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בית הוראה

Shaare Ezra

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Parshat Bahalotecha

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When the President Is Mocked, the Torah Speaks

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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Last week, we witnessed a disgraceful barrage of insults directed at President Trump by Elon Musk. While the president is known for never remaining silent in the face of personal attacks, this time he chose a more restrained and measured response. But even as mere observers, we too have a halachic responsibility. We are not permitted to speak negatively about the president—even in private, as we will see from the following examples. This applies even to a king who is not favorable to the Jewish people—how much more so when we are dealing with President Trump, who has been strongly pro-Jewish and has done much for our national interests. All the more so must we show the highest level of *hakarat hatov*—gratitude—even if one disagrees with certain policies.



curse a rich person in your bedchamber. And even if he were merely a communal leader, I still would not curse him, as it is written: *'You shall not curse a leader among your people.'*

Hordus kept pressing him in different ways, but Bava Ben Buta remained firm and respectful. When Hordus eventually revealed his identity and regret over his actions, he asked Bava Ben Buta for advice on how to repent. Bava Ben Buta told him to restore the honor of the Jewish people by rebuilding the Beit HaMikdash, which Hordus then did—building it with incredible beauty.

This story highlights the critical importance of showing respect to a king—not

only by refraining from public curses or insults, but even in private. The obligation extends so far that one must be careful not to harbor a curse against the king even in his own thoughts.

The story of Bava Ben Buta is highly relevant when discussing the halachic obligation not to speak negatively about a ruler—even when that ruler is unjust or wicked.

The Gemara (Baba Batra 3b-4a) tells the story: King Herod (Hordus), who ruled during the late Second Temple period, was a cruel and violent monarch. The Gemara recounts how he murdered all the sages of his time, sparing only Bava ben Buta—a leading Tanna—whom he viciously blinded. **One day, while in disguise, Hordus approached the blind Bava ben Buta and attempted to provoke him into speaking negatively about the king.**

"See, Rabbi, what this evil slave Hordus has done—you should curse him!" Hordus urged. But Bava Ben Buta, unaware that he was speaking to Hordus, refused to say anything negative, instead he quoted a pasuk: *"Do not curse the king, not even in your thoughts."* (Kohelet 10:20). Hordus objected, *"He is not a king—he rules illegally!"* Bava ben Buta replied, *"Even if he were only a wealthy man, I would not curse him, as it is written: 'Do not*

The Torah emphasizes the importance of respecting authority, even when the leadership is wicked. The pasuk states: **"Hashem spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, and He commanded them regarding the Children of Israel and regarding Pharaoh, the king of Egypt"** (Shemot 6:13).

Chazal explain this command as an instruction to **show honor to the monarchy**—even to Pharaoh (Mechilta Bo, ch. 13).

The Chatam Sofer learns from this that it is a Torah obligation to honor a king. Pharaoh was as evil a king as one can imagine, and yet Hashem still commanded Moshe and Aharon to show him honor.

Similarly, Chazal taught: **"One must always maintain a reverence for the monarchy,"** as it says: **"All your servants shall come down to me and bow before me..."** (Shemot 11:8).

The pasuk could have said, *"You [Pharaoh] will come down to me,"* but it was worded more respectfully

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WHEN THE PRESIDENT IS MOCKED, THE TORAH SPEAKS

to teach us the importance of honoring the king (Zevachim 102a; Menachot 98a).

In another Midrashic teaching, Moshe and Aaron say: **"Lest He strike us with plague or sword"** (Shemot 5:3) uses the plural "us" instead of directly warning Pharaoh "lest He strike you."

This too is interpreted to teach that **one is obligated to speak respectfully to the monarchy**, even under threat (Shemot Rabbah 5:15).

We also learn that respect for authority must be expressed through active gestures. For example, the prophet Eliyahu ran before the wicked King Achav, escorting him all the way to his palace, as it says: **"And the hand of Hashem was upon Eliyahu, and he girded his loins and ran before Achav until the entrance of Yizre'el"** (Melachim I 18:46).

Similarly, Yosef shaved and groomed himself before appearing before Pharaoh, in order to show proper respect for the king, as it says: **"So Yosef shaved and changed his clothes, and he came to Pharaoh"** (Bereishit 41:14, Rashi).

These sources demonstrate how deeply embedded the value of honoring kingship is within Torah—even when the leader is immoral or oppressive.

This applies even when there is no threat of harm from the king.

When Yosef came to visit his father Yaakov on his deathbed, he "strengthened himself and sat up" to show honor to Yosef. Rashi explains that this was out of respect for the king. From this we learn several things: first, that honor must be shown even when there is no fear of the king—as Yaakov had no reason to fear his son; Second, even though Yosef was not technically the king but only second to Pharaoh, he was treated as a king—teaching us that anyone in a position of authority is regarded as a king in this regard and deserves to be honored accordingly. and finally, that even a father is required to rise for his son if his son is a king.

