

THE PARADOX OF KEEPING THAT WHICH HE GIVES AWAY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Naso

The Paradox Of Keeping That Which He Gives Away

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 419, Causing the Erasure of Hashem's Name. Good Shabbos!

This week's parsha contains the pasukim [verses]: "And all that is raised up of all of the holies that the Children of Israel bring to the Kohen, it shall be his (lo yi-heye). A man's holies shall be his and what a man gives to the Kohen, it shall be his (lo yi-heye)." [Bamidbar 5:9-10].

These pasukim are rather difficult to accurately translate. There is ambiguity in the subject of the phrase 'lo yi-heye' (it shall be his). To whom is this referring?

Rashi quotes a statement of our Sages that interprets the pasuk [verse] to mean that the person who indeed gives the Kohen all the proper priestly gifts will himself receive much wealth." This, then, is reminiscent of the rabbinic teaching on the pasuk "Asser Ta'aser": "Asser B'shvil She'tis'asher" [Tithe (asser) in order that you will become rich (t'is'asher) -- Shabbos 119a].

I saw an alternative interpretation of the expression "it shall be his" in a sefer [book] called Yavin Shmua. The author relates the following incident: There was a King who had a very wealthy Jew living in his kingdom. The king asked the Jew what his net worth was. The Jew quoted a figure to the king. The king looked at him and said, "You know that is a lie. You are probably worth four or five times that much. Why did you tell me such a transparent falsehood?"

The Jew answered the king, "The figure that I quoted as being my net worth is the amount of charity that I have given over the years. That is the only money that I know I really 'have.' Even if I have large

sums of other money, tomorrow you may confiscate my money and I will have nothing. I cannot count money which I may lose in an instant as part of my net worth. Only that which is mine to keep - the charity that I already gave away -- is truly part of my net worth."

This is the meaning of the pasuk: That which a person gives to the Kohen will be his. That is the only possession in this uncertain world that he can truly be assured will remain his own.

Unfortunately, we see all too often that one day a person can be worth seven million dollars and the next day he can be worth seven dollars. It happens all the time. One never knows what will happen tomorrow. The only thing that a person can be assured of is that the merit of that which he gives away charitably will remain his in perpetuity.

Let No Person Say: This Can Never Happen To Me

Immediately following the parsha of the Sotah [suspected adulteress], is the parsha of the Nazirite [one who vows to abstain from wine]. Rashi quotes the teaching of our Sages that the reason for the juxtaposition of these two Torah sections is that whoever sees the shame of the suspected adulteress should take a vow to abstain from wine, for it ultimately leads to adultery.

Reb Yeruchum Levovitz (1874-1936) makes the following interesting observation: Most people's reaction to the Sotah's ordeal would be "How disgusting! How despicable! How stupid!"

This is a fine upstanding woman, married to a fine fellow, with lovely children. She is respected in the community. Look what she did! It was not only disgusting on her part -- it was stupid! She gave up everything for a moment of passion.

People's standard reaction to such a spectacle is "This has nothing to do with me. I would never risk my family, my status in the community, even my life by engaging in an act of such moral turpitude. I might not be the biggest Tzadik in the world -- but I am not an animal! Certainly I am not that stupid. This has nothing to do with me!"

However, our Sages warn that this should not be our reaction. The person who eventually winds up as a Sotah did not transform from being a fine and noble person one day to being a disgusting immoral person the next day, giving up everything and becoming an adulteress in a moment of passion. It never happens like that.

Rather, the woman started as a fine, righteous, upstanding, smart woman who one day performed a small act that involved the smallest of breeches. Maybe it was not even a sin. It was perhaps just

some flirtatious comment. It always starts innocently enough.

However, that initial innocent flirtatious comment can lead to another thing that can lead to another thing that can lead to another thing until the people become so involved and so blinded by their passions that they lose their entire sense of reason and common sense. It is always somewhere down the line -- two months later, four months later, two years later -- that people lose their wisdom and ability to look at things clearly. It never starts out like that.

Therefore, our Sages teach that EVERYONE who sees a Sotah in her shame should learn a lesson and plan preventative strategies. One should not say "it can never happen to me." It can happen to anyone.

Wine symbolizes that which brings a person to irrational behavior. Too much wine, too much beer, too much liquor - and the next thing a person knows -- he has lost all rhyme and reason. Once one acts irrationally, sin inevitably follows.

A person should never say that it can never happen to him, because the path towards irrationality is a very slippery slope from which none of us are immune.

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. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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