

Lessons From The Sota II

This week's parsha, Nasso, tells us the laws of the Sota. If a husband has a feeling of jealousy, and says to his wife, "do not seclude yourself (hide) with that man." And then it continues with the details of what happens if in fact she was alone with that man.

Aside from the simple meaning of the passage, that it is talking about a husband and wife, on a deeper level, it is talking about the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people, He is, so to speak, the husband and every one of us, is the wife.

On Mount Sinai, He said, "You should not have any gods before Me," that was His statement of warning to us. In a way He is saying, "do not seclude yourself (hide) with that man."

We have to ask: How is it possible to hide from Hashem? He is everywhere, as the Zohar says, "There is no place that is void of Him," and as Hashem says, "If a man hides in hidden places, will I not see him?" So how is it possible to be hidden from Him?

The answer is, that Hashem says about a person with an inflated ego, "he and I can't dwell in the same place." In a way the big shot is hiding himself from Hashem. It is only that way, because Hashem wants it to be that way, He really doesn't like a big ego. It is as if He is not there.

As the Baal Shem Tov interprets the verse as a statement, "If a man hides in hidden places, and (he is an) I, I will not see him"

The Talmud says, "A husband who took back his jealous statement, his statement is void." This only works if she hadn't secluded herself with the man prior to the husband taking back his statement. If however she has already secluded herself, it isn't in his power to take it back any more.

The Talmud Yerushalmi says that he can still take it back, even if she had been secluded. "As long as the Megillah has not been erased." This was the

end of the process that the Sota went through. They would write the passage of the Sota on parchment, which was called the Megillah, it would be erased in water, and then the Sota would drink it.

There seems to be a difference of opinion between the Talmud Bavli and the Talmud Yerushalmi. How can we reconcile the two?

The Rogechever answers this dilemma. He says that the Yerushalmi is talking about a specific case, when the seclusion would normally be appropriate, and it is only inappropriate because of the husband's jealous statement. For example, if he said, "I don't want you to be alone with your father," which is normally allowed.

Since it is only based on his own words, he could take it back at any time.

The truth is that Hashem really sees everything and there is no hiding from Him. The only reason we are able to be hidden from Him, is because Hashem chose it is to be that way. "Every big ego is disgusting to Hashem," and "he and I can't dwell in the same place."

Since Hashem imposed this on Himself, He can always change His mind and take it back, even after the so called seclusion.

In the case of the Sota, she goes through a process that ends with erasing of the Megillah. They erased the ink from the parchment in water. This is only possible with parchment and ink or the like, because they are two entities that are attached, so they can be separated. However if the words are engraved then there is no erasing them.

When one studies Torah in a way that it is engraved into the person, then although he secluded himself from Hashem, by having a big ego, when he finds humility, he will immediately be forgiven, he doesn't have to go through a process, because it can't be erased. However when he studies Torah in the way of ink on parchment, then as in the Sota's case, she had to offer a sacrifice of barley, which is

animal fodder and a very small amount, which is considered a poor person's offering. So too, does the one who has a big ego has to realize that he is acting like an animal, that only thinks of himself and is poor, as poor in judgement.

And when he goes through this process, he doesn't remain the same, but becomes much better than before, as the Sota was healed, even if she wasn't able to have children, she now was able to have children.

May we merit to come closer to Hashem and see a miraculous healing for all of us. And may we meet the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Dedicated in honor of our son Mendel, who celebrated his birthday this week, may Hashem give you an amazing year, Mommy and I are so proud of you.

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Making The Desert Into A Home

Parshas Nasso begins with the count of the children of Gershon and Merari from the tribe of Levi, who would be hauling the coverings, curtains, posts and panels of the Mishkan and its courtyard, when the Jewish people traveled in the desert. It comes after the count of the children of Kehos, who carried the vessels of the Mishkan, which is written about at the end of the previous parsha, Bamidbar.

Everything in Torah is eternal, but these counts seem to be only pertaining to the time that they were in the desert. Why does the Torah tell us about this, which seems to be irrelevant today? Being that the Torah writes this, it must also be eternal and it must be relevant to every one of us. What is the eternal message here for every single Jew?

