



On the Air with Rav Aviner ~ #70

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Voting in the Israeli elections

Q: What should we say to the Ultra-Orthodox who say that since the Satmar Rebbe wrote in the book "Va-Yoel Moshe" that it is forbidden to vote in elections in the State of Israel – "it is preferable to sit and not act"?

A: The Chazon Ish already spoke about this issue and said that it is a mitzvah to vote. His students asked him: a mitzvah like matzah? He said: 'No, a mitzvah like maror.' It is possible to say that it is a mitzvah like matzah. It is correct that if we do not vote it is a case of "sit and do not act" since other people do go and vote. We are always crying and staging all types of protests in order to influence the Government. This is an opportunity to influence the Government without the need to protest. The Chatam Sofer says in his responsa that there were local elections and someone later complained. The Chatam Sofer asked him: then why didn't you vote? It is true that the Government of Israel is not the ideal Government we want but we do not say: it is all or nothing. There are many discussions in the Gemara that even if it is impossible to fix everything, we should fix what we can. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (16a) says that Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi paid money in order to delay the sacrifice of idol worship to another day. The Gemara explains that he wanted to uproot the sacrifice altogether but he was doing it gradually, step-by-step. The Gemara in

Sotah (48a) says that if men sing and women answer, it is lewd. If women lead and men answer then lust flares like burning chips of flax, since men have to listen carefully to the women's voice. The Gemara asks: What difference does it make – both are forbidden?! Answer: If one cannot stop both, he should prevent the latter, since it is more severe (Rashi). The Rashba (vol. 5 #238) wrote that if you cannot fix everything, fix what you can. It is true that we will not elect King David by going to vote, but we should influence the Government to follow Torah law as much as possible. We have an obligation to do this. I have learned the book "Va-Yoel Moshe" and it is difficult to understand his proofs in relation to the State of Israel. I have a relative who is a Satmar Chasid. I once visited him when I was on "shelichut" in America and he told me: The Satmar Rebbe once showed his book to a Dayan (Judge) on the Beit Din of Satmar. After some time, he asked: "Did his honor look in my book?" He did not and he said: "It is not enough to just look in his honor's book, it requires study." The Satmar Rebbe waited some time. He then asks: "Did his honor study my book?" The Dayan saw that he could not avoid the question so he said: "If this book is based on sources from the Gemara, I do not understand what is written there. If it is based on the 'Ruach Ha-Kodesh – Divine Spirit' of his honor the Rebbe – then what can I say?" This is how a Dayan on the Beit Din of Satmar responded. He also said that there were things which are not understandable. The Satmar Rebbe wrote in the book that it is forbidden to speak Hebrew; one must speak Yiddish and before that Aramaic was spoken. King David and King Shlomo spoke Aramaic?! The whole Nation spoke Aramaic then? It is possible to prove otherwise. It is difficult to understand many things in this book. Therefore, even if we are not completely happy with many things that are happening in the State of Israel – and there are many things about which we are not thrilled – we influence what we can. This is called by the halachic authorities: "To save what can be saved."

Contradictory Midrashim

Q: How do we understand midrashim that contradict one another?

A: There are three possibilities: 1. There are contradictory midrashim because certain facts were forgotten because they occurred a long time ago. For example, there is a dispute regarding the height of the altar in the Temple as to whether it is three amah or ten amah (see Zevachim 58b-59a). The Rambam in the Laws of Shofar (3.2) asked: how could the Jews have forgotten the correct sounds to blow on the Shofar – they blew the shofar every year? It is not a secret – every Jew heard it?! The Rambam answered that it was because of the Exiles and suffering. We experienced so many hardships that we forgot. Someone once asked me: how is it possible to forget because of Exiles and suffering? I said: You are

fortunate that you were not in the Holocaust; you therefore do not know how a person can forget on account on what is happening to him. 2. There are midrashim which are not to be understood according to their literal meaning as is explained in Rambam's introduction to his commentary on the Mishnah. There are midrashim which appear contradictory, but they are to be understood as parables. The Maharal spends much effort explaining them in his works, especially in "Be'er Ha-Golah." 3. It is also possible that there is a dispute if there is an ethical or spiritual value to these facts for the Nation of Israel and for sanctifying Hashem's Name. One midrash says that the fact is unimportant and another midrash says that it is important.

Davening in sandals

Q: Is it permissible to daven in sandals without socks?

A: One is required to daven dressed in a way in which he would stand before a king. How one stands before a king is dependent on the place and time in which one lives. The Beit Yosef says that one is obligated to daven barefoot (Orach Chaim 91:5). Not only is it permissible but one is obligated to daven barefoot. Obviously, today if someone shows up barefoot to daven, he would be thrown out of the shul. Therefore, it is dependent on reality. Wearing sandals nowadays is respectable (this applies in Israel, other locations may differ). Wearing flipflops, however, is not considered respectable since a person wears them when getting out of the shower or at the pool or on the beach.

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