

# Torah Talk—מאמרי תורה



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Parashat Naso  
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פרשת נשא  
ט' בסיון תשע"ז

Torah Reading: *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 4:21-7:89

In this *parasha*, Hashem describes the service of the Gershon family of *Levi'im* (Levites); laws relating to the *sotah* (suspected adulteress) and the *nazir* (nazirite) are given; Hashem tells Moshe and Aharon the *Birkat Cohanim* (Priestly Blessing); the heads of tribes bring gifts to the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle).

*N'zirut*, the act of becoming a *nazir*, is an interesting phenomenon. The relevant text in the Torah reads as follows:

ב דָּבַר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם: אִישׁ אוֹ-אִשָּׁה, כִּי יִפְלֵא לְנָדָר נָדָר נָזִיר--לְהִזִּיר, לַה'. ג מִיַּיִן וְשִׁכָּר יִזִּיר, חֲמֵץ יַיִן וְחֲמֵץ שִׁכָּר לֹא יִשְׁתֶּה; וְכָל-מִשְׁרֵת עֲנָבִים לֹא יִשְׁתֶּה, וְעֲנָבִים לַחִים וַיִּבְשִׂים לֹא יֹאכַל. ד כָּל יָמֵי נָזְרוֹ: מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה מִגִּפְנוֹ הַיַּיִן, מִחֲרָצִנִּים וְעַד-זֶג--לֹא יֹאכַל. ה כָּל-יָמֵי נָדָר נָזְרוֹ, תַּעַר לֹא-יַעֲבֹר עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ: עַד-מְלֵאת הַיָּמִם אֲשֶׁר-יִזִּיר לַה', קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה--גְּדֹל פָּרַע, שְׁעַר רֹאשׁוֹ. ו כָּל-יָמֵי הַזִּירוֹ, לַה', עַל-נֶפֶשׁ מִת, לֹא יָבֵא. ז לְאָבִיו וּלְאִמּוֹ, לְאָחִיו וּלְאֶחָתוֹ--לֹא-יִטְמָא לָהֶם, בְּמֹתֵם: כִּי נָזִיר אֶל-לֵהָיו, עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ. ח כָּל יָמֵי נָזְרוֹ, קֹדֶשׁ הוּא, לַה'.... יג וְזֹאת תּוֹרַת הַנָּזִיר: בַּיּוֹם, מְלֵאת יָמֵי נָזְרוֹ, יָבִיא אֹתוֹ, אֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד. יד וְהִקְרִיב אֶת-קָרְבָּנוֹ לַה' כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן-שָׁנָתוֹ תְּמִים אֶחָד, לְעֹלָה, וְכִבְשָׂה אֶחָת בֵּת-שָׁנָתָהּ תְּמִימָה, לְחֻטָּאת; וְאֵיל-אֶחָד תְּמִים, לְשִׁלְמִים. טו וְסֹל מִצּוֹת, סֹלֶת חֲלֵת בְּלוֹלַת בִּשְׁמֹן, וּרְקִיקֵי מִצּוֹת, מִשְׁחִים בִּשְׁמֹן; וּמִנְחָתָם, וְנִסְכֵיהֶם. טז וְהִקְרִיב הַכֹּהֵן, לִפְנֵי ה'; וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת-חֻטָּאתוֹ, וְאֶת-עֹלָתוֹ. יז וְאֶת-הָאֵיל יַעֲשֶׂה זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים, לַה', עַל סֹל הַמִּצּוֹת; וַעֲשֵׂה, הַכֹּהֵן, אֶת-מִנְחָתוֹ, וְאֶת-נִסְכּוֹ. יח וְגִלַּח הַנָּזִיר, פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד--אֶת-רֹאשׁ נָזְרוֹ; וְלָקַח, אֶת-שְׁעַר רֹאשׁ נָזְרוֹ, וְנָתַן עַל-הָאֵשׁ, אֲשֶׁר-תַּחַת זֶבַח הַשְּׁלָמִים. יט וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-הַזֶּרֶע בְּשֵׁלָה, מִן-הָאֵיל, וְחֲלֵת מִצָּה אֶחָת מִן-הַסֹּל, וּרְקִיקֵי מִצָּה אֶחָד; וְנָתַן עַל-כַּפֵּי הַנָּזִיר, אַחַר הַתְּגַלְחוֹת אֶת-נָזְרוֹ. כ וְהִנִּיף אוֹתָם הַכֹּהֵן תְּנוּפָה, לִפְנֵי ה'--קֹדֶשׁ הוּא לַכֹּהֵן, עַל חֲזֵה הַתְּנוּפָה וְעַל שׁוֹק הַתְּרוּמָה; וְאַחַר

יִשְׁתָּהּ הַנָּזִיר, יֵינ. **כא** זאת תִּזְכֹּר הַנָּזִיר, אֲשֶׁר יִזְכֹּר, קִרְבָּנוּ לֵה' עַל-נִזְרוֹ,  
מִלֵּבֶד אֲשֶׁר-תִּשְׁיֵג יָדוֹ; כִּפִּי נִדְרוֹ, אֲשֶׁר יִזְכֹּר--כִּן יַעֲשֶׂה, עַל תּוֹרַת נִזְרוֹ.

