



Taste of Chavruta — 5772 — Authority

KEY QUESTIONS:

- *What sorts of authority are there in ancient and modern Judaism? What about in modern society?*
 - *What is the source of these authorities?*
- *How do we deal with conflicts between Jewish and secular authorities?*
- *How do we reconcile subservience to earthly authorities with acknowledging that God's authority is ultimate?*



5. Physical authority

Proverbs 16:31-32

³¹Grey hair is a crown of glory;
It is attained by the way of righteousness
³²Better to be forbearing than mighty,
To have self-control than to conquer a city.

משלי ט"ז:ל"א-ל"ב
עֲטָרַת תְּפִאֲרֹת שִׁיבָה³¹
בְּדֶרֶךְ צְדָקָה תִּמְצָא:
טוֹב אֲרֶךְ אַפַּיִם מִגִּבּוֹר³²
וּמִשָּׁל בְּרוּחַזוֹ מִלְכַּד עִיר:

1 Samuel 9:1-2

¹There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of substance. ²He had a son whose name was Saul, an excellent young man; no one among the Israelites was handsomer than he; he was a head taller than any of the people.

שמואל א' ט' א'-ב'
וַיְהִי־אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי־מִינַם וְשֵׁמוֹ קִישׁ בֶּן־אַבְיָאֵל בֶּן־זֶרֶר
בֶּן־בְּכוֹרֹת בֶּן־אַפְיָה בֶּן־אִישׁ יְמִינֵי גִבּוֹר חָיִל:
וְלוֹ־הָיָה בֶן וְשֵׁמוֹ שָׁאוּל בְּחוּר וְטוֹב וְאִין אִישׁ מִבְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל טוֹב מִמֶּנּוּ מִשְׁכֶּמוֹ וּמַעְלָה גְבֵה מִכָּל־הָעָם:

Translations: JPS, 1999

Every age produces its own sort of fables, and our age seems to have produced The White Messiah fable.

This is the oft-repeated story about a manly young adventurer who goes into the wilderness in search of thrills and profit. But, once there, he meets the native people and finds that they are noble and spiritual and pure. And so he emerges as their Messiah, leading them on a righteous crusade against his own rotten civilization...

It's a pretty serviceable formula. Once a director selects the White Messiah fable, he or she doesn't have to waste time explaining the plot because everybody knows roughly what's going to happen. The formula also gives movies a little socially conscious allure. Audiences like it because it is so environmentally sensitive. Academy Award voters like it because it is so multiculturally aware. Critics like it because the formula inevitably involves the loincloth-clad good guys sticking it to the military-industrial complex...

It rests on the stereotype that white people are rationalist and technocratic while colonial victims are spiritual and athletic. It rests on the assumption that nonwhites need the White Messiah to lead their crusades. It rests on the assumption that illiteracy is the path to grace. It also creates a sort of two-edged cultural imperialism. Natives can either have their history shaped by cruel imperialists or benevolent ones, but either way, they are going to be supporting actors in our journey to self-admiration.

From David Brooks, 'The Messiah Complex', on *The New York Times* website (Jan 7, 2010)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/08/opinion/08brooks.html>

5. Physical authority

Some etymologies:

Senator, senior	from Latin <i>senex</i> , meaning 'old man'
Presbyter, priest	from Greek <i>presbys</i> , meaning 'old man'
Alderman, elder	from Anglo-Saxon <i>ald</i> meaning 'old'
Zakenim, זקנים	Hebrew for 'elders', from Hebrew root ז.ק.נ. also with sense of 'beard'
King, Queen	from Anglo-Saxon <i>cynn</i> , <i>cynne</i> meaning 'kin', related to Greek <i>genos</i> , <i>gyne</i> meaning 'family'

From *Chambers Dictionary*

Points to consider

What connects physical appearance to authority?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a gerontocracy (rulership by the most elderly)? How does that compare to kingship, which is often begun quite young?

Saul later became the first king of Israel and Judah. Why might the attributes describing Saul be appropriate or desirable for a king?