



SHAVUOT

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Yizkor > Is Israel David or Goliath?

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IS ISRAEL DAVID OR GOLIATH?

SECRETS FROM THE MAN WHOSE BIRTHDAY AND YAHRZEIT IS ON SHAVUOT

ABSTRACT

50 years ago, with the victory of the Six Day War, the world saw Israel as David, whose G-d performed a miracle of biblical proportions and slew its giant enemy, Goliath the Philistine in the form of the Arab nations.

Today, many across the globe (and, sadly, within Israel itself) call Israel “Goliath,” a mean bully that is attacking poor “David.” Today, some people portray Israel as a giant warrior in armor attacking the poor Palestinians.

This has become a major PR and political disadvantage for Israel – especially on campuses and with the so-called “liberal-minded” Jews and others. How did Israel go from such a miraculous and resounding victory to such an unresolved state of affairs in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and Gaza? From being a David to being perceived as a Goliath?

King David, of the David and Goliath story, was born and passed away on Shavuot.

King David is the epitome of Israel, the symbol of Israel, the eternity of Israel – the King of Israel (*Dovid melech Yisroel chai v'kayom*), and from King David stem all the Kings of Israel, including the final redeemer, Moshiach.

What is King David's secret weapon? And what is its connection to Shavuot, King David's birthday and *yahrzeit*? How can that empower us today?

King David, and his chosen weaponry for eternal victory over Goliath, teaches us what it means to receive the Torah and how to achieve total and eternal victory over our present-day Goliaths.

50 years from the Six-Day War and we can resolve all of Israel's challenges with a change in perspective – and an acknowledgment of who we, Israel, really are.

1. My Father's Stronger Than Your Father! (Joke)

A cartoon is circulating showing two boys sitting at their school desks in the classroom. One boy is massive and muscled, while the other is tiny and scrawny. One looks like a jock with a high popularity, while the other looks like a nerd with a high IQ.

One boy is yelling at the other: “Well, my father is stronger than your father!”

While the other responds: “Y’think so? My father is way stronger than your father!”

The cartoon caption reads: David and Goliath’s sons.

Truth be told, today it is David and Goliath’s grandsons.

2. Shavuot – King David

King David was born into this world¹ and passed from this world on Shavuot.² This is one of the reasons many Jews read the book of Ruth on Shavuot.³ Ruth was King David’s great-grandmother, and out of her and his line the royal family of kings of Israel sprouted, as well as the Messiah, the final redeemer of Israel.

Many people pray at King David’s tomb near the Old City of Jerusalem on Shavuot night and walk from there to the Western Wall to study until daybreak, when we receive the Torah.

In addition to his passing on Shavuot and being buried in Jerusalem, there is an integral connection between King David and the city of Jerusalem. Saul ruled in Hebron, some 30 miles south of Jerusalem. It was King David who conquered (and purchased) Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, establishing it as the capital of Israel, and setting into motion the building of the Temple, completed by his son, King Solomon.⁴

Thus, many Jews find a divine symmetry on Shavuot through praying at King David’s tomb and then alighting to the Western Wall to hear (and receive) the Ten Commandments.

In just a few moments we will recite the Yizkor memorial prayer, remembering all of our loved ones who have passed, King David included. Our loved ones, those who gave their lives for the people of Israel, those who traveled through the wilderness and who entered the Promised Land; those who were exiled to Babylon and those who were exiled to Rome; our loved ones who celebrated Shavuot through the hells of inquisitions and pogroms, through the smokestacks of Auschwitz and those who gave their lives to recapture and reunite Jerusalem only 50 years ago – all of our loved ones, our parents and grandparents all the way back to Abraham and Sarah – today, at Yizkor, we remember them all.

And they remember us. Moreover, their teachings and legacies pioneered and paved the way for us, guiding and empowering us to deal with our present day challenges.

And King David, though his actions and victories, teaches us exactly how to act and be victorious, regardless of the adversary or adversity.

