

# **RAL on Israeli National-Religious Policy Issues: Baruch Goldstein, Rabin Assassination, Disengagement, Renting to Arabs**

Class 23

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## **1. Aharon Lichtenstein, Avraham Kurzweil, Shmuel Haber and Dov Leor, "A Rabbinic Exchange on Baruch Goldstein's Funeral," *Tradition* 28:4 (1994), pp. 59-63**

To my dear colleague, Greetings, ha-shalom ve-ha-berakha.

We all recognize the great sensitivity that exists within the network of Yeshivot Hesder and our mutual cooperation in it toward safe guarding the absolute independence of each yeshiva in regard to its educational policy; and we are all quite committed to the appropriate and established tradition of mutual non-interference in this area. Nonetheless, during these troubled times, I feel compelled to temporarily abandon this tradition—not out of a desire to express my opinion, but simply, because it is impossible, from a personal and moral stance, to remain silent. Therefore, I must vigorously protest against what transpired last night before all of Israel and the entire world. A person, whatever his previous merits may have been, departed this world while engaged in an act of awful and terrible slaughter, *tevah ayom ve-nora*, and thereby, beyond the crime itself, desecrated the name of Heaven, trampled upon the honor of the Torah and mitzvot, soiled and sullied the image of Keneset Yisrael, and endangered the future of [Jewish] settlement in Yehudah, Shomron, and Gaza. This man won praise and honor in the yeshiva of his hometown, in Kiryat Arba, and was eulogized "ke-halakha," with full ceremonial honor, by her Rosh Yeshiva. Woe to the ears that hear this! But, if it has been decreed that we must hear it, at least there should be a clear protest which expresses not just disassociation, but also disgust and shock. We must do so, not to protect our public image, but to preserve our self-image. May He Who, "being merciful, forgives iniquity" [Psalms 78:38], "remove the shame of His people over all the earth" [Isaiah 25:8]. In fear and trembling, For the sake of the honor of the Torah and its students, Aharon Lichtenstein Rosh Yeshiva, Har Etzion

Dear Rabbi Lichtenstein, Greetings, shalom rav.

Let me note that we are against terrorism of any kind, Arab terrorism against Jews and also Jewish terrorism against Arabs. But the protests made by the rabbi [in his letter] do not sit well with us, in the spirit of "Take the beam from between your eyes" [T.B. Baba Batra 15b], As is well known, your honor supports the political process and all that accompanies it, which includes, if even only de facto, the legitimization in the eyes of the entire world of the arch-terrorist (may his name be blotted out), who has spilled the blood of Jews and others like water, and the terrorist ideology he represents, thereby causing a terrible and awful desecration of God's name, a *hillul Hashem nora ve-ayom*, and indescribable damage to the Jewish people everywhere. Therefore, although it is clear to us that your honor's intentions are for the sake of Heaven, his words in this matter are not to be heard. For where there is desecration of God's name, one does not grant due respect to sages.

With blessings,

Avraham Kurweil Shmuel Haber Roshei Yeshiva, Karnei Shomron

Dear Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshivat Hesder in Alon Shevut,

With greetings, ha-shalom ve-ha-berakha ve-kol tov sela, and appropriate solicitude, ahar derishat shelomo ka-ya'ut.

We received a fax in our yeshiva office, and though it wasn't explicitly addressed to me, as my name did not appear, it was nonetheless clear to whom it was directed, and because of kavod ha Torah, I find it proper to relate to it and respond out of respect. Indeed, I eulogized the late Baruch Goldstein (may Hashem avenge his blood), who was lynched by the non-Jews in the Cave [of Makhpela]. A Jew who is killed because he is a Jew must certainly be called kadosh, a holy martyr, just as we refer to the kedoshei ha-Shoa, the holy martyrs of the Holocaust, without investigating their previous conduct. How much more so in this case, for we knew him intimately as God-fearing and compassionate, as one who loved humanity and saved lives. Even if someone holds the opinion that his final act was improper, lo haya ke-shura, why should he not be entitled to a eulogy ke-halakha. In my eulogy, I intentionally did not address the deed itself, but rather his personality and his achievements, and I did not take a public position on the deed itself. The eulogy took place in the assembly hall

of the yeshiva, not to show our identification with the deed, but rather for other reasons, among them, the wintry and rainy weather conditions that did not allow for the event to be held outside in the public square. I marvel that great Torah sages, lovers of Israel, are quick to judge an individual without knowing the background and circumstances in which he acted and which compelled him to act. Perhaps this was a situation of "his heart coerced him" [T.B. Shevuot 26a], for he was the first to see the spilling of blood in the area; people died before his eyes, and [he] also [heard] the cry "Slaughter the Jews! "Atbah al-Yahud!" on Purim night and [saw] the disgrace of the Jewish people. All these together, I assume, caused him to do this extreme deed. I repeat that my purpose in these remarks is not to formulate a conclusive judgment, but rather to judge favorably, le-lammed zekhut, as we are commanded to judge our fellow Jews favorably [Avot 1:6]. I hope the honorable rabbi will understand the spirit of my words, which are said in pain and distress, and may Hashem bind up His people's wounds [Isaiah 30:26].

With blessings,

Dov Leor

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Nir, Kiryat Arba

Dear Roshei Yeshiva of Yeshivat Karnei Shomron, Rabbis Avraham Kurzweil and Shemuel Haber, Shlita.

Greetings, ha-shalom ve-ba-berakha. Upon returning from a brief trip outside of Israel, I found your response to my letter, which astonished me.

1. Reading between the lines it is evident that you agree that my reaction, in and of itself, was correct—that, at the very least, there was a "sliver" [T.B. Baba Batra 15b] which required attention—but felt that I am not the appropriate person to speak to the issue as I am "publicly known" as a supporter of the process which bestows legitimacy upon terrorist ideology. Thus, the question begs to be asked: Why were you silent then? Why was no protest heard from those in our community, mi-pi anshei shelomeinu, who champion your political views, against the tribute given in a yeshivat hesder to (as Rabbi Leor wrote in his response to me) "the late Baruch Goldstein (may Hashem avenge his blood), who was lynched by the non-Jews in the Cave [of Makhpela]. A Jew who is killed because he is a Jew must certainly be called kadosh, a holy martyr, just as we refer to the kedoshei ha-Sboa, the holy martyrs of the Holocaust, without investigating their previous conduct"? Was this the time for the enlightened scholars, with impeccable foreheads, without slivers and without beams, perhaps even foreheads adorned with tefillin, to be silent and still? I admit without embarrassment that, from both a practical and communal perspective, it would have been better if my reaction would have been heard from roshei yeshiva who have no trace of the taint which, in your opinion, clings to me. But, to my distress, this did not happen. In any event, I doubt if this would have exempted me from the obligation and the desire to take a stand on this subject.

