

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Libby and Robbie Lehman, in memory of Libby's step-father, Julius Louis Speert, whose *yahrtzeit* was 26 Av.
- Phyllis and Daniel Sykes, in memory of Phyllis's father, Morton Rosenbloom, Mordechai Menachem ben Avraham, whose *yahrzeit* is 7 Elul.

May the *neshamos* have an *aliya* and may the sponsors be rewarded for their dedication to the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

The *Shmitta* year is coming. This year presents many challenges for farmers in Israel. As a shul, we will be assisting Israeli farmers to keep this *Mitzva* by providing financial support. I am in touch with Rav Yosef Tzvi Rimon, the ultimate *baal chessed*, who will help us connect with specific farmers in need. Please donate to the BYTF for this purpose. We are hoping to raise \$20,000, and we are already half-way there due to the generosity of an anonymous matcher. Your donations will be matched—dollar for dollar. Please be a part of this special *Mitzva*.

The **Shel"א Hakadosh** teaches that the *Parshios* we read at this time of year are carefully structured to connect us to the Elul and Teshuva mindset. Last week, in anticipation of Rosh Chodesh Elul, we read *ראה אנכי נתן לפניכם היום ברכה וקללה*. Life presents us with choices, and our responsibility, every day of our lives, is to choose good over evil, to choose right over wrong, to choose blessing over curse.

But that is easier done in theory than in practice. We can learn about it, and think about it, and resolve to do it—but when we are confronted with a real-life situation—we struggle to find the firmness and tenacity to follow through.

Therefore, the **Bnei Yissaschar** writes, we read Parshas Shoftim in Elul. **שופטים ושופרים תתן לך**, the commandment to place judges is in the singular, to teach us to control ourselves, by controlling each of our senses, and to judge ourselves and hold ourselves accountable for our choices.

בני יששכר מאמרי חודש אלול מאמר א - מהות החדש
(י) בהתחלת אלול קורין תמיד סדר שופטים ושופרים תתן לך וכו' [דברים טז יח], שזהו התחלת התשובה ועיקרה אשר הבעל תשובה מחויב להושיב שופט ושופר אצל כל שערי, דהיינו כל החושים אשר המה שערים באדם שפתחם הבורא ית"ש להשתמש עמהם, כגון עינים ואזנים וחוטם ופה וראש הגויה, מחויב האדם להושיב הדעת לשופט אצל כל שער ישפוט בצדק את אשר ישתמש בחושים ואת אשר יניח ,

But how can we judge ourselves honestly and objectively? Regarding judges, the Torah writes **כי השוחד יעוור עיני חכמים**, bribes color the perspective of judges. The **Gemara in Kesuvos 105b** says that the word **שוחד** comes from the language **שוהא חד**. This suggests that, by taking a bribe, a judge becomes one with the person he is judging and, thereby, loses his objectivity and neutrality. So how are we expected to judge ourselves, when we are invariably too close to the situation?

To answer this, let us analyze another connection to Rosh Hashana in this week's Parsha. Parshas Shoftim introduces the Torah's description of a Jewish monarchy. We learn about Jewish kings, their unique power, and their obligations.

שום תשים עליך מלך אשר יבחר ה' אלקיך בו

You shall appoint a King whom Hashem chooses

The **Rambam** and **Sefer Hachinuch** consider it a *Mitzva* to appoint a King, and claim that a monarchy is the ideal form of Jewish government.

The **Abarbanel**, however, writes that it is *רשות*, something the Jewish people have a right, but not an obligation, to do. If they choose to have a King, they must follow the Torah's guidelines, but ultimately it is up to them to decide if that is the form of government they wish to utilize.

The Abarbanel's "evidence" that a monarchy is not a *Mitzva* comes from Jewish and world history, which is replete with examples of failed monarchies and abusive tyrants. The consensus of the Rishonim and Acharonim clearly follows the opinion that a monarchy is the ideal form of Jewish government. But what about the concerns of the Abarbanel? Hasn't history shown us that a monarchy is a form of government that can lend itself to abuse?

There is a famous saying "*Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.*"

Why would Hashem endorse this type of totalitarianism? Can a monarchy actually work?

