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Tying Things Together

Rabbi Shmuel Goldin

Parshat Naso, the largest single parsha in the Torah, is also one of the most fragmented. Central to the parsha is a section consisting of disparate legal themes, including:

1. The temporary exile of individuals afflicted with specific forms of tuma from various sections of the camp
2. Laws concerning theft and false denial of financial obligation
3. The regulations governing a Sota, a married woman suspected of adultery
4. The laws of a Nazir, an individual who vows to undertake more rigorous religious observance
5. The rules of Birkat Kohanim, the priestly blessing

Questions

What, if any, unifying thread connects the seemingly disparate laws found in Parshat Naso? Why are these regulations specifically commanded now, as the Israelites prepare for their monumental departure from Mount Sinai?

Approaches

A: While, at first glance, a global theme uniting all of Parshat Naso's laws remains elusive, connections between specific sections of the text are suggested by traditional sources.

The Talmud, for example, notes that the laws concerning theft close with an admonition to respect the legal rights of the Kohanim. Immediately thereafter the text records the regulations governing a Sota. Interpreting this textual flow midrashically in "cause and effect" fashion, the rabbis proclaim that anyone who holds back the portions meant for a Kohen will be punished with family strife and will ultimately require the services of a Kohen at the ritual trial

of his suspected wife.

The Talmud likewise explains the positioning of the laws of nezirut immediately following the regulations governing a Sota. The irresponsible, licentious behavior that can be caused by intoxication is starkly highlighted by the spectacle of the Sota. "Anyone who personally witnesses the degradation experienced by a Sota," the rabbis maintain, "will be moved to separate himself [like a Nazir] from wine."

Numerous commentaries address the potential link between the textual section concerning nezirut and the section immediately following, delineating the laws of Birkat Kohanim. The Ibn Ezra simply states that after discussing the Nazir, an individual of sanctified status, the Torah turns its attention to another sanctified group, the Kohanim. The Abravanel and, centuries later, the Alshich, maintain that the textual message strikes deeper. The path towards sanctity need not be inherited, as in the case of the kehuna, but can be earned, as in the case of nezirut (see Vayikra: Tzav 2).

Adding our voice to the mix, a tantalizing additional approach can be suggested to explain the flow between the regulations of nezirut and the laws of Birkat Kohanim. Perhaps the Torah means to highlight the critical overall similarities and distinctions between the categories of nezirut and kehuna.

On the one hand, both the Nazir and the Kohen are bound by strikingly similar rules. Each, to a varying extent, is commanded to refrain from contact with death, and each, again to a varying extent, is governed by regulations concerning the consumption of wine (see Vayikra: Shmini 2 for an analysis of the textual passage restricting the Kohen's consumption of intoxicating beverages).

On the other hand, these two spiritual categories rise from contrasting origins.

The Nazir is motivated by a desire to separate, to move away from the surrounding society (see Naso 3 for a fuller discussion of nezirut). His religious search is inherently isolating.

The Kohen, in contrast, gains his spiritual power specifically from connection to the community. One cannot, after all, be a priest without constituents, without those who are dependent upon his services as a representative before God. There can be no kehuna in isolation.

More than any other ritual associated with the kehuna, the Priestly Blessing underscores this fundamental connection between priest and community. By commanding the Kohen to bless the nation on God's behalf multiple times daily, the Torah literally forces each priest to regularly and directly confront the true source of his own sanctity: the people themselves. The Kohen's kedusha emanates out of his role as a representative of the nation before God. Absent the people, there would simply be no need for the Kohen.

Not by coincidence, therefore, the Torah places the laws of Birkat Kohanim directly after the regulations governing nezirut. In sharp contrast to what many see as the flawed, isolating religious attitude of the Nazir, the Kohen must always recognize that his role rests upon his connection to – and his need for – the people.

B: Numerous other commentaries struggle to discern additional thematic and even linguistic associations between the various legal passages of Parshat Naso.

As instructive as these and other links may be, however, they fail to answer the two global questions raised at the beginning of our study.

On the level of pshat, is there one unifying thread that somehow connects all of the laws of this section of Parshat Naso? Will the discovery of this unifying thread help us understand why these laws are commanded specifically at this pivotal moment in time, as the preparations for the nation's momentous journey from Sinai near their end?

