

## **BEST ESSAY ON *TANAKH* BY A STUDENT IN A HEBREW, SCHECHTER OR YESHIVA HIGH SCHOOL**

*In 2001, to stimulate interest in Tanakh among students in Hebrew, Schechter and yeshiva high schools, the Jewish Bible Quarterly initiated an annual contest for the best essay on a topic from Tanakh. Principals of more than 50 schools were invited to choose one student essay to submit in this contest, to be judged by the Editorial Board of the JBQ.*

*The essay of Eve Eichenholtz, of the Solomon Schechter High School of Long Island, was unanimously selected as the first prize-winning essay, to be published in this issue of the JBQ. We express our appreciation to Rebecca Friedman, Judaic Studies Coordinator at Solomon Schechter, for encouraging such a fine student.*

### **THE NATURE OF *KINAT DAVID*: PUBLIC OR PRIVATE?**

**EVE EICHENHOLTZ**

David's *kina* [dirge] for Saul and Jonathan appears in II Samuel 1:17-27:

- 17 *And David intoned this dirge over Saul and his son Jonathan.*  
18 *He ordered the Judites to be taught [The Song of the] Bow. It is recorded in the Book of Jashar.*  
19 *Your glory, O Israel, Lies slain on your heights; How have the mighty fallen!*  
20 *Tell it not in Gath, Do not proclaim in the streets of Ashkelon, Lest the daughters of the Philistine rejoice, Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.*  
21 *O hills of Gilboa – Let there be no dew or rain on you, Or bountiful fields, For there the shield of warriors lay rejected, The shield of Saul, Polished with oil no more.*  
22 *From the blood of slain, From the fat of warriors –*

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*The bow of Jonathan Never turned back; The sword of Saul  
Never withdrew empty.*

23. *Saul and Jonathan, Beloved and cherished,  
Never parted in life or in death!*

*They were swifter than eagles, They were stronger than lions!*

24 *Daughters of Israel, Weep over Saul, Who clothed you in crimson  
and finery, Who decked your robes with jewels of gold .*

25 *How have the mighty fallen In the thick of battle –  
Jonathan, slain on your heights!*

*I grieve for you, My brother Jonathan You were most dear to me.*

26. *Your love was wonderful to me, More than the love of women.*

27 *How have the mighty fallen, The weapons of war perished!*

In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter examines the composite narrative in I Samuel 16-17. Alter builds on Gros Louis' proposal<sup>1</sup> that David's portrayal in these chapters introduces the tension between his public and private personae.<sup>2</sup> This tension, recognized in I Samuel 16-17 by both these scholars,<sup>3</sup> is also evident in *Kinat David* (II Sam. 1:18-27).

The *kina*, for all intents and purposes, appears to be a public statement.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the section opens with David ordering *the Judites to be taught* [The Song of the] *Bow. It is recorded in the Book of Jashar* (1:18).

The versets<sup>5</sup> *slain on your heights* and *how have the mighty fallen* envelop David's intended speech. The chiasmic parallelism of Verses 19 and 25 create an *inclusio*, denoting these verses as one unit. The repetition of the phrase *How have the mighty fallen* in Verse 27 might lead one to conclude mistakenly that Verses 26 and 27 also belong to this unit. However, the verset *slain on your heights* is missing, thereby signifying that the last two verses were not intended to be part of the original *kina*.

The seven verses of the *kina* illustrate and follow through on the opening statement that this was a speech for the public to hear. Firstly, the public nature of the *kina* manifests itself in the formal literary structure. War is presented as a theme in the *kina*. This is evident by the repetition of war imagery in II Samuel 1:21-22. David says *for there the shields of warrior lay rejected . . . the sword of Saul never withdrew empty*. David uses war imagery as a theme because that emphasizes the public nature of the *kina*. If the *kina* were

private, David would have used imagery that reflected his personal relationship with Saul, that of the *soother and lyre player* (I Sam. 16:23). Rather, he emphasizes the people's vision of Saul, that of king and military leader. Therefore, the military imagery supports the argument that the *kina* is for the public ear rather than David's private statement.

