

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter XLVIII: Shoftim (Deut. 16:18–21:9)

### Essay 3. Saul surrendered his honor

**בַּפָּרֶקֶט** ב' דְיוֹמָא אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר וְשִׁמוּאֵל מִפְּנֵי מָה לֹא נִמְשָׁכָה מַלְכוּת בֵּית שְׂאוּל, מִפְּנֵי שְׂלֵא הִנָּה בּוֹ שׁוּם דּוֹפֵי, דְאָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן מִשׁוּם רַבֵּי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן יְהוֹצְדָק אֵין מַעְמִידִין פְּרָנָס עַל הַצָּבוּר אֲלָא אִם פֶּן קוּפָה שְׁל שְׂרָצִים תְּלוּיָהּ לּוֹ מֵאַחֲרָיו, שְׂאִם תְּזוּם דַּעְתּוֹ עָלָיו אוֹמְרִים לּוֹ תְזוּר לְאַחֲרָיָךְ אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר רַב מִפְּנֵי מָה נִעְנָשׁ שְׂאוּל, מִפְּנֵי שְׁמַחַל עַל כְּבוֹדּוֹ. לְכַאוּרָה יֵשׁ לְדַקְדָּק בְּמֵאֵי פְּלִיגֵי רַב וְשִׁמוּאֵל.

In chapter 2 of tractate *Yoma*, we read:

**Rav Yehuda said [that] Shmuel said: Why did the kingship of the house of Saul not continue [on to succeeding generations]? Because there was no flaw [in his ancestry; he was of impeccable lineage]. As Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yehotzadak: One appoints a leader over the community only if he has a box [full] of creeping animals hanging behind him [i.e., he has something inappropriate in his ancestry that preceded him]. [That is] so that if he exhibits a haughty attitude toward the community, one can say to him: Turn [and look] behind you [and be reminded of your humble roots]. [This is why David's kingdom lasted while Saul's did not, as David descended from a family with problematic ancestry, namely Tamar (Gen., chapter 38) and Ruth the Moabite (Ruth 4:18–22).]**<sup>1</sup>

**Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: Why was Saul punished? Because [at the very outset of his reign he inappropriately] surrendered his [royal] honor, as it is stated [with regard to Saul's inauguration]: “And some scoundrels said: How can this man save us? So they disparaged him and brought him no gift. But he was as one who did not hear” (I Sam. 10:27).**

- *Yoma* 22b

**Apparently, we need to check where Rav and Shmuel disagreed.**

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<sup>1</sup> This teaching is also discussed in *Zera Shimshon*, Chapter XXVI: Shemini, Essay 9

וּנְרָאָה דְלֹא פְּלִיגֵי פְּלֵל, וְעִקְרָהּ הַעֲוֹנָשׁ הִנֵּה מִפְּנֵי שְׁמִחָה עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ כְּרַב, וּמֵה שְׁאֵמֵר שְׁמוּאֵל שֶׁלֹּא הִנֵּה בּוֹ שׁוֹם דּוֹפֵי אֵינּוּ אֶלְיָא לְהוֹסִיף פֶּת וְטַעַם לְסִבְרָתוֹ שֶׁל רַב, דְּבִשְׁלֵמָא אִם הִנֵּה לוֹ שׁוֹם דּוֹפֵי הִנֵּה יָכוֹל לְהִתְנַצֵּל, שֶׁשְׁטַעַם שְׁמִחָה עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ הִנֵּה כְּדֵי שֶׁלֹּא יֵאמְרוּ לוֹ חֲזוֹר לְאַחֲרֵיךָ, אֲבָל עֲתָה שֶׁלֹּא הִנֵּה לוֹ שׁוֹם דּוֹפֵי, בְּנִדְאֵי לֹא הִנֵּה לוֹ לְמַחֲזֵל.

**It seems that there was no disagreement at all, and the main point of the punishment was because he surrendered his honor, as Rav said, and what Shmuel said, that he had no flaw in his lineage, was only to add strength and flavor to Rav's opinion. For granted, if he had some flaw in his lineage, he would have been able to excuse himself by saying that the reason that he surrendered his honor was in order to not act haughty, so that they wouldn't say to him, "turn [and look behind] you." But now that we understand that he in fact had no flaw, certainly he should not have surrendered his honor.**