C: An approach to these issues can perhaps be suggested by reflecting on the overall placement of Parshat Naso itself

in the text.

Until this point, the narrative of Sefer Bamidbar has focused mainly upon the physical structure of the Israelite encampment in the desert and upon the place of each family and tribe within that camp. Now, however, the Torah turns its attention to the harmony meant to reign within the camp's boundaries.

Through a series of sharp legal strokes, the text addresses potential sources of spiritual and social disruption, outlining the response to each. While each of the examples cited by the Torah is case specific, they are meant to serve as paradigms as well. The text thus purposely addresses, as the nation's journey is about to begin, a series of life arenas within which peace and harmony must be continually and assiduously cultivated:

1. Spiritual disruption will be addressed through the temporary expulsion of individuals afflicted with specific forms of tuma from various sections of the camp. Only once these individuals have regained the status of tahara can they return to full functioning within Israelite society (see Vayikra: Tazria-Metzora 1–3 for discussions concerning the concepts of tuma and tahara, ritual impurity and purity).
2. The social fabric of the camp will be preserved through adherence to the laws prohibiting theft and dishonesty.
3. The structure of the family – critical yet at times fragile – will be addressed through the laws of Sota (see Naso 2 for a discussion as to how these laws are designed to help salvage a family in extremis, suffering from the devastating forces of suspicion and jealousy).
4. The potentially divisive desires of those wishing to move beyond the religious norm will be addressed and controlled through the laws of nezirut.
5. Finally, this entire section of text concludes with the laws of Birkat Kohanim, a blessing that culminates in the prayer for God's most precious gift of shalom, peace.

Through the interplay of law and prayer, the Torah thus communicates that true peace within the Israelite encampment will be dependent both upon the nation's conscious efforts and upon God's continuing blessings.

The Uniqueness of Each Nasi's Korban

Rabbi Shlomo Drillman zt"l

Written by Rabbi Benjamin Kelsen based on a shiur from Rabbi Drillman zt"l

Bamidbar 7:1-3: "It came to pass, on the day Moshe finished erecting the Mishkan, and he anointed it and consecrated it and all of its utensils, and the Altar and all its utensils, and he anointed them and consecrated them. The leaders of Israel brought, [those who were] the heads of their fathers' houses; they were the leaders of the tribes, they stood by during the counting. They brought their offerings..."

One of the main occurrences in Parshas Naso is that of the Chanukkas HaMizbeach, the consecration of the altar, in the Mishkan. What is most interesting about the way in which this event is related is that even though the Nasi, leader, of each of the tribes brought an identical sacrifice to commemorate the historic occasion, the Torah repeats each and every one of the details of each offering.

Why was it necessary for the Torah to repeat the specifics of each korban? Would it not have been enough to say that each Nasi brought the same offering, of what the offering was comprised, and which Nasi brought his offering on which day of the festivities? Furthermore, should we accept that there is a reason for the Torah having done so, we must still ask why the Torah summarizes the total number of the sacrifices that were brought during the consecration period at the end of the Parsha?

The Ramban offers us two answers for our questions. According to the Ramban, the Torah wanted to bestow honor upon each Nasi and his respective Sheivet by appointing a specific day for each tribe to bring its gift to the Mishkan. Since it was an impossibility for each Nasi to be the first to offer his korban, each was honored instead with his own day to bring his tribes' offering. The second reason that the Torah lists each and every offering, says the Ramban, is that each Nasi, simultaneously and yet still on their own, decided to bring the same sacrifice in honor of the consecration. The Ribbono Shel Olam agreed, k'vayachol, with this idea. Similar cases can be found in several places within the Torah. One such example is that of the episode of the daughters of Tzlofchad from which we learn that a daughter inherits the property of her father should there be any male offspring. Another example is that of the mitzvah of Pesach Sheini.

