

## Daily Daf Differently – Tractate Nazir 2-8 – Joseph Rosenstein

This file consists of seven episodes that I prepared and recorded as podcasts that were released, one per day, on Monday, August 24, 2015 through Sunday, August 30, 2015 for the Daily Daf Differently; the podcasts were available on [jcastnetwork.org/ddd](http://jcastnetwork.org/ddd) and now are at a different site. The program is described on the website as follows: “Join a wonderful group of liberal rabbis and teachers as we take part in the cycle of the Daf Yomi. Each week a different teacher presents short episodes on the daily daf “differently”.”

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Welcome to Daily Daf Differently. This is Joe Rosenstein, and I am a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University and the author of Siddur Eit Ratzon and Machzor Eit Ratzon. Today we will be studying Tractate Nazir, daf 2, bet.

Chapter 1, the first chapter of the tractate, begins on this daf, and coincidentally ends on daf 8, which will be my last day on the program.

Masechet Nazir, Tractate Nazir, deals with questions about a nazir, usually translated – for lack of a better term – as nazirite. Since the English word “nazirite” conveys no additional information, we will simply use the Hebrew word “nazir.” For the state of being a nazir, usually translated as “Naziriteship,” we will use the Hebrew word “n’zirut;” the word “n’zirut” is also used to mean the term of a nazir, that is, the length of time a person is a nazir.

The description of a nazir occurs in Bamidbar, Numbers, Chapter 6 – a nazir is a person who vows to abstain from the fruit of the vine, to avoid all contact with the dead, and to let his or her hair grow long. Yes, the Bible states explicitly that a woman can be a nazir.

Masechet Nazir comes directly after the tractate of Nedarim, vows, because the nazir is a person who makes a vow – “neder nazir – a vow to be a nazir,” as it says in Bamidbar, Chapter 6. That is, the person becomes a nazir by virtue of a vow which, as we saw in the previous tractate, is a very serious commitment. This is a particularly serious

vow, because in the Septuagint translation of the Bible, the vow of a nazir is referred to as “neder gadol – a great vow.” (Recall that the Septuagint translation from Hebrew to Greek was prepared in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, presumably for the large number of Jews who lived in Alexandria and other locations, perhaps commission by Ptolemy for the great library of Alexandria. According to legend, 70 rabbis independently translated the Bible and came up with identical translations, whence its name “Septuagint - seventy” in Latin and “targum hashivim” in Hebrew.)

One question that interests me is why the nazir must adopt this particular combination of three abstentions. The nazir does not have to abstain from society and go off and live in the wilderness like a hermit, the nazir does not have to abstain from sex and become celibate, the nazir does not have to abstain from alcohol, only from grape wine and, yes, grape juice. What common thread is there to the three abstentions of a nazir?

Perhaps there is no common thread. Perhaps abstaining from wine is to be considered a form of self-denial, perhaps letting one’s hair grow long is to be considered a form of public identification (“I am a nazir”), and perhaps avoiding all contact with the dead is a way of identifying with the Kohen Gadol, the high priest. Many descendants of Kohanim to this day will not go into a cemetery, except to bury their parents, spouse, and siblings, in order to avoid becoming ritually impure, “tamei.” However, the nazir, like the Kohen Gadol, had to avoid contact even with the bodies of his or her parents, spouse, and siblings.

Another connection between the nazir and the Kohen Gadol is that the Kohen Gadol wears a gold plate on his forehead, called a nezer, on which is written “Holy to Adonai”, and this exact phrase “Kodesh lAdonai” is applied descriptively to a nazir in Bamidbar.

Why is a nazir called a nazir? We don’t know. Most of the occurrences of the word “nazir” in various forms in the Bible occur in Chapter 6 of Bamidbar or in reference to Samson, who is discussed later in this first chapter of Masechet Nazir. So we have little guidance to determine the meaning of nazir by comparing its uses in different contexts. Is nazir connected linguistically to the nezer worn by the Kohen Gadol? Apparently both are expressions of consecration. Is nazir just an Aramaic version of the word neder, with the daled in the Hebrew word “neder” replaced with a zayin to get an Aramaic word “nazir,” a replacement that happens frequently? Both Jacob and Moses, in offering their final blessings, speak of Joseph favorably as “n’zir echav,” which presumably means “the

chosen one of his brothers;” is a nazir someone who is especially chosen? Are the untrimmed vines in the seventh year, the sh’mitah year, called “invei n’zirecha” by association with the unshorn nazir, or is it the other way round, that a nazir is similar to untrimmed vines? We probably can’t give definitive answers to any of these questions.

The English terms usually associated with a nazir do not really apply – a nazir is not really an ascetic – the only pleasure denied to a nazir is that of wine. A nazir is not really a hermit – the nazir can have a family and participate fully in society. A nazir is not necessarily a spiritual person – there is no indication that the nazir engages in prayer, contemplation, mysticism, or self-improvement, and the only Biblical figure that is identified as a nazir, Samson, is hardly recognizable as a spiritual person. Though not necessarily an ascetic, a hermit, or a spiritual person, the nazir is recognizably different from others in his community.

In addition to asking what a nazir is, we can ask the following questions:

- What function does a nazir fill in society?
- Why does a person choose to be a nazir?
- Does the society approve or disapprove of the practice?
- Is becoming a nazir a private commitment to God – the text in Numbers refers to this person as “yazir l’Adonai”, a nazir to God – or is it a matter of public interest?

These questions are difficult to answer because they are rarely discussed explicitly and because the institution of n’zirut essentially disappeared from Judaism once the Temple was destroyed, because release from the nazir vow and the rituals to complete one’s n’zirut could only be performed at the Temple.

So the person who compiled the Mishnah in about the year 200, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, Rabbi Judah the Prince, and the writers of the Talmud in the subsequent three or four centuries had never seen a nazir.

But we will try to glean some response to these questions as we proceed through the coming pages of Masechet Nazir.

The first mishnah of Masechet Nazir, deals with the question of “How does one become a nazir?” Now normally you would expect that a person who wishes to be a nazir would make a statement like “I vow to be a nazir.” And that may be what normally happened. But the very first Mishnah deals with the unusual cases, where the person can’t bring himself or herself to make that vow explicitly, perhaps out of fear, perhaps out of

awe – the concept of becoming a nazir, and even the word “nazir” itself, might have been scary. So the rabbis provided “kinuyim – euphemisms” that a person might use – like “pazir” instead of “nazir.” Thus if you announced “I vow to be a pazir”, then you became a nazir.

The rabbis also describe partial statements referred to as “yadayim – handles,” abbreviations that would also be interpreted as nazir vows. For example, if you said “I will do that” while a nazir was walking by, your statement would be accepted as a nazir vow. You had to be careful what you said – in those days – or you might find yourself committed to becoming a nazir – even though you were just thinking out loud about the role of the nazir. In the context where vows were taken very, very seriously, where the words you said trumped the thoughts in your mind, you didn’t want to suggest that you admired a nazir unless you really wanted to become one – in which case you could express your admiration by saying explicitly that you admired this person but didn’t want to emulate him or her.

The mishnah provides several other abbreviations, which we will consider when the gemara gets to them. It should be noted that there is an extensive discussion of abbreviations that arise in making vows in the opening chapter of the previous tractate, Nedarim, whose focus of course is on vows.

Before addressing the substance of the topic, the gemara on our daf discusses briefly three textual concerns.

First, the opening paragraph of the gemara provides some insight into how Rebbe structured the Mishnah. Since he was the leading teacher of his generation, Rabbi Yehudah haNasi is often referred to simply as “Rebbe.” The opening paragraph asks the logical question of why the tractate of nazir is in the volume of the Mishnah that deals with nashim – women.

Recall that the Mishnah has six sections – which we are familiar with from the phrase “shisha sidrei Mishah – six are the parts of the Mishnah” in the Pesach Hagaddah. The six sections are named “Z’raim – seeds” which deals with agriculture, “Mo-eid – times” which deals with festivals, “Nashim – women,” which deals with family issues, “N’zikin – damages,” which deals with civil law, “Kodashim – holy things,” which deals with the sacrificial system; and “Tohorot – purity,” which deals with impurity.

In which of those categories does Masechet Nazir belong? In fact, in which of those categories does the tractate Nedarim belong? There is no obvious answer. But an

important feature of vows is that a husband can annul a vow made by his wife and a father can annul a vow made by his daughter. So a natural category for both tractates, Nedarim and Nazir, is “Nashim.” The gemara, however, doesn’t give this answer.

It gives instead the following answer, not here but in the next tractate of Sotah, which says that since tractate Ketubot – whose focus is on marriage – ends with an issue concerning vows, it is followed by the tractate that deals with vows, that is, Nedarim, and since a person becomes a nazir by making a vow, it makes sense to follow Tractate Nedarim with Tractate Nazir. Thus the two tractates of Nedarim and Nazir are interjected between tractate Ketubot and tractate Sotah.

Now the compilers of the Talmud felt that it was necessary to also provide a logical link between the tractates of Nazir and Sotah, the tractate that deals with a woman who is suspected of adultery by her suspicious husband. This woman is referred to as a sotah and has to undergo a degrading trial-by-ordeal at the Temple, which is described in detail in Chapter 5 of Numbers. At the beginning of tractate Sotah, they provide the following explanation ascribed to Rebbe: “Anyone who sees a sotah in her degradation will take the vow of a nazir and forgo drinking wine.”

Huh? What's the connection? Back to our page, Nazir daf 2. The compilers of the gemara ask that question and answer it by saying that, well, wine was the cause of the sotah’s infidelity.

If you think that's a stretch, then I certainly agree with you. Sometimes the anonymous compilers of the Talmud come to far-fetched conclusions.

