

## THE BOOK OF SHMUEL

### LECTURE 54: CHAPTER 28 SHAUL IN EIN-DOR (PART II)

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#### I. WHY?

In the previous lecture, we saw the stages through which Shaul passed leading up to his forbidden encounter with Shmuel's spirit raised by the medium in Ein-Dor. Now, when the meeting is taking place, Shmuel turns to Shaul with words of rebuke:

(15) And Shmuel said to Shaul, "Why have you disquieted me,1[1] to bring me up?"

Shaul answers with an apology and explains his situation:

And Shaul answered, "I am sore distressed;2[2] for the Pelishtim make war against me, and God is departed from me and answers me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams; therefore I have called you,3[3] that you may make known unto me what I shall do.

With these words, Shaul wishes to express the idea that Shmuel – alive or dead – is the only address to which he can turn. Shaul understands that God has departed from him, and he is no longer capable of receiving the word of God. Underlying Shaul's approach to Shmuel is the assumption that it would be possible to sever Shmuel from God. In Shaul's view, the absolute rupture between him and God does not necessarily mean a rift between him and Shmuel. From Shaul's perspective, Shmuel bears personal responsibility for Shaul's appointment as king, and therefore it was legitimate for Shaul to turn to Shmuel in this manner.

Special attention should be paid to Shaul's words to Shmuel, "Therefore I have called you, that you may make known unto me what I shall do," wording that undoubtedly alludes to what Shmuel said to Shaul at their first meeting: "Seven days shall you tarry, till I come unto you, **and tell you what you shall do**" (10:8). Who else but to Shmuel can Shaul turn in his distress?

Shaul Tchernikowsky captured this feeling in his famous poem, "In Ein-Dor:"

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Why did you take me from behind the flocks,  
And set me as this day as prince over your people?

I have spent all my strength in the storms of battle,  
And my domestic happiness has already turned into desolation.

The people of Peleshet surround me, the dread of the shadow of death  
–  
The evil spirit will crush me until death.

O man of God! What will God answer me?  
For He has departed from me – what shall I do? Answer me!

Why, alas, did you anoint me king over your people?  
Why did you take me from behind the flocks?

Shaul, however, is wrong. God cannot be detached from Shmuel. It is not Shmuel who chose Shaul, but rather God; if God departed from Shaul, Shaul must draw the necessary conclusions, without disturbing Shmuel from his rest:

(16) And Shmuel said, "Why then do you ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from you, and is become your adversary?"<sup>4[4]</sup>

Note that this is already the fourth time in the chapter that an argument has been levelled against Shaul that opens with the word "why." Such an argument was raised twice by the medium and twice by Shmuel:

- (9) **Why** then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die?
- (12) **Why** have you deceived me? for you are Shaul.
- (15) **Why** have you disquieted me, to bring me up?
- (16) **Why** then do you ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from you, and is become your adversary?

This phenomenon is not unique to our chapter. Over the course of his years as king, the question "why?" was raised to or about Shaul over and over again – more than to any other Scriptural figure (except for Moshe):

**Why** then did you not hearken to the voice of the Lord but did fly upon the spoil, and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord? (15:19)

**Why** then will you sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? (19:5)

And Yonatan answered Shaul his father, and said unto him, "**Why** should he be put to death? What has he done?" (20:32)

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**Why** do you hearken to men's words, saying, "Behold, David seeks your hurt?" (24:9)

**Why** does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? Or what evil is in my hand? (26:18)

It seems that it is not only Shmuel, David, Yonatan and the medium, who turn to Shaul with this question. Scripture itself cries out to Shaul, "Why?" The nine times that this word is directed toward Shaul express Scripture's continuous frustration with the conduct of the young lad who "from his shoulders and upward was higher than any of the people" but was unable to stand up to the challenges set before him and ended up committing a series of irresponsible acts. Could you not have acted differently? Why did you fail to realize your potential? Why did you commit such blatant mistakes? Why? 5[5]

