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**Kashrus in the Age of Corona**

**By Rabbi Chananya Jacobson**

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 Kashrus is a very hands-on affair:  factories must be visited, cows must be shechted, and lettuce must be checked.  How is it possible to maintain kosher supervision when travel is restricted and  mere proximity bears risk?

**Early Hurdles**

 STAR-K felt the effects of coronavirus well before it struck the United States.  The mashgichim who staff the Far East were called back to their home bases in Israel and the U.S. as hundreds of manufacturers in China closed in January for the Chinese New Year, with no plans to reopen.  Fear of COVID-19 overtook the world, and in many places foreigners were no longer welcome.

 One mashgiach, who had been living peacefully in India for  several months with his family,  decided it was time to leave his home there when his wife was accosted in the marketplace by people pointing at her accusingly and shouting, “Coronavirus! Coronavirus!”  Another senior mashgiach managed to leave Spain only 12 hours ahead of a countrywide travel lockdown and cessation of all air travel.  All were faced with weeks of quarantine upon returning home.

**The Response**

STAR-K  is working with other  major  kashrus  organizations to  keep  the kosher food supply chain uninterrupted and  provide  food  manufacturers  and consumers  with  the information they need during this pandemic.  Every facility under our supervision has been notified that kosher standards cannot be lowered in the face of COVID-19.

 Since non-essential  travel  is prohibited  in many  locales,  STAR-K  has worked with  Agudath Israel  and  local  governments  to  ensure that kosher service is  recognized as essential  and  has  provided  the  documentation needed for mashgichim to travel.

**Restaurants and Caterers**

 In food service facilities,  kashrus  requires that  our  mashgichim  work  hands-on in the  kitchen.    Rabbi Sholom  Tendler, STAR-K  Kashrus  Administrator,  delivered a  webinar  instructing  mashgichim  regarding  the extra caution necessary  during  these times. Despite shortages, he provided personal protective equipment (PPE)  such as gloves and N95 masks.  When Rabbi Tendler was told by a mashgiach that he was uncomfortable being the only person in the kitchen with access to PPE, Rabbi Tendler replied, “I’ll get masks for everyone there!”

**Factory Visits**

 Many factories are located in  regions that are closed. As of this writing, international borders are still closed to travelers, and interstate commerce is severely restricted.    Even in accessible regions, factories are reluctant to allow outside visitors due to the devastating effects of the virus.  For productions requiring hashgocha temidis (such as kosher runs in otherwise non-kosher plants) we have often been able to gain access to a plant by explaining that, unlike other inspections, kosher supervision is part of the production process.

 However, in plants that we cannot access, special kosher productions have been canceled for the time being.  Likewise, we may need to suspend certification in factories that require frequent visits to ensure that kosher standards are upheld.

 “We have been gratified,” remarks Dr. Avrom Pollak, president of STAR-K, “when companies that are following strict guidelines limiting entry into their facilities recognize the essential nature of kosher requirements and continue to accommodate routine inspections, albeit with appropriate measures.” STAR-K is requiring all mashgichim to follow a safety program developed by NSF, a certification partner, for plant inspectors during this pandemic. Detailed protocols are designed to minimize risk exposure both for plant personnel and the mashgiach.

**Consumer Information**

 This year, people found themselves unexpectedly making Pesach at home, many of them for the first time, and  in need of halachic guidance.  Consumers have always turned to the STAR-K Kosher Hotline in the weeks leading up to Pesach, typically placing thousands of calls to the STAR-K office during that time; but this year our office was closed.

 As the stay-at-home order took effect, our dedicated technical support team  created  a virtual office  so that every question would still be answered.  From their individual homes, our  front office, database  staff and  rabbonim were able to answer an unprecedented number of queries including thousands of emails and nearly 12,500 phone calls between Purim and Pesach!

 In partnership with  Baltimore Jewish Life,  STAR-K broadcast  special COVID-19-focused  shiurim  and webinars to educate people about Hilchos Pesach, both timeless and timely.

 With social distancing protocols in effect, people could not visit their rabbonim to sell their chometz.  STAR-K developed a website that enabled the public to sell  chometz  online.    The transaction was made legally binding using DocuSign technology.  Rabbonim across America then followed suit, implementing similar initiatives in their own communities.

**Going Forward**

 Even  now,  kosher food production  does continue.    Inspectors  are in the field visiting factories, shochtim  are traveling to do shechita, and mashgichim are in the kitchens checking lettuce.  However, it is not entirely business as usual.  We will not have the entire array of kosher products available in the manner to which we are accustomed.

