

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter IX: Vayeishev (Gen. 37:1–40:23)

Essay 5. The virtue of silence

מדרש רבה "והנה קמה אלמתי וגם-נצבכה", ר' לוי אומר עתידים אתם לעשות אלילים אלמים לפני עגליו של ירבעם ולומר "אלה אלתיך ישראל". אומר ר' אבא עתידים אתם להעלים עלי דברים לפני אבא "חיה רעה אכלתהו", ומאן קאים לי משתיקותא דאמא קמה עכ"ל.

There is a Midrash Rabbah explaining Joseph's intent in relaying his dream: "There we were binding sheaves in the field, **when suddenly my sheaf** [אלמתי] [*alumati*] **stood up and remained upright**; then your sheaves gathered around and bowed low to my sheaf."¹

Rabbi Levi said: [Joseph was telling his brothers: Even though it's true that my descendant, Jeroboam, will make golden calves,] **you are destined to make mute** [אלמים] [*ilmim*] **idols prior to Jeroboam's calves,**² **and say: "This is your god, Israel"**³ [i.e., referring to the Golden Calf at Mount Sinai].

Rabbi Abba⁴ **said: You are destined to conceal** [להעלים] [*le'ha'alim*] **matters about me before our father,**⁵ **saying: "An evil wild beast devoured him."**⁶ **What will stand in my favor? Mother's silence stands** [in my favor].

- Gen. Rabbah 84:10

במדרש הזה "סתמים וחתמים הדברים" ולא נודעה פוננת יוסף בדברים אלו ומה ענינם ובמאי פליגי. אף אמרינו בפרק ג' דערבין אומר ר' חמא בר חנינא מאי תקנתיה של מספר לשון הרע, יעסק בתורה, שפאמר "מרפא לשון עץ חיים". ר' אבא בר כהנא אומר סיפר אין לו תקנה שפכר כרתו דוד ברום הקדש, אלא מאי תקנתו שלא יבא לידי לשון הרע, אם תלמיד חכם הוא יעסוק בתורה.

In this Midrash, these "words are secret and sealed,"⁷ and the intention of Joseph in these words is not known, and how [these explanations] are connected to the brothers' feud, and what difference it makes whether we accept the view of Rabbi Levi or Rabbi Abba.

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¹ Gen. 37:7.

² Rabbi Levi draws a parallel between the word אלמתי [*alumati*] ["my sheaf"] and אלמים [*ilmim*] ["mute"]. Jeroboam made golden calves, as reported in I Kings 12:28.]

³ Ex. 32:4.

⁴ Our version of the Midrash reads "Rabbi Acha."

⁵ He suggests a parallel between the word אלמתי [*alumati*] ["my sheaf"] and להעלים [*le'ha'alim*] ["to conceal"].

⁶ Gen. 37:20, 37:33.

⁷ Dan. 12:9.

What point is Rabbi Levi making in our Midrash?
It is said in the 3rd chapter of tractate Arakhin:

Rabbi Chama bar Chanina said: What is the remedy for one who speaks slander? If he is a Torah scholar, he should study Torah, as it is stated: “A soothing tongue is a tree of life” (Prov. 15:4). And [the word] “tongue” means nothing other than malicious speech, as it is stated: “Their tongue is a sharpened arrow [it speaks deceit]” (Jer. 9:7). And [the word] “tree” means nothing other than Torah, as it is stated: “It is a tree of life to them that lay hold of it” (Prov. 3:18). . . .

Rabbi Abba bar Kahana⁸ says: If one has already spoken slander, he has no remedy, as [King] David, [inspired] by Divine Spirit, has already cut him off [i.e., excommunicated him], as it is stated: “May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great things” (Ps. 12:4). Rather, what is his remedy [beforehand], so that he does not come to [speak] slander? If he is a Torah scholar, he should study Torah . . .

