

Emes Ve-Emunah

A Forum for Orthodox Jewish thought on Halacha, Hashkafa, and the social issues of our time.

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How Pro Trump or Anti Trump Are We?



I have of late been thinking about what drives Orthodox Jews who should have similar values to almost opposite political extremes. This has become most apparent over the last few years during the Trump era. Which began about the time he announced he was going to run for President. The extremes are so polarized, it is mind boggling to see just how polar opposite we are.

I am fully aware that Orthodox Jews can lean left or right. We are not a monolithic political group. We are politically diverse. My own political views reflects that diversity somewhat by the fact that I am conservative on most issues and liberal on others. (Which I think makes me a bit unusual these days. But that's OK. I've been called a lot worse than unusual.)

My political views are informed by my religious values. Which do not always point me towards a conservative perspective. Sometimes they point me towards a liberal perspective. What has happened over the Trump era is that - for a lot of people - conservative politics have become synonymous with the President.

Best I can tell – that seems to be the case with most Orthodox Jews these days. Regardless of whether they are Charedi or Modern Orthodox. Although the percentages of liberal versus conservative might differ - both sides exist in both communities. The politically conservative Orthodox Jews have virtually identical views with non Jewish conservatives on all issues. The same thing is true of politically liberal Orthodox Jews. They tend to have identical views with their non Jewish liberal counterparts. Each side seems to believe that their political views align perfectly with their religious views. Only now those values are translated into being pro Trump or anti Trump.

That's a pretty amazing contradiction if you think about it. But it seems to be a fact nonetheless - borne out by a recent study conducted by [Nishma Research](#). From a Nishma press release:

A just-released post-election study among 449 Orthodox Jews ("Priorities of Trump Voters vs. Biden Voters in the Orthodox Jewish Community: A Post-Election Analysis"), conducted November 4-15, 2020, has uncovered striking differences between the two groups. Out of 35 issues that people considered when voting, there were less than a handful that both groups agreed were important, with surprisingly sharp differences on some major issues.

While Trump voters ranked Israel as their #1 issue (80% saying it was a critical factor), it ranked only 15th among Biden voters (29%). In contrast, Biden voters ranked the coronavirus pandemic as their #1 issue (78% saying it was a critical factor), while it ranked only 26th among Trump voters (12%). A few other examples: 41% of Biden voters cited climate change as critical, compared to a bare 1% of Trump voters; and 49% of Biden voters cited "how decisions at the top are made," compared to 16% of Trump voters.

According to Mark Trencher, president of Nishma and the study's lead researcher, "not only was there a lot of disagreement between the two groups, in many cases

their views were diametrically opposed. In recent years there have been ideological and halachic differences within Orthodoxy and we've had a sense that there were some growing political differences as well, but now we see the extent of it, and it's both surprising in its scope and worrisome. This goes beyond the differences between Orthodox and non-Orthodox; it really affects the Orthodox community internally."

There is however an interesting addendum to this stark divide. Trencher noted that a lot of the commentary on that study showed that people on both sides of the divide were 'parroting campaign messages often heard from their favored candidate and reflecting their extremely different personalities and ideologies.'

I think he's right. I see it right here all the time. In fact if the debate between the two sides that often takes place here were not virtual, I fear the two opposing sides would come to blows! The anger I see expressed by one side against the other is palpable. It sometimes scares me! It is frightening to contemplate that Orthodox Jews of one view can only see an opposing view as evil. This is true on both sides.

My hope is that Trencher is right. And that the stridency that has become so common these days is based on parroting their favorite candidates views rather than reflecting their core values. So many of us have become so intoxicated with the views of the politicians we support some of us are unable to dissociate ourselves at all from their rhetoric.

Why did this happen? Love him or hate him, I believe we can place the blame almost entirely on the President. In the case of Orthodox Jewish conservatives - his unprecedented support for Israel and protecting religious rights has blinded some of us to his flaws. In some cases seeing those flaws as strengths!

By the same token politically liberal Orthodox Jews see the President as the antithesis of Torah values to the point of being blind to anything good he might have done. They therefore see supporting him as evil. With that kind of thinking on both sides, it should come as no surprise that the rancor expressed by one side against the other is so visceral. Their intellect is left out in the cold.

It cannot not be that those of us that subscribe to the values of the Torah can be so diametrically opposite in our political views. As Trencher suggests - they probably aren't deep down.

A lot of friendships have suffered because our political views have diverged in diametrically opposite extremes over these last few years. I hope that we can reverse that trend. Like it or not, my hope is that with the change in leadership our stridency will be relaxed and we can return to more civilized discourse on issues upon which we disagree. Sooner rather than later. A lot sooner.

Posted by [Harry Maryles](#) at [12:03 PM](#)



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