

Lapid Comments Draw Fire From Ultra-Orthodox Jews

Finance Minister Yair Lapid still hasn't accepted that election season is over. His comments on Tuesday from the Knesset podium against haredim and their children are both vexing and outrageous.

Right now, as the government is getting ready to impose harsh economic policy, social cohesion is of the utmost importance, and it seems reasonable to expect the nation's finance minister to deploy national—not sectorial—rhetoric. After all, he is everyone's finance minister.

I am sure that a lot of Yesh Atid's voters were tickled pink by Lapid's theatrical performance at the Knesset. "Fantastic—he really hung 'em out to dry," they jeered, as if we're lining the bleachers in the State Cup finals. It was Yair's father who set the precedent for the junior Lapid's sharpened and offensive style, and we all know the political lifespan of his party, which championed hatred against the haredim. Israel's existence cannot be fortified by hatred.

One could criticize the ultra-Orthodox leadership's behavior throughout modern Israel's history and, as far as I'm concerned, since the establishment of the Zionist movement and the first claims that the Jews needed a state of their own. One cannot ignore, though, a glaringly fundamental fact—that the haredi public is like an insurance policy for the Jewish nation's ongoing existence at a time when massive civilizations are roiling in oceans of uncertainty.

We mainly returned to our homeland after an extended furlough in the diaspora because, for thousands of years, we believed that God had promised this land to our ancestors and to us. We prayed three times a day for the return to Zion and its

capital in Jerusalem. Our nation is a nation because of the Torah – this is what Medieval Jewish philosophers believed. Amazingly, they were right. Great nations have vanished into nothingness, and yet we are still active on history's grand stage, against all odds.

When politicians talk about the haredi public, I expect from them a little more humility and gratitude. When politicians and haredi rabbis shrilly cry out against those "Zionists," they need to lower their eyes and give thanks to the Israeli soldiers who have sacrificed themselves for the right of the ultra-Orthodox to study Torah.

The political leadership's fiery rhetoric over the haredi public is stirring hysteria. Haredim know that the train to greater cooperation in Israeli society has left its station. The ultra-Orthodox community has already accepted that those haredim who have not made Torah their trade in the fullest sense of the word will have to integrate into the national fabric and join the workforce. That will be a huge contribution both to society, and to the haredi community at large.

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