YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #256: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXVI) – The Prohibition of Bamot (XLIII)**

In the [previous *shiur*](http://etzion.org.il/en/lecture-255-history-divine-service-altars-lxv-%E2%80%93-prohibition-bamot-xlii)we concluded our examination of the service of God in the days of Shaul as it is reflected in the end of the book of I *Shemuel.* We dealt with the state of the *Mishkan* in Shilo until its destruction and with the separation of the great *bama* which was located in Nov and later in Giv'on from the ark which was situated in Kiryat-Ye'arim. We surveyed various aspects of the service of God as they found expression in the days of Shaul.

We wish now to begin to examine the service of God in the days of David, first when he ruled as king of Yehuda, and afterwards when he ruled as king of all of Israel. We will then move on to the period of Shlomo, and continue with the service of God in the kingdoms of Yehuda and Israel until their destruction. In this way we will try to understand the nature of the service that was conducted at *bamot* both in Yehuda and in Israel.

### David's inquiring of God

After David's lament for Shaul, David addresses an inquiry to God:

Shall I go up into any of the cities of Yehuda? And the Lord said to him, Go up. (II *Shemuel* 2:1)

David is not satisfied with this general affirmative response, and therefore inquires where precisely he should go up, and God answers: "To Hebron."

King David is one of the prominent figures who make inquiries of God. In order to understand the uniqueness of his inquiries, we must consider the context of the earlier inquiries made of God.

### Inquiry regarding war

We find that inquiries are often made of God in connection with war. Following the death of Yehoshua it says:

Now after the death of Yehoshua it came to pass, that the children of Israel asked the Lord, saying, Who shall go up for us against the Kena'anim first, to fight against them? And the Lord said, Yehuda shall go up: behold, I have delivered the land into his hand. And Yehuda said to Shimon his brother, Come up with me into my lot, that we may fight against the Kena'ani; and I likewise will go up with you into your lot. So Shimon went with him. (*Shoftim* 1:1-3)

In the war relating to the concubine at Giv'a:

And the children of Israel arose; and went up to the house of God, and asked counsel of God, and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Binyamin? And the Lord said, Yehuda shall go up first. (*Shoftim* 20:18)

And afterwards:

And the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until evening, and asked counsel of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Binyamin my brother? And the Lord said, Go up against him. (*Shoftim* 20:23)

And again later:

And the children of Israel inquired of the Lord, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days. And Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon, stood before it in those days), saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Binyamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, Go up; for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand. (*Shoftim* 20:27-28)

It is clear that throughout the various stages of the battle, the defeat and the assorted attacks, the people of Israel inquire of God who was to go out to battle, and twice they even ask whether they should at all continue to fight.

Shaul, as well, at the battle at Mikhmash, tries to inquire of God:

And Shaul said to Achiya, Bring the ark of God here. For the ark of God was at that time with the children of Israel. And it came to pass, while Shaul talked to the priest, that the noise that was in the camp of the Pelishtim went on and increased: and Shaul said to the priest, Withdraw your hand. (I *Shemuel* 14:18-19)

And at Shaul's battle on the Gilboa:

And when Shaul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by the *Urim*, nor by prophets. (I *Shemuel* 28:6)[[1]](#footnote-1)

In the case of David we find many instances of inquiries of God relating to war, for example, when David flees from Shaul (I *Shemuel* 23:2). On the assumption that the outcome of a war is in the hands of God, the inquiry of God is meant to connect the human-military moves to the will of God. So too in connection with Tziklag:

And David said to Evyatar, the priest, Avimelekh's son, I pray you, bring me here the efod. And Evyatar brought the efod of David. And David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? Shall I overtake them? And He answered him, Pursue: for you shall surely overtake them, and without fail recover all. (I *Shemuel* 30:7-8)

After consolidating his power in Jerusalem:

And the Pelishtim came and spread themselves in the valley of Refa'im. And David inquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up to the Pelishtim? will you deliver them into my hand? (II *Shemuel* 5:18-19)

And later:

And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, You shall not go up; but make a circuit behind them, and come upon them over against the bakha trees. And let it be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the bakha trees, that then you shall bestir yourself: for then shall the Lord go out before you, to smite the camp of the Pelishtim. (II *Shemuel* 5:23-24)

Regarding inquiries of God by way of the *Urim* and *Tumim* relating to war, we wish to make several comments.[[2]](#footnote-2)

### A. Inquiring of God when going out to war – a *mitzva* for future generations

The Ramban writes at the end of his strictures to the Rambam's *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*:

There is a *mitzva* about which I am in doubt, as it seems to me that there is a *mitzva* falling upon the king or the judge or one who has the authority to take the people out to an optional or obligatory war, that he should make an inquiry by way of the *Urim* and *Tumim*, and act in accordance with what they say. This is what God says: "And he shall stand before Elazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of the *Urim* before the Lord: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation" (*Bemidbar* 27:21).He commands Yehoshua who was the first governor appointed over the congregation, that he should inquire of the *Urim* and *Tumim* and in accordance with their judgment take the people out and bring them in, and the same applies to all the judges and kings in future generations… About this they said (*Yoma* 71a, 73b, *Hilkhot Kelei ha-Mikdash* 10:12): "Inquiry was made only for the king, or for the court, or for one whom the community needs, as it is stated: "And he shall stand before Elazar the priest" – this is the king; "and all the children of Israel" – this is the High Priest anointed for war and one whom the community needs; "even all the congregation – this is the court. From this wording, it appears that this is a command for all generations…

Now the Master himself [= the Rambam] wrote in his introduction to the commandments as follows: "And it is known that wars and conquest of lands are done only by the king, and with the counsel of the Great Sanhedrin and the High Priest, as it is stated: 'And he shall stand before Elazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of the *Urim* before the Lord.' And this is truly a *mitzva*, not just advice, and it is for all generations."

Without delving deeply into the words of the Ramban, I wish to emphasize two points: First, that inquiring of the *Urim* and *Tumim* involves a *mitzva*, and second, that this *mitzva* applies in all generations. Therefore, when we find a war-related inquiry made by David, according to the Ramban, this is not merely a search for wise counsel, but the actual fulfillment of a *mitzva*.

### B. Inquiry was made only for the king, or for the court, or for one whom the community needs

The Mishna in *Yoma* states:

The High Priest performs the service wearing eight garments… In these were the *Urim* and *Tumim* inquired of, but they were not inquired of except for the king, for the *Av Bet Din*, and for one whom the community needs. (*Yoma* 71b).

And so rules the Rambam:

Inquiry should not be made [of the *Urim* and *Tumim*] by an ordinary person, only by a king, the court, or one who the community at large needs. As it is stated: "Before Elazar the priest shall he stand... [he and all the children of Israel with him, and the entire congregation]." "He" refers to the king; "all the children of Israel" to the priest anointed to lead the people in war, or someone whom the people need to make inquiry for them; and "all the congregation" refers to the High Court. (Rambam, *Hilkhot Kelei ha-Mikdash* 10:12)

According to the plain sense of the verses and so too according to the Halakha, there is an essential relationship between inquiring of the *Urim* and *Tumim*, and the king or someone whom the community needs to make inquiry for them.

### C. Faith in God

*Chazal* draw a comparison between the kingdom of Shaul and the kingdom of David with respect to the wars that they waged against the Pelishtim (Shaul at Mikhmash and David in Emek Refa'im). They state as follows in *Midrash Shochar Tov*:

"Of David. The Lord is my light, and my salvation" (*Tehilim* 27:1). This is what Scripture states: "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path" (*Tehilim* 119:105). If a lamp, why a light, and if a light, why a lamp? Rather, David said: When I start with words of Torah, I start with little, and they flow. And when I enter into it, many gates open for me. Therefore he first said: Lamp, and afterwards: Light. Another explanation: "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path." When did David state this verse? When he was going to Emek Refa'im. Even so he did not go to war until he inquired by way of the *Urim* and the *Tumim.*

And similarly you find when Shemuel went to anoint David, the ministering angels were denouncing him before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: Master of the universe, why have you removed the monarchy from Shaul and given it to David? He said to them: I will tell you the difference between Shaul and David. Shaul went and made inquiry by way of the *Urim* and the *Tumim*. When he saw that the Pelishtim were coming toward him, he said to the priest: "Withdraw your hand," and did not wait for him to finish the matter, as it is stated: "And it came to pass, while Shaul talked to the priest, that the noise that was in the camp of the Pelishtim went on and increased: and Shaul said to the priest, Withdraw your hand" (I *Shemuel* 14:19).

But when David saw the Pelishtim coming toward him in Emek Refa'im, he immediately began to make inquiry by way of the *Urim* and the *Tumim*, as it is stated: "And when David inquired of the Lord, he said, You shall not go up; but make a circuit behind them" (II *Shemuel* 5:22-23). You have no permission to attack them, even if they are close to you, until you see the tops of the trees swaying, as it is stated: "And let it be, when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the bakha trees, that then you shall bestir yourself" (II *Shemuel* 5:24).

