**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**student summaries of *Sichot* of the *Roshei Yeshiva***

***Parashat Naso***

***Sicha* of HarAV Mosheh Lichtenstein**

**The Purity of the *Nazir* and the Sanctity of the Priest:**

**Difficulties with Torah Study**

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**From Apex to Nadir**

At the end of the fourth chapter of the book of *Bamidbar,* the Torah reports:

According to the commandment of the Lord they were appointed by the hand of Moshe, everyone to his service, and to his burden; they were also numbered, as the Lord had commanded Moshe. (*Bamidbar* 4:49)

This concludes the various censuses and assignments which occupy all of *Parashat Bamidbar* and the first part of *Parashat Naso*. We see that a well-organized and well–structured society is being built here, every Israelite knowing his place by tribe, every Levite knowing his place and task by family. The *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) is located at the center of the camps, and the entire nation is focused on it.

However, immediately afterwards, we confront reality:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Command the Israelites, that they put out of the camp every leper (*tzarua*), and everyone that has an issue (*zav*), and whosoever is unclean by the dead; both male and female shall you put out, outside the camp shall you put them; that they defile not their camp, in the midst of which I dwell. And the Israelites did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord spoke to Moshe, so did the Israelites. (*Bamidbar* 5:1-4)

Suddenly, we discover that there are other characters in the Jewish camp, not just priests and Levites and common Israelites. These include: a *tzarua* (also known as *metzora*, a person suffering from *tzara’at*, often translated leprosy, a malady which manifests in various dermatological conditions), a *zav* (a person with a certain type of atypical genital emission) and a person who has contracted impurity through contact with a corpse. These are not just theoretical but real figures, which the people of Israel send out of the camp immediately after they are commanded to do so.

The Torah goes on to state:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the Israelites: When a man or woman shall commit any human sin, to commit a trespass against the Lord, and that soul be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have done; and he shall make restitution for his guilt in full, and add to it the fifth part thereof, and give it to him in respect of whom he has been guilty. (*Bamidbar* 5:5-7)

The Mishna (*Bava Kama* 9:7) explains:

[If a one said], Where is my deposit? and the other said, It is lost, [if the one says,] I adjure thee, and the other says, Amen!, and witnesses testify that the first party has consumed it, he need pay [only] the value.

But if he confessed it of himself, he must repay the value and the [added] fifth and bring a guilt-offering.

The Gemara (*Bava Kama* 109a ff.) explains in light of the verses that we are dealing here with a person who makes a false oath concerning a deposit, denying the receipt of the article or money from the depositor. Such a case can take place in a more extreme situation:

But if the man has no redeemer to whom restitution may be made for the guilt, the restitution for guilt which is made shall be the Lord's, even the priest's; besides the ram of the atonement, whereby atonement shall be made for him. (*Bamidbar* 5:8)

This is a case of theft from a convert, as explained ibid.:

“But if a man has no redeemer” — is there any person in Israel who has no redeemers? Rather, the verse must be speaking of theft from a convert.

 A convert is one who may have no heirs, no blood relatives — a person who left his home and family and joined the people of Israel (as Rabbi Yosei states in *Yevamot* 48b, “whoever converts is like a newborn baby,” i.e. all previous familial relations are dissolved). How serious it is to steal from such a lonely person!

From the utopian depiction of the Israelite camp in the wilderness, each element in its appointed place, we move on to various sicknesses (as in the case of the *zav*), to evil talk and arrogance (which are causes of *tzara’at,* according to Rabbi Yochanan, *Arakhin* 16a), to the violation of a person's trust (lying about a deposit) and to the exploitation of the weakest elements of society (stealing from a childless convert).

*Chazal* in the *Sifrei* explain that this transition takes place because of sin:

Said Rabbi Yosei the Galilean: Come and see how great is the power of sin, for until they sent out their hands in sin, there were no *zavim* or *metzora’im* among them, **but when they sent out their hands in sin, there were *zavim* and *metzora’im* among them…**

Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai said: Come and see how great is the power of sin, for until they sent out their hands in sin, what is stated about them: "And the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire" (*Shemot* 24:17)*—* they were neither afraid nor did they tremble. But as soon as they sent out their hands in sin, what is stated about them: "And when Aharon and all the Israelites saw Moshe, behold, the skin of his face sent forth beams; and they were afraid to come near" (*Shemot* 34:30). (*Sifrei*, *Naso*, 1, s.v. *Asher ani*)

The *parasha* continues to deal with the ills of society until it reaches a break in the most basic stronghold — the family unit. This the passage of the *sota*, the woman suspected of adultery. Here even God's seal, the seal of truth, is damaged. A refined society can be immune to illness, it can merit the revelation of the *Shekhina*, the Divine Presence; but these components are quickly lost through sin.

The *Sifrei* ibid. says that these events all occurred on one day: "These three things took place on the same day." With the erection of the *Mishkan*, there are already impure people to remove from the camp! This is reminiscent of what is stated about Adam:

Rabbi Yochanan bar Chanina said:

The day consisted of twelve hours.

