

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Naso for your Shabbos Table

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DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Acknowledging Failure

איש או אשה כי יעשו מכל חטאת האדם... ואשמה הנפש ההיא, והתודו את חטאתם אשר עשו....

"If a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind...then that soul shall bear guilt. They shall confess the sin which they committed..." (5:6)

The Torah here addresses the case of somebody who committed a certain offense, stealing from a convert who did not beget children after his conversion, and then passed away after being victimized. Since the convert has no halachic heirs, the thief who now repents and wishes to rectify his crime cannot return the stolen goods to the victim's estate. The Torah here outlines the procedure whereby the thief can attain atonement.

This process begins with verbal confession – והתודו את חטאתם אשר עשו. This *pasuk* is the source for the obligation of *vidui*, that after acting wrongly, one must verbally admit that he failed, and acknowledge that ואשמה הנפש ההיא, he is guilty of misconduct.

The first step to self-improvement is recognizing the need to improve, acknowledging that we have done something wrong, that we have failed.

Several weeks ago, the Milwaukee Bucks' Giannis Antetokounmpo gave an interview following his team's shocking defeat to the Miami Heat in the NBA playoffs. He was asked by a reporter whether his season was considered a failure, given the high expectations which did not materialize. In a response that went viral, Antetokounmpo insisted that the season was not a failure, because he and his team played hard and did their best.

I later wrote an [article](#) objecting to this idea, and to those in the Orthodox Jewish world who applauded Antetokounmpo's remarks and saw them as conveying a valuable educational message. Certainly, we should not beat ourselves up for our failures, or wallow in shame and guilt. The institution of *teshuvah* tells us that we are not defined by our failures, that we can move forward and overcome them. However, this is only possible if והתודו את חטאתם – if we acknowledge that we've failed. Without this first critical step, we will never grow, we will never improve ourselves.

The word חטא is commonly translated as "sin," but this is not the real meaning of the word. The verb לחטא means "miss the mark." A חטא is when we miss an opportunity. Every *mitzva* of an opportunity to connect with Hashem, and when we transgress, we have squandered a precious opportunity. The process of *teshuvah* allows us to rectify this failure, but only if והתודו את חטאתם, if we recognize that we erred, that we transgressed, that we missed an opportunity to serve Hashem. This is the first critical step that we must take in order to grow.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

The Way to Change

The Gemara in Maseches Sota takes note of the fact that the Torah in Parshas Naso juxtaposes the *halachos* of the *sota* (suspected adulteress) and those of the *nazir* (person who voluntarily commits to abstain from wine and other restrictions). Immediately after presenting at length the laws that apply in the situation of a *sota*, the Torah proceeds to discuss the *halachos* of somebody who takes upon himself the status of *nazir*. The Gemara explains that

this juxtaposition teaches us, הרואה סוטה בקלקולה יזיר – somebody who sees the tragic fate of the *sota* should respond by vowing to abstain from wine for a period of time. If the *sota* was, in fact, guilty of infidelity, then she would die after drinking the special water that she was given. One who witnesses this tragedy will be frightened, and will thus be motivated to undertake measures to protect himself from sinful lures and temptations. This person is thus advised to become a *nazir* and refrain from wine.

The question arises, is this really all that a person needs to protect himself from temptation? Is this single measure sufficient? Shouldn't the Torah be encouraging people to do more to safeguard against wrongful behavior?

The work *U'l'sitcha Elyon* explains that when we want to change, when we seek to grow and lift ourselves, it is unwise to take on too many things all at once. This is not likely to have much of a lasting effect. Instead, we should make one small, not especially difficult, change, and this change will serve as a constant reminder that now we are trying to be different. True, committing to abstain of wine will not, in itself, protect a person from sin. But it will remind the person every time he is offered a glass of wine, or feels like taking a glass of wine, that he has embarked on a journey of growth and self-improvement. He will thus gradually begin to see himself differently, and will, day-by-day, undergo the desired process of change. We should begin with one simple measure, and this will lead us to slowly experience the kind of transformation that we want.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

The Bridge Between Body and Soul

The Torah speaks of a person who chooses to become a *nazir* with the phrase כי יפליא לנדור נזיר נזיר. This *pasuk* is the basis for the use of the term הפלאה in reference to the halachic concept of vows. The Rambam names one of the fourteen books of his *Mishneh Torah* הפלאה, and this book consists of all the *halachos* relevant to vows and oaths, including the laws of *nezirus*.

This word stems from the root פלא, which means "wonder." Why is this term used to refer to vows?

Rav Yitzchak Hutner explains the word הפלאה based on the Rama's discussion (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 6) of the conclusion of אשר יצר, the *beracha* recited after performing one's bodily functions. After expressing gratitude to God for this remarkable mechanism, whereby the body retains the nutrients from food

and discharges the waste, one concludes, ברוך אתה, ה' רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות ("Blessed are You, Hashem, healer of all flesh, who performs wonders"). The Rama explains that the expression מפליא לעשות refers to the "wonder" that the soul can reside within the body. The physical body and the spiritual soul are opposites; they are two entirely different entities, which should not be able to merge together into a hybrid that is the human being. The *Mishna Berura* adds that the פלא of the merging of body and soul can be seen in the fact that food sustains both. When we eat, the food sustains our physical bodies, providing them with what they need to continue operating, but the food also sustains our soul, keeping it within the body. This is truly a פלא – that God devised a system whereby body and soul, two diametrically opposite entities, can be simultaneously sustained by the same substance and the same mechanism.

On this basis, Rav Hutner suggests, we can understand why the word הפלאה is used in reference to vows, the power with which we are endowed to create new halachic realities through a verbal pronouncement. The faculty of speech marks the intersection, or the bridge, between body and soul. The ability to speak is unique to human beings among all physical creatures, because it is a product of the soul, which only human beings possess. Speech is the way we use our physical bodies to express abstract and profound ideas. It brings our thoughts, feelings and emotions into our physical world, allowing them expression through physical means. As such, speech signifies the extraordinary blend between our physical and spiritual elements, between the body and soul. This is why speech can be used to change a halachic reality. Through the spoken word, a person can transform himself into a *nazir*, subjecting himself to certain halachic restrictions and obligations. A person can proclaim a vow to obligate himself to do something, or to abstain from something, and this vow is binding. As the power of speech originates from the soul, it has spiritual power. Therefore, this area of *halacha* is called הפלאה, because it demonstrates the wondrous interplay between body and soul, how our physical and spiritual components work together, in tandem, despite being diametrically opposite one another.