It must be, that the Torah believes that it can work. And the key to its success is found in a special *Mitzva* given to the King to write two Sifrei Torah—one to carry with him and one to leave in his palace. The Torah introduces the idea of a Torah that would be with him, always, as follows:

דברים פרק יז פסוק יט
והיתה עמו וקרא בו כל ימי חייו

"*And it shall be with him and the King should read it all the days of his life. . .*"

Is carrying a Torah scroll around really going to save a King from letting his power go to his head?

The answer is found in the precise wording of this *Pasuk*. There is a grammatical inconsistency in the Torah's description of the Torah that he carries with him. *והיתה עמו* is feminine; but *וקרא בו* is masculine.

The **Ibn Ezra** points out that the word for the content of Torah, *תורה*, is feminine, while the word for the actual scroll, *ספר*, is masculine.

אבן עזרא דברים פרק יז פסוק יט
(יט) והיתה עמו - התורה. וקרא בו - בספר.

Based on his explanation, *והיתה עמו* means that it is not enough for the King to carry a physical scroll wherever he goes. The King must internalize the actual Torah—its lessons and worldview--until it is an integral part of him—and that is what he is carrying with him. His identity must be one with the will of Hashem. He must know at all times that he, so to speak, works for Hashem. The question he must ask himself before everything he does is "what does Hashem want from me."

For this reason, the **Maharsha in Kiddushin (32a)** explains that a King does not have the right to be *mochel* on his *kavod* שמים על כבוד, because it is really Hashem's honor. The King is simply Hashem's messenger, and he must remember that.

This is the meaning in the phrase *שום תשים עליך מלך אשר יבחר ה' אלקיך בו*. The Torah does not say *אותו*, which is the word we might expect. The word *בו* connotes *בתוכו*, what is inside. Hashem chooses a King based on what is inside him--what he stands for and the values he embodies: the Torah and Hashem's will. It must permeate his very being.

The Torah is clear that, while it is not easy to have power, and to be objective in your decision making, by truly internalizing the Torah's guidelines, a King becomes Hashem's representative, as it were, in the world. As the *Pasuk* in *Divrei HaYamim* says regarding Shlomo haMelech:

דברי הימים א פרק כט פסוק כג
וישב שלמה על כסא ה' למלך תחת דויד אביו ויצלה וישמעו אליו כל ישראל :

When a Jewish monarch is ruling correctly—he is sitting *al kisei Hashem*--on God's throne, as it were. He embodies Torah and Torah values and, as a model of spiritual growth and connection to God, shows the Jews how to live their lives and inspires them by his own example.

In **Pirkei Avos**, Rabban Gamliel warns us about improper governments. Ironically, his father, Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, was a very close friend of the benevolent Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius, whom the Gemara refers to as Antoninus.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ב משנה ג

הוּו זְהִירִין בְּרִשּׁוֹת שְׂאִין מִקְרִבִין לֹו לְאָדָם אֵלָא לְצוּרֵךְ עֲצֻמָן נִרְאִין כְּאוֹהֲבִין בְּשַׁעַת הַנְּאֻתָן וְאִין עוֹמְדִין לֹו לְאָדָם בְּשַׁעַת דְּחָקוּ :
Rabban Gamliel said: Be wary of governments because ultimately, they are after their own self interests. They will act as your friend when it is in their best interest but will not be there for you in your time of need. They cannot be trusted to have a moral compass, to be working for ultimate good and objective truth.

In the next Mishna, Rabban Gamliel expounds on the virtue of subjugating oneself completely to Hashem.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ב משנה ד

הוּוָּ אִיָּה אוֹמֵר עֲשֵׂה רְצוֹנוֹ כְּרְצוֹנְךָ כְּדִי שִׁיעֲשֵׂה רְצוֹנְךָ כְּרְצוֹנוֹ בְּטֵל רְצוֹנְךָ מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹנוֹ כְּדִי שִׁיבְטֵל רְצוֹן אֲחֵרִים מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹנְךָ
These statements seem to be disconnected. But upon further analysis, I believe Rabban Gamliel is contrasting secular governments with the secret of the success of Jewish Kings, subjugating their will to the will of Hashem, in order to teach us about human nature, and to teach us about power. The most idealistic people can become self-serving and corrupt when they gain power over others. They cannot be trusted because power corrupts. Rabban Gamliel is contrasting that, with the possibility of avoiding this result, by following the rules of a Jewish monarchy. Unlike politicians, who may use their position to impose themselves on the group, a Jewish monarch is first and foremost accountable to Hashem and His will. This is apt advice for the Jewish leader and also all of us—to subjugate ourselves completely to the will of Hashem.