 Our Rav HaMachshir, Rav Moshe Heinemann, shlit”a, comments:

 “With the many precautions and restrictions being put in place in all areas of food production,  including kosher  supervision, it is easy to understand that there will be a reduction in supply.  Maybe among all the other messages  being sent to us by  ה“הקב through this virus is that we can  and should  be במועט מסתפק and be happy and grateful with a little less.

 The עולם של רבונו ,in his mercy, will see that we are all trying and  will   put an end to  this  מגפה and see with נחת that,  even  then, we will try to continue to be  מסתפק במועט in so many areas of our lives.  Needless to say, we are grateful and appreciative for the understanding and patience  from the companies and the consumers with whom STAR-K shares a strong relationship, ברכה עליכם ותבא ברכה

*Reprinted from the Spring 5780/2020 eidition of Kashrus Kurrents, a publication of Star-K Kosher Certification. Rabbi Chananya Jacobson is a Kashrus Administrator for Star K.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

**On Parshas Naso**



 When the Torah describes the count of the tribe of Levi, at the onset of this week’s reading, it uses the expression “raise the head of the tribe of Levi.” At first glance this is a strange way of to present the matter. The Torah should say directly, “count the tribe of Levi.”

 By using the expression “raise the head” the Torah communicates to us a subtle but vital lesson. And that is that pure numbers by themselves are insufficient when we wish to appreciate the value of tribes, groups, or individuals. For if that group or individual does not have a sense of pride, a sense of mission and purpose, then numbers alone, in the long run, are almost worthless.

 The Levites were assigned a special role in Jewish society and temple service. The were also to be the teachers of Israel and, perhaps just as importantly, the role models for Jewish generations and public service. It is no accident of random choice that the greatest public servant the world has ever known, our teacher Moshe, was a Levite. Because, unless leadership feels the impetus of mission and exalted responsibility upon itself, it can never achieve the fulfilment of its assigned task.

 This can only be accomplished by raising one’s head, by having a sense of pride and self-worth and an individual commitment to excellence in the performance of one’s duties and obligations, be they personal or societal. By using the phrase, “raise the head,” the Torah emphasizes to us the correct and eternal way of assessing human numbers and accomplishments.

 Modesty and humility are necessary traits for all of us and they are extremely necessary for those who find themselves in positions of public leadership, spiritual guidance, and education. Yet, in this these areas of human character, like in all other areas of thought and behavior, a proper sense of balance is required.

 Our teacher Moshe is the most humble and self-effacing of all human beings, yet he realizes that he is Moshe, that his face shines with G-dly eternity and that upon him lies the responsibility for preserving the Jewish people and their loyalty to Torah.

 Therefore, his head is raised while at the same time his inner self retains the humility that characterizes his nature. This is a very delicate balancing act and many a potentially great leader has failed because of an excess of pride, on one hand, and meekness on the other.

 We find for instance that King Saul was reprimanded by the prophet Samuel for being overly modest and therefore weak in his response to public pressure. The prophet said to him, “You may be small in your own eyes, but you are the head and leader of the tribes of Israel.”

 Throughout history all of us, and especially those that find themselves in roles of familial, social, educational, and religious leadership are challenged by this exquisite balancing act – how to have a humble heart and a raised head at one and the same time, a demand that the Torah places upon us.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Parshas Nasoh**

**Listen to Your Messages**

By Rabbi Bentzion Shafier

Founder of TheSmuz.com



 “Speak to the Jewish Nation and say to them, ‘If a man or woman makes a vow to separate as a *nazir* to HASHEM.” – *Bamidbar* 6:2

**The Connection between the Sotah and the Nazir**

 If a man suspects his wife of infidelity, he is to bring witnesses and warn her not to go into private quarters with the man in question. If she violates that warning, he is to bring her to the *kohain,* who will give her the “bitter waters” to drink. If she was falsely accused and was innocent, she will be blessed with children. If she was guilty, she will die a gruesome death.

 This is the *parshah* of the *sotah*. Immediately after discussing these laws, the Torah details the laws of the *nazir* and his abstinence from wine. Since these two sections are specifically placed next to each other, the Torah is teaching us that there is a connection between them.

 Rashi is bothered by the connection. What does an unfaithful wife have to do with a man separating himself from worldly pleasure? Rashi explains that since wine brings a person to immorality, the man who witnessed a woman become a *sotah* should refrain from drinking wine.

 The Torah is teaching us that if a man sees a woman fall to such a low level, he should recognize the danger of intoxication and become a *nazir* to abstain from drinking.

 This Rashi is difficult to understand. Either wine is dangerous or it’s not. If wine brings to sin, then it should be avoided, regardless of whether he saw the *sotah* in her debacle. And if wine isn’t inherently dangerous, then why should he make this vow, just because he saw her fall?

 The answer to this question is based on understanding how HASHEM runs the world.

