

All In The Royal Family: What We Can Learn From a Modern Day King

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There are very few examples of real royalty in the world. Only a handful of countries in the world- Swaziland and several countries in the Middle East- are run by monarchs who serve as absolute heads of state and wield commensurate power. Most of them are figureheads, fodder for tabloid covers, relegated to making public appearances in stylish or regal clothing. One article recently caught my eye, however, concerning the royal family of Sweden. I consulted about this with our Chattan Torah, Danny Guttmann, our resident correspondent on all matters Swedish. Apparently, King Carl XVI Gustav and Queen Silvia have announced their intent to strip their grandchildren, the ones who are not in the direct line of succession, of their royal titles. Henceforth, the children of Princess Madeline and her husband Christopher O'Neill and Prince Carl Phillip and his wife Princess Sofia will still be members of the royal family, but will no longer be required to perform royal duties and will not be addressed as His or Her Royal Highness¹. It is the end of an era, so I will allow you all a moment to

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<https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/a29386922/king-removes-swedish-royal-children-titles/>

reflect upon this jarring and unsettling news. While it sounds like a harsh move, it might actually be the best gift of all; no longer do these children have to conform to artificial expectations and engage in pointless pomp and circumstance. Instead, they can have a semi-normal childhood.

We have spent the last two weeks speaking about and praying for God's sovereignty in the world. It is the focal point of Rosh Hashanah, and hundreds of us stood together at/in our unity neilah declaring "*Anu Amecha ve'Ata Malkeinu!*" We have established not only God's dominion, but also our role as His subjects, and even his princes. Can *we* be stripped of that royalty? What happens to us when we walk out of the palace?

Let me share with you a Medrash from Vayikra Rabbah, in Parshat Emor.

ויקרא רבה (וילנא) פרשת אמור פרשה ל סימן ב

ד"א שובע שמחות אל תהי קורא כן אלא שבע שמחות אלו שבע מצות שבחג ואלו הן ד' מינין שבלולב וסוכה חגיגה ושמחה אם שמחה למה חגיגה ואם חגיגה למה שמחה א"ר אבין משל לשנים שנכנסו אצל הדיין ולית אן ידעין מאן הוא נוצח אלא מאן דנסב באיין בידיה אן ידעין דהוא נצוהי א כך ישראל ואומות העולם באין ומקטרגים לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא בר"ה ולית אן ידעין מאן נצח אלא במה שישראל יוצאין מלפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ולולביהן ואתרוגיהן בידן אנו יודעין דישראל אינון נצוהי א לפיכך משה מזהיר לישראל ואומר להם ולקחתם לכם ביום הראשון.

Thought the holiday of Sukkos belongs to a different holiday cycle than the High Holidays, the Medrash offers a fascinating link between the two.

R' Avin offers a parable featuring two litigants who exit the palace of a king, after an extended court case. Those on the outside do not know the verdict- who emerged victorious and who was defeated. There is only one way to tell: whoever is holding the sceptre has clearly prevailed. The Medrash concludes- how do we know that the Jewish people were successful in their divine judgement? Because they emerge from Yom Kippur with their lulav and etrog in their hands.

What happens when we exit the palace? We carry with us a visible reminder that we have not been stripped of our royal status. This obligates us- as the song goes, *“you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave.”*

Our parsha deals with the moment in which someone is about to check out permanently. Moshe Rabbeinu prepares his final ascent, and God chooses an odd time to remind him of his most fatal mistake.

דברים פרק לב

(ג) וּמֵת בְּהַר אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עֹלֶה שָׁמָּה וְהֶאֱסָף אֶל-עַמִּיךָ כְּאֲשֶׁר- מֵת אַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ בְּהַר הָהָר וַיֶּאֱסָף אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ:

(נא) עַל אֲשֶׁר מְעַלְתֶּם בְּיַד בְּתוּךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִי־מְרִיבַת קֹדֶשׁ מִדְּבַר־צִן עַל אֲשֶׁר לֹא־קִדְשְׁתֶּם אוֹתִי בְּתוּךְ
בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

for you both broke faith with Me among the Israelite people, at the waters of Meribath-kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, by failing to uphold My sanctity among the Israelite people.

Moshe knows all too well why he is being denied entry into the Holy Land. He doesn't need a reminder at this final moment, and neither do we. What is it coming to add?

The Shemen HaTov suggests a homiletic approach to these words:

Whenever a person ascends to spiritual heights there is a new danger which is generated - the possibility that you might fall from your new perch. And if you ascend, and that ascent does not also carry with it a sanctification of God's name, that is not only a fall, but is an act of theft from God- *Me'ilah*, when we misappropriate something of higher sanctity.

"היינו, בשעה שאתה מתעלה יש לך לקיים יותר"

The sin of the *mei merivah*, the striking of the rock, was a failure to recognize the royalty of the Jewish people, as well as promoting God's exalted status as king. Moshe's final charge as God's greatest shepherd is to remind them that they can never relinquish their status as God's children.

Over the course of Yom Tov, a number of us hopefully made internal commitments for the new year. [After sharing the story about the chain of mitzvot and the tefilin, a member called me up and asked where they can purchase a pair of tefillin] Colleagues have told me that their sermons have inspired members to take on Tefillin, others have chosen to more regularly attend minyan and we all know what we committed to do. We cannot relinquish our newly discovered royal status. Good intentions that are unactualized are a misuse of the heightened spirituality and the power of the day. Let's come up with a plan to make them real- You are royalty...Don't leave your sceptre back in the palace!