However, while the physical sacrifice may have been identical, according to the Ramban each leader had a

different Hashkafic approach to his sacrifice. Examples of this concept are that of Sheivet Yehudah which brought their korban with notions of Malchus in mind, Sheivet Zevulun which sought financial success, and Sheivet Yissochar which prayed to the Ribbono Shel Olam for success in the learning of Torah. Though outwardly it would appear that each Nasi brought the same offering on behalf of his people we find that the Korban Sheb'lev, a closer look at the internal perspective and approach associated with each offering reveals that each Korban was, in fact, unique in its own way.

If one examines other instances of korbanos being brought in the Torah one would find that the name of HKB"Y usually associated with sacrifices is the tetragrammaton as opposed to "Elokim" which is the name which is associated with the divine attribute of justice, the Middas HaDin. Utilizing a strict application of the concept of the Middas HaDin, it would appear that Man should have to offer himself as atonement for his sins. Only due to the implementation of the Middas HaChessed v'HaRachamim, the divine attribute of Kindness and Mercy, is Man able to atone for his sins by bringing an animal in his place. An example of this concept is found in the parsha of Akeidas Yitzchok when HKB"Y tells Avraham Avinu to bring Yitzchok as a sacrifice. Just as Avraham is about to take his son's life, HKB"Y appears to Avraham with the name Elokim, connoting Middas HaDin. Only after Avraham shows his readiness to give up his son as a demonstration of his commitment to HKB"Y, does the Ribbono Shel Olam call out to Avraham, using the name that denotes the Middas HaChessed v'Rachamim.

According to Chazal the passuk "Adam ki yakriv mikem..." means that Man must be prepared to sacrifice himself as required by Middas HaDin. It is only through the Middas Hachessed of HKB"Y that man may substitute a different offering in his place of his own life.

The Kavanah HaLev associated with a person's sacrifice is transferred to his substitute Korban making it unique and truly his own. In the Midbar, each Sheivet had a separate identity with unique talents and strengths symbolized by the unique device depicted upon their flag and the color associated with each tribe. Together, the

colors of the various tribes comprise the complete color spectrum. It is this rainbow of color which makes up Klal Yisroel. Even though on an external and superficial level each of the elders brought the same Korban, each Korban was as important and unique as the flag and the color of the Sheivet by which it was brought.

We find in Parshas Naso that the term “Knesses Yisroel” is used instead of the more common terminology of “Am Yisroel”. What is the significance of this? The word “Knesses” is derived from the root “likaneis”, “to bring in”. The meaning of the term Knesses Yisroel is that each individual Jew and each individual tribe contributes their special qualities and their uniqueness of the overall mosaic that is Bnei Yisroel. It is to this idea that the Ramban was referring when he writes that after specifying the sacrifice for each Nasi the Torah reviews the total number of sacrifices brought during the consecrational period. The Chanukkas HaMishkan is representative of the contributions made by each of the tribes which, when viewed together, allow us to appreciate the glory of a complete and united Knesses Yisroel.

Nazir and Birkat Kohanim

Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

With 176 pesukim, parashat Naso is the longest parasha in the Torah. Although the parasha deals with many different topics, Chazal attempt to find the kesher that exists between each of them. For example, in our parasha the Torah deals with the laws of the nazir. The parasha immediately preceding the parasha of the nazir is that of the sotah. Rashi explains that the reason behind the juxtaposition of these two parshiot is that one who sees the sotah b'killulah (in her undoing) will swear to abstain from wine. A bit later in the parasha the Torah deals with the korbanot of the nesi'im, followed by the parasha of lighting the Menorah in the Mishkan at the beginning of parashat Beha'alotcha. Here, too, there is a thematic kesher between these two topics, leading to their juxtaposition, as Rashi points out: since Aharon was upset because he and his shevet did not get to participate in the chanukat hamizbeach, HaKadosh Baruch Hu told him, “Your portion is greater than theirs, since you light and clean the neivot.”

