

Shavuot

The Ten Commandments... for Religious Zionists

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What are the core beliefs for religious Jews, sometimes referred to as Religious Zionists, who also view Medinat Israel as authored by Hashem? The radical political swings of the past thirty years have muddled some of these central values. Here are Ten Commandments for Religious Zionists.

Divine authorship

The establishment of Medinat Yisrael is a divinely authored event, which signals the start of our national redemption. For two thousand years we were scattered amongst foreign nations, facing relentless violence and hostility. Now that we have returned to our ancient homeland, history is back on track. The ingathering of Jews from across the globe, the agricultural renewal of our previously arid homeland, and the exponential surge in our economic prosperity, not to mention our successful resistance of our surrounding hostile neighbors, are all signs that Hashem has returned His people to His country. It is impossible to determine how quickly the process of geulah will unfold or how many twists and turns will occur. It may take twenty years, or it may take two hundred years. Either way, the process has begun.

Divine right

We were chosen by Hashem to represent Him and to inspire humanity toward monotheism and morality. As part of this mission, we were selected to live in the land of Hashem, to better broadcast these messages. One day, when Hashem's presence is roundly acknowledged, our divine rights to this land will also be fully recognized. However, our world is still fractured and our rights to Israel are still hotly contested. To one degree or another, we must still operate within international codes and make concessions for diplomatic considerations. However, political concessions should not blur our conviction that all of Israel has been earmarked for our people, and that, one day, our rights will be universally acknowledged. We are not obstacles to peace nor are we occupiers. One day the

entire world will see it that way, but until that day we, ourselves, must maintain our own religious and historical clarity.

A Culmination

Living through a new era of redemption must not sever us from our glorious past. Jewish history is linear, and our return to Israel was enabled by the heroism of the past generations which preserved Jewish emunah, religion and identity through brutal conditions of exile. Though they never walked in Israel, their historical footprints crisscross our modern state. Our return in 1948 was a culmination, not an overhaul.

Bifurcating between the gloomy pre-1948 era of suffering and the exhilarating post-1948 era of pride amputates us from our past. Simplistic caricatures of the weak "Jew of exile" often referred to as the "yehudi galuti" are intellectually bankrupt and historically disrespectful. Moreover, they are especially toxic for religious identity which is predicated upon accepting the authority and masorah of past generations.

Jewish history did not begin in 1948 and religious people must be more adept at incorporating the spectacular triumphs of the present with the steady traditions of the past. This is one of the primary challenges facing religious Zionists who view the state of Israel as a new era in history.

Privilege and Duties

It is impossible to determine why the privilege of returning to Israel wasn't afforded to previous generations, which may have been more deserving than ours. One thing though is clear: being chosen carries duties and responsibilities. In addition to renewed religious commitment, we are duty-bound to actively contribute to this Jewish renewal. We are composing the final chapters of Jewish history and our stories will be retold by future generations. Living in the modern state of Israel isn't just a luxury, but a mandate. We aren't here merely to enjoy the comforts and luxuries of Medinat Yisrael.

Social change

Living in a sovereign Jewish state, we are finally empowered to determine the shape of our broader society. Geulah isn't merely religious or geographic but is

also societal. In our zeal to settle the land or to reinvigorate Torah and mitzvot we tend to overlook the broader social agenda. Promoting social and economic welfare are less exciting than settling hilltops, but are also part of our religious and redemptive agenda.

Moral Behavior

Hashem is compassionate and desires kind and moral behavior. Sadly, Islamic fundamentalism has hijacked the face of Hashem, recasting Him as angry and bellicose. There is no joy in heaven when innocent people suffer. By crafting a sympathetic society of justice and civility, we showcase the true face of a compassionate God.

Facing persistent military aggression, we are forced to tenaciously defend ourselves. Amidst these efforts we must also protect the rights of innocent civilians who are often caught in the crossfire. Obviously, our own security takes precedence, but we cannot completely ignore our moral conscience. Without moral behavior, we lose our divine deed to this country. We should be proud that the IDF is a moral army. Hashem is certainly proud.

A Sacred bond

I dislike the misleading term "Religious Zionism" because it implies that commitment to the state of Israel is a political ideology which is merely appended to religious identity. Commitment to our divinely inspired return is an integral and inseparable aspect of religious identity. I am not a religious Zionist. I aim to be a deeply religious Jew, for whom dedication to Medinat Yisrael is a crucial aspect of my frumkeit.

If everything stems from religion, we must treasure our deep partnership with Charedim who are also deeply religious, despite disagreements about how to express religious passion. Furthermore, without renewed religious commitment our return to Israel isn't sustainable. By investing massively in Talmud Torah, Charedi society advances our overall process of Jewish geulah. It is illegitimate to view ourselves as sincerely religious people if we dismiss others who are equally passionate about our shared religious values and practices.

A Sacred partnership

We share a different, but important partnership with secular Israel. Our return to Israel, under the banner of secular nationalism is a divine mystery for which we have few answers. We anticipate an era of widespread religious revival, but until that day we embrace secular Israel as partners, as part of Hashem's larger plan of historical reconstruction, and as hinged to our common destiny. Additionally, we have much to be inspired by the ideals of this value-driven community. Secular Israelis are an indispensable part of our one, indivisible family.

Inspiration, not Coercion

Several central elements of the public common must be regulated by religious standards. Kashrut, Shabbat, and marriage and conversion, all must be regulated by religious guidelines. However, in other areas of public life, we must be careful about aggressively imposing religious standards upon an unwilling secular population. Imposing religion rarely ends well, and, more often it boomerangs, generating unhealthy alienation toward religion. Much of secular Israel is traditionalist or 'masorati' and still harbors affectionate sentiments toward religion. If religious Jews forcefully legislate religious laws, these sentiments can quickly turn sour.

Respecting government institutions

Operating in a democracy often means conforming to disagreeable policies and laws. Political dispute, public protests and civil disobedience are all legitimate tools of the democratic process. Sadly, sometimes political tensions and irresponsible leadership incite the disrespect of public symbols of government. Government symbols, such as security forces or elected officials, are shared national "representations" whose value is much larger and much more important than any specific political issue. A policeman symbolizes much more than whatever law he happens to be enforcing. Our grandparents could only dream of Jewish security forces or of a Jewish parliament. Disrespecting national symbols and institutions tarnishes the larger divine and historical narrative of our return to statehood and sovereignty.

These are our core values. In the long term, compromising these values is never worth it. Values are far more important than any fleeting issue.

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