2. Even as we are astonished by the silence relating to the tribute expressed in tears and eulogy, we must likewise question the inaction within our own yeshivot in regard to the killing itself. I do not suspect my colleagues, God forbid, of giving a seal of approval to the occurrence, even after the fact. But the reluctance to take a public position, in and of itself, calls for inquiry; it has caused moral and public damage to both our immediate and our broader community. The Chief Rabbis, shlita, have said their piece; Rabbi Mena chem Eliezer Shach and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef have issued, however belatedly, vigorous statements. In the religious-national camp, however, several of the elder statesmen who are accustomed to take positions and issue protests on the occasion of much less significant events were struck mute. This fact has given rise to a variety of questions, and many have reached the sad conclusion that "since they are silent, presumably, the rabbis are content" [T.B. Gittin 56a], I hope that this conclusion is mistaken, but as to the depth and intensity of the discontent, there is room for soul searching.

3. As to the supposed "beam" that disqualifies my protest, I am simply amazed. This is not the place to discuss the peace process itself, concerning which I too, to some extent, am hesitant and perturbed, because of security considerations. But clearly, any ben Torah who supports it—and is prepared, in this regard, to forcibly swallow his objections to rewarding one who has spilled Jewish blood—is not acting out of esteem, even most grudgingly, for terrorism, but rather to prevent further bloodshed. To be sure, in your opinion this assessment of the situation is mistaken, and the entire process leads to "indescribable damage to the Jewish people" instead of leading to progress. But how can we equate a view sincerely based on the aspiration to save tens of thousands of

lives with the bestowing of honor, even as a kind of last obsequy, a besed shel emmet, to a mass murderer? Were you convinced that the peace process is indeed necessary from the standpoint of saving the lives of the many, pikuah nefesh de-rabbim, and that it would indeed yield genuine peace to the House of Israel, would you abstain from embracing it only because of fastidiousness (nekiyut ha-da'at)?

With blessings of the Torah and mitzvot,  
Aharon Lichtenstein

## **2. "On the Murder of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin z"l," accessible at <http://gush.net/archive/ral1-rab.htm>**

This *sicha* was given by Harav Lichtenstein to Yeshivat Har Etzion on Monday, 20 *Cheshvan* 5756 (November 13, 1995).

There are many reasons to cry, to mourn. First, we must not lose sight of the personal aspect: the family's loss, even when there is a national, public aspect. The first and most immediate loss is suffered by those closest to the deceased. Nevertheless, for us, the public side is the most important. Here, we have undoubtedly suffered a grievous loss. It is rare to find someone with such a level of leadership: the combination of military background and over twenty years of political statesmanship, and the ability to lead and inspire confidence, to steer a course in turbulent and dangerous waters towards a shore whose safety is itself questionable.

Aside from this, there is a special source of worry for those to whom the settlement of *Yehuda* and *Shomron* is important. This is paradoxical, since the fiercest opposition to his leadership arose from precisely those ranks. It is clear, though, that within his government, Yitzhak Rabin was he who more than anyone else cared for and protected the settlements, and hence will be missed by us, more than by others, for just this reason. But even more, within the issue of the peace process there is importance not just to what is given back, but also to how it is given back - not just to the contents of policy, but to how it is carried out. In this respect, objectively speaking, if we rise above the opposition to the policy, Rabin was the proponent of this policy as a necessary compromise; with pain, with real feeling for the nature of the loss, more than anyone else involved in the process. This was not, perhaps, to the extent we would have liked, but nonetheless, he had a real feeling for the values we hold. Recently, out of frustration and in the heat of the argument, he made several statements which expressed disregard for the value of *Eretz Yisrael*, which I am sure he regretted afterwards. Nonetheless, in summary, his genuine feeling for our values will be missed by all of us, whether we support territorial compromise or not.

All this would be true if he had died naturally. The circumstances of his cold-blooded murder, though, are a source of great pain and distress for us. Last week I visited *mori ve-rabi* Harav Aharon Soloveitchik *shlit"l*, whose fierce opposition to the peace process is well-known. As soon as I walked in, he repeated over and over - "A badge of shame, a badge of shame." For two days, he hadn't slept, out of shame and humiliation. This shame - that our state, our people, should have fallen to such a level, should be felt by everyone: religious, secular, right and left. For to the extent that we feel any sense of unity within *Am Yisrael*, to the extent that we feel like a single body, then the entire body should feel shamed and pained no matter which limb is responsible for this tragedy. We should feel deep shame that this method of supposedly solving conflicts has become part of our culture.

But naturally, this shame should be felt by our camp, the National Religious camp, more than any other. Here was a man who grew up in the best of our institutions. A day before the murder, he could have been cited as a shining example of success and achievement, and a source of communal pride. Coming from a "deprived" background, he studied in a Yeshiva High School, attended a great *Yeshivat Hesder*, and was accepted to the most prestigious division of Bar-Ilan University. Today, we hide behind the phrases, "a wild weed," "from the outskirts of our society." But if a day before the murder we would have said proudly, "See what we have produced," we must say it now as well: "See what we have produced!" It is indefensible that one who is willing to take credit when the sun is shining should shrug off responsibility when it begins to rain. Let us face our responsibility - not defensively, but as *Chazal* would see it. I cite words which are so terrible that it frightens me to say them. I am not saying that we should apply them literally, but let us examine how *Chazal* see such things and what is their standard of responsibility.

Concerning one who worships the *Molekh*, the verse states, "I shall put my face against that man and his family." The *Gemara* asks, "If he sinned, did his family sin? This teaches you that there is no family that includes an extortionist where they are not all extortionists, and none that includes a robber where they are not all robbers - because they protect him"...

Can we honestly say that what the murderer did was "despite" his education, in the same way that some yeshiva graduates are no longer *Shabbat*-observers? In that case it is clear that the choice is "despite" the education. Is not here the choice, at least partly, not "despite" but "because?"