Immediately after the parasha of the nazir, the Torah instructs the kohanim how to bless the nation, birkat kohanim. Here, too, Chazal point out a kesher, although it is a halachic kesher rather than a thematic kesher: Just as a

The Torah tells us that HKB”H blessed Avraham Avinu “Bakol”, with everything. Avraham, the first Jew, possessed all the qualities and attributes that later embodies by all of his descendants, Klal Yisroel. In Bereishis, the Ramban comments that “Bakol” when referring to Avraham Avinu is similar to the term “Kallah” as utilized by Shlomo HaMelech in Shir HaShirim. It is this element which makes Shir HaShirim one of the most beautiful of all the Kisevei HaKodesh because its notion of beauty and of the quintessential bride describes all of Knesses Yisroel in that it includes everyone. It is from here that we learn that each and every Jew is an integral part of the whole of Knesses Yisroel and without each individual part that whole would not be the same. This idea is especially appropriate here as Rashi HaKadosh tells us on the first passuk of the seventh perek of Bamidbar that when Klal Yisroel entered the Mishkan for the first time it was like a bride coming to stand under her chuppah.

May it be the will of the Ribono Shel Olam that we be able to dance once again under our chuppah in the Beis HaMikdash, she'yiboneh bimheirah b'yomeinu.

nazir is forbidden to drink wine, so a kohen may not drink wine at the time of his avodah. This leads us to ask our first question: There is a halachic kesher between parashat nazir and parashat birkat kohanim; is there no thematic kesher between these two parshiot as well?

Our second question: At the termination of his nezirut, the nazir must bring a korban chatat, among other korbanot. This korban atones for the sin he committed “al hanefesh” (BaMidbar 6:11). The Ramban asks: What sin did the nazir commit that requires him to bring a korban chatat? He explains that it is his return to normal life, which naturally contains a higher level of tumah than his life of abstention as a nazir, that obligates a korban chatat. Rabbeinu Bechayei, an 11th-century rishon, challenges the Ramban's explanation, pointing out that nowhere do we find that a person must bring a korban chatat before he actually sins; entering a situation more conducive to tumah cannot be enough to obligate the nazir to bring a korban chatat. Why, then, must the nazir bring a korban chatat?

The haftarah of parashat Naso deals with nezirut Shimshon. We have a principle that the haftarah is always related to the parasha, with the exception of the special

haftarot, such as the sheva d'nechemta. Our third and final question, then, is: How does the haftarah of nezirut Shimshon relate to the parasha? After all, nezirut Shimshon is not even directly comparable to the nezirut of our parasha, as there are halachic differences between the two types of nezirut!

Rather, when we read in the navi the entire story of Shimshon haGibbor, of his tremendous might and his colossal downfall, it is clear that the navi wishes to teach us that there is no gevurah without kedushah. The moment the gevurah is no longer attached to kedushah, it vanishes. Therefore, when a person ascends to the Beit HaMikdash and witnesses a sotah b'kilkulah, drinking the water in which the Name of Hashem was erased, her stomach blowing up and the kohanim rushing her out of the Mikdash as she suffers a horrible and painful death, he has witnessed a clear instance of a sin and its punishment. This inspires him to accept upon himself extra kedushah and yirat shamayim.

Seemingly, this is a good thing. However, when it comes time for the nazir to end his nezirut, it becomes clear that the kedushah he originally accepted upon himself was one that isolated him from the tzibbur. In other words, this is a nazir b'kilkulo. When a person accepts additional kedushah upon himself, that kedushah must strengthen his connection to the tzibbur, not weaken it. This is the kilkul for which the nazir must bring a korban chatat.

Levites and Nazirites

Rabbi David Horwitz

The stirring words of the Rambam at the end of Hilkhhot Shemittah ve-Yovel (13:12-13) are deservedly well-known:

Why was the Tribe of Levi granted no right to a share in the Land of Israel and in its spoils, together with his brothers? Because they were set apart to worship the Lord, to serve Him, and to teach His upright ways and His righteous judgments to the many, as it is said, They shall teach Jacob Your ordinances, and Israel our Law (Deut. 33:10). They were consequently set apart from the ways of the world: they may not wage war as do the rest of Israel they have no share in the Land, and they may acquire nothing for themselves by physical force. They are rather the host of the Holy name, as it is said, Bless, L-RD, His host (Deut. 33:11). It is He, blessed be He, who acquires for them, as it is said; I am your portion and your inheritance. (Numbers 18:20).

