



3:16-28 The story of the Zonot

1. Radak to Melachim I 3:26

ומה שלא לקחה אותו אחר שהאחרת אמרה "תנו לה" כי ידעה כי מרחמת עליו אמרה, וחשבה כי המלך לא יתנהו לה:

She did not take him after the other woman said "Give to her" because she knew that the other woman was only speaking out of mercy for the child, and she thought the king would not actually give the child to her.

2. Abarbanel to Melachim I 3:26

לפי שחשבה שהמלך לא יתן אותו אליה, וגם הילד אחרי כן תמיד יספק בהיותו בנה מפני זה המחלוקת אשר התפרסם, ולא היתה הפצה לגדלו ואחרי כן ילך לו...

Because she thought that the king would not give him to her, and then the child would always remain in doubt as to whether he was her son due to this public dispute, and she did not want to raise him and then have him leave her...

3. Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra (Spain, Egypt, Israel 16th century), Responsum 3:634

שאלת ממני ידיד נפשי על המשפט ששפט שלמה הע"ה בין שתי הנשים זונות... ומה החכמה היתרה שיש במשפט הזה. אין זה כי אם תחבולה מן התחבולות ויש בזמננו מי שיודע לעשות תחבולות כאלה וזולתם..

תשובה יפה שאלת וכבר קדמך ר' יצחק אברבנאל ומה שתירץ אינו נכון בעיני תדעהו מספרו...

You asked me to tell you, my beloved friend, of the judgment which King Solomon judged between the two *zonot*... and what was the great wisdom in this judgment. It was only a strategy among strategies, and in our own day we have people who know how to make such strategies and others...

Answer: You have asked well, and Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel preceded you. His answer is not correct in my eyes, you may know it from his book...

4. Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom, *The Mystery of Solomon's Wisdom*

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/981635>

5. Abarbanel to Melachim I 3:22

וספר הכתוב שהאשה הנתבעת לא רצתה להרבות בדברים פן תכשל בדבריה...

And the text told that the defendant did not want to extend her words, lest she stumble in her words...

Source	Who won?	Basis for King Solomon's Judgment
Malbim	Defendant	Wording: She emphasized that her child was the live one
R' Weissenberg	Defendant	Words: The plaintiff couldn't have known that her accusation was true
R' Etshalom	Plaintiff	Words plus test: The allegation was of murder, not manslaughter
Abarbanel	Plaintiff	Faces and delivery
Radbaz	Defendant	Analysis of physical characteristics

6. Malbim to Melachim I 3:22

ספר הכתוב כי בדברם, אמרה הנתבעת בלשון בני החי ובני המת, והתובעת אמרה בהפך בנך המת ובני החי, וכלל בלשון שהאדם יקדים תמיד מה שהוא העקר ויאחר את הטפל, ולפ"ז הסברא נותנת שהאשה שדקדקה להקדים בלשונה בני החי קודם, עקר מגמתה שיהיה החי בנה, והמקדמת בלשונה בנך המת עקר מגמתה שיהיה המת בן חברתה, לא שיהיה החי בנה, ומזה כבר היה יכול להבין ולהכריע מי אמו...

The text told that when they spoke, the defendant said it with the language of "My son is the living one and your son is the deceased," and the plaintiff said the opposite, "Your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one." There is a principle in language, that people put first that which is the essence, and postpone that which is subsidiary. Based on this, logic would dictate that the woman was careful to first say "My son is alive," as her main focus was that the living one was her child. And the one who first said "Your son is the dead one," her main goal was that the dead one was the son of the other woman, and not that the live one should be her son. From this he could already understand and determine the identity of the mother...

7. Rabbi Dr. Ephraim Yehuda Weissenberg, <https://www.herzog.ac.il/vtc/0030840.html>

השאלה המתעוררת מיד היא שאם היתה "ישנה" כיצד היא יודעת בדיוק את כל מעשיה של האשה האחרת שהיא קוראת לה בכוז "האשה הזאת". בשלמא בסוף דבריה "...ותקח את בני מאצלי..." אפשר להמליץ בעדה שהיא משערת שהמעשה מוכרח היה להיות כפי שסיפרה שהרי "אין זר אתנו בבית זולתי שתיים אנחנו בבית" ואם לא היא החליפה את שני הילדים אזי מי החליף. אבל טענתה נגד אותה האשה שבפשיעתה היא המיתה את בנה, "וימת בן האשה הזאת אשר שכבה עליו," יש בה פירכא מניה וביה כיצד היא יודעת זאת אם היתה "ישנה". The question that arises immediately is: If she was "sleeping", how did she know, precisely, all of the deeds of the other woman whom she scornfully called, "that woman"? The end of her speech, "And she took my son from me," is fine; one could suggest on her behalf that she assumed that the deed was obviously so, for she had said, "There was no stranger with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house." If she was not the one who switched the two children, then who switched them? But her claim against that woman, that in her carelessness she killed her son, "And the son of this woman died, for she lay upon him," has a challenge to it within itself. How could she know this, if she was sleeping?

