



PROTEST

Rimonim

The Conversation of Torah

A PROJECT OF TORAHLAB

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First published 2008

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Typeset and design by TorahLab

Published by TorahLab
Monsey – Jerusalem

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Printed in Israel

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Foreword

Rabbi Yaacov Haber

Ghandi said, "The lowest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in the face of a moral crisis."

In the story of Chanukah, a small group of righteous Kohanim stood up against the mightiest army in the world to protect the values that they knew were holy. Miraculously, they succeeded. They acted as did Shimon, Levi and Pinchus before them; Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Chananya ben Tradion after them. They were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the ideals of the Torah.

Are we?

There is so much wrong with the world and so much that needs to change. Where are we? Is it our calling to protest? What if we feel that nothing will be accomplished by protesting?

There is an inherent spiritual tension that comes with the decision to protest. Is protest an act of arrogance or selflessness? To protest is to assume a position of moral or intellectual superiority and therefore has great potential for arrogance. Even worse, protest often contains elements of anger and temper, attributes that should usually be controlled.

So before we protest we must engage in a process of painstaking self-scrutiny. We must examine the wisdom and motivation behind our need to assume leadership. We must ask ourselves: who gives us the right to dare believe in our own understanding and then exert our personal opinion upon the world?

This self-scrutiny can humble us into the silent background. Will the humble person ever protest?

And then there is the practical dilemma. If we do protest, how will it affect our families and our own standing in the community? If we don't protest how committed are we to our vision of truth? If we do submit to a system that we consider immoral, how long until we assimilate into that very culture and become part of that which we despise?

Finally, if we do decide to react, how far should we take it? Or, perhaps a better question would be, how far will it take us? How often in history have the highly principled activists fallen into violence and immoral behavior to accomplish their moral goal?

The Maccabees stood up to fight, the Beis HaMikdash survived in Jerusalem for an extra two hundred years. Jews were able to live in Israel independently and maintain their tradition.

Yigal Amir, upon murdering the Prime Minister of Israel said: "Everything I did, I did for Israel. For the Torah of Israel, for the People of Israel and for the Land of Israel." Twelve years later, what, in fact, was accomplished?

כל מי שאפשר למחות לאנשי ביתו ולא מיחה- נתפס על אנשי ביתו, באנשי עירו- נתפס על אנשי עירו, בכל העולם כולו- נתפס על כל העולם כולו.

(תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף נד:)

If a person can protest the misdeeds of his household, yet does not, he becomes guilty with them. If he can protest the misdeeds of his townsmen and doesn't, he is guilty with them. If he can protest the misdeeds of the entire world and doesn't, he is guilty with them.

(Talmud Bavli Shabbos 54b)

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1 What if I am not sure I believe in the cause?

2 What if I endanger myself by protesting?

3 Why should I be considered guilty for the actions of others?

וזה פשוט, כי מי שאוהב את חבר אי אפשר לו לסבול שיראה מכים את חברו או מחרפים אותו ובודאי שיצא לעזרתו. גם מי שאוהב שמו יתברך, לא יוכל לסבול ולראות שיחללו אותו חס וחלילה ושיעברו על מצותיו.

(הרמח"ל ספר מסילת ישרים פרק יט)

If a person loves his friend he cannot stand by and watch his friend be beaten and insulted. He would come to his aid. Likewise, a person who loves God cannot bear to see the desecration of His Name and the transgression of His mitzvos...

(R. Moshe Chaim Luzzato, *Mesillas Yescharim* chapter 19)

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal blue lines.

- 1 If I do not come to the aid of another, does that mean I do not love him/her?
- 2 What if the 'natural consequences' he or she is experiencing will be ultimately helpful to that person?
- 3 What if my protest on behalf of God provokes a worse counter reaction?

**Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato,
Ramchal
(1707-1747)**

- o Born in Padua, Italy.
- o Author of many texts including *Mesillas Yescharim* and *Derech Hashem*.
- o Died in Israel, buried in Teveria.

כלומר, לוא יצויר שהאדם רואה את אחיו אוכל מאכל שיש בו חשש רעל, באיזה התאמצות ישתדל להציל אותו, ואפילו בכח. אבל בודאי לא ישמח לאיד לוא יקלל אותו וכדומה, אלא תמיד יזכור שאחיו הוא, ורצונו בטובתו...סוף דבר, עזות היא מדה יקרה וחשובה ונצרכת לעולם, אבל היא כמו אש. במדה מוגבלת ומודרכת היא טובה לבשול במטבח וכו' אבל כאשר מתפשטת בצורה בלתי מרוסנת, היא מכלה את הכל ח"ו.

