

Fill Your Own Cup 5786 – Summer Series*Power and Powerlessness in Jewish Texts Session Three – Citizenship***1) Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l, Covenant & Conversation, Behaalotcha 5782**

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/behaalotcha/is-a-leader-a-nursing-father/>

The “great man” theory of leadership haunts Jewish history like a recurring nightmare. In the days of Samuel the people believe all their problems will be solved if they appoint a king “like all the other nations.” In vain, Samuel warns them that this will only make their problems worse. Saul looks the part, handsome, upright, “a head taller than anyone else” (1 Sam. 9), but he lacks strength of character. David commits adultery. Solomon, blessed with wisdom, is seduced by his wives into folly. The kingdom splits. Only a few subsequent kings are equal to the moral and spiritual challenge of combining faith in God with a politics of realism and civic virtue.

During the Second Temple period, the success of the Maccabees was dramatic but short-lived. The Hasmonean kings themselves became Hellenised. The office of High Priest became politicised. No one could contain the growing rifts within the nation. Having defeated the Greeks, the nation fell to the Romans. Sixty years later Rabbi Akiva identified Bar Kochba as another “great man” in the mold of Judah the Maccabee, and the result was the worst tragedy in Jewish history until the Holocaust. Judaism is about diffused responsibility, making each individual count, building cohesive teams on the basis of a shared vision, educating people to their full potential, and valuing honest argument and the dignity of dissent.

2) Parker J. Palmer, *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, pp. 17-18, 22-23***The Heart of Democracy Lies Within Each of Us***

Heart is a word that reaches far beyond our feelings. It points to a larger way of knowing-of receiving and reflecting on our experience—that goes deeper than the mind alone can take us. The heart is where we integrate the intellect with the rest of our faculties, such as emotion, imagination, and intuition. It is where we can learn how to ‘think the world together,’ not apart, and find the courage to act on what we know.

If you hold your knowledge of self and world wholeheartedly, your heart will at times get broken by loss, failure, defeat, betrayal, or death. What happens next in you and the world around you depends on how your heart breaks. If it breaks apart into a thousand pieces, the result may be anger, depression, and disengagement. If it breaks open into greater capacity to hold the complexities and contradictions of human experience, the result may be new life. The heart is what makes us human—and politics, which is the use of power to order our life together, is a profoundly human enterprise. Politics in the hands of those whose hearts have been broken open, not apart, helps us hold our differences creatively and use our power courageously for the sake of a more equitable, just, and compassionate world...

The impulses that make democracy possible—and those that threaten it—originate in the heart, with its complex mix of heedless self-interest and yearning for community. From there, these impulses move out into our relations with each other in families, neighborhoods, workplaces, voluntary associations, and the various settings of public life. These are the places where 18th-century Quaker abolitionist John Woolman made a difference simply by walking and talking persistently and with principle. These are the places where we can make a difference, too, once we free ourselves from the illusion that we are at the mercy of forces beyond our control.

We normally associate “politics” with distant centers of power—legislatures, lobbyists, party caucuses, and board rooms—not with the everyday settings I just named. That is a mistake, for those places comprise the vital prepolitical layer of our common life, the social infrastructure on which democracy’s well-being depends. At the highest levels of institutional politics, the common good is rarely served if citizens are not speaking and acting in these local venues, gathering the collective power necessary to support the best and resist the worst of our leaders as they decide on matters that affect all of us.

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I. Feeling Responsible for the Community

3) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Shabbat 54b

Everyone who can protest the sin of their household and does not is responsible for the people of their household.
(Who can protest the sin of) the people of their city, (and does not) is responsible for the people of their city.
(Who can protest the sin of) the whole world, (and does not) is responsible for the whole world.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת נד:

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.

4) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Taanit 11a

Another Baraita taught: When the community is in trouble let not a person say, ‘I will go to my house and I will eat and drink and all will be well with me’.

For of one who does so Scripture says, “And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine — ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die!’”(Isaiah 22:13)

What follows after this [verse]? “And God revealed Godself in my ears: surely this sin shall not be forgiven you until you die” (22:14).