In the first hour, his [Adam's] dust was gathered.

In the second, it was kneaded into a shapeless mass.

In the third, his limbs were shaped.

In the fourth, a soul was infused into him.

In the fifth, he arose and stood on his feet.

In the sixth, he gave [the animals] their names.

In the seventh, Chava became his mate.

In the eighth, they ascended to bed as two and descended as four [with their two newborn sons].

In the ninth, he was commanded not to eat of the tree.

In the tenth, he sinned.

In the eleventh, he was tried.

And in the twelfth he was expelled [from Eden] and departed, for it is written: "Man abides not in honor" (*Tehillim* 49:13). (*Sanhedrin* 38b)

Man could not live one full day without sinning! This idea seems to underlie David's statement in *Tehillim* 51 (v. 7):

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Even the creation of man is impossible without the dimension of sin, without sexual desire that contains a layer of the Evil Inclination.

**The Process of Repentance**

Is it our job then to simply raise our hands in despair? To think that creation will never reach a perfect state? To believe that sin stands at the foundation of the world and there is no remedy for it?

Certain religions in the world have accepted this approach, but we are as far from it as east is from west. It is precisely the reality that contains man's sin, the Evil Inclination, as part of the process of man’s creation, that gives legitimacy to the process of repentance. God recognizes our weaknesses and therefore allows us to repent: "For He knows our inclination; He remembers that we are dust" (*Tehillim* 103:14).

Therefore, we reiterate on Yom Kippur, the existence of the *Shekhina* amid sin and uncleanness, as is also mentioned in the abovementioned passage in the *Sifrei*:

"That they defile not their camp, in the midst of which I dwell" (*Bamidbar* 5:3).

Precious are Israel, for even when they are unclean, the *Shekhina* dwells among them.

And similarly it is stated: "that dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses" (*Vayikra* 16:16).

And it is stated: "When they defile My tabernacle that is in the midst of them" (*Vayikra* 15:31).

And it is stated: "That they defile not their camp, in the midst of which I dwell."

And it is stated: "And you shalt not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell" (*Bamidbar* 35:34).

When the framework of refined society is damaged, the Torah offers us a solution. We must not be discouraged by the multitude of problems and challenges, for they are inherent in the world, and even a person's birth would have been impossible were it not for the Evil Inclination. It is important to remember that every problem has a solution, that there is a process of healing and repentance — the *metzora* goes out of the camp but in the end returns, a *sota* is saved if she has not been defiled.

**Whoever Sees a *Sota* in Her Degradation Should Take a Nazirite Vow and Abjure Wine**

There are different views among the Sages concerning the phenomenon of *nezirut*, the status assumed when one takes the Nazirite vow. This is what is stated in the Gemara in *Nazir* (2a):

Whosever sees a *sota* in her degradation should take a Nazirite vow and abjure wine. (*Nazir* 2a)

A person who sees an unfaithful wife in her degradation reveals the ugliness in humanity, the severity of betrayal and trespass, the ability to abandon a faithful spouse. This traumatic event might cause a person to flee, to try to escape from the ordinary world. Thus, the passage of the *nazir (Bamidbar* 6:1-21) immediately follows that of the *sota* (ibid. 5:11-31).

The Gemara in *Ta'anit* relates to the designations that the Torah uses for the *nazir*:

Rabbi Elazar Ha-kappar be-Rabbi says: What is the Torah referring to when it says [of the *nazir*]: "And make atonement for him, for that he sinned by reason of the soul" (*Bamidbar* 6:11)? Against which soul does [the *nazir*] sin? [It must refer to the fact of] denying oneself wine. We can now make this *a fortiori* inference: If this [*nazir*] who denied himself wine only is called a sinner, how much more so whoever denies himself the enjoyment of ever so many things.

Rabbi Elazar says: He is called holy, as it is stated: "He shall be holy, he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long" (*Bamidbar* 6:5). If this [*nazir*] who denied himself wine only is called holy, how much more so whoever denies himself the enjoyment of ever so many things. (*Ta'anit* 11a)

A *nazir* is called holy but is called a sinner. What then is the essential nature of the *nazir*?

There is a constant tension between the natural world and the human world, the world above nature. Between a world of natural impulses and passions and a world of aesthetics and human creation. On the deeper level, this is the tension between the world of purity and the world of holiness, and between the world of impurity and the world of mundaneness. Holiness is comprised of a world of partitions, of withdrawing into a room within a room. Purity expresses a free burst of the force of nature.

The priesthood, which is an expression of holiness, is manifested in ornate clothing and a glorious tradition. We know that the high priest must be able to clearly trace his lineage to Aharon the Priest, since this expresses the preservation of human creation, the respectful attitude to tradition.

