

STAGES OF CHANGE – PART 3: TAKING ACTION

Background

Shaul Hamelech had promised his daughter Michal to Dovid. After their marriage, Shaul turned against his new son-in-law, and Dovid fled from Israel. Shaul then gave Michal to Palti as a wife. (According to Shaul, the marriage to Dovid wasn't valid.) Palti knew that Michal was in fact married to Dovid, and living with her would be living with a married woman. However, the king's orders were for him to marry her, so he couldn't refuse. He brought her into his house, but to prevent himself from touching her, he planted a sword between his bed and hers and said, "Whoever engages in marital acts shall be stabbed by this sword."

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף יט/ב

כתיב פלטי וכתיב פלטיאל
אמר רבי יוחנן פלטי שמו
ולמה נקרא שמו פלטיאל
שפלטו אל מן העבירה מה
עשה נעץ חרב בינו לבינה
אמר כל העוסק בדבר זה
ידקר בחרב זה והכתיב
וילך אתה אישה שנעשה
לה כאישה והכתיב הלך
ובכה על המצוה דאזיל
מיניה עד בחורים שנעשו
שניהם כבחורים שלא
טעמו טעם ביאה אמר
רבי יוחנן תוקפו של יוסף
ענוותנותו של בועז תוקפו
של בועז ענוותנותו של
פלטי בן ליש

Why is he called Palti in one posuk and Paltiel in another? Rebbe Yochanan explains that his name was Palti, but he was called Paltiel because HASHEM (Kel) saved him from sin. What did Palti do? He planted a sword between his bed and hers and said, "Whoever is involved in this (marital relations) will be stabbed with this sword."

Rebbe Yochanan said: the greatness of Yosef was small compared to the greatness of Boaz, and the greatness of Boaz was small compared to the greatness of Palti.

Questions

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz asks, "Who needs the sword and what good is it?" Clearly Palti understood that Michal was Dovid's wife and if lived with her, he would be living with a married woman. If he maintained that resolve, he wouldn't need the sword; the power of his decision would be strong enough to prevent him from touching her. On the other hand, if he weakened and felt tempted to be with her, it would be easy enough for him to remove the sword and do what he planned on doing. The sword wasn't needed and couldn't help. So what did Palti accomplish with this act?