To here is the measure of the intermediate ones, but [about] the measure of evildoers, what is written? “Come and I will get wine and we will fill ourselves with ale, and it shall be like this tomorrow” (Isaiah 56:12).

What is written after it? “The righteous man perishes, and no man places it to his heart [... that] it is because of the evil that the righteous man is gathered” (Isaiah 57:1)

But rather a person should share in the distress of the community, for so we find that Moses, our teacher, shared in the distress of the community, as it is said, “But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it.” (Exodus 17:12). Surely Moses had a pillow or a cushion to sit on!

Rather, Moses said [to himself], “Since the people of Israel is in distress, I will be with them in their distress.” **Whoever shares in the distress of the community will merit to behold its consolation’.**

תלמוד בבלי תענית יא.

תניא אידך בזמן שהצבור שרוי בצער אל יאמר אדם אלך לביתי ואוכל ואשתה ושלוש עליך נפשי
ואם עושה כן עליו הכתוב אומר (ישעיהו כב, יג) והנה ששון ושמחה הרוג בקר ושחוט צאן אכול בשר ושתות יין אכול ושתו כי מחר נמות
מה כתיב בתריה ונגלה באזני ה' צבאות אם יכופר העון הזה לכם עד תמותון עד כאן מדת בינונים אבל במדת רשעים מה כתיב (ישעיהו נו, יב) אתיו אקחה יין ונסבאה שכר והיה כזה יום מחר מה כתיב בתריה הצדיק אבד ואין איש שם על לב כי מפני הרעה נאסף הצדיק
אלא יצער אדם עם הצבור שכן מצינו במשה רבינו שציער עצמו עם הצבור שנאמר (שמות יז, יב) וידי משה כבדים ויקחו אבן וישימו תחתיו וישב עליה וכי לא היה לו למשה כר אחת או כסת אחת לישב עליה? אלא כך אמר משה הואיל וישראל שרוין בצער אף אני אהיה עמהם בצער וכל המצער עצמו עם הצבור זוכה ורואה בנחמת צבור

II. Financial Responsibility to the Community

5) Mishna Tractate Bava Batra 1:5

The residents of a courtyard can compel each inhabitant of that courtyard to financially participate in the building of a gatehouse and a door to the jointly owned courtyard.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel disagrees and says: Not all courtyards require a gatehouse, and each courtyard must be considered on its own in accordance with its specific needs.

Similarly, the residents of a city can compel each inhabitant of that city to contribute to the building of a wall, double doors, and a crossbar for the city. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel disagrees and says: Not all towns require a wall. How long must one live in the city to be considered "one of the people of the city"? Twelve months.

But if he bought himself a residence in the city, he is immediately considered like one of the people of the city.

משנה בבא בתרא א:ה

כופין אותו לבנות בית שער ודלת לחצר

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר לא כל החצרות ראויות לבית שער

כופין אותו לבנות לעיר חומה ודלתים ובריח

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר לא כל העיירות ראויות לחומה

כמה יהא בעיר ויהא כאנשי העיר שנים עשר חודש קנה בה בית דירה הרי הוא כאנשי העיר מיד:

6) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Bava Batra 8a

It was taught: [One must dwell in a place] thirty days [before giving] to the soup kitchen, three months for the charity fund, six months for clothing, nine months for burial, twelve months for paying taxes.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא ח.

והתניא: שלשים יום - לתמחוי, שלשה חדשים - לקופה, ששה - לכסות, תשעה - לקבורה, שנים עשר - לפסי העיר

7) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Bava Batra 7b

With regard to this issue, Rabbi Elazar asked Rabbi Yoḥanan: When the residents of the city collect money to build a wall, do they collect based on the number of people living in each house, or perhaps they collect based on the net worth of each person? Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: **They collect based on the net worth of each person**, and Elazar, my son, you shall fix nails in this, i.e., this is an established halakha, and you must not veer from it.

