

Parashat Naso 5784, 2024:

The Greatness of Shimshon

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

Chazal often chose a *haftarah* that reflects one of the subjects in its associated Torah portion. This week's *haftarah* follows this approach, and just like our *parasha* presents the laws of the *nazir*, our *haftarah* focuses on the miraculous events preceding the birth of *Shimshon HaGibor*, the most celebrated *nazir* of all time:

And there was one man from Zorah, from the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren and had not borne. And an angel of Hashem appeared to the woman, and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren, and have not borne; and you shall conceive and bear a son. Consequently, beware now, and do not drink wine or strong drink, and do not eat any unclean thing. Because you shall conceive and bear a son; and a razor shall not come upon his head, for a Nazirite to *Elokim* shall the lad be from the womb; and he will begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." (*Sefer Shoftim* 13:2-5, this and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Following this passage, our *haftarah* concludes with the birth of Shimshon and informs us that Hashem both blessed and rested His Divine spirit upon him: "And the woman bore a son and called his name Shimshon; and the lad grew, and Hashem blessed him. And the spirit of Hashem began to come to him at times in the camp of Dan..." (*Sefer Shoftim* 13:24-25)

In my view, Shimshon emerges as one of the most misunderstood figures in Tanach. *Chazal* address these misperceptions and help reveal his authentic persona. The Torah teaches us that two of the twelve tribes received the appellation "*gur aryeh*." *Ya'akov Avinu* bestowed this title on Yehudah and his descendants, whereas *Moshe Rabbeinu* did so regarding the tribe of Dan:

A cub (*gur*) [and] a grown lion (*aryeh*) is Yehudah. From the prey, my son, you withdrew. He crouched, rested like a lion, and like a lion, who will rouse him? (*Sefer Bereishit* 49:9)

And of Dan he (Moshe) said: “Dan is a young lion (*gur aryeh*), streaming from Bashan.” (*Sefer Devarim* 33:22)

Midrash Bereishit Rabbah (Parashat Vayechi 8) interprets “*gur aryeh*” as Ya’akov’s blessing to Yehudah to acquire “the strength of a lion and the temerity of a lion cub.” In his *Commentary on the Torah* on this *pasuk* (*Sefer Bereishit* 49:9), Rashi suggests that Ya’akov’s use of *gur aryeh* is a prophetically suffused reference to *Dovid HaMelech*, Yehudah’s most famous descendant and forebear of the *Mashiach*, who embodied both lion-like strength and great boldness. Shortly thereafter the text states, “Dan will avenge his people, like one, the tribes of Israel.” Rashi explains this *pasuk* in this manner:

All Israel will be like one with him, and he will avenge them all. [Ya’akov] uttered this prophecy concerning Shimshon. We can also explain, “like one, the tribes of Israel,” [as follows]: like the special one of the tribes, namely Dovid, who came from Yehudah.

Rashi’s gloss strongly underscores Chazal’s perception regarding the relationship between the tribe of Yehudah and the tribe of Dan, as exemplified by their most famous descendants, *Dovid HaMelech* and Shimshon. This idea is given powerful voice in *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah*, Parashat Vayechi 14: “*Ya’akov Avinu* saw him [Shimshon in a prophetic vision] and thought he was the *Melech HaMashiach* (the King Messiah) ...” Clearly, Shimshon’s potential was nearly unlimited.

Shimshon’s role as one of the most outstanding *shoftim* and protectors of the Jewish people is found in *Talmud Bavli*, *Sotah* 10a:

Rabbi Yochanan said: “Shimshon judged the Jewish people just like their Father-in-Heaven. As the text states, ‘Dan will avenge his people, like one [Rashi—the One of the World Who renders righteous judgment], the tribes of Israel.’” (*Sefer Bereishit* 49:16). And [in addition] Rabbi Yochanan said: “Shimshon was named after the name of the Holy One blessed be He. As the text states: ‘For a sun (*shemesh* — similar in Hebrew spelling to Shimshon) and a shield is *Hashem Elokim*; Hashem will give grace and glory; He will not withhold good from those who go with sincerity.’” (*Sefer Tehillim* 84:12, Talmud translation my own)

Rabbi Yochanan compares Shimshon to the Almighty in two respects, as an honest and forthright judge and as a true *shomer Yisrael*—guardian and defender of the Jewish people. In his estimation, this was the authentic Shimshon.

Another aspect of Shimshon's greatness was his willingness to do *teshuvah*, just as *Dovid HaMelech* did following his initial involvement with Batsheva. Shimshon rose to this level when he prayed to Hashem to give him the strength to destroy his idolatrous Philistine captors. When Hashem granted him this power, Shimshon was able to *mekadash shame Shamayim b'rabim*—sanctify Hashem's name before the entire world:

And Shimshon called to the Hashem and said, “O *Hashem Elokim*, remember me and strengthen me now, only this once *HaElokim*, that I may be avenged the vengeance for one of my two eyes from the Philistines.” And Shimshon grasped the two pillars of the center, upon which the house rested, and leaned upon them, (the) one with his right hand and the other with his left. And Shimshon said, “Let my soul die with the Philistines,” and he bent with (his) might, and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein... (*Sefer Shoftim* 16:28-30)

With Hashem's help and our fervent desire, may we, too, live lives that are *mekadash shame Shamayim*, and thereby bring honor to His holy Torah. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha's* name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.