



HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

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Becoming an *Ish*

MELACHIM I 2:1-12

As Dovid HaMelech approaches the end of his life, he does not reflect on his accomplishments or offer comfort. Instead, Dovid offers a crucial lesson on leadership and life to his beloved son, Shlomo.

Dovid's opening charge is familiar, yet striking: וְהִצַּקְתָּ וְהָיִיתָ לְאִישׁ, *Strengthen yourself, and you will become a man*. We are accustomed to hearing Chazak v'Ematz as a call to courage, words spoken to Yehoshua as he assumed leadership. But Dovid's formulation is more precise and more demanding. He does not say, *Be strong because you are a man*. He says, *If you strengthen yourself, you will become a man*. Manhood here is not assumed. It is achieved.

According to our Sages, Shlomo was still a נער at the time — barely twelve years old. Dovid is not asking his son to behave like a man. He

hands Shlomo responsibility not because he is ready, but because readiness comes from carrying it. Strength, in Dovid's language, is not an expression of maturity; it is the discipline that creates it.

Dovid immediately translates strength into practice: וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת מִשְׁמֶרֶת ה', אֱלֹקֶיךָ, *Guard the charge of Hashem your God*. Strength, Dovid insists, is not emotional resolve or political force. It is discipline. It is the ability to stand watch — *mishmeret* — over one's values, even when that vigilance is difficult, costly, or unseen.

He then details that charge carefully: to walk in Hashem's ways and to keep His *chukim, mitzvot, mishpatim, and edot*. These categories span the full range of Torah life — laws we understand and laws we do not, ethical imperatives and identity-shaping testimonies. Dovid does not collapse Torah into a single phrase because strength is tested precisely when clarity varies. Some obligations feel intuitive; others feel heavy. Becoming an *ish* means remaining anchored across all of them, not only the parts that align easily with the moment.

The Haftorah does not idealize this charge. Dovid speaks openly of unresolved wrongs and moral debts that Shlomo must confront with wisdom. Leadership, he teaches, does not mean smoothing over the past. It means carrying its weight honestly and responsibly. And then, almost quietly, Dovid adds one final instruction: *"Show kindness to the children of Barzillai the Gileadite."* Barzillai held no position of power. He offered no strategy. He showed up when

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Dovid was fleeing, vulnerable, and unsure. In Dovid's final accounting, that kindness is not sentimental. It is essential. It belongs at the king's table.

Here Dovid completes his definition of strength. To be an *ish* is not only to guard Torah and law, but to remember chesed. Authority alone cannot sustain a kingdom. Faith endures through truth — and through loyalty forged by kindness. Vayechi mirrors this message. Yaakov's final blessings are honest, measured, and forward-looking. Both parsha and haftorah teach that endings are not about comfort. They are about transmission.

וְחִזְקָתָּ וְהָיִיתָ לְאִישׁ is not a call to power. It is a call to becoming. Strengthen yourself by guarding what matters, by walking faithfully, by holding Torah and chesed together — and in doing so, you become an *ish*. That was Dovid's final charge. And it remains ours ■



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