



הרב הראשי עיה"ק אלעד **מרדכי מלכא שליט"א**  
נשיא וראש מוסדות "אור המלך"

מחבר ספרי שו"ת דרך המלך, אמרי מרדכי, ודרכי המלך על המועדים ועוד  
רשת מעונות, ורשת גנים, ת"ת פרי תואר, ובית יעקב פרי תואר, תיכון בית יעקב החדש, ת"ת מאור ישראל,  
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**Parashat Ki Tavo**  
**"The Kohen At That Time"**

**Questions:**

- 1) In our *parasha* (26:3, 9) the *pasuk* instructs the Jews to go to the *kohanim*, *leviim*, and judges "of that time." Our Sages ask what these words are meant to teach us – could we possibly go to the *kohanim*, etc. of the previous generations?
- 2) Furthermore, the Ramban asks why when discussing the mitzvah of bringing the *bikkurim*, the Torah states that we should bring them to the kohen of that time. Rashi explains that this teaches that we should go to the *kohanim* of that time and not belittle them. Now, asks the Ramban, we can understand why the Torah would say this by a judge, for example. It is meant to teach us that even though he may not be as great a scholar as judges in former generations we should seek out his ruling. But to bring *bikkurim* - who else could we go to if not the kohen?

**Winds Are Blowing**

Elections will soon be upon us. As we know, the way that the *Chareidi*, Torah observant population votes is in a different fashion from the general public. The general public votes for whomever they please, while the *Charedi* vote is decided by the Torah leaders of the generation. Many times I have heard people murmuring, "Can it be that the Torah leaders are taking away the public's right to vote? All the more so, when they decide for an entire city – do they not have the right to speak for themselves and decide on their own which candidate they wish to vote for?" There is even a worse claim though: people believe that the Torah leaders do not decide for themselves; rather, it is truly the Torah leader's household and attendants who are constantly in his presence who decide. Furthermore, the last number of years has seen rise to new Torah leaders, and people say that they cannot compare to those of the previous generations. Therefore, people claim that their opinion need not influence their vote. However, our Torah teaches us, "Yiftach was in his generation what Shmuel was in his." In other words, even though the present Torah *gadol* may not be as great as his predecessor, nevertheless, he is still regarded as the Torah leader of his generation and is the appropriate one for his generation. Every generation, Hashem appoints Torah leaders according to the spiritual level of the generation and one that is suitable for the needs of that specific generation. We must therefore abide by their decisions, for their words are Torah and are absolutely binding. Just like one who needs a particular *yeshua* goes to a *gadol beYisrael* because he knows that he can rely upon them and their blessings, so too, should they be relied upon regarding every matter.

**Everything is from Heaven**

The *pasuk* states (*Divrei Hayamim* 1 29:11), "Yours Hashem is the Majesty, and the sovereignty over every leader." Our Sages (*Baba Batra* 91b) quote Rav Chanan bar Rabba as saying that this applies even



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to the one in charge of deciding who will be the first to draw water from the cistern to irrigate his field. In other words, the Gemara is learning from the aforementioned *pasuk* that since majesty belongs to Hashem alone, it is He who decides who will receive a position of authority, no matter how small. Even the man who decides who will draw water first – a position not many would deem overly prestigious – since it entails responsibility to the public, it is decided upon by Hashem and announced in Heaven. This is an important fundamental that man must remember his entire life: man errs in thinking that he is the one who determines his position and job. However, this line of thinking is heresy and rebellion against Hashem. Therefore, everything that we see today, how people make every effort and fight over power, is all totally futile. This is because it is Hashem who is the one who determines who will be appointed to any position, and He is the one who causes everything to happen in this world, thereby furthering His Will. Despite the fact that individuals live in a fantasy world, thinking that they are the cause of their success, they are no more than chess pieces, where the player moves the king and his soldiers around according to his will. No one would ever think that it was the king or soldier on the chess board who was victorious! Or it is like a puppet show, where the man standing behind the stage places his hand inside the puppet and the puppets start to frolic on the stage. Is it the puppet that is playing on the stage? No, it is the man who is controlling the puppet. So too, is Hashem controlling anyone's ascent to power.

### Even The Least Distinguished Leader is Considered Like the Most Distinguished

There are many sources from our Sages that teach us that even if a Jewish leader is not as great as the Torah leaders of previous generation, or even the greatest scholar of **his** generation, he is nevertheless considered to be the absolute leader, and his decision is binding. See the mishnah in Rosh Hashanah 24b which describes the episode when Rabban Gamliel forced Rabbi Yehoshua to walk to him with his wallet and walking stick on the day that Rabbi Yehoshua deemed to be Yom Kippur. Rabban Gamliel disagreed and to prove his authority for the sake of the Jewish Nation, he decreed that Rabbi Yehoshua appear before him. Rebbe Yehoshua complied, even though he was greater than Rabban Gamliel in Torah knowledge. When Rabbi Yehoshua appeared before Rabban Gamliel, Rabban Gamliel kissed him on his head and said, "Come in peace, my teacher and my student! My teacher – because you are greater than me in Torah wisdom; my student – because you heeded my words." Furthermore, we find that the Sages teach (ibid. 25a) that Yerubal (Gidon) in his generation was like Moshe Rabbeinu in his. Badan (Shimshon) in his generation was like Aharon in his. Finally, Yiftach in his generation was like Shmuel Hanavi in his. The Gemara says that this teaches us that even the least distinguished of men – if he is appointed over the public – he is considered like the most distinguished leader of his generation. The Sages then continue by quoting the *pasuk* we opened with, "and he will go to the *kohanim, leviim*, and judge **of that time**." The Gemara asks the obvious question: why does the *pasuk* tell us to go to the leaders of **that time**? To whom else should we go to, the leaders of the previous generations? This means, explain the Sages that one should always ask for the ruling of the Jewish leaders of *his* time, and he should not say that the leaders of former times were better than the present day leaders. The



