

*Religious Zionism*  
*Post Disengagement:*  
*Future Directions*

EDITED BY  
Chaim I. Waxman

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## The Disengagement Plan as Reflected in Virtual FAQ

*Yuval Cherlow*

### **BRIEF INTRODUCTION**

One novel channel of communication between rabbis and very large communities which was introduced in the last decade is the “Ask the Rabbi” websites. Thousands of questions and appeals are addressed to rabbis over the Internet through these sites. Many of the queries and the rabbis’ answers are posted on the different sites, thus constituting a mass study of Torah and a common asset. One of the surprising advantages of these sites is the vast pool of knowledge they offer, indicating public views and concerns. Just by perusing the questions one can learn quite a lot about the state of affairs.

When the disengagement plan was at hand, about 1,000 queries about the disengagement and its implications were presented before me. The questions suggest a very intensive public state of mind, and point to a fundamental disagreement, schism, and internal conflict, and to the tremendous forces at play. This essay includes only a

minute portion of the questions referred to and addressed by me, but it may help to portray the fascinating collage of issues on the public's mind at the time. It was difficult to pick out and to sort the different questions, and I have invested a great deal of time and effort in it. I hope readers are provided with an interesting perspective in this essay, a perspective which involves both public concerns and my positions as reflected in my responses. The questions and answers are brought as posted on the website, even when crudely articulated, except for minor grammar corrections. I wish to make clear that I have not assorted the most esoteric questions for this essay, but the most frequent.

With God's will, I shall succeed in finding a way to publish all the questions and answers in a book about the disengagement.

The topics of discussion in this essay are:

- A. The attitude toward the disengagement: many questions were asked about the religious credence regarding the disengagement; is it a religious duty or a duty by Halakhah to oppose? Is it permissible to support?
- B. The attitude toward the State of Israel, given its decision to disengage: These questions troubled many people since the State of Israel seemed to have betrayed one of its moral foundations – the precept of inhabiting the Land of Israel. The matter of attitude involves numerous issues such as whether to persist in the custom of praying for the state's good or not.
- C. The State of Israel has been perceived by various Zionist-religious factions not only as an important and significant component of the Jewish experience, but also as a realization of the vision of redemption. Does the disengagement prove that the movement of redemption has failed?
- D. This plan had been given many names: disengagement, deportation, devastation, The Pogrom, etc. I shall exemplify the importance of this issue and contemplations concerning it.
- E. The attitude toward the military: the IDF was perceived as the chief instrument of evil deployed to execute the disengagement. This feeling was so bad that some have asserted that IDF



stands for Israeli Deportation Forces. The questions about this matter were by and large of two sorts: one about the attitude to be taken toward the army in principle, and the other about the proper way to treat the soldiers who participated in the demolition of Gush Katif.

- F. Restriction of protest: what ways of opposing the plan are allowed and what ways are forbidden.
- G. The (military) insubordination was one of the major issues in question, and a profound contention revolved around it. I published a summary of this discussion in Hebrew on <http://www.mizrachi.org/ideas/view.asp?id=219> and in English on <http://www.mizrachi.org/ideas/view.asp?id=218>
- H. Where have all the prayers gone – an integral part of the deep religious experiences people had during the disengagement was soul-searching prayer. Many were disappointed by the prayers not being answered and some piercing questions were raised about prayer in general as a result.
- I. The eminence of great rabbis: besides the many practical actions taken in order to stop the disengagement, there were many acts of belief. Many have proclaimed that the virtue of confidence means that utter denial is the proper disposition toward the plan, derived from faith in the plan not being realized. Some said one should not pack nor cooperate etc. All these assertions have failed. This failure elicits very difficult questions. On the other hand, some rabbis ruled that insubordination is prohibited, and some of the youths have deemed those rabbis collaborators and traitors. The hardest thing to endure was the disagreement which greatly undermined the rabbis' authority, for there was no single take on the matter that many rabbis could agree with.
- J. Religious Zionism has always strived to bridge between different sectors of the nation, and to act legally and as decently as possible. This approach could not stop the disengagement. Does it go to show that the religious Zionist way was equivocated altogether?
- K. Has the way of "love of Israel" reached its end?

- L. The issue of youth education.
- M. Orthodox Judaism has let down those who oppose the disengagement. On top of not participating in the campaign against the disengagement, it refrained from toppling the government in parliament votes. This gave rise to many questions regarding our relation to Orthodoxy.
- N. Internal revision: we do not have any exact numbers, but many religious Zionists concluded that a new way of thinking may be called for in light of the disengagement – focusing more on social issues, forging society, aspiring for justice and grace.
- O. Personal crises: aside from big ideological issues, the evacuation of Gush Katif has brought about many personal crises to those who have fought against it.
- P. What does the good Lord expect of us?

**EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR RELIGIOUS  
ZIONISM AND MODERN ORTHODOXY,  
ESPECIALLY AFTER THE DISENGAGEMENT**

A precise reading of the questions that were asked provides us with a fascinating picture of the major challenges that face religious Zionism for the coming years. In order to understand these challenges, we must go backwards a few decades, to become aware of the very significant change experienced by religious Zionism, a major portion of which was expressed in the responses to the disengagement cited below. This insight will also aid us in defining our future goals.

Religious Zionism is intrinsically bipolar: religious Zionism; national-religious; military service-yeshivah; religious-kibbutz; Torah-and labor, and so on. As a hyphenated movement, it was historically characterized by moderation, both religious and political. Religious moderation (and many would say, making light of Judaism) is expressed in different ways – from laxity in personal observance to the low status of rabbis and the few yeshivot of classical religious Zionism. As proof of political moderation, we need merely mention Mizrachi's support of the Uganda scheme, and the National Religious Party ministers' opposition to entering the Old

City of Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria in the Six-Day War. As a bipolar movement, it usually found it possible to exist as a Jewish and democratic society; it viewed the State of Israel as the “first flowering of our redemption,” despite being a secular state; and it was involved in all aspects of Israeli society.

In the 1960s religious Zionism encountered the school of Rav Kook, and in many senses, fell under his sway. Many erroneously identified Rav Kook’s teachings with religious Zionism, but this is a major mistake. Rav Kook’s teachings draw upon a kabbalistic-mystical conception that all is sacred; its main innovation lies in its subsuming nationalism, culture, general education, and even sport under the heading of “sacred,” and in this it diverges greatly from the ultra-Orthodox conception. This is so, however, only if they all fundamentally serve the holy, but they cannot exist as an independent pole. Consequently, this notion externally resembles religious Zionism (since it includes numerous mundane concepts), but its conceptual foundation is extremely disparate, and is closer to the ultra-Orthodox understanding.

The match between the movements gave birth to a wonderful religious Zionist generation whose path is illuminated by the holy, redemption, *Eretz Israel*, and the like. Obviously, the return to all parts of Eretz Israel greatly intensified the consequences of the meeting of the two camps. But that is the problem: this encounter did not prepare itself for a situation in which the Jewish state and society would not appear to be serving the holy, but the opposite – as acting against it. The primary crisis was generated when the state does not even serve its fundamental *raison d’être*, as perceived in the thought of those who regard themselves as the exclusive successors of Rav Kook’s teachings: the settlement of Eretz Israel.

Consequently, the disengagement plan created a staggering series of educational challenges that face us, of different sorts. One type pertains to ideology. The restoration of the ideas of religious Zionism concerning the supreme importance of the Jewish collective in the national political organization, and the methods that obligate this collective – decision making, fairness, recognition of institutions, and the like – poses a complex educational challenge, especially after

the span of a generation in which the attitude to the state focused on its “sacred” nature. A second type pertains to the ability to conduct oneself in a reality in which matters do not proceed according to a worldview which the individual perceives as exclusively correct and just. A complete response to the shattering of the dream entails a different comprehension of life, and a singular understanding of the “process of redemption” as conditional. A third type is the question of the attitude to authority, either rabbinical-religious, or political and judicial. This is a lengthy process of learning civics, the relationship between democracy and conscience, and numerous other relevant topics. Above all, this is a very profound examination of our belief: with a deeper understanding of the trait of trust in God, the relationship between man’s actions and Divine Providence, and, mainly, man’s limitations and his inability to comprehend the divine goal of world affairs. As a continuation of this issue, the basic question arises, especially regarding youth, concerning the relation between adopting the radical vision of *tikkun olam*, “fixing” and changing the world and not accepting it as it is, on the one hand, and, on the other, adopting the democratic idea and the decision of the majority, even when replete with injustice.

