



Bet Horaah

בית הוראה

Shahre Ezra

עברי עזרא

Parshat Noah

Zmanim for New York:

Candle Lighting: 5:33pm

Shabbat ends: 6:33pm

R"T 7:03pm

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THE TORAH'S OUTLOOK ON ELECTIONS

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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We understand the importance of casting a ballot on Election Day, but not everyone is familiar with the Torah's perspective. Should people voice their opinion on who should be their leader? If Hashem governs everything in the world and His decisions are unchangeable, is there a need for us to vote? To answer this, we look at the teachings of Chazal for guidance.

The clearest source indicating that the Torah advocates voting is found in Berachot (55a). Rabbi Yitzhak says: אמר רבי יצחק, אין מעמידין פרנס על הצבור אלא אם כן נמלכים בצבור, שנאמר: "ראו קרא ה' בשם בצלאל".

Hashem said to Moshe: "Is Betzalel a suitable choice in your eyes?" Moshe responded: "Master of the universe, if he is suitable to You, then certainly to me." Hashem instructed Moshe to also consult the people, who ultimately confirmed their approval. Even though Hashem had chosen Betzalel, He deferred to the will of the people, demonstrating a clear endorsement of their involvement in leadership selection. This concept, now known as an election, is fundamental to a Torah-based society.

Our sages derive from this that a leader should not be appointed over the people without first consulting them.

Another example can be found in the 300-year delay in appointing Shaul Hamelech as king. Although the Torah mandates appointing a king upon entering the Land of Israel, the Netziv (Haamek Davar on Dvarim 17:14) explains that the appointment was postponed because the nation was not yet willing. This reinforces the principle that a leader should only be appointed with the people's consent.

"לא ניתן לצוות מינוי מלך כל זמן שלא עלה בהסכמת העם.. אין סנהדרין מצווין (במינוי מלך) עד שיאמרו העם שרוצים בהנהגת מלך ומשום הכי כל משך שלוש מאות

שנה שהיה המשכן נבחר בשילה לא היה מלך, והיינו משום שלא היה בזה הסכמת העם, והיינו משום שלא היה בזה הסכמת העם."

The Gemara Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 2:6) further emphasizes this point, stating that Hashem removed



Himself from the decision-making process, underscoring the nation's responsibility to appoint their leader.

Yet, the Gemara (Bava Batra 91b) says that even the lowest-level authority, such as a water supervisor, is appointed by Heaven:

"וְהַמִּתְנַשֵּׂא לְכָל לְרֵאשִׁי... אֶפִּילוּ רִישׁ גְּרוּתָא מִשְׁמִיא מוֹקְמִי לִיה."

This might imply that Hashem alone appoints leaders. The Iyun Yaakov reconciles this by explaining that while Hashem chooses the next leader, the people's approval is still required. Leadership is thus a partnership between Divine will and the people's choice.

Let's delve deeper. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 26a) recounts the story of Shebna, a minister in King Hezkiah's court, who was a prominent figure with considerable influence. Shebna would teach Torah to a crowd of 130,000 followers, surpassing King Hezkiah's audience of 110,000. When king Sancheriv besieged Yerushalayim, Shebna wrote a surrender note, shot it over the wall with an arrow, and it read: "Shebna and his camp have appeased Sancheriv and are ready to surrender; Hezkiah and his camp have not appeased him.

Upon hearing this, Hezkiah feared that the majority stance might sway Hashem's will, causing even those who resisted to fall into the hands of the Assyrians. But the prophet Yeshaya reassured him with the words: "Say not: A conspiracy, concerning all of which this people say: A conspiracy" (Yeshaya 8:12). The prophet's message clarified that a conspiracy of wicked people does not count as a legitimate majority. Thus, despite their numbers, Shebna's sup-

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porters were disregarded as the “majority” in the eyes of Hashem. Commentaries explain that since Hashem often sides with the majority opinion, Hezekiah feared that Hashem might side with the majority here as well. However, the prophet reassured him that Hashem does not side with the wicked. This highlights the importance of voting, as only the majority vote of Klal Yisrael truly holds weight in Hashem’s consideration.

