

“WHEN A MAN OR WOMAN SINS [TO STEAL AND SWEAR FALSELY]...A MAN WHOSE WIFE IS UNFAITHFUL...A MAN OR WOMAN WHO VOWS TO BECOME A NAZIR.” (BAMIDBAR 5:6 - 6:1)

Without peace in the home, man cannot be at peace with his neighbor

The final step in his sequence seems puzzling

This strife torn individual is incapable of living peacefully

THE RALBAG EXPLAINS the mysterious juxtaposition and sequence of the above three segments in this week's *parasha*. The ultimate goal of mankind, the Ralbag teaches, is a peaceful society, where people dwell together in security and tranquility. This is the subject of the first portion above, dealing with one who steals and swears falsely – a problem of society as a whole. This goal of a peaceful society can only be achieved, the Ralbag continues, if there is peace in the building blocks of society: the home and family. This is referred to in the second portion quoted above, dealing with an unfaithful wife – a *sotah*. Without peace in the home, man cannot be at peace with his neighbor. Yet even this objective of domestic harmony depends on a more basic type of peace: man being at peace with himself. This is alluded to by the third and final portion above, that of a *nazir*, who vows to abstain from the pleasures of wine and intoxicating beverages. One who does not restrain himself from indulging in sensory pleasures is not at peace with himself; therefore he cannot live in tranquility with his spouse and ultimately cannot dwell peacefully in society with his neighbors.

The Ralbag's penetrating analysis of the keys to a harmonious community is certainly useful in our attempts to reach this ideal state of living. However, the final step in his sequence seems puzzling. He claims that one who indulges in his physical desires is not “at peace with himself.” Shouldn't a person who satisfies his body's cravings be more tranquil than one who leaves his physical yearnings unfulfilled? Why does the Ralbag characterize a self indulgent person as one who is “in conflict” with himself?

Man was not created to be a purely physical creature. He is a miraculous blend, an intertwining of spiritual and physical, soul and body, Divine and mundane. Just as the soul cannot be at peace if the body is deprived of its essential nourishment, so too the body cannot be truly tranquil if the soul is spiritually starving. If man neglects his Divine purpose and focuses only on satiating the body's desires, he is torn with internal strife, a ceaseless tension and inner turmoil fueled by the soul's cry for spirituality, for true fulfillment and eternity. The “pleasure seeker,” so glorified in the hedonistic world around us, is, in reality, a walking battleground, body and soul locked in endless combat. To the public, he smiles and enjoys “the good life.” But deep inside, a civil war rages – a restlessness gnaws away at him, giving him no peace and leaving a yawning emptiness in his soul. This strife torn individual is incapable of living peacefully with his spouse, and cannot be a harmonious member of society.

Any intelligent and conscientious person is constantly trying to foster more peace, both within his home and in the world at large. A good place to begin is right inside ourselves, by following the Torah, increasing our spiritual intake and limiting our physical indulgence. The Torah's dictates are not only rules that guide us to perfection and earn us eternal reward in the World to Come they are the only prescription for true happiness and inner tranquility in this world, prescribed by the Designer and Creator of man.