The gemara in Yoma (23a-b) relates:

It happened once that two *kohanim* were running evenly up the ramp [of the altar in the Temple, in order to be first and thus be the one to perform the sacrificial service of the day]. One of them intruded within the four cubits of the other. He drew a knife and plunged it into his heart. R. Zadok stood on the steps of the Sanctuary and said: My brothers, the House of Israel, pay heed! It is written, 'If one be found slain in the land [and it is not known who the killer is]...your elders and judges shall go out...[and the elders of the town nearest the corpse shall...break a heifer's neck... and wash their hands...and declare: 'Our hands did not shed this blood...'] (*Devarim*. 21:1-9).' In our case, who should bring the *egla arufa* (broken-necked heifer), the city or the *azarot* (Temple courtyards)? And the people burst out crying. The father of the [slain] youth came and found him in his death-throes. He said, 'May he be your atonement - my son is yet in his death-throes and the knife is not yet defiled!' This teaches us that ritual purity was more serious in their eyes than bloodshed. And thus it is written (*Melakhim II* 21:16), 'And also Menashe spilled very much innocent blood, until Jerusalem was filled from end to end.'

R. Zadok [who cites *egla arufa* in the Gemara despite it being technically inapplicable] is making a point. The principle behind *egla arufa* is collective guilt. When there is a known murderer, then on a technical-legal level, he takes the guilt. If not, it is attached to the whole city, to the community, to the elders. Collective guilt is not established in order to remove or excuse individual responsibility; family, society, upbringing and climate do not remove personal guilt. Jewish tradition insists on personal responsibility. But *egla arufa* teaches that there is another level - that beyond the individual guilt, there also is a level of collective guilt.

One priest stabbed the other. Do the other priests say, "He was just a wild weed which somehow sprouted in our midst," and return to their everyday pursuits? Do they say, "He was a lone madman," and go home? R. Zadok is saying that this act wasn't **despite** us; this was, partially, **because**. Did the *kohen* kill because he rejected sanctity and opposed the service in the Temple, or rather precisely because of his passion and love for the service of God? God forbid that we should say that his teachers taught him that killing another human being is an acceptable way of expressing devotion to God. But they were undoubtedly responsible for emphasizing one side - the importance of competitiveness, of devotion, of striving and commitment, of zeal and ardor, without sufficiently emphasizing the corresponding importance of brotherhood, love, and respect, which must accompany the honest, pure, good, holy and exalted desire to serve God.

The gemara proceeds to relate that the father of the victim, himself a priest, demanded the removal of the sacrificial knife before his son was completely dead, in order to prevent its ritual defilement. "The purity of the knife was more important to them than murder." The gemara (23b) understands that there is an educational imbalance here and asks - did they overvalue ritual purity or undervalue the sanctity of life? Where was the educational flaw? The conclusion is that it was human life that they failed sufficiently to value, and not that they exaggerated the value of ritual purity...

There are many of us for whom it is convenient to sever the connection of the city and the *azara*. The city is them: television, decadent music, pub-culture, and corruption; the *azarot* are us. To some extent, this is true. There does exist an element in general culture which is the opposite of Jewish values, which sees itself, today more than ever, as engaged in a campaign to uproot and destroy anything with a glimmer of holiness. But God forbid that we should try, or even want, to detach *azara* from city. There are some of us who rejoice at every chance to point out the drugs, the prostitution, or the violence in the wider community, so we can say, "Look at the difference between US and THEM" - look at the statistics, look at Dizengoff, look at their family lives. But remember - the people on Dizengoff aren't foreigners; they are our flesh and blood. It is our city and it should hurt; it cannot be a source of joy, of satisfaction, of self-congratulation and gloating. We should cry over the

lack of values. And if, indeed, part of what has happened is the result of the culture of the city - and I think this is undoubtedly so - we are also part of the city, and we too must take part in the city's *egla arufa*.

There is, of course, a difference between the city and the *azara*. We see ourselves - justly! justly! - as residents specifically of the *azara*, the keepers of the flame. But that is precisely why we have a special responsibility, because part of the zeal of that *kohen* who murdered comes from his also having been a resident of the *azara*, from his desire to be first to the altar. Therefore, beyond our responsibility to bring an *egla arufa* as members of the city, we must also bring an *egla arufa* specifically as members of the *azara*. It is no wonder, then, that all the people burst out in tears...

if we indeed strive for completeness, if we want to adhere to all these values, then we must at all times keep in mind the whole picture, the balance and interplay between these values. Have we done enough to ensure that our approach to each aspect of our sacred values is balanced? Perhaps even if we have indeed taught the evil of bloodshed - we have exaggerated, as that terrible gemara suggests, the value of ritual purity.

There are several points I would suggest as worthy of reflection. First: the self-confidence that arises from commitment and devotion to a world of values and eternal truths - whether in terms of *Torat Yisrael* or *Eretz Yisrael* - sometimes has led to frightening levels of self-certainty and ultimately to arrogance. This arrogance has sometimes led us to act without sufficient responsibility towards other people, and at times even without responsibility to other values. "We are good, we have values, and they are worthless" - this attitude has seeped deeper and deeper into our consciousness.

Secondly, at times we have promoted simplicity and shallowness. Pragmatically, this has a greater chance of success than teaching complexity and deliberation... Uncomplicated directives excite more passion than a balanced and complex approach, which confronts questions of competing spiritual values and of competing national interests. Because we wanted our youth to strive, to run up the altar, we not only promoted simplistic slogans, but also a simplistic lifestyle. Once, shocked to my core, I walked out of a meeting of religious educators where a teacher said that although we know that the Ramban and the Rambam disagree about the nature of the *mitzva* to settle the Land of Israel, we must keep this information to ourselves, lest we lower the enthusiasm of our youth and dampen their fervor. Here we aren't delegitimizing Dizengoff; we are delegitimizing the Rambam!

Third, sometimes we taught our students to belittle and suspect others. One who doesn't agree with us is criminal, not merely mistaken. Any opportunity to credit a public leader with good intention was rejected in order to credit him with alienation, with hostility, with malice - not a suspicion of evil, but a certainty! From this way of thinking, horrible things can result...

the process of examining the *azara*, of the problems which arise not despite its holiness but because of its holiness - that is clearly mandated. Not our principles, but surely our analysis of public policy and public needs, needs to be re-examined.

