
פרשת נשא

פרק ו פסוק ב

דבר אל-בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם איש או-אשה כי יפלא לנדר גדר נזיר להזיר לי-הנה:

רש"י

כי יפלא: יפריש. למה נסמכה פרשת נזיר לפרשת סוטה? לומר לה שכל הרואה סוטה בקלקולה נזיר עצמו מן היין, שהוא מביא לידי ניאוף.

מושג

כל הרואה סוטה בקלקולה נזיר עצמו מן היין.

Translation:

All who see a Sotah at her time of ruin, will make a vow separating themselves from wine.

Explanation:

One who sees the punishment of the Sotah will most certainly recognize the damage that results from immoral acts and realize how the high risk behavior of drinking wine contributed to the Sotah's downfall. Such a person will become a Nazir and distance themselves from wine and its destructive consequences¹. Even though normally we might suggest refraining from forms of excessive abstention, as they might be considered a sin, here we encourage it. Here we are confident that one who has witnessed the ruin of the Sotah, will never waver from their vow of abstention. This commitment will ensure that the abstention remains a positive, spiritually uplifting act, and will not bring with it regrets that would turn it into a negative act of sin.

Looking in the Pasuk:

The Parsha of Nazir follows the Parsha of Sotah, suggesting a link between the two, known as סמיכות. While not every proximity proves a logical connection, here the fact that a Sotah and Nazir sit on two ends of the moral spectrum (and therefore should not be written near each other), plus the use of the seemingly extra words איש או אשה, lead us to link the two².

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Witnessing the terrible punishment meted out to the Sotah, and the role that wine played in her downfall, will strengthen one's commitment to become a Nazir and distance themselves from this danger.

Understand: Even according to those who see abstention in a negative light, when it leads to spiritual purity all agree it to be a positive experience. One's commitment to the abstention is the key to using it as a morally corrective tool. Seeing the Sotah in her ruin will ensure the necessary commitment and lead to a successful נזירות.

Think: Not only must one look at the context of individual Pesukim, for extra or redundant words, but also at proximity of one Parsha to another.

1 See note #2

2 See note #1

NOTES

1. Rashi's source is found in the Gemoroh in (ב.) מסכת סוטה which seeks to understand why, in the order of the Talmud, מסכת נזיר follows מסכת סוטה. The Gemoroh answers that there exists a cause and effect relationship between the two, as is evidenced by the fact that in the Torah the Parsha of Nazir follows the Parsha of Sotah. The logic behind the link is found in the fact that one who witnesses the ruin of the Sotah - either referring to a Sotah who is put through a demeaning process to prove her innocence, or to the gruesome death that meets the unfaithful wife - should become a Nazir³. For, as Rashi concludes, wine leads to licentious behavior.

The question that is asked by commentators is why Rashi mentions this Gemoroh. After all, Rashi usually only mentions חז"ל that are consistent with מקרא של פשוטו⁴. It does not seem problematic for Nazir to follow Sotah in the Torah⁵, so why does Rashi see a need to quote the Gemoroh?

There a number of answers given. The גור אריה does find it problematic that Nazir should follow Sotah. After all, he reasons, one is considered holy and the other impure, why does the Torah put one near the next? The כלי יקר points out that the wording at the beginning of our Pasuk is what led Rashi to require the Gemoroh's explanation. The Pasuk begins with the words איש או אשה which seem unnecessary, for I should have no reason to assume there to be a difference between the two regarding becoming a Nazir⁶. To answer these textual difficulties Rashi brings the Gemoroh which explains why the Torah connected the impure Sotah to the holy Nazir.

2. The Gemoroh quoted by Rashi teaches:

תנא מנזיר סליק (המחבר של המשנה ממשך ממסכת נזיר), מאי תנא דקא תנא סוטה (מה לימד שהוא מלמד עכשיו סוטה)? כדרבי. דתניא, רבי אומר למה נסמכה פרשת נזיר לפרשת סוטה? לומר לך, שכל הרואה סוטה בקלקולה יזיר עצמו מן היין.