¹ Bechor Shor in footnote 3.

² Jerusalem Talmud, Chagigah 2:3. Cited in Tosafos Chagigah 17a. See Likkutei Sichot, vol. 2, p. 568. vol. 8 p. 21-22 and in the footnotes.

³ Bechor Shor, Baba Basra 13a. Birchei Yosef, Orach Chaim 494:11.

⁴ See I Chronicles 11. Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer 36. Meaningful Life Sermon, Chayei Sarah 2014.

3. David and Goliath

One of the most famous – and, as we shall see, most misinterpreted – episodes of the Bible is found in the first Book of Samuel and involves King David – descended into and ascended out of this world on Shavuot – and a Philistine giant named Goliath.⁵

The conventional narrative is that David, the smaller, weaker, neophyte, with zero combat experience was a complete underdog and, miraculously, with the sling of his slingshot, David slew Goliath, the mighty warrior and sure-thing victor.

Malcom Gladwell, in his book entitled *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*, has a more novel interpretation to this famous biblical narrative.⁶

In short: Gladwell hypothesizes that David wasn't really an underdog at all. From a conventional perspective, sure he seemed to be – the young novice shepherd against a seasoned warrior and mightiest of men – but if you look a bit closer, David always had the advantage.

Goliath, says Gladwell, wore heavy armor, perfectly suited and skilled for close-quarter, hand-to-hand combat. David, in all his years as a shepherd, honed his skill of using his slingshot to sling away any predator threatening his flock. Thus David was really a well-trained marksman, with far more fine-tuned and precise artillery, if you will.

From a distance, artillery, a sniper, beats the mightiest warrior ten times out of ten.

Gladwell takes it one step further. Based on some interesting, if not exactly convincing medical acrobatics, Gladwell believes that Goliath, the giant, may have been afflicted with a condition very common to giants called acromegaly, which results in overproduction of hormones caused by a benign tumor on the pituitary gland. A major side effect of acromegaly is double visions and extreme nearsightedness. Goliath's limited vision coupled with David's sharpshooting abilities from distance, makes him perfect prey – maybe even the underdog – in this biblical battle.

Gladwell puts it well: “What the Israelites saw, from high on ridge, was an intimidating giant. In reality, the very thing that gave the giant his size was also the source of his greatest weakness.”

I am no medical expert, and I do not know if Malcom Gladwell's theory is correct, but it definitely serves as food for thought and as a perfect segue into the Torah's understanding of this famous biblical story.

⁵ I Samuel 17.

⁶ https://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_gladwell_the_unheard_story_of_david_and_goliath/transcript?language=en.

4. Is Israel David? Are Its Enemies Goliath?

If you look at the conventional world's description of Israel in 1967 you would see Israel being compared to David, and its Arab neighbors to Goliath.

C. L. Sulzberger, a journalist and family member of the New York Times Sulzbergers, wrote on May 24, 1967, right before the beginning of the Six-Day War:

Fact one is that the Arab states have sworn to destroy Israel, no matter how long they must wait, and, despite internecine quarrels, they are today better armed and better deployed than ever before. Fact two is that Israel, having no place to retreat, is prepared to fight desperately and without compromise.

Ben-Gurion says he cannot endorse the idea of classical Greek tragedy which sees fate unjustly controlling the destinies of man; that Israel must fight fate itself if necessary. This contemporary David already battled his Goliath, Nasser. Ben-Gurion is out of office, but his cardinal precept prevails.

James Reston wrote the *New York Times'* editorial on June 11, 1967, right after the victory and two days before Shavuot:

Everybody here, however, is so pleased with the re-enactment of the David and Goliath story—which, incidentally, took place on the very spot where the little guy slew the giant—that the causes of the conflict are in danger of being lost.

...And even Israel is in danger of losing because it is now tempted to think that military power will save a small nation in the midst of a vast and hostile Arab world.

