

Toronto Torah

YU Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Naso (*Diaspora*)

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Please enjoy this week's mini-edition of Toronto Torah!

G-d willing, our full edition returns next week.

The Many Layers of the Nazir Prohibitions

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

"...When either man or woman shall make a special vow, the vow of a *nazir*, to separate himself to Hashem, he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of fermented drink, neither shall he drink any juice of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is made of the grapevine, from the seeds even to the skins." (Bamidbar 6:2-4)

The *nazir*, who has accepted upon himself/herself strictures similar to those of the Kohen Gadol, must avoid wine and all grape products for the term of their *nezirut*. Our sages and the commentaries assume that the primary impulse for this limitation is to avoid intoxication. Hence, our sages suggest that the acceptance of *nezirut* is a potential response for one who saw a *sotah*, an adulterous woman, as he/she will understand that alcohol can lead to promiscuity and thus avoid this temptation. (Sotah 2a, cited in Rashi)

However, the prohibition goes beyond this, including all grape products. Halachically speaking, this is a source for the law that the mere taste of prohibited food can also be forbidden, *ta'am ke-ikar*. (Pesachim 44b) Why? Grape does not lower one's inhibitions, nor does the remnant taste of wine in the walls of a pot!

The commentaries (Ibn Ezra, Ralbag) argue that this is a biblical safeguard to prevent drinking wine. (See Rabbi Yosef Engel, *Lekach Tov* 8, who

expands on the principle of biblically imposed safeguards.) Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv, commentary to Bamidbar 6:3) notes that the laws of *nazir* become a rabbinic paradigm for the distance one should place between himself and sin. Following the story of Shimshon (Shoftim 14:5), where he avoided even entering a vineyard, our sages coin an expression they use in many contexts: "Go around, go around, and do not approach the vineyard, they say to the *nazir*." (Shabbat 13a) In short, stay far away from sin.

Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenburg (*HaK'tav V'Ha-Kabbalah* 6:3) goes further, noting that even the prohibition against drinking wine is essentially only a safeguard. After all, drinking wine in moderation is not discouraged. On the contrary, "Rava said: Wine and good scents make me wise." (Yoma 76b) As Tehillim (104:15) notes, wine gladdens the heart and makes one's face shine. Thus, even prohibiting wine is an added layer to prevent intoxication.

Why, then, does the law of *nazir*, a self-accepted prohibition, carry with it so many layers of safeguards, even on a biblical level, more than almost any other mitzvah? Rabbi Mecklenburg suggests that *nezirut* is only accepted by someone who has concrete fear that he will sin. In such a situation, moderation is not sufficient – one must go to the opposite extreme, avoiding anything associated with wine which can confuse the mind and lower inhibitions. [In Hilchot Dei'ot Chapter 2, Rambam suggests a similar method to change any negative character trait – not simply

following the "golden mean" but going to the opposite extreme until one is ready to moderate.] This is part of the *nazir's* attempt to focus entirely on G-d. However, while this may explain why wine should be avoided to ensure that one does not become intoxicated, this doesn't seem to explain avoiding grape products or the absorptions of wine in a vessel.

Perhaps a slightly different angle can be suggested. As our sages note in the context of *tzitzit*, symbolism is powerful. Wearing *tzitzit* prevents sin by reminding the wearer, through several steps of imagery, of G-d. (Menachot 43b-44a) The *nazir* is someone who recognizes in himself or herself the need to reinforce commitment to G-d. Prohibiting wine is obvious. However, the other prohibitions seem not just to be a practical way of preventing intoxication. By forbidding all that is associated with the dangers of inebriation, the law forces the *nazir* to be actively cognizant of his or her pledge to keep his or her mind singularly focused on G-d. By being forced to check whether the pots and pans one uses have been utilized to cook grape products, the *nazir* will constantly think – I saw in myself a need to go the extreme to recalibrate my relationship with G-d. That awareness, more than the local prohibition of drinking wine, will help the *nazir* achieve his goal.

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The establishment of the modern Jewish state has caused halachic issues that were theoretical for two millennia to suddenly become practical. One issue is the applicability of the *ger toshav* (non-Jewish “resident alien”) status.