These are some of the main educational issues raised by the reactions to the disengagement. They teach of the educational challenge in the reevaluation of several of the leading principles that guided religious Zionism in recent decades. This article presents a real time analysis of the issues troubling the religious Zionist public, on the one hand; and, on the other, a few educational guidelines that I composed as a response to questions directed to me. These guidelines are a sort of blueprint for the comprehensive educational program in which we must invest great effort.

### **A. Attitude toward the Disengagement**

Q: Honored Rabbi,

Hello and happy holidays!

I find it hard to make up my mind about the disengagement over the past few days. People keep telling me that as they are religious, it seems pretty obvious that they should oppose, seeing as

most of our rabbis and the great teachers of our generation decided to oppose.

There is however one question that haunts me: Have all those hundreds of rabbis and scholars who have passed judgment against (including your honor) the plan, perused and scrutinized its objectives and have they delved into the security-military aspects of the plan and into the possible good that might come of it, according to its contrivers (such as counteracting against the possibility of an Arab majority in Israel, maintaining the concentration of settlements etc.) and the halakhic considerations with respect to these benefits, and only then ruled? Or have they rendered a general Halakhah forbidding the handing over of territories without considering those important desirable outcomes I mentioned? If the latter is not the case, it makes things far simpler for me. Among my many vices, of course, I find it hard to take for granted that the rabbis have thoroughly investigated this matter.

Sorry for the cumbersome question, I'd be glad to receive an answer.

Thank you very much and may you continue enjoying a kosher and happy holiday!

A: Greetings,

I cannot answer empirical questions. I do not know who has read the plan and its justifications (mind you the prime minister never once put forth the reasons behind the plan nor the nature of his decision, so the rabbis can hardly be blamed for not perusing it). Neither do I know whether it would be accurate to say that an absolute majority of the Torah greats are against it – I'm not quite sure as to your idea about who they are, and chiefly – how do great scholars of Torah of the Orthodox persuasion stand with respect to the disengagement, and so forth. I suggest you look into the teachings of Rabbi Abraham son of Maimonides. In the beginning of his book, *Wars of the Lord*, he speaks – referring to the book's main subject – of the duty to be loyal to one's truth and not to decide by counting "greats" in favor or against any book.

As for the matter itself, I have no doubt in my mind that this

plan has some advantages. Several times and in this website too, I have written about our duty to face the disengagement not by an internal discussion among ourselves where we persuade one another, but to listen and be very attentive to arguments in its favor, and then to try and find a different non-military way to attain the good that may come of it without having to incur the heavy cost of the disengagement.

Speaking for myself I can tell you this: I have been looking for the disengagement's benefits for long and I think I know what the main ones are. Moreover, I find those advantages very important. My stand against the disengagement stems from two reasons that are intertwined: just as the inquiry you have brought up regarding the rabbis' considerations, so I find the government's considerations to be amiss – they have neglected to consider our duty toward the Land of Israel. This is why their conclusion is inherently erroneous even in theory, because not all facets have been weighed in. And besides all that, I find that the pragmatic assumptions on which the plan is based are wrong (like the change in the European attitude toward us), both in spirit and in practice, and of course this is not only due to an objective discernment of reality but from the grave predicament this plan should inflict upon us which makes one view the state of affairs with much more acumen and skepticism than the government does.

## **B. Attitude toward the State of Israel**

Q: Rabbi Cherlow, good week!

Since the deportation I have been agonizing and disturbed about how we should relate to the State of Israel which has done this.

First off – one of my friends was among the firsthand executors of the disengagement. I cannot face him. How can a man who had studied in a *Mekhina*, a religious military preparatory program, in the West Bank perpetrate such a crime? So he was weeping, so what? Some people cry in the movies too.

On the other hand, I know some people who have found various ways to dodge the army service. We must stop hiding by

saying, “Oh I am convinced our marvelous youth would continue to enroll in the army.” This week I was trying to hitch a ride dressed in uniform near my settlement which is very temperate in terms of religious vigor. The first driver to pull over said, “I don’t give rides to soldiers” and drove off. The second driver, “If you participated in the deportation I won’t take you” (I would like to say that I would do the same).

The crisis is not constrained just to the matter of the Land of Israel. It has to do with a falling out between Torah and state. The state is run by internal interests where the Torah is not even regarded as a marginal interest with any respect. The state’s attitude toward the Torah is no different than its attitude toward the Koran or any other scripture, as Herzl put it, “Let the rabbis stay at the halls of Torah.” The country’s institutions are managed according to an utterly western doctrine. The Supreme Court, for instance, persists in ruling against Halakhah credence, banishing anything that’s Jewish, from marriage to funerals. Why should we regard it as an authority of any kind?

I am not referring to the judges who reside there, some of whom are good and some are bad, but to the system. Did those who established Israel’s national systems do so with the notion of the State of Israel as “the throne of God’s honor in this world” in their minds?! Obviously they didn’t. I was raised to believe that we should influence, and today I am not so sure. One cannot have influence on a system which is fundamentally estranged to Judaism.

The non-religious public, who we were always taught to think of as a “prodigal son” we can learn a lot from, has revealed its true nature in the deportation. You can count the secular people who expressed essential opposition to the deportation on one hand: cold hearted, insensible, laughing at us. I stopped blaming the government a long time ago. The government is merely the public’s delegate. It is entitled to act as it sees fit. The problem is with the voters – the non-religious population which as a whole lacks moral values. Stop the hypocrisy!! To settle in people’s hearts is infeasible. The secular public simply wants a non-Jewish state. True they have a Jewish soul and a Jewish flair but eventually they will become demographically

extinct, like the Hellenists and the Sadducees. Why don't we engage in internal fortification like the orthodox do? We should not involve ourselves with building the state for the simple reason that this building is liable to tumble down like a house of cards, and we are destined to seize the power by sheer demographics.

I am not saying one should hate the state, but that one should realize that this state is not the one referred to in the Torah as "a kingdom of priests and of a holy people." We should pay our taxes and perform our civil duties, but generation, construction, volunteering – what for?

Thank you very much.

A: Greetings,

I know no one among us who is not in the midst of a great turmoil. You are mistaken in the way you treat your friend. Your friend has made the profound choice to adhere to the reason saying that for the sake of the Israeli nation, the IDF cannot be put at risk of internal deterioration and that the order must be obeyed in order to save human life. The struggle against the disengagement should not have involved the military, but public and political affairs only. And by adhering to this dictum it has saved the Israeli nation from grave misfortune. Moreover, many soldiers reasoned that since the disengagement is inevitable, they had better be there and make it easier for the settlers, because they can be sensitive about it, rather than leave this delicate task to troupes who might be much more violent or emotionally indifferent about it.

I do not understand what you mean by "hiding by saying..." I think the first driver who did not give you that ride committed a serious wrong by alienating the army and seeking to dissolve it, the second driver with whom you sympathize was also severely wrong in my opinion. What you would have done is no lesser a crime – disassembling the army, hurting those who sacrifice their lives to defend you and others, and continuing to constantly batter the army and the police for having done what they should have. Those who do that are jeopardizing the national life, so to speak, and I know not by whose permission they do so.



It is true that Torah considerations are not included in the state's management. But we cannot but assume responsibility for that and ask what our part was in bringing this about, and what more can we do that we have not already done. There is plenty to be done, and instead of plunging into great despair, we should reassure ourselves in great faith and take our missions head on. There is no such thing as a circumstance in which one cannot make any difference. The capacity to influence always exists – it's just a matter of finding the way. And since we are full of tremendous energies, as our campaign has demonstrated, we must not direct these energies toward despair and revenge (as manifested in the behavior of the drivers you spoke of), but to use them to march forward.

As far as judging the non-religious population with respect to opposing or supporting the deportation goes, you are right. But is it an appropriate criterion to judge them by? Most of them were not cold hearted, insensible, mocking etc. And I don't know by which data you find that they were. Most of the population was very sorry, but thought and still think it was in our nation's best interest. Most Israelis would like to have a state of Jewish characteristics and of safe recognized borders within which a Jewish majority prevails, end to that end, so they think that the government's action was warranted. We are furious about their mistake, but your denunciation goes much too far. You are certainly not conforming to the Torah way when you bad mouth the Israeli nation so strongly, and wrongly at that.

