

## All the days of the vow of his nezirus... holy shall he be. (6:5)

The *Nazir* is unique in that his body becomes consecrated to Hashem. He becomes *kadosh*, holy, *b'kedushas ha'guf*, his actual body becomes holy. He is not permitted to become ritually impure to a corpse, even to his closest seven relatives. Why? *Ki neizar Elokav al Rosho*, "For the crown of his G-d is upon his head" (ibid 6:7). What is the meaning of being the "receptacle" for Hashem's crown? Why would this be a reason for prohibiting him from becoming contaminated to a corpse? Is he holier than the *Kohen* who is permitted to become *tamei*, contaminated, to his seven close relatives?

*Chazal* teach that the prohibition is only concerning ritual defilement due to actual contact with the corpse. He is, however, allowed to attend the eulogy and to stand in line with the mourners. This law is applicable whether the *Nazir* has a growth of hair on his head or whether it has already been shorn.

In a masterfully crafted thesis, **Horav Nissan Alpert, zl**, distinguishes between the various loves that exist between parent and child, mother and newborn infant, child and parent who has passed away. He delineates between love for the human body of either parent or child, versus a deeper, more profound and intellectual love for the character of the person.

The love of a parent toward his/her child, and child toward his/her parent, reaches its apex during variant, almost contrasting, stages. The love felt and expressed by a mother for her newborn infant is without peer and measure. Likewise, the pain felt and expressed by a child experiencing the demise of a parent is unparalleled. The intensity of emotion reaches its highest point during birth and death. During these experiences, a commonality is shared in that the emotion is unrestrained and unbounded. During the intervening period of "life" following the infant's growth until shortly before a parent's death, the parent/child relationship is more complex, requiring greater understanding.

In other words, to place it in a more present-day vernacular: there is a difference between emotional love, which is unconfined and inexhaustible, and intellectual love, which is bounded by intellect, common sense and an acute awareness of reality. Now that we have established these parameters, we ask ourselves why, according to the Torah's point of view, should this pattern exist? How are we to understand this?

*Seichel ha'yashar is mechayev*, common sense compels that the older one gets, the greater intelligence that he possesses, the more "person" he becomes, it would give greater reason for a stronger, more balanced egalitarian and harmonious relationship. Logically, one would expect that parents relate better to offspring after such offspring has matured and reached a stage of greater intellectual and personal sophistication.

The flipside is just as reasonable and presents a strong argument. As a child matures,

independence sets in. Anyone who has ever raised a teenager or *chosson/kallah* “type” knows that this transformation does not always lend itself to greater harmony. Independence, by its very essence, means to break away, to sever the relationship. The child is no longer an extension of the parents’ bodies.

This state of independence which fluctuates up and down, back and forth, during the lifetime relationship between parent and child, is terminated upon death. The deceased is now completely reliant upon the kindness and love of the surviving loved one. At death, the relationship reverts to its status at birth, when the child is once again an extension of the mother’s body. The love that has over the years been suppressed is now aroused and ready to once again be shared. Likewise, in death, the surviving relative can wail more easily and, without inhibition, declare, “Woe, for what I have lost! Woe, for the part of me that has left me!”

When Chavah gave birth to Kayin, she exclaimed, *Kanisi ish es Hashem*, “I have acquired a man with Hashem” (*Bereishis* 4:1). She had more than an emotional bond with her newborn child. She acquired something special. The connection was physical, as well as emotional. Mother and child develop a relationship unlike any other relationship between two human beings, other than husband and wife, concerning which it is written, *V’hayu l’basar echad*, “They shall become one flesh” (*Bereishis* 2:24). There is a physical, as well as emotional, bond.

There is another area of commonality to be addressed – that of the birthing mother who becomes *tamei*, ritually unclean, with birth, and a corpse, which is the *avi avos ba’tumah*, highest level of ritual impurity. Rav Alpert explains that when a person takes leave of his mortal surroundings, there is an outburst of love which is purely physical in nature. People who were close to the *niftar*, deceased, yearn for the physical entity – not the *Tzelem Elokim*, Image of

G-d, spiritual essence of the individual, but his physical aspect, the one to which we related, we loved. When death occurs, the mourners grieve over the “body” without the soul. Likewise, when a child is born, the attachment that is generated by its birth is physical. The mother focuses on the physical entity which is an extension of herself. Thus, there is *tumah*, ritual impurity.

This, explains Rav Alpert, is the idea behind our supplication that Hashem be merciful to us, *k’racheim av al banim*, “Like a father is merciful toward his children” (*Tehillim* 103:13). David *Hamelech* underscores father, rather than mother. A mother’s love stems from her physical bond with the child who is an extension of herself. The father’s love is more focused on his child’s being a *Tzelem Elokim*. It is a deeper, perhaps less traumatic, sort of love.

Attraction to physicality can be somewhat dangerous. Inordinate fascination to the physical can be manifest in one’s excessive interest in base earthly pleasures, or by being overly impressed and impacted by the purely physical external aspects of people, such as beauty. Additionally, one becomes obsessed with what he lacks – physically – rather than by what he has.

*Kinah*, envy; *taavah*, lust; *kavod*, honor: are the three primary physical drives which our sages consider to be the most harmful negative character traits that can drive a person to forfeit his portion in the World to Come. These are all obsessions with physicality, seeking what another person possesses, feeling a personal sense of inadequacy, always mulling over how one appears in the eyes of others.

This is what prompts the *nazir* to take an extreme approach to life, to make an about face, to remove himself dramatically from the pursuits of the flesh. He is prepared to live a life focused on spirituality, idealism, character refinement and closeness to Hashem. By being a *nazir*, he embarks on a radical path that circumvents the passions of the flesh and brings him into greater proximity to Hashem.

A *nazir* may not drink wine, cut his hair, or contaminate himself to a corpse. Basically, we can say that he has severed his relationship with all externality, superficiality, from the flesh – which represents the outer layer of a person. His outward appearance is of no significance to him. He neglects himself by growing his hair long. He eschews physicality.

We now understand why, although the *nazir* may not come in proximity of a corpse, he may, attend the *hesped*, eulogy. The human corpse represents the flesh/external aspect of a human being. The eulogy focuses on his essence, his character, achievements – not his physical dimension. The *nazir* may attend the “intellectual” aspect of death, because it enhances his goals. While it is true that at a funeral we mourn the “body” of the friend, relative, with whom we will no longer share our experiences; but more so, we grieve over the vacuum left by the return of his *neshamah*, soul, to its Heavenly source.

In closing, *Rav Alpert* returns to the *pasuk*, “For the crown of his G-d is upon his head.” Hashem is the primary influence on the *nazir*. He is guided by his “head,” looking up to G-d for guidance. He has outgrown the passions of his heart, the desires of the flesh. He is guided by *Elokav*, his G-d, employing the Divine Name which reflects *Middas HaDin*, the Attribute of Strict Justice. Hashem judges a man through the spectrum of justice, clarity unclouded by emotion. Likewise, the *nazir* is guided by the “crown of his G-d on his head”; his thought process, his “head,” referring to his *seichel*, common sense, wisdom, ability to view situations cogently, is not distorted by his heart. He is *kadosh l'Hashem*, holy to G-d.

How fitting it is that the *parsha* of *nazir* follows immediately after that of the *sotah*, wayward wife. This woman represents all that can go wrong when the passions of the heart, the desires of the flesh, distort one's ability to think rationally. The *nazir* sees where too much wine can lead to more than inebriation. It can lead to the destruction of one's self, family, and future. The *nazir* knows what he must do; he understands the immediate course of action that he must take. He must place his head in “gear” before his heart goes into “overdrive.”