



Being a Real Superman

The famous superman of the bible, Samson, is in the Haftarah this week. What, really, was his superpower—and is it something we can emulate?

The Special Birth

Good Shabbos!

This week, we are reading about Shimshon HaGibor, Samson the Warrior.

Shimshon the Warrior was the most famous of the Judges of the Tanach. There's no kid who doesn't know Samson stories—whether it's how he physically tore a lion in two, or uprooted the gates of Gaza, or died with the Philistines. (That whole story appears in the Book of Judges, Chapters 13-16.)

But what we read in the Haftarah today is the lesser-known part of the story: the saga of how he was born. Shimshon's mother had been infertile for some time when an angel of G-d suddenly appeared to her and informed her that she'd give birth to a son.

Now, this was not a regular occurrence at all—but the fact is that it had happened before in the Tanach.

Everyone is familiar with the story of the three angels who came to inform Avraham about the upcoming birth of his son Yitzchak: "I will surely return to you at this time next year, and behold, your wife Sarah will have a son" (Bereishis 18:10). And even before that, in the story with Yishmael, an angel also revealed himself to Yishmael's mother Hagar and said to her, "Behold, you will conceive and bear a son, and you shall name him Yishmael" (Bereishis 16:11).

But what's special about the story of Shimshon's mother is that it's the only time in the entire Tanach that an angel shows up and tells a

mother what to do even before her child is born. With Shimshon's mother, the angel tells her, "Don't drink wine and beer, and don't eat anything impure." Why? Because "the child will be consecrated to G-d from the womb."

It's the first time that the Torah tells us that an expectant mother's behavior during pregnancy has an effect on the fetus. That's widely accepted today in medicine and science—the idea that the mother's nutrition and health in pregnancy directly affects the baby, not just in utero but for the rest of his or her life. But the Torah taught us that over 3,000 years ago.

So, back to our story. Shimshon's mother ran to tell her husband, whose name was Manoach, that she had seen angel who had told her that she would give birth to a child and that she was to refrain from drinking wine and eating anything impure.

What's interesting is that with Avraham, the angels revealed themselves to him, while Sarah got the news at the door of her tent. But here, the angel revealed itself specifically to the wife, not the husband, and it was she who informed the husband, not the other way around.

So Manoach couldn't bear the fact that here he was receiving instructions from an angel via his wife—and so he prayed to G-d that He send the angel again to instruct them "what we should do for the lad who is born." And indeed, the angel appeared again—but again, the angel appeared specifically to his wife.

So again, Manoach's wife ran to call her husband, and, as the verse tells us, "Manoach walked after his wife." This time, the angel was still there when they both there, and this time, the angel repeated the same warning: do not drink wine and don't eat anything impure.

And indeed, the angel's promise was fulfilled: "And the woman gave birth to a son, and she called his name Shimshon."

Samson's Revelation

Now in general, Judaism believes that a person's name tells us who the person is—and all the more so with the names of people in the Tanach which were given by mothers to whom angels had been revealed.

In a farbrengen (Hisvaduyos, Motzoei Shabbos, Yud Shvat, 5730), the Rebbe quotes the Talmud (Tractate Sotah 10a), which says that

“Shimshon was named for G-d’s Name, as the verse states, ‘For a sun and a shield is the L-rd G-d’ (Psalms 84:12).” The Rebbe explains what “named for G-d’s Name” means: that people who saw Shimshon immediately remembered G-d.

Actually, the Rebbe continues, the mission of every Judge or Prophet is to reveal G-d in the universe. In general, they accomplish this through their actions. The Judge or Prophet inspires people to act with justice and integrity, or inspires them to repentance. And some of them performed miracles, and it was those miracles that reminded the world that there is a G-d— that there is an Owner to this Home. In Shimshon’s case, however, his mission was on an entirely different level altogether.

Anyone who saw him, whether Jew or Philistine, openly saw G-d in him. Why so? Because Shimshon’s supernatural powers were themselves revelations of G-d in the universe. This means that Shimshon didn’t need to perform miracles—he himself was a walking miracle. It’s like what the Sages say in Ethics of the Fathers: “Ten miracles were done for our forefathers in the Beis Hamikdash,” and as such, anyone who came to the Beis Hamikdash and saw the miracles that regularly happened there, such as the Western Candle constantly burning, would also see G-d there.

And it was the same thing with Shimshon—you saw a physical human being who had powers completely beyond the natural order. Here was a person who could literally singlehandedly kill 1,000 enemy soldiers. He could physically pull gates out of the ground, and yet he wasn’t a giant like Goliath. The simple meaning of the verse implies that he was of normal size but of supernatural powers. (Not only that, but at least according to one commentator, he was actually paralyzed from the waist down, and he would drag himself around on his hands.)

So it makes sense to say that because he harbored an open revelation of G-d, he was like a walking miracle, and so therefore, he also succeeded in doing something that no other Jewish leader had previously succeeded in doing.

Regarding Shimshon, the Talmud (Yerushalmi, Tractate Sotah 61:5) tells us that “the Philistines feared him for 20 years after he died, just as they had feared him for 20 years while he lived.”

In his last appearance before the Pelishtim, after they had already gouged his eyes out and stood him up before everyone to celebrate, he turned to G-d and said, “Remember me and strengthen me but this once,” and he collapsed the building upon those inside it, including

himself.

So “Let my spirit die with the Philistines,” the Book of Judges tells us, killed more Philistines than he had killed during his life—and it was that fact that caused the Philistines to fear him even 20 years after he had died.

That is a phenomenon that we do not find with other leaders.

In general, every individual leader has power and influence in his lifetime—but with Shimshon, that power and influence continued some 20 years after his death. Why so? Because he was a “G-d sun”—he recognized and promoted G-d’s Name in the universe with his every essence.

The Lesson

So what is the lesson for us?

We’re not asking anyone here to tear apart a lion or uproot the gates of Gaza. We’re not even expecting anyone to become Nezirim: We’re allowed to enjoy wine and, as a matter of fact, it’s a mitzvah to do so on Shabbos—and what’s more, we don’t need to grow our hair long.

But what is expected of us is that everyone be a Shimshon, a “G-d sun”—that with our behavior, each one of us remind others of G-d’s Name.

When a Jew walks in the street, his appearance needs to remind everyone of G-d—the way he or she walks, the talk, the language and, above all that, to simply reflect that here rests the Divine Presence.

Good Shabbos!