

## AVIGAYIL, PROPHETESS OR SEDUCTRESS?

*How is the context important? See the chapters before and after.*

*How is verse 1, the death of Samuel relevant?*

*How is this story important beyond this story?*

*How is her good "sechel" sense important?*

*What does the parallel to Esav and Yaakov tell us?*

*How about the parallels with Ruth? Why did David merit to be saved? Why wasn't Saul saved like this?*

*What techniques does Avigayil use to make her case? To whom does she belong?*

*If she is a prophetess, what form of prophecy is this?*

*What is a prophet and is she acting like one? What are all the forces that are grey at this point?*

*Who is right between David and Naval? Is there an intimidation involved?*

*What do you think of what Avigail says about her husband?*

*Is she blessing him or predicting for him? Is this romance or something else?*

*How does she take him back to an earlier version of himself?*

*How does David see her? How does she see her husband? Is she there to protect him or herself?*

*How does she see her role with David? Why is her flattery important from a political point of view?*

*Why is she so humble at the end? How would you characterize her in the modern context? Does this fit her?*

### **Talmud Megilah 14a**

**שבע נביאות מאן נינהו שרה מרים דבורה חנה אביגיל חולדה ואסתר ...**

**There are seven prophetesses, Sarah, Miriam, Devorah, Chanah, Avigayil, Chulda (days of Jeremiah) and Esther.**

אביגיל דכתיב (שמואל א כה, כ) והיה היא רוכבת על החמור ויורדת בסתר ההר בסתר ההר מן ההר מיבעי ליה

Abigail was a prophetess, as it is written: "And it was so, as she rode on the donkey, and came down by the covert of the mountain" (I Samuel 25:20). The Gemara asks: Why does it say: "By the covert [beseter] of the mountain"? It should have said: From the mountain.

אמר רבה בר שמואל על עסקי דם הבא מן הסתרים נטלה דם והראתה לו אמר לה וכי מראין דם בלילה אמרה לו וכי דנין דיני נפשות בלילה אמר לה

The Gemara answers that in fact this must be understood as an allusion to something else. Rabba bar Shmuel said: Abigail, in her attempt to prevent David from killing her husband Nabal, came to David and questioned him on account of menstrual blood that comes from the hidden parts [setarim] of a body. How so? She took a blood-stained cloth and showed it to him, asking him to rule on her status, whether or not she was ritually impure as a menstruating woman. He said to her: Is blood shown at night? One does not examine blood-stained cloths at night, as it is difficult to distinguish between the different shades by candlelight. She said to him: If so, you should also remember another halakha: Are cases of capital law tried at night? Since one does not try capital cases at night, you cannot condemn Nabal to death at night. David said to her:

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מורד במלכות הוא ולא צריך למידייניה אמרה לו עדיין שאול קיים ולא יצא טבעך בעולם אמר לה (שמואל א כה, לג) ברוך טעמך וברוכה את אשר כליתני [היום הזה] מבא בדמים

Nabal, your husband, is a rebel against the throne, as David had already been anointed as king by the prophet Samuel, and Nabal refused his orders. And therefore there is no need to try him, as a rebel is not accorded the ordinary prescriptions governing judicial proceedings. Abigail said to him: You lack the authority to act in this manner, as Saul is still alive. He is the king in actual practice, and your seal [tivakha] has not yet spread across the world, i.e., your kingship is not yet known to all. Therefore, you are not authorized to try someone for rebelling against the monarchy. David accepted her words and said to her: "And blessed be your discretion and blessed be you who have kept me this day from coming to bloodguiltiness [damim]" (I Samuel 25:33).

דמים תרתי משמע אלא מלמד שגילתה את שוקה והלך לאורה ג' פרסאות אמר לה השמיעי לי אמרה לו (שמואל א כה, לא) לא תהיה זאת לך לפוקה זאת מכלל דאיכא אחריתי ומאי ניהו מעשה דבת שבע ומסקנא הכי הואי

The Gemara asks: The plural term damim, literally, bloods, indicates two. Why did David not use the singular term dam? Rather, this teaches that Abigail revealed her thigh, and he lusted after her, and he went three parasangs by the fire of his desire for her, and said to her: Listen to me, i.e., listen to me and allow me to be intimate with you. Abigail then said to him: "Let this not be a stumbling block for you" (I Samuel 25:31). By inference, from the word "this," it can be understood that there is someone else who will in fact be a stumbling block for him, and what is this referring to? The incident involving Bathsheba. And in the end this is what was, as indeed he stumbled with Bathsheba. This demonstrates that Abigail was a prophetess, as she knew that this would occur. This also explains why David blessed Abigail for keeping him from being responsible for two incidents involving blood that day: Abigail's menstrual blood and the shedding of Nabal's blood.

