

## It's Just Crazy

Parshas Naso is always read near Shavuos. Some years Naso is immediately before Shavuos and most years, Naso is immediately after Shavuos.

Considering this proximity to Shavuos, it is not surprising to find many lessons in Parshas Naso which guide us regarding how to approach Torah as a whole.

Among the more obvious:

Parshas Naso is the longest Parsha in the Torah with 176 Pesukim. The lesson is, when it comes to Torah learning quantity matters; learn lots and lots of Torah.

The same five pesukim are repeated over and over almost verbatim for a total of twelve times, and then the same information is repeated a thirteenth time in the form of the totals from the previous twelve sets of Pesukim. The lesson is that Torah is not meant to be learned once and then move on to something else. Torah is meant to be reviewed and relearned again and again.

(The Rebbe offers an interesting insight into Rashi's commentary on this. The first time that the offerings are detailed, Rashi offers a few clarifications of what is being said in the text. For the second day and the second set of offerings, Rashi provides Midrashic explanations of the symbolism of the offerings and the numbers and so on. Rashi then is silent on the remaining ten days and their offerings. Why is this? It is not as if the Midrash does not offer allusions and symbolism for the offerings of the other days. If this Midrashic insight is useful for understanding day two, why not explain the other ten days as well. And, why wait until day two to give the Midrash instead of including it in the commentary for day one?

The Rebbe explains that normally Rashi does not see the need to resort to Midrashic allusions in order to explain the meaning of the Torah, and therefore, on the first day he does not cite the Midrash. When we read the second day's offerings, however, and discover that they are identical to the first, Rashi sees the need to explain the repetition. He therefore explains that on this day, the numbers etc. were meant to represent certain specific things, which were not alluded to on day one. Being that the symbolisms are different, it was necessary to detail the offerings again. When we



come to the third day, Rashi does not need to explain anything. We already know that the repetition of the details is because although they may appear to be the same as the previous day, in actuality they represent something different. It follows then, that the repetition on day three and subsequent days is because each day has a different symbolism. Exactly what it is for each day, is beyond the purview of Rashi whose purpose is only to explain the basic meaning; if you want to know what the Midrash says you can go look it up yourself.)

There are also lessons regarding Torah in general which can be derived from the specific Mitzvos spelled out in our Parsha. Allow me to share one of them. One of the Mitzvos in the Parsha is Sota. This deals with a woman who is warned by her husband not seclude herself with another man and she does so nonetheless. The husband suspects her of being unfaithful. The Torah details a process whereby her innocence can be established. Why is she called a “Sota?” The term derives from the opening verse where it states:

דִּבֶּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אִישׁ כִּי־תִשְׁטֶה אִשְׁתּוֹ וּמָעַלָה בּוֹ מֵעַל:  
*Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: If any man's wife shall go  
 astray and break faith with him*

Rashi explains that the basic root meaning of the word is to “turn away” off the proper path. Rashi also brings the teaching of the Gemara (Sota 3a) that the word should be read as if it was with a Shin rather than a Sin, making this word related to the word for imbecile or fool, a Shota. This teaches us, says the Gemara, that a person does not sin unless a spirit of folly enters him. This seems like bad news but actually is good news for our Torah observance in several ways.

The idea stated in the Gemara is expanded upon at length in numerous places in Tanya, and is also the subject of Kuntres uMaayan (“Overcoming Folly”) which is the text we have been studying for a while on Sundays. What does this Talmudic statement mean? Are we just being dismissive or taunting one who sins? “You sinner, you’re an imbecile!” What good what that do, anyway?

The Torah is teaching us how a person comes to violate the Torah laws and succumb to temptation. Understanding how that works is empowering because it gives us the tools to succeed. It helps us in dealing with others who fail. And it helps us to get ourselves back on track.



A parable is told of a king and his advisor who were discussing an impending crisis. All evidence indicated that eating of the coming harvest would make the eater crazy. (This is not merely an invented device for the purpose of the parable. I remember reading once that during the Little Ice Age, when Europe suffered from intense, long, cold winters and very short summers, the harvested grain did not have enough time to dry out before being brought into storage. As a result of the dampness, it grew mold or other such microbial beings which, when ingested, caused insanity.) Not to eat was not really an option; starving to death was not a plan. So, they decided that they, too, would eat and become insane. But, they would put marks on their foreheads to remind themselves and each other that they are temporarily insane.

The Torah is telling us that it is totally irrational to do an Aveira. We are being created every moment by Hashem. He has laid out clearly what He wants from us and how that will benefit us in the short term as well as for eternity. He has the power to fulfill that. Furthermore, in our core essence we are one with Him, so that what we want and what He wants is really one and the same. What could possibly be more pleasurable and meaningful than doing what we want deep down, what Hashem wants, and which will bring goodness upon us and the whole world forever?

Somehow, we convince ourselves to overlook all of that and much more, and instead to opt for some silly transient pleasure which really is never as good in reality as it appeared in anticipation. How many people destroyed their lives, their careers, their families and themselves, by injudiciously succumbing to some temptation? How can that be characterized other than insanity?

The first time around, we can perhaps understand that it seemed like such a good idea that the time, and how much could one little Aveira'le hurt?

The story is told of the two famous brothers, students of the Mezritcher Magid and colleagues of the Alter Rebbe, Reb Meilech and Reb Zushe (who wrote one of the approbations of Tanya). Once Reb Meilech said to Reb Zushe, "All souls are connected to the soul of Adam. If so, we were there when he sinned. Why did you not reach out and hold back his hand from taking the forbidden fruit?" To which Reb Zushe replied, "Had I done so, for all these thousands of years people would have lived wondering, "What if he had eaten? What delight did we miss out on?" This way we know the price which accompanied that fleeting pleasure."



How do we go back and do it again, after knowing that the pleasure is not that great, and the feelings of remorse and guilt are very unpleasant, not to mention the spiritual harm which is brought upon ourselves and the damage we have done to our relationship with Hashem?

The answer to that is “insanity.” It is irrational. No normal person would ever do such a thing. And that is the first message from the Torah’s choice of words here. We are rational, thinking creatures endowed by Hashem with the ability to make good decisions. When we feel that irrational desire coming on, we need to identify it, and freeze it. “That’s nuts! I am not even going to think about doing that. I am too smart to contemplate something so dumb.” Keep in mind “the mark on the forehead” reminding us that what lies in front of is a potential descent into insanity and that is not who I am.

The second application of this: Even if Chas v’Shalom we do slip up, all is not lost. What I did (or failed to do) was a result of temporary insanity superimposed upon my good and rational self. I can shake that off in a second and allow my true self to shine forth. Because even while committing the act my inner core was not in that act but still firmly connected with its source Hashem above. The moment my true self asserts itself all the layered on insanity will dissipate into the nothingness that it is.

This also helps us see others properly. Even if they have failed, that does not mean they are bad people. It simply tells us that they are suffering from temporary insanity, and that is what caused their misdeeds. Condemnation is not what is needed; rather we must remind them of the ultimate truths which deep down they already know and help them find their way back to their true rational selves.

Insanity sometimes is a good thing. Going all out for what is right and what needs to be done, without carefully calculating whether I have all the resources in hand, and what the likelihood of success is, and all sorts of other seemingly rational considerations, and just doing it despite all odds, may seem irrational. It probably is. But that irrationality is what kept Jews and Yiddishkeit alive, surviving the most daunting of challenges throughout history. The Rebbe once said, “I am crazy about Moshiach.” It is this kind of positive insanity which will bring Moshiach NOW.