- Arakhin 15b

ואף כּאן יוסף היו אָהוּ שׁוֹנְאִים אוֹתוֹ שֶׁהֵי מְסַפֵּר לְשׁוֹן הַרְעָ עֲלֵיהֶם, וְהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים לוֹ מָה מוֹעִיל לָךְ כָּל הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁאַתָּה לָמַד אִם כָּבֵר סִפְרָתְךָ לְשׁוֹן הַרְעָ וְאִין עוֹד תִּקְנֶה, שֶׁהֵי סוֹבְרִים כְּסִבְרַת ר' אַבְא בַר כְּהֵנָא, דְּאָמַר סִיפֵר, אִין לוֹ עוֹד תִּקְנֶה. וְהוּא מְשִׁיב עֲתִידִים אֲתָם וְכוּ', וְאִיתָא בְּמִדְרַשׁ רַבָּה עַל הַפְּסוּק "לְדָרַד כִּי שָׁחַת עֲמֹד" וְכוּ', אָמַר הַקַּב"ה "אִזִּי לָהֶם פִּי־נִדְדוּ מִמֶּנִּי" וְכוּ' וְאִנְכִי אֶפְדֶם וְהִמָּה דִּבְרוּ עָלַי כְּזָבִים" שֶׁהֵי אוֹמְרִים אֵלֶיהָ וְהַעֲגֵל פָּדָה אוֹתָם מִמִּצְרַיִם, "הִמָּה דִּבְרוּ עָלַי כְּזָבִים", אַף אֲנִי אוֹמֵר שֶׁאִינָם עִמִּי כִּי "זָבַח לְאֱלֹהִים יְהָרָם" עַכ"ל.

Even here, the brothers of Joseph hated him, for he spoke slander about them, and they said to him, how does all the Torah that you learned avail you, if you have already spoken slander and there is no remedy? That is, they were of the opinion of Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, who said, “If one has already spoken slander, he has no remedy.” He answered them, “You are destined to make mute idols.” It is brought in the Midrash Rabbah on the verse, “Hurry down, for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely,”⁹

The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: “Woe unto them, for they have strayed from Me; they deserve destruction, for they have transgressed against Me; shall I then redeem them, seeing they have spoken lies against Me?”¹⁰ For they said G-d and the [Golden] Calf have redeemed them from Egypt, “they have spoken lies against Me.” But I say that they are not my people, “Anyone who sacrifices to a god, except the L-rd alone, is to be utterly destroyed.”

- Ex. Rabbah 42:3

⁸ Our version of the Gemara reads Acha bar Chanina.

⁹ Ex. 32:7.

¹⁰ Hosea 7:13.

אם פו לדברייכם אתם שדברתם לשון הרע על המקום לא הנה לכם תקנה, אלא נדאי צריך לומר פר' תמא בר חנינא דאמר "מרפא לשון עץ חיים", ומכל שכן שאף ר' אבא בר פהנא לא אמר שאין לו תקנה אלא לאחר שבא דוד ופרתו ברום הקדש, הא קודם שבא דוד גם הוא מודה שיש לו תקנה.

If so, regarding your words that according to Rabbi Abba bar Kahana there is no remedy for slander, then **you, who have spoken slander against the Omnipresent** by saying that He did not rescue you from Egypt on His own, but needed assistance from the Golden Calf, then **you too have no remedy.**

Rather, it's certainly necessary to disagree with the position of Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, and instead say as Rabbi Chama bar Chanina, who said, "A soothing tongue is a tree of life," i.e., that there is a remedy, viz, Torah study. **Moreover, even for Rabbi Abba bar Kahana, he only said there is no remedy after David came, and by Divine Spirit cut [the slanderer] off through excommunication. But before David came, even [Rabbi Abba] acknowledged that [the slanderer] had a remedy available.**

וכנגד זה אמר "והנה קמה אלמתי", אף על פי שלדברייכם הנה לה לנפול אדרבא "והנה קמה". ועוד לפי האמת "וגם-נצבה" על עמדה שלא נפלה לעולם, שהרי עדיין לא בא דוד. אי נמי "וגם-נצבה" רצה לומר שלאחר שישטאו ישראל וידברו לשון הרע על המקום נתחזקה הסברה דיש תקנה למספר לשון הרע.

Corresponding to this, [Scripture] said, "when suddenly my sheaf stood up," even though according to your words that there was no remedy for slander, [my sheaf] should have fallen, "but mine stood up." Also, the truth is that "it remained standing," being upright such that it would never fall, for David had not yet come.

Alternatively, "it remained standing" means that after Israel will sin and speak slander against the Omnipresent, the opinion was strengthened that there is a remedy for one who speaks slander, for there must be a remedy for the entire Jewish people. That would show that Joseph's own slander could be remedied.

