TOLEDOT: Which Promises Will Be Broken?

THE NUMBERS DON’T ADD UP

On October 27, Israel went to the polls. The election produced three political blocs. None reached, on its own, the 61 seats needed to govern in a 120-member Knesset.

Netanyahu’s right-wing bloc (Likud, Shas, Yahadut HaTorah, Otzma Yehudit and Religious Zionism) won 53 seats.

The opposition bloc, led by Gadi Eisenkot and made up of parties from the right, center and left (Yashar, Bennett and Lapid’s B’Yachad, Liberman’s Israel Beitenu and Yair Golan’s Democrats) won 48. Far fewer than its leaders had expected.

The two Arab parties, Ra’am and the Joint List, won 19 seats. A record.

Last Sunday, President Herzog gave Eisenkot the mandate to form a government because, at least on paper, he has the best chance of doing so. He has 28 days, with a possible extension of another 14. If he fails, the mandate could pass to Netanyahu. And if Netanyahu also fails, Israel may have to hold new elections.

THREE SCENARIOS

To reach 61, Eisenkot and his allies need new partners. And this is where the real problem begins: every possible alliance would force them to break one of their central campaign promises.

Scenario one: an alliance with the Haredi parties

Yahadut HaTorah and Shas together have 13 seats. With them, Eisenkot’s bloc would reach exactly 61.

The math is simple. The problem lies in their campaign promises.

Eisenkot had promised that he would accept into his coalition only parties that supported military service. That condition was aimed squarely at the Haredi parties, which have still not managed to pass a draft law (Chok Giyus) that would exempt full-time Torah students and require those who do not study to serve.

Bennett, who presents himself as a right-wing leader, was even more categorical. Before the election, he said the door was "locked" to any party that supported draft evasion. His entire campaign focused on convincing soldiers and reservists that he would increase the number of young men serving in the military, easing the burden on reservists. He even named his bloc, which includes people from the left, center and right, Berit HaMesharetim: the alliance of those who serve in the army. Tens of thousands of soldiers and reservists voted for him because of that promise. Bringing in the Haredim now, who would demand an exemption from military service, would be a betrayal of his own voters.

For Liberman, also on the right, the contradiction would be even greater. For years, he attacked Netanyahu for not doing enough to pass a law requiring every Jew to serve, and he explicitly promised not to sit in a government with the Haredi parties.

For Liberman and Bennett, this alliance would be political suicide.

But above all, most Haredi leaders do not seem willing to join an opposition that, for the last four years, harassed them, demonized them, and blocked every reasonable compromise that could have led to an agreement on military service.

Scenario two: an alliance with the Arab parties

The opposition’s second option would be to form a government with the Arab parties: Mansour Abbas’s Ra’am and the Joint List (HaMeshutefet), which together won 19 seats. The numbers are more than enough. But here, the problem goes much deeper than a broken campaign promise.

These parties are led by people who reject the Jewish and Zionist identity of the State of Israel, identify with the Palestinian cause, and hold positions deeply hostile to the Jewish state.

Ra’am, with 8 seats, has its roots in the Islamic Movement in Israel, historically tied to the Muslim Brotherhood, and has maintained relations with Islamist movements and with countries like Qatar and Turkey, enemies of Israel. The Joint List (HaMeshutefet), with 11 seats, is much worse. Unlike Ra’am, it does not even try to hide its hostility toward Israel and openly embraces anti-Zionist ideas.

A striking illustration of Arab voters’ loyalties is the case of Yoseph Haddad. Haddad is an Israeli Arab and a former soldier who publicly defends Israel and fights international campaigns against the Jewish state. He ran on the Amcha Israel list.

In Nazareth, his hometown, Haddad’s party received just 45 votes. The Joint List received 32,418, and Ra’am 9,248. Together, the two Arab parties received 41,666 votes.

The gap is staggering: 45 against 41,666. These numbers show how little support Arab voters gave a list with an Arab candidate who stands with Israel, and how much they gave the parties that oppose the Jewish state.

Beyond the ideological contradiction of opening the doors of government to Israel’s enemies, there is an even more serious concern: national security and the future of the Jewish state. A government that included these parties would have to give them access to sensitive information and a say in decisions

about military operations, intelligence, and other defense matters. How would those conflicts of interest be handled at critical moments for Israel's security? In my opinion, such a government would be extremely dangerous for the country's future. It would be suicidal. A pact with the devil.

