

Think

All things are created. By definition, this means they have properties. Properties, by definition, are exclusive; i.e., water is moist, and not dry. Animal skin and dye are also limited to their properties. These comprise a mezuzah. Do not imagine a mezuzah has powers. **Think.** Follow reason. Only God has power.

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Parashas Shoftim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Do not pervert judgment. Do not show favoritism. And do not accept a bribe – for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous." (Devarim 16:19)

Moshe instructs the nation to appoint judges. He instructs these judges to be equitable. They must not show any favoritism. Moshe warns the judges that they cannot accept any gratuity from the litigants. Accepting such a

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Shoftim: 'Perfect' with God

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah says in Deuteronomy 18:9, "When you come into the land which Hashem your God gives you, do not learn to do as the abominations of those (other) nations." The Torah lists idolatrous prohibitions; passing children in between pillars of fire (Molech), inquiring counsel from your staff (Kosame), fortune telling, witchcraft, consulting the dead and other practices. We understand that all these idolatrous practices are not based on knowledge and are completely false. But this section concludes with a statement not found at the end of other sections of commandments, (18:13) "Perfect (tamim) shall you be with Hashem your God." My question is: Why isn't this statement applied in other areas i.e. kosher and non kosher animals, laws of robbery, court systems, or any other section? Why is the statement of "Perfect shall you be..." mentioned here? And what

does this statement mean?

We must say that only in the area of the idolatrous practices is one in violation of "perfect shall you be with Hashem your God". If one were to eat non kosher foods, he would not violate this command to be perfect. To what specific objective does "perfect" with God refer? Framing the question this way, we are forced to understand these "abominations".

What we find is that each of the mentioned practices is an attempt in some way, to procure information. In each case, there is an inquiry, or an attempt to secure oneself. I will give a few examples. Molech was a practice where a parent would pass his son or daughter through two flames - not burning the infant according to at least one view. What was this objective? Fire is the one element which opposes all biological existence. In all elements, an organism

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Shoftim: 'Perfect' with God

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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may survive, except in fire. Passing the child through, and unharmed, the father imagines that just as the child is shielded from flames, so he is shielded from all other mishaps during his life. It makes sense that the parent/child relationship forms the prohibition, as the paternal or maternal instinct is focused primarily on survival of their infant. The parent has a distorted notion that such action is fortuitous and actually "protects" the remainder of his child's existence. Kosame and Nichush were two practices which foretold the success or failure of future events or actions. So too was the practice of consulting the dead. The goal is to obtain knowledge of the 'other side', or of future events. One would usually attempt to consult a dead friend or relative. As there was nothing to be learned about someone with whom you were already intimate with, the interest in consulting the dead must serve some other need; knowledge of the future, or more specific, the inquirer's future. Obsession with the dead is an expression of one's own immortality fantasy.

What common thread runs through all these practices? The answer is "knowledge". In each of these violations, the inquirer seeks security through some imagined source of knowledge, via a warlock, an enchanter, or the dead. He assumes there is a source of knowledge out there - besides God. This is precisely where one removes himself from following God perfectly, or rather, exclusively. To assume sources of knowledge other than God, is to not follow God "perfectly". It is a dilution of God's omniscience. Therefore, the command to "be perfect with God", means in other words, "do not assume other causes for the universe's existence and operation".

The followers of these practices



assume there are in fact other means by which the universe operates. They feel some people have supernatural powers over events outside real laws of cause and effect. This of course is absurd. Their insecurities propel them to seek forecasts for their actions, so they need not think for themselves. Relying on another's advice removes their need to make decisions. This is the opposite of God's plan that man receive and engage the gift of intelligence. Similar to these idolatrous practitioners are present day Jews who check a mezuzah when household members fall sick, or those who don red bendels, place keys in challas, use prayer books as protection, and those who ascribe powers to Rebbes, Mekubals and Kabbalists. I recently heard of a "Meir bal Hanase" practice where foolish individuals believe by giving charity, you can locate a lost object. How ridiculous and damaging are such notions! What is "created", cannot oppose the "Creator". It is clear. Just as God set boundaries for the sea, "You set a boundary, they cannot overstep..." (Psalms, 104:9) so too, all creation follows the laws governing its matter. Just as parchment and ink mezuzas burn, so too they are static, and have no will, and cannot "do" anything.

