

The Book of Judges Chapter 14

Summary: Samson's chose to marry a Philistine woman from Timnat. On his journey there he was pounced on by a young lion which he killed. A swarm of bees gathered in the lion's carcass with honey which Samson scraped out and ate during his journey to the wedding. His new wife elicited the answer to a riddle Samson had posed to the wedding guests and revealed it to them. When the guests came with the answer, Samson travelled to Ashkelon and killed thirty Philistine men, took their garments and gave them to the wedding guests as their reward. He went back to his parent's house while his wife was given away to another man.

A deeper look: Samson's bizarre choice to marry a Philistine woman was a ploy to get close to the enemy (Judges 14:4). Yet the Gemara cites Samson's physical attraction to women as the ultimate source of his downfall (Sotah 9b).

This explains the deep symbolism of the events surrounding the lion and the bees. Samson was left alone on the edge of the vineyard for as a nazirite he was forbidden to enter. His parents however, cut across on their way to Timnat leaving Samson alone. Rabbi Sabbatai Sheftel Weiss explains that the lion was a warning to Samson to gird himself with both physical strength to fight the Philistines and self-control to overcome his inclination and passion for women.

The Mishah in Ethics of Our Fathers asks 'Who is strong? One who masters his evil impulse.' (Pirkei Avot 4:1, see Green Siddur page 545). The lion is not only employed by the Shulchan Aruch as an animal which is mighty in character (Orach Chaim 1:1), but the tribe of Dan from which Samson is a descendent is blessed to be like a young lion (Deuteronomy 33:22).

When Samson turns to find bees and honey in the lion's carcass it alludes to the verse in Proverbs which says 'Have you found honey? Only eat enough for you, lest you become sated with it and vomit' (Proverbs 25:16). This was a warning to Samson not to lust after earthly physical pleasures, lest he become ensnared in the Philistine honey-trap (Mishbetzot Zahav on Judges 14:5,8).

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