**2** Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When either man or woman shall clearly utter a vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to consecrate himself to Hashem, **3** he shall abstain from wine and strong drink: he shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried. **4** All the days of his Naziriteship shall he eat nothing that is made of the grapevine, from the pressed grapes even to the grapestone. **5** All the days of his vow of Naziriteship there shall no razor come upon his head; until the days be fulfilled, in which he consecrates himself to Hashem, he shall be holy, he shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow long. **6** All the days that he consecrates himself to Hashem he shall not come near to a dead body. **7** He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die; because his consecration to God is upon his head. **8** All the days of his Naziriteship he is holy to Hashem.... **13** And this is the law of the Nazirite, when the days of his consecration are fulfilled: he shall bring it to the door of the tent of meeting; **14** and he shall present his offering to Hashem, one he-lamb of the first year without blemish for a burnt-offering, and one ewe-lamb of the first year without blemish for a sin-offering, and one ram without blemish for peace-offerings, **15** and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, and their meal-offering, and their drink-offerings. **16** And the priest shall bring them before Hashem, and shall offer his sin-offering, and his burnt-offering. **17** And he shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace-offerings to Hashem, with the basket of unleavened bread; the priest shall offer also the meal-offering thereof, and the drink-offering thereof. **18** And the Nazirite shall shave his consecrated head at the door of the tent of meeting, and shall take the hair of his consecrated head, and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace-offerings. **19** And the priest shall take the shoulder of the ram when it is cooked, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them upon the hands of the Nazirite, after he has shaven his consecrated head. **20** And the priest shall wave them for a wave-offering before Hashem; this is holy for the priest, together with the breast of waving

and the thigh of heaving; and after that the Nazirite may drink wine.

**21** This is the law of the Nazirite who vows, and of his offering to Hashem for his Naziriteship, beside that for which his means suffice; according to his vow which he vows, so he must do after the law of his Naziriteship.

Some of the questions which immediately arise from this section include:

- How long did *n'zirut* last?
- Why should a *nazir* not cut his or her hair?
- Why should a *nazir* not drink any wine or liquor, nor ingest any grape product at all?
- Why does a *nazir* bring a sin-offering after he or she completes this term of special devotion to Hashem?

Indeed, this set of laws is so complex that an entire tractate of Talmud is devoted to it. According to chapter 1 of Tractate *Nazir*, the standard time for *n'zirut* is thirty days. This understanding is derived from the fact that the words *n'zirut* and *neder* (vow) appear in this section thirty times. Of course, there were some life-long *n'zirim*, the most famous being *Shimson* (Samson) in the book of *Shoftim* (Judges). The Talmud also debates whether *Avshalom*, the son of David, and the prophet *Shmuel* (Samuel) were Nazirites.

Sforno (16<sup>th</sup> century Italy) states that the Nazirite refrained from cutting his or her hair to “remove from himself arrogance and all thoughts of beauty and adorning his hair.”

According to Rabbi Menachem Brayer (20<sup>th</sup> century America), people cannot properly serve God unless they are in control of their faculties at all times. Alcohol suppresses inhibitions, slows reflexes, and impairs cognitive abilities. The *nazir's* special consecration to God had to be internally rather than externally induced and totally under his or her control. Other grape products were excluded to prevent the *nazir* from even coming close to imbibing and losing sobriety.

Two opposing views exist as to why the *nazir* needed to bring a sin-offering after his or her *n'zirut*. Ramban (13<sup>th</sup> century Spain/Palestine) suggests this is due to “his abandoning his separation and service to Hashem, as he should remain in such service all the days of his life.” Others, such as the Talmudic Rabbi Elazar ha-Kappar,

take the opposite tack and claim that Judaism eschews asceticism; since the *nazir* knowingly prevented himself from enjoying the pleasures of God's world, he sinned and needed to bring atonement for that.

There is some evidence that *n'zirut* was widely practiced through the Hasmonean era (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE). The Rabbis of the Talmud between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE and their later followers rejected *n'zirut*, and the practice disappeared completely after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Why might someone want to become a Nazirite?
- Can you think of any other reasons for the questions posed above?
- What other Jewish traditions have totally disappeared from Jewish culture? What new traditions have arisen since the Talmudic times?