

FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE HEART

by Rabbi Dovid Green

The parsha tells of a person who takes upon himself to be a Nazir. This is a person who vows to conduct himself according to prescribed laws of a Nazir for a predetermined amount of time, the minimum being 30 days. Among the laws he must follow is complete abstinence from wine, and all grape products and by-products. He must also leave his hair to grow for the entire time he is a Nazir. The reason for observing these particular laws is not for our discussion here. Nevertheless, the net result is that the Nazir achieves an elevated level of uniqueness and dedication to G-d. When the time is up he cuts his hair, and brings sacrificial offerings. *Strangely enough, one of the offerings that he brings is a sin-offering which is normally brought for specific forms of transgressions. The obvious question is why the Nazir must bring a sin-offering when he completes this elevated period of dedication to G-d.

The medieval commentator, Nachmanides, explains that the Nazir brings a sin-offering because when he returns to his normal practices he is essentially "backsliding." He should have chosen to remain on the lofty plain which he ascended to during his period of being a Nazir. If that is the case, however, then what about the average person who has never been a Nazir, and is always in the relatively lower state that the Nazir returned to? Shouldn't he also be required to bring a sin-offering?

The following will help us understand the difference. When a person is bereaved of a loved-one we know there is unbearable pain associated with the bereavement. Rabbi Yaakov Emden writes that it would be impossible to go on living if the pain would not subside. The Talmud tells us that the pain of bereavement goes away in stages as the deceased is "forgotten" from the heart. Not G-d forbid, that the deceased is forgotten, but he is forgotten from the "heart." Even though the knowledge is relatively fresh in our minds, in our intellect, the pain of the loss significantly subsides. This is a gift from G-d.

We see from this that when knowledge fails to penetrate the heart it lacks significance. Once the deceased is "forgotten" from the heart, the pain subsides even though the brain still registers the loss. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Chasman quotes the passage "And you shall know this day and return it to your heart that Hashem is G-d in heaven above and on the earth below..." which reflects this point. G-d expects us to pass our knowledge on to our hearts to the point that it remains there permanently, and we can feel the knowledge with our senses.

Many times we see that the function of knowledge alone is weak. Most smokers are well aware of

the risks they are taking when they smoke, yet knowledge alone is not strong enough. I know someone whose husband the doctor took her to a hospital oncology ward and showed her the results of smoking, and then she took it seriously and stopped for good. The risks went from head-knowledge to heart-knowledge. Then she was able to quit.

This is the criticism which the Torah conveys of the Nazir. He reached the level of succeeding in a program of holiness and devotion to G-d. He penetrated his heart with an ideal which brought him close to the service of G-d, and distanced himself from subjectivity and the influences of earthly desires. Now he gives it all up and returns to the very existence which he transcended! For that he must bring a sin-offering. How does he remove his "crown" of the Nazir and toss it away after being on such a lofty plain? On the other hand, the average person has never experienced the freedom and pleasure of the Nazir, and is not faulted for not attaining it.

We recite in "Shema" as follows. "And these words which I command you this day should be on your heart"(Deuteronomy 6:6). We know that G-d is the One and Only, Who is sustaining the universe constantly. We know that everything that exists emanates from Him. We know what great wisdom he invests in creating us and our surroundings, and that He does it all for our ultimate good. We should never tire looking for ways to show our thanks; we should serve Him with our full hearts, our entire souls, and with all of our wherewithal. We know it intellectually, but we must bring it to our hearts. Then we will feel it. Then we will act on it. Then we will relate to G-d with a full heart. This is the road to success. This is the road to understanding the beauty of a G-dly life. And this is the road to eternal happiness.

Good Shabbos!

Text Copyright © 2002 Rabbi Dovid Green and **Project Genesis, Inc.**