In 1978, Shimon Peres visited the *Yeshiva*. He asked me what the political credo of the *Yeshiva* was. I told him the *Yeshiva* has no political credo, but we teach three things:

1. Even when sitting in the *bet midrash*, you have a responsibility to the community;
2. When addressing these problems, you have to think deeply and not simplistically;
3. Even when doing what is right, you have to know how to respect other opinions and the people who hold them.

This has to be our educational goal. The question is not just what are the particular values we hold, but through which spectacles we view values, through which eyes. A man, said Blake, doesn't see with his eyes but rather through his eyes. What sees is the mind...

Finally, there is another facet to what we have been discussing, which relates to our community and leadership... [W]e must remember the principle of the gemara in *Shabbat*:

Anyone who can rebuke the members of his household and doesn't do so is culpable for [the acts of] his household; [if he can rebuke] his townspeople, is culpable for his townspeople; the whole world - he is culpable for the whole world.

Everyone should tally his own accounts in this respect, but I am not wrong if I say that for all of us the degree of rebuke, of protest was not sufficient; for some, because they did not evaluate the evil properly, for

others because they were not willing to publicize wrong when they feared our opponents could use it to attack our whole system. The point of *Chazal* remains the same; their terrible words carry the same force in either case...

We are today in a very difficult situation, partly practical, partly metaphysical. Practically, our struggle for our values within society has suffered a mortal blow. Among ourselves, there is a shocking atmosphere. Yesterday, the sight of armed guards in the Yeshiva, accompanying R. Yoel Bin-Nun, was shocking. Why was it shocking? I remember the gemara describing how the *Kohen Gadol* on *Yom Kippur* was suspected of being a Sadducee, a heretic - and both he and his accusers wept: he because he was suspect, his accusers because they lived in a world where such suspicions were necessary. Sadder than the sight of bodyguards in the Yeshiva was the knowledge that we live in a world where it is necessary. The transformation from a healthy, organic, trusting society, a society of *azarot*, to one sundered by suspicions is an awful and terrifying one.

There is not only *chillul Ha-Shem* (desecration of God's name) as reflected in what others say, in our sullied public image, but also intrinsically, because (as it were) God is not complete and His name is not complete if there is bloodshed in Israel.

Today we must, out of the crisis, assume an educational and ideological task. Someone may say, "The *Rosh Yeshiva* says that *azarot* can lead to bloodshed - let's close the *azarot*!! Let us abandon the *Mikdash*!" I say, no! We will not close a single *azara*, nor will we encourage tepid and unenthusiastic service. The challenge is, can we continue to inspire the yearning for sanctity, shake people out of complacency, get them to face the great call of the hour - to understand the importance of the *Medina*, to understand the historical process in which we live - without losing a sense of morality, of proportion, of right, of spirituality? Do we have to choose between *azarot* and morality? *Chas ve-shalom*! But we must purify our hearts and our camp in order to serve Him in truth.

About ten years ago, after the disclosure of the existence of the "*Jewish Underground*," I spoke about the role of the Levites. I said then and I say now: the *Levi'im* had a double role. On the one hand, their job was to educate, to inspire, to open eyes and arouse hearts to the service of God and its ecstasy. At the same time, they were the guards at the Temple doors, forbidding entry to the unqualified, not letting one enter where one cannot, setting up boundaries. On the one hand, they called everyone to the Temple, and at the same time, they themselves pressed on the brakes. We are *Levi'im* - we must call a great and large company for this endeavor. We must not divide by saying "I saw and warned and you were silent." This sort of pettiness must be placed aside. We have to build a wide, secure base that can allow all Levites, all who are committed to the city and the *azarot*, to conjoin in the great effort to ensure that the light of the *azarot* shines onto the city.

This is very hard, ten times harder now than before the murder. But anything less will be a betrayal of our obligations and our rights, in this holy hour. May we purify our hearts and our camp, and through a spiritual and Torah-inspired effort, attempt to purify and to sanctify, to the greatest extent possible, our city and our society.

### **3. "Balancing the Settlement Ideal with the Creation of a Just Society," accessible at <http://gush.net/archive/sichot/vayikra/32-65bechukotai.htm>**

[This *sicha* was delivered at the Tzohar rabbinic conference in Av 5764 (Summer 2004).]

The relationship between the Religious Zionist community's vision in the social sphere and its vision concerning settlement is a subject that presents a dual challenge. Firstly, this community is wholeheartedly committed to both ideals. Although a certain tension exists between the two, we dare not relinquish either one of them.

... the welfare of society is a significant value in its own right, but it is also a critical element in security and foreign policy. Society's determination and inner strength is crucial if we are to maintain our hold on Eretz Yisrael - any and all parts of it.

We dare not forego either of these two values. At the same time, while in theory we may feel very attached to certain values which do not contradict one another and even complement one another, in practice, when it comes to finding the balance between them - the order of priorities, in Halakha and in life - we must be able to order our preferences.

... In the midst of a discussion as to the status of Beit She'an and the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael as applying to it, the Gemara teaches (*Chullin 7a*):

Rabbi Shimon ben Eliakim said in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat, who said in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Shamu'a: Many cities were conquered by those who came up [to Eretz Yisrael] from Egypt, which were not conquered by those who returned from Babylonian exile. They believed that the original sanctity [created by those who came up from Egypt] was temporary, not a sanctity for all time.

In other words, the returnees from Babylonia refrained from conquering some areas that had first been conquered by *Bnei Yisrael* when they entered the land. By refraining from conquering these areas, they thereby annulled their sanctity.

Why did they refrain from conquering these areas? The Gemara continues, "In order that the poor would live off these areas of land during *Shemitta* years."

Let us pay close attention: we are not speaking here of some empty outposts, but rather "cities;" and not a few of them, but rather "many cities!"

All this for what? So that the poor could live off that land during the Sabbatical year. What good fortune awaits the destitute in these cities during the seventh year? For one year out of seven, they receive a little produce (here there are different opinions among the *Rishonim*): the produce that fell during the gathering (*leket*), whatever produce was forgotten in the fields (*shikhecha*) and the produce of the corners of the field (*pe'ah*), some fruit, and some tithes for the poor. Is this sufficient reason for *Chazal* to decide to leave "many cities" in gentile hands, just so that this miserly amount of food will reach the poor every seven years?

This ruling was certainly meant for its time, but *Chazal* regarded it as setting a direction and ordering priorities for future generations, too. Backed into a corner, when they had to choose between competing ideals, this was their preferred solution.