However, on Yom Kippur, even in the framework of the Temple we encounter another track: that of the goat sent away to Azazel. Two identical goats are offered, one is offered to God and is subject to the all the services performed in the Temple: slaughtering, receiving the blood, bringing the blood to the Altar, sprinkling it upon the Altar. There are special rules as to the place where these services must be performed, and the manner in which they must be carried out. On the other hand, its twin, the goat that is sent to Azazel, dies a natural death in the wilderness to which it is taken by an appointed man, devoid of special identity or lineage. Here the one stands against the other: the atonement in the partitioned-off area against the purity of nature.

The *nazir* and the high priest embody these two tracks as well. Both of them are forbidden to defile themselves even to tend to their seven close relatives (for whom a common priest is required to defile himself), and are bound to engage in the burial of a “mitzva­ corpse” only, a dead body with no one to tend to it, as ignoring such a case would desecrate the image of God.

There is, however, a difference between them: the *nazir* expresses the reaction of wild and passionate forces of life, and thus the *nazir*’s hair is left to grow wild. The prohibition to drink wine is precisely the exception that proves the rule — permitting the *nazir* to drink wine would be like adding oil to a fire, which would lead to an explosion. These life forces cannot meet with death, which is their complete opposite. In contrast, the high priest, who stands at the summit of human holiness, cannot meet the impurity that stands at the opposite end.

The *mishna* in *Nazir* brings a case in which these two tracks stand one against the other (7:1):

A high Priest and a *nazir* may not defile themselves [by contact] with their [dead] relatives, but they must defile themselves with a mitzva corpse.

If they were walking by the way, and found a mitzva corpse, Rabbi Eliezer says that the priest should defile himself but not the *nazir*. But the Sages say: The *nazir* should defile himself but not the high priest.

Rabbi Eliezer said to them: The priest should defile himself, for he does not offer a sacrifice for his defilement, but the *nazir* should not defile himself, for he does offer a sacrifice on defilement.

They said to him: The *nazir,* whose holiness is temporary, should defile himself; but the priest should not defile himself, for his holiness is permanent.

The *halakha* is decided in accordance with the view of the Sages, and Tosafot(*Nazir* 47a, s.v. *Nazir*) comment:

"The *nazir,* whose holiness is temporary" — for even if one said: I will be a *Nazir* forever, nevertheless unspecified *nezirut* is thirty days.

What are Tosafotsaying? Even when a person accepts *nezirut* for one’s entire life, the nature of the vow of *nezirut* remains the same — a one-time surging action, a momentary and instinctual burst of life.

Still, even the *nazir* ultimately offers his hair in the Temple and burns it in the fire under the sacrifice of the peace-offering. Even the hair that has grown wild is in the end offered in the formal world of the Temple. The *nazir* returns to the normative life of successive step-by-step ascent.

Societies and populations differ one from the other, and for each one a different mode of service is appropriate. Societies in which the Chassidic element dominates will incline in the direction of *nezirut*, whereas societies in which the classical spiritual movement dominates will incline in the direction of the priesthood.

**Dealing with Difficulties**

Both *nezirut* and priesthood are ways of dealing with deficiency in the world. The Temple is the place where we offer sacrifices and achieve atonement, and *nezirut* is a place of refuge for human beings when one encounters the harsh betrayal and destruction of the family unit.

Our world is built out of difficulties. It is related about Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, *zt"l*, that he once asked one of his students about the state of his prayers, and the student answered that he had no problems regarding this issue. Rabbi Ahron responded in wonder: How is that possible? When I was your age, I had many problems with prayer!

In many personal conversations conducted with students, there arises the issue of the difficulty of studying in the yeshiva framework. There is often a false impression that all problems can be resolved and that a utopian state can be reached. This, however, is incorrect. There are difficulties in studying Torah: difficulties with the lessons, difficulties with one’s study partner, difficulties with the daily schedule, difficulties with prayer, arguments and positions that are difficult to understand!

We must recognize that the world contains built-in insufficiency in all areas, and that even Adam and Chava sin already on the first day of their creation. Nevertheless, there is a way to deal with insufficiency:

So the Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, to Israel: My children, I created the Evil Inclination, and I created the Torah as an antidote to it. (*Kiddushin* 30b).

Even the priests must learn the virtue of moderation. The Gemara tells that when the priests would race up to the Altar all at once, some would fall or be knocked down by their comrades:

It once happened that two were even as they ran to mount the ramp. One of them pushed his fellow, who fell and broke his leg…

Our Rabbis taught: It once happened that two priests were equal as they ran to mount the ramp, and when one of them came first within four cubits of the Altar, the other took a knife and thrust it into his heart. (*Yoma* 22a-23a)

The way to go up the Altar is heel to toe: slow and constant work, readiness to deal with the difficulties and challenges.

The difficulties are not only when one arrives at yeshiva as a first-year student — they remain in the fourth, fifth and sixth years, and even afterwards. These are difficulties that are built in to the world. We must know how to deal with them, and we must believe that we can fix them.

[This *sicha* was delivered on *Shabbat Parashat Naso* 5774 (2014).]