

THE BOOK OF *SHMUEL*

LECTURE 37: CHAPTER 19 (PART I) DAVID'S FLIGHT Rav Amnon Bazak

I. From an Indirect Plan to Direct Action

Chapter 18 was marked by Shaul's indirect attempts to hurt David – from casting his spear at him to demanding a hundred Pelishti foreskins for his daughter's dowry – all of which had a single objective: "to make David fall" (18:25). In chapter 19, Shaul goes one step further; what he had previously harbored in his heart, he now shares with those closest to him in explicit manner:

(1) And Shaul spoke to Yonatan his son, and to all his servants, that they should slay David...

At this point, it is difficult to discern the official grounds for putting David to death. Hence, the words of the *Metzudot* are persuasive: That they should slay David - "with cunning and inadvertance so that it not be known that it had been done on the king's command." In other words, we are still not dealing with an official order, but rather with an attempt to remove David in a disguised manner.

Here, however, Shaul makes a mistake. By turning also to the crown prince, Yonatan, he attests to the fact that he does not understand the depth of the connection that his son feels toward David:

(1)... but Yonatan, Shaul's son, delighted much in David. (2) And Yonatan told David, saying, "Shaul my father seeks to slay you; now, therefore, I pray you, take heed to yourself in the morning, and abide in a secret place, and hide yourself. (3) And I will go out and stand beside my father in the field where you are, and I will speak with my father of you; and if I see anything, I will tell you."

Yonatan informs David of the change that transpired in Shaul, and at the same time he tells David about his own plan to try and convince Shaul to change his mind about David. There is an obscure point in Yonatan's proposal: On the one hand, he instructs David to hide in the field; on the other hand, he tells him that he will report to him what Shaul said. If so, why is it necessary for David to hide in the field? According to the Radak, Yonatan intended that David himself should hear the good things that Shaul says about him, but if he does not hear them, Yonatan will recount them to him. Rabbenu Yeshaya, in contrast, understands that Yonatan meant that he would stay close to David, so that if the answer is in the negative, he will be able to immediately report back to David, so that he can flee. At this stage, we will restrict ourselves to these two explanations, and we will note at the outset that

the significance of the matter for what follows will become clear in the next chapter.

In any event, Yonatan initiates his plan and persuades his father to abandon his designs against David:

(4) And Yonatan spoke good of David unto Shaul his father, and said unto him, "Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he has not sinned against you, and because his work has been very good towards you. (5) For he put his life in his hand, and smote the Pelishti, and the Lord wrought a great victory for all Israel; you saw it, and did rejoice. Wherefore, then, will you sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?"

When he talks to Shaul, Yonatan employs several tactical means of persuasion:

1) Yonatan opens with the words: "Let not the king sin against **his servant, against David.**" He notes that Shaul's attitude toward David is sinful, but he emphasizes that Shaul is the king and David his servant; thus, he deepens Shaul's sense of security. Yonatan also opens in third person, as a demonstration of respect – "Let not the king sin" – and only in the continuation, when his words become more intimate, does Yonatan shift into second person. At that point, he allows himself to spell things out more forcefully: "Wherefore then will you sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?"

2) On the one hand, Yonatan presents David's self-sacrifice and how he risked his life in his contest with Golyat, and he reminds Shaul about a point that he may have already forgotten: "You saw it, and did rejoice."¹ Here, too, however, Yonatan tries not to exaggerate David's strength. Thus, he emphasizes: "And the Lord wrought a great victory for all Israel" – that is, the victory came from God.

3) The mention of the victory connects to another point: After the successful war waged against Ammon, we are told: "And the people said unto Shmuel, 'Who is he that said, 'Shall Shaul reign over us?' Bring the men, that we may put them to death.' And Shaul said, 'There shall not a man be put to death this day; **for today the Lord has wrought deliverance in Israel**'" (11:12-13). Shaul himself established the principle that no one is to be executed on a day on which God brought deliverance to Israel. As may be remembered, this is the very argument that was put forward by the people when Shaul wanted to kill Yonatan, after the latter unintentionally violated the ban and tasted the honey: "And the people said unto Shaul, 'Shall Yonatan die, **who has wrought this great salvation in Israel?** Far from it; as the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has wrought with God this day.' So the people rescued Yonatan, that he died not" (14:45).

In other words, if on a day that God delivered Israel, no one is put to death, all the more so must we not put to death one who wrought the deliverance. Now, Yonatan uses the same argument that in the past had been put forward to save his own life in order to save David, who also had a part in the deliverance (which he attributes to God), and therefore should not be put to death.

