

## THE BOOK OF II SHMUEL

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### LECTURE 71: CHAPTER 6 (II)

#### THE TRANSFER OF THE ARK AND MIKHAL'S LAUGHTER

##### I. "WITH SHOUTING AND WITH SOUND OF THE HORN"

As may be recalled, following the tragic death of Uzza, David brought the process of transferring the ark to Jerusalem to a halt, and the ark remained in the house of Oved-Edom the Gittite. David wanted to know whether the entire process was a mistake, or perhaps the problem was limited to the way in which it was carried out. Indeed, before long, David learned that the process itself was fitting, and that it was appropriate to move the ark to a more respectable place:

(11) And the ark of the Lord remained in the house of Oved-Edom the Gittite three months; and the Lord blessed Oved-Edom, and all his house.

God's blessing of Oved-Edom and his house<sup>1</sup>[1] proves that the ark need not bring about harm to anyone who is in possession of it. From here, David understands that he can correct that which needs correction and proceed onward to Jerusalem:

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1 [1] In *Divrei Ha-yamim*, God's blessing of Oved-Edom is described as follows: "And Oved-Edom had sons: Shemaya the first-born, Yehozavad the second, Yoach the third, and Sakhar the fourth, and Netanel the fifth; Amiel the sixth, Yisakhar the seventh, Peultai the eighth; **for God blessed him**" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 26:4-5). Although it is clear that this is not the blessing mentioned in our chapter, which was already evident after three months, the verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim* implies that God's blessing of Oved-Edom did not come to an end even after the ark was removed from his house.

(12) And it was told to King David, saying, "The Lord has blessed the house of Oved-Edom and all that pertains unto him because of the ark of God." And David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Oved-Edom into the city of David with joy.

Were the necessary lessons really learned? The answer to this question is found in the parallel passage in I *Divrei Ha-yamim* (chapter 15). As may be recalled, there were two main problems in the first attempt to move the ark to Jerusalem: carrying the ark 1) in a cart and 2) by people who were not of the tribe of Levi. These two faults are corrected in the second attempt:

Then David said, "None ought to carry the ark of God **but the Levites**; for them has the Lord chosen to carry the ark of the Lord, and to minister unto Him for ever..." And David called for Tzadok and Evyatar the priests, and for the Levites, for Uriel, Asaya, and Yoel, Shemaya, and Eliel, and Aminadav, and said unto them, "You are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites; sanctify yourselves, both you and your brethren, that you may bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, unto the place that I have prepared for it. For because **you [bore it] not at the first**, the Lord our God made a breach upon us, for that we sought Him not according to the ordinance." So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel. And **the children of the Levites** bore the ark of God **upon their shoulders** with the bars thereon, as Moses commanded according to the word of the Lord. (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 15: 2,11-15)

During the second attempt, the ark was carried upon shoulders, and specifically upon the shoulders of the Levites. The book of *Shmuel*, on the other hand, emphasizes less the practical correction, and more the correction of the general atmosphere which underlay the halakhic problems that arose in the first attempt (as we explained in the previous lecture):

(15) **So David and all the house of Israel** brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the horn.

Let us note the similarity between this description and the description of the first attempt, as well as the difference between the two:

**(5) And David and all the house of Israel** played before the Lord with all manner of instruments made of cypress-wood, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with sistra, and with cymbals.

The two verses begin with the same words – but what a difference between them in the continuation! The second attempt was undertaken out of fear and out of recognition of the enormity of the event – "brought up the ark of the Lord" – as opposed to the first attempt, which was undertaken in an atmosphere of gaiety and with the accompaniment of "all manner of instruments made of cypress-wood, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with sistra, and with cymbals." This atmosphere totally changed in the second attempt, which was "with shouting and with the sound of the horn."

The second attempt was undertaken in an atmosphere of reverence that precedes gladness. After clear boundaries were set up, there was room for joy as well, and David expressed the quality of love with great intensity: "And David danced before the Lord with all his might" (v. 16). But this joy stemmed from the recognition of the boundaries of reverence and observance of the *mitzvoṭ*, and for this reason it was fitting joy.

