

# The Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash

Themes and Ideas in the Haftara  
Yeshivat Har Etzion

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**This haftara series is dedicated in memory of our beloved  
Chaya Leah bat Efrayim Yitzchak (Mrs. Claire Reinitz), zichronah livracha, by  
her family.**

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## ***VAYECHI***

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**Dedicated by Aaron and Tzipora Ross and family in memory of our grandparents  
Shmuel Nachamu ben Shlomo Moshe HaKohen, Chaya bat Yitzchak Dovid, and Shimon  
ben Moshe,  
whose yahrzeits are this week.**

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## **DOUBLE DANGER**

**Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein**

## **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YAAKOV AND DAVID**

The *haftara* for *Parashat Vayechi* (I *Melakhim* 2:1-12) informs us of David's last testament to Shelomo, when he is lying on his deathbed. In this, of course, the *haftara* is similar to the *parasha*, the focus of which is Ya'akov's blessings to his

sons. Unlike Yaakov's blessings, which relate to his sons' basic character traits and tell of a distant destiny described in general terms, David's testament includes detailed instructions that are meant to be executed immediately. The difference between the two situations is clear. Yaakov is a founding father outlining the course of events across the generations, and his perspective is long-term. David, on the other hand, in addition to being a founding father, is also a political figure, so that besides his concern about the distant future – "That the Lord may continue His word which He spoke concerning me, saying, If your children take heed to their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you (said He) a man on the throne of Israel (I *Melakhim* 2:4) - he also sees fit to offer Shelomo guidance with respect to present needs that require an immediate answer in order to establish his rule.

The most important element of these immediate instructions is connected to the punishment of those who rebelled against David, and the reward of his allies. The proposed punishment involves the use of the king's authority to execute offenders. Imposing the death penalty is not a simple matter; to understand its use we must consider a talmudic passage in *Megila* and its analysis by R. Yehuda Rosennes (Constantinople, beginning of the eighteenth century, author of the *Mishne Le-Melekh* on the Rambam. Among his other works, R. Rosennes authored a book of discourses, in which he dedicated a large part of discourses 11-12 to the status of King David. His point of departure is a fundamental question regarding the laws pertaining to kings, namely, the relationship between the man and the office.

## **THE MAN AND THE OFFICE**

Let us explain. In each of the various realms of Halakha that deal with a significant office, we must consider the relationship between the status of the person and the office that he occupies, with respect to the *halakhot* applying in that realm. Does a particular law relate to his personal status as a distinguished person or to the fact that he fills a certain office? For illustrative purposes, let us consider the example of the High Priest. The High Priest functions as a High Priest, performs the parts of the service that are uniquely his, offers the sacrifices that are unique to him, and also enjoys the personal status of the sanctity of the High Priest. Ordinarily, these two things – the sanctity and the office – rest in the same person. There are, however, situations in which these two components part company. For example, a High Priest

who has retired from office retains his personal status, but no longer functions as a High Priest. In such a case, the laws governing his personal status, e.g., the prohibition to marry a widow or to defile himself through contact with deceased relatives, apply to him, but he does not offer the special sacrifices of a High Priest (the bull on *Yom Kippur* and the special meal-offering brought every day), because these depend on the office of the High Priest and not on his personal sanctity. The reverse situation – a High Priest who fills the office of High Priest, but does not enjoy his personal status – is also possible. This might have been the case with Moshe Rabbenu during the seven days of *milu'im* and/or in the wilderness. During that period, he was governed by the laws connected to the office of the High Priest, but not by the laws depending upon the sanctity of the priesthood.<sup>[1]</sup> Another example is a Torah scholar. If he forgets what he had learned, he ceases to be a Torah scholar who functions as a source of Torah, but he retains his personal standing ("for the tablets [of the law] and the broken tablets rested in the Ark"). The law that people are obligated to show him honor rests on the assumption that the honor due to Torah scholars depends upon the person and not upon the office.

