

# How Underlying Attitudes Affect Our Value Judgments on Israel and the Washington Rally

*Rabbi Elchanan Adler*

*Adapted from a Shiur, Nov. 22, 2023*

*Rabbosai*, we're living in an *eis tzarah*: an *eis tzarah* for *acheinu Bnei Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael*, and an *eis tzarah* for *acheinu Bnei Yisrael* throughout the world. Obviously, we have *bitachon* in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that all of this will ultimately result in something positive, and we are *metzapeh l'yeshuah– ki l'yeshuashcha kivinu kol hayom*. Generations before us have davened for *Mashiach*; *halevai* our *dor* should be *zocheh* to welcome him.

One of the tragedies of *galus* is a sense of *pirud* in *Klal Yisrael*. We are an *am k'shei oaref*: we hold strong opinions, and we're not shy about expressing those opinions. People might observe a certain reality and see it in completely different ways based on their preconceived notions. It's true in the world at large; we see it going on even in terms of how the media and people in the world are looking at what's going on in the battle in Gaza. But it's also true for us in *Klal Yisrael*.

I want to think about this in terms of the historical time that we're in. We all yearn for *Mashiach*, but there are different visions about how it is going to happen. Even in the Gemara, we find a

*machlokes Tannaim* if it will happen only with *teshuvah*, or if *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* will bring *Mashiach* even if we don't do *teshuvah* on our own. Even the second opinion seems to say that *Mashiach's* going to come because Hashem will create *gezeiros* and *Klal Yisrael* will do *teshuvah* because it will be imposed on us. Either way, even the *Tannaim* weren't sure and had a *machlokes* as to exactly how it was going to play out.

Within *Tanach*, there are many *pesukim* that speak about *acharis hayamim*, and also about the events that will lead up to *acharis hayamim*, and to the *geulah*. There are *nevuos* that relate to *Umos Haolam* and the punishments that will be imposed on those nations, such as Bavel, Mitzrayim, Amon, Moav, and Edom, and on their lands, as retribution for having oppressed us throughout our history. There are *nevuos* that pertain to *Klal Yisrael*, to *Eretz Yisrael*, to *kibbutz galuyos*, about a spirit of *teshuvah* that will envelop us, about the land being revived. All these are *pesukim meforashim* in *Tanach*.

And then there are *pesukim* that describe a very dark period that's going to precede the coming of *Mashiach*. *Chazal* refer to this as *chevlei Mashiach*, analogous to birth pains. The Gemara in the end of *Sotah* (49b) as well as the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (97b and much of the *perek Ed.*) talk about various *simanim* of *chevlei Mashiach*. One aspect of *chevlei Mashiach* is *milchemes Gog U'Magog*, which is described in *nevuos* in *Yechezkel* and *Zechariah* which we read in the *haftaros* of Sukkos. They describe how all the nations of the world will converge on Yerushalayim to wage war, and the outcome of that

war will be a universal recognition of “*vehaya Hashem lemelech*” (*Zechariah* 14:9), the *pasuk* we say every day in davening. In connection to *milchemes Gog U'Magog*, *Chazal* have a tradition that there will be a precursor to *Mashiach Ben Dovid*. The Gemara in *Sukkah* (52a) and various *midrashim* discuss *Mashiach Ben Yosef*. Who is *Mashiach Ben Yosef*? Someone who is going to be tragically killed in *milchemes Gog U'Magog*, about whom there will be a major *hesped*. After that will be *Mashiach Ben Dovid*. There are sources in *Chazal* and the *Zohar* that single out Yishmael as a nation that's going to wreak great havoc upon the world at the end of days, close to the coming of *Mashiach*. *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* in a few *perakim* (29, 30, and 32) speaks about wars that Yishmael will wage against the Jewish people. The *Zohar* speaks in *parshas Vayeira* about the *zechus* of Yishmael in *Eretz Yisrael*. Why does he have a *zechus*? Because Yishmael underwent *bris milah* at age 13, and Avraham Avinu begged *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* “*lu Yishmael yichyeh lefanecha*” (*Bereishis* 17:18). Therefore, he has the *zechus* of a foothold in *Eretz Yisrael*.