This may find expression in the twofold mention of the sacrifices that were offered on that day:

**(17)...** and David offered **burnt-offerings and peace-offerings** before the Lord. **(18)** And when David had made an end of offering **the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings...**

Burnt-offerings and peace-offerings are two different kinds of sacrifices that express two different ways of understanding the connection between God and man. The burnt-offering is entirely for God; man has no part in it. It expresses the quality of fear – the distance between God and man. In a peace-offering, on the other hand, there is a part for God, a part for the priests, and a part for the person bringing the sacrifice, and it expresses the quality of love; man merits eating from God's table. But the burnt-offering always precedes the peace-offering, and the emphasis of this point in our chapter expresses the idea that the fear of God must always come first, and only at a later stage is there place for expressions of the quality of love.

## II. DAVID'S INVOLVEMENT

Another difference between the two attempts to move the ark is the special role that David plays in the second attempt, which is strongly emphasized in the verses:

(13) And it was so, that when they that bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling.<sup>2[2]</sup> (14) And **David** danced before the Lord with all his might; and **David** was girded with a linen *efod*. (15) So **David** and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn.

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2 [2] The parallel verse in *Divrei Ha-yamim* states: "And it came to pass, when God helped the Levites that bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that they sacrificed **seven bullocks and seven rams**" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 15:26). The Sages disagreed about the relationship between the verses (*Sota* 35b). According to R. Pappa bar Shemuel, "at each pace an ox and a fatling [were offered] and at each six paces seven bullocks and seven rams." R. Chisda sharply retorted: "On your theory you filled the whole of the Land of Israel with high places!" In the final analysis, however, his understanding is not essentially different: "But rather R. Chisda said: At each six paces an ox and a fatling [were offered] and at each six sets of six paces seven bullocks and seven rams."

According to the plain sense of the text, it may be suggested that only one offering was made, and this was done after the first six steps taken by the bearers of the ark. As for the apparent contradiction between the verses, it seems that "ox and fatlings" are collective nouns, and do not indicate a number (like, for example, what Yaakov said to Esav: " And I have oxen (*shor*), and asses (*va-chamor*) and flocks, and men-servants and maid-servants" [*Bereishit* 32:6]). What must still to be explained is why the offering was brought only after six steps. It may be that David and his men waited to see that nothing happened to the ark bearers, and after a few steps, when it became clear that no one suffered any harm, they saw this as a final go-ahead to continue. The Radak tried to explain why they took specifically six steps: "It seems that this was the measure that Uzza had walked when he took hold of the ark and God smote him, and once these ark bearers saw that they had taken six steps without suffering injury, they put the ark down and offered sacrifices." It is still not clear, however, why God smote Uzza only after six steps. It should be noted that this is the only place in Scripture where distance is measured in steps.

First of all, the threefold repetition of David's name stands out, as it testifies to the fact that this time David assumes responsibility and is the dominant figure in the entire process. Second, it is interesting that in many ways David serves here like a priest:

1) David is "girded with a linen *efod*," like the priests (see I *Shmuel* 22:18).

2) David himself offers sacrifices: "And David offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord" (v. 17).

3) David blesses the people, like the priests:

(18) And when David had made an end of offering the burnt-offering and the peace-offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of hosts.

Scripture seems to be emphasizing that David is not acting here like a king, who is concerned about his personal interests, but like a priest, who serves as God's agent and is concerned about his obligations toward Him. In this way, David adds a dimension of sanctity to the process of transferring the ark to Jerusalem, which contributes to a more appropriately balanced atmosphere, as was noted above.

In the end, David allows the rest of the people to participate in the joy:

(19) And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, both to men and women, to every one a loaf of bread, and a cake made in a pan, and a sweet cake.<sup>3[3]</sup> So all the people departed every one to his house.

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3 [3] The words "*eshpar*" and "*ashisha*" are difficult. Chazal (*Pesachim* 36b) understood "*eshpar*" as one sixth of a bullock (*echad mi-shisha par*), and "*ashisha*" as one sixth of an *efa* of flour or else a flask of wine. The word "*ashisha*" is also familiar to us from the verse, "Stay you me with *ashishot*, refresh me with apples" (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 2:5), and based on the parallelism in

David acts here as if it were his own celebration and thereby expresses his deep fidelity to God.