A *Washington Post* article of the same day runs the headline – **“David Fights Goliath in a Desert Mirage.”**

Today, the biblical reference has been reversed. On the PR trails, on campuses, in Europe, in the UN, and sadly also in parts of Israel – many liberals see the Arabs in Israel – referred to as Palestinians – as the tiny weakling underdog “David” quivering at the grand warrior that is the Israel, the massive “Goliath”.

How did this perception change so drastically in the last 50 years?! In 1967 Israel was seen as righteous David, and now, a mere 50 years later, it is perceived by too many as an “evil occupier,” an “apartheid state,” an “oppressor of children”?! Israel is still a tiny nation with a sliver of land compared to the vast Arab/Muslim world. Arab and Muslim lands are over 800 times the size of Israel, and their population is 60 times that of Israel's! How then can Israel be perceived as the Goliath?!

5. The Great Insult

The answer lies in the true biblical narrative of David and Goliath, found in its literal reading.

But before we get to that, allow me to say a few words about the tremendous insult and distortion perpetrated by those comparing Israel to Goliath, G-forbid.

Israel may be a convenient scapegoat. Nothing new there, Anti-Semites have always found ways to “blame” the Jews. But it is particularly shameful in our case, especially when the accusations come from so-called friends, and fellow Jews.

People, especially liberal free thinkers claiming to save the world, love a David vs. Goliath narrative, an underdog story – and perhaps they find the “Palestinian” cause as being more appealing than the Israeli one. But this has nothing to do with the truth.

David was an Israeli, period. Goliath was a Philistine, full stop. Calling Israel a Goliath is untruthful, inaccurate, and insulting – morally untruthful, historically inaccurate, and personally insulting.

Firstly, Goliath was a Philistine. The Romans names Israel “Palaestina” to insult and denigrate the Jews, comparing their land to the Philistines. This is where modern day “Palestine,” under the British Mandate, got its name. Hence, “Palestinians.”

Secondly, David is the Jewish king. Israel will always be David, no matter how mighty or tiny Israel is, no matter if Israel is the underdog or the favorite. Israel is David.

Thirdly, though Israel today is physically stronger and larger than it was in 1967, in no way shape or form is that the source of its true power. Its true power comes from G-d and G-d alone.

And this is the true biblical tale of David and Goliath.

6. The True Story

Let us read together the climax of the biblical narrative:

And the Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I shall give your flesh to the fowl of the air, and to the cattle of the field.” And David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword, spear and javelin, and I come to you with the Name of the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of the armies of Israel which you have taunted. This day, the L-rd will deliver you into my hand, and I shall slay you, and take off your head, and I shall give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines this day, to the fowl of the air and to the beasts of the earth, and all the earth shall know that Israel has a G-d. And all this assembly shall know that not with sword and javelin does the L-rd save, for the battle is the L-rd’s, and He will deliver you into our hand.”

And it was, when the Philistine arose and drew closer to David, that David hastened and ran to the battle array, toward the Philistine. And David stretched his hand into the bag, and took a stone therefrom, and slung it, and he hit the Philistine in his forehead, and the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. And David overpowered the Philistine with the slingshot and with the stone, and he smote the Philistine and slew him: and no sword was in David's hand. And David ran and stood up to the Philistine, and he took his sword and drew it from its sheath, and slew him, and with it, severed his head. And the Philistines saw that their hero had died, and they fled.⁷

When the giant Goliath boasts of his skill and weaponry, how does David respond? *And David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with sword, spear and javelin, and I come to you with the Name of the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of the armies of Israel which you have taunted."*

David does not say, "Hey, I am a sharpshooting sniper with a slingshot." David does not mention a single physical weapon. David simply says: *I come to you with the Name of the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of the armies of Israel.* David's power was not physical, his strength was not material, his might was not bronze, his weapon was not ammunition; David's power, confidence, and certainty was G-d Al-mighty. David was armed to the teeth with *the Name of the L-rd of Hosts.* David's Commander in Chief was the *G-d of the armies of Israel.*

The Talmud⁸ perfectly describes the personality of Goliath – the epitome of a low-life, who had "100 fathers and only one mother," a Talmudic euphemism for Goliath's debased and immoral family, and the decrepit life he lived.