But we do learn from this passage that Rabbi Yehudah haNasi – Rebbe – thought of a nazir primarily as one who abstains from wine, and sees wine as a problematic substance, which can sometimes best be overcome by taking the vow of a nazir. It’s as if he thought of n’zirut as a rehab program for alcoholics.

In its second introductory comment, the gemara notes that the text that they have of the Mishnah is incorrect – indeed, it appears that someone whose role it was to recite the Mishnah by heart omitted the phrase between two occurrences of the same word ... and that error was perpetuated in subsequent generations. The rabbis in the gemara have no hesitation about saying that the text they have is incorrect and they have no hesitation in providing a corrected version of the text. So fifteen hundred years ago, our sages realized that texts were not perfect and that errors crept into sacred writings. Given that fact, why

should anyone be surprised or have objections when someone today claims that the sacred writings have errors.

What change did they actually make to the Mishnah? The Mishnah reads “All the abbreviations for the vow of the nazir are equivalent to the vow of the nazir,” and then gives two lists, first a list of euphemisms and then a list of abbreviations. Having a list of euphemisms doesn’t make sense since the Mishnah has not even mentioned euphemisms.

The Mishnah as edited reads “All the abbreviations for the vow of the nazir are equivalent to the vow of the nazir” – now here’s what they added – “and all the euphemisms for the vow of the nazir are equivalent to the vow of the nazir. The following are euphemisms:” So now it makes sense to have a list of euphemisms and then a list of abbreviations.

In the third introductory comment, the gemara has an extended discussion of style. The gemara asks the question, if you announce that you are going to provide and discuss two lists, List A and List B, shouldn’t you first give examples of List A and afterwards give examples of List B? Here we are told that we will discuss abbreviations – that’s List A – and euphemisms – that’s List B, but instead of starting with a list of abbreviations, the mishnah starts with a list of euphemisms. And then the gemara gives several examples dealing with other topics where List A is given first, and then several examples where List B is given first, and concludes that “The truth is that the author of the Mishnah sometimes uses one method and sometimes the other.” They then try to figure out which method is used when, but gratefully don’t persist in trying to answer that question.

The gemara then begins its discussion of the Mishnah itself, focusing on several of the phrases that might be considered abbreviated versions of the vow of the nazir. It doesn’t discuss the euphemisms mentioned in the Mishnah, since what can you say about replacing “nazir” with “pazir,” an arrangement of letters that has no meaning, but just sounds like “nazir.”

One of the abbreviations discussed is the phrase “I will be attractive.” Samuel, a rabbi in Babylonia from the generation after the completion of the Mishnah, explained that the Mishnah meant that statement to abbreviate the vow of the nazir only if the person saying it was holding onto his or her hair. As noted earlier, you had to be careful of what you said, or you might accidentally become a nazir, without actually intending that outcome.

One might have thought that growing one's hair long led to the bedraggled look of a hermit, an outsider, an outcast from society. This phrase suggests exactly the opposite, that the nazir had an attractive appearance, that made him or her look distinctive, and that served, so to speak, as a recruitment vehicle that would lead others to become n'zirim.

Today's daf closes with a question: How can a nazir be attractive, for isn't a nazir considered a sinner?

Since the daf ends there, we will also end there, and resume next time with the question, why would someone consider a nazir to be a sinner?

Welcome to Daily Daf Differently. This is Joe Rosenstein, and I am a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University and the author of Siddur Eit Ratzon and Machzor Eit Ratzon. Today we will be studying Tractate Nazir, daf 3, gimel.

This tractate, Masechet Nazir, deals with men and women who make a vow to abstain from wine and all grape products, to refrain from cutting their hair, and to avoid contact with all dead bodies – so that they don't become “tameh” or ritually impure. These requirements of a nazir appear in Chapter 6 of Numbers, that is, Bamidbar.

On the previous daf, we observed that someone who said “I will be attractive” while holding his or her hair, just like that becomes a nazir. (Note that in Biblical times you had to be very careful what you said!) The word translated as “attractive” is “na'eh” which appears in a different form, “anveihu,” in “Shirat haYam,” the song at the sea: “Zeh Eili v'anveihu – this is my God, whom I will glorify.” So when a person pledging to be a nazir says “I will be attractive,” the implication is “I will glorify God,” in this case with my hair.

We noted yesterday that one might have thought that growing one's hair long led to the bedraggled look of a hermit, an outsider, an outcast from society, This phrase suggests exactly the opposite, that the nazir had an attractive appearance, that made him or her look distinctive, and that served, so to speak, as a recruitment vehicle that would lead others to become n'zirim.

A question is raised at the very bottom of the previous page: How can a nazir be considered attractive, for isn't a nazir a sinner?

Let us first discuss why someone would think that a nazir is a sinner. Chapter 6 of Bamidbar, Numbers, notes that when the nazir ends “n'zirut” – the term of the nazir” – he

or she has to come to the Temple and bring three offerings, a *korban olah*, which is consumed in flames as an offering to God, a *korban sh'lamim*, part of which is given to the Kohanim, with the remainder providing a festive meal for the nazir and his or her guests, and a *korban chattat*, a sin offering.

Since the nazir has to bring a sin offering, one might reasonably conclude that the nazir has in fact committed a sin. However, the text in Numbers gives no clue as to what that sin might have been. One explanation is that the nazir's sin is in fact concluding his or her *n'zirut*, that ideally he or she would remain a nazir. This explanation clearly is a pro-nazir approach and has the assumption that being a nazir is a good thing, and that the only bad part of being a nazir is leaving that state. But this explanation does not have a basis in the Biblical text.

Another explanation is that giving up wine is an offense against God, since the nazir is not partaking of part of God's bounty. This explanation is derived by R. Elazar haKappar on daf 19a from the following phrase in Chapter 6 of Bamidbar: “*v'chipper alav mei-asher chata al hanefesh* – the nazir shall atone for having sinned against the soul.” What soul has the nazir sinned against? Her own! Why? Because she deprived herself of wine.

And then comes a “*kal vachomer*” argument that goes like this: If someone who deprives himself only of wine is called a sinner, then how much more so is someone who deprives himself of all things! Initially we might respond positively to this anti-ascetic argument, since we don't think positively about ascetics. However, once we take a second look, our response would not be so positive, since this statement would also imply that vegetarians or teetotalers are sinners.

Let us consider another possible explanation of why a nazir might be required to bring a sin offering.

Immediately before the discussion of the conclusion of *n'zirut* in Bamidbar, there is a discussion of what happens if someone dies in the presence of a nazir. One of the defining characteristics of a nazir is to avoid being in the presence of a dead body, and if such happens, the nazir has become ritually defiled, “*tameh*,” and has to start his or her *n'zirut* from the beginning – after a seven day period of decontamination. In that case, a sin-offering is prescribed, which is appropriate since the nazir did not commit the sin intentionally.



That's what happens if the nazir knows that he or she has become tameh. But what if the nazir unknowingly was in a place where there was a corpse? It may have been likely that a nazir, at some point during the n'zirut, passed through an area where there was a burial place but didn't know it. In those days, burials may have taken place anywhere, and markers of graves may have been non-existent, or may have disappeared with time.

So maybe the sin-offering was required of every nazir just in case the nazir did not actually fulfill the n'zirut completely.

On the other hand, it may be that the sin-offering was not required of every nazir, but only in the case when the n'zirut was known to be flawed. That would make sense because the phrase cited above – “v'chipper alav mei-asher chata al hanefesh – the nazir shall atone for having sinned against the soul” – refers only to the case of a nazir whose n'zirut is flawed, and can be read “the nazir shall atone for having sinned by being in contact with a dead body.”

That a sin-offering is required only when the n'zirut is flawed is precisely what R. Elazar haKappar suggests on today's daf. However, that view is rejected by the gemara, because on daf 19, when the same R. Elazar says that the nazir's sin is depriving himself or herself of wine, the gemara notes that that explanation implies that a sin-offering is required even if the nazir completes his n'zirut perfectly.

So, the question of why a nazir has to bring a sin offering is not resolved, but even raising the question of whether a nazir is a sinner, and not resolving it, does create a negative impression of the nazir. We will return to this issue – whether the tradition admires or disdains the nazir – in a few days?

By the way, I mentioned earlier that at the completion of the n'zirut, the nazir brings three offerings. Actually there are four offerings. At the ceremony that ends the n'zirut, the nazir's hair is cut, and the hair is burned on the altar. As a result the closing ceremony of the n'zirut is called “hitgalachat” since the root gimel-lamed-chet means cutting hair.

Since the other three offerings are two sheep and a ram, you might conclude that only a wealthy person could afford to be a nazir. It turns out that there was an established practice of finding a wealthy sponsor who would pay for your hitgalachat and thereby merit some level of participation in your n'zirut. In the Talmud Yerushalmi, the Jerusalem Talmud, it is told that when Shimon ben Shatach was the head of the Sanhedrin, in about 50 BCE, he petitioned King Alexander Yannai on behalf of 300 n'zirim, that if Yannai

would contribute half the cost of their offerings, he, Shimon ben Shatach, would contribute the other half. In the history of the Jewish people written in about 90 by Josephus, the Jewish general who sided with the Romans, he notes that the Jewish King Agrippa sponsored about 40 n'zirim, and in the Christian bible (Acts 21), Paul is said to have sponsored four n'zirim, perhaps to demonstrate to the public that he still considered himself a Jew.