We also find in various Kabbalah sources—in the *Zohar*, *Tikkunei Zohar*, and in the writings of the Gra—that the challenge that Yishmael poses to *Bnei Yisrael* will be magnified through his joining with the forces of Esav who will be his allies. This is alluded to in the *pasuk* at the end of *parshas Toldos*, where Esav marries the daughter of Yishmael (*Bereishis* 28:9). This union of Esav and Yishmael is an unholy alliance that will cause us problems. Various *mekoros* in *Chazal* also speak about Paras (Persia, modern day Iran) in connection to *chevlei Mashiach*. The Maharal mentions this in his *sefer* on Chanukah (*Ner Mitzvah*), and writes that Paras has a

connection to Yishmael. There are other things in *kisvei haGra* about the *eirev rav*: parts of *Klal Yisrael* who will join forces with the *klipos* of Esav and the *klipos* of Yishmael, and they bear guilt and responsibility for the *galus* being as long as it is.

What does all this mean? It's very mysterious, very enigmatic.

The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Melachim* (12:2) that we don't know for sure exactly how these things will occur, and it will only become clear after they happen. We shouldn't pay too much attention to it. But as history unfolds before our eyes, it's tempting to begin to contemplate world events, especially as they relate to *Eretz Yisrael*, in terms of how events fit within Hashem's ultimate plan. There were *gedolim*, for example the *Meshech Chochmah*, who saw a harbinger of *geulah* in the Balfour declaration of 1917, reminiscent of what Koresh proclaimed when he told the Jews to return to *Eretz Yisrael* from Bavel and build *Bayis Sheini*. Some have suggested that the horrors of the *churban* in Europe—the *Shoah*—are part of *cheilei Mashiach* and *milchemes Gog U'Magog*.

Many viewed the settlement of *Eretz Yisrael*, going back already to the 18th century with the *aliya* of *talmidei haGra* and *talmidei haBa'al Shem Tov*, as part of a manifestation of a stage in the *geulah*. Some even suggest that *Mashiach Ben Yosef* is not a person, but a *tekufah* of resettling the land. Building off of that, many have felt that having a State of our own is considered “*reishis tzemichas geulasainu*”– *aschalta d'geulah*. This is one end of the spectrum.

On the other end of the spectrum, *mamash min hakatzeh el*

*hakatzeh*, we have segments of *Klal Yisrael* who view the secular state of Israel as a manifestation of the *eirev rav*, that it may actually be inhibiting the coming of *Mashiach*. Even what seems to be successful is really nothing but *maaseh Satan*, because it is a secular state, and its founders were *reshaim*, who were far from *shomrei Torah umitzvos*. This is what the Satmar Rebbe held, and he developed a whole theology to support it.

After everything is said and done, we don't have a *navi*, and we don't have the benefit of hindsight until everything has fully unfolded. We can't really know for sure how to interpret the paths of history. The Chasam Sofer says on the *pasuk* "*vera'isa es achorai ufanai lo yeirau*" (*Shemos* 33:23) that we can only understand world history retrospectively. Afterwards we understand where it was coming from, but meanwhile, we don't know for sure. We have this sense of uncertainty, and it's hard to live that way. It's hard to admit to ourselves and to others that whatever our instincts might be, there might be another side to the story.

The Torah is full of absolutes: there's *tov* there's *ra*; there's *kasber* there's *treif*; there's *mutar* there's *assur*. Where there's *safek*, there are *hanbagos* of *safek*. There are *klalim*: *safek de'oraisa lechumra*, *safek derabanan lekula*, *safek tumah b'rshus hayachid sfeiko tamei*, *b'reshus harabim sfeiko tahor*, *raglayim ledavar*, *rov vechazaka*... In *halachah* there's a *psak*; if you have a *taaroves* you plug in the *klalei hapsak*. In the world of *hashkafah*, there are a lot of variables and it's hard to pin down. Where one ends up is often dependent on where one's starting point of reference is.

With what prism should we view the modern State of Israel? How should we relate to the fact that its underpinnings were secular, and its founders were secular? On the one hand, it is a vehicle to bring masses of our fellow *yidden* to *Eretz Yisrael*, and it has instilled a sense of pride in Jews all over the world. Many Yeshivos take subsidies from the government. On the other hand, we know that its policies have often been antagonistic to Torah, and maybe associating with it is legitimizing *kefira*.

The attitude that one takes to *Medinas Yisrael* has always been a fault line that divides segments within *Klal Yisrael*. This goes back to before '48, to the rise of the secular Zionist movement: the question of whether such a movement should be praised or rejected. On one extreme, there were those who took a more positive view of the beginning of the movement, and they tried to infuse it with a more religious component. You can mention *gedolim* and find them. On the other extreme there were those who were staunchly opposed to Zionism. Seeing it and all of its trappings as *muktzah machmas mius*, it has to be fought tooth and nail; it's a threat to Torah.