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch (Tshuvot Vehanhagot 2, 140) recounts a rabbinic meeting held before the establishment of the State of Israel, where the rabbis gathered to discuss and cast their opinions. He describes how Rav Elchanan Wasserman and Rav Aharon Kotler wanted to leave the meeting, but Rav Chaim Ozer urged them to stay. When Rabbi Avraham Kalmenovitz questioned why their presence mattered, given that their vote would likely have little impact on those establishing the state, Rav Chaim Ozer explained that in Hashem’s eyes, only the opinions of the righteous truly matter, as we see from the Gemara’s account of King Hezekiah.

We learn from this the importance of the Jewish vote in Hashem's eyes, as only those opinions truly matter to Him.

The obligation to vote is also mentioned in a letter from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, dated October 3, 1984. He writes: “Upon reaching the United States, Jews found a safe haven. The rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights have allowed us the freedom to practice our religion without interference and to live safely in this republic.

A fundamental principle of Judaism is hakaras hatov—recognizing the benefits we have received and expressing our gratitude. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Jewish citizen to participate in the election process as an expression of appreciation.

A democratic system safeguards the freedoms we enjoy. One of the most fundamental responsibilities of each individual is to register and vote. Therefore, I urge all members of the Jewish community to fulfill their duty by registering as soon as possible and by voting. Through this, we can express our gratitude and contribute to the continued security of our community.

Signed: M. Feinstein”

In conclusion, selecting a leader is a godly act. Hashem determines the potential leader but waits for the people’s approval, making our vote a crucial part of this sacred partnership.

ANCIENT CONSPIRACY THEORIES: THE AGE-OLD STRATEGY OF FEAR

In the modern era, we are quite familiar with conspiracy theories—some people believe them, while others do not. The purpose of this article is neither to support nor oppose conspiracy theories, but to show that while these theories may seem relatively new, studying the Chumash reveals that, as King Shlomo said in Kohelet, “there is nothing new under the sun.”

Reduce the global population

For instance, there are those who believe in a movement among world leaders with an agenda to reduce the global population.

The theory that world leaders aim to reduce global population suggests an elite agenda to control population numbers via policies related to public health, sustainability, or crisis management. Often rooted in mistrust, this belief interprets global initiatives as veiled efforts to limit population growth.

Some conspiracy theories allege that vaccines are used as a means of population control by reducing fertility rates or causing health issues to limit population growth. Proponents claim that ingredients in vaccines or specific vaccination programs are covertly designed to impact fertility, particularly in lower-income countries.

The episode involving Cham and Noach is a significant yet troubling moment in the biblical narrative. After the Flood, Noach cultivated a vineyard, became intoxicated, and lay uncovered in his tent. Cham, one of his three sons, discovered his father in this vulnerable state and chose to inform his brothers, Shem and Yefet, rather than act with respect and dignity.

The Torah does not specify the exact nature of Cham's actions, leading to various interpretations in rabbinic literature. Rashi suggests that Cham mutilated his father Noach. According to Rashi, Cham's motivation stemmed from his belief that Noach, having already fathered three children, was planning to have a fourth, which he deemed excessive for the world’s population. Cham recalled that Adam had only two children, one of whom killed the other, leading him to conclude that three children were already too dangerous for the safety of the world.



Global warming

Another example is global warming which refers to the long-term increase in Earth's average surface temperature due to human activities, primarily the burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, and industrial processes. While

the majority of climate scientists agree that global warming is real and poses significant environmental risks, some individuals and organizations dispute its existence or severity. Opponents often argue that climate change is a natural phenomenon, question the reliability of climate models, or emphasize the economic costs of addressing it, framing their resistance as a defense of personal freedoms and economic growth.

Those who support the view that global warming is a critical issue suggest reducing greenhouse gas emissions through regulations and incentives, transitioning to renewable energy sources like solar and wind, and promoting energy efficiency in homes and transportation. They advocate for carbon pricing to hold pol-

SUMMARY OF THE HALACHOT OF THE ARBA MINIM (FOUR SPECIES)

luters accountable, emphasize conservation and reforestation to enhance carbon absorption, and encourage public awareness about climate change. Additionally, they call for international cooperation through global agreements to unite countries in combating climate change.

