

THE BOOK OF SHMUEL
LECTURE 33: CHAPTER 17
DAVID AND GOLYAT (PART II)

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V. "The Man Who Kills Him"

While he is in the Israelite camp, David hears of the prize promised to the one who kills Golyat:

(25) And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man that is come up? Surely to taunt Israel is he come up; and it shall be, that the man who kills him, the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter, and make his father's house free in Israel."¹[1]

Prizes promised to those who emerge victorious in battle are familiar to us from other places. At the beginning of the book of *Shoftim*, we are told about Kalev ben Yefuneh's proposal: "He who smites Kiryat-Sefer and takes it, to him will I give Akhsa my daughter as a wife" (*Shoftim* 1:12). And prior to the battle for Zion, David proclaims: "Whoever smites the Yevusi first shall be chief and captain" (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 11:6). Nevertheless, the prize that is promised here appears to be on a grander scale, for it includes economic components as well as personal status – family connection to the king.

This prize attests to two things. First, it gives expression to Shaul's personal intervention in the matter. It was already noted that it was Shaul who should have gone out to fight Golyat; the personal prize offered by Shaul emphasizes his personal interest in having someone else do the job in his place.²[2] Second, the prize illustrates the enormity of Israel's fear to meet Golyat's challenge. This impression is reinforced by the fact that even this grand prize fails to persuade anyone to accept the task. This picture is further supported by David's question:

(26) And David spoke to the men that stood by him, saying, "What shall be done to the man that kills this Pelishti and takes away the taunt from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Pelishti, that he should have taunted the armies of the living God?"

David's question can be understood as a simple request for information, stemming from a desire to hear details about the promised prize. According to Ralbag, David understood these events as the beginning of the realization of his anointment as king:

Now David volunteered to fight the Pelishti as soon as he heard what would be done to the man who kills him... For he relied on the fact that Shmuel had designated him for the kingship, and it was as if he thought that this would be the means to fulfill the will of God regarding the flowering of his kingdom. For as the son-in-law of the king it would be possible for him to successfully reach kingship.

It is possible, however, that David's question was not a simple request for information, but rather an exclamation of his great astonishment. After hearing about the promised reward, David expressed his astonishment about the very need for such a great prize; surely every man in Israel must have a personal interest in removing the reproach from Israel. Who is this uncircumcised Pelishti that he can taunt the armies of the living God, and everyone is so afraid of him?!

A simple proof in support of this explanation is the fact that David does not content himself with a single answer, but rather asks again in disbelief about the nature of this unjustified reward:

(27) And the people answered him after this manner, saying, "So shall it be done to the man that kills him..." (30) And he turned away from him toward another, and spoke after the same manner; and the people answered him after the former manner.

This also seems to be the way to understand the fact that his words eventually reach Shaul:

(31) And when the words were heard which David spoke, they rehearsed them before Shaul; and he was taken to him.

The time of the meeting between Shaul and David has now arrived. On the one side there is a frightened king, who is looking for someone to accept upon himself a mission that is rightly the king's and who is ready to promise great rewards in exchange; on the other side is a young man, who does not understand why no one has gone out to fight the uncircumcised Pelishti and who is filled with faith in victory over one who taunts the armies of the living God.

VI. David Before Shaul

Although David's readiness to go out himself and fight Golyat is implicit in his question (as I understand it) of why such a great prize must be offered for volunteering for a mission that should not involve any internal struggle, nevertheless, up until this point David has said nothing explicit about the matter. Now, as he stands before Shaul, David expresses for the first time in a straightforward manner his desire to fight Golyat:

(32) And David said to Shaul, "Let no man's heart fail within him; ³ your servant will go and fight with this Pelishti."

At this point, Shaul rejects David's proposal:

(33) And Shaul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Pelishti to fight with him; for you are but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."

With these words, Shaul continues with the approach that he has taken up until now, judging the situation from a non-faith-based perspective and without considering the possibility of Divine deliverance even when the balance of forces is tipped in the other direction. Scripture may be employing irony when it puts into Shaul's mouth the description of Golyat as "a man of war," ignoring the fact that "the Lord is **a man of war**, the Lord is His name" (*Shemot* 15:3).

In response, David persuades Shaul of his fitness for the mission by telling him of his killing in the past of a lion and a bear. First, he relates the facts:

(34) **And David** said unto Shaul, "Your servant kept his father's sheep; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, (35) I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. (36) Your servant smote both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Pelishti shall be as one of them, seeing he has taunted the armies of the living God."

What does this story mean? Attention should be paid to the fact that David's words are divided into two (as is indicated by the bold typeface). David describes how he killed the lion and the bear, using a series of verbs – "I went out... and smote him... and delivered it... I caught him... and smote him, and slew him." We are left with the impression that David is boasting of his strength. Shaul does not seem to react to any of this, and in a certain sense he is disappointed, for the courage to stand up to a lion or a bear does not guarantee victory over a man of war like Golyat. David therefore adds another statement, which changes the picture entirely:

(37) **And David** said, "The Lord who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Pelishti."

