



DVAR TORAH

NASSO

By: Rabbi Rory Meyerson



Essence of the נזיר

The נזיר of פרשה is the occasion to discuss an important concept in spirituality – the notion of refraining from that which is permitted in hopes to attain higher levels of קדושה. The נזיר's choice of abstinence from wine and from staying well-groomed are not merely dietary and trendy decisions.

The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 374) writes that Mankind is the only creature that synthesizes both physical and spiritual. On one hand, Mankind has שכל – intellectual capacity commensurate to מלאכים, yet on the other hand, we have a mundane body that functions exactly like the animal kingdom.

This unique combination comes with a rule. Mankind must always maintain a symbiosis between the body and soul. The body has needs. It must be properly fed and nurtured. Too little sustenance and the soul begins to depart. Any restriction imposed on the physical body is felt by its spiritual counterpart, the soul. Too little food or sleep and our mind will not think. Skipping the coffee in the morning can weaken your davening, learning and workflow throughout the day. Our goal is not to defy our needs and to obtain abstinence. Rather, it is to define our needs correctly and find a balance.

In fact, we have a commandment to keep our body strong and healthy. The Gemara (Taanis 22b) says, a person is not allowed to afflict themselves by refraining from the physical – we have a חיוב to keep our body alive. The Seforno (Bamidbar 6:2) notes that this is an important distinction from other religions which promote abstinence. The Seforno emphasizes that piety at the expense of health is not the Torah's goal.

The verse in Mishlei (3:17) states, דרכיה דרכי נעם וכל נתיבותיה שלום – which means “Her ways are pleasant, and all her paths are peaceful.” Meaning when Hashem commands a change to our lifestyle it must yield a life that is pleasant and peaceful. There must be a positive correlation between “more Godliness in my life” and “a better life.”

On the opposite extreme, it hardly needs mention, but of course, too much attention to bodily needs is not good. If a person consistently eats junk food or over eats, their mind will become muddled, and they will not be able to think or concentrate properly. Or perhaps if taken too far, overindulgence can lead to obesity and disease – *chas veshalom*. Living with this unique composition, Mankind must always be recalibrating to find the correct balance to be able to straddle the two worlds of body and soul.

With this description of Mankind, we can now unpack the נזיר of פרשה. At a glance, the נזיר is attempting to achieve abstinence. By seeking to remove the ‘extras’ in life, such as wine products and freshly groomed haircuts, he hopes to attain קדושה. Some of the commentaries praise this move, explaining that removing these two things help a person conquer his יצר הרע. The Rebbeinu Bechaya (Bamidbar 6:2) explains that when a person is constantly concerned with their appearance, it brings about an unnecessary worry which takes a man away from other more important goals in their עבודת ה'. Regarding wine, the רמב"ם in Moreh Nevuchim (3:8) details the negative effects of gatherings where the goal is communal inebriation, writing that there is no worse degradation of man. The נזיר refrains from these pleasures, he doesn't drink wine and lets his hair grow long, so that he can open the door to higher levels of spiritual attainment. And the נזיר is even praised for his courage in subduing physical desire, so much so the אבן עזרא says he is called a נזיר, because the נזר אלקיו על ראשו – the Crown of God rests on his head.

However, this is slightly contradictory. As mentioned above, as Jewish people, we do not make attempts at asceticism and celibacy. Composed of body and soul, we know we need to accommodate each of these parts. So, what is going on here by the נזיר!?

This is precisely why the פסוקים finish the נזיר of פרשה by reporting that he must bring a קרבן חטאת, a sin offering. The Sefer HaChinuch explains that the extra piety and restriction is not wholly the will of Hashem. It is side stepping this important duality of body and soul. To be consumed by piety to the extent that it exacts a toll on the body is not the will of Hashem! And this is what the נזיר has done. We are meant to enjoy the permitted pleasures of this world. We need them! Imagine you have a car filled to the brim with rocks; it will not drive. A car is not meant to function that way – and neither is a person. Part of the failure of the נזיר is failing to recognize this.

So which נזיר are we meant to follow – the one praised with the crown of ה' for his spiritual discipline, or the one commanded to bring a sin offering for denying himself what Hashem expressly permitted?

