

Reflections of Redemption

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

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ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** ה"י
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by
Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

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 mitzvot, 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)

The Announcement Of The Redemption

37

The proclamation of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation¹ : "Immediate repentance (and automatically) immediate redemption," and that everything is already completed, including "polishing the buttons,"² has been mentioned often lately. His announcement that it only remains to "stand³ prepared, all of you"⁴ has also been completed. We are now ready to greet our righteous Moshiach immediately. It's obvious that we are now at the time when the promise that "I will return your judges [as they were in the beginning]⁵... and your counselors"⁶ is ready to be fulfilled. Furthermore, "as they were in the beginning," alludes to the fact that this has already begun,⁷ as mentioned earlier.

...In every generation - even before the resurrection of Moshe - it is relevant to know the law that "G-d gives prophecy to mankind."⁸ It is within the grasp of the created to experience a true revelation of G-dliness, even to the degree of perfection that was

1. "*Kol Koreh*" in "*HaKriah VhaKedushah*" (Sivan-Tammuz 5701. Elul 5702) - published in the *Igros Kodesh* of the *Rebbe Rayatz*, vol. 8, p. 361 ff. 377 ff. 408 ff. Vol. 6, p. 430 ff.

2. See *Sichos Simchas Torah* 5689.

3. His *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 4, p. 279. See there for cross references.

4. See *HaYom Yom* 15 Teves and in many other places.

5. *Yeshayhu* 1:26.

6. See Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishneh*, Sanhedrin, chapter 1, Mishneh 3, which implies there that "I will return your judges, etc." will be "before the coming of Moshiach" and as the passage concludes, "afterwards it will be called for you a righteous city, etc." See *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 9, p. 105, note 74.

7. [There is a play on words. In the citation from *Isaiah (Yeshayhu)* it says, "All your counselors as in the beginning." The *Rebbe* interprets this to mean that the beginning of this prophecy has already occurred. Translator's note.]

8. Rambam, *Hilchos Yesodei Torah*, beginning of chapter 7.

attained by Moshe.⁹ Furthermore - relevant to every generation is "I will establish for them a prophet **like you**,"¹⁰ as the Rambam explains:¹¹ "We do not believe in any prophet that arises after Moshe our Teacher only because of the sign [he performs], but because of the mitzvah commanded **by Moshe in the Torah**, etc." This means that every prophet is a continuation of the prophecy of Moshe and his Torah. As the Rambam explains, it is only in the **manifestation** of the prophecy that there exists different levels.¹² In our generation it is my sainted father-in-law who has attained the degree of prophecy.

Specifically, after "prophecy has returned to Israel,"¹³ as an "introduction to Moshiach"¹³ - our righteous Moshiach (who will be "a great prophet¹⁴ approaching our teacher Moshe") will prophesy. Our Sages¹⁵ state that "the first Redeemer (Moshe) is the final Redeemer" and in every generation there is one who is qualified for this. Therefore one has to know as a halacha [law] that even now prior to the Redemption, there exists a revelation of prophecy from Moshiach, even before the Redemption which is a taste and beginning of the complete revelation of prophecy after the Redemption. This means, that this prophecy is not an innovation that will be realized only after the Redemption, but the beginning of it will be achieved even before, in the spirit of "your counselors as in the beginning." The Rambam, who includes in his law code the laws relevant to the days of Moshiach and the introduction to it as well, writes about this [prophecy].

9. Likkutei Sichos, vol. 23, p. 71. And elsewhere.

10. Our parsha, 18:18.

11. Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei Torah, chapter 8, halacha 2.

12. Chapter 7, halacha 5.

13. Rambam, Igros Teiman, chapter 3.

14. Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva, chapter 9, halacha 2.

15. See Shmos Rabbah, chapter 2:4. Zohar Chadash vol. 1, 253a. Shaar HaPesukim, Parsha Veyechi. Torah Or, beginning Parshas Mishpatim. And elsewhere.

One can then understand the accomplishment of the later generations in general and the current generation in particular. It is only in current times that my sainted father-in-law, **the leader of our generation**, has declared that everything has been completed. According to all the signs, it is the last moments before the Redemption.

...The spreading of the wellsprings outside, to all corners of the world, has been completed, and in a way that is intellectually comprehensible even to one who is situated in the furthestmost hinterland. The inner teachings of Torah and Chassidus have been translated into many languages (Russian, among many), through my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation. In an ever expanding and illuminating fashion, we have come to witness the recent publication of the Tanya, the Written Torah of Chassidus¹⁶ in Braille, the script for the blind, May G-d preserve us (as mentioned above¹⁷).

According to the announcement of my sainted father-in-law, all aspects of Divine service have been completed, including the Divine service of our Rebbe's, our leaders, who served as "your judges" and "your counselors" until the present day. In addition, the expression "the generation is worthy"¹⁸ can be understood **literally**. It follows then that we have already arrived at the time of "I will return your judges as at first and your counselors as in the beginning" in the most complete sense of the words. (There is therefore no need for officers to enforce the law, because everything is already refined.) Of this, our rabbis and leaders have already provided us with a taste and beginning.¹⁹

16. A letter of my sainted father-in-law - published in the summary and notes to *Tanya*, page 118 and further. His *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 4, p. 221 and further. See there vol. 5, p. 90.

17. Sichos Shabbos Parshas Eikev (*Sefer HaSichos*, 5751, p. 764 and further).

18. The expression of our Sages - *Yevamos* 39b. *Chullin* 93b.

19. See Rambam's *Commentary on the Mishneh* in note 6: I will return your

In the last moments of exile, the lesson for everyone of Shabbos Parshas Shoftim can be understood. There must be a Divine service appropriate - measure for measure - to the situation of Redemption:

One must publicize to one's self and to all whom he can reach the necessity to internalize the lessons and advice of "your judges" and "your counselors" of our generation. In general these leaders are the rabbis, as in the statement; "Who are the kings? The Rebbis."²⁰ More specifically, it is the leader of our generation, the judge, counselor and prophet of our generation and the continuation of our Rebbeim who preceded him.

The obligation to receive the words of the leader is rooted in the commandment of the Torah:²¹ "I will raise up a prophet for them from amongst their brethren like you and will put My words in his mouth and he will speak to them all that I command him..." "To him you will listen."²² According to the legal decree of the Rambam mentioned above, if one has the qualifications and perfection required of a prophet, when this same person performs signs and wonders, "we do not believe in him because of the signs alone, but because of the mitzvah Moshe commanded in the Torah when he said, 'if he gives you a sign, listen to him.'" The sign is: "He will tell you thing to come and his words will prove true,"²³ - as we have seen and continue to see the fulfillment of the blessings of my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation.

judges as before times and your counselors as in the beginning... this will be without a doubt when the Creator corrects the hearts of men, their merits increase, their desire is for G-d and their wisdom increases before the coming of Moshiach, etc.

20. See Gittin 62a. [*The phrase used in the original is the following quotation: "who are the kings? the rabbis." Translator's note.*]

21. Our parsha, 18:18.

22. Our Parsha, 18:15.

23. Rambam, *ibid*, beginning of chapter 10.

And furthermore: "A prophet about whom another prophet testifies that he is a prophet is presumed to be a prophet and the second one needs no examination."²⁴ This applies to the leader of our generation, and continues in the next generation through his disciples. One must immediately obey him even "before he gives a sign." Similarly, "it is forbidden to have doubts about him and question his prophecy, that maybe it isn't true, and it is forbidden to test him overmuch" as it says,²⁵ do not test the L-rd your G-d as you tested Him at Massa... But since it is known that he is a prophet, believe in him and know that G-d is in your midst. Do not doubt or question him..."²⁴ One believes in the words of the prophet not because it is the prophet's speech, but because it is **G-d's** speech through **this** prophet!

...One must make known to all members of the generation that we have merited that G-d has chosen a person endowed with free choice, who is incomparably higher than the members of his generation, to be "your judge," "your counselor," and the prophet of the generation. This chosen leader will provide the instructions and advice relevant to the service of all Jews and all people of the generation, in all matters of Torah and mitzvos, and daily conduct in the manner of "in all your ways, know Him" and "all your deeds (should be for the sake of Heaven)."²⁶ [His counsel has] extended to the essential prophecy²⁷ of "immediate Redemption" and instantly "Behold he (Moshiach) comes."²⁸

The acceptance of and adherence to the instructions of "your

24. Ibid, halacha 5.

25. *Vaeschanan*, 6:16.

26. *Mishlei* 3:6. Avos, chapter 2, Mishneh 12. See Rambam, *Hilchos De'os*, end of chapter 3. *Tur Shulchan Aruch*, *Orach Chayim*, section 231.

27. Not just as a Sage and Judge, but as a Prophet, for this is certain - see Maamarei Ha'ketzirim of the Alter Rebbe, p. 354-5.

28. *Shir HaShirim* 2:8 and *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on the verse.

judge" and "your counselor" of our generation creates the sampling and beginning of the fulfillment of the prayer²⁹ "Return our judges as of old and our counselors as in the beginning." This is in accordance with the principle "The end of creation arose in thought first."³⁰ How much more [must there be acceptance and adherence] when these matters have already been expressed in speech (i.e., prophecy, which in Hebrew derives from a word that means "movement of the lips"), as it has become customary recently to express the words in speech, particularly the words that the Redemption is imminent.

We can now answer the question that has been raised recently that the Redemption is coming imminently. The question is, how can this statement be accepted? How will the family and the world at large react to this?

In truth, if the subject of Redemption were an innovation, the question would possibly have a place. But the Redemption is not new; rather all of it has already begun ("as in the beginning") and has been brought into and received in this physical world, the lowest of all possible worlds (in the context of "your counselors as in the beginning"). Therefore it won't be a wonder when the Redemption comes imminently!

(From the talk of the Shabbos Parshas Shoftim, 7 Elul, 5751)

29. The eleventh blessing of the Amidah prayer.

30. The hymn "*Lecha Dodi*."

IN LOVING MEMORY OF
Mrs. Roneete Mona Mina bas **Reb Zev Kurtzman** ע"ה
Passed away on 9 Cheshvan, 5783

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Passed away on 24 Tamuz, 5783

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