

CAMP ISN'T FOR EVERYONE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Fundamental to doing the Mitzvos and seeing how they influence our daily lives is the division between social and religious law. There are commandments that are between an individual and society, and there are commandments that are between an individual and G-d. Both categories of Mitzvos are required for properly serving G-d and accomplishing our assigned task as Jews. Therefore, it is incumbent upon every individual to be vigilant in fulfilling all the Mitzvos.

Most individual commandments demand discernible action and G-d judges us on the performance of those actions. Granted, G-d's judgment is determined by more criteria than just action and performance; however, performance of His commandments is always going to be the minimum requirement for being considered a "servant of G-d." This, in part, is what we learn from the famous response, "Naaseh V-Nishmah" We will do then we will attempt to understand why we are doing. Most everyone recognizes that personal understanding can positively affect the quality of our performances. However, for someone who believes in a G-d Who created the universe for a reason, the Mitzvos are statements of His will; and regardless of what we feel or think, or not feel and think, we must carry out His commandments.

In addition to the actual performance of the Mitzvos, there is symbolic meaning to every commandment. The symbolic meaning is a more profound understanding of the Mitzvah that aids us in developing an integrated religious personality. For example, showing honor to parents might very well be an intelligent and understandably ethical commandment; however, there is much more to the Mitzvah of Kibud Av V-Aim than behaving properly toward parents. The underlying focus of the commandment is recognizing the absolute dependency we have on our parents, regardless of whether or not they actually raised us and cared for us. They, and only they, were G-d's partners in granting us life, and we must show them our appreciation for the gift of life! Having recognized the degree of our dependency on our parents, we are able to extrapolate the degree of dependency we have, and must therefore acknowledge, on G-d. The system of creator and creation, provider and dependant is revealed! to us as intrinsic to the natural order of the universe. Honoring parents then symbolizes much more than the framework for the parent child relationship.

In Parshas Naso, we are presented with a series of Mitzvos that are far more than their specific performances. At first glance, they appear to be unrelated to each other or their placement in the book of Bamidbar. Furthermore, they cross over the demarcation between social and religious law. Based upon the commentary of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, we can understand the symbolic

meaning of these seemingly unrelated commandments as well as their placement in our Parsha.

As part of the nation's preparation for entering Eretz Yisroel, the tribes had to be organized for both travel as well as national duty. Parshas Bamidbar counted the tribes and positioned them in their proper place for camping and traveling. At the end of Parshas Bamidbar, the Torah began counting the tribe of Layvie. In chapter 4 of Naso, the Torah finished counting the tribe of Layvie and assigning them their specific tasks. Starting in chapter 5, our attention is directed to a series of six mitzvos that involve the sanctity of Jewish nationhood.

1. A Tzaruah - leper must leave the outer encampment, the camp of the Israelites. Since this was the outer most camp, the Tzaruah was restricted from the two inner camps as well.
2. A Zav - someone with a genital infection, was restricted from the middle encampment of the Levites.
3. A Taameh Lanefesh - someone who came in contact with a dead body, was restricted from the inner most encampment of the Shechinah or Kohanim, (where the Mishkan was situated).
4. The law of Gezel Hager -- someone who steals from a convert and the convert dies without an heir before the thief can make retribution. The money is then repaid to the Kohanim.
5. The law of the Sotah - the woman accused of being an adulterer.
6. The law of the Nazir.

The underlying theme of these Mitzvos is G-d's presence in our social relationships, our familial relationships, and in the lives of individuals.

The encampment of the Jews in the desert was intended to organize and focus each component of the nation on our mission as the Chosen People. Centrally placed in the camp were the Mishkan and the Kohanim. They represented the ideal life of the individual Jew in the service of G-d. Just as each Kohain lived in close proximity to G-d and represented the rest of the nation in serving Hashem, so too, each and every Jew is capable of living a life of sanctity and representing all of humanity in serving Hashem. Note that the Kohanim were each named and counted individually. They were each personally accountable to their selection as Kohanim - so too the rest of the nation. Each one individually is accountable as having been chosen to represent G-d to the rest of humanity.

The middle camp, the camp of the Levites, represented the Jewish family. As we see from last week's Parshios, the Laviyim were not only counted as a tribe, but each family within Layvie was also counted. The family represents the next unit in the organized service of G-d. Parents train their children to be responsible members of the Chosen People. Fathers are obligated to teach their sons Torah. Mothers are obligated to create an environment where G-d's presence is both welcome and evident. Families as a whole are the building blocks for Jewish identity and the setting where individuals train to assume responsibility for our national destiny.

