

ONE OF A KING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Judges and officers you shall appoint in all your cities . . . (Devarim 11:26)

If anything reveals that the Torah we have today is not the ultimate version, it is this: What need does a Torah society have for judges and officers? The Torah should automatically make people righteous, and righteous people are their own officers and judges, are they not?

Yes, they are. But, the trouble is that not everyone who lives by Torah automatically becomes righteous. The Torah in our possession, what the Kabbalists call "Toras Beriyah," not only does not flow to others through the one who learns it, but it barely affects the person unless he works on himself with devotion. However, with respect to "Toras Atzilus," what the Vilna Gaon referred to as Toras HaMoshiach, not only automatically purifies the one who learns it, but it even purifies those who come into contact with the one who learns it.

Therefore, until Moshiach comes and Torah is revealed on the level of the Luchos Rishonos (the First Set of Tablets with which Moshe descended and subsequently broke at the time of the golden calf), we have a Torah that necessitates the maintenance of a police force, and the appointment of judges to hear the cases. In other words, we are forced to "take" a free- will supplement.

As the Mesillas Yescharim teaches, there are two levels of fear of G-d. There is the first level, with which most of us are familiar: fear of punishment. Many people do not abstain from incorrect behavior because they see it as wrong and wasteful, but because they fear being caught and punished for their actions. THAT is what they see to be wasteful, or at least very inconvenient and uncomfortable.

However, the second level of fear of G-d, which is the ultimate level, means to see your life as G-d sees it. It means to appreciate the true value of existence and your part in it, so that sinning becomes as wasteful as throwing away money, and worse. The idea of being punished for a wrong act is secondary to the true punishment of having wasted moments of your life with wanton behavior, no matter how pleasurable it may have seemed at the time.

It is not difficult to see that the first and lower level of fear of G-d corresponds to Toras Beriyah (and the Second Set of Tablets that Moshe had carved out, upon which G-d later wrote the Ten Commandments for the second time), while the higher level of fear of G-d corresponds to Toras

Atzilus and the First Set of Tablets. Therefore, if a person is able to reach the higher level of fear of G-d, their Torah becomes elevated to Toras Atzilus, or least to some aspect of it. Thus, though a tzaddik may walk and talk in this world, in truth he lives in another, higher reality altogether.

Hence, a tzaddik does not need an officer to keep him in line, nor will he ever stand before a judge to justify his actions. It is not only that he is so righteous that he never sins; it is that in the world in which he lives, these mitzvos are represented by other more lofty realities. For, even though police officers and judges are no longer necessary, the Torah concept upon which they are based must be eternal if it is a part of Torah, even on the level that we have it.

It is like the idea of melachah (creative activities that are forbidden) on Shabbos. We don't abstain from such activities on Shabbos simply because we need to stop doing them one day a week. Rather, by keeping Shabbos one rises to a higher spiritual plane on which such activities are no longer necessary; indeed, they are irrelevant. Performing such activities on Shabbos is like coming to a black-tie wedding wearing shorts and a t-shirt, and being totally out of synch with the reality around you.

This is why in the time of Techiyas HaMeisim, holidays such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur will cease to be holidays of judgment. Rather, they will become days of attaching oneself only to G-d. Thus, rather than dread such days as many do now, either because they are afraid to face their Maker and own up to their past sins, or because they have difficulty praying for so long, or fasting, we will look forward to such days as very special opportunities to come closer to G-d, to feel some of the eternal ecstasy of the World-to-Come. Judgment will no longer be relevant at such an advanced stage of spiritual development.

SHABBOS DAY:

When you come to the Land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, and possess it, and settle in it, and you will say, "I will set a king over myself. Like all the nations around me . . ." (Devarim 17:14)

The parshah appears somewhat disjointed. It starts off with the establishment of just courts and officers, and then turns to the mitzvah of not placing a tree near the Altar of G-d. Then it warns against offering an unblemished offering to G-d, before speaking of the death penalty for idol worship.

This is followed by the mitzvah of zaken mamrei - the rebellious elder who decides against the decision of the Great Sanhedrin. Differences of opinions are a natural part of being human, but only up until the unanimous decision of the Sanhedrin HaGedolah. Two Jews, three opinions are only possible up until this point.

After this comes the mitzvah to appoint a king, which seems to represent kind of a climax in Jewish history.

There is a flow, and we see examples of it each time some important leader comes to town. For

instance, the first thing the local government does in preparation for a visiting dignitary is secure the place, so that his life is never threatened or made uncomfortable. Once that is done, it is feasible to begin the rest of the preparations for his visit.

