

Lessons from Meghan

What lesson can we learn from the world's obsession with the British royal family?

The Hot Topic

This week, the world united around one singular issue. It wasn't the vaccines or the stimulus bill, nor was it the coronavirus pandemic. This was a much more important issue. I'm talking about Harry and Meghan's interview with Oprah. Close to fifty million people worldwide tuned in to watch it, and the media has been covering it incessantly.

The Rebbe always repeated the teaching of the Baal Shem Tov that everything a person sees or hears should teach him a lesson in his service of G-d.

There is a famous principle in Jewish law: "All Jews are children of kings." Every Jew is G-d's child; as the Torah clearly states, "You are children to the L-rd your G-d," (Devarim 14:1). Therefore, we all fall into the category of royalty.

This has various Halachic implications. The Mishna relates (Bava Metziah 83a) that Rabbi Yochanan ben Masya once sent a son to hire laborers. As part of their contract, his son promised to provide the workers with their meals. His father was perturbed; "My son," he said, "even if you feed them a sumptuous feast fit for King Solomon, you will not fulfill your obligation, because they are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Quick, before they begin working, go and clarify that they will receive

only bread and legumes.”

Another example is the Shema prayer. We all know the words of the 1st section, “*beshachbeca uvkumecha*,” commanding us to read it when we lie down and when we rise.

The sages asked: what is the definition of “when you rise”? When does morning begin and end? This question is answered in one of the first passages of the Talmud: “Shema may be recited up to three hours into the day, because that is when princes usually rise.”

Three hours, in talmudic context, means the first quarter of daylight. If sunrise is at six in the morning and sunset is at six at night, you can read Shema until nine in the morning. The Jewish calendar has a section called “zmanim, times,” which lists the specific times for various Jewish observances like candle lighting on Friday night and when Shabbat ends. It includes the times for the recital of Shema, and that is always the first quarter of the day, when princes wake up—because every Jew is a prince.

This has implications for another law, as well: if someone falls into debt, the court could confiscate items in his possession. However, they are not permitted to confiscate his clothing. This is true even if he owns very expensive garments. The debtor is not permitted to exchange it with a simpler set of clothing, because, as Rabbi Akiva said, “All Jews are worthy of wearing that garment.” Every Jew is a prince, so even the most expensive clothes are considered a basic necessity which cannot be confiscated. (Bava Metziah 113b).

There is one Jewish holiday where we adopt the image of kings

and princes. At the Pesach Seder, every father is a king and every mother is a queen. It is customary to adorn the table with the most expensive cutlery and dishes to commemorate the great wealth with which the Jews left Egypt. When we eat the Matzah and drink the four cups of wine, we recline. The entire evening is shaped as an expression of our freedom, and moreover, as an expression of our royalty.

Be Royal

What is the meaning of being a prince?

In this week's Torah portion, we read about the building of the Tabernacle. All Jews—men, women, and children—contributed to the effort. The Torah tells us about one unique contribution: among other items, the women donated their mirrors. Rashi tells us that Moses rejected them; he saw mirrors as a decadent expression of a base human impulse, and felt that they had no place in G-d's sanctuary. Indeed, it is forbidden to pray in front of a mirror.

However, G-d told Moses to accept them; "Those are most precious to me," He said.

Rashi explains that those mirrors were instrumental in the survival of the Jewish nation in Egypt. (Vayakhel 37:8). The men and the woman in Egypt were purposely separated, making it difficult for children to be born. The men were taken to slave labor in the fields, while the women remained in the city. In addition, many men had no desire to bring children into the world. Why bring children into a world where they will be enslaved and drowned?

The women, on the other hand, did not give up hope. They always held on to the belief that a day would come when they would leave Egypt. They would adorn themselves, go out to their husbands in the fields, feed them, and with the help of the mirrors, they would convince them to bring children.

How did the women have such resolve? The Rebbe once explained in a talk, “Every Jew, deep inside, has an innate sense of royalty. A king rules over his surroundings; he is totally free and nobody can exert control over him. So too, no Jew is subject to the rules of nature.” (Toras Menachem vol. 27 pg. 490).

To be royal means to be different. A prince is expected to behave in a more refined manner. He speaks differently, he dresses different, and his etiquette is different. The fact that he is set apart from the rest of the world doesn't deter him; to the contrary, it is a source of pride. Even today, the British royalty follow strict codes of conduct. There are rules for sitting, standing, speaking, smiling, and definitely eating.

As Jewish princes, we also have a rule book, the code of Jewish law, which dictates our behavior from the moment we wake up until the moment we go to sleep. But it's not just about containing our behavior. It's about a way of life. We have the ability to not be influenced by the world around us. A Jew lives with an inner conviction that his path is correct, regardless of the opinion of others. That is genuine royal behavior.

The Rebbe once repeated a story of the Alter Rebbe's Chassid, who, while in Petersburg, was tempted to do a certain thing. But then, he reminded himself that he was a follower of the Alter

Rebbe and it was therefore “below his dignity.” The very fact that he was the Alter Rebbe’s Chassid held him strong.

Every Jew should feel like a prince—and should emulate the King Himself.