The outer camp, the camp of the Israelites, represented Jewish society as a whole. Individuals and families are not the only ones responsible for having relationships with G-d. Societies as a whole are

also responsible for having a relationship with G-d. The whole of the nation was subdivided into separate tribes, but each tribe itself was a mini-nation and society. In so far as tribal obligations in relation to G-d were concerned, no one tribe was different than another; each was equally responsible to keep all the Mitzvos. This means that a Jewish society must be involved in the religious lives of individuals and families in order to guarantee the integrity of the societies relationship with G-d. (Keep in mind that Jewish kings, judges, and Kohanim, representing society, were the ones entrusted with maintaining more than the proper functioning and safety of society.

Our leaders were responsible for protecting the soul of the nation). The first law mentioned is the Tzaruah leper having to leave all three camps. The Tzaruah represents an individual whose actions have harmed society. As explained in the Talmud, Tzaraas was a dermatological manifestation of the destruction caused by speaking Lashon Harah - slander. The leper was condemned to dwell (outside of the encampment) because of his anti-social reprehensible conduct. (Rav Hirsch, Levi, 14:6). The insidiousness of slander is such that the perpetrator can cause extreme harm, even death, without ever lifting a finger. Mere insinuation or expression can destroy a person's reputation, family, and life. Therefore, the Tzaruah - leper leaving the outer camp symbolizes societies obligation to protect itself against physical and spiritual harm.

The law of Gezel Hager someone who stole from a convert, is another example of societies responsibility for maintaining its own integrity. G-d's place within society is most evident in the laws governing and protecting the individual -- especially the lonely and the poor. A convert stands alone. He or she joined the Jewish people because of their desire to be close to G-d. They do not have a portion in the land of Israel. They do not have a tribal affiliation. They do not even have the support system of a family or the personal status of Yichus ancestry. In time, if they do marry and have children, they will build their own support system. Their children will eventually marry into the body of the Jewish nation. Over many generations, they will gain ancestry. The convert symbolizes the most individual component of our society. Society is their family. Society must be their support.

If a person steals, it shows a lack of trust and faith in G-d's ability to maintain His world. However, even if the victim has died, because every Jew must have a relative no matter how distant, it is possible to make restitution by returning the stolen money or object to the relative. The convert is the only exception. If he died without ever marrying or having children, he has no heirs. Instead, society represented by the Kohanim, become his heirs.

The law of the Tzaruah - leper parallels the law of Gezel Hager. Both of them comprise the legal institution that proclaims the presence of G-d in the social relationships of the nation. (Rav Hirsch, Bamid. 6:21).

The second law mentioned is the Zav someone with a genital infection having to leave the middle encampment, the Levite camp. This parallels the law of Sotah the accused adulterer. The middle camp represents the sanctity and integrity of the family unit. Sexuality is an exclusive component of

the family unit represented by a husband and wife. All other forms of sexual expression are forbidden. Therefore, an individual suffering from a genital infection must leave the inner camp symbolizing the sanctity of sexuality and family. The Sotah is a tragic circumstance where the basic unit of the family has been infected with jealousy, accusation, and possible betrayal. The laws of the Zav and the Sotah comprise the legal institution that proclaims the presence of G-d in the sexual purity of the family. (ibid.)

The third law mentioned is Taameh Lanefesh someone who came in contact with a dead body having to leave the inner encampment. This parallels the law of Nazir. The Nazir was an individual who desired greater closeness with G-d. He would restrict himself from drinking any grape by-product, and allow his hair to grow. He looked different and acted different.

The Nazir represented a discipline of life and aspirations which raises him who has voluntarily vowed to adopt it above and beyond his contemporaries of belonging exclusively to G-d. (ibid. 6:2). Like the Kohain, he was prohibited from coming in contact with the dead. Death represents the opposite of moral freedom and choice. Once we have died we can no longer exercise the one quality that sets us apart and above all other creations, our free will.

The Nazir represents the highest expression of free will, he who chooses to belong exclusively to G-d. The Kohain is designated as a symbol of a person who belongs exclusively to G-d. Therefore, both the Nazir and the Kohain must avoid coming in contact with the dead. Therefore, anyone who comes in contact with the dead must leave the inner camp. The laws of the Nazir and the Taameh Lanefesh comprise the legal institution that proclaims the Divine Presence for every individual who aspires toward G-d in spiritual and moral self-consecration. (ibid).

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