Returning now to the discussion on our daf, the gemara considers several other abbreviated vows that are listed in the mishnah. For example, the mishnah says that a person who says “hareini mechalkeil” thereby becomes a nazir. What does that phrase mean? The word “hareini” means “I am hereby going to”, but the word “m'chalkeil” has several meanings – it can mean “tending to the needs of people”, as Joseph tended to his father and brothers in Egypt, or as God tends to all living things – “m'chalkeil chayim b'chesed” – in the second berachah of the Amidah. But it can also mean tending to one's hair.

The gemara follows Samuel's perspective with respect to all of the abbreviated vows – their meaning depends on the context. If a person is holding his or her hair while stating “hareini mechalkeil” or “hareini m'salseil”, then he or she is a nazir; but otherwise not. Similarly, if a person says “hareini kazeh – I am going to be like that one”, and says that while a nazir is walking by, then he or she is a nazir, but otherwise not.

On the second side of today's daf, there is a new Mishnah whose main point is that one cannot be a partial nazir. If you vow to let your hair grow long, then you are a nazir, even though you didn't vow to abstain from wine. If you even vow to abstain from using grape pits, then you are a nazir even though you didn't vow to avoid ritual defilement by dead bodies. If you make a vow involving just part of the vow of a nazir, then you become a nazir. As we have said before, you have to be very careful what you say.

What would an alcoholic say if he wanted to stop drinking wine but did not want to become a nazir; we don't know, but what he said would have had to be worded carefully.

Before considering the discussion in the gemara, let us review exactly what Chapter 6 of Numbers, Bamidbar, has to say about wine. “Mi-yayin v'sheichar yazzir – the nazir should abstain from yayin and sheichar – chometz yayin v'chometz sheichar lo yishteh – the nazir should not drink vinegar made from yayin or sheichar – v'chol mishrat anavim lo yishteh – the nazir should not drink juice made from grapes – va'anavim lachim viveishim lo yocheil – and should not eat fresh or dried grapes. Kol y'mei nizro – all the days of his

or her n'zirut – mikol asher yei-aseh migefen hayayin meichartzanim ad zag lo yocheil – the nazir should not eat anything that is made from the grapevine, from pressed grapes, or even from the pits.”

Before we discuss “yayin v'sheichar” let us note that nowhere else in the Torah is there a blanket prohibition against everything made from grapes. The Kohanim, when they were on duty, were forbidden to drink “yayin v'sheichar”, but the nazir is unable to make kiddush even with grape juice. What is the reason for this broad prohibition? No reason is given in the Torah, but presumably they believed that grapes and their derivatives could ferment, even after being ingested. Whether this is true or not is unclear, but there is at least one website that claims that if you have the right genetics and physiology and eat the right foods, you can brew beer in your stomach!

You may have noticed that the word “nazir” occurs in a verb form in the cited passage – “miyayin v'sheichar yazir”, which we have translated as the nazir should abstain from “yayin v'sheichar.” Some translations say that the nazir should “separate himself” from “yayin v'sheichar” implying that the principal meaning of the word “nazir” is one who separates himself, supporting the hermit model of nazir, which we have rejected. Indeed, although the Torah could have used yazir in speaking of separating oneself from the dead, it does not. It does use the phrase “yazir lAdonai” which is usually understood as “consecrated to Adonai” which is another way of saying “kadosh lAdonai,” which is also used to refer to the nazir. So we can't be sure of what the root nun-zayin-resh of the word nazir really means since it is used in different ways and its meaning depends on the context in which it is used.

Now we turn to the question of what is “yayin v'sheichar”. We know that “yayin” means wine. But what is “sheichar”? Many translations assume that “sheichar” refers to other intoxicating drinks, because you would think that such drinks would be prohibited to the nazir. However, the word “sheichar” appears only 23 times in the Bible, and in all but two of these, “sheichar” is in conjunction with or is parallel two “yayin”. Two particularly noteworthy occurrences of “yayin v'sheichar” are near the end of Deuteronomy, where Moshe reminds the Israelites that they haven't had “yayin v'sheichar” during their 40 years in the desert – maybe that's why they complained so much – and in Vayikra when Aaron and his two surviving sons are commanded not to perform their ritual duties after having drunk “yayin v'sheichar.” Since this command comes directly after Aaron's other two sons are executed after bringing “eish zarah – strange fire” before God, the implication is

that drinking wine was a contributing factor in their offense. Hmm. That seems to contradict Moshe's statement that they didn't have wine during their wanderings in the desert.

One of the places where sheichar appears alone is in Psalm 69, where it is used to create a rhyme. The other place where sheichar appears alone is Numbers, Bamidbar, 28:7 where in describing the daily offering to God, the *korban olah*, the Torah says that the libation to accompany the *korban olah* shall be should be poured in the sanctuary, “*nesech sheichar lAdonai* – a libation of “sheichar” for God. In other words, “sheichar” is used as a libation offering. That means that “sheichar” must mean wine, for all other libation offerings are specified as wine.

But then what is the difference between “yayin” and “sheichar.” Several possibilities are mentioned – one is that “yayin” refers to new wine and “sheichar” to old wine; another is that “yayin” refers to wine used for sacramental purposes and “sheichar” is non-sacramental wine; a third possibility is that “sheichar” was too strong to be potable and was diluted with water in order to create the more potable “yayin.”

But what about other intoxicating drinks? And can't other fruits become fermented? We know that beer was discovered and used in the Middle East over four thousand years ago, and so must have been known to the Israelites. However, it is not specifically prohibited. (As an aside, there is apparently no word for beer in the Bible; the modern Hebrew word for beer is thus “*birah*”.)

Since the *kohanim* were not allowed to perform their duties while inebriated, presumably their prohibition against “*yayim v'sheichar*” must have included other intoxicants, so it seems that even though “sheichar” meant “wine,” it was used colloquially to include other alcoholic beverages as well.

Indeed, in Josephus' account of the story of Samson, the angel tells Samson's mother that her son “should avoid all other kinds of drink, (for so had God commanded,) and be entirely contented with water.” Philo Judaeus, a Jewish philosopher who lived in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century in Alexandria, claimed that not only the *nazir* but even the *kohanim* were permitted to drink only water, presumably while they were on duty.

We mentioned earlier that the new Mishnah on this page asserts that if you make a vow involving just part of the vow of a *nazir*, then you become a *nazir*. The gemara notes that Rabbi Shimon disagreed with this Mishnah and argued that a person does not become a *nazir* unless he or she means to fulfill the entire vow of the *nazir*, and then notes that the

opinion of Rabbi Shimon was a minority opinion and was overruled by the rabbis of the Mishnah.

Why did the rabbis come to that conclusion? The editors of the gemara imagine a scenario where a person vows to abstain from “yayin.” They think that the rabbis would argue that that vow is sufficient to make the person a nazir – would we want the person to also vow to abstain from “sheichar” and from grape juice and from grape pits, in effect to recite the first eight verses of Numbers Chapter 6.

Then the gemara asks why Rabbi Shimon is not convinced by the reasoning of the rabbis and he responds that the Torah has to tell us that the nazir can’t drink either “yayin” or “sheichar” because the nazir is prohibited even from drinking wine when it is a ritual obligation, like Kiddush or Havdalah – that’s “yayin” – and also prohibited from drinking wine which is not a ritual obligation – that’s “sheichar”. If a person vows not to drink “sheichar”, then perhaps his oath means that he will drink wine for Kiddush, but no other wine. (As an aside, note that Rabbi Shimon is not present for this conversation – he lived hundreds of years earlier. The reasoning of the rabbis, and the response of Rabbi Shimon, although they may be plausible, were likely made up by the compilers of the gemara.)

The daf ends with a question. Isn’t the wine of Kiddush and Havdalah obligatory? Unstated is the implication: If so, the whole idea of a nazir is contrary to the Torah! We will deal with this question at the beginning of tomorrow’s session.

Welcome to Daily Daf Differently. This is Joe Rosenstein, and I am a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University and the author of Siddur Eit Ratzon and Machzor Eit Ratzon. Today we will be studying Tractate Nazir, daf 4, daled.

This tractate, Masechet Nazir, deals with men and women who make a vow to abstain from wine and all grape products, to refrain from cutting their hair, and to avoid contact with all dead bodies – so that they don’t become “tameh” or ritually impure. These requirements of a nazir appear in Chapter 6 of Numbers, that is, Bamidbar.

Yesterday’s daf ended with a question. Isn’t the wine of Kiddush and Havdalah obligatory? Unstated is the following problem. A nazir vows to drink no wine or anything made from grapes. So if the wine of Kiddush and Havdalah, at the beginning and end of

Shabbat, are obligatory, then how can a person take an oath which is contrary to the Torah? If so, the whole idea of a nazir is contrary to the Torah!

The solution of this problem is simple, so simple that it isn't stated explicitly in the text. Nowhere in the Torah is there a commandment to drink the fruit of the wine at the beginning or end of Shabbat. That practice was instituted by the rabbis, and so the possibility of becoming a nazir, which is stated explicitly in the Torah, trumps the practice of drinking wine or grape juice for Kiddush and Havdalah on Shabbat.

Do we have any examples of a nazir in the Bible itself?

The clearest example of a nazir is Samson, whose birth was foretold by an "angel" who told Samson's barren mother that she would give birth to a son whom she would have to raise as a nazir. However, we know that her son Samson was at drinking parties, and we know that he killed many people, so that he had frequent contact with the dead. Moreover, he did not take the vow of a nazir on himself, but was committed to that life by his mother. Finally, he had enormous strength, and that strength was connected to his hair being long. For all of these reasons, Samson was not your typical nazir.

We will come back to Samson later, as well as Samuel and Absalom, each of whom had some of the characteristics of the nazir but were not the typical nazir. Unfortunately, there are no examples in the Bible of a "typical" nazir.

