

## Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

### *Parashat Naso* – The Barley Offering: Mistress or Mastery

#### Dealing with the Grabbing Instinct

Every Jewish holiday is an opportunity to practice holy eating. I just completed my annual six-day juice fast coming out of it on Shavuot. While watching everyone at the table enjoying their eggplant parmesan and cheesecake, I was happily munching away at my delicious organic salad. Juice fasting and coming out of it gracefully without throwing yourself into the food like an animal is quite an exhilarating restraint practicing experience. It is an amazing feeling to eat so slowly and mindfully, chewing every bite carefully, feeling satisfied with so little. I experienced that dealing with my grabbing instinct helped me get in touch with my *neshama* (soul), feeling so much more loving and giving. Victor Lindlahr said, “You are what you eat!” I’d like to modify this statement to, “You are *how* you eat!” We have a choice to behave like an animal grabbing the biggest piece first, gulping it down quickly before going for seconds, or patiently waiting our turn to eat for the sake of being healthy to serve Hashem. In *Megillat Ruth*, Boaz “gave her [Ruth] a pinch of parched grain, and she ate, was satisfied and she left over.” Ruth, the mother of kingdom, is a model for holy eating, rectified sexuality and selfless behavior for the sake of others. Note, that these are the very qualities that bring redemption. Together with Ruth, we have gone through the refinement period of counting the Omer of barley, which is considered animal food. During this period, we have worked on self-refinement, becoming less and less animalistic with every Omer count. When Shavuot arrived, we moved from barley to wheat, which is considered human food. The holiday of Shavuot is linked to wheat because two whole-wheat *chametz* loaves were sacrificed then. Not only food needs to be eaten in measured ways. Food and sexuality are two sides of one coin. How many suffer today in broken families because of unrestrained sexual behavior, when a married man or even woman inadvertently gave up eternity for the sake of a fleeting pleasure? Below I share with you more about the mystical and medicinal properties of barley part of which is excerpted from my book: [The Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with their Mystical & Medicinal Properties](#).

#### Animal Food

This week’s *parasha* tells of the suspected adulteress – סוֹטָה/*sotah* who secluded herself with a man whom her husband had specifically warned her not to befriend. Her sin offering is a barley sacrifice rather than the usual wheat because barley is considered animal food. The סוֹטָה/*sotah* brings a barley sacrifice. “Just as her actions were animalistic, so does her sacrifice consist of animal food” (*Babylonian Talmud Sotah* 14a). Her inability to protect the precious boundaries of her marriage is considered an animalistic act, as we cannot expect an animal such as, for example, an ox to be faithful to any specific cow. “The superiority of the human over the animal is nothing (אֵין/*ayin*)...” (Ecclesiastes 3:19). The word *ayin* means nothing’ or ‘no.’ In addition to

the accepted interpretation, that there is no difference between man and animal, this verse can also mean that the superiority of the human being over the animal is our ability to say 'ayin' (No!). (Rav Ruderman (1901–1987), quoted by Rabbi Frand, *Parshat Naso* <http://www.torah.org/learning/ravfrand/5762/naso.html>). Therefore, the suspected adulteress sacrifices an offering of barley in order to rectify her animal soul, and to ingrain within her the *Gevurah* of self-restraint and setting proper boundaries.

### Our Actions Create an Inverse Reaction

In my book I link each of the Seven Fruits of the Land of Israel with one of the seven lower *sefirot* based on the teachings of the Arizal. It is interesting that in spite of the fact that barley is considered animal food and people and animals differ by the animals' inability to practice self-restraint, barley corresponds to גְבוּרָה/*gevurah* – restraint. The *sotah* brings a barley offering, for barley embodies the power of all the *gevurot* (Arizal, *Sefer HaLikutim, Parashat Ekev*, chapter 8). Perhaps, this teaches us that the nature of the world is such that our actions create an inverse reaction. For example, when we give of ourselves to someone, the recipient of our giving becomes the receiver. When we act unrestrained, we create a constricted reality. This explains that only when we keep the laws and rules in the Torah do we become truly free. Animals that do not have this ability are relegated to a world of limitations embodied by the constrained barley animal-food.

### The Boundaries of Measure

When we measure something, we determine its particular boundaries. Barley corresponds to the boundaries of measurement. The root of the Hebrew word for barley, ר-ע-ש /*sin-ayin-reish* with the ו, consists of the same letters as the Hebrew word for measurement, שְׁעוּר /*shiur*. This term is often used in Jewish law, as for example one needs to eat a certain שְׁעוּר /*shiur* – amount, in order to be required to recite an after-blessing (See for example Rav Shlomo Ganzfried, Ungvar, ערוך שולחן קיצור /*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, 54:8). We also use the term שְׁעוּר /*shiur* to refer to a Torah class. Many people may not be aware, however, that a שְׁעוּר /*shiur* implies that the class takes place within a certain time frame, and must begin and end on time. It is also interesting to notice that a grain of barley is used to determine the minimum measure that negative spirits may control. Therefore, the Egyptians were unable to replicate the plague of lice, “for the demon is powerless over a creature smaller than a barley seed” (Rashi, Exodus 8:14). Perhaps the reason for this is that whatever is beyond measure belongs exclusively to the Divine domain.

### In Praise of Barley

From what we have written so far, it seems as if barley is a lower kind of food not worthy for human consumption. However, this is far from the truth. By way of contrast, barley teaches us to behave like a *mentch* rather than let our impulses lose. Barley also has many nutritional benefits. In my book, I quote Rambam who teaches that barley cereal has cleansing properties. It cleans the respiratory system and dries up mucus. Barley is also cooling, especially for the



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eyes. Lentils have opposite qualities to barley and balance it. Therefore, a dish cooked from a mixture of barley and lentils is especially beneficial (Nisim Krispil, *Medicinal Herbs of the Rambam*, p. 208). I also explain there, how Barley is an excellent source of dietary fiber, iron, phosphorus, magnesium, manganese, selenium, and thiamin. It is also a great source of niacin, riboflavin and vitamin B6.

Each of the seven fruits of the land has their own song in the פֶּרֶק שִׁירָה / *Perek Shirah* – Nature’s song. In my book I have a section from Nature’s Song, beautifully illustrated, for each of the seven fruits. I will conclude with the Song of Barley from my book.

**The Song of Barley:** “A prayer of the poor, when he wraps himself and pours out his trouble before Hashem” (*Psalms* 102:1). Barley is ‘poor man’s food.’ When a person is hungry and has nothing to eat, he is happy to receive even barley. From this we may learn that when we are, G\*d forbid, in trouble, we must stand with a broken heart like a pauper who stands in the doorway all wrapped up. We must, likewise, wrap ourselves and pour out our trouble in heartfelt prayer to Hashem. Then Hashem will hear our prayer and redeem us (Album *Perek Shirah*, quoting Rav Ya’acov Emden, *HaYa’avetz* and Rav Moshe MiTrani, (*Hamabit*), *Beit Elokim*).

May Hashem hear our prayer and help us on the windy road to true freedom through exercising proper boundaries in our lives through mindful motivational mastery!