

Disengagement and Responsibility

Teaching Manual for Religious Secondary Schools

November 2005

Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary
of the Assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin



To the Religious School Principal and Classroom Teacher

This month we, the citizens of Israel, are commemorating the tenth anniversary of the assassination of the late Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin.

This year, following the recent disengagement from Gaza, the Religious Zionist public is asking itself some painful questions such as, what should be the response to episodes of insubordination in the Army? Was disengagement decided upon democratically? What should be the relationship between halakha and the State of Israel?

The Yesodot staff has developed a teacher's manual for use on Yitzhak Rabin Memorial Day, emphasizing the following questions:

1. How should the Religious Zionist public respond when the government acts against its worldview?
2. Should we categorically rule out a course of action that involves the use of violence —physical violence against politicians, soldiers, or police; blocking of roads; crossing of police barriers; damage to State property (vehicles, telephone lines) — even if the State acts in a way that clashes directly with our ideology and worldview?
3. In the struggle over ideology, should actions such as “disengagement from the State” be sanctioned or should attempts to change the situation from within become the focus?

We hope this unit will prove helpful to you and your students in organizing an intelligent and thorough discussion of these critical issues.

Teacher's Manual— How to Use This Teaching Unit

- **Time required for the program:**

45-90 minutes

- **Materials:**

- Photocopies of the Study Sheet for each student
- Writing implements

- **Program:**

-The teacher photocopies the “Bus Dilemma” (see next page) for each student or reads it aloud to the whole class. The teacher writes down the three possible solutions on the chalkboard and asks the class to divide into groups and debate each solution.

-The students are given the Study Sheet. Share the following basic biographical information with the students about the authors of each viewpoint presented in the “Case Study”:

Yehuda Etzion

Leader of the “Jewish Underground” and a prominent activist on behalf of the Temple Mount.

Rabbi Zvi Tau

Spiritual mentor at Yeshivat Har Hamor and other Yeshivas, a disciple of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hachohen Kook, and a systematic supporter of the pro-State approach.

Rabbi Shlomo Aviner

Chief Rabbi of Beit El, Rector of Yeshivat Ateret Cohanim, a disciple of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Hachohen Kook, and an independent thinker.

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein

Rector of Yeshivat Har Etzion, son-in-law of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, one of the greatest contemporary teachers of Talmud, and the proponent of a moderate Religious Zionist approach.

Points to emphasize in concluding discussion with the entire class:

- What are the practical implications of any one segment of Israeli society dissociating from the State?
- What problems may arise if the National Religious public dissociates itself from the State of Israel?
- Is it important to preserve the integrity of the State? Why?
- What are the practical implications of “preserving the State”?
- Are there situations in which the use of violence in a struggle over Israel's direction is justified?

The “Bus Dilemma”

(Excerpted from Prof. Shalom Rosenberg's article, "Judaism and Democracy.")

You are a member of a group that must get out of a dangerous place in the middle of the night. The group decides the best travel option is by bus, traveling through the winding mountain roads, despite the danger of falling off the edge. Others in the group propose an alternative route that they believe will be safer.

You represent the group of passengers who are in favor of the alternate route. You are convinced that the night trip on that mountain road will end in disaster, harming people and their property. You try to convince the others, but they are not interested in hearing what you have to say.

What should you do?

Disengage from the group!

While you will not use force in order to reach your objective (even if you were strong enough to do so), you are not willing to unnecessarily put your lives at risk. The others are wrong and you refuse to remain with them and follow their plan. Instead, your group decides to run away, and save yourselves!

Share the responsibility!

You are in a predicament. On the one hand, you see the disaster coming; on the other hand, you don't want to split from the original group. You see yourselves as an integral part of that group and every member of that group is dear to you. You also believe that if you stay together, you may be able to influence the decision-making and perhaps take corrective action at a later stage. You choose to stay and try to influence the rest of the group.

Survival at any price!

You must follow your conscience! You have to save yourselves and the rest of the group at any cost, even it means using violence. You don't have a choice. You plan to attack the bus driver. If that doesn't work, you'll immobilize the bus. You have no doubt about your goal. You're acting in the best interest of the entire group, and feel justified even if it entails causing injury to property or to people!

