

Dawidh King of Yisrael:

Choices

Introduction

From the first time I laid eyes upon him, I liked him. To this day, I still can't tell you why. But, there was something about this young man that caused my heart, which I had thought long frozen in a state of cynical decay, to soar. I later learned that his name was "Dawidh." His name in the language of Yisrael means, "beloved." Eventually, I would learn that for this young man, his name was at once the essence of truth and the bitterest of irony.

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I had been standing in the Valley of Elah with my commander, waiting for one of the Children of Yisrael to answer his challenge. Neither of us really expected anyone to take up the gauntlet. Especially as the days turned into weeks until this morning of the fortieth day. Nevertheless we waited each and every day.

My master, Goliath the P'lishti, had been steadily undermining the morale of Yisrael, coming out every morning and evening, shouting challenges to the camp of Yisrael that filled even my withered soul with zealous rage for our God. Yes, my God too. Despite my mercenary nature, serving as the shield bearer for the enemy, I suppose my soul was not entirely cut off from my people and my God, the Holy One of Yisrael.

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We were just about to turn around and head back to our camp, when that young man, Dawidh, made his appearance.

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Goliath stretched his body. "Let's go, Uri'yah, they aren't coming again," he said as he snapped his neck from side to side. My commander laughed, "Cowards. We've already won, Uri'yah." His comment strangely disturbed me. I scowled at my lapse into sentimentality.

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Then he caught a glimpse of someone coming out into the valley. "What?" he was taken by surprise. I saw him too, and unexpectedly my heart filled with hope. Maybe today was the day that I had been waiting for. I laughed to myself. I didn't even know I was waiting for something. I had given up on hopes and dreams a long time ago.

Goliath turned to meet the challenger, and his surprise increased. Anger and contempt soon followed as he went out to meet the fool.

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"It's not their 'king,' that's for sure," Goliath spat, but something told me differently. True, it wasn't King Sha'ul. Goliath had met him on the battlefield many years ago, when this "king of Yisrael" was just another farmer playing soldier. I also had seen him on few occasions. No, it wasn't Sha'ul the son of Kish. Yet, some inner voice had awakened in me. I couldn't yet put words to the voice. The closest I could come to describe the feelings inside me was ... anticipation, or maybe, a vague type of hope. But in what, I had no idea.

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On the other hand, my master was clearly disappointed. I could read his thoughts. This young man didn't even have a decent weapon. Goliath felt cheated.

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He felt as if he was being mocked. Like some oversized child, he was always afraid that people were laughing at him from behind his back. Goliath cocked his head to make sure he was seeing correctly. It looked like some shepherd searching for his lost sheep. I know what he was thinking, maybe even hoping: Maybe, this fool stumbled into the battlefield by accident?

“Lose you sheep, boy?” Goliath's voice was dripping with disdain. He began to approach Dawidh. I quickly followed

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Finally, Goliath accepted that this really was the challenger. He shook his head in disgust. He was a well-built, healthy young man. He was full of vigor, but clearly not a seasoned warrior. Goliath was probably wondering if he had ever even seen a battle. He was muttering to himself. I could barely catch the words. “Why would the `Ivr'im send such a man?” It was beyond contempt. Goliath was enraged. Someone had just spoiled his mood.

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Goliath released a shout. He noticed the staff, now, and mocked, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” Goliath laughed, but then something caused him to stop. I heard the laughter catch in his throat. Goliath stared in wonder at the little man standing opposite him. He was calm. There wasn't any fear emanating from him. Goliath must have concluded that this boy was insane.

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Dawidh smiled casually. Who was this young man that would tread with confidence in a place where most men would flee, I wondered. In spite of myself, I

liked him. I knew I would have to find out more about this boy. That is, if he managed to survive the next few moments of his life.

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He looked so young standing there. Well, maybe not young, so much as fresh and alive. It had been some time actually, sixteen years, since the boy had reached the age of majority amongst his people. Thirteen was a special age for everyone in Yisrael. Yet, like most things for Dawidh, that day was bittersweet. The morning of his thirteenth birthday was forever etched onto his soul, for good and for bad. For most, a day like that would have made someone an old man before his years. Dawidh was just the opposite. His spirit shone bright, in spite of, or possibly because of, all the hammering his soul received. Like a well worked piece of leather, it would seem that this young man was being constantly stretched and softened by the Almighty Himself, but the light in his eyes never, or at least rarely ever, lost their shine.

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Standing in the doorway, Dawidh hesitated. Expectation, and fear that those hopes would be dashed, pierced his heart like a knife. *Maybe now*, he thought. *Please, Almighty, let it be different now.* Dawidh was the seventh son, thus far the youngest, of Yishai of BethleHem. Today was the day that Dawidh turned thirteen. Thirteen, the age of majority for the People of Yisrael: It was a very special milestone in the life of a young man. It was the day that he became a man.

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Dawidh's six older brothers were all seated around the same low table, eating their morning meal. They were engaged in lively conversation, but the conversation came to a standstill as Dawidh approached the table.