### III. WHY DID MIKHAL LAUGH AT DAVID?

Let us now move on to another dimension of the story: the clash between Mikhal and David. Mikhal sees David's merrymaking, and not only does she not identify with his joy, but she regards David with contempt:

(16) And it was so, as the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, that Mikhal the daughter of Shaul looked out at the window and saw king David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.

When David comes home in order to bless the members of his household, Mikhal unloads her negative feelings about his conduct:

(20) Then David returned to bless his household. And Mikhal the daughter of Shaul came out to meet David, and said, "How did the king of Israel get him honor today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!"

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this verse, it may be explained as "fruit." Another possible understanding is "a cluster of grapes," based on the verse: "Though they turn unto other gods, and love cakes of raisins (*ashishei anavim*)" (*Hoshea* 3:1).

Some have suggested that we are dealing here with a melding of words, and based on I *Shemuel* 14:34 – "Bring me hither **every man his ox, and every man his sheep** (*ish shoro ve-ish siyehu*)" – they understand our verse as: "And he dealt among all the people, even among the whole multitude of Israel, both to men and women, to every one a loaf of bread, and **to each a bullock and to each a sheep** (*ve-ish par echad ve-ish seh achat*." There are, however, two difficulties with this clever explanation: First, "sheep" is masculine, and it does not stand to reason that Scripture would write "*seh achat*;" and second, the word "*ashisha*" is written in plene form, and it is difficult to disregard the letter *yod* in the middle.

According to their plain sense, Mikhal's words express the position that a king must conduct himself in a restrained and respectable fashion, and not like an ordinary person. David does not hold his tongue, but rather fires back at Mikhal:

(21) And David said unto Mikhal, "Before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me prince over the people of the Lord, over Israel, before the Lord will I make merry.  
(22) I will hold myself even more lightly esteemed than this and be humble in my eyes; and with the handmaids whom you have spoken of, with them will I get me honor."

David responds to Mikhal by saying that he does not see any diminution of his honor in the way he acted, for as long as this conduct is performed "before the Lord," it expresses the service of God in the most perfect manner, without any intermingling of personal honor. David's words eventually became a symbol for serving God in joy:

The happiness with which a person should rejoice in the fulfillment of the *mitzvot* and the love of God who commanded them is a great service...

[In contrast,] anyone who lowers himself and thinks lightly of his person in these situations is [truly] a great person, worthy of honor, who serves God out of love. **Thus, David, King of Israel**, declared [II *Shmuel* 6:22]: "I will hold myself even more lightly esteemed than this and be humble in my eyes," because there is no greatness or honor other than celebrating before God, as [II *Shmuel* 6:16] states: "King David was leaping and dancing before the Lord." (Rambam, *Hilkhos Shofar Sukka Ve-Lulav* 8:15)

David also alludes to Mikhal that she is continuing in the path of her father Shaul, who in the end was deposed by God and whom David was chosen to replace. Indeed, we find that on various occasions, Shaul gave priority to his personal honor over obedience to God. One of the striking examples of this is found in Shaul's conduct during the war against Amalek. Shaul did not fulfill God's command in its entirety, but rather spared Agag's

life<sup>4</sup>[4] and allowed the people to take spoil, and acted in a way to increase his personal honor: "And it was told to Shmuel, saying, 'Shaul came to Carmel, and, behold, **he is setting him up a monument**'" (I *Shmuel* 15:12). Later in that same story, he gives explicit expression to his concern about his own honor: "Then he said, 'I have sinned; yet **honor me** now, I pray you, before the elders of my people, and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God'" (ibid. v. 30). When compared with Shaul's behavior, David's humility and self-effacement before God is particularly striking.

There seems, however, to be yet another layer to this clash between Mikhal and David. We noted in chapter 3 (lecture 63) the tortuous relationship between David and Mikhal, which started with Mikhal's one-sided love, and ended with a total rift between them. Despite everything, David made sure that Mikhal was returned to him, to the great sorrow of her husband, Palti ben Layish. We noted that Scripture does not describe Mikhal's feelings at that juncture, and this may indicate some hidden hope that still nested in her heart that past experience notwithstanding, David might still grow to love her. We see from our chapter that this was not the case. David seems to have remained distant from Mikhal. When she saw David's great zeal in his service of God, which stood in such sharp contrast to his attitude towards her, an argument broke out about the proper conduct of a king, the basis of which was Mikhal's frustration regarding David's relationship with her.