Today's daf has two Mishnahs. The first Mishnah notes that a person who vows to become a nazir like Samson becomes a nazir like Samson. The second Mishnah asks, what is the difference between a nazir like Samson and a nazir for life. The gemara says, "Wait a minute! Before asking what the difference is between a nazir like Samson and a nazir for life, you have to state how one becomes a nazir for life, and it suggests that there is something missing from the first Mishnah, namely, the statement "If a person vows to be a nazir for life, he or she becomes a nazir for life."

As we noted on daf 2, the rabbis of the Talmud did not have a problem correcting the text of the Mishnah since they recognized that errors naturally arise when texts are recited from memory or when scribes copy texts. We sometimes seem to have unlearned that lesson.

Back to our Mishnah. It distinguishes between two kinds of nazir – a nazir like Samson and a nazir for life. Before continuing with the differences between these two kinds of nazir, it is important to note that neither of these n'zirim is the nazir described in Chapter 6 of Bamidbar. A substantial portion of that chapter, verses 13 to 21, discusses the

end of the n'zirut – thus assuming that every n'zirut has an end, that every nazir has a fixed term – and there is no mention in the Torah of the nazir for life or a nazir like Samson.

We will discuss the fixed term nazir tomorrow, when we get to the next Mishnah. Today's daf, as mentioned earlier, focuses on a Mishnah that asks what are the differences between a nazir like Samson and a nazir for life. The Mishnah provides two answers to its question. First, it discusses the practical question of what happens when the hair of the nazir becomes too heavy – for someone who vows to be a nazir like Samson, there is no solution, he has to live with his heavy head of hair. However, a person who is a nazir for life may thin out his hair with a razor – but not cut it with a scissors – and bring the offerings prescribed for a fixed-term nazir, and then resume his n'zirut.

The gemara asks, what is the scriptural basis for allowing the nazir for life to thin his hair if it becomes burdensome? And they answer their question by pointing to Absalom, one of the sons of King David. In chapter 15 of Samuel II, we read that after a number of years Absalom says to David “I will go now to Chevron and fulfill the vow that I vowed to Adonai. For your servant made a vow when I was in Aram saying that if God enables me to return to Y'rushalayim, then I will serve God.” David replied: “Go in peace,” and Absalom went to Chevron. And in the previous chapter, we learn that “There was no one in Israel who was as beautiful as Absalom, he had no blemish, from the sole of his foot to the top of his head. He would periodically (mikeitz yamim l'yamim) have to cut his hair because it was so heavy; indeed his hair weighed 200 shekels according to the royal standard.”

Because Absalom speaks of his long-term vow to God and has long hair, the rabbis concluded that Absalom was a nazir for life. Since Absalom was able to trim his hair if it became burdensome, so too any nazir for life should be able to trim his hair.

However, this conclusion that Absalom was a nazir ignores the back story. Absalom had a sister named Tamar, who was raped by Absalom's older half-brother Amnon. Two years later, Absalom created an opportunity where Amnon could be assassinated and then, fearing David's wrath for having killed his heir-apparent, Absalom fled to Aram. Three years later, Absalom is allowed to return to Jerusalem. That would have been an appropriate time to fulfill whatever vow he had made in Aram, but there is no indication that he did that. It was only many years later that he tells David of his vow and gets David's permission to go to Chevron, presumably because there is a temple there. However, he doesn't seek out the temple or fulfill his vow. Instead he uses the opportunity

of being in Chevron to declare himself king and initiate a rebellion against his father David. All of this is hardly nazir-like behavior.

The end of his life seems quite appropriate. As he flees on horseback from David's army, his long hair is entangled in the low-hanging branches of a tree, and he is killed by David's men. Despite his son's rebellion, David is inconsolable over the death of Absalom and cries out "would that I had died instead of him!"

These dramatic events are recounted in detail in II Samuel, Chapters 13-19.

Returning now to the daf, recall that we said that the Mishnah indicated that there were two differences between a nazir like Samson and a nazir for life. The first difference was that a nazir for life was permitted to trim his hair if it became burdensome, whereas a nazir like Samson was not permitted to trim his hair. The second difference between the two is that if a nazir for life becomes ritually defiled as a result of contact with a dead body, then that nazir has to bring the offerings prescribed in Chapter 6 of Bamidbar, whereas a nazir like Samson does not.

This conclusion is based on Samson's peculiar version of n'zirut, about which the rabbis of the Mishnah and gemara seem to be rather skeptical. Rabbi Shimon rejects altogether the category of a nazir like Samson – he says that if a person declares that he intends to be a nazir like Samson, his statement has no effect, since we are not aware that Samson ever himself pronounced a vow of a nazir. In objection, the gemara quotes the verse that says "your child shall be a nazir from the womb", but then notes that Samson did not vow to be a nazir, it was the angel who said this.

Rabbi Judah does not go as far as Rabbi Shimon and agrees that a vow to be a nazir like Samson is valid, but says that a nazir like Samson is permitted to ritually defile himself or herself by contact with a corpse, and may even do so deliberately. Why? Because that's what Samson did. The gemara then asks, how do we know that Samson did that? We know that because Samson himself said: "With the jawbone of an ass, I have killed a thousand men." Well, says the gemara, perhaps Samson was very careful, and killed them without touching them. But there's another quote from the book of Judges where Samson killed thirty men and took their possessions as spoils of war. Perhaps, the gemara suggests, he took their clothes first and afterwards killed them. That doesn't work, the gemara responds, because the text says first that he killed them and afterwards that he took their possessions. Perhaps, the gemara suggests, he mortally wounded them, then took their possessions, leaving them to die of their wounds. Then, without generating a



response to this far-fetched scenario, the gemara says that, however the incident played out, our tradition is that Samson did in fact come into contact with the dead.

Embedded in this discussion is an enigmatic story that is told about a young man, evidently a long-term nazir or a nazir for life, who appeared at the Temple in about 300 BCE to have his long curly locks shorn. The Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, Shimon haTzaddik, who is cited in the first chapter of Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, asked the young man why he decided to destroy such beautiful hair. He replied that he was a shepherd and that gazing into the well, he became enamored of his image. What he actually said was: “My evil inclination grabbed me and tried to remove me from the world.” We don’t know what that means – perhaps it means that he would now be tempted to sin, or perhaps, like Narcissus, he would be tempted to unite with his image and drown himself in the water. The young man did not succumb and berated his evil inclination: “You good for nothing. Why are you so conceited in a world that is not yours, where you will eventually be food for worms. I swear that I shall shave you – agaleichacha – for the sake of God.”

Of course, the young man was actually speaking to himself. Instead of making him humble, his n’zirut had made him conceited ... so he had to end it. And he has come to the Temple to request that his n’zirut be terminated with the shaving – hitgalachat – of his hair, which had become the locus of his yeitzer hara, his evil inclination. His story has a much more satisfying conclusion, and a more ethically meaningful one, than the story of Narcissus.

The story of the young man is not enigmatic. What is enigmatic is the response of the Kohen Gadol, Shimon haTzaddik. First of all, the story begins with his statement that only one time had he eaten part of the asham offering brought by a nazir. Now the asham offering is not brought by a nazir who completes his n’zirut, but only by a nazir whose n’zirut is interrupted by ritual defilement. The asham offering is brought by a person who has sinned unintentionally; we recognize the word asham from the list of sins that we recite on Yom Kippur that begins with the word “ashamnu – we have sinned unintentionally.” Once the nazir brought the asham offering, that person’s n’zirut would begin again, but it would have to restart at day one. Apparently Shimon haTzaddik did not trust n’zirim whose n’zirut was interrupted. Perhaps he thought that they should have been more careful and should have avoided ritual defilement; perhaps he did not trust that they would do

better the second time around. In any case, it is clear that he did not have a positive feeling about n'zirim, particularly about those who didn't complete their n'zirut.

After making this initial statement that only one time had he eaten part of the asham offering brought by a nazir, Shimon haTzaddik tells the story of this one exception, our young man who was enamored of his image and decided to cut his hair. Then he continues: “Then I rose and kissed him on the head and said: “Would that there be many n'zirim in Israel like you – who consecrate themselves unto God as you have!”

Shimon haTzaddik apparently felt that this young man was consecrating himself to God, but that other n'zirim apparently took the vows for ulterior motives. But Shimon haTzaddik ignores the fact that by ending his n'zirut, the young man was breaking his vow to be a nazir for life, and that by allowing him to be freed of his vow, Shimon haTzaddik was perhaps setting a bad precedent. I remain puzzled by this story ... and wonder whether it might actually have been written in a later era ... and that is where we end today's episode.

Welcome to Daily Daf Differently. This is Joe Rosenstein, and I am a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University and the author of Siddur Eit Ratzon and Machzor Eit Ratzon. Today we will be studying Tractate Nazir, daf 5, hei.

This tractate, Masechet Nazir, deals with men and women who make a vow to abstain from wine and all grape products, to refrain from cutting their hair, and to avoid contact with all dead bodies – so that they don't become “tameh” or ritually impure. These requirements of a nazir appear in Chapter 6 of Numbers, that is, Bamidbar.

Today's daf begins with a rather amusing discussion of how often Absalom cut his hair. You recall from yesterday's session that Absalom had long hair – which led the rabbis to believe that he was a nazir – and that, even though he was a nazir, he cut his hair from time to time because it was apparently very thick and heavy – his hair weighed 200 shekels, according to the royal standard.

How often did Absalom cut his hair? II Samuel says that his hair was cut “mikeitz yamim l'yamim” which would normally be translated as “from time to time.” Various opinions are given about how often this took place – once a year, once in two years, once a

month, once every three months – each with its own justification, none of which is particularly credible. The final statement in this series is the opinion of Rabbi Nehorai that Absalom cut his hair every thirty days because the priests cut their hair every thirty days.