Levi had three boys, Gershon, Kehos and Merari, in that order, but when they were counted, Kehos was counted first. Why?

To understand this, we first have to answer a more general question. Why did Hashem have the

Jewish people stay in the desert for forty years? It is true that they were punished not to enter the Holy Land for forty years because of the fiasco with the spies who gave a bad report, turning the hearts of the people against the land. But that only explains why they didn't enter the land. Why not take them to another country for forty years? Why did they have to be "in the great and awesome desert with snakes, serpents and scorpions, and thirst, for there is no water?"

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains, "The reason for their travels in the desert with the Mishkan and its vessels, was to subdue the power the negative forces leach (off holiness) , because their ability to leech (off holiness) stems specifically from the desert." And even more, through subduing the ability of the negative forces to leach from holiness, "They drew the revelation of G-dliness."

You see, there is a constant spiritual battle between the negative forces and the forces of good. But the negative forces don't get their nourishment directly from Hashem, rather, in an indirect way, they leech what they can from us. They find openings, due to our weaknesses and failings, and that becomes their nourishment. Our travels in the desert, greatly hampered their ability to leech off holiness, therefore, weakening them for all time. Being that we weakened them, we made more room for G-dliness. So the forty years we spent in the desert, laid the groundwork and gave us the spiritual upper hand in our mission as Jews. There is still a battle, but it is vastly easier than it would have been, without our accomplishments traveling in the desert.

Every spiritual accomplishment surfaces in the physical. That is why, wherever we traveled in the desert, the clouds of glory that protected us, killed the snakes, serpents and scorpions, the Mishkan was set up, and the well of Miriam gushed forth water, making the desert bloom with all kinds of greenery and trees. In other words, wherever we went ceased to be desert, ceased to be negative. So for the Jewish people, there was really no desert, because their travels made the desert civilized.

The ability to do all this came from the tribe of Levi, and specifically from those who dismantled, carried and erected the Mishkan and its vessels. What gave them the power to effect their surroundings so drastically? It was the count at the end of parshas Bamidbar and the beginning of parshas Nasso that raise them above and separated them, so that they weren't affected by the negative, rather, they affected the negative and turned it into positive, they made the desert habitable.

This idea of making the desert into a home is applicable to every person and in every generation.

When a person thinks about his life, he comes to the realization that he is flawed, because no one is perfect, everyone has failings of some sort. In other words, he and his surroundings is not habitable for Hashem, and even if it is, it is not a permanent home for Him. This can be disheartening and even depressing, and bring a person to run away from his purpose and mission that Hashem gave him.

This is where this lesson comes in. We are each traveling in a desert and our job is to make our personal deserts bloom. Just as in the desert, the Jewish people only traveled on Hashem's word, we too only travel on His word. In every situation that we find ourselves, it is Hashem Who specifically put us there and we have the ability to turn it in to an oasis for Hashem.

Everyone of us can be like a Levi, as the Rambam says, "Not just the tribe of Levi, but anyone... who will give of himself... to separate himself and stand before Hashem to serve Him... Hashem will be his portion and his inheritance... just as the Kohanim and the Leviim merited to have."

In other words, anyone who puts himself to the task of, "teaching His virtuous ways and His righteous laws to many," will be given the strength and prestige from above, he will be raised higher and higher, he will reach the level of the children of Gershon, and then the level of the children of Kehos, the highest level of the tribe of Levi. And

through this, he will be able to effect his place in the world, and make it into a home for Hashem.

There is another lesson here. One might look back at his bleak past and think to himself, "The way I acted in the past was negative, I've been acting that way so long. How am I going to change now?" Thinking this way, he can give up hope of ever becoming a better person, or a follower of Hashem's ways.

To him the Torah says, that the children of Gershon, Kehos and Merari, first began their service at the age of thirty, notwithstanding their previous life, and they were able to reach the highest levels, they started to carry the Mishkan and turned the desert into an oasis. Same is true for us, we don't have to dwell on the past, it is never too late to begin, and if we make the effort, we can reach the highest levels, we will be given the strength to rid ourselves of any negativities, bad habits or addictions, and make ourselves and our surroundings into a beautiful home for Hashem.

