

## A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazirite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

When we first set eyes on an individual who has chosen a life of crime, human nature tends to focus on the present; he is a criminal, with little or no redeeming value. Rarely do we take the time to question his or her origins: What was his or her family life like as they were growing up? Did he or she go to school? Did he or she have good friends? In other words, we rarely ask where and when he or she went wrong? For the most part, this is due to a preconceived notion that all criminals had a miserable childhood, no parents to speak of, no clear set of values, etc. We could be no further from the truth.

Let us take a look at our *parsha*, peruse the *halachos* of the *nazir*, and ask ourselves about the origin of this saintly person, the *nazir* who has taken a vow upon himself to abstain from worldly pleasure, to live an ascetic life fully devoted to spiritual ascendance. Surely, this must be a person to whom sin and moral turpitude must be an anathema. Clearly, this is a person to whom the very notion of sin is something very distant. Our sages take a different look at this person – and, indeed, at all of us.

*Rashi* notes the juxtaposition of the laws of *nazir* upon those of the *sotah*, wayward wife. He explains that we derive from here that one who sees a *sotah b'Kilkulah*, in her degradation, should abstain from wine. Often, the result of inebriation is a clouding of the senses. No longer are the parameters of right and wrong clearly demarcated. People try to become lax with previously ordained moors of morality. The result is a total breakdown of the structure of morality. Infidelity is no longer taboo, and everything else that sadly follows is the stuff we read about on an almost daily basis.

Let us ask ourselves whether this holy *nazir* has anything to do with this repulsive woman. She has lost all sense of morality. She left her husband, her family, her friends and her parents; she shamed them all – why? A momentary fling; a lapse in moral decency; a selfish deference to base nature. Why would the *nazir* even dream that this woman, who represents his complete opposite, has any lesson to impart to him? He surely does not lead such a degenerate lifestyle.

This is specifically the Torah's lesson. It takes one mistake, one diversion from the straight and proven path, one uncontrolled glass of wine, and suddenly the individual is no longer the same. This is why he must immediately abstain from wine. Hashem has shown him something very important. It was no simple sojourn that he took that day. If it led him past an *ishah sotah*, there must have been a reason for it.

I once met a fellow who was doing his third "tour" in the department of corrections. At first glance, he appeared to look like a common person – nothing special – nothing overly negative about his appearance. After speaking with him for a while, I discovered that he had graduated Harvard Law

School *magna cum laude*, and had immediately been hired as a White House intern during the Clinton administration. His future was very promising; his life appeared to be moving forward on a positive note.

Then he discovered the allure of narcotics. First, it was pain killers, followed by anti-depressants, until, as they say in contemporary vernacular, he was hooked. One thing led to another. He lost his prestigious position. After great difficulty, he found another job in a law firm. This, too, did not last long. He was an emotional and physical wreck – all the product of his own foolish delinquency. He had no one to blame but himself. Now he sits incarcerated, with time to mull over a life gone bad. He has repented – numerous times. Each time he makes up his mind – no more – until the next time. This is the *sotah b'kilkulah*. We think it can never happen to us. The Torah, thus, encourages us to abstain from wine. No protection against sin is too much.