shechinah into her home. When there is modesty in the home, the Shechinah finds a large opening through which to enter, for a home filled with modesty constitutes a sanctuary in which it may rest, as it is stated: "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me, and I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). As a result, what can be more important to us than modesty? It is in this area that every Jewish woman of Israel should place her glory.

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 noticed for his remarkable talents while still in his youth, and although later he 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 Midrash, 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.