

One of the laws in this week's *Parashah* is that of the "Nazir." This section is introduced with the words: "Ish oh ishah ki yafli" / "A man or a woman who shall disassociate himself..." R' Avraham ibn Ezra z"l (1089-1164) observes that the word "Yafli" also can mean: "Who does wonders." He explains that a *Nazir*, who disassociates him or herself from wine, is doing something wondrous--unlike the typical person, who is controlled by the pursuit of pleasure.

R' Simcha Bunim Alter z"l (1898-1992; fifth *Gerrer Rebbe*) adds that the section of *Nazir* teaches us how G-d helps one who undertakes to improve himself. Becoming a *Nazir* is a wondrous thing--indeed, it is nearly impossible to be around people who are enjoying normal pleasures and to refrain from partaking. Nevertheless, because the *Nazir* sincerely undertakes to be different, *Hashem* helps him. The *Gerrer Rebbe* adds: The same thing is true of any person who wants to change himself. Once one makes a sincere commitment to change--even if change appears impossible--*Hashem* will help.

This week's *Parashah* is always read on either the *Shabbat* before or--more commonly--the *Shabbat* after *Shavuot*. The idea that *Hashem* desires our sincere commitments is closely tied to the holiday of the Giving of the Torah. How so? The *Tosafot* to *Avodah Zarah* (3a) teach that, although our Sages say that the heavens and earth can exist only if we study Torah, in fact it is our sincere commitment to study, rather than the actual study, that keeps the world going. (*Pardes Yosef*)

Shabbat

"Tzav et / Command Bnei Yisrael that they shall send out from the Camp anyone with Tzara'at, anyone who is a Zav, and anyone who is Tamei / ritually impure because of a human corpse." (5:2)

Literally, this is a commandment to send out of *Bnei Yisrael's* camp individuals with certain forms of *Tum'ah*. However, R' Moshe Yehoshua Hager z"l (1916-2012; *Vizhnitzer Rebbe*) writes in the name of his father, R' Chaim Meir Hager z"l (1887-1972; *Vizhnitzer Rebbe*), that this verse also contains a lesson about *Shabbat*. He explains:

The *Gematria* of "Tzav et Bnei Yisrael" (with the addition of 12, the number of Hebrew letters in the phrase) equals the *Gematria* of "Shabbat Kodesh," while the word "Tzav" hints at a "Tzavta" / a gathering. Thus, the verse is teaching that by gathering together with friends on *Shabbat*, we can push away many forms of impurity. The initial letters of "Et Bnei Yisrael" (*Aleph, Bet, Yud*) have the same *Gematria* as "Ahavah" / love. This teaches that the participants in the gathering must be full of love for each other in order to achieve the maximum benefit.

The *Vizhnitzer Rebbe* continues: We read (*Tehilim* 133:1), "Behold! Mah / How good and how pleasant is Shevet Achim / the dwelling of brothers together." "Mah" is the *Gematria* of one of the Names of *Hashem*, while "Shevet" has the same letters as "Shabbat." Thus, this verse teaches: If one wants to know how good and pleasant *Hashem* is, he should gather together with friends on *Shabbat*. Of course, these gatherings should not be an occasion for frivolity. Rather, you shall "Achim"--the Aramaic word for "warm up." The purpose of these gatherings should be to create a "warm" *Shabbat* full of Torah study, prayer, and lively singing of praises to *Hashem*.

We read (*Bereishit* 37:16), "Et achai anochi mevakesh"--literally, Yosef said, "I am seeking my brothers." However, this verse can also be translated: "Et achai" / When I am with my brothers, "Anochi" / I become a "Mevakesh" / one who seeks G-d. In contrast--making a play on *Bemidbar* 33:23--when one sits alone, he becomes haughty and thinks that all is well with him spiritually, even when it is not. (*Yeshu'ot Moshe: Ma'adanei Ha'shulchan*)

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“Speak to *Bnei Yisrael* and say to them, “A man or woman who shall dissociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence [from wine] for the sake of *Hashem*.” (6:2)

Rashi z”l writes: Why does the section of the *Parashah* dealing with the Nazirite follow immediately after the section dealing with the *Sotah* / a woman who is suspected of adultery? To teach that he who has once seen a *Sotah* in her disgrace should abstain from wine, because wine may lead to adultery. [Until here from *Rashi*]

R’ Yitzchak Leib Kirzner z”l (1951-1992; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef in Edison, N.J.) asks: To the contrary! One who sees the disgrace of the *Sotah* should not need additional motivation to behave properly!

