



# Bet Horaah

בית הוראה

# Shahre Ezra

עברי עזרא

**Parshat Vayera**  
**Zmanim for New York:**  
**Candle Lighting: 4:19pm**  
**Shabbat ends: 5:21pm**  
**R"T 5:49pm**

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**IS PRESIDENT TRUMP THE WORLD'S STRONGEST OR WEAKEST LEADER? UNCOVERING WHO REALLY HOLDS THE POWER**  
 WRITTEN BY **RABBI SHAY TAHAN**  
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## HALACHA QUESTION?

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"Will President Trump be good for the Jewish people? Will he be good for Israel? Is President Trump better for us than Harris? Will he stop Iran's nuclear ambitions?" These are the talking points circulating everywhere now—in the media, newspapers, in phone conversations, stores, streets, and even in shuls. The reason for this fervent discussion is the widespread perception that the newly elected president of the United States is the world's most powerful leader, and has the ability to ultimately shape the next four years. And closer to home, the Jewish community wonders how his policies will impact us directly.



Surprise! According to the Torah's perspective—the true outlook on life—the president is actually among the least powerful people in the world, perhaps even helpless. Why is that? Let's delve into the Torah's perspective and reshape our mindset accordingly. Shlomo Hamelech in Mishlei says: "The heart of the king is like streams of water in the hand of Hashem; He directs it wherever He desires" (Mishlei 21:1). Rabbi Yishmael explains (Midrash Mishlei): "Streams of water are in Hashem's hand." Just as water, when placed in a container, can be directed to flow in any direction you choose, so too when a person rises to kingship, his heart is in the hands of the Hashem. If the world is deserving, Hashem will incline the king's heart toward positive decrees, but if the world is not deserving, Hashem will incline the king's heart toward negative decrees. Any decree that a king issues do not originate from him alone; rather, it first comes from Hashem. Therefore, the pasuk says, "He directs it wherever He desires."

The Torah's teachings on free choice highlight Hashem's deep respect for human agency. On one hand, Hashem urges us to choose a righteous path

and avoid evil, yet each person is given the autonomy to make their own choices, for good or bad, without divine interference. This approach grants individuals the dignity of self-determination, along with the responsibility for the consequences of their choices, whether positive or negative.

Free choice is foundational to a life of purpose and growth. It enables individuals to develop spiritually, learn from their experiences, and build an authentic relationship with Hashem based on freely made decisions rather than compulsion. This freedom, however, also entails accountability: those who choose good draw closer to Hashem and merit reward, while those who choose otherwise face the results of their actions. In this way, each person's choices shape not only their own destiny but also their influence on the world around them.

However, Chazal tell us there is one exception: the king. The heart of a king is completely in Hashem's control, influenced according to Hashem's will. Metaphorically, a king is held by strings, and Hashem moves these strings to direct the king's actions as He sees fit (see Malbim, Ralbag on Mishlei).

The reason for this distinction is that while a person's choices determine their own destiny and directly affect only those within their immediate circle, Hashem allows them the freedom to choose and either merit reward or suffer consequences for their actions. A king's decisions, however, have far-reaching effects on many others—his nation or, in the case of the U.S. president, potentially the entire world. Since no one holds the right to determine the fate of the entire world except Hashem, He alone directs and influences the king's heart to align with His divine will (Malbim). The Gemara (megilah 11, 1) further illustrates this concept with the decree in the time of Haman. The pasuk, "A song of ascents: If not for Hashem who was on our side, let Israel now say, if not

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for Hashem who was on our side when a man rose up against us" (Tehillim 124:1-2), uses the word "man" rather than "king," emphasizing that Haman was not a king. The Maharatz Chayot explains that if Haman had been a king, he would have been subject to Hashem's control, as it says, "The hearts of kings and rulers are in the hand of Hashem." Evil enacted by a king is a reflection of Hashem's judgment. But since Haman was merely a man with free will, he acted on his own wickedness, without Hashem's direct influence. Therefore, the pasuk highlights that only with Hashem's help were the Jews able to overcome him, as he had acted out of personal choice and not as a controlled ruler.



