

# Torat Imecha

# NACH YOMI



Sefer Shmuel Alef is dedicated to the safety and peace of Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael. May the words of Nach uplift us and give us strength during these challenging times.

*Please keep in mind that these sheets contain sheimos and should be discarded in accordance with halacha.*

## Shmuel Alef 5

Hello and welcome to *Torat Imecha Nach Yomi* with the OU Women's Initiative. My name is Elana Glatt and today we will be studying 'ספר שמואל א' פרק ה', Chapter 5. In yesterday's *perek*, we reached one of the lowest moments in *Sefer Shmuel*. *Bnei Yisrael* went to war against the *Plishtim* and were unfortunately defeated.

In an attempt to turn the tide, they brought the *Aron of Hashem* from *Shiloh* into the battlefield. But instead of bringing victory, the war ended in catastrophe. 4,000 and then another 30,000 Jewish soldiers were killed. *Chofni* and *Pinchas* died together on that very same day, just as the prophecy had foretold.

And the *Aron* itself was captured. When *Eli* heard the terrible news that the *Aron* had been taken, he fell from his chair and died. And *Pinchas's* wife, in her last dying breaths, named her newborn son *Ichavod*, for the glory has departed from Israel. Yesterday's *perek* ended off with a tremendous colossal *chillul Hashem* of *Hashem's Aron* being captured and taken by the *Plishtim*.

But today in *perek heh*, Chapter 5, we will see that *Hashem* himself will protect his honor and will smite down the *Plishtim* for this audacious sin, with plagues on the level of those last seen in the days of *Yetziat Mitzrayim*. *Perek heh* opens up by telling the story of what happens after the *Aron* arrives in *Plishti* territory. The *Plishtim* controlled five major cities along the southwestern coastal plain of Israel, cities that had not been fully conquered during the time of *Yehoshua* and remained a constant thorn in the side of *Bnei Yisrael*. These cities were: *Aza*, *Gaza*, which unfortunately we are too familiar with nowadays; *Ashkelon*, *Ashdod*, *Gat*, and *Ekron*.

The *Plishtim*, or the Philistines as they were known, were a seafaring people. They were not indigenous to the land of Israel, the land of *Canaan*. Rather, they came from the isles of the

Mediterranean, conquering coastal areas, including coastal plains of Israel, and their god was a seafaring god, as we will see in a moment. The *Aron* will travel through several of these cities, and everywhere it goes, disaster will follow.

This *perek* is short, only 12 *psukim*, but it carries a powerful message. *Psukim aleph* through *bet*: The *Plishtim* take the *Aron* from the battlefield and they bring it to the city of *Ashdod*, which today actually stands as the fifth largest city in Israel. There, they place it inside the temple of their god *Dagon*, setting it beside the idol. *Dagon* was one of the main *Plishti* gods.

According to the description brought in the *mefarshim*, *Dagon* had the upper body of a man but the lower half of a fish. As we said, the *Plishtim* were coastal people, fishermen, who came from the islands in the Mediterranean and settled along the shore of *Canaan*. Naturally, they worshipped a sea-related god. Their thinking in placing the *Aron* specifically there next to their god *Dagon* may have been one of two possibilities.

The *Yalkut Shimoni* records a dispute between *Rav Yochanan* and *Resh Lakish*. According to *Rav Yochanan*, he says that they were actually showing honor to the *Aron* by placing it before their god. *Resh Lakish* though says the opposite. He says that they were actually demonstrating that their god *Dagon* had defeated the God of Israel, so the *Aron* now stood in submission before *Dagon*.

*Psukim gimel* and *dalet* continue the story. When the people of *Ashdod* wake up in the next morning, they discover something shocking. Their idol *Dagon* has fallen flat on its face before the *Aron* of *Hashem*. The way the idol falls, it looks exactly as if *Dagon* is bowing down to the *Aron*.

*Vayashkimu Ashdodim mimachorat*, and the *Ashdodim* they wake up the next morning, והנה דגון נפל לפניו ארצה, and *Dagon* had fallen before the *Aron* of *Hashem* on the ground. Here we see this expression of *Dagon* fallen upon his face to the ground. *Rav Amnon Bazak* actually points out in a beautiful article that this is an expression of submission, similar to the manner in which the brothers fell before *Yosef* in the days back in the story of the brothers facing their brother *Yosef* not knowing it was him, following the whole incident with the goblet that was taken. The *psukim* there tell us: And *Yehuda* and his brethren came to *Yosef's* house for he was still there and they fell before him to the ground.

