




# Pinchas: Jewish Leadership — Torah and Royalty


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The Torah portion of *Pinchas*<sup>1</sup> recounts how Moshe asked G-d to “appoint a man over the community” to be its next leader, so that the Jewish people will not become “like sheep that have no shepherd.” G-d replied to Moshe: “Take Yehoshua... and lay your hands upon him.”

In explaining how a Jewish king is appointed, the Rambam states:<sup>2</sup> “The first king of a dynasty cannot be appointed save by the court of seventy [one] elders and a prophet, as was the case with *Yehoshua*, who was appointed by Moshe and his court [of 70 elders].” The Rambam is thus of the opinion that Yehoshua was invested as a king.

Accordingly, the following must be understood:<sup>3</sup> The Rambam rules<sup>4</sup> “When a king is appointed, he is to be anointed with anointing oil.” Why then did Moshe merely lay his hands on Yehoshua and not anoint him?

The *Midrash*<sup>5</sup> notes that Moshe had anticipated that his children would inherit his mantle. G-d, however, told him: “ ‘He who plants the date palm [merits that he] eats its fruits.’<sup>6</sup> Your children.... did not occupy themselves in Torah. Yehoshua.... since he served you with all his might, is worthy of serving the Jewish people.”

How was it possible for Moshe to assume that his sons would inherit the mantle of leadership when he knew they were guilty of “not occupying themselves in Torah”?

Our Sages explain<sup>7</sup> that Moshe hoped to be succeeded by *two* leaders, one to serve as king and military commander, and the other to lead in Torah. It was in the former position that he hoped to be succeeded by his children. G-d, however, replied: “Only one will lead them... Yehoshua will be their king... and [be their] preeminent Torah scholar, for ‘Two kings cannot make use of the same crown.’ ”<sup>8</sup>

The reason Moshe’s request for two leaders was rejected must be understood. While it is true that “Two kings cannot make use of the *same* crown,” Moshe desired that his position be divided into two *distinct* “crowns” — the crown of royalty and the crown of Torah scholarship. Why could they not be separated, with the crown of royalty being inherited by Moshe’s children?

The true function of a Jewish king is described by the Rambam.<sup>9</sup> Not only must the king provide the Jewish people with their material needs,<sup>10</sup> but his goal must be to “uplift the true religion,” i.e., to see to it that the laws of the Torah are carried out.

Thus, in the Jewish context, regency is an extension of the Jewish high court, whose purpose is to be “the pillars of Torah law for all the Jewish people.”<sup>11</sup> The king must ensure that the Torah laws issued by the high

court are obeyed by the populace.<sup>12</sup>

This is why in the Jewish scheme of things, kingship and Torah leadership cannot be viewed as two distinct entities. Rather, they are one continuum; splitting royalty and Torah scholarship results in “two kings utilizing the *very same* crown.”

The reason Yehoshua’s appointment to leadership came about through Moshe’s laying on of hands and not through anointment will be understood accordingly:

The regal aspect of Yehoshua’s leadership was a direct result of, and wholly secondary to, his Torah leadership. It therefore followed that the mantle of Torah leadership, a mantle transmitted through *semichah*<sup>13</sup> — the laying on of hands — took precedence; anointment was entirely unnecessary.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos* Vol. XXIII, pp. 190-196 .

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Bamidbar* 27:15-23.
2. *Hilchos Melachim* 1:3.
3. This question is asked by the *Minchas Chinuch* in his glosses to *Rambam* *ibid*.
4. *Hilchos Melachim* *ibid*. 5-7.
5. *Bamidbar Rabbah* 21:14; *Tanchuma Pinchas* 11.
6. *Mishlei* 27:18.
7. *Megaleh Amukos, Ofen Alef*. Quoted in *Yalkut Reuvaini, Bamidbar* 27:15.
8. *Chulin* 60b.
9. Conclusion of ch. 4 of *Hilchos Melachim*.
10. See *Berachos* 3b.
11. *Rambam* , beg. of *Hilchos Mamrim*.
12. See *Likkutei Sichos* XIX p. 166ff.
13. See *Sanhedrin* 14a; *Rambam Hilchos Sanhedrin* beg. of ch. 4.

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