The concept above seems to be contradicted by a Gemara (brachot 55, 1) that teaches us to pray for a good king, implying that it is within the king's choice to be good or bad. Moreover, the Gemara derives this from the pasuk in Mishlei, which leaves us wondering: If the verse says that the heart of the king is in Hashem's hand, how can the king's actions be considered his own choice?

An even more challenging question arises: Why would Hashem punish Pharaoh for his evil actions if they were ultimately not within his control? Furthermore, why would Hashem hold other oppressive leaders accountable throughout history for the harm they caused, if their choices were also directed by divine will? We obviously don't believe that people like Hitler would go unpunished.

The answer, as explained by the Rambam (hilchot teshuva), is that every person, including a king, has the choice to do good or bad. However, there are times when Hashem removes that ability. Before a king is appointed, while he is still a private individual, he has the choice to be a good or bad leader. At that stage, we pray that a righteous and benevolent leader will be chosen. This means that Hashem will bring blessings through a kindhearted leader, while

harsh decrees come through a wicked one. If our prayers are answered, a well-meaning leader is appointed. Once he assumes power, however, Hashem directs his actions, ensuring that every decision aligns with His divine plan.

Thus, a wicked leader will be punished for all the harm done, even if he was no longer in control of his actions. This is because Hashem judges the wicked based on their inner will and intent, punishing them for their malicious desires, regardless of their actual power at the time.

This concept is found in the Gemara (Masechet Kiddushin 40a), which states, "Machshava ra'ah ein Hakadosh Baruch Hu metzarfa lema'aseh," meaning that Hashem does not typically punish for evil intentions alone unless they become actions. However, there are

exceptions for wicked people, where their intent itself is considered part of their guilt. The mefarshim explain that, for regular people, Hashem does not punish for intentions alone, as they might change their minds before acting. But in the case of truly evil individuals, Hashem may punish even for their intent, as they are unlikely to abandon their harmful plans.

Another approach is offered by the Nodah BiYehudah (in the Tzlach), who explains the Gemara's teaching on praying for a good king. He suggests that we should not only pray before a king is appointed, asking that a good leader be chosen, but also continue praying after the appointment that he remains righteous and benevolent in his rulership.

Conclusion: Although the Jewish community at large is pleased with the appointment of a president who seems to be a friend of the Jewish people and the State of Israel, and we wish him well, from this point forward it is Hashem who fully guides his actions. Ultimately, **our merits** will influence whether his leadership brings outcomes that are favorable or otherwise.

**AMSTERDAM RIOTS: THE TORAH'S PERSPECTIVE ON PROTECTION AND REVENGE**

As we witnessed the recent attack on our people in Amsterdam, we are reminded once again of how important it is to have the means to protect ourselves and our families, and to be prepared for potential threats. There is a reason why in America the Second Amendment allows one to protect themselves with arms. If a person seeks to harm another, they will likely think twice and reconsider if they know that their target has the ability to defend themselves. The fact is that these cowards often look for easy targets. They seek out the weak, just as Amalek did, and spare those whom they believe could fight back.

But is that the Torah's view? Maybe the Torah wants us to accept our fate of being constantly persecuted? Let's delve into some cases in the Torah to better understand this perspective.

**Avraham war against the four kings**

In the previous parasha, we read how Avraham went to war to rescue his nephew Lot, who had been kidnapped by a coalition of four kings. These kings had defeated the kings of the cities of Sedom, Amorrhah, and others, and had taken Lot and his possessions as spoils.

When Avraham heard that Lot had been captured, he immediately mobilized his trained men, who were born in his household—318 men. With these men, Avraham pursued the captors, and he managed to defeat the kings and their armies. He rescued Lot, along with the other captives, and recovered the spoils.

This story demonstrates Avraham's courage and determination to protect his family, even at the risk of his own life. Despite his

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great faith in Hashem, Avraham was not passive. While relying on Hashem for success, he took decisive action to ensure the safety of his loved ones. Avraham didn't view the situation as a divine decree that he should passively accept; instead, he understood that in order to live with dignity and stop oppression, he had to take action. He put himself in grave danger, fighting a war that seemed almost certain to be a suicide mission, against four trained and armed armies.