And *Yehuda* said: What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves? And the *pasuk* goes on. That's the *pasuk* in טו and מ"ד:י"ד, Bereishit 44:14 to 15. That the wording of *nofel lefanav artza* is submission, that here *Dagon* was as if he was submitting before the *Aron* of *Hashem*.

Embarrassed, the people of the *Plishtim* lifted up their idol and they put it back in its place. But the next morning something even more dramatic happens. Once again *Dagon* has fallen before the *aron* the next morning. But this time the idol is shattered, his head and both hands are severed lying on the threshold while only the fish-like body, the *Dagon* part of him, remains intact.

It was as if *Hashem* was telling the *Plishtim*, your quote-unquote god- he has no head, he cannot think, and he also has no hands, he has no power to do anything at all. It reminds me of the imagery of the *perek* of *Tehillim* which we say as part of *Hallel*, *Tehillim* 115 in the *perek* what we say *lo lanu*, we say ולא יראו עינים להם ולא יראו, describing their powerless gods, we say "a mouth they have, but they cannot speak, eyes they have but they cannot see." These descriptions illustrate the total impotence of man-made idols like *Dagon* who we're speaking of here, which lack basic senses which ordinary man himself is able to perceive. The *Midrash* explains that before *Hashem* punishes people, *Hashem* first punishes their god, giving them a chance to recognize the truth and to repent, to do *teshuvah*, similar to how the Nile river was struck first in *Mitzrayim*.

But instead of learning the message, the *Plishtim* responded with stubbornness. In *pasuk heh*, they even declared the very threshold where the idol's head and hands had fallen to now forevermore be a sacred and holy spot. They said that from that day on, no one was ever allowed to step on that place again. Instead of acknowledging this obvious miracle that happened in front of their eyes, they reinterpreted the events to preserve their own beliefs.

So now in *pasuk vav*, *Hashem* is going to begin to strike the people themselves. *Pasuk vav* reads: ותכבד יד ה' אל האשדודים וישמם ויך אותם (בעפלים) [בִּטְחָהִיִּם] את אשדוד ואת... The hand of *Hashem* then became heavy upon the *Ashdodim* and He devastated them and He struck them with a painful disease which was similar to that of hemorrhoids, *Ashdod* and its surrounding areas. *Rashi* tells us that in addition to this extremely painful and uncomfortable intestinal disease that they experienced, they were also stricken by an additional plague, that of mice, that mice would enter their bodies, disembowel them and then they would crawl out.

There are other versions of *Midrashim* that elaborate what else happened with mice, that in addition to causing them tremendous discomfort, the plague of mice also destroyed all of their crops, similar to that of *makat arbeh*, the *maka* of locusts back in the days of the *makot* in *Mitzrayim*. The *Midrash* describes that the mice spread throughout the entire land running and ruining their fields and everything in sight. In *pasuk zayin*, the people of *Ashdod* acknowledge that the ark has been harsh against them and they become desperate to send the *aron* away from their city as soon as possible. So in *pasuk chet*, they called together all five of the *Plishti* rulers to decide what to do with the *aron* and they decide to send it to *Gat*, another major *Plishti* city.

Moving the *aron* to a different place stems from their misconceived notion that gods have particular places in which their power is the greatest. We actually see this with *Bilam* in *Parshat Balak* when *Bilam* doesn't succeed at cursing the Jews, what does he do? He moves from place to place. He constantly moves his altar thinking perhaps it's the place that's wrong, not realizing that perhaps his actions are the ones that are wrong. We actually see a complete contrast to this with the actions of our forefather *Avraham*.

When *Avraham* goes to see what became of his *tfilah* to *Hashem* to save the people of Sodom, the *pasuk* in *Bereishit* tells us -and *Avraham* arose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before *Hashem* in *Parshat Vayeira*. Our Rabbis

teach us that from here we actually learn that when we *daven*, we're supposed to do so in a *makom kavua*, in a set place, just like *Avraham* goes back to the same place where he *davened*, even though his *tfilah* wasn't answered, he goes back to the same place, for we acknowledge and we know that *Hashem* is the one who answers *tfilot*. It's not superstition based on where we are, where the location is, it's based on our actions and it's based on the actions and the responses that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* wants to send our way. But here, the *Plishtim* are too entrenched to see the truth and they send the *aron* to *Gat*.

But alas, *pasuk Tet*, verse 9, their plan doesn't work. As soon as the *Aron* arrives in *Gat*, the same plague breaks out there as well. This time even worse. The entire city is struck with the same painful disease and the suffering spreads throughout the entire population.

