

Fill Your Own Cup – Year Two
Jewish Food for Thought on the Elections

1) Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein – Judaism and Democracy

<https://etzion.org.il/en/halakha/studies-halakha/laws-state-and-society/judaism-and-democracy-part-1-2>

The most basic foundation of all political science is the question of the source of authority and its roots: from whence does it derive its values and draw its power, on the practical level, but also – more importantly – on the level of ideas? In this context, it is clear that if we compare our world view to that of western democracy, there is a contradiction. Democracy maintains that the source of authority, its root and basis, is the vox populi – the voice of the public. The public decides, for better or worse; the public determines what is desirable and what is not, both in legal and in moral terms.

We, on the other hand – and I refer also to those who cleave to universal religious values in general, and to our world-view in particular – highlight the idea that the source of authority is the Holy One and His will. “He is our God and there is no other.” We are His servants; we are happy to serve Him, and we proclaim – like any believing Jew – that “They are My servants, whom I took out of the land of Egypt.” God’s command comes “first” both chronologically and logically. In this sense, then, it is clear that our world view differs from the democracy espoused by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Locke.

At the same time, however, one thing must be clear. While we differ regarding the roots of authority, this does not necessarily place us in opposition to the democratic perception of government, namely, how it is structured and how it is elected. The contradiction between “they are My servants” and a view of authority as emanating from a human, secular power is one that would exist even if we were speaking of an oligarchy or monarchy...

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...Spiritual self-fulfillment is maximized to the degree that human free will finds expression. It is specifically in a democratic society, where man has freedom of choice in very significant areas of his life, pertaining to his lifestyle and the structure of the society in which he lives, that the human aspect – the aspect of the “Divine image,” as reflected, inter alia, in the freedom of choice – finds expression. This fundamental Jewish value – the ability to choose – assumes more significant expression specifically in a democratic world, just as democratic values find expression specifically in a Jewish, halakhic framework...

I. Monarchy Model

2) Deuteronomy 17:14-20

If, after you have entered the land that your God has assigned to you, and taken possession of it and settled in it, you decide, “I will set a king over me, as do all the nations about me,” you shall be free to set a king over yourself, one chosen by your God. Be sure to set as king over yourself one of your own people; you must not set a foreigner over you, one who is not your kin. Moreover, he shall not keep many horses or send people back to Egypt to add to his horses, since God has warned you, “You must not go back that way again.” And he shall not have many wives, lest his heart go astray; nor shall he amass silver and gold to excess. When he is seated on his royal throne, he shall have a copy of this Teaching written for him on a scroll by the Levitical priests. Let it remain with him and let him read in it all his life, so that he may learn to revere his God, to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching as well as these laws.

דברים י"ז: י"ד – כ

(יד) כִּי תָבֹא אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְקֹוּק אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לָךְ וַיִּרְשָׁתָהּ וַיִּשְׁבְּתָהּ בָּהּ וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲשִׁימָה עָלַי מֶלֶךְ כְּכָל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹתַי:
 (טו) שׁוּם תִּשִּׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר יְקֹוּק אֱלֹהֶיךָ בּוֹ מִקְרֵב אַחֲיֶיךָ תִּשִּׂים עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ לֹא תֹוּכַל לִתֵּת עָלֶיךָ אִישׁ נָכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא אַחֲיֶיךָ הוּא:
 (טז) רֶק לֹא יִרְבֶּה לוֹ סוּסִים וְלֹא יִשִּׁיב אֶת הָעָם מִצְרַיִם לַמַּעַן הַרְבּוֹת סוּסֵי וַיִּקְוֶה אָמַר לָכֶם לֹא תִסְפּוּן לָשׁוּב בַּדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה עוֹד:
 (יז) וְלֹא יִרְבֶּה לוֹ נָשִׁים וְלֹא יִסּוּר לִבּוֹ וַיִּכְסֹף וַיִּזְהַב לֹא יִרְבֶּה לוֹ מֵאֵד:
 (יח) וְהָיָה כְשִׁבְתוֹ עַל כִּסֵּא מַמְלַכְתּוֹ וְכָתַב לוֹ אֶת מִשְׁנֵה הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת עַל סֵפֶר מַלְפָּנָי הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּם:
 (יט) וְהָיְתָה עִמּוֹ וְקָרָא בּוֹ כָּל יְמֵי חַיָּיו לְמַעַן יִלְמַד לִירְאָה אֶת יְקֹוּק אֱלֹהָיו לְשַׁמֵּר אֶת כָּל דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת וְאֵת הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה לַעֲשׂוֹתָם:

Thus he will not act haughtily toward his fellows or deviate from the Instruction to the right or to the left, to the end that he and his descendants may reign long in the midst of Israel.

(כ) לבלתי רום לבבו מאחיו ובלבתי סור מן המצוה ימין ושמאל למען יאריה ימים על ממלכתו הוא ובניו בקרב ישראל:

3) Samuel I 8:11 – 17

He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots.¹² Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots.¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants.¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants.¹⁶ Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle^{17a} and donkeys he will take for his own use.¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves.