Through this, Avraham paved the way for us to understand that we, too, should not be passive when attacked. Aggression invites more aggression, and we must stand up for ourselves and protect those who are vulnerable.

**Yaakov preparation for a war**

Similarly, we see with Yaakov after he learns that Esav is threatening his safety. Yaakov takes the necessary steps to ensure he is prepared for a meaningful war, while also attempting to resolve the conflict diplomatically by appeasing Esav in various ways. Yaakov prepares for battle, but he does not rely solely on war as his first option.

Yaakov could have surrendered to Esav, who was stronger and possessed a trained army. Surrendering would have spared his life and the lives of his large family. However, Yaakov chose a different path. He demonstrated that, while one should always seek peace and resolve conflict through peaceful means when possible, it is also necessary to be prepared to defend oneself when faced with aggression.

Through this, Yaakov teaches us the correct approach to aggression: first, try to resolve the situation diplomatically, but when faced with real threats, we must also prepare to stand our ground and defend ourselves.

**Yehudah prepares to fight the king**

Later, when Yosef wanted to keep Binyamin as a slave for Pharaoh, Yehudah understood the injustice and decided to speak to him harshly, threatening to kill him and Pharaoh (Rashi). This act was by any means punishable by death, and Yehudah clearly knew this. However, he felt that he had no choice but to stand up to the aggression Yosef was displaying. Today, such an approach might be seen as an act of suicide, and some might blame Yehudah for his own fate. Yet, we see that this was how the Shvatim understood how to respond to aggression—through direct confrontation and standing firm in the face of injustice.

Their willingness to stand up, even at great personal risk, demonstrates the principle of fighting for justice, even if the odds seem insurmountable. Yehudah's actions show that sometimes one must confront aggression head-on, knowing the risks, and standing firm in what is right.

**Armed and ready**

In Shemot (13:18), the Israelites left Mitzrayim "armed for battle" to be prepared for any potential threats on their



journey to Eretz Yisrael. While Hashem protected them with the pillar of fire and the cloud of glory, they still took weapons with them to ensure they were ready to defend themselves if needed. This teaches that while we place our trust in Hashem, we are still required to take the necessary steps to protect ourselves and do our part in safeguarding our wellbeing.

**Moshe last war**

In Bamidbar (31:1-7), Hashem commands the Israelites to fight against the Midianites, even though at that point the Midianites did not pose an immediate threat to the nation. The purpose of this command was simply for revenge, as Hashem instructs them to avenge the cruelty the Midianites had inflicted upon the Israelites. This was not just a passing statement, but rather, the last command Moshe Rabbenu had to fulfill in his life, as Hashem informed him that immediately after carrying it out, Moshe would pass away.

Moshe Rabbenu, in accordance with Hashem's command, quickly mobilized the army to carry out this mission, demonstrating the importance of responding to aggression and injustice with consequences. It underscores the principle that Israel should not be attacked without repercussions, teaching that there is a time to take action against those who harm us, even when the threat is not immediate, in order to prevent further harm.

**Avenging Amalek**

Another example is Hashem's command to forever seek revenge against Amalek for attacking our people in the desert. Why didn't Hashem instruct us to forgive and forget, as modern psychology often recommends for emotional healing? The reason, as explained earlier, is that forgiveness and forgetting are possible when the threat has ended and the dignity of our nation and Hashem's honor are not at risk. However, when Am Yisrael is attacked, it sends a message to others that they too can act with impunity. This message can linger for eternity, as it did with Amalek. Therefore, Hashem commands that such brutality must be eradicated at its core, to prevent further harm and send a clear message that such actions will not be tolerated.

**Final words**

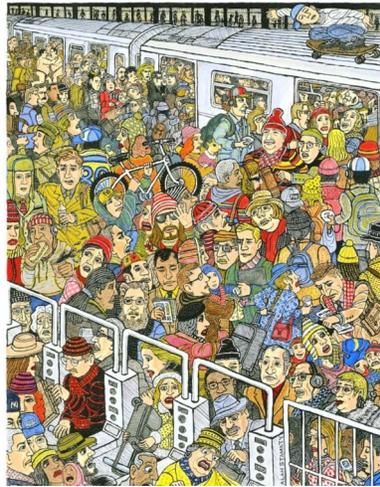
In conclusion, the Torah presents a balanced approach to protection and justice, showing that while we must rely on Hashem, we are also expected to take necessary steps to safeguard ourselves and uphold our dignity. When our people are harmed, the Torah advocates a response to prevent further aggression, maintaining that unchecked harm or injustice against the Jewish people should never be tolerated. This outlook underscores our responsibility to defend against threats while upholding a sense of divine purpose and justice.

