

# "YOUR MONEY OR YOUR WIFE?" AND OTHER SUCH LIFE DECISIONS

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Naso

### "Your Money Or Your Wife?" and Other Such Life Decisions

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 727 - Singing During Davening - Pro or Con? Good Shabbos!*

Parshas Naso contains the Parsha of Sotah, the suspected adulteress [starting with Bamidbar 5:11]. Rashi comments on the adjacency of this section to the preceding passage: "A man's holies shall be his and what a man gives to the Kohen, it shall be his." Rashi explains the connection as follows: If you withhold the gifts of the Kohen, I swear by your life that you will need to come to him to bring him (your wife) the sotah. In other words, if a person does not visit the Kohen to give him what is his due, the person will inevitably have to visit the Kohen for another reason -- to have him carry out the ritual of the suspected adulteress.

The Medrash Rabbah comments in a similar vein, if one does not pay the poor who come to his house to ask for support, he will wind up having to pay that same money to the doctor (for medical expenses for himself or family members). This is a very scary thought. When the Almighty gives us money, we are supposed to perform mitzvos with the money -- tzedakah, chessed [charity, kindness]. We have the choice and opportunity to use the money that we are given properly; however if we do not use it properly, the Medrash says that we will wind up using it to pay doctors' bills.

The sefer Lulei Sorascha records many episodes from the life of Rav Shach, zt"l. Usually, when I read such stories, the names mentioned do not mean anything to me. However, I recently came across a story mentioning someone that I know well. This is a person, several years older than me, whom I grew up knowing in Seattle, Washington. The person's name is Rav Tzvi Genauer. He is a very distinguished individual, who has been living in Eretz Yisrael for many decades now.

What is the story? A person came into Rav Schach and gave him \$5000 with the instructions that he

could do whatever he wanted with money. He could give it to whomever he felt needed it. It was not every day that someone walked into the Rosh Yeshiva's office and dropped \$5000. Rav Schach inquired regarding the source of the money. The person who brought the money told the following story:

Rav Tzvi Genauer needed an eye operation. He wanted a certain doctor to perform the surgery. In Israel, they have government-funded socialized medicine (Kupat Cholim). Apparently, a person cannot choose his doctor, but rather, must go wherever the system sends him for his medical needs. [This is probably equivalent to our experience regarding "Is this doctor part of your insurance plan or is he not part of the plan?"] So Rav Genauer went to a person who had "protexia" in the system. The person was able to pull some strings for Rav Genauer, such that he had his surgery done by his preferred ophthalmologist. Kupat Cholim paid the full price of the surgery -- \$5000.

As a token of appreciation to this intermediary who was able to get him into his preferred doctor, Rav Genauer gave him \$100 for the charity of his choice and thanked him for arranging the operation for him. He came home and proudly told his wife that as Hakaras Hatov, he gave the man who pulled the strings for him \$100.

Mrs. Genauer said, "You only gave him \$100? You should have given him \$5000! His intervention saved you \$5000 in out of pocket expenses that you would have been willing to pay to have the surgery done by Dr. so-and-so." Rav Genauer thought about it and said, "You're right!" He went back to the intermediary and told him "Here is \$5000. This is the money that I would have had to pay out. You saved me from having to pay it out. Now that you saved me from paying it out, I want it to go to tzedakah."

This is a reverse form of the choice alluded to by the Medrash. Either we can give the charity to the poor or we will have to give it out one way or another. Knowing of this choice, we would all much rather give our money to the poor than to doctors.

### **Nezirus: You Do Not Need To Be Young To Think Young**

Following the laws of Sotah, the Torah presents the laws of Nazir. The Nazir has certain restrictions that are equivalent to those of the Kohen Gadol [High Priest]. The Kohen Gadol may not spiritually defile himself through contact with the dead. Regular Kohanim are also not allowed to become tameh mes through corpse contact, however they are allowed to attend the funerals of close relatives, becoming tameh mes if Heaven Forbid they are confronted with the loss of a parent, sibling, or child. The Torah specifically disallows the Kohen Gadol from becoming tameh, even from deceased members of his immediate family.

