

Afterward the Nazir may drink wine. (6:20)

A fundamental principle of spiritual growth is: Inspiration is fleeting, but what truly matters is how we internalize the experience/inspiration and allow it to shape our actions over time. A person may attend a powerful *shiur* or *shmuess*, ethical discourse in which the speaker's oratory is remarkable. The listener is overcome with emotion and experiences a personal wake-up call that shakes him to his core. How long does it last before his emotion dissipates? We have all been there. If a few days pass and business proceeds as usual, it is an indication that the inspiration was like the passing wind. It passed. The true measure of growth is whether the experience translates into real, lasting change. The *Kotzker Rebbe*, *zl*, famously said, "The way to measure a person is, not by where he stands during a moment of inspiration, but rather, where he walks afterwards." A single high moment is insufficient; what truly counts is how it influences his path going forward.

The *Alshich Hakadosh* expresses this idea in his commentary to the above *pasuk*. He wonders why Torah still refers to the man who has just completed his *nezirus* as a *nazir*. He has concluded his period of *nezirus*. He is no longer a *nazir*. He explains that the test of his commitment commences now. How will he now drink wine? Will he imbibe as he did before? Will he go to a *kiddush* and knock down a few *bechers* of wine, or will he demonstrate constraint? Will he show that he has changed, that he is a *nazir* who has just abstained from wine due to a vow he made? Was it a one-time deal, or has he become a spiritually-elevated person?

A *chassid* once asked the *Baal Shem Tov* why, despite his many days of fasting, he has not become spiritually elevated. One would think that such self-denial would render him more spiritually-transcendent. It appears that it was not working. The *Baal Shem Tov* replied that he once had to address a pressing situation in a distant town, and every minute counted. He availed himself of a carriage and a team of horses, and they were off at breakneck speed. They "flew through the air," passing by a number of rest areas in which the horses could stop and drink. They passed villages and did not stop to eat. Indeed, it seemed that everyone – man and steed – were spiritually driven and required no food. Finally, they reached their destination; the horses were unhooked and allowed to go to the trough to eat. One would think that, after having experienced such an otherworldly trip, the horses would have shown some restraint. Horses, however, remain horses, and they dug into their food as if they had not eaten for days. Likewise, a person is not measured in accordance with his status when he fasts, but rather, how he eats afterwards.

The *Ostrovitzer tzaddik*, *zl*, was known for his constant fasting. In addition, he made a point to attend every *Pidyon Ha'ben* that came his way. It is a tradition that one who attends a *Pidyon Ha'ben* is considered as if he had fasted eighty-four *taneisim*, fast days. [The *S'dei Chemed* writes (60:54) that he never found the source of this statement.] The *Rebbe* was asked about his practice of fasting, citing *Chazal* (*Taanis* 11a) *Yosheiv b'tanis nikra choteh*, "One who sits and fasts is called a sinner." The *Rebbe* countered, "*Chazal* are speaking about a person who is *yosheiv b'tanis*, 'sits' on one level; the fast does not spiritually elevate him. Such a person should eat, since the fast is doing nothing for him." Self-flagellation is not a *mitzvah*.

