

Transmitting a Message

By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz

Republicans and many of us were convinced that there would be a great big Red Wave, sweeping them into control of the Senate and Congress and clearing out Democrats from governorships and other state positions across the country. It didn't happen. And everyone is pontificating on what went wrong.

There must be a disconnect when despite it being plainly evident to all that prices are rising, the economy is failing, crime is rampant in big liberal cities, and the president is often incoherent, a majority of people still vote for the guilty party.

To their credit, Biden's handlers succeeded in covering up his many errors, lies and missteps, and basically kept him out of the campaign, where he only would have done damage.

In fact, following the election results, President Biden mocked the Republican Ripple and said that he doesn't plan on doing anything different than the big government, socialist policies he's been following until now.

Hopefully, when the Republicans take over Congress and begin enforcing some checks and balances, he will come to regret what he said. Who knows. And when they begin aiming for cutting discretionary spending and undercutting his war on gas and oil, as well as his inflationary measures and woke initiatives, his handlers and party-mates may begin to shuffle things around, if only to improve their chances for 2024.

With an administration tone deaf on high energy prices, the open border and rampant crime, and 75% of Americans telling pollsters that the country is heading in the wrong direction, struggling middle- and lower-income families voted to keep things basically the way they are.

The president and his party obfuscate, shamelessly lie, and create straw men to cause voters to focus not on the issues, but on tangential things unrelated to a candidates' positions and ability to do the job they are running for. This is the third election in a row that this strategy was successfully deployed.

The Republicans never responded to the propaganda that they are a group of extremist election denying, anti-democratic racists who seek to deny people their rights and want to do away with social security and welfare. They thought that the charges were ridiculous and unrelated to the main concerns of voters. But by every Democrat, from the president on down, hammering away at these charges through the media, the Democrats were able to change the focus of the average voter.

They switched the election from being a referendum on an unpopular, incompetent president; historic inflation and rising prices coupled with a worsening economy and recession; a porous border inviting millions of illegals; rising crime; loosening morals and many other ills confronting the country, to phony claims, which were untrue and had no effect on people's lives.

Did the Red Wave become the Red Puddle because Republican messaging was bad, or was it the candidates who were bad? Both theories may be correct, but if you look at who won, those problems didn't make any bit of a difference for the other side. Biden was a dismal candidate, rarely leaving his home

throughout the entire 2020 campaign. This time around, he didn't travel much either, unwanted by candidates, who feared that his loser stigma would rub off on them. John Fetterman, an embarrassing candidate, won in Pennsylvania. It is doubtful that there is anyone who voted