## **II. "AND TOMORROW SHALL YOU AND YOUR SONS BE WITH ME"**

Following his admonition of Shaul, Shmuel relates to what Shaul can expect to happen in the war against the Pelishtim:

(17) "And the Lord has wrought for Himself;6[6] as He spoke by me; and the Lord has rent the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor, even to David. (18) Because you did not hearken to the voice of the Lord,7[7] and did not execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore has the Lord done this thing unto you this day. (19) Moreover, the Lord will deliver Israel also with you into the hand of the Pelishtim; and tomorrow shall you and your sons be with me. The Lord will deliver the host of Israel also into the hand of the Pelishtim."

Shmuel emphasizes time and time again that it is not he who is responsible for Shaul's fate. Shmuel mentions God's name seven times, thereby stressing that Shaul should have understood that he cannot patch up the rift between him and God through the artificial circumvention of inquiring after the information by way of a medium. God's non-response clearly signified Shaul's imminent end. Shaul, who hoped for a different outcome, hears now in full the bitter news of his expected fall into the hands of the Pelishtim.

Despite the harsh rebuke, a question remains: Why in fact did Shmuel reveal himself to Shaul and provide him with the desired information? Was Shmuel "forced" to do so by the medium?

It seems that even though Shaul failed to obey the voice of God, and

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even though he turned to Shmuel in a forbidden manner, he nevertheless was given one last chance to mend his ways, if only partially. Even though Shaul only made things worse when he visited the medium, nevertheless, he gets credit for his very desire to inquire of God and hear from Shmuel, despite the invalid manner in which he did so. Shaul did not use his power to realize God's commands in his wars against the Pelishtim and Amalek, and he tried time and time again to harm David in order to avoid Shmuel's prophecy that God would choose a neighbor better than him to be king. Shaul stands now before a final test, and two paths are open to him. The first is to try again to avoid the fulfillment of the prophecy by running away from the battle; the second is to accept the prophecy with courage and go out to war with Israel, even though he knows that he will die in battle.

At first, Shaul opts for the first alternative:

(20) Then Shaul fell straightway his full length upon the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Shmuel; and there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night.

The combination of hearing Shmuel's harsh prophecy and the fact that Shaul had not eaten in a long time, owing to the mental stress that he was under,<sup>8[8]</sup> brings Shaul to a state of utter collapse. The man who had been "from his shoulders and upward higher than any of the people" (9:2) falls apart, absolutely powerless.

At this point, however, the medium in surprising fashion comes to his aid, and persuades him to get up and eat:

(21) And the woman came unto Shaul, and saw that he was sore affrighted, and said unto him, "Behold, your handmaid has hearkened unto your voice, and I have put my life in my hand, and have hearkened unto your words which you spoke unto me. (22) Now, therefore, I pray you, hearken you also unto the voice of your handmaid, and let me put a morsel of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength, when you go on your way."

The woman utters her words in wise fashion. Corresponding to the fact that "your handmaid has hearkened unto your voice," she asks of Shaul, "hearken you also unto the voice of your handmaid." And corresponding to the fact that "I have put my life in my hand," she turns to Shaul with the words, "and let me put a morsel of bread before you, and eat." Shaul tries to refuse, but his servants and the woman continue to urge him to eat, until they achieve their goal:

(23) But he refused, and said, "I will not eat." But his servants, together with the woman, urged him; and he hearkened unto their voice. So he arose from the earth, and sat upon the bed. (24) And the woman had a

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fatted calf in the house; and she made haste, and killed it; and she took flour, and kneaded it, and did bake unleavened bread thereof.9[9] (25) And she brought it before Shaul and before his servants; and they did eat. Then they rose up, and went away that night.

In the end, then, Shaul gets up from the ground, and thus he avoids ending his career absolutely downtrodden.

