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OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

ד"ר

Shimshon and the Road to Redemption

Our Sages (Rosh HaShanah 25a-b) teach that the leaders of each generation, no matter their spiritual level, should be as highly regarded in their own times as were Moshe, Aharon and Shmuel when they lived. The Talmud specifically cites Gid'on, Yiftach and Shimshon as exemplars of this principle - even though they are each problematic figures, they are equated with the three archetypal leaders of the Jewish people. Most commentators explain that the level of the leader is commensurate with that of the generation; thus, a generation on a higher spiritual level would merit a leader of higher caliber, while a less spiritually developed generation would be granted

a leader on a lower spiritual level. Logically, this formulation makes a lot of sense - a leader has to be able to relate to the concerns of his people, and a strong leader in a weak generation might not empathize with the people's limitations.

R. Yosef bar Meir Teomim, known as the Pri Megadim, offers a novel suggestion in his sefer Tavat Gome on the Haftarat: He argues that in general, a leader receives divine inspiration that is fueled both by his own merit and that of the people he leads. If a generation is on a high spiritual level, even a leader who as an individual may not be so spiritually elevated may receive great divine inspiration, fueled by the holiness of his generation. A generation on a lower level might require a leader on an even higher level to enable him to receive prophecy. He cites Shimshon as an example, explaining that this was why Shimshon needed to be a *Nazir m'rechem*, a Nazirite from the womb, a previously unheard of phenomenon. His intense holiness would counteract the spiritual poverty of the generation he led.

R' Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (Yisrael Kedoshim 5) echoes the idea of Shimshon's extraordinary holiness. He notes that if we look closely at the wording of the text we notice an anomaly. The *pasuk* in Sefer Shmuel cited by the Gemara reverses the chronological order of the three judges mentioned, placing Shimshon before Yiftach, parallel to Aharon HaKohen. This presents us with an enigma. On the one hand, many sources attest to the great holiness of Shimshon. On the other hand, his behavior does not always seem consistent with

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this approach, and just as there are sources in Talmudic and midrashic literature that praise Shimshon for his intense holiness, there are also those that criticize him for his apparently immoral behavior. How can we resolve this contradiction?

Shimshon's extraordinary *Gevurah*, his physical strength, was a reflection of its spiritual source. *Gevurah* in the teachings of our Sages is associated with כיבוש היצר, overcoming one's evil inclination. In his *brachot* to his sons before his death, Yaakov Avinu compared Dan, Shimshon's ancestor, to a snake. Kabbalistically, in the world of ultimate truth, the snake represents the conquest of the evil inclination. The word נחש is numerically equivalent to משיח. Shimshon was a potential משיח, whose *nezirut* was intended to shield him from the desires of the material world. Thus his behavior in the physical realm, while morally incomprehensible on a superficial level, was on a deeper level purely a function of his holy motives. When his *nezirut* was violated, his spiritual strength was depleted and he was no longer protected from physical desire. His ability to rise above the weakness of his generation was impaired.

Yaakov Avinu foresaw and exclaimed over the strength of Shimshon in his *bracha*, but ultimately also foresaw his downfall. When

confronted with the disappointment of Shimshon's defeat at the hands of the Plishtim, Yaakov prayed "לישועתך קויתי השם" - I hope for Your salvation, Hashem. Ultimate salvation may begin, as in the days of Shimshon, with human effort rooted in spiritual strength, but its culmination is in the hands of Hashem. Chazal derive from Yaakov's words that "הכל בקווי", everything is dependent upon our hopeful expectation of Hashem's deliverance. We faithfully await the day when as in the time period of the Sho'fetim, the time between the initial conquest of the land and the building of the Beit HaMikdash, so too in our time, between the establishment of the State and the rebuilding of the Mikdash, we merit Hashem's salvation. ■

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

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