

SHAILOS L'CHAZARA

Review Questions

Likkutei Sichos Vol. 2

לקוטי שיחות · חלק ב

Parshas Naso

פרשת נשא

2 sichas in this booklet

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TEACHER'S EDITION

Answers are printed in italics on the answer lines, with the section (§) of the sicha.

★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

Each sicha has questions, a true chassidishe story, and a lesson for you.

No Such Thing as a “Small” Aveirah!

כי תשטה אשתו

Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, Parshas Naso, p. 311 (Hebrew edition pp. 19–20), sections 1–2. From the sicha of Yud Shvat 5713 (1953). One sicha, divided here into two parts.

The point: *In the maamar Basi LeGani, the Frierdiker Rebbe explains the “foolishness of the other side” (shtus d’le’umas zeh) and brings a proof from the posuk “ki sisteh ishto”, the parsha of the sotah. In Chassidus everything is exact, so a proof from a posuk shows that the posuk is connected to the topic. The simple connection: Chazal’s saying “a person sins only if a spirit of foolishness enters him” is learned from this very posuk (the word sisteh is like shtus). But many sayings of Chazal come with no posuk at all, so this posuk must have a special connection. And there is a bigger question: “two hundred includes one hundred”, but not the other way around. The rule “a person sins only through foolishness” is true even of a light aveirah, even a small detail of a d’rabbanan, and even “kadesh atzmecha bemutar lach”, since (Tanya ch. 24) every aveirah goes against Hashem’s will. So why prove it from such a severe aveirah? The first answer: the law of sotah applies only to a married woman, and the seriousness comes from her being married. The same is true of every Jew: any aveirah, even a light one, separates him from Elokus, because the Jewish people are like a “wife” to Hashem. The Zohar says that a philosopher asked R’ Elazar why the chosen people are weaker than the other nations; he answered that because they are the choicest, they cannot tolerate any “waste”, like the heart, the choicest organ, which can’t tolerate even the tiniest bit of waste. Something that is not counted as rebellion for others is a complete separation for a Jew, because he stands so high. Hashem is the “Husband” and the Jewish people are the “wife”, at all times, even in galus. Now He is called “Ba’al”, and in the future “Ish”. When the Jews complained that Hashem had “divorced” them, the posuk answers: “Where is your mother’s divorce document?” He can never exchange us for another nation. And “Who is a fine wife? One who does her husband’s will.” So even a small wish of Hashem matters, including “kadesh atzmecha”. That is why the posuk “ki sisteh ishto” is brought: it is not only a proof but an explanation of why even a light aveirah is so serious.*

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

- ★ In which maamar does the Frierdiker Rebbe bring the posuk “ki sisteh ishto”, and what does he prove from it?

In the maamar Basi LeGani (5710, §3). He uses it to prove the idea of the “foolishness of the other side” (shtus d’le’umas zeh), which brings a person to sin. (§1)

- ★★ Why does it matter that the proof comes from a posuk? Isn’t it just showing that he knows Tanach?

In Chassidus everything is exact. A proof from a posuk isn’t there to show knowledge; it shows that the posuk is connected to the topic being explained. (§1)

3. ★ What is the simple connection between “ki sisteh ishto” and foolishness?

Chazal’s saying (Sotah 3a) “a person sins only if a spirit of foolishness (ruach shtus) enters him” is learned from this posuk; sisteh is like the word shtus. (§1)

4. ★★ Why isn’t the simple connection enough?

Many sayings of Chazal have no proof from a posuk at all. So there must be a special connection between this posuk and “a person sins only through foolishness”. (§1)

5. ★★★ What does “two hundred includes one hundred” mean here, and what question does it raise?

A proof from a big case includes the small case only when the rule is the same. But the rule “a person sins only through foolishness” is true even of a light aveirah, a small detail of a d’rabbanan, even “kadesh atzmecha bemutar lach”. So why prove it from the most severe aveirah of the sotah? (§1)

6. ★★ According to Tanya (ch. 24), why is even a light aveirah, or not keeping “kadesh atzmecha”, a problem?

Because it goes against the will of Hashem (retzon ha’Elyon), and that is true of a small aveirah just as of a big one. (§1)

7. ★★ What is the first connection between the sotah and every aveirah?

The law of sotah applies only to a married woman, and the seriousness comes from her being married. In the same way, every aveirah, even a light one, separates a Jew from Elokus, because the Jewish people are like a “wife” to Hashem. (§2)

8. ★★ What did the philosopher ask R’ Elazar in the Zohar, and what was the answer?

“If the Jews are the chosen nation, why are they weaker than the other nations?” R’ Elazar answered: because they are the choicest, they can’t tolerate any spiritual “waste”, so they can’t tolerate it physically either. (§2)

9. ★★ How are the Jewish people like the heart?

The heart is the choicest organ and can't tolerate even the tiniest bit of waste. So too a Jew:

even a small aveirah affects him. (§2)

10. ★★★ Hashem is called "Ba'al" now and "Ish" in the future. Does that mean the Jews are not His "wife" in galus? Prove your answer.

