

PARSHAS SHOFTIM: HIS SEFER TORAH

by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz

The kings of the Jewish nation lived under a very different set of norms than their colleagues in the surrounding nations. Jewish Kings were mandated by our Torah to maintain a sense of humility and spirituality despite the glory and the trappings of royalty. They were instructed to limit their conspicuous consumption (Devorim 17:16-17) *"lest their hearts stray from Hashem,"* and were reminded to regularly read from the Torah (Devorim 17:19-20) *"so that their hearts do not become haughty."*

Congruent to the theme of having a Torah-led monarchy, each king was instructed to write a Sefer Torah (Devarim 17:18) once his reign was properly established. Throughout the years of his reign, the king would carry the Sefer wherever he went and would read from its contents regularly. It is interesting to note that the mitzvah of having this royal Sefer Torah was not fulfilled if the king inherited a Torah from his family members. Even if that were the case, he was still obligated to write a sefer of his own.

This would seem to symbolize that regardless of his *âyichus* - the accomplishments of his ancestors - each king needed to make his own positive impact and legacy by living a meaningful life.

His Sefer Torah

There is much discussion among our chachamim (sages) as to the purpose of having the kings write and carry their personal Sefer Torah. Special attention is given by the meforshim (commentaries) to the words, *"V'haya emo, v'karah bo kol yemei chayav - it [the Torah] shall be with him, and he shall read from it all the days of his life."* (Devarim 17:19)

Rashi interprets this phrase quite literally and explains that this Torah was intended to be with him at all times. It served as the King's spiritual compass, and reminded him of his bearings and of his sacred mission.

Ramban comments that the king needed to internalize the eternal lessons of the Torah to the extent that they [the lessons contained in the Torah] remain with him all the days of his life.

Rabbi Moshe Sofer, known as the Chasam Sofer, explains that the Torah needed to be in the possession of the king at all times since he would need to make difficult decisions throughout his reign - often far from his palace. The Torah would serve as his guide to which he can consult with [read from, as the pasuk states] whenever he needed guidance.

Two Sifrei Torah

The Gemorah (Sanhedrin 21b) relates that the king, in fact, maintained two Sifrei Torah. One was carried with him at all times, and the other was stored in his treasure room. The Rambam notes that if the king inherited one Sefer, he would write the second one on his own. If, however, he did not own a Sefer Torah, he would be obligated to write two sefarim.

The question arises; why was there a need for two Sifrei Torah, and why was the second one stored in his treasure house, of all places?

Keeping the 'Original'

I would like to suggest that there was powerful symbolism in these requirements made of our kings.

Think of the last time that you studied, or rather crammed for finals. You copied a friend's notes (or they copied yours). Then, copies were made of the copies, and so on, until it became quite difficult to read the words on the paper due to the fact that they were copied so many times. At that point, a frantic search took place for the original copy.

This analogy may shed light on the reason for the two seforim maintained by the king. During his tenure, the king traveled the length and breadth of his country. He led his troops in battle, and often made very difficult life-and-death choices. He carried a Torah with him at all times to keep his spiritual bearings and live by its eternal messages.

Often, however, people tend to change with time as they make sometimes- necessary accommodations to the realities of their lives. It was therefore imperative that the king maintains an original copy of the Torah in his treasure room. Storing the original Torah in his treasure house reminded him of the primary value of the Torah in his life - and that it was worthy of the most elevated level of security.

The 'stored' sefer also concentrated the mind and heart of the King on the pristine, untouched Torah that was in his vault for safekeeping. The King would compare the sefer that he carried with him on his daily excursions with the original version - and refresh his commitment to maintaining its eternal lessons.

Best wishes for a Gutten Shabbos

Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).

Rabbi Horowitz is the founder and dean of Yeshiva Darchei Noam in Monsey, NY, as well as the founder and Program Director of Agudath Israel's Project Y.E.S. (Youth Enrichment Services), which helps at-risk teens and their parents. He is a popular lecturer on teaching and parenting topics in communities around the world, and is the author of several best-selling parenting tape and CD sets.

For more information on Rabbi Horowitz's parenting tapes, visit <http://www.rabbihorowitz.com/> or call 845-352-7100 X 133.