Do not speak of demographic extinction, and do not treat the secular public this way. It is not in compliance to Torah; it is not true. It is condescending, arrogant, and uncalled for. Do not prophesize the downfall of buildings for we shall "seize power" or the likes because it is unfounded. One had better work hard rather than utter such statements.

Best regards.

Q: Honored rabbi, hello,

When I began giving serious thought to the inevitability of the disengagement being carried out, Jews being cruelly and violently

evicted from their homes (which even the anti-Semites of the Diaspora did not do so often), graves dislocated, synagogues shattered...deeds which are like a blow in the face of the entire Zionist feat and of the Torah, I came to the conclusion that I may find it really difficult to rekindle my sympathy with our national symbols! How can I sing *Hatikva* and raise the flag of the country whose actions stand against all my moral standards and are directed against the people and the Land of Israel? What would I have in common with this state?

I shall thank the rabbi for a prompt response, lest I join Neturei Karta.

A: Greetings,

I cannot tell you how you can sing, but I can tell you how I would:

If the State of Israel were not more than a place of refuge for the Jews – let us be content.

If the State of Israel were not more than a place where we can protect ourselves – let us be content.

If the State of Israel were not more than a place that made possible the restoration of history – let us be content.

If the State of Israel was not more than a place where we can exhaust our talents – let us be content.

If the State of Israel was not more than a place where our spread nation has gathered – let us be content.

If the State of Israel was not more than a place where we can live as Jews without fear – let us be content.

If the State of Israel was not more than a place where we can eventually persuade the entire nation to follow suit with us – let us be content.

If the State of Israel was not more than a place where the greatest epoch of Torah study in history can be had – let us be content.

If the State of Israel was not more than a place upon which the state of redemption is based – let us be content.

And let us be content many times over for the good bestowed

upon us by all of the above and much more. Of course this does not cover up the disastrousness of the pulling out scheme's consequences, should it be executed God forbid, and it does not cover up the fact that it would abate the things you mentioned. By the way, there is no need for exaggerations – the anti-Semites of the Diaspora may not have evicted us out of our homes so often, no, they just slaughtered us therein...and aside from that, no policeman or soldier deports with cruel or violent intent.

Best regards.

Q: (no greeting to begin with)

Knowing the rabbi's political stands regarding the plan to banish and extirpate the settlers of northern Shomron and Gush Katif out of their homes, while killing, injuring, incarcerating, and emotionally and physically handicapping them, ruining their life's enterprise of three generations, digging their loved ones out of their graves and scattering their corpses throughout the country, sending thousands of men, women and children to refugee camps, to trailers or tents perched in the middle of the desert, plundering the property for which they toiled for over thirty years to attain, banishing elderly people off their beds, pulling youth away by their hair, tearing babies from their mothers' arms and handing them to strangers, exerting force against righteous helpless Jews who have harmed no one, hurting disabled people, converters to Judaism, widows and orphans, destroying thousands of their homes, hundreds of their synagogues, schools of Torah, yeshivas, ulpan, schools, kindergartens, demolishing their factories and hothouses, destroying the crops in their fields, and delivering all of their belongings to the murderers who have murdered their families, I wanted to confront the rabbi with some tough but imperative questions:

- A. Does the rabbi undertake full responsibility, in this world and in the next one, over the ramifications of his assertion that "the law is the law" and that "orders must be obeyed?" For clarification, by undertaking responsibility I mean over all the

eventualities listed above as well as some which might occur but we cannot yet imagine, should the extirpation take place, God forbid.

- B. Does the rabbi find that the decision was democratically made, that it is in keeping with the principle of protecting minorities' basic rights, or whether the exact opposite was the case?
- C. Does the rabbi think that the decision to disengage was made with the nation's good in mind, or that the decision-makers were guided by irrelevant considerations (such as various perks, the legal circumstances the prime minister is under, hostile media and attorney general, tycoons looking after their interests etc.)?
- D. Would the rabbi have pronounced that this order should be obeyed if it had been given in a communist country ruled by a despot whose decisions are categorically accepted, even when the people clearly object as manifest in the last "elections"?
- E. Would the honored rabbi call to obey these orders if only the names of the settlements to be legally evicted were changed (for instance Um el Fahem instead of Gush Katif, Sachnin instead of Homesh, Sa-Nur, Ganim, and Kadim)? And, in short, would he have sanctioned the deportation of Arabs by the same law?
- F. This is merely a hypothetical question. If the honored rabbi's parents lived in Gush Katif, and if (God forbid) he had grandparents buried in the cemetery there, and they had to go through all of the horrors listed above, would the rabbi, in this case too, call to blindly obey the order of deportation?
- G. Is it true that "different aspects can only be seen from different angles," and it is all just a matter of perspective, unless it involves one personally, and that as long as one is not directly afflicted, they should allow other Jews who are not close family to undergo the same atrocities inflicted upon the people of Israel by the meanest peoples over the past two thousand years?

Excuse me for the long and direct questions, but I would like to know whether the rabbis of Israel assume responsibility for their words

and actions, or whether when it comes to the lives of Jews who are not their relatives, blood can be shed under the pretence of obeying the sanctified Israeli “law.”

A: Greetings,

Before I answer, I wish to ask his honor one tough but necessary question: Do you think the language you use is called for? Do you think it has anything to do with reality or truth?

Before answering my question myself, I would advise you to refrain from such language. Firstly, because what you say and the way you put it is not true and therefore dismissed altogether. And secondly, this kind of expression yields all possible damages and no good can come of it whatsoever. You had better stop.

As for your questions:

- A. I never said that the law is the law and orders must be obeyed. On the contrary, this kind of statement is fascist, anti-halakhic, and inhumane. The law has limits and orders have limits. So said Maimonides in his well known book about the Rules of Kings, Chapter 4, Halakhah 1. Therefore, I am of course exempt from answering the first question.
- B. The question of whether minority rights have been observed is indeed difficult to answer in the context of the outcome. In such cases the inverse question may be of use: suppose the government had decided to expand the settlements (I wish) and in order to pave a new highway, it would evacuate the settlement of Kerem Shalom against the settlers will – what would we have said then? That is to say that in principle, the government is authorized to abate individuals’ rights for the greater good. The question is, of course, how far this authority goes.
- C. I presume some of the considerations were irrelevant, and even corrupt. However there are three points to be taken: first, not all of our reasoning is relevant either. Second, irrelevant considerations are a fact of life, and a decision supported by a large majority cannot be invalidated because such considerations

were in play. And third, there are also many relevant considerations in this plan. Rest assured, I think that reasoning is wrong and that the plan is very bad, but one cannot say it is devoid of any reason.

- D. As for obeying the law in a communist country, refer to answer A.
- E. This hypothetical question concerning the parents naturally applies to you too, only inversed: would you have discerned differently if you found good reason to carry out the disengagement? I hope you would not have, and would have stayed loyal to your beliefs. As am I. First off, not only that I have very tight relations with some residents of Gush Katif and northern Shomron, but I also believe that this bad policy will be extended to all of Shomron and Judea, and there I have siblings. And second, I too was in this reality during the campaign to keep the Golan, and that was my position then too. One should not assume that others would think differently if matters concerned them directly.
- F. First of all – tone down. None of the government’s actions bear even the slightest resemblance to the deeds of the meanest peoples (let alone the evil ones) over the past two thousand years, and I suggest we read again the preface to my response. And secondly, of course different angles allow you to see different aspects. This is exactly Arik Sharon’s rebuttal, namely that if you were in his shoes you would do the same. However, this is precisely what we have to deal with and we should be men of truth and not ones who succumb to their heart’s desire.

The rabbis of Israel most certainly assume responsibility for their actions. This website must be responsible for human life rulings in cases which are far worse than the worst case scenario for Gush Katif and the northern Shomron. The likes of this keep one awake at nights, and afraid of the Day of Judgment and day of reprimand. This is exactly why they are undertaking the responsibility of saving the Israeli nation, as little as their chances are to succeed in that. And many of the rabbis (an absolute majority I think) see it as their

mission to save the people of Israel from the horrible dangers that statements such as yours give rise to – both dangers related to the terrible articulation, and to the conclusions you draw thereof, as can be read between the lines, about what measures should be taken. The question of responsibility in this world and the next world is therefore addressed back to you: how can you undertake the responsibility of saying such terrible things and for the conclusions you would like to have inferred thereof?

Best regards and God save us.