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Gemara in *Archin* 17 records a dispute between the Sages if the generation is made to fit the leader or if a leader is appointed from Heaven if he is appropriate for the generation. However, according to all opinions, the leaders of the each generation are suitable for their generation. Every generation has a special role to play in creation and it has its own specific spiritual role to carry out as well. Since every generation has a spiritual duty, Heaven appoints a leader that can help them fulfill that role.

### A Tzaddik Sees Only in His Lifetime

Once, when Rebbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk was in the house of his rebbe, Rebbi Simcha Bunim of P'shischa, a teacher of young children arrived in P'shischa wishing to ask the advice of his rebbe. He had a son who had great acumen for Torah learning, and there was a wealthy man who wanted him as a son-in-law. The potential father-in-law wished to give his daughter a large dowry for the sake of marrying this young man. Furthermore, he was prepared to give the young man's father an enormous sum of money – 500 gold coins. He would never have to teach again! There, was, however, a downside. The potential father-in-law was not a G-d fearing man. The Kotzker, who had been by his rebbe's side the entire time, heard him agree to the match, but remained silent. When the teacher had left the room, the Kotzker followed him out and told him, "Nevertheless, I do not think that you should make this match for your daughter." The teacher was now very confused – should he listen to the advice of the rebbe or his great student? However, his desire for money overcame him, and he agreed to the match. The young *chatan* joined the home of the wealthy man and lacked nothing. The teacher as well, received the sum of money he was promised; he invested in business and was successful. Years later, Rebbi Simcha Bunim passed away, and over time, the once promising young man, lured buy material pleasure, left Torah learning and even began to read secular literature. He eventually left the Torah path entirely, while his father's business also began to dwindle and dwindle until it totally collapsed. He rose and traveled to Kotzk and poured out his heart, telling the Rebbe that he was totally impoverished and that his son had left the Torah path. What's more, even though his son was wealthy, he would not agree to help his father. The Kotzker replied that he had told him at the time not to go ahead with the match. But the man said that Rebbi Bunim had agreed to the match. So the Kotzker explained that a tzaddik can only see the future for as long as he will live. Therefore, as long as Rebbi Simcha Bunim was alive, the man was successful. But the Kotzker had been able to see the results of what would take place in his lifetime; therefore, he knew that the match would have dire consequences.

### Answering the Questions

**Now we can answer the questions we opened with: The Torah wishes to teach us that we must follow the advice of the Torah great of our generation. This is because he was chosen by the King of All Kings and is therefore the most worthy leader. It also answers the question of the Ramban. The Seforno writes on the *pasuk*, which exhorts us to go to the kohen of our time that this teaches us that despite**



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the fact that even though he is not great in Torah learning, nevertheless, he should be spoken to respectfully. This is because he has been appointed by Hashem and he is Hashem's messenger.

### Words of Mussar

We have learned from our holy Torah that the Torah greats of our generation have been appointed by Hashem, and their actions are determined by Hashem. They are the ones who issue the final decision, even though the members of their household are whispering in their ears. Is Hashem not aware of this fact? There were always attendants and the like surrounding the *gedolei Yisrael*, but even so, Hashem did not allow them to falter in their rulings. It is clear as day that Hashem is with them and that He guides them according to the *daat Torah* to lead the Jewish Nation. Even though there are many who saw Torah greats of previous generations in all of their grandeur and splendor, nevertheless we must not *chas ve'shalom*, denigrate the Torah leaders of our generation, since Hashem is helping them. We must distance ourselves from those who do not observe the Torah and mitzvot, and on the contrary, fulfill the mitzvah of "Do everything that you have been instructed to do." This is a mitzvah even in present times and it includes all aspects of life. One who seeks the advice of the Torah sages will never stumble; on the contrary, all his endeavors will succeed. This is because the generation's bounty is sent through the Torah greats of that specific generation. Therefore, man must be strong and stand up against the winds that are blowing nowadays, because they carry with them an aspect of heresy. Especially when the elections roll around, for then the *yetzer hara* works overtime. Sadly, it is specifically in these days of mercy and *selichot* that all the strife regarding the elections begins. Therefore one who cares about the well-being of his soul will stay away from these things. Rather, he should live with faith that there is a controller of the universe and everything happens in accordance with His will. Then we will all merit a good and blessed year and a *ketiva v'chatima tovah, amen ve'amen*.

Shabbat Shalom,  
Rav Mordechai Malka