



Likkutei Sichos

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Monarchy or Anarchy?

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1.

IS A KING GOOD OR BAD?

Regarding the mitzvah to “appoint a king over yourself,”¹ the following question is widely known:²

When the Jewish people petitioned Shmuel, the prophet, for a king,³ Shmuel was very displeased.⁴ Moreover, Hashem declared,⁵ “For they have rejected Me.” This complaint is puzzling because this request seems to be the fulfillment of the mitzvah Hashem had **commanded** the Jewish people! This is particularly significant in light of the teaching of our Sages:⁶ “Upon their entry into the land, Israel was commanded to fulfill three mitzvos: appoint a king....”⁷ Therefore, appointing a king is evidently a sublime mitzvah, even relative to the other mitzvos contingent on residing in the land.

Furthermore, if the Jews’ request for a king at that specific time was deemed undesirable, why did Hashem tell Shmuel to go ahead and appoint a king over them **at that time?**

¹ *Devarim* 17:15.

² *Abarbanel* on *parshas Shoftim*, “the tenth doubt”; subsequently, *Abarbanel* quotes the answers of quite a few commentators; see there; *Kli Yakar* on this verse; *Radak* on *Shmuel I* 8:5; See *Sanhedrin* 20b; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 1, par. 2; et al.

³ {*Shmuel I* 8:6.}

⁴ *Shmuel I* 8:6; see *Shmuel I* 12:12 ff.

⁵ *Shmuel I* 8:7.

⁶ *Sanhedrin* 20b; *Sifrei* on *parshas Re’eh* (12:10), et al; *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Melachim*,” ch. 1.

⁷ {The command to appoint a king was given not only in response to the Jewish people requesting one, but it was a mitzvah they were given to perform as soon as they settled the land.}

2.

TWO REASONS FOR A KING

Chassidus explains⁸ that the purpose of appointing a king can be explained on two levels (one more profound than the next):

- a) A simple reason is (in the lexicon of the Mishnah):⁹ “Were it not for the fear (of the government) a man would swallow his fellow alive.” The king leads his nation and ensures that the citizenry conducts themselves appropriately.

Even when a person understands intellectually the necessity of acting properly, this alone is insufficient. After all, “the eye sees, and the heart desires....”¹⁰ Therefore, the person’s fear of the king is a decisive force to keep the person on the straight path.

- b) When the situation is such that the mind consistently governs the heart, there is no need to appoint a king for the reason mentioned above. There are certain matters, however, concerning which people lack the understanding to address. Then, the king, with his exceptional virtues, who is “head and shoulders above the people,”¹¹ can apprehend the matter and provide directives on how to act. Subsequently, the people comply because the king commands it.

This is the (more profound and fundamental) purpose of appointing a king over the Jewish people, whose {true} Master and King is Hashem. A king of flesh and blood is designated as an intermediary to reveal Hashem’s kingship to the Jewish people:

Inherently, Jews are believers. Jews understand and sense that their lives stem from (the sovereignty of) Hashem. This awareness ought to engender

⁸ Tzemach Tzedek’s *Sefer HaMitzvos {Derech Mitzvosecha}*, “*Mitzvas Minui Melech*,” ch. 1; ch. 3; see, there, for a lengthy explanation (quoted later on in this text, ch. 2-3).

⁹ *Avos*, ch. 3, mishnah 2.

¹⁰ *Rashi on Bamidbar 15:39*.

¹¹ *Shmuel I 9:2*; this is explained in *Or HaTorah*, “*Bereishis*” (vol. 4), p. 1528; “*Shir Hashirim*” (vol. 2), pp. 414-15; et al.

subservience to Hashem. However, when this subservience is wanting, they need to turn to a king of flesh and blood. By the awe his kingship inspires, they are instilled with reverence and *bittul*¹² to the King of all kings, the Holy One, blessed is He.

When Jews are in their ideal spiritual state and possess **this** *bittul* to Divinity on their own, however, the appointment of a king serves a higher purpose: {A king gives them access to} the levels of G-dliness that are beyond the natural reach of Jews and **beyond** their grasp. The king (who, with his exceptional virtues, as mentioned earlier, possesses an understanding of these levels as well) draws forth and channels this G-dly effluence to the Jewish people. Consequently, he elicits in the Jews an even more profound sense of awe and self-subordination, which surpasses that which their comprehension and understanding by themselves would demand.

3.

SECOND BEST

On this basis, we can answer the questions raised above:

Shmuel desired that the state of the Jews be such that they attain *bittul* to Hashem independently, without recourse to a king. Instead, Shmuel wanted the king to imbue them with a higher degree of *bittul* and awe (*yirah ilaah*). However, the Jews asked for a “king to rule over us **like all the nations**,”¹³ a king who would prevent people from swallowing one another alive. This demonstrated that they lacked the fear of Heaven, an attribute that Jews should have cultivated on their own. Therefore, Hashem said, “For they have rejected Me.” They were missing the fear of Heaven.

Still, Hashem “acquiesced.” He instructed the Jewish people to appoint a king. For if, for any reason, the Jews lacked the fear of Heaven, even though they

¹² {*Bittul* connotes submission to Hashem, self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

¹³ *Shmuel I* 8:5; similarly, *Shmuel I* 8:20.

ideally **should have** reached a state of *bittul* on their own without the influence of a king, appointing a king could not be deferred because until then, the Jews would remain, G-d forbid, without self-subordination to Hashem.

