YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

The htm version of this shiur for easy printing is available at:

<http://vbm-torah.org/archive/sichot71/35-71naso.htm>

**Parashat naso**

# SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL *zt”l*

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# JUST PUBLISHED: By Faith Alone: The Story of Rabbi Yehuda Amital by Elyashiv Reichner, now available at a 33% discount [here](http://www.amazon.com/Faith-Alone-Story-Yehuda-Amital/dp/159264192X/ref=sr_1_4?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1305197924&sr=1-4) (also in e-book format)

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**Fear of Heaven and Fear of Sin**

Translated by Kaeren Fish

When a man or woman pronounces the vow of a *nazir*, to separate himself unto God… (*Bamidbar* 6:2)

Judaism opposes self-affliction. The *nazir* status is meant for a person who is burdened by an oppressive sense of his material existence and who seeks to separate himself from it in order to achieve balance. The decision to spend a period of time as a *nazir*, in such circumstances, conforms with the Rambam’s prescription in his *Shemonah Perakim*. He writes that although the “golden mean” is always best, if a person feels that he is tending towards an extreme in some particular area, he should act according to the opposite extreme in order to ultimately regain the ideal – i.e., to return to the middle path.

In previous generations, pious individuals used to afflict themselves in various ways. People observing them used to think that this was the path of Judaism, but they were mistaken; those *tzaddikim* used to afflict themselves for a different reason. What was their true reason?

One might imagine that they felt themselves to be too materialistic, and they therefore sought to disconnect themselves almost completely from materialism, so as to achieve the golden mean. However, this is difficult to maintain in light of the fact that there were great *tzaddikim* who were far removed from any sort of earthly pleasures, such as the Vilna Gaon, who nevertheless subjected themselves to affliction and exile.

Rav Kook writes in “*Orot*” that these *tzaddikim* were motivated by something else. Indeed, in terms of their own personal balance, they had no need for afflictions. However, there is another dimension of balance – social balance. These individuals saw that society was becoming increasingly materialistic, and they therefore took it upon themselves to remain removed and disconnected from material comfort in order to bring balance to society.

The prayer attributed to Rav includes the words, “Grant us … life which includes fear of sin” (*Berakhot* 16a). Ashkenazim recite this prayer on the Shabbat before every Rosh Chodesh, but with a small addition: “life which includes **fear of Heaven** and fear of sin.” What is the meaning of this addition? The Gemara (*Chullin* 105a) teaches:

Mar Ukva said: I may be considered as vinegar which is the product of wine [Rashi – I am inferior to my father, in this one matter of waiting between eating meat and milk]. If my father was to eat meat today, he would not eat cheese until this hour tomorrow, whereas I would not eat cheese at this meal, but I will eat it at the next meal.

At first, this testimony seems rather perplexing: is it really so difficult to abstain from milk after eating meat until the next day, such that Mar Ukva is unable to maintain his father’s standards?

Mar Ukva could wait the 24 hours, but for him this would have been a ritual performed outwardly without any inner resonance. His father was on a level where he could not permit himself to eat dairy food within 24 hours of having eaten meat. Mar Ukva views himself as “vinegar which is the product of wine” because he knows that if he were to wait 24 hours it would be an act of pretense. Therefore he also says (*Berakhot* 35b): “Many conducted themselves … like Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai [who focused solely on Torah study and not on worldly occupation], and were not successful.”

Why were they not successful? Because they conducted themselves “like Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai” – i.e., they attempted to imitate him. Had they arrived at such conduct out of their own inner spitual awareness, they would have been successful in their quest.

There was once a student at the yeshiva who would often approach me after the prayer service with the same query: “I fear that I may not have prayed with the proper intention. Must I pray a second time?” A person like this ends up suffering from halakhic neurosis. This is not the Jewish path.

It is for this reason that in our prayer for the coming month we ask for “life which includes fear of Heaven”, in addition to “fear of sin.” Fear of sin alone is not sufficient. A person who fulfills the commandments solely out of fear of sin becomes neurotic over each and every mitzva, and he observes them as a mere collection of laws to be punctiliously obeyed. Fear of sin must have backing: it must be accompanied by and derive from fear of Heaven. Only thus, with inner awareness, will there be true fulfillment of the commandments. The ideal life of a Jew is one that includes both “fear of Heaven and fear of sin.”