It is difficult to ignore the similarity between the actions of the medium here and the actions of Avraham at the beginning of *Vayera*:

I <i>Shmuel</i> 28	<i>Bereishit</i> 18
(22) "Now, therefore, I pray you, hearken you also unto the voice of your handmaid	(3) "If now I have found favor in your sight, pass not away, I pray you, from your servant.
and let me put a morsel of bread before you; and eat, that you may have strength, when you go on your way."	(5)And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort your hearts; after that you shall pass on..."
(24) And the woman had a fatted calf in the house; and she made haste, and killed it...	(6)And Avraham hastened... (7) And Avraham ran to the herd, and fetched a calf tender and good, and gave it to the young man; and he hurried to prepare it.
and she took flour, and kneaded it...	(6) "Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes."
(25) Then they rose up, and went away that night.	(16) And the men rose up from there... (22) and they went toward Sedom.

What is the significance of this surprising correspondence?

This seems to be the way that Scripture gives expression to the complexity of the story. Shaul eradicates the mediums and diviners, but over the course of his reign, and especially in this chapter, he conducts himself in an improper manner. The medium, in contrast, whom Shaul had marked for eradication, reveals herself as a kind woman, who follows in the ways of Avraham. Of course, this does not grant legitimacy to her acts of divination, but nonetheless, we are presented with a slightly more complex picture of the parties involved.

This correspondence also sharpens Scripture's position regarding the direction initiated by the medium. Shaul is called upon here not to allow despair to paralyze him, but rather to gird himself with strength and courageously go out to his last battle.

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This seems to be what *Chazal* had in mind when they expounded the words of Shmuel, "and tomorrow shall you and your sons be with me," as follows: "With me – in my compartment [in Heaven]." Shmuel calls upon Shaul to go out in battle against the Pelishtim; if he passes the test and courageously accepts his punishment – he will merit to join Shmuel in the world-to-come.

The end of the chapter seems to give expression to a message totally opposite from that expressed by Tchernikowsky in the aforementioned poem:

During the morning watch without bow or weapon  
On the swiftest horse in the camp, King Shaul returns.

His face is white, but there is no fear in his heart  
And in his eyes shines dreadful despair.

According to what we said above, Shaul's heart was indeed filled with fear, but it was not dreadful despair that shined from his eyes, but rather the courage and bravery to pass the final test of his life with honor.

### **III. APPENDIX: SCRIPTURE'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE MEDIUM'S ACT**

It should be noted that the incident involving the medium touches directly upon the issue of the Torah's attitude toward the phenomenon of mediums and wizards. The commentators disagree about the fundamental question of whether the Torah forbids these activities because they are void of substance, or perhaps precisely because they have substance, but are impure paths to revealing the future. Regarding the verse, "You shall not apply to mediums or wizards, nor seek to be defiled by them" (*Vayikra* 19:31), the Ibn Ezra writes: "The empty-brained say that were it not that the mediums speak the truth by way of magic, Scripture would not forbid them. But I say the very opposite, for Scripture does not forbid the truth, but rather only falsehood. And the proof is<sup>10</sup>[10] idols and images." Despite this sharp statement, many Jewish thinkers entertain the possibility that there might be some truth to acts of forbidden magic. According to the Ramban (*Devarim* 18:9), magicians have certain powers, and he argues indirectly with the words of Ibn Ezra: "Many feign piety and say that there is no truth whatsoever to magic... We, however, cannot deny things that have been made known to the eyes of witnesses." The Ramban goes on to offer a theological explanation for the existence of magical powers.