The first thing the city does is clean up its act. Anything that might be offensive to the visiting leader is removed; the more something is valued in his country, the more important it is to remove that which opposes it. And, as the city sets up to play host to its important guest, only the very best the city can offer is used in a show of respect and appreciation. How would it look if the motorcade was made up of second- hand vehicles for the ticker-tape parade?

Furthermore, it is important to silence the opposition. Nothing is more embarrassing for a government than locals or political leaders who use the visit of a foreign dignitary as an opportunity to make their counter- claims heard. In a democracy, this does not mean locking up the opposition or using physical intimidation, unless it means coming to some kind of advance agreement with them to maintain the civility of the state visit.

Finally, when all of this has been tended to, the dignitary can arrive in a fitting manner.

Likewise is it with respect to the preparation for the appointment of a Jewish king. By appointing judges and officers we "secure" the place in advance of the king's "arrival." By ridding the nation of idol worship, we clean the "town" up and make it "presentable." By dealing with improper dissenting opinions, we pave the way for the type of Jewish unity necessary for a king to rule over the Jewish nation.

Thus, then and only then are the people ready to be ruled by a single, wise, benevolent ruler. Before society reaches such a stage, the appointment of a king can, instead, lead to anarchy, either by the people or by the king and the leaders with whom he rules. Before the people can be ruled by a king, they must first become a kingdom, and not the other way around. This is why Shmuel HaNavi was so angry with the Jewish people when they first requested a king.

In fact, the first king of the Jewish people was "Sha-ul," whose name means "borrowed." He was the first king who's rule was premature, and as a result his kingdom crumbled within four short years before being passed over to Dovid HaMelech. Had the Jewish people adequately prepared themselves for a king, then Dovid HaMelech would have been the first and the last king, Melech HaMoshiach.

In other words, because the Malchus (kingdom) started off on the wrong foot, even Dovid's kingdom never achieved complete fruition. He had to work hard to build it up, had many troubles along the way, and went to the grave being doubted by his enemies (Shabbos 30a). The ground was shaking under his kingdom while he still walked it, though it did not divide until the death of his son, Shlomo HaMelech.

Shlomo HaMelech, in spite of all his own great wisdom, made some very unwise decisions to such

an extent that the Talmud had to clear his name. That he built the First Temple was not enough to overcome the problems he brought into his kingdom by marrying 1000 women, the most notable of whom was the daughter of the king of Egypt in his time.

Thus, we have another way of describing the tikun of history: paving the way for the king. Of course, once this is done and the king is ready to rule over the Jewish people, he will be none other than the king for whom we have been waiting for thousands of years: Melech HaMoshiach. He will be the last king, because having become the Malchus we were destined to become since Creation, there will no longer be any need for other kings.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

A prophet from your midst, from your brethren, like me, shall Hashem your G-d establish for you; to him you shall listen. (Devarim 18:15)

Today, the only prophets people know about and listen to with devotion are the "profits." They have strange names like Dow Jones, Nasdaq, and Bursa, but they also have hundreds of millions of faithful followers. However, once-upon-a-time there were real prophets, and they too had plenty of followers until their prophetic messages became too negative. But, there will come a time once again, b'ezras Hashem Yisborach, when true prophecy will return to the Jewish people.

Prophecy has many functions, but one of the prime reasons for prophecy is to let the nation know what is on G-d's mind. It is G-d's way of communicating with the people who are not holy enough to hear directly from G-d, in order to "remind" them about the consequences of straying from the Torah, or to comfort them after the consequences have occurred. Therefore, only as long as there were people willing to heed the words of the prophets was there a need for prophecy, and that is why there are no prophets today.

On more than one occasion in the Talmud, a Bas Kol (a Heavenly Voice) came out to announce that someone at that time was worthy of receiving prophecy. So why didn't he receive prophecy at that time? Because, most of the people would not have listened to the messages he would have delivered in the Name of G-d. Even Torah leaders, the Maharshah points out, only get their guidance from Heaven based upon the willingness of the people to heed their direction. (Gittin 56b)

Thus, we learn from this that just because a generation exists without prophecy does not mean that there are no potential prophets alive in any given generation. On the contrary, there may be a few in every generation, but not having the audience they would need to justify G-d speaking directly to them, we lose the chance to have them as our prophets.