The question must be asked: Why is this idea so important to the Torah? The Maharsha offers a profound insight:

"It is fitting to show honor even to the wicked kings of old, as mentioned... for we say in Berachot (Perek Haro'eh) that earthly kingship is a reflection of the heavenly kingship. One who disgraces them is, in essence, disgracing the honor of Hashem."

This teaches us that a king serves as a reflection of Hashem's sovereignty in the world. In other words, Hashem rules over the world through these kings—they are, so to speak, His extended hand. If so, we can understand why the Torah is so concerned that we show respect to these leaders: by honoring them, we are ultimately honoring Hashem, who appointed them as His messengers.

MORE THAN A QUICK QUESTION: THE CORRECT WAY TO INQUIRE

"Ask in the Proper Manner" (Avot 5:7)

While rabbis are glad to share their halachic knowledge and guidance, the responsibility doesn't lie with them alone. Asking a question is not just about getting an answer—it's part of a shared process that requires thought and clarity. As the saying goes, "A well-asked question is half the answer." Halacha addresses not only **what** to ask, but also **how**, **when**, and **whom** to ask. Following these guidelines ensures that the process of seeking Torah guidance is respectful, efficient, and effective.

How to Ask?

When posing a halachic question, clarity is essential. Though this may seem obvious, it bears emphasizing. All too often, a rabbi receives vague questions like: "Shalom, Rabbi, is it okay for me to listen to music?"

Now we surely don't expect for the rabbi to treat this like a Talmudic sugya, considering all possible scenarios. Is the question asked because the person is mourning (*aveilut*)? Is it during *Sefirat HaOmer* or the *Three Weeks*? Is he asking about leaving music playing on Shabbat from before sunset? Or perhaps he wonders if listening to music is permitted at all, as some opinions forbid. Each of these possibilities could yield a different answer. Therefore, the question must be clear.

Of course, once a rabbi receives an unclear question, he is obligated to ask for the necessary details. However, we must recognize that a rabbi's time is valuable, and we should do our part to minimize unnecessary back-and-forth by presenting our questions as

clearly and precisely as possible from the outset.

At the same time, the question should be concise and to the point, not too long and without unnecessary details. Rabbanim are often extremely busy—especially those who devote much of their day to learning—and do not have the time or patience for lengthy, unrelated back stories.



If you have a lengthy concern, you should first ask the rabbi if he has time to discuss it—and if not, when would be a good time. Don't launch into a long story without checking; it can be inconsiderate and burdensome.

Sometimes people ask overly broad questions like, "When is a loan considered interest (*ribbit*)?" While the question may stem from a specific situation, it is unfair to expect the rabbi to teach all the laws of *ribbit* or try to guess what the real question is. The questioner should think through what they truly want to ask and formulate it clearly.

This applies especially to questions sent via text. Typos, autocorrect errors, or vague wording can completely alter the meaning. Often the sender

doesn't even review what they typed. Were the same person sending a message to a lawyer—who charges by the minute—they would surely reread it multiple times to avoid waste. Why should a rabbi, who graciously serves the public, deserve less consideration?

When to Ask?

For some reason, there are people who believe that a rabbi can be contacted 24/7. They feel no hesitation in calling during the middle of the night. If the question involved *pikuach nefesh*, we would understand. But in reality, questions asked during those hours are

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rarely urgent. It's as if the caller assumes the rabbi has nothing else to do and they're doing him a favor by giving him something to occupy his time.

Some treat their rabbi like a smartphone app—ready on demand on speed dial whenever they have a question. There are even those who call daily, as if they have an unlimited subscription. While it's praiseworthy to consult a rabbi when in doubt, one must also remember that beyond the phone line is a human being, with a schedule, obligations, and a life of his own. His time is not solely designated for whoever happens to call first.

What to ask?

What to ask is another important point. If you have a personal or family matter—such as a shalom bayit issue or a concern with a child—your conversation will likely be time-consuming. Make sure the rabbi has the time for it. Just as importantly, make sure he's someone who deals with these types of issues. Many times, people bring questions to rabbis who aren't experienced in that area, when they would be better served by speaking to a rabbi who is, or even a qualified professional.

Hey Rabbi

Addressing the rabbi is another important consideration. While the rabbi himself may not be particular about how he is addressed, we must do our part to show proper respect. One should not send a message that reads, "Hey rabbi, what's up? You're up for a quick question?" Such casual language reflects a lack of kavod haTorah (honor for Torah) and diminishes the seriousness of the interaction. When seeking guidance in Torah matters, our approach should reflect the reverence due to both the Torah and its teachers.