Neither his reasoning nor his conclusion makes much sense.

The reasoning goes like this: Why did the priests cut their hair every thirty days? Because their hair became burdensome (“kaveid”) after that period. So too, since Absalom cut his hair because it was burdensome (“kaveid”), it must also have been every thirty days.

Very strange reasoning, because the two uses of the word “kaveid” are not parallel. Long hair was burdensome to the priests because it interfered with their work – it must be hard to offer sacrifices if your long hair gets in the way. On the other hand, long hair was burdensome to Absalom because it became literally too heavy.

The conclusion doesn’t make sense because if Absalom cut his hair every thirty days, he would never have ended up with enough hair to get caught in a tree and his hair would certainly not have weighed 200 shekels, as asserted in the Bible.

But it turns out that this amusing discussion was a prequel to the next Mishnah which says simply that if a person vows to be a nazir without specifying a time limit, that person shall be a nazir for thirty days.

Although the previous discussion has prepared us for the default time for a nazir to be thirty days, the gemara begins by asking why the Mishnah sets thirty days for the nazir, and doesn’t respond with the assertion by Rabbi Nehorai that we mentioned a moment ago – that since the Kohen cuts his hair every 30 days, the nazir, who is like a Kohen, should also cut his hair every 30 days. Instead it gives us two different answers. First, it quotes Rabbi Mattena who said that the text in Bamidbar that describes a nazir notes that “kadosh yihyeh – he shall be holy” – and the numerical value of “yihyeh – he shall be” is 30 – that is, yod is 10, heh is 5, yod is 10, and heh is 5, a total of 30. Rabbi Mattena might just as well have argued that the default time should be 404 days since that is the numerical value of “kadosh.” Proofs by gematria are generally unconvincing. A second reason for the 30 day n’zirut is given in the name of Bar Pada who said the word “nazir” in both verb and noun forms occurs exactly 30 times in Chapter 6 of Bamidbar – if you include occurrences of the word “neder – vow” as well. Needless to say, neither of these reasons is compelling.

Whatever the justification was, it is clear that by the time of Mishnah, it had been settled that a person who vowed to be a nazir would be a nazir for 30 days, unless he or she

specified otherwise. You might say that 30 days is a natural time limit, the length of a month, but in saying that, you would be influenced by the fact that 30-day periods are commonly used in our times. Is there any evidence that 30 days was a natural period in Talmudic times, where the length of a month – that is, a lunar month – was probably seen as 29 days? So it seems that we don't know why the rabbis chose 30 days as the standard term of a nazir.

The term of 30 days is not mentioned in Chapter 6 of Numbers, nor is any other term mentioned. However, the phrase “kol y'mei nizro – all the days of that person's n'zirut” occurs at the beginning of each of the three prohibitions, suggesting that each nazir had a fixed term and, since no term is specified, each nazir must have chosen his or her own term.

Moreover, the fixed term had to be determined at the outset, since when the nazir accidentally became ritually impure, that same term had to start over; the nazir couldn't simply say “let's stop here – however many days I have already been a nazir, that's my term as nazir.”

Let us take a few minutes to speculate about why a set time was introduced for the term of the nazir, and what was the impact of introducing a set time. Note that the Mishnah did not say that every n'zirut had to last exactly 30 days – a person could vow to be a nazir for 613 days – but it did say that every n'zirut for which no time was specified had to last for 30 days. Did this Mishnah intend to set a “floor” below which no nazir could go?

Perhaps this Mishnah was a reaction to a situation where some people set absurdly low n'zirut terms for themselves – perhaps as extreme as “nazir for a day.” Possibly, but then the Mishnah should have said simply that every n'zirut had to last at least 30 days.

It is also possible that the rabbis of the early Mishnaic period were reacting to the opposite situation – that many people were vowing to be a nazir for a long term and were unable to meet their obligation, so the rabbis recommended a 30-day term. If a nazir completed a 30-day term, he or she was able to begin another 30-day term right away – or could sign on for a second term that was longer than 30 days. And if someone was sure that they wanted to be a nazir for a year or more, they could still make that vow.

Although it doesn't seem clear what was intended by the 30-day term ruling, it does seem clear that the gemara understood its import to be that every nazir should have a term of 30 days – all of the discussions focus on n'zirim whose term is 30 days.

Also not clear is when this ruling was made? Was it something that had been in place for hundreds of years before the Mishnah, or was it made by the authors of the Mishnah ... after the institution of n'zirut had been terminated?

Does this regulation reflect a positive attitude to n'zirut ... or a negative attitude to n'zirut? That's hard to determine. But when you set a floor, the floor often becomes a ceiling. That is, I suspect that in the early years, the typical nazir had long flowing hair, and was therefore "publicly identified" as a nazir, but that in the later years, although there may have been more n'zirim, the typical nazir had relatively short hair and could not be recognized as a nazir from his or her appearance. If that were the case, the relationship of the nazir to the community became different, and n'zirut became more a private than a public practice.

Moreover, it is quite possible that the practical effect of setting a default term for a nazir at thirty days made it easier for a person to become a nazir, since the conception of a nazir changed from a person who made a long-term commitment to God to a person who had a brief encounter with holiness.

Why would a person become a nazir? This question is not asked explicitly. However, in discussing the nazir in the Talmud, several examples of n'zirim are mentioned.

A strange example is described on daf 10 of tractate Nedarim. Pious people who wanted to fulfill all of the commandments in the Torah could not bring a sin-offering without accidentally committing a sin. But they didn't want to sin, even accidentally. Of course, if you plan to sin accidentally, well, surprise, it is no longer an accident. So they realized that a way of fulfilling the mitzvah of bringing a sin offering without actually sinning accidentally was to become a nazir.

Here are three more "usual" examples: a person who vows to be a nazir if his wife gives birth to a boy, a person who vows to be a nazir for the duration of a journey, and a person who vows to be a nazir if her son returns safely from battle. What these three situations have in common is the sense that a nazir is one who makes a bargain with God.

It is possible that one reason that the rabbis of the Talmud responded negatively to the idea of a nazir is that they did not see the nazir as a person who wished to be holy to God, but rather as a person who was courting God's favor.

It is quite possible that in early days a nazir was typically a person who wanted to devote himself or herself to God, to consecrate himself or herself to God, to be a holy

person, someone who was “kadosh lAdonai – holy to God, dedicated to God.” This person wanted to be a religious. The word “religious” in English is used as a noun by Catholics but, as a noun, is foreign to Jews.

Can you imagine yourself as a religious, as a person who, while living a normal life, also lives a life consecrated to God?

And what does such a life have to do with the three prohibitions that defined a nazir – abstention from wine, not cutting one’s hair, avoiding contact with the dead?

We have noted that a nazir is sometimes described as an ascetic, sometimes as a person who removes himself from society – or even a hermit, sometimes as a wannabe Kohen, sometimes as a person undergoing rehabilitation, sometimes as a person who shows off his beautiful long hair, sometimes as a person who wards off human contact because of his bedraggled long hair, sometimes as a spiritual person, or even a mystic. But each of these descriptions relates to only one or two of the three prohibitions, and none of them speak to the motivation of the nazir.

The key to answering these questions, and to understanding the motivations of the nazir is ... the hair of the nazir and what happens to it. As described in Bamidbar 6, when the nazir’s term is completed, the nazir comes to the Temple, where his or her hair is cut and is burned on the altar. Why is that significant?

There may come a time in the life of a person when he or she feels a need to be consecrated to God, to make of himself or herself an offering to God. This may happen as a result of an event in the person’s life – it could be at a time of great thanksgiving, or at a time of great relief, or at a time of great pain or distress, or at a time of a spiritual awakening. The ordinary response – to bring an offering of sh’lamim and participate in a celebratory meal – may not feel appropriate. Nor would it feel appropriate to offer a gift to the Temple that represents the monetary worth of the person ... an offering that might be appropriate in other circumstances.

What the nazir wants to do is to offer himself or herself to God.

Of course, Judaism does not allow human sacrifice, and therefore does not allow such self-sacrifice.

What part of oneself can one offer to God? The only part of ourselves that we can give up, and still remain whole, is our hair.

So the nazir is a person who grows hair specifically for God and uses the burning of that hair as a symbolic way of offering himself or herself to God.

But once the nazir has vowed to be a nazir and consecrated his or her hair to God, then the nazir has taken on the responsibility of ensuring that that hair is kept in a state of holiness. Thus, the nazir must avoid contamination by the dead – avoiding contamination not of the nazir but of the consecrated hair – what the text in Numbers repeatedly refers to as “rosh nizro – his consecrated head.” And the nazir must be like the Kohen who guards consecrated objects and, when on duty, cannot drink “yayin v'sheichar.” So too the nazir, who must guard his or her head 24-7, must always be on guard and avoid “yayin v'sheichar.” Even grape juice may ferment inside the nazir’s stomach, so juice too is forbidden.

This seems to be the simple meaning – the p'shat – of the description of the nazir in the sixth chapter of Bamidbar. A nazir is a person who is consecrated as an offering to God, symbolically through the offering of his or her hair to God. And a nazir is a person who must also guard God’s hair until it is brought to the altar, so the nazir, like the Kohen, must abstain from the fruit of the vine and must avoid all contact with the dead.

A nazir is not a hermit, not an ascetic, not a recovering alcoholic, not a wannabee Kohen, not a long-haired hippie or freak, not a mystic, but a person who has consecrated his or her hair to God, and who has thereby consecrated his or her very self to God.

This perspective of the nazir was first presented in a 1997 article by Rabbi Eliezer Diamond ... and it is really surprising to me that earlier teachers and scholars had not thought of it. How can it be that from the Mishnah to the Rambam to modern times, no one persisted in asking the question of how the three conditions of the nazir are linked? And how can it be that no one came up with this simple answer?