At this stage, Yonatan succeeds in his mission:

(6) And Shaul hearkened unto the voice of Yonatan; and Shaul swore, "As the Lord lives, he shall not be put to death." (7) And Yonatan called David, and Yonatan told him all those things. And Yonatan brought David to Shaul, and he was in his presence, as beforetime.

Yonatan's success, however, is short-lived. Once again, war breaks out with the Pelishtim, and once again, David achieves a great victory:

(8) And there was war again; and David went out, and fought with the Pelishtim, and slew them with a great slaughter; and they fled before him.

Shaul's feelings of jealousy and frustration swell once again to the surface, leading to the following situation, which in large measure is a repetition of what had happened in the previous chapter:

(9) 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. (10) 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; and David fled, and escaped that night.

We already noted the difference between the two incidents: In the previous chapter, Shaul cast the spear in haphazard manner, as it were, without David realizing that he was trying to harm him; here, Shaul openly exploits the fact that he is alone with David, and tries to kill him while the evil spirit from God is upon him. David manages to escape, but he understands that he can no longer remain in Shaul's service.^{2[2]}

David is left with no alternative but to flee, but his very flight provides Shaul with official grounds to kill him. From now on David is regarded as a rebel, and Shaul's men are mobilized to apprehend him.

II. The Terafim and the *Kevir Ha-Izim*

In the previous chapter, we discussed the beginning of the relationship between David and Mikhal. Here, we come to the high-point of this relationship, when Mikhal puts her life in danger, choosing to save her husband

from her father Shaul, and even to deceive her father in order to further that end:

(11) And Shaul sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning;^{3[3]} and Michal, David's wife, told him, saying, "If you save not your life tonight, tomorrow you shall be slain."
(12) So Michal let David down through the window; and he went, and fled, and escaped.^{4[4]} (13) And Michal took the *terafim*, and laid it in the bed, and put a quilt of goats' hair (*kevir ha-izim*) at the head thereof, and covered it with a cloth. (14) And when Shaul sent messengers to take David, she said, "He is sick."^{5[5]} (15) And Shaul sent the messengers to see David,^{6[6]} saying, "Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him." (16) And when the messengers came in, behold, the *terafim* were in the bed, with the quilt of goats' hair at the head thereof. (17) And Shaul said unto Michal, "Why have you deceived me thus, and let my enemy go, that he is escaped?" And Michal answered Shaul, "He said unto me, 'Let me go; why should I kill you?'"

While in the previous chapter, Michal is designated "Shaul's daughter" (18:20, 27, 28), here she is referred to as "David's wife." Later in the story, with the weakening of the connection between them, Michal is once again called "Shaul's daughter" (see II *Shmuel* 3:13; 6:16, 20, 23).

Our analysis of these verses, however, will be devoted primarily to the use of the *terafim* and the *kevir ha-izim*. Many have already asked why *terafim* were present in David's house, for the story of Rachel's stealing of Lavan's *terafim* (*Bereishit* 31:19-37) implies that the *terafim* served as idols. We already noted,^{7[7]} however, in the wake of the Ramban (*ibid.* v. 19), that the *terafim* were not ordinary idols, but rather served as a tool to predict the future. This can be demonstrated from various places in Scripture. For example, "For the *terafim* have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie" (*Zekharya* 10:2); in the list of abominations destroyed by Yoshiyahu, which includes other tools for revealing the future and other secrets – "Moreover the mediums, the wizards, and the *terafim*" (II *Melakhim* 23:24); and elsewhere. The use that Michal made of the *terafim* is clarified by the Ibn Ezra in *Bereishit* (*ibid.*): "The *terafim* have the form of human beings... Proof that the *terafim* are as such [may be adduced from] the *terafim* that Michal the daughter of Shaul put in the bed, and that the house guards thought were David." Thus, Michal used the *terafim*, which have a human shape, in order to deceive Shaul's messengers.

Whereas the term "*terafim*" is familiar to us from other places in Scripture, the expression "*kevir ha-izim*" is unique to our passage, and its meaning is unclear. The biblical commentators proposed various suggestions, the common denominator between them being that the *kevir ha-izim* was another component of the disguise that was supposed to give the appearance of a head and hair. Rashi explains: "A full hide... because the *terafim* lack hair, and this is similar to human hair;" the Radak writes: "A pillow made of goat hair;" and R. Yeshaya explains in the wake of the Targum: "A leather bag made of goat [hide]."

