

Coronation Under Higher Law: Free Will, Limited Kingship, and Non-Domination at the Threshold of 5787

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On the eve of Rosh Hashanah the Torah's architecture of power and accountability stands in sharp relief. The month of Elul has been the season in which the King is in the field—accessible, approachable, present among the people without the full ceremonial distance of the palace. The Chassidic tradition, drawing on the Alter Rebbe and subsequent Rebbeim, presents this accessibility as an invitation to free-will return. Rosh Hashanah itself is the day of coronation: the people renew the acceptance of divine kingship, and the King judges the material and spiritual welfare of the coming year. The body of the Jew is declared precious; the judgment is not abstract but concrete.

Rambam places free will at the structural center of Hilchot Teshuvah. Every human being is granted license (*reshut*) to incline toward the good or the evil; no external decree forces the path. Just as sin is performed knowingly and willfully, so repentance is performed knowingly and willfully. Divine foreknowledge does not cancel human responsibility. The classical sources therefore reject both fatalism and any political theology that would treat human agents as mere instruments of larger forces. Teshuvah is possible precisely because the will remains free; accountability is possible for the same reason.

Within Orthodox thought the emphasis varies. Some streams stress the communal and liturgical framework that supports individual return; others, particularly Chabad, underline the radical accessibility of the King in Elul and the preciousness of embodied Jewish life. Yet the shared foundation remains: power—even divine power as experienced in history—is ordered by higher law, and human agents retain the capacity to respond.

Republican political theory supplies complementary analytic tools. Philip Pettit's conception of freedom as non-domination insists that a person or people is free only when no agent possesses the uncontrolled capacity to interfere arbitrarily in their choices. Classical republicanism and Hebraic sources (Yoram Hazony's biblical particularism, Daniel Elazar's covenantal federalism) converge on the same insight: legitimate authority is limited, accountable, and covenantal rather than absolute. The Torah's law of the king (Deuteronomy 17) forbids the multiplication of horses, wives, and silver precisely so that the heart of the ruler does not turn away; the king must write a personal copy of the Torah and read it all his days. Power is thereby subordinated to the higher text.

The constructive criticism runs in both directions. Pure non-domination theory can underplay the necessity of decisive leadership in the face of existential threats and the particular covenantal obligations that bind a people to its land and law. Certain Orthodox political theologies can slide toward an uncritical sacralization of existing power or an underestimation of institutional checks. The Torah framework corrects both: kingship is real and necessary, yet strictly limited; free will is real and inviolable, yet exercised within a covenantal order that includes judgment and return.

The synthesis is therefore neither quietist nor revolutionary. It is recalibrational. Free will remains the foundation of moral and political responsibility. Limited kingship remains the constitutional form that prevents domination. Teshuvah remains the perpetual possibility of return. On the threshold of 5787 the King is still in the field; the invitation to accept the yoke of heaven and to order earthly power accordingly stands open.

Extended Bibliography (selected hyperlinks) - Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 5–7: https://www.sefaria.org/Mishneh_Torah%2C_Repentance - Hayom Yom, Elul 29: https://www.chabad.org/therebbe/article_cdo/aid/5928/jewish/Hayom-Yom-Elul-29-Erev-Rosh-Hashana.htm - Tanya, relevant discussions of free will and the Jewish body (Igeret HaKodesh and core chapters) - Deuteronomy 17 (law of the king) and Deuteronomy 30 (choice of life) - Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* - Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* and related Hebraic essays - Daniel J. Elazar, covenantal federalism writings

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