(בית יחזקאל שער ה פרק ו דף קפא)

If someone sees his brother eating food that might be poisoned he will do anything to save him, including using force. But he certainly shouldn't rejoice in the misfortune or curse him, or the like. He should always remember that he is his brother, and his intentions are for the other's good. Aggressiveness is an important trait that is needed for the world. But it is like fire: in limited and directed amounts it is good for cooking etc. But when it surges forth unbridled, it can destroy everything.

(Beis Yechezkel, Sha'ar 5, Chapter 6, p. 181)

- 1 What if my brother asked not to be helped?
- 2 How can I determine when my aggressiveness is useful or destructive?

Rabbi Moshe Yechiel Weiss Tzuriel
contemporary

- Former Mashgiach in Yeshivat Shaalvim.
- Profilic author of many works including Beis Yechezkel.

ואמר ריש לקיש: קשוט עצמך ואחר כך קשוט אחרים.

(תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא מציעא דף ק"ז:)

Reish Lakish said: Correct yourself first, then correct others.

(Talmud Bavli Bava Metziah 107b)

אין הכוונה, שימתין מלטפל באחרים, עד שהוא עצמו יגיע לתכלית השלמות. אלא הכוונה היא: שתיקון עצמו ישפיע על אחרים, שממנו יראו וכן יעשו.

(הרב מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן ליקוטי שיחות א:עט)

Not that you should wait to correct others until you have reached the height of perfection yourself. Rather, by correcting yourself, you will influence others, who will observe you, and do so themselves.

(R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, *Likutei Sichos* 1:79)

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- 1 Is it impossible to know or promote what is right without being perfect?
- 2 Should fear of hypocrisy prevent one from protesting?
- 3 Is it enough to show a good personal example?

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson,
Lubavitcher Rebbe
(1902-1994)**

- o Born in Nikolayev, Ukraine.
- o Succeeded his father-in-law as Rebbe of Lubavitch in 1951.
- o Started the worldwide Chabad-Lubavitch movement.
- o Authored many works including *HaYom Yom*, *Haggadah Im Likutei Ta'amim U'Minhagim*, and *Sefer HaToldos*, his public discourses are published as *Likutei Sichos*.
- o Died in Brooklyn, New York.

גדלותו של פנחס היתה, שבשעה שכל העם עומדים ורואים מעשה זימרי ואינם עושים מאומה, ואילו פנחס אינו מתחשב בדעת הציבור אלא כיון שראה ונזכר הלכה פועל לפי הבנתו ווהכרתו, זו היא האות וסימן שקנאת ה' צב-אות בוערת בו ומשו"ה זכה לברכת כהונת עולם. והיינו כמש"נ שכיון שהאדם פועל לפי ראות החוש, ורואה שרבים פועלים באיזה אופן אף זה נעשה לחוש ואינו מסוגל לנטות ממנה, נתבונן נא מעט באורחות חיינו ונראה היאך אנו מושפעים מדעת הרבים, ואף בדברים הידועים וברורים אצלו, מ"מ בעת שרבים פועלים אחרת לא עוזר לו הבנתו וידיעתו ונגרר אחר דעת הרבים, וענין זה מושרש כ"כ עמוק בנו עד שאיננו מסוגלים כלל להבין ולהרגיש שאנו נמשכים אחר העולם, ולו היינו חיים במדבר ללא השפעה חיצונית היה כל התנהגותינו שונה לחלוטין.

(הרב יחזקאל לוינשטיין, אור יחזקאל, מידות דף רצו)

The entire nation was standing by and watching the [illicit] act of Zimri, yet did absolutely nothing. Pinchas ignored the general attitude, and when he saw what was happening, rose and acted according to his own understanding. This was the greatness of Pinchas. Usually when a person sees that most people behave in a certain way, he becomes influenced by them and cannot do otherwise. Think about our own lives, and how much we are affected by public opinion, even in issues which are completely clear to us. When public opinion says otherwise, our own understanding doesn't help, and we get pulled along. This behavior is so deeply rooted until we cannot even feel that we are influenced by the world. Perhaps, if we lived in the desert, without any outside influence, our behavior would be completely different.