All practices assuming forces to control cause and effect, are idolatrous. It makes no difference if we see "religious" Jews practicing such foolishness, or if we even read about them under a

Hebrew title, or authored by a Rabbi. What is the objective truth? That which God created and wrote in our Torah. He created and controls the universe, therefore, He alone determines reality. Not people, and not objects. The same mezuzah which will be consumed when touched by flames, people foolishly think it to possess protective abilities. If it cannot protect itself, how can it protect anything else?

God created everything. There is no other source of knowledge. God's knowledge alone defines the operation of the entire universe. Therefore, there cannot be anything which can alter our reality, other than God, the Sole Creator.

"Perfect shall you be with God" means we must not deviate from following Him alone. God, to the exclusion of anything else, is the only the Cause. This makes sense: How can That which has ultimate power, coexist with anything else laying claim to His power? God's ultimate Kingship and power negates anything else from having any power whatsoever. This is so clear, it boggles the mind that there are such idolatrous practices within our fold.

Having shown that the term "perfect" (tamim) refers to man's requirement not to create sources of knowledge outside God, we have a question: In Genesis 17:1, regarding circumcision, God instructs Abraham to "walk before Me and be perfect". God uses the term "perfect". How does this fit in with our theory? I believe it is

'perfect'. The Ibn Ezra says the following commentary on this command to Abraham to "be perfect", "You should not ask why perform circumcision." On the surface, Ibn Ezra defies all which he stands for, i.e. a life of understanding. How then can he verbalize such a statement? I don't believe Ibn Ezra is saying we should not use our minds. Rather, he is teaching us that Abraham should not make his performance of divine decrees dependent on his own intelligence. Ibn Ezra teaches that man can fall prey to an erroneous notion that "only when I know the reasons will I perform, but not before". To this, Ibn Ezra teaches, "do not inquire why the circumcision" - "do not let your inquiry determine your acts". "Be perfect with God and don't render your intelligence superior to His" - this is what Ibn Ezra is teaching, and why the term "perfect" is also used here. In this case too, man can go so far as to think of himself as a source of knowledge outside of God...making his subjective knowledge supreme over the knowledge contained in God's divine commands. God says to Abraham, "be perfect" - follow me even when your mind does not grasp with complete understanding.

We see Abraham does follow this concept, as he did not second guess God when he was commanded to kill his son Isaac. A Rabbi once asked why Abraham inquired of God's decision to destroy Sodom, but not regarding Isaac's slaughter. The Rabbi suggested that Abraham realized he could learn about God's justice by asking. But regarding perfection via commands, Abraham felt he could not always understand how a command would perfect him, although it did. He therefore did not ask about the killing Isaac - a divine command - but he did inquire about God's justice. ■

Magicians vs Prophets

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: What exactly is the difference between Moses and any of the other prophets?

Mesora: See the paper, "Maimonides 13 Principles", Principle VII. Moses (Moshe) differed in four manners:

1) All other prophets God spoke to them through intermediaries. By Moshe it was without one, as it says "face to face I spoke to him".

2) Regarding all other prophets, prophecy came to them at night while they were asleep in a dream as it says "in a dream of the night" and other such references; or in the day but only after a deep sleep-like state came over them, and all their senses were shut off except their thoughts. Not so by Moshe. Moshe would receive a prophecy any time when he would stand between the two figures on the ark as God attests to it, "and I will make it known to you there" and "not so my servant Moshe. Face to face I speak to him."

3) When a prophet would receive prophecy he would not be able to stand the intense effect and he would shake and not be able to stand. As it relates regarding Daniel in his encounter with the angel Gabriel. Regarding Moshe, he did not suffer from this. As it says "Face to face do I speak to him as a person speaks to his friend". And even though this is the greatest connection to God, still he did not suffer.