No. The Jews are His "wife" at all times, even in galus; only the name is different. When they

complained that Hashem had "divorced" them, the posuk answers (Yeshayah 50:1): "Where is your

mother's divorce document?" He can never exchange us for another nation. (§2)

11. ★★ What does "Who is a fine wife? One who does her husband's will" teach about a small aveirah?

Even a small wish of the Husband matters. Someone who goes against even a small will of Hashem,

including "kadesh atzmecha", is not doing "the Husband's will". (§2)

12. ★★★ So why does the Frierdiker Rebbe bring "ki sisteh ishto" of all posukim? Explain in your own words.

The posuk is not only a proof but an explanation: the soul, the animal soul, the natural soul and

the body are like a "wife" to Hashem, and a fine wife does her husband's will. So even a light

aveirah, even against a small will, is serious. (§2)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

Half a Cup of Water

The Romans had forbidden the Jews to learn Torah, but Rabbi Akiva kept teaching his talmidim, until he was arrested and thrown into prison. He was already an old man.

Every day his talmid, Rabbi Yehoshua HaGarsi, was allowed to bring him a measure of water. One day the jailer looked at the jug. "That's a lot of water for one man," he said suspiciously. "Maybe he wants to dig under the walls and escape!" He poured out half of the water and handed back the rest.

When Rabbi Yehoshua came in, Rabbi Akiva said, "Yehoshua, don't you know that I am old, and my life depends on you? Why are you late?" Rabbi Yehoshua told him what had happened.

"Bring me the water," said Rabbi Akiva. "I want to wash my hands."

"Rebbi! There isn't even enough for drinking," cried Rabbi Yehoshua. "How can you use it for washing?"

Rabbi Akiva answered, "What can I do? Chazal said that whoever eats without washing his hands deserves to die. Better that I die by my own hand than go against the words of my colleagues, the Chachamim."

He washed his hands, and only then did he eat. When the Chachamim heard about it, they said: "If he is so careful now, as an old man in prison, how careful he must have been when he was young and free!"

Source: *Talmud, Eruvin 21b; retold as "Rabbi Akiba in Prison" (chabad.org)*

Think: Netilas yadayim is a mitzvah d'rabbanan. How does Rabbi Akiva show the lesson of this sicha?

For him there was no "small" mitzvah, even a d'rabbanan, even in prison. It was the will of

Hashem, so he kept it with his whole life, like a "fine wife who does her husband's will".

THE LESSON FOR YOU

There is no such thing as a "small" aveirah or a "just d'rabbanan" mitzvah. You are close to Hashem, like family, so even His small wishes matter.

For example: At a friend's party there's pizza and no sink nearby. You could think, "It's only netilas yadayim, no big deal." Instead you go find water, wash and make the brachah, because Hashem wants it.

Fell Down? You Were Never Lost!

ונקתה ונזרעה זרע

Likkutei Sichos vol. 2, Parshas Naso, p. 313 (Hebrew edition pp. 20–22), sections 3–4. From the sicha of Yud Shvat 5713 (1953).

The point: A second connection between “ki sisteh ishto” and sin. The posuk speaks of a case where it is not known that the wife did anything wrong: her husband had warned her not to be alone with a certain man, and she went and was alone with him (v’nisterah). She may be completely innocent, yet the posuk calls it “sisteh”, from the word shtus, foolishness, an “animal act”, and she must bring an offering of barley, animal food (Sotah 15b). Why, if most Jewish women are kosher and we could assume she is innocent? Because putting herself in a situation where she can be suspected is itself an “animal act”: a bas Yisrael must never be in a situation of suspicion. But it is only for a short time. Since she did not actually sin, she is afterwards pure, as the posuk says: “v’nikesah v’nizre’ah zara”. So too when a Jew does an aveirah, through a “spirit of foolishness”: it is not, chas v’shalom, a real defilement of his bond with Hashem, because “My glory I will not give to another” (Yeshayah 42:8): the G-dly spark in every Jew is never given away. He did an “animal act” for a short time, and in the end “v’nikesah”, for “no one will be pushed away from Him” (Shmuel II 14:14). If thinking that anything exists apart from Hashem is already a denial of His oneness, then someone who knows he stumbled in a d’rabbanan, or worse, might think, “Hashem has left me, Hashem has forgotten me” (Yeshayah 49:14). So the posuk teaches: just as the sotah who was found innocent was not defiled, is afterwards permitted, and is even blessed more than before (Sotah 26a), so too a person who knows the foolishness inside himself must not fall in spirit. He was never defiled; it was a short “animal act”, and in the end he will reach love and fear of Hashem through his own effort, the union of the “Husband” and “wife”, the Shechinah revealed in his soul, the inner soul revealed. That is the “personal Moshiach” in each one (Igeres HaKodesh 4), a preparation for the coming of Moshiach for the whole world.

