



Parashat Vaera 5771 - #169

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On the Parashah...

How Minute are you Acts, Hashem!

[From Rav Aviner's Commentary on the Pesach Haggadah]

"The sorcerers said to Pharaoh: It is the finger of G-d" (Shemot 8:15). We find the word "finger" three times in the Tanach: 1. In relation to the stars representing enormity, "When I see your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You made" (Tehillim 8:4). 2. In relation to the tablets of the Ten Commandments which represent spiritual heights, "Inscribed by the finger of G-d" (Shemot 31:18). 3. In relation to the lice which represent minutia. This is to teach you that everything is one and equal within Hashem's ability (Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon, Torah Sheleimah, Shemot 8:50 with note). Our revered teacher Rav Kook, wrote: "'Along with 'How great are Your acts, Hashem' (Tehillim 104:24 and prayer "Yotzer Or" in the morning prayer), it is proper to say with great astonishment 'How very tiny are Your acts, Hashem.' This means that just as we are full of wonder at the greatness of the luminaries, wide expanses of the heavens, and the mighty powers of nature, we are also amazed by our observation of the depth of creation in its minutia, in the smallest details of the limbs of animals, and the fineness of materials and the precision of the powers in the farthest places." Similarly, the most abstract, supreme thoughts are together with the details of the halachot and precision of hair-splitting argumentation (Orot Ha-Torah 3, 8).

Rav Aviner on...

Without Loyalty There is No Citizenship

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Shemot 5771 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: A law has been proposed in the Knesset that any non-Jew who wishes to receive citizenship in our country must swear a loyalty oath: "I declare that I will be a faithful citizen to the Jewish state, and I undertake to respect the country's laws." Is this law appropriate?

Answer: Obviously, I don't deal with laws and jurisprudence, but with the Torah. And so, here is how things look according to the Torah:

1. It is halachically possible for a non-Jew to live in the Land of Israel. The Torah allows for a ger toshav, or resident alien. The Poskim [halachic decisors] write that even in our times there is room for a status similar to that of the resident alien (see Rambam, Ra'avad, Kesef

Mishneh). In other words, it is possible for a non-Jew to live in the Land. Yet there are two preconditions to this, one moral and the other political.

2. The first condition is moral: undertaking the seven laws commanded to Noach, the foundations of human morality, by virtue of which man is called man. True, some take the lenient view that it suffices for a non-Jew to undertake not to worship idols, and such was the ruling of Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohain Kook (Mishpat Kohain), and our Rabbi Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook (Sichot HaRav Tzvi Yehuda – Eretz Yisrael). After all, this is the Land given to Avraham, who fought against idolatry. Hence it cannot be that somebody who goes against this should live here. Therefore, this is not the place of the various types of Christians, and of various pagan faiths from the Far East. By contrast, Islam is not idolatry.

3. The political precondition is that the candidate must accept the state's authority (Rambam, Hilchot Melachim). This is something obvious and logical that exists throughout all the nations of the world. Certainly, somebody busy destroying our country and killing us cannot live here. That goes without saying.

4. Let's just point out that there is no racism in either of these conditions. Racism is a biological doctrine that distinguishes between races, but within the Jewish people there are Jews from almost all of the races, whether they were born Jews or converted.

5. All that said, the idea of a Jewish-Democratic state can find expression, but note that I place the word Jewish first. In other words, there is room for democracy on condition that it does not contradict Judaism. That is certainly how things must be. After all, this is the State of Israel, or, in the words of Theodore Herzl, "the state of the Jews", in both Hebrew and German, or, "the Jewish state", in Yiddish and French. This is a Jewish state, and not a state of all its citizens.

Certainly, democracy, i.e., the will of the majority, cannot force an immoral or antinational law. Examples would include a law that would force Shabbat violations or a law that would decide to erase the State of Israel and make it part of the United States. Even the philosopher Plato described an idealistic democracy aimed at the general good as an organism and not just a utilitarian gathering of individuals. Certainly there are timeless ideals that transcend the law. After all, a nation is not built solely on economics and security, but on ideals and history as well.

To cut a nation off from its history, from its soul, is an immoral act, and the most antidemocratic act there could be.

Let us support real, exalted democracy: responsibility and loyalty to the Nation down through the generations.

In the News...

Rabbi Aviner: Don't read talkbacks

One of Religious Zionism's leaders says responding to articles on websites may lead to religious and moral transgressions. 'Talkbacks can bring many blessings, but for the most part we see that they have many negative sides which means it isn't worth it in the long run'

Kobi Nahshoni - <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3986921,00.html>

[Rav] Shlomo Aviner, one of Religious Zionism's leading rabbis, has stated that responses to articles on websites should not be read due to fears that doing so would lead to religious and moral transgressions.

In a conversation with Ynet, Rabbi Aviner stressed that this isn't a halachic decree or a comprehensive ban from a higher rabbinic authority, it is a ruling he gave to his students after

receiving a question via text message which asked: "After reading a 'kosher' article is it all right to take a look at the talkbacks?"

The Rabbi's response: "No, due to major fears that it would lead to 'lashon hara' (gossip, slander), humiliation, and valueless time consumption". The question and answer session was published in the Maayanei Hayeshua weekly which is given out in synagogues.

"Talkbacks can bring many blessings, but for the most part we see that they have many negative sides, which means it isn't worth it in the long run," Rabbi Aviner explained on Thursday.

In his opinion, the ability to respond to articles and publications and to hold debates should have promoted "clarification and reformation of ideas and opinions" which is why "it could have been a wonderful thing", but instead it is used for diatribes and gossip under assumed identities which the Torah sees as "cursed be he that smites his neighbor secretly".

The Rabbi gave an example: "A professor writes an article, and then some pipsqueak comes out of nowhere and responds with 'you know nothing, you and your nonsense', you can of course disagree and argue the point, but what kind of cheap rude style of response is that?"

After examining the complicated situation – and the positive and negative sides of talkbacks, the Rabbi ruled that it is preferable to give talkbacks a pass and explained: "I can't tell the person who asked me the question to look at the talkbacks in a critical light, read only the positive ones, it doesn't work that way. A person can get swept away by the talkbacks, so a decision is needed. It's like having someone ask if they should eat soup that has a few unhealthy vegetables in it.

"We all give up positive things because of the unhealthy elements they have. I mean, you aren't in the desert with no food, so no, don't eat the soup. Find something else to eat. Instead of reading article talkbacks, I recommend reading Rashi's 'talkbacks' on the Torah."

Kitzur Tefilat Amecha - #24

[adapted for middle-schoolers by Rabbi Shmuel Jablon from Rav Aviner's three-volume commentary on the siddur "Tefilat Amecha"]

In the Ashrei, the first words that David Ha-Melech wrote are "I will raise you up My G-d The King and I will bless your name forever." Sometimes when we talk about Hashem, we may forget that He is our King. We relate to him as the Creator and even the one who gave us the Mitzvot. But He is even more - He is our King, the Ruler of All. David Ha-Melech is saying that we raise Him up and bless His name for every. We do this even when there are problems. David Ha-Melech didn't always have such an easy life. But even when he was afraid for his life, he served Hashem and did all that he could to bless His Name. We also try to do this forever- not just for our own lives but for the entire history of Klal Yisrael - for all time.

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