

## "A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem; from new or aged wine he shall abstain ..." (6:2,3)

*Rashi* cites *Chazal* who explain the juxtaposition of the laws of the *Nazir* to the laws of the *Sotah*. They state that one who sees a *Sotah* in her state of degradation should take a *Nazirite* vow in order to enforce his abstinence from wine. The *Sotah* is a woman who has profaned herself by destroying the fidelity of her marriage. She has submitted to her passions by allowing her heart to overpower her mind. Wine stimulates the senses and catalyzes a behavior which, if not controlled, can be detrimental. By abstaining from wine and focusing on the lessons gleaned from the *Sotah* narrative, one will learn to adopt a lifestyle of spiritual restraint.

*Horav Dovid Firkas, z.l.*, expressed a homiletic interpretation of this *Chazal*. A *talmid* of the *Baal Shem Tov*, *Horav Firkas* was replying to a *misnaged*, one who was opposed to the *Baal Shem Tov's* *chassidic* doctrine and its approach to serving Hashem. Founded by the *Baal Shem Tov*, *chassidic* doctrine was characterized by ecstatic forms of prayer, which reflected an inner peace and profound joy. The *tefillos* were often accompanied by outbursts of joy, song and dance. Religious fellowship among *chassidim* also featured a fraternal meal, particularly on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. At this meal, the *chassidim* expounded *Torah* thoughts accompanied by vibrant singing as an expression of exultation in being able to serve the Creator.

It once happened that a *misnaged* approached a group of *chassidim* who were enthusiastically engrossed in a *tish*, festive meal, singing and dancing, expressing their love for Hashem in ecstasy. He berated their lack of concern and insensitivity to *Klal Yisrael's* plight, "How can you drink wine and sing and dance, when we Jews are suffering from the tragic effects of *galus*? Your behavior is nothing more than an expression of callous disregard for the Jewish people!"

*Horav Dovid Firkas* responded by first explaining the seeming discrepancy in the text of this *parsha*. As mentioned above, *Rashi* states that it is proper and correct to abstain from wine once one has been privy to the public disgrace of a *Sotah*. In *Pasuk 11*, regarding the *Nazir's korban*, however, *Rashi* cites *Chazal* who say the *Nazir* must offer penance for abstaining from something which has been permitted to him -- namely, wine. How are we to reconcile this apparent contradiction ?

*Horav Firkas* responded with a homiletic analysis of the *pasuk*. "One who sees a *Sotah* in her degradation" refers to one who always sees the worst in his fellow Jew. Regrettably, there are individuals who obtain a perverse feeling of superiority by denigrating others. The degradation of others is a pathologic defense employed by many people to build their own self-images. They distort reality, always looking at the negative aspect of every endeavor or good deed performed by another Jew. To this person the *Torah* responds, "Let him abstain from wine" for any form of intoxicant may increase his careless and baneful disregard for other human beings.

On the other hand, the individual who has a positive outlook on life in general and people in particular has no need to refrain from drinking wine. On the contrary, wine engenders a heightened sense of joy and enthusiasm, adding to his already favorable views. Such a person sins when he restricts his opportunity for enhanced optimism.

Unfortunately, there are people who are always "*seeing the Sotah in her degradation*," seeking to ferret out every bit of *lashon hara* regarding an individual or an institution. Every community is plagued with such malevolent people. They are the first to "know about" a scandal and the last to stop talking about it. Their own lack of self-esteem feeds upon the disgrace of others. If they would only focus on themselves with the same microscope they use to judge others, their whole attitude towards people would drastically transform.