The simple understanding of this חז"ל is that one who would see the ordeal of the unfaithful wife would realize the danger that wine might cause to his moral sense and should thus vow to become a Nazir.

There are a two obvious problems with this understanding. First, why would one become a Nazir? After all, a Nazir is not only forbidden to drink wine, but is also commanded not to cut his hair and not to become impure to a corpse. Why would one take on these prohibitions out of concern for a drinking problem?⁷ Also problematic is the logic in the statement. For if the Gemoroh would have simply said one who sees a Sotah, then I could understand that seeing an unfaithful woman should help him realize the dangers of wine, leading to a vow of abstention. But why say one who sees a Sotah *in her ruin*? I would imagine that one who witnesses the gruesome death of the Sotah will be so traumatized that they will not touch wine for the rest of their lives! Why in the world would they need to become a Nazir?

Perhaps a fuller understanding of the sacrifices brought by a Nazir might lead us to a different understanding of our Musag.

3 The Gemoroh continues to wonder, that if seeing a סוטה is what causes one to become a נזיר, then מסכת נזיר should follow מסכת סוטה and not the other way around! The Gemoroh answers that in fact there is are two מסכתות that do not seem to belong in סדר נשים, where מסכת נזיר is found; מסכת נדרים and מסכת נדרים. To explain why they were included in סדר נשים the Gemoroh explains that we first placed מסכת נדרים following מסכת כתובות, as it is connected to one of the final chapters of מסכת כתובות. We then followed נדרים with נזיר, as נזיר is a נדר in itself, and finally placed סוטה after נזיר, even though the cause and effect places סוטה before נזיר.

4 We have discussed previously the status of סמיכות according to Rashi. See Musag on יב פסוק ה פרק ה.

5 The point being that not every time the Torah places one Parsha near another is it warranted to search for a connection.

6 The מדרש רבה (י:ד) seems to agree that the connection between the two is reflected in the use of the words איש או אשה. The Midrash reads: כי הוא דכתיב איש או אשה כי יפלא

7 To answer this question one might claim that the Gemoroh only said יזיר עצמו מן היין, only accept upon themselves the prohibition of wine. However, this is difficult to maintain as the word יזיר connotes a full נזיר and one may not only become a נזיר from wine alone.

There seem to be conflicting messages in the Torah concerning the spiritual status of a Nazir. On the one hand the Torah calls him holy, קדוש יהיה, and on the other hand he brings a קרבן חטאת, both upon resuming his נזירות following an episode of טומאת מת, and after successfully concluding his נזירות. How can he be both holy and a sinner?

The question of whether a Nazir is essentially a saint or a sinner is the subject of a debate in מסכת (יא). תענית. The debate centers around the question if one who constantly fasts is considered holy or a sinner. Two Amoraim, Shmuel (agreeing with opinion of רב אלעזר הקפ"ר) and Rav Elazar argue; Shmuel considers him a sinner and Rav Elazar considers him holy. Both derive their opinions from how the Torah views a Nazir. Shmuel points to the fact that the Torah considers the Nazir a חוטא⁸, while Rav Elazar argues that in fact a Nazir is considered קדוש⁹.

Both Amoraim are challenged to explain why the Torah titles the Nazir both a קדוש and a חוטא. Rav Elazar explains that essentially he is holy, and he brings a קרבן חטאת only as a result of his negligence which led to his becoming impure¹⁰. Rav Elazar does not explain why even a נזיר טהור brings a קרבן חטאת at the end of his נזירות. However, the רמב"ן explains¹¹ that the חטאת brought at the conclusion of his נזירות is the result of his leaving the elevated spiritual state of the נזיר and returning to a more material life¹². Shmuel, on the other hand, explains that the Nazir is essentially a חוטא, and the use of the word קדוש in the Torah refers only to the growth of his hair or to his distancing himself from טומאת מת¹³.