### **c. The Dawning of our Redemption**

Q: To the attention of the honorable Rabbi Cherlow may he live long and prosper,

The recent events were hurtful for any Jewish soul, but the well known teachings of Maimonides, in the *Rules of Fasting* decree by which saying “let bygones be bygones” is a form of cruelty, meaning reflection and deliberation of painful events are warranted so as to prevent their recurrence. I find it difficult to fathom how many of my fellow religious Zionists persist in regarding the state as the beginning of our redemption and persist in attributing an air of sanctity to it. Should one not distinguish between the people of Israel and the Land of Israel who revel tremendous divine powers, and the state which was founded upon heresy to begin with? Surely all that has transpired here in the last sixty years is God’s will and part of a divine contrivance for true and whole redemption, but the question is what is the holy platform upon which we as faithful Jews must build the Lord’s throne in this world, rather than what are the reasons by which the maker of reasons delivers our redemption.

Should we attribute sanctity to the United Nations since without their vote in favor, the State of Israel would not have been founded? Is attributing sanctity to the state not tantamount to deeming the vermin Kosher? Our Torah is pure truth! Are we to delude ourselves by believing it can be built on a crooked foundation? This horrible plan is a blow in the face of religious Zionism. The army we so glorified is evicting Jews from the Land of Israel under the pretence of the sanctity of democracy, as if there is a “holy” duty to

abide by governmental decrees even when they reek of wrong doing and of corruption and danger!

Maybe God is implying something by having what we deemed holy turn against us? Maybe the point is the mistake we made because of unjustified naivety or because it was convenient to enjoy the benefits bestowed by the government. The Rabbi of Chabad taught us that the mere reciting of praise and mentioning the dawning of our redemption in prayer on Israel's day of independence defers the coming of the Messiah, and his teachings probably mean that these prayers employ elements which are not sanctified, i.e., they intensify the darkness of exile...

Should we not alter the way we perceive the state and just regard it as a practical reality rather than ascribe to it qualities it does not possess? Should we not direct the wonderful forces of our public to beckoning our brothers closer to the truth of Torah and developing of the land instead? I am not suggesting we should become orthodox, but that we should be more disillusioned in our cause, and, God willing, we shall be able to fundamentally change the state! Until then I think we had better delete the words "the dawning of our redemption" from the prayer for the state's well being and regard the Day of Independence as a day of reckoning in which we can hold seminars and so forth, rather than as a holiday by Halakhah, and refrain from assigning a Kosher cachet to the state, which it could exploit for doing deeds that conflict with our holy Torah.

Expecting response with due respect.

A: Greetings,

It is definitely time to become disillusioned, and those who haven't yet, had better do so as soon as possible.

It is bad to avert internal revision in difficult times.

It is puzzling how some people still do not see the State of Israel as the dawning of redemption. It is puzzling how some people still haven't relinquished their self-delusional desires to dictate to the Lord how to deliver the redemption, and because the Lord does not do as they expect, they deny the good of His deeds.

We were given a state by the Lord. And because we are not



doing right by this state, we must open our eyes and start doing what's right. Maybe God's insinuation is that we have not given enough attention to the state and by not doing so we are unable to elevate it.

Our duty by Halakhah is to thank the King of All Kings for the grace bestowed upon us, and those who refrain from doing so because it might be a blessing to no avail are snared in a trap of not recognizing the good which is a far graver vice. This does not mean one should not search his soul. This is the correct nature of halakhic holidays – giving praise and thanks for the blessings, and contemplation to that which is yet to be attained.

Best regards.

#### **D. The Correct Terminology**

Q: My question follows up on a response you have published where you assert that the term “banishment” is most suitable for the coming eviction of Gaza and Shomron. I do not fully understand what you mean. First you say that the decision to evacuate settlements is “not banishment” and then you say that since the word eviction is too gentle and you would rather dub it “banishment.” I am not clear as to why you have skipped over the term “rooting out” and have gone to the most extreme term.

But moreover, I do not understand how you – who have agreed that the arguments by which we are to be excluded from the rest of Israel are not valid – still find it appropriate to call this eviction deportation. Because by doing so you exclude yourself from Israel too: deportation is what those in power do to those who are devoid of power, whereas in this case the settlers or the religious-patriots or orthodox-patriots are all part of the entity of power (the state/government of Israel). We have all reached a certain decision together, and those whose opinion was rejected should not cry to high heaven for the wrong done to them when the decision is implemented. This is an outright lie and an undignified and indecent deception.

I sympathize with the distress of the public who is about to endure a very difficult disaster and that public's attempt to articulate its feelings with harsh words and imagery, this is why the term

rooting out seems appropriate to me, seeing as it honestly conveys their feelings without distorting the truth. Namely, a settler can root himself out of his home, with grief, pain, and tears, but with acceptance of the ruling he took part in rendering. This is the essential difference between rooting out and banishing. A man cannot banish himself out of his own home; it is always another, a hostile party that banishes. As for your argument that “some people think that the society does not have the authority to make a decision such as this,” I say all the more reason! This is exactly why you should make clear that this is not a transfer nor banishment and that a decision such as this is legitimate. And the other way around, by endorsing terms like “transfer” or “banishment” you give them reason to think that the society is not authorized to make such decisions.

I understand the rabbi’s wish to convey his sympathy and support of the settler’s struggle by using these harsh words to describe the events, but it is improper and inappropriate to do so. A rabbi and leader in Israel, of all persons, should be meticulous about his choice of terminology and the terminology he suggests be used.

Therefore I ask again, do you still find it appropriate to use the term “banishment” to describe the eviction of settlements in Gaza and the Shomron?

And if you think I want to banish Jews out of their homes, how can you even speak to me?? For I condone a real crime!! Are you aware of the (implied) allegation you are charging me with? The allegation that I, a religious man who was educated in religious Zionist institutions, support the banishment of Jews from their homes! This is inconceivable! What do you take me for, a Nazi???

Please take back what you have ascribed to me and those like me. It is important to me that you explicitly do so (ignoring this letter of mine, as you have ignored the response posted in that link above, would suggest that you really think that’s true). (Did the rabbi intend that if Sharon can use the euphemism “disengagement” to refer to the rooting out of settlements so can we, by the same token, refer to it as “transfer” or “banishment”?)

Thank you for your serious response.

A: Greetings,

- A. The term “rooting out” is a euphemism, and it does not convey the intensity of emotion which the evicted settlers are liable to feel.
- B. The matter of the settlers being part of the decision making entity is not at all simple. Complete elaboration on this issue is too long, so I lay out just the headlines of the points to be made. Surely you are aware that democracy is not just about the rule of majority, for this can be the worst kind of dictatorship where the majority’s stand always prevails and the suffering of minorities is persistently exploited. Democracy is also based on matters in which the majority should not prevail. The true nature of western democracies is discerned by the restrictions imposed on the majority and not by its power. The question is whether a majority should be allowed to demand such a sacrifice from a minority, after the majority itself deemed the settlement a national goal. This is a complex question. And it might be that this is one of the cases where the majority should not be allowed to prevail. Therefore the term “banishment” is appropriate.
- C. If the majority had considered all aspects and had been willing to fight for the minority, things would have been different. But the majority argues that this cannot be done and the outcome would be the downfall of all. Still, the disengagement plan is a subject of such fierce dispute, with respect to factual evaluations as well as to opinions and beliefs, that it is unclear how the majority’s view can be justified in light of the facts at hand.
- D. I do not use these words to gain acceptance, I do so because this is how I truly see it.
- E. Your arguments about the “crime” committed or “Nazis” are demagogic. I expressed my opinion that this is the right word to be used. I did not use any derogative term to describe those who disagree, nor can those derogations be logically deduced from what I said. If you read what I posted again, you would see for yourself that I do not consider it a clearly illegal action

which one must refuse to participate in. My stand is refined and precisely articulated enough not to be demagogically misrepresented.

Best regards.

### **E. Attitude toward the Army**

Q. I wanted to hear the rabbi's opinion regarding the thoughts I have been contemplating lately.

What should be our attitude toward the military in light of the recent events?

I was taught in the yeshiva that the military is the embodiment of redemption in our time, that every commander is "holy," and that one should contribute to the country. But I see that our military is not so pure. Not all military causes are purely martial. A great deal of politics is involved, up to the point of risking human lives for no reason.

We were in Lebanon for a number of years. We believed it was the best option, until one prime minister came and got us out of there. Apparently we did not have to be there all these long years. Were we getting killed there for nothing?