In the story of the Dor Haflaga, found in Parashat Noach, humanity united in an ambitious attempt to build a tower, known as the Tower of Babel. Their goal was to reach the heavens and prevent another divine flood. They believed that by constructing this towering structure, they could establish a foothold in the heavens; thereby supporting it and ensuring it wouldn't collapse or be destroyed.

After experiencing the Flood of Noach, they concluded that the sky collapses approximately every 1,600 years. To prevent this from happening again, they devised a plan to support the heavens with structural supports.

Anti-Semitism

Though not directly from our parsha, one of the most infamous conspiracy theories worth mentioning is the age-old claim that the Jewish people are covertly maneuvering to control world affairs and ultimately dominate the globe. This myth was most notoriously detailed in The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, a fabricated

document that falsely portrays Jewish leaders as scheming for global control. This work has fueled centuries of anti-Semitic ideology and has been thoroughly debunked, yet its baseless claims continue to resurface, reminding us of the enduring power of conspiracy theories to distort perceptions and incite fear.

Pharaoh used a similar conspiracy theory to incite fear and mistrust toward the Jewish people in Egypt. In Shemot (1:9-10), Pharaoh warns his people that the Israelites are becoming "too numerous and too mighty," suggesting that, in the event of war, they could join Egypt's enemies and "rise up from the land," undermining Egyptian control.

Pharaoh's rhetoric painted the Jews as a potential fifth column—a group secretly plotting against Egypt. This claim, although unfounded, gave Pharaoh the pretext he needed to oppress the Israelites, turning public sentiment against them and justifying harsh measures, including forced labor and infanticide. By casting them as a dangerous and untrustworthy population, Pharaoh's conspiracy theory laid the groundwork for systematic oppression, setting the stage for their eventual enslavement.

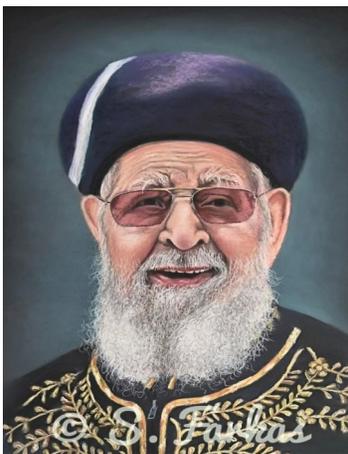
This ancient example illustrates how conspiracy theories have historically been used by leaders to manipulate and mobilize public opinion, often with devastating consequences for marginalized groups.

CHACHAM OVADIA YOSEF : RESTORING THE CROWN TO ITS FORMER GLORY.

As the yahrzeit of Maran Chacham Ovadia Yosef approaches on the third of Cheshvan, we take a moment to reflect on some of his main teachings and his contrasts with another Sephardic giant, the Ben Ish Chai. The differences between these two luminaries are profound, marked not only by their distinct approaches to halacha but also by Chacham Ovadia's dedication to writing entire sefarim addressing and arguing against rulings of the Ben Ish Chai. Their contrasting styles and perspectives highlight the diversity within Sephardic halachic thought, with Chacham Ovadia's legacy focusing on reestablishing halachic unity through the Shulchan Aruch, while the Ben Ish Chai embraced kabbalistic customs and local traditions.

Kabbala vs. Pshat

The halachic approach of the Ben Ish Chai often blended halacha with Kabbalah, heavily influenced by the teachings of the Arizal (Rabbi Itzchak Luria) and other kabbalistic sources. He frequently integrated kabbalistic concepts, guiding his followers to act in ways that resonated with these teachings, even if they sometimes differed slightly from mainstream halacha. In contrast, Chacham Ovadia Yosef championed a "pure halachic" approach, emphasizing rulings grounded in the Talmud, Rishonim (early commentators), and Shulchan Aruch with minimally relying on kabbalistic influence. He argued that Kabbalah should not override practical halacha, favoring clear, logical, and straightforward rulings over kabbalistic considerations. He strongly advocated for following the rulings of Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulchan Aruch, particularly for Sephardim, and prioritized classic halachic sources over kabbalistic customs.