Some *midrashim* say that the plague intensified there and many people began to even die from it. Meanwhile, the people in *Ashdod* remain sick even after the *Aron* left them, showing that the punishment had already begun. So the residents of *Gat* panic and they quickly send the *Aron* away again. *Pasuk yud*, this time they send it to the city of *Ekron*.

But when the *Aron* arrives in *Ekron*, the people are struck instantly and also they react immediately and they cry out in fear, "They've brought the *Aron* of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people. What are we going to do?" The reputation of the *Aron* has already begun to spread. Continuous *Pasuk yud aleph*, so they summon and gather together all of the *Plishti* leaders and they beg them to send away the *Aron* of *Hashem*. Let it return to its place and not kill us or our people.

For there was a panic of death in the city. The hand of *Hashem* was very heavy there. And our final *pasuk* for today, *pasuk yud Bet*, the people who did not die were stricken with these terrible hemorrhoids and their cry ascended to heaven. One interesting parallel from our *perek* to the times we're living through today, the *Malbim* points out that even as these people in these *Plishti* cities beg their leaders to remove the *Aron* as their suffering was too great to bear, their leaders were less willing to capitulate and acknowledge the God of Israel.

We unfortunately see a similar dynamic today when leaders of terrorist regimes make decisions based on their own power and their own interests without truly taking into account the suffering their own people endure. In today's *perek*, we saw how the *Plishtim* thought that they had captured the *Aron* and defeated the God of Israel. But instead they discovered just how powerful the *Aron* and the God of the Jewish people truly are. In tomorrow's *perek*, we will *bezrat Hashem* watch as the *Plishtim* finally realize that the only solution is to send the *Aron* back home.

Thank you so much for learning this *perek* together, wishing everyone a beautiful day. Today's *perek* is dedicated to the safety and peace of *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. May the words of *Nach* uplift us and give us strength during these difficult times.

## Shmuel Alef 6

Hello and welcome to Torat Imecha Nach Yomi with the OU Women's Initiative. My name is Elana Glatt and today we will be studying *Sefer Shmuel Alef, perek vav*, chapter 6. First, a quick recap of yesterday's *perek, perek Heh*. Yesterday we watched as the *Aron HaShem*, which unfortunately was in *Plishti* captivity after the *Plishtis'* defeat of *Bnei Yisrael*, was brought to the city of Ashdod and was placed in the temple of their god Dagon.

But we saw that instead of demonstrating *Plishti* victory, the opposite happened. Dagon fell before the *Aron*, first collapsing, prostrating itself before the *Aron HaShem*, and then the next day, his head and hands were severed, leaving only the fish-like body of the idol intact. Soon after, a terrible plague struck the *Plishtim*, painful hemorrhoid-like afflictions and according to many *mefarshim*, a devastating plague of mice that destroyed their crops and brought terrible suffering to all that crossed its path. The *Plishtim* tried moving the *Aron* from city to city, from Ashdod to Gat to Ekron, but everywhere it went the plague followed them.

Finally, after seven months of devastation, they realized that they could no longer keep the *Aron*. That brings us to today's *perek, perek vav*, chapter 6. *Pasuk alef* opens up by telling us that the *Aron* remained in the fields of the *Plishtim* for seven long months. It's important to note that during these seven months *Hashem* was extremely disappointed with the *Bnei Yisrael* for not trying their utmost to ransom back the *Aron Hashem* or to try in any way to convince the *Plishtim* to give the *Aron* back.

This complacency on the part of *Bnei Yisrael* gave the wrong impression to the *Plishtim* that the Jews didn't really care anymore about their holy *Aron*. The *Midrash* notes that *Hashem* himself stepped in. "Since *Bnei Yisrael* are not taking care to rescue the *Aron*, I will have to return it Myself." We will now see how that will happen as our *perek* unfolds.

*Pasuk bet*: ...ויקראו פלשתים לכהנים ולקסמים לאמר מה נעשה לארון ה' הודיעונו במה נשלחנו. Finally the *Plishtim* gathered their priests and their astrologers and they asked the obvious question: what should we do with the *Aron* of the Gd of Israel? The *Malbim* notes here that they turned specifically to the astrologers and the priests this time and not the leaders because they recognized that this plague was metaphysical and possibly spiritual in nature even though they still weren't a hundred percent certain. And so these were the men to help with this kind of scenario. Interestingly, *pasuk gimel*, the priests do not directly say to send it back.

