

# KINGSHIP = RESPONSIBILITY

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 398 - K'rias Shma: How Early, Interruptions, and Other Issues. Good Shabbos!*

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## Kingship Equals Responsibility

The parsha begins with Yehudah's plea to Yosef, in which Yehudah said, "For you are like Pharoah" [Bereshis 44:18]. The Medrash comments that at this moment, "the kings joined in battle". It was a clash of titans: Yehudah and Yosef. We understand why the Medrash considers Yosef a king. After all, he was the de facto ruler of the land of Egypt. But in what sense was Yehudah considered a king?

It is true that later on, in Parshas Vayechi, Yaakov designates Yehudah as the tribe of kingship. But at this point in time, nothing has really transpired that would make Yehudah into the king. Why then does the Medrash refer to him as a king?

Perhaps the answer is that the king is ultimately the person who is responsible for the decisions and destiny of his nation. The bottom line is that responsibility resides with the leader of a nation. He must decide when to send the nation into war and when to sue for peace. Kingship equals responsibility.

When Yehudah came forth and committed to his father Yaakov, "I will be responsible for him (Binyamin), from my hand you may seek him..." [43:9], he became the king. At the point in time when he put his life on the line, by personally guaranteeing his brother's safety, there was a metamorphosis. He changed from being just another brother to being the king.

This explains another difficulty. Only two pasukim [verses] earlier, at the end of Parshas Miketz, when it was thought that Binyamin was 'guilty', Yehudah seemed to act quite differently. He acted meekly, prostrated himself in front of Yosef, confessed to the brother's guilt, and offered himself and all his other brothers into slavery. Suddenly, two pasukim later, Yehudah spoke with confidence and even arrogance towards Yosef [See Rashi Bereshis 44:18].

What suddenly happened to Yehudah? Only two pasukim earlier, he was this weak little fellow, begging to be Pharaoh's slave. Now he is suddenly on the attack. He is aggressive and assertive, standing up for what is right. What suddenly happened to gentle, mild mannered, and servile Yehudah?

Rav Yosef Leb Bloch explains that Yehudah had remembered his acceptance of responsibility. Once he remembered the commitment of "I will be his guarantor," he underwent a metamorphosis. He could no longer play the role of the weak, gentle, and servile brother. "I'm in charge. The buck stops here. It is my responsibility." Yehudah experienced a personality change. He was now a different person. "I accepted responsibility and I must do what I must do to live up to that responsibility."

We see this many times. The fact that a person accepts responsibility changes him. "Some people are born great; some people achieve greatness; and some people have greatness thrust upon them." [Winston Churchill]. Yehudah had greatness thrust upon him and he rose to the challenge.

### **How Far Have We Drifted From The Way of Truth**

Pharaoh instructed Yosef to bring his father and family down to Egypt. "Do this: Take for yourselves from the land of Egypt, wagons for your small children and for your wives; transport your father (u'nesasem es avichem) and come." [45:19]. The Daas Zekeinim m'Baale HaTosfos infers that the wagons were only provided for the purpose of transporting the women and children. However the brothers were supposed to carry their father on their shoulders. Why? This is part of honoring one's father (Kibud Av).

But who was talking here and who was showing concern for the laws of Kibud Av? It is Pharaoh. Pharaoh was instructing Yosef in proper manners (derech eretz) towards one's father!

Rav Gifter comments "how far have we gone from that which seemed obvious". In those days, it was even self-evident to Pharaoh that this is how one should treat a father. To us, this is not merely a novelty -- it is something that we would not even dream of doing! And yet, Pharaoh held it to be self-evident that one treats his father with far greater reverence than one gives to one's wife and children. Pharaoh did not consider it proper for Yosef's brothers to merely provide a wagon ride for their father.

Our values and way of living have drifted so far from the self-evident truths of Biblical times that this seems foreign to us. Rabbi Wein points out that the Public School in Chicago (built circa 1920) where he was a student had two entrances -- one for boys and one for girls. The purpose of each entrance was engraved in stone over the doorways. The need for separate entrances was obvious back then. Even though it was a co-educational institution, everybody knew that there had to be separation of the sexes. Sixty, seventy, and eighty years ago, it was even understood in a public school that there need be certain guidelines of propriety and of tznius [modesty/privacy]. Today, you might find separate entrances for the men and women in some religious congregations. Anywhere else, the concept is totally foreign.

How far have we drifted from the ideas of truth! Concepts that were self-evident in previous generations are novel ideas today. We must learn from a Pharaoh the proper way to treat a father. Today, it is something that we barely aspire to fulfill. But that nevertheless is the way of truth.

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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Vayigash are provided below:

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