On the one hand, you see Rav Kook's writings and those of his son Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, whose ideas incorporate the spirit of secular Zionism and view it as ultimately compatible with Torah and as part of Hashem's plan for the *geulah*. In the *sefer Eim Habanim Semeicha*, Rav Yissaschar Teichtal writes that he feels that the *tzaros* of the *churban* of Europe came about because of opposition to settling *Eretz Yisrael*. That was one extreme. Yet, many *gedolim* remained suspicious of, and staunchly opposed to, Zionism. And the Satmar

Rebbe had his *shita* that was the opposite extreme: Zionism was to blame for Jewish suffering.

I think that what is often lost in all of this discussion is that between the two extreme outlooks there exists a wide spectrum, and you don't have to be completely on one end or on the other. I'll give you an example: even within the *mesorah* of this Yeshiva which is certainly very positively disposed to *Eretz Yisrael* and *Medinas Yisrael*, not everyone embraces the Messianic perspective of Rav Kook and his followers. The Rav was an eloquent spokesman for Mizrachi, but he was opposed to any attempt to tamper with *nusach hatefillah*. Whether on Yom Ha'atzmaut or even within the wording of *nacheim* on Tisha B'av, he didn't want to change anything. There are many indications that he was opposed to certain styles of celebration of Yom Ha'atzmaut.

Equally true is that the "non-Zionist" *gedolim* are not monolithic. Some were a little closer to the view of the Satmar Rebbe: maybe the Brisker Rav, to some extent the Chazon Ish, as well as Rav Aharon Kotler. Others, for either ideological reasons or pragmatic reasons, were more positively disposed toward the *Medinah*. When people would ask where to go to daven at *kivrei tzadikim*, Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach would say to go to Har Herzl to daven at the soldiers' graves. There was a sensitivity, an appreciation for what it meant to be *moser nefesh* for the country. Rav Yosef Kahanman insisted that an Israeli flag be hung on Yom Ha'atzmaut in the Ponevezh Yeshiva, and it still is. There's a *teshuvah* by Rav Moshe from 1957 (*Orach Chaim* 1:46) about a shul which had put up both

*Rabbi Elchanan Adler - How Underlying Attitudes Affect Our Value Judgments  
on Israel and the Washington Rally*

Israeli and American flags. People wanted to break away and start a new shul, because *chas v'shalom*— how could they daven in a shul that has flags? Both American and Israeli flags have nothing to do with a shul. Rav Moshe acknowledges that such flags do not belong in a shul, but *chas v'shalom* to break away over this! He goes on to discuss an American flag and an Israeli flag. Those who associated with the flag may have been *reshaim*, but the flag itself is not a religious symbol and its presence in shul is not technically *assur*.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky writes in *Emes L'Yaakov* that the State of Israel restored a sense of dignity to *Klal Yisrael* after the horrors of the Holocaust. There are many examples like this. I know that Rav Henkin, who was a big *posek* in the Lower East Side where I grew up, was very much in the camp of anti-Zionism before 1948. But then something changed; once there was a State, there was a certain association that was created in the world around us. You have to understand the reality that people now associate Jews and Israel, and if you're going to go against Israel, you're really going against Jews. Rav Henkin wrote strongly against the Neturei Karta philosophy and against Satmar; it's all there in his writings. He was not a religious Zionist, but he had very strong views about how to relate to the State of Israel. Back in 1949, Rav Ruderman invited Rav Zev Gold, the head of the Mizrachi, as the guest speaker at the 6th *Chag Hasmicha* in Ner Yisrael.

It's a fault line. Recently, there was a split between different factions in *Eretz Yisrael* about how to deal with the exemptions of *yeshiva bochurim* from the army. You have the faction in Bnei Brak,



and the faction in Yerushalayim; the more moderate faction was Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman, and you have the more extreme factions.

Again, this partly has to do with what your starting point is. If your visceral feeling about *Eretz Yisrael* as a State is the way the Satmar Rebbe felt, then your natural inclination is going to be an attitude of “in your face”. The more that you’re able to see things in a nuanced way, you can understand that there’s a more moderate approach that you can take.

Another example of this is an organization called Eretz Hakodesh that was founded recently as part of the World Zionist Organization. You had to express some kind of allegiance toward the values of Zionism, but the organization would also help *Chareidim*, and Jews in general, as opposed to having money allocated toward other things which are *mamash kefira*.

The question is: by having such a group, are you somehow betraying your own values? This became a very controversial issue, and it still is.

