

# REALIZE WHO YOU REALLY ARE!

*by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner*

This week Parshas Naso is read in 'chutz laAretz' [outside of Eretz Yisroel--the Land of Israel] while Parshas B'haaloscha will be read in Eretz Yisroel. This would normally serve to make my job a bit more difficult however, the concept that I want to work on happens to run through both of these parshios. I doubt that this will be the case each week until chutz laAretz catches up but we'll take things one week at a time.

Sunday, the day after Shavuot, was the final day of the school year at the Yeshiva where I teach. Each of the boys who had completed different tractates of the Talmud make the siyum [official completion] in front of the entire yeshiva. Afterwards, each boy gets a chance to speak, affording him the opportunity to reflect upon and share his experiences and feelings about the past year and to express his appreciation to those who helped make it so meaningful.

Many different thoughts were expressed (by the fifty-four speakers!) but I'd say that the predominant theme was the recognition of how, before they came to the Yeshiva in Israel, they had been so adversely affected by the negative influences around them. They had been so deeply and strongly affected that it took months to, so to speak, clear it out of their system. They expressed their gratitude for the yeshiva's patience and stamina to bear with them and see them through it, allowing them to reach the point at the end of the year where they were actually amazed at the way they had walked in.

There were many great lines but one that left a very strong impression on me was the boy who concluded by saying: "I'm not where I could be, I'm not where I should be but I thank G-d that I'm not where I used to be."

We find a very strange episode in Parshas B'haaloscha. "And the Assafsuf (Rashi explains that this refers to the Erev Rav--the group of Egyptians who joined the Children of Israel in the exodus) that was in their midst desired a desire, and Bnei Yisroel also cried saying: 'who will feed us meat?' [11:4]"

Rashi explains that their complaint was totally groundless--they had meat and plenty of it! Furthermore, they had the miraculous manna which could assume any taste. If so, what was their complaint?

He explains that they were simply looking for an excuse to complain. The Ramban goes even further, explaining the seeming redundancy of 'desired a desire' to mean that they desired to be caught up in desires.

Rav Leib Chasman zt"l compares this to the leading elders of the generation walking out of the study hall and seeing a number of small children sitting and playing in sandboxes. They 'desire' to play also and get down on the ground, roll up their sleeves and join these children. When someone runs past and ruins the castle they were all building, the elders together with the children break out into tears, mourning the destruction of their efforts...

What is happening to Bnei Yisroel that they are stooping down to the level of the Assafsuf, desiring to have desires and crying over an imaginary shortage of food?

Rav Leib writes that the answer can be found in Parshas Naso. In Naso [5:11-31] we learn about the Sotah--a woman whose husband warns her not to be alone with a particular man and she wantonly secludes herself with that man. She is brought to the Temple where she must drink a water mixture. If she in fact had relations with this man, then the water will simultaneously cause her and that man's body to erupt.

This is followed immediately by the topic of Nazzir--one who takes upon himself a vow to abstain from any intoxicating beverages, to not defile himself by coming in contact with a corpse and to grow his hair [6:1-21]. He understands that there are ways to sanctify oneself which the Torah felt was too difficult to demand from the entire nation. He as an individual opted to try to raise himself up to that level.

Why are these two disparate topics taught back to back in the Torah? The Talmud [Sotah 2A] says that it is to teach us that "every person who sees a Sotah in her disgrace must take a Nazzarite oath of abstention from that which leads to adultery--wine."

Rav Leib points out that the Sages are very specific. "Every person" who sees a Sotah is affected by the spirit of the Sotah. Even though she is in her disgrace, suffering the repercussions of her immorality, nevertheless, a flesh and blood who sees her is affected and dragged down.

The holiest tzaddik is affected by a Sotah, the generation that stood at the foot of Sinai was affected by the Assafsuf and we are certainly affected by the crass environment that surrounds us.

We who don't have the option of assuming a Nazzarite vow must connect ourselves to an environment which lifts us up. To realize that we are Bnei Yisroel, not Assafsuf. That we are the lofty elders, not the children in the sandbox. That we are the Nazzirs, not the Sotahs. To realize who we truly are and who we are meant to be.

As one of the boys who spoke said about one of the Rabbeim: "You pick us up, clean off the dirt, hold us in front of a mirror and say: 'Look at yourself--that's who you really are...'"

Good Shabbos,

Yisroel Ciner

*Warmest wishes of Mazel Tov to Jeff Stern and Elke Lieberman on their upcoming marriage. May they*

*continue their wonderful work of kiruv and harbatzas haTorah.*

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