

Two links

- Classes on the Book of Judges <https://www.yutorah.org/search/?teacher=81072&collection=8423>
- This series <https://www.yutorah.org/search/?teacher=81072&collection=9986>

1. Numbers 6:2-8 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)

Speak to the Israelites and say to them: If anyone, man or woman, explicitly utters a nazirite's vow, to set himself apart for the Lord, he shall abstain from wine and any other intoxicant; he shall not drink vinegar of wine or of any other intoxicant, neither shall he drink anything in which grapes have been steeped, nor eat grapes fresh or dried. Throughout his term as nazirite, he may not eat anything that is obtained from the grapevine, even seeds or skin. Throughout the term of his vow as nazirite, no razor shall touch his head; it shall remain consecrated until the completion of his term as nazirite of the Lord, the hair of his head being left to grow untrimmed. Throughout the term that he has set apart for the Lord, he shall not go in where there is a dead person. Even if his father or mother, or his brother or sister should die, he must not defile himself for them, since hair set apart for his Gd is upon his head: throughout his term as nazirite he is consecrated to the Lord.

2. Judges 13:3-5 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)

An angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "You are barren and have borne no children; but you shall conceive and bear a son. Now be careful not to drink wine or other intoxicant, or to eat anything unclean. For you are going to conceive and bear a son; let no razor touch his head, for the boy is to be a nazirite to Gd from the womb on. He shall be the first to deliver Israel from the Philistines."

3. Questions

- Why does the Torah give the nazirite vows their own section?
- Why would anyone become a nazirite?
- Why make Samson a nazirite?
- Does Samson succeed as a nazirite?
- Is Samson really a nazirite at all?

4. Judges 14:10-11 (JPS 1985 edition, c/o sefaria.org)

So his father came down to the woman, and Samson made a feast there, as young men used to do. When they saw him, they designated thirty companions to be with him...

5. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Being a Nazir 3:13-14

Samson was not a full nazirite, for he did not vow to be a nazirite, but the *malach* separated him from ritual impurity. What was his law? He was prohibited from wine and prohibited from shaving, and permitted to become ritually impure for the dead; this is halachah by tradition.

Therefore, one who says, "I am a nazirite like Samson," is a nazirite from shaving and wine forever. He does not shave every twelve months like other eternal nazirites. He may become ritually impure for the dead... And one who vows to be a nazirite like Samson cannot repeal his vow, for the period of being a nazirite of Samson was eternal.

Hatzlelponi, Mother of Samson

6. Talmud, Sotah 9b

What is the meaning of "anything ritually impure"? Further, did she eat ritually impure [non-kosher] things until now? Rabbi Yitzchak of the yeshiva of Rabbi Ami said: That which a nazirite may not eat.

7. Amos 2:11

And I will establish from your children prophets, and from your youths nazirites...

8. Midrash, Sifri Zuta 6:8

Because he vowed for a life of separation and purity he is called 'holy.' The verse even gauges him to be as a prophet...

9. Rabbi Moses Nachmanides (13th century Spain), Commentary to Numbers 6:14

The reason a nazirite brings a *chatat* when he completes his period of being a nazirite is not explained. On a simple level, he causes himself to transgress when he completes his period of being a nazirite, for now he is separated [from normal life] in his holiness and his service of Gd, and it would be appropriate for him to maintain this separation forever and remain for his entire life a nazirite, sacred to Gd... and so he needs atonement when he returns to contaminate himself with the desires of this world.

The Conventional Model

10. Talmud, Sotah 2a

Why are the portions of the nazirite and the sotah juxtaposed? To teach you that all who see the sotah in her corruption should vow distance from wine.

11. Talmud, Nedarim 9b

Shimon haTzaddik said: I never ate the guilt offering of a nazirite who had become ritually impure, but once. Once a nazirite came from the south, and I saw that he was of beautiful eyes, a handsome appearance and long, braided hair. I asked him, "What made you decide to destroy this beautiful hair?"