**Listen to Your Messages**

 The story is told that when the Chofetz Chaim learned about a major earthquake in Japan, he began crying. Someone asked him, “Why is the Rebbe so troubled?” He answered, “*Chazal* tell us: ‘Calamities only come to the world because of *Yisrael.*’ We were meant to hear that message.”

 The Chofetz Chaim was making a significant point. For reasons that only HASHEM knows, a vast number of people were supposed to die that day. There are, however, many ways that their deaths could have come about. There are many messengers in HASHEM’s employ and many ways for Him to fulfill his decree. The reason those people died in such a violent manner was so that the Jewish Nation would hear about it and learn from it. The message was for us. The Chofetz Chaim heard the message, and he cried.

**Learning to Listen**

 This seems to be the answer to the Rashi. Nothing in this world just happens. There are no random events. Nothing is by chance – nothing by happenstance. HASHEM speaks to us. There are, however, many vehicles and media that He uses to communicate with us. Sometimes it’s simply by arranging that someone should be in a particular place at a particular time.

 The fact that this man was witness to the *sotah’s* disgrace wasn’t by accident. He was supposed to see that event. HASHEM was saying this to him, “Look how far things can go. Wine itself is a tool; it can be used for good or for bad. Other people may not have to be concerned, but for *you*, this is dangerous. See what happened to that woman? Take it to heart — it could happen to you.”

 A wise man listens to his messages and takes corrective action. In this case, the correct response is for that man to abstain from drinking by becoming a *nazir*. By putting these two unrelated concepts next to each other, the Torah is teaching us that we should be aware of the way that HASHEM speaks to us through events of our lives.

 This concept carries a powerful lesson. There is a Master to this World who orchestrates every event and every occurrence. And He speaks to us. The reason we have difficulty hearing the message is because He remains hidden behind the veil of natural occurrences. Our job is to cut through the fog, to see behind the smoke and mirrors, to recognize Who orchestrates these events, and to understand what He is saying to us. When things occur and we happen to be present, there is a reason. We were meant to hear it and learn from it. Whatever we experience, whether personally or communally, has a message for us, and we are supposed to be open to it and learn from it.

**A Changed World**

 This idea is especially poignant in our times. On August 6, 1945, the Japanese city of Hiroshima was wiped off the face of the map, and reality was changed. With one explosion, neighborhoods, communities — an entire modern city — was obliterated. Never in the course of history was so much force placed into the hands of man. It took a while to grasp that we had entered a new era — the era of atomic power.

 That power is now a threat to mankind. Iran, an evil regime on the brink of nuclear armament, thinly veils its aspiration to use those weapons against its sworn enemies, the United States and Israel. North Korea, long known to have both a nuclear and chemical arsenal, with a barrage of belligerent acts now threatens its neighbors with wanton destruction. Civilization as we know it is in jeopardy.

 And there is message in this for us. That message is for us recognize that HASHEM is in complete control. He alone orchestrates and coordinates every event under the sun. He puts pawns into positions of power, using them to deliver his message. Is the threat real? In a sense, it is. If we don’t heed the message, then the result could be devastation beyond anything we’ve seen before. If we do listen, then these pawns become revealed for what they were – mere puppets in the theater of life.

 All that HASHEM wants from each of us is to return to His ways, to follow the Torah with all of our heart and soul. He speaks to us in different ways. We have to listen to our messages.

*Reprinted from this week’s website on TheShmuz.com This is an excerpt from the [Shmuz on the Parsha book](https://theshmuz.com/product/shmuz-on-the-parsha-book/).*

**How Even a Jew Who Sins Doesn’t Want to Lose His**

**Precious Connection to G-d**

**From the Talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe**

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, Zt”l**



The Torah reading, Naso, contains the portion of the sota -- a wife whose behavior is indiscreet. A deeper examination of the concept reveals the symbolism behind the Torah's words, alluding to G-d as Husband, and the Jews as His wife.

On the verse, "If the wife of any man goes aside," our Sages comment: "One does not commit a sin unless the 'spirit of folly' has entered him."

 The Hebrew word for "folly" is related to the word that means straying from the path.

 With this statement our Sages sought to explain the seemingly incomprehensible phenomenon of a Jew who commits a sin.

 How can such a contradictory state of affairs occur? Is not every Jew, by virtue of his G-dly soul, connected to G-d on the very deepest level? How then can he possibly allow himself to commit a transgression which separates him from his Source Above?

 The answer to this is the "spirit of folly," an outside, external force that temporarily gains control and obscures the Jew's faith.

 Because of this "spirit of folly," the Jew cannot perceive the true consequence of his actions -- the disconnection from G-d that his sin actually causes. Were he properly aware of this at all times, the Jew could never bring himself to disobey the commandment of G-d under any circumstances.

