

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Shoftim, 5778
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IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Horav **Schneur Zalman Halevi** עי"ה
ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov
Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766
Reb **Dovid Asniel** ben Reb **Eliyahu** עי"ה
Ekman
Passed away on 5 Sivan - Erev Shavuot, 5765
Mrs. **Devora Rivka** bas Reb **Yosef Eliezer** עי"ה
Marenburg
Passed away on the second day
of Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5766
Reb **Yitzchok Moshe** (Ian)
ben Reb **Dovid Asniel** עי"ה
Ekman (Santiago, Chile)
Passed away on the 24th day of Shevat, 5769
ת. נ. צ. ג. ה.
AND IN HONOR OF
Mrs. **Esther Shaindel** bas **Fraidel Chedva** שתח'ל
Shagalov
DEDICATED BY
Rabbi & Mrs. **Yosef Y.** and **Gittel Rochel** שיחי
Shagalov

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by
Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann

Shoftim

KING AND LEADER

The Torah emphasizes the importance of appointing a king. Various commentators explain why. Among them, Maimonides says that: “The king’s heart is the heart of the entire Jewish people.” Since the main function of a king is to lead, the analogy should have been to the brain. But there are two types of rulers of the Jewish people: a melech and a nasi, a king and a leader. A king may be compared to the heart and the nasi to the brain. In many periods of Jewish history one person was king and another was nasi. But Moses, the first Redeemer, was both king and nasi, combining within himself the qualities of both. Moshiach, the last Redeemer, will also be both king and nasi.

One of the commandments in this week’s Torah reading, that of Shoftim, is to appoint a king. So important is this commandment that the Torah states emphatically, “You **must** set a king over yourselves.” Of course, the king the Jewish people set over themselves must be the individual G-d has chosen.

Although appointing a king is only one of the six hundred thirteen mitzvos, it is a central one. A king is required for the Jewish people to be properly settled in the land of Israel. Several Biblical commentators offer explanations for the importance of a king. For example, the Rashba says, “the king is like the community, since the community – all Israel – depends on the king.” A Midrash expresses the same idea, declaring that “the head of a generation is the entire generation.” Rashi, the foremost Biblical commentator, phrases the concept in a slightly different manner: “the leader of the generation is like the entire generation, since the leader is everything.” Maimonides, writing in the *Mishneh Torah*, his code of Jewish law, explains why the king is so central to the people: “The king’s heart is the heart of the entire Jewish people.”

At first glance, the comparison of the king to the heart makes sense, since, just as the body depends on the heart for its life, so too the people depend on the king. But, while it's true that the limbs of the body receive their life from the heart, their **conduct** depends on the brain. And the main function of a king is to lead the people, give them direction. So there is a basic question about Maimonides's analogy: why is the king compared to the heart, and not the brain? That would seem to be more appropriate.

Of course, since Moshiach will be a king, indeed the ultimate king of the Jewish people, any observations about a Jewish king in general will apply with even greater force to Moshiach.

In Hebrew, the word for king is *melech*. But the Torah also uses another word to describe a ruler. The leader of the Jewish people is also called a *nasi*. These two terms, *melech* and *nasi*, indicate two different types of leadership, as we shall see. However, the term *melech* – king – indicates a higher stature than the term *nasi* – prince or leader. There is only one king, while there may be several princes; indeed, the leader of each tribe was called a *nasi*.

That seems to make the earlier question even more difficult: surely the king, the **head** of the people, should be compared to the brain, not the heart. Why, then, does Maimonides compare the king to the heart? What do a king and the heart have in common?

To answer this question, we first have to understand the essential difference between a king or *melech* and a leader or *nasi*. Basically, a king is in charge of the physical wellbeing of the people: fighting their wars, maintaining the infrastructure, insuring a fair judicial system, etc. A *nasi*, on the other hand, deals mainly with spiritual matters, instructing the people about Jewish law, safeguarding the rituals and relationship with the Divine, etc. Thus, the leader of the Sanhedrin, the rabbinic court, was called a *nasi*.

The practical difference in their roles is illustrated by the

following law: if the *nasi*, or spiritual leader, wishes to set aside the honor due him, say by giving deference or ‘pride of place’ to someone else, he may do so. But the *melech*, the king, is not allowed to set aside the honor due him, even if he wishes to do so. He, the king, is the ‘heart’ of the people.