## **PERSONAL STATUS OR ROYAL NEEDS**

Let us now consider the king. With regard to the king there are also two elements. On the one hand, he is anointed with the anointing oil, and enjoys a unique personal status, but on the other hand, he is the head of state and its ruler. The question, therefore, arises regarding all the laws stated about him, whether they follow from his personal status or from the needs of the kingdom. In classical Yeshiva terms, we might ask whether a particular law is a law regarding the king or a law regarding the kingdom. This dilemma was well known to *Chazal* and it received its classic formulation in *Yerushalmi Horayot* (3:2):

Rav Chuna said: Those six months during which David was running away from Avshalom, a she-goat would atone for him as for an ordinary person.

The *Yerushalmi* raises a question about the law that would have applied to David during the period that he fled from Avshalom and was deposed from the throne: Would he have been obligated to bring the special sin-offering assigned to the king ("when a ruler has sinned"; *Vayikra* 4:22) or the regular sin-offering of an ordinary

person? At that time David still enjoyed the personal status of king, but he no longer functioned as king, heading the kingdom and running its affairs. The Gemara's uncertainty relates to the question whether the king is assigned a special sin-offering on account of his personal sanctity, and the significance of the sin in light of that, or whether this sin-offering is meant for a person who holds the high office and authority of king, and whose sins therefore have special meaning. Rav Chuna's (= Huna's) resolution is that this law is connected to royal authority, since the verse refers to the *nasi* (ruler), a term denoting authority.<sup>[2]</sup>

Another rabbinic source that deals frontally with this point served the *Parashat Derakhim* as the basis for his discussion. I refer to an *aggada* in tractate *Megila* (14a) which describes the meeting between David and Avigayil in the context of the incident involving Naval the Carmelite. That text reads as follows:

"As she rode on the ass, that she came down by the covert [*seter*] of the hill" (I *Shemuel* 25:20). "By the covert of the hill" – it should have said "from the hill"! Rabba bar Shemuel said: Regarding matters of blood coming from the concealed parts [*setarim*] of the body. She took a blood stain and showed it to him.<sup>[3]</sup> He said so her: Do we rule on blood stains at night? She said to him: Do we rule on capital cases at night? He said to her: He rebelled against the king, and requires no judgment! She said to him: Shaul is still alive, and you are still not the legitimate king. He said to her: "Blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you who have kept me this day from coming to shed blood" (ibid. v. 33).

The *Parashat Derakhim* understands that the argument between David and Avigayil revolves around the law regarding one who rebels against the king; does it apply to one who rebels against the person of a king, in which case Naval was liable for the death penalty because he had rebelled against David who at the time had already been anointed king, or does it apply only to one who rebels against the kingdom, thus endangering its stability, but not against one who hurts the king as a person. At the time, David enjoyed the sanctity of a king on the personal level, but not the power of a king, for Sha'ul was still the actual ruler. David's assumption that Naval was liable for the death penalty because he had rebelled against the king assumes that this law depends upon the personal status of the king. To this Avigayil answered: "You are not yet the legitimate king"; that is to say, David does not yet enjoy the authority of a king, and thus an opponent is not governed by the law of one who rebels against the kingdom. Avigayil understood that it is the rebellion against the ruling

power that incurs liability for the death penalty. Indeed, her position is more reasonable, both on logical grounds, for the authority to put a rebel to death seems to follow from the fact that he poses a danger to the community, and also textually, for the one verse that explicitly deals with the matter relates to Yehoshua, who enjoyed the authority of a king, without the accompanying personal status.<sup>[4]</sup> And indeed, David accepts her position and does not kill Naval.

## RETURNING TO THE *HAFTARA*

In light of this discussion, the *Parashat Derakhim* examines many episodes in David's life. He relates to our *haftara* hardly at all, but we can analyze it in light of what he says there. The main question that must be addressed is whether David wanted to kill Shimi and Yoav because of their wickedness, i.e., because of sins that they had committed in the past; or did he view them as posing a threat to the present stability of the kingdom, inasmuch as they were likely to incite against Shelomo. In the wake of the Gemara's conclusion that David accepted the position of Avigayil, our chapter should also be understood in light of the principle of harming the stability of a kingdom and posing a danger to it.

