What Jewish GOPers Need to Know

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If you are still a Republican after everything that has gone on in this country in the last few months—and continues to go on, including this week—not only should you re-evaluate your affiliation (for now, at least), you also should consider whether that affiliation violates basic Torah law, starting with the laws to be found in the Torah readings this Shabbat and next.

You do not have to abandon your conservative beliefs or become a registered Democrat, but you should re-register as an independent. You also should stop voting for Republicans seeking national office until GOP leaders (a) take constructive action to erase the influence now being wielded by QAnon and various white supremacist groups, and (b) censure in some meaningful way those legislators and state parties that enable these people, including expelling from the party the most outrageous among them.

Today’s Republican Party is the party of QAnon and the sundry white supremacist groups for whom Donald Trump is their godfather. His winks and nods in their direction, and at times his active support, have cowed the GOP leadership into submission. The Grand Old Party is now the party led by Gutlessly Obsequious Puppets.

The GOP leadership turns a blind eye to the extremists because it has its good eye focused on the polls—and what they see scares them.

According to one recent poll, for example, 66 percent of Republicans approve of Trump’s post-election behavior; 65 percent agree with him that there was widespread fraud on November 3; and 78 percent say he bears little to no responsibility for the insurrection on January 6 (even as Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy and some others have uncharacteristically said otherwise).

Add to this the primary challenges already taking shape to unseat the 10 Republican House members who voted to impeach Trump because of his role in the insurrection. The only way to counteract a nightmare is with another nightmare—moderate Republicans walking away from their party until it deals forcefully to reject the extremists, some of whom serve in Congress. In the House, GOP Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene (Ga.), and Lauren Boebert (Colo.) are prime examples, followed by Mo Brooks (Ala.), Jim Jordan (Ohio) and the rest of the powerful 45-member so-called House Freedom Caucus. In the Senate, there are Ted Cruz (Texas) and Josh Hawley (Mo.), with the once moderate Lindsay Graham siding with them, most likely because he sees the extreme right as the way to take back control of the Senate in 2022.

Greene, as news reports have shown, is in a category all her own**~~.~~** She gave a thumbs up to someone who would put “a bullet to the head” of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. She also urged another someone who would see former President Barack Obama and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hang to “be patient.” That is because the “[s]tage is being set. Players are being put in place.”

She is also a diehard anti-Semite. Here is one outrageous yet ludicrous example. On Nov. 17, 2018, Greene offered a 535-word “speculation” on Facebook blaming what she clearly meant to suggest was a Jewish conspiracy for the devastating northern California camp site fire then raging. It was caused, she “speculated,” by a satellite-mounted laser beam shooting concentrated beams of solar energy onto the Camp Creek Road site where the fire had originated. Jews were most notable among the conspirators, including Rothschild Inc, and such people as Sen. Diane Feinstein and her husband, Richard Blum. Also involved was Roger Kimmel, vice chairman of Rothschild Inc., who at the time was also a director of Pacific Gas and Electric. The “space laser” was put there, Greene said, by a startup company founded by Gary Spirnak called Solaren, in partnership with PG&E.

(For the record, Solaren has yet to launch any satellites. Also, the sun’s energy would be transmitted to Earth by radio waves, not laser beams.)

Rather than disowning Greene or, better yet, expelling her, as the Constitution allows,the GOP’s House leadership named her to two prestigious committees—the Budget and the Education and Labor committees. GOP leaders are not prepared to take on someone Trump campaigned for and calls a “future Republican Star,” or who has the support of the House Freedom Caucus. While McConnell, on Monday, attacked her views as “loony lies” that “are cancer for the Republican Party and our country,” he never mentioned her by name, and did not call for her expulsion from the party. McCarthy and the House GOP Steering Committee met with her on Tuesday evening and again on Wednesday, but refused to take any action against her, apparently out of fear that they would face a backlash from the Freedom Caucus. The last thing McCarthy wants to do is risk losing the leader’s slot because he wants to become Speaker in 2023, assuming the GOP is again the House majority. On Thursday; the Democrats, with 11 brave Republicans joining them, ended up having to remove her from the committees instead.

