

שופטים

Shoftim (Judges)

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 16:18-21:9

In **Parashat Shoftim**, the Almighty gives specific instructions to the “**kings**” who will in the future, rule over Israel.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 17:14 " When you come to the land which יהוה your Elohim is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, '**I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me.**'¹⁵ "you shall surely set a **king** over you whom **יהוה your Elohim chooses;** *one from among your brethren* you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who *is* not your brother.¹⁶ "But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for יהוה your Elohim has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.'¹⁷ "Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.¹⁸ " Also it shall be, **when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this Torah in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites.**¹⁹ "And **it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life,** that **he may learn to fear יהוה his Elohim and be careful to observe all the words of this Torah** and these statutes,²⁰ **that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren,** that he may not turn aside from the commandment *to* the right hand or *to* the left, and that he may prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Moshe's prophecy came to pass and the people asked for a “**king**.” In **1 Samuel**, they asked for a “**king to judge us**.” “**Judging**” wasn't the function of an earthly king. According to our Parasha, “**judging**” was specifically for the “**judges**.”

1 Samuel 8:5 ... **make us a king to judge us like all the nations.**"⁶ But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "**Give us a king to judge us.**" So Samuel prayed to יהוה And יהוה said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."⁸ "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day -- with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods -- so they are doing to you also."⁹ "Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall **solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.**"¹⁰ So Samuel told all the words of יהוה to the people who asked him for a king.¹¹ And he said, "This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint *them* for his own chariots and *to be* his horsemen, and *some* will run before his chariots.¹² "He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, *will set some* to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and *some* to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.¹³ "He will take your daughters *to be* perfumers, cooks, and bakers.¹⁴ "And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and

your olive groves, and give *them* to his servants. ¹⁵ "He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. ¹⁶ "And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put *them* to his work. ¹⁷ "He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. ¹⁸ "And **you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves**, and יהוה will not hear you in that day." ¹⁹ Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but **we will have a king over us, ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.**"

The problem really wasn't having a "king" over them. יהוה had already set the boundaries for a "king." A "king" who operated within the boundaries set by the Torah would lead the people righteously, never abusing his power. The problem was the motivation behind their request. The problem was that the people wanted "a king like all the nations," one that would "judge us and go before us and fight our battles." Huh? Our Torah reading spends a lot of time talking about setting up "judges" and speaks of "Levites" handing out decisions (decisions made by seeking יהוה's will through the Urim and Thummim):

Devarim/Deuteronomy 16:18 " You shall **appoint judges** and officers in all your gates, which יהוה your Elohim gives you, according to your tribes, and **they shall judge** the people with just judgment.

Devarim/Deuteronomy 17:9 "And you shall **come to the priests**, the **Levites**, and **to the judge there** in those days, and inquire *of them*; **they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.** ¹⁰ "You shall do according to the sentence which they pronounce upon you in that place which יהוה chooses. And you shall be careful to do according to all that they order you.

Shemot/Exodus 28:30 "And you shall put in the **breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim**, and they shall be over Aharon's heart when he goes in before יהוה. So **Aharon shall bear the judgment** of the children of Israel over his heart before יהוה continually.

The earthly appointed "king" was never intended to be the "judge." Only the Divine could hold both positions of "king" and "judge":

Isaiah 33:22 (For יהוה *is* our **Judge**, יהוה *is* our Lawgiver, יהוה *is* our **King**; He will save us)

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the **throne of David** and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with **judgment** and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of יהוה of hosts will perform this.

Four hundred years after Moshe, the Israelites asked Samuel for a "king," Saul became the answer to their request to "be like the nations around them." But notice how יהוה feels about their desire.

1 Samuel 10:18 ... "Thus says יהוה Elohim of Israel: 'I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians *and* from the hand of all kingdoms and from those who oppressed you.'¹⁹ "But **you have today rejected your Elohim**, who Himself saved you from all your adversities and your tribulations; and you have said to Him, 'No, set a king over us!' Now therefore, present yourselves before יהוה by your tribes and by your clans."²⁰ And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen.²¹ When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was chosen. And **Saul** the son of Kish **was chosen**.

יהוה saw their request as a personal rejection. But as per **Devarim 17:15**, יהוה is the one who chooses Saul to be their king. Did יהוה knowingly give Saul to the Israelites for their king in order to teach them a lesson? What the Israelites desired in a king was not the king of **Devarim 17:14-20**. Sometimes our Heavenly Father knows we have to take the hard road....