The Nazir has the same basic halacha as the Kohen Gadol in this regard. However, it is interesting to note that when the Torah specifies the relatives from whom the Nazir may not defile himself, it only mentions "his father and mother; his brother and his sister" [Bamidbar 6:7]. When the Torah spells out

the relatives for whom a regular Kohen may become tameh, in addition to father, mother, brother, sister, the Torah also mentions "son and daughter". It is noteworthy that "son and daughter" are not mentioned by Nazir (even though he may not in fact come in contact with them either, in the unfortunate situation that they die while he is a Nazir). Why would this be?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, in his sefer Emes l'Yaakov, advances a novel theory: Normally, the only people who became Nazirites amongst the Jewish people were unmarried young men. He supports this idea from a pasuk in Amos [2:11] where the prophet complains, "your sons (bneichem) could have become prophets and your unmarried young men (bachureichem) Nazirites..." The Ramban alludes to the same idea that unmarried men used to become Nazirites. There are also certain sources that quote an ancient Jewish custom not to make birthday parties for young men, but to celebrate their birthdays by training them to achieve spiritual heights through practicing Nezirus. The Gemara in Nedarim also relates the story of a single young man who came to a pond and saw his handsome reflection in the water. Seeing his beautiful hair, he felt that his evil inclination might overcome him so he vowed to become a Nazir. This incident too involved a bachur.

The common denominator of all these sources is that, in practice, the observance of the Nazir laws seems largely limited to single young men.

Rav Yaakov suggests why this might be so. The Gemara suggests that a person will be inspired to proclaim himself a Nazir when he sees the amazing sight of a Sotah being shamed for her indiscretions. This motivates a person to change his life and abstain from wine. Rav Yaakov deduces from this Gemara that Nezirus is all about changing.

Normally, young people are amenable to change. As we get older, it becomes harder to change ourselves. Young people may become motivated to change their lives and they do something about it. The older we get, the more tolerant we become of our weaknesses and shortcomings, the less we try to improve ourselves.

This, Rav Yaakov says, is why generally the single young men became Nazirim. They are young and idealistic and are ready to change. This is why there is no need for the Torah to mention the scenario of becoming tameh to their deceased sons or daughters. As a general rule, (and the Torah speaks often of the general case), the Nazir would be unmarried and not have a son or a daughter!

I hesitated long and hard before quoting this insight of Rav Yaakov that only the young are idealistic enough to try to improve themselves through the proclamation of Nezirus. What does that say for the rest of us? We do not want to give the impression that life -- in terms of spiritual improvement -- is over at 25 or at 30. That is certainly not the point I am trying to get across.

I am just saying that the reality is that young people are much more amenable to change. We must try to emulate the young in this respect. The Torah says, "Do not set up for yourself a statue that the L-rd your G-d hates." [Devarim 16:22] The simple interpretation of the pasuk refers to idolatry. However, homiletically, the words "Lo Takim lecha matzevah" may be translated "Do not make

yourself into a matzevah (a solid piece of stone) that the L-rd your G-d hates." There is no growth to a piece of stone. It is what it is and always remains at the same level. The Almighty, who desires constant spiritual growth, hates such static spirituality.

Whether we are 30, 40, 60, or 70, this is not the time for matzevahs [tombstones]. A matzevah is for after we die. When we are still alive, we should use the time to grow and improve ourselves spiritually. We live in a generation in which Baalei Teshuvah can inspire us. We see people who even later in their lives -- in their 40s, 50s, and 70s -- become different people spiritually than they had been in their earlier years. What does that tell us? Of course, it is easier to change when one is younger, but the Baalei Teshuvah phenomenon proves to us that we in our middle years or beyond can indeed change ourselves, perhaps dramatically. It may be harder for us than when we were young, but we can do it.

Like the young man who sees the Sotah in her moment of disgrace, we constantly see things around us that should motivate us to take upon ourselves life style changes that will protect us from the spiritually corrosive environment that surrounds us. We see things that should inspire us. Our reaction should not just be a shrug of the shoulders with life continuing as usual.

The pasuk says, "For Israel is a naar [young lad] and I love him." [Hoshea 11:1] The Almighty praises Israel because he is child-like. What does that mean? It means our spiritual capacity is one of youth. The Torah also praises Yehoshua [Joshua] in this way -- he was a "naar" who did not depart from his master's tent. [Shemos 31:11] He was not 13 years old at that time, but this remained a character trait of his well into his adult life and beyond. He had the capacity of youth.

As Douglas McArthur once said "Youth is not a time of life, it is a state of mind." We are as young as we think we are. At 15, some people have the attitudes of old men. However, there are people that are young of heart and young of mind at age 50 and beyond. The lesson of Nezirus is that man can change himself. We should not think that this applies only to youngsters.

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