



VOTING RIGHTS

לא תהיה אחרי רבים לרעת ולא תענה על רב לנטת אחרי רבים להטת

You shall neither side with the mighty to do wrong—you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute so as to pervert it in favor of the mighty. (Exodus 23:2)

רבי חנינא סגן הכהנים אומר: הוי מתפלל בשלומה של מלכות שאלמלא מוראה איש את רעהו חיים בלעו.

Rabbi Hanina, the vice-high priest said: pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear it inspires, every man would swallow his neighbor alive. (Pirkei Avot 3:2)

שופטים ושוטרים תתן לך בכל שעריך אשר ה' אלוהיך נתן לך לשבטיך ושפטו את העם משפט צדק.

You shall appoint magistrates and officials for your tribes, in all the settlements that your God is giving you, and they shall govern the people with due justice. (Deuteronomy 16:18)

לא תטה משפט לא תכיר פנים ולא תחד שחד כי השחד יעור עיני חכמים ויסלף דברי צדיקים:

You shall not judge unfairly: you shall show no partiality; you shall not take bribes, for bribes blind the eyes of the discerning and upset the plea of the just. (Deuteronomy 16:19)

צדק צדק תרדוף למען תחיה וירשת את הארץ אשר ה' אלוהיך נתן לך:

Justice, justice shall you pursue, that you may thrive and occupy the land that your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:20)

הלל אומר: אל פרץ מן הציבור

Hillel said: do not separate yourself from the community. (Pirkei Avot 2:4)

With regard to Bezalel's appointment, Rabbi Yitzhak said: One may only appoint a leader over a community if he consults with the community and they agree to the appointment. (Babylonian Talmud Berachot 55a). Rabbi Yitzhak further explained that in the Torah, Bezalel could be chosen to build the Tabernacle only with the community's approval.

SOME HISTORY

This deeply embedded ethic of political participation has guided Jews to enthusiastically participate in the American electoral process. Jews played an active role in the dramatic civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, a movement that ultimately granted citizens of color unfettered access to the franchise. Indeed, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 was partially drafted in conference rooms of Jewish organizations, under the aegis of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.

When the Mississippi Summer of 1964 was organized to break the back of legal segregation in the most stubbornly resistant state of the Union, 50 percent of the young people who volunteered from all parts of the United States were Jews. In that struggle, white extremists killed three martyrs in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Two of them, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, were Jewish; the third, James Earl Chaney, was black.

Rabbis marched with Martin Luther King Jr., throughout the South, where some were beaten and many were jailed. Prominent among these was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who was a spiritual partner to King in the struggle against racism.

Jewish political leverage contributed to passage of landmark civil rights laws, nationally and locally. Once civil rights



and religious groups mobilized the conscience of America against racial evil, changes came at last. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were both drafted in conference rooms of Jewish organizations in Washington, D.C.

CONSIDER:

- Is it a Jewish responsibility to play an active role in our community and choosing its elected leaders?
- How do the teachings of our tradition speak to the dangers of mixing money and politics?
- We are commanded to stand up for the widow, the poor, the orphan and the stranger. How does this value intersect with voting rights today?

NEXT STEPS:

- Take the time to call/write/visit with your government official to explain your viewpoint.
- Attend rallies to support your viewpoint.
- Register others to vote in any election so their voice can be heard and counted.
- Participate in events and initiatives where you can learn more about the other side.
- Donate money to an organization that supports your point of view.
- Commit to treat others, especially those with whom you disagree with the sensitivity, caring, dignity and respect they deserve.