

JUST SAY 'NO'

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Naso

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 331, Must A Kallah Cover Her Hair At The Chasunah?
Good Shabbos!*

Taking The Sin Of Sotah Back To Its Original Source

The laws concerning the Nazir [a person who vows not to drink wine] are written immediately following the laws concerning the Sotah [the unfaithful wife]. The Rabbis comment that the purpose of the juxtaposition of these two parshios is to teach us that anyone who sees the disgrace of a Sotah should (immediately) take a vow to abstain from wine [Sotah 2a].

The Jerusalem Talmud [Nedarim 29a] states that, in general, it is not an admirable practice to accept prohibitions beyond those that the Torah mandated. However, the exception to that rule is a person who accepts the restrictions of a Nazirite upon himself after having seen a woman go through the Sotah process.

The question may be asked, why is accepting Nazirus the appropriate response to seeing a Sotah? Apparently there is some kind of connection between wine and infidelity. What is the nature of this relationship?

The Zohar addresses this connection. The Zohar begins by asking the following question: Why is a Nazir forbidden, not only to drink wine, but also to eat grapes? There are a number of similarities between the laws of the Priesthood and the laws of the Nazirites. A Kohen is prohibited to participate in the Service of the Bais Hamikdash [Temple] after he drank wine. However, the Kohen is not in any way restricted after having consumed grapes. The Nazir on the other hand, is restricted, not only

from wine but from grapes as well. Why the difference?

The Zohar answers that the reason why a Nazir cannot eat grapes is because grapes were the food that Adam ate when he consumed the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. There are various opinions in the Talmud as to the nature of this "Etz HaDa'as". Some say it was an olive tree; some say it was wheat; one opinion was that it was a grapevine. The Zohar follows this last opinion. The Zohar explains that the reason why a person must declare himself a Nazir and abstain from wine and grapes after seeing what happens to a Sotah is because he thereby "corrects" the sin of Adam who violated G-d's command and ate grapes from the Tree of Knowledge.

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995), in his sefer "Mayan Beis Ha'Shoevah" helps us to explain this Zohar. Rav Schwab says that when Adam ate from the Etz HaDa'as, he diminished his "Tzelem Elokim" [Image of G-d] to a large extent. Human beings are created in the "Image of G-d". The essence of being "G-d - like" is that man controls his passions and not vice versa.

Rav Ruderman, zt"l, (1901-1987) used the following verse to illustrate this concept. The pasuk says, "And the superiority of man over the animal is nothing (ayin)..." [Koheles 3:19]. Rav Ruderman always used to interpret this pasuk (which classically is interpreted as meaning there is no difference between man and animal) to mean that the superiority of man over animal is the former's ability to say "ayin" (No!)

If one leaves his picnic basket unattended on a farm for a few moments, inevitably, the cow or the goat will be poking its head in the basket and eating the food. But, we may ask - how can he do that? The food is not his! The answer is that when an animal sees food or smells food, it wants the food and it eats food. It does not ask any questions. This is the nature of animals. Their passions and instincts control them.

On a very basic level, human beings must know that not everything is theirs to take. Forgetting for a moment the issue of the laws of Kashrus [Kosher Food laws], a person can not just take food that looks appealing, if the food does not belong to him! That level of inhibition separates man from beast. Man can say, "Yes I know that I am hungry and I would like the food very much but I can't take it because it's not mine."

As Jews, we have many more restrictions. However, the ability of all people to abstain and say "No" distinguishes them from animals. That represents being created in G-d's Image. Man's awareness that certain things are morally "off-limits" for him is what defines him as a G-d - like creature.

On that fateful day, when the first man ate from the Tree of Knowledge, he diminished his Image of G-d. G-d told him "do not eat". The snake came and said "but it looks so enticing and it tastes so wonderful". The snake convinced Adam and he ate from the Tree of Knowledge. He let his passions, to a certain extent, control him. Those grapes that he ate diminished his "Tzelem Elokim".

Likewise, this Sotah - if she has in fact done what she was accused of - has also lost her "Tzelem

Elokim". A woman who has been unfaithful to her husband, who has given in to her passions, has, in effect, lost the ability to say "No". She has again altered the "Tzelem Elokim". That is why the Sotah ritual - uncharacteristic of virtually any other halacha - consists of purposely humiliating the woman. In general, even when a Jewish Court administers the death penalty or lashes to an individual, the halacha is very specific about "choosing a compassionate form of death". Beis Din [Jewish Court of Law] is consistently warned to remember the admonishment of "Love your neighbor as yourself" when administering punishments.