Instead they say to the people, if you do decide to send it back then don't send it back empty. Send it with a guilt offering. Then you'll be healed and you'll realize why His hands would not turn away from against you. Again, they're not telling them to send it back, but they're saying if you *do* decide to do that then just don't send it back empty.

So *pasuk dalet* tells us that what did the priests recommend doing? They recommended sending it with the following guilt offerings along with the *Aron*: five golden hemorrhoid-like figures and five golden mice. Why five? Because like we learned yesterday's *perek*, there were five *Plishti* rulers who represented the five major cities of the *Plishtim*, which were Ashdod,

Gaza, Ashkelon, Gat, and Ekron. These cities and their leaders had all been struck by the same plague. According to the explanation brought by the *mefarshim*, as we learned yesterday, the golden hemorrhoids represented the terrible disease that afflicted them and the golden mice represented either part two of that same disease or the plague of mice that destroyed their land and their crops.

*Pasuk vav*, the *Plishti* priests warned them, just do not harden your hearts like the Egyptians did. They still remember the story of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and how *Pharaoh* had stubbornly resisted *Hashem's* will, bringing disaster upon those people. Yet even with all of this knowledge, the *Plishtim* were still hesitant to admit 100 percent that this was truly the hand of *Hashem*. So they designed a test.

What was the test? *Pesukim zayin* through *tet*, verses 7-9 tell us precisely what this test was. They would take two nursing cows that had never been used for work before and they should attach to them a wagon. On the wagon they would place the *Aron* together with the special golden offerings that they had prepared. Then they would lock the cows' calves back at home.

Naturally, a nursing mother, a mother cow should run straight back to her calves. That's pure instinct. So if the cows turned around to their babies, the *Plishtim* could say that the plague was just coincidence, just natural, just happened to have happened, has nothing to do with the hand of their God. But if the cows went straight towards *Beit Shemesh*, towards the land of Israel, ignoring their calves, it would then prove to them once and for all that the God of Israel was behind everything all along.

And so comes *pasuk yud*. The people do just as they were suggested and the test was carried out. The *aron* was placed on the wagon with the golden offerings beside it and the cows were sent on their way with their calves locked up back at home.

*Pasuk yud bet* tells us something remarkable.

וישרנה הפרות בדרך על דרך בית שמש במסילה אחת הלכו הלוך וגעו ולא סרו ימין ושמאל וסרני פלשתים הלכים אחריהם עד גבול...n: The cows set out on the direct road to *Beit Shemesh*. On a single road they go, lowing as they went, and they did not veer right or left, and the *Plishti* princes followed the wagon the entire way, watching carefully to see what would happen. According to Rashi, *vayisharna* comes from the word *Yashar*, straight. The cows went straight along the road towards *Beit Shemesh*. They did not turn right or left. But he also quotes a *Gemara* in *Avoda Zara*, which teaches something even deeper and so beautiful about this very word. *Vayisharna* can also be understood from the word *shira*, song.

The cows were not merely walking straight, they were singing praise to *Hashem* with every single step that they took. Even though what they were doing was completely unnatural for them, it's not normal for cows to walk away from their nursing calves, yet their deeper instinct, the desire to fulfill the will of *Hashem*, that's what kicked in and they even sang along the journey with recognition that they were able to fulfill *Hashem's* will. *Pasuk yud gimel*, the wagon eventually arrives at *Beit Shemesh*, a city we're all pretty familiar with today, which was located

near the border between the territory of Israel and the *Plishtim*. At that moment the *psukim* tell us that the people of *Beit Shemesh* happened to be out in their fields harvesting their wheat at the time and when they look up and they see the *aron* returning they were overjoyed, they were so excited.

*Pasuk yud daled*: And the wagon stopped in the field of a man named *Yehoshua* of *Beit Shemesh* where there was a big rock. The people chopped up the wood of the wagon and they offered up the cows as an offering to *Hashem*. Just a quick note that this was permissible now. Once the *Mishkan* of *Shilo* was destroyed, it was allowed to bring *karbanot* outside of the *Mishkan*, just something important to keep in mind.

*Pasuk tet vav*: The *Leviim* came forward and they properly lifted down the *aron* and the people of *Beit Shemesh* offered elevation offerings and slaughtered feast offerings on that day to *Hashem*.

*Tet zayin*: Meanwhile the *Plishti* governors, who had been watching the scene from a distance the entire time, looked up, and once they saw that the *aron* was received they returned home. The  *perek* however does not end on a joyful note at all as we might expect based on the *psukim* that we read so far. Soon after the *aron* arrives and once the *Plishti* leaders left, a terrible tragedy occurs.