Shelomo was a young king who had ascended the throne, following a governmental struggle that was by no means simple, by virtue of his father and mother and others who supported him. The actions to crown him king were taken on the initiative of David (after he had been persuaded by Bat-Sheva and Natan), and Shelomo's victory over Adoniyahu was achieved by virtue of others – Scripture does not describe any action taken by Shelomo (see chap. 1, verses 32-50). The assertion that "King David had made Shelomo king" (v. 43) describes not only the handing over of authority, but also the tactical moves that ensured his rising to power. In such circumstances, Shelomo being a young and tender lad, the danger presented by powerful elements hostile to Shelomo and frustrated by their own downfall was great. If David had once testified about himself, "I am this day weak, though anointed king: and these men the sons of Tzeruya are too hard for me: the Lord shall reward this doer of evil according to his wickedness" (II *Shemuel* 3:39), and if he saw Yoav as a threat to the stability of his kingdom, then all the more so should the quiet and passive Shelomo feel that way. It is not for naught that David commands Shelomo at the very beginning of the *haftara*, "Be strong yourself, and show yourself a man" (v. 2). This statement clearly reflects David's concerns that Shelomo had not yet reached

manhood. Indeed, the author of the *Seder Olam* gave this biological expression, arguing that Shelomo was only twelve years old when he became king. David was, therefore, concerned that Yoav would wait for the right moment to undermine the stability of the regime, and that an ambitious person like Yoav who does not recoil from the use of force, would certainly fight against Shelomo sooner or later. It was, therefore, necessary for security reasons to kill Yoav as a rebel and not allow him to live as a walking time bomb.

The same argument can be made regarding Shimi. Shimi was not merely another bitter old man who blasphemes for his own pleasure, but rather the exiled spiritual leader of those who denied the legitimacy of the kingdom of David and Shelomo. If Yoav was the potential military leader of Shelomo's enemies, then Shimi was the charismatic spiritual leader who threatened the regime. His very presence was a danger to the regime, and he too had to be put to death because of the threat that he presented. It should be added that the *Parashat Derakhim* argues that David had already earlier recognized the danger, but he did not want to kill Shimi, because in the current circumstances, he thought that the damage would be greater than the benefit, and that killing Shimi would be more dangerous to the regime than keeping him alive. Nevertheless, both then and now, Shimi presented a danger to the kingdom, and only now when the circumstances changed in the wake of Shelomo's rise to the throne, did David think that the time had arrived to remove the danger.

The concluding verse of the *haftara*, "Then Shelomo sat upon the throne of David his father; and his kingdom was firmly established," attests to David's success and to the centrality of the establishment of Shelomo's throne. Already in the continuation of the chapter, when the prophet relates how Shelomo executed David's instructions, we see an authoritative leader who had strengthened himself and become a man. David merited that Shelomo became an authoritative and self-secure king who led his kingdom effectively.

The entire story as presented thus far is one possible reading of the *haftara*, that follows the proposal put forward by the *Parashat Derakhim* regarding other chapters of David's life, and rests on seeing the political situation, during the sensitive period of the transition of power in the wake of a rebellion and attempted coup, as particularly fragile. This is a legitimate interpretation that relies on the exegetical approach of a great Torah authority.

## THE SPIRITUAL LEGACY OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID

We wish, however, in the second half of this *shiur*, to propose a different approach. The opening verse of the *haftara* that serves as the chapter's heading is "Now the days of David drew near that he should die." If we compare it to the heading of the *haftara* of *Chayyei Sara* taken from the previous chapter – "Now King David was old, advanced in years" – we see that there are two differences between the verses. The more striking of the two is the emphasis on the kingdom in chapter 1 (the *haftara* of *Chayyei Sara*) as opposed to the omission of the title "king" from David's name in chapter 2. The significance of this difference is that the point of view of chapter 1 is the political struggle over the inheritance of King David's kingdom; the story revolves around the intrigues surrounding the selection of an heir. Adoniyahu aspires to ascend to the throne illegally, and the story focuses on the way he was stopped by Bat-Sheva and Natan. This mission, however, already succeeds in the first chapter. In the continuation of the chapter, in the verses that are not part of the *haftara* of *Chayyei Sara*, we read about David's efforts on behalf of Shelomo, his crowning of the true heir, and the end of Adoniyahu's rebellion. The chapter ends with the dispersal of Adoniyahu's supporters, "And all the guests that were with Adoniyahu trembled, and rose up, and went every man his way" (I *Melakhim* 1:49), and Adoniyahu's submission to Shelomo, "And he came and bowed himself down to King Shelomo" (ibid. v. 53). Thus the transition from King David to King Shelomo is completed, and the struggle over his political legacy comes to an end.

