

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

The Strongest Man Was Not From Nazareth

In this week's Torah portion Naso (Numbers 4:21–7:89), we are introduced to the Nazir, a man or woman who chooses to abstain from wine, cutting their hair and contact with death. In doing so, the Nazir strives for a higher level of holiness which transcends materiality.

As recorded in the book of Judges, Samson is the most well-known individual who was a Nazir.

As children, we were taught Bible stories and told that Samson was the “strongest man who ever lived.” Movies like Cecil B. DeMille's 1949 classic “Samson and Delilah” captured the imagination of millions and glorified Samson's long hair as the secret to his superhuman strength.

However, there is much more to the Nazir than the movie depicts. The real source of Samson's strength was his dedication to God.

A Nazir is usually considered an ascetic who practices self-denial and extreme asceticism. However, the Nazir is a paradigm of someone who undertakes a spiritual “detox program,” dedicating oneself to God by taking extraordinary steps to control compulsive impulses. This message is especially relevant today when the internet provides a constant flow of stimulation, which influences people to act impulsively.

Although the internet provides countless opportunities for growth, the dark side of the net objectifies women, promotes drug use, and glorifies violence.

The rise of violence in society today is correctly attributed to mental health issues, the use of methamphetamines, and a lack of parental role models. Studies by York University and the US National Center for Health have shown that obsessive playing of violent video games can increase aggressive thoughts and behaviors. Furthermore, a lack of impulse control also contributes to violence among young adults.

The Jewish sage Ben Zoma, addressed this issue when he taught, “*Who is strong? He who subdues his [evil] inclination*” (Ethics of our Fathers 4:6). Ben Zoma did not glorify bodybuilders or warriors; rather, he said true strength is found in the person who overcomes his impulses, as it says, “*slowness to anger is better than a mighty person*” (Proverbs 16:32).

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The Nazir's lifestyle promotes self-control in three areas: Abstinence from wine controls immorality, not cutting one's hair prevents ego and self-glorification, and avoiding contact with death discourages violence and murder.

The Nazir's sanctification of human impulses fosters humility, which is a precursor to a deeper spiritual connection to God. Taking the oath of a Nazir is not for everyone. However, we can apply the Nazir's example to develop a foundation for a moral, meaningful, and spiritual life.

It is significant that the Nazir is defined by his behavior and not by where he lives. This fact is relevant in responding to the missionary claim that Jesus fulfilled a prophecy when he moved to the city of Nazareth. The New Testament says, "*he went and lived in a town called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.*" (Matthew 2:23).

To anyone knowledgeable of the Jewish bible, Matthew's claim immediately raises a red flag. Nowhere in the Jewish bible does it say that anyone would be called a Nazarene [someone from Nazareth]. Besides, the city of Nazareth did not exist in the time of Jewish scriptures.

The most likely explanation for this contradiction is that Matthew fabricated this "prophecy" to give the impression that Jesus fulfilled a [non] requirement of the promised messiah.

In an act of desperation, some missionaries attempt to explain this contradiction by claiming Matthew is referring to the biblical prophecy "*he will be a Nazirite to God from the womb*" (Judges 13:5).

However, in context, this verse is referring to Samson who was a Nazarite [Nazir-נזיר] which has nothing to do with where a person is born or lives. Although the words Nazarite and Nazareth [נצרת] may sound alike in English, that is all they have in common. They have different meanings and are spelled differently in Hebrew.

May the Jewish people be blessed with the moral strength and impulse control of a Nazir to withstand the temptations of other religions, pursue truth, and serve God wholeheartedly.

Shabbat Shalom,

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