Questions for discussion:

- Which course of action would you choose?
- What considerations, pro and con, did you think about before you made your choice?
- What real situations do you know that resemble the “Bus Dilemma”?

Summing Up

As a result of the disengagement from Gaza, the National Religious public has come to realize that significant portions of Israeli society have worldviews that profoundly differ from and severely clash with their own. Religious Zionist society is, therefore, considering how it should relate to the State of Israel and Israeli society, especially since the differences are having a major impact on the country's direction.

Everyone realizes that attempting to resolve the dispute by violence may destroy the State and inflict disaster on the Jewish people. This leaves the religious public with two options: dissociation from Israeli society or remaining an integral and active part of it.

The dissociation option actually includes two different paths. One involves separating from Israeli Zionist society, along the lines of the haredi ("ultra-Orthodox") model. Those who follow this path may reject the authority of Israel's democratic system and adopt a passive stance toward the process of Redemption. The other path is the continuation of efforts to make progress in the Return to Zion and Redemption, but as an entity that is separate from the State of Israel. If this possibility is chosen, an exclusively Religious Zionist political and security entity of sorts will come into being (a "State of Judea," or a faith-based State). This entity would engage in settlement and defense, not for the State of Israel, but rather for itself.

We believe this second option is unacceptable. The rabbinical approaches we presented emphasize that everything the National Religious public does in building the State of Israel and the Land of Israel stems from love of the Jewish people and a belief in the responsibility of Jews for each other. However, one must also consider the moral dimension.

Anything done in the context of settlement, security, and other issues must be binding on the entire Israeli public and not only on the religious sector. Just as the religious public vehemently (and justly) demands that their views be taken into account in determining the State's actions, so the religious public must obtain the general public's consent for its actions. It is inappropriate to force measures down the public's throat unilaterally and in circumvention of democratic due process.

Thus, the religious public has two morally viable options: to dissociate from Israeli Zionist society following the haredi model or to continue taking part fully in building the State of Israel, and the land of Israel, together with the Israeli public at large. If the second option is chosen, the religious public must accept the rules by which the State is managed, i.e., the "democratic game."

If the religious public wishes to be part of the process of the Return to Zion, it must continue strengthening its partnership with the general Israeli public, while it continues to probe and clarify the shared rules and attempts to apply them strictly and fairly.

Study Sheet—“Disengagement and Responsibility”

The State of Israel is made up of diverse population groups that look at various issues in different ways. When the Prime Minister establishes a certain policy, such as going to war in Lebanon (Operation Peace for Galilee), evacuating the Sinai Peninsula, evacuating and destroying the Gush-Katif Block, some groups in Israel think that his decision will inflict an unbearable disaster on the nation, its security, and its spiritual integrity. Sometimes these groups fail to convince the majority that they are right and fail to replace the government or change the policy that they consider disastrous.

● The “Case Study”:

You belong to a group that considers the government’s policy disastrous for the country. The options available to you are parallel to those listed in the “Bus Dilemma.” Below are sources containing remarks by rabbis and intellectuals. Choose among these sources to identify with one of the paths offered or to propose an alternative.

1. Disengage from the State!

(From Yehuda Etzion, “Secede, Congregate, Renew, and Lead,” *Nekuda*, September 2005)

“Secede from the political system, from the un-Jewish democratic regime, from the culture of meaninglessness that prevails here. Don’t vote in Knesset elections and don’t run for a Knesset seat. Secede from the profane in order to prepare the sacred. Don’t secede from the people—secede from being an Israeli national who accepts the authority of the State.

Secede in order to rescue posterity from the tentacles of a State that, because it is ignorant of the Jewish vision, threatens to de-Judaize the people. Gather in a new House of Study. Strengthen yourself and urge fellow Jews to strengthen one another. We are a minority in this people and will probably remain so for a long time to come. In these difficult conditions, let us build ourselves until we become a minority that sets a new direction.

In order to revitalize our viewpoint, we must revive our capacity to steer the life of the nation to a sovereignty determined directly by the Torah, and no longer indirectly, in accordance with the Zionist legacy.”

