THE ROAD TO MALCHUS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

After you enter the land which God, your God gives to you, and possess it and live there and say, "I will make a king over me, just like all the surrounding nations," do so only with one from your brothers, a person whom God chooses. Do not choose a non-Jew for over yourselves. (Devarim 17:14-15)

The Jewish people have been in exile for so long and without their own homeland that the idea of a Jewish king seems so foreign. Indeed, the next time the Jewish people will have a king he will be Melech Moshiach, and the Jewish people will be united and living on their own land without any further need for exile.

It is an interesting fact of history that there are almost no kings today. Today, countries are headed by Presidents and Prime Ministers, most of whom are elected officials, at least in the Western world, and they have to answer to more elected officials, such as Congress, or the House of Commons, etc. Royalty, today, might be entitled to an opinion, but it is not entitled to determine national policy.

That seems to have been an improvement, not for the monarchy, but for the people, since, unfortunately, most kings of the past often were dictators, and often still are, where they remain. Their sense of entitlement resulted in a general disregard for the people, who, according to the king or queen, were at the throne's disposal-literally.

However, as the average individual became somewhat more intelligent, and a little more aware of the freedoms that might exist around the political corner, rebellion fermented. Eventually, it resulted in revolutions, the great- est and most successful of all, perhaps, being the American Revolution in 1776, and government that is run by the people for the people.

"Absolute power corrupts absolutely," or so the expression goes. However, so we have found, the expression is not absolutely correct. For, even within the system of checks-and-balance, there has been considerable corruption. Indeed, perhaps even more, because lacking the right-to-rule by bloodline alone, many elected officials have greatly cheated to maintain their grip on power, and some spend a considerable amount of time and effort conspiring against their own governments and their own people.

In other words, Democracy can, and does tend to, make people desperate. And, not just the elected officials, but the electorate as well. Ironically, many of them end up acting the same way that the kings they sought to replace acted in the past, in self-interest. Who votes for ideology anymore, if

they ever did in the first place?

Hence, it was never about replacing kings with elected officials, at least not in essence. It has been about replacing the attitude of the leaders and the people, so that both of them became more interested in the betterment of mankind in general, rather than of the lot of the individual in particular. It's not just about putting philosophical leaders into power, but about making people more philosophical in general.

This is why the appointment of a king over the Jewish people took hundreds of years, and even then it was premature. Hence, the name of the first king was Shaul (pronounced, sha-ool), which means "borrowed." As a result, even Dovid HaMelech's kingdom struggled, as he did as a king, and his own son, the wisest man of history, was powerless to keep the kingdom unified after his death. The development of a nation into one that is driven more by philosophical ideals than by personal concerns, remains a work in progress.

The Torah predicted this when it added the words, "I will make a king over me, just like all the surrounding nations," which mean, in a manner like the nations of the world. Just as the appointment of judges and a police force mentioned at the beginning of the parshah, was a warning that they would be necessary, even after the giving of the Torah, likewise did the Torah predict that, when the Jewish people finally made a king of their own, it would not be in the ideal way.

This is why Shmuel the Prophet, when approached by the Jewish people to place a king over them, became very angry. Seemingly, they did so exactly as the Torah prescribed. "Prescribed? Warned," said Shmuel HaNavi. "The Torah was telling you how not to do it, hoping, so-to-speak, that instead you would say, `I will make a king over me, as according to the wishes of the Torah.' "

As the Talmud warns, "Anyone who pushes off the moment will be pushed off by the moment" (Brochos 64a). As Shlomo HaMelech wrote, everything has its time, and Malchus-kingship-is no different. For thousands of years now we have been pushed off by the moment, because we first pushed off the moment, as we wait for the one king who will be king for the right reasons, and in the right way.

But, you may argue, we seem no closer to being the philosophical nation we ought to be to merit a philosophical king, and you would be right. On the contrary, at this late stage of history, we are, perhaps, the least philosophical, and for that matter, the most selfish. In fact, never before have so many people felt so entitled to so much, and have the means to go after it, and politicians seem to sell everything but their souls, and in some instances, even that, just to get elected.

Where could a true Jewish king fit into all of that?

He can't, and won't, which is why he hasn't until this very day. But, as history runs out of time, he will have to at some point soon, which means something has to give. Something, or someones will have to learn to change, and you can be sure than it won't be Melech Moshiach! And, you might tell me, it

won't be us either .