I do not mean here to address political issues. We certainly cannot draw conclusions from one situation to another, from one reality to another. But what we see here is a matter of principle, where the question under discussion involved a need to choose...

There is something attractive about presenting the picture in this way. When discussing welfare, it can sound egocentric: you're talking about allowing a person to achieve his desires, his dreams, to realize his personal vision. In contrast, the ideal of settlement reflects the realization of national, historical, meta-historical, and eschatological values. There is simply no comparison between the two.

Some would add that settlement is a mitzva whose time-frame is critical; not so the sphere of charity. The latter boils down to specific, personal, private matters, all of which pale in comparison with the majestic vision of settlement. Social welfare is a permanent mitzva that can be fulfilled at all times. If we don't get to deal with the social questions this year, we can do it in five years' time, or ten or twenty years' time – by which time a new generation has arisen and joined the ranks of the poor. We can deal with it then.

I agree that we do not wish to encourage egocentricity; rather, we want to encourage idealism, a life of giving, action and productivity. We promote a way of life that transcends personal, private concerns, and focuses one's gaze on greater and more elevated ideals. We want to educate people towards an awareness of "*tikkun olam*" – repairing or perfecting the world, and making it a better place.

Nevertheless, I question the basic assumption of this approach, namely, that charity and concern for welfare are just a means, and settlement is the ultimate end and ideal. Is this the conclusion that arises from the Books of the Prophets? Was this the view of *Chazal*? Was this the view of the *Rishonim*? Can this possibly be?

We are told (*Tehillim* 89:3), "The world is built upon *chesed* (kindness)." This applies to the world at large, to our national world, and to the world of each individual. *Chesed* cannot be seen only as a means to satisfying the needs of settlement.

This issue depends, inter alia, on the question of how one views the place of the individual in relation to society. Much has been written on this subject: does the state exist only for the sake of the individual, or does the individual exist for the sake of the state? I adopt the position of Rav Soloveitchik, who maintains that the supposed contrast is itself a distortion. On a certain level, the state is indeed meant to serve the individual, but

the individual has an obligation to rise above his own narrow interests and to serve society and the state, in a constant quest to "repair the world."

Nevertheless, there are differences between the spheres of the individual and the collective. Rav Kook followed Hegel's philosophy, which was couched in meta-historical terms. At the same time, though, he identified to some extent with the harsh criticism that Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky and others leveled at the view that placed meta-historical entities on a pedestal while ignoring the existence, the suffering, the needs and desires of individuals.

When we speak of social and economic problems, we are not talking about fulfilling someone's desires for a second DVD, or a fur coat, or a world cruise...

I believe that love of Eretz Yisrael burned in the hearts of *Chazal* no less than it does in the hearts of those who speak so loftily today. They, too, understood the meaning of the "sanctity of the land." They, too, understood the importance of settlement. Yet they decided to forego settlement of parts of the land in order to benefit the poor...

"The world is built on kindness" is a principle not for metaphysical *midrashim*, but for reality. These are the values that connected Avraham to Eretz Yisrael. Can we then, heaven forefend, come and claim that that world of kindness is no more than a tool for the fulfillment of the mitzva of settling the land?

"A world of kindness" is not a luxury. It is a fundamental component of our identity as servants of God. It is a central pillar of our existence: "The world rests upon three things: Torah, service, and acts of kindness" (*Avot* 1:2)...

Being involved in social welfare, in "repairing the world," requires that we address the question of how to define a properly functioning society. What is the meaning of the phrase, "fulfilling the needs of others"? It must certainly include physical, material needs: breakfast and a school-bag for a child. Yet this cannot be enough...

Clearly, "*tikkun olam*," perfecting the world, must include fulfilling people's spiritual needs. We must help both those who are poor financially and those who are poor spiritually. The latter must be brought to understand that poverty of knowledge is also poverty.

Here again, we must figure out the order of preferences and priorities. Not because there is, heaven forefend, any fundamental contradiction between Eretz Yisrael and Torat Yisrael, between a thriving society and a thriving economy. Rather, we must consider where are the greatest portion of our energies, the bulk of our strength and efforts, should be invested. If we ponder this, then the serious questions that we should be asking will arise on their own.

We must take care of "temporal life" – the needs of society as well as the needs of its individuals. But we must also take care of "eternal life" – theirs and ours. We are "emissaries of God" as well as "emissaries of men." We must find every opportunity to advance, with full responsibility, that lofty vision...

Yishayahu ben Amotz cries out (1:16): "Wash yourselves, purify yourselves; remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes." In the preceding diatribe, the prophet is not denigrating, heaven forefend, the great values of Torah and fear of God. Rather, he demands that we give everything its proper weight – not out of scorn for their importance and value, but out of a vision of the broader picture. I have spoken here about a question of priorities. We must see things in the proper perspective, with awareness of and commitment to meeting the needs of both temporal life and eternal life. We must strive to build a just society, which is devoted, with all its heart and might, to the service of God, and aspires to life in the World to Come.

#### **4. Yair Kahn and Kalman Neuman, "A Rabbinic Exchange on the Disengagement: A Case Study in R. Aharon Lichtenstein's Approach to *Hilkhot Tsibbur*," *Tradition* 47:4 (2015), pp. 157-187**

In the buildup to the withdrawal from Gush Katif, R. Avraham Shapira zt"l, former Chief Rabbi and head of Mercaz Harav, publicized a halakhic ruling prohibiting soldiers from participating in expelling Jews from their homes in order to hand the land over to non-Jews. The letter employed very severe language to describe the repercussions for anyone who ignored the pesak...



As R. Lichtenstein says explicitly, he is not taking a position regarding the disengagement itself, and he is far from sure that it will prove to be a worthwhile enterprise. However, the thrust of his letter is that the disengagement is the result of a legitimate governmental decision, while widespread insubordination in the army that the ruling called for could have dire consequences for the both military and the State. Consequently, he questioned both the halakhic veracity as well as the wisdom of what appeared to be a one-sided ruling...

In the 2005 exchange, R. Lichtenstein clearly sees himself as following in the path charted by his father-in-law, the Rav...

The pesak of R. Shapira regarding disobeying orders was based on the assumption that the disengagement was categorically prohibited by halakha and therefore, from the Torah's perspective, orders to carry out the plan were illegitimate and hence not binding. Consequently, R. Lichtenstein's thrust in the correspondence was to show that the government's position could be justified according to certain halakhic opinions. Accordingly, the government could be seen as acting in a legitimate way and there would be no room for defying orders...