*Hashem* purposely waited until the *Plishti* leaders were far far away so as not to allow them to see the upcoming tragedy or to think in any way, *Hashem kills the Jewish people just as he kills us, chas v'shalom*. This was a completely separate incident. *Pasuk yud tet* tells us unfortunately, ... וַיִּךְ בְּאִנְשֵׁי בֵּית־שֵׁמֶשׁ כִּי רָאוּ בְּאֲרוֹן ה' וַיִּךְ בָּעַם שְׁבַעִים אִישׁ חֲמִשִּׁים אֶלְפֵי אִישׁ וַיִּתְּאֲבְלוּ הָעָם כִּי הִכָּה ה' בָּעַם מִכָּה... ג. And *Hashem* smote of the men of *Beit Shemesh* because they peered into the ark of *Hashem*.

He struck them, 70 men, 50,000 men. The people mourned because *Hashem* had smitten the people with a great blow. What exactly happened here that was so bad and was deserved of such a grave punishment? And how many people were struck? Was it 70? Was it 50,000? What exactly is going on here? The *mefarshim* all work overtime to try and thread the strands together for us. According to the *Malbim*, some of the people gazed at the *aron* improperly without showing it the proper reverence and respect that it deserved.

The *Midrash* actually describes how the *aron* had been returned with all of its coverings. The *Aron Kodesh* was always covered with special coverings out of honor for the holiness that was represented by the *aron* itself. And what happened here, according to the *Midrash*, the *Plishtim* returned it with the proper coverings, but as soon as it entered Israeli territory, as soon as it entered *Beit Shemesh*, the strongest wind came and blew the coverings off. And at that moment, the *Midrash* tells us that some people, instead of immediately rushing to cover the *aron* again, to give it the proper respect that it deserved, some people took that moment to stare at the *aron* that they had never seen before, something that was considered extremely disrespectful.

According to the *Radak*, they actually opened up the *aron* and looked at what was inside of it. That, he says, is why the *pasuk* says they looked *into* the *aron*- *b'aron* - rather than simply saying that they looked *at* the *aron*. According to the *Ralbag*, they continued working and didn't show the proper and appropriate honor when the *aron* had arrived. Instead of stopping everything and demonstrating awe and reverence for this incredible moment that they were experiencing, some people unfortunately just treated the moment too casually.

The *Midrash* elaborates that *Hashem* was extremely disappointed with their overall attitude towards the *Aron* during the entire time that it was in captivity. Their passive approach to the *Aron's* return only amplifies the casual acceptance that they had of it being taken captive all that time in the first place. If they had lost a valuable jewel, wouldn't they have spent seven long months looking for it? And in the very least, they would be *davening* for it to return at all moments, anxiously awaiting that moment, preparing themselves for how to best act when they do somehow manage to retrieve it. Their *laissez-faire* attitude at this very joyous moment was a deep indicator of their lack of concern that they felt about the *aron* and its honor all throughout.

*Hashem* therefore struck them with a terrible plague. 70 elders and 50,000 people died. How do we understand this number? *Targum Yonasan* explains it literally. He says that 70 elders and 50,000 common people unfortunately died that day.

*Rashi* explains it to mean that it was 70 people who were each as important as 50,000, or he says it was 50,000 men each of whom was equal to the 70 of the *Sanhedrin*. Because these were incredibly *chashuv*, important people, great people who were killed for not treating the *Aron* properly according to the different answers that we just discussed. After this whole encounter, the *Psukim* tell us that the people of *Beis Shemesh* cry out, "Who can stand before *Hashem*, this holy God? To whom among us can this *Aron* ascend?" Overwhelmed by the intense responsibility that keeping the *Aron* carries, they now look for a new home where the *Aron* could reside and the *perek* ends off that they sent it to *Kiryat Yearim*.

Just to end off with an interesting fun fact from today's *perek*:

According to the *Gemara* in *Yoma* 52B, right before the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, there was a Jewish king whose name was *Yoshiyahu*, and he actually buried the *Aron* along with other important objects so that they would be kept safe and saved for the future even after the *Beis Hamikdash* itself was destroyed. And you know what was one of those items that was listed as an item that he buried along with the *Aron*? He buried it along with a special portion of *mahn* that was kept in a jar from the days of *Moshe Rabbeinu* himself and it was in the *Beis Hamikdash* all this time. And along with *Aharon HaKohen's* special staff that sprouted almonds and blossomed and it always stayed fresh in order to remind the *Bnei Yisrael* that it was only *Shevet Levi*, the tribe of Levi, who was chosen to work in the *Mishkan*. Along with those holy items, another item that was kept all of this time was a box which contained within it, you guessed it, the golden gifts that the *Plishtim* had sent to the *Bnei Yisrael* in our very *perek*.