- In practical terms, what does it mean for one sector to dissociate itself from the State of Israel?
- What goals does a sector that disengages from the State of Israel expect to attain?



2. Preserve National Unity!

(From Rabbi Zvi Tau, Internet responsum, *NRG-Yahadut*, Sivan 5765 [June/July 2005])

“There is today a radical approach that says, ‘let’s disengage from the State of Israel; the State should let us go our own way and let us go on living here by ourselves.’ That’s rather like solving the problem of the flashing red light in your car by cutting the wires to it. That’s not how you solve problems in general, and certainly not how you solve a problem of this magnitude that affects all Israel, of the sort we are now experiencing. We work with G-d and are part of the current situation, which is part of the great Divine process of the Return to Zion, whether or not everything that happens along the way is pleasant and comforting. We must continue at all costs to be part of the Divine process that returns His presence to Zion in the wondrous process of redemption.”

- Why is it important to preserve national unity, even when the country is moving in the wrong direction?
- Are there limits to preserving national unity?

3. Save the State, Whatever the Cost!

(Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, “A Prime Minister has Fallen in Israel” [1995], from the book *Prime Minister*)

“It is a black day for Israel, perhaps the blackest since the State was born. A day of terrible sin, doubled and redoubled. A Jew in the Land of Israel murdered a Jew, ostensibly on behalf of the Land of Israel. A Prime Minister, it was a Prime Minister! He is not a private individual. He is the center of the nation.

As a private individual one can castigate him, one man to another; but as the Prime Minister one must address him reverently. To murder a Prime Minister because we do not agree with him is not just murdering a Jew. To kill the Prime Minister when we disagree with him, even if someone has terrible and sharp criticism of him, is no way to run a country!”

(*Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, “Let us Examine our Way” [December 1995]*)

“The sense of the decline of our State, our hope and joy, to such a level, which we thought could be found only across the oceans, a decline to a level where political disputes and disagreements are settled this way, should envelope each and every one of us in disgrace. This includes the Right and Left, religious and secular. If a Jew feels something of the unity of the Jewish people, then, even if it is a matter of one organ, the entire body must feel some sense of shame that its face looks like this, the face of our entire society today. A society that employs the most extreme violent means to ‘resolve’ conflicts, is a sick society.

Sometimes with good intentions, we have taught our students on more than one occasion to have a scornful attitude, or even total suspicion, of others. Those who do not think the way we do, those who do not act the way we do, are not presented as mistaken or different, but as evil. If there was an opportunity to attribute good intentions or bad intentions to a public figure or an entire sector, the immediate response was the latter. Such patterns of thought may lead to frightful and horrible things.”

- Is there any justification to employing violence in the struggle for how the country should be run?
- Can one distinguish different types of violence and perhaps even justify the use of some forms in certain circumstances?

Yesodot—The Order of the Day

At Yesodot, we view ourselves as public emissaries. Our mandate is to ensure that crucial issues of compatibility between Jewish and democratic values become an integral part of religious education in Israel.

The Yesodot Center for Torah and Democracy was established by a group of concerned National Religious Jews in 1996, following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. This decision stemmed from the growing polarization of Israeli society and a profound sense of urgency to thoroughly examine the attitude of National Religious society toward democracy and democratic values.

At Yesodot we believe that a comprehensive Jewish religious education, especially in this day and age, must include examining the relationship between individuals and their country as well as rights and obligations.

The disengagement from Gush Katif triggered a head-on exploration by the Religious Zionist public of the disengagement's affect on relations between the Torah, the State and democracy.

Yesodot's activities include:

- running more than forty in-service courses on Judaism and democracy for educators in religious elementary and high schools throughout Israel.
- counseling teachers on how to use in their homeroom class Yesodot's specially designed curriculum dealing with issues such as human dignity, responsibility and leadership, and the status of women.
- operating special programs for women serving in the National Service and for men studying in Hesder Yeshivas.
- inaugurating an innovative Talmud study program for high school students that highlights the Talmud's support for democratic values.

The Yesodot Team

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