If the country believes that the "territories" are ours, then they should be settled and bravely defended. But if we are going to be evacuated tomorrow, why is settlement encouraged by special grants and cheap housing? If we shouldn't be there, let's evacuate the place now, rather than let people build for years and years and then throw them out. Why? Because that's what we decided now.

What I feel now is that I have no confidence whatsoever in the government and the military systems, and it is very difficult for me, as a religious person who has been raised differently, to see and to identify myself with it.

Thank you.

A: Greetings.

- A. We cannot place absolute pureness as a criterion. Unfortunately, we are human beings, and we are not completely pure in any aspect – even our learning of the Torah is not completely pure, the way we build a house is not completely pure, our settlement

efforts are not completely pure, etc. The Torah was not given to the ministering angels, and if we will measure things according to absolute pureness, we will probably denounce everything that exists in this world.

- B. What you call politics is often a policy which works to the benefit of the people of Israel, in its own way.
- C. We often work in a reality of doubt – we do not completely know what is good, and we try to do the best. If we do not succeed we try a different way. It is the same when learning the Torah: The Talmud teaches that a person does not understand the teachings of the Torah without failing first – is this a reason not to learn? Is everything we learned in the past a mistake? Was Shimon Haamsoni, who at first interpreted every “et” and then retired, mistaken, and was everything he did wrong for that reason?
- D. The “country” has great doubts regarding Judea and Samaria, and that is why its policy is not consistent, and one hand works against the other. This is certainly neither good nor suitable, and we should not make the post facto reality an ab initio reality. However, this is part of the way that things are conducted in the human world, and to deduct from this that military and military service are not worthy of our efforts is going too far and wrong.
- E. Instead of feeling distrust, it is better to do two things: The first is to understand how complicated the reality is, and how mistaken it is to expect it to be unambiguous and simple. As soon as you change your perspective and understand the complexity of the situation, you will gain the ability to correctly observe reality. The second thing is to try and change this reality to make it better. Reach for some mission for something you believe in, and ask yourself how you could bring reality closer to the vision of your mind. In this way you shall succeed.

All the best.

Q: Hello, honorable Rabbi.

I live in Northern Israel, and I give a weekly Talmud lesson in

my home. During the last year, a neighbor, living a few houses away in my street, joined. He is a simple person, married with a few children and working as a patrol officer in a nearby town. I have recently asked him whether he will be sent to participate in the “disengagement,” and he told me that he will indeed be sent, and that he will go, as this is his livelihood and there are no other options.

I went to Gush Katif, and on Monday, when the forces attempted to enter the settlements in order to deliver the decrees, my children called to tell me they saw him in the police lines at the Neve Dekalim entrance. I came to see, and I could not believe what I saw: he was wearing a black uniform with black gloves, like the special police forces, with a hat and sunglasses. I approached him and he exhibited discomfort, and did not want to talk with me. I greeted him and wished him that he will not raise his hand against a Jew. He answered “I hope so,” and did not look me in the eye.

Yesterday, which was Friday, I was taken out of Gadid. I returned home and reached the synagogue on Sabbath eve. I passed by him, and he did not say anything, as if he did not see me. My children approached him outside of the synagogue and admonished him, asking him how he could take Jews out of their homes, etc. He said “calm down!” and did not answer them.

My question is: should I shun him and ban him from my lessons, perhaps for some time? Educational anger? I thought this may alienate him for good. On the other hand, I do not think I should keep silent on everything, and act nice, as if nothing happened.

I would be happy to learn if there are general guidelines for this question and similar situations. Thanks in advance!

A: Hello.

I do not understand the dilemma.

I can find no reason on earth to ban him from the lessons.

Criticism of the disengagement plan can not be directed at him, and he is not the one responsible for it. Criticism should be directed at the political echelon, and if you would ask me about a member of the Knesset who voted for the plan, I would have to consider this. However, there is no place for thinking this over, as

that person should be brought closer and encouraged to learn Torah and to constantly grow stronger in his faith.

The struggle against the supporters of the plan will be conducted against those who made the decision, rather than against those who defended the people of Israel, by keeping its police force from crumbling.

All the best.

## **F. Limits of the Struggle**

Q: Hello Rabbi!

I would like to know the Rabbi's opinion regarding the way the struggle for the land of Israel should be conducted.

Naturally, I am talking about this specific case, in which it is not at all clear that it is against the laws of the Torah, and whether there is a duty to rebel against the government.

I would like to know whether the Rabbi believes that this plan should be fought against only within the limits of the law, or whether it is also permissible to deviate from the law in order to prevent this plan, for example, to block roads. I am not talking about the moral aspect, but about the actions being prohibited, and why?

Thanks in advance.

A: Greetings,

I did not completely understand the question.

Of course the law should be followed.

The problem in this case is that some of those fighting against this bad plan believe it to be essentially illegal, as it is illegal to leave the Land of Israel out of our own will, and it is illegal to drive people out of their homes in order to (perhaps) improve the lives of others. For this reason, it is hard to be convinced, in terms of law, that it is prohibited.

My stand on this issue is that the plan is unfortunately legal, and not only that, but that on the day after – whether the struggle succeeds or fails – we will be left with a bleak reality where there is no law and no judge, with a divided society with no mutual rules of behavior, and with a group of extremely idealistic young people

who have become used to acting against any rule or authority, and to a “get arrested and you win” festival, God will have mercy.

All the best.

### **G. Refusing to Obey Orders**

Q: Today it was published that a large group of religious Zionism rabbis support Rabbi Shapira’s call to refuse to obey orders to evacuate settlements. On the other hand, Rabbi Aviner has made the reverse statement, and this is also the impression I get from your answers to previous QandAs.

1. What are the sources used by Rabbi Shapira and his supporters in order to base the halakhic decision they have made, and what are the sources of the opposite halakhic decision?
2. How should a soldier who is not a student of one of the Rabbis who have signed these halakhic decisions act? Does the contradiction between the Rabbis enable him to choose a Halakhah which befits his personal point of view?
3. Is it possible that people have this option of choosing between different halakhic decisions in any case?
4. Is it possible that the contradiction between the judgments is due to the fact that this is a political-defense issue, and so the judgment derives from the Rabbi’s personal point of view, rather than from neutral objective use of halakhic sources?
5. If the answer to my last question is positive, how is it possible to deal with the claim that as a conclusion, Rabbis should not participate in some issues?

Thank you.

A: Hello.

I will answer briefly:

1. Rabbi Shapira, God bless him, clarified his sources – it is a Halakhah from Maimonides, which states that the king’s (or the government’s) orders should not be followed if they make the soldier transgress the law of God. This decision, of course,



assumes that it is forbidden for the country to give parts of the land of Israel to gentiles, and so the soldier is committing a felony when doing this. Those who argue against this base their argument on one of three claims: the first is that the government is allowed to say that it cannot hold on to parts of the Land of Israel, and that the command to settle the Land of Israel did not mean doing this under all circumstances, but rather to hold on and win, and if this is not possible – to retreat. The second is the argument that once the Knesset makes the political decision, this is the violation, and there is no halakhic meaning in the individual soldier's refusal – imagine that the army commands him to go on a vehicle and retreat. The third is the argument that even the command to settle the land should be examined in light of saving lives for the country, and that refusal is a matter of saving lives for the country.

2. This is a delicate question. I believe that the soldier should follow the decision of his Rabbi. A Halakhah is not “chosen,” and in case of disagreement, the student should follow his Rabbi. I have often heard this position from Rabbi Shapira himself, God bless him, who referred students from other yeshivas who approached him with questions to the heads of their yeshivas.
3. I do not want to enter, in this limited framework, the issue of halakhic judgments and following the Rabbi.
4. I do not think so. I think many Rabbis agree with Rabbi Shapira, God bless him, in his assessment of the political-defense situation (for example, Rabbi Aviner, God bless him, who you have quoted, and even I humbly believe so), and there is no relation between their statements and refusing orders. Therefore, the claim that this is a matter of political beliefs is wrong.
5. Therefore, Rabbis must participate in this matter, and state what they believe should be done.

All the best.

Q: If an order would be given in the IDF to desecrate the Sabbath, God forbid, would you say that one should refuse to obey that order?

What is the difference between this precept and the prohibition to hand our land to the enemy?

A: Greetings,

There are a number of differences, but the primary one is the consideration of the duty to settle the Land of Israel, which is affected by the duty to observe the Sabbath. Just as the Sabbath itself is affected by the deaths of people, and therefore one Sabbath should be desecrated in order to observe many Sabbaths, and the nation of Israel will be torn apart if refusals will be widespread, and the duty of settling the land of Israel will collapse.

