
***Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu Melech Ha'Olam, Asher Kidshanu BeMitzvotav
VeTzivanu, La'asok BeDivrei Torah. Hafoch Bah!***

Text 1: Reb Simchah Bunim, *Ramatayim Tzofim, Chap 30, n. 88*

(in *The Quest for Authenticity*, by Rabbi Michael Rosen, p. 57)

[While on a journey close to Warsaw,] I knew that I had to tell about a certain incident, but it was something secular and I know that it would be seen as a great joke if I told the story. My evil inclination said that I shouldn't tell the story for I would lose the world and they would no longer regard me as a rebbe.

Text 2: Chancellor Gerson Cohen, *Chancellor's Address in Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly (1980), p. 36*

(in *Can a People of the Book also be a People of God?* by Rabbi Gordon Tucker, *Conservative Judaism* 60:1-2, Fall/Winter 2007-8, p. 21-22)

I refer frequently to a verse from Psalm 119 that Maimonides used as the superscription to his Mishneh Torah: *Az Lo Evosh baHabiti el Kol Mitzvotcha* – “only when I contemplate the totality of the tradition can I hope to attain religious fulfillment.” ... Not everything we do is a fulfillment of the divine will, but everything must be measured by the divine will, and everything is either a response [to] or a retreat from it. ...I am worried about only one thing. Do we look as we believe we should look in terms [of] the most authentic interpretation of our heritage? You and I are rabbis, and he who fails to live up to his designated role is *Kovesh Rabbanuto* – [a suppressor of his rabbinate]. ...He suppressed his charge and withholds the message entrusted to him. He is thus a man who fails in his religious duty.

Text 3: Rabbi Joel Roth, *Halakhah in Ramah*

(in *The Ramah Experience: Community and Commitment*, edited by Sylvia Ettenberg and Geraldine Rosenfield, p. 65-66)

Let me give one example of the difference between halakhist/consultant and halakhist/educator. An abbreviated Birkat Hamazon is recited after each meal, except for Shabbat, when the complete standard version is recited at two of the three meals. I am quite certain that any competent halakhist/consultant would have been able to indicate what the required elements of Birkat Hamazon are, would have been able to point out forms of it reflected in ancient *siddurim*, and would have affirmed that one who recited such a version of Birkat Hamazon would, indeed, have fulfilled his legal obligation. A halakhist/educator, however, would have been very concerned with the other educational questions as well. Do we want to convey the unmistakable message that whatever is halakhically adequate is sufficient? How should we ensure that campers will not misperceive the full Birkat Hamazon as intended halakhically for use only on Shabbat? How do we infuse into the very consciousness of the camp that *heterim* [allowances] that were motivated by educational needs were not intended to become normative for the entire Conservative Movement; were intended as starting points only; and that not everything that is halakhically defensible is necessarily halakhically desirable?

Text 4: Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in *Celebrating Life, p.182*

(in *Inspired Jewish Leadership*, by Dr. Erica Brown, p. 155-156)

We have to be prepared to change. The trouble is, consistently today we hear the argument that human beings cannot change... The family is breaking down? Inevitable. Civility is on the wane? That is how things are. Too much violence in the media? If that is what people want, that is what they get. None of these is true. Why are they said? Because we have focused on institutions that reinforce rather than change human behavior. Governments reflect votes. Politics follow opinion polls. The market mirrors consumer choices. ... There is only one thing missing from this constellation. It is the language of aspiration, the idea that, whatever we are, we might be different. We *can* grow and develop. We are not simply a bundle of desires. We have immortal longings.

Text 5: Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Toward an Understanding of Halakhah*

(in *Conservative Judaism and Jewish Law*, edited by Seymour Siegel, p. 144)

What is the Jewish way to God? It is not a way of ascending the ladder of speculation. Our understanding of God is not the triumphant outcome of an assault upon the riddles of the universe nor a donation we receive in return for intellectual surrender. Our understanding comes by way of the *mitzvah*. By living as Jews we attain our faith as Jews. We do not have faith in deeds; we attain faith *through* deeds. When Moses recounted to the people the laws of the covenant with God, the people responded “We will do and we will hear.” This statement was interpreted to mean: *In doing we perceive*. A Jew is asked to take a *leap of action* rather than a *leap of thought*: to surpass his needs, to do more than he understands in order to understand more than he does. In carrying out the word of the Torah he is ushered into the presence of spiritual meaning. Through the ecstasy of deeds he learns to be certain of the presence of God. Jewish law is a sacred prosody. The Divine sings in our deeds, the Divine is disclosed in our deeds. Our effort is but a counterpoint in the music of [God’s] will. In exposing our lives to God we discover the Divine within ourselves and its accord with the Divine beyond ourselves.

Text 6: Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism*, p. 57

The existence of halakhic strategies such as those described above plays into the widespread notion that a solution can be found to almost every basic halakhic difficulty, given the proper institutional circumstances (that is, general consensus of opinion among a recognized community of major rabbinic authorities). A by-now notorious slogan first coined by Blu Greenberg – “where there is a rabbinic will there is a halakhic way” – is probably meant to express this faith in the halakhic system’s ability to rise to the challenges of modernity. Nonetheless, the rather cavalier attitude to due process of law that this slogan seems to imply (omitting, as it does, any reference to limitations upon the nature of such solutions) has raised the ire of rabbinic authorities. Such an attitude continues to serve as a red flag; it ignores the fact that, beyond the objective political and historical constraints mentioned earlier, another more subjective and ideological factor is extremely influential: the perceptions of the halakhic decisor himself and of his community as to just how far he may legitimately take his interpretations.

CJLS Teshuvot being mentioned are included in two volumes published by The Rabbinical Assembly: “Responsa 1980-1990”, edited by Rabbi David J. Fine, and “Responsa 1991-2000”, edited by Rabbi Kassel Abelson and Rabbi David J. Fine are available for purchase at http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/publications/jewish_law.html.

From “Responsa 1980-1990”:

- **Commemorating the Sho’ah**, by Rabbi Ben Zion Bergman (OH 46:7.1998) p. 3
- **Annual and Triennial Systems for Reading the Torah**, by Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff (OH 137.1987a) p. 74
- **Tape Recording and Photography on Shabbat**, by Rabbi Mayer Rabinowitz and Dvora Weisberg (OH 340:3.1984), p. 218
- **A Question of Great Interest: May a Synagogue Issue Interest-Bearing Bonds?** By Rabbi Ben Zion Bergman (YD 167.1.1988a) p. 319
- **A Statement on Gambling**, by Rabbi Henry A. Sosland (HM 370:1981)
- **Co-Ops for Kosher Meat**, by Rabbi David H. Lincoln (HM 376:1.1986), p. 798
- **Smoking: A Jewish Perspective**, by Rabbi Seymour Siegel (HM 427:9.1986), p. 833

From “Responsa 1991-2000”:

- **May a Non-Kohen be Called First to the Torah in the Presence of a Kohen?**, by Rabbi Herbert J. Mandl (OH 135:3.1991), p. 16
- **Response to Miscarriage**, by Rabbi Debra Reed Blank (YD 340:30.1991a), p. 357
- **Converts Mourning the Death of Close Relatives**, by Rabbi Joel E. Renbaum (YD:374:5.1998), p. 431
- **Mamzerut**, by Rabbi Elie Kaplan Spitz (EH 4.2000a), p. 558
- **A Concurring Opinion Regarding Mamzerut**, Rabbi Daniel S. Nevins (EH 4.2000b), p. 587