Only now, when David expresses his trust in God and states that it was He who gave him strength and saved him from the lion and the bear and it is He who will also save him from the hand of the Pelishti, does Shaul agree that

a special person is standing before him, a person whose natural strengths accord with his spiritual power:

And Shaul said unto David, "Go, and the Lord shall be with you."⁴^[4]

Without a doubt, David was graced with courage and might, but he still had to remember at all times that his courage and strength stem from God; never was he to remove this understanding from his consciousness.

In any event, this story may contain another message. It was noted in chapter 9 that Scripture refers to the king as "*nagid*," and that the meaning of this term is "shepherd" (see II *Shmuel* 5:2). The role of the leader of Israel parallels the role of a shepherd who leads his flock and protects it from all harm. Here, David describes his devotion to his flock, which brought him to go out to fight against a lion and a bear in order to insure his flock's welfare. It is possible, then, that these words of David are directed against Shaul, who is not acting with the same devotion towards his flock/people, and is not going out to battle in order to save them.

After Shaul agrees that David will go out to fight Golyat, Scripture records a short episode:

(38) And Shaul clad David with his apparel, and he put a helmet⁵^[5] of brass upon his head, and he clad him with a coat of mail. (39) And David girded his sword upon his apparel, and he essayed to go, [but could not]; for he had not tried it. And David said unto Shaul, "I cannot go with these; for I have not tried them." And David put them off him.

What does this portrayal mean? First, it is significant that Shaul dresses David in Shaul's own apparel. This act may attest to personal intimacy, as does Yonatan's act in the next chapter: "And Yonatan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his apparel, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle" (18:4). It may also symbolize a transfer of authority, as we find in other contexts. It is in this manner, for example, that the High Priesthood is passed over to Elazar prior to Aharon's death: "Take Aharon and Elazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Chor. And strip Aharon of his garments, and put them upon Elazar his son. And Aharon shall be gathered to his people, and shall die there" (*Bamidbar* 20:25-26). This is also one way to understand what Eliyahu did when he came to anoint Elisha as prophet in his place: "And Eliyahu passed by him, and cast his mantle on him" (I *Melakhim* 19:19). The fact that Shaul dresses David in his apparel symbolizes, then, the beginning of the realization of Shmuel's prophecy, which also related with Shaul's clothing: "...He laid

hold upon the skirt of his robe, and it rent. And Shmuel said unto him, 'The Lord has rent the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you'" (16:27-28).

This picture, however, also contains an ironic element. Shaul sees the battle as an ordinary battle, and David as an ordinary warrior, and he therefore tries to outfit him with the best possible battle gear: his own equipment. It seems, however, that David already understands that this battle will not be fought in the manner chosen by the Pelishti. In that manner, he would have no realistic possibility of victory, and David does not expect a miracle running so counter to nature, victory in a face-to-face battle with a well-armed giant. David understands that the key to victory – with the help of God, but in a way that appears to be natural – lies in his ability to exploit the Pelishti's weak spots, while utilizing his own natural talents.

VII. David Versus Golyat

David chooses to use his shepherd's tools and stones that he finds in the brook:

(40) And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, even in his scrip; and his sling was in his hand; and he drew near to the Pelishti.

Let us consider David's deceptive maneuver. David hides the five smooth stones that he removes from the brook, holds his staff in one hand and his sling in the other, thus blurring the manner in which he chooses to fight Golyat. Corresponding to this delicate and sophisticated move, Scripture describes at length a series of crude actions taken by the Pelishti giant; these are divided over four verses in a graded structure that is striking to the eye:

I	(41) And the Pelishti came nearer and nearer unto David; and the man that bore the shield went before him.
II	(42) And when the Pelishti looked about , and saw David, he disdained him; for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and withal of a fair countenance.
III	(43) And the Pelishti said unto David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with staffs?" And the Pelishti cursed David by his god.
IV	(44) And the Pelishti said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field."

The Pelishti's self-confidence increases from moment to moment. At the first stage (I), Golyat is aware that a representative of Israel has finally taken up his challenge to fight. Golyat hasn't yet seen David, but he carefully advances to the designated arena, and the man that bears his shield goes before him in order to protect him. However, when the Pelishti sees David

from a distance (11),6[6] he is surprised to see a ruddy youth of handsome appearance, and demonstrates the disdain in which he holds him. When he is already standing across from David, he expresses his scorn – "Am I a dog, that you come to me with staffs" – and unknowingly, falls into the trap that David had set for him: instead of seeing a staff and a sling, Golyat sees "staffs." In his arrogance, Golyat curses David with his god,7[7] and then the actual battle begins, with additional expressions of disdain for David.

At this point, David delivers his speech, full of trust and faith in God:

(45) Then said David to the Pelishti, "You come to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. (46) This day will the Lord deliver you into my hand; and I will smite you, and take your head from off you; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Pelishtim this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. (47) And that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hand."

