

March 2016 Message from Rabbi Dubin

With the Presidential nominating races fully underway, it's hardly difficult to become a bit jaded every now and then about the process. To call the campaigns nasty or opportunistic would at times be quite the understatement. It's no wonder our country has one of the lower voter participation rates in the democratic world!

But, lest we become too overwhelmed by the fierce vitriol being hurled every which way, it is important to consider and appreciate the outrageous privilege that we, as Americans, have in being able to vote for our governmental representatives. In fact, so great is this privilege, that I would say voting is nothing less than a responsibility and obligation. And I wouldn't be alone in thinking this, because Jewish Tradition argues to the same conclusion.

Rabbi David Evan Markus, co-chair of [ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal](#), the umbrella organization for the Jewish Renewal movement, and co-rabbi of New York City's Temple Beth-El of City Island (New York City) wrote a wonderful short piece about voting. He is especially qualified to write on the subject because not only is Rabbi Markus an ordained rabbi, he is a licensed attorney who holds a Masters Degree in Public Policy as well.

Rabbi Markus presides as judicial referee in New York Supreme Court, 9th Judicial District, which makes him one of the few U.S. pulpit rabbis also to hold public office.

Among the points Rabbi Markus makes in his article are the following:

1. **Government is important**, as "Rabbi Chanina, the Deputy High Priest, says: "Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear of it, man would swallow his fellow alive." (Mishna Avot 3:2).

2. The duty to create and support government is **one of the few duties that Jewish law recognizes for all, Jew and non-Jew alike** (B.T. Sanhedrin 56a).

3. As Maimonides (1135-1204) writes, the purpose is to ensure public order: "Six precepts were commanded to Adam:

- i. The prohibition against worship of false gods;
- ii. The prohibition against cursing God;
- iii. The prohibition against murder;
- iv. The prohibition against incest and adultery;
- v. The prohibition against theft;
- vi. **The command to establish laws and courts of justice.**

How must the gentiles fulfill the commandment to establish laws and courts? They are obligated to set up judges and magistrates in every major city to render judgement concerning these six mitzvot and to admonish the people regarding their observance.

-- (Mishneh Torah, Melachim 9:14)

The most important reason Jews must vote, though, according to Rabbi Markus, is that our Tradition values collective action so highly that public interest can compel individual behavior. By choosing to live somewhere as citizens, we bind ourselves into a **social contract with our society**. As Shlomo ben Meiri (1080-1174, “Rashbam”) held, this social compact obliges Jews to honor the realm’s civil laws in exchange for the realm’s benefits and protection (comm. Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 54b).

While Rabbi David Markus represents perhaps the most liberal side of the modern Jewish religious world, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (b. 1895 in Minsk – d. 1986 in New York) became perhaps the single most revered Orthodox legal authority in all of America during his 91 years. Remarkably, while branches of our Jewish family tend to have different perspectives quite often when it comes to matters of personal obligation, on the matter of voting, these two rabbinic authorities are of one mind.

Among the treasure trove of writings that Rav Feinstein produced, one in particular stands out at this period of our political calendar: “October 3, 1984
"On reaching the shores of the United States, Jews found a safe haven. The rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights have allowed us the freedom to practice our religion without interference and to live in this republic in safety.

"A fundamental principle of Judaism is hakaras hatov – recognizing benefits afforded to us and giving expression to our appreciation. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each Jewish citizen to participate in the democratic system which guards the freedoms we enjoy. The most fundamental responsibilities incumbent on each individual is to register and to vote.

"Therefore, I urge all members of the Jewish community to fulfill their obligations by registering as soon as possible, and by voting. By this, we can express our appreciation and contribute to the continued security of our community.” -- M. Feinstein

While the New Jersey and Pennsylvania primary dates come later in the process than many of the other states, this does not render your voice any less critical. If you have not yet registered to vote, I urge you to do so at your very earliest convenience.

DATES TO REMEMBER:

- March 28, 2016: Last day to register to vote in the Pennsylvania Primary Election
- April 26, 2016: Pennsylvania Primary Election
- May 17, 2016: Last day to register to vote in the New Jersey Primary Election
- June 7, 2016: New Jersey Primary Election

Rabbi Dubin

Copyright © 2016 Jewish Center of Northwest Jersey