אמנם ר' אבא מפרשו בענין אחר וסבירא ליה שלדעת יוסף לא הנה פאן לשון הרע כלל, כמו שפיתבו המפרשים וכמו שנגאריה בנה לקמן בפירשה זו, וראיה על זה שהרי אדרבא סופו הוכיח על תחלתו כי מבית האסורים יצא למלוד.

What point is Rabbi Abba making in our Midrash?

However, Rabbi Abba explained this in a different matter, and his opinion is that Joseph believed there was no slander here at all on his part, as the commentators wrote,¹¹ and as we will expound at length below in this parashah, in essay 10. The proof for this is that to the contrary, the end proves the beginning, for in the end, [Joseph] went out from prison to rule over Egypt, which shows that in the beginning, his slavery and imprisonment was not a punishment for slander.

¹¹ Yehuda Rosanes (1657-1727), rabbi of Constantinople, *Parashat Derachim.*, chapter 1 (*Derech ha'Atarim*).

ומעתה כִּי אָמַר יוֹסֵף לְאָחָיו, אַתֶּם שׂוֹנְאִים אוֹתִי בְּשׂוֹבִיל שְׂאֵתֶם אוֹמְרִים שְׂסַפְרִתִּי לְשׁוֹן הָרַע עֲלֵיכֶם, וְאַנִּי יוֹדֵעַ שְׂבִשְׂבִיל זֶה תִּגְרְמוּ לְאָבִי שְׂיֹאמַר "חַיָּה רַעָה אֲכָלְתָּהוּ", דְּגִרְסִינוּ בְּפֶרֶק קַמָּא דְּתַעֲנִית "אִם-יִשְׂף הַנְּחֹשׁ בְּלוֹא-לְחַשׁ" לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא בְּאֵים כָּל הַחַיּוֹת אֲצָל נְחֹשׁ וְאוֹמְרִים לוֹ אָרִי דוֹרַס וְאוֹכֵל וְכוּ' מָה הַנְּאָה יֵשׁ לָהּ, אוֹמַר לָהֶם וּמָה "יִתְרוֹן לְבַעַל הַלְּשׁוֹן" וְכוּ' עכ"ל. וְהַנְּחֹשׁ הוּא חַיָּה רַעָה שְׂאִיו הַנְּאָה לְהַגִּיקוֹ וְכַוְנָתוֹ לְהַזִּיק.

Thus, Joseph spoke thus to his brothers: You hate me because you say that I slander [לְשׁוֹן הָרַע] [*lashon ha'ra*] about you. I know that because of this, you will cause my father to say, “An evil wild beast [חַיָּה רַעָה] [*chaya ra'ah*] has devoured him.”¹² I.e., Jacob could have simply said חַיָּה [*chaya*] [a wild beast], but he added the word רַעָה [*ra'ah*] [evil], as an illusion to slander [*lashon ha'ra*], literally “evil speech.” Thus, we find in the first chapter of tractate Ta’anit:

[Regarding the verse], “If the snake bites because no spell was uttered, no advantage is gained by the trained charmer,”¹³ i.e., what’s the benefit of having a snake charmer present if he’s not going to help prevent someone from being bitten? Reish Lakish said **in the future, all the animals will gather together and come to the snake and say to him: A lion mauls [its prey] and eats [it]; a wolf tears apart [its prey] and eats [it]; what pleasure do you have [when you bite a person, as you are incapable of eating him]? [The snake will] say to them: “What is the ‘advantage to the charmer?’”** [The literal translation for “charmer” is “master of the language,” so the snake is asking, “What pleasure does a slanderer receive?”]

- Ta’anit 8a

The snake is the evil wild beast, for this is no enjoyment to injure someone, and yet his intention is to injure.

וְלָכוּ יַעֲקֹב בְּשִׂירָאָה בְּתַנְתִּי יַחֲשׁוּב בְּלִבּוֹ זֶה "כְּתַנְתִּי בְּנִי" וּבְנֵדָאֵי "חַיָּה רַעָה אֲכָלְתָּהוּ", דְּהֵינּוּ הַנְּחֹשׁ בְּשׂוֹבִיל הָעוֹן לְשׁוֹן הָרַע, וְאִי עַל פִּי שְׂאֵנִי יְכוֹל לְשַׁלּוֹם שְׁלִיחַ לְהַגִּיד לְאָבָא כָּל מָה שְׂתַעֲשׂוּ לִי, כֵּן לֹא אֲעֻשֶׂה כְּדִי שְׂלֹא יִהְיֶה גְרָאָה לְשׁוֹן הָרַע, כִּי רַחֵל אִמִּי תִפְסָה פְּלֶדֶ שְׂתִיקָה וְכָל בְּנֵיהָ אַחֲרֶיהָ תִפְסּוּ פְּלֶדֶ שְׂתִיקָה, וְזוֹ רְאִיָּה לְדַבָּר שְׂלֹא דְבִרְתִּי לְשׁוֹן הָרַע וְהַשְׂתִּיקָה תַעֲמוּד לִי לְיָכוּתִי.

