

PARSHAS NASO: SETTING A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

Many years ago, when I served as an eighth-grade rebbi, I had the pleasure of teaching a grandson of Rav Shimon Schwab z'tl. At the bar mitzvah of my talmid, Rav Schwab z'tl related a beautiful dvar Torah, (later published in his sefer Ma'ayan Hashoeva), about the importance of effectively modeling a Torah lifestyle. He used the events preceding the birth of Simshon Hagibor (Samson) to illustrate his point.

THE BIRTH OF A CHILD DESTINED FOR GREATNESS

This week's Haftorah reading (Shoftim 13:2-25) discusses the birth of Shimshon Ha'gibor (Samson), and the instructions that his parents received from an angel prior to his birth.

The Navi (Shoftim 13:3) relates that an angel came to Shimshon's mother and told her that she was going to have a special child, who would be a nazir. That meant that for the boy's entire life he would live as an ascetic - he would not be able to drink wine or cut his hair.

THE REQUEST FOR ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE

When the woman related this incredible episode to her husband, Monoach, he prayed to Hashem, "Yovoi na oid ailaynu v'yoreinu mah na'aseh l'nar hayulod - Please send the angel to us again, and teach us what to do with this [special] child who will [soon] be born (Shoftim 13:8)."

The angel then appeared to them a second time and told the father, "Mikol asher amarti el haisha tishomeir - Whatever I told your wife [the first time that I appeared; that] is what you should do." The angel then shared with Monoach some halachos about nezirus. Upon hearing these instructions, Monoach expressed his gratitude to Hashem for the additional directives.

Rav Schwab asked several questions on this sequence of events:

To begin with, why did Monoach want the malach to visit him? Didn't he trust his wife to relay the instructions properly? Additionally, why did he need assistance from an angel as to the laws pertaining to a nazir? He could have read them directly from the Torah! Most difficult to understand is - what additional guidance did he receive during the second visit of the angel? The malach merely repeated what he had already told Monoach's wife?

A PROFOUND INSIGHT

Rav Schwab offered a fascinating interpretation as to the request of Monoach and the response of

the angel. He explained that Monoach was troubled by the fact that he was being asked to raise a child with a set of halachos that he would not subscribe to. He asked Hashem, "How can I raise my child as a nazir when I myself will be drinking wine? How can I possibly be mechanech my son when I am following a different set of rules?"

During the second visit of the angel, said Rav Schwab, the angel told Monoach, that he, Monoach, should also assume the role of a nazir. Mikol asher amarti el haisha Tishomer - YOU should do all that I told the woman. Hashem agreed that Monoach would have great difficulty raising a child with different standards than he himself would ascribe to, and instructed him to take upon himself all the stringencies of a nazir.

SETTING A PERSONAL EXAMPLE

As we mature and expand our horizons, we often wish to convey our hashkofos (strongest beliefs) to our circle of family and friends. The most common vehicle for delivering our message is usually the spoken word. Rav Schwab points out that the power of our words pale in comparison to the effectiveness of a personal example. Values and middos tovos (good character traits) "are caught not taught."

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, zt"l, offers an insightful point regarding the well-known statement of our Sages: K'shot atzmecha v'achar kach k'shot acherim, "Examine yourself [first] and after that [you can] examine others." The phrase is traditionally understood to mean that one should reflect upon one's actions and self-evaluate before having the temerity to criticize others.

Rav Hirsch says that the first time that the term k'shoit is used in this phrase, it is related to the Aramaic word kushta, meaning "truth" (as in "alma d'kshoit" - the world of truth; a reference to the World to Come). In other words, be truthful with yourself before rebuking others.

Rav Hirsch implores us to look at ourselves honestly before we address the faults of others. We transmit best to others what we believe in - and practice - ourselves.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

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