

Orthodox Jew: What Is Right for the Israeli Government?

A friend asked recently how anyone who supports the right-wing in Israel could advocate for anything other than two right of center parties, headed by Naftali Bennett and Gideon Sa'ar, to join a government lead by the Likud party, and with Benjamin Netanyahu remaining as prime minister.

Combined with the two ultra-Orthodox parties and a further right-wing party, they could (easily) form a solid, stable, right-wing coalition, per what my friend posted, is the will of the majority of Israelis.

This comes in light of deliberations and negotiations going on as to who will form the next government, with an understanding that all three of these leaders would have to make significant compromises to create or join such a coalition. The premise of the question is that the voters for (all) these parties are of the same mindset and want a right-wing government, above all. I have a different view.

I'm right of center. I voted for Sa'ar's New Hope Party last month and Likud every election prior except one. I want any Israeli government to be, or have, a solid right of center orientation, however not necessarily above all. I voted for Sa'ar because I very much believe that it's time for a change at the top, and I believe that Sa'ar is the only one committed to that.

Prime Minister Netanyahu has done a world of good for Israel in many ways. This cannot be diminished or dismissed. But, after 15 years, I believe it's time for him to step aside or be replaced.

Israeli elections are complicated. Anyone who votes in an Israeli election knows that ideological compromises will be

made unless, by some miracle, one party (or maybe two) are able to garner 51% of the 120 members of the Knesset to form a government that doesn't require give and take bordering on being a contortionist. I expect that and expected it as part of the outcome of this election. I want a strong right-wing influence. Yet, I understand that there may need to be issues addressed that I don't care about or about which I disagree. I'd rather see a stable government that has a strong right-wing influence than a right-wing government where Netanyahu is just going to play one off the other to buy time until his trial ends or he is pardoned.

If that means a coalition with others to the left with whom I disagree on some things, the same way I disagree with the ultra-Orthodox parties and factions of the more far right National Religious Party, I can live with that. I also don't mind seeing Arab participation as long as it's not anti-Zionist and treasonous to the existence of Israel's existence as the Jewish state. It's unclear whether any new government will need, seek or rely on the support of the four seats of the Arab Islamist Ra'am Party. But more now than ever before, such a possibility exists. According to a recent poll, 48% of Israelis don't oppose the participation of an Arab party to form a government. My issue is less about the importance of the representation of Israeli Arabs, some 20% of the population, than who their representatives are and how they relate to Israel as a Jewish state.

By voting for Ra'am, a good portion of Israeli Arabs voted for change in their own communities as well. We should facilitate and embrace that. If we've crossed the point of no return, and Israeli Arab parties are no longer reflexively hostile to being part of and support the government, and for the bulk of Israeli Jews that's no longer a red line, that's a good thing. Indeed, even with an Islamist party, there can be common issues that resonate with a traditional Jewish audience.

However, the question is whether the Muslim Brotherhood

affiliated Ra'am Party is the Arab hope that Israel, Arabs and Jews, needs, or is it just the flavor of the month? Ra'am's charter calls for the "right of return for Palestinian refugees," says "there can be no allegiance" to Israel, and calls Zionism a "racist, occupying project." Not very embracing if you're a Jewish Israeli.

According to a *Times of Israel* article, the Ra'am charter states, "The State of Israel was born of the racist, occupying Zionist project; iniquitous Western and British imperialism; and the debasement and feebleness of the Arab and Islamic [nations]. We do not absolve ourselves, the Palestinian people, of our responsibility and our failure to confront this project."

Many Israelis won't object to Ra'am's advocating for a "two-state solution" with a Palestinian state established "alongside Israel." But many Israelis are opposed to the call to destroy Israeli communities in the "West Bank," and resist a division of Jerusalem. For most, Ra'am's option to establish a single binational state is an anathema.

Recently, Ra'am has avoided discussing these and other controversial issues. Party leader, Mansour Abbas, held an unprecedented primetime address aired live on every major TV station. This was received with what was termed courageous pragmatism, but lacked substance on issues that Israelis who favor greater Arab involvement want to know about. Highlighting the uncertainty, Ra'am Knesset member Walid Taha noted, "We have stances, but now is not the time."

Their charter says, "Our political participation, on all its levels, from local government to the legislative authority in parliament, and in official civil authorities, is but an attempt to defend our rights and the interests of our Arab Palestinian community inside [Israel], and to aid our Palestinian cause, and to clash with the proposals and policies and programs of the Zionist project from within the

heart of the state institutions.”

Has Ra’am turned a corner? Is it willing to support a government now for practical reasons, or is the lack of discussion of the controversial issues a form of deliberate deception, *taqiyya*, which is sanctioned in Islam to gain the trust and ultimately defeat others?

The support and even inclusion of an Arab party in the establishment of an Israeli government is not by definition a bad thing. It could be very good. Yet time will tell as to who may be able to form a government now, whether Ra’am will be part of the equation and to what end, or whether Israel will be heading to another election later this year. {eo}

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