

Rav Kook Torah

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Appointing a Leader for Israel

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Moshe was worried. Who would lead the Israelites after his death?

"Moshe spoke to God, saying, 'Let God... appoint a man over the community... Let God's community not be like sheep that have no shepherd.' God told Moshe, 'Take Yehoshua bin Nun, a man of spirit, and lay your hand on him.'"

"Moshe did as God ordered him. He took Yehoshua and had him stand before Elazar HaKohein and before the entire community. He then laid his hands on him and commissioned him." (Bamidbar 27:15-22)

Yehoshua's appointment to replace Moshe was clearly a critical point in the spiritual and political development of the Jewish people. Every aspect of this sensitive transition was significant.

We read that God commanded Moshe to "lay your hand" on Yehoshua. The Torah testifies that Moshe did as he was commanded. But in fact, Moshe placed both of his hands on his disciple. What is the significance of this change?

Material and Spiritual Leadership

The Jewish people require two types of leadership. Like any other nation, they need leadership in worldly matters -

economic, societal, political, and military. In addition, as bearers of God's Torah, they require spiritual guidance. Capable leadership will lead to success in both areas, revealing the greatness of Israel. All will recognize the wisdom and the beauty of their ways, as befits a special people who enlighten the world with spiritual knowledge and holiness.

In his plea before God, Moshe referred to the people both as "the community" and as "God's community". Moshe requested that they have a leader for all of their needs, both material - as any community - and spiritual - as 'God's community.'

One or Two Leaders?

The question is: can these two areas be combined under the guidance of one leader? Or is it necessary to divide them into two positions - one leader to govern the nation's material needs, and a second leader for spiritual direction?

Clearly, if there is not conflict between the two positions, it is preferable to limit the number of leaders. Shlomo HaMelech described the instability of a country ruled by multiple authorities: "Because of the sin of a land, its princes are many; but with a man of understanding and expertise, its stability will long continue" (Mishlei 28:2).

The answer - whether spiritual and worldly leadership should be combined into one position - depends upon the state of the nation and the world. When God's unity is manifest, and the entire world enjoys God's beneficence, then anything contributing to the world's advance is directly connected to God's will. With material progress, the spirit gains understanding and insight. As the Talmud teaches, "All of your builders will be taught of God" (B'rachot 64a, based on Yeshayahu 54:13). Those who literally build up the world, in all of its aspects,

will be granted enlightenment and wisdom. All occupied in advancing the world will be carrying out the will of their Creator. In their actions, they cleave to God's holiness, just like the holiness associated with performing mitzvot and studying Torah, which are directly and truly the will of God.

In such an elevated reality, there is no conflict between the spiritual and material spheres. Therefore, it is logical that the supervision of both realms be combined under a single leader. The prophetic visions foresaw that this will be the state of the world under the leadership of the messianic king.

This was also the level of Moshe, who was responsible for both spiritual and physical needs in the wilderness. He was an eved ne'eman, a faithful servant who looked after the people's material needs. And yet he was crowned with kelil tiferet, pure splendor, a metaphor for his exalted spiritual position. Moshe never felt a contradiction between these two functions. His bodily powers were not weakened by the divine light that appeared to him, due to his clear recognition of the unity in God's divine will.

But when the intellect is unable to attain such an elevated state - when we are able to draw spiritual sustenance only when we are not encumbered with material occupations - then it is necessary to limit time and effort spent in worldly matters in order to grow spiritually.

In summary: when the Jewish people merit the revelation of God's unity in all realms, then they should have one leader, providing enlightenment in spiritual matters, and counsel in material ones. The leader will not be distanced from holiness by his occupation in mundane matters. On the contrary, he

will gain grace and honor. When, however, the Jewish people fall in their spiritual level, a conflict develops between the physical and the spiritual realms. Then it is necessary to appoint two distinct leaders. In those times, the study of holy topics distances one from worldly matters. And occupation in worldly matters dampens the desire to warm the soul with the Torah's holy light.

Two Hands

Now we can understand why God commanded Moshe to place one hand on Yehoshua. The hand is a metaphor for control and governance. Two hands represent control over two realms, the spiritual and the physical. Were God to command Moshe to place both hands on Yehoshua, that would indicate that - for all times - both spiritual and practical leadership would be divinely issued. In dark times, when the material realm is distant from the spiritual, we can hardly ascribe to the material leader the same divine right to rule that Moses passed on to his disciple.

Why then did Moses place both hands on Yehoshua?

Moshe understood from God's command that only in the spiritual realm would there always be a divinely-appointed leader. Nonetheless, Moshe wanted to prepare the stage for a future world, an era in which both realms will united under one leader. Therefore, he made Yehoshua stand before both the Kohein Gadol (representing the spiritual) and the common people (the physical). Moshe then placed both hands on the new leader. 