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JEWISH
CONTINUITY

Naso – Death and Determination

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It is in this week's Parsha that we are introduced to an important personality – the Nazir. He is a man who takes a vow to abstain from wine, cutting his hair, and coming in contact with the dead. Why would someone take such a vow? To attain a higher level of life sanctity. The Nazir is a person who has lost his way, has become too entrenched in the material world, and is looking to hit the life reset button. His behavior is extreme, but it is designed to allow him to ultimately find the middle path of synergistic partnership between body and soul.

But sometimes the best laid plans go awry.

“If someone in his presence dies unexpectedly or suddenly, and causes the nazirite head to become defiled, he shall shave off [the hair of] his head on the day of his purification; on the seventh day, he shall shave it off. And on the eighth day, he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the kohen, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The kohen shall prepare one for a sin offering and one for a burnt offering and atone on his behalf for sinning by coming into contact with the dead, and he shall sanctify his head on that day. He shall consecrate to the Lord the period of his abstinence and bring a lamb in its first year as a guilt offering; the previous days shall be canceled because his naziriteship has been defiled (Bamidbar 6:9-12).”

The Nazir tried his best, but an unavoidable circumstance puts a corpse in his proximity. The days observed fall by the wayside, and the Nazir must restart the fulfillment of his vow. The Beis Yisroel (Rabbi Yisroel Alter of Gur, 1895-1977) explains that the Torah is conveying a deeper message. The Nazir represents a person looking for more out of life. He realizes that he is not living the life he should be living; he is not becoming the person he is capable of being. So, he decides to make dramatic life change. Sometimes, you just have to bring life to a grinding halt in an effort to recalibrate and plot a new course for the future. The Nazir found the strength and adopted a new approach (for a limited amount of time). But then he failed. He finds himself in proximity to a corpse, and everything ends; he must start all over again. He is determined and tries to better himself, and his vow ends in failure. He is *tamei*, impure and back to square one. But it is here, in these details, that God teaches us how to deal with failure.

“V'kidash es rosho ba'yom ha'hu, and he shall sanctify his head on that day;” on the day he finishes his purification process, he gets back up and starts all over again. There is no time for lamenting; there is only time to get up, dust off, and start again. As King Solomon wrote in Proverbs, *“For a righteous man can fall seven times and rise, but the wicked shall stumble upon evil (24:16).”* Everyone stumbles and falls, the righteous get back up, the wicked stay down.

But there is one more piece. The above-mentioned section ends, *“... the previous days shall fall away (be cancelled).”* In order to have a meaningful second chance and a new beginning, one must let go of the feelings of pain and failure of the past. In the aftermath of failure, I think to myself, “I wasted so much time and so many resources on this initiative, idea, or mission which never materialized.” A person could feel demoralized in the aftermath of failure, and that prolonged feeling could prevent a person from trying again and believing that things can be different in the future. Sometimes, you just have to let go in order to move on.

The message of the Nazir is a message for us all. We all fail, and we all fall; this is an inevitable reality of the human condition. What is our response to life failure? Get back up and try again. Clean up your wounds, let go of the past, and make another go at it. We may not identify with the restrictions of the Nazir, but his quest for holiness and elevation inspires us all.