Why was that so important to keep? You know why it was so important to keep? Because just like we learned today, it reminded the Jewish people of the miraculous story of exactly what we

saw, of the special and supernatural return of the *aron* to the Jewish people. And it reminded them just how powerful and incredible *Hashem* truly is. With that, we conclude our learning for today. I wish everyone a lovely and beautiful rest of your day.

Today's *perek* is dedicated to the safety and peace of *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. May the words of *Nach* uplift us and give us strength during these times.

## Shmuel Alef 7

Hello and welcome to *Torat Imecha Nach Yomi* with the OU Women's Initiative. My name is Elana Glatt and today we will be studying *Sefer Shmuel Aleph, perek zayin*, chapter 7. In yesterday's *perek, perek vav*, we were privy to witness the miraculous return of the *aron* of *Hashem* from the hands of the *Plishtim* where it had unfortunately been held captive for seven long months. We learned the story of the cows pulling the *aron* all the way to its destination, despite having their nursing calves locked up back at home, demonstrating the depth of their inner desire to do the will of *Hashem* and proving to the *Plishtim* that this entire episode was divinely guided and not a mere matter of circumstance.

We also learned about how upon the *aron's* miraculous arrival in *Beit Shemesh*, the people of the city were struck with a terrible plague killing tens of thousands of people, leaving the residents of *Beit Shemesh* and all of *Am Yisrael* in shock and mourning. We learned together many different approaches as to what could have prompted such a harsh response and harsh punishment from *Hashem*. And now in today's *perek, perek zayin*, we'll see the *aron* being given over to the nearby town of *Kiryat Yearim* where it will remain safely, uneventfully for twenty years. As we begin our study of *perek zayin*, we're going to see how this *perek* is going to mark an important turning point in our *sefer*.

For the last few *perakim* we have mostly been following the story of the *aron*. In today's *perek* we will once again turn to *Shmuel* and watch as he rises as the national leader of the people of Israel. In this *perek* we will see how *Shmuel* will guide the *Bnei Yisrael* through *teshuva*, *tefilla* and ultimately victory over the *Plishtim*, their enemies. And we'll see what a strong and devoted of a leader *Shmuel* was to the *Bnei Yisrael*, how deeply he invested himself in the spiritual growth of the Jewish people.

Let's begin. *Pasuk Aleph* begins: *ויבאו אנשי קרית יערים ויעלו את ארון ה' ויבאו אתו אל בית אבינדב בגבעה, the people of Kiryat Yearim came and they took the aron of Hashem and brought it into the house of Avinadav which was located on a hill, 'ה' קדשו לשמר את ארון ה' His son, Elazar, was chosen to guard and watch over the aron.*

Continues *pasuk bet*: *ויהי מיום שבת הארון בקרית יערים וירבו הימים, From the time that the aron was stationed in Kiryat Yearim, much time passed, 'ויהיו עשרים שנה וינהו כל בית ישראל 'אחרי ה' there were twenty years and the entire household of Bnei Yisrael were drawn after Hashem. The wording of this *pasuk* is a bit ambiguous, and as such, there is much debate among the *mefarshim* as to where precisely in this twenty-year period our *perek* and the story which is about to follow falls.*

It's either at the end of these twenty years that today's story begins with *Shmuel* gathering the people for a *teshuva* gathering, an approach which the *Abarbanel* favors. Although, we're left with an issue of figuring out how all of this fits into *Shmuel's* fifty-two years of life. Following this approach though, we can appreciate an extremely deep message: that *teshuva*, the ability to grow and change, is a long, slow and gradual process. Even with a leader on the level of *Shmuel* and even after being *zocheh* to witness all of the miracles with the *aron* of *Hashem*, it

would still take the *Bnei Yisrael* twenty years of time for them to be open to doing *teshuva* and bettering their ways as a nation.

A second approach, based on the *Midrash Shmuel* and which chronologically might make a bit more sense is that at some point in the middle of these twenty years, *Shmuel* led the *Bnei Yisrael* for eleven years, then *Shaul* reigned as a king for two years, and then the *aron* remained for seven years under *David's* leadership as he served as king in *Chevron*, and only then did he move it when he moved his capital to *Yerushalayim*, then he brought the *aron* with him to *Yerushalayim*. It's at this moment in time that *Shmuel* passionately addresses all of *Bnei Yisrael* in *pasuk gimmel*. If with all of your hearts you are returning to *Hashem*, then you have to remove the foreign gods and the *ashtarot* from among you and direct your hearts to *Hashem*, serving him alone, and then he will rescue you from the hands of your enemies, from the hands of the *Plishtim*.