The use of *leitwörter*, such as *giborim* [mighty ones], emphasizes the public nature of the *kina*. By highlighting Saul's and Jonathan's heroism, David shows his political astuteness. By recognizing that Saul and Jonathan sacrificed their lives in a glorious fight for Israel, David is able to accomplish two goals. He instills in the people the fact that Saul and Jonathan are no longer there to lead. David also encourages the perception that he is the "good guy," by paying tribute to those who held power before him. By repeating the word *giborim*, David humbles himself before those who must learn to support him.

David<sup>6</sup> also employs three kinds of parallelism in the *kina*, a formal literary technique, implying that this was an official statement: chiasmic, synthetic and antithetical. Verses 19 and 25, as discussed above, contain a chiasmic structure. Practically every verset is accompanied by a synthetic parallel: *tell it not in Gath, do not proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon* (1:20), *they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions* (1:23). Parallel versets link similar objects or people, reinforcing each point by making it twice. David also employs antithetical parallelism: *Lest the daughters of the Philistine rejoice* (1:20) and *Daughters of Israel weep over Saul* (1:24) are parallel statements that have opposite meanings.

Yet these literary techniques are not the only evidence of the public nature of the *kina*. In the first line, David addresses Israel: *Your glory, O Israel* (1:19). This again emphasizes that David is giving a public statement. In the penultimate line of the *inclusio* David reiterates that he is talking to the people: *Daughters of Israel weep over Saul* (1:24).

The only point at which David appears to break from form is when he refers to Saul and Jonathan as *hane'e'havim* [beloved]. It would seem that since the word has the root *ahav* [love], then it is a personal statement. Yet in this case the word is in the passive tone. The idea that needs to be reconciled is: If David is not doing the loving, then is it still personal feelings? One answer is that it is a Divine love bestowed on an individual or the people of Israel.<sup>7</sup> In addition, instead of "beloved" it could mean "lovable" and, there-

fore, refer to Saul's and Jonathan's personality and not anyone's feelings toward them.<sup>8</sup> Both of these interpretations support the concept that it was still a public speech.

The use of *hane'e'havim* and its dual connotation may have started a thought process in David. Although his statements were meant to be public, his thoughts seemed to have turned towards his own private reaction to losing Saul and Jonathan.

The point at which David makes a transition from the pre-orchestrated lament to the free speech of a person who grieves is in the middle of Verse 25. David mentions Jonathan, who dies in the thick of the battle. It may have been unintentional, and it seems as though David tries to recover by repeating the opening phrase *slain on your heights*, but he is unable to subvert his own feelings any longer and in Verse 26 he lets out his innermost feelings about the death of Jonathan.

David makes two comments which fall into the private realm only. He refers to Jonathan as a brother. This indicates David's personal feelings. He ceases to speak in his public voice, as his feelings for Jonathan are finally verbalized. At the same time, David even goes further into his private being by proclaiming Jonathan's love more wondrous than the love of a woman. In this statement, David repeats the root *ahav*. The first time it was used in a manner of respect and honor, but here it is a passionate and intimate love; one that is even greater than that of the love between a man and a woman.

The final verse of the *kina* is Verse 27. At this point, for the benefit of the larger community, David attempts to deliver a public speech and suppress his own personal need to grieve, but he has failed and exclaimed his grief over Jonathan's death. David attempts to regain not only composure but also his position as leader. He closes his statement with a repetition of *How have the mighty fallen* (1:27). This time the statement must be modified. The phrase, *the weapons of war perished*, as explained by commentators such as Alter,<sup>8</sup> actually refers to Saul and Jonathan. This is an important modification to the first part, because it signifies that David has also fallen. He has succumbed to his own human nature and grieved for Jonathan in a public setting.

## THE NATURE OF KINAT DAVID: PUBLIC OR PRIVATE?

1. Gros Louis, R. R. Kenneth, "The Difficulty of Ruling Well: King David of Israel" *Semeia* 8 (1977) pp. 15-33.
2. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York: Basic Books, 1981) p. 148.
3. Alter does not directly mention *Kinat David*. Gros Louis brings many examples to support his thesis in addition to I Samuel 16-17, but only discusses *Kinat David* in contrast to the public nature of II Samuel 22.
4. For the purposes of this paper David is assumed to be the author of the *kina*.
5. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985) p. 9.
6. F. Brown et al, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Inc, 2000) p. 13.
7. F. Brown et al.
8. Robert Alter, *The David Story* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1999) p. 201.