

LETTERS

'Wearing Your Own Spy': Continuing the Discussion

I read Mrs. Grunfeld's response to a letter regarding her article ("Wearing Your Own Spy," *Hamodia Prime*, June 17, 2020), and while she says there is "overwhelming evidence" that African-American civilians are harassed or mistreated by police, has she bothered to consider the difference in how suspects respond to police? Perhaps some people are more resistant or abusive when they are arrested and require greater force. I don't know if there is any data on this but there should be, to put this in perspective.

It is disappointing that Mrs. Grunfeld didn't even bother to consider this factor. Police officers risk their lives for us and to cut them no slack on how some may behave in some situations is tragic.

Yisroel Wise

The author responds:

Thanks for your letter.

The data, again, indicate that African-Americans are still more likely to experience nonlethal force than whites even when compliant. One chief study on the subject, which looked at 5 million policing incidents in New York City, found that officers were 53% more likely to use force with African-Americans than whites (the researchers looked at all forms of physical force, ranging from putting hands on a civilian, to restraining, to using a baton). Once you control for compliance, the number shrinks, but African-Americans were still 21% more likely to experience nonlethal force. And that's based on police reports of the encounters. It's difficult to escape the fact.

As is often the case, neither the Democratic nor Republican narrative has gotten this one quite right.

Faigy Grunfeld

Concern for the Community

Ezra Friedlander's op-ed in *Prime* advocating that all *frum* Jews in New York register as Democrats should be reconsidered for two reasons: both because of its message and because of the messenger.

First the messenger: Mr. Friedlander is a paid political consultant. That means he makes money by advising politicians or people with interest in currying favor with politicians. He therefore is financially invested in the Democrat polls in New York; as he himself admitted, they are the only show in town. In our language, we call it *negius*. I find it very troubling that a person who stands to gain financially had donned the mantle of altruistic *askan* giving our community "impartial" advice about how the community can "save" itself from itself.

In no place in the article (or in a blurb about him) is there any indication of Mr. Friedlander's financial interest in these very Democratic politicians for whom he is advocating we vote.

The message also does not stand up to scrutiny. Mr. Friedlander writes, "Politics is not religion." Who gave him the right to make such a false statement?! Politics certainly has religious consequences, sometimes incredibly significant religious consequences. Mr. Friedlander doesn't even mention the imperative for rabbinic input on the highest levels on such weighty hashkafic issues at hand. The fact that he doesn't mention this itself is telling.

Yes, financial gain is very important for our *mosdos* and individuals, but it isn't everything.

I would perhaps modify Mr. Friedlander's sentence and instead of saying, "A community that votes is a community that is heard," I would say, "A community that votes in consonance with the Torah and the guidance of Torah sages is a community that is heard by Hashem."

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As featured in Inyan
Kol Mevaser interview #311938

I would rather be heard by Hashem than de Blasio and Cuomo.

Avrohom Birnbaum

The author responds:

While I understand Mr. Birnbaum's concern, he is misinformed if he thinks that I stand to gain financially. I don't. In fact, my political consulting is almost nonexistent.

What I wrote is only in the interests of the community, not my personal interests.

Additionally, hardly any candidate or elected official meets the criteria of voting in accordance with the Torah. That statement in and of itself goes against the Torah.

I remember full well when the Bobover Rebbe, Harav Shlomo Haberstam, *zy"א*, hosted then-Mayor Koch at a ceremony when 48th Street was renamed Bobov Promenade. There was a protest organized against the Mayor due to his support of certain laws that are contrary to the Torah and the Rebbe disregarded the protests. This is fact.

There is no uniformity regarding what is the correct policy from a Torah perspective. I have facilitated meetings of Rabbanim with elected officials from all stripes regarding pertinent issues. Everyone understands that these Rabbanim are not endorsing the positions of those candidates; the meeting is to impress upon the future office holder what issues are of paramount importance to our community.

This is not something new. It goes back to when the Chofetz Chaim met with the Polish President regarding *chinuch* a hundred years ago, and from time immemorial.

Unfortunately, there are well intentioned but misguided individuals who want to force their viewpoint upon the entire *tzibbur* without taking responsibility for their actions.

What I'm referring to is as follows: It's not only sources of revenue that are at stake; it's sometimes *pikuach nefesh mamash!* I can reference time and time again when relationships with NYC officials, with whom Mr. Birnbaum would not want to engage, actually saved lives!

To conclude: I enjoy and have close working relationships with elected officials of every stripe, including the most conservative viewpoints, in my interactions in Washington.

However, here in NYC, the fact remains that it is only the Democratic primary that counts. That is why so many of *anshei shlomeinu* who are elected officials are in the Democratic party. It's the only way to have a real voice in New York. Hence, I urged everyone to register only to advance the community's electoral power. In the actual election, you're not committed to the party. You can vote your conscience. It's a free country. But only because people vote.

It has absolutely no impact on Ezra Friedlander or my company if the entire community registered Republican and voted Republican. I won't be hurt financially in the least. I can't emphasize this enough. But not being able to vote in Democratic primaries in New York can hurt the entire community.

But it goes further. There are times (more than one would think) that an elected official was asked to make a phone call where a sick patient was waiting to be transferred and a visa needed to be procured. And the only way to get it was by literally waking up the U.S. ambassador in that particular country.

Sometimes the member of Congress needed is someone from the more progressive camp with whom presumably the community doesn't see eye-to-eye. Yet when the patient is hovering between life and death and minutes are too precious to be wasted, you need that member to make that phone call and ask for a courtesy to be extended — because he is personally acquainted with the Ambassador.

As for *negius*, I think it's important to set the record straight. My primary business is not political consulting for people running for election. And not primarily in New York. In fact, my work is based primarily in Washington. Years can go by and I don't have a client who is running in a Democratic primary. I have no *negius* in this issue. I wrote my opinion purely out of concern for the community. In fact, most of the times any involvement I have in a Democratic primary is without pay. Again, my motive for involvement is so the community can have effective input with the candidates on issues of concern that are high on the agenda.

Ezra Friedlander

CEO, THE FRIEDLANDER GROUP.

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