



"AL HAPEREK"

A Renewed Meeting with Tanach

Shmuel Perakim 3-4

The induction of Shmuel into the exalted world of prophecy renews the relationship between God and His nation which had been weakened during the period of the judges. Shmuel undergoes a personal transformation that dramatically changes his own life and the collective experience of the nation.

General Overview < "וַיִּקְרָאוּ בְּסֵפֶר בְּתוֹרַת הָאֱלֹהִים"

Perek 3

- ❶ God calls out to Shmuel three times (3:4, 6, and 8), but Shmuel mistakenly identifies the voice as Eli's. Why is Shmuel unable to initially identify the voice of God? Consider the following sources: Shemot 3:1-5; Shoftim 13:6-22.
- ❷ "'Samuel, my son.' And he said, 'Here am I'" (3:16). Discuss the supportive, yet nuanced relationship between Eli the priest and Shmuel, his disciple.
- ❸ Verses 19-20, which are written in a dramatic and celebratory style, describe the culmination of Shmuel's prophetic inauguration which gradually progresses throughout perakim 1-3. Discuss the different aspects of this process and its climactic culmination as expressed in these two verses.

Perek 4

- 4 " . . . for they said: 'God is come into the camp'" (4:7). Following their defeat in the campaign against the Philistines, the Jewish people decide to bring the Ark of the Lord (אֲרוֹן) into the battlefield. How do the people understand the role of the Ark in war, and why do they believe its presence is sure to bring victory?
- 5 In the reader's first encounter with Eli, he is seen sitting on a chair and supervising at the entrance of the Mishkan (1:9). He receives the heartbreaking news of the Ark's fall in that same place (4:13), immediately falls off his chair, and dies (18). Study the character of Eli in chapters 1-4, paying particular attention to verses 1:4, 14-18; 2:23-25; 3:16-19; and 4:18. Where does the Mishkan stand among Eli's priorities? What elements of the work done in the Mishkan does he emphasize?

In-depth Study < "מִפְּנֵי שֵׁם וְשֵׁם שְׁכָל"

- 6 "The words of the Torah are rich in one place and spare in another place" (R. Yosef Bechor Shor). The destruction of Shiloh is not mentioned explicitly in Chapter 4, but is inferred from a prophecy about the impending destruction of the Temple in the book of Yirmiyahu 26:9: "This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without an inhabitant." Why do you think the destruction of Shiloh is never explicitly mentioned in Tanach?
- 7 There are only two stories in Tanach which describe a birth that ends in the tragic death of the mother. In both instances, the dying mother manages to name her newborn son before she passes away. The first instance is in Bereshit 35:16-20, and the second in I Shmuel 4:19-22. Compare the circumstances of these two births stories and what message each mother chooses to perpetuate through her son's name. How does this comparison shed light on the character of Pinchas' wife and on the broader state of the nation at the moment of the Ark's captivity?

Appendix < "וְנִבְיָנוּ בְּמִקְרָא"

The most exalted creation of all is the personality of the prophet. Each man is obligated to give new life to his own being by modeling his personality upon the image of the prophet; he must carry through his own self-creation until he actualizes the idea of prophecy--until he is worthy and fit to receive the divine overflow...Prophecy is man's ultimate goal, the end point of all his desires. "It is one of the foundations of religion to know that God causes men to prophesy. Prophecy rests only on an exceedingly wise man, who is strong with respect to his moral habits so that his inclination [*yetzzer*] does not overcome him in anything whatsoever but he, through the use of his mind, always overcomes his inclination, and who also possesses an exceedingly broad and ready mind...for he prods himself and teaches his soul not to take any thought at all of any empty matters nor of the vanities of the age and its contrivances, his mind always facing upward..."

The prophet creates his own personality, fashions within himself a new "I" awareness and a different mode of spiritual existence, snaps the chains of self-identity that had linked him to the "I" of old--to man who was just a random example of the species, who "walk[ed] in the darkest of the times--and turns into a man of God.

(Halakhic Man, by Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, pp. 128-130; quote from the Rambam's Laws of the Foundations of the Torah 7:1)