The similarity of nazir and nezer should have been a give-away. The nezer is the diadem that the Kohen Gadol, the high priest, wore on his head, and on it was written “kodesh lAdonai – holy to God.” The hair of the nazir is also, of course, worn on the head and it too is referred to as “kodesh lAdonai.” The hair of the nazir is the nezer of the Kohen Gadol.

The purpose of growing one’s hair was to burn it ... so that, according to this understanding of nazir, Samson was not a nazir, or at least not this kind of nazir. His hair was grown to maintain his strength in order to defend the Israelites from the Philistines, as God had promised his mother. He did not have to avoid contact with the dead – indeed, he was a producer of corpses – and, although his mother was told to avoid wine, that did not explicitly apply to him. Nor was Samuel this kind of a nazir. Nor was Absalom this kind

of a nazir – we are told that he cut his hair when it became too heavy, but not that he offered it to God. So these three Biblical figures did not serve as models or examples of the kind of nazir that is described in Numbers Chapter 6.

We will continue our discussion tomorrow.

Welcome to Daily Daf Differently. This is Joe Rosenstein, and I am a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University and the author of Siddur Eit Ratzon and Machzor Eit Ratzon. Today we will be studying Tractate Nazir, daf 6, vav.

This tractate, Masechet Nazir, deals with men and women who make a vow to abstain from wine and all grape products, to refrain from cutting their hair, and to avoid contact with all dead bodies – so that they don't become "tameh" or ritually impure. These requirements of a nazir appear in Chapter 6 of Numbers, that is, Bamidbar.

The Mishnah on the previous daf stated that if a person vows to be a nazir without specifying the term of his or her n'zirut, then the term is automatically 30 days. We really don't know why 30 days was chosen as the default term, since 30 is not commonly used by the ancient Israelites, although it seems like a natural term to us.

Two reasons for the 30 day period were presented in the gemara on yesterday's daf, neither of which is credible, and on today's daf, the the gemara tries to determine which of those reasons is correct by testing them against various practices related to the nazir. We will focus on the nazir practices without getting bogged down in the question of which of the two rationales they support or contradict.

We begin with the question of when the nazir's concluding ceremony takes place.

Recall that at the conclusion of a person's n'zirut, there are three sacrificial offerings that involve animals – a korban olah, an offering that rises – that is, an offering to God that is entirely burnt, a korban chatat – a sin offering, and a korban sh'lamim – part of which is eaten by the nazir and his or her guests. The first two are sheep, the third is a ram.

Most importantly, there is a hair offering – that is, the hair that the nazir has so carefully guarded and protected from contamination for the entire period of n'zirut is burned on the altar. As discussed yesterday, the whole point of becoming a nazir is to



offer oneself to God which, since human sacrifice is forbidden, can only be accomplished by offering one's hair to God.

This understanding of the nazir provides an explanation for all three of the prohibitions that are described in Numbers – no cutting of the hair, no contact with the dead, lest the hair become ritually impure, and, since the nazir has to guard the hair 24/7, the nazir has to abstain from wine like the Kohen who is on duty.

Because of the importance of the hair, the ceremony at the end of “n'zirut” is referred to as “higalachat”, which means the cutting of the hair.

When does this hitgalachat ceremony take place? Well, if the n'zirut lasts for 30 days, then the hitgalachat ceremony would normally take place on the 31<sup>st</sup> day.

However, there is a principle that “part of a day is equivalent to a whole day.” We are familiar with the application of this principle to sitting shiva. The mourner does not sit shiva for seven full days; indeed, after the morning service on the seventh day, shiva ends and the mourner starts to return to his or her daily routine.

Why is that the case? Because of the principle that “part of a day is equivalent to a whole day.” Since the mourner has been sitting shiva for part of the seventh day, it is considered as if he or she has been sitting shiva for the whole day.

That principle should apply here as well. That is, the hitgalachat ceremony could take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> day.

However, the first Mishnah in Chapter 3, which is cited on our daf, begins “If a person vows to be a nazir, the closing ceremony takes place on the 31<sup>st</sup> day.” This teaching seems to contradict the conclusion that we reached above. The Mishnah continues, “but it is acceptable for the hitgalachat to take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> day,” so the Mishnah does reach our conclusion.

But then the Mishnah continues, “If a person vows to be a nazir for 30 days, then it is not acceptable for the hitgalachat to take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> day.” That seems to contradict what was just said.

However, there is a difference between the two clauses of the Mishnah. The first vow is simply to be a nazir, the second is to be a nazir for 30 days. Each then has to be a nazir for 30 days, the first by default, the second by intention, but after some discussion, the gemara decides that when a person vows to be a nazir for 30 days, then his vow is binding for 30 full days. By including the number of days in the vow, the nazir forgoes the

“part of a day” principle, and therefore his or her hitgalachat ceremony will take place on the 31<sup>st</sup> day.

What happens if a person undertakes to be a nazir for two 30-day terms? The next Mishnah in Chapter 3, also cited on our daf, says that in that case the closing ceremony for the first n’zirut is on the 31<sup>st</sup> day and the closing ceremony for the second n’zirut is on the 61<sup>st</sup> day; but if the closing ceremony for the first n’zirut takes place on the 30<sup>th</sup> day, then the closing ceremony for the second n’zirut should be on the 60<sup>th</sup> day.

Let’s figure out the math here – first, let’s deal with the second part of that Mishnah. If we apply the principle that “part of a day is equivalent to a whole day”, then we have seen above that the closing ceremony for the first n’zirut could be on the 30<sup>th</sup> day. The second n’zirut begins on the 31<sup>st</sup> day and, applying the principle a second time, the second n’zirut would end on the 60<sup>th</sup> day, since the 60<sup>th</sup> day is the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the second n’zirut. And then the hitgalachat could take place on the 60<sup>th</sup> day. And that’s what the Mishnah says.

If we don’t apply the principle that “part of a day is equivalent to a whole day” because the person vowed to be a nazir for 30 full days, then the closing ceremony for the first n’zirut would be on the 31<sup>st</sup> day. The second n’zirut begins on the 32<sup>nd</sup> day, and the 30<sup>th</sup> day of that n’zirut would be on the 61<sup>st</sup> day, so that the closing ceremony for the second n’zirut would be on the 62<sup>nd</sup> day. That conclusion doesn’t agree with the Mishnah which said that the closing ceremony should be on the 61<sup>st</sup> day ... not the 62<sup>nd</sup> day.

What are we missing? The answer is that we’re missing that “part of a day is equivalent to a whole day” applies to the beginning of the count as well as to the end of the count. Thus, if at 3pm a person announces that he or she will be a nazir for 30 days, meaning 30 full days, that day counts as the first day even though it is not a full day. So on the 31<sup>st</sup> day, after the closing ceremony for the first n’zirut takes place, the second n’zirut begins. That is, the second n’zirut does not begin on the 32<sup>nd</sup> day, as was mentioned in the previous paragraph, but on the 31<sup>st</sup> day, and therefore it ends on the 60<sup>th</sup> day, and the closing ceremony would be on the 61<sup>st</sup> day, exactly as stated in the Mishnah.

But the same reasoning can also be applied to the first case, where the person doesn’t vow to be a nazir for 30 full days, so the closing ceremony for the first n’zirut is on the 30<sup>th</sup> day, which is also the first day of the second n’zirut, so the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the second n’zirut would be on the 59<sup>th</sup> day, which is when the concluding ceremony of the second n’zirut

could take place. And indeed the Mishnah cited above mentions that the concluding ceremony for the second n'zirut can in fact take place on the day before the 60<sup>th</sup> day.

So that Mishnah got the math right! Or, perhaps, we figured out correctly how the authors of the Mishnah arrived at their conclusion.

The gemara on this daf continues citing Chapter 3 of the Mishnah: If a person comes in contact with a dead person on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of n'zirut, then the whole period is rendered void; Rabbi Shimon says that only the next seven days are void. What is this dispute about?

Recall that Chapter 6 of Numbers says that if a nazir becomes “tamei” through contact with a dead person, then the nazir has to start all over again, and presumably that applies no matter when in the n'zirut the nazir becomes ritually unclean. So why is there a Mishnah that discusses the 30<sup>th</sup> day in particular.

If you followed the previous discussion, you might say that if the nazir becomes “tamei” on the 30<sup>th</sup> day, then it shouldn't matter, because “part of the 30<sup>th</sup> day is equivalent to the whole day.” Therefore, if the nazir got “tamei” at noon, you might say that the nazir actually finished his n'zirut at 1 lam, and so should not have to start all over. This is apparently the reasoning of Rabbi Shimon.

The difficulty with this reasoning is that until his hair is cut, the nazir has to protect it from becoming defiled. So his n'zirut isn't really over until his hair is cut and placed on the altar. If he becomes “tamei” after that, it makes no difference, because he is no longer a nazir. But if he becomes tamei before that, it makes a big difference, because he is still a nazir and, because he has become tamei, he has to begin his n'zirut anew.

So Rabbi Shimon's reasoning is rejected. But what does Rabbi Shimon mean when he says that only the next seven days are void? He intends the following timeline: On the 30<sup>th</sup> day the nazir becomes tamei, but since part of a day counts as a whole day he has finished his period of n'zirut. But since he is tamei, he can't perform the hitgalachat ceremony. As with anyone who is tamei, he has to undergo a seven-day period of decontamination – those are the seven days to which Rabbi Shimon refers in the Mishnah – and on the following day, he does the hitgalachat ceremony. That's apparently what Rabbi Shimon means ... but, as noted above, his view is rejected.