When the Pelishtim came, Israel saw them, and they were not four cubits away from them. Israel said to David: Why are we standing? He said to them: Heaven has already commanded me not to attack them until we see the tops of the trees swaying. Therefore, if we attack them we will immediately die, and if we do not attack them, they will immediately kill us. It is better that we die as righteous men than we die liable. Rather you and I must lift up our eyes to the Holy One, blessed be He.

Immediately, all the trees moved, and immediately they attacked them, as it is stated: "And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him; and smote the Pelishtim from Geva until the approaches of Gezer" (II *Shemuel* 5:25).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to the ministering angels: See the difference between David and Shaul. What caused David to be saved? The word of the Holy One, blessed be He, which he fulfilled, and it shined for him, as it is stated: "Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path." (*Midrash Tehilim* 27:2)

The Midrash sees this difference with respect to the way they inquired by way of the *Urim* and the *Tumim* as a most essential difference between David and Shaul and as one that explains why the monarchy was taken away from Shaul and given to David. Inquiry by way of the *Urim* and the *Tumim* is not merely a tool to be used in order to achieve victory in wars waged against Israel's enemies. It both establishes and expresses the deep relationship between human kingdom and the kingdom of God.

It is precisely in a time of war when the rule, the kingship, and the personal power of the king can find expression in a most extreme manner, that the test of the king with respect to his relationship to God is to lead and conduct the war based on precise Divine guidance, even when the king would be able to decide the battle without inquiring of the *Urim* and the *Tumim.*

According to this we well understand why the Ramban says that inquiring of God by way of the *Urim* and the *Tumim*, specifically with respect to war, is a *mitzva* for all generations (and not just wise counsel, or a temporary *mitzva*).[[3]](#footnote-3)

Against the background of inquiring of God on matters of war, let us return to David's inquiry of God after the death of Shaul.

First, it is interesting that David's inquiry of God as to where he should go up is the first act recorded in Scripture that David performed after sounding his lament for Shaul.

As opposed to inquiries of God regarding matters of war, here the question raised is where David should go up to when in actuality his rule was limited to the tribe of Yehuda. Does the determination of the seat of his kingdom require an inquiry of God as do military matters?[[4]](#footnote-4) Perhaps this decision could be a royal decision, as was David's going to Jerusalem after the death of Ish-Boshet, and David's desire to rule as king over all of Israel. The Malbim relates to this question:

After it was reported thus far that David did not take the monarchy for himself by force like a slave who rebels against his master, not at the outset, as he was anointed by a prophet, and not during Shaul's lifetime, as he submitted to him like a faithful servant, and not when Shaul chased after him, for his enemy [= Shaul] fell twice into his hands, and yet he did not attack the anointed of God, and not even after Shaul's death, as he killed the person who informed him of his death, and he eulogized and lamented over him; it is reported that now as well it was not his intention to seek the crown, and that he thought that perhaps the kingship would reach Shaul's son, and that perhaps the time had not yet arrived for him to rule, in which case it would be dangerous for him to return, and therefore he did nothing before inquiring of God, asking Him whether he should return and to where he should return, and he did not rely on his own counsel and intelligence, as this was David's superiority over Shaul, that he put all his trust in God. (II *Shemuel* 2:1)

The Malbim makes an important point about David's personality and kingdom. David did not seize his kingship by force, not at the beginning, and not the entire length of Shaul's reign. Even now, after Shaul's death, David does not want to take the monarchy by force, and so he inquires of God. He makes his inquiry of God not only to know the place where he should go up, but also to make sure that the time has come for him to rule as king, with God's approval. This conduct is typical of David who put all his trust in God.

It is also interesting that God's decision that David should go up to Hebron accords with the essence of Hebron, the city of permanence and kingship, where David begins his kingdom.[[5]](#footnote-5)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The inquiry of God here and later in the chapter point to the growing break between Shaul and God, which later moves from the *Urim* and the *Tumim* to dreams and prophets, as we saw in previous *shiurim*. One inquiry of God in connection with Shaul outside the framework of war is the inquiry that was made at the time that he was appointed king (I *Shemuel* 10:22 and on). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is not our intention here to enter into a comprehensive discussion of the *Urim* and the *Tumim*, their nature, their level, or the way they work. We related here to several aspects of inquiries made of God that allow us to clarify the matter of David's inquiring of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. So too, the relationship between inquiry by way of the *Urim* and the *Tumim* and kingship is very understandable, in light of the fact that war itself is a revelation of God's kingship in the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. It could also be argued that the overall context is a military context, since in chapter 3 war is waged between Avner and Yoav. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We dealt at length with the essential nature of Hebron in our series of *shiurim* devoted to Biblical Jerusalem, in the *shiurim* dealing with the road to Jerusalem, *shiur* no. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)