Josephus Flavius ("The Antiquity of the Jews," book VI, 11, 4) suggests a surprising explanation: "She then set up a bed for a sick person, as it were... and put a goat's liver under the blankets... and owing to the movements of the liver, which were causing the cover to move, her words were viewed as trustworthy, that that which lay before them was David who was breathing heavily." The source of this explanation is the Septuagint, which translates the words "*kevir ha-izim*" as "the liver of (*kaved*) goats." The novelty in Josephus's words lies in his explanation that the liver, by way of its movements, helped give the impression that a live person, who was breathing heavily, lay beneath the cover. The difficulty with his explanation is that the *kevir ha-izim* was placed "at his head;" if the liver's role was to simulate breathing, one might have expected that it be placed in the chest region! In any event, following the Septuagint, we can suggest that *kevir* is *kaved*, for we find in Scripture and in manuscripts many examples of the letters *dalet* and *resh* substituting for each other.^{8[8]}

A decisive proof can be adduced in support of this explanation, one that sheds new light on the entire chapter. When the prophet Yechezkel describes the divination of the king of Bavel, who is debating whether to go up to Jerusalem or to Rabbat Ammon, he says:

For the king of Bavel stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways to use divination. He shook the arrows, **he consulted the *terafim*, he looked in the liver** (*ba-kaved*). (*Yechezkel* 21:26)

We have here another verse that juxtaposes *terafim* to liver! Indeed, the use of the liver as a tool for seeing into the future is familiar to us as a prevalent practice in ancient times. The custom is even mentioned by *Chazal* (see *Kohelet Rabba* 12, 8 – "Like that Arab who would slaughter a sheep and look at the liver").

It is, therefore, possible that it is not by chance that Scripture relates that Mikhal used these particular props. If "*kevir*" is indeed a liver, then it turns out that in her abetting David's escape, Mikhal made use of two tools for seeing into the future.

Before we consider the significance of this interesting phenomenon, note should be taken of another factor that fits in well with the general picture. The continuation of the story in chapter 20 describes the attempt on the part of David and Yonatan to understand Shaul's intentions by examining the king's reaction to David's absence from the Rosh Chodesh feast. In response to David's question of how he will know what Shaul's reaction is, Yonatan answers:

And in the third day you shall hide yourself well... And I will shoot three **arrows** to the sideward, as though I shot at a mark. And, behold, I will send the lad, "Go, find the **arrows**." If I say unto the lad, "Behold, the **arrows** are on this side of you; take them, and come," there is peace to you and no hurt, as the Lord lives. But if I say thus unto the boy, "Behold, the **arrows** are beyond you," go you away; for the Lord has sent you away. (20:19-22)

We see here that in the continuation of the story use is made of the third divination tool mentioned in connection with the king of Bavel – arrows! This point rounds out the similarity between Mikhal and Yonatan, Shaul's two children: Both of them loved David, both of them saved him from their father by sending him away, and both of them made use of divination tools while providing assistance to David. What is the meaning of this phenomenon?

In chapter 28, Scripture states: "And Shaul had put away the mediums and the wizards out of the land" (28:3). At first glance, we are dealing with a positive act on the part of Shaul – fulfillment of the Torah's command: "There must not be found among you... or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer" (*Devarim* 18:10-11). However, the fact that this action is mentioned in the very chapter that describes Shaul's failure when he visited the medium in Ein Dor suggests that Scripture is not reporting this action to Shaul's credit. The reason is clear: By removing the mediums and the wizards, Shaul fulfilled only the first half of God's command regarding fortune tellers – wiping out those magicians who are directly connected to idolatry. But this command is complemented by another: "The Lord your God will raise up to you a prophet from the midst of you, of your brethren, like me; to him you shall hearken... And it shall come to pass, that whoever will not hearken to My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of him" (*ibid.* vv. 15-19). The Torah does not negate the possibility of knowing the future by way of supernatural forces, but it forbids listening to idol worshippers and requires absolute obedience to the words of the God's prophets. Shaul only performed a superficial job – wiping out the mediums and wizards; what value does such conduct have if Shaul violates the essence of the commandment – listening to the prophet?

Shaul heard from Shmuel that the king who would replace him had already been chosen, and it is reasonable to assume that he understood that Shmuel was referring to David. Nevertheless, he pursues David with all his might, and invests all his energies in the process. Removing the mediums and the wizards did not bring Shaul to obey the word of God – on the contrary, Shaul makes every effort to thwart the realization of the prophecy.

How symbolic it is that Shaul's children make use of *terafim*, a liver, and arrows – tools used by many idol worshippers to look into the future – to help realize God's word. Thus, Scripture proves that things are not determined by superficial appearances, but by inner content. Listening to the voice of God and obeying his prophets are the decisive factors, and it is through them that the removal of magicians and witches has value. Just as Shaul emptied the command of its inner significance, thus pulling the carpet out from under his actions, so – measure for measure – the divination tools were severed from their superficial meaning; on the contrary, they became tools for the realization of God's will.^{9[9]}

(Translated by David Strauss)

10[1] While there is no mention in chapter 17 that Shaul rejoiced in David's victory, this is obvious from the whole incident. The phenomenon of filling in details about a previous event at a later point is well known from other contexts. For example: *Bereishit* 31:7 ("And your father has deceived me, and changed my wages ten times") and *ibid.* 42:21 ("Truly, we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear"); as the Ramban notes there: "It is the manner of Scripture to be brief in one place and expansive in another."