This question, of course, shapes our understanding of the chapter, and the Radak discusses the issue at length. He cites two opinions of the Geonim, both of which agree that there is no truth to the acts performed by a medium, but which give rise to two different understandings of the chapter. According

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to Rav Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon, Shmuel did not actually rise by way of the medium's act, and the whole story is an act of deception on the part of the woman:

Some say that Shmuel did not speak with Shaul, and that God forbid, Shmuel did not rise from his grave and speak. Rather, the woman did it all by way of deception. For she immediately recognized that he was Shaul, but to show him that it was owing to her wisdom that he recognized him and discovered the truth, she said, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Shaul." It is the way of mediums to bring a person who speaks in a low voice from a concealed place. When Shaul came to inquire of her, and she saw that he was frightened, and she knew that tomorrow he was going out to war and all of Israel were overcome by great fear, and she knew what Shaul did when he killed God's priests, she put the words stated in the story into the speaker's mouth. And that which it says, "And Shmuel said to Shaul" – this is what Shaul thought, for he thought that it was Shmuel who was talking to him. And that which it says, "and did not execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek" – this was well-known, for from that time Shmuel had told him that God rejected him from being king. And that which it says, "to your neighbor, even to David" – it was well known to all of Israel that David had been anointed king. And that which it says, "and tomorrow shall you and your sons be with me" – he said this based on logical reasoning.

It is very difficult to reconcile this approach with the plain sense of Scripture. Rabbi Shmuel ben Chofni was aware that his understanding goes against the approach adopted by *Chazal*, who accepted the story in its plain sense. And here he asserts a principle, surprising in its novelty: "And he said: Even though the plain sense of the words of the Sages in the Gemara is that the woman truly brought Shmuel back to life, **they are not to be accepted when they are contradicted by reason!**" That is to say, the words of *Chazal* do not obligate us when they run contrary to logic!

The second approach cited by the Radak is that of Rabbenu Sa'adya Gaon and Rav Hai Gaon, who agree that the acts of a medium are generally vanity, but here we are dealing with an exception: God "resurrected Shmuel in order to tell Shaul everything that would befall him in the future. Indeed, the woman who did not know all this was frightened, as it says: 'she cried with a loud voice.' And that which the woman said, 'Whom shall I bring up unto you?' are words of sarcasm, for she was planning to do as she normally does." According to this, the woman herself was surprised by the incident, because the acts of a medium are ordinarily a bluff.

The Radak rejects both of these approaches:

One must ask according to these Geonim: If God resurrected Shmuel in order to inform Shaul what would happen to him in the future, why did He tell him not by way of dreams or the Urim or prophets, but by way of the woman who was a medium? And furthermore, how would it

have escaped Shaul, who was a sage and a king and had wise men with him, if the medium worked with another person speaking from a concealed place? And who would say that he would err in this matter? This cannot be accepted by reason.

According to the plain sense of Scripture, it seems more reasonable to assume that magicians had certain powers that allowed them to raise the dead. Nevertheless, according to what we have said, it seems that the woman would not have been able to do this with Shmuel were it not God's clear intention to provide Shaul, whose desire to inquire of God was indeed a good one, one final chance to prove himself.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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11[1] The root *r-g-z* is used in particular to describe disturbing the peace of the dead. As it is stated in *Yeshayahu* 14:9: "Sheol from beneath is moved (*ragza*) for you to meet you at your coming; it stirs up the shades for you, all the chief ones of the earth; it has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations." It is also possible that the verse, "The tents of robbers prosper, and they who provoke (*margizei*) God are secure" (*Iyov* 12:6) refers to grave robbers, who disturb the peace of the dead.

12[2] We are accustomed to use the expression, "*tzar li me'od*," in the sense of "I am very sorry." Here, however, these words seem to mean: "I am sore distressed" and am left with no alternatives.

13[3] Shaul uses the "cleaner" term, "I have called you" (*k-r-a*) – as opposed to the root *a-l-h* ("raise") used throughout the chapter (vv. 11[2], 13, 14, 15).