In short, the king’s job is to maintain justice and conduct wars. But it is not his job to instruct the people, to teach them or sit as a judge. That is, while the king executes judgment – according to Torah or the needs of the time – he does not determine what Torah says the law should be. That job, interpreting the Torah and teaching the people, belongs to the *nasi*, as head of the Sanhedrin.

Indeed, the head of the Sanhedrin must be chosen on the basis of his wisdom. It is the wisest of the Sages who is appointed to be the leader of the Rabbinical council. The Sanhedrin – the rabbis – are responsible for instructing the people, and establishing the observance of the Torah for all the Jewish people. The *nasi* was the head, the wisest, of all the rabbis.

There is a second critical difference between a *melech* and a *nasi*, between a king and a spiritual leader. The people must obey the king’s commands. The king can draft the people into his army, require craftsmen to build various structures in different locales, direct the agricultural efforts, etc. And of course, he can levy taxes.

A *nasi*, on the other hand, has no such power. Although he receives a salary from the public and is supported by them, there is a limit to his income. And certainly, unlike a king, the people do not fulfill his every whim.

This power of the king to take from the people whatever he wants, whenever he wants – under the principle of “what a servant acquires, the master acquires” – ironically illustrates a certain “weakness” in the position of the king. Everyone else earns a

living through his or her own effort, while the king must come to the people. Even the *nasi*, who receives a public salary, is paid for doing a job. On the other hand, all the king has, he receives from the people. This fact simply emphasizes that the king is the people, with nothing of his own. His whole being is dedicated to their welfare and their existence; therefore, what he receives, he receives from them.

This also helps explain the comparison of the king to the heart, and not the brain. The heart beats in a continuous rhythm, back and forth, without interruption. The brain, while it is the source of life for the whole body, itself remains at rest, unmoving. Further, the heart is the weakest organ.

The “weakness” of the heart stems from its function: its whole purpose is to spread life to the limbs. For this reason the heart beats continuously and for this reason it is the weakest organ – because the heart exists solely for the other limbs and organs of the body.

The brain, on the other hand, remains separated, aloof from the body itself. It has a separate existence, so to speak.

Thus a king is compared to the heart, for the king moves to the rhythm of the people, as it were, bringing them out and leading them forth. The king exists to serve the people, provide for their needs. And this is his “weakness,” like that of the heart – that he receives everything from them, with nothing of his own.

A king in his capacity as king cannot intellectualize. He is too involved in the affairs of the people to objectively analyze a situation or logically debate an issue. His concern is, what do the people need. The *nasi*, the spiritual leader, on the other hand, remains distanced somewhat from the people, aloof, similar to the head and the brain, which is separated from the rest of the body.

This is why Rashi says about the *nasi* that “the leader is everything.” Even the heart is instructed by the brain; even the

king learns Torah from the *nasi*. The king's job is to provide for the people – as Torah instructs. The king guides the conduct of the people – according to the teachings of Torah. But who is it that teaches the king, tells him what Torah demands of the times, informs the king of the Torah's meaning and intent? The *nasi*.

There have been periods in Jewish history when there was both a duly appointed king, and a 'chief rabbi,' a *nasi* of the Sanhedrin. But Moses was **both** a king **and** the *nasi*, the spiritual leader. Moses was a king, conducting wars and enforcing the judicial system, and doing everything necessary to provide for the needs of the people. He was their heart. Moses was also the *nasi* and head of the Sanhedrin, who gave the Torah to the Jewish people. Indeed, all aspects of Torah throughout all the generations are aspects of the Torah of Moses, G-d's servant. Moses received the Torah at Sinai and taught it to the people. He was their brain.

The same is true of Moshiach. Moses, the first Redeemer, was both a king and *nasi*, a ruler and a teacher. Moshiach, the final Redeemer, will also be a king. Indeed, his kingship will be complete. Moshiach will also be a *nasi*, teaching Torah to the entire people, all of them, everywhere. *(Based on Likkutei Sichos 19, pp. 165-170)*

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR FREIND
Reb Yosef Yisroel ben Reb Sholom ע"ה Rosner
 Passed away on 7 Menachem-Av, 5777

ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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