These words speak for themselves. Nevertheless, attention should be paid to a point that is stressed in David's words – the matter of the sword and the spear: "You come to me with **a sword**, and with **a spear**, and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel... and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with **sword** and **spear**...." This emphasis is not by chance, for once again, later in the chapter, Scripture emphasizes: "So David prevailed over the Pelishti with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Pelishti, and slew him; but there was no **sword** in the hand of David" (v. 50). Moreover, in the end, Golyat's sword serves only one purpose: "And David ran, and stood over the Pelishti, and took **his sword**, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith" (v. 51).

The twofold contrast between Divine deliverance and the sword and the spear is directed first and foremost at Golyat, but it seems to be aimed also at Shaul. Many times throughout the book, Shaul appears together with his sword and spear – as one who is in constant need of personal protection and does not feel safe without his sword and spear in his hand:

So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was **neither sword nor spear** found in the hand of any of the people that were with Shaul and Yonatan; but **with Shaul** and with Yonatan his son was there found. (13:22)

And David played with his hand, as he did day by day; and Shaul had **his spear** in his hand. And Shaul cast **the spear**. (18:10-11)

And an evil spirit from the Lord was upon Shaul, as he sat in his house with **his spear in his hand; and David was playing with his hand**. And Shaul sought to smite David even to the wall with **the spear**; but he slipped away out of Shaul's presence, and he smote **the spear** into the wall. (19:9-10)

And Yehonatan answered Shaul his father, and said unto him, "Wherefore should he be put to death? What has he done?" And Shaul cast **his spear** at him to smite him. (20:32-33)

And, behold, Shaul lay sleeping within the barricade, with **his spear** stuck in the ground at his head; and Avner and the people lay round about him. (26:7)8[8]

The contrast between Shaul's trust in his sword and spear and his lack of trust in God, which found expression in several of Shaul's battles, creates a difficult parallel between Shaul and Golyat. The ironic tragedy is that Shaul's end was similar to that of Golyat – dying by his own sword, which had failed to protect him:

Then said Shaul to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and make a mock of me." But his armor-bearer would not, for he was sore afraid. Therefore **Shaul took his sword, and fell upon it**. (31:4)9[9]

Standing out against this phenomenon are David's great faith and the principal message in his words, which was so lacking in Shaul for the entire length of his kingship in general and at the beginning of the present campaign in particular:

The Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's.

(Translated by David Strauss)

10[1] "Free in Israel" means free from taxes and "from the things mentioned in the laws of the king" (Rashi).

11[2] Personal involvement was also a factor in the story of Kalev, for the mission was to capture the cities situated in his territory.

12[3] The Radak suggests two ways to understand this expression: Either David is referring to Shaul's heart, but he uses delicate language so as not to insult the king; or he is referring to the heart of all men, as if he were saying: "There is no reason for anyone to fear this Pelishti."

13[4] This is stated explicitly in *Vayikra Rabba* (26:9): "David said to him: 'Your servant kept his father's sheep; and when there came a lion, or a bear... and this uncircumcised Pelishti shall be as one of them.' Shaul said to him: Who told you that you can kill him. David immediately answered him: 'The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Pelishti.' Immediately: 'And Shaul clad David with his apparel.'"

14[5] Here, the word *kova* is spelled with a *kuf*, whereas in verse 5 it is spelled with a *kaf*. This difference is part of the general linguistic phenomenon of developing many words with similar meanings, in our case "a round swelling," from a single root: *kova* (with a *kaf*), *kova* (with a *kuf*), *giv'a*, *migba'at*, *gabachat*, and others.

15[6] It stands to reason that the word *va-yabet*, "he looked around," denotes looking from afar, as in: "And he said to his servant, 'Go up now, look toward the sea.' And he went up, and looked (*va-yabet*), and said, 'There is nothing'" (I *Melakhim* 18:43). See also I *Shmuel* 24:8; I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 21:21.

16[7] According to *Metzudat David*, Golyat cursed David with the Pelishti gods, but it is also possible to understand that the reference is to the God of Israel.

17[8] This phenomenon bestows special significance on what is reported there about David's taking of Shaul's spear.

18[9] The parallel between the death of Shaul and the death of Golyat continues in the Amaleki lad's report to David of Shaul's death. First, the lad mentions Shaul's spear: "As I happened by chance upon Mount Gilboa, behold, Shaul leaned upon **his spear**..." (II *Shmuel* 1:6). The continuation of the lad's story – "So I stood beside him, **and slew him**, because I was sure that he could not live after he was fallen. And **I took** the crown that was upon **his head**, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and **brought** them here to my lord" (ibid. v. 10) – parallels what is stated in our chapter: "And David ran, and stood over the Pelishti, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, **and slew him**, and cut off his head therewith... And David **took the head** of the Pelishti, and **brought it** to Jerusalem."