רש"י שמות פרשת משפטים פרק כא

וְלָמָּה נִסְמְכָה פֶּרֶשֶׁת דִּינִין לְפָרֶשֶׁת מִזְבֵּחַ, לֹוּמֵר לֵךְ שְׂתִישִׂים סְנֵהֲדָרִין אֲצֵל הַמִּקְדָּשׁ [הַמִּזְבֵּחַ]:
And this is why, as **Rashi** teaches in Parshas Mishpatim, the Sanhedrin needed to be seated next to the *mizbe'ach*—to ensure that the guiding light of the judges was Hashem and His will.

Let's go back to the original question--- when we asked, how can a person make proper decisions and judge his own actions objectively?

The Torah expects us to judge ourselves, by staying connected to the will of Hashem, as explained by our Torah, our *mesorah*, and by seeking the advice of role models, leaders, and guides.

דברים פרק יז

(ח) כִּי יִפְלֵא מִמֶּךָ דְבָר לְמִשְׁפָּט בֵּי-יָדָם לָדָם בֵּי-יָדָיו לְדִין וּבִין נִגְעַל לְנִגְעַל דְּבָרֵי רִיבָת בְּשַׁעֲרֵיךָ וְקִמַּתְּ וְעָלִיתְּ אֶל-הַמִּקְוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְתֵּר יִקְוֶה אֵלֶיךָ כּוּ:
(ט) וּבָאתְּ אֶל-הַפְּהִינִים הַלְוִיִּם וְאֶל-הַשֹּׁפֵט אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה בֵּימֵי הַהֵם וְדַרְשָׁתָּ וְהִגִּידוּ לְךָ אֵת דְּבַר הַמִּשְׁפָּט: (י) וְעָשִׂיתָ עִלְ-פִּי הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר יִגִּידוּ לְךָ מִן-הַמִּקְוֹם הַהוּוָּ אֲשֶׁר יִבְתֵּר יִקְוֶה וְשִׁמְרָתָּ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר יֹרְוּ:
(יא) עִלְ-פִּי הַתּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר יֹרְוּ וְעִלְ-הַמִּשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁר-יִיאָמְרוּ לְךָ תַּעֲשֶׂה לֹא תִסּוּר מִן-הַדְּבָר אֲשֶׁר-יִגִּידוּ לְךָ יָמִין וּשְׂמָאל

The Torah says that, when we have a question, we should seek the counsel of spiritual guides, and follow their advice, even if it is hard to understand. לא תסור ימין ושמאל, do not deviate to the right or to the left. We are told to follow Chazal's teachings—even if they tell you your right is left, or your left is right.

Rav Yaakov Galinsky asks how we can be expected to go against something we know to be true--- something as clear as our right and left hands! His answer is that the difference between right and left is clear and not up for debate---but right and left also depend on what direction you are facing....

Sometimes, because of our personal *negios*, our subjective way of seeing things, we are facing the wrong way---and our right and left are reversed. When that happens, we must rely on the moral clarity of our leaders, our friends, and our family to make sure we face the right direction in life.

That is the message for Elul. In our lives, whatever pursuits we are involved in, each of us is tasked with being a *shofet*, a judge over ourselves, and a *Melech* over our sphere of influence. But to live properly and correctly, and to make good choices, we must not only carry the Torah with us superficially, as a scroll in our personal *aron kodesh*, but we must also internalize the Torah's message and always carry it with us in our lives and all of our pursuits.

We look forward to the day when *Vv'haya Hashem l'melech al kol ha-aretz*, when Hashem's Kingship will be recognized and accepted by all of humanity. This is possible only if each person accepts the yoke of heaven. . .and brings God into their lives, accepting Hashem as our King—מלוך על כל העולם כולו בכבודך, as we say on Rosh Hashana.

May we all take advantage of the unique opportunity of the month of Elul as a the time for *teshuva* and change, a time for introspection and honest thinking, and become the Godly people we can be, and may we be *zoche* to see the day when all of creation will recognize Hashem together...amen.