Until now, the people had been hedging their bets. They believed in *Hashem*, but they also kept elements of idolatry. *Shmuel* explained to them that this is impossible. True monotheism means serving *Hashem* alone. And in *pasuk dalet*, incredibly, the *Bnei Yisrael* are open and receptive to *Shmuel's* words.

They removed the *Baal* and *Ashtarot avoda zara* from amongst them and they serve *Hashem* alone. This moment sparks a real spiritual turning point for the *Bnei Yisrael*. *Pasuk hey: Shmuel* here gathers the entire nation at *Mitzpah* and he promises that he will pray to *Hashem* on their behalf. And *pasuk vav*: ויקבצו המצפתה וישאבו מים וישפכו לפני השם ויצמו ביום ההוא ויאמרו שם, and they all gathered at *Mitzpah* and they drew water and they poured it out before *Hashem* and they fasted on that day and they said there, חטאנו להשם וישפט שמואל את בני ישראל במצפה, "We have sinned to *Hashem*." They declared their mistakes and *Shmuel* judged the people, the *Bnei Yisrael*, at *Mitzpah*.

There's so much to unpack and learn about this gathering here. First, where's this place *Mitzpah* that they're gathering in? This is after all the place we reference in our *selichot* as the place where *Shmuel* davened his ultimate *tefillah* in his life and was answered and it's referenced in the line מי שענה לשמואל במצפה הוא יענונו us as well.

You might know the chorus of this song better: זכרתי את בריתי יעקב ואף את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכר והארץ אזכר. You can hear the tune in the background as I'm saying the words. This is the most famous scene we have of *Shmuel* davening and having his *tefillah* answered. So where is this *Mitzpah* after all? The *Radak* explains that this *Mitzpah* is actually the same historic site which was mentioned in *Sefer Yehoshua*, *perek yud alef* where *Yehoshua* was miraculously able to defeat *Yavin*, the king of *K'naan* and his ally alliances.

This special place has long been a place associated with national gatherings and with miraculous salvation. *Shmuel* purposely brought them here to access the spiritual power and the miraculous nature of this very spot. The next detail of the *pasuk* we need to unpack is what was this water pouring ceremony that was taking place? Many of the *mefarshim* understand

their pouring out water before *Hashem* metaphorically. The *Malbim* explains that these words express how *Bnei Yisrael* were *davening* and the act of pouring water before *Hashem* symbolized pouring out their hearts in prayer and letting their tears stream fully before *Hashem*.

They weren't per se doing some *nisuch hamayim*, some pouring of the water ceremony. What they were pouring in front of *Hashem* was the water of their tears in true *tefillah* with true *davening* before him. The *Radak* explains that it was an act of pure *teshuvah*, of deep repentance. Symbolically they were pouring out their inner selves in repentance before *Hashem*, pouring their souls out into the open, genuinely bettering themselves in this process.

This was an extremely powerful and deep moment of national prayer and national *teshuvah* that they were all experiencing together here in *Mitzpah* with *Shmuel* as their guide. Finally, delving deeper into one final detail: what precisely was *Shmuel* doing judging the people here at this moment? They're *davening*, they're doing *teshuvah*, what type of judging was going on? The *Malbim* notes something beautiful here. He points out that the people had already repented for the sins between themselves, between them and *Hashem* in their moments of heartfelt *tefillah* and *teshuvah*. So now *Shmuel* was trying to help them to repair the sins that happened between people.

True complete *teshuvah* requires both repenting before *Hashem* and repairing our relationships with other people. Our national *teshuvah* would not keep be complete if we were not more unified and connected through this process. That is what *Shmuel* was so busy with at this precise moment. But while *Bnei Yisrael* were soaking up the holiness of this gathering, the closest comparison I can conjure up in my mind of an experience like this would be the last *Siyum HaShas* in MetLife Stadium where the momentum was so pulsating.

The entire stadium was moving and it's impossible to explain and recreate the oneness and closeness that one can feel to *Hashem* in such a powerful soul-stirring gathering like that. While *Bnei Yisrael* are soaking up the holiness and enjoying their special spiritual moment together, the *Plishtim*, their enemies, hear about this massive gathering in *pasuk zayin* and they become extremely alarmed. From their perspective, having all of their subjects gathering together in one place is not a good sign. It could signal that they're trying to plan a rebellion against them.