Why am I telling you this? I will try not to speak on a personal level, although I do have strong feelings.

This past week, we had a beautiful rally that showed tremendous solidarity with Israel. It was attended by all types of Jews: religious, non-religious, Yeshivish, and modern. It was held for a particular reason – to send a strong message to the United States government to continue to support Israel. It goes into *pikuach nefesh*.

*Rabbi Elchanan Adler - How Underlying Attitudes Affect Our Value Judgments  
on Israel and the Washington Rally*

It was to advocate for the hostages. It was to do more to fight anti-semitism. The greater the number of people that attend, the stronger the message.

Now, what happened? There's a world called the Agudah world, the Yeshivish world, and they are not Zionist. They are sort of in the middle road; a non-Zionist organization. They have a lot of people who are their constituents. They were not organizing the rally, rather it was a Jewish Federation rally.

Initially, they encouraged participation, and a letter went out saying that people should go. It said maybe not the *yeshiva bachurim*, depending on the case, but at least the *ba'alei habatim* should go. Then, at the last minute, there was a letter from several notable members of the Moetzes telling people not to go. It created a lot of confusion and controversy that continues to reverberate. I don't want to get into the politics of it— it's not relevant. I did speak to Rav Elya Brudny, and his *cheshbon* is not one that I want to address right now. What I would like to do is provide a perspective to a letter that came out several days ago. I don't know how many of you saw it, but it got a lot of press. The Rosh Yeshiva of Ner Yisrael, Rav Aharon Feldman, offered a rationale for his position to stop supporting the rally. Now, I will try to separate my personal feelings, although I will not hide the fact that I was very saddened and disappointed by the letter, but I want to address some of the confusion here.

Where is it coming from? The letter goes through different reasons to oppose the rally. One issue is that due to a pastor speaking, one might become enamored with Christianity. I don't understand

*Rabbi Elchanan Adler - How Underlying Attitudes Affect Our Value Judgments  
on Israel and the Washington Rally*

exactly why anyone who is going to the rally, for the reasons they're going, would believe in that, but that was one of the points.

But then the letter gives a lot of attention to the idea that going to the rally legitimizes Zionism. There's the singing of Hatikvah, and people being exposed to this could *chas v'shalom* get caught up in the *avodah zarah* called Zionism. Now, I want to explain where this is coming from. If your starting point is that you view the State of Israel in such black and white terms, then of course— the most important issue at stake is exposure to *avodah zarah*, and even *pikuach nefesh* would not be relevant here because this is *avodah zarah*.

That's why you end up where you end up. But you don't have to be that extreme. You don't have to be in YU, you don't have to be someone who went to a *besder yeshiva*, you can be someone who went to any number of *yeshivos* not within the YU world, you can be someone who doesn't say *Hallel* on Yom Ha'atzmaut, and maybe even say *tachanun*, and yet, you don't have to view every aspect of Zionism as inherently evil. You can attend the rally and recognize the fact that it is addressing a large spectrum of people. They're going to sing Hatikvah, even if you don't join in. Even if it's not going to make your heart warmer hearing that Hatikvah, you can still attend, and understand why you're going.

There's another aspect to this. The more that you see *Klal Yisrael* in a broader sense, the more you are able to appreciate the value of Jews coming together, and see the fact that people are proud of their Jewishness as a positive thing, maybe even as a *hirbur teshuvah*. The more you define *Klal Yisrael* in very limited

*Rabbi Elchanan Adler - How Underlying Attitudes Affect Our Value Judgments  
on Israel and the Washington Rally*

and narrow terms, *achicha b'mitzvos*—which has *halachic* implications—the less it bothers you that you're not part of the larger *tzibbur* of *Klal Yisrael*. Because *Klal Yisrael*, as defined by you, is more narrow.

I want to end with this. We pointed out in terms of understanding the way history plays out, and how to understand where we're headed and why it's happened: it can mean one thing or something else. You can have a view which is very extreme, but you have to honestly define it as such. It's essentially a *da'as yachid*. It's not the mainstream, and this has been proven; I've heard this time and time again. In fact, there were many *bnei Torah* and *bnei Yeshiva* who attended the rally. Rav Aharon Lopiansky took his entire yeshiva except for ten people. He kept *asara batlanim* just to be there to keep the *sedarim* of the Yeshiva, and proudly went with everyone else. I know that Rav Shalom Spitz from Shaar Hatorah was planning to go, and he encouraged *talmidim* to go. Chofetz Chaim went.

