

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Naso

“AND THE KOHEN SHALL STAND HER BEFORE HASHEM...”
(BAMIDBAR 5:18)

THE TORAH DETAILS THE PROCESS done to a *sotah* – a woman suspected of infidelity. The procedure is tedious and meant to tire-out and provoke fear in the heart of the *sotah*, in the hope that she will break down and confess her misdeed, before the final steps: the erasure of the Name of Hashem and mixing the particles into water that she must drink. If she is guilty, this mixture will cause her a horrible death; if she is innocent, she will be blessed with offspring. The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 9:16) points out that the above *pasuk* is the second time in the space of two *pasukim* where the Torah says, “Before Hashem.” The first time, explains the Midrash, is simply to tell us the location of the procedure. The second time is to tell us that the *kohen* must impress upon the *sotah* that she is indeed standing in the presence of Hashem.

**Imagine the emotions
running through the mind
of this woman**

Imagine the emotions running through the mind of this woman: She is suspected of a very serious crime. The procedure she is about to begin may end in her violent death. Her husband and the *kohen* bring her into the holy Beis HaMikdash where the ineffable Name of Hashem will be scraped off the parchment on which it was written. One would imagine that all her senses would be heightened at this moment and that she would be very aware of exactly where she is standing in a physical, emotional and spiritual sense. Why would the *kohen* have to remind her once again that she is standing before her Creator?

**Our yetzer hara can blind
us to this fact**

We see from this Midrash how “forgetful” our minds can be of even the most basic concepts. Every believing Jew will immediately acknowledge that we are always in the presence of Hashem. Yet, our *yetzer hara* can blind us to this fact and cause us to forget this reality. This temporary amnesia is so powerful that it can cause one to forget his Creator even while standing in His “home” – the Beis HaMikdash – and even when his very life is at stake. How much more so when we are not in the Beis HaMikdash, but rather in our home, school, on the street or in the workplace, do we certainly need to remind ourselves of this most obvious fact!

The Shulchan Aruch opens with the words “I have placed Hashem constantly before me.” (Tehillim 16:8) - this is a great rule in Torah...” (Orach Chaim 1:1) This is such an important concept that the Ramah chose it as the introduction to the laws of Jewish living. When one stands before Hashem in prayer, this awareness becomes even more critical. As the Mesilas Yesharim writes (Chap. 19), “One can instill in his heart the truth of this concept, how one comes [before Hashem] and actually communicates with Him, and pleads before Him, and requests of Him; and He, blessed be His Name, pays attention to him and listens to his words – just as when one speaks with his friend, and his friend hears and listens to him.”

**He awaits our Torah, our
mitzvos and our tefilos**

We have the privilege, as Hashem’s chosen people, of standing before Him and serving Him with our every action, word or thought. He awaits our Torah, our *mitzvos* and our *tefilos*, to fulfill His purpose in creating the universe. Let us remind ourselves constantly that we stand in His presence - He watches us and yearns to see our striving and our struggles to come closer to Him. May we use this awareness to help us fulfill His will and reach towards the lofty goal of perfection.