Therefore, Joseph was saying to his brothers, when Jacob will see my coat of many colors, he will think in his heart, “This ‘is the coat of my son,’ and certainly, ‘an evil wild beast has devoured him,’ which is the snake, because of the sin of slander. Even though I am able to send a messenger to tell father everything that you will do to me, I won’t do so, in order that it won’t appear to be slander. For my mother, Rachel, adopted the wisdom of silence, and all of her descendants after her adopted the wisdom of silence,¹⁴ and this is proof to the matter that I did not speak slander, and the silence will stand for me in my merit, as proof that I did not speak slander.

¹² Gen. 37:33.

¹³ Eccl. 10:11.

¹⁴ Gen. Rabbah 71:5.

ואף שאול הבא מרחל תפס פלג שתיקה, פדכתיב "ובני בליעל אמרו מה ישענו זה ויבנהו ולא הביאו לו מנחה ויהי כמתריש". ואין לערער עליו שלפי שהיה מלך לא היה לו לשתוק, שהרי כתב הרמב"ם (בפרק ג' מהלכות מלכים), וכל המבנה את המלך יש למלך רשות להרגו עכ"ל. הא קמן שלא כתב חייב המלך להרגו אלא יש לו רשות, דשמע מנה דבכהאי גוונא יכול המלך למחול אם ירצה, ומנה הטעם עצמו מחל דוד לשמע בוגרא.

Further discussion of silence as a virtuous trait

Even, Saul, who descended from Rachel, adopted the wisdom of silence, as it is written, **“But some scoundrels said, ‘How can this fellow save us?’ So they scorned him and brought him no tribute, but he was as a deaf man.”**¹⁵ It cannot be disputed that since he was a king, he had no reason to be silent, for the Rambam writes (in the Laws of Kings, chapter 3, halacha 8), **“[Regarding] whoever degrades the king, the king has authority to kill him.”** Note that it is not written that the king is obligated to kill him, rather that he has authority to do so, for we hear from this that in the same situation, the king is able to forgive the slanderer if he should want to do so. For this very reason, David forgave Shimei, son of Gera when he cursed him.¹⁶

ומה שאמרו מלך שמחל על כבודו אין כבודו מחול, היינו שאין כבודו לעשות דבר הפך כבודו, כמו שכתב הרמב"ם עצמו (שם בפרק ב'), אין רואין אותו כשהוא מסתפר ולא כשהוא ערום וכו' דמלך שמחל על כבודו אין כבודו מחול עכ"ל.

Regarding what [the rabbis] said, **“For a king who forgoes his honor, his honor is not forgone,”**¹⁷ it means that it is not honorable for [a king] to do something contrary to his honor. This is as the Rambam himself wrote, there in the Laws of Kings, chapter 2, halacha 3, **“It is forbidden to see him when he is having his hair cut, and when he is naked, etc., for ‘even if a king forgoes his honor, his honor is not forgone.’”** Nevertheless, a king is not obligated to punish someone who mocks him.

והמפרשים טרחו עצמם לפרש הטעם דנקט קרא "ובני בליעל". ונראה לומר שחידוש גדול משמיענו, כי היכי דלא נימא שאותם שאומרים "מה ישענו זה" היו האנשים היותר צדיקים, כמו שידענו שלא הושו פלם בכנונה אחת לשאול להם מלך לשופטם ככל הגוים, ואדרבא מפת גודל יראת ה' שהיה בלבכם ויודעים שהפל תלוי ביד ה' בכנונה טובה והגוונה אמרו "מה ישענו זה" אלא הקב"ה פי "לה" הישועה", לכן כתב קרא "ובני בליעל" לומר שבלב רע דברו זה.