Much of the halakhic debate that ensued related to whether or not *pikkuah nefesh* could be applied to override any prohibitions that the disengagement might entail. The primary question in this regard relates to the impact of *pikkuah nefesh* on the commandment of *yishuv Erets Yisrael*...

R. Sylvetsky, as well, grounding himself on the *Minhat Hinnukh* (and assuming that there is an obligation to wage war to conquer the land), outlined the position as follows:

By its very nature, the obligatory war to conquer the Land of Israel involves a dangerous situation of *pikkuah nefesh*. But nevertheless, the Torah decreed to fight and conquer. From here we see that the *mitzva* to take possession of the Land [of Israel] applies even in a place of danger to individuals, as long as the community as a whole will continue to exist ...

At face value, the argument of R. Babad seems compelling. However, closer examination reveals a significant flaw... After all, the Torah also recognizes endangering lives during a voluntary war, which is rooted in no specific *mitsva*. Apparently the concern of individual *pikkuah nefesh* is suspended within the context of war, whether based on *mitsva* or voluntary. Therefore, it is not the particular *mitsva* which deflects *pikkuah nefesh*, but the situation of war itself...

Moreover, the suspension of *pikkuah nefesh* within the context of war is not because of an axiological preference of war over human life. Rather, the normal parameters of *pikkuah nefesh* simply cannot be maintained during battle. However, this does not mean that individual lives are unimportant nor that loss of human life should be ignored...

R. Shapira says that clear military assessments based on "topography, power of ammunitions, manpower, etc.," are able to tip the halakhic scales. However, broader, long-term considerations such as internal security, demography, foreign relations, etc., are not sufficient to override the prohibitions involved in withdrawal...

R. Lichtenstein clearly thinks that the distinction between considerations based on present conditions and speculations regarding possible future situations does not eliminate the latter as part of legitimate halakhic determination...

R. Lichtenstein further supported his claim that long-term security considerations are legitimate halakhic parameters by quoting the *Gemara* (*Eruvin* 45a) which says that it is permitted to desecrate the *Shabbat* in order to oppose a border raid of non-Jews even if their objective is plunder and there is no immediate danger to life... The situation at hand was a matter of controversy among the political and military analysts. While some thought that the disengagement would save lives, others argued that it would actually endanger them. R. Sylvetsky notes the disagreements among the security experts and writes:

This is reminiscent of what emerges from the *responsum*... regarding a dangerously ill patient, some of whose doctors maintain that a certain drug will save his life, while others think that that very drug will kill him ... *shev ve-al ta'ase adif*—sitting back and doing nothing is the preferred course of action.

Applying this principle to our situation means that there is no room to allow the removal of settlements relying on a single school of defense authorities...

Although R. Lichtenstein agreed to the basic comparison to medical questions of *pikkuah nefesh* as formulated by R. Soloveitchik, he took exception to this particular application. He formulated his major reservation as follows:

...The second element that—to my sorrow and surprise—is lacking is the national dimension.

Recognition of the government's authority to decide matters, to choose among alternatives, and to assess the state of the country, its opportunities and risks, is almost entirely effaced from your letter. You discuss differences of opinion among security experts, using tools that are meant to guide halakhic decision-making when disagreement erupts between physicians, and you conclude... that "it is better to do nothing" when doctors disagree about the benefit or harm caused by a particular medicine... It is precisely from your school of thought, in light of its past record, that one might have expected greater emphasis on the national state-oriented dimension...

The preference of government officials is not because they have greater expertise, but because they have greater authority. What is the basis for such authority? First of all, the nature and need for the existence of a political regime. Since decisions of war and peace are public ones, there must be a mechanism for making such decisions which is not necessarily based (solely) on expertise. Political leadership, however constituted, is the ultimate authority for making such decisions. It would seem that halakha would recognize the existence of such an authority, empowered to determine when confronted by conflicting views...

R. Lichtenstein therefore expects his interlocutors to be consistent with regard to their conceptualization of the status of the state. Since the government has the authority to determine strategic policy in the face of disagreement between various advisors and experts, there is clearly no room for basing insubordination on the claim that the government has overstepped its legitimate parameters, when it has exercised that very authority. If, indeed, the very nature of national security demands complex consideration of situations and consequences of which variant assessments are inevitable, then the political and halakhic buck must stop at the desk of the modern day surrogate of the king...

One overarching aspect is the extent to which halakha in general and halakha regarding political questions in particular requires a nuanced and complex view of reality...

R. Lichtenstein rejects relating to the issue as a binary one. Although in the context of the exchange he does not systematically formulate his personal opinion, it is evident from his writings as well as his practice that in his view the establishment and protection of the Jewish State justify the risk of human life.<sup>55</sup> However, there are different levels of risk, which must be balanced based on the prospective gain. Therefore, each situation must be judged independently. R. Lichtenstein sees the *mitsva* to inherit the land in its entirety (even in the context of a *milhemet mitsva*)<sup>56</sup> not as an imperative which puts a government on "automatic pilot," but rather as a goal whose complete attainment must be weighed in light of military, political, social and economic circumstances... The different attitudes toward non-military considerations provide an additional example of the distinction between a halakhic position that reduces the question to a binary one and a more nuanced approach which sees the process as one of considering all the variables in order to arrive at the most informed and appropriate decision. As we have seen, R. Shapira and R. Sylvetsky accept the opinion of military experts only in determining that a certain action is futile. Only the military question of victory or defeat is relevant from a halakhic perspective and consequently binding on the political leadership. On the other hand, long term considerations which fall under the broader rubric of "national security" are halakhically irrelevant. Once again, the halakhic decision is black or white, based solely on one concrete issue. R. Lichtenstein does not accept this method of adjudicating halakhic questions. The very definition of *pikkuah nefesh* regarding political questions is complex; there are many factors that must be considered. Therefore, R. Lichtenstein emphasizes that the variables that must be taken into account are not limited to the implementation of the tactical decisions of the military. There is a need for manifold strategic considerations both regarding the survival and well-being of the polity as a whole and with respect to its individual members...