And, you would be right, once again, if nothing significant happens to make us change. But it will, because it has to, and it has, more than likely, already begun. When it is finished, we will be exactly who we have to be to live under a true king and servant of God. We call that "thing" the War of Gog and Magog.

Most people, when they think of the War of Gog and Magog, think of the war to end all wars, just one incredibly awesome and destructive world war that will involve just about every fighting nation, and more than likely, against tiny little Eretz Yisroel. It's purpose? Some kind of historical threshold mankind will have to cross over on the way to the Messianic Era, because we didn't go the Torah and mitzvos route. It's kind of like God saying, "Well, if you're going to make a mess of the world, then you'll have to clean it up after with a massive war."

Interestingly enough, there is a lot of discussion as to what will occur, and why. But, few talk about it in terms of the rectification it will bring about in the world and the Jewish people. The most important rectification of all? It will prepare us for the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth, visa- vis the kingdom that Moshiach will establish, just as Moshe Rabbeinu did in his time.

However, unfortunately, Moshe was unable to complete his task, which is why he died in the desert, and the Jewish people never fully set up a Jewish Malchus on earth. Instead, the people contested Moshe Rabbeinu's authority, Shaul rejected himself, and some of the people fought against Dovid HaMelech all of his life. The synergy that Malchus is supposed to bring about never occurred, like a car engine turning over several times, but never actually starting.

Unfortunately, we experienced some of this in the Holocaust. The Holocaust affected more than half of the Jewish people, and just about every European Jew of that time. Before the Shoah occurred, Jews were scattered all over Europe, and the differences between religious Jew and secular Jew were great, as well as between one group of religious Jews and another.

Then came Amalek, y"s. He went out of his way to the point of sacrificing victory in World War II to concentrate the Jews and to make them equal. All external differences were removed, and the peril that each Jew faced in the camps, for the most part, made everyone a brother or sister in suffering. A kind of achdus-national unity-was imposed that previously had not existed.

Unity is the foundation of Malchus. The greater and more sublime the unity, the greater and more sublime the Malchus. However, that's not going to happen until something else occurs that will be so important that it will become the foremost concern of every Jew, or at least every Jew who wishes to remain part of the Jewish people, at least on some level. And, if we are not careful, that thing will be the War of Gog and Magog.

What must we be careful of? The Talmud explains:

> It has been taught: Rebi Yosi said, "Three commandments were given to the Jewish people when they entered the land: to appoint a king, to cut off the seed of Amalek, and to build the Temple. I do not know which of them has priority, but when it says, `Because the hand is upon the Throne of God; it is a war for God with Amalek in each generation.' (Shemos 17:16), we infer that they had first to set up a king, since `throne' implies a king, as it says, `Then Shlomo sat on the throne of God as king' (Divrei HaYamim 1:29:23) ." (Sanhedrin 20b)

It seems from this that without a king we cannot go to war against Amalek. Why is that? Because Amalek, more than any other enemy, represents Jewish doubt. As the Torah points out, Amalek is the antithesis of the Jewish people and everything they stand for. As the Zohar explains and that we learn from Balak and Bilaam, whose Hebrew names combine to produce the name Amalek, Amalek comes to principally to disrupt Jewish continuity, as the Holocaust made perfectly clear.

If we are careful to learn this, and to take it to heart, and to act upon it, then personal and petty self-interests will become secondary to the national goals of the Jewish people, and unity will result. And, with such unity will come Malchus, and therefore, the ability to overcome Amalek at his own deadly game. Moshiach will come because we will have earned his leadership, what the Talmud calls Achishenah-a hastened redemption (Sanhedrin 98a).

The alternative is spoken about in Tanach, the Talmud, and Midrashim, as the Leshem explains:

> After Moshiach comes a major war will be instigated against the Jewish people, as mentioned in the Holy Zohar . This is the "War of Gog and Magog" spoken about in Yechezkel (38, 39), and Zechariah (14), as well as in Midrash Tehillim (Mizmor 118:9): Three times in the future Gog and Magog will war with Israel and go up against Jerusalem; he will assemble and anger the nations to go up to Jerusalem with him, as it explains there. Also see Vayikra Rabbah (27:11), and many other places. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 491)

This is what the Talmud calls B'ittah, which is the redemption at the last possible moment. Moshiach will come, but his presence will instigate the nations, not placate them, setting in motion the most terrible war of all history. The Jewish people will not only survive this war, they will win it, led by Moshiach himself. The only question will be, what will have to be lost along the way to victory, along the way to becoming a Malchus in the full sense of the term.

Text

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