

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Reuven Leib Ben Mordechai HaLevi, Robert Lipton. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS NASSO

## Letting Go

**Speak to Bnei Yisroel, and say to them, if any man's wife goes astray, and commits a trespass against him... (5, 12)**

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Gemara in *Brachos* (63a) that explains why the Torah places the laws of *Sotah* (a woman that was warned by her husband not to go into seclusion with another man) following the laws of giving the *Kohanim Teruma* and *Ma'aser*; for anyone that withholds from the Kohen the priestly gifts will find that he needs the Kohen (i.e. he will be obligated to come to the Kohen) and bring his wife to be tested through the *Sotah* waters.

Maharal (*Gur Aryeh* 5, 12) asks two fascinating question: 1) There are a number of reasons that a person would need the service of a Kohen (e.g. *tzoraas*); why do we necessarily associate the occurrence of *Sotah* to not giving the Kohen the priestly gifts? 2) Why does the Torah introduce the laws of *Sotah* with "if any man's wife goes astray"? Why not just begin "when a married woman goes astray;" why does the Torah introduce the man at all?

After a careful reading of Rashi, one can see how he understands what Chazal are teaching: Rashi doesn't say that the man **refuses** to give the Kohen the priestly gifts, rather Rashi says that the man **withholds** the gifts from the Kohen. This is a critical point. Essentially, a landowner has the obligation to distribute the priestly gifts to the Kohen.

Yet someone who withholds them is trying to exert influence over the Kohen; to make him come and beg for something that, in reality, he is entitled to receive. Why would someone behave in such a manner?

This is how a person with a controlling personality acts. Making someone come to him to ask for what is rightfully theirs is done to send a clear message of who is in charge. The Torah juxtaposes these

two sections to teach us that they are interrelated. A controlling person doesn't just behave this way in business, he behaves like this in all aspects of his life including his personal life. The reason a woman would go into seclusion, after being warned by her husband not to, is to demonstrate her independence. She is rebelling against his overbearing and controlling personality. In other words, she is telling her husband "you're not the boss of me."

This is also why the Torah begins with "any man's wife goes astray;" the Torah is explaining the root cause of her disloyalty. Even if she never sinned by being intimate with another man, by going into seclusion she is trying to send her husband the message that he is not in control.



### Did You Know...

This week's *parsha*, *Parshas Nasso*, is the longest *parsha* in the Torah, containing 176 *pesukim*. Remarkably, we find this exact number in two other places: The longest chapter in *Tehillim*, Chapter 119, also has 176 *pesukim*, and the longest Gemara, *Bava Basra*, goes until page 176! Obviously this can't be a mere coincidence, so what's special about the number 176?

Chapter 119 of *Tehillim* has 176 verses because it follows a pattern of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and each letter is used to begin 8 *pesukim*. That is,  $22 \times 8 = 176$ .

This of course raises the question: What is the significance of 22 and of 8?

Twenty-two is a number of completeness. We know that Hashem created the world through speech. Therefore, the very letters that make up the language incorporate every aspect of the physical world. Rashi in *Parshas Vayakhel* explains that the Mishkan was created by Betzalel because he knew the secret of combining the letters used in creation.

(Continued on reverse)

# Living in Denial

**Speak to Bnei Yisroel and say to them, when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate themselves for Hashem... (6, 2)**

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Gemara in *Sotah* (2a) that makes the well-known comment: "Why is the law of the *Nazir* juxtaposed with the law of the *Sotah*? To teach us that anyone who sees a *Sotah* in her degradation should take a vow of abstinence from wine."

When a woman is suspected of infidelity she is tested with the *Sotah* waters. If she is indeed guilty, she will die a gruesome death. Chazal teach us that a witness to that death should take a vow of *Nezirus* to prevent himself from succumbing to the temptation for immorality as the *Sotah* did. Rashi explains that excessive drinking is a common cause of licentiousness, and the *Nazir's* vow to abstain from wine will thus help a person avoid committing an act of immorality.

Nevertheless, it is hard to understand how a vow of *Nezirus* can have a greater impact than the sight of the *Sotah's* death itself. Surely, witnessing such a shocking sight should itself be enough to deter anyone from committing the same sin. Moreover, even if it is not sufficient, it is difficult to imagine that becoming a *Nazir* will suffice in its place. A *Nazir's* vow generally takes effect only for thirty days; after that time, the *Nazir* is freed of the restrictions associated with his vow, including the prohibition of drinking wine. Chazal's intention is obviously that a person who witnesses a *Sotah's* death should do something to reinforce his own standards of morality on a permanent basis. How can this be accomplished by eschewing wine for only thirty days?

Chazal give us a fascinating insight into human nature: Consider the case of a person who is speeding along a highway when he suddenly comes to the scene of an accident. Traffic slows long enough for him to take in a chilling sight: A car is overturned, there are emergency vehicles

with flashing lights, and there is the unmistakable shape of a human body lying motionless on a stretcher at the scene of the crash. For just a moment, the driver passing by will be shaken by what he has just observed. Yet it invariably takes less than a minute for a person to lapse back into all his normal (less than cautious) driving habits even after witnessing such a shocking sight. Why does the effect of the shock wear off so quickly?

The mind makes it very difficult for a person to handle seeing a disaster. The possibility that the same catastrophic event might happen to him is so daunting that the mind will automatically leap into action, conjuring up one rationalization after another to preserve the person's sense of security. Deep down, every person wishes to believe that he is immune to whatever disaster he has seen befall someone else, and the mind will stop at nothing to ward off any feelings of vulnerability. The driver passing the scene of a deadly accident will reason that the other car was made to inferior safety standards, or that the driver was drunk or not wearing a seat belt – anything that he can identify as a risk factor that does not pertain to him. Within seconds of witnessing the disaster, he will have a dozen reasons to believe that whatever happened to the other person has no bearing on him.

For the same reason, a person who witnesses the shocking death of a *Sotah* is actually unlikely to improve himself as a result. He is far more likely to begin to rationalize away what he witnessed. He will come up with any number of reasons to assume that the *Sotah's* punishment has no bearing on his life. Because of this very human tendency, Chazal teach us, the Torah calls for such a person to take a vow of *Nezirus*.

Obviously becoming a *Nazir* is not intended to serve as a permanent cure for the drive for licentiousness. Rather, the act of taking a vow of *Nezirus* is a way for a person to acknowledge and internalize the fact that he, too, is susceptible to the sinful drives that caused the *Sotah's* demise. True, the 30 days of abstinence from wine will not shield a person from immorality for a lifetime, but those days will drive home the message that the *Sotah's* punishment is indeed relevant to him. Once he accepts that, the very experience of seeing the *Sotah's* death itself can then have a lifelong impact on him.

## Did You Know Continued

As for the number 8: We know that 7 represents the "natural realm" (7 days of the week), but 8 represents completeness beyond nature, what mankind contributes to the physical world (see *Maharal Tiferes Yisroel*). That is why the *bris milah* is held on the 8th day of a boy's life. This also explains why Hashem first commanded Avraham to perform his *bris milah* with the words, "Walk before Me and be complete" (*Bereishis* 17:1).

The product of two "complete" numbers, 22 and 8, is therefore the ultimate completeness. That's why 176 is used to demonstrate the amazing perfection of the Torah.

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