14[4] The word "*arekha*" may be understood in several ways. It might be equivalent to *re'ekha*, with a transmutation of the letters, as Shmuel had already said to Shaul in the past, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day, and has given it to a neighbor (*le-re'ekha*) of yours, that is better than you" (15:28), and as he says to him in the very next verse, "For the Lord has rent the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor (*le-re'ekha*), to David" (28:17). Most commentators (Rashi, Radak, Ralbag, and others), however, understand the word in the opposite sense – "your adversary – as is stated in *Daniel* (4:15): "The dream be for those who hate you, and its interpretation for your enemies (*le-arakh*)." According to this, *arekha* is equivalent to *tzarekha*, with a substitution of *ayin* for *tzadi* (as in the words *eret* = *ar'a*). If this is the meaning of the word, the verse may be understood in two ways: either the term "adversary" relates to God, who is now Shaul's enemy (Ralbag), or it refers to David, who is called Shaul's enemy (Rashi).

15[5] It is possible that the various questions in our chapter allude to Shaul's various sins: The question, "**Why** then do you lay a snare for my life, to cause me to die..." alludes to Shaul's pursuit of David; "**Why** have you deceived me..." corresponds to his deception concerning Mikhal and Merav, similar to Yaakov's words to Lavan: "Did I not serve with you for Rachel? **Why then have you deceived me?**" (*Bereishit* 29:25); and corresponding to Shaul's inquiry of the medium – "**Why** have you disquieted me..."

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16[6] To whom does the pronoun "lo" refer? It might refer to David, in which case the word "arekha" in the previous verse refers to David as well (see above, note 4); this is the understanding of the Targum and *Metzudat David*. There is, however, a difficulty with this interpretation, for the continuation of the verse – "and the Lord has rent the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbor, even to David" – creates a certain redundancy. This may be the reason that the Radak explains the verse differently, so that the reference is to Shaul himself: "According to the plain sense of the text, 'lo' is like 'lekha,' for it is the way of Scripture to refer to second person and to third person in the same manner." [Editor's comment: "Lo" may also refer to God: "And the Lord has wrought for Himself." Compare to 13:14: "But now your kingdom shall not endure; the Lord has sought Himself ("bikesh Ha-Shem lo") a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be a prince over His people, because you have not kept that which the Lord commanded you."]

17[7] There are three ways to understand the words "because you did not hearken to the voice of the Lord:" 1) These words might serve as an introduction to what follows: "and you did not execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek" – a sin for which Shaul was specifically rebuked for not having listened to the voice of God, as Shmuel states there: "Wherefore then **did you not hearken to the voice of the Lord**, but did fly upon the spoil, and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord" (15:19, and see also 20:24). 2) Scripture may possibly be referring here to a different sin, and specifically to Shaul's offering of a sacrifice prior to Shmuel's arrival before the first campaign against the Pelishtim, as Shmuel said to him at that point: "You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you" (13:13). 3) This might also be a general heading relating to all of Shaul's sins, which is followed by the special mention of the sin involving Amalek. In any event, there is no special reference here to the sin involving Nov the city of priests. We already noted in chapter 22 (lecture no. 43) that this affair is interpreted primarily to David's discredit.

18[8] Compare with 20:34: "So Yonatan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did eat no food the second day of the month; for he was grieved for David, and because his father had put him to shame." It is possible that this difficult situation is also connected to a mistake committed by Shaul during his reign: his adjuring of the people during the war with the Pelishtim, "Cursed be the man that eats any food until it be evening" (14:24), in the wake of which the people ended up violating the prohibition of eating blood (see lecture no. 26).

19[9] *Matza* was baked because food had to be prepared in a speedy fashion, as at the exodus from Egypt (*Shemot* 12:39) and in connection with Gid'on (*Shoftim* 6:19).

20[10] As used by the Ibn Ezra, the term "*ve-ha-ed*" means "and the proof is." The Ibn Ezra proves from the prohibition to turn to idols, which the Torah clearly views as falsehood and vanity, that the Torah also prohibits things that have no substance whatsoever.

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