



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 19 | Shoftim | Sichah 1

All for the People

Translated by Rabbi Mendel Rapoport
Edited by Rabbi Eliezer Robbins and Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

A note on the translation: Rounded parentheses and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; squiggly parentheses are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in squiggly parentheses are those of the translators or editors, and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists. **Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org**

1.

THE HEART OR THE HEAD

“You shall surely set over yourself a king.”¹ Regarding a king, the *Teshuvos HaRashba* says² that “a king is like the community, for the community and the entire Jewish people depend on him.” Similarly, *Tanchuma* says: “The head of the generation is the entire generation.”³ (Or in Rashi’s words, “The leader {*nasi*} of the generation is like the entire generation, for the leader is everything.”)⁴

Rambam says that “the king’s heart is the **heart** of the entire Jewish community.”⁵

Simply understood, the king is “the **heart** of the entire Jewish community” because just as the vitality of the entire body is dependent on the heart,⁶ the “entire Jewish community” is dependent on the king (as mentioned above in *Teshuvos HaRashba*, “the entire Jewish people depend on him”).

We must clarify: Although all of the body’s limbs receive vitality from the heart, **control** of the limbs depends on the **brain**.⁷ (Consequently, although the heart is (also) referred to as the “king”⁸ in relation to the other limbs, the head is the “king over **all** of a person’s limbs.”⁹)

Accordingly, why do we compare a king — whose role is to **conduct** the nation, “who shall take them out and bring them in”¹⁰ like a shepherd leads his sheep — to “the **heart** (of the entire Jewish community)”?

¹ *Devarim* 17:15.

² *Teshuvos HaRashba*, ch. 1, sec. 148.

³ *Tanchuma*, “*Chukas*,” sec. 23.

⁴ Rashi’s commentary on *Bamidbar* 21:21.

⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 3, par. 6.

⁶ See *Zohar*, vol. 3, p. 221b; *Iggeres HaKodesh*, ch. 31; *Responsa Chacham Tzvi*, ch. 74, sec. 86-87.

⁷ See *Tanya*, ch. 51 (pp. 71a-b) at length.

⁸ *Zohar*, vol. 2, p. 116b (end); vol. 3, p. 221b; *Raya Mehemna*, p. 232a (end); p. 235a.

⁹ *Shabbos* 61a.

¹⁰ *Bamidbar* 27:17. {This is part of a statement made by Moshe in reference to a king’s role in leading the nation.}

2.

GREATER THAN A NASI

In the terminology of Torah, a king is also referred to by the title “*nasi*.”¹¹ For example, “when a *nasi* sins”¹² — *Sifra* and the *Mishnah*¹³ explain, “Who is a *nasi*? This refers to a king.” The *Mishnah* continues, “There is none above him other than Hashem his L-rd.” Similarly, King Moshiach is also referred to (in Yechezkel’s prophecy¹⁴ and other places) as *Nasi*. Nevertheless, simply, the title “king” is greater than the title “*nasi*,”¹⁵ which is also used to refer to the leader of each tribe, and the like.

In our discussion, we find, as mentioned above, that the “*nasi* of the generation” — Rashi’s wording — is (referred to and) called in the *Midrash* “the **head** of the generation”.

The above difficulty is now more problematic: How can a king, who is greater than a *nasi*, be referred to only as “the **heart** of the entire Jewish community,” rather than “the head?”¹⁶

3.

KING VS NASI

We will resolve these difficulties by prefacing: In the nomenclature of our Sages, there is a fundamental difference between the title of “king” and the title of “*nasi*”: “king” is to be understood in its plain sense, as its usage in Torah. *Nasi*, however, is primarily the leader of the *Sanhedrin*, or a spiritual leader.

¹¹ {Lit., “the one who is raised up,” connoting a ruler or a leader.}

¹² *Vayikra* 4:22.

¹³ *Horayos* 10a.

¹⁴ *Yechezkel* 37:25.

¹⁵ See *Bava Basra* 4a; Rashi’s commentary ad. cit.; *Maharsha*’s commentary on *Bava Basra* 122a.

¹⁶ Although we do find the term “head” used to refer to a king (*I Shmuel* 15:17 et. al.).

As the *Mishnah* says, “the *Nasi* and the head of the *Beis Din*.”¹⁷ The Talmud also says, “Hillel, who is referred to as the *Nasi* of the Jewish people”; “Hillel and Shimon... acted as *Nesiim* over the course of one hundred years during the era of the *Beis Hamikdash*,”¹⁸ even though there were Jewish kings at that time — proper kings to whom all the relevant laws applied.

There is even a fundamental *halachic* difference {between a *nasi* and a king}:¹⁹ “A *nasi* who forgoes his honor, his honor is forgone. A king who forgoes his honor, his honor is not forgone.”²⁰

It is reasonable to say that the distinction (in Torah nomenclature) between the ranks of “king” and “*nasi*” when used to refer to a king is **similar**.