They had an immediate need for a king who could address **these** issues. With time, they could cultivate *bittul* and fear of Hashem on their own, even reaching the higher level of *bittul*, aided by the king, as discussed above.

4.

A SPIRITUAL MENTOR

From every matter, a lesson must be learned in our service of Hashem:

Although during exile, we have no {Jewish} king, our Sages say,¹⁴ “Who are kings? The Rabbis.” Just as there is a mitzvah to appoint a king, so, too, a Jew has a personal mandate to “make a Rav for yourself.”¹⁵

This is the lesson that we can draw from this discussion: Some believe they can handle minor issues on their own without the guidance of a Rav.

The mishnah says, “Make a Rav for yourself” — **every** Jew should have a Rav. However, a person may think that this is only necessary to resolve major issues, whereas, for minor issues, he might think that he can rely on his own judgment and does not require the guidance of a Rav, as he can handle these situations on his own.

Alas, as time passes, the person finds himself in the same wretched state. But still, he believes a Rav’s counsel is unneeded. The person plans to wait “until a spirit from On High is poured out upon him”¹⁶ — until he is filled with the requisite reverence and can resolve everything on his own.

¹⁴ See *Gittin*, end of ch. 5.

¹⁵ *Avos* 1:6,16 {i.e., a spiritual mentor}.

¹⁶ {A play on words based on *Yeshayahu* 32:15.}

This is the lesson derived from appointing a king nowadays in a spiritual sense: Although (a king is to be set “**over yourself**” — over the Jewish people,) the purpose and impact of a king are intended primarily for higher levels; when “they have rejected Me,” G-d forbid, or even if there is a risk of them doing so, the fear of a king must be brought to bear immediately.

5.

NO EXCUSES

Some individuals claim that they have not yet identified any {qualified} Rav for themselves. They should be aware that this notion reflects the counsel and incitement of the evil inclination. In truth, “Israel is not widowed,”¹⁷ so, it is impossible that among Jews, there isn’t someone who possesses a more profound love and fear of Hashem than this individual who could potentially serve as his Rav. All a person needs to do is to “**make**” (as in the expression, “make *tzedakah*”¹⁸ — force yourself). **Effort** is essential — one must work diligently and search until he finds a Rav, because a person should not rely on his own judgment.¹⁹ Having a Rav to guide him is crucial. “If you exert yourself, **you will find.**”²⁰ If someone sincerely puts in the effort and seeks with determination, he will find a Rav.

The Rav will then teach the Torah sections that the king {of Israel} would read at the *Hakhel* gathering — the “*Shema*” and “וַיְהִי אֶת־שְׁמַעַי, *VeHaya Im Shamo’a*,”²¹ etc.²² Firstly, they will study the *Shema*, which teaches the acceptance of the yoke of Heaven. Subsequently, they will delve into the meaning

¹⁷ {*Yirmiyahu* 51:5.} See *Bereishis Rabbah* (ch. 56, par. 7): “In every generation, there exists someone like Moshe.”

¹⁸ {“מעשין על הצדקה” in the Hebrew original, meaning that *tzedakah* can be compelled.} *Beis Yosef on Tur*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 248; this is explained in *Maamar VeAvdi David* 5699; see *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bechukoisai*,” 48a.

¹⁹ As our Sages say (*Avos* 2:4): “Do not be sure of yourself.”

²⁰ *Megillah* 6b.

²¹ {The first two pars. of *Shema*.} *Sotah* 41a (in the *mishnah*); *Mishneh Torah*, “*Chagigah*,” ch. 3, par. 3.

²² *Sotah* 41a (in the *mishnah*); *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Chagigah*,” ch. 3, par. 3; this is explained in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 24, p. 204.

of what it says {in וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ},²³ “And it will be if you diligently obey,” etc., and “you will gather your grain.” The Rav will help a person comprehend intellectually that {the promise} “you will gather your grain” is contingent upon “if you diligently obey.”²⁴

Once the Rav awakens in the person the lower level of *bittul* and his unconditional acceptance of Divine authority,²⁵ the next step will involve reaching the higher level — *yirah ilaah*.

All the above holds a special significance concerning the “footsteps of Mashiach” — the period preceding the arrival of our righteous Mashiach. His role is twofold:²⁶ To teach as a Rav (he will impart Torah knowledge to everyone, even to our forefathers and Moshe Rabbeinu²⁷), and to reign as our king — {he is referred to as} King Mashiach.

— Based on the talk delivered at *Simchas Beis HaSho'evah*, the year of *Hakhel*, 5713 (1953)

²³ {*Devarim* 11:14 — this is part of the 2nd par. of *Shema*.}

²⁴ {“וְשָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ,” the continuation of “וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ.”}

²⁵ *Berachos*, ch. 2 (in the mishnah); quoted in Rashi on *Sotah* 41a, s.v., “*ushemah*.”

²⁶ Tzemach Tzedek’s *Sefer Hamitzvos* {*Derech Mitzvosecha*}, “*Mitzvas Minui Melech*,” ch. 1; ch. 3.

²⁷ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Tzav*,” 17a; *Shaar Haemunah*, ch. 56 ff.; Tzemach Tzedek’s *Sefer Hamitzvos*, *ibid*.