How does one go about doing this? There are two parts to this effort, "refraining from doing bad," and "doing good." When you want to make a home fit for a king, first you have to clean out the junk and then you can bring in the furnishings and make it beautiful. The same is true when you want to make yourself and your surroundings into a home for Hashem, first you have to "refrain from bad," stop the negative actions, and then you have to start "doing good," doing what Hashem wants.

These two, "refraining from bad," and "doing good," are hinted in the names of the sons of Levi. Gershon is from the word gerush, which means to divorce, and Merari is from the word mar, which means bitter. Together they mean to separate from the bad or "refrain from bad." Kehos is from the word yikhas, which means to gather, which is doing something positive or "doing good."

Gershon was born before Kehos, because the order is first "refrain from bad," and then "do good." However, when it comes to counting them, which counting raises the status of the things being

counted, Kehos was first, to show that "doing good" is more important. If you think about it, even though refraining from bad is very difficult and of course, nothing bad is being done, but it doesn't accomplish anything positive. Its whole purpose is to create a wholesome environment, so you can "do good."

This idea is also brought out in the work they did. Gershon and Merari carried the parts that made the house of the Mishkan, just as a home provides protection. It symbolizes "refraining from bad," protecting yourself from negative actions. Kehos carried the vessels of the Mishkan, the vessels are what all the services in the Mishkan were done with. The house is there to protect and create the perfect environment for the people living in it, so they can do positive action with the vessels, and that is what makes it a home.

May we merit to see our deserts become a everlasting home for Hashem, with the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.

Haftora: The Birth Of A Superhero

The Haftora for parshas Nasso, is from the book of Shoftim (Judges). It is the story of how Shimshon (Samson) was born.

The connection to our parsha, is that parshas Nasso tells us the laws of the Nazir, one who took upon himself to abstain from drinking wine, cutting his hair, or coming in contact with anything impure for a period of time, usually a month. Similarly, in the Haftora, Shimshon's parents are instructed that he is to be a Nazir all his life. There is also a connection to Shavuoth, which always falls in the week preceding or following parshas Nasso, as we will soon see.

Shimshon's mother, who according to the Talmud was called Tzlalponis, was the wife of Manoach from the tribe of Dan. She was barren, she never had children. An angel in the form of a man appeared to her and told her that she would have a son. He instructed her that during her pregnancy

she shouldn't drink wine or eat anything impure. From here we learn that what a woman consumes during pregnancy, affects the growing baby in her womb. It is therefore customary for Jewish women to be extra careful to keep to high standards while pregnant, to ensure that her baby has a holy spiritual advantage.

He instructed her with regards to the upbringing of the baby, that he be a Nazir from the time he is in her belly.

When she told Manoach what happened, he prayed to Hashem that He send the angelic man again. Hashem granted his wish. When Tzlalponis was out in the field, the angel appeared to her again and she ran to get her husband.

Manoach asked the man, "Now your words will come true, what rules should be followed with the lad?" The angel answered, "Be careful of everything I said to your wife."

The Rambam tells us that Shimshon was not a complete Nazir.

There are three kinds of Nazirs. The typical Nazir takes an oath to be a Nazir to Hashem for a set amount of time, usually a month. He is not permitted to consume anything that came from the grapevine, cut his hair, eat anything impure, or become impure by coming in contact with a dead person. After the Nazir's time is up he brings certain sacrifices, cuts his hair and that ends his Nazirite status.

Then there is a Nazir for life, like our prophet Shmuel, who has to keep all the laws of the Nazir, except that he can cut his hair when it becomes too heavy, which is understood to mean after 12 months. To cut his hair, he brings the Nazir sacrifices and cuts his hair. At this time he can ask for his Nazirite oath to be annulled, which would end his Nazirite status, if he doesn't, he continues as a Nazir.