(R. Yechezkel Levenstein, *Ohr Yechezkel*, Midos p.296)

1 How far must a person go in his or her protest against public opinion?

Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein
(1884-1974)

- o Born in Warsaw.
- o Author of *Ohr Yechezkel*.
- o Mashgiach in Yeshivos Mir and Ponovich.
- o Died in Jerusalem.

א"ר חייא א"ר סימון ג' היו באותה עצה, בלעם, ואיוב, ויתרו, בלעם שיעץ נהרג, איוב ששתק נידון ביסורין, יתרו שברח זכו בניו וישבו בלשכת הגזית.

(שמות רבא פרשה א:ט)

[Before Pharaoh decreed that Jewish male babies be thrown into the Nile he consulted with three world leaders- Bilaam, Iyov and Yisro]. (ed. note)

Bilaam, who advised Pharaoh to carry out his evil plan, was killed. Iyov, who was quiet, was punished with suffering. Yisro, who fled, merited that his children became judges of Israel (lit. sat [on the Sanhedrin] in the hewed chamber).

(Medrash Rabba, Exodus 1:9)

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1 What is the difference between remaining silent and running away?

”הכועס צריך להפוך אותו אל הסבלנות, ואדם הרחמן (יותר מדאי) צריך להשתנות אל הרגזנות כמו שמצינו בשאול שריחם על אגג (שלא כדין) מפני שכל אחד מהקצוות רעות...ולכן מי שטבעו רגזן מאוד, המקפיד על כל דבר אף שאין (הדבר) מגיעות אליו. צריך בתחילה להעתיק עצמו אל הצד השני לסבלנות יתרה, אף לסבול נגד (במקום הנוגע אל) קנאות ה' צבאות”

(כתב יד הגר"א הוצאת קליינרמן)

Anger must be transformed into patience. On the other hand a person with excessive compassion must develop the trait of anger... for all extremes are bad. Therefore, a person who is hot-blooded by nature, and who is very critical, even of things that do not pertain to him, must first reach the other extreme – absolute forbearance, even in the face of the desecrated honor of G-d.

(Manuscript of R. Eliyahu of Vilna, *Commentary on Mishlei* 1:3, published by Klienerman)

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal blue lines.

- 1 What type of anger is necessary?
- 2 If others are committing blatant violations of Jewish law, is it ever right to display patience and tolerance?

**Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna (Kremar)
Gra or Vilna Gaon
(1720-1797)**

- o Born in Vilna, Lithuania.
- o Authored hundreds of books, including glosses on *Shulchan Aruch*.
- o ‘Father’ of the Lithuanian Yeshiva world.
- o Died and buried in Vilna.

ואמר רבא: האי צורבא מרבנן דרתח - אורייתא הוא דקא מרתחא ליה.

(תלמוד בבלי מסכת תענית דף ד עמוד א)

Rava said, If you see a Torah scholar become enraged, it is the Torah that is burning in him.

(Talmud Bavli Ta'anis 4a)

אורייתא הוא דקא מרתחא ליה. הכוונה לפי שהאנשים המבינים המיושבים בדעתם ורוחם ומתנהגים בכל דבר במתינות רבה מפני ידיעתם בטבע הנהגת העולם. והאנשים ההם מבקרי מומי התלמיד חכם בראותם את רתיחת טבעם לפעמים היוצא מגדר נימוס הדרך ארץ. לפי שהכעס הוא ממדות הגרועות. ואמר רבא דיש לדין התלמיד חכם לכף זכות. דאורייתא שהיא דבר רוחני דומה לאש כמ"ש אש דת למו כשתבא היא בגוף התלמיד חכם היא מרתחת את הגוף ומביאו בטבע לידי כעס שהוא מרתח הלב כי האור האמת יפוך ענני הכעס לפעמים.

(הרב חנוך זונדל בן יוסף, עץ יוסף, תענית ד')

There are men who are wise and calm, who act with depth of judgment, always in line with the ways of the world. They become critical when they see this burst of anger, which transgresses "good manners"... Rava was telling them to judge favorably. For the Torah is a spiritual force, likened to fire. It burns inside a Torah scholar and brings him to anger. At times, the light of truth sends up clouds of rage.

(Rabbi Chanoch Zundel Ben Yosef, *Eitz Yosef*, commentary to Talmud Bavli, Ta'anis 4)

1 Is the anger of youth an understandable stage of development or a positive trait for a Torah scholar?

Rabbi Chanoch Zundel ben Yosef

- Lived in Bialystock, Poland.
- Author of *Eitz Yosef* and *Anaf Yosef* among other works.