שמואל א' פרק ח:יא-יז

ויאמר זה יהיה משפט המלך אשר ימלך עליכם את בניכם יקח ושם לו בקרבתו ובפרישיו ורצו לפניו קרבתו. ולשום לו שרי אֶלפים ושרי חמשים ולקח שרישו ולקצר קצירו ולעשות כלי מלחמתו וכלי רכבו. ואת בנותיכם יקח לרקחות ולטבחות ולאפות. ואת שדותיכם ואת פרמיכם וזיתיכם הטובים יקח ונתן לעבדיו. ותרעיכם וכרמיכם יעשר ונתן לשריטיו ולעבדיו. ואת עבדיכם ואת שפחותיכם ואת בחוריכם הטובים ואת חמוריכם יקח ועשה למלאכתו. צאנכם יעשר ואתם תהיו לו לעבדים.

4) Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 20b

Mishna: And the King may send them out to a voluntary war, with the agreement of a Beit Din (court) of seventy-one, and he can break through a wall in order to make himself a road, and no one may stop him. The road of a king has no set amount. The people take spoils of war, and he takes half of them.
Gemara:
Rav Yehudah said in the name of Shmuel, Everything that was said in the section on the king (in Sefer Shmuel) - a king can do.
Rav said: This was only said in order to intimidate the people, as it says "Place upon you a king – so that his fear will be upon you."

תלמוד בבלי מסכת סנהדרין דף כ עמוד ב

משנה. ומוציא למלחמת הרשות על פי בית דין של שבעים ואחד, ופורץ לעשות לו דרך, ואין ממחה בידו. דרך המלך אין לו שיעור. וכל העם בוזזין ונותנין לו, והוא נוטל חלק בראש.
גמרא.
אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: כל האמור בפרשת מלך - מלך מותר בו. רב אמר: לא נאמרה פרשה זו אלא לאיים עליהם, שנאמר +דברים י"ז+ שום תשים עליך מלך - שתהא אימתו עליך.

II. Democratic Model

5) Exodus 35:30 – 36:7

And Moses said to the Israelites: See, God has singled out by name Bezalel, son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, endowing him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft, and inspiring him to make designs for work in gold, silver, and copper, to cut stones for setting and to carve wood—to work in every kind of designer's craft—and to give directions. He and Oholiab son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan have been endowed with the skill to do any work—of the carver, the designer, the embroiderer in blue, purple, crimson yarns, and in fine linen, and of the weaver—as workers in all crafts and as makers of designs. Let, then, Bezalel and Oholiab and all the skilled persons whom God has endowed with skill and ability to perform expertly all the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary carry out all that God has commanded.
Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skilled person whom God had endowed with skill, everyone who excelled in ability, to undertake the task and carry it out.

שמות לה-לו:ז

ויאמר משה אל בני ישראל ראו קרא יהוה בשם בצלאל בן-אורי בן-חור למטה יהודה:
וימלא אותו רוח אלהים בחכמה בתבונה ובדעת ובכל מלאכה:
ולחשב מחשבת לעשות בזהב ובכסף ובנחשת:
ויחַרַשֵׁת אָבֹן למלאת ויחַרַשֵׁת עֵץ לעשות בכל מלאכת מחשבת:
ויהוֹרֶת נְתָן בְּלִבּוֹ הוּא וְאַהֲלִיאֵב בֶּן-אַחִיסָמָךְ לַמִּטָּה:
וְיִמְלֵא אֹתָם חֵכְמַת-לֵב לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל-מְלָאכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְיִחַשְׁבוּ וְיִקְחוּ וַיַּאֲרֹגְמוּ בְּתוֹלַעַת הַשָּׁנִי וּבִשְׂשׁוֹ וְיִאָרְגוּ עֲשֵׂי כָל-מְלָאכָה וְיִחַשְׁבוּ מַחֲשַׁבֹת:
וְעֹשֶׂה בְּצִלְאֵל וְאַהֲלִיאֵב וְכָל אִישׁ חָכֵם לֵב אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה חָכְמָה וְתַבּוּנָה בְּהִמָּה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת-כָּל-מְלָאכֶת עֲבֹדַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ לְכָל אֲשֶׁר-צִוָּה יְהוָה:
וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל-בְּצִלְאֵל וְאֶל-אַהֲלִיאֵב וְאֶל כָּל-אִישׁ חָכֵם לֵב אֲשֶׁר נָשְׂאוֹ לְבֹ לְקַרְבָּה אֶל-הַמְּלָאכָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ:

They took over from Moses all the gifts that the Israelites had brought, to carry out the tasks connected with the service of the sanctuary. But when these continued to bring freewill offerings to him morning after morning, all the artisans who were engaged in the tasks of the sanctuary came, from the task upon which each one was engaged, and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than is needed for the tasks entailed in the work that God has commanded to be done." Moses thereupon had this proclamation made throughout the camp: "Let no man or woman make further effort toward gifts for the sanctuary!" So the people stopped bringing: their efforts had been more than enough for all the tasks to be done.