4) All other prophets could not receive prophecy at their will. Only when God wanted to tell them. Some would go days or months without prophecy. Even if they wanted or needed something sometimes it would be days or months or years or even never that they would be told. Some would have people play music to put them in a good mood such as Elisha. But Moshe peace be upon him received prophecy whenever he wanted as it says, "Stand here and listen to what

God will tell you what to do" and "God said to Moshe tell Aaron your brother that he can't come to the holy of holies at any time [he wants]". Our rabbis said "Aaron was prohibited to come whenever he wanted, but not Moshe.

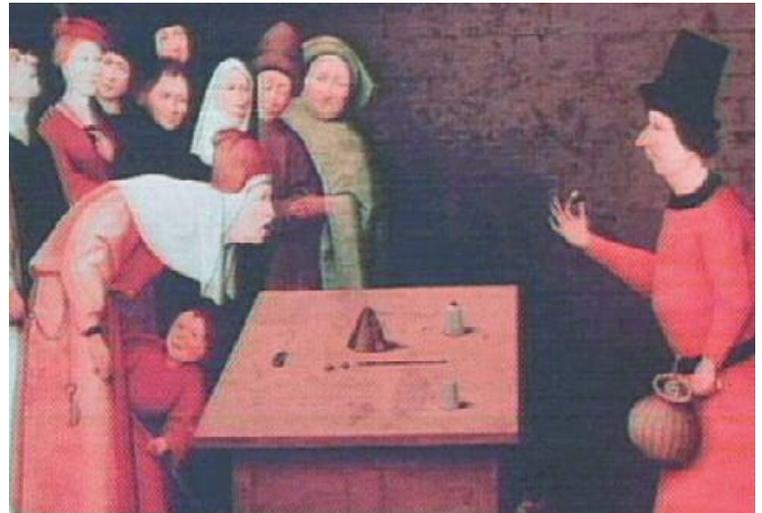
Reader: You write that Israel did not believe Moses because of the miracles he displayed.

Mesora: "Israel did not believe Moses because of the miracles", is a quote from Maimonides.

Reader: In fact, you disparage the concept of a warlock in general. On the other hand, one of the tests a prophet has to pass in order to be accepted is the prediction of the future - exactly the type of miracle being performed in many of the stories, some having been corroborated, that people have written to you about. Yet when people write you about that, you respond with Maimonides' criticism of astrology.

Mesora: Let me first say that today's astrology is not divine, it is man's invention, as opposed to prophecy which is God's Divine, informative gift. If I am clear, what you are asking is how a warlock is of no validation, yet a true prophet who predicts future events is accepted, and even warranted. It is a good question.

I would make this distinction; A warlock and one who tells the future are doing two qualitatively different acts. The prophet who forecasts events which all come true in fine detail demonstrates a perfection in the realm of knowledge, and only attainable by God's Will. This validates him, as operating in line with the Creator. Additionally, he is not spoken of in the Torah as one who derails another from following the Torah, as opposed to one who performs tricks in order to cause others to defect from Judaism. Here



alone we see why God tells us not to follow the "baal mofes", the warlock. He is speaking against the Torah. Here, God teaches that when a warlock and Torah come into conflict, the Torah is always to be followed. Torah is the absolute truth. (Saadia Gaon dismisses all the signs of Pharaoh's magicians as merely slight of hand.)

To reiterate, only a true prophet can forecast the future with 100% accuracy. This is because one who is not a prophet, has no means by which to forecast. A human being has but five senses, and no others. Therefore, he has the future closed off to him. He is as a blind man is to vision. For this very reason, that the future is unavailable without prophecy, does the Torah validate one as a prophet when his forecast comes true with 100% accuracy, to the finest detail. Only in such a case do we know that he must have been informed via prophecy.

