

# SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



## Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 24

*Shoftim, Sicha 1*

### The Context:

Appointing a Jewish king is a fundamental mitzvah in the process of entering the Land of Israel and establishing a functioning society. (Devarim 17:15) Yet, when the Jewish people asked the prophet Shmuel to “set up for us a king to judge us like all the nations,” G-d was dismayed at the request, seeing it as an indication of their betrayal of Him, “they have rejected Me from reigning over them.” (Shmuel I, 8:5,7) Nevertheless, G-d fulfilled their request and instructed Shmuel to appoint Shaul as Israel’s first king.

### The Question:

If appointing a king is a central mitzvah, why was G-d disappointed in the people’s request. And if their request was improper, why did G-d fulfill it?

### The Explanation:

Chassidus explains that a king can serve two different functions:

At the most basic level, a king ensures law and order. The threat of the king’s power curbs the worst impulses of the population and reigns in any potential violence and corruption.

But when the populace is more refined and has sufficient self-restraint to govern their own disputes and affairs, a king serves a loftier purpose — he imparts to them a higher level of Divine awareness and awe than they are capable of reaching on their own.

Shmuel wanted the people to attain a basic level of fear of Heaven on their own, and to desire a king so that they can reach for loftier levels of awe. Yet their request for a “king to judge us like all the nations,” indicated that they lacked that basic level of self-restraint and needed a king like all other nations, to instill law and order in their society. Thus, Shmuel, and G-d, were disappointed at the people’s lack of submission to G-d.

Nonetheless, G-d heeded their request because they still needed a king to serve that basic, first function of ensuring peace and morality.

### The Lesson:

Although we do not currently have a king, we do have the imperative to “appoint a teacher” for ourselves, (*Pirkei Avos* 1:6) and, today, the “rabbis are our kings.” (*Gittin*, end of ch 5) Thus, we can apply the standards for appointing a king to our personal responsibility to find a mentor for ourselves.

It is common for people to assume that they do not need a mentor to guide them in the basic, elementary decisions in life, and to help them fulfill their basic spiritual obligations. Yet, the narrative of Shmuel’s appointment of a king shows us that even if we have not reached a loftier level of Divine awareness, we still must appoint a “king” to ensure basic law and order in our personal lives. Thus, it is precisely when we are lacking in basic awe of Heaven that we must actively search for a mentor who can guide us in our spiritual lives.

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