

# G-D SAVE THE KING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*"Judges and officers you shall have in all your gates ..." (Devarim 16:18)*

These are the opening words of this week's parsha, which contains many mitzvos, including the mitzvah to appoint a king. However, the very first mitzvah is the one to establish a Torah-based legal system to maintain Torah law-and-order.

Though this mitzvah comes late in the Torah, its importance and centrality should not be underestimated. The Talmud states that when judges sit and judge fairly, the Divine Presence comes down to join their court, so-to-speak. When judges act corruptly, then they "push" the Divine Presence away, which is tantamount to single-handedly causing exile (exile can be defined as the inability of the Jewish people to sense the Divine Presence). Indeed, the Talmud states that it is such corruption that brings suffering to the Jewish nation as a whole (Shabbos 139a), and which must vanish before Moshiach will come.

The Torah then goes on to admonish the judges of Israel to not favor either the defendant or the claimant. This of course means not taking a bribe, even if taken to judge the case truthfully, for Torah-judgment must be totally objective and therefore above **ANY** outside influences. This is why, according to the Talmud, many rabbis of the past excused themselves from cases after benefiting, even inadvertently, and in a small way, from one of the parties involved in the case they were scheduled to try. (One case involved a delivery boy, who, the day before his case was to be heard, delivered, as usual, one of the judges groceries. Nevertheless, the judge dismissed himself from sitting on that case.)

An interesting point to raise is that, as common as jail is in Western Society today, often used as the punishment for breaking the law, it is not a familiar concept in Jewish law. Any type of jail mentioned in the Torah usually was only used a "holding place" for the accused until his sentence could be determined and carried out. It seems that jail, from the Torah's perspective, is not a viable and effective deterrent of crime, either from a disciplinary-rehabilitation point of view, or a financial one.

The truth is, one would think that a Torah-based society would not need a system of courts and judges. One might assume that adherence to Torah perfects the character to such an extent that

breaking the law is never a real possibility, except, perhaps, inadvertently. But the Torah is telling us in this week's parsha that even in the best of times Torah is not enough to cleanse the person so that they are free of the effects of the yetzer hara-something which is only really achieved through death. This is why it is almost impossible to judge Torah today by those who try to observe it.

Torah helps us to realign our way of thinking to match G-d's, and to refine our intentions. However, the impact of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was to absorb the effects of the snake, which left us with plenty of pride and too much desire. The rest is history, and what a history it has been!

Thus this mitzvah to "keep the peace" is a reminder of what society ought to be, but isn't. Nevertheless, it is also a mitzvah that alludes to what life **WILL** be like once Moshiach arrives, a time when there will be **NO** need whatsoever for judges and police. Once the veil of nature lifts and the master plan of creation is revealed to all, then the yetzer hara will no longer have a say in the affairs of men. Like other mitzvos in the time of Moshiach, the mitzvah to appoint judges and police will become irrelevant.

However, until such time, it remains for us to rise to heights of spiritual greatness, in order to battle the yetzer hara in the great struggle over control of our minds. And, in the meantime, just as the nation has a mitzvah to appoint judges and police, so too does every individual have a mitzvah to be a judge over his or her own life, and to police his or her actions.

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## Shabbos Day:

As I write this parsha sheet, the month of Elul begins. As many may already know, the word Elul is said to be an acronym for the words: *ani ledodi v'dodi li*-I am to my beloved and my beloved is to me-words that come from Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs). According to tradition, it is in this month right before Rosh Hashanah that G-d "descends" to make it easier for us to reach out to Him in advance of the Day of Judgment, as an act of love for His people.

However, beginning from the month of Elul up until the day before Rosh Hashanah (and not including Shabbos), we also blow the shofar. According to the Rambam (Maimonides) we do this also to prepare ourselves for the Day of Judgment, to awaken us from the spiritual "slumber" into which we have descended. Hence, from the beginning of Elul, we experience two very different but simultaneous spiritual environments-one mercy-oriented, and the other, judgment-based.

This might seem somewhat strange. How can a person both feel the fear of someone, and yet the love of that person at the **SAME** time? Don't parents and children struggle with this very question? Usually it is the parent's anger that disciplines the child, expressing to the child the parent's serious perspective on a serious situation. But does the child feel the love of that parent at **THAT** time?

Likewise, when the parent is in a loving and light mood, does the child feel the parent's sense of seriousness?

The answer to this question is the make-up of what it means to be a "good" parent, one whose life's goal it is to produce not just good children, but great adults, and we learn this from G-d Himself.

For **WHOM** is the judgment? For G-d? Of course not. It is for us. We need judgment, and especially G-d's, for it is **HIS** judgment that awakens us to the true meaning of life, which energizes us to understand and utilize our potential. This is one of the reasons why we dress up in our Yom Tov clothing for Rosh Hashanah and dine on an elaborate feast, even though the value of our lives is in the balance. In this fashion, we express our appreciation for G-d's concern about the direction we have taken in life.

G-d's judgment is a gift to us, something that only comes as a result of His deep and eternal love for us. It is an expression of His commitment to our success as individuals, and as a nation as whole. Realizing and living with this love is the first and most important step to doing lasting tshuva (repentance), something for which the world was created.

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## Seudah Shlishis:

Returning to the parsha, we come across the mitzvah to appoint a king over the Jewish nation. In fact, says the Talmud, there were three mitzvos incumbent upon the Jewish people upon conquering and settling the land of Canaan: appoint a king, wipe out the seed of Amalek, and build the Temple.

