



## Machar Chodesh: 1 Samuel 20:18-42

*In memory of Ira Beer, Yitzchak Dov ben Tzvi Mendel,  
on the occasion of his second Yahrzeit.*

After Israel’s first king, Saul, failed to obliterate the nation of Amalek as God commanded, the prophet Samuel told him that God rejected him and would replace him with a better king.<sup>1</sup> Samuel then privately anointed a humble commoner, David, as king. As a leading warrior, David’s victories and fame threaten Saul’s rule. At the same time, David’s musical skill soothes Saul, whose moods and behavior become increasingly irascible and erratic. David eventually marries one of Saul’s daughters, joining Saul’s family, too. Saul instructs his son, Jonathan, and the rest of his royal court to kill David. Sacrificing his claim to the throne, Jonathan refuses this, instead swearing eternal loyalty to David. Saul repeatedly tries to kill David. Yet at other times, Jonathan persuades his father to relent, allowing David to soothe and fight for Saul.

A public royal Rosh Chodesh feast approaches, which David, as a court official, must attend. Uncertain whether Saul will kill him there, David tells Jonathan that he will hide in a nearby field. He asks Jonathan to tell his father that he granted David permission to attend a feast of his own family instead of the royal feast. They agree that Jonathan will assess his father’s reaction to David’s absence and excuse, and inform David whether he can safely return to the palace.

Since David and Jonathan make these plans on the day before Rosh Chodesh, the story of how they unfold, detailed below, is read as the Haftarah on every Shabbat when the following day is Rosh Chodesh. The Haftarah’s name, “machar chodesh” (Hebrew for “tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh”), is taken from its opening verse. It replaces the Haftarah associated with the weekly Torah reading.<sup>2</sup>

### Haftarah Breakdown

**Verses 20:18-23:** Jonathan tells David how he will shoot arrows to send a secret signal to David as he hides in the field so that he can flee if Saul is angry, or return if he is calm.

I Samuel 20:21-22	שמואל א כ:א-כ"ב
I [Jonathan] will order [my] young servant, “Go and find the arrows.” If I call to the servant, “The arrows are on this side of you,” [then] take him and come, for it is peaceful for you and there is nothing [to fear]—as the Lord lives! But if I say this to the lad- “The arrows are beyond you”- [then] leave, for the Lord has sent you away.	והנה אֲשַׁלַח אֶת־הַנֶּעֱרָר לְךָ מֵצֵא אֶת־הַחֲצִיצִים אִם־אֶמְרֶה אֶמְרֶה לְנֹעַר הַגֵּה הַחֲצִיצִים א מִמֶּנּוּ וְהִגֵּה קַח־נָו וּבִאָה כִּי־שָׁלוֹם לָךְ וְאִין דְּבַר חַיִּיה': וְאִם־כֵּה אֶמְרֶה לְעֵלָם הַגֵּה הַחֲצִיצִים מִמֶּנּוּ וְהִלָּאָה לְךָ כִּי שָׁלַח־ה' ה'

**Verses 20:24-26:** Saul notes David’s absence at the royal Rosh Chodesh feast but assumes something ordinary prevented his attendance.

I Samuel 20:24	שמואל א כ:כ"ד
David hid in the field. When the new moon came, the king sat down to eat the [celebratory] bread [meal].	וַיִּסְתֵּר דָּוִד בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיְהִי הַחֹדֶשׁ וַיֵּשֶׁב הַמֶּלֶךְ (על־) [אֶל־] הַלֶּחֶם לְאָכֹל:

<sup>1</sup> [Haftarah Helper for Parshat Zachor](#) details this episode.

<sup>2</sup> The story includes the ancient practice of celebrating Rosh Chodesh, as does the [Haftarah for Parashat Vayeirah](#). Shulchan Aruch [OC 419](#) rules that it is a mitzvah to feast on Rosh Chodesh. [Haftarah Helper for Parashat Hachodesh](#) details celebration of Rosh Chodesh during the messianic era, as well.

Verses 20:27-29: When David does not appear the next day, Saul asks Jonthan to explain. Jonathan states that he granted David permission to heed his brother's command to join his family's celebration in Bethlehem.

I Samuel 20:28	שמואל א כ:כ"ח
Jonathan answered Saul, "David firmly asked leave of me [to go to Bethlehem.]"	וַיַּעַן יְהוֹנָתָן אֶת־שָׁאִיל נְשָׂאִיל נְשָׂאֵל דָּוִד מֵעַמְדִי עַד־בַּיִת לְחָם:

Verses 20:30-34: Saul berates Jonathan for favoring David instead of inheriting the throne. After Jonathan refuses Saul's command to bring David so Saul can kill him, Saul tries to kill Jonathan. Jonathan leaves angrily.

I Samuel 20:33	שמואל א כ:ל"ג
Saul threw his spear at [Jonathan] to kill him. Jonathan realized that his father was determined to kill David.	וַיִּטֵּל שָׁאִיל אֶת־הַחֲנִית עָלָיו לְהַכּוֹתוֹ וַיֵּדַע יְהוֹנָתָן כִּי־קָלָה הָיָא מֵעַם אָבִיו לְהַמִּית אֶת־דָּוִד: (ס)

Verses 20:35-40: As previously arranged, Jonathan uses a servant and arrows the next morning to secretly signal to David that he must flee from Saul. Jonathan dispatches the servant back to town with his equipment.

I Samuel 20:37	שמואל א כ:ל"ז
When the lad came to the place of the arrow that Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the lad, "The arrows are beyond you."	וַיָּבֹא הַנַּעַר עַד־מְקוֹם הַחֲצִי אֲשֶׁר יָרָה יְהוֹנָתָן וַיִּקְרָא יְהוֹנָתָן אַחֲרָי הַנַּעַר וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלוֹא הַחֲצִי מִמֶּנּוּ וְהָאֵלֶּה:

Verses 20:41-42: Grateful to Jonathan, David comes out of hiding. David is overcome with emotion as they embrace and weep. Jonathan dispatches David to safety, reaffirming their mutual oath and the eternal alliance between themselves and their descendants.

I Samuel 20:42	שמואל א כ:מ"ב
Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace! For we two have sworn to each other in the name of the Lord: 'May the Lord be [witness] between you and me, and between your offspring and mine, forever!'"	וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוֹנָתָן לְדָוִד לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ שְׁיִינֵנו אֲנִיחֵנוּ בְּשֵׁם ה' לֵאמֹר ה' יִהְיֶה   בֵּינִי וּבֵינֶךָ וּבֵין זַרְעֵי וּבֵין זַרְעֵי יְרָעָה עַד־עוֹלָם: (פ)

### Connection

The Mishnah uses the unconditional loyalty of David and Jonathan for one another to exemplify **selfless love**.

Pirkei Avot 5:16	משנה אבות ה:ט"ז
Every love that depends on something, when the thing ceases, the love ceases. [A love] not dependent on anything will never cease. What is [an example of] love dependent on something? The love of Amnon and Tamar. [What is an example of love] not dependent on something? The love of David and Jonathan.	כָּל אֲהָבָה שֶׁהִיא תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, כִּטְל דְּבָר, כִּטְלָה אֲהָבָה. וְשֶׁאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, אִינָהּ כִּטְלָה לְעוֹלָם. אִיזוֹ הִיא אֲהָבָה תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זֶה אֲהָבַת אֲמֹנוֹן וְתָמָר. וְשֶׁאִינָהּ תְלוּיָהּ בְּדָבָר, זֶה אֲהָבַת דָּוִד וְיְהוֹנָתָן:

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