 What exactly is this "spirit of folly"?

 Nothing but the desire for physical gratification, which causes a lessening in spiritual perception.

 Consequently, a person imagines that nothing will happen if he commits the sin, and that he will remain just as connected to G-d as he was before. His desire for gratification blinds him to the fact that even the tiniest of infractions is detrimental to his bond with G-d.

 The reverse side of this principle is that even when a Jew does sin, G-d forbid, it does not mean that the Jew himself is bad; rather, every Jew is inherently good, and his innermost desire is to obey G-d's will. It is the "spirit of folly" that is to blame, an outside factor that is incongruent with the Jew's true nature.

 In the symbolic sense, G-d is referred to as the "Husband" of the Jewish people.

 A Jew who commits a sin is likened to a wife whose indiscreet conduct arouses the suspicion of her husband.

 The sota has not committed a sin with certainty; she has merely behaved in a manner which raises doubts. And just as the sota is rewarded when she is found to be innocent -- "but if she is pure she shall conceive seed" -- so too does G-d promise that every Jew will ultimately repent and return to Him, for the Jew's inner essence always remains untouched by sin.

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**Rav Avigdor Miller**

**On Shalom Bayis**



 **QUESTION**: If a husband and a wife attempt to live in peace and they succeed, can their happiness in this world be deducted as a payment for their happiness in this world? Also can their *shalom bayis* ever be taken away from them as a punishment for sin.

 **ANSWER:** Those are two separate questions. So we’ll answer one at a time. When people are happy as a result of doing *mitzvos*, they will never lose: any reward in *Olam* *Habah* because of that happiness. Although other kinds of happiness like wealth or fame or even long life may be deducted from your reward in the World to Come – a person has to be afraid he’s being paid off in this world –but if you’re happy as a result of *mitzvos*, if you’re happy because you practice living peacefully with people and people like you, or husband and wife like each other, that will never be deducted as part of your payment.

 And so if you’ll sit in the *sukkah* and rejoice with your family on *Sukkos*, that will never be deducted from your *schar* in *Olam Haba.* That’s a *klal gadol –* the *simcha* of a *mitzvah*is never considered as payment in this world.

 The second question: Will the happiness achieved in doing a *mitzvah* ever be imperiled because of somebody’s misbehavior? And the answer is that anything is imperiled by one’s misbehavior. Even your *tefillin* are imperiled. You see that we say מפני חטאינו גלינו מארצנו – because of our sins we were exiled from our land and we lost the *Beis Hamikdash* and *korbanos*.

 We lost most of the *Seder* *Kodshim*! And most of the *Seder* *Taharos* we lost. A big *shas* we lost because מפני חטאינו. So you see by doing sins, people can be deprived even of *mitzvos*. A *mitzvah* is a benefit – it’s a privilege to be able to do *mitzvos*. And sometimes, by misdeeds, a person loses that privilege. And that’s the very worst form of punishment there could be – there’s no punishment worse than losing the opportunity to do *mitzvos*.

*Reprinted from the February 27, 2020 email of Toras Avigdor based on Tape #427 (September 1983).*

**Thoughts that Count**

**For Parshat Nasso**

*The Book of Deuteronomy*

 What is the difference between the Book of Deuteronomy and the other four Books of the Torah? In transmitting the first four Books, Moses acted strictly as G-d's emissary, repeating the message word for word without involving his own intellect in the process.

 Deuteronomy, however, was transmitted precisely through the intellect and understanding of the leader of the generation, in response to the exact needs of the people and its particular spiritual level. Accordingly, Deuteronomy - given to the Jewish people just prior to their entry into the land of Israel, and the new lifestyle it would entail - contains many explanations of concepts that were only alluded to in the first four Books. *(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

*Moses began (ho'il) to explain this law* (Deut. 1:5)

 The Hebrew word "ho'il" contains the same letters as "Eliyahu" - an allusion to the time to come when Elijah the Prophet will answer all our difficult questions. Also, the questions posed by the last few generations before Moshiach will be complicated and troublesome; their answer will only be found through the same self-sacrifice that was shown by Pinchas, whom our Sages explain was reincarnated as Elijah the Prophet.

*(Yalkut Moshe)*

*How can I alone bear your weight, your burden and your strife?* (Deut. 1:12)

 As Rashi explains, the "burden" referred to by Moses was the heretics among the Jewish people. Commented Rabbi Nachman of Breslov: "The heaviest burden a person can bear is apostasy. The heart of a Jew who believes in G-d is calm and tranquil, while the heretic must constantly contend with the weight of his doubts and troubling thoughts."

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