

PARSHAS PINCHAS - YEHOShUA'S CORONATION

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Yehoshua's Coronation¹

Hashem said to Moshe, "Take to yourself Yehoshua ben Nun, a man in whom there is spirit, and lean your hand upon him. You shall stand him before Elazar the kohen and before the entire assembly, and command him before their eyes. You shall place some of your majesty upon him, so that the entire assembly of the Bnei Yisrael will pay heed. He shall stand before Elazar the kohen, who shall inquire for him of the judgment of the Urim before Hashem. At his word they shall go out and at his word they shall come in, he and all the Bnei Yisrael with him, and the entire assembly.

Maybe you figured a simple swearing-in ceremony would have been nice. HKBH clearly thought otherwise. Yehoshua assumes the role of successor-appointee through a rather involved exchange with a number of people. Looking carefully at the words of the holy Torah, we will find important insights into the relationship between a leader and his flock, and the checks and balances that assure his integrity.

Moshe is told to "take to yourself" Yehoshua. While Moshe's chief concern is continuity of leadership, there is no question that he is pleased with the appointment. Moshe finds personal satisfaction in the elevation to power of his cherished disciple. For Moshe, then, the appointment of Yehoshua contains an element that is very much a taking for himself.

Yehoshua is described to us here simply as one in whom there was "spirit." This means that he possessed his own sense of mission and purpose. He would not be easily swayed by forces within (his baser desires) or without (the opinions of others). He held firm to his own principles, guided by his own spirit of individuality.

Moshe is to place his hand upon Yehoshua. This simple gesture proclaims that all of Yehoshua's impressive accomplishments and qualification will be insufficient to the job without the beracha of Hashem. Moshe's hand upon him signaled to Yehoshua that He could count on Divine assistance in comprehending the facts and the principles in every case that would be brought before him for a decision. His great "spirit," as important a job qualification as it was, would not be sufficient; he would not succeed in his role as judge without special help from Hashem. Yeshoshua is to become acutely aware of his inadequacies at the very moment that the community gathers to celebrate his

accomplishments.

Next, Yehoshua is presented before the kohanic leadership, i.e. Elazar, and before the assembly. The purpose is clear. Yehoshua is introduced as the next leader of the nation, the figure to whom all would, in some form or another, be subservient. Curiously, the Torah expresses this presentation with the words "he shall stand him." Just a few pesukim later, Yehoshua is depicted as "standing" before Elazar, when the need would arise to determine Hashem's wishes through the Urim ve-Tumim. Yet it is very clear there that Yehoshua would not be in control of the inquiry of the Divine mind. Yehoshua would remain subservient in such inquiries to Elazar, who will instruct the nation about certain matters. "At his word they shall go out and at his word they shall come in." Yehoshua will have to defer to Elazar. Is "standing before" someone a sign of demonstrating power over the second party, or a sign of deference?

We cannot escape the conclusion that Yehoshua is stood before the people chiefly in order to offer them their new leader - effectively their new king. (The Rambam^[2] illustrates the need to appoint a king through a beis din and a navi through the example of Yehoshua's appointment by Moshe and his beis din.) By using the same word - "standing" - that the Torah uses later to indicate subservience to Elazar, the Torah here offers a sobering thought to the new future-king designate. Yehoshua is given enormous power over the people. But the power is not for him to abuse or even to savor. Entrusting the Jewish ruler with power makes him, ironically, subservient to the people. Wielding power must be a form of service, not a form of privilege. He is stood before the people as if he serves them, rather than the opposite.

In the pasuk that depicts the presentation of the future leader to the nation, Elazar is mentioned as well. This is consistent with Yehoshua's role, which legally was equivalent to king. Kings exercised some dominion at times over the kehunah. A medrash, for example, sees King Yanai ordering the kohen gadol to disallow any other voluntary offerings on a day that he, the king, chose to offer one.

Now the Torah turns to instructing Yehoshua regarding the core task of guiding his generation of Jews. Rashi explains that Yehoshua was "commanded" in the sense of being forewarned that his charges would be a difficult group. He was commanded to stay the course, despite it being unglamorous and unattractive at times. "Know that they are troublesome and contrarian. You accept this job with the understanding that you accept these realities."

Ramban objects that it would be extremely unseemly to paint such an uncomplimentary picture of the Jewish people to Yehoshua as he stood before them. Such a depiction to their faces would precipitate even more rebellion of the people against his authority. The "assembly," however, does not mean the Jewish people. (This becomes obvious in the later pasuk that speaks of "all the Bnei Yisrael with him, and the entire assembly." The terms "Bnei Yisrael" and "assembly" cannot both mean the same thing! Rather, assembly means the Sanhedrin.) It was not so terrible that the Sanhedrin heard an honest appraisal of the more difficult traits of the Nation. To the contrary,

hearing Yehoshua instructed to bear with the people even when they would be obstinate, would have the effect of impressing the members of the Sanhedrin that they, too, had to be patient and forbearing in dealing with the people.

Although we have removed Ramban's objection to Rashi's approach, there is no question that Ramban's interpretation is also correct. Moshe here directed Yeshoshua in his new role through words of mussar regarding how to shepherd the masses.

The coronation of Yehoshua did not require some bejeweled diadem. Moshe gave Yehoshua something more meaningful and more lustrous. "You shall place some of your majesty upon him." This refers to a visible form of honor and splendor. It was available in fixed amount. As a midrash^[3] explains it, this splendor was like a substance poured from one vessel (i.e. Moshe) into another (Yehoshua). The face of the student was like that of the moon relative to the sun. Yehoshua's light was a reflected one, deriving from his master. Like the moon, however, which cannot be seen when the sun is at its brightest, but only after it weakens somewhat, the light of Yehoshua's glory only shone when that of Moshe began to diminish^[4].

A different line in the same midrash says that confirming the role of Yehoshua was like lighting one lamp from another, in which the lighting of a second lamp does not diminish the light of the first at all. This would seem to offer an opposing view of the relationship between teacher and disciple than that of pouring from a vessel. In truth, there is no tension between the images. The latter image, in which Moshe's power remains undiminished, applies to the power of Torah study. Creating a powerful student did not diminish Moshe's power. The image of the substance poured from one container to another applies to the honor and splendor of position. In regard to this alone - the honor and majesty of malchus - Yehoshua's greatness became a shining beacon only with the diminution of the role of Moshe.

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1. Based on Haamek Davar, Bamidbar 27:18-21
 2. Hilchos Melachim 1:3
 3. Bamidbar Rabbah 21:15
 4. Haamek Davar, Devarim 31:14
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