For example, regarding the practice of wearing Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, Chacham Ovadia followed the Shulchan Aruch, advising that if one chooses to wear both Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam tefillin, he should make a condition to fulfill the mitzvah only on whichever set is correct. In contrast, the Ben Ish Chai followed the Arizal's teaching, which he received from Eliyahu Hanavi, asserting that both types of tefillin are equally correct and may be worn together without such a condition.

The Ben Ish Chai often ruled in accordance with the Rema rather than the Shulchan Aruch. Chacham Ovadia felt strongly that this needed to change and tirelessly worked to encourage Sephardim to follow the Shulchan Aruch instead of the Rema. Another key difference was the strictness of the Ben Ish Chai's approach, which was evident in his rulings. Chacham Ovadia believed that our generation could not handle such a hardline stance, and he made every effort to adopt a more lenient approach, making the laws more accessible for people to follow. This approach helped many return to their religious roots, leading them to view Chacham Ovadia as their mentor and rabbi.

Keeping minhagim from the old country

The Ben Ish Chai directed his works primarily at Sephardic Jews in Baghdad and other Middle Eastern communities, offering practical guidance interwoven with kabbalistic insights. His rulings became the accepted standard in many Sephardic communities, particularly in Iraq and nearby regions, due to his approachable, narra-

CHACHAM OVADIA YOSEF : RESTORING THE CROWN TO ITS FORMER GLORY.

tive style. On the other hand, Chacham Ovadia Yosef sought to unify and standardize Sephardic practice by returning to the Shulchan Aruch as the definitive source. His mission extended to all Sephardic communities, which he believed had strayed into diverse laws, some influenced by the Ben Ish Chai and others by other halacha authorities. His work aimed at restoring unity under one halachic authority, often dismissing certain customs he viewed as unnecessary additions.

One of Chacham Ovadia's core principles in addressing customs was his view that all Jews who came to live in the Land of Israel should follow the rulings of the Shulchan Aruch and set aside the customs of their countries of origin. This stance sparked considerable debate, as many communities felt it was inappropriate to abandon the traditions they had carried with them from their homelands.

For example, certain communities refrained from eating rice on Pesach, following the customs of their countries of origin. Chacham Ovadia ruled that upon moving to Israel, these communities should adopt the ruling of the Shulchan Aruch and permit the consumption of rice, setting aside their previous stringency.

The secret of their appeal

The Ben Ish Chai's works are known for their narrative style, weaving in parables, moral teachings, and stories to convey halacha in a way that is both instructive and spiritually uplifting. This made his teachings accessible to a broader audience and deeply beloved within his community. Chacham Ovadia Yosef, however, used a rigorous, analytical, and legalistic style. His books, especially Yabia

Omer and Yechaveh Da'at, focus on complex halachic analysis and in-depth sources. His arguments aimed at scholars and halachic authorities but also included simplified versions of his rulings for laypeople in Halichot Olam and Chazon Ovadia which made his work very attractive to the nation.

While Chacham Ovadia's work was deep and extensive, his son, Harav Yitzhak Yosef, made his rulings accessible in a simple and concise manner for the entire nation, catering to both those well-versed in halacha and those less knowledgeable. He authored a large set of sefarim called Yalkut Yosef, which has become a staple in every Sephardic home.

Chacham Ovadia held a weekly class broadcast around the world every Motzaei Shabbat for many years. In these classes, he descended from his lofty levels and spoke in a simple way that everyone could understand. He explained halachot in an accessible manner, shared stories of gedolei Yisrael, and offered his da'at Torah on current events, guiding the people on matters of importance.