The main benefit enjoyed by a *ger toshav* is permission to buy land and live in Eretz Yisrael, unlike other non-Jews who are subject to limitations. (Rambam, Sefer haMitzvot, Prohibition 51) Beyond that, a *ger toshav* enjoys some social benefits, as we are directed to help him physically and financially. (Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 10:12).

The early talmudic sages disputed the extent of mitzvah observance required of a *ger toshav* to be eligible for these benefits. Per Rabbi Meir, he needs only to refrain from idol worship, whereas according to some of the other sages, he must observe all of the Torah’s commandments, except for the laws of kashrut. (Avodah Zarah 64b) It may be suggested that these sages disagreed about the nature of the *ger toshav* status: According to Rabbi Meir, a *ger toshav* remains

completely non-Jewish, and commits to not worship idols to avoid being a negative influence upon the Jewish residents; according to some of the other sages, however, a *ger toshav* gains a quasi-Jewish status, which is primarily national, but not religious. Halachah has accepted a middle position held by the majority of the talmudic sages: A *ger toshav* must accept all seven Noachide Laws.

Could the *ger toshav* model be implemented today? The Talmud’s linkage between the acceptance of *ger toshav* and applicability of *yovel* (the Jubilee year) seems to close this door. (Arachin 29b) However, some authorities maintain that while our obligations towards the *ger toshav* – such as social benefits – cannot apply in our days, we are still commanded to let him reside in the land. (Raavad to Avodah Zarah 10:6) Furthermore, even if the biblical model of *ger toshav* is completely inapplicable nowadays, it can still serve as a model for our relationship with non-Jewish minorities in Israel.

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Weekly Highlights: June 15 – June 21 / 12 Sivan – 18 Sivan

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Jun 14-15				
After hashkama	R’ Alex Hecht	Parshah Analysis	Clanton Park	
Before Avot	Ezer Diena	Daf Yomi	BAYT	Rabbi’s Classroom
After minchah	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Gemara Avodah Zarah	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Sun. Jun 16				
8:45-10:15 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Medical Ethics: Blood and Live Organ Donation	BAYT Simcha Suite	CME accredited Laypeople welcome
Tue. June 18				
10:00 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Jews and Non-Jews in the Time of Mashiach	Adath Israel	Women; there is a fee info@adathisrael.com
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Yeshayah: Chapters 19-20	Shaarei Shomayim	
7:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: Chapters 2-3	129 Theodore Pl.	Men
Wed. June 19				
10:00 AM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Leading Philo-Semites 3: Napoleon	Beth Tikvah	
8:00 PM	R’ Alex Hecht	Non-Jews in Jewish Law	Shaarei Tefillah	
Thu. June 20				
1:30 PM	R’ Mordechai Torczyner	Shemuel: Chapter 11	49 Michael Ct.	Women
8:30 PM	Ezer Diena	Gemara Beitzah	ediena@torontotorah.com	Men, Advanced
Fri. June 21				
10:30 AM	R’ Elihu Abbe	Kiddushin	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Advanced

For University Men, at Yeshivat Or Chaim

10:00 AM Sunday, R’ Aaron Greenberg, Gemara Shabbat

11:00 AM Sunday, Beit Midrash Rotation: Contemporary Halachah: Ezer Diena, Shiluach haKen in Your Yard?

8:30 AM Wednesday, Ezer Diena, Stories and She’eilot

8:30 AM Friday, R’ Mordechai Torczyner, Parshah

WOMEN’S BEIT MIDRASH for University and Adult Women, at Ulpanat Orot, with Mrs. Eliana Abbe

9:30 AM Tuesdays: Sefer Devarim, 9:30 AM Thursdays: Tefillah

Seder Boker for Adult Men

10:00 AM to Noon, Wednesday - R’ Moshe Yeres: Masechet Megilah and Olat Ra’ayah

10:00 AM to Noon, Tuesday/Thursday - R’ Moshe Yeres: Parshanut on Parshah and Prinei Halachah