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UNITY

Where Do We Go From Here?

In the days since the presidential election came to its astounding conclusion, the blogosphere has exploded with passionate opinions expressed by myriads of people from all walks of life. Many — or most — of the new “commentators” were so rattled by the elections that they just let off steam, joining the legion of other “pundits” who rush to publicize their “unedited” thoughts to an ever-growing audience.

The encroaching danger of the blog culture has been touched upon in these pages in the past. The ease — and speed — with which any anonymous person can pontificate to an indiscriminating audience and purport to represent Torah Jews is frightening and ominous. The spontaneity of it is the birthplace of irresponsibility, and the subsequent deterioration of our thought process is almost inevitable. Before one has a chance to sort things through, to consider all the information, their sources and credibility, the agenda behind them, and sift through them with care and deliberation, one’s brain has already been influenced — inundated, in fact — by an avalanche of thoughtlessness and toxic stimuli. No longer can our community take pride in our ability to analyze a situation rationally and productively.

Years ago, when a major political event occurred, *askanim* came together to discuss it, to brainstorm and to formulate a proper response that would be in the best interests of *Klal Yisrael*. Despite inevitable — and healthy — disagreement on some of the finer points, there was an understanding that it was important to overcome those differences and find the higher common ground, with the direction of *daas Torah* as applicable, for the benefit of the community. Even those who disagreed respected the fact that much care and deliberation was exercised in preparing the community’s reaction.

Some people welcome the opportunity for other voices to emerge, to protect the position of the less popular, less politically correct point of view. That would be beneficial if it were executed with responsibility, care and deliberation and in consultation with leadership.

We dare not forget that we are still in *galus*, and the new reality is that our internal discourse is broadcast to the outside, often hostile, world. Every comment that is posted or shared on social media informally and carelessly gets shared indiscriminately, in and out of context. The uninhibited expressions are gleefully embraced by those who seek to vilify our community and to verify negative stereotypes about Torah Jews.

Tragically, “pens for hire” have become our “*manhigim*” and “*poskim*,” and even members of our community are influenced by their words that they view as *halachah l’Moshe miSinai*. In

such circumstances, there is no place for the true *Gedolim* to speak and be heard.

Where do we go from here?

In the last few decades, we have become spoiled with a political landscape that was basically safe and even supportive of our community’s needs. When opinions were expressed, even publicly, they did not carry enough weight in the political corridors as to endanger our community’s status quo.

But now that has changed. While we respect the Orthodox Jews who identify with the democratic party, it is critical to note that a serious shift in America’s attitude towards religion and the protection of religious liberties has permeated their platform. Consequently, when religious Jews or institutions express their objections to lifestyles outlawed by the Torah, we are subject to labels of bigotry and worse. The consistent deterioration of America’s moral standards is complemented by a lack of tolerance for those who are still loyal to a Higher Authority and principles that are not subject to the whims of people. And the liberal Supreme Court only strengthened this new trend, leaving our educational and communal institutions at risk.

As much as it’s important to be vigilant about what goes on politically and to be aware of who the next chief of staff might be, it is more important to recognize what Orthodox Jewry in America will now have to deal with. We have to differentiate between tangential and shallow issues and focus instead on the core concerns.

Now, more than ever, when the rift between the different factions in America may not easily heal, we Jews, who have harsh challenges to overcome in our spiritual survival, must understand our responsibility to each other vis-a-vis the outside world. No, we are not so naive as to think people are going to simply shut off their phones, but at the very least we must exercise caution before sounding off carelessly on social media. We dare not contribute to the chaos and divisiveness that threatens the country. The very least we can do is work on strengthening our internal unity so that we can speak in one voice to the outside world. The secular world may be able to understand that Orthodox Jewry has unique values and principles different from Reform Jewry, but if we can’t clearly articulate what those values are, we are hurting our own interests. We dare not be so comfortable in our “*goldene medinah*” that we forget the threat of Reform Jewry, which recently gained tremendous influence.

And if we don’t remember to work together, our enemies will surely remind us.

Wake up, dear Jews. ■