I heard a recording of Rav Moshe Brown from the Yeshiva of Far Rockaway (a towering *talmid chacham*) that back in 1967, when the State of Israel also faced an existential crisis, Rav Ruderman took the entire Ner Yisrael, Rav Elya Svei took the entire Philly Yeshiva, and all of Telz Yeshiva went to attend a rally. Again, these are not “Zionist *gedolim*”; they are within the traditional Yeshiva world. But if you have a broader perspective, and you don't make an issue like this into a litmus test, you can see a broader issue. This is where I think it's important to put things in perspective.

Decisions in life, both in this regard and regarding lots of other

*Rabbi Elchanan Adler - How Underlying Attitudes Affect Our Value Judgments  
on Israel and the Washington Rally*

things, are not always black and white. You can be right in one context, and you can see a larger perspective in a different context. One way to look at it is that joining with non-Orthodox Jews for a rally that will include speakers who might say things that clash with our sensitivities is a *shmeck* of *kefira*. On the other hand, without giving up my values or my convictions, I understand that there's another value here. I want to be part of a *pikuach nefesh* endeavor to send a message to the government even though I'm not *maskim* to everything that is going on. Even within the groups that attended there were liberal groups in the Jewish spectrum, and they came together even though they probably heard the pastor say things that hurt their ears, because they believe in trading land for peace. The point is that you attend, and you put the disagreements aside. But if you see things in very absolute terms, you can't do that. Depending on what your preconceived notions are about a given issue—in this case, the State of Israel—those counter arguments either will pass muster or won't pass muster.

Again, to come back to where we started, without a *navi*, and without hindsight, we can't know with certainty what to make of this situation or that situation. It's nice to be sure of things, or to sound like you're sure, but ultimately, we should follow our *mesorah*. Whatever your *mesorah* is along the spectrum, there's a lot in the middle. You don't have to be on one extreme or the other. What's promoted to be a *daas Torah* doesn't have to be a *daas yachid*. A *daas yachid* is a *daas yachid*, and it's good for those who want to follow that particular *daas yachid*. But don't assume that this represents more than that *daas yachid*; *Klal Yisrael* is not monolithic. It's not a breakdown between YU and the "Yeshiva world", it is a particular

point of view that is, in my eyes, quite extreme, but everyone is entitled to their opinion. The Satmar Rebbe was a *gadol*. This is an opinion, but it's not a mainstream opinion.

I want to end with a very important Tosafos. Whatever opinion you take in whatever situation, however moderate, however extreme, there's always another question to consider, which is your motives. How much *le'sheim shamayim* are you? The Gemara in *Sotah* (36b) brings an interesting *Chazal* about *krias Yam Suf*. When *Klal Yisrael* were at the *Yam Suf* the *shevatim* were arguing about who should go in first. Based on a *pasuk* in *Tebillim*, the Gemara states that *Shevet Binyamin* went in first, and *Shevet Yehuda* were stoning them. Tosafos (37a "*Vebayu*") explains this with a *midrash* which brings an interesting *mashal*. A king had two sons: one older, and one younger. He tells the younger son to wake him up at sunrise, and the older son to wake him up three hours into the day. The next morning the younger son comes at sunrise, but the older son won't let him wake up the king. The older son says, "father told me to wake him up three hours into the day", and the younger son says "no, he told me sunrise." While they're going back and forth arguing, the father wakes up. He says to the two sons: "both of you were *mechavein* for my honor, so I'm going to give you both your reward." Tosafos compares it to Yehuda and Binyamin: when Binyamin goes in and Yehuda stones them, they're both acting *le'heim shamayim*.

Whenever you take a position, especially if it's on the extreme side of the spectrum, there's always a risk. If you're too tolerant, then you can start seeing things positively when they should really be called

*Rabbi Elchanan Adler - How Underlying Attitudes Affect Our Value Judgments  
on Israel and the Washington Rally*

for what they are. If it's evil, you can't just say everything is good. But being extreme on the other side can undermine *abavas Yisrael*, breed feelings of negativity, and corrupt one's *middos*. Whatever position you take in any given issue in life, using this as a *mashal* to bring out other examples, you have to recognize that it's not just about being right in the abstract, it's about being right in the context of the situation and having the motives *l'sheim shamayim*.

May we get to the point that we can fully understand everything in hindsight. Meanwhile, we should follow the *mesorah* that resonates for us, that we've been *mekabeil* from our Rabbeim, and strive to act *l'sheim shamayim*, and may we all be *zocheh* to *yeshuas Hashem bikarov*.