Then there is a Nazir like Shimshon, who was a Nazir from the womb. He was different than the

other kinds of Nazirs, in that he could never cut his hair, nor ask for annulment, but he is permitted to become impure by coming in contact with a dead person, which Shimshon did. This is what the Rambam means by an incomplete Nazir, that he was allowed to become impure by coming in contact with a dead person.

In the last Mishnah of the tractate Nazir, it derives that the Shmuel was a Nazir from Shimshon, from the similar wording in the verses pertaining to them. Then the Talmud on the Mishnah debates, what is superior, to say a blessing or to respond amen, affirming one's inclusion in the blessing? Then it concludes with a famous teaching, "Rabbi Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Chanina, 'The students of the sages add peace in the world...'"

What could possibly be the connection between Shimshon and Shmuel being Nazirs and the Talmudic debate and teaching that follow?

The Rambam says that Shimshon never took the Nazirite oath. And because we learn that Shmuel was a Nazir from Shimshon, presumably Shmuel didn't either take the oath.

If they didn't take the oath, how did they become Nazirs?

Shmuel's mother, Chana, was the one who made an oath to Hashem, but the rule is that when a mother promises that her child will be a Nazir, it is not legally binding. In the case of Shimshon, it was the angel that said that he will be a Nazir, and that is certainly not binding. An angel has no say in the matters of a Jewish person's life.

Although these oaths were not binding, they were enough to start them off being a Nazir in practice, as Chana and Tzlalponis brought them up as Nazirs, based on Chana's oath and the words of the angel. However, it was only when they they reached the age of thirteen, the age of adulthood, and they continued the practice of being a Nazir on their own, that affirmed the statements of Chana and the angel, making them binding.

Now we can understand how the debate about the blessing fits in. What is greater the one who says it or the one who affirms? Was Chana's and the angel's statements greater, or was Shmuel's and Shimshon's affirmation greater? In this case we see that the affirmation is greater.

The same is true for Rabbi Elazar's teaching. Why does he refer to the students of the sages? Why not the sages themselves? Because by the students following in the ways of the sages, they are affirming, which, like we explained earlier, is greater.

The Haftora continues with Manoach asking the man to stay and eat, "I will prepare a goat for you." The angel refused, saying, "I will not eat your food." Manoach didn't know that it was an angel. He asked, "What is your name, so when your words come to be, we will honor you." The angel responded, "it is a secret." Manoach then offered the goat as a sacrifice to Hashem, and the angel wondrously produced a fire while Manoach and Tzlalponis looked on. As the flame rose upward to heaven the angel went up in the flame, while they looked on. They then fell on their faces, realizing finally that the man was actually an angel of Hashem.

Seeing all this Manoach said to his wife, "We are going to die, because we saw G-d."

Tzlalponis responded, "If Hashem wanted to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted from our hand a burnt-offering, and He wouldn't have shown us all these things, and at this time He would not let us hear (things) like these."

The first two things that Tzlalponis said to calm her husband's fears make sense, however the third brings up questions.

First she said, that "if Hashem wanted to kill us, He wouldn't have accepted from our hand a burnt-offering." Being that Hashem accepted their offering, and in a miraculous way, as the angel wondrously produced a fire, it clearly means that Hashem doesn't want them to die, rather to live.

Her second response came to answer Manoach's fear that seeing Hashem will cause them to die. She said, "He wouldn't have shown us all these things." Meaning, that it was Hashem Who chose to show Himself to us, we didn't go and seek to gaze inappropriately. Hashem can do anything, He could choose that a physical body should see him and live.

What is difficult to understand is her third proof, "He wouldn't have let us hear (things) like these." Once she brought a proof from seeing Hashem, which is superior to hearing Him, what does hearing add? If with seeing Hashem they will live, surely after hearing Him they will live. On top of that, Manoach only was afraid because he saw Hashem, he didn't seem concerned about hearing Him, so how does her answer allay his fears?

We must conclude that there is a type of hearing that is superior to seeing, and that is what she was referring to.

Because we live in a physical world is natural to see the physical, in other words, the physical is real to us. On the other hand, G-dliness is only heard, meaning that we could understand it, but it is vague, it doesn't have the same real impression as the physical world that we can see.