Why then isn't a forecast of 50% accurate enough? He has in fact forecasted something properly! The answer why we require 100% accuracy is simple: a person may make guesses, and reality may coincidentally parallel one's guess. This can and does happen. This is how warlocks attracted people. If

they say enough generalities about the future, a few are bound to be somewhat similar to events that eventually happen. Followers of warlocks and fortune tellers are emotionally driven, and latch on to any small statements the warlock makes, if it smacks of similarity to reality. But these followers don't realize that there is such a thing as coincidence. They view coincidental phenomena as actual forecasts which have come true. The Torah tells us how we verify a true prophet, ALL predictions must come to be. If even one detail is not realized, he is a false prophet, and is killed. (Deut. 18:20)

One might ask, "what if an accurate predictor of events tells us to follow idolatry? Do we then follow him, as he predicted future events accurately, is he now completely validated by his forecast?" The answer is that one who forecasts accurately, will never oppose the Torah. Why? It is because his forecast demonstrates that he is receiving knowledge from God, and God will never give a true forecast that one oppose Torah. This is the case as God instructs us that one who forecasts with 100% accuracy must be accepted by Torah standards. □

MOORE'S X COMMANDMENTS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Last week, Mesora issued a response to the Roy Moore/Ten Commandments controversy. As you know, a federal court decided against Judge Roy Moore housing a monument of the Ten Commandments in his court. We stood behind Judge Moore, and Alan Keyes. We explained the nature of our support: the Ten Commandments are a historical issue, not a religious one. Moore's position is that through housing the Ten Commandments monument, he supports his oath to abide by God's laws. Moore views the Ten Commandments not as a religious issue, but as a testament to God's laws. I limit my support to this argument alone.

Many readers wrote in to us saying, "How can Mesora support a Christian Ten Commandments", and, "What's next, allowing a court to place statues of Jesus and Mohammed?" Many of you feel this monument crossed the line into religion as Judeo-Christian favoritism, excluding other religions.

Christianity's worship of man, and other religions' selection of blind faith over reason, are the furthest thing from Judaism, as we have shown in so many of our articles. Our disagreement is never with followers of other religions; people arrive on the scene after their religion has. Our arguments are aimed at religious belief, not religious followers. All religions believe their's is the "true" religion of God. Obviously, each religion maintains all others must be

false. Reason too dictates this must be so: God would not create many opposing religions, so, one alone must be God's will, all others are impostors. Therefore, 'reason' alone is to be the deciding factor when selecting which religion is THE God-given system. Our article "Torah from Sinai", and "Why Be Observant" argue that Judaism is based on reason and proof - which no other religion claims.

Although these Ten Commandments form part of Christianity, they are not Christian in nature. Christian Bibles may include some alterations in the text of the Jewish words as recorded on the original Torah. So when we refer to the "Ten Commandments", we refer to God's Hebrew words alone, excluding all other versions. We do not tolerate any distortion of God's original Hebrew. This too Christians would agree to.

Now we come to the point of contention: Are the Ten Commandments standing in Judge Moore's court a support of religion? And, what do we mean when we say that America is one nation "under God", and "In God We Trust"? How does supporting God fit into our constitution, while simultaneously, we refrain from religious support under "church and state"?

There is to be no legislation of religion. If so, how can we still write on all coinage, "In God We Trust"? The difference is that although religion is not

to be legislated, the U.S. government does not view belief in God as a "religious" issue. All religions attest to God's existence. One religion is not being favored over another. Therefore, belief in God is not a violation of "church and state". This reasoning can be understood. The U.S. government does not legislate religion, but wishes to enable freedom of religion. The government's support of a belief in God is not a support for any one religion, but a support of the belief in the Creator. Supporting a belief in God does not favor one religion over another. This does not violate "church and state".

This is where we must think clearly: When the U.S. government supports a belief in our God, how may citizens endorse such a belief? Certainly, if this belief in God is supported by government, then citizens of that government are correct to support this governmental belief. If God's giving of His Ten Commandments is a proof to His existence, for our "One nation under God", then placing a monument to these commandments is not violating "church and state", but in fact, supporting what U.S. law supports, "In God We Trust."

We support Judge Moore, as he supports the historical truth of God's existence, via this monument.

The truth is, there is no other event that Judge Moore could have found that supports the belief in God, better than the Ten Commandments' monument.

