

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Binyomin *ben Avrohom a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Moshe, King of Yisrael

PARSHAS KORACH 5777

In an earlier *parshah*, Moshe was commanded to fashion the *chatzotzros* (trumpets): וַיְדַבֵּר ד' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר, עֲשֵׂה לָךְ שְׁתֵּי חֲצוֹצְרוֹת כָּסֶף – “And Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Make for yourself two trumpets of silver” (*Bamidbar 10:1, 2*). In describing their function, Rashi states: שִׁיְהִיו תּוֹקְעֵינָם לְפָנֶיךָ כְּמֹשֶׁה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיְהִי בִישׁוּרוֹן מְלֶכֶךְ – “So that they shall trumpet before you as (is done for) a king, in accordance with what it says (*Devarim 33:5*): ‘And there was a king in Yeshurun (appellation for Yisrael).’” And, indeed, other commentators share this interpretation of the latter verse. The Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni both understand that the mention of ‘king’ in “*Va’yehi v’Yeshurun melech*” is a reference to Moshe Rabbeinu.

Royal Privilege

But this assertion appears somewhat puzzling, given the nature of the command itself, which employed the word “*lecha* – for you”: “*Aseih lecha shtei chatzotzros* – Make for yourself two trumpets.” Rashi himself cites there the derivation of Chazal, who learn from here that in fashioning these items, Moshe had to use his very own resources: “*Lecha – mi’shelcha*” – “‘For you’ (here implies) ‘from your own possessions.’” This almost appears as a contradiction from one Rashi to the next: if Moshe was a true king, governed by the laws associated with any king of Yisrael – why did he have to use his own funds? After all, the trumpets were intended to highlight the glory of his kingship; wouldn’t it have been more fitting and honorable had the community provided the funding? Is it truly respectful to obligate the king to pay out of pocket for the trumpets that shall sound in his honor?

A further apparent difficulty centers around a statement Moshe issues in this week’s *parshah*, which features the episode of Korach’s rebellion. Dismayed by the detractors and their unwarranted claims, Moshe expresses his consternation. As the *passuk* states: וַיַּחַר לְמֹשֶׁה מְאֹד – וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל ד'... לֹא חֲמוֹר אֶחָד מֵהֶם נִשְׂאָתִי וְלֹא הִרְעֵתִי אֶת-אֶחָד מֵהֶם – “And Moshe was greatly aggrieved, and he said to Hashem: ‘... Not a donkey of any one of them have I requisitioned, nor have I mistreated a single one of them’” (*Bamidbar 16:15*). But the real question is: why not? After all, as we have seen, Moshe was the king and, as such, would have been completely within his rights to utilize his subjects’ property as he saw fit. We find, in a similar vein, that a king is authorized to make use of the property of others for purposes of his own convenience; as the Mishnah states (*Sanhedrin 2:4*):

וּפּוֹרֵץ לַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ דֶּרֶךְ, וַאֲיוֹן מִמַּחֲיוֹ בְּיָדוֹ.

“(The king) may even dismantle (someone’s private fence) in order to lay out a pathway for himself (leading to his fields and vineyards; *Bartenura*) – and none may prevent him.”

In any event, the king certainly may impose confiscatory taxes on the people. Why, then, did Moshe feel the need to act defensively, maintaining that he had never requisitioned property – he would have had every sanction to do so!

No Need for Titles

The answer, explains R' Moshe Feinstein (*Penimim Mi'shulchan Gavohah, parshas Korach*), is that the source of Moshe's kingship was fundamentally different than the usual. The subsequent kings of Yisrael acceded to their posts through appointment, being anointed for this purpose with the anointing oil. What was different about Moshe Rabbeinu was that his ascension to rulership was something of an automatic affair, as it was derived solely from the power of his attachment to Torah. That being the case, he could not derive personal benefit from his position like other monarchs; this would be considered an improper use of the Torah itself, as Hillel warned: "*U'd'ishtameish b'saga chalaf* – One who makes personal use of the Torah's crown shall pass on" (*Avos 4:5*). The very fact that Moshe could not rely on communal funding or property was an indication of the unique and elevated source of his position.

This idea bears significant ramifications for the great sages and *gedolei ha'dor* – Torah leaders of the generation. People sometimes wonder how a certain individual becomes "selected" to this illustrious post. But the truth, explains R' Moshe Feinstein, is that there is no official "appointment" to such a position *for it simply and automatically derives from the strength of their Torah*. Thus, we find that it matters not whether a certain *gadol* officiates as the *rav* of a large city or a small city – or any position at all, for that matter. Any individual whose connection with Torah reaches the requisite level is automatically elevated to greatness.

We see evidence of this phenomenon even in our times. R' Chaim Kanievsky (he should live and be well) is universally recognized as one of the primary leaders of the generation. And yet, he does not hold any official position as *rosh yeshivah* or otherwise. (This writer once asked an eminent Torah scholar what R' Chaim's "*shteller*" [position] was. The *talmid chacham* replied that his *shteller* was to finish the entire Torah every year.)

R' Moshe Feinstein made these remarks in a eulogy for R' Yechezkel Abramsky who, R' Moshe pointed out, held a variety of different posts: He served as *rav* of both large and small towns, he officiated on a rabbinical court, and, while residing in Eretz Yisrael toward the end of his life, he served in no official capacity whatsoever. But through it all, he was recognized as the *gadol hador* – a testament to the fact that this most eminent "position" does not depend on any one official title or post.

This notion may serve as an important reminder to each and every one of us. An official position is not the prerequisite to attaining true greatness; in fact, as stated above, it may bear no real relation whatsoever. The only real prerequisite depends entirely on one's own efforts and exertion – that is, his measure of greatness in Torah.

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