This belief of mine was published a number of times, and I even attach the following article, published in a newspaper regarding this.

The new political reality might place many commanders and soldiers in a personal dilemma, of whether to participate in the evacuation and obey the order on the day it is given. This dilemma derives from real causes – it would be terrible for a society if its soldiers did not have moral dilemmas, and it would be terrible for a society if it did not acknowledge that there are some orders that are illegal, which soldiers must refuse. This dilemma does not exist in a society in which one could “quit” the military, or in a fascist society, where obeying an order is a value above all others. It is correct, in terms of democracy, for soldiers not to face this dilemma, as the tool for enforcing law and order in a country is the police force, rather than the military. However, we do not do all the right things, and in this context clear statements should be made:

One must obey an order, even if it implies, to our great sorrow, the evacuation of settlements, which is in our eyes stripping another piece of Israel’s Jewish identity. One must obey an order even if the land of Israel is our land, and although there is a religious and a Zionist commitment to settle all of it. One must obey an order even if it means destroying his own house, or that of a relative. It is necessary to do this because this is the backbone of our coexistence. Without it, we would tear society apart, and it must be done in order to save lives in a country with no regular government and decision making norms.

But is there no limit? God forbid. There is not a person in the world who is allowed to be completely committed to a country, with no limits. It is not for nothing that the principle of a clearly illegal order, and its definition as an order with “a black flag waving above it,” were set in law. This decision is very compatible with the words of Maimonides himself, who talks about the limits of obeying the king’s commands. However, these situations are at the extreme ends of reality, and are not on the country’s agenda. Using the term “clearly illegal order” when it is not such an order, is only an ugly manipulation of the fundamentals of reality, and a real danger to the purity of morality, and to the lives of many, who will each have his own personal definition of such a command, and who will destroy this little plant who have started to cultivate in the land of Israel.

In addition, on the practical aspect as well, refusal is a mistake. Not only does it achieve no goals but it also makes people hate those who use this tool – the public does not forgive those who put a gun to their temples in order to create an internal balance of terror, and to try to enforce their will by violent force. Not a single good thing came to the land of Israel and to Jewish society from refusing orders. In addition, refusing also supplies a justifiable argument for mutual refusal – one refuses to evacuate, while the other refuses to defend; one acts according to his conscience, which prevents him from handing parts of the land of Israel to the enemy, while the other acts according to his conscience, which prevents him from participating in an “occupying” army, and Israeli society returns to the times prior to its destruction. The will to change the nature of the society and its policies should be directed to other means, by which reality can be affected: dialogue, persuasion, building an exemplary model which others would want to imitate, and other worthy human means.

All the best.

## **H. Prayers**

Q: Honorable Rabbi,

Hello,

If prayers by the great and marvelous rabbis of our generations do not cancel this horrible command upon us, how could we, the

simple people who also learn some Torah, etc, bring forth the mercy of the Lord?

I do not wish to degrade any person, but it is simply frustrating. As you can see, great rabbis are praying with intent, and nothing seems to move!

A: Hello.

We do not know the ways of the acceptance of prayers.

Since the days of Hassidism we have learned some of these principles. Hassidism emphasized that acceptance is not necessarily a result of the greatness of the person, as perceived by human eyes. Sometimes, it is the simple Jew, with simple and real intents, who can open the gates of heaven more than great and marvelous Rabbis.

Because we cannot know this, we pray with the fullness of our might, in the ways told by our wise men, and the Lord does what is good in his eyes. This goodness can come from the prayers of the entire nation, and the most important thing is united public prayer. This is what we learn from the commandment of convening the people with trumpets, and this is the conclusion derived from the prophet's calls for repentance, prayer and fasting.

All the best. May the Lord hear our prayers.

## **I. The Great Rabbis**

Q: Rabbi Cherlow, Hello.

My name is Gil. I am 36, secular (agnostic) and liberal, but I am very curious about the process that the national-religious society is going through.

In the months, weeks and days before the disengagement, we have often heard news of Rabbis declaring that the disengagement will not happen, that the Good Lord will not let such a disastrous event occur, and such statements which are all directed to one idea: Trust us Rabbis. We hereby announce that the Almighty Lord will prevent the plotters from hurting the sanctities of our religion. Yet despite all, reality proved them wrong.

My questions are as follows:

How do believers deal with a Rabbinical establishment which “has not provided the goods,” to use business terms, and which was so drastically wrong?

How do you deal with a “disappointing God?” How do you deal daily with all those believers who put their trust in God, while He did not prevent them from being evicted from their homes?

Do you believe that the rabbis were wrong (and not post facto) in connecting faith with “a return”? I am not a great scholar in the teachings of Maimonides, but did he not argue that a believer should not expect a return for his faith?

And the same argument, from a different perspective – how does that rabbi, who made such strong statements, deal with his mistakes, and with his followers who might have doubts.

Of course it is possible that this is not occurring, and that only a secular point of view assumes that this should occur.

I will appreciate your answer, even if it is not fundamentally halakhic, and even if it is worded in a more “secular” way.

Sincerely,  
Gil

A: Hello.

- A. The question of dealing with unfulfilled “prophecies” is divided into three main approaches. The first is to claim that these were not prophecies to begin with, and that it was never claimed that these things will happen on the factual level. These were merely expressions of hope or wishes, rather than factual statement. Many have come in defense of these Rabbis using this approach, claiming that the Rabbis were misunderstood to begin with, and that for this reason there is no place for a credibility crisis.

The second approach is a deep credibility crisis with those who have stated their prophecies, although the truth must be said, that most of those who have such a deep credibility crisis have also had these doubts in the past.

The third approach, which is taken by a great deal of the

public when facing this question, is the feeling that even if they were wrong and even if those were uncalled prophecies – these Rabbis are still great enough to make up for this problem.

- B. For generations, religious people have learned that the Lord does not “work for us” and that it is not imperative that he will answer prayers. We believe that the Lord hears our prayers, but that he sometimes refuses our requests. Because of this, there is no special argument against him, and I do not know many whose faith in God was diminished because of the unanswered prayer.
- C. If there was a connection between faith and reward, than this is obviously a serious mistake. As stated above, the Lord is not committed to do anything, including providing a return for worship. I am not sure that there was such a connection, but if it existed, than it was mistaken.
- D. I do not know what those Rabbis, who the public understood as promising something that did not happen, go through. I am not the address for this question.  
All the best.

## **J. Religious Zionism**

Q: I wish to share my private thoughts. I am completely distraught by the recent events in the country, and I cannot understand how the religious Zionist movement does not notice that it is sawing off the branch that it is sitting on. Everyone around me thinks differently, and I feel lonely in my beliefs and sad. I do not wish to challenge or to object just for the sake of objecting. I am past my adolescence, but I find myself tormented by my opinions and frustrated with the other side's inability of even listening. I believe everybody hurts, as this issue is close to our hearts. There are supposedly different opinions regarding many issues, but I see doom, and like my friends, I am pessimistic, but from the other side of things. As I already stated, this is not a question, but rather these are my private thoughts. Perhaps approaching the honorable Rabbi directly stems from being acquainted with your opinions, which do not always correspond with mainstream ones.

A: Hello.

I hardly know a single person in the religious Zionist movement who is not terribly worried – both from the fact that the disengagement will be executed, and from its difficult outcome on the image of the values of the State of Israel, and loss of confidence in the entire governmental system, as well as from the fact that we are harming ourselves, and causing religious Zionism to disengage from the state and society of Israel, and to adopt the ideology which actually led ultra-orthodox Judaism in regard to the rest of the Jewish people and their expression of nationality.

For this reason, your thoughts are not peculiar, but rather these thoughts accompany everyone. You decided one fear outweighs the other, while many others decided the opposite. But the very fact that both sides are present with the great majority of the religious Zionist public, makes me believe that it is possible to grow stronger through walking the border without crossing it.

In this difficult time, efforts should be constantly made not to fall into the pit of despair, and the belief that both sides hold a truth, and the recognition of the deep dilemma for both sides, will enable to rehabilitate everything, and even to do this with greater force, as long as neither side silences the other side, which exists within himself. For this reason, I am not afraid of the future, but rather I am confident that the great strength we have will rise, and for the time being we only need to ensure that neither side crosses the lines to places from which it is impossible to return.