We can understand why the Torah is insistent upon wiping out Amalek, whom we have spoken about in previous weeks. Amalek is the antithesis of the Jewish people, and therefore our mortal and spiritual nemesis. As Hitler (may his memory be blotted out forever) himself said, "Where the Jews stand, I cannot stand, and where I stand, they cannot stand." Spoken like a true Amalekian ...

We can also appreciate why building the Temple was such a priority. After all, it was the lack of Temple (Tabernacle) that led many in the desert to participate in the building of the golden calf at Mt. Sinai. People, it seems historically, require a **PHYSICAL** place of **SPIRITUAL** worship. To at least save the future generations from following in the ways of their ancestors, a Temple was crucial as a central place of Jewish worship.

However, why is the appoint of a king so crucial, especially since the Jewish people didn't get around to doing so until some 390 years after entering the Land-and which when they did Shmuel the prophet, and even G-d called it a rejection Himself and His prophet!

Monarchy is nice, but is it essential?

There are many points to consider when answering this question. However, for the sake of this discussion, we'll focus on one point, which is alluded to by the Hebrew word for king itself: *melech*.

According to the Kabbalists, the word *melech* (*mem-lamed-chof*) alludes to three words: *moach* (brain), *leiv* (heart), and *kaveid* (liver), a system of blood-refinement. It is the liver's role to refine the blood before sending it on to the heart to nourish it and the rest of the body; it is the heart's responsibility to further refine the blood before sending it to sustain the brain. This process, the Kabbalists say, also refers to a process of intellectual and spiritual refinement.

Every idea we are confronted by possesses depth and nuances not readily discernible from the start. One must constantly "turn" the idea over and over, and intellectually peer into it for more insight, and even more insight. Sometimes just thinking about the idea during a time of crisis, or a placid moment, yields previously undetected insights, which can have dramatic impact on life and the world itself.

This is also the role of the king. It was the king's role, among his many other responsibilities, to act as a foil for his people, as a kind of spiritual "mirror" for the nation in very much the same way the Torah does. In this way, the people can constantly aspire for higher plateaus of spiritual perfection. This is the way the king becomes a true servant of the people, and the people, true servants of the King of Kings, G-d Himself.

Perhaps this is alluded to by the word "*melech*" itself, which, when the order of its letters are switched around spells the word "*lachim*" (*lamed-chof-mem*), which means "to you." It is as to say that the king is meant to be a reflection of the people and their desire to reach spiritual perfection.

This is why G-d was angered by the Jewish people's request for their first king, which was taken as a rejection of spiritual growth. The Jewish people at that time had not requested a spiritual "mirror," but a flesh-and-blood individual who would take over their spiritual responsibilities, and free them from the demands of being a holy nation, and children of G-d. But that's not what Jewish monarchy is all about.

Hence, the Jewish people had not been ready for a king at the time they had asked for one. Perhaps this is why the name of the first king was Shaul, which means "borrowed." G-d relented to their request for a king, but He had only "lent" them one in the interim, until they deserved the true king of Israel, Dovid HaMelech. Likewise, perhaps it is a lack of desire on our part to accept and manage our own spiritual responsibilities that denies us our king, Moshiach himself.

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## **Melave Malkah:**

*The need for the Eglah Arufah is only because of stinginess (tzoras ayin), as it says,*

*"They will answer and say, 'Our hands did not spill this blood.' " (Devarim 21:7).*

*(Sota 38b)*

The mitzvah of the Eglah Arufah, the calf whose neck was to be broken when a dead body was found outside of a city and the murderer was not known. The procedure was that five members of the Sanhedrin went out and measured from the place that the corpse had been found, in order to ascertain the closest city.

They measured from the nose of the body (the place through which the soul was breathed into the first man). Then the elders of the closest city decapitated the calf, and washing their hands in a strongly flowing river, recited, "Our hands did not spill ..."

The Talmud says that such a devastating tragedy befell a town for not properly showing its wayfarers the proper amount of hospitality, for tzaros ayin—for a "tight" eye. However, at this point, whenever we come across any mention of ayin, we know that it has to do with vision, specifically the vision of the mind's eye. The Eglah Arufah came to counteract the blindness of the spiritual, mind's eye.

Which blindness? Whose blindness?

*A beautiful **CALF** is Egypt ... (Yirmiyah 46:20)*

It was the physically-oriented and limited Egyptian outlook (symbolized by the calf) that remained in the psyche of the collective Jewish mind that led to the accidental death. Caring more about themselves than about wayfarers, the townspeople allowed the visitor to leave their city unattended and vulnerable to the negative and dangerous forces of the road.

Furthermore, the word *arufah* (*ayin-reish-peh-heh*) can also be arranged to spell the name Paroah (*peh-reish-ayin-heh*), the infamous ruler of Egypt and main antagonist in the Pesach story. Paroah was the very embodiment of this philosophy and attitude toward life and other people.

Hence, the message is clear: selfishness and self-centeredness is not merely a bad character trait; it is a return to Egyptian oppression, at least on a spiritual level. It is also the undoing of the Jewish people, and can lead to horrible and irretractable results. On the other hand, it is selflessness and a sense of chesed that builds the person and society, and which forms the basis of Torah itself. For, as Hillel told the inquiring potential convert who asked about the contents of Torah:

*"Don't do unto others as you would not like others to do unto you. The rest is commentary—now go and learn!" (Shabbos 31a)*

And, in the words of the great Rebi Akiva: Love your neighbor as yourself is a very important

principle of Torah!

Not only is it important, but a very difficult one to fulfill. After all, if loving one's neighbor like himself was so natural, would the Torah command it?

Have a great Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston

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