

TO DRINK OR NOT TO DRINK?

by Shlomo Katz

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Edited by Shlomo Katz

Contributing Editor: Daniel Dadusc

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Today's Learning:

Yoma 3:1-2

Orach Chaim 303:3-5

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Ketubot 79

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 28

In today's haftarah we read that an angel appeared to the future mother of Shimshon and instructed her not to drink wine or eat grapes because she would bear a child who was supposed to be a nazir. The woman's husband, Manoach, asked Hashem to send the angel once more so that he could teach them "what we shall do for the child who is born." How, Manoach wanted to know, would they raise him as a nazir?

The angel told Manoach, "From all that I have told the woman, you shall beware." Manoach, too, should eat no grapes nor drink wine. Why? Manoach was not meant to be a nazir!

Manoach's question, says R' Shimon Schwab, shlita, was: How can I rear my son as a Nazir if he sees his father drinking wine? How can I tell my son, "Don't do as I do but as I say"?

Whereupon the angel answered: You can't! Although there is nothing wrong with drinking wine and a person is not required to be a nazir, Manoach had to refrain from drinking wine in order to set an example for his son of the higher standard that was expected of him. Otherwise, "chinuch"/educating children is impossible. (Selected Speeches p.98)

"A man's holies shall be his, and what a man gives to the kohen shall be his." (5:10)

The midrash relates this verse to the verses in Tehilim (128:1- 2), "Praiseworthy is each person who fears Hashem . . . When you eat the labor of your hands, you are praiseworthy." What is the connection between our verse and these verses?

R' Yehuda Sobel (Rumania; 1940's) explains: The Zohar teaches that the reason that souls come to this world is so that they can earn Hashem's closeness instead of receiving it as a gift (which would be the case if the soul was never born and remained in Heaven). Yet, even a soul that toils in this world is doing so using Hashem's gifts! Can one put up a mezuzah if Hashem has not given him a house? Can one wear tzitzit if Hashem has not given him clothes? If so, what has been accomplished?

R' Sobel answers: The Sages teach, "Everything is in the hands of Heaven except fear of Heaven." Whether or not a person fears Hashem is the one thing over which Hashem has no control. Therefore, if one performs mitzvot in the spirit of fear of Heaven, he is given credit for doing the mitzvah on his own. This is the meaning of the verses in Tehilim. When is one praiseworthy? When he fears Hashem, for then he is truly eating the labor of his hands. And, the midrash tells us by connecting those verses to our verse, it is only in such circumstances that a man's holies, i.e., his accomplishments, are his. (Perach Ha'geffen)

"Any man whose wife shall go astray ('tisteh') and commit treachery against him." (5:12)

Rashi comments: "Our Rabbis taught [based on this verse] that one does not commit adultery unless a spirit of madness ('shetut') has entered into him."

The gemara (Sotah 3a) states more generally that one does not commit any sin unless a spirit of madness has entered into him. Based on this teaching, R' Shlomo Eiger z"l (see page 4) writes:

The Talmudic sage Rava is of the opinion that any time a person commits an act which the Torah forbade, that act is legally ineffective ("ee avid, lo mehani"). [One example which is discussed in the Talmud is the following: if one separates terumah from lower quality produce on behalf of higher quality produce, which is improper, the higher quality produce is deemed to be in a state of tevel, i.e. produce from which no terumah has been separated.] Why? Based on the gemara's teaching that one does not sin unless a spirit of madness has entered into him, we can understand, for the act of a

madman has no legal effect.

R' Eiger adds: this idea is alluded to by Rambam who writes that a man who refuses to give his wife a get may, in some circumstances, be beaten until he consents. Why? Must not a get be given voluntarily? Rambam explains (as interpreted by R' Eiger) that we presume that every Jew in fact wants to do what is right, and when he refuses, it is only because the yetzer hara has driven him out of his senses. (Sefer Ha'ikkarim)

"May Hashem bless you and safeguard you." (6:24)

R' Yaakov Lorberbaum z"l (see page 4) explains: a person who is blessed needs to be safeguarded so that the very thing with which he is blessed does not turn into a curse or a stumbling block. (Nachalat Yaakov)

"They brought their offering before Hashem: six covered wagons and twelve oxen . . ." (7:3)

R' Shmuel Bornstein z"l (died 1926) asks: G-d did not command that wagons and oxen be donated to the mishkan. Presumably, if the nesi'im/princes had not donated these items, all of the lev'im would have carried the mishkan components on their shoulders just as the family of Kehat carried the Ark on its shoulders. What lead the nesi'im to donate oxen and wagons to the mishkan?

He answers: the nesi'im wanted a spirit of holiness to descend to the lowest levels of the physical world, even to animals, for this would cause the "animal soul" of man to be sanctified as well. (Shem Mi'Shmuel 5671)

"Hashem said to Moshe, saying, 'Take from them [i.e., from the nesi'im/princes] . . . you shall give them [the princes' gifts] to the levi'im, each man according to his work'." (7:4-5)

R' Yishayah Horowitz (the "Shelah Hakadosh") asks: although these verses are found in the Torah after the selection of the lev'i'm, the dedication of the mishkan (of which the gifts of the nesi'im were part) actually took place one month before the levi'im were selected to work in the mishkan. How then can our verses be understood?

The answer is that Hashem hinted to Moshe that the levi'im were destined to be selected. We similarly find that Hashem told Moshe (Sh'mot 27:20) to take oil for the menorah even though the actual mitzvah to light the menorah is not mentioned until later (Vayikra, ch. 24). The reason for hinting in advance that the levi'im would be selected was so that the levi'im could prepare and sanctify themselves. This is based on the principle that a person's ability to be sanctified from Above

depends on his taking the initiative to sanctify himself below. (Quoted in Musarei Ha'Shelah Al Ha'Torah p. 98)

R' Chaim Davidson z"l

R' Chaim Davidson was born in Pintchov, Poland, in approximately 1760, the son of a respected talmid chacham/Torah scholar, R' David Tevele (hence the name "Davidson"). R' Davison studied under R' Yaakov Lorberbaum (the "Nesivos") and received semichah/ordination from him, but chose a career in business rather than the rabbinate.

On his business trips, R' Davidson would frequently spend time at the home of R' Akiva Eiger and would study under him as well. A sign of R' Davidson's closeness to R' Eiger is the fact that the latter entrusted R' Davidson with arranging a match for his son, R' Shlomo. (After R' Shlomo's engagement, the match was nearly broken off because of rumors that began circulating about the bride's health. The following is R' Eiger's letter to the bride's family when he later realized that he had believed false rumors:

I do not know why G-d brought my way such a great sin, causing pain to such beloved souls as yourselves. . . In my life, I have never even troubled a student to bring me a book, for I do not know who learns from whom [and who is greater]. . . I would rather have lain sick in bed for twelve months [than to have erred as I did]. All I can ask is your forgiveness . . . I do promise you that my son Shlomo knew nothing of this, and may there be peace on us and all of Israel.)

In his hometown of Warsaw, R' Davidson was regarded as one of the elders and sages despite holding no official position. Warsaw's rabbi, too, regularly consulted with R' Davidson.

At the age of 80, R' Davidson himself was elected rabbi of Warsaw, leading the people of Warsaw to joke that they had suffered a double loss - first they lost their previous rabbi and then they lost their most respected businessman. R' Davidson served as rabbi of Warsaw for fourteen years until his death in 1854. (Source: Gedolei Ha'dorot p. 611)

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