

# RASHI AND THE FOUR MINUTE MILE

*by Rabbi Dovid Green*

Why is the Subject of the Nazir juxtaposed to the subject of the Sota? To teach you that anyone who sees a Sota in her destruction should refrain from wine.

-(Rashi)

I'll never play hooky again!

-(Spanky)

There's a glaring question in this statement of Rashi. With a little information, it will become apparent.

A Nazir is someone who goes on a specific 30 day spiritual diet to "detoxify" himself. The situation involving a Sota is one which arises when a husband suspects and formally investigates whether his wife has placed herself in a position of impropriety. When a doubt still lingers over whether there was actually an act of infidelity, she is offered a sort of truth serum to alleviate the doubt. If she drank and was found innocent, then she was promised a blessing of children. If she drank and was found in violation, then she would swell up and die.

Let's say you saw Rabbi X drive up to a certain non-kosher drive-thru window and buy himself a DOUBLE CHEESE WHOPPER AND A MILK SHAKE! He then surreptitiously pulls his car to the side and (without a blessing) opens his mouth wide to take the first bite. You watch in amazement as a dark rain cloud gathers spontaneously as if it had a mind and mission of it's own. As Rabbi X begins to sink in his teeth...WHAM! A bolt of lightening is launched from the cloud leaving Rabbi X and his whopper a charred piece of toast.

Are you now more or less committed to the discipline of keeping kosher? Perhaps you might hesitate or even refrain entirely from anything of doubtful kosher status after that. The lesson of the experience could not have been more clear.

If someone witnesses the Sota in her hour of doom, does he then need a spiritual realignment? After all, he's seen "the hand of G-d" in action. Why then does Rashi come to tell us that if someone sees the Sota fall from grace then he should become a Nazir?

When the Satmar Rav was a yet a very young child he once came into the study hall and found everyone in a feverish discussion. "What is the problem?" he boldly asked. "Someone has stolen the pushka (charity box)!" he was told. "That's impossible!" the boy exclaimed as everyone stared at him,

awaiting an explanation. "It's says in the Torah....DO NOT STEAL!"

To the holy and innocent child those words, "do not steal" meant that there is an iron wall between me and another's possessions. Unfortunately, for many, it's an admonition to squelch an ever-present temptation.

For decades it was considered a physical impossibility for a human being to run a mile in less than 4 minutes. Then Roger Bannister broke the 4 minute barrier and that same year, 6 others were also able to achieve the same accomplishment! This incident revealed that it was never a mere physical barrier. It was a mental boundary.

When a person entered the courtyard of the Holy Temple and saw the indignity and demise of the Sota we might imagine that the person was left with the impression that "crime does not pay". The Torah however warns of a more profound and subtle impression that may eclipse the more overt lesson.

When the Sota dies of supernatural causes, the implication is that a deed of infidelity was truly perpetrated. She did it! A social barrier has been shattered. Where there was an iron wall of impossibility yesterday, a picket fence of possibility stands today. The next day there's a footpath and the next week...a super highway!

The genius of the human psyche is that one imagines that the poor Sota merely fell victim to the "11th commandment"-Thou Shall Not Get Caught! The clear warning is that one should not be lulled into a false sense of moral superiority as standards decline. We may not be better...we may be next!

Part of the danger is that once new lower standards are established as negative collective habits, it seems impossible to reverse the trend. There seems to be a new iron wall erected but this time, behind us, which says "you can't go back!" "It cannot be done!" The subject of the Nazir grants us hope that those barriers are vulnerable too. Armed with will and discipline a person can reinforce a wall under siege and pioneer a courageous future for himself and all humanity.

The 4 minute mile is always there for the breaking. So says Rashi!

Good Shabbos!

*We would like to thank Rabbi Label Lam of Foundations for Jewish Learning for his contribution this week. You can find out more about the upcoming Foundations seminars which will be held on June 10th in South Africa, July 4th in Danbury Conn., (Hebrew/English) and Rosh HaShana with Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, by calling Foundations at 1-800-700-9577.*

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