Before God gave us the Torah, He gave us our own “constitution”—the Sefer Ha-b’rit, or Book of the Covenant (Exodus 21-23)—in essence a set of “basic laws” on which the Torah’s laws as a whole were to be based, and He required this constitution to be accepted before giving us the rest of “the Torah and the commandments [the mitzvot] that I have inscribed to instruct them.” (See Exodus 24:12.)

This Shabbat, when God begins to set out that “constitution” by announcing its preamble (the so-called Ten Commandments in Exodus 20), one of its clauses is “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

This is elaborated on next Shabbat in the Book of the Covenant itself. Says God in this regard: “Do not carry false reports or join hands with the guilty….Do not follow a crowd to do evil; do not side with a crowd to do that which is evil….Keep far away from a false statement; do not bring death on those who are innocent and in the right, for I will not acquit the wrongdoer.” (See Exodus 23:1-2 and 7.)

According to our Sages of Blessed Memory, the way to avoid violating these commandments is to have nothing to do with those who violate them. We see this in a comment on the phrase "the precious children of Zion” in Lamentations 4:2. A midrash explains why they were called precious: because “none of them would attend a dinner without knowing beforehand who his fellow diners were, or sign a contract without knowing who the other signatory was. They did this, says the midrash, because the Torah prohibits “[joining] hands with the guilty.’” Maimonides, the Rambam, cites “Keep far away from a false statement” as the reason. (See Lamentations Rabba 4.4 and Mishneh Torah Sanhedrin and Its Penalties 22:10.) Clearly, they also would not support a political party that allowed its members “to do evil.”

Also applicable here is Leviticus 19:16. The verse in its entirety reads, “You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, nor shall you stand idly by the blood of your fellow.” Commentators were quick to note that while the two halves of that verse seem disconnected from each other, they actually are tied together.

Rambam, for example, states that not only is slandering someone “a grave offense,” but it could also lead to blood being shed, as Jewish history proved. (See his Mishneh Torah, Moral Dispositions and Ethical Conduct 7:1.)

The early 13th century commentator Rabbi Chizkiyahu ben Manoach, the Chizkuni, adds to this by noting the similarity between Leviticus 19:16 and Ezekiel 22:9. The latter verse states, “Slanderers there were among you so as to shed blood.” Said Chizkuni, “In other words: talebearing is no better than bloodshed.”

The 12th century commentator Abraham Ibn Ezra carried this even further and in a way that is highly relevant here. Leviticus 19:16 is not simply warning us not to slander. Said he, “A person should not [even] associate with” slanderers. (See his comment to the verse.)

Richard Elliott Friedman, in his comment to Exodus 23:1-2, sums it up it this way: “Do not follow a group, a crowd, a major­ity if what they are doing is wrong….It is easy to be hurtful in a group. And it is easy to keep silent when one's group does harm—or when its leaders do harm from their position, which derives its power from the group. *All of this is forbidden. It is utterly inconsistent with the Torah's concep­tions”* of how we should behave. (Emphasis is mine.)

To those who would argue that if an action or inaction is not specifically prohibited by the Torah, then Torah law is not being violated. Nachmanides, the Ramban, says otherwise.

He bases this on the Torah enjoining us several times to “do what is right and good in the eyes of the Lord.” Commenting in one such verse, Deuteronomy 6:8, he says that even if there is no specific prohibition of a particular action, “we need to use our common sense to do what [we know will be] good and right in God's eyes.”

The only way the Republican Party will ever be motivated to move effectively against the extremists in its midst is for “the silent majority” to turn its back on the GOP until it does so. For Jews within that majority, turning their backs on the GOP is not an option; it is a requirement.