Not only the Tribe of Levi, but each and every

Perhaps this is the thematic kesher between the parasha of the nazir and that of birkat kohanim. One who sees a nazir terminating his nezirut is witnessing a nazir b'kilkulo; the tikkun for this is birkat kohanim, through which the kohen uses his unique kedushah not to isolate himself from the tzibbur, but to contribute to the tzibbur. Although his blessing of the tzibbur is because Hashem commanded him to do so, he does it with love and affection, sharing his kedushah with the entire tzibbur.

As we stand at the foot of Har Sinai, so close to Kabbalat haTorah, we must remember that the Torah is given to us, human beings, in order to create the proper balance in life, infusing every aspect of the Creation and every one of our actions with kedushah. Once we accomplish this we will truly be a mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh – a goy on the one hand, leading a normal life, but also kadosh, infusing normal life with kedushah.

Today, more than ever, we see that gevurah cannot exist without kedushah. We must pray for gevurah on this Shavuot, haba aleinu l'tovah, and accept upon ourselves the yoke of Torah with the pleasantness of Torah, in a way that it connects to every aspect of our lives. As it says in the Yerushalmi, “Kol hamekabel ol torah mochal in lo al kol avonotav, All who accept the yoke of Torah upon themselves are forgiven for all their sins.”

individual of those who come into the world, whose spirit moves him and whose knowledge give him understanding to set himself apart in order to stand before the Lord, to serve Him, to worship Him, and to know Him, who walks upright as God had made him to do so, and releases his neck from the yoke of many speculations that the children of man are wont to pursue- such an individual is consecrated to the Holy of Holies, and his portion and inheritance shall be in the Lord forever and ever-more. The Lord will grant him in this world whatsoever is sufficient for him, the same as He had granted to the priests and to the Levites. Thus indeed did David, upon whom be peace, say, O L-RD, the portion of my inheritance and of my cup, You maintain my lot (Psalms 16:5).

Rabbi Yehudah Cooperman, in his sefer Qedushat Peshuto shel Miqra (Jerusalem, 2009, pp. 298-301) pointed out certain similarities between these words of the

Rambam and that of the author of the fourteenth century anonymous work, written in Barcelona, titled Sefer Ha-Hinukh. In the midst of his discussion of a nazir (Mitzvah #376), and while discussing why a nazir is even forbidden to come into contact with the bodies of his dead relatives, (equivalent to the rule regarding a kohen gadol and more stringent than the rule regarding a regular kohen) the Hinukh writes as follows:

... if a man has vowed to be a nazir to the Lord, then all the days of his vow to be a nazir he is consecrated to the Lord as Scripture attests about him, because his separation to God is upon his head (Numbers 6:7). Then he is not to become defiled through worldly cravings, and is not to be found in any house of feasting or a banquet of friends. For his separation from wine attests about him that he has set his heart to understand and practice abstinence before the Lord and to repair the ways of this spirit, leaving aside the pleasures of the benighted body. Then having set his whole heart and all his thoughts on the good of his precious spirit, and having cast off the needs of his self and his flesh, why should he desire the company of his companions and friends any longer, except for some mitzvah?

There is no doubt that as the spirit is raised to a higher level, the pleasure of the body, with all that concerns it, becomes very insignificant in its eyes. Then all the more certainly will it not go after the company of other persons, whether they are near or far; and it will find pleasure in nothing whatever except in the hallowed (Divine) service

Nazir, Narcissus, and Sacrifice

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Ancient Greeks told the story of a young man named Narcissus, who was so remarkably handsome that even a deity, Echo, fell in love with him. One day Narcissus was admiring his own reflection in a pond, and he declared to himself, “I love you.” Echo saw him, and repeated, “I love you.” Narcissus thought his reflection had spoken, and he remained there, gazing at himself in the water, until he died.

Our sages (Nazir 4b) also report a story about a young man staring at himself in water, but with a very different ending: At some point during the early years of the Second Beit haMikdash, a young man of beautiful appearance and long, braided hair told the sage Shimon haTzaddik that he had just completed a term as a nazir, and was now going

to which it has become attached, and to which it constantly looks.