An allusion to this may be found in a unique expression appearing in our story: "That Mikhal the daughter of Shaul looked **out at the window** (*be'ad ha-chalon*)." This expression previously appeared at the high point of Mikhal's love for David: "So Mikhal let David down **through the window** (*be'ad ha-chalon*); and he went, and fled, and escaped" (I *Shmuel* 19:12). Mikhal's entire life moved between these two windows: between the window that she had opened for David, based on her absolute commitment to save her beloved husband, and the window through which she now looks down upon David with a sense of alienation, and thus effectively closes the last window of opportunity to create a meaningful relationship between them.<sup>5</sup>[5]

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4 [4] In our lecture there (no. 27), we explained the significance of sparing Agag's life, which can be added to what is stated here.

5 [5] This verse may stand in contrast to what is stated in the story involving Avimelekh, Yitzchak, and Sara: "And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Avimelekh king of the Philistines **looked out a window**, and saw, and, behold, Yitzchak was sporting (*metzachek*) with Rivka his wife" (*Bereishit* 26:8). There, looking out the window brought Avimelekh to see Yitzchak "sporting" with Rivka, whereas here looking out the window brought

#### IV. THE CONSEQUENCES

The chapter ends with a note that for once and for all seals the disconnection between the house of Shaul and the house of David:

(23) And Mikhal the daughter of Shaul had no child unto the day of her death.<sup>6[6]</sup>

The emphasis placed here on the fact that Mikhal is the "daughter of Shaul" further sharpens the message lying in our verse: Since Mikhal chose to walk in the ways of her father and prefer the honor of the king to the honor of God, she did not merit giving birth to a son to David, and no trace of the house of Shaul remained in the royal house of the people of Israel.

Thus, the connection between the house of Shaul and the house of David came to an absolute end. Previously we noted that the possibility existed of continuing the connection between the two houses, based on Yehonatan's vision in his last meeting with David: "You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto you" (I *Shmuel* 23:17). We also noted the reason that this vision was not realized: Yehonatan's decision to remain with his father during his lifetime, and thus also in his death. Not a trace remained of the two possibilities that had existed to integrate scions of the house of Shaul in the kingdom of the house of David.

Nevertheless, *Chazal* provided this story with a positive end:

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Mikhal to see David "making merry" (*mesachek*) before God, without her (my thanks to R. Yaakov Beasley for this observation).

6 [6] This verse seems to contradict what is stated later (21:8): "But the king took the two sons of Ritzpa the daughter of Aya... **and the five sons of Mikhal** the daughter of Shaul, whom she bore to Adriel the son of Barzilai the Mecholaitite." But this verse is difficult in itself (for Adriel's wife was Meirav, and not Mikhal; see I *Shemuel* 18:19), and therefore the proper place to discuss it is in chapter 21.

Three women died in childbirth: Our matriarch Rachel, the daughter-in-law of Eli, and Mikhal the daughter of Shaul... "And Mikhal the daughter of Shaul had no child unto the day of her death" – R. Yehuda bar Simon said: Unto the day of her death, she had no child, [but] on the day of her death she had a child. This is what is written: "The sixth, ltre'am by Eglah his wife" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 3:3). Why was she called Eglah? R. Yehuda bar R. Simon said: Because she bleated and died like a calf (*eglah*). (*Midrash Shmuel, parasha 11*)

The idea that Mikhal died in childbirth seems to stem from the great similarity between the story of David and Mikhal and the story of Yaakov and Rachel, a similarity which we noted at length in our lectures on I *Shmuel* (especially chapters 18-19; lectures 36-37). But in addition to the continuation of the correspondence, there is here an optimistic message, which expresses a positive change on the part of Mikhal, in the wake of which she merited giving birth on the day of her death, and thus leaving a remembrance of the house of Shaul in the house of David.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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