The message to take home from the נזיר is that we must always be tallying up our lives, asking ourselves, “What is serving our betterment both spiritually and physically; what could we use a little less of, and what a little more of?” For some more discipline may not always be the answer. Being an extremist living on the fringes is neither maintainable nor advisable. Others need an awakening from their careless, undisciplined lifestyle. Ultimately, a better life is one that is designed with the proper balance. How does one achieve this? The answer is that every life decision we make, we must continuously ask ourselves, “Will this help me serve ה' better?” Sometimes we need more spiritual discipline and sometimes we need more permitted physicality. Let this mantra be your moral compass, “Is this what ה' wants from me right now?” Refine, refine, and refine that answer until you find your way.



By: Rabbi Chaim Yeshaya Freeman

SUMMERTIME HALACHOS

TEFILAS HADERECH



The source for Tefilas Haderech is found in the Gemara in Brachos (29b-30a). The Gemara relates that Eliyahu Hanavi told Rav Yehuda, “When you set out on the way, seek permission from your Creator prior to leaving.” The Gemara explains that he was referring to Tefilas Haderech. Subsequently, the Gemara cites a statement from Rav Yaakov in the name of Rav Chisda that one who sets out on his way is required to recite Tefilas Haderech. The obvious question is, what is Rav Yaakov adding to the statement of Eliyahu Hanavi?

To answer this question, an analysis of the conclusion of this passage of Gemara is necessary. The Gemara concludes with another statement from Rav Yaakov in the name of Rav Chisda, that the obligation of Tefilas Haderech is dependent on a parsa (between 12,000-16,000 feet).

There is a dispute among the Rishonim regarding the understanding of this passage. Rashi (s.v. ad parsu) explains that a parsu is the cutoff point at which one no longer can recite Tefilas Haderech. The Rashba (s.v. eimas), as well, writes that after a parsu, one can no longer recite the prayer, taking Rashi’s approach. Rabbeinu Yonah (20a dapei haRif s.v. misha’a) follows Rashi’s general approach to the Gemara. However, he writes that reciting Tefilas Haderech before travelling a parsu is preferable, but if one forgets, he can still recite Tefilas Haderech, so long as there is a significant distance remaining in his journey.

However, the Rosh (Brachos 4:18) is bothered as to why someone cannot recite Tefilas Haderech after a parsu if one still has a long journey ahead. The Rosh therefore follows the Bahag’s approach that a parsu is referring to the minimal amount one has to travel to be required to recite Tefilas Haderech.

The Meiri (s.v. kol) answers the Rosh’s question and explains that after a parsu, one has missed the opportunity to “seek permission” (as expressed by Eliyahu Hanavi) from his Creator.

The Tzlach (ibid.) cites the Shelah that one can discern if he has received permission to travel based on how fluently one’s lips are able to utter the prayer; this idea is based upon Brachos 34b, where a similar idea is expressed by Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa regarding his ability to discern if his prayers were accepted by Heaven. The Tzlach comments that since we are not on the level of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, the Gemara requires that Tefilas Haderech be said in the plural; by including the needs of the public, not just one’s personal needs, one can assume consent is granted.

Based on this, the Gemara cited earlier, as well as the dispute regarding how to understand the passage, can now be explained. Rashi understood that the primary obligation to recite Tefilas Haderech is predicated upon the statement of Eliyahu Hanavi. Rav Yaakov is adding that the obligation to seek permission is applicable to all people, including those who are not on the level of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. Hence, the essence of the tefila is to seek permission from Hashem. After a parsu into the trip, therefore, one has lost his opportunity. However, the Rosh and the Bahag understood that the obligation to recite Tefilas Haderech is not connected with the statement of Eliyahu Hanavi to seek permission from Hashem; rather, it is a separate idea of reciting a tefila to protect the traveller upon his journey. Rav Yaakov is thus introducing the obligation to recite this tefila to protect us on our journey. Therefore, as long as there is a significant distance left in the trip, one is obligated to recite the tefila. However, it is unclear from Rav Yaakov’s words how much distance must still be left in the journey for one to be able to recite the tefila.

What is the practical halacha? To be continued next week...

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