The exception to this rule is the Sotah. Imagine the scene. She comes into court. Her hair covering is ripped off. Her hair is purposely messed up. Her clothing is torn and made to hang on her. She is literally publicly humiliated.

There is a message here. We do not usually humiliate people. Why? They are "Tzelem Elokim". But this woman has diminished her "Tzelem Elokim". She has brought this upon herself. She has humiliated herself! Beis Din is just bringing out into the open the humiliation that she has already brought upon herself in private. She is the one who has given into her passions and her lusts, thereby humiliating the "Tzelem Elokim" within her. The Court is merely administering "tokenism" vis a vis what she has already done to herself. [Note: Even if she in fact did not commit adultery, she would at least be guilty of secluding herself (Yichud) with another man and of violating her husband's specific warning (Kinui) not to allow herself to be in the private company of that individual.]

The potential Nazir sees all of this. He sees a woman who has diminished the "Tzelem Elokim". He sees this amazing scene of the court humiliating her to emphasize the diminishment that she has caused to the "Tzelem Elokim". The Sages therefore advise him "take a vow to abstain from wine" - go back to the source of the problem. Go back to the original sin and stop eating grapes and wine, because that is where it all started. It all started with the first man, when Adam gave in to his desires. The correction of the problem of the diminution of the Image of G-d amongst mankind lies in reversing Adam's original sin.

The Way To Raise a Nazir Is To Be A Nazir

Rav Schwab also provides a tremendously novel interpretation of certain pasukim in this week's Haftarah. We learn of the famous story of Shimshon [Samson]. An angel told Manoach and his wife that they would have a child. This was to be a special child who would be a Nazir for life. Even during her pregnancy, Manoach's wife was forbidden to consume wine or grapes. The child was to be a Nazir literally from the time of conception.

Later in the chapter, Manoach prayed to G-d that the angel should return to him and his wife because "I have to know how I am to raise this child". The question can be asked, what was Manoach really asking for here? The angel already conveyed the basic information that was necessary to know: The child will be a nazir and the mother should not drink wine or eat grapes even during her

pregnancy. What more is there to know?

It is unlikely to suppose that Manoach was asking for information about the laws of being a nazir. For that information one does not need an angel. Manoach should simply go to his Rabbi or Judge and study the laws of Nezirus.

Nevertheless, the angel did return. What did he tell Manoach in response to his request? "From everything that I warned your wife, guard (tishamer). Do not consume that which comes from the grape of the vine, etc." [Shoftim 13:13-14]. So what in fact is new in the angel's answer? He just seems to be repeating what he already told Manoach's wife!

Rav Schwab explains that Manoach did not have a question regarding the laws of being a Nazir (a 'Nezirus shaylah'). He was asking a question regarding the laws of raising children (a 'Chinuch shaylah'). "How," asked Manoach, "can I raise a Nazir, if I myself am not a Nazir?" He was asking how one can raise a child to do something if the father himself does not do those same things.

According to Rav Schwab, the angel responded, "Yes, in fact, you must also observe these laws yourself". This is an elementary principle in child raising, but it is a tremendously novel interpretation of the pasuk in Shoftim. In Hebrew grammar, the verb "Tishamer," which appears in the angel's instructions to Manoach can be interpreted in one of two ways. The standard interpretation is "SHE should guard HERself" (third person, referring to Manoach's wife). Rav Schwab interprets the word in accordance with the second possible translation: "YOU should guard YOURself" (second person, referring to Manoach).

The angel was conceding Manoach's point: You are correct that if you do not observe the Nazirite laws yourself, you will never be able to succeed in raising a Nazir. Therefore, the solution to the problem is for you to keep these laws yourself. "From everything that I warned your wife - guard yourself against, as well!" "Do as I say, not as I do" is terrible pedagogy. Rather, one must teach "Do as I do".

Again, while this is a very novel interpretation of the pasuk, it is one of the most basic principles of education. We cannot preach to children. The only way to teach is by example.

There is a famous incident told about the Rebbe of Ger. A disciple complained to the Rebbe that his son was not learning. "I've tried everything. I've tried encouragement, I've tried incentives, I've tried punishment, and I've tried taking things away. Nothing works. What should I do? I want my son to learn."

The Rebbe asked the disciple one question: "Does the boy's father learn himself?" All the speeches in the world will not make one iota of difference. Children learn by example.

This rule applies to all aspects of child raising. If one wants to raise a Nazir, he must be a Nazir himself. If one wants to raise a decent and honest Jewish person, then he himself must be a decent and honest Jewish person.

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (# 331). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Must a Kallah Cover Her Hair at the Chasunah? The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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