So what do the *Plishtim* do? They quickly mobilize their army to attack.

*Pasuk chet*: The Jewish people heard the *Plishtim* coming and they become extremely frightened. They scream and beg to *Shmuel*, to their leader, "Do not remain silent, please cry out to *Hashem* for us so that he will save us from the *Plishtim*." *Pasuk tet* tells us that *Shmuel* listens to the people and he takes a young nursing lamb and he offers it as a complete burnt offering to *Hashem*. He cries out to *Hashem* on behalf of the people and the *pesukim* tell us that *Hashem* answers him.

*Pesukim Yud* through *Yud-Alef*: As *Shmuel* is offering up the *korban* and as the *Plishtim* are approaching, *Hashem* sends an incredibly loud and scary thunderous noise on that day. And the terrifying sound confuses and panics the *Plishtim* and they're defeated before *Bnei Yisrael*. The

*Bnei Yisrael* continue to pursue the *Plishtim*, and they're able to strike them down until a place that the *pasuk* calls *Beit Kar*. *Pasuk yud bet*: Acknowledging the incredible miracle that took place, *Shmuel* sets up a large stone which he places between *Mitzpah* and the cliff, and he names it *Even Ha'azer*, declaring, "Until here *Hashem* has helped us."

*Psukim yud gimmel* through *yud daled*: The *Plishtim* were humbled and during the days of *Shmuel* they no longer dominated Israel. They even returned the cities that they had previously taken from *Ekron* until *Gat* and there was peace with neighboring peoples as well. Although *Plishtim* do end up reappearing soon during the time of *Shaul*, perhaps this can mean that during *Shmuel's* leadership they didn't succeed in overpowering Israel again.

And our *perek* continues, *pesukim tet vav* through *yud zayin*, by describing *Shmuel's* unique style of leadership. He judged the *Bnei Yisrael* all the days of his life. He was constantly on the move, traveling in a circuit between *Beit El* and *Gilgal* and *Mitzpah*, judging the people in all of these places. Then he would return to *Ramah*, where his home was. This was remarkable leadership on *Shmuel's* part. *Shmuel* followed in the footsteps of his father *Elkanah* and he devoted himself to the entire nation. *Shmuel* chose to go out to the people, pitching his own tent and bringing all of his own belongings with him, rather than wait for the people to have questions and have to come to him. As uncomfortable as economy seats have become nowadays (if you're even able to get on a flight), comparatively, traveling in those days was extremely difficult- long distances, harsh conditions, and slow travel by donkey.

Yet *Shmuel* wasn't concerned about himself or his comfort. His entire life revolved around reaching the most people and spreading the most *Torah* to all of *Am Yisrael*. According to *Chazal*, these constant travels may actually have caused him to age prematurely, as we'll see in our opening line of tomorrow's *perek*. But that didn't stop *Shmuel*. Every fiber of his being was focused and thought about *Am Yisrael* and how he could reach them best.

One last beautiful idea to conclude with for today: *Rav Soloveitchik* in his monumental work *Al HaTeshuva* points out that the words *כי שם ביתו* ותשובתו הרמתה, "*he would return to Ramah because that's where his home was,*" he explains is one of the unique places in *Tanach* where the word *teshuva* is used, and that that very word can shed light for us as to how *teshuva* works. He explains that *Shmuel* spent his life traveling outward around *Eretz Yisrael*, constantly on the move, inspiring the nation.

But at the end of the day, every journey and every circuit he took ended with his eventual return back home to *Ramah*. Sometimes we imagine our relationship with *Hashem* as a straight line, that with each step sometimes we're going further and further away. But really just like *Shmuel*, our relationship with *Hashem* is like a circle. And the farther out we go, we're really always on our way back home to Him.

So *Teshuva* is returning back home to that place where *Hashem* is and where our relationship with *Hashem* is. And sometimes you might think you're getting far, but really you're always on your way back. A Jew is always in the circle of returning back to *Hashem*. For a *perek* which focused on *Klal Yisrael's* national moment of *teshuva* and reconnection with *Hashem*, this is a

fitting personal takeaway for ourselves for today, to view ourselves in a circle of return to *Hashem* and to rekindle the closeness once again.

Thank you so much for learning this *perek* together. Wishing everyone a wonderful and meaningful day. Today's *perek* is dedicated to the safety and peace of *Am Yisrael* and *Eretz Yisrael*. May the words of *Nach* uplift us and give us strength during these challenging times.