QUESTIONS ★ easy ★★ medium ★★★ harder

1. ★ In the case of “ki sisteh ishto”, do we know that the wife sinned? What did she do?

No. It is not known that she did anything wrong. Her husband had warned her not to be alone with a certain man, and she was alone with him (v’nisterah). She may be completely innocent. (§3)

2. ★★ If she may be innocent, why is it called “sisteh”, and why must she bring an offering of barley, animal food?

Because putting herself in a situation where she can be suspected is itself foolishness (shtus), an “animal act”. A bas Yisrael must never be in a situation of suspicion. That’s why the offering is animal food (Sotah 15b). (§3)

3. ★★ Why might we have thought she doesn’t need any offering?

Since we don’t know for sure that she sinned, we could leave her with her chazakah (presumption) of being kosher, and most Jewish women are kosher. (§3)

4. ★★ Is her situation permanent? Which posuk shows this?

No, it is only for a short time. Since she did not actually sin, she is afterwards pure and permitted again: "v'nikesah v'nizre'ah zara" (Bamidbar 5:28). (§3)

5. ★★ How is a Jew who does an aveirah like the sotah?

It comes from a "spirit of foolishness", an "animal act" for a short time, but it is not a real defilement of his bond with Hashem, chas v'shalom. In the end "v'nikesah": he becomes pure again. (§3)

6. ★★★ What do the posukim "My glory I will not give to another" and "no one will be pushed away from Him" teach about a Jew who sinned?

"My glory" is the G-dly spark in every Jew. Hashem never gives it to "another" (the other side), so it can never truly be defiled. And "no one will be pushed away": in the end every Jew returns. (§3)

7. ★★★ What dangerous thought might come to someone who knows he stumbled? Why does the sicha say it is so serious?

He might think, "Hashem has left me, Hashem has forgotten me" (Yeshayah 49:14). That is serious, because thinking that anything exists apart from Hashem is already a denial of His oneness. (§4)

8. ★★ What happens to the sotah after she is found innocent, according to the Gemara?

She is not only permitted to her husband again; she is blessed even more than before (Sotah 26a), for example, if she used to have children with difficulty, now it is easy. (§4)

9. ★★ What should a person do when he knows there is "foolishness" inside him?

He must not fall in spirit. He should know that he was never defiled, chas v'shalom; it was only a short "animal act". (§4)

10. ★★★ In the end, what will a person who rises after a fall reach? How does the Rebbe explain "v'nizre'ah zara"?

He will reach love and fear of Hashem through his own effort. That is the union of the "Husband" and "wife": the Shechinah and the inner part of his soul revealed in him. (§4)

11. ★★★ What is the “personal Moshiach” in each one, and how is it connected to the Moshiach of the whole world?

The revealing of the inner part of the soul (Igeres HaKodesh 4) is the coming of each person's

“personal Moshiach”, and it is a preparation for the coming of Moshiach for the whole world. (§4)

A CHASSIDISHE STORY

Fifty-Five Years Later

In the winter of 1881, Y.M., the son of a Petersburg chassid, had long since left his father's way of life. One day the Rebbe Maharash, who was in Petersburg working to protect the Jews, looked at him and said: “How long has it been since you stopped putting on tefillin?” Then the Rebbe told him, step by step, how he had slowly let everything go.

Y.M. was shaken. He bought tefillin and started keeping kosher, in secret. Before he left Lubavitch that summer, the Rebbe told him: “A branch thrown into the air comes back to its place. How long can a person wander? Fifty, maybe fifty-five years. Remember who you are, and don't forget where you grew from.”

Soon the Rebbe Maharash passed away, and Y.M. drifted again. Thirty years went by.

In 1912, on a train from Paris, he saw a face in the dining car: the Rebbe Maharash's grandson, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak, later the Frierdiker Rebbe. That year Y.M. turned fifty-five. All night the Rebbe's words rang in his ears. The next morning he knocked on the Rebbe's compartment, weeping. “May I borrow your tefillin? I don't know how many years it's been.”

Years later, a bearded man came up to the Frierdiker Rebbe in a hotel lobby. It was Y.M., now a fully observant Jew in Amsterdam, who had built a shul and supported Torah scholars.

Source: *The Frierdiker Rebbe's diary (Hatamim, 1936), tr. Shimon Neubort, Links in the Chassidic Legacy; “The Baal Teshuvah” (chabad.org)*

Think: How does this story show “My glory I will not give to another”?

Even after thirty years far away, Y.M.'s G-dly spark was never lost. One reminder woke it up, and

in the end he came back even higher, “v'nikesah v'nizre'ah zara”.

THE LESSON FOR YOU

When you fall, don't think “I'm just bad” or “Hashem gave up on me”. That was a moment of foolishness, not the real you. Get up, and you'll come back stronger.

For example: You lost your temper and said something hurtful to your brother. Instead of thinking “I'm hopeless”, you say: “That wasn't the real me.” You apologize and decide how to react next time.