The commentators troubled themselves to explain the reason that Scripture selected the language, **“But some scoundrels said, ‘How can this fellow save us?’”** [The commentary] seems to say that [they are called scoundrels] to inform us of a great novelty, that we should not say that those who say, **“How can this fellow save us”** were the more righteous ones. How could one think that, if the word “scoundrels” had been omitted? As we know, the people did not all reach a consensus of one thinking when they asked for a king to judge them like all the other nations. I.e., to the contrary, the righteous among the people had a great fear of G-d in

¹⁵ I Sam. 10:27.

¹⁶ II Sam. 16:5–13.

¹⁷ Ketubot 17a.

their hearts, and they knew that everything depended upon the Hand of G-d. So one might think that it was the righteous ones talking, and with good and proper intention, they said, “How can this fellow save us,” rather the Holy One, Blessed be He, for “deliverance is the L-rd’s.”¹⁸ Therefore, to make it clear that it was not the righteous ones speaking, Scripture stated, “But some scoundrels,” to say that they spoke this with an evil heart.

אָלָא דְקָשָׁה מָה הִיְתָה פְּוֹנָתָם לְבִזּוֹת אֶת הַמֶּלֶךְ וְהֵלֵא הֵם בְּקִשְׁוֵהוּ מִתַּחֲלָה. וַיֵּשׁ לֹאמֵר דְּגֵרְסִינּוּ בְּפֶרֶק ג' דְּעֶרְכִין ר' יְהוּדָה וְשִׂיאָה וְרַבֵּנּוּ, הֵד אָמַר דּוֹר לְפִי פֶרְנָס, וְהֵד אָמַר פֶּרְנָס לְפִי הַדּוֹר. וּמְסִיק הַתָּם דְּלַעֲנִין תּוֹקֶפֶא וְנִיחּוּתָא קְאָמְרִי ע"כ. וְשִׂאוֹל לֹא זָכָה לְמַלּוּכָה אֶלָּא מְרֻב מַעֲנֻתָנּוּתוֹ יְתִירָה כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ רַז"ל עַל הַפְּסוּק "הִגְדָּה-הוּא נִחְבָּא אֱלֵי-הַכֹּלִים", וְהָיוּ אוֹמְרִים אִם אָנוּ מְקִיפִים וְעֵזִים וְרַבֵּי בְּלִיעַל, דְּהֵינּוּ עֵזִים עַד מְאֹד, אִם כֵּן בְּהֶכְרַח יֵשׁ לוֹ לְמֶלֶךְ לְהִיּוֹת גַּם הוּא עֵז, בֵּין לְמַר וּבֵין לְמַר, דְּעַד כָּאֵן לֹא פְּלִיגֵי דּוֹר לְפִי פֶרְנָס וְכו' אֶלָּא קוֹדֵם הַמְּנׁוּי, אֲבָל לְאַחַר שְׁנִתְמַנְּה מִן הַשְּׂמַיִם בְּנִדְאֵי שִׁיְהִיו כּוֹלֵם שְׁוִים בְּדַעַת אַחַת. וְכִשְׂרָאוּ שִׂאוֹל כָּל כֶּף עֲנִיו הִפְּדוּ טְבַע שְׁלָקָהֶם, נוֹסֵף עַל זֶה כִּי מִשְׁפֵּט הַמֶּלּוּכָה הוּא לְנִהוּג הַנְּשִׂאוֹת בְּרַמִּים כְּדִי שְׁתֵּהֵא אִימָתוֹ מוֹטְלָת עַל הָעַם, אָמְרוּ, "מַה-יִשְׁעֵנוּ זֶה".

Rather, the question is: What was their intent in insulting the king, for if we're talking about those who were not righteous, didn't they desire him initially?

It can be said that it's presented in the 3rd chapter of tractate Arachin (17a), “Rabbi Yehuda the Nasi and the rabbis had a disagreement about the verse, “This is the generation of them that seek after Him, that seek Your face, Jacob. Selah” (Ps. 24:6), which teaches that the generation is on the same level as those who lead them, who seek after G-d. One said: [The level of the] generation follows [the level of the] leader, and one says: [The level of the] leader follows [the level of] his generation. The Gemara concludes there that they are speaking in terms of harshness and gentleness, that one that if the leader is harsh, then the generation will be harsh. If the leader is gentle and kind, the generation will be the same. The other holds that if the people of a certain generation are harsh, they will have a harsh leader; if the generation is gentle and kind, the leader will be similar.