וַיִּקְחוּ מִלִּפְנֵי מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל־הַתְּרוּמָה אֲשֶׁר הָבִיאוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לַמְּלָאכֶת עֲבֹדַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ וְהֵם הָבִיאוּ אֵלָיו עוֹד נְדָבָה בְּבֹקֶר בַּבֹּקֶר:
וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־הַחֲכָמִים הַעֲשִׂים אֶת כָּל־מְלָאכֶת הַקֹּדֶשׁ אִישׁ־אִישׁ מִמְּלָאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־הִמָּה עֲשִׂים:
וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מֵרַבִּים הָעָם לְהָבִיא מִדֵּי הָעֲבֹדָה לַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר־צִוִּיָּה יְהוָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ:
וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה וַיַּעֲבִירוּ קוֹל בְּמַחֲנֵה לֵאמֹר אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה אֵל יַעֲשׂוּ עוֹד מְלָאכָה לַתְּרוּמַת הַקֹּדֶשׁ וַיִּבְלָא הָעָם מִהָבִיֵּא:
וְהַמְּלָאכָה הַיְתֵה דַיִּם לְכָל־הַמְּלָאכָה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתָהּ וְהוֹתֵר: {ס}

6) Babylonian Talmud Tractate Brachot 55b

With regard to Bezalel's appointment, Rabbi Yitzhak said: One may only appoint a leader over a community if he consults with the community and they agree to the appointment, as it is stated: "And Moses said unto the children of Israel: See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel, son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah" (Exodus 35:30). The Lord said to Moses: Moses, is Bezalel a suitable appointment in your eyes? Moses said to God: Master of the universe, if he is a suitable appointment in Your eyes, then all the more so in my eyes. The Holy One, Blessed be God, said to him: Nevertheless, go and tell Israel and ask their opinion. Moses went and said to Israel: Is Bezalel suitable in your eyes? They said to him: If he is suitable in the eyes of the Holy One, Blessed be God, and in your eyes, all the more so he is suitable in our eyes.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות נה:

אמר רבי יצחק אין מעמידין פרנס על הצבור אלא אם כן נמלכים בצבור שנאמר ראו קרא ה' בשם בצלאל אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה משה הגון עליך בצלאל אמר לו רבונו של עולם אם לפניך הגון לפני לא כל שכן אמר לו אף על פי כן לך אמור להם הלך ואמר להם לישראל הגון עליכם בצלאל אמרו לו אם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ולפניך הוא הגון לפנינו לא כל שכן

7) Rabbi Sacks, The Home We Build Together, Parshat Terumah 5764

The building of the Tabernacle was the first great project the Israelites undertook together. It involved their generosity and skill. It gave them the chance to give back to God a little of what He had given them. It conferred on them the dignity of labour and creative endeavour. It brought to closure their birth as a nation and it symbolised the challenge of the future. The society they were summoned to create in the land of Israel would be one in which everyone would play their part. It was to become – in the phrase I used as the title of one of my books – "the home we build together."

From this we see that one of the greatest challenges of leadership is to give people the chance to give, to contribute, to participate. That requires self-restraint, tzimtzum, on the part of the leader, creating the space for others to lead. As the saying goes: "When there is a good leader, the people say: The leader did it. When there is a great leader, the people say: We did it ourselves."

This brings us to the fundamental distinction in politics between State and Society. The state represents what is done for us by the machinery of government, through the instrumentality of laws, courts, taxation and public spending. Society is what we do for one another through communities, voluntary associations, charities and welfare organisations. Judaism, I believe, has a marked preference for society rather than state, precisely because it recognises – it is the central theme of the book of Exodus – that it is what we do for others, not what others or God does for us, that transforms us. The Jewish formula, I believe, is: small state, big society.

The person who had the deepest insight into the nature of democratic society was Alexis de Tocqueville. Visiting America in the 1830s he saw that its strength lay in what he called the "art of association," the tendency of Americans to come together in communities and voluntary groups to help one another, rather than leaving the task to a centralised government. Were it ever to be otherwise, were individuals to depend wholly on the state, then democratic freedom would be at risk.

In one of the most haunting passages of his masterwork, Democracy in America, he says that democracies are at risk of a completely new form of oppression for which there is no precedent in the past. It will happen, he says, when people exist solely in and for themselves, leaving the pursuit of the common good to the government... There is only one solution: to make the people co-architects of their own destiny, to get them to build something together, to shape them into a team and show them that they are not helpless, that they are responsible and capable of collaborative action. Genesis begins with God creating the universe as a home for human beings. Exodus ends with human beings creating the Mishkan, as a 'home' for God... Hence the basic principle of Judaism, that we are called on to become co-creators with God. And hence too the corollary: that leaders do not do the work on behalf of the people. They teach people how to do the work themselves. It is not what God does for us but what we do for God that allows us to reach dignity and responsibility.