Our daf then cites the next Mishnah of Chapter 3. Suppose a person vows to be a nazir for 100 days and becomes tamei on the last day. Then the whole period is, as in the previous case, rendered void, although Rabbi Eliezer disagrees.

So what's the point of discussing what happens when a nazir becomes tamei on the last day of a 100-day n'zirut if it's the same as a 30-day n'zirut?

The answer is that there is a difference between these two cases. The difference is that if a nazir becomes tamei on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of a 30-day n'zirut, then he or she has another 30-day term. But what is the length of the second term of a nazir who becomes tamei on the 100<sup>th</sup> day of a 100-day n'zirut?

If you follow the text of the Torah, the second term should be 100 days long, since the nazir has to complete the term he originally declared. On the other hand, if you follow our Mishnah's innovation that an undeclared term is 30 days, then you might conclude that, since the nazir did not specify the length of the second term, it should be for 30 days. Indeed Rabbi Eliezer's view, according to Resh Lakish, is that if a nazir becomes tamei on the 100<sup>th</sup> day of his 100-day n'zirut, then he only needs to repeat 30 days.

This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, but we know that this perspective cannot prevail because, if it did, anyone who started a 100-day n'zirut could, by intentionally becoming tamei, get off the hook in 30 days ... or 37 days, if you counted the decontamination period.

That's all for today.

Welcome to Daily Daf Differently. This is Joe Rosenstein, and I am a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University and the author of Siddur Eit Ratzon and Machzor Eit Ratzon. Today we will be studying Tractate Nazir, daf 7, zayin.

This tractate, Masechet Nazir, deals with men and women who make a vow to abstain from wine and all grape products, to refrain from cutting their hair, and to avoid contact with all dead bodies – so that they don't become “tameh” or ritually impure. These requirements of a nazir appear in Chapter 6 of Numbers, that is, Bamidbar.

We provided an explanation of these three requirements. The nazir is a person who wants to offer himself or herself to God which, since human sacrifice is forbidden, can only be accomplished by offering one's hair to God. Not only must the nazir refrain from cutting his or her hair, in order to bring it as an offering to God, the nazir must also guard that hair to prevent it from becoming ritually impure through contact with a corpse, and

like the Kohen must avoid the fruit of the wine while he or she is on duty, which for the nazir is 24/7.

On the previous daf we learned that if a person vows to be a nazir without specifying the term of his or her n'zirut – that is, how long he or she will be a nazir – then that term is automatically 30 days.

Curiously, if the person vows to be a nazir for 30 days, then the n'zirut is 30 full days, and the closing ceremony, called hitgalachat, when his or her hair is cut and then burned on the altar of the Temple, is on the 31<sup>st</sup> day. On the other hand, if the person didn't specify a 30-day n'zirut, then the hitgalachat can take place on the 30<sup>th</sup> day since, as we discussed yesterday, the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> day qualifies as a full day, and so the closing ceremony can be in the afternoon.

We also learned that a person can specify any term of more than 30 days for his or her n'zirut so that, for example, if the person said, I vow to be a nazir for 123 days, then the term of his or her n'zirut would be 123 days.

As noted above, you could vow to be a nazir for 31 days, and your n'zirut would last for 31 days. But, according to the second Mishnah on today's daf, if you vowed to be a nazir and to have an extra day as a nazir, then this was considered two vows and you had two 30 day terms as a nazir. Even if you vowed to be a nazir and to have an extra hour as a nazir, you had two 30-day terms.

If a person wanted to be a nazir for 45 days, the appropriate vow should be “I vow to be a nazir for 45 days”, but if the actual vow is “I vow to be a nazir, and to have an extra half-term as a nazir,” then this is considered two vows and the person has to have two 30-day terms as a nazir.

Thus although it may have seemed far-fetched for us to have discussed a person with two periods of n'zirut on yesterday's daf, we see now how it could have come about that a person would have become obligated to two terms as a nazir.

According to the third Mishnah on today's daf, the length of the n'zirut had to be a whole number of days. Thus if a person vowed to be a nazir for 30 days and an hour, the n'zirut would have to be 31 full days. Contrast this with what we mentioned moments ago – if the person vowed to be a nazir and have an extra hour as a nazir, then there would be two full terms as a nazir.

As we've seen many times, when it comes to vows, you have to be very careful with your wording.

The remainder of daf 7 and daf 8, chet, which we will study tomorrow, both deal with the question of how long is the n'zirut if the person adds something to his vow about the duration of the n'zirut without mentioning a precise number of days. The Mishnah goes into much detail on this topic, and the discussion in the gemara on these two pages is relatively brief.

For example, the first Mishnah on daf 7 teaches that if someone says “I vow to have a long n'zirut” or “I vow to have a short n'zirut”, that person's n'zirut is for the default 30 days; there is not enough information in the vow to make any other determination for the length of the n'zirut. The Mishnah continues, even if the person vows to be a nazir “for as long as it takes to go to the end of the earth,” that person's n'zirut is also 30 days, since they didn't know how long that was.

The gemara suggests that this person should be a nazir for life, because that's how long it takes to get to the end of the earth. They respond that this is just a figure of speech indicating that it's a great and perhaps distasteful distance – a figure of speech that found its way into Yiddish where one says that someplace is so remote as if it were “in der erd afen eck – at the edge of the earth.”

The gemara now compares the above Mishnah to one on tomorrow's daf where the person also uses a distance to define his n'zirut. A person says, “I vow to be a nazir as long as it takes to get from here to such and such place.” In that case, the Mishnah says, they estimate the number of days it takes to get to that place – if that is less than 30 days, then his n'zirut is for 30 days; if the distance is more than 30 days, then his n'zirut is that many days.

Shouldn't that Mishnah apply when someone refers to going to the end of the earth? The gemara responds with a statement by Raba: “In the Mishnah on the next page, he made the vow as he was beginning an actual journey to an actual location,” so that the n'zirut was linked to an actual trip. On the other hand, in the Mishnah on this page, his vow about being a nazir until reaching the end of the earth seems not to be linked to an actual trip and therefore doesn't give us enough information to determine how long his planned trip will take. As a result, his n'zirut lasts for the default period of 30 days.

Anticipating another discussion on the next daf, the gemara asks, “Shouldn't someone who vows to be a nazir for the duration of a trip be expected to be obligated for a separate n'zirut for each stage of the trip? And it responds, “In the case of our Mishnah, the person has already said that he intends to have a single n'zirut.”

Over the past week, we have asked a number of times whether the tradition approves or disapproves of the nazir. So I would like to spend a few minutes addressing this question, even though it does not apparently arise in today's daf. I use the word "apparently" intentionally, because this daf and all the others we have seen manifest an intense interest in the mechanism of n'zirut, but no apparent interest in the purpose of n'zirut.

The institution of the nazir was apparently important in Biblical times, even though we can find no example of a nazir in the Bible except for Samson who, as we have seen, belonged to a separate category of nazir.

How do we know that the nazir was apparently important in Biblical times? The Bible devotes essentially a whole chapter, Chapter 6 of Bamidbar, Numbers, to discussing the law related to the nazir.

Moreover, the prophet Amos rebukes the Israelites (2:11-12) with the following words: "I raised some of your sons to be prophets and some of your young men to be n'zirim – did I not do that for you, children of Israel, says Adonai – but you made the n'zirim drink wine, and you told the prophets not to prophecy."

Evidently Amos puts the nazir in the same category as the prophet – the same category to which he belonged. Evidently he felt that the existence of n'zirim kept the Israelites on an appropriate ethical course – one that involves doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with God. (Those words are of course from Micah, not from Amos.)

And the author of Lamentations, usually ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah, speaking of Jerusalem, notes that "zaku n'zireha misheleg – it's n'zirim were purer than snow."

Perhaps the n'zirim were seen as righteous people who, by their very existence, sustained the world – a view that was later translated to the lamed-vovniks – 36 anonymous souls whose existence sustains the world.

In the Septuagint translation of the Bible into Greek in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, the vow of the nazir was referred to as "neder gadol – the ultimate vow." And Josephus and Philo Judaeus spoke positively about n'zirim during the first century.

However, after the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, the institution of nazir disappeared, since the completion of the nazir's term of n'zirut had to take place at the Temple; the description of the nazir in Chapter 6 of Bamidbar was closely linked to the sacrificial system of the Temple.

The authors of the Mishnah had never seen a nazir, and the section of the Mishnah that discusses the nazir has few statements about the nazir that date from Temple times – at least not in the first chapter.

Perhaps the rabbis of the Mishnah didn't appreciate the role of the nazir in early days. On daf 2 we saw a statement by Rabbi Yehudah haNasi, the author of the Mishnah, that suggested that becoming a nazir was a way of giving up alcohol. On daf 3, we saw a suggestion that a nazir was a sinner. On daf 4, we saw a suggestion that the nazir violates the Torah by forgoing wine and grape juice on Shabbat and festivals. And in this whole chapter, we've not heard anyone say anything positive about a nazir or about the institution of n'zirut.

Now it is possible that the institution of n'zirut deteriorated over the centuries, that while originally the nazir was a person who was consecrated to God, in later years becoming a nazir meant making a bargain with God. Indeed all of the examples cited in the Mishnah and gemara of n'zirim seem to be in the latter category.

It could also be that the institution of a default 30-day term of a nazir, whenever that happened, allowed people to become short-term n'zirim, so that people who didn't really want to consecrate themselves to God, could still become a nazir for a relatively short term. This possibility might have encouraged the bargainers and devalued those who really did want to devote themselves to God.