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"What do you want?" Eli'av's acerbic tone bit into Dawidh's heart. He was the eldest, and seem to hold the most contempt for their youngest brother. All of their eyes seemed to bore into Dawidh, Eli'av's most of all. Dawidh felt their hate and scorn. They probably didn't even know that it was his birthday, today. They certainly didn't care. Dawidh wanted more than anything for just one kind word from his older brother. Tears welled up in his eyes. He wanted to run, to hide, but the pain of having his soul torn asunder had welded his feet in place. Dawidh's head spun as he waited for his brothers to finish the kill.

"He wants to sit with us," suggested Shim'a, the third son of Yishai.

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"What?" Eliav scoffed. "He must have lost his mind. Why would we let *that* sit with us?"

Avinadav, Yishai's second son, looked at Dawidh, and his heart cracked a little. He knew why Dawidh was there. His eyes shifted from Dawidh to his older brother, and sighed. He realized there would be no quarter in his older brother's war against Dawidh, but he allowed himself to try. "It's his birthday today. He's thirteen today," offered Avinadav.

Dawidh's eyes met Avinadav. Though they were swollen and moist, he tried to offer a silent thanks with his glance. Avinadav returned an uncomfortable half-smile. He felt sorry for Dawidh, but he also felt like a traitor to his older brother. Eliav was not cruel by nature, most of the time. Avinadav didn't know what he had against Dawidh, but he was sure that there must be some justification for his hatred. Eliav didn't act that way with any of the other brothers, or even with the family servants. Avinadav had seen Eliav show kindness in some of the most unlikely places. His attitude towards Dawidh was a mystery to him, but he, like the rest of the brothers, trusted his judgment and followed their older brother's lead.

"So what?!" attacked Eliav, "That's supposed to make a difference?" He shot a look of chastisement at his brother. "Don't you have chores to attend to?" Eliav challenged Dawidh.

Dawidh turned to leave, when their father entered. "What's this?" Yishai asked, looking from Dawidh to the brothers seated at the table.

"It's his birthday. He's thirteen today," offered Netan'el.

Yishai shifted uncomfortable. "Ah, well, then." Yishai mechanically placed a hand on Dawidh's shoulder. "Well, then ... eh, *Mazal tov*," he said flatly, his mouth almost curling into a smile.

Where his brothers were mean, his father was distant and reserved. He didn't seem to possess any fatherly warmth for Dawidh. It might have been okay, except

that Dawidh was acutely aware of the love and warmth Yishai had, and regularly showed, for his brothers. It was like he only had enough love for six sons, and by the time Dawidh came he hadn't any left. His sterile politeness towards Dawidh pierced his heart even deeper than his brother's cruelty.

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It was true that Dawidh did have a reputation for being a troublemaker, a big troublemaker. It had become a regular occurrence for Yishai to be accosted with accusations that his youngest son had either stolen or damaged something.

Dawidh always maintained that the accusations against him were totally unfounded. He was the victim of a bad reputation, and people needed someone to blame. Anytime something bad happened in BethleHem, Dawidh was automatically blamed. His culpability was always assumed, evidence or not. How could his father believe all those lies about him?

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But he did. Everytime someone made even the most outrageous of claims, Yishai made restitution without so much as a protest. Dawidh didn't understand it. His father was a judge in Yisrael, and an expert at getting to the truth of the matter. Yet, he didn't even ask Dawidh for an explanation.

Dawidh looked up, into his father's eyes, searching for something, some answer to all this suffering. Yishai returned a blank stare. "Thank you, *avi*, Father," said Dawidh quickly, before turning and running out of the house. Tears were streaming down his eyes, as he ran. He just wanted to go, but he didn't know to where. As he ran he shouted to the gates of heavens, imploring his Father in Heaven

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to turn a kind eye towards him. Something. *Anything*. He ran till his lungs gasped for air. Then slowly, almost aimlessly, he turned back towards the family estate. Dawidh headed for his great-grandmother's room. Mamma Ruth could always help soothe the pain.

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"I know about being an outcast, my little lamb," Mamma Ruth's voice was soothing. She stroked his hair of his head as it lay on her lap. Dawidh felt her voice blanket his soul and warm his heart, fanning the dying embers, so that the spark wouldn't die.

"The Holy One is preparing you for something grand," her voice was full of confidence, though Ruth herself wondered at the suffering of her great grandchild's soul. "Everything has a purpose," she soothed, assuring herself as much as the boy resting in her lap. "Even His chastisements are a kindness."

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"But why? I didn't do anything. I don't deserve this," protested Dawidh.

"I know, lamb, I know." Ruth sighed, and then offered, as much to herself, "Sometimes we just get placed into the middle of the story, without knowing its beginning or its ending. We simply have to have faith in the Holy One, that He knows the whole story, and in the end, everything will make sense." Ruth sighed again. "We should pray that we merit seeing the outcome; so that we can understand the good of all the difficult times."

Ruth was no stranger to difficult times. As she stroked the child in comfort, her mind drifted to the beginning of her story. Well, not the beginning, but a beginning, a time of choice and destiny, whose path still hasn't come to its conclusion.

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