It's worth noting that questions that begin with the phrase "Can I ask a quick question?" are, for some strange reason, usually anything but quick.

With all due respect

And of course, there are those who begin questioning a rabbi with an introduction like, "Rabbi, with all due respect." For some reason, this opening makes the person feel as though it now gives them license to start arguing forcefully. If you feel the rabbi may have made a mistake, you can address it respectfully—perhaps by saying something like, "If the rabbi doesn't mind, I'd like to ask from..." This form of respectful challenge is actually the proper approach outlined by the Gemara. As the Rambam writes, if a student sees

his rabbi violating the Torah, he should not rebuke him directly but rather say with great respect: "My teacher, didn't you teach us that one should do...?"

Now, of course, a rabbi can be wrong—he's human. But if he didn't make an obvious mistake, and simply gave a ruling you don't agree with, you should still respect the psak. After all, you approached him with a question, which means you sought his guidance and valued his opinion. It's certainly appropriate to ask for clarification—if the rabbi has the time. But don't assume he's now available to deliver a full shiur with all the background and sources behind his ruling. Show respect for his time and for the Torah he represents.

Whom to Ask

In the past, we mentioned the words of the Tzemach Tzedek (cited in Pithei Teshuvah, Yoreh De'ah 99), who explains that one who asks a *lamdan*—a learned individual who is not a recognized posek—and follows his ruling, but the ruling is incorrect, is considered a *mezid* (intentional transgressor) rather than a *shogeg* (unintentional), because he relied on someone not qualified to rule. However, if he consulted a recognized posek and the ruling turned out to be mistaken, he is judged as a *shogeg*, since he did what was expected.

The *Meshech Chochmah* (beginning of Parashat Bo) discusses how one becomes known and established as a *moreh hora'ah* (halachic authority):

"It is well known that honor among the people comes in two forms: either from the individual's exceptional wisdom, godly character, and upright conduct—or from unusual and wondrous acts that appear supernatural. The former earns respect first from the sages of the generation, who recognize true wisdom, scrutinize conduct, and examine character with discernment. Once they revere him, his name spreads to the masses, who in turn respond with awe. But someone admired only for his wonders gains fame first among the masses, who lack discernment and quickly declare him otherworldly. As stories spread—often exaggerated or fabricated—his fame increases until even the discerning are tempted to question whether so much admiration is undeserved. Experience proves this pattern time and again.

In short, there is a proper way to ask, a proper time to ask, and a proper person to ask. Observing these guidelines not only honors the rabbi but also upholds the dignity and integrity of halachic inquiry itself.

LAW AND ORDER: A TORAH PERSPECTIVE ON LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CIVIL DISORDER

For those of us who've been "missing" the action, it looks like the riots on the American streets are making a comeback—and this time it's Los Angeles' turn. Burning, looting, breaking—all the blessings of the good old protests we saw four years ago. Just like then, when governors allowed it to continue, this time too they aren't stopping it—only now, it looks like the president isn't playing anymore and is determined to crack down on the garbage. Let's try to see what the Torah perspective is on this.

In *Parashat Shoftim*, we are commanded: "Judges and officers shall you appoint in all your gates" (Devarim 16:18).

Rashi explains:

- **Judges** – Refers to scholars who issue rulings.
 - Officers** – Those who enforce the rulings of the judges, using force if necessary, with rods and straps until the litigant accepts the judge's verdict.
- The Rambam, in *Hilchot Sanhedrin* (1:1), codifies this as a positive mitzvah:
- "It is a positive Torah commandment to appoint judges and officers in every province and district, as it says, 'Judges and officers you shall appoint in all your gates.' Judges are those who rule on

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legal matters; officers are those with the power to enforce those rulings. They patrol markets and streets to ensure fairness, correct dishonesty, punish wrongdoers, and bring violators to justice under the authority of the courts."

The phrase "in all your gates" implies that this obligation applies not only in Eretz Yisrael but in every community worldwide, including outside the Land (Radbaz).

The *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzvah 491) echoes this:

"It is a mitzvah to appoint judges and officers to compel the observance of the Torah's commandments and return deviants to the path of truth by force if necessary. They are to command what is proper and prohibit what is disgraceful."

This reveals two core functions of law enforcement according to Torah:

1. To enforce religious observance and Torah law.

To uphold public order and morality.

Therefore, the Sages prohibited Torah scholars from residing in a city without a functioning *Beit Din* that has authority to punish and imprison (Sanhedrin 17b; Rambam *Hilchot De'ot* 4:23).