This Sinaiic event was witnessed by millions of people. This story in our possession today, of a mountain on fire, of words emanating from the fire, would not have been spread - had it been false. What happened is that all eyewitnesses passed down the details of this great revelation at Sinai. World history, not religion, attests to God's giving of the Ten Commandments. Again, had such an event never transpired, not only would it have never spread, but there would be, somewhere, a record of the "true" history of the Jews at that era. But there is not one other account, because the exact Jewish history is recorded, commencing thousands of years before Sinai, through thousands of years after. The only way the story of God giving the Ten Commandments to Moses on Sinai was accepted by the world, is because it must have happened. Just like all history attested to by masses of eyewitnesses is verified as 100% truth, Sinai, which had mass witnesses in the millions, is credible evidence to its veracity. We accept the miracles and Divine revelation at Mount Sinai as much as we accept Caesar's rulership of Rome. Masses present at a historical event is the formula which proves accurate history, beyond any doubt.

World history cannot be altered. Judge Moore teaches world history, and part of it is God's revelation to the Jewish nation at Sinai. Denouncing Judge

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MOORE'S X COMMANDMENTS

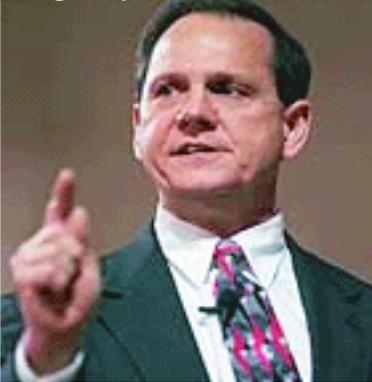
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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Ambassador Keyes



Judge Roy Moore



Moore's support of the Ten Commandments is a denial of the God of our nation. Moore supports "In God We Trust" in its best form - the historical event of Sinai that proves God's existence.

This is Mesora's support of Moore, as Moore does not endorse a favoritism of one religion over others. To Moore, the Ten Commandments are not about religion, but are a historical proof of God. Judge Roy Moore endorses God's existence. Moore is careful not to cross the line into a religious support of Christianity. He understands "church and state". We endorse this specific stand of Judge Moore; to endorse God's existence through His historically true and proven giving of the Ten Commandments.

However, if the situation were where someone sought to promote religion

through housing these tablets, we would oppose such a practice. This would violate freedom of religion. No governmental party may support religion. Religious freedom is our constitutional right, and to be practiced only by citizens and their groups, but not enforced by any governmental officer, or group.

An interesting question arises; would a monument to the creation of the Earth be in violation of "church and state"? On the surface, you would say no. But think about it. The solar system is no less an act of God, than the Ten Commandments. Yes, American culture has forced all "scientific" phenomenon under the category of "science", not religion, and all "religious" phenomenon, under "church and state". But are these categories accurate?

Up to this point, I have been using

U.S. Government categories. I will answer this question using God's categories.

The creation of the Earth has one goal, man's perfection via knowledge of God, "...and the land (God has) given to the children of man." (Psalms, 115:16) The creation of Earth was for the existence of man - man's existence is solely to know his Creator. Earth is then a prerequisite for the Ten Commandments, as both, the Earth and the Commandments join in the singular goal of studying God's works: His physical creation, and His metaphysical laws. Earth and Commandments represent these two categories. A monument to the Ten Commandments would be no more religious than one to the creation of the Earth. Both affirm God as the Creator, and once you affirm this, you cannot separate between God, and His will.

What are we defining as "God"? Our definition is only by way of reference. We cannot point to Him, or describe His essence, as our minds are incapable of this, "No man can know Me an live". (Exod., 33:20) We refer to God by His actions, or by His universe. But we cannot stop there, God has done much more. He performed miracles, interceded with man, and gave us His Ten Commandments. An accurate definition of God must include all we know He has performed. Just as observing half of scientific knowledge

will corrupt our knowledge of science, so too, dismissing much knowledge of God's actions must corrupt our view of God. To affirm God, means to affirm ALL that He has done. If we affirm His destruction of peoples, such as the Flood and Sodom, but we do not affirm His delivery of Jews from unlawful bondage, we will view God as evil. A complete picture of God's actions is necessary, if we are to appreciate what is truly God. We cannot separate "God" from His actions.