11[2] There is an ironic correspondence between v. 8, "And there was war again; and David went out, and fought with the Pelishtim, and **slew** them with a great slaughter; and they **fled** before him," and v. 10, "And he **smote** the spear into the wall; and David **fled**, and escaped that night." While David strikes at the Pelishtim and causes them to flee, Shaul attempts to strike at David and causes him to flee.

12[3] Why didn't Shaul's messengers go in to arrest and execute David that night? It seems that it was not accepted practice to go into a person's house in the middle of the night, when he was there with his wife. We find that the Pelishtim acted in similar manner, laying wait for Shimshon at night in Aza, but not going in to kill him until the morning (*Shoftim* 16:2).

13[4] This series of actions explains how David evaded the guards: first he proceeded slowly, so as not to arouse suspicion, and only afterwards did he begin to run to escape and save his life.

14[5] It may be presumed that the messengers arrived in the morning, and in the meantime David had managed to escape. Mikhal's claim that David was sick bought him extra time, for the messengers went back to Shaul, and only afterwards did they return with the order to bring David, whatever his condition. It is reasonable to assume that the messengers saw the *terafim* and the *kevir ha-izim* from a distance and mistakenly took them for David, and therefore failed to understand at this early stage that David had escaped.

15[6] These words imply that Shaul asked the messengers whether they had seen David in unmistakable fashion, and when they answered in the negative, he sent them with an explicit order to see David, and if he was indeed sick, to bring him in his bed.

16[7] This was briefly discussed in my lecture on chapter 4 regarding the parallel between the death of Pinchas's wife in the wake of the capture of the ark and the death of Rachel in the wake of her taking Lavan's *terafim* (lecture 8), and at greater length in my article, "*Ha-Terafim U-Kevir Ha-Izim*," *Megadim* 24, 5755, pp. 53-60.

17[8] For example, *Bereishit* 10:3-4: "And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and **Rifat**, and Togarma. And the sons of Yavan; Elisha, and Tarshish, Kittim, and **Dodanim**," as opposed to I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 1:6-7: "And the sons of Gomer; Ashkenaz, and **Difat**, and Togarma. And the sons of Yavan; Elisha, and Tarshisha, Kittim, and **Rodanim**" (and see Radak, ad loc., who expanded on the phenomenon); *Bamidbar* 1:14: "Elyasaf the son of De'u'el," as opposed to *Bamidbar* 2:14: "Elyasaf the son of Re'u'el"; and compare II *Shmuel* 22:43 to *Tehillim* 18:43; and elsewhere. (See also Y. Elitzur, "*Kutzo Shel Dalet*," in: *Sefer Ha-Yovel Le-Rav Mordechai Breuer* [Jerusalem, 5792], pp. 615-620.) In various places, the *Minchat Shai* comments about the switching between *dalet* and *resh* in different manuscripts: In *Yehoshua* 15:52, "*ve-Duma*" (and in the Koren edition), as opposed to "*ve-Ruma*" in various manuscripts (and in Rav Breuer's edition); in II *Shmuel* 8:3 and elsewhere the name is "Hadadezer," but in several manuscripts, we find "Hadarezer;" and many other examples. We also find a switch of *dalet* and *resh* between the *ketiv* and the *keri* in various places. For example, in *Mishlei* 19:19, the *ketiv* is "*geral chema*," and the *keri* is "*gedal chema*."

The common phenomenon of switching *dalet* for *resh* can help explain difficult passages.

Thus, for example, what is said in *Yehoshua* 9:4 about the Givonites, "*va-yelkhu va-yitztayar*," Yonatan translates as if it read – "*va-yitztayadu*;" similarly, Abravanel, ad loc. See also Rashi to *Iyov* 15:24, "*la-kidor*" – "It should be understood as if a *resh* had been replaced by a *dalet*... *la-kidor* as if it read *la-kiror*." And see *Perush Rav Shmuel bar Chofni Gaon* (ed. Greenbaum, Jerusalem, 5739), on *Bereishit* 41:18 (and editor's note, no. 79).

18[9] On this point there is a similarity to what we saw in chapter 4. There, too, the people of Israel thought that the very bringing of the ark would save them, rather than the mending of their ways and repentance. In actuality, however, bringing the ark only strengthened the Pelishtim's resolve and led to Israel's defeat in battle.