He told me, "I was a shepherd for my father in my town, and I went to draw water from the spring, and I saw my reflection. My *yetzer* became agitated and sought to draw me from the world. I told it: Wicked one! Why are you arrogant about a world that is not your own, with one who will be decay and worms? By the Temple Service, I will shave you off for the sake of Heaven!" I immediately stood and kissed him on his head and said, "My son, may there be many more nazirites like you in Israel."...

12. The Narcissus story, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Narcissus-Greek-mythology>

Narcissus, in Greek mythology, the son of the river god Cephissus and the nymph Liriope. He was distinguished for his beauty. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book III, Narcissus's mother was told by the blind seer Tiresias that he would have a long life, provided he never recognized himself. However, his rejection of the love of the nymph Echo or (in an earlier version) of the young man Ameinias drew upon him the vengeance of the gods. He fell in love with his own reflection in the waters of a spring and pined away (or killed himself); the flower that bears his name sprang up where he died.

13. Sefer haChinuch (anonymous, 13th century), Mitzvah 374

Whenever our intellect can reduce its labour on behalf of the physical, and place as its goal the service of its Creator, it will be good for the person, so long as [the intellect] does not abandon the work of its 'house' entirely, destroying it, for that would also be a sin, as the King wishes to have such a creation... And this is the sanctity of the nazirite and his elevated level, when he leaves the service of the physical and he breaks his desires in a way that does not entirely demolish the 'house', such as avoiding drinking wine, and growing his hair, for this humbles the *yetzer*...

14. Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 10:5

It was revealed before Gd that Samson would follow his eyes, and so He commanded that he be a nazirite, not to drink wine, since wine leads to impropriety.

15. Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (13th-14th century France), Commentary to Judges 13:3

And because it was clear and known before the Creator of the world that Samson would pursue women and suffer through them, Gd planned from birth and the womb and conception to prevent it...

16. Rabbi Moses Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Laws of Prohibited Relationships 13:14-16
Do not entertain the thought that Samson, Rescuer of Israel, or Solomon, King of Israel, who was called a “friend of Gd”, married foreign women when they were not Jewish. Rather, the secret of the matter is thus: The proper mitzvah is that when a male or female outsider comes to convert we investigate him to see whether he is coming to join the religion to gain money or power, or out of fear...

And because Solomon converted women and married them, and Samson also converted and married, and it was known that [the women] pursued this only for benefit and were not converted by a [true] court, the text viewed them as idolaters, remaining prohibited. Further, their end demonstrated their original intent, for they served their idols and built altars, and the text viewed it as though [Solomon] had built them, as Kings I 11:7 says, “Then Solomon built an altar.”

17. Don Isaac Abarbanel (15th-16th century Spain), commentary to Judges 14:1

We have seen many times in the stories of the prophets that they occasionally acted against the rules, so that the service of Gd would emerge from those deeds... Gd enabled him to do this, because even though those activities were in themselves mixed up, vengeance against the Philistines would emerge from them.

18. Talmud, Sotah 9b

Judges 14:4 says, “And his father and mother did not know that it was from Gd” – but when he did it, he followed what seemed good to him.

A Role Model

19. Rabbi Meir Leibush Weiser (19th century Ukraine), Commentary to Samuel I 1:3

It said that no one ascended from Shiloh, only that man ascended...

20. Samuel I 3:1

And the youth, Samuel, served Gd before Eli, and the word of Gd was rare in those days; prophecies were not common.

21. Prof. Yechezkel Kaufmann (20th century Israel), Judges, pg. 243

Here we see magical substance change its nature, a magical idea clothed in the form of a religious idea... Beside the magical sign we find its Israelite translation. Immediately after “And his strength left him” it says, “that Gd had left him.”

22. A Demonstration

- Chosen by Gd
- A Divine agent
- Source of his strength
- Source of the loss of his strength
- The final prayer

Review Questions

- 1) Why does the Torah present the nazirite’s brand of vow separately from other vows?
- 2) Why does Samson’s mother take on some of the laws of a nazirite?
- 3) What are the two models of a nazirite?
- 4) Within each model, why was Samson required to be a nazirite?
- 5) Why was Samson required to be an eternal nazirite, without a break even to cut his hair?
- 6) Did Samson succeed as a nazirite?