

Royalty

Category: Devarim, Nitzavim

Lessons we can learn from the Royal funeral.

The Great Funeral

This week, the world watched the Queen's funeral. What's interesting about the event is that it was planned meticulously over 60 years ago, in the 1960s. The plan was revisited and updated three times a year since then, and the queen herself was heavily involved in the planning.

Over the years, they even made several rehearsals which were attended by the queen. Indeed, the funeral was perfectly choreographed. 6,000 soldiers participated and they all made every move exactly as planned. Even the horses, they say, were trained to respond positively to the sound of crying among the crowds.

The Rebbe constantly cited the Baal Shem Tov who taught that every single encounter in life should serve to teach us a lesson. How much more so, an event that reached the attention of more than half of humankind — over 4 billion people.

The first image that struck me at the funeral was the image of the soldiers standing at attention, not moving a limb, utterly focused on their task.

This week's Torah portion is called Nitzavim, which means "standing."

The beginning of the Torah portion describes how Moses tells the Jewish people that "You are standing here today..." and that God was bringing them into a covenant — a covenant that they would fulfill God's commandments, and he would, in turn, keep them as his nation.

The term Nitzavim means "standing," but the ordinary word for standing in Hebrew is *omdim*. The word Nitzavim means standing with strength and firmness.

The Midrash teaches that "the Torah was given three times, and each time, the term Nitzavim was invoked — at Sinai, at the designation of the Tent of Meeting,

and here, in the plains of Moab” (Midrash Hagadol).

What were these three occasions?

The first was the giving of the Torah at Sinai. The verse describes how the Jewish people “stood” at the foot of the mountain when Moses received the ten commandments from G-d (Yisro 17:19).

The second was not much later. After Moses came down from the mountain with the second set of tablets, following the entire saga of the golden calf, he set up a tent outside the Israelite encampment which served as the temporary Tabernacle until the actual Tabernacle was erected 6 months later. Every time Moses left the encampment to enter the tent, the Torah says, all the Jews would “stand” at the entrances of their tents at attention until Moses would enter the tent (Tisa 33:8).

The third time is in this week’s Torah portion, when Moses makes the covenant with the Jewish people on the day of his passing.

The use of this term in all three instances tells us a very important message — that our commitment to Torah survives only when we stand firm. In other words, there will always be obstacles to observance and good reasons to avoid doing a mitzvah at any given point. Therefore, its observance only survives when we stand firm in our commitment — when we do what needs to be done like soldiers, whether or not it is convenient.

Royal Behavior

There’s also another lesson:

Throughout the week, the behavior of the royal family was carefully followed and analyzed down to the smallest gestures. Every move was considered significant. How did they stand and how did they sit, what did they wear, and who spoke to whom — nothing was overlooked. The royal family follows a very exacting protocol which dictates exactly what to do and how they do it.

The Talmud says that all Jewish people are the sons of kings. We are all royalty — and it even has implications in Jewish law.

For example, the entire Seder night is predicated on the concept that we are

royalty. The pesach-sacrifice was eaten roasted, because that was royal behavior. We recline at the Seder — even paupers are obligated to recline — because even the pauper was redeemed from Egypt; even he is a prince, and a prince must eat while reclining.

The implications in Jewish law go much further than the night of the Seder.

The first topic in the Talmud is the laws regarding the recitation of the shema every morning and every night. As we state in shema, we are obligated to say it “When you lie down and when you wake up.”

The sages of the Talmud explained that the shema is to be recited not when you go to sleep and when you wake up, but at the time that people, in general, go to sleep and at the time that people, in general, wake up.

When is that?

The second Mishnah states that according to Rabbi Eliezer, shema could be recited from dawn until sunrise; that is when most people (in those days) woke up, and that was therefore the appropriate time for shema.

However, his colleague Rabbi Yehoshua argued that the Shema can be recited until 3 hours into the day, “because princes wake up 3 hours into the day.” Because, for royalty, 3 hours into the day is still considered morning, every Jew is able to recite the shema throughout that entire period.

There are many similar examples throughout Jewish law.

We are about to celebrate Rosh Hashanah. The most famous prayer of Rosh Hashanah is, no doubt, “Avinu Malkeinu.” In this prayer, we declare that our father is the king — which means that we are all royalty.

How is this relevant?

Very often, people question why Jewish law is so obsessed with dictating every minor detail of our lives, even how we put on our shoes and tie our shoelaces. It very often seems overblown; does it really matter if I wash my left hand before my right or the opposite? Does God really care if I move my right foot before my left foot?

This week, we received the answer to this question, when we watched the Royal family behave according to an exact protocol which dictated their every movement.

When we will appreciate being G-d's royalty, we will embrace the fact that every moment of our lives, every smallest behavior, is imbued with that reality. Royalty behaves like royalty.

It's Our Father

And the most important lesson: when Rosh Hashanah comes, and we all stand in judgment for the coming year, we remember that the king is our father — and that changes everything.

The story goes that a child stood on a seashore waving a lantern towards a large ship in the sea.

“Who are you signaling to?” He was asked.

“To the captain,” he responded.

“Why do you think the captain of a big ship will pay attention to a little kid on the coast?”

“Because the captain is my father.”