

RADIO PROGRAM - WHY WAS SAMSON A FAILURE?

Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

Shalom. I have often been intrigued by the story of Samson, the story of that mighty man of old who came from the Tribe of Dan and inflicted a mighty blow against the Philistines. He was a man of great physical ability, a man of great strength, but, ultimately, he was a complete failure. Why should it be that this Samson, this mighty man, was a complete failure? It seems to me that if we look carefully at the story of Samson, and we all know the story of Samson, how at the end Delilah found out his secret and his hair was cut off, and then he was taken by the Philistines and paraded in their temple and in the middle of the celebration he pulled the pillars of the temple down and the Philistines all perished, thus, helping Israel begin on its road to recovery allowing them to throw off the yoke of the Philistine oppressors, but Samson, himself, was a great failure. Why should it be that Samson was a failure? At his birth he was told that he would be a great man in Israel. In fact, before he was born an angel appeared to his mother and father and told them Samson was to be a Nazerite from birth. He was not to cut his hair nor drink man. Samson was known as a holy man. He was known as a man of great ability, but, yet, he failed.

It seems to me the reason Samson failed was because he confused the importance of the inner man with the importance of the outer man. He was a man of show only. He was a man who had an outer image but no inner self. He was a man who had an image of himself as a holy man, and this was displayed by his long hair because that was the symbol of a holy man in those days, and once his hair was cut off then his internal image was shattered, and he became a weakling, because he knew that inside he was hollow. Unfortunately, in our day we see the same thing happening.

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There are so many people who are so fragmented. They have one outer image and one inner image. They are not whole people because they somehow feel they have to be all things to all people. What was the cause of Samson's downfall? It seems to me that the cause of Samson's downfall was explained even when he was doing his last act. Even when he was pulling those pillars down and destroying the Philistine hosts who had been oppressing Israel, he did not say, "Please, G-d, give me the strength to pull down this temple so I can begin to save Israel. Please, G-d, give me the strength to do this so women and children can be safe." He did not say this. He said, "G-d, give me the strength to do this to avenge the Philistines for putting out my eyes." Yes, once Samson's hair was cut, once his outer image was shorn, he had no more vision. His eyes were put out. That was the tragedy of Samson. Samson was only concerned about Samson. Samson put an excessive stress on his own individual capabilities.

I think today we are going through a similar phase. We, too, are putting inordinate stress upon the individual and upon his responsibility to develop himself. Samson was concerned only with me, me, me. Of course, it is true that man has to be concerned with himself. In fact, there is a very famous Hebrew proverb which says, "In Ein Aneelee Meelee - If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" But, it continues and has a second part which says, "Usheanee L'Atzme U'Onee - But if I am only for myself, what am I?" Samson was a man who really only thought of himself. He was a man who concentrated only on himself. In fact, he really could not figure out whether he wanted to be a Jew or a Philistine. We all know that he had a wandering eye. He was a holy man, supposedly, but he had a wandering eye and went after all the Philistine girls. He was a man who

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publicly would avoid even passing through a vineyard so no one would think that even the taste of a grape would pass his mouth, but he was a man who was not above all sorts of practical jokes, and a man who did certain things which we would not be too proud of.

Samson was a man who was torn, and the reason why I think he was a man who was torn is the same reason why so many people today are torn, and that is because they have no feeling of being part of a whole. They feel their whole worth is concentrated on not what they are but what they can do, what people want from there. Therefore, they are insecure, and, because they are insecure, they feel they have to be all things to all people. They feel people will only like them, be with them, if they have something to offer. This, unfortunately, I think is in our day the product of the breakup of the family. People know and do not feel anymore that they will always have someone they can turn to no matter what they have done, or no matter what they have said. Oh, they may be bawled out, but at least they know they have a place where they can just "be". They do not have to produce this or that for someone else. They know they are part of a whole. They know they belong someplace. Yes, Samson thought that he was only important for what he could do, not for what he was.

It is a terrible commentary on our times, but it is true, that during wartime people are the happiest, because then they know that they are part of a whole, that even the most mundane task they are doing contributes to the welfare of the whole. They find solace and comfort in the fact that they are needed. They then feel secure. It is a terrible commentary on our times, but this is true. Mental illness falls.

Psychologists and psychiatrists will tell you that people, basically, are much happier because they see they are part of something bigger than themselves, and they are transformed and their small mundane tasks take on great importance, while, in other times in life, this is not true. People feel they will be shucked off either for doing this or doing that, that they have to be all things to all people. Their private image has to be different than their public image, because if their private image and public image were the same, then people would cast them out. To this group of people you have to act this way; to that group of people you have to act that way. To a certain measure, this is true. In business we know if a worker does not have what we want we fire him immediately, and, in a certain context, perhaps this is correct, but in the context of society and the context of family and the context of friendship this obviously is wrong.

Yes, the rabbis say that a Nazerite like Samson had to bring a sin offering. Why? Because when he became a Nazerite, even though it was for his own edification so he could be a holy man, he diminished part of his family responsibilities because he could no longer attend funerals. Samson was only concerned about himself, about developing his me, his I, and, because of this excessive stress on his own individual talents, he turned out to be a failure because he was forced to become a fragmented man, one who saw his worth now in what he was but only in what he could produce. I hope that all of us will realize that our worth lies in what we are. It is important that we produce but it is because we are the Children of G-d that we are important.