

נָשָׂא

Nasso

(lift)

B'midbar [Numbers] 4:21-7:89

The Nazirite Vow

B'midbar (Numbers) 6

B'midbar (Numbers) 6:1-2

Again YHWH spoke to Moshe, saying,
² "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to YHWH' "

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם | אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּי
יִפְלֵא לְנַדֵּר נֶדֶר נְזִיר לְהִזְיֹר לַיהוָה:

One of the keys to understanding the Nazirite vow is the word פלא, which is translated here as 'special'. פלא means: "wonderful, special, difficult." There are five references in the Torah to a special or difficult vow: Vayyiqra (Leviticus) 22 and 27, B'midbar (Numbers) 6, and two references in B'midbar (Numbers) 15. The references in Vayyiqra 22 and B'midbar 15 are concerning the necessary sacrifices for completing the vow. Vayyiqra 27 outlines the valuation procedure and gives us a clue to the nature of the Nazirite vow.

Vayyiqra (Leviticus) 27:2

"Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When a man makes a difficult vow, he shall be valued according to your valuation of persons belonging to YHWH.' "

We see this passage is dealing with someone making a special or difficult vow. When someone takes a Nazirite vow they are not their own person anymore; they belong to YHWH. This basically means Nazirites have a higher standard and are more accountable for their actions than the typical Israelite.

Dietary Restrictions

B'midbar (Numbers) 6:3-4

³ " 'he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh or dried grapes. ⁴ All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from *the* seeds even to *the* skin.' "

מִיַּיִן וְשִׁכָּר יִזְיֵר חֶמֶץ יַיִן וְחֶמֶץ שִׁכָּר לֹא יִשְׁתֶּה | וְכֹל מִשְׂרֵת עֲנָבִים לֹא יִשְׁתֶּה וְעֲנָבִים לַחִים וְיִבְשִׁים לֹא יֹאכַל: כָּל יְמֵי נִזְרוֹ | מִכָּל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה מִגֶּפֶן הַיַּיִן מִחֲרָצְנָיִם וְעַד זֶג לֹא יֹאכַל:

Verses three and four explain the dietary restrictions of the Nazirite. The Nazirite is not to have any alcoholic beverage; this includes wine of any sort, beer, and grain alcohol. Anything made from grapes is also forbidden: raisins, grape juice, and grape seed extracts to name a few.

Verse three mentions vinegar made from wine or strong drink. Because it does not say vinegar, but rather, specifies vinegar of wine or strong drink, it makes sense that vinegar in general is not forbidden. So what does it mean? When an alcoholic drink is made, over time it will turn into vinegar; this is what is forbidden. How do you tell the difference? Unless the type of vinegar is specified, you can't tell the difference. Typically, apple cider vinegar and a couple of other types of vinegar are not forbidden.

Other Restrictions

B'midbar (Numbers) 6:5

⁵ " 'All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to YHWH; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long.' "

כָּל יְמֵי נִזְרוֹ תֵּעָר לֹא יַעֲבֹר עַל רֹאשׁוֹ | עַד מְלֵאת הַיָּמִם אֲשֶׁר יִזְיֵר לִיהוָה קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה גִדְּל פְּרַע שְׂעָר רֹאשׁוֹ:

Another restriction for the Nazirite is cutting the hair of his head. Because of the wording, this restriction is for the hair on your head and is not referring to or including the beard. This is verified by Ezra 9:3, which says he pulled hair out of his head and beard. If it means both head and beard, it says so.

