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# The Nazir (Parashat Naso)

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As seen by Moshe Rabbeynu's blessing to Shevet Levi (recorded in Parashat V'zot HaBerakha), the tribe, and especially the Kohanim acted as the spiritual conduit between HaShem and the Jewish people. The Kohanim served not only in the Beit HaMikdash (Temple), they also served as the teachers, Rabbanim and prophets throughout the countryside. It appears as if the Kohanim had a monopoly on all the most special positions, which brings one into an intimately close relationship with HaShem. Thus, if one were not born a Kohen priest, one would not have access to the necessary schooling to become a teacher, rabbi or prophet. Although everyone in Israel had access to studying Torah, this was on a one to one basis, within families. Apparently, according to the historical and midrashic records, there was no structure of formal Torah education and schooling during the entire period from Yitziat Mitzraim (exodus) through Hurban Beit HaRishon (destruction of the First Temple) (with the possible exception of the n'vi'im-prophets).

The layman was not ordained to live life at the level of the Kedusha (holiness) of a Kohen. The level of layman spirituality was thereby correspondingly limited. In order to enable the layman Jew to experience the intensity of the Kohanic spirituality, HaShem ordained for us in His Torah, the order of the Nazir vow.

Most discussion in the Gemara (Talmud) about Nazirut revolves around the nature and specifics of how the vow is entered into and later fulfilled. There is some peripheral discussion about the nature of midot (morality) that a Nazir is supposed to have. However, the spiritual influence the vow has on its taker is rarely discussed outside of the mystical literature. Yet, it is these same mystical revelations that enable us to understand the true nature of Nazirut and how its lessons can be applied today.

The word Nazir includes two different meanings. The first, as clearly defined by Rashi is Perisha (separation). The Nazir by definition is one who separates from wine, uncleanness and the like. The concept of separation is also mentioned in Parashat Kedoshim, "You shall be holy" (Lev. 19:1). Kedusha (holiness) means to be separate. Thus the separation

brought about by the Nazirut also brings along with it Kedusha. Yet, the Kedusha of the Nazir is of the highest caliber. The Nazir achieves a level of Kedusha similar to a Kohen Gadol (High Priest). This is suggested by the second meaning of the word Nazir. Nazir can also mean “crown” or a diadem.

The word for crown in Hebrew is Keter. Keter is a well-known word and concept to the Mekubalim. They recognize Keter to be the first and highest level of G-d’s ten Divine lights in creation known as the Sefirot. Keter, the holy Zohar writes, is metaphorically called the place of the Ra’avah HaRa’avin (desire of desires). This is a reference to G-d’s highest manifestation of pure, unadulterated and unhampered mercy. This is a level of mercy rarely deserved by or seen by mankind.

According to the Mekubalim, mankind stands in relationship to G-d based upon our actions. G-d relates to us, depending upon how we relate to Him and to one another. G-d has ordained for us laws and commandments. We either walk the straight and narrow path or we veer from it. We can thus either receive from G-d His blessings as a reward for our obedience or His curse as punishment for our rebelliousness. This lesson is clearly spelled out through the entire Bible.

What we learn from this is that we do not always deserve, nor receive G-d’s FULL grace and mercy. Granted, if G-d acted towards us for even the shortest of moments without any grace and mercy we would cease to exist. Nonetheless, while we receive a sliver of the Divine mercy, we are not receiving its abundance, all the while that we stand before G-d with sin in our hands and judgment on our heads.

The Mekubalim, therefore, use a metaphor and state that we stand before G-d’s “Small Face.” This is the famous Kabbalistic metaphor Zeir Anpin, better known as Z.A. (corresponding to the sefirat Tiferet, which also emanates the written Torah). This metaphorical “Small Face of G-d” is what we humans perceive all the while that we do not merit the abundance of G-d’s full grace and mercy.

Now, along comes the Nazir.

The Nazir wishes to draw as close as is humanly possible to the Divine. He/she wants to bond with His G-d. His yearning for spiritual experience is intense. His heart is fully devoted and committed to his L-rd in Heaven. Alas, the young future Nazir lacks only one thing in order for him/her to achieve his goals. He lacks the necessary Kedusha (holiness). It was to provide this holiness for him/her that the Nazir vow was ordained. By taking this vow and living it, one could rise to the level of the Kedusha of a Kohen Gadol, for like the Kohen Gadol, the Nazir was forbidden to contaminate his Kedusha by having any exposure (close proximity) to the dead.

More than this, however are the two most peculiar aspects of the Nazir. A Nazir was not allowed to cut or groom his hair nor was he to consume any product that has its origins

from the grapevine. These two practices reveal to us the unique high stature accorded to the Nazir.

