

THE THREAD THAT BINDS - FAITH

by Rabbi Berel Wein

This week's parsha of Nasso is the longest parsha in the Torah. The parsha deals with varied subject matter and on the surface seems to lack a unity of narrative. All of the great commentators to the Torah have sought and found certain common threads in the parsha that somehow bind it together. One of those commonalities is the concept of faith and trust. The Levites were to be the public servants of the people of Israel, the administrators and workers in the Temple and the teachers of Israel. They were to be supported by the Jewish people so as to free them from the harsh necessity of making a living to support themselves and their families. The Levites, therefore, had to trust that the Jewish people would attend to their needs. On the other hand, the Jewish people had to trust that the Levites would fulfill their public service tasks with efficiency and propriety. Mutual trust is the basis for all government and organizations, whether they be commercial, social or religious.

Corruption, venality, poor judgment, arrogance of power, all destroy the thread of trust that is necessary for a harmonious society to function.

The parsha discusses the circumstances of disloyalty between spouses in a marriage. Nowhere in life is absolute trust as necessary as it is in marriage. The betrayal of infidelity destroys the bond of the marriage relationship. It is therefore most fitting that the woman "the sotah" described in the parsha recites the word "amen" twice in her oath of professed innocence. The word "amen" is a word of affirmation, faith and of trust. Moshe complains about the Jewish people that they are children whom I cannot trust. The woman suspected of infidelity seeks restoration of trust. The "amen" is therefore repeated twice as part of this trust- building process. It is meant to emphasize her true sense of loyalty and rectitude. Without this added emphasis and declaration, it is unlikely that the thread of trust can be repaired in that family. Woe to the couple that distrusts each other and woe to the person who allows one's self to be involved in a compromising situation that will certainly breed mistrust and suspicion.

Trusting one's self too much is a dangerous trait. The parsha discusses the nazir the person who takes a vow of abstinence in order to attempt to improve one's spiritual level. Ordinarily, Jewish tradition opposes the taking of vows of abstinence and the Talmud records for us the strong disapproval of the High Priest, Shimon Hatzadik towards the taking of the vows of nezirut. Yet, Shimon Hatzadik agreed that in the face of overwhelming temptation, when there is no certain trust left within the person in one's ability to overcome that temptation, that vows of nezirut are in order. We are warned never to trust ourselves fully. Self- trust and confidence are necessary traits for

successful living. But complete and implicit trust in one's judgment, borders on arrogance. The thread of self-trust is very delicate. We should not break it nor should we feel that it is strong enough to carry us through all situations in life. Nezirut reminds us of the caution necessary in dealing with our own selves and our self-trust.

Shabat shalom.

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