



Netzavim-Vayeilech 5771

September 24, 2011

A Taste of Torah The Case for Monarchy

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

Democracy is the worst form of government except for all those others that have been tried.

Before you all rush to cancel your subscription to this outstanding publication, consider that it is not I who made that statement, but, rather, Sir Winston Churchill.

Now, let's see what the Torah has to say about democracy.

Truth be told, the Torah states that the form of government the Jewish People ought to have in Eretz Yisroel is a monarchy (see Devarim 17:14-20). But let's take a closer look at the Torah's idea of an ideal monarchy.

In this week's parsha, Moshe tells his disciple Yehoshua, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall come with this people to the Land" (31:7). Rashi (ad. loc.) comments that the verse stresses "with this people" because when Moshe gave Yehoshua these instructions, he told him, "The Elders of the generation will be with you; everything should be with their counsel and advice."

However, says Rashi, Hashem told Yehoshua otherwise. When Hashem spoke to Yehoshua (31:23), He instructed, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring Bnai Yisroel to the Land." Hashem told Yehoshua, "Everything depends upon you! Take a stick, if need be, and hit them over the head! There can only be one leader, not two."

What Rashi doesn't tell us, though, is how Moshe could contradict Hashem's command. Not to worry, though; Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman (1874-1941), Rosh Yeshiva of the Baranovitch Yeshiva in pre-WWII Poland, helps us to resolve this conundrum.

Rabbi Wasserman explains that the two sets of instructions are not at odds with each other; au contraire, they complement each other. Any leader worth his salt, says Rabbi Wasserman, must have advisors whose counsel he regularly seeks. And he can't just pay lip service to them; he has to listen well to their opinions. The final decision, however, must be made by the leader himself. If there are multiple individuals trying to come to a final decision, very little will get done.

So there you have it. The ideal, Torah-true monarch is not an autocratic despot; it is a king who takes the advice and needs of his nation into consideration. However, when all is said and done, the authority to decide is invested in the king and in the king only.

So while Churchill may have posited that monarchy is a dismal failure, it is not due to the inherent flaw in such a form of government, but, rather, due to abuse of the office. Power may corrupt, and absolute power may corrupt absolutely, but only in a leader who is not guided by G-d's Word. A Torah-true, G-d-fearing king, on the other hand, is the best form of government.

Ask the Rabbi Graduated Observance

Mike Epstein from Greenville, SC wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I belong to a Conservative shul, the most traditional shul within a hundred

Stories For The Soul

Hand in Hand

A little girl and her father were once crossing a flimsy bridge. The bridge began to shake from side to side.

The father was growing increasingly nervous, so he asked his young daughter, "Sweetheart, please hold my hand so that you don't fall into the river."

The little girl replied, "No, Father, you hold my hand."

"What's the difference?" asked the puzzled father.

"There is a big difference," replied the little girl. "Father, if I hold your hand and something happens to me, chances are that I may let your hand go."

"But," she continued with a wisdom beyond her years, "if you hold my hand, I know for sure that no matter what happens, you will never let my hand go."

In the Yom Kippur davening we say the verse, "K'rachem av al banim, kain Tirachem aleinu," "Like the mercy of a father on children, may You (G-d) have mercy upon us."

On Yom Kippur we must remember that Hashem loves us with an infinite love and is waiting to hear our prayers and give us what we need. Even if our sins are black as night, Hashem is waiting with open arms to lovingly receive us, just as a parent will always yearn for a child to return.

May we pour our hearts out to Hashem on Yom Kippur with purity and deep sincerity. May Hashem grant us a happy, healthy new year.

Adapted with permission from ShulWeek by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

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Kollel Happenings

KNOW THY ENEMY TUES. AT AISH

Join Kollel Dean Rabbi Shachne Sommers in studying the tactics and strategies of the Yetzer Hora, and develop your own battle plan for the greatest challenge of your life - the war against the Evil Inclination. Based on the classic work Chovos Halvevos. Tuesday mornings 7:55-8:25 at Aish. For information, please contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855.



THE LATE SHOW: THURS. NIGHT SEDER AT AISH

Join the Chevra for learning and cholent at Aish. Maariv is at 9:00 p.m. followed by learning and refreshments. For chavrutas or other information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmh@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855



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Interpersonal Issues

Consenting to Wait

Even if the worker requested payment, but then consented to wait for his money, bal tolin is not transgressed.

Furthermore, even if the worker really wanted to get paid, and only agreed to wait because he is ashamed to press his demand, there is no bal tolin. However,

he must clearly express his consent with a "Yes", "OK", etc.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi

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miles. I have kept kosher for the past year and try to observe the mitzvos. I drive to shul on Shabbos and holidays but do not work. This is my question. I am a teacher and am wondering if I can justify going to my school's graduation? If I were fully observant, I know that the answer would be "no" because I would have to drive. But since I drive to shul anyway, would attending the graduation be wrong in itself? Thank you for any advice you can give.

Dear Mike Epstein,

First, I'd like to tell you that I admire your efforts to observe the mitzvos in Greenville, and I think you should be applauded and encouraged. I bet it's not always easy to keep up your level of observance.

Your question is an interesting one. The truth is that the actual ceremony might not involve any Shabbos violation, but sitting through such a ceremony isn't really in the Shabbos spirit.

And, as you know, Jewish law forbids driving to synagogue, or anywhere else, on Shabbos. Going to synagogue is certainly a good thing, but not at the expense of one of the Ten Commandments!

Each time you refrain from driving on Shabbos is a meritorious act in itself. The fact that you do sometimes drive to shul doesn't take away from the merit of the other times when you don't drive.

Also, it seems to me that you've gone to lengths to explain to your teachers and colleagues why you don't work on Shabbos. Now, even if technically the graduation won't be problematic, you might get some very dubious looks from your fellow teachers. They might not understand whatever subtle differences there may be here, and they may view you as a hypocrite.

A story: Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky and a friend were walking one Shabbos morning when a car pulled up to ask for directions. "Good Shabbos," said the driver, thus identifying himself as Jewish. "Good Shabbos to you," they answered. The driver then asked for help finding his destination, to which Rabbi Kaminetsky gave very clear and detailed directions. The driver said thank you and drove off.

Rabbi Kaminetsky's friend was a bit surprised: "Surely we must help others whenever we can," he said. "But are we allowed to help a fellow Jew to violate Shabbos?"

"On the contrary, I helped him avoid violating Shabbos. If he gets lost, he will drive around looking for his destination, thus violating Shabbos much more. By giving clear directions, not only did I help him get straight to his destination, but I helped him do so with less Shabbos desecration."

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The Torah Weekly is made possible through a generous grant from the

Harry H. Beren Foundation of Lakewood, NJ, in memory of Harry H. Beren, z'l.

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