In my opinion, part of the language of the Hinukh might be appropriately seen as an expression and application of the notion that the Rambam had already formulated in Hilkhos Shemittah ve-Yovel and quoted above. This nazir, although not of the tribe of Levi, is also becoming “consecrated to the Holy of Holies!” (This term [Hebrew: nitqadesh qodesh qodoshim] is clearly taken from the Book of Chronicles {I Chronicles 23:13}. The verse there states: The sons of Amram: Aaron and Moses; and Aaron was separated, that he should be sanctified as most holy, he and his sons forever, to offer before the L-RD, to minister unto Him, and to bless in His name for ever. In light of this verse, I believe that the correct translation of the Rambam should not be “is consecrated to the Holy of Holies, but is consecrated as Holy of Holies). The Rambam believed that the highest level a human being can achieve, is immortality of the soul = eternity of the intellect, one who devotes himself entirely to God has an opportunity to achieve this height.

To be sure, according to the Rambam, any human being, Jew and non-Jew can reach the exalted level of being “consecrated to the Holy of Holies” But an immediate Jewish application, replete with its strict and precise halakhic manifestations, is to be found in Parashat Naso, in the person of the nazir.

to comply with the laws of nezirut by shaving off all of the hair on his head. Shimon haTzaddik asked him, “What made you decide to take this vow and destroy this beautiful hair?”

The anonymous young man replied, “Once, when I went to draw water from a spring, I began to gaze at my reflection, and my evil inclination asserted itself and urged me to abandon the Torah. I rebuked myself, saying, ‘Empty one! You arrogantly claim the pleasures of this world, which is not yours - you will end up rotting in the grave! Instead, I will shave off all of your hair for the sake of Heaven!’” Shimon haTzaddik reacted by praising this young man. Narcissus and the talmudic nazir present two stories with very different endings; where Narcissus

is a target for mockery, our nazir is a spiritual superhero, an UberJew wresting control of himself, and Shimon haTzaddik judges him praiseworthy.

Surprisingly, the sages generally did not admire the nazir. Instead, the gemara noted that a nazir brings a sin-offering upon completing his nezirut, and one sage, Rabbi Elazar haKappar, explained that the nazir sinned in swearing off wine, denying himself a permitted pleasure! Even though the Talmud (Sotah 15a) acknowledges that the nazir's offering is not truly atonement for sin, numerous rabbinic commentators have echoed these harsh words. How could they condemn our spiritual superhero?

One approach is to distinguish between suffering and sacrifice.

Suffering has no inherent meaning; one pays a high price without acquiring goods to show for it. There is no nobility in pain. This is the act of the nazir who is criticized by Rabbi Elazar haKappar.

Sacrifice, on the other hand, is a goal-oriented, constructive act of self-engineering, a statement of our capacity to stimulate and direct our own growth. There is plan, will and purpose. This is our anonymous nazir's initiative, the anti-Narcissus, forsaking an obsession with

personal beauty. He knew the person he wished to become, and singlehandedly transformed himself into that person. This is the nazir who earns the praise of Shimon haTzaddik. There is no dignity in suffering unbidden pain, but there is awesome nobility in choosing to sacrifice.

One difference between suffering and sacrifice is that sacrifice requires a plan; we do not impulsively abandon randomly selected pleasures in order to emerge as better people on the other side. King Solomon (Kohelet 5:4) condemned the practice of freely taking vows; this self-engineering requires careful consideration. In our own day, sacrifice might be a person identifying a weakness for harmful speech, and deciding to abandon all speech for a day, or a period of days, to gain control. Sacrifice might be a frugal person recognizing his unwillingness to give, and contributing extra cash to tzedakah to defy his wallet-tightening impulses. Sacrifice is calculated; we strip away some diseased, destructive or dysfunctional part of our lives in order to build up what remains.

The nazir teaches us that we will be much better off when we look at ourselves, when we understand and take seriously the importance of self-engineering, and - through sacrifice rather than suffering - grow into our better selves.

An Extreme Lifestyle

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Naso, we encounter two particularly challenging themes. We read of the Sotah, a woman suspected of being unfaithful to her husband, and of the Nazir, the Nazirite who takes upon himself a vow not to drink wine, not to cut his hair and not to allow himself to be contaminated to the dead.