When we received the Torah at Mount Sinai it says, that we "saw the sounds." The Midrash tells us, that according to Rabbi Akiva, we saw what was heard and we heard what was seen. In other words, G-dliness which is usually heard, and does not feel so real to us, was seen, it felt real. Because of this, their perception of the physical world changed, now they heard the G-dliness in the physical. Seeing G-dliness is amazing, but experiencing G-dliness in the physical is by far greater.

Manoach and Tzlaponis had an experience similar to the giving of the Torah. And her third response should be understood like this. "At this time," after this amazing experience, if He wanted us to die, "He would not let us hear (things) like these," He

wouldn't continue to have us experience the G-dliness in everything.

The Haftora concludes with Shimshon being born and that the spirit of Hashem would come to him, meaning, that he would receive prophecy.

We aren't told much about Tzlaponis, her name isn't even mentioned in the Tanach, but from the Haftora we gather that she was a great woman. The angel appeared to her twice, the second time when she was in the field. Why does it have to tell us where she was? What difference does it make to know that she was in the field? Being in the field, in Tanach is code for davening. It is telling us that she was a davener and close to Hashem. From her answers to Manoach, we understand that she was wise. And finally, she gave birth to the mighty Shimshon, who was a prophet, a Tzadik, he was one of the Judges and lead the Jewish people for 22 years. The Talmud records her name together with the names of Avraham and David's mothers who were special women. Why are their names not recorded in the Tanach? Perhaps because the essence of who they were was total selflessness, providing for their babies, Avraham, David and Shimshon to become the first Jew, the quintessential king, who is the father of Moshiach and the one who was given miraculous strength to singlehandedly save the Jewish people from the Philistines. It was not about them, to show that, their names aren't mentioned. The name Tzlaponis could be divided into two words, tzlal, which means clear, and ponis, which means facing towards. Because I have gained much respect for her preparing this article, I would venture to say that it means, that she was clear of sin and that she faced Hashem, meaning, that her focus in her life was Hashem.

About Manoach we know very little. From the Haftora we know that he was from the tribe of Dan, that Hashem answered his prayers, he had the good trait of giving thanks (hakaras hatov), he was extremely G-d fearing, and he had a great wife.

Just as we read in this Haftora how Hashem provided the one who could save the Jewish

people, may he once again send the one who could redeem us from this dark exile, Moshiach. The time has come.

Dedicated to my son Mendel who is celebrating his birthday this week. May you have a Shnas hatslacha, and be a source of nachas to Hashem, the Rebbe, your teachers, your parents, and especially to yourself.

Lessons From The Sota

This week's parsha, Nasso, is always read just before or just after Shavuoth. This is a clear indication that there are lessons to be learned from here, for our national mission, which began on Shavuoth.

The parsha tells us the laws of the Sota, the Suspected Adulteress.

What lessons are we meant to learn from the Sota? What life changing possibilities are we to take from here?

In a way, we are the Sota. Let me explain.

When a husband is overtaken by a feeling of jealousy, and suspects his wife of straying... He then gives a warning... On Shavuoth, when we received the Ten Commandments, which is the marriage between Hashem and the Jewish people, He warned us, "Don't have other gods before Me." Although most of us have not done something this extreme, we have done this on a more subtle level. As we live in this world, filled with pleasures, we desire them and to be like high society, and prevailing culture. We stray from who we are to experience things that pull us away from our relationship with Hashem.

After the warning, she does it again. As a nation, this has been our history over and over. Falling spiritually, despite the warnings.

He then brings her to the Temple, the holiest place. The Kohen writes a certain part of the Torah, our

holiest writings, which contains Hashem's name, which is so holy, we may not erase it. However here Hashem instructs the Kohen to erase the writing with Hashem's name. Indicating how important the husband and wife relationship is to Hashem, He even allows His name to be erased to bring the couple back together. It is erased in the holiest water, taken from the Kiyor, which was made from the copper mirrors of women who used them to be close to their husbands in Egypt. In the water was earth, taken from the Mishkan, the holiest ground.

Then she drinks it. If she is indeed guilty this water will be bitter and fatal to her.