⁶ "All the days of his separation to YHWH he shall not go near to a dead person. 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 separation to Elohim is on his head. ⁸ All the days of his separation he is holy to YHWH. ⁹ But if a man dies very suddenly beside him and he defiles his dedicated head of *hair*, then he shall shave his head on the day when he becomes clean; he shall shave it on the seventh day. ¹⁰ Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the doorway of the tent of meeting. ¹¹ And the priest shall offer one for a sin offering and *the* other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him concerning his sin because of the *dead* person. And that same day he shall consecrate his head, ¹² and shall dedicate to YHWH his days as a Nazirite, and shall bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering; but the former days shall be void because his separation was defiled." "

כָּל יְמֵי הַזִּירוּ לַיהוָה | עַל נֶפֶשׁ מֵת
לֹא יֵבֵא: | לְאָבִיו וּלְאִמּוֹ לְאָחִיו
וּלְאֲחֹתוֹ לֹא יִטְמָא לָהֶם בְּמָתָם | כִּי
נָזַר אֱלֹהֵיו עַל רֹאשׁוֹ: | כָּל יְמֵי נְזָרוֹ |
קֹדֶשׁ הוּא לַיהוָה: | וְכִי יָמוּת מֵת עָלָיו
בְּפֶתַע פְּתָאִם וְטִמָּא רֹאשׁ נְזָרוֹ | וְגִלַּח
רֹאשׁוֹ בַּיּוֹם טְהָרָתוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
יִגְלַחְנוּ: | וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי יֵבֵא שְׁתֵּי
תְּרִים אוֹ שְׁנֵי בְּנֵי יוֹנָה | אֶל הַכֹּהֵן
אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: | וַעֲשֵׂה הַכֹּהֵן
אֶחָד לְחֻטָּאת וְאֶחָד לְעֹלָה וְכִפֹּר עָלָיו
מֵאֲשֶׁר חָטָא עַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ | וְקִדַּשׁ אֶת
רֹאשׁוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא: | וְהִזִּיר לַיהוָה אֶת
יְמֵי נְזָרוֹ וְהֵבִיא כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן שָׁנָתוֹ
לְאִשָּׁם | וְהִימִים הָרִאשֹׁנִים יִפְלוּ כִּי
טִמָּא נְזָרוֹ:

This Nazirite restriction is the same for priests.

Vayiqra (Leviticus) 21:11

nor shall he approach any dead person, nor defile himself *even* for his father or his mother;

This is not saying you can't go to someone's funeral; you just can't help in the preparations (or be a pallbearer). It's also not saying you can't defend yourself. Shimshon killed plenty of Philistines and Scripture says he was doing what he was supposed to do.

Shophtim (Judges) 14:4

However, his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD, for He was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. Now at that time the Philistines were ruling over Israel.

Ending the Vow

B' midbar (Numbers) 6:13-21

¹³ "Now this is the law of the Nazirite when the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall bring the offering to the doorway of the tent of meeting. ¹⁴ And he shall present his offering to YHWH: one male lamb a year old without defect for a burnt offering and one ewe-lamb a year old without defect for a sin offering and one ram without defect for a peace offering, ¹⁵ and a basket of unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil and unleavened wafers spread with oil, along with their grain offering and their libations. ¹⁶ Then the priest shall present *them* before YHWH and shall offer his sin offering and his burnt offering. ¹⁷ He shall also offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings to YHWH, together with the basket of unleavened cakes; the priest shall likewise offer its grain offering and its libation. ¹⁸ The Nazirite shall then shave his dedicated head *of hair* at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and take the dedicated hair of his head and put *it* on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings. ¹⁹ And the priest shall take the ram's shoulder *when it has been boiled*, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put *them* on the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his dedicated *hair*. ²⁰ Then the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before YHWH. It is holy for the priest, together with the breast offered by waving and the thigh offered by lifting up; and afterward the Nazirite may drink wine.' ²¹ This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to YHWH according to his separation, in addition to what *else* he can afford; according to his vow which he takes, so he shall do according to the law of his separation."

