

## And you will say, “I will set a king over myself” ... You shall surely set over yourself a king who Hashem, your G-d, shall choose. (17:14,15)

Unlike secular royalty, the *melech Yisrael* is not merely a ruler, but rather, a spiritual shepherd, warrior, judge and unifier, who embodies the highest level of *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, and humility. While he represents the glory of our nation, he remains a servant of the people. His presence inspires awe and fear of Heaven, with his very being reminding us of *malchus Shomayim*, the Heavenly kingdom. Ideally, the *melech Yisrael* (if he is worthy) is the institution through which Hashem enables the people to live in peace and justice, maintaining the ability to serve Him in preparation for the *geulah shleimah*. Sadly, it did not always work out that way, because, regrettably, some of the kings that sat on the throne were far from worthy.

The first *melech Yisrael* was *Shaul Ha'Melech*, who was anointed by *Shmuel HaNavi*. Ultimately, his reign did not end on a positive note. The question is why. The Torah instructs us to, “Set a king over yourself.” *Shaul* was that king. What went wrong? When the people approached *Shmuel HaNavi* asking for a monarch to lead them, they said, *Atah simah lanu melech l'shafteinu*; “Now, set for us a king to judge us (as all other nations).” *Shmuel* responded with Hashem's choice: *Shaul*. If the Torah endorses – even mandates monarchy -- and the people respectfully have dotted all the “I's” and crossed all the “T's” in their request, why did *Shaul's* monarchy fail dismally?

The *Rambam* writes that, while appointing a king is a *mitzvah*, the people did not ask appropriately. They did not ask for a king because they wanted to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Som tasim alecha melech*; rather, they came with accusation and complaint, no longer wanting to commit to *Shmuel HaNavi's* leadership. They wanted a leader with whom they could “work.”

The *Kli Yakar* explains that the divergence between the Torah's *mitzvah* of appointing a king and the nation's request for a king was all in one word, but it made all the difference because it showed that the people were not on the same page as the Torah. It was certainly the *ratzon Hashem*, will of G-d, that a righteous king rule over them. The Almighty wanted a centralized leadership. The nation had judges present in each tribe who sat in their respective places. They, however, did not have a king who projected an image of royalty, fear and discipline. This king would be appointed by a *Navi* – not through the people's collective decisions. This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, *Asimah aleihem melech*, the king should be Heavenly designated. The people, however, had their own agenda which did not align with the Torah's criteria. They did not say, *aleinu melech*; “upon us a king,” but rather, *lanu*, “for us.” They wanted to call the shots; asking for a king for the people, not over the people. Hashem told *Shmuel*, “Heed their voice and appoint for them a king,” not because they deserved a king, but so they would learn the consequences of their request. Hashem gave them what they asked for – but not in the ideal way.

A king must reign over the people. The people must accept his rule, with the understanding that he represents Hashem's choice. *Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, shlita (Otzroseihem Amalei)* quotes one of the present-day *darshanim*, speakers, who portrayed their flawed request with the following analogy. Hundreds of years ago, when the watch/time piece came into vogue, people would set their watch by the time of a central clock that stood tall in the middle of the city. People would walk by, check the time and synchronize their watches with the main clock. As always, one person had to be wiser than everyone, one person who thinks that his expensive watch was calibrated better and was more accurate than the main clock. Since he was also wealthy and influential, he decided that the time on the clock should be coordinated with the time on his watch. He "convinced" the city's leadership to allow him to set the time. Not wanting to fall into this man's bad graces, they agreed to his request. A problem still existed: the clock was too high, and he did not want to climb a ladder every time it was necessary to change the time. They resolved the issue by lowering the clock to a height accessible to the man.

Everything went well for a few days. He checked his watch, adjusted the clock, and all was in order. The problem was that now that the clock's dial was accessible, it could be adjusted by anyone who felt his watch was set on the correct time. Thus, every time someone passed the clock, he adjusted the time to coincide with his watch. The analogy is obvious: when everyone is permitted to do as he pleases; when there is no central authority who leads in accordance with the Navi's direction, we are left with anarchy and flawed monarchy, which is exactly what took place during the reign of Shaul.

When the will of the people shapes a leader's directive, instead of Divinely-guided principles, the result is often confusion, insecurity and instability. Such leadership is inherently flawed because the leader is reactive. He is not a rooted leader but one who is insecure and fears the people; thus he ignores the *Navi's* guidance and does not lead with conviction. He bends with the winds of each person who wants to change the time on the clock. When the people crown themselves through their election of a king, they fail. Shaul *Hamelech* was holy and righteous. He did not fail the people. They failed him, and he responded to their guidance and demands. This presents a powerful lesson for us all: those who have designs for leadership; those who are there already; and those who, with the help of Hashem, survived. To those who seek it: remember leadership is not glory; it is an honor, privilege, but also a burden. For those who hold it: beware of being led. Do not take your cue from the crowd; fear Hashem and do what is right. For those who survived: you owe a special gratitude and humility. If you remain faithful, your vindication comes from Hashem.