8. Abarbanel to Melachim I 3:24

וכבר כתבתי למעלה בשער השני אמתת הענין הזה לדעתי, והוא ששלמה השיג אמתת הדבר הזה קודם הנסיון והבחינה הזאת. כי מהכרת פני הנשים הזונות ומפרצופיהן כשעיין בהן ואופן דבריהם כששמע אותן, השיג מצפוני לבותן וירד לאמת הענין. וגל' ליושבים לפניו תוכן הענין ואמותו כפי מה שהשיג בחכמתו מפרצופי הנשים ואותות דבריהן ותנועותיהן. האמנם עשה הבחינה הזאת בהם שהראים היושבים ראשונה במלכות לפניו יכירו חכמתו ויתאמתו אליהם דבריו וגזרתו וידעו שהוא עושה משפט וצדקה בזה:

I have already written above, in the second Gate, the truth of this in my view – that Solomon grasped the truth of the matter before this trial and test. By knowing the faces of the harlots and from their features when he examined them, and the way of their speech when he heard them, he grasped what was hidden in their hearts and he descended to the truth of the matter. And he revealed to those who sat before him the essence of the matter and its verification in accordance with what he grasped in his wisdom from the women's faces and the signs in their speech and motions. But he performed this test with them so that the onlookers sitting first in his kingdom before him would recognize his wisdom, and his words and decree would be verified for them, and they would know that he performed justice and righteousness in this.

9. Rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra (Spain, Egypt, Israel 16th century), Responsum 3:634

מה שנראה לי כי המלך שע"ה הכיר את אם הילד מכמה בחינות. חזא שהכיר פרצוף הילד החי דומה לפרצוף האשה אשר תובעת אותו, ופרצוף הילד המת דומה לפרצוף האשה אשר בידה הילד החי. עוד הכיר את טבע האשה התובעת שהיא קצת התנועה, זריזה וזוהרה, ולא שכבה על בנה. ואת האשה האחרת הכיר בה הפך זה, ושפט בדעתו כי המת בנה של זו... ועל כן שפט המלך שזה בנה ואמר לעומדים אצלו זה בנה של זו וזה בנה של זו. ולברר הדבר שיאמינו שכך הוא, עשה התחבולה הזאת להבחין הדבר ועל כן ידעו כי אמת אמר המלך בתחלה... ואעפ"י שלא נזכר זה בכתוב בהדיא, דרך הכתוב לקצר. ואפשר לדקדק כן מדקאמר "ותעמודנה לפני המלך" שנראה [מיותר] לגמרי, אלא בא לומר שעמדו לפניו זמן מה, ונסתכל בהם והכיר המשפט קודם שידברו.

וכן יש לדקדק ממאמר המלך "זאת אומרת זה בני החי ובנך המת וכו'" דאע"ג שדרשו ז"ל "מכאן לדיין שצריך לשנות טענות הבעלי דינין," כך היה ראוי לומר: "זאת אומרת בני החי ובנך המת," כמו שאמר גבי האחרת, ומה לו להזכיר מלת "זה"? ואפילו אם תרצה לומר להורות באצבע אמר "זה," מה שאין בו צריך, מ"מ אמר אותו שלא במקומו שכך היה ראוי לומר "זאת אומרת זה בני החי בני!" על כן אני אומר אל העם העומדים בהיפך פנים כנגד האשה אשר הבן בידה, "זאת אומרת זה בני חי," ואין זה אמת, כי אין זה בנה אלא המת. ולגבי אחרת לא אמר "זה" אלא סרה טענתה לבד...

It appears to me that King Solomon identified the mother of the child from a few points. First, he recognized that the features of the living child resembled the features of the plaintiff, and the features of the deceased child resembled the features of the woman who held the living child. He also recognized the nature of the plaintiff, that she made small motions, and was energetic and careful, and she did not lie on her child. He recognized that the other woman was the opposite, and he judged that the deceased child was hers... And therefore the king judged that this was her son, and he told those who stood beside him, "This is the son of this one, and this is the son of this one." And to clarify the matter so that they would believe this was so, he performed this strategy to test it, and so they knew that the king had spoken truly at the outset...