It could be that the tradition of what it meant to be a nazir was lost – that no one remembered that a nazir was a person who wanted to offer himself or herself to God, but had to be satisfied with offering his or her hair instead, and committed to keeping that hair ritually pure by avoiding contamination with the dead and avoiding the fruit of the vine, so that he or she became like a full-time Kohen for the period of n'zirut, fully committed to God while living their life.

How do we know that this tradition was lost? No one in the Mishnah, Talmud, or subsequent scholars even mention it ... until 1997 by R. Eliezer Diamond.

And, perhaps surprisingly, the rabbis of the Talmud who spent their lives trying to determine how God wanted us to behave and who spent their lives consecrated to God, did not see themselves as the successors of the nazir.

In any case, we can answer the question of whether the nazir was approved or disdained by the tradition. In the early years, the nazir was approved and in the later years, the nazir was apparently disdained.



Unfortunately, that disdain continues to the present day, when scholars and rabbis often compare the nazir negatively to the sage.

Welcome to Daily Daf Differently. This is Joe Rosenstein, and I am a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University and the author of Siddur Eit Ratzon and Machzor Eit Ratzon. Today we will be studying Tractate Nazir, daf 8, chet.

This tractate, Masechet Nazir, deals with men and women who make a vow to abstain from wine and all grape products, to refrain from cutting their hair, and to avoid contact with all dead bodies – so that they don't become “tameh” or ritually impure. These requirements of a nazir appear in Chapter 6 of Numbers, that is, Bamidbar.

We provided an explanation of these three requirements in our previous discussions. The nazir is a person who wants to offer himself or herself to God which, since human sacrifice is forbidden, can only be accomplished by offering one's hair to God. Not only must the nazir refrain from cutting his or her hair, in order to bring it as an offering to God, the nazir must also guard that hair to prevent it from becoming ritually impure through contact with a corpse, and like the Kohen must avoid the fruit of the wine while he or she is on duty, which for the nazir is 24/7.

A previous daf included the ruling of the Mishnah that says that if a person vows to be a nazir, then the length of time of that person's commitment – referred to as n'zirut – is 30 days; moreover, one cannot be a nazir for a shorter n'zirut than 30 days.

We noted yesterday that the final two pages of the first chapter of tractate Nazir, including today's daf, both deal with the question of how long is the n'zirut if the person adds a phrase to his vow about the duration of the n'zirut without mentioning a precise number of days. The Mishnah goes into much detail on this topic, and the discussion in the gemara on these two pages is relatively brief.

In daf 7, we discussed what happens if the added phrase is directly related to time. The Mishnahs in daf 8, on the other hand, consider what happens if the person specifies his or her n'zirut not in terms of time, but in terms of other measures. For example, if a person says “I vow to be a nazir like the hairs on my head,” or “like the dust on the ground,” or “like the sand at the sea,” then he has vowed to be a nazir for as many 30-day terms as

there as hairs on his head – so that, in effect, he is a nazir for life, although his hair must be cut every 30 days, since he didn't vow to be a nazir for life.

This is the majority view of the Mishnah, although Rabbi Yehudah haNasi argued that this person actually is a nazir for life and should not have to cut his hair every month. But if the person said “I vow to have terms of n'zirut like the hairs on my head,” then Rabbi Yehudah would agree that her hair would have to be cut every 30 days.

The gemara provides no discussion of the Mishnah cited above. But the Mishnah continues with a similar case. A person says, “I vow to be a nazir as the capacity of this house”, or “of this basket.” In other words, instead of comparing her n'zirut to a length of time or to a large quantity of discrete objects, like hairs on one's head or grains of sand, she is comparing her n'zirut to a volume. In that case, according to the Mishnah, we interrogate the nazir and if she says “I meant one big n'zirut”, then she is a nazir for 30 days, as was discussed on daf 7. But if she says that she didn't mean anything particular by comparing her vow to a basket, then we imagine the basket as being full of mustard seeds and she becomes a nazir for life, as if she had said “like the hairs on my head.”

The gemara asks why should we imagine the basket to be full of mustard seeds. Why not imagine it as full of cucumbers or gourds so that she would have a lesser obligation?

Implicit in the discussion is that she could have said in the interrogation that she meant that her n'zirut was equal to the number of objects in her basket, or that she would have a number of n'ziruts equal to the number of objects in her basket. The problem is that if the basket did not contain actual objects, then we would not know how many days her n'zirut should be ... or how many different n'ziruts she had obligated herself to fulfill. Therefore if we decided that that basket could hold 100 cucumbers and we had her complete her n'zirut on the 100<sup>th</sup> day, then that would be a serious violation of the sacrificial code if the basket could in fact hold 101 cucumbers. So the only safe solution was to imagine that the basket had in effect an infinite number of objects, that is, that it were filled with mustard seeds.

The Mishnah continues with an example where the person compares his n'zirut to a distance. A person says, “I vow to be a nazir as from here to such and such place.” In that case, the Mishnah says, they estimate the number of days it takes to get to that place – if that is less than 30 days, then his n'zirut is for 30 days; if that is more than 30 days, then his n'zirut is that many days.

Finally, the Mishnah for Chapter 1 concludes with the following example, where the term of n'zirut is compared to some other known number: A person says, "I vow to be a nazir according to the number of days in the solar year." In that case, the person has to fulfill 365 30-day terms of n'zirut.

Although the Mishnah does not mention this, the gemara notes that, as in a previous example, Rabbi Yehudah Hanasi would agree that he has to fulfill 365 terms of n'zirut only if he said explicitly "I vow to be a nazir for as many terms as the number of days in the solar year."

However, the Mishnah does not mention Rabbi Yehudah haNasi's view; it takes for granted 365 separate n'ziruts. This example doesn't seem to add much to the discussion. It appears that the purpose of this Mishnah is to provide an opportunity for this final observation: "Rabbi Judah said: This actually happened." That is, he knew of a person who completed 365 30-day terms of n'zirut, a total of more than 30 years. The story does not end well – Rabbi Judah added "Keivan shehishlim meit – when he finished, he died." Sad news. And we're not told the point of the story.

The Chapter concludes with four Beraitas, that is, four teachings which are from the time of the Mishnah, but which were not included in the Mishnah.

Beraita #1. Our rabbis taught: If a person says "I wish to be a nazir all the days of my life", that person becomes a nazir for life. That is, this nazir has no fixed term and remains a nazir forever, although he or she may cut their hair if it becomes burdensome. On the other hand, if a person says "I wish to be a nazir for 100 years", that is to say, specifies a term of his n'zirut, then that person in effect is a nazir for repeated 30 day terms, and undergoes hitgalachat – ritual cutting of the hair – every 30 days, even though it appears that his vow is for a lifetime. Thus, according to this beraita, there are apparently two different types of nazir for life.

Beraita #2. Our rabbis taught: If a person says "I vow to be a nazir plus one," then he has two terms of n'zirut. If a person says "I vow to be a nazir plus one, and another," then he has three terms of n'zirut. If a person says "I vow to be a nazir plus one, and another, and again," then he has four terms of n'zirut. The gemara asks, "why mention the last case, isn't this obvious?" And it answers, "you might have thought that "and again" refers to the first three n'ziruts, so the person has three plus three, or six terms of n'zirut, so it was thought important to stress that there are only four terms of n'zirut. This reasoning would not make it into any anthology of the wisdom in the Talmud.

Beraita #3. Our rabbis taught: If a person says “I vow to be a nazir” and adds one of the Greek counting numbers “hen,” “digon,” “trigon,” “tetragon,” or “pentagon,” then according to Symmachos the person is committed to one, two, three, four, or five terms of n’zirut, respectively. This beraita tells us that a vow of n’zirut can be made in other languages.

Beraita #4. Having mentioned the Greek counting numbers, the editors of the gemara inserted here another beraita which mentions those numbers. Our rabbis taught: A house that is shaped like a circle, or digon, or trigon, or pentagon does not contract defilement through leprosy. Only a house that is a tetragon – that is, four-sided – contracts leprosy. Why is that, you may ask. The answer is that the discussion of house leprosy in Leviticus twice mentions walls in the plural, thus referring to four walls altogether. This reasoning, and this conclusion, would also not make it into any anthology of the wisdom in the Talmud.

Before ending today’s discussion, I would like to leave you with this question to consider: How can we in our day consecrate ourselves to God in a way that the nazir did in ancient times?

The answers that we might give are “being a good person,” “living a life of service,” “living a religious life,” and “engaging in tikkun olam – fixing a broken world.” Although these responses are all very commendable, they are all required of all of us.

If we wanted to consecrate ourselves to God, what would we have to do beyond living in accordance with those principles?

That’s something to think about.

We have now completed today’s page, daf chet, and the first Chapter of Tractate Nazir, which is referred to by its opening phrase “Kol Kinuyei N’zirut.” Speaking, as it were, to this chapter, we say:

Hadran alach, perek Kol Kinuyei N’Zirut. May we return again to you, chapter “Kol Kinuyei N’Zirut,” and study you more deeply.

And we conclude with a traditional prayer:

Y’hi ratzon l’fanecha, Adonai Elohai, veilohei avotai v’imotai – May it be Your will, our God and God of our fathers and our mothers, that just as you have enabled us to complete this chapter, so may You help us to begin and complete other chapters, tractates, and holy books, to learn and to teach, to lovingly observe and fulfill all the enduring words that are in the teachings of Your Torah. Amein.

Completing a chapter or a tractate is traditionally a cause for celebration ... which for Jews of course means food and drink. I have uploaded various refreshments to jcastnetwork and I invite you to partake of them with me ... or to provide your own if you are unable to download mine. L'chayim.

It has been a pleasure for me to prepare and present these sessions, and I hope that you have enjoyed them as well. Until we meet again ... Shalom.