THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE CHAPTERS OF SOTAH AND NAZIR

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Nasso

The Connection Between The Chapters of Sotah and Nazir

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 683 - Shalom Bayis: How Far Can One Go? Good Shabbos!

In Parshas Nasso, the section about the Nazir [the person who vows to abstain from wine, hair cutting, and contact with the dead for at least 30 days] immediately follows the section about the Sotah [suspected adulteress]. Our Sages suggest that this juxtaposition teaches that whoever sees a Sotah in her state of humiliation, should take a nazirite vow to abstain from wine [Sotah 2a].

Rav Aharon Feldman, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Israel, made the following very true observation: One might have argued that just by witnessing the events associated with the Sotah’s humiliation that alone would be enough of an inspiration and moral lesson for people to behave themselves in the future. Why do Chazal suggest that under those circumstances one should additionally vow to abstain from wine?

The lesson is that if one witnesses a scene as traumatic and awesome as that associated with a Sotah’s punishment and then does nothing with that inspiration, this will deaden the person from any future inspiration. If an amazing sight - one that should shake people up -- happens in someone’s lifetime and he or she lets it pass with equanimity and without acting upon it, then the next time such a thing happens, the person will become insensitive to the wonderment (hispaylus) that such a scene should engender in a person.

Rav Feldman related that in the Slabodka Yeshiva in Europe during Simchas Torah, they would open up the mechitza separating the men from the women so that the women behind the mechitza would be able to see the hakofos (dancing around with the Torah). The women were very excited to see the dancing and the honor being given to the Sifrei Torah. However one girl was not moved by the scene. She did not even bother getting up from her seat to watch the festivities. Who was this girl? It
was the daughter of the town's scribe (sofer). She saw Sifrei Torah on her dining room table every day so seeing a sefer Torah was not such a big deal to her. Simchas Torah for her was "Just another day at the office".

If a person sees the amazing event of a Sotah being humiliated and he lets it go by without it changing him, without doing anything about it, then the next time a wondrous event occurs, his attitude will be "been there; done that".

This does not just apply to witnessing a Sotah in her moment of humiliation. There are other events that shape our lives that sometimes occur on a fairly common basis - both good events and bad events. If we let these events nonchalantly pass without doing anything about them, then we are spiritually deadening ourselves from appropriate reaction to future events of significant import. In order to prevent going through life so spiritually numb that nothing makes a difference, one who sees the humiliation of a Sotah should take upon himself a nazirite vow to abstain from wine.

One Needs To Be Flexible and Bend The Rules Sometimes To Bring Peace

The Sotah process entails within it the dramatic ritual of erasing G-d's Name by placing it in water and forcing the Sotah to drink this water to prove her innocence. If she is in fact guilty, drinking this potion will cause her to die a extraordinary gruesome death. Under normal circumstances, the making of such a potion would involve a Biblical prohibition - erasing the Name of G-d. However, G-d -- as it were -- says *My Name that was written in holiness shall be erased by water to make peace between husband and wife.*

Clearly this involves a miraculous process, but the question that needs to be considered is why G-d made it work in precisely this fashion. Why was it necessary to take the Divine Name and erase it to accomplish this test of the woman's guilt or innocence? The same miraculous "explosion of the woman" could have occurred with water mixed with dirt from the floor of the Temple or with ashes from the altar. Why did G-d's Name have to become part of this potion? Why create a process that involves this seemingly unnecessary erasure of Hashem's Name?

The answer must be that the Almighty is teaching us a lesson that is vital for Shalom Bayis (domestic tranquility). The lesson is that when it comes to making peace it is sometimes necessary to bend the rules. One cannot stand on principle all the time. One must not always be yelling "the law is the law!" The Master of the Universe is teaching us that to preserve domestic tranquility, it is even sometimes permissible to erase the Name of G-d. True this miracle could have been accomplished with ashes or with dirt, but the symbolism would be lacking.

The Torah introduces the laws of Sotah with a peculiar expression *"A man, a man whose wife goes astray and commits trespass against him..."* [Bamidbar 5:12]. The commentaries note that repetition of the word "Ish" [a man] is indicative of a husband who is "too much of a man" - i.e. - too domineering
and too controlling. When the atmosphere in the house is one of over assertiveness on the part of the husband, a likely result will be that the wife will go astray.

G-d teaches here that sometimes the way to bring peace between people requires bending the strict letter of the law. There was no greater way to teach this lesson than to allow "My Name that is written in sanctity" to be eradicated in water.

The Medrash tells of a man whose wife went to hear a lecture from Rabbi Meir one Friday night. It was a long lecture and by the time the woman returned home, the Shabbos candles had already burned out. The husband chastised his wife that she failed to come home in a timely fashion to get benefit from the Shabbos candles as the law requires. He forbade her from stepping foot back in the house until she spat in Rabbi Meir's eye.

The Medrash continues that Eliyahu haNavi came to Rabbi Meir and explained the situation between the husband and his wife. Rav Meir found the woman and told her that he had a certain eye disease and his doctor told him the only way he would be cured of the disease would be to have someone spit in his eye seven times.

There in the Beis Medrash, the woman approached Rabbi Meir publicly and spat into his eye seven times. She then returned to her husband and told him that she not only fulfilled his condition of spitting in Rabbi Meir's eye once, she did it seven times!

The students asked Rabbi Meir why he allowed himself to be disgraced in such a fashion. He responded that he learned a kal v'chomer from the Almighty. If G-d can forgo His honor to bring peace between husband and wife, certainly Rabbi Meir can forgo on his own honor to accomplish the same goal.

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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