Among the differences between a “king” and a “*nasi*” (in the lexicon of our Sages):

a) A king’s role is “to execute justice and wage wars,”²¹ in accord with the above-mentioned verse, “who shall take them out and bring them in,”²² but not to give {**halachic**} **guidance**. Jewish kings may not judge at all (“they may not judge”).²³ Even kings who descend from King David, although “they may judge the people,”²⁴ “they are not appointed to the *Sanhedrin*.”²⁵

[“To execute justice” which is said regarding kings, primarily means (not to investigate and **adjudicate** the law, but rather) to **execute** justice

¹⁷ *Chagigah* 2:2.

¹⁸ *Shabbos* 31a, 15.a.

¹⁹ *Kiddushin* 32b; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Talmud Torah*,” ch. 6, par. 6; “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 2, par. 3.

²⁰ {Meaning, if a *nasi* asserts that he is overlooking the requirement of others to show him honor, his wishes are effective. However, if a king says that he is willing to overlook being shown signs of honor, his subjects are still obligated to do so.}

²¹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 4, par. 10.

²² *Bamidbar* 27:17.

²³ *Sanhedrin* 19a; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Sanhedrin*,” ch. 2, par. 5.

²⁴ *Sanhedrin* 19a; *Mishneh Torah*, *ibid*.

²⁵ *Sanhedrin* 18b; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Sanhedrin*,” ch. 2, par. 4, 5.

— to implement the laws of Torah (as determined by the *Beis Din*) or to mete out royal justice “according to the needs of the time.”²⁶

In contrast, the role of a *nasi*, “in the terminology of the **Sages**,” is completely different — his **primary** role is that of the **head** of the *Sanhedrin*. As *Rambam* says, “The one with the greatest knowledge is appointed as the head over them. He acts as the *Rosh Yeshivah*. And he is called the **Nasi** by the Sages in all sources. He assumes the position of Moshe Rabbeinu.”²⁷ The {members of the} *Sanhedrin* are (in the words of the *Rambam*) “the pillars of instruction from whom statutes and judgments issue forth for the entire Jewish people.”²⁸

Moreover, Moshe, being the shepherd of the Jewish people, the King of the Jewish people,²⁹ was involved in all matters and needs of the Jewish community.

b) A “king” — the **nation** must provide him with **all** he desires, as the *Rambam* elaborates regarding a king, “he may take from the nation valiant men... and employ them as soldiers for his chariots... to run before him... he may take from the nations’ craftsmen... he may take fields... he is entitled to a tenth of the produce of the seed....”³⁰

A *nasi*, however, although also supported by the community (just as any communal official), is only entitled to be **supported** according to his station (because he works for the community), unlike a king, for whom the nation must provide for **all** he wishes.

²⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 3, par. 10.

²⁷ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Sanhedrin*,” ch. 1, par. 3.

²⁸ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Mamrim*,” ch. 1, par. 1.

²⁹ See below Section 8.

³⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 4, par. 1-7.

4.

AN OXYMORON

This (second) concept — that the king may expropriate anything from the nation — points to opposite aspects of the monarchy:

It shows the king's authority, for the entire nation and all of its possessions are treated **similar** to a servant and the servant's possessions: "Anything that a servant acquires, his master acquires"³¹ — a king may **seize** whatever he desires.

Conversely, it shows the king's "weakness" (relative to the nation). In order to fulfill any of his desires, he is **reliant** upon the nation.

The rest of the nation earns their livelihood, etc., by their **own effort** — "in all you do."³² Even a communal worker who receives his **livelihood** from the community, the directive "all you do" relates to his communal work. However, everything a king has, he **receives** from the nation.

The explanation: This itself is the answer! The entire role of a king (in his function of a king) is to "take them out and bring them in,"³³ to "serve" the nation; therefore, the king is sustained by his nation.

5.

A KING IS COMPARED TO A HEART

In light of the above explanation, we understand the comparison of a king to the **heart** specifically (and not to the head or brain):

Among the differences between the heart and the brain — are:

³¹ *Pesachim* 88b, *Kidushin* 23b.

³² *Devarim* 15:18. {This verse refers to Hashem's blessing that comes through a person's own effort.}

³³ *Bamidbar* 27:17.

- a) The heart **beats constantly**, “running and returning”;³⁴ the heart pulsates without interruption. The brain, however, is motionless. Vitality is drawn from the brain to the entire body, although the brain itself is at rest.
- b) The heart is the weakest limb (weaker than the brain), as the *Zohar* says,³⁵ “the heart is soft and frail.”³⁶

We can posit that these two qualities are interdependent: The heart is “soft and frail” — the frailest of the limbs — because its entire function is to serve as the **life of the limbs**.³⁷ The heart has no other role, only to enliven the body.

Therefore —

- a) The heart beats **constantly**, which illustrates that its constant (or entire) being is to give life to the limbs.
- b) The heart is “frail” because its role is to give vitality to the **other limbs**.