R. Lichtenstein acknowledges the necessity of granting authority to constituted political bodies in order to deal with this complexity. Weighing such factors is the very substance of political authority and halakha recognizes that there are decisions that in the absence of quantifiable concrete data must be taken by the powers that be. Therefore, according to R. Lichtenstein, the political leadership has the authority to decide, when confronted

with an ambiguous situation that allows for various dissenting views. Halakha as a system, and the halakhist as a legal decisor, must respect the mandate of the properly constituted leadership to make such judgments (and therefore oppose the notion that disagreement with governmental decisions calls for disobeying orders)... This awareness of the multifaceted aspect of reality is familiar to anyone who has ever heard R. Lichtenstein confront those halakhic questions that require consideration beyond technical reference to an authoritative text.<sup>59</sup> His approach is predicated on the need to reflect all dimensions of a given situation in order to issue a ruling. He sees the awareness of complexity as an essential characteristic of halakhic thinking and a basic attribute of the halakhic personality. This view of halakha, in which the role of the decisor is to weigh different aspects of reality no less than to locate and apply various texts, is even more evident regarding political decisions, in which complexity and uncertainty are common fare. Making such decisions cannot be reduced to a glib formula such as “shev ve-al ta’aseh adif.” Saying “when in doubt – do nothing” makes as much sense in politics as in chess. When dealing with questions of national security, speculation is an inseparable part of the game...

R. Aharon has orally expressed admiration (even if not total agreement) for the realism of Reinhold Niebuhr’s Moral Man and Immoral Society. Accordingly he does not reduce political action to realizing abstract rules, but rather (as in the Burkean political tradition) he values experience and contingency rather than striving for utopian perfection. Because of the nature of such decisions, it is inappropriate for the posek to present a certain conclusion as the halakhically correct one, as there are questions and realms of activity which are not totally governed by halakhic guidelines...

R. Lichtenstein’s understanding of the role halakha may play in statecraft. Of course, the political ruler like anyone else is subject to halakha and does not have a carte blanche to arbitrarily go against the law. On the other hand, it is hard to accept that halakha would affect the political process itself to the extent that it leaves no room for considerations that are part and parcel of the political dimension of human life. It is also difficult to believe that halakha would dictate policy at odds with common sense and universally accepted morality. Torah must reflect a moral standard and an appreciation of human life no less sensitive than that of other nations... We hope that we have shown how the topics that we have dealt with here (as well as his discussion of the possible repercussions of mass insubordination) illustrate R. Lichtenstein’s masterful way of showing how Torah can confront complex reality with intellectual clarity and moral insight.

##### **5. “On the Events at Amona,” accessible at <http://www.gush.net/archive/sichot/shonot/ral-66amona.htm>**

This sicha was delivered on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Shevat, 5766 – Feb. 7, 2006...

A week ago, the Israeli government carried out the demolition of some of the houses in the settlement outpost of Amona, an event unfortunately accompanied by violence. I was reminded of an episode that occurred in 1970, a year before I made aliya. At Kent State, an enormous crowd participated in stormy demonstration against the Vietnam War, a war that was widely opposed among students. Some members of the National Guard who were present apparently felt threatened, lost their composure and opened fire on the student demonstrators. Four people were killed in this incident, which shocked the entire American nation. I was reminded of those days when I wondered, last week, what would have happened if one of the youths at Amona had, God forbid, been killed as a result of the police behavior. Aggression of the sort that we witnessed is an expression of weakness, not strength – especially when it is carried out by agents of the state, who are meant to maintain restraint and maximum control.

On various occasions, I have mentioned the fact that the prohibition against hitting appears in the Torah specifically in connection with the agent of the court: "Forty lashes he may give him; he shall not exceed" (*Devarim* 25:3). This seems strange: after all, it is prohibited to strike any person, at any time. Why, then, is the prohibition mentioned specifically as an issue pertaining to the agent of the *beit din*, who is assigned to carry out a punishment ordered by the court?

The answer is that it is specifically when a person enjoys a special status because of his position that there is a danger that his inner aggressive streak - the wild animal that exists within each of us - will burst forth. It is specifically in a situation where a person is performing his actions out of a sense of duty, when he feels that his actions have official sanction, when he feels that he is representing a system – it is precisely then that there is a

need to emphasize the prohibition against "excessive beating." Indeed, it would appear that some of the aggressive feelings that the Torah warns about did find expression on that black and bitter day at Amona. Those actions represent a stain on Israeli society, and this crisis should shake us profoundly.

What took place is surprising because it is so different from what happened during the summer. During the Disengagement from Gaza, we witnessed how – regardless of political affiliations – the process was carried out with understanding on the part of both parties and a certain respect for each other, despite the distance between them. Great efforts were made not to be drawn into violence – neither on the part of the government nor on the part of the leadership of the public that suffered and was expelled; the latter generally restrained the public, both ideologically and practically. This time, that did not happen – on either side...

Hence, at Amona both sides displayed determination, but abandoned sensitivity in order to gain the upper hand. While the question of which side was in fact victorious is an important one, it seems clear which side lost: the State of Israel and its population as a whole. Thus, the question that arises in light of what we saw is – God in heaven, what are they waiting for? For deaths? Those who dispatch youths and fire them up to the point where they endanger the lives of soldiers and police by throwing cinderblocks at them – what are they waiting for? And those who send mounted police to suppress those same youth – what are *they* waiting for? This problem is a national one; even someone who is altogether cut off from one of the camps – emotionally, politically, ideologically – must regard the actions of both sides with concern...

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the Religious Zionist public must view the situation with even greater concern, and rightly so: partly because its institutions and constituency represent the principal injured party in these events, and partly because the vision of the Greater Land of Israel is one that this public holds especially dear. It would appear that it is specifically because we feel so strongly about these issues that our camp and its leaders bear an even greater and more significant responsibility – to consider their actions and the consequences thereof, and to grapple with the issues.

Therefore, it pains us particularly to hear, from within our camp, expressions that do nothing to heal the rift and schism, but rather aggravate and amplify them. According to the polls, we are currently witnessing the justified disappearance of a party (Shinui) that garnered considerable support in the last elections because its central message was one of hatred. Unfortunately, there are those among us, too, who attract and draw people along using messages of hatred and disengagement. Such trends express not only an inability to understand what is going on from the other side's perspective, but also an unwillingness to do so...

It was, as we have said, a black day, and heaven protect us from any more days like that one. At such times, what is required of all of us is soul-searching, the drawing of conclusions and the learning of lessons. Today, more than ever, we need to bring hearts closer – and we should start with the hearts of those in our own camp. We must act and pray for better days, when we shall be able to attain peace amongst ourselves; a true peace, a peace of understanding, a peace born of the will and ability to promote our own needs – along with an appreciation of the debate and of the needs of the other side. The events at Amona undoubtedly represented a stumble; let us act and pray that they not turn into a downfall.