Saul only merited the kingship because of his exceeding humility, as the rabbis of blessed memory said on the verse where Samuel prophesied that Saul would be king, and they searched for him, and found him, “Here; he is hiding among the baggage” (I Sam. 10:22).¹⁹ They said, we are powerful and shameless and scoundrels, which means extremely shameless. If so, the king also necessarily must be shameless, both according to the opinion of one master, i.e., Rabbi Yehuda the Nasi, and the other master, i.e., the rabbis.

They believed that at this point, prior to his appointment, there is no disagreement whether the generation follows the leader or whether the leader follows the generation. But after [a king] is appointed by Heaven, certainly everyone will become united in outlook.

As Saul appeared so humble, the opposite of their nature, in addition to the fact that the usual way of kingship is to conduct the leadership in a haughty manner so that fear of him will be imposed upon the people, they said, “how can this fellow save us.”

¹⁸ Ps. 3:9.

¹⁹ Midrash Tanchuma, Vayikra 3:1.

לא יעשה מלקמות פי לא ירגיש ולא יקנא בלחץ האויב. והואיל שהיו סבורים שאינו ראוי למלכות משום הכי, "ויבנהו ולא הביאו לו מנחה", כלומר לא תחשב לומר שמה שביזוהו הוא מפני שנהנה מהם, דומיא למאי דאמרינן בתלמיד תכם אצל עם הארץ נהנה מפניו דומה עליו כקיתון של חרס וכו', שהרי לא הביאו לו מנחה ודורון ומתנה.

That is, those who were not righteous wanted a king, but they did not want Saul. They felt that **he won't wage wars because he will not feel nor be provoked by the pressure of the enemy. Since they were of the opinion that he was not suitable for the kingship because of this, "they scorned him and brought him no tribute."** Why would they bring him a tribute, as they viewed him with scorn? **The intent is, don't think they scorned him because he benefited from them by accepting gifts, i.e., "Oh, he's just another crooked ruler who's out for his own interest."** This is **similar to what was said about the Torah scholar compared to the ignoramus:**

At first, [when he does not know him, the ignoramus considers the Torah scholar to be] like a goblet of gold. [Once] he has conversed with him [concerning mundane matters, he considers him to be] like a goblet of silver [i.e., the stature of the Torah scholar is downgraded in the eyes of the ignoramus]. [Once the scholar] **has received benefit from him, [the ignoramus] [considers him to be] like an earthenware goblet, [which] once broken cannot be fixed.**

- Sanhedrin 52b

Thus, their scorn was certainly not based upon Saul's willingly taking gifts from them, **for they didn't bring him tribute and gifts.**

ואמר, "ניהי כמתריש" ולא מתריש, לומר שתפס פלך שתיקה כמו רחל ואסתר. אי נמי שלא התריש ממש רק המתין להראות להם מופת חומד שהוא ראוי להיות מלך עליהם, שאמרי זה בסמוך כתיב קרא "מי האמר שאול ימלך עלינו" וכו' "ויאמר שאול לא יומת איש ביום הזה כי היום עשה-ה' תשועה בישראל". וקשה מה ענין זה לזה אדרבא יש לנו לדון לכף חובה המבנה את המלך כי הוא כמבנה חס ושלום הקב"ה, ועל זה נאמר "ויבערת הרע מקרבך".

Also, [Scripture] said, "He was as a deaf man," and not "he was deaf," to say that he adopted the wisdom of silence, like Rachel and Esther.

Alternatively, he wasn't literally deaf, rather, he waited to show them conclusive proof that he was suitable to be king over them. For afterward, in the adjoining verse, Scripture writes, "The people then said to Samuel, 'Who was it who said, "Shall Saul be king over us?" Hand the men over and we will put them to death!' At that point, Saul replied, 'No man shall be put to death this day! For this day the L-rd has brought victory to Israel,' "²⁰ **i.e., against the Ammonites. There is a question how one thing relates to another. How was the miraculous defeat of the Ammonites a reason to forgive those scorning him? To the contrary, we should be strict in judging one who insults the king, because he is like one who insults the Holy One, blessed be He, G-d forbid. About this, it is said, "thus you will sweep out evil from your midst."**²¹

²⁰ I Sam. 11:12–13.

²¹ Deut. 17:7, 22:21, 22:24, and 24:7.