אֲבָל עֲדֵיין קָשָׁה שְׁלִכְאוּרָה מֵה שְׁמִחָה עַל כְּבוֹדוֹ פְּהוּגָה עֲשָׂה, שְׁהָרֵי בְּאוֹתוֹ יוֹם שְׁנִתְמַנֶּה לְמַלְכָּה וְאָמְרוּ כָּל הָעָם "יִחִי הַמֶּלֶךְ" לֹא נִהְיָה בּוֹ כְּבוֹד כְּמַלְכָּה, דְּכִתִּיב "וַיִּשְׁלַח שְׁמוּאֵל אֶת־כָּל־הָעָם אִישׁ לְבֵיתוֹ: וְגַם־שְׁאוּל הִלָּךְ לְבֵיתוֹ גְּבַעְתָּה וַיָּלְכוּ עִמּוֹ הַחַיִל אֲשֶׁר־נָגַע אֱלֹהִים בְּלִפְתָּם: וּבְנֵי בְלִיעֵל אָמְרוּ" וְכוּ'. וְהֵלֵא מִן הָרְאוּי הִנֵּה שְׁלִיכּוּ כָּל הָעָם אַחֲרָיו. וְאֵנּוּ רוֹאִים שֶׁלֹּא הִלְכוּ עִמּוֹ לֹא כּוֹלָם וְלֹא מִקְצָתָם רַק "הַחַיִל אֲשֶׁר־נָגַע אֱלֹהִים" וְכוּ'. וְזֶה מוֹרָה שְׁעֵדֵיין לֹא קִבְּלוּהוּ עֲלֵיהֶם בְּרִצּוֹן שְׁלָם, וּכְמוֹ שְׁפִירְשׁוּ הַמְּפָרְשִׁים שְׁעֵדֵיין לֹא הִנֵּה מְרוּצָה לְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְכֵן נִרְאָה מִפְּשֵׁט הַפְּתוּבִים שְׁהָרֵי אַחֵר כִּדְ כָּתִיב "לְכוּ וְנִלְכְּהוּ הַגִּלְגָל וְנִסְחַדְשׁוּ שֵׁם הַמְּלוּכָה".

**But there is still a question, that he apparently acted properly in surrendering his honor, in recognition of the will of the people, for on the same day that he was appointed king and all the people said, "long live the king,"<sup>2</sup> they nevertheless didn't treat him with the respect due a king. This is as it is written afterward:**

Samuel expounded to the people the rules of the monarchy, and recorded them in a document which he deposited before the L-rd. **Samuel then sent the people back to their homes. Saul also went home to Gibeah, accompanied by men of valor, whose hearts G-d had touched. But some scoundrels said, "How can this fellow save us?"** So they scorned him and brought him no gift. But he was as one who did not hear."

- I Sam. 10:25–27

**Wouldn't it have been proper for all the people to have followed him? We see that they did not go with him: not all of them, nor even a significant fraction of them, but only "men of valor, whose hearts G-d had touched." This shows that [the people] still hadn't accepted him with a complete will. This is as the commentators explained, that he was not yet desired by all of Israel, and thus it appears from the plain meaning of the verses, for afterward, it is written, "Samuel said to the people, 'Come, let us go to Gilgal and there inaugurate the monarchy.'**"<sup>3</sup> Thus, as he had detractors and was nowhere near universally accepted, would it have been right for him to respond harshly to the detractors?

<sup>2</sup> I Sam. 10:24.

<sup>3</sup> I Sam. 11:14.

ובכר ידוע עצת הזקנים "אם-היום תהנה-עבד לעם הנה ועבדתם" וכו', שאין ראוי למלך להראות דין ומשפט בתחלת מלכותו, ואף בתלמיד חכם דאמרינו התם כל תלמיד חכם שאינו נוקם ונוטר פנחש אינו תלמיד חכם, מקשים התם מההיא דהעלובים ואינם עולבים וכו', ומסקינן לעולם דנקיט ליה בליביה, והכי נמי שאול נקיט ליה בליביה, שנאמר "ניהי כמחריש", דהנה לו לומר "ניהי מחריש", אלא שלא החריש להם לגמרי אלא נקיט להו בליביה, ולא הנה ראוי להעניש.

**The advice of the elders is already known, for they said to Rehoboam, son of Solomon, "If you will be a servant to those people today and serve them, and if you respond to them with kind words, they will be your servants always."<sup>4</sup> That is, that it is not fitting for a king to demonstrate strict justice and judgment at the beginning of his reign.**

This is true even for a Torah scholar. This may not initially appear to be the case, for it says there, "Any Torah scholar who does not avenge [himself] and bear a grudge like a snake [when insulted] is not [considered] a Torah scholar [at all, as it is important to uphold the honor of Torah and its students by reacting harshly to insults]."<sup>5</sup> However, [commentators] question there about the [teaching] that "[regarding those] who are insulted but do not insult, who hear their shame but do not respond, who act out of love and are joyful in suffering, the verse says: 'And they that love Him are as the sun going forth in its might' (Judges 5:31)."<sup>6</sup> They considered that "actually, [the scholar may] keep [resentment] in his heart,"<sup>7</sup> for [Scripture] could have said, "But he did not hear," instead of saying, "But he was as one who did not hear." Rather, he wasn't completely deaf to them, rather he kept resentment against them in his heart, and he did not deserve to be punished.