All the best.

### **κ. Is the Path of the Love of Israel Over?**

Q: Honorable Rabbi Cherlow, hello,

These days we are hearing incessant warnings saying that the disengagement and evacuation will cause a civil war. These warnings and alerts come from the west bank circles and the Rabbis.

My question is:

A civil war is by definition a war between brothers, and in order for it to happen, God forbid, one party must start it. If both sides are in a difficult and bitter argument on principles, a civil war will still

not occur as long as no side considers this option possible, because it prefers war and bloodshed rather than waiving its principles.

It is now clear that the government and its bodies (the military and police) will not start a war against the settlers. How, then, would this be a civil war? Only if the settlers would start it. The very threat of a civil war demonstrates this option is being seriously considered, and not by marginal extremists, but by public leaders.

Does the evacuation of the Gush Katif and Samaria settlers, as tragic and painful as this mistake might be, justify in the Rabbi's opinion starting a civil war, and spilling our brother's blood?

Is this not an extremely dangerous incitement, and doesn't it give legitimacy to acts which might actually bring about the destruction of our country?

A: Hello,

- A. The assumption that civil war will not break out unless one side is interested is not accurate. Sometimes it takes just one fool to light an entire forest on fire, and the danger is not in controlled circumstances, but in circumstances which might get out of control.
- B. As far as I know, it is incorrect that this option is being considered at all by the leadership, and I have no doubt that if there will be an actual danger, the entire leadership will withdraw rather than start a civil war. However, as stated above, I do fear the explosive atmosphere which might cause a civil war, God forbid.
- C. The demand to avoid the creation of this atmosphere should be directed both ways, first of all to us settlers, because the government has a monopoly over power. However, one can not ignore the heating up of the atmosphere by the government, which is impervious to its need of public legitimacy, and it is using this force with a predation which goes contrary to the appropriate spirit when facing such a difficult decision. The prime minister seems as if he is drunk on power, and this also puts our domestic existence into jeopardy.
- D. There is no justification, of any kind, to start a civil war, and



even things which are worse than withdrawal from Gush Katif do not justify a civil war.  
All the best.

## **L. The Question of Education and Youth**

Q: To Rabbi Cherlow,

In light of the evacuation of the Gush Katif settlements, Social Group B in the town in which I live decided to conduct a series of activities for the town's youths, as preparation to the evacuation which might take place.

Honorable Rabbi, the questions which the young people wish to deal with comprehensively extend to their religious definitions of God, definitions of religious Zionism – an entire ideology which is disappearing right in front of our eyes! We do not know how to conduct such an important and complex series of activities. We cannot simply answer the questions. This is not what the youth is asking for. They are asking for something to grab on to when they are falling!

I would liken the situation to the process of a lonely man's despair, when a psychologist sits in front of him, trying to help, but all he can say are words of encouragement such as "it will all be alright," having no real solution.

I have no exact question. I am asking for a way in which my teammates and I can lead these teenagers...

Thank you in advance.

A: Hello,

I understand this problem well, as we all face it.

I propose a course of activities based on three principles:

- A. Re-examination of religious Zionism, especially a decision to ask ourselves again what we wish to achieve, and what our vision is. There are two different types of vision to be recognized – a future vision, when the entire people of Israel accept divine love and adherence to religious law, and a closer vision – what is our mission in the current sociological reality, when most

of the people are not with us – what can be and what cannot yet be achieved.

- b. After clarifying the vision, the question of current reality should be dealt with – and this, too, on two aspects: what can be realized now, out of the short-term vision, and what do we take upon ourselves in order to be fuller of the complete long-term vision.
- c. Assimilating the fundamental principle of constant construction. We will be taken from this place, and we will build in that place, and we will be uprooted from this place, and we will make this place grow. This is the principle of those who believe they can face the world's challenges.  
All the best. I will assist you in any possible way.

### **m. The Ultra-Religious Public**

Q: Hello Honorable Rabbi Cherlow.

How should we regard Rabbi Elyashiv now that he has deserted us, and that he no longer cares about anything except for his own interests?

A hurt person.

A: Hello,

First of all, one should regard him as a great Torah scholar, who is a supreme leader for some of the religious world, a scholar who many Rabbis look up to. The Torah always comes before any other thing.

Even I am very sorry for the decision made by Rabbi Elyashiv, God bless him. This decision will cause great damage to the land of Israel as the holy land, and to the religious commandment of settling the land. It will further intensify the image of ultra-orthodox Judaism as being eager for bribes, will increase the separation between the ultra-religious public and us, hurt the religious world, etc.

At the same time, one must also be fair when criticizing. Let us not forget two things. The first is the fact that this is exactly how the ultra-religious public felt when the *Mafdal* party joined the

government, and was a part of a policy which was harmful to the ultra-orthodox public – both in terms of budgets as well as in issues regarding the religiousness of the national system of the land of Israel. One cannot complain to another when his hands are not clean. Indeed, we are convinced that we have acted properly, and that move had a chance, but this is exactly what they feel, and one should always “make sure our actions are proper, and then demand others to act properly.”

Another issue is the very method used by Rabbi Elyashiv in making his decision. The path he has taken – weighing different issues such as the world of education and Torah and other issues regarding the State of Israel, together with the question of the land of Israel and adhering to Maimonides’ positive precept – is in principle, according to the Halakhah, a very correct method. This is exactly the role of a halakhic judge. Sometimes he must choose between two bad options, and make his decision (this is exactly the subject of my general lesson in the yeshiva today). We who dispute the conclusions of this weighing cannot dispute the very acts – for the reasons that this method is correct, and that this is exactly what we are doing: we conclude that the main consideration is the land of Israel, and we reject many good things we could have done for the people of Israel if we would be in the coalition, and so – why should we complain about others?

For this reason, instead of criticizing others, we will try to convince more and more people that our weighing is correct and just, and with God’s help will well achieve both what the ultra-religious public achieved, and what we wish to achieve, because as a matter of fact we are pretty close to each other, and our aspirations are similar.

All the best.

## **N. Self-Scrutiny on the Matter of Social Justice**

Q: Hello Rabbi Cherlow,

During the last year a new term has entered our lives – “Disengagement.” There is no doubt that this term implies quite a few

bad things, such as evicting people from their houses, the danger of civil war, etc. Since the moment the disengagement plan has been decided on, most of the national religious public has been busy in demonstrations, sitting in protest tents, doing door to door explanatory discussions – in short, fighting against the giving away of areas of the Land of Israel is the top priority of our population. In any place I go to, whether to a branch or to school, all I hear about is the disengagement plan, how bad it is and how we all can prevent it.

I am very disturbed by the fact that we all demonstrate with all our strength only when the issue is the land of Israel and people from our segment of the population, but when the issue is poverty, starvation, suffering of the weak and the injustice done to so many people in our country, not one of us acts, and almost no one cares. None of my friends have ever gone to sit in a protest tent in the “Bread Demonstrations,” but almost all of them, with no exception, went to sit in the protest tent in front of the Knesset to protest against the disengagement.

I wanted to ask the honorable Rabbi – What value should be given priority, and what is most important – the complete Land of Israel, or social justice and help to the poor? Is it right that we, the national religious public, who can definitely contribute and assist the weaker segments of our country’s population, should protest against the disengagement now, when there are so many people who are starving and suffering, who really need immediate assistance?

I will be happy to receive the Rabbi’s answer on this issue, as it perplexes me.

Thank you in advance.

A: Hello.

If reality was as you describe it, the situation would indeed be very grave, and it would contradict the Torah, which expounds on the principles of justice and charity, according to both the prophets and the wise men.

However, reality is not that unambiguous, but rather it is more complex, for three reasons:

- A. During these many long years, the public was also involved in many charity activities. It is hard to estimate the extensive activity of the religious Zionist public in different charity organizations, in volunteering for national challenges, in going to the development towns (see where some of the yeshivas are located) and in many other issues regarding these principles. It is incorrect that we were not active before. You are right in that most of the time people were motivated for works of charity, rather than being concerned with social justice.
- B. Some of the disengagement plan's grave implications are going to deeply hurt social justice for those people, and all the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza, God forbid, later on.
- C. There are important charity activities, whether conducted by "Circles of Justice" or by other groups.