However, Shmuel, who considers abstention a sin, must agree that becoming a Nazir is a מצוה, as the Torah would not instruct the laws of becoming a Nazir if it was a sin! But, how can נזירות be a מצוה and yet a sin? The Tosafot answer (נזיר יא. ד"ה אמר שמואל) that in effect both are true. On the one hand becoming a Nazir is a positive, spiritually purifying act, actually required in certain situations as our Musag teaches. However, the fact that it is accomplished through abstention somewhat taints the experience and adds a shade of חטא to his actions. But, we must ask, why would the Torah have him reach this spiritual high through a sin? Isn't here a better way that would not involve sinning by completely abstaining from wine?

Perhaps this question can lead us to a novel understanding of Shmuel's opinion and of our Musag.

The key is found in the following story related in מסכת נזיר (ד):

אמר שמעון הצדיק: מימי לא אכלתי אשם נזיר טמא חוץ מאדם אחד, שבא אלי מן הדרום יפה עינים וטוב רואי וקווצותיו סדורות לו תלתלים, אמרתי לו: בני, מה ראית לשחת שער נאה זה? אמר לי: רועה הייתי לאבי בעירי, והלכתי

לשאוב מים מן המעיין ונסתכלתי בבבואה שלי, ופחזו יצרי עלי וביקש לטורדני מן העולם, אמרתי לו: ריקה מפני מה אתה מתגאה בעולם שאינו שלך, שסופך להיות רמה ותולע? העבודה, שאגלהך לשמים! עמדתי ונשקתיו על ראשו, אמרתי לו: כמותך ירבו נזירים בישראל, עליך הכתוב אומר: איש כי יפליא לנדור נדר נזיר להזיר לה'.

The story is found, almost verbatim, in the מדרש רבה (יז:) with an important addendum:

8 Thereby concluding that if abstaining from wine alone is considered a sin, abstaining from all food through fasting certainly will be considered a sin.

9 Thereby concluding that if abstaining from wine alone earned one the title of קדוש, one who fasts would certainly be considered holy.

10 The two explanations brought by Rashi in (פסוק יא) reflect these two opinions.

11 פסוק יד ד"ה וטעם החטאת

12 It is difficult to understand why the Gemoroh does not address the issue how רב אלעזר would explain the קרבן חטאת brought by a נזיר at the conclusion of his נזירות, which did not include an episode of טומאת מת. A closer reading of the רמב"ן might answer this question as well. The רמב"ן, in explaining this חטאת writes:

וטעם החטאת שיקריב הנזיר ביום מלאת ימי נזרו, לא נתפרש. ועל דרך הפשט כי האיש הזה חוטא נפשו במלאת הנזירות, כי הוא עתה נזיר מקדושתו ועבודת השם, וראוי היה לו שיזיר לעולם ויעמוד כל ימיו נזיר וקדוש לאלקיו... והנה הוא צריך כפרה בשובו להטמא בתאוות העולם: If one examines the end of the רמב"ן's words carefully he writes that the נזיר who concludes his נזירות has returned to "defile himself in the desires of the material world". Why use such strong words? Perhaps the רמב"ן is explaining that when the Gemoroh answered that, according to Rav Elazar, the קרבן חטאת is brought as a result of him becoming impure, the Gemoroh was not only referring to the נזיר who became impure by touching a corpse, but also to the נזיר who, at the conclusion of his נזירות, becomes impure by returning to "defile himself in the desires of the material world".

13 The text of our Gemoroh reads קאי (שער) קאי, meaning that the word קדוש applies to his hair. This can be learned from the wording of the Pasuk (פסוק ה) קדוש יהיה גדל שער ראשו. However, it is difficult to understand why the Torah would term his hair 'holy'? Other commentaries (see the ר"ג and ר"ה) therefore rely on a different text which teaches that the holiness he attains is the result of his commitment to distance himself from טומאת מת.

