

Tzav

“Moshe said to the community, ‘This is what Hashem has commanded to be done.’ Then Moshe brought Aharon and his sons forward and washed them with water. He put the tunic on him, girded him with the sash, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him, girding him with the decorated band with which he tied it to him...He poured some of the anointing oil upon Aharon’s head and anointed him, to consecrate him. Moshe then brought Aharon’s sons forward, clothed them in tunics, girded them with sashes, and wound turbans upon them, as Hashem had commanded Moshe. (Leviticus 8:5-13)

The Ohr haChayim notes that according to rabbinic tradition, Moshe Rabbeinu had the status of a king of Israel. Despite the fact that he was simultaneously its primary prophet, he was also its de facto political leader. This leads to a question: is it appropriate that a king be required to involve himself in conducting a ceremony of the sort described above? It seems strenuous and undignified. In fact, normally we would expect a priest or prophet to anoint a king, and not vice versa. To this day, a member of the clergy swears in the President of the United States; in the ancient world, religious leaders anointed kings. What gave Moshe the right to reject this norm? After all, the sages tell us: “A king who relinquishes his honor - his honor is not relinquished.” (Kesubos 17a)

The Ohr haChayim explains that it is for this reason that Moshe was careful to inform the people: “This is what Hashem has commanded to be done.” He made it clear to them that generally such conduct was not acceptable for a leader of Israel. However, here and now--to consecrate the kohanim (priests) and the Mishkan--God had commanded that he demonstrate to Israel that the state is subservient to the religion, and not the other way around. Only an explicit command from God could justify such actions, and that is why Moshe acted as he did.

There is one thing higher than Royalty: and that is religion, which causes us to leave the world, and seek God.

Queen Elizabeth I of England

Shabbat Shalom
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