There are those who say that Rabbi Elazar asked Rabbi Yoḥanan: When they collect money to build a wall, do they collect based on the proximity of the houses to the wall, so that those people who live closer to the wall pay more? Or perhaps they collect based on the net worth of each person. Rabbi Yoḥanan said to him: **They collect based on the proximity of the houses to the wall**, and Elazar, my son, you shall fix nails in this.

It is related that Rabbi Yehuda Nesia once imposed payment of the tax for the wall even on the Sages. Reish Lakish said to him: The Sages do not require protection, as it is written: "How precious are your dear ones to me, O God...If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand" (Psalms 139:17–18).

תלמוד בבלי בבא בתרא ז:

בעא מיניה רבי אלעזר מרבי יוחנן: כשהן גובין, לפי נפשות גובין, או דילמא לפי שבח ממון גובין? אמר ליה: לפי ממון גובין; ואלעזר בןי, קבע בה מסמרות!

איכא דאמרי, בעא מיניה רבי אלעזר מרבי יוחנן: כשהן גובין, לפי קירוב בתים הן גובין, או דילמא לפי ממון גובין? אמר ליה: לפי קירוב בתים הן גובין; ואלעזר בןי, קבע בה מסמרות!

רבי יהודה נשיאה רמא דשורא אדרבן. אמר ריש לקיש: רבנן לא צריכי נטרותא, דכתיב: "אספרם מחול ירבון"

8) Tosafot on Bava Batra 7b:13:1

Based on the proximity of the houses to the wall – They collect according to the closeness of the houses. Rabbenu Tam explained that the resolution of “according to the closeness of the houses” means that the poor who live closer to the wall must give more than the poor who live further from the wall. And similarly the rich who live closer give more than the rich who live further – However (even) the rich who live further give more than the poor who live closer, because the collection is also based according to monetary value of the citizens.

תוספות בבא בתרא ז:

לפי קירוב בתים הן גובין. פירש. ר"ת ונותנין עניים קרובים יותר מרחוקים וכן עשירים קרובים יותר מעשירים רחוקים אבל עשירים רחוקים נותנין יותר מעניים קרובים דלפי שבח ממון נמי הן גובין:

III. Are there Limits to my Personal Responsibility?

9) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Bavah Metziah 62a

The Gemara asks: And Rabbi Yoḥanan, what does he do with this verse: “And your brother shall live with you”?

The Gemara answers: He requires the verse for that which is taught in a Baraita (section of earlier text): If two people were walking on a desolate path and there was a jug [kiton] of water in the possession of one of them, and the situation was such that if both drink from the jug, both will die, as there is not enough water, but if only one of them drinks, he will reach a settled area, there is a dispute as to the halakha. Ben Petora taught: It is preferable that both of them drink and die and let neither one of them see the death of the other. This was the accepted opinion until Rabbi Akiva came and taught that the verse states: “And your brother shall live with you,” indicating that your life takes precedence over the life of your friend.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא

מציעא סב.

רבי יוחנן האי וחי אחיך עמך מאי עביד ליה מבעי ליה לכדתניא שנים שהיו מהלכין בדרך וביד אחד מהן קיתון של מים אם שותין שניהם מתים ואם שותה אחד מהן מגיע לישוב דרש בן פטורא מוטב שישתו שניהם וימותו ואל יראה אחד מהם במיתתו של חברו עד שבא ר' עקיבא ולימד וחי אחיך עמך חייך קודמים לחיי חברך

10) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Ketubot 50a

Rabbi Ile'a said: In Usha the Sages instituted that one who dispenses his money to charity should not dispense more than one-fifth. That opinion is also taught in a baraita: One who dispenses money to charity should not dispense more than one-fifth, for he may become dependent on others.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת כתובות נ.

אמר רבי אילעא, באושא התקינו: המבזבז – אל יבזבז יותר מחומש. תניא נמי הכי: המבזבז – אל יבזבז יותר מחומש, שמא יצטרך לבריות.