Needless to say, the Arab parties, whose first loyalty is to pan-Arab interests, would be more than willing to participate in any political arrangement that removed Netanyahu, either from within the government or by supporting its parliamentary majority without joining it. And they would do it "without asking for anything in return." Why? Because Netanyahu is the nightmare of Israel's enemies. His incredible achievements in the Middle East worry the leaders of Qatar, Turkey, Egypt and, above all, Iran, who, for different reasons, have a strong interest in seeing him out of power.

Fortunately, for now, Liberman has said this option "does not exist." Bennett, who previously brought an Arab party into his coalition to become prime minister, promised his voters he would not do so this time. And Eisenkot had stipulated that his coalition partners must be Zionist.

I do not believe this scenario will happen. But you never know how far hatred between political rivals, sinat chinam, can go. That is why I pray, and ask you to pray, that this scenario never becomes reality.

Scenario three: a national unity government

A third option is a national unity government that brings together Eisenkot and Netanyahu, along with any other parties willing to join. This would require Eisenkot and his allies to set aside their hostility toward Netanyahu, who has already said he is willing to form a broad government.

And yes, here too, some opposition leaders would have to break a promise: they had assured their voters they would not sit in a government with Netanyahu. But there is a fundamental

difference. A unity government would only ask them to set aside their personal resentment toward a political rival. It would not force them to give up any of their principles.

Which of these scenarios will become reality?

ISAAC AND ABIMELEKH

The Torah teaches us an extraordinary lesson about overcoming personal resentment when a nation's well-being is at stake.

Our Parasha tells us that Isaac prospered remarkably in Gerar, the land of the Philistines. He planted during a year of drought and, against all expectations, harvested a hundred times what he had sown.

The Philistines envied him and, with the sole purpose of hurting him, filled his wells with dirt. Eventually, King Abimelekh himself, resentful of Isaac's extraordinary success, expelled him: "Go away from us, for you have become much richer and more powerful than we are" (Bereshit 26:16).

Isaac moved to Beer Sheba. But one day, unexpectedly, Abimelekh came to visit him, accompanied by Achuzat and Pikhol.

Isaac greeted them with a question:

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"Why have you come to me, when you hated me and sent me away from you?" (26:27).

Abimelekh did not apologize. He did not ask for forgiveness. Nor did he say that he liked Isaac now. He was pragmatic: "We have seen that HaShem is with you [and that when you lived in our land, you brought His blessing. Let's put our grudges aside and] let us make a pact between us" (26:28).

Why did Abimelekh want to make peace?

Because while Isaac lived in Gerar, the land of the Philistines had been blessed. In the middle of a drought, Isaac found water, and his fields produced food in abundance. Our Sages tell us that when he left, the wells dried up, the trees stopped bearing fruit, and the people could no longer even buy food from the Jewish patriarch. Abimelekh understood that by expelling Isaac, they had lost the blessing his presence brought to their land.

Perhaps Abimelekh never stopped envying Isaac, or even hating him. But he understood that Isaac was not his enemy! He recognized that his people's well-being mattered more than his personal feelings. Isaac, for his part, set no conditions for his rivals either. He put his resentment behind him, prepared a feast for his visitors, and they ate and drank together.

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"They rose early in the morning and swore to one another [an alliance]. Isaac sent them off, and they left him in peace" (26:31).

A PACT WITH RIVALS OR WITH ENEMIES?

That is exactly what should happen in Israel's Knesset this coming week. A pragmatic alliance between old rivals. Opposition leaders may have deep disagreements with Netanyahu. They may reject his policies, criticize his decisions, and even feel strong personal hostility toward him. But they share something fundamental with him: responsibility for the future of the Jewish state.

If sinat chinam prevails, and the opposition forms a government that depends on Arab parties whose positions conflict with the fundamental interests of the Jewish state, Israel could face terrible political, economic, and security

problems. And the people who would ultimately pay the price would be the people of Israel.

Abimelekh did not love Isaac. But he knew the difference between a rival and an enemy.

I hope that, with God’s help, the same will happen in the Knesset.

SHABBAT SHALOM