



Asher Manning
Gush Chapter
Director
**The Case Against
Equality**

Does the Torah believe in equality? Is equity a Jewish value? I would propose that it is not. At least not the equality and equity that are being championed today.

One of the great revolutions that the Tanach imprinted upon humanity is the concept of equality before the law. Hashem treats all equally, peasant or king, no one is immune from divine justice. This message changed humanity's conception of justice forever.

And yet, when we come to appraise the Torah with the yardstick of modern morality, we are filled with unease.

“Send forth from the camp everyone with Tzaraat... (or other impurity)”. Our parsha commands us to actively discriminate. Other commandments in our Parsha also ‘trigger’ our modern sensibilities. Sota = sexism, Birkat Kohanim = hereditary privilege. The census = a patriarchal system. All of these seem to be crimes against today's values of equality.

Questions such as these demand a much deeper and longer inquiry than this Dvar Torah. Nonetheless, I think it is important to give voice to a feeling that many of us share when we hold up our Torah to the light of the times.

I would like to propose not an answer but a clarification. The Torah doesn't talk in the language of human rights but rather human responsibilities. The Kohen is not better than a Yisrael or closer to God, rather he plays a different role.

Equality implies that we should all be seen as the same. But truthfully, we all have different skills, talents and purposes to fulfill in our lives. Each is given the tools and gifts necessary for our individual role. Before the law and God, we are all equal, but it would be futile to enforce equality in all other realms of human existence. Some are tall and some are short. Some are Kohanim and some Yisraelim. Each comes with privileges and limitations.

Equity and diversity are mutually exclusive. If we are all supposed to be the same then how can we celebrate our God-given differences? Is equality a Jewish value? Yes.

But not in the way you might think.



Hillel Smolarcik
11th Grade, Efrat
Acting on Inspiration

In this week's parsha, Parshat Nasso, we are given two very different parts of Judaism in the same Aliyah. The first is the case of Sotah, a woman who is accused of adultery. The second is the halachot of a Nazir.

These two cases could not be more random. Sotah is a case where a woman is accused of adultery and the ritual she must

undergo, and Nazir seems to be just a case of someone who accepts more personal vows upon himself.

The connection between these two cases is given on the first page of Masechet Sotah. “One who sees a Sotah in her state of degradation should prohibit wine to himself by taking a Nazirite vow” (Sotah 2a). But why does one even need to become a Nazir anyways? Isn’t seeing the Sotah happen enough inspiration to be holier?

While seeing the Sotah offers a huge amount of inspiration, it is pointless if nothing is achieved as a result. Doing nothing with this will just numb the person’s ability to be inspired in the future.

This can be seen in the following story. In the Slobadka Yeshiva in Europe, when it was time to dance with the Sifrei Torah on Simchat Torah the mechitza would be lowered so the women could feel part of the Simcha. One girl, however, didn’t get excited at all. She was the daughter of the town’s Sofer (scribe), and she saw Sifrei Torah every day. It wasn’t a big deal to her.

In this day and age, the chances for inspiration are near limitless. (I hope you, the reader, are being inspired right now). Unfortunately, the distractions are just as plentiful. The Torah is teaching us a timeless lesson here, that we should never just sit back and be content with mere inspiration. We must learn from the nazir, and use this inspiration to make ourselves holier people. Have a wonderful Shabbat! ■

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