He explains: Although we know in the abstract that there are sinners and that they will be punished, actually meeting a person who has committed a serious sin can have a negative impact on a person. (R’ Kirzner writes that there are many proofs to this idea in *Tanach*, but that they are beyond the scope of this discussion.)

Additionally, if *Hashem* has arranged that a certain person would be in the *Bet Hamikdash* at the very moment when the *Sotah* is disgraced, it is a sign that *Hashem* wants that person to act on this “coincidence.”

Lastly, when a person has a significant experience, he should not let it pass without sanctifying himself in some way in order to preserve the feelings he experienced in the moment. (*Ma’oz La’tam*)

“Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying, ‘So shall you bless *Bnei Yisrael* . . . Let them place My Name upon *Bnei Yisrael*, and I shall bless them.” (6:23, 27)

The *Gemara* (*Chullin* 49a) states: The verse, “So shall you bless *Bnei Yisrael*,” teaches that the *Kohanim* should bless the people. But, it does not include a blessing for the *Kohanim*. When the later verse says, “And I shall bless them,” we learn: “The *Kohanim* should bless *Yisrael*, and *Hashem* will bless the *Kohanim*.”

R’ Moshe Shmuel Glasner z”l (1856-1924; rabbi of Klausenberg/Cluj, Romania) asks: The *Kohanim* did not own land; rather, they were supported by the various *Matnot Kehunah* / gifts that the Torah requires *Yisra’elim* and *Levi’im* to give to the *Kohanim*. Therefore, when the *Kohanim* bless *Yisrael* with financial success, G-d’s favor, and with peace, which is what the *Birkat Kohanim* / Priestly Blessing addresses, the *Kohanim* will necessarily enjoy the fruits of that blessing as well. Why, then, does the *Gemara* say that the *Kohanim* need a separate blessing?

He answers: *Kohanim* require another blessing as well, a blessing that they will succeed in their Torah studies and merit the Torah’s true light so that they will, in turn, succeed in their role of guiding the Jewish People. That is the additional blessing to which the *Gemara* refers. (*Dor Revi’i*)

“The *Kohen* shall inscribe these curses on a scroll and erase it into the bitter waters.” (5:23)

The *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 53a-b) relates: When King David excavated for the foundations of the *Bet Hamikdash*, he reached the water table and displaced a shard of pottery on which *Hashem*’s Name was engraved and which had been there since the time of Creation. Immediately, the waters rose and threatened to flood the world. King David asked: “Does anyone know whether it is permissible to write *Hashem*’s Name and throw it into the water?” An advisor named Achitophel knew, but he did not answer, because he was angry that King David had not appointed him to a position of honor. King David then pronounced a curse on anyone who knew but did not speak up. Hearing that, Achitophel responded, “If *Hashem*’s Name may be erased to bring about peace between a husband and wife [referring to our verse], it certainly may be erased to save the entire world!” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

Rashi z”l writes that King David also knew this *Halachah*, but he did not want to issue a *Halachic* ruling in the presence of his “teacher,” Achitophel. R’ Yerachmiel Shulman z”l *Hy”d* (*Menahel Ruchani* of the *Bet Yosef-Novardok Yeshiva* in Pinsk, Poland; killed in the Holocaust) observes: The *Mishnah* (*Avot* ch.6) says that King David learned only two things from Achitophel; nevertheless, King David honored Achitophel as if the latter were his teacher. As such, R’ Shulman writes, the above *Gemara* is teaching us the extent to which a person can be influenced by jealousy and a desire for honor, on the one hand, and by *Mussar* / working on refining one’s character, on the other hand.

He explains: The waters were rising from the excavation, and they were threatening to destroy the world. Nevertheless, Achitophel would not come to King David’s aid until he was threatened by King David’s curse. At the same time, King David would not cross the bounds of proper behavior by ruling in the presence of his teacher, even a minor teacher, even to save the world! [Generally, saving lives supersedes nearly all *Mitzvot*, but not if the same goal can be accomplished without transgressing, as was the case here.]

Logic would dictate that the flood should have been stopped as quickly as possible. However, writes R’ Shulman, man’s natural instinct to seek honor and to be jealous is stronger than logic; thus, Achitophel did not respond at first to David’s call for aid. Likewise, the demands of character refinement go beyond what man’s logic dictates; thus, King David refrained from saving the world in order not to rule in the presence of his teacher. The practical lesson for us is that we cannot rely on our own intellects to determine the demands of character refinement.

(*Peninei Ha’shlaimut*: Introduction p.4-5)