



# With Two Hands!

*People tend to get very heated in their political debates these days. What's a better way to go about it? How should we set our priorities?*

## Judicial Reform

Israelis are currently debating the judicial reform that the current government wants to pass into law. Debating is perhaps an understatement; the topic has spilled over into the international press, and Israelis, Americans, and anyone with an opinion is convinced that the other side is threatening the very future of Israel.

I think the debate is so heated not only because of what is at stake, but also because of the trend in recent years of what I call "one-sidedness." People are fully engrossed in their political bubbles; we've come to a point where people are so entrenched in their positions that they cannot fathom the other side having a legitimate point or concern.

But what's a better approach? How should we treat other people's opinions?

Let me share with you an old Chasidic story.

## Is He Acquitted?

The Tzemach Tzedek was the third Chabad Rebbe, the spiritual leader for tens of thousands from the 1830s to the 1860s.

He once entered his synagogue and ask the chassidim a question:

“Would you like to hear a chasidic discourse or a story?”

It was very unusual for him to offer a story, so everyone realized that something was going on. “A story,” they replied.

He told over the following:

A Jew once rented an inn from his fellow Jew. Life was hard and income wasn't easy to come by, and at the end of the year, the renter did not have the money to pay. A year later, the story repeated itself. The owner wanted the money owed to him, but the renter had nothing to offer.

Being a pious Jew, the owner went to consult with his rabbi. Hearing the details of the story, the rabbi suggested that he not evict the renter. “He has a large family and this is his only source of income. Have pity on him and let him stay.”

The same thing happened a year later. The owner complained to his rabbi about the freeloader living on his property, but the rabbi convinced him to leave him alone.

By the fourth year, the owner had lost all patience. He finally evicted his tenant, once and for all.

When the final day of judgment arrived and the owner arrived in heaven, he was convinced that he would get a free pass to paradise for allowing someone to live rent free on his property for four years. To his shock and surprise, the heavenly court actually wanted to prosecute him for evicting a fellow Jew despite his rabbi's instructions!

The owner, now the defendant, argued that the angels had no right to judge the case. “You never lived on earth, and you don't know the challenges of earning a livelihood. You don't understand the power that money wields in the physical realm. You can't judge me for my decision.”

The court accepted his argument. They decided to bring three deceased great rabbis, who had lived in the physical world and knew the experiences of life, to judge his case. When they too, ruled against him, the owner continued to argue. These souls had been deceased for too long and had since forgotten life's difficulties. "I want to be judged by living people!"

Suddenly, the Tzemach Tzedek looked at his students and asked, "And what do you think? Should he be acquitted?"

"You rule!" said his disciples, understanding that the heavenly drama was playing out in real time.

"He is right! He is right! He is right!" The Tzemach Tzedek called out.

Angels have no capacity for empathy. They never lived in this world and never experienced its difficulties, so they can never appreciate and empathize with a person's story. Even souls of people who once lived on earth had long forgotten the travails of life. It was specifically someone that was living, in the moment, that was able to empathize with the owner's experience.

Whenever we are engaged in a debate, it's important to remember that we see only our side; it's impossible to truly appreciate the other's experience — and that is what should judge how we engage in the topic.

## **Two Hands**

There is one more thing to be said on the topic, and this time from this week's Torah portion:

Towards the end of the song of the sea, there's a very interesting sentence. תְּבִיאֵמוּ וְתַטְעֵמוּ בְּהַר נַחֲלֹתֶיךָ מָכוֹן לְשִׁבְתֶּךָ פְּעֻלָּתְּךָ הַ מְקוֹדֶשׁ הַ כּוֹנֵנִי. *You shall bring them and plant them on the mount of Your heritage, directed toward Your habitation, which You made, O L-rd; the*

*sanctuary, O L-rd, [which] Your hands founded.*" In simple English, this means that G-d will bring the Jewish people to the land of Israel and build a Temple in which He will dwell.

Rashi makes an interesting point by contrasting this verse with a different one. This verse, he says, demonstrates the preciousness of the Holy Temple, because when G-d describes the creation of the world, he says that he made it with one hand ("My hand established the world"), but here, he says that he will build a Temple with two. (Beshalach 15:17).

Now, this is obviously a metaphor. G-d didn't create the world with one hand or with two. The Torah is obviously trying to use terminology that we can understand in order to impart a specific message. What is that message?

The Rebbe points out something simple, but profound:

When you do something with one hand, your other hand could be occupied with something else. But when you do something with both hands, it means your attention is fully engaged with the matter at hand (Likkutei Sichos v. 31 p. 81).

G-d created the physical world with one hand to teach us that it's not the most important thing in our lives. In fact, that verse about the creation of the world actually refers to the left hand. It says, "My hand established the Earth and My right hand fashioned the heavens" (Isaiah 48:13). Physicality was created with G-d's left hand, but spirituality was created with His right.

In simple terms: we should engage with the physical world "with a left hand," the weaker hand, with the recognition that it's not the most important matter. Spirituality, on the other hand, is more important. That was made with G-d's right hand, with more focus and strength.

But the most important of all is the task to build the Holy Temple, a place where G-dliness rests within the physical world. This task, of bringing spirituality into the physical, to make the world a place where G-d could feel comfortable — that's something we should do with both hands.

## **The Rebbe's Siddur**

Here is an example that I personally experienced with the Rebbe:

The Rebbe had a custom to lend a special prayer book to a groom on the day of his wedding.

The day of one's wedding is like a personal Yom Kippur, a day when all of your sins are forgiven, as you turn a new page on life. The bride and groom fast the entire day, and recite the Al Chet prayers from the Yom Kippur liturgy.

The Rebbe possessed a prayer book which the previous Rebbe had used. He would give it to every groom for the minchah prayers before the wedding; he would hand it to the groom and say, "*oisbeten ale gute zachen*, pray for all good things."

Now, the Rebbe was often handing things to others — dollars for charity, honey cake before Yom kippur, coins to children, and so on. He always gave it with his right hand, and insisted that the receiver accept it with his right hand as well.

But when he would hand over this prayer book, he would give it with **two hands!**

I think the same could be true about ideological and political debates. When people seem to be getting all heated up and convinced that only their side could be correct, use only one hand, and your left hand for that matter. Keep your disagreements on a low burner. It's really not that important.

When it comes to engaging in something Jewish, and welcoming another Jew into Jewish observance — when it comes to building a Temple for G-d — jump inside with both hands. Even better: give him a hug – that takes two hands. You'll see that all ideological fights will evaporate and disappear.