YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA**

**Parashat Emor**

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

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Dedicated in memory of Rav Hanoch ben Aaron Eliyahu Singer *z"l*   
whose *yahrzeit* is 12 Iyar, by his granddaughter Vivian Singer

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In honor of the *yahrzeit* of Charna Reiter bas Morthe,   
which falls on the 15th of Iyar, "from those who remember her."

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**The Death of King Shaul and His Sons**

Summarized by Shmuel Fuchs

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

A week ago, we read *Parashat* *Kedoshim*, which concludes with the following verse: "A man also or a woman that divines by a ghost or a familiar spirit, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones; their blood shall be upon them" (*Vayikra* 20:27). Through this verse, the *Midrash Rabba* connects our *parasha*, *Parashat Emor*, to King Shaul. From there, the *midrash* moves to the meeting between King Shaul and the witch of Endor, and explains Shaul's cruel death in battle, together with his three sons.

Rabbi Yehoshua of Sakhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moshe: Each generation and its judges, each generation and its kings, each generation and its sages, each generation and its leaders, each generation and its teachers, each generation and its officers, each generation and its administrators, each generation and its violent men, each generation and its robbers, each generation and its prophets. And He showed him Shaul and his sons falling by the sword.

He said to Him: Will the first king appointed over Your children be pierced by a sword?

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: You speak to Me? "Say to the priests," whom he killed, for they denounce him! As it is stated: "And the Lord said to Moshe: Say to the priests, the sons of Aharon." (*Vayikra Rabba Emor*, no. 26)

This *midrash*, however, does not accord with the reason stated explicitly at the home of the witch of Endor – namely, that Shaul was punished because of his failure to destroy Amalek:

And Shmuel said: Why do you ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from you, and is become your adversary? And the Lord has wrought for Himself, 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. Because you did not hearken to the voice of the Lord, and did not execute His fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore has the Lord done this thing to you this day. 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. (I *Shmuel* 28:16-19)

These verses leave us with difficult feelings about Shmuel's coldness towards Shaul and the harsh sentence decreed against Shaul for not having been sufficiently determined in his war against Amalek. After all, he was already punished when the kingship was promised to David; why did he receive the additional punishment of his own death, together with that of his sons, at Gilboa?

The Sages were aware of this problem, which is why they explained that the sin for which Shaul fell in the Gilboa was not his negligence regarding Amalek, but rather his destruction of Nov, the city of the priests, with its 85 priests and the members of their families, "both children and sucklings" (I *Shmuel* 22:19). This was a terrible sin!

The *midrash* brings this in connection with the beginning of our *parasha*, where the Torah demands from the priests extreme dedication and forbids them to defile themselves through contact with the dead, even if it is a friend or second-degree relative who passed away. Above them stands the High Priest, who is not to interrupt the Temple service even to go to the funeral of a first-degree relative. The passage dealing with Nadav and Avihu indicates that priests are forbidden not only to defile themselves for the sake of their relatives, but even to mourn for them, because of the importance of their service in the *Mishkan.* When Shaul kills the High Priest and all the priests of the *Mishkan* and the members of their families, should we expect that their blood will not cry out from the earth? Should we expect that God will not punish him for killing God's devoted servants?!

Is there a connection between the reason mentioned in Scripture, Shaul's failure to destroy Amalek, and the massacre of Nov, the city of the priests, which is the critical sin according to the *midrash*? There is a clear verbal analogy that connects them:

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay **both man and woman, child and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey**. (I *Shmuel* 15:3)

And he smote Nov, the city of the priests, with the edge of his sword, **both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen and donkeys and sheep,** with the edge of the sword. (I *Shmuel* 22:19)

*Chazal* were sensitive to this verbal analogy and the connection between the two accounts:

When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Shaul: "Now go and smite Amalek," he said: If on account of one person the Torah said: Perform the ceremony of the heifer whose neck is to be broken, how much more [ought consideration to be given] to all these persons! And if human beings sinned, what has the cattle committed; and if the adults have sinned, what have the little ones done? A heavenly voice issued forth and said: "Be not righteous overmuch" (*Kohelet* 7:16). And when Shaul said to Doeg: "Turn you and fall upon the priests" (*Shmuel* 22:18), a heavenly voice issued forth to say: "Be not overmuch wicked" (*Kohelet* 7:17). (*Yoma* 22b)

**The Witch of Endor and the “Revelation” of Shmuel**

The question remains: *Chazal*, as it were, "correct" what is stated in Scripture. While their "correction" may seem to be a good one, can they do that?

The Biblical passage containing Shmuel's answer to Shaul – that his liability is for his sin with Amalek – was written from the perspective of Shaul. According to what is stated there, Shaul did not see Shmuel, and perhaps he did not hear him, either. In order to understand what happened, let us consider a dispute among the *Geonim* (cited by the Radak, ad loc.) about the question of how Shmuel was revealed, at God’s instruction, by way of the witch of Endor, whose sorcery is nothing but emptiness.

Two of the greatest Geonim, Rav Sa’adya Gaon and Rav Hai Gaon, said that this was a "temporary ruling" (*hora’at sha’a*) of God; He wanted Shaul to see Shmuel precisely through the forces of impurity, since God had turned away from him and did not answer him.

