



Sicha Summary

Chelek 18 | Nasso | Sichah 3

The Context:

The Torah describes two forms of the nazirite vow: 1) A person who takes a nazirite vow for a specific duration (minimum of thirty days) may not cut his hair, consume grape products, or become ritually impure through contact with a corpse. 2) A person who takes a nazirite vow for life may cut his hair every twelve months. (*Bamidbar* 6:3 ff)

A third category of nazirite appears in the narrative of Shimshon: An angel appeared to his mother and told her “you are going to conceive and bear a son,” and then instructed her, “a razor shall not come upon his head, for the boy is to be a nazirite to G-d from the womb on.” (*Shoftim* 13:5) Shimshon, however, was permitted to become ritually impure through contact with a corpse.

The tractate of *Nazir* concludes with the following Mishnah concerning Shimshon’s unique nazirite status:

“Shmuel was a nazirite, in accordance with the statement of Rabbi Nehorai, as it says [when Chanah, his mother, prayed for a son, she vowed]: ‘And no *morah* shall come upon his head.’ (*Shmuel I* 1:11). It says regarding Shimshon: ‘A *morah* [razor] {shall not come upon his head},’ and it says: ‘A *morah*,’ regarding Shmuel. Just as the term ‘*morah*’ stated regarding Shimshon means that he was a nazirite, so too the term ‘*morah*’ that is stated regarding Shmuel indicates that he was a nazirite.” (*Nazir* 66a)

Rabbi Yossi disagrees with Rabbi Nehorai and maintains that we cannot deduce Shmuell’s nazirite status from Shimshon.

The Questions:

- 1) Rambam rules that Shmuel was a full-fledged *nazir* for life. (*Hilchos Nezirus* 3:16) This means that Shmuel's nazarite status was more complete than Shimshon's status, as Shimshon was allowed to contract corpse impurity but Shmuel was not. If Shmuel's nazarite status is derived from Shimshon's status, as Rabbi Nehorai explains, how can he be bound by a more complete nazarite vow than Shimshon?
- 2) *Radak* asks a more foundational question: How can Shmuel assume nazarite status without taking his own vow? A mother's vow cannot confer nazarite status to an unborn child.
- 3) The same question can be asked regarding Shimshon: How can an angel's instruction confer nazarite status to a human being? The essence of the nazarite law is that the person's own speech creates the nazarite status.

The Explanation:

A *Beis Din* can convert a gentile child in infancy if they appraise the situation and believe it is appropriate (for example, if a gentile father is converting along with his child). The conversion is contingent on the child's choice when reaches thirteen years of age: If he continues to act like a Jew, he retroactively confirms his conversion. If he actively objects to the conversion, it is annulled. (*Kesubos* 11a)

The mechanism of this conversion is that the child is not actually endowed with Jewish status as a child. He merely underwent the practices of the conversion process. Once he passively accepts the conversion as an adult, the conversion process he underwent as a child is imbued with intention and is therefore retroactively valid.

The same logic can be applied to Shimshon and Shmuel's nazarite status: The angel's instruction and Chana's vow did not create a binding nazarite vow for either Shimshon or Shmuel. But it did obligate them to conduct themselves as nazirites throughout childhood. When they reached

adulthood and did not object, they retroactively confirmed their nazirite status.

Thus, Rabbi Nehorai's textual proof did not attempt to apply Shimshon's nazirite standards to Shmuel, but rather, to equate the method by which they became a nazirite: Just as Shimshon grew up observing certain nazirite practices and confirmed them as an adult, so, too, Shmuel confirmed his childhood nazirite practices as an adult. Shimshon and Shmuel were not the same **type** of *nazir*; they became *nezirim* through the **same process** of confirmation of earlier behavior.

The Talmud's Conclusion:

Based on the above, we can appreciate the thematic coherence of the Talmud's commentary to this final Mishnah, which concludes tractate *Nazir*. The Talmud says:

“Rabbi Yossi says: The one who answers amen is greater than the one who recites the blessing. And Rabbi Nehorai said to him: By Heavens, it is so. Know that this is true, as the military assistants [*gulyarim*] initiate the war, and the mighty follow them and prevail.”

What relevance does this discussion have to the Mishnah?

Essentially, Rabbi Nehorai and Rabbi Yossi disagree whether a subsequent confirmation of an earlier act merely strengthens the act or actually transforms the act and elevates it into a new status.

Rabbi Nehorai maintains that Shimshon and Shmuel's confirmation of their *nezirus* as adults transformed mere nazirite **behavior** into actual nazirite **status**.

But Rabbi Yossi disagrees: Only Shimshon could be considered a nazirite, because his subsequent confirmation of his earlier behavior did not transform him into a full-fledged nazirite, but rather into some form of a hybrid nazirite — he was permitted to come into contact with a corpse.

Thus, his confirmation strengthened his earlier behavior, but it did not transform this behavior into his attaining a new status. Shmuel, however, could not become a complete nazirite by his subsequent confirmation, because Rabbi Yossi maintains that a subsequent confirmation does not have that power.

The same applies to the answering of amen to a blessing: Amen is a declaration confirming the content of the blessing. According to Rabbi Yossi, “The one who answers amen is greater than the one who recites the blessing.” “Greater” implies an increase in kind; the person who confirms the blessing increases and amplifies the message of the blessing. But Rabbi Nehorai goes further: “The military assistants [*gulyarim*] initiate the war and the mighty follow them and prevail.” The mighty soldiers who prevail accomplish something qualitatively different than the assistants who initiate the conflict. So, too, the one who makes the blessing merely begins the battle, while the person who answers amen accomplishes the victory itself.

Following this discussion, the tractate concludes with this teaching:

“Students of [Torah] scholars increase peace in the world....” In talmudic usage, “scholars” refers to teachers of Mishnah while “students of scholars” refers to talmudic sages who expand the mishnah’s discussion. A person only familiar with the concise statements of a Mishnah cannot issue legal rulings, for the Mishnah does not spell out the deeper rationale of the law provided by talmudic discourse. Thus, the statement “Students of [Torah] scholars increase peace in the world” continues the same theme of Rabbi Nehorai in the Mishnah and the discussion about answering amen: The students of Talmud who follow, continue, and confirm the earlier teachings of Mishnah are the ones who dramatically change the world.

The Deeper Dimension:

A nazirite, who voluntarily increases his spiritual responsibilities, represents an increase of Divine light within the strictures of the natural world. This is similar to responding amen, for a blessing is a disclosure of

Divine light from Above, and amen is a confirmation that draws this light down into this world.

Rabbi Nehorai, whose name is Aramaic for “light,” is sensitive to the transformational power of a lower entity (transforming a profane language [Aramaic] into a vehicle for light). Thus, he maintains that answering amen, which is merely drawing down Divine awareness into a lower reality, is infinitely greater than the blessing which reveals Divine light Above. This will become manifest in the Messianic Era, when the deepest Divine truths (blessings) will be plainly evident within the lowest physical reality (responding amen).