In conclusion, the legacies of Chacham Ovadia Yosef and the Ben Ish Chai exemplify the richness and diversity within Sephardic halachic thought. Their differing methodologies not only shaped their respective communities but also continue to influence contemporary Jewish practice. As we reflect on their teachings, we recognize the importance of unity in halachic observance and the ongoing relevance of their contributions to Jewish life today. Through the wisdom of both luminaries, we are reminded of the enduring power of tradition, adaptability, and the quest for spiritual growth.

הנמצא במקום שאינו יכול להשיג יין או מיץ ענבים לקידוש,

לציון (ח"ב עמוד קפז), וכן כתב בחזו"ע (ח"ב עמוד קכד).
ובהגדרת חמר מדינה כתב בשלטי הגיבורים (פסחים קז): "במקום שקובעים סודתם על השכר ורוב שתייתם שכר, השכר הוא להם כמו יין ומבדילים עליו ומקדשין עליו ומברכין עליו ברכת המזון".
והסביר בשו"ת אור לציון (שם) שישנם שלשה תנאים כדי להחשיב משקה חמר מדינה, שיהא מותר לקדש עליו. א. שאין מצוי בעיר יין. ב. שנוהגין לשתותו באותה מדינה. ג. שיהא זה משקה מבשם נוטה לשיכרות.

וכתב שם האור לציון שלכן אין לקדש על משקה קל כגון מיץ תפוזים טבעי, תה או קפה כיון שהם אינם משקים משכרים, וכן הובא בשו"ת הלכות קטנות (ח"א ס"ט) ובשו"ת לבושי מרדכי (ח"ב סימן לא).
אכן מפשטות דברי השו"ע שכתב שמקדשין על שכר ושאר משקין חוץ מן המים, משמע שכל שנקרא חמר מדינה דהיינו שהוא משקה חשוב ששותים אותו באותו מדינה אפשר לקדש עליו מלבד המים. ובמשנ"ב (סימן רצו סק"ט) ביאר דבריו ששאר משקין היינו כל משקים שרגילים לשתותם.



הנמצא במקום שאינו יכול להשיג יין או מיץ ענבים לקידוש, בלילה יקדש על הפת, ובוים ישתדל למצוא משקה משכר כגון בירה וכדומה.

כתב השולחן ערוך (סימן ערב ס"ט): "במקום שאין יין מצוי, יש אומרים שמקדשין על שכר ושאר משקין חוץ מן המים, ויש אומרים שאין מקדשין. ולהרא"ש, בלילה לא יקדש על השכר אלא על הפת, ובבוקר יותר טוב לקדש על השכר, שיברך עליו שהכל קודם ברכת המוציא, שאם יברך על הפת תחלה אין כאן שום שינוי, ודברי טעם הם".
ועל פי דברים אלו נלמד שבמקום שיש יין אין לקדש על שאר משקים, ומקורו מדברי המהר"ם מרוטנבורג (סימן קמו): "מה ששאלת על חמר מדינה, לא שרי אלא כשאין יין באותה מלכות כלל, דהא לא אמר חמר עיר אלא חמר מדינה, הילכך כיון שבכל המלכות יש יין אף שבסוף השנה יחסר לכם יין, הרי יש יין בכל סביבותיך. ובכל השנה אתה ממשיך כמה פרסאות לכבוד עצמך ואי אתה ממשיך פרסה אחת לכבוד קונך, ולמה תכניס ראשך בפלוגתא דרבוותא". וכן הביא המשנ"ב (סימן קפג ס"ק יג) שלענין קידוש והבדלה צריך לחזר דוקא אחר יין, כיון שיש נמצא בעיר, וכן כתב בשו"ת אור

Leylul Nishmat Tune but Bahiye

Shaare Ezra is a one of a kind, multi-faceted organization that's there for the community. Under the leadership of HaRav Shay Tahan שליט"א Shaare Ezra feels that proper Halachic guidance should be accessible to everyone, therefore we offer the community the opportunity to call, text, WhatsApp, or e-mail any halachic questions they may have, through the Bet Horaah, where qualified, trained and ordained Rabbis are available to answer your questions in English, Hebrew and Russian. Shaare Ezra is from the community—for the community.

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