

Shabbat Spice

PARSHAT NASSO



The Power of Beauty

By Rachele Nitzani

This week's parasha, Parshat Naso, discusses the concept of the *nazir*, the Jewish priest who takes separate measures from others in society to be holy.

As holy as this way of life is, a *nazir* must bring a *Korban Chatat*, a sin offering, when he finishes being a *nazir*, indicating that he still did something wrong by living such a holy life. His "wrong doing" lies in the fact that this separate life is not the ideal choice of a Torah Jew. A Torah Jew is meant to live in the physicality of this world and uplift every part of it.

Our Torah teaches us how to live a normal life for ourselves and with other people. Balance is one of the hardest things to achieve in life, but it is an important Torah value and something that Judaism holds in high regard.

A woman specifically is not meant to be a *nazir*, namely to cast aside her feminine uniqueness and beauty for the sake of holiness. On the contrary, a Jewish woman must and should use her beauty and physical qualities in order to bring love and holiness into her home. In doing so, she teaches her children a most powerful lesson: physical qualities and strengths should be used to put effort into the home, to care for the home and the beauty of the home, and make herself beautiful, thereby making herself and her home pleasant.

But she cannot cast aside the lesson of the *nazir* completely and forget to balance her physical characteristics and beauty with inner beauty as well. By living a life that does not cast aside beauty and physicality completely, and incorporates beauty and beautiful things in her outside life, a woman actually emerges with a renewed focus on the inside. By using her beauty to beautify her life on the outside, always in a modest way, she remembers to beautify the inside as well, focusing on her developing her inside beauty and her characteristics. She asks herself things like "Do I appear the same on the street as I do in my home?" and by working on inner beauty and balancing it with outer beauty, she is left with confidence and belief in herself.

It is a woman's duty to turn her attention inward as well and make sure that on the inside, she is beautiful. Indeed, the need to attract attention from the outside is subconsciously the need to receive the respect and recognition we all need. When a woman doesn't like herself, she will always depend on the likes of others. When she likes herself and believes in her inner beauty, she will not use her beauty for external recognition and instead, have the healthy balance of beauty.

Essentially, a woman, by living a Torah life of this physical world, emerges with a balance between outer and inner beauty, without ever casting away the concept of physicality and beauty completely.

Shabbat Shalom!

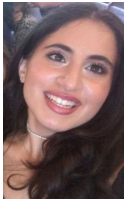
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Jewish Monkhood

By Rachel Aziz

In this week's parsha, Parshat Nasso, we come across an interesting concept. A Jew (both male and female) is given a voluntary commandment to take on a vow of the *nazir*, as a means to deepen their relationship with Hashem. The word *nazir* means to "keep aloof from" according to Rashi. The restrictions are as follows: One is not allowed to cut their hair, drink or eat anything that grows from the grapevine (grapes, wine, etc.), or come into contact with a dead body (including one's own immediate family). The length of the Nazarite vow is up to the individual, as the Torah only outlines thirty days but in no way specifies a concrete time period. At the end of the vow, the *nazir* is required to bring forth three sacrifices: a sin, a burnt, and a well-being offering.

The vow is what I consider to be the closest concept we have in Judaism to monks and nuns in other religions. A major distinction is that in our religion we are opposed to those practices of self-denial. Vows of silence and fasting and abstinence are never found in our Torah. This is because Judaism firmly believes that almost every pleasure Hashem put on this earth; food, alcohol, money, physical intimacy... was meant for us to enjoy, at the right time and place.

As Ramban explains in the first pasuk of Parashat Kedoshim: "*And such is the way of the Torah, that after it lists certain specific prohibitions, it includes them all in a general precept.*" How then could we reconcile restricting ourselves as we do as a *nazir* in order to deepen our relationship with Hashem?

This is a question of great controversy in our Oral Torah, in both the Mishnah and the Talmud. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (z"l) also explores this question in his essay "Sages and Saints." R. Elazar and Nachmanides (or Ramban), see the self-sacrifices of the *nazir* as an opportunity to elevate him/her to the same level as a prophet, an individual who is especially close to Hashem. They offer the idea that the sin offering at the conclusion of the vow is for ceasing to be a *nazir*.

However, Rav Eliezer HaKappar and Rav Shmuel believe that the sin offering is for becoming a *nazir* to begin with, as a *nazir* is abstaining from the pleasures of the world that Hashem created. Judaism is a religion that holds the very important idea that Hashem is to be found in the physical world. Therefore, any enjoyment from the physical world or its pleasures should be used to sanctify it.

The dispute seems to confound Maimonides (or Rambam) himself who maintains both views in the Mishneh Torah. Rather than explain the contradiction, he later identifies two types of devout Jews- the Saint and the Sage, or the Chasid and the Chacham. The Chasid, or the "Saint" is one who acts in extremes, good extremes but in an abundance of what is required of him/her. However, the Chacham, or the "Sage", is a creature of the "middle way." This describes someone who acts in moderation and avoids extremes of too much or too little in everything. But you cannot live both lifestyles. One cannot live dedicated towards self-fulfillment, while also being present in creating a just and compassionate society, as Rambam explains.

(Continued...)

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This is because the Saint may decide to give away all their money to the poor, but then what is left for his family? He may choose to forgive all sins committed against him, but then what about his duty to justice?

The life of a Saint is exemplary as the life of an individual, but if all of society were to conduct themselves like that? G-d didn't create us that way nor for that purpose. Their quest may be for the benefit of the masses but it is one that serves to isolate themselves from those very same masses. The *nazir* most compares to the Saint, s/he pursues a deeper relationship with Hashem through self-denial, but his efforts are praiseworthy in their intention which is why Rambam equates them to the status of a prophet. The only issue then is the loneliness such a uniquely high level often brings.

The Torah itself understands this basic struggle and the necessity of humans to develop a balance between their relationship with fellow man as well as their relationship with Hashem. That's why there is a balance of mitzvot for each category. The woman is especially sensitive to this delicate balance of achieving personal perfection through their interpersonal deeds while gaining self-actualization with Hashem. Her full attention is needed from almost everyone around her in almost every stage in life and yet she must find time for herself, to give herself what she needs, to do what millennials call "self-care."

It is for this very reason we have been blessed with the opportunity of the *nazir*.

The Nazarite vows are given to us as a way of saying "Yes, there may be times when you feel you need to take on something a little extra to further your relationship with Hashem. This is how Judaism tells you to take that journey." Since the nazariteship is such a personal and circumstantial situation, the Torah gives no time constraint. One can choose his time limit.

However, like the scholars before us recognized, the life of a *nazir* is not meant to be a permanent lifestyle. In the case of the famous life-long Nazir Shimshon, it became mundane for him, in a way that began to hurt his relationship with Hashem rather than help it. Additionally, a life of denying self-pleasure was recognized as similar to abandoning all duty to society. To not be there for your fellow man is selfish.

For that reason, at the conclusion of one's vow they are to bring a sin offering as a form of repentance, in recognition that their choice, while justified, still yields a consequence. Like all things in Judaism, we are meant to enjoy things within a context denoted by the Torah. The relationship one developed with Hashem during the Nazarite vow doesn't dissipate afterwards when it's over. Much like in the case of Shmuel Hanavi, who was a *nazir* for three years in his childhood, he then concluded his vow and went on to become a prophet who we all know and learn from every day. It's all about juggling this balance of, "How do I connect myself to Hashem without ruining my relationship with him and completely cutting myself off from society?"

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