Because of this, the Kohen put her through a process that was exhausting, in the hope, that if she is indeed guilty, she would confess, and not have to drink the water and die. As a nation, we have experienced being thrown around from country to country, never resting too long on one spot.

If however, she maintains her innocence, the Kohen makes her take an oath that she did not defile herself, that if she did, she would die a horrible death because of the water, and that if she did not, the water will prove her innocence.

After administering the oath, he would erase the words into the water and she would drink it.

The Torah now tells us that if she was guilty, she would experience a horrible death. And if she is innocent the water will cleanse her of all suspicion, and even more, it will cause her to have better births. Rashi explains, that if before her births were painful, now they would be relaxed...

When the Kohen administered the oath, he described in detail, what would happen if she was guilty. However, regarding if she was innocent, all it says, is that the water will cleanse her of suspicion, with no mention of the blessings of having better births. Only after she was proven innocent, does the Torah mention that, by the way, she will have

better births. It is an outcome of drinking the water but not mentioned as part of the process.

This is similar to a Baal Teshuva, the one who returns to Hashem. We are taught that one who committed sins and then returned to Hashem wholeheartedly, his sins are turned into merits. Why? Because it was his sins that moved him to return. When he realized how far he has become, because of his transgressions, he became bitter. And this bitterness acted as a springboard, to his return. This doesn't work for someone who plans to sin and then return. You can't plan it. Only after a true return, does his transgressions turn to merits.

In some way each of us are the Baal Teshuva. We have an opportunity to get closer to Hashem, and when we do as a nation, He will forgive us, our past will be turned to merit, the bitter waters of this exile will turn sweet, and Moshiach will come, completing our national mission. May he come soon.

The Significance Of Every Jew

This week's parsha, Nasso, is the longest parsha with 176 verses. It is always read right before or right after Shavuoth. This is a clear indication, that there must be something of great importance to be learned from here, that is central to keeping the Torah.

The parsha starts with the tribe of Levi's responsibilities, moving the Mishkan. Then you have the Cohen's blessing. Finally, it ends with the offerings brought by each of the Israelite (Yisrael) tribal princes, for the Mishkan's inauguration. This adds to the central importance of the message, to each tribe and each classification, Cohen, Levi and Yisrael, with regards to our service of Hashem, symbolized by the Mishkan.

What central lessons can be learned from these three sections, Levi's responsibilities, Cohen's blessing and Yisrael's inaugural offerings?

The service of the Levi was manual labor, moving and hauling parts of the Mishkan. This teaches us

that even physical work can be holy and that we must serve Hashem not only with Torah and Mitzvos, but also our physical day to day actions.

The Cohen, with love, blesses all the Jewish people with blessings of physical abundance, physical grace and physical peace. The Cohen is made to recognize that Hashem loves and values every Jew, in every place and at every time and wants him to have physical abundance, etc. So too, we must recognize the value of every Jew and seek to have them included in Hashem's service. We must find pleasure in each others good fortune and seek to help those who haven't found theirs yet.

It seems that all the princes brought the same offering. But if one is to delve deeper into the symbolism of each prince's offering, you will find, that what looked the same, was in fact unique in meaning and therefore, truly different. When we do a mitzvah, it might seem that it is the same as the next person's mitzvah, we both put on Tefillin, we both light Shabbos candles. In truth, we are all different and though we are doing the same action, the Mitzvos we do couldn't be more unique. No one can do your mitzvah. This is why each offering had to be separately written, though they look alike, they are not.

So you see, your physical action is holy, your physical abundance is cherished and your Mitzvos are unique, the same but different. We can't do without you.

The Jewish people and the Torah are one, we are the ones who live it, we are living Torahs and everything we do could be holy and special.

Writing these Dvar Torahs made me realize that I have my unique way of seeing the world. It made me realize that I have something different to contribute. Thanks to you, I feel that my efforts are valued and I feel loved and cherished. I guess you really do get this, even if you haven't thought about it.

Dedicated In Honor of my daughter Mussie, in honor of her birthday, and graduation, we love you Mussie.