An interesting proof of this is the way we listen to the prophets today. I'm not talking about those who claim to have received new prophecy in this generation, but to the prophets of yesteryear, the confirmed prophets of G-d who are in Tanach. Though, in their generations they were spurned by their brethren, we have the good fortune of knowing with confidence that they were indeed counted

among the true prophets of G-d, and that their messages were and are Divine.

And what is even more amazing, if you think about it, is that they did not only prophecy for their time period, but for ours as well, and about the so-called End-of-Days. They wrote words to warn and inspire us, generations living long after they were physically incapable of delivering Heavenly messages. They prophesized THEN for TODAY.

Yet, where are their prophecies today? On the shelf? Read in part briefly on Shabbos as part of some Haftarah that we may or may not understand, and after listening to the entire Torah parshah, we may or may not pay attention to. They are supplying us with some of the most important information our generation needs to know to survive the test at the end of history, yet we ignore them as if their messages are as ancient as the words themselves!

Thus, on a Pshat-Level, Moshe Rabbeinu, in the posuk above, was addressing only those generations that actually merited to have prophets in their time. But, on a deeper level, he is talking to ALL generations of Jews, whether they possess flesh-and-blood prophets or just the messages they left behind for the future. We too have to heed their words, especially at this time in history when the very things about which they spoke may be happening to us.

If the great commentators of the past felt it was important enough to spend so much time and ink explaining their words, the least we can do is spend some time learning and understanding their words and their commentaries. It will probably save our lives one day soon.

MELAVE MALKAH:

If a body is found on the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you to possess it, fallen in the field, and it is not known who killed him . . . (Devarim 21:1)

This mitzvah, perhaps, is the perfect conclusion for this parshah, for it sums up what goes wrong in a society that requires us to appoint judges and officers. It shows what is necessary to overcome the shortcomings of man, those things that prevent us from building the kind of world that a true Jewish king can rule over. The Talmud has a name for it: tzari-ayin (tightness of the eye), or what we call in modern-day terminology: stinginess.

By now, whenever the word "ayin" appears you know that Amalek (Ayin-malak: the severed ayin) is not too far away. We know that he is the nemesis of the Jewish people, the antithesis of all that Torah comes to do for the world. He is the root of all spiritual problems, and THE thing for which tikun is necessary. Rectify the problem of Amalek, and everything else simply falls into its rightful and holy place.

The king of the Jewish people is supposed to represent that solution and bring it about. That is why one of his foremost mitzvos is to go to war against Amalek and eradicate him. Shaul HaMelech's failure to do so was what eventually resulted in Haman, a descendant of Amalek, and who knows how many others like him throughout history. It resulted in the loss of Shaul's right to the Malchus,

which was handed over to the dynasty of Dovid HaMelech just one generation later.

It does not take much imagination to see how a tight eye is just one step along the way to a severed eye. It is not Amalek's goal to physically remove the eyes of the Jewish people, but to cause them to focus their minds' eye on anything except that which will perfect their character traits and bring them closer to G-d. Selfishness is just one of his devices to bring that about, for it is the opposite of G-dliness.

Thus, we have read all kinds of stories about how Eliyahu, the one who will announce the arrival of Moshiach, dressed up as the kind of beggar no one would want to give to, just to see how charitable the people really were. He often came to test a person's stinginess and willingness to give for the right reasons for the benefit of the person in need.

Whether the outstretched hand is Eliyahu HaNavi's or not, that is his role, from a global point of view. Coming face-to-face with a person in need, especially when he gives us reason to suspect his authenticity, we often forget Who sent him to our door: Hashgachah Pratis, Divine Providence. And believe me, no one ever thought that when they sent the person away without properly caring for his needs, or by not escorting him out of the city, that it would result in his death. Had they foreseen that, they would have dealt with him accordingly.

Only people with tzari-ayin can't see so far. But they should have seen that the situation was arranged by Heaven as a test, because nothing happens by accident and everything happens to rectify our character traits. If it affects us, it was meant to be that way to make us into better people. On Rosh Hashanah we have to answer for this. We have to answer for why we dealt with reality as if it was random, ignoring our tests as if they weren't tests at all. There is no such thing as being in the right place at the right time for a Jew, or worse, being in the wrong place at the wrong time. There is only G-d and it is His desire to bring us closer to Him, with all of His signs and wonders that He performs to wake us up and get us moving in His direction.

Reverse the tzari-ayin and we rectify the Malchus that makes possible the Melech. Ultimately, this means THE Melech - the King of Kings - G-d Himself. That is why Rosh Hashanah is all about Malchus.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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