## **6. "Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein's Response to the Letter Banning Sale of Homes to Gentiles in Israel," accessible at <http://kolharav.blogspot.com/2010/12/rabbi-aharon-lichtensteins-response-to.html>**

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2010

Response to the Esteemed Rabbis, Signatories of the Letter Forbidding the Sale of Homes to Gentiles in the Land of Israel

I have read the document that you have disseminated throughout the country. As I read your words, I was impressed enough by the dogged determination inherent in your love of the land and your love of the nation that dwells therein to advance your approach. However, I am concerned that in this instance your love has affected your judgment. To say the least, it must be asked whether this is a battle worth fighting. Aside from the judgment, the wisdom of it seems faulty as well.

Indeed, almost the entire unfolding of events that resulted from the dissemination of this letter was foreseeable and, to a large extent, obvious. The public furor, both social and ideological, the rift that has opened among the citizens of the state—between camps and within camps, the op-eds in the various media outlets, the various

positions, often impassioned and overheated, the attack on the religious-Zionist rabbinate from the right and from the left, even from Torah giants—it was all foreseeable. One reads it and wonders what happened to the wisdom of those who are enjoined to consider future ramifications?

It has been particularly painful for those faithful to the Torah and mitzvot who fear for the stature and character of the state; it has upset the spiritual leaders who work hard to make the Torah and adherence to halakha beloved and who strive to set the State of Israel on the pillars of tradition and ancestral heritage. This pain stems from the shortcomings that the document manifests in precisely those areas that should have been its strong point. The document speaks in the name of Halakha, and its signatories see themselves as its envoys and propagators.

But therein lies the problem; the prohibition of selling homes to gentiles is presented as the exclusive halakhic position in the manner at hand, and the voice that bursts forth from the throats of the signatories is made to sound like the single unequivocal word of God, that is, halakha. Here one asks, is that indeed so? Without a doubt, the position expressed in the letter is based on rabbinic sources and a long halakhic tradition. Yet taken as a whole, the document leaves one with the impression that its conclusions are based on presumptions that characterize a particular—but not exclusive—halakhic approach. This impression is generated in part by what the document states, and no less by what the document omits. For example:

A. The first paragraph of the letter gives the impression that Rambam linked intermarriage, selling a parcel of land to gentiles, and the desecration of God's name. It further implies that there is no escaping the conjunction of these elements, and there is no way to minimize or neutralize their linkage. However, there is no such formulation in the writings of Maimonides.

B. The concluding paragraph states that one who sells a residence to a gentile must be excommunicated. This ruling is patently erroneous. The excommunication discussed by the Talmud and Rishonim addresses harm to Jewish neighbors in context of the issue of a neighbor's right of first refusal (dina de-bar metzra)—unrelated to the questions of lo techanem or lo yeshvu be-artzekha, the prohibitions that set the tone of the letter.

C. Regarding that which was not said: any position or opinion that could have been relied upon to moderate the stance taken in the letter simply does not exist. There is no mention of Ra'avad's position that limits the prohibition to the seven aboriginal nations of Canaan. For some reason, the opinion of the Tosafists—that if the gentile is willing to pay a higher price than a Jew for the property, there is no prohibition against selling it him—has been ignored. At the same time, the letter never addresses the position among the Rishonim, based on Bava Batra 21a, that the prohibition against leasing is limited to craftsmen who wish to set up shop in the neighborhood—indicating that they were concerned about the neighbors fleeing, not about the sanctity of the land and all it entails. The opinion of Ramban and his disciples, that the prohibition of lo techanem does not apply to transactions rooted in the grantor's interests—which admittedly relates to the granting of a gift or a favor, but may also be applicable to the granting of a tract of land—directly contradicts the position expressed in the letter.

D. In addition, the document is based almost exclusively on Rambam's position, which, as it approximates the perspectives discussed in the Talmud, left its mark on the Shulchan Arukh. Yet every school child knows that for whatever reason there is a wide gap between Rambam's position and the approach of the Tosafists. It is sufficient to leaf through the first pages of the talmudic Tractate Avoda Zara with an eye on the prohibitions discussed there, or through the end of the first chapter of that tractate, to see the degree to which the Tosafists exploited every loophole and leniency with regard to these prohibitions. For example, several Tosafists maintained that the prohibition to lease a home to a gentile was limited to an instance in which the gentile is expected to bring foreign gods inside. I certainly do not wish insert myself into a dispute among giants or presume to decide between Rambam and the Tosafists; I merely note that the required willingness to examine approaches that would limit the prohibitions associated with this issue, given that there are tools and materials that enable such limitations, is completely absent from the letter.

I conclude with what should be self-evident. At stake are key questions that involve meta-halakhic considerations. The willingness and ability to consider and assign appropriate weight to wide-ranging

components related to halakhic content and its connection to both historical and social realities mandates a much wider discussion. We, who dwell in the beit midrash, remain committed to our belief and desire “to proclaim that God is upright, my rock in whom there is no wrong.”

**7. Jeffrey Goldberg, “A Bit of Good News on the Don’t-Sell-to-the-Arabs Controversy,” October 2010, accessible at <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/12/a-bit-of-good-news-on-the-dont-sell-to-the-arabs-controversy/67977/>**

The coalition lined-up against the group of rabbis in Israel who ruled that it is forbidden by Jewish law, halacha, to sell homes to Arabs, has gained a new and powerful voice in that of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, who is, my Orthodox informants tell me, quite the genius of Jewish law. Already, the prime minister and the president of Israel have condemned the ruling, but when a great dude of halacha weighs in, it matters even more. Here is an extract from Lichtenstein's letter, addressed to the racist rabbis:

I was impressed enough by the dogged determination inherent in your love of the land and your love of the nation that dwells therein to advance your approach. However, I am concerned that in this instance your love has affected your judgment. To say the least, it must be asked whether this is a battle worth fighting. Aside from the judgment, the wisdom of it seems faulty as well.

The letter goes on to explain to these rabbis, with understatement, elegance and erudition, that they don't actually speak for God.

These are unhappy days in Israel for people who would like to see the rabbis in synagogues and not in the prime minister's cabinet, but the country's immune system is still working.