

Israeli Election Was Victory for Judaism

By Rabbi Yossi Groner

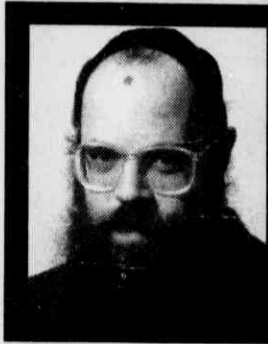
Although it is too soon to tell what the long term effects of the recent elections in Israel are, one thing is certain, a significant majority of Jews in Israel did not feel comfortable with the state of affairs. Sixty percent of the Jewish voters in Israel said they want change. The majority of Israeli voters expressed their distrust of the promises and dreams that were to usher in the dawn of a new era in the Middle East.

All of the convincing arguments made by the previous government, and its agents in the Israeli media, did not stand well with the majority of Jewish voters. Israeli Jews did not believe that by following the Oslo Accords, they will see the birth of a new Middle East, a garden of delight in which Israel would be one of the centerpieces.

Most political analysts focused on the "peace process" and the changes it will undergo as a result of the election. Can Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who represents the "peace through strength" approach, succeed in bringing a real peace to the Middle East? That is the question most commentators ponder.

What is certain is that Mr. Netanyahu has a clear mandate to retain the territories of Judea, Samaria, especially Hebron, and the Golan Heights and to further settle the land with Jewish inhabitants and to keep the entire city of Jerusalem under Israeli control.

Another encompassing issue faced Israeli voters on May 29. It may not be as captivating as the issue of security, but it is never-



Point of View

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theless an important issue as it speaks to the Jewish destiny of Israel. Voters had the option to choose between a more religious-traditional representation and a more secular and pluralistic government. The election results would have a significant impact on issues regarding Judaism.

What voters actually said was that they want a more Jewish Israel. They want more Judaism taught in their schools, they want more sensitivity to religious needs on the part of the government, and they want more Jewish tradition in their lives.

The vote in Israel was a referendum on the very character of the State of Israel. Is Israel a Jewish state where Judaism and Jewish pride thrives, or is it a secular state where a majority of its citizens happen to be Jewish?

The battle lines were drawn during the last four years of the previous government, through statements and actions which stunned the Israeli population.

Some examples will illustrate this point. In a case which made headlines, the last Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin was crit-

icized for reciting the "Shma Yisrael" prayer at a memorial service held for the victims of the Bergen-Belsen death camps. Rabin, who had been invited by the German government to represent the State of Israel at the memorial, delivered an emotional sermon which he ended with a prayer recited by many of the Nazi victims. The then Minister of Education threatened a no-confidence vote for the "crime" of a State official reciting a religious prayer.

That same Minister had made derogatory statements about King David in public and continuously mocked the Jewish religion. She was largely responsible for cutting the already-limited curriculum in Biblical history. The then Minister of Religious Affairs introduced ideas which sought to minimize the importance of Jewish religion.

This neglect of Jewish values by many in the previous government was also expressed in their attitude toward the holiness of the land. Statements were made by high officials in the previous government that denigrated the

importance of the city of Hebron, the burial site of the Jewish Patriarchs. "You care about the graves of the Patriarchs; we care about the children," they said.

Israelis value their land and see it as a G-d given eternal gift to the Jewish people. They value its history and consider the land of Israel to be inseparable from Judaism. They also realize that people who don't care about our history and heritage don't really care about our Jewish future.

One must understand that although the majority of Israelis are not Orthodox and do not consider themselves religious, they nevertheless tend to identify with their religion and want to keep it sacred. They shudder when it is suggested to remove the word "Jew" from the Israeli national anthem, as some from the previous government had recommended.

What the election results tell us is that Israeli Jews felt that they were being pulled too far from their roots and were fearful of losing touch with their heritage. Israeli Jews said loud and clear that they want a Jewish state with a Jewish soul and a Jewish heart. They feel comfortable with the fact that for the first time in Knesset history, over 25% of the Members of Parliament wear a "kippah" and openly display their religion.

How refreshing it was to hear Netanyahu's first acceptance speech include the words "B'ezerat Hashem," with the help of G-d. Jews all over the world listened with pride as the new Prime Minister concluded his

address to the United States Congress with the Biblical verse "G-d will give strength to his people, G-d will bless his people with peace."

It Shimon Peres had won, the results of the election would have been interpreted as just the opposite. It would mean that the majority had chosen to distance itself from its ancient heritage and was ready to become totally secular. This point is further emphasized by the fact that Peres could not muster a Jewish majority; his predicted victory in the polls was based on a heavy Arab vote.

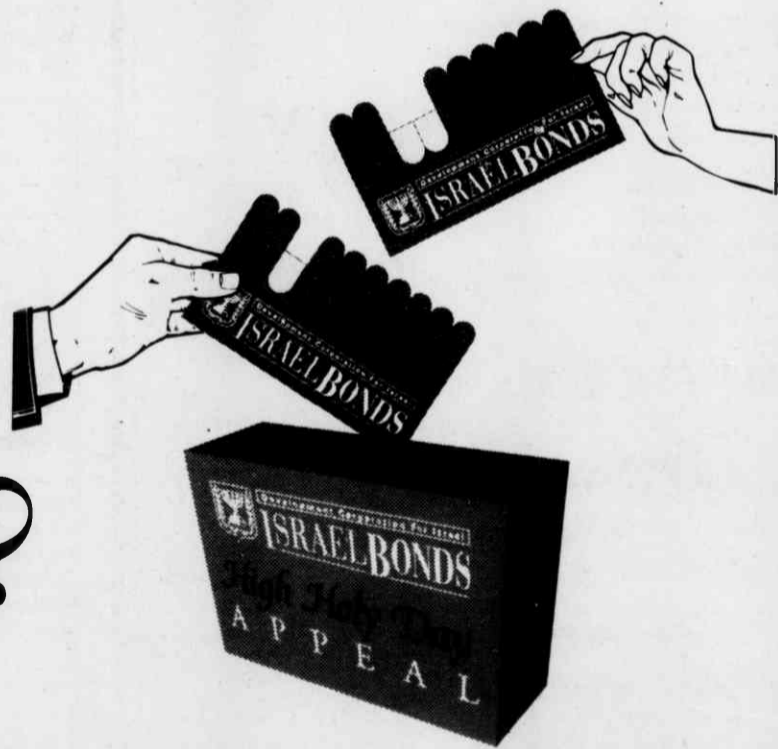
Israel will continue to be a pluralistic society, but its foundation will be Judaism. There is much left to comment as to what the future holds for Israel. There are many unanswered questions facing Israelis. Will Jews be able to maintain a majority status in Israel? Will the religious parties be sensitive to the needs of all Israelis? I hope these issues will be resolved in a fair and timely manner.

In conclusion, I am hopeful for a better future for Israel, and I join in prayer for a true and everlasting Israel.

May the New Year bring all of Israel and Jews everywhere a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year. May the Almighty G-d make this the year of redemption and peace through the arrival of Moshiach, at which time all Jews will be reunited in the Holy Land and we will see the rebuilding of the New Holy Temple in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

L'shana Tovah Tikateivu V'tichteimu!

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