

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Yosef ben Yisroel a”h
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

The Right Regard

PARSHAS NASSO 5777

One of the many devices Chazal employ to interpret the Torah is the incidence of “*Semichus Ha’parshiyos* – Juxtaposition of Sections.” The arrangement of the various sections in the Torah is, of course, not haphazard; thus, Chazal derive laws and lessons of great significance by divining why one particular topic is situated next to another.

Gifts and Jealousy

There are a few prominent examples in this week’s *parshah*. One of the most familiar ones involves the *Semichus Ha’parshiyos* of two bodies of law – the section of Sotah followed by that of the Nazir. In the case of the former, a spirit of jealousy devolves upon a man who grows suspicious of his wife. Fearing infidelity, he follows the procedure outlined in the Torah whereby she is brought before the *kohein* and made to drink the “bitter waters” to determine her faithfulness. The subject of the Nazir involves an individual whose vow requires him to refrain from wine and hair-cutting. Rashi (*Bamidbar 6:2*), citing the teaching of Chazal, explains:

לָמָּה נִסְמְכָה פְּרֻשֵׁת נָזִיר לְפָרֶשֶׁת סוֹטָה, לומר לך שְׁכַל הַרוּאָה סוֹטָה בְּקִלְקוּלָהּ נִזִּיר עֲצָמוֹ מִן הַיָּין שֶׁהוּא מְבִיא לִידֵי נִיאוּף.

“Why was the section of Nazir placed next to the section of Sotah? This tells you that whoever beholds the disgrace of a Sotah (in the event of the establishment of her guilt and subsequent demise) will restrict himself from wine, which leads to scandalous behavior.”

There is another example of such *Semichus Ha’parshiyos*, but perhaps not as widely familiar. This also relates to the section of the Sotah, but involves the juxtaposition with its *preceding* section, which deals with *matnos kehunah* (priestly gifts, such as *bikkurim* [first fruits]). Why were these two sections placed next to each other? Rashi (*Ibid. 5:12*) understands that an implicit warning is contained in this arrangement:

אם אתה מעבב מתנות הכהן, חגיף שתצטרף לבא אצלו להביא לו את הסוטה.

“If you withhold the *kohein’s* gifts, by your life, you shall end up having to go to him to present before him (your wife as) a Sotah.”

The message seems to be that no good will come from a refusal to give the *kohein* those gifts that are his due. Doing so will result in a most unpleasant circumstance: one’s familial life will be plagued by scandal and discord, necessitating the offices of the *kohein* to administer the procedure of the Sotah.

At first glance, it is somewhat difficult to understand how exactly this situation conforms to the well-known principle regarding Divine retribution. In such instances, Hashem operates with the notion of “*middah k’negged middah* – measure for measure,” as expounded by the Mishnah (*Sotah 1:8*):

בְּמִדָּה שֶׁאָדָם מוֹדֵד, בָּהּ מוֹדְדִין לוֹ. הִיא קִשְׁטָה אֶת עֲצָמָה לְעִבְרָה, הַמְקוּם נִזְלָה... שֶׁמִּשּׁוֹן הַלֵּךְ אַחַר עֵינָיו, לְפִיכָךְ נִקְרוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים אֶת עֵינָיו... אֲבִשְׁלוֹם נִתְגָּאָה בְּשַׁעְרוֹ, לְפִיכָךְ נִתְלָה בְּשַׁעְרוֹ...
לְפִיכָךְ נִקְרוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים אֶת עֵינָיו... אֲבִשְׁלוֹם נִתְגָּאָה בְּשַׁעְרוֹ, לְפִיכָךְ נִתְלָה בְּשַׁעְרוֹ...

“In the measure with which a person conducts himself, so will judgment be meted out to him. (The Sotah) adorned herself for (the purposes of committing) a transgression; (as a result,) Hashem brings about her disgrace... Shimshon went after his eyes (following foreign women); therefore, (in his end) the Pelishtim gouged out his eyes... Avshalom (who rebelled against his father, King David) had prided himself over his luxuriant hair; therefore, (his downfall came about when) his hair became entangled (in the bough of a tree)...”

As is apparent from the other examples, the mode of punishment directly mirrors the form of the sin. But how, exactly, does this apply in the case mentioned by Rashi? What is the connection between withholding priestly gifts and dealing with the Sotah procedure?

Countering Contempt

R' Baruch Sorotzkin (*Ha'binah V'ha'berachah*) perceives herein a most powerful lesson. He clarifies the matter by reminding us of the essential role of the *kohein*. The members of the Levite tribe function not only as ministers of the Temple service, but also as the teachers and spiritual advisors for the rest of the nation. As stated in Moshe's blessing to them: יִוְרֵי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִשְׁפָּטֶיךָ לְיַעֲקֹב וְתוֹרָתְךָ לְיִשְׂרָאֵל – “They shall instruct Ya'akov in Your statutes, and Your Torah to Yisrael” (*Devarim 33:10*). And, in fact, the whole notion of the priestly gifts is predicated on this aspect. By providing the *kohanim* with sustenance, they are thereby unencumbered and so are able to devote the entirety of their time to amassing Torah knowledge to share with the nation (*cf. Rambam, Hilchos Shemittah V'Yovel 13:13*).

Thus, by withholding the priestly gifts, this individual makes a bold and brazen statement. He demonstrates thereby a lack of respect and appreciation for this role of the *kohein*. In other words, he basically reveals that, in his mind, he doesn't need the *kohein*'s input and guidance. It is as if he is telling the *kohein* (in our parlance): “I can very well take care of myself, thank you very much; I don't need your involvement in my spiritual affairs.”

This, then, is the “*middah k'negged middah*” component to which Rashi refers. For what ends up happening? For all intents and purposes, his spiritual life ends up in an absolute mess. This same individual becomes embroiled in the whole Sotah affair, as “a spirit of jealousy passes over him,” (*Bamidbar 5:14*) and he must involve himself with the whole procedure. This entails, as mentioned, the need to seek out and visit the *kohein* to deal with this whole unpleasant circumstance. That is, the very *kohein* whose spiritual guidance he felt unnecessary now becomes involved in the most private matters of his life. He now desperately needs the *kohein*'s services in order to restore harmony and purity, and to get his spiritual house in order.

The message is quite apparent. It is obviously preferable for one to cultivate early on a proper regard for the teachers and guardians of Torah – without having to learn this lesson “the hard way”.

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