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Jews have always been a community drawn together by virtue of Torah. No matter where you may be, we welcome you to the Ziegler community through Today's Torah e-mail.

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All of five feet tall in his stiff new suit and shiny shoes, he can barely be seen over the bima. In a cracking adolescent voice, he announces, "Today I am Bar Mitzvah. Today I am a man!" Yes, you are. But what do you know about being a man? A Jewish man? What can we tell you?

His Haftorah describes the miraculous birth of Samson. Born a nazir, a holy ascetic, and blessed with superhuman strength and a voracious id, Samson's life is the diametric opposite of the Torah's ideal of righteousness. Impulsive, undisciplined, unreflective, violent, lustful, vengeful and vain, Samson is testosterone personified. He is entirely sex and violence, shamelessly pursuing his lust for women, murdering mercilessly to settle personal scores, until he is finally seduced and betrayed by the sultry Delilah whose wiles he cannot resist.

Hollywood loves this character. In 1949, Cecil B. DeMille won five Oscars for "Samson and Delilah," starring Victor Mature and Hedy Lamarr. In 1996, there was a remake for TV with Elizabeth Hurley, an Australian version in 2009 with yet another big screen remake just this year. Hollywood loves Samson because Hollywood loves testosterone. To date, we've enjoyed eight "Fast and Furious" films, twenty episodes of Marvel Comics "Avengers" (Iron Man, Hulk, Thor, Captain America, et al), twenty-one DC

Comics adventures (Superman, Batman), twenty-six James Bond movies. What does our Bar Mitzvah learn of masculinity from American popular culture? On TV, in popular music and video games, even on the evening news, men use, abuse and silence women. Violence is the emblem of true manliness. Everywhere he looks, our Bar Mitzvah finds Samson's spiritual descendants.

The Jewish tradition thought differently. Though Samson was a Biblical Judge, the sages of Jewish tradition found his character troubling. Only in his sad fate do they find morality: "Samson rebelled against God through his eyes, therefore the Philistines put out his eyes," teaches Talmud Sotah.

The sages read Samson as the Shadow, the dark underside of an ideal of Jewish masculinity. Samson is a loner; each of his feats is done by himself and for himself. The Jewish Man lives a life enveloped in family and community. Samson is a warrior; his power measured in body counts, his heroism proven in bloody battle. To the Jewish Man, violence is an anathema. The Jewish Man becomes a hero by mastering Torah and mending the world's brokenness. His aggression is sublimated into Talmudic debate, his prowess demonstrated in self-control, his valor proved in selfless acts of compassion. Samson uses women, until in the end, a woman uses him and destroys him. The Jewish Man embraces an ethic of id, the holiness of true intimacy, sharing the creation and nurturing of a family and thereby gaining a share of immortality.

For almost 20 centuries, this was the ideal of the Jewish male – scholarly, gentle, and pious. But over time this devolved into meekness, passivity, and impotence. In 1903, Chaim Nahman Bialik, poet laureate of Zionism, was sent to report on the Kishenev pogrom. He was shocked by the vicious slaughter

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