After somewhat assuaging your arguments, it seems that the principle claim you have made is very correct, but it does not necessarily come at the expense of the struggle for the land of Israel. We must struggle for the title "Jewish state," under which the justice and law of Abraham, settlement of the land of Israel, Jewish public domain, etc. are expressed. Under this title we must act, and you are right in saying that we must shift the system of balances between different issues we struggle for toward social justice, and that we must increase our efforts in that field.

Indeed, you in your good deeds are leading such a move, and it will be good for you to continue in it, and to convince your friends to work on the different aspects which constitute the image of the Jewish state. These actions will bear many blessings.

All the best.

Q: Honorable Rabbi Cherlow,

For a long time I am saddened by the distance created between the religious Zionistic public and other segments of the population. This is in part the result of an exclusive connection of this public with only one issue – Judea, Samaria and Gaza. A comment made to

your article by one of the non-religious readers, about the fact that when he sees a person wearing a knitted yarmulke he immediately thinks “settler,” with all emotional expressions linked to that thought, is a real wide spread phenomenon, and even I come across severe expressions of hatred toward people with that appearance.

This is indeed painful and infuriating for us – what is the cause for this hatred? Don’t they know that we also contribute in other places and fields? Don’t they know about the volunteer and charity work we perform everywhere? Why do they not note and appreciate that?

This has made me think about the ways we act as a public.

I believe that an essential part of the problem is that our activity in all these other fields of social change is not a political activity. The activity is communal, local and to a large extent is similar to the charity work done in the Diaspora.

On the other hand, the only political activity related to politics and legislation is in the context of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, and I wonder why it is so. The aspiration of establishing in this country a proper society, in the spirit of Jewish values, is immensely important for us. We always talk of social ethics and morality of the leadership, but we implement this in personal or local context, rather than making this a symbol of our public. These aspirations should have also gone through the Knesset, rather than only on the local level of doing truth, justice and charity. When there is governmental corruption, cruelty toward the weak, political injustices, we should cry out and go to demonstrations, just as we do when we demonstrate against the disengagement, work through organizations which change legislation (most of which include leftists, who think this is not an important issue for religious people), through a lobby in the Knesset, through the media. These issues are also important to us, and they represent who we are and what we believe in. Through these issues, many segments of the society from different sectors can see in us partners in their struggle, know us and join us. Activity which initiates acquaintanceship meetings between sectors is indeed good and blessed, but there is nothing like real cooperation on issues that are important to all sectors, which leads

to acquaintanceship and appreciation of the other side. It is exactly us, as a public which sees the state as an important stage in its salvation, and who wants the Torah and Jewish morality to be the light for this political existence, who should work using the tools which exist in the state to establish this path. It is our role to do this, and these are our political struggles. Who will do it if we won't?

As a note I will add – I am active in a social organization which deals with the troubles of foreign workers and the issue of women trafficking, which works toward changing policies. I know that this issue also concerns the Rabbi, who participated in a number of events related to this matter. Unfortunately, when I examine the make-up of the organization, I am a minority. There are no religious people (and this is also true for other such social organizations). The other members are very far from religion, and they even do not like religious people. In one of the meetings, in a discussion, someone asked against the settler public – “Do you see here, in our organization, anyone who is religious?” meaning, these issues and activities do not concern them, while I know it is important to us. In a country where human trafficking occurs, shouldn't the Rabbis call for the public to demonstrate against this and to act for legislation against this issue? And so on and so forth. This is true for many fields in which we continue to deteriorate ethically, and if we act in these fields, then it is not done on a political-national level, while using the great strength of this public.

A: Hello,

Your statements are correct.

I would prefer the word “public” to “political.”

I have been saying these things for years and years, and I think that our neglect of the public aspect, and of working for social justice, has caused a great deal of damage. We do an exceptional scope of charity works, thank God. But when the issue is building society, we do not perform this in an appropriate scope, although many of the reforms of Israeli society were made by religious members of the Knesset.

This is one conclusion we will have to make, and I believe it will be made.

All the best, and well done.

### **O. Personal Crisis**

Q: I am torn from within...I cry endlessly...I cannot sleep and I take all my rage out on my husband and my baby...The disengagement is tearing me apart, and I cannot comprehend it...The belief that everything will change.... Nothing, I am shattered, and I cannot believe that this is happening. Perhaps God has already decided we are not his chosen people?...I am sorry if this is a harsh statement, but this is how I feel...I am terribly confused...

A: Hello,

The difficulty you are feeling is so understandable and human. I do not know how a person could not feel this way.

The Halakhah which is so dear to us taught us that these feelings are legitimate. In the mourning rules, the Halakhah sets “three days for crying,” meaning: One does not start great reckoning on the first days of mourning, and one is permitted to cry freely without finding answers for all issues and matters. We cry and we are angry. Of course we should be careful, not because what we feel is illegitimate, but because we do not want to tear apart what we cannot heal later on. The baby and the husband cannot promise that they will be able to withstand your mood, and this is something you should consider in order to avoid breaking up the house.

It is exactly because of the great strengths revealed over the last few weeks that we know for sure that we will have the power to rehabilitate and rebuild. We know that God Almighty is with us forever, and that he has not left us in more difficult circumstances, and so we trust that he will grant us the strength to build the future, and so we do not give up. After crying, we will recover, and we will find the way to rebuild together with everyone.

I wish you the best.

Q: Many people in the national religious public believed that there



will be no eviction, and the God will perform a miracle, and will prevent all of this at the last minute. Many people continued on their daily routine in Gush Katif, even as they saw the soldiers entering. They believed a miracle will happen. Important Rabbis said that this was God testing us, like in the binding of Isaac, and that a miracle will happen at the last minute.

In light of the bleak outcome, has this not caused our public a great deal of damage, especially among teenagers, who are idealists and who see everything as black and white, and who do not understand that life also has its downs in order for us to be able to go up again? Has this not caused great despair and disappointment among religious teenagers specifically, and among adults as well, which might cause people to give up on the Torah and its laws?

A: Hello,

We cannot know what the repercussions of this reality will be. We are still in the midst of a great storm, and only after it passes we will be able to examine the damages caused to the ship and correct them.

I am much less pessimistic. The great strength of our children and teenagers will withstand these questions as well, as well as many other questions. I do not predict a general crisis, and this despite of the fact that everyone is going through a very difficult experience. There are also many spiritual conclusions that should be made. One should not believe in false beliefs, and the belief that a miracle will happen, and that something will not occur, is a futile belief. Not only is that a lie, but it also brings with it great damage when it is not fulfilled. Because of this, we need to make an inquiry as to the meaning of the measure of confidence and faith ourselves, and indeed I have been writing about this time and again for a number of months.

If we will combine the great strength of the religious youth in order to re-examine the principles of faith, not only will the crisis be avoided, but we will also have a great possibility for powerful growth.

All the best, may we succeed.

## **P. What Does God Want?**

Q: Hello Rabbi,

After seeing what goes on in the U.S with the storm which flooded its south (New Orleans), I immediately thought: “measure for measure” – in the same way that they wanted and caused the deportation of thousands of Jews from their homes, God caused them to evict thousands of residents from their homes. Is there a problem in saying that?

People have attacked me and have told me that one cannot make God’s calculations etc. But the gemara explicitly determines that all of God’s measures are done measure for measure, and in the story of Rabbi Huna and the wine, the wise men have said that not only do we not know God’s calculations, but have explicitly told him, “Who would suspect God would punish without a reason?”

This case, in my opinion, cries out “measure for measure.”

Am I wrong in thinking this?

If this is wrong, I promise to try to repent with God’s help.

Thank you.

A: Hello,

I do not interpret God’s will in such a direct fashion. In this case I am also not sure that this is correct factually, as Sharon’s unilateral policy was actually not what the Americans wanted. However, even if it were so, I cannot rule out the possibility that this was God’s response to the policies of this superpower, although I do rule out the notion that we could know such a thing.

We should remember that if we start to think that we know the meaning of God’s actions, we will have to decide things about ourselves – what does it mean that we have not been successful in our struggle, and that God enabled the destruction of Gush Katif?

This is only one example of the complications you bring upon yourself when you try to understand what is happening in the heavens. There is a person who can do this, and whose main mission is to do this – the prophet. As long as we have no prophets, we are not able to understand the way things happen in the world.

It is true that our wise men have chosen this way a number of

times, but it seems that they were talking with doubt, rather than with certainty, and in addition – those were more direct things, such as the souring of four hundred jugs of that person's wine, and not general issues such as the storm in the United States

I wish to stress that a connection might exist, but we can not know this.

All the best.