



new london
synagogue



Religion and Politics

The General Election has been called. I'm taking the opportunity to re-share some words I wrote a while ago about how I, as a combination of Rabbi (your Rabbi?), charity worker, congregational leader and person see the intersection of politics and pulpit.

I police my own language with great care. In sixteen years as Rabbi of New London, I have used the name of a specific British political party to make a religious point on one occasion only, and only as the result of deep reflection and (for what it's worth) extensive consultation with the lay leadership. I am deeply committed to keeping my political-party-specific opinions to myself. New London Synagogue is and must always be a place welcome and support for the broadest range of party-political affiliations. I am committed to treating any candidate or elected official with the respect due their willingness to serve and certainly their mandate. "Pray for the government," taught Rabbi Chanina, "without its due respect a person would eat their fellow alive." Amen to that. I have never and would never condone use of inflammatory epithets directed against anyone, member, stranger or political leader alike. We must all police our language to ensure debate is for the sake of heaven, and our words are not used to cause pain.

But Judaism can never, in the words of our founder rabbi, Rabbi Louis Jacobs of blessed memory, be allowed to be "insipid" or "remote from the day-to-day concerns" of Jews. Judaism is not wholly or even primarily a spiritual/theological commitment. Judaism is a commitment to be part of a covenant of action. Its real-world commitment is evinced in verse after verse of the Torah and Sugya after Sugya of the Talmud. As I reflect on my own interest in matters of the polis, it's to the Torah and the Talmud that I go, and from the Torah and the Talmud that I draw the inspiration that drives my teaching. If I'm interested in gender politics, it's that verse in Genesis that insists the image of divinity is expressed through both male and female forms that underlies my interest. If I advocate for the dispossessed and unvoiced in society, it's the repeated Biblical insistence to love, care for and not oppress the stranger that inspire me. If I have the temerity to critique political leadership – insignificant as I am – I have Samuel, Isaiah and an entire prophetic tradition to serve as models.

A fuller version of these words is posted at

<https://rabbionanarrowbridge.blogspot.com/2024/05/rabbis-this-rabbi-and-politics.html>.

I share appreciation for all of those whose civic service has supported us, as part of both Jewish and broader communities, in this most recent government. In particular I want to acknowledge the support New London has received from Karen Buck, MP for Westminster North – for just a few days more. Our current constituency is being abolished and our ward is being absorbed into the Cities of London and Westminster.

Register if you are not yet registered and remember photo ID on the day.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Jeremy