Goliath and his people may have been physically mighty, but they were spiritually bankrupt. They may have been materially muscled, but they were morally undeveloped. They may have been biological giants, but they were ethical midgets. Goliath and the Philistines may have been armored in plates of bronze, but they were utterly devoid of divine wisdom and naked of divine deeds.

Gladwell is right in one regard: Goliath and the Philistines were surely nearsighted, myopic and blind to the greater divine vision.

And, as we all know, when the physical battles the spiritual, the spiritual wins every time.

You come to me with sword, spear and javelin, and I come to you with the Name of the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of the armies of Israel which you have taunted." This is why David beat Goliath. This is why Israel beat the Arabs in 1967. And this is how Israel will be victorious today.

⁷ I Samuel 17:44-51.

⁸ Sotah 42a-b.

7. Jerusalem Today, 50 Years After Reuniting With It

50 years since the miraculous victory in 1967, some are sadly arguing that the entire Six-Day war was a mistake. Israel should never have conquered – or in the commonly held distortion: “occupied” – the so called “West Bank” and Jerusalem. As if that would have solved the conflict between the Arabs and the Jews...

“Occupied” is a false word. Max Kempelman has already pointed out⁹ that according to international law the territories are, at most, “disputed,” not “occupied.” The land never belonged to any “Palestinians,” and for that matter there was never such an entity called “Palestinians” back then. Israel conquered the land from Jordan, Egypt and Syria – in a justified, defensive war, responding to Nasser’s menacing actions and Arab belligerence at the time, threatening the very existence of Israel.

Yet, some continue to insist that the events of 1967 were a mistake. That alone can make you weep.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe saw the great victory as the beginning of a new, unprecedented spiritual revival.¹⁰

Now, on Shavuot, as we celebrate the Torah, as we enjoy Jewish sovereignty of Jerusalem, and as we literally hold our destiny in our own hands – and yet, with many unanswered questions in Israel, and divides among Jews both in Israel and in the Diaspora, there is much to think about:

Where does Jerusalem stand today? Does she sit alone?¹¹

Where do we stand today? Do we appreciate the gifts we are blessed with?

Today, on Shavuot, as Israel receives and accepts its contract with G-d, and G-d with Israel, we must grab this source of motivation and honor this eternal gift by living up to it. It is a day that should serve as a wake up call to appreciate the Divine blessings in our lives.

We must appreciate and declare – so that all this assembly shall know - that our true strength comes not from weapons and a strong military, *not with sword and javelin does the L-rd save, for the battle is the L-rd’s, and He will deliver you into our hand.*

You come to me with sword, spear and javelin, and I come to you with the Name of the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of the armies of Israel.

As in the year 2448, and in the year 5727 (1967) we must appreciate and act on the awakenings and inspirations in our lives.

⁹ <https://www.meaningfullife.com/shemini-war-peace/>.

¹⁰ See sermons of Shabbat Bamidbar and Shavuot Day One.

¹¹ See Eicho (Lamentations) 1:1.

After 3329 year it's about time that we should have the power to finally appreciate and respect the Promised Land given to us, and stop questioning our place in the Land.

8. David and the Jewish People's Secret Weapon

The Jewish people's greatness and power – as King David's – comes not from size and physical strength – but from humility. “David the small.”¹² “Jacob the small.”¹³ The Jewish people are “fewest among nations.”¹⁴ They are all called by and compared to the “small luminary,”¹⁵ the moon.¹⁶ Small in number and size; but precisely because of that – because of their tremendous humility in face of G-d – that is what made them so great and powerful.

That is King David's secret weapon, and that is our secret weapon. And that is what we celebrate and reclaim on Shavuot, when we receive the Torah anew, on King David's birthday and yahrzeit.

