

Parshat Nasso, *Mah Nishma*, Leffell School Newsletter

The classic Roman myth of Narcissus is a scary one. In one of the most famous versions of the tale, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (written in 8 C.E.), the hunter Narcissus sees his reflection in the water and falls in love with it. When he realizes his love is unrequited, he continues to stare at his own image in the water, refusing to eat or drink, eventually dying or pining away for this lost love, his own self! The myth pushes us to think about the dangers of too much self-obsession.

Sadly, narcissism hardly seems like a myth anymore. Too many of us seem to get pulled into our own reflection, focusing on ourselves so much that we forget the world around us. The Nazirite vow in this week's *parasha* offers a possible remedy to narcissism: stepping back. The Talmud presents an alternative, perhaps even a critique of the Roman myth, echoing the story with some essential differences.

Shimon HaTzaddik met a man with beautiful eyes, a lovely face, and long curly hair who had chosen to become a Nazirite. He asked him: My son, what did you see to become a nazirite, which would force you to destroy this beautiful hair, as a nazirite must cut off all his hair at the conclusion of his term?

The Nazirite responded: I went to draw water from the spring, and I looked at my reflection in the water. And my evil inclination quickly rose against me and sought to drive me from the world. I said to my evil inclination: Empty one! For what reason are you proud in a world that is not yours? I swear by the Temple service that I will become a nazirite and shave you for the sake of Heaven.

When Shimon HaTzaddik heard this response, he arose and kissed him on his head, saying: May there be more Nazirites like you in Israel, whose intentions are noble.

Babylonian Talmud Nazir 4b

The Nazirite life of asceticism is not actually the ideal; in fact, a sin offering is required for those who choose total abstinence. Instead, the Talmud's version of the story might teach us a different lesson. The Nazirite vow is a model that not only critiques narcissism, but also proposes a cure, reminding us to go inward to find our way, changing self-obsession to self-reflection and discipline. Shimon HaTzaddik's kiss is a sign of the blessing that comes when we use the "mirrors" in our lives as opportunities for growth. May the Nazirite vow remind us to let our inclinations-- whatever they may be-- move us away from narcissism and closer to who we want to be. Shabbat Shalom!