וגיש לומר ששואול לא רצה להמית אלו הבני בליעל מפני שאינו יכול לדעת כמה אחרים יש בישראל שסוברים כמוהם, ואף על פי שלא בזו אותו בגלוי ופרסום כמו אלו, שמא בלבם יש להם שנאה עליו ואפשר שישובו ויגליו עליו כל העדה. ומשום הכי הקריש ולא רצה להמיתם, וכוננתו היתה שיודו מעצמם על חטאם ופושעם הואיל שהקב"ה עשה תשועה בישראל. והטעם הוא מפני שהם היו סוברים ששואול אינו ראוי למלוכה לפי שלא היה עז ובליעל כמוהם. ואילו היו כל ישראל קשים ובני בליעל זה אל זה לא היו נוצחים במלחמה, שדורו של אחאב מתוך שהיתה ביניהם אהבה ושלוש יוצאים במלחמה ונוצחים מה שאין כן דורו של דוד.

It can be said that Saul didn't want to kill these scoundrels, because he did not know how many others there were in Israel who thought like them. Even though [the others in Israel] didn't despise him openly and publicly like these scoundrels, perhaps in their hearts they had hatred against him, and it's possible that the entire community would return and curse him. For that reason, he was deaf and didn't want to put them to death. His intent was that they would acknowledge their sin and crime themselves, since the Holy One, Blessed be He, brought victory to Israel. The reason for them to admit their sin in scorning him is because they were of the opinion that Saul was not fit for the kingship, because he was not strong and a scoundrel like them. However, if all Israel had been tough and scoundrels to each other, they would not have been victorious in war. Regarding the generation of Ahab, even though they were idolators, there was love and peace between them, and no informers, and they went out to war and were victorious. That is something that was not so in the generation of David, who would sometimes lose battles because of division and slander.²²

וכיון שנוצחו במלחמה אמר שאול מדנתו ה' תשועה בישראל שמע מינה שיש ביניהם שלום ואהבה. ונתאמת הדבר שהדור והפרנס הם כלם בדעת אחת שנה על נכון, ומשום הכי "לא יומת איש", לפי שמה שעשו לא היה בנדון ופושע אלא שפועו בסברתם. וכיון שאני מודיע להם שמהישועה שעשה עמנו הקב"ה יש לנו מופת חותם הפך סברתם, בנדאי שיתחרטו. אבל הוא עצמו טעה בסברתו, שהרי אדרבא מהישועה זו נודע שאלו היו יחידים בסברתם ולא יש אחרים בקשר עמם.

Since they were victorious in war, Saul said: Since G-d gave us salvation in Israel, hear from this that there is peace and love among them. It is fitting that the generation and the leader are all of the same temperament, and for that reason, "no one shall be put to death," as what they did was not malicious and a crime, rather, they only erred in their opinion. Since I am informing them that the Holy One, Blessed be He, has given us salvation, we have conclusive proof in opposition to their reasoning, and certainly they will repent.

But he himself erred in his opinion, for to the contrary, from this salvation it was known that these scoundrels were the only ones with their opinion, and there was no one else associated with them.

²² Lev. Rabbah 26:2.

ולפי שהעולם נידון אחר רובו והם בטלים במיעוטם משום הכי הנה להם הישועה, ואם כן כל עוד שלא שבו ונתתרוטו הנה לו להמיתם, וכי קאמרינן שהמלך יכול למחול הוא דוקא כשהמבנה מתתרט, כמו דוד שיצא לקראתו שמעי בן-גרא שהנה מתנחם ומתתרט על מה שעשה.

Because the entire world is judged according to the majority,²³ and they were an insignificant minority, because of this, they had a salvation. If so, as long as they did not return and repent, he should have killed them. Regarding the Rambam saying that the king is able to forgive them, that is specifically when the scornful person repents, as with King David, when Shimei, son of Gera, went out to him, for he was regretful and repenting for what he had done in cursing David.

וזהו פירוש הפסוק "לה' הישועה", כשה' עושה איזו תשועה בקרב ישראל זה אות אמת שיש ביניהם שלום כדורו של אהאב, והשלום הוא פלי מחזיק ברכה, וזהו, "על-עמך ברכתך סלה".

This is the explanation of the verse, “Deliverance is the L-rd’s; Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah!”: When G-d presented some salvation among Israel, it is a true sign that there is peace among them, such as the generation of Ahab. The peace is a vessel that holds a blessing, and this is the meaning of, “Your blessing be upon Your people! Selah!”

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²³ Kiddushin 40b.