Rav Shmuel bar Chofni Gaon disagreed and instead proposed an exceedingly forced explanation of the verses: that the witch knew, by way of logical reasoning and her understanding of reality, that Israel would be defeated in the war and that Shaul would be killed; she was also familiar with the angry prophecy directed against Shaul after he failed to destroy Amalek; and therefore, she hid somebody in the room who spoke as if he were Shmuel.

This is a logically unacceptable interpretation, and therefore, I wish to offer an intermediate interpretation, which incorporates both interpretations proposed by the Geonim.

It is possible that Shaul did not hear the voice of Shmuel himself, but heard Shmuel's "prophecy" through the hearing of the witch of Endor – to whom Shmuel did in fact appear, by way of the forces of impurity that God temporarily bestowed upon her.

We can get an idea of what this woman could hear of prophecy from the words of Elifaz to Iyov, and from the words that he heard by way of a pure spirit from an unknown prophecy:

Now a word was secretly brought to me, and my ear received a whisper thereof. In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, fears came upon me, and trembling, and all my bones were made to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face, that made the hair of my flesh to stand up. It stood still, but I could not discern the appearance thereof; a form was before my eyes; I hear a still voice. (*Iyov* 4:12-16)

Elifaz does not fully understand what was said to him, and he tries to interpret it. The witch of Endor did the same with what she heard, and Shaul heard her interpretation. Shmuel did in fact say that Shaul and his sons would die in the war, but it is possible that he gave another reason for it – the reason offered by *Chazal*, i.e., Shaul's terrible sin against the priests of Nov.

**The Givonites and Shaul**

We find *Chazal* doing this in another place as well, and that too is puzzling:

And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David sought the face of the Lord. And the Lord said: It is for Shaul, and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Givonites. And the king called the Givonites, and said to them – now the Givonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn to them; and Shaul sought to slay them in his zeal for the children of Israel and Yehuda. (II *Shmuel* 21:1-2)

If Shaul slayed them "in his zeal for the children of Israel and Yehuda," it seems the action was justified; even if he was wrong, he acted out of a desire to protect his people. Is it right, then, that he should receive a punishment for this in addition to his punishment on the Gilboa, and seven of his children and grandchildren should die for his sin, their flesh given to the birds of the sky and not being buried for about eight months?

Once again, *Chazal* offer a solution:

Where, however, do we find that Shaul "put to death the Givonites"? Rather, since he killed the inhabitants of Nov, the city of the priests, who were supplying them with water and food, Scripture regards it as if he himself had killed them. (*Yevamot* 78b, and similarly *Bava Kama* 119a)

It is unthinkable that Shaul's seven sons and grandsons had to die in order to atone for the cut in the livelihood of a number of Givonites. It seems that *Chazal* wish to teach us that the "bloody house" mentioned above is not the Givonites, but rather Nov, the city of the priests, and that Shaul was punished with the death of his seven children and grandchildren for what happened in Nov – the injustice in the deaths of the priests, their wives, and their children.

Here is the place to ask why there are two punishments for the same sin, and why the death of Shaul and his three sons – and their humiliating hanging on the wall of Beit Shean – was not enough.

It is possible that God punished Shaul not only with his death, but also by hanging him and his sons and not bringing them to burial for an extended period of time. The men of Yavesh Gilad, in their nobility, bravery, and kindness to Shaul for the war that he waged to save Yavesh Gilad from Nachash the Amonite, "shortened" Shaul's punishment, and that night they stole his and his sons' bodies from the wall of the city, and brought them to burial in Yavesh Gilad. But the blood of the priests of Nov continued to flow (and perhaps they too were not brought to burial for a long time), and David was forced to hand over the additional seven to be hanged, not buried, and to be eaten by the birds of the sky. Ritzpa the daughter of Aya bravely saved part of the situation, and then God's anger waned, rain fell on the earth, and Shaul and his three sons were brought to a proper burial, in the grave of their father Kish in his ancestral land.

**The Consolation**

One final point: *Chazal* make an effort to reveal words of comfort within Shmuel's harsh prophecy to Shaul from the house of the witch of Endor:

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… (I *Shmuel* 28:19)

According to *Chazal*, he does not mean "with me" in the depths of Sheol, but "with me" in my division – in Shmuel's school in heaven, in the Garden of Eden:

"Tomorrow shall you and your sons be with me." What is "with me"? Rabbi Yochanan said: With me – in my division. (*Vayikra Rabba Emor* 27)

Why did *Chazal* bother to add these words of comfort? Shaul had a partner in the terrible crime that was committed in Nov, the city of the priests – Doeg the Edomite – who informed on them, who himself carried out the sentence, the murder, and who also added the women and children to the horrible killing. *Chazal* say that Doeg is one of those who have no part in the world-to-come (Mishna *Sanhedrin* 10:2). Indeed, there is no mention of Doeg being punished for his actions in this world.

Shaul, on the other hand, received a heavy punishment in this world, and therefore *Chazal* tell us that he has a portion in the world-to-come, in the division of Shmuel the prophet.

[This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Emor* 5781.]