



Embracing Ridiculous

As Israel's 24th Knesset was sworn in, not knowing if their tenure would last more than a few months, President Rivlin urged co-existence and mutual respect, and the development of a model of Israeliness that was inclusive and respectful. Israel continues to remain stuck in an absurd cycle of election and reelection, reeling from the insufferable and seemingly endless situation in which we find ourselves: nasty elections that result in a highly divided electorate and a Parliament that can't seem to find its way to a majority, let alone some sort of ideal consensus.

On April 6th, the President handed the power to form a government, once again, to Binyamin Netanyahu, who received the most endorsements by lawmakers. However, Netanyahu opens the negotiations with only 52 of the required 61 mandates.

To say that this situation has created strange bedfellows is an understatement. Netanyahu has reached out to the four-seat-winning Arab Ra'am party whose charter calls Zionism "a racist occupying project" and supports a Palestinian right of return. He also (supposedly) offered Naftali Bennett the option of rotating as a Prime Minister – on the strength of only seven mandates. Ostensible head of the left leaning coalition, Yesh Atid's Yair Lapid, also offered the explicitly right-wing Bennett a rotation as Prime Minister – the first rotation even. There is also loud chatter among the right leaning anti-Bibi parties about offering Netanyahu the Presidency, so he will step down as Prime Minister and those who promised never to serve with him can join together in a right-wing coalition.

I learned a new Hebrew word: מגורר – in English: truly ridiculous. These permutations and political machinations have ventured into once inconceivable, and outrageously incongruous and contradictory, pairings.

But perhaps the situation is actually not at all מגורר, or if it is, it should be reframed as brash and innovative. Maybe this is the parliamentarians' (conscious or subconscious) response to the idea that "Insanity is repeating the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." The electorate and the Parliament have simply repeated the same thing; the exact seats won by the exact parties have differed slightly, and the exact coalitions tried have varied somewhat, but overall, we have repeated similar patterns. There is no reason at all to believe that a fifth election will change anything. So maybe we need a little ridiculousness – a totally radical way of getting ourselves out of this deadlock. Maybe we should embrace the contradictions, instead of looking at them askance.

Israel is a country full of contradictions that combine to form things of beauty. Last month we celebrated Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut. The two days were deliberately established one directly after the other – a seemingly absurd juxtaposition of mourning and celebration that demands a willingness to embrace contradictions and an ability to tolerate nuanced conflicting emotions. More: the IDF can only function within a strict hierarchy, but as high up as the Supreme Court, laws have been passed that demand every soldier take personal responsibility for his own actions.

Yerushalayim, the capital of this

extraordinary country, has developed into a city of co-existing incongruities: Ultra-Orthodox mingling with teenagers in ripped jeans on Jaffa Street, Moslem doctors in hijabs tending to hospitalized Holocaust survivors in Hadassah. Electric scooters parked by ancient synagogues, and start-up companies housed in centuries-old buildings.

At the heart of Yerushalayim is the Kotel and Har HaBayit, a living testament to the power of reconciled contradictions: a Temple built by a king of peace, who was able to do so only because his father was successful at war. The place Yitzchak became an *akeidah*, because of his father's willingness to sacrifice him to a G-d that demanded the end of all human sacrifice. And in 1967, it was only with the deadly force of Israel's army that a democratic peace could be established over an undivided city.

So perhaps we should listen closely, but with an open mind, to what President Rivlin asked of us all: to develop a model of Israeli coexistence that is inclusive and respectful. Maybe what we need to most include and respect is the quintessential Israeliness of demanding that we live simultaneously within contradictions. And perhaps instead of calling some of the suggestions being made by parliamentarians מגורר, we should urge them to think in even more creative ways about how to create a new model of unity built upon the once inconceivable.

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