

# The Rebbe vs. the Joint

Category: Bamidbar, Shlach

*What is the nature of true Jewish leadership? (In honor of Gimmel Tammuz)*

Once again, there are going to be elections in Israel.

It's funny to watch how during election season, the regular citizen suddenly becomes important.

In normal times, a citizen's opinion is meaningless to most politicians. People can complain, demonstrate, write letters and drive themselves crazy, but the politicians do their own thing. But this all changes during election season. Suddenly, leaders want to know public opinion and they listen to every nudnik who thinks he can solve the country's issues, and so on. It's a very different attitude.

Judaism is different.

## Choosing Teachings

There is an interesting discussion in the Talmud (Eirubin 64a): Rabbi Yehudah said a halachic ruling about the laws of Eruvin in the name of Shmuel. Rabbi Nachman heard the ruling and agreed with it; he said: 'This halachah is excellent.' He thought it was valid and well-founded.

Rabbi Yehudah saw that his ideas were being well-received, so he taught another one of Shmuel's teachings: "Whoever drank a *reviis* of wine should not issue halachic rulings." If a rabbi drank about 3 ounces of wine, he should refrain from ruling because the wine muddles his thought.

When Rabbi Nachman heard this halachah, he did not agree. He said: "This halachah is not excellent, because I do not have a clear mind *until* I drink a *reviis* of wine." He found himself capable of issuing Halachic rulings only *after* he had a good l'chaim. The wine helped him clear his mind, not the opposite.

Rava, who was Rabbi Nachman's teacher, responded and said, "Don't you know what Rabbi Acha said — that anyone who says, 'This teaching is nice and this

teaching is not nice,' loses his fortune of Torah!" Rabbi Nachman immediately retracted his remarks.

The Rebbe explains (Toras Menachem vol. 46 pg. 157):

Why is it that someone who differentiates between Torah teachings loses his fortune in Torah?

This is because the Torah is not to be measured by human intellect.

In the Ten Commandments, everyone agrees with the commandment to honor your father and mother, but there are those who may have trouble with the commandment to believe in G-d. But if a person only accepts those mitzvos which he understands and rejects those that he does not — "he loses his fortune of Torah." In other words, he will also lose the mitzvah of honoring his father and mother.

Why? Because if the obligation to honor one's parents is built on human intellect, one might very possibly conclude that for whatever reason, the obligation is no longer relevant. You might suddenly remember that your parents favored your other siblings, and therefore come to the conclusion that you are no longer obligated to take care of them as a result of your 'terrible traumatic upbringing.' The moment you allow your own intellect to take over, it will come up with very creative reasons to absolve you of anything you find difficult.

The Rebbe added that we saw this exact result with the Nazis. They were precisely the people who built their entire culture on reason; even morality was subject to human understanding. It was this "morality" which eventually led to theft, murder and the worst possible atrocities.

Therefore, the Rebbe says, the Ten Commandments were delivered in "one statement." It is impossible to separate "I am the L-rd your G-d" and "You shall not kill"; the latter commandment will only be fulfilled if the former is fulfilled as well.

## **Choosing People**

But the Rebbe expands on this idea:

The Jewish people are called “Yisrael.” Our holy books explain that Yisrael is an acronym for “*Yesh shishim ribo osiyos l’Torah*, there are six-hundred-thousand letters in the Torah of G-d.”

Just as in the Torah, one cannot give preferential treatment to a specific teaching, one cannot give preferential treatment to a specific person. A leader who says, “I like this Jew, but I don’t like that Jew,” is not worthy of being a leader.

Normally, every community leader takes care of his own community. A mayor feels committed to his residents, and a head of state cares for the citizens of his country. But the sign of a true Jewish leader is that he cares for every Jew, wherever and whoever he may be.

## Morocco

In 1950, immediately after the *shiva* following the previous Rebbe’s passing, the Rebbe sent a letter to a Chassid in France instructing him to travel as his emissary to Morocco to establish Jewish schools.

There were about a quarter of a million Jews in Morocco at the time, but the state of Jewish education was dismal. The boys received a very small amount of Jewish education, while the girls did not receive any education at all. The parents assumed that a daughter would learn Jewish basics from her mother — which resulted in terrible ignorance regarding Jewish tradition. Most of them were traditional Jews; they kept Shabbat and so on, but their knowledge of Jewish law was very weak.

The Rebbe’s emissaries began to establish Jewish schools, first in large cities like Fez and Marrakech, and then they discovered the villages, where the situation was far worse. If in the big cities, there were still organized communities and Jewish institutions, in the villages — where thousands of Jews lived — there was terrible neglect. They found terrible poverty; children roamed around without shoes and dressed in rags, and there was no organized Jewish education to think of.

They started organizing small schools in the villages. In one village, they pulled 40 children together, hired a local teacher who knew a little more than the children themselves, brought them to a local synagogue (which in many cases was

a structure about to collapse), provided them with some food & books, and a school was established. They did so in dozens of villages.

In some cases, the only way to get to the village was to travel on donkeys. The Shluchim, Russian and Yiddish speaking Ashkenazi Jews, had to get used to a place with a profoundly different culture and where only Arabic and Hebrew were spoken.

## **The Dispute**

All this activity was funded by the Joint Distribution Committee, the largest Jewish humanitarian organization in the world (which are leading the efforts to help Jewish refugees in Ukraine today). When Chabad approached the Joint and asked them to finance the activities in Morocco, the Joint sent their representatives to visit, and they were very impressed by Chabad's work. But then a controversy arose, or rather, a disagreement over priorities.

The Joint argued that Chabad should focus on the big cities and establish successful educational institutions there. The villages need to be abandoned. They argued that Chabad did not have enough manpower to do everything; it was better to run several proper institutions than to spread their efforts in fifty different places and do half a job.

The Rebbe argued, however, that under no circumstances could a single Jewish child be overlooked. Even if that child lives in a remote village near the Sahara desert, he needed to be spiritually saved.

The debate lasted for some time, but in the end, the Joint accepted the Rebbe's approach, taking responsibility for every Jew in every location. They have indeed become great supporters of Chabad in Morocco and continue to support the work there.

## **Moshe**

In this week's Parsha, we once again meet the kvetching and complaining Jewish people.

The people ask Moshe to send spies to check out the land of Israel, and Moshe

accedes to their request. When the spies return with bad news, the Torah says, “and the people wept that night”; everyone cried and complained.

Last week, they complained that they were tired of the manna and they wanted meat. This week, they complained, “Why is G-d bringing us to this land to die by the sword and for our women and our children to be taken as spoils?” They went so far as to decide, “Let’s appoint a leader and return to Egypt.”

The Almighty turned to Moshe and said, “Until when will this people provoke me?” He offers Moshe the same offer he made to him after the sin of the Golden Calf — that a new Jewish nation should be started from Moses himself.

Seemingly, this is the best compliment Moses could have ever received.

But Moses does not accept it. He doesn’t even mention the offer. Instead, he immediately starts praying that G-d should save the people of Israel. He asks G-d to forgive them, and indeed, G-d says “*Salachti k’dvarecha*, I have forgiven, as you say.”

Where did Moshe get the strength to, again and again, stand before G-d and defend Israel?

He was a true leader. A true leader cares about every person, whether he lives in New York or in a remote village near the Sahara Desert.

(From *Chabad B’Morocco* pg. 98 and on)