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105, foremost commentator on the Bible), in his comments on Numbers 6:2 cites the rabbis who ask why the portion concerning the Nazirite follows in the Torah on the heels of the portion regarding the Sotah? They explain that it is to teach that anyone who sees the failings of the unfaithful wife should separate himself from wine that leads one to possible adultery.

From this rabbinic remark it appears that the Nazirite takes upon himself ascetic limitations because he is desperately concerned that he will give in to his base desires. He therefore resolves not to become intoxicated and not to cut his hair so that he will not be attractive

to women. He also makes certain that he does not contaminate himself, and strives to maintain a strict state of ritual purity. By separating himself from the temptations, he hopes that he will not succumb to the blandishments and enticements around him.

The laws of the Nazirite represent one particular approach to those who face moral challenges—simply avoid them. When faced with what one regards as extreme temptations—either eliminate them or eliminate yourself by completely separating from those negative influences.

We frequently see this: what appears to be extreme life philosophy adopted and implemented in modern times by those spiritual souls who join ashrams or relocate to the Himalayas to live fully spiritual lives, completely apart from any possible negative or alien influences. To a certain extent, some of our Chareidi brothers and sisters have chosen this path as well, trying to eliminate secular influences on their lifestyle as much as possible. In effect, the Nazir chooses one extreme lifestyle in order to avoid

another extreme lifestyle.

It is somewhat surprising that the great rationalist, Maimonides (the Rambam, Jewish philosopher and codifier, 1135-1204), actually recommends this pattern of behavior in Hilchot Dayot 2:2.

In his advice to those who face medical or emotional challenges, Maimonides, who was a physician, recommends that such people seek out wise men who are also physicians of the soul who may be able to heal them by instructing them in the dispositions which they should acquire until they are restored to the right path. So, those who are irascible or easily angered, should go to the opposite extreme by subjecting themselves to the assaults or abuse of others and not allow themselves to feel affronted. An arrogant person should accustom himself to endure the criticisms of others, sit below everyone, wear old and ragged garments that bring the wearer into contempt, until the arrogance is eradicated from his heart and he has regained the middle path, which is the right way. Maimonides concludes: "On similar lines, he should treat all his dispositions. If, in any of them, he is at one extreme, he should move to the opposite extreme, and keep it for a long time until he has regained the right path which is the normal mean of every class of dispositions."

It is important to note that adopting an extreme lifestyle as a corrective measure should never be a permanent goal, except when pursuing positive character traits, such as humility, kindness and charitability. Consequently, the Nazir's lifestyle is also meant to be only temporary, and to serve as a means of achieving a balanced disposition. During the designated period of naziriteship, the Nazir will learn to reject the temptations, preparing himself to return

to a normal lifestyle, strengthened and reinvigorated. (This, of course, goes against the philosophy of contemporary "twelve step" programs, in which alcoholics are never again permitted to drink alcohol.)

Rabbi Ben-Zion Firer (Rabbi of Nir Galim, Israel, renowned for his erudite homilies), in his collection of parasha insights, *Hegyonah shel Torah*, suggests that the Levites who killed 3000 worshipers of the Golden Calf, and Pinchas who speared Zimri and Kosbi when they performed a lewd act publicly, did not regard their extreme behavior as the proper way. To the contrary, they also believed in the "golden path" of moderation—certainly not in fanaticism. They saw their extreme actions as necessary in order to restore a balance of normalcy.

When all the people who had recently accepted the Torah at Sinai rebelled against G-d and began to worship the Golden Calf, the Levites saw it as their duty to be no less extreme in their behavior in order to save the Torah. When Zimri, the prince of the tribe of Simeon, remonstrated publicly in a particularly unsavory manner and abused the Torah of Moses, Pinchas resorted to temporary fanaticism to protect the Torah. This radical behavior, however, was not meant to be a normal pattern, but rather a brief corrective action. It is similar to radical medical procedures that are administered when the danger of the malady is at its height, but are no longer necessary after the body has been restored to normalcy.

Perpetual extremism is not the proper path. But sometimes it is a necessary temporary palliative. It is the "golden path" and the balanced disposition that must always be a Jew's goal.