

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XXXI: Emor (Lev. 21:1–24:23)

Essay 19. Saul's embarrassment and forgiveness

בְּרַכּוֹת פָּרַק קמ"א כָּל הָעוֹשֶׂה דְבַר עֲבִירָה וּמִתְבַּיֵּשׁ בָּהּ מוֹחֲלִין לוֹ עַל כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵאמַר "לָמָּה הִרְגַּזְתָּנִי לְהַעֲלוֹת אֹתִי" וְכוּ' "וְלֹא-עָנְנִי עוֹד גַּם בְּיַד-הַנְּבִיאִים גַּם-בְּתַלְמוֹת". וְאֵילּוּ "אוֹרִים וְתוֹמִים" לֹא קָאָמַר. מִשּׁוֹם דְּקָטְלִיהּ לְנוֹב עִיר הַפְּתָנִים. וּמִזֵּי דְאַחִילוּ לִיהּ מִן שְׁמַיָא, דְּכָתִיב "וּמָחָר אֶתְּהָ וּבְנִיךָ עָמִי" וְאָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן "עָמִי" — בְּמַחֲצִיטֵי.

Tractate **Berachot**, the first chapter:

And Rabba bar Chinana Sava said in the name of Rav: **One who commits an act of transgression and is ashamed of it, all of his transgressions are forgiven, as it is said . . .** “Samuel said to Saul, ‘**Why have you disturbed me and brought me up [from the dead]?**’ And Saul answered, ‘I am in great trouble. The Philistines are attacking me and G-d has turned away from me; **He no longer answers me, either by prophets or in dreams.** So I have called you to tell me what I am to do.’”¹ [Saul said he consulted prophets and dreams, but] **he did not say [that he consulted] the *Urim VeTummim* [even though I Sam. 28:6 states that he consulted them].**

[The reason for this is] **because he killed [all the residents of] Nov, the city of priests** [and because of this transgression Saul was ashamed to consult the *Urim VeTummim*, which was accomplished by means of a priest].

And from where [is it derived] that Saul was pardoned by [G-d in] the heavens [for his transgressions]? As it is written: “And Samuel said to Saul: **Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.**”² **And Rabbi Yochanan said: With me** [does not only mean that they will die, but also means, in a statement that contains an aspect of consolation, that they will be] **in my company** [among the righteous in the World-to-Come, as Saul was pardoned for his transgressions].

- Berachot 12b

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¹ I Sam. 28:15.

² I Sam. 28:19.

מקשים למה מתו שבע בָּנָיו מחמת טענת הגִּבְעוֹנִים והקב"ה שלא הרעב שלוש שנים על שהמית את הגִּבְעוֹנִים כְּשֶׁהָרַג נֹב עִיר הַכֹּהֲנִים וְהֵלֵא כָּבֵד נִתְכַפְּרוּ כָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו.

After Saul's death, Israel suffered a three-year famine, which was thought to have happened because Saul had wronged the Gibeonites. The Gibeonites told David that the only compensation available was the death of seven of Saul's sons. David then handed over Saul's sons Armoni and Mephiboshet, and five of Saul's grandsons, all of whom were killed by the Gibeonites.³ **Commentators⁴ question why [Saul's] seven sons died because of the claim of the Gibeonites, and why it is that G-d sent the famine three years for killing the Gibeonites, when [Saul] destroyed Nob, the city of the priests. For hadn't all his sins been atoned for,** according to Rav in Berachot 12b?

ולדין אין זו קושיא שהרי הקב"ה אינו מכפר אלא עבירות שבין אדם למקום, אבל שבין אדם לחבירו בפרט בעודם בחיים צריך מתחלה לפייס לחבירו ואחר כך יתכפר מהקב"ה, שמי שחוטא לחבירו הוא מבזה המקום במה שמבזה חבירו, ואף כּאן לשאול נמחלו לו כל העבירות שבינו למקום, אמנם במה שחטא עם הגִּבְעוֹנִים הִיָּה צָרִיךְ מִתְחִלָּה לִפְיִים הַגִּבְעוֹנִים וְאַחֵר כִּי אִף הַקַּב"ה יִמְחֹל לוֹ הַחֵלֶק הַמְּגִיעַ לוֹ.

But for us, there is no difficulty, for the Holy One, Blessed be He, only forgives transgressions between man and the Omnipresent. But those between man and his fellow, especially while they are still alive, one must first reconcile with his friend and then repent from the Holy One, Blessed be He.⁵ For one who sins against his fellow is despising the Omnipresent with what he has despised his fellow. So too here, in requesting that all the transgressions between himself and the Omnipresent be forgiven, in light of how he had sinned with the Gibeonites, it was initially necessary to appease the Gibeonites. Afterward, even the Holy One, Blessed be He, would forgive him the portion of the sins relevant to Him.

עוד מקשים על הלשון "עמי" — במחיצתי, דאיה יתכן זה והלא שמואל נקבר ברמה ושואל נקבר בִּיבֶשׁ גִּלְעָד. ואם נאמר דשייך על הנשמה, והלא כל צדיק וצדיק עושים לו מחיצה ומדור בפני עצמו שנגאמר "כִּי־הִלֵּךְ הָאָדָם אֶל־בֵּית עוֹלָמוֹ".

We quoted earlier from Berachot 12b, that Samuel told Saul, "Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me," and Rabbi Yochanan interpreted "with me" as meaning "in my company." **People question the language of "with me" as meaning "in my company," for how is this possible, for wasn't Samuel buried in Ramah,⁶ and Saul was buried in Jabesh-Gilead?⁷ If it'll be said that this relates to the soul rather than the physical body, doesn't each and every righteous person**

³ II Sam. chapter 21.

⁴ See the Rif on Ein Yakov.

⁵ Mishnah Yoma 8:9; Yoma 85b.

⁶ I Sam. 25:1.

⁷ I Sam. 31:11–13.

make a partition and compartmentalization for himself, as it is said, “But man sets out for his eternal abode.”⁸

וַיֵּשׁ לְזִמְרָה דְאִמְרֵינָן פְּרָק כ"ג דְּשַׁבְּתָא אוּבָא טְמֵיָא, הֵיכִי אֶסְקִיָּה לְשִׁמּוּאֵל בְּנִגְיָדָא? אֶפְשָׁר לְזִמְרָה הַתָּם תּוֹךְ שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֳדָשׁ הָיָה, דְּתַנְיָא כָּל שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֳדָשׁ, הַנְּשֻׁמָּה עוֹלָה וְיִוְרְדָתָּ. לְאַחַר שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֳדָשׁ, הַגּוֹף בָּטֵל וְהַנְּשֻׁמָּה עוֹלָה, וְשׁוֹב אֵינָה יוֹרְדָתָּ עַכ"ל. וְאִם כֵּן תּוֹךְ שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר חֳדָשׁ שָׁל שִׁמּוּאֵל הָיָה יָכוֹל לְהִיּוֹת שְׁאֵוֹל בְּמַחֲצֵיתוֹ מִפְּנֵי שְׁעָדֵיין הַנְּשֻׁמָּה לֹא הִלְכָה לְבֵית עוֹלָמָה וְלְמַחֲצֵיהָ הָרְאוּיָה לָהּ דְּנִקְא.

It can be said that we say in the 23rd chapter of tractate Shabbat:

A certain apostate said to Rabbi Abbahu: You say that the souls of the righteous are stored beneath the Throne of Glory, [but if so], **how did the oracle woman raise up Samuel using necromancy** [if his soul was no longer in this world]? [Rabbi Abbahu] **said to him: There, it was within twelve months** [of his death], **as it was taught** [in a *Baraita*]: For a **full twelve months** [a deceased person's] **body remains and his soul ascends and descends**, [such that it is sometimes in this world with its body]. **After twelve months, the body ceases** [to exist].⁹

- Shabbat 152b

If so, within the twelve months following Samuel's death, it was possible for Saul to be in his presence, because his soul had not yet traveled to its eternal place and to the partition appropriate for it.

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⁸ Eccl. 12:5.

⁹ Righteous people are only available for twelve months, but wicked people can be called up indefinitely, as we see from Gittin 57a, which reports that Onkelos raised Balaam. Zohar III:168b-169a says that when the *nefesh* leaves the body, it loses its voice, which scatters to the four corners of the earth. Through necromancy, the scattered voice can be gathered, but only as a low voice coming from under the earth, and only in order to tell the person falsehoods, or to speak of things it heard “from behind the curtain.” See also Rabbi Menachem Azaria da Fano (“Rema M’Pano”) (1548–1620), Italian Kabbalist and commentator on the Talmud, *Asara Ma’amorot*, in the article “HaNefesh,” part 3, section 15.