



Parashat Ve-etchanan 5771 - #198

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On the Parashah...

Take Away from Tisha Be-Av: There is No "Us" and "Them"

We constantly hear people invalidating the secular or the religious, the left or the right, government ministers or the Government. How sad that after 2,000 years of exile, and being educated through suffering to have Ahavat Yisrael, there are those who still speak in this manner. These are lies, and saying them is considered lording over others!

We must be extremely careful against making generalizations. We live in a world where nothing is perfect. We must distinguish between one whose only thoughts are evil and who thinks of way to destroy the Nation and Land of Israel, and one whose intentions are good and wants to save the State, but who is nevertheless gravely mistaken in his path. There is a big difference between an evil person and a good person who errs. As Maran Ha-Rav Kook expresses, if we explain to a good person that $2 + 2 = 4$ and not 5, he will be grateful to us. When someone is mistaken, there is only one way of convincing him otherwise - and it is not by harshness and insults.

Am Yisrael is not divided in such a way that one group is completely right and contains all of the positives, while everyone else is lacking. There were times like this in the past, when idol worshippers were completely corrupt and scorned Hashem, but - in our days - the merits are scattered among the Nation. We even give the benefit of the doubt to those who divide the Nation: They are idealists, whose words flow from their heart to defend the Torah and the Land of Israel. But, with all due respect, they are also mistaken when they cut the body of the Nation with a sharp knife and use the terms "us" and "them".

Why do these idealists err so severely? Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah explains that the answer is found in two words: "Kima, Kima" ([the Redemption arrives] slowly, slowly). In the Exile, the Nation crumbles. But with its return to its Land, everything is being rebuilt and revived. This process takes time. It comes slowly.

It is easy to prove that this is the State about which the prophets prophesized. After all, the Nation is returning home and the Land continues to blossom. This is not the complete Redemption, for which we pray each day in the Shemoneh Esrei, but we must nonetheless be joyous for every "crumb" of Redemption. The Nation will not be reborn in a day. Israel will not return to its Land in one day. The Nation will not come to love Yehudah and Shomron in one day. And not everyone will begin to keep Shabbat and eat Kosher in one day.

Reality does not have wings like imagination. We must therefore gird ourselves with patience. Hashem has incredible patience. He waited 10 generations from Adam to Noach before destroying the world and another 10 generations between Noach and Avraham before rewarding Avraham for all of the goodness (Pirkei Avot 5:2). Hashem waited close to 2,000 years before the appearance of Avraham Avinu.

Patience is not idleness, but action based on considering the pace of reality. What we have accomplished thus far in the State of Israel has great value, and we must continue on. We must do all we can, without losing our joy and optimism. We must rejoice over what we have attained up to this point, in all realms. It is true that there are many complications, but one who only sees darkness and no light is lacking in gratitude to Hashem.

We must increase Ahavat Yisrael - love of our fellow Jews - and the understanding that we are one Nation. That which we have in common is infinitely greater than that which separates us. We are in the same boat; we are one soul. And - most of all - we must remember that difference of opinion is permissible, but division of hearts is forbidden.

Rav Aviner on... Torah or the Law of the Land

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

Question: Which takes precedence - the Torah or the law? Which is more important? Surely there's no question! Doesn't the Torah override all else? Isn't G-d's word the root and source of all?

Answer: Certainly G-d's word overrides all else. Yet G-d's word tells you: Respect the law! The laws of the King of England, the laws of the America. The kingdom's law is the law. If you don't like the laws of a country, you're free to leave.

This applies all the more so to the laws of Israel, the laws of the Israeli Government, the laws of the Israeli Parliament. Obviously I'm not going to tell you that if you don't like the laws here you can leave, but I am going to tell you that even if you don't like the laws, you should stay, because this is your country. But keep the law! Even if the king is no saint, but wicked like Ahab, his laws are still binding (Tosafot, Sanhedrin 20a).

Such is the will of the Supreme King of Kings that the laws of the kingdom should take precedence (Derashot Ha-Ran 11). See the long responsum of Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook that the agreed-upon ruler of the nation is to be classified as a king (Mishpat Cohain 337-338). Yet the truth is that even without the rulings of our medieval and more recent sages, we would know this. For what alternative is there if there is no law and no rule? Chaos. Civil War. The Jungle. The Wild West. Might makes right. Therefore, "one should pray for the welfare of the kingdom. If people did not revere it, they would swallow one another alive" (Avot, chapter 3).

Yet we say that law and order have not only utilitarian worth, but spiritual, halachic, divine worth as well. See also Ein Aya (Berachot 89), regarding the four types of people [who have undergone life-threatening experiences and] who must thank G-d. One of them is the person who has returned from the desert, a place where there is no governmental law and order. That person suddenly understands the value of such law and order, and joyfully undertakes the restrictions of the law.

So please! Respect the law and honor the law's representatives joyfully.

The story is told of a student of the Mercaz Ha-Rav Yeshiva who was arrested by a policeman due to a legal infraction while driving. Just at that moment, our Rabbi Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, the head of the yeshiva, passed by. The student turned to his Rosh Yeshiva and asked him to talk to the policeman on his behalf. Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehuda told the policeman, "Give him a ticket!"

You might ask: Is every law really the law?! Even laws that go against the Torah?! Is a law the law even if Hitler made it?!

I was waiting for that demagogic question. Certainly there are exceptions. Every person with a head on his shoulders understands that. Even the Halachah itself nhas exceptions, and even a great Torah scholar must drive his wife to the hospital on Shabbat so she can give birth. Yet we don't let exceptional cases ruin all the conventional ones.

It's true that Hitler made laws, yet that doesn't render the very concept of laws to be invalid. The Nuremberg Laws are invalid. Yet in principle, law is not invalid. Your implied claim is called *Reductio Ad Hitlerum*, a false syllogism in which one invalidates something because Hitler ascribed to it.

Please stop placing the Torah above the law! In this game, which occupies the two extremes, with one side placing the Torah on a pedestal and the other side placing the law on a pedestal, there is an unholy alliance in which the unity of the nation is torn to smithereens.

When we say that the Torah is above the law, we don't mean that the Torah is a dictator who smashes and tramples his subjects. Rather, the Torah should be providing a soul to the law, morality to the law, lending weight to the law and rendering it more savory. And obviously, the Torah should also facilitate critical review of the law, while exalting and refining it.

Yes, the law is the law, and not because the law stands above the Torah, but because the Torah teaches us that we must keep the law. That is a Halachah, and obviously, we can be strict in this as well...

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

Destructive Pampering

One should certainly love his child, but this does not mean he should pamper him. Pampering is buying every single item for the child and answering his every demand. This phenomenon is very damaging to a child and can lead to his character crumbling. He must learn to overcome and conquer his inclinations. In life, we do not always get what we want. And there is no reason for the response to such situations to be rebellion or despair. When he grows up, there will be many times when there is a gap between his aspirations or desires and what he actually has. We must educate our children when they are young to deal with these situations. It is forbidden to spoil child – the word "spoil" means to "ruin". This is what happens when one pampers a child.

In truth, a child has no need for being pampered. Pampering is a replacement for love. When there is love, there is no need for pampering. A child does not demand to be spoiled. When parents do not love enough, they shower their child with pampering. They buy him lots of toys and candy in place of the love which is lacking.

In America, many parents work hard from morning to night, don't have time for their kids, and are therefore filled with guilt. As a result, they provide compensation for love by spoiling their children, which literally spoils them. The equation pampering = love is incorrect. Love is what equals love.

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