

# PARSHAS SHOFTIM

תשע"ט

Parshas Shoftim has multiple mitzvos. They touch upon different topics, but one theme goes through many of them.

The parsha begins with the fact that Jewish society is structured by the Torah. The values and demands of the Torah are taken very seriously. The system of halacha is put into practice within everyday normal life by a system of botei din and dayanim and law enforcement.

It then discusses the severity of avodo zoro and moves on to the mitzvos of a melech.

The Torah puts many constraints on a Jewish king. He cannot have too many horses, too many wives, too much money. Try telling this to any ruler! He can't be too wealthy?!

Another unique aspect is that a Jewish king must have a sefer Torah—a second one which was portable—it had to be with him at all times and he has to read from it at all times. Why? To maintain his yiras shomayim.

The melech is uniquely in danger of losing his yiras shomayim because he is given nearly absolute power over his subjects. This is very dangerous—power can easily corrupt people and go to their heads. The king needs to constantly read from his Torah to prevent his ego from swelling and avoid feeling above the rules that control ordinary people. He may not use his power for his own personal advantage.

There is a unique halacha about a melech which is different than the other authority figures we find in the Torah—rabbonim and parents. When it comes to the kovod of a talmid chochom, he can be mochel. Why? The gemara says that when a person learns Torah, it becomes his Torah—his status as a talmid chochom is a reflection of his own personal effort and achievement in his many years of toiling in and absorbing Torah. Therefore he can be mochel on it.

When it comes to parents, they too can be mochel on their kovod because being a parent requires forming a close relationship with one's children, and sometimes this kovod can interfere with that relationship.

But a king cannot be mochel. Why? The Maharam Miruttenburg has a deep explanation for this halacha. In our tefillos on Rosh Hashono we declare that Hashem appoints kings but still retains complete sovereignty. The human king does not have his own authority—he is appointed to serve as a model of Hashem's sovereignty over the entire world. Hashem has absolute power and control, so He allows His representative to exercise a similar absolute power to give people a feeling for what malchus is. The power is not his to be mochel. He has to remain cognizant that this absolute power is not from his own achievement or status. He can only use it in the fulfillment of Hashem's will and Hashem's purpose.

So even though every Jew has a mitzvah to write his own sefer Torah, there is no obligation to keep it with him at all times. The melech has to write a second sefer Torah to be reminded at all times that the power he controls is not his own.

We have the incident of Shaul Hamelech. He was commanded through Shmuel Hanovi to wipe out the entire nation of Amoleik—including all their property and everything associated with them. Hashem gave Shaul the status of melech in order to carry out these instructions. But Shaul didn't carry out the command completely. He wavered and allowed the king Agog and the choicest animals to be spared. Shmuel

Hanovi confronts Shaul about this violation and he defends himself by saying he will use these animals as korbonos.

Shmuel realized that Shaul had a very noble character—he was extremely humble and didn't consider himself worthy of commanding such absolute power. As a result, Shaul felt inferior to Agog and was not able to assert his power in order to completely wipe him out. So Shmuel tells him—even though as an individual, being humble is a noble trait, but as the leader of Klal Yisroel representing Hashem in this world, it is out of place. As the leader of Hashem's people, you have no right to feel inferior to anyone. The malchus doesn't belong to you to allow you to be mochel on your kovod and feel inferior to Agog.

Nowadays we are not on the level to have a melech. The melech has to be so pure—like Dovid and Shlomo—that he feels he has no authority of his own—he is only a representative of Hashem. But as that representative, his authority is absolute.

This is the ideal form of government because when people see the exercise of absolute authority over their own lives by a human king, they are able to have a concept of Hashem's absolute authority over the entire universe. But we are not mature enough to have such an example of absolute authority in our lives today. As a result, when governments rule over society in a democracy, this also trickles down into people's psychology. They start to think that the Torah's authority over them is also subject to democracy. Just as governments and laws can be voted in and voted out, so too can the Torah's rules be voted in and out. Anything goes as long as we vote on it and decide what we want.

Hashem's demands are absolute—whether or not He has a physical representative in this world. It helps if we had a king with absolute power as a model, but we need to understand that Hashem has absolute power over the universe regardless. This is the malchus we speak about so much on Rosh Hashono and Yom Kippur. It is a major theme that we will be discussing in the coming weeks. This is the time of year to refocus on the nature of our relationship with Hashem.

Hashem created the world in six days and He used the Torah as the blueprint for this creation—including the creation of the human being. He runs the world completely and He gave us rules to live by which are absolute—they don't change and get modified throughout the generations—even though society changes.

Why isn't the Torah subject to change? Because Hashem built the physical world to be a reflection of the Torah. Torah is a blueprint of a deeper reality that underlies the physical reality we live in. Hashem runs the world through the system of the Torah. Just as the physical laws of nature cannot change—we can't take a vote and decide that we want to change the way nature works—the spiritual laws of the Torah cannot be changed either. This is an expression of Hashem's absolute malchus over the world.

Human malchus is a very delicate thing. On the one hand, the king is a representative of the malchus of Hashem and he has absolute power. But on the other hand, he could not view himself as anything special—he was not allowed to think of himself as being above the Torah or above any other Jew. His entire authority came from the Torah and he couldn't abuse it for personal advantage. He was limited by the Sanhedrin, etc.

Unfortunately, we don't have this model of absolute malchus in our

lives nowadays. Everything is subject to change, and people carry this attitude over to the Torah. But this is wrong. The Torah is absolute and can never change.