רב מונא בעי (שאל) למה לא היה שמעון הצדיק אוכל אשם נזיר? אם תאמר מפני שנזיר חוטא הוא על שצער עצמו מן היין, וכי לא אכל שמעון הצדיק חטאת חלב או חטאת דם מימיו? סבור שמעון הצדיק בני אדם מתוך הקפדה הם נודרים בנזיר, וכיון שהם נודרים מתוך הקפדה סופן לתהות, וכיון שהוא תוהה נעשו קרבנותיו כשוחט חלין בעזרה, וזה מתוך ישוב הדעת נדר ופיו ולבו שוים.

Shimon HaZaddik would never eat from the חטאת sacrifice of a Nazir who was resuming his נזירות after becoming טמא מת. The Midrash wonders why this sin offering was different from any חטאת sacrifice from which Shimon HaZaddik did eat. The Midrash answers that one who makes a vow frequently does so impetuously and often regrets their decision. (This would be particularly true in the

case of a נזיר who became טמא and was compelled to re-do his נזירות.) If one were to regret his or her

decision to become a נזיר the sacrifice they would bring would be tantamount to bringing a non-sanctified animal into the בית המקדש. For this reason Shimon HaZaddik would not partake of the חטאת of a נזיר who had become טמא. He was he willing to eat only from the sacrifice of this particular lad, who he knew to have vowed out of pureness of heart and therefore would surely never regret his decision.

Using this idea we may propose that even according to Shmuel the act of נזירות is, in fact, *not* a sin whatsoever. For one who abstains from wine for spiritual growth is in no way a sinner. However, if the Nazir was not careful and became טמא לנפש then all his previous days of abstention are voided, leading him to regret his vow¹⁴. At this point of regret his abstention would retroactively become a sin, for it no longer will lead him to spiritual growth! However, if he were to never become טמא, and therefore not regret his vow, then he would not be considered a sinner at all. Only upon the conclusion of his נזירות, when he has decided to leave this elevated spiritual state, would he then be called a חוטא as the רמב"ן explained above.

With the above understanding, we may now provide a new explanation for our Musag. For it is indeed difficult still to understand why the Torah would propose the מצוה of נזירות if, in the end, it will lead to חטא, either by the נזיר becoming לנפש טמא or upon the conclusion of his נזירות. The obvious answer is that the Torah does not tell him to become טמא nor to conclude his נזירות. The Torah's hope is that he will remain a נזיר טהור and retain that status, as the Pasuk (עמוס ב:יא) teaches: וְאָקִים מִבְּנֵיכֶם לְנָבִיאִים וּמִבְּחוּרֵיכֶם לְנָזִירִים. For this reason, we may conclude, becoming a Nazir is not for everyone. For only one who can hope to never waver in his or her commitment, to abstain from wine and retain that lofty status no matter how difficult this may be, should vow to become a Nazir. Who might be such a person? To this our Musag answers, one who saw a סוטה בקלוקלה, a Sotah suffering a most gruesome death. Such a person, will be able to swear off wine and never look back. In short we are not to understand that one who sees a סוטה בקלוקלה *must* become a Nazir, but rather, *may* become a Nazir.

The Musag is not a requirement, but rather an allowance for such a person to enter the lofty status of a Nazir, as such a person will fully realize the dangers of wine to one's moral sense, and will hold fast to a commitment to distance themselves from its siren call.

3. Questions for further thought:

- According to Tosafot, while becoming a Nazir is a מצוה it also brings with it an aspect of sin. Why is this not considered a מצוה הבאה בעבירה, tantamount to using a stolen לולב on סוכות?
- How do you think one might feel upon seeing a Sotah who drank the water but did not die?

14 See the יקר (ד"ה וכפר עליו) who proposes a somewhat similar explanation.