Universal Obligation: Law Enforcement Among Non-Jews

Remarkably, this principle is not limited to the Jewish people. The Rambam (*Hilchot Melachim* 9:1) writes that Adam HaRishon was commanded on six mitzvot, and Noach was later given a seventh—eating flesh from a living animal. Among the original six is the obligation of *dinim*—establishing a system of law.

In *Halacha 14*, the Rambam elaborates: "They must appoint judges in every district to adjudicate these six mitzvot and to warn the people. A gentile who violates any of the seven Noachide laws is liable to penalty. **Law Enforcement Is Essential for Civil Society**

From all the above, the Torah's position is clear: **there is a divine imperative to appoint and empower a system of law enforcement**—one that not only upholds religious truth but protects public safety and justice.



This theme is powerfully expressed by *Rabbi Chanina* (Avot 3:2): "Pray for the welfare of the government, for without fear of it, people would swallow each other alive."

The *Tiferet Yisrael* offers a haunting interpretation:

We might be mistaken to rely on four factors that seem likely to restrain a powerful person from harming another: (1) fear of Heaven, (2)

love or friendship toward the other person, (3) awareness of the severe consequences of causing harm, and (4) recognition that there is no personal gain in doing so. Yet even these may not be enough. Without fear of government punishment, they often fail. That is why the Mishnah emphasizes that only the fear of government keeps the strong from devouring the weak—even while they are still alive and fully conscious of the pain.

He adds: "Therefore, do not merely pray that the government not rebel or collapse. Pray also for the peace and well-being of its leaders—physically, domestically, and politically—so they have the strength and clarity to oversee the public good."

Conclusion

The Torah is not silent about law and order. On the contrary, it demands a functioning system of justice, complete with enforcement. Calls to abolish or defund law enforcement are, from a Torah standpoint, both dangerous and morally misguided. The absence of such a system endangers not only religious life but the very survival of civil society.

רחוב או עיר הנקרא על שם עבודה זרה, מותר להזכירו בפיו וכן לכותבו.

וגם בשו"ת חוות יאיר (סימן א' השגה יא, יב) נזקק לזה וכתב שאין בו איסור וגמגום אפילו בפה מכמה טעמים. חדא, שאפילו שנקרא שם לעבודה זרה ממש כשם אדם, אין איסור להזכיר שמה מאחר שגם עכשיו יש הרבה בני אדם שנקראים בשמות כאלו והרי לא עובדים את אותם האנשים. וכן כבר אמרו חז"ל שגוים בזמן הזה אינם עובדים עבודה זרה ממש. וכבר כתב היראים (סימן עה) שאין איסור להזכיר אלא שם אלהות, אבל שם הדיוט, כגון כרע בל קרס נבו, אף על פי שעשו אותן אלהות מאחר שלא ייתן השם לשם אלהות ואינו נשמע אלהות ואדנות מותר. וכן הובא להלכה בביאור הגר"א (יו"ד סימן קמז סק"ב), וביאר שלכן הוזכרו שמות אותו האיש ותלמידיו בש"ס בכמה מקומות.

המטייל בחוץ לארץ במקומות הנקראים בשם עבודה זרה רשאי לומר או לכתוב את שם אותו המקום, ולדוגמא כששוכר מונית וצריך לומר לנהג לאן פניו מועדות, ושם המקום נקרא בשם עבודה זרה. ואף שנפסק להלכה בשולחן ערוך (יו"ד סימן קמז ס"א) שאסור להזכיר שם אילילים בין לצורך ובין שלא לצורך, דהנה הרב מנשה קליין (בשו"ת משנה הלכות ח"ט סימן קסט) נשאל בזה, וכגון המבקר בעיר בוענס איירעס בברזיל, שיש בה רחובות הנקראים על שם אותו האיש, וכן באירופה ישנם עירות הנקראות על שם העבודה זרה שלהם. והשיב שלגבי כתיבה ודאי יש להתיר מטעם דכתיב 'לא ישמע על פיך', דמשמע רק בפיו ולא בכתיבה. וכבר הסתפק בזה בספר מנחת חינוך (מצוה פו), והעלה על פי דברי השאגת אריה (סימן יג) להתיר.

Shaare Ezra is a one of a kind, multi-faceted organization that's there for the community. Under the leadership of HaRav Shay Tahan שליט"א, Shaare Ezra feels that proper Halachic guidance should be accessible to everyone, therefore we offer the community the opportunity to call, text, WhatsApp, or e-mail any halachic questions they may have, through the Bet Horaah, where qualified, trained and ordained Rabbis are available to answer your questions in English, Hebrew and Russian. Shaare Ezra is from the community—for the community.

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