**איש העומד באוטובוס ליד אישה**

**איש העומד באוטובוס ליד אישה, או יושב במטוס ליד אישה ולהיפך, יזהרו לא לבוא לידי נגיעה, ואם נגעו בלי כונה לא עברו איסור. ואם הדבר אפשרי מומלץ להחליף את כסאו עם חילוני שאינו מקפיד לישב ליד אישה.**

ברזל וטסים באוירון, ומקומו סמוך לאשה ובא לידי נגיעה, יש לומר על פי הגמרא (פסחים כה, ב) דהיכא דלא אפשר ולא מכיין כולי עלמא מודו דמותר, והתוספות שם כתבו אפילו אפשר בדרך אחר אלא שהוא טורח גדול חשיב לא אפשר. והכא נמי ליסע בכל פעם במרכבה יחידית (מונית) הוא הוצאת ממון ודינו כמו טרחה רב, והוי לא אפשר והוא אינו מתכוין לה".

ובספר אהל יעקב (פסקי הוראה א' סימן קסו) כתב בשם הגר"י זילברשטיין שאדם שקבעו לו מקום ליד אישה והדבר מפריע לו רשאי להחליף את מקומו עם מי שלא מפריע לו לישב שם מכיין שאין כאן איסור נגיעה ואין הוא מכשיל את השני, אלא רק שהדבר מפריע לו מחמת הרגלו שלא לישב ליד אישה.



באגרות משה (אבה"ע ח"ב סימן יד) נשאל אם רשאי אדם ליסע לעבודתו ברכבת התחתית של ניו יורק כשקשה להימנע מנגיעה בשעות העומס, וכתב: "בדבר הליכה בסבאווי ובבאס (רכבת תחתית ואוטובוס) בזמן שהולכים בני אדם לעבודתם, שנמצאים שם אנשים ונשים דחופים זה בזה, שקשה מלהיזהר מנגיעה ודחיפה בנשים, אם מותר אז ללכת בשעות אלו שם.

הנה מצד הנגיעה ודחיפה בנשים אין שום איסור משום שאין זה דרך תאוה וחיבה, וכל איסור נגיעה בעריות אף להרמב"ם שסובר שהוא בלאו ד'לא תקרבו' דאורייתא, הוא דוקא דרך תאוה, כמפורש בדבריו ריש פרק כא מהלכות איסורי ביאה. ומשמע שבלא דרך תאוה אין אפילו איסור מדרבנן, שלא הזכיר איסור זה".

וסיים ש"לכן לא שייך לחוש מלכת בסבאווי ובבאס בשעות הליכה לעבודה שדחוקים ודחופים אנשים ונשים אף שלא יוכל ליזהר מנגיעה ודחיפה בנשים, שהנגיעה בלא כונה מחמת שאי אפשר ליזהר, אין זה דרך תאוה וחיבה"

וסיים את התשובה: "וכן ליכא איסור מהאי טעמא גם לישב אצל אשה כשליכא מקום אחר, דגם כן אין זה דרך תאוה וחיבה... אבל אם יודע שהוא יבוא לידי הרהור יש לו למנוע מללכתאז אם אין נחוץ לו. ואם מוכרח לילך אז גם כן לעבודתו אין לאסור לו אף בכהאי גונא, ויתחזק להסיח דעתו מהן ולהרהר בדברי תורה כעצת הרמב"ם (שם הי"ט), ועל זה יוכל לסמוך וליירך לעבודתו".

וכן כתב גם בספר שערים מצוינים בהלכה (סימן קנב הערה יא): "מה שנוסעים ברכת תחתית וצפופים אנשים ונשים, וכמו כן נוסעים ברכת

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