We know from reading the books of **1st** and **2nd** **Kings** and **Chronicles** that the kings of Israel and then after the split, the kings of the southern and northern tribes, in most cases, did not follow the Torah's directions for a "king." Had the kings followed the Torah as יהוה had commanded them, future exiles could have been averted.

Let's focus on one command given for the "king":

Devarim/Deuteronomy 17:18 " Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall **write for himself a copy of this Torah** in a book, from *the one* **before the priests**, the Levites.¹⁹ "**And it shall be with him**, and **he shall read it all the days of his life**, that he may learn to fear יהוה his Elohim and be careful to observe all the words of this Torah and these statutes,²⁰ "**that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren**, that he may not turn aside from the commandment *to* the right hand or *to* the left, and that he may prolong *his* days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.

Each "king" was to personally write out "his own copy of the Torah."



It appears that he even was to duplicate it from the original Torah written by Moshe, kept by the priests. The king's copy was not to be locked up in some safe place, but was to be read by the king every day! It was his daily manna. And everywhere he went, **“it was to be with him.”** When he went to war – the Torah was there.

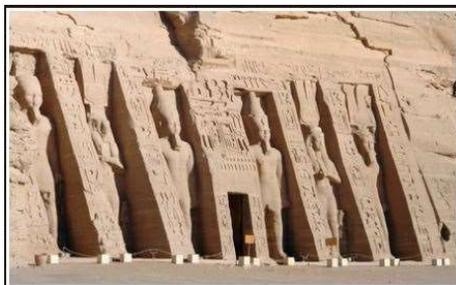


Keeping himself immersed in the Torah was a powerful way to keep him from **“turning aside from the commandments.”**

The Torah functioned as Israel's constitution. No one, not even the king, was to be above יהוה's Torah, because no one is above יהוה. His Word is the final authority and even the king could not transgress it. There were no royal exceptions, and writing out the Torah reminded the king of his boundaries.

Verse 20 says **“that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren.”** Notice it says **“above his brethren”** not **“above his subjects.”** In the eyes of the Torah, the **“king”** is just another subject in the Almighty's kingdom. A **“king”** is to be humble, like Moshe. A mere man, completely dependent on the heavenly King. In fact, the **“king”** was meant to be the conduit through which the **“King”** of the kingdom of heaven was shown to the world.

The idea that a king should be humble in the ancient world would have seemed absurd. In the ruins of Egypt, we can still see today the projects of vanity created by rulers in honor of themselves. The ancient Egyptians built pyramids as tombs for Pharaohs and their queens. Ramses II built various monuments and temples inscribed to make sure his own name lived on with god-like status.



Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes concerning the reason for a “**humble king**”:

Aristotle would not have understood the idea that humility is a virtue. For him the *megalopsychos*, the great-souled man, was an aristocrat, conscious of his superiority to the mass of humankind. Humility, along with obedience, servitude and self-abasement, was for the lower orders, those who had been born not to rule, but to be ruled. The idea that a king should be humble was a radically new idea introduced by Judaism and later adopted by Christianity.

This is a clear example of how spirituality makes a difference to the way we act, feel, and think. Believing that there is a God in whose presence we stand means that we are not the center of our world. God is. “I am dust and ashes,” said Abraham, the father of faith. “Who am I?” said Moses, the greatest of the prophets. This did not render them servile or sycophantic. It was precisely at the moment Abraham called himself dust and ashes that he challenged God on the justice of His proposed punishment of Sodom and the cities of the plain. It was Moses, the humblest of men, who urged God to forgive the people, and if not, “Blot me out of the book You have written.” These were among the boldest spirits humanity has ever produced.

There is a fundamental difference between two words in Hebrew: *anivut* (humility), and *shiflut* (self-abasement). ...Humility is not low self-regard. That is *shiflut*. Humility means that you are secure enough not to need to be reassured by others. It means that you don’t feel you have to prove yourself by showing that you are cleverer, smarter, more gifted or successful than others. You are secure because you live in God’s love. He has faith in you even if you do not. You do not need to compare yourself to others. You have your task, they have theirs, and that leads you to co-operate, not compete.

This means that you can see other people and value them for what they are. ...Secure in yourself you can value others. Confident in your identity you can value the people not like you. ...It is the understanding that “it’s not about you.”

