

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 23

Pinchas, Sicha 2

The Context:

As Moshe nears the end of his life, he asks G-d to help him appoint a successor, "who will go forth before them and come before them, who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of G-d will not be like sheep without a shepherd." (Bamidbar 27:16-17) G-d instructs Moshe to select his devoted student, Yehoshua, as the next leader, "and you shall lay your hand upon him."

The Question:

Rambam considers Yehoshua to have had the status of a monarch. Yet the law states that a king is to be anointed with oil. Why was Yehoshua appointed with Moshe "laying his hand on him," and not with the anointing oil?

The Explanation:

The Midrash relates that Moshe wanted his children to succeed him, but G-d responded that Yehoshua had earned that right

because of his devotion as a student, while Moshe's sons did not dedicate themselves to study.

The Megaleh Amukos elaborates that Moshe envisioned a dual leadership, a king for security matters, and a scholar who would teach the people Torah. G-d decided, however, that "two kings cannot share one crown." Yehoshua had to be the sole leader.

Why was this the case? In later generations, the Jewish people did have this dual leadership structure — a king who oversaw the physical welfare, and a leader who directed the court of law. Why could Yehoshua and Moshe's son not share these roles?

In describing the chain of transmission of the Oral law, Rambam writes that each successive leader received the tradition from the previous leader, "and his court." Meaning, there was not a private, individual chain of transmission, but rather, a group of people who received from the previous coterie of sages, although there was one distinctive voice of the group who was the leader. The only exception to this was Moshe and Yehoshua, in describing that transmission, Rambam does not say

Yehoshua received from “Moshe and his court,” just from Moshe himself.

What follows from this is that there is a fundamental difference between Yehoshua and later heads of courts. Subsequent leaders were part of a committee, they did not hold absolute power. Yehoshua, however, did hold monarchical power, he was the single possessor of the full extent of Moshe’s teaching. Later generations could have the dual roles of king/scholar because the scholar did not have absolute power. But there cannot be two leaders who both hold absolute power. Therefore, Yehoshua and Moshe’s son could not divide the roles, there could only be one “king,” and because Yehoshua was the one who excelled in Torah study, he would have to be given the role of material king as well.

In reality, these two roles are related. Even though the king’s immediate concern is the physical wellbeing of the people, his role is also to uphold the spiritual standards of the people and to enforce the law articulated by the courts. Therefore, Yehoshua’s monarchy flowed from, and was a consequence of, his Torah leadership.

Yehoshua’s primary role was that of teacher; his political role was derived from that. Therefore, he was appointed by Moshe leaning his hands upon him, which is the classical form of conferring authority in Torah study. The anointing oil is reserved for a king, but Yehoshua, whose kingship flowed from his Torah leadership, was anointed by a leaning of hands alone.