Therefore, the subject matter of chapter 2 is not the resolution of the struggle over the kingdom, but rather the spiritual legacy of the house of David. The house of David is not only a royal regime, but also a spiritual ideal. Just as Israel was crowned with the crown of Torah and the crown of the priesthood, so too was it crowned with the crown of the kingdom which David acquired for his descendants. The house of David is mentioned daily in our prayers, not because of its political achievements, but because of the sanctity of its kingdom. In addition to his concern about governmental stability, David was also concerned about the spiritual-moral nature of the house of David.

The beginning of the *haftara* emphasizes this point. David opens not with practical instructions for Shelomo, but with a commandment regarding the appropriate spiritual objective and a general declaration regarding the goals of the monarchy of the Davidic house:

And keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Torah of Moshe, that you may prosper in all that you do, and wherever you turn yourself: that the Lord may continue His work which He spoke concerning me, saying, If your children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you (said He) a man on the throne of Israel. (vv. 3-4)

Thus, he commands his household as head of the Davidic monarchy and anointed one of God who instructs the kings of the house of David about the path that they must follow. This issue was of great concern to David and it rises in various other places in Scripture.<sup>[5]</sup> He is not only concerned about punishment for sin, but rather this is the realization of the destiny of the kingdom of the Davidic house.

The second difference between the opening verses of the *haftara* of *Chayyei Sara* and our chapter is that there it says that David was old and here it says that his days drew near that he should die. As we explained at the time, David's old age and his inability to function signal the beginning of a struggle over the inheritance and the question who will be his heir. The subject matter of the first chapter is the question of the heir, and therefore David is described as being "old." In the second chapter, on the other hand, this struggle has already been decided, and the subject matter now is David's spiritual legacy and testament. A person does not give such a testament when he reaches old age, but rather when he is on the verge of dying and passing from this world. And thus the opening verse notes that David is close to dying.

## **THE FEAR FOR THE SPIRITUAL CHARACTER OF THE KINGDOM**

It is in this light that we should examine David's instructions to Shelomo concerning Shimi and Yoav. According to the previous understanding, we assumed that the transition from the religious commandment to the political one reflects concern for the stability of Shelomo's kingdom. Now, we wish to examine a second possibility, that David's instructions regarding Yoav and Shimi were also part of his spiritual testament. From this perspective, David sees Shimi and Yoav as opposing his spiritual legacy and endangering it. We are not dealing with a personal grudge, but with the assumption that the failure to strike at Yoav and Shimi will cast a significant stain on the house of David. If the founding father of the royal dynasty will be perceived by the people as granting them protection, it will give them royal legitimacy and they will be regarded as important personalities from the period of the previous king.

David's defense of Shimi at the time of his offense, in the wake of Shimi's statement that he comes "first of all the house of Yosef" (II *Shemuel* 19:21) to join the king, certainly allows room for the assumption that David accepted him as an ally, and therefore defended him and swore to him. Such a notion, that a blasphemer who cursed God's anointed one, denying thereby the world of sanctity, should join David's camp, would cast a spiritual stain on his kingdom, and therefore David, who knows very well who Shimi is, instructs Shelomo that he not clear him.