The grapevine, especially wine, is the Jewish archetypal symbol of the goodness of the Earth, blessed to us by G-d. Wine is used in every Jewish celebration. The Bible teaches us that wine makes the heart of man rejoice. The grapevine, thus is a potent symbol of the power of G-d manifest here upon the Earth. However, G-d's full power is not revealed here upon the Earth. G-d's power is more fully expressed in Heaven. G-d's "Small Face" shines upon the Earth, whereas the Mekubalim say that it is G-d's "Long (Great) Face" that shines in Heaven. This "Full-Long-Great Face," referring to the sefirat Keter is referred to metaphorically by the Mekubalim as Arikh Anpin, or simply Arikh.

Now, please do not confuse Kabbalistic metaphors. G-d is One and His Name is One. Yet, G-d is revealed differently in different places in the universe, all in accordance to the actions of his servants in that "place." In the highest Heavens, the tenth Heaven to be exact, is the "place" where G-d's "Full-Long-Great Face" is revealed. This is where G-d is perceived as Arikh. It is there that G-d's full and abundant mercies shine. It is this "place" that few on Earth are ever able to perceive due to the sins in our hands and judgment on our heads.

The Nazir, he is the different one. He is willing to separate from the pleasures of earthly living and the limited blessings and mercy that G-d has placed within them. The Nazir wishes to experience the blessings and mercy of G-d from their source above in the tenth Heaven, at the level of the Keter, the "Full-Great-Long Face." The majority of Israel experience G-d as Z.A., the "Small Face." We enjoy G-d's blessings, flowing upon the Earth from Z.A. (the "Small Face") when we deserve them, meaning, when we fulfill the commandments of the Torah. We receive G-d's wrath when we violate the commandments of the Torah.

The Nazir wishes to rise above all of this and to experience G-d's "Full-Long-Great Face," the "Face" which only shows mercy. Alas, most men never merit to experience only G-d's mercy, but for the Nazir, this is for what he lives.

The Bible also often references these two aspects of Divine providence, which the Mekubalim metaphorically refer to as the "Long", and "Short Faces" of G-d. For example, in the Song of the Sea, sung by Moshe Rabbeynu and Benei Yisrael, G-d is referred to as an "Ish Milhamah" ("Man" of war). It is said that at the parting of the Sea, G-d "appeared" (metaphorically speaking) as an Army general, with long black hair and beard. Black is a metaphor of judgment, a reference to Zeir Anpin (Z.A.) the "Small Face."

Centuries later, Daniel has a vision of G-d, where he sees G-d seated on a throne in Heaven, appearing as an ancient "old man" with "white hair" (as is typical of a senior citizen). Daniel thus refers to G-d metaphorically as the "Ancient of Days." This is a reference to G-d's ultimate "Long Face" of mercy, Arikh Anpin, the "Full-Long-Great Face."

These Biblical metaphors also explain the purpose for the Nazir to grow his/her hair. The hair on the head expresses the life force within the head. When one lives under the spiritual influence of Z.A. the "Small Face" the hair on one's head is metaphorically said to be "black." This signifies that one is under judgment. For this reason, Mekubalim shave their heads (except for peyot) and married women completely cover their hair. In this way, the Divine judgment, which emanates from the head and out onto the hair is mitigated.

The Nazir, on the other hand, brings to Earth, an emanation of the "Full-Long-Great Face" of Arikh Anpin. The hair of the Nazir, therefore, should grow long and abundant to act as a receptacle for G-d's full and abundant mercies.

It is evident that G-d is revealed through many "Faces." Please do not allow this mystical truth to be perverted to justify the "faces" of idolatry. This evil blemish has occurred throughout the centuries. Only by coming to know G-d's truth in His holy Torah is one able to come to recognize the "Face" of G-d and to distinguish it from the "faces" of false gods, the "faces" of imposters and evil.

The Nazir lived a life of scrupulous Torah observant. He/she wanted to be more than a tzadik and Hasid, he wanted to be a Kadosh (holy person) similar to a Navi (prophet). Indeed, in the Bible, Nazirs are mentioned alongside prophets, for the two types together share a common goal – to live as "close" to their Creator as is humanly possible. Whatever has to be sacrificed to serve that goal is, therefore, sacrificed!

Today, we have no Beit HaMikdash (Temple) and thus no Nazirite sacrifices can be offered, therefore, no official Nazirite vow can be undertaken. Nonetheless, there are great moral lessons to be learned from the Nazir.

Whatever it is that can serve to engross one in this world and act as a hindrance separating one from an intense, passionate, experiential relationship with the Living HaShem, Creator and G-d of the universe should be viewed with disdain and discarded. Although the vow of the Nazir is long gone, the spirit, which motivated them, lives on, in us.

May HaShem raise up among us those sincere and devoted souls who wish to serve as conduits to emanate upon the Earth the light of Arikh Anpin. Only those who scrupulously observe the mitzvot, study Torah, Pshat and Sod every day, and want to be a Kadosh need apply.



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