וְזֹאת תֹּרַת הַנָּזִיר | בְּיוֹם מְלֵאת יָמָיו
נָזְרוּ יָבִיא אֹתוֹ אֶל פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד:
וְהַקָּרִיב אֶת קֶרְבָּנוֹ לִיהוָה כֶּבֶשׂ בֶּן
שָׁנָתוֹ תָּמִים אֶחָד לְעֹלָה וְכִבְשָׂה
אֶחָת בֵּת שְׁנֵתָה תְּמִימָה לְחֻטָּאת |
וְאֵיל אֶחָד תָּמִים לְשִׁלְמִים: וְסֹל
מִצּוֹת סֹלֶת חֶלֶת בְּלוֹלַת בִּשְׁמֹן
וּרְקִיקֵי מִצּוֹת מְשָׁחִים בִּשְׁמֹן |
וּמִנְחָתָם וְנִסְפֵיהֶם: וְהַקָּרִיב הַכֹּהֵן
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה | וַעֲשֵׂה אֶת חֻטָּאתוֹ וְאֶת
עֹלָתוֹ: וְאֶת הָאֵיל יַעֲשֶׂה זֶבַח
שְׁלָמִים לִיהוָה עַל סֵל הַמִּצּוֹת |
וַעֲשֵׂה הַכֹּהֵן אֶת מִנְחָתוֹ וְאֶת נִסְכּוֹ:
וְגִלַּח הַנָּזִיר פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֶת
רֹאשׁ נָזְרוֹ | וְלָקַח אֶת שְׁעַר רֹאשׁ נָזְרוֹ
וְנָתַן עַל הָאֵשׁ אֲשֶׁר תַּחַת זֶבַח
הַשְּׁלָמִים: וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן אֶת הַזֶּרֶעַ
בְּשֻׁלָה מִן הָאֵיל וְחֶלֶת מִצָּה אֶחָת מִן
הַסֹּל וּרְקִיקֵי מִצָּה אֶחָד | וְנָתַן עַל כַּפֵּי
הַנָּזִיר אַחַר הַתְּגַלְחוֹ אֶת נָזְרוֹ: וְהִנִּיף
אוֹתָם הַכֹּהֵן תְּנוּפָה לִפְנֵי יְהוָה קֹדֶשׁ
הוּא לַכֹּהֵן עַל חֲזֵה הַתְּנוּפָה וְעַל שׁוֹק
הַתְּרוּמָה | וְאַחַר יִשְׁתֶּה הַנָּזִיר יַיִן:
זֹאת תֹּרַת הַנָּזִיר אֲשֶׁר יָדַר קֶרְבָּנוֹ
לִיהוָה עַל נָזְרוֹ מִלְבָּד אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁיֵג יָדוֹ
| כִּפֵּי נָזְרוֹ אֲשֶׁר יָדַר כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה עַל
תֹּרַת נָזְרוֹ:

This passage shows the process required to end the Nazirite vow. Male and female yearling sheep, a ram, and unleavened bread are needed for the sacrifices; the redemption money outlined in Vayiqra 27 is also needed. The valuation is based on the shekel of the sanctuary, which uses silver. According to today's silver values, a shekel is approximately \$6.65. The valuation for a male between 20 and 60 years is 50 shekels.

To redeem something dedicated to YHWH you must add a fifth to the valuation, this makes 55 shekels; in today's money, this would be about \$365.75. Add the values of the sacrifices and you have over \$500.

Understanding the valuation system makes what Sha'ul did in Acts 21 seem more effective: Sha'ul paid the costs for five people, all males. The total cost in today's money would be well over \$2500. He definitely wanted people to understand that he still kept Torah.

The Aharonic Benediction

B'midbar (Numbers) 6:22-27

²² Then YHWH spoke to Moshe, saying, ²³ "Speak to Aharon and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Yisrael. You shall say to them: ²⁴ "YHWH bless you, and keep you; ²⁵ YHWH make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; ²⁶ YHWH lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace." ²⁷ "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Yisrael, and I then will bless them."

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: דַּבֵּר
אֶל אַהֲרֹן וְאֶל בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר כֹּה תְבַרְכוּ
אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל | אָמֹר לָהֶם: יְבָרַכְךָ
יְהוָה וַיְשַׂמְרְךָ: יָאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ
וַיַּחַנְךָ: יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם
לְךָ שָׁלוֹם: וְשָׂמוּ אֶת שְׁמִי עַל בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל | וְאָנִי אֲבָרַכְכֶם:

This chapter concludes with the Aharonic Benediction, showing us that even though the Nazirite vow is not required, their standard should be ours. We are YHWH's people; we should act like it.

Lemuel ben Emunah
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