## **THE DANGER OF THE IMPERVIOUS AND AGGRESSIVE WARRIOR**

The same applies with respect to David's attitude towards Yoav. While Yoav was an ally of David who demonstrated great self-sacrifice in his regard, David had always felt that the world of the sons of Tzeruya was founded on aggression and imperviousness to others. The image of the warrior which is antithetical to sanctity and stands in absolute contradiction to Judaism's outlook, is reflected in the personalities of the sons of Tzeruya. In several places in the book of *Shemuel*, David warns about this and presents the sons of Tzeruya as endangering his kingdom:

And I am this day weak, though anointed king, and these men the sons of Tzeruya are too hard for me: the Lord shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness. (II *Shemuel* 3:39)

And David said, What have I to do with you, you sons of Tzeruya, that you should this day be a hindrance to me? Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel, for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? (II *Shemuel* 19:23)

*Chazal* identified David with "Adino Ha-Etzni – when sitting and studying Torah, he made himself pliant like a worm, and when going out to war, he hardened himself like a tree" (*Mo'ed Katan* 16b). But Yoav cast a great stain on that. Yoav's status within the framework of David's kingdom only intensified the problem.

In this context, it is very important to pay attention to the place where Yoav sought refuge and to the symbolic meaning of his action. Yoav's fleeing to the altar (2:28-34) and his attempt to hold its horns are the sharpest symbolic expression of the abyss between him and David and Shelomo. In Yoav's eyes, the altar is a place ruled by the sword and killing, and just as they are legitimate at the altar, so Yoav's aggressive use of the sword is justified. David and Shelomo, in contrast, understand the altar as a place where the spirit overpowers the sword and subjugates it to its values. According to them, the altar is not Yoav's ally, but the absolute antithesis of his world.

Had Yoav not followed Adoniyahu, it is possible that David could have reconciled himself with his status. However, Yoav's mobilization on behalf of Adoniyahu testifies to the way he was liable to use the traits that David so feared. Since Adoniyahu was routed, the fear is not necessarily for the stability of the regime, but for its spiritual character.

## **AN AMORAIC CONTROVERSY**

The two theses that we have proposed seem to underlie the two positions found in *Chazal* regarding the killing of Yoav. The Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (49a) addresses the issue of Yoav's execution at the hand of Shelomo and presents two opinions. The first argues that Yoav was judged for the killing of Avner and Amasa,

while the second maintains that he was judged as one who rebelled against the kingdom.

According to the second opinion, Yoav was put to death because of the danger that he posed to the stability of the regime and because of his rebellion against the kingdom. The first opinion does not see Yoav's execution as connected to rebellion, but rather to other factors. It seems, however, that we are not dealing here with the ordinary liability for capital punishment in the case of murder, for there are several difficulties with such an assumption. Besides the question regarding the degree to which were met the requirements for capital punishment (warning, etc.), surely had Yoav been liable for execution for murder, he should have been judged at the time, and David should not have mentioned him in his last testament. David mentioned Yoav in his instructions to Shelomo, not because of Yoav's personal liability for the death penalty, but because of the threat that Yoav posed to the Davidic monarchy. Since, according to this opinion, we are dealing here with a stain from the past, and not on some future danger, it seems that it sees in Yo'av's murderousness a moral stain that threatened the legacy of the house of David.

And indeed, Avner and Amasa were killed by Yoav, purportedly, for the sake of the kingdom, but with no real justification. Thus, Yoav crossed the lines between legitimate sovereign action and destructive aggression that exploits the regime and its power. Furthermore, the crossing of the lines in these two cases raised the suspicion that Yoav and his brothers may have acted also in other cases out of pure aggressiveness, and without political justification. It was for this reason that David was concerned about the stain that would adhere to his kingdom, and therefore before he died he ordered his son and heir to take action against these dangerous forces.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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[1] Regarding what is found in this paragraph, see *Yoma* 73a and *Avoda Zara* 34a.

[2] Compare *Bavli, Horayot* 11b (before the Mishna).

[3] Avigayil came to David with a question regarding a blood stain in connection with the laws of *nidda*.

[4] This assertion, like others made here, requires additional discussion, and consideration of the literature on the issue. A *shiur* that deals with the *haftarot* is not the proper forum for such a task. The interested reader can find a wider and more systematic discussion of the issue in the series of *shiurim* on the Rambam's *Hilkhot Melakhim* that I wrote for the VBM several years ago.

[5] See II *Shemuel* 23:1-7; *Tehilim* 89:20-38; *Tehilim* 132:11-18; and see II *Shemuel* 7:8-29.