9. Practical Suggestions For David (Royal Spirit) To Knockout Goliath (Corrupt Matter)

Practically speaking, to help us concretize these ideas in real action, here are some things each of us can do to help our brethren in Israel and to help us receive the Torah in the fullest sense of the word:

- Wage a spiritual war against all forces of moral apathy and ignorance.
- Strengthen the three pillars which holds up the world – both personal and global: Torah, Prayer, and Kind deeds.¹⁷ Indeed, it is through these three things that Israel is called “Zion,” “Zionists,” from the Hebrew word *Metzuyon*, meaning exemplary or outstanding.¹⁸
- Intensify your commitment to Torah study – study a new text, and designate additional time to your study.
- Say additional prayers for the safety of people facing danger, especially for the Israeli Defense Forces.
- Give additional amounts of charity. Charity has a special energy to counter perilous situations.
- Engage your family and friends in meaningful dialogue. Reach out to your sphere of influence and inspire them with spiritual awareness.

¹² 1 Samuel 17:14.

¹³ Amos 7:2.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 7:7.

¹⁵ Genesis 1:16.

¹⁶ Talmud, Chulin 60b.

¹⁷ Pirkei Avot end of chapter 1.

¹⁸ Jerusalem Talmud, Taanit 4:2 based in Isaiah 51:1.

- Encourage everyone you come in contact with to study Torah and add a new mitzvah – a good deed. The Bible tells us that through Torah study and performance of mitzvahs G-d promises: “You will dwell securely in your land. I will provide peace in the land. You will sleep without fear.”¹⁹
- Initiate a gathering in your home or office, promoting additional goodness and kindness.
- Jewish men should be encouraged to put on Tefillin each weekday morning. Tefillin has faculties that add in protection in threatening times. [This suggestion was initiated by the Lubavitcher Rebbe in connection with the Six-Day-War and the subsequent wars in Israel].
- Women and girls should be encouraged to light Shabbat and Holiday candles, 18 minutes before sundown leading into Shabbat or the Holiday. It is also customary to give some charity before lighting the candles.
- Encourage children to say holy verses and prayers and add in charitable and kind deeds. Children play a particular role in time of crisis. As King David, our hero, states in the book of Psalms: “out of the mouths of babes and sucklings You have established the strength...to destroy an enemy and avenger.”²⁰ [This suggestion was initiated by the Rebbe before the 1973 Yom Kippur War].

10. Conclusion

To conclude: It has always been a Jewish tradition and custom to recite Tehillim, Psalms in a time of need, and at gatherings of Jews, and even every day, as many Jews recite the daily Tehillim after morning prayers.

Now, with a better understanding of King David, the author of the Psalms, we can appreciate a bit more the power of Tehillim. In these words lies the spirit of G-d, to go into battle against any adversary – be it Goliath of then, or a Goliath of now – a seemingly giant problem, or a seemingly insurmountable illness we may be facing today, heaven forefend. Armed with King David, “the sweet singer of Israel,”²¹ and his Tehillim, surely we can vanquish any enemy or challenge that stands in our way.

Not (only) because we are smarter, physically stronger, or more strategic, but because, in King David’s immortal words, *You come to me with sword, spear and javelin, and I come to you with the Name of the L-rd of Hosts, the G-d of the armies of Israel which you have taunted...and all the earth shall know that Israel has a G-d. And all this assembly shall know that not with sword and javelin does the L-rd save, for the battle is the L-rd’s, and He will deliver you into our hand.*

¹⁹ Leviticus 26:5-6.

²⁰ Psalms 8:3.

²¹ 2 Samuel 23:1.

Our G-d, the G-d of Israel, Who, as ratified at Sinai, imbues within all of Israel a divine spark and divine mission, is the reason we are victorious, have been for 4000 years, and will be for eternity with the coming of the Redemption, the grandson of King David and Ruth, and who will show all the world what it means for David to be victorious over all forms of Goliath.

Happy Shavuot and Chag Sameach!

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