



Torah Thoughts on the New Israeli Government



The formation of the new government in Israel raises three fundamental issues that are the subject of deep Torah discussion.

The first is the very formation of a government contrary to the promises of the election. One possible response to this is that any election promise is intrinsically binding upon the elected, since the mandate is not his or hers. They are emissaries of the public. Therefore, although they have the authority to make political decisions and maneuvers (because they are part of the mandate endowed by the voters) they may not deviate from the principles of their promises.

Several arguments have been made against this though, such as that voters know that when they vote for a particular person, they give that person the opportunity to make fundamental changes; that every promise is subject to circumstances, and that if the other option is a threat to the party's very existence, politicians may choose the lesser evil, which may be a violation of the election promise/s.

Secondly, is it halachically permissible to form a government which relies on non-Jews, who can overturn it at any point? The basis of this discussion is whether the Torah command, "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 kinsman" (Devarim 17:15), is relevant in a democracy.

Some claim that it remains relevant, despite the government not being a monarchy. In this context, a government which relies on non-Jews is not halachically legitimate. The fact that the non-Jew in question is a representative of the Arab population, some of whom express severe antagonism toward Israel as a Jewish State, strengthens the halachic opposition to such a government.

On the other hand, some argue that since the government is a democracy, human rights of all citizens must be respected, which includes the right to vote and be elected. It should be noted that the first Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog zt"l, claimed that since Israel was established by virtue of the United Nations resolution, it is halachically bound by international law regarding the right to be elected.

The third debate is regarding the legitimacy of the Prime Minister to rely on a very small faction in the Knesset. Here it is difficult for me to present the two sides, since I find it difficult to understand the position which claims this is illegitimate. That position argues that the government must be based on the will of the people, which is not expressed in a small faction. However, this position is very problematic.

Not only is this action legitimate according to the "rules of the game," but it is certainly good (in principle) that a middle faction, no matter how small, heads the government, because it can bridge positions on both sides.

Above all these debates though, the big question is, is this new government a *Chilul Hashem* or a *Kiddush Hashem*? Those who claim the former stress the fact that the government was a) formed on a foundation of breaching promises to the voter, an act of deception contrary to the age-old Jewish tradition and the supreme value Halacha places on speaking truth, b) it relies on non-Jews who hold the possibility of suddenly ousting the government, and c) it represents a small party's political extortion. Because of all of this, the formation of this government should be viewed as a deep embarrassment, and every effort should be made to overthrow it.

On the other hand, there are those who claim the new reality is a *Kiddush Hashem*, in that, for the first time, a Torah-observant Jew has been elected Prime Minister of Israel. Moreover, despite the fact it is not a true unity government (since significant factions are not represented), different, polarized parties have decided to give up their positions to work together for the benefit of the State of Israel. And that willingness, that approach, is certainly an important step on G-d's path: אַתָּה אֶחָד וְשִׁמְךָ אֶחָד וְנַמִּי כְּעַמֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל גּוֹי אֶחָד בְּאֶרֶץ, "You are One and Your Name is One, and who is like Your nation Israel, one people."

Rabbi Yuval Cherlow is Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Amit Orot Shaul and a founding member of the rabbinical organization Tzohar.



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