

TESHUVAH: TWO ELEMENTS TO A SIN

Background

The Torah is outlining for us the laws of vows. One of the details is that a husband has the ability to annul a vow that his wife made – with or without her consent and knowledge. Rashi is teaching us that in a case where a woman made a vow, was unaware that her husband annulled it, and then went ahead and violated it anyway, she needs forgiveness.

ספר במדבר פרק ל

וַאֲם הִנִּיא אָבִיהָ אֶתְהָ
בְּיוֹם שָׁמְעוּ כָּל נִדְרֶיהָ
וְאֶסְרֶיהָ אֲשֶׁר אָסְרָה עַל
נַפְשָׁהּ לֹא יִקּוּם וַיִּדְוֶד יִסְלַח
לָהּ כִּי הִנִּיא אָבִיהָ אֶתְהָ

And if her father will annul it (her vow) on the day that he hears it, all of her vows and all that she forbade to herself will not stand. And G-d will forgive her since her father annulled it.

רש"י על במדבר פרק ל פסוק ו

וה' יסלח לה - במה הכתוב מדבר באשה שנדרה בניזיר ושמע בעלה והפר לה והיא לא ידעה ועוברת על נדרה ושותה יין ומטמאה למתים זו היא שצריכה סליחה ואע"פ שהוא מופר ואם המופרים צריכים סליחה ק"ו לשאינן מופרים (ספרי)

HASHEM will forgive her – *What is the verse referring to? A woman who made a vow to be a Nazir. Her husband heard her vow, and unbeknownst to her, annulled it. She then violated her vow by drinking wine or becoming impure through a dead body. She requires forgiveness, even though her vow was annulled.*

Questions

Why would this woman need forgiveness? Since her vow was annulled, she didn't sin. Imagine for a minute that I sat down to eat a cheeseburger, but it turned out that it wasn't really cheese in the burger, but soy. In reality, I didn't eat meat and milk. I didn't sin, and I should not need atonement. Similarly here, since the woman's vow was annulled, even though she didn't know it, she didn't sin. So why does she need atonement?