For governing diverse peoples in one country, "church and state" secures for the individual his and her freedom of religion. But for the philosopher, separation between "church and state" presents a problem. God has in fact not only created the Earth, but He has given man existence, and divine laws for his existence. God is inseparable from His laws. ■



Parashas Shoftim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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gift will inevitably affect their objectivity.

The Torah previously – in Parashat Mishpatim – discussed the impact of such gratuities. Moshe is reviewing this prohibition. However, Moshe slightly alters the phrasing of the admonition. Moshe states that the bribe “blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous”. In Parshat Mishpatim the Torah states that, “the bribe blinds the clear-sighted person and perverts the words of the righteous”. [1] Moshe substitutes a reference to the wise in place of the term “clear-sighted”. Why does Moshe make this change?

In order to answer this question, we must consider a related problem. The Talmud in Tractate Shabbat discusses the importance of the judicial system. The Talmud explains that a judge who decides a case justly is a partner of the Almighty in the creation of the universe. [2] The simple meaning of this statement is that society cannot exist without justice. The universe was created to foster humanity. Therefore, the judge’s role is fundamental to the mission of the universe. Without upright jurisprudence society degenerates and humanity cannot develop. The universe and creation are rendered meaningless.

However, there is a difficulty in the specific wording of the Talmudic text. The Talmud does not merely state that the judge must render a just decision. The Talmud uses a very unusual phrase. It can best be translated to mean that the decision must be accurate and consistent with truth. The commentaries observe that this phrase seems redundant. If the judgment is accurate, certainly it is consistent with truth!

Tosefot respond to this problem. They explain that there are two factors that determine the quality of a judge’s decision. First, the judge must accurately interpret and apply the law. Second, the judge must appraise the truth of the competing claims and evidence. This requires that he assess the validity of the evidence. An example will help illustrate these two considerations. Assume Reuven borrows money from Shimon. Shimon claims he was never repaid. Reuven insists that he repaid the debt. Reuven produces witnesses that testify on his behalf. The judge must accurately apply the appropriate legal considerations. The judge must determine the specific evidence Reuven must produce in order to release himself from any further obligation to Shimon. However, the judge must also assess the truth. The judge must appraise the veracity of the witnesses. If the judge questions the truthfulness of the witnesses, he cannot decide the case on behalf of Reuven. This is the message of the Talmud. The judge is responsible to effect a decision that is accurate in its interpretation of the law. The decision must also be consistent with the truth. [3]

Based on Tosefot’s comments Rav Eliyahu of Vilna offers an additional insight into the Talmud’s statement. He observes that in order for this judge to

be the Almighty’s partner in creation, the judgment must be both accurate and truthful. He explains that society relies on the courts to foster peace and harmony within society. Concord is essential for the effective function of society. This peace and harmony only emerge from a decision that is both accurate and true. If a litigant loses a case but feels the matter was judged accurately and truthfully, he can reconcile himself to the court’s decision. However, if he feels the decision was accurate but false, he will resent the judgment. He will be frustrated and disappointed. Ultimately, he may become estranged. Therefore, the judge only fosters harmony through decisions that are both accurate and truthful. [4]

Rav Eliyahu of Vilna concludes that a judge must be more than a master of the law. He must also be an excellent judge of character and possess keen insight into human behavior. He needs this insight to assure that his decisions are not just accurate but also truthful.

This resolves our original problem. The Torah in Parshat Mishpatim refers to the judge as clear-sighted. Moshe refers to the judge as wise. Both of these descriptions are appropriate. The judge must have both of these qualities. The judge must be wise. This term represents the ability to interpret and apply the law. The judge must also be clear-sighted. This means he must have the ability to find the truth through evaluating the veracity of the evidence.