So in accordance with the advice of the elders, and the views of the commentators that a Torah scholar should also keep resentment against detractors in his heart, why was Saul punished?

ויש לומר דלעולם מחמת מלכותו לא הנה לו למחול, משום דכבר הנה נבחר מהקב"ה למלך, ובצל פרחו של ישראל היו צריכים לכבדו, ולא שייך הכא טעמא ד"אם-היום תהנה-עבד" וכו', דשאני התם ברחבעם שהיה תלוי בבחירתם של ישראל, ואדרבא כבר נגזרה הגזירה על מלכות בית דוד שתתחלק, אבל פאן הכבוד שלו הוא של הקב"ה, ומשום הכי נעניש מדה כנגד מדה. הוא לא חלק פבוד למלכות וריחם על אותם בני בליעל שלא הנה ראוי לרחם עליהם. משום הכי נעניש שבא לידו ענין אחר פיוצא בזה ממש שריחם על העמלקים עד שבזה אבד מלכותו. ואף לפי שהיה תלמיד חכם לא עשה פהוגן, שהרי לפי פירוש רש"י התם על דנקיט בליביה, שרצה לומר ואם בא אהד לנקום נקמתו בקו המשפט ישתוק, אם פן לבסוף פשאמרו "העם אל-שמואל מי האומר שאול ימלוך עלינו תנו האנשים ונמיתם" הנה לו לשתוק, והוא לא עשה כן אלא אדרבא "ויאמר שאול לא-יומת איש ביום הנה".

**It can be said that because of [Saul's] kingship, he should not have surrendered his honor, because he had already been chosen by the Holy One, Blessed be He, to be the king. Because of that, it was necessary for Israel to respect him. The reason given that "If you will be a servant to those people today . . . they will be your servants always," is not relevant here.**

**It's different there for Rehoboam, that he depended upon the selection of Israel, rather than being selected by G-d. To the contrary, a decree had already been decreed that the**

<sup>4</sup> I Kings 12:7.

<sup>5</sup> Yoma 22b–23a.

<sup>6</sup> Shabbat 88b.

<sup>7</sup> Yoma 23a.

kingdom of the House of David would be divided. I.e., Rehoboam was the first king of Judah, but being king of a divided kingdom was not as great as being king of a united kingdom. Therefore, the advice of the elders that he surrender his honor was fine for him.

**But here, with Saul, his honor was that of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and because of this, he was punished measure-for-measure, because he did not show respect for the kingship, and he took mercy on those scoundrels for whom it was not proper to have mercy upon them. Because of this, he was punished, such that another matter came to his attention, exactly like this, when he showed mercy on the Amalekites, such that he lost his kingdom.<sup>8</sup>**

Even though [Saul] was also a Torah scholar, he did not act justly, for according to the explanation of Rashi there on [a Torah scholar] keeping resentment in his heart, that means to say that if [a Torah scholar] comes to take revenge according to the letter of the law against someone who has insulted him, he will be silent.<sup>9</sup> If so, at the end, when the people 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,’ ”<sup>10</sup> he should have remained silent, though continuing to maintain a grudge in his heart. **But he didn’t do this; rather, to the contrary, “But Saul replied, ‘No man shall be put to death this day!’ ”**<sup>11</sup> This implies that he did not even maintain a grudge in his heart.

ועוד שהרי הרמב"ם (בפרק ז' מהלכות תלמוד תורה) פסק שתלמיד חכם שביזוהו בצנעא, מדת חסידות היא למחול, בפרהסיא אסור לו למחול וכו'. וכאן הביזוי היה בפרהסיא ומשום הכי נענש, ואף על גב שהמבנה תלמיד חכם אינו חייב מיתה בידי אדם, מכל מקום היה לו לצרף בזה בזיון המלכות, אף על גב שעדיין לא קבלוהו עליהם לגמרי.

**Also, the Rambam ruled that:**

**If a Torah scholar is embarrassed in private, it was the practice of the pious to forgive, but if a Torah scholar is embarrassed in public, it is forbidden for him to surrender his honor.** Indeed, if he does so, he is punished, because the disrespect of the Torah is involved. Instead, he should seek vengeance and carry enmity over the matter like a snake, until the offender requests to be pardoned. Then, he should forgive him.

- Mishneh Torah, Laws of Learning Torah, 7:13

**Here, the scorn was in public, and for that reason, he was punished, and even though one who insults a Torah scholar is not obligated to die at the hands of man, nevertheless he should have disciplined them for this insult of the kingship, even though they had not yet accepted him completely.**

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<sup>8</sup> I Sam., chapter 15.

<sup>9</sup> Rashi on Yoma 23a.

<sup>10</sup> I Sam. 11:12.

<sup>11</sup> I Sam. 11:13.