

Limited Partnership: May One Join the Wicked to Do Good?

Adapted from the writings of Dayan Yitzhak Grossman

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Among the questions that arose during and after President Biden's total withdrawal from Afghanistan was whether and how the U.S. should cooperate with Afghanistan's new government, given that the country is now ruled by Taliban terrorists. Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said weeks ago that it is "possible" that the United States will coordinate with the Taliban in fighting against the Islamic State.[1] (The Taliban, for their part, recently rejected any such cooperation.[2]) A key aspect of the issue is whether America ought to work with an organization it has long considered "evil";[3] similar questions arose with regard to America allying with Stalin's USSR in World War II. In this article, we consider the question of cooperation with evildoers.

Divrei Hayamim (II 20:35-37) records:

Afterwards, Yehoshaphat, king of Yehudah, allied himself (*es'chabar*) with Achazyah, king of Yisrael, who acted wickedly. He joined forces with him (*vayechabreihu*) to make a fleet to go to Tarshish, and they built ships in Ezion Gever. Eliezer son of Dodavahu of Mareishah prophesied about Yehoshaphat, saying, "Because you have allied yourself (*kehis'chabercha*) with Ahazyahu, Hashem has wrecked your undertakings!" The ships broke down and did not succeed in going to Tarshish.[4]

Accordingly, Nitai Ha'Arbeili exhorts (Pirkei Avos 1:7): "Do not associate (*v'al tis'chabeir*) with the wicked." Avos deRabbi Nassan (9:4) elaborates:

This teaches us that a person should not associate with a bad person, nor a wicked person. For so we find with Yehoshaphat, that he joined Achav and went up with him to Ramos Gilad, and Hashem's rage came upon him. Then he joined Achazyah...

Another interpretation of "Do not associate with the wicked": even to study Torah.

Rabbeinu Yonah construes this as an actual prohibition:

It is prohibited to associate with the wicked person in worldly affairs, as it says, "Because you have allied yourself with Achazyah, Hashem has wrecked your undertakings."...And our Sages, of blessed memory, said in Avos deRabbi Nassan, "Do not befriend a wicked person, even in the context of a mitzvah." [5]

Perhaps the best known application of this principle in recent times was the position of the Satmar Rebbe that participation in the Israeli government, including voting in its elections, falls under the prohibition of associating with the wicked. The consensus, however, was that even insofar as the government is considered wicked, such participation is nevertheless permitted, because it is not voluntary but necessary for self-preservation, and it does not constitute an endorsement of the wicked and their ways. R' Reuvain Grozovsky explains:

It is our opinion that with regard to sending our delegates to the

Knesset, it is beyond any doubt that we are obligated to send them to stand guard and to fight in order that the wicked shall not swallow up the righteous. This does not constitute association (*his'chabrus*), endorsement, assistance, or submission, but rather defending our lives and doing everything in our power, in the most effective way possible within the natural order, and girding the remnants of our strength, to save the inheritance of Hashem, and to not relinquish the portion of control that remains ours and turn it over to others.[6]

R' Reuvain concedes that *his'chabrus* to Zionism does constitute *his'chabrus* to the wicked, and even *his'chabrus* to an ideology whose founders and leaders were infused with heresy, but he nevertheless maintains that

None of this is relevant to the elections to the Knesset, since the Knesset itself has no connection to doctrine, and participation in the government does not constitute participation in a doctrine and in an idea.[7]

(There are certainly other views of the State of Israel that have been held by *gedolei* Yisrael, but a discussion of that issue is beyond the scope of this article.)

Perhaps similar considerations would apply to security cooperation with evil regimes like the Taliban: It is merely a matter of pressing self-interest, and it does not constitute *his'chabrus* or an endorsement of their ideology.

[1]Rachel Pannett, Ellen Francis, Miriam Berger, Sammy Westfall, and Paulina Villegas. U.S. could work with Taliban against terrorists, Pentagon says. The Washington Post.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/09/02/afghanistan-kabul-taliban-live-updates/>.

[2]Kathy Gannon. Taliban say they won't work with US to contain Islamic State. AP.

<https://apnews.com/article/business-taliban-islamabad-middle-east-islamic-state-group-4d419bb70259f93f7165169889d05ff1>.

[3]President George W. Bush. President Outlines War. Effort Remarks by the President to the George C. Marshall ROTC Award Seminar on National Security, Cameron Hall, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia. Apr. 17, 2002.

<https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/04/20020417-1.html>.

[4]Cf. Melachim I 22:49-50.

[5]Sha'arei Teshuvah *Sha'ar* 3 #51. Cf. here.

[6]Ba'ayos Hazman pp. 31-32.

[7]Ibid. pp. 33-34.