

When 51% Is Not Enough, or How to Read Election Results

Dear friends of Hillcrest Jewish Center,

As I write these words, the Soccer World Cup is about to begin. The World Cup is the most prestigious association football tournament in the world and every four years, those of us who enjoy *the beautiful game* get reenergized by 32 teams (including The U.S. and Argentina) competing for the ultimate glory. Also, those of us who like sports (not only soccer) know that all you need to achieve this moment of glory is a one goal difference – just one.

Now imagine the following exchange between a husband and wife: “Honey, when I think about all the years we have been married, I realized that I really loved you during 60% of all these years.” Winning your spouse’s affection 60% against 40% wouldn’t make most of us happy. In other words, in relationships, numbers are not enough; the parts involved need to make the relationship work.

How do elections compare with the above two different scenarios? I would like to suggest that we can think about winning an election as somewhere in between the sports scenario and the relationship one.

Like in the sports scenario, all you need to win an election is one more point than the other candidate. In most states, getting more votes than your opponents will give you a seat in Congress or the Senate.

However, not totally unlike the relationships scenario, to successfully run a country, a state, a city, a congregation, or a family, it is not enough to win by the minimum margin. Successful leaders understand that 51% of the votes, or 60% of the votes only gives an opportunity to create consensus and make a difference for 100% of the population, be it the population of a country, a state, a congregation, or a family.

In sports, when you win by the minimum margin, you can lift the cup and celebrate in a triumphant parade. When you win an election by 55%, let’s say, and you are a good leader, you must think: what can I do to reach out or to connect with the other 45% who didn’t vote for me.

Our country is extremely divided, if not 50/50, close enough. It will take true leaders and “wise” winners in both parties to be gracious in their victory and use their new gained power to reach out to those who think differently, to create consensus among their constituents, and to build bridges around common interests.

I pray that Hashem who is One, and whose name is One, will grant wisdom to the leaders of our country, the State of Israel, and the world, to bring unity where there is dissension, to build bridges where there is disconnection, and to strive to create consensus and lead with kindness and compassion.

It may be too much to ask, but who knows, we may all be surprised.

Many blessings,

Rabbi Manes Kogan