And even though the text does not say this [deduction] explicitly, the text is normally concise. And one may deduce it from when it says, "And they stood before the king," which appears entirely [superfluous]. It comes to say that they stood before him for some time, and he looked at them and recognized the verdict before they spoke.

And so one may deduce from the king's statement, "This one says: This is my living son and your son is the dead, etc." Even though our Sages taught, "From here [we learn] that a judge must repeat the claims of the litigants," he should

have said, "This one says my son is the living and your son is the dead," as he said for the other. Why did he include the word "This is"? And even if you wish to say that he said "this" to point with his finger, which was unnecessary, still, he said it out of place. He should have said, "This one says: This living one is my son"! Therefore, I say that to the people who stood with their faces turned toward the woman who held the boy, "This one says: 'This is my living son,' and this is not true, for this is not her son, but rather the dead one." And to the other he did not say 'This', but her claim remained, alone...

10. Talmud, Makkot 23b

הופיע רוח"ק... בבית דינו של שלמה דכתיב "ויען המלך ויאמר תנו לה את הילד החי והמת לא תמיתוהו, היא אמו" - מנא ידע? דלמא איערומא מיערמא! יצאת בת קול ואמרה "היא אמו."

Divine inspiration was manifest... in the court of Solomon, for it says, "And the king declared, saying: Give her the living child, and do not kill him; she is his mother." How did he know? Perhaps she was being clever! A small voice emerged [from Heaven] and said, "She is his mother."

11. Bereishit 40:8, 41:16; Daniel 2:27-28

12. Rabbi Nachum Rabinovich (translated), *Wisdom and Human Pretention: The Riddle of Shlomo and its Resolution*
<https://thelehrhaus.com/scholarship/wisdom-and-human-pretention-the-riddle-of-shlomo-and-its-resolution/>

The Sages have already addressed this puzzle and illuminated a path to understanding that precisely what seems to be the supreme expression of a "wise and discerning mind" (*ibid.* 12) was not simply a gift from Gd, and it in fact pushed him into the abyss of destruction. The Sages said: "Kohelet [=Shlomo] sought to pronounce judgement based on intuition—without witnesses and without admonition. A heavenly voice issued forth and said to him: 'and that which He wrote is upright and true' (Kohelet 12:10)—'by the mouth of two witnesses...' (Devarim 17:6)." Shlomo wanted to circumvent the Torah's demands with his wisdom. It was not with divine wisdom that he sought to do so; wisdom has its own dark drives.

The Sages even found fault with the wisdom of Shlomo's judgment regarding the identity of the mother of the live child: "How did he know? Maybe she was duping him?" The wisest of all men wished to go beyond the boundaries of human intelligence and liberate himself from the shackles of *mitzvot*, which are merely the tools with which the body confines the soul. But that was not the intent of the prophecy, and so there is no place for the story of Shlomo's judgment in Divrei Hayamim. We must look to the Book of Melakhim to understand Shlomo's seemingly split personality.

13. Radak to Melachim I 3:28

לפיכך יראו מפניו לעשות דבר רע ואפילו בסתר כי ראו כי ברוב חכמתו יוציא לאור משפט כמו שנעשה בזה המשפט:

Therefore they feared to do anything bad, even in private, for they saw that in his great wisdom he could bring justice to light, as happened in this legal decision.

Non-comprehensive Review Questions for Chapter 3

- 1> How could King Solomon marry the daughter of the Pharaoh, even with conversion? Aren't all Egyptians prohibited until their third generation? And if this was wrong, why doesn't the text mention punishment for it?
- 2> Did King Solomon really build his own palace before the Beit haMikdash, as it appears in 3:1?
- 3> What was wrong with King Solomon's use of minor altars? They were halachically permitted!
- 4> If King Solomon is using minor altars, how do we see him bring korbanot in the Mishkan in 3:4?
- 5> Gd speaks with King Solomon four times. Are any of them actual prophecies?
- 6> What does King Solomon mean when he describes the Jews as *kaved*?
- 7> Why did Gd grant King Solomon a request, in a way that seems unique in Tanach?
- 8> Did Gd give King Solomon greater wisdom than anyone before or after? What about Moshe and general scholars?
- 9> Is the story of the two *zonot* a positive one for King Solomon?
- 10> What was King Solomon's brilliance here, and what was the role of the sword trick?