שמואל א כה, כט) והיתה נפש אדוני צרורה בצרור החיים כי הוות מיפטרא מיניה אמרה ליה (שמואל א כה, לא) ( והטיב ה' לאדוני וזכרת את אמתך

Apropos Abigail, the Gemara explains additional details in the story. Abigail said to David: "Yet the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bond of life with the Lord your God" (I Samuel 25:29), and when she parted from him she said to him: "And when the Lord shall have dealt well with my lord, and you shall remember your handmaid" (I Samuel 25:31).

אמר רב נחמן היינו דאמרי אינשי איתתא בהדי שותא פילכא איכא דאמרי שפיל ואזיל בר אווזא ועינוהי מיטייפי

Rav Naḥman said that this explains the folk saying that people say: While a woman is engaged in conversation she also holds the spindle, i.e., while a woman is engaged in one activity she is already taking steps with regard to another. Abigail came to David in order to save her husband Nabal, but at the same time she indicates that if her husband dies, David should remember her and marry her. And indeed, after Nabal's death David took Abigail for his wife. Some say that Rav Naḥman referred to a different saying: The goose stoops its head as it goes along, but its eyes look on from afar to find what it is looking for. So too, Abigail acted in similar fashion.

### **מגילה ט"ו א:ז-ח'**

תנו רבנן ארבע נשים יפיפיות היו בעולם שרה (ואביגיל רחב) ואסתר...תנו רבנן רחב בשמה זינתה יעל בקולה אביגיל בזכירתה מיכל בת שאול בראייתה

## Megillah 15a

...To complete the discussion about the prophetesses, the Gemara cites a baraita in which the Sages taught: There were four women of extraordinary beauty in the world: Sarah, and Abigail, Rahab, and Esther... The Sages taught in a baraita: Rahab aroused impure thoughts by her name, i.e., the mere mention of her name would inspire lust for her; Yael, by her voice; Abigail, by remembering her; Michal, the daughter of Saul, by her appearance.

### ***What do we make of the parallel to Ruth and Boaz?***

1) Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground. (Rut 2:10)

And she fell before David on her face, and bowed herself down to the ground. (I Shemuel 25:23)

2) These are the only two women in Scripture who hint to a man about their desire to marry him. Ruth says to Boaz:

And she answered, "I am Ruth your handmaid; spread therefore your skirt over your handmaid, for you are a near kinsman." (Ruth 3:9)[2]

And similarly, Avigayil says to David:

And it shall come to pass, when the Lord shall have done to my lord according to all the good that He has spoken concerning you and shall have appointed you prince over Israel... then remember your handmaid. (I Shmuel 25:30-31)[3]

3) In both cases, the man blesses the woman for the good that she did for him, using identical language. Boaz says to Ruth:

Blessed be you of the Lord, my daughter. (Rut 3:10)

And similarly David blesses Avigayil:

And blessed be your discretion, and blessed be you. (I Shemuel 25:33)

## Parallels to Esav and Yaakov

He himself went on ahead **and bowed low** to the ground **seven times** until he was near his brother.

4 Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept.

5 Looking about, he saw the women and the children. "Who," he asked, "are these with you?" He answered, "The children with whom God has **favor**ed your servant."

6 Then the maids, with their children, **came forward and bowed low**;

7 next Leah, with her children, **came forward and bowed low**; and last, Joseph and Rachel **came forward and bowed low**;

8 And he asked, "What do you mean by all this company which I have met?" He answered, "To gain my lord's favor."

9 Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; let what you have remain yours."

10 But Jacob said, "No, I pray you; if you would do me this favor, **accept from me this gift**; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably.

11 Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty." And when he urged him, he accepted.

12 And [Esau] said, "Let us start on our journey, and I will proceed at your pace."

13 But he said to him, "**My lord** knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die.

14 **Let my lord go on ahead of his servant**, while I travel slowly, at the pace of the cattle before me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir."