



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
Executive Director, OU Israel
aberman@ouisrael.org

While I love many parts of my job, one of the aspects I love most is that the OU made a wise decision many years ago to avoid getting involved in politics. During the last eighteen years of my tenure as Executive Director of OU Israel, I have been asked more times than I can count to endorse a certain candidate running for election, to join a politician's gathering or fundraiser, or to encourage others to come to a politician's event and talk about the politician to others. As a proud father of five voting-age sons, the politicians seem to know we have a house full of voters. With the numerous elections that we've had in Israel the past five years, the requests from different political parties - representing all sides - were regular. The advertising revenue we could have brought in from these parties' ads and articles in Torah Tidbits would have funded the printing of Torah Tidbits for years. Yet, we have turned them down time and time again because OU Israel takes pride in being an apolitical organization.

What went into this decision? Primarily,

it is because we don't want anyone to feel that since they disagree with the OU politically, the OU isn't for them. If they want to learn Torah at the OU, if they want to join an activity on our campus, if they want their children to join our youth programming, we want them to feel comfortable doing so. Our job is to enhance the lives of our fellow Jews as much as we can and to give them whatever they need toward that goal.

It is interesting that in English, we call the different groups "political *parties*." It sounds like a happy thing, a party. However, in Hebrew, the word is "*miflaga*" which is derived from the word "*pilug*," that means a faction, a separation. When there is separation and division, that is not something any Jew should want.

Sometimes, it is necessary. We all have different priorities, and we attempt to resolve them through votes and the democratic system, to fulfill the will of the majority of the nation. Still, it comes from a place of separation, and we shouldn't forget that. Unfortunately, many people get so caught up in this separation that instead of arguing for their party's positives, they emphasize the other party's negatives. This kind of *pilug* is so painful for me to see.

That's why being "forced" to stay distant from politics has made my life so much better and enjoyable. I do have many friends in the political world, and I want to support them. I have my own personal beliefs. But still, it makes my life a lot easier, and the OU much more productive,



**OU Israel joins all of Klal Yisrael
in mourning the passing of**

Maoz Morell מ"ר

**beloved son of our dear friends
Eitan & Varda Morell and nephew
of our dear colleague Sima Kelner,
who fell in defense of Am Yisrael.**

**May the family and all of the bereaved
families be comforted among the
mourners of Tzion and Yerushalayim**

when I can say, “Sorry, but as the head of OU Israel, I have to remain apolitical.”

All that being said, OU Israel has in the past, and continues today, to encourage people to make use of their right to vote. Those reading the Torah Tidbits are very likely to be from a country with a democratic system, and so I don’t need to tell you how lucky we are to live under this system instead of a dictatorship or other kind of terrible government. The fact is that we have influence on our leadership because of our democratic system.

This coming Tuesday, there will be municipality elections throughout Israel. I am currently writing these words from Florida, where I am meeting the most wonderful Jews, who care so deeply about Israel. Before I left Israel a week and a half ago, I noticed something. This year, there were much fewer signs, posters, and discussions surrounding these elections. It occurred to me that there is a likely reason for this. We are at war. The nation before the war was divided, but during this war, there has been incredible unity. While at war, our values have crystalized and we see what’s really important. Politicians and their teams know that division will not strike the right chord for how the nation is feeling right now.

For this reason, I’m actually enjoying the fact we have these elections during this time. I know that some argue this is the wrong time for elections, but I think it’s optimal. We get to see what it’s like to have parties without harsh division. There’s less time to argue. Instead, it’s brought out a lot of positives.

I encourage all of you to do your homework and look into who has made things better for the Jewish People, who has improved your cities and who has a good vision for the future of your cities. Whatever you decide, please go out and vote. Unfortunately, I hear so many times from *olim* that they don’t know



what’s going on in politics in Israel, and therefore they don’t vote. In America, or Britain, or wherever they made *aliyah* from, they were intensely involved and aware of the issues, but they stay away here. This is a problem. It’s important our politicians know that the Anglo voice is a strong and loud voice. So please

make sure to use that democratic voice we collectively have. This way, you too can have a *chelek* (portion) in building *Eretz Yisrael*.

Here in Florida, I am going from meeting to meeting to parents who are so proud of their children living in Israel, so proud of their Rabbi who made *aliyah*, so proud of the missions that have gone to Israel from North America, and so proud of the support and supplies being sent daily to Israel. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Florida community - Miami Beach, Hollywood, and the rest, for really stepping up to the plate and supporting the work that we are doing in Israel.

So go out, vote, and may we choose together the best way forward for the Jewish People.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring

Shabbat,

Rabbi Avi Berman

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Aleeza Ben Shalom