Conversely, the brain is “detached” from the rest of the body. True, it is the source for the body’s vitality, yet it remains separate from the body. This (also) demonstrates that it is a {relatively} **discrete** organ, only that from it, the limbs receive vitality.

Therefore: a) in the brain, there is no pulsation. It is “detached” from the rest of the body; b) the brain is not “soft and frail” (like the heart), as it is an independent organ.

³⁴ {“*Ratzo vashov*” in the Hebrew original (*Yechezkel* 1:14). According to Chassidus, *ratzo* is a state of longing to cleave to Hashem, the passionate desire of the soul to transcend its material existence, to “run forward” and cleave to its Source; *shov* is the soul’s sober determination to “return” and fulfill its mission in the body, the resolve to live within the context of material reality, based on the awareness that this is Hashem’s ultimate intent.}

³⁵ *Zohar*, vol. 3, 221b.

³⁶ {“Frail,” probably in the sense of its vulnerability to injury. - YED}

³⁷ See *Zohar*, *ibid.*, “the heart is soft and frail, **and it rules and sustains** {the body}.”

Therefore, a king is compared to the heart specifically, because a king also has these two heart-like qualities (as discussed above in section 4): He is focused constantly on the nation — “who shall take them out and bring them in” — because the nature of monarchy is to serve the nation. For the same reason, his being possesses a “weakness”(relative to the nation) — all of his needs are filled by the nation.

6.

INTELLECT AND EMOTION

The above-mentioned distinction between the heart and the brain is also found in the soul-powers encloded in them: intellect (in the brain) and emotions (in the heart).

The function of the intellect — to comprehend something — can only really happen when a person remains **detached** from the subject that he wants to understand. If the subject becomes fixated and embedded **within** his intellect, his intellect is “bribed” — it will be swayed and will not understand the idea correctly.

In contrast, emotions are a **person’s feelings** for something. This happens when a person draws himself close toward the subject, until a feeling of closeness (love) or the opposite, etc., is generated.

This dovetails with the distinction between intellect and emotions in the two qualities mentioned above:

- a) Emotions involve **excitement** (“movement”), while intellect requires contemplation, calmness, and repose.
- b) Emotions are not inherently durable and long-lasting; they are **prone** to change — today a person feels one way, tomorrow he will feel differently. Conversely (true) intellect is unswerving— intellect

comes to a conclusion when it has arrived at the **truth**; consequently, it is unchanging.

7.

THE TRUE ROLE OF A KING

In light of the above, we understand the distinction between a king and a *nasi*:

A king, whose role is to “take them out and bring them in,” is involved with (and invested in) providing the people with their needs (just like a heart gives life to all of the limbs). Intellect and **guidance** (functions of the brain) to deliberate and adjudicate *halachah* are not part of his role.

Specifically, the (primary) role of the *nasi*, who remains detached from the people, is to serve as the “head” and brain of the nation — to adjudicate the rulings of **Torah** (Hashem’s wisdom) pertaining to all matters of the people.

Therefore, “The *Nasi* (as well as the *nasi* quality within a king) is **everything**,”³⁸ for the heart also receives from the brain, as noted above. The heart’s function is to diffuse vitality (also the vitality from the brain as well) to all of the limbs. This concept is mirrored simply by the function of a king. The king is responsible for implementing the **directives of Torah** that he receives. ({In this sense, a king is obviously subordinate to a *nasi*.) It is even a “*mitvzah* for the king to honor Torah scholars. And when members of the *Sanhedrin* or Jewish Sages appear before him, he rises....”³⁹

³⁸ Rashi’s commentary on *Bamidbar* 21:21.

³⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 2, par. 5.

8.

A KING IS COMPARED TO A HEART

In addition to the above, we find a special emphasis regarding Moshe *Rabbeinu* — from whom we derive that “the *Nasi* is everything.” Moshe exercised both types of influence — “heart” and “brain”:

Moshe was a **king**⁴⁰ (as the verse says, “He became King over Yeshurun”).⁴¹ He was occupied with providing the Jewish people with all of their needs (including their physical needs)⁴² — he was the **heart** of the Jewish people. Simultaneously, he was the *Nasi* and head of the *Sanhedrin*. Furthermore, all matters of **Torah** (in all generations) are referred to as “the Torah of Moshe, My servant,”⁴³ for he received the Torah on Mt. Sinai, and he taught Torah to all of the Jewish people — he was **the brain** {of the Jewish people}.

Similarly, Moshiach — “for Moshe is the first redeemer and the last redeemer”⁴⁴ — will serve in both capacities: as **king** — moreover, he will epitomize the quality of kingship; and simultaneously, as **rabbi** {brain} — he will teach Torah to the entire nation.

— From a talk delivered on the 6th of *Tishrei*, 5737 (1976)

⁴⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” ch. 6, par. 11.

⁴¹ *Devarim* 33:5. {*Yeshurun* is another name for the Jewish people.}

⁴² *Bamidbar* 11:11.

⁴³ *Malachi* 3:22.

⁴⁴ *Ohr Hachaim*, “*Vayechi*,” 49:11.