The two passages explain that a bribe undermines both of these qualities. It interferes with the judge’s ability to interpret and apply the law. It also undermines the judge’s ability to assess the truthfulness of the evidence. [5]

“When you come to the land that Hashem your G-d is giving to you and you occupy it and settle it and you will say, ‘‘Appoint upon us a king like all the nations that surround us’’, you will place upon you a king that Hashem your G-d chooses. You will appoint a king from among your brothers. You are not permitted to appoint a stranger that is not your brother.’’ (Devarim 17:14-15)

Moshe relates to Bnai Yisrael the commandment of appointing a king. The simple interpretation of Moshe’s words is that the nation is commanded to appoint a king over itself. There must be a leader. This interpretation is supported by an earlier incident in the Torah. Hashem tells Moshe that the time has come for his death. Moshe asks the Almighty to appoint a new leader. Moshe contends that it imperative for Bnai Yisrael to have strong leadership. Hashem responds by appointing Yehoshua. In this incident, the Torah clearly acknowledges the importance of strong political leadership. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that our passage is addressing this need and creating the institution of kingship. Maimonides accepts this interpretation of our pesukim. In his Mishne Torah, he writes that Bnai Yisrael became obligated in three commandments when they entered the land of Israel. One of these mitzvot is to appoint a king. Maimonides quotes our passage as the source for this commandment. [6]

However, there is a problem with this interpretation of our passages. After the death of Moshe, the nation was lead by a series of judges and prophets. The last

of this series was the prophet Shemuel. The nation approached Shemuel. They asked Shemuel to appoint a king. They explained that they wished to be lead in a manner similar to the surrounding nations. These nations were ruled by kings. Bnai Yisrael wished to also be ruled by a king.

The Navi explains that Shemuel felt that the request was evil and inappropriate. [7] This reaction seems to contradict our passage. The Torah apparently requires the appointment of a king. How can Shemuel contest the appropriateness of Bnai Yisrael’s request?

Don Issac Abrabanel suggests that our passages do not actually require the nation to appoint a king. In fact, the nation is not required to establish an institution of kingship. It is preferable to be led by prophets and judges. However, the Torah also recognizes that Bnai Yisrael may succumb to the desire to emulate other nations. Bnai Yisrael may ask for a king. Our pesukim respond to this issue. If the request is made, it is permitted to appoint a king. However, the passages outline specific perimeters. For, example, the king must be a member of Bnai Yisrael.

Abrabanel is acknowledging that our passages are a mitzvah. However, he argues that this does not create any absolute obligation. Instead, the mitzvah deals with a contingency. It provides the response, should the nation seek a king. [8]

Sforno supports Abrabanel’s interpretation of our passages. He adds that it is essential for the nation to have political leadership. The prophets and judges provided this guidance. In some ways these leaders were kings. However, they differed from kings in one fundamental area. They could not pass their authority to their children. The prophets and judges were not royalty. The institution of kingship creates royalty. The king passes his authority to his son. [9] This is not an ideal arrangement. The king’s son may not be fit to assume his father’s position. Yet, inevitably he views himself as vested with the right to be king.

Maimonides suggests an alternative solution. He insists that our passages are an absolute command. Bnai Yisrael was obligated to appoint a king. Nonetheless, the nation sinned in approaching Shemuel. Their request conformed to the mitzvah. However, their motivation was corrupt. They did not ask for a king out of a desire to fulfill the Torah’s commandment. Instead, they wished to escape Shemuel’s leadership. Rather than wishing to observe the Torah, they sought to escape the influence of a true Torah leader. [10] ■

[1] Sefer Shemot 23:8.

[2] Mesechet Shabbat 10a.

[3] Tosefot Baba Batra 8b.

[4] Rav Eliyahu of Vilna (Gra), Kol Eliyahu, Parshat Shoftim.

[5] Rav Eliyahu of Vilna (Gra), Kol Eliyahu, Parshat Shoftim.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 1:1.

[7] Sefer Shemuel I, 8:4-6.

[8] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer Devarim, pp. 166-167.

[9] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 18:14.

[10] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 1:2.