...In 2014, the *Harvard Business Review* published the results of a survey that showed that “The best leaders are humble leaders.” They learn from criticism. They are confident enough to empower others and praise their contributions. They take personal risks for the sake of the greater good. They inspire loyalty and a strong team spirit. And what applies to leaders applies to each of us as marriage partners, parents, fellow-workers, members of communities and friends.

One of the most humble people I ever met was the late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. There was nothing self-abasing about him. He carried himself with quiet dignity. He was self-confident and had an almost regal bearing. But when you were alone with him, he made you feel you were the most important person in the room. It was an extraordinary gift. It was “royalty without a crown.” It was “greatness in plain clothes.” It taught me that humility is not thinking you are small. It is thinking that other people have greatness within them.

Ezra Taft Benson said that “pride is concerned with *who* is right; humility is concerned with *what* is right.” To serve God in love, said Maimonides, is to do what is truly right because it is truly right and for no other reason. Love is selfless. Forgiveness is selfless. So is altruism. When we place the self at the center of our universe, we eventually turn everyone and everything into a means to our ends. That diminishes them, which diminishes us. Humility means living by the light of that-which-is-greater-than-me. When God is at the center of our lives, we open ourselves up to the glory of creation and the beauty of other people. The smaller the self, the wider the radius of our world. (end of quote)

Of course, the greatest, most humble, most loving, and most servant-hearted leader was and is our **King Yeshua**. He made His entrance into Jerusalem as “**king**” with “**humility**”:

Matthew 21:5 "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your **King** is coming to you, **Lowly**, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.' "

Luke 19:33 But as they were loosing the colt, the owners of it said to them, "Why are you loosing the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "Adonai has need of him." ³⁵ Then they brought him to Yeshua. And they threw their own clothes on the colt, and they set Yeshua on him. ³⁶ And as He went, *many* spread their clothes on the road. ³⁷ Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise El with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, ³⁸ saying: " '**Blessed is the King who comes in the name of יהוה!**' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Yeshua encouraged His followers to fulfill their mission to be a light to the nations. He also trained His disciples in this style of “**humble**” and servant-hearted leadership:

Matthew 20:25 But Yeshua called them to *Himself* and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. ²⁶ "Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

²⁷ "And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave -- ²⁸ "just as the **Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve**, and to give His life a ransom for many."

When Yeshua washed His disciples' feet, He showed us a beautiful “**example**” of how we should serve others:

John 13:14 "If I then, *your* Adonai and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ "For **I have given you an example**, that you should do as I have done to you.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Messiah Yeshua, ⁶ who, being in the form of Yah, did not consider it robbery to be equal with Yah, ⁷ but **made Himself of no reputation**, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.

Yeshua is the eternal “**King**” of Israel who will rule in the future as a “**Judge**” in righteous judgment and justice. In all leadership roles, we here on earth are to follow His earthly example of ruling or governing. Although in His first coming, He did not come as a “**judge**,” He will return taking up His position in all offices – **King, High Priest, and Judge!**

John 12:47 "And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for **I did not come to judge the world** but to save the world. ⁴⁸ "He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him -- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

Hebrews 4:14 Therefore, since we have a **great high priest** who has gone through the heavens, Yeshua the Son of Yah, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Revelation 19:11 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness **He judges** and makes war.

Yeshua was a true “**king**” of Israel and during His days on earth He kept Torah all the days of His life. He was not above the rule of Torah. Those appointed to be “**judges**” – the High Priest and the Sanhedrin were never able to come up with testimony against Him:

Mark 14:55 Now the chief priests and **all the council sought testimony against Yeshua to put Him to death, but found none**. ⁵⁶ For many bore false witness against Him, but their testimonies did not agree.



Because the testimony of the witnesses did not agree, the “judges” could not convict Him. It was Yeshua Himself who made the decision to lay down His life:

John 10:17 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. ¹⁸ "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

And so, we have the challenge before us as to whether or not we will identify with our “King” Yeshua who is the source of all wisdom and compassion. **Parashat Shoftim** cautions us that there is a danger when self becomes inflated with pride and elevation. To close, the prophet **Jeremiah** spent his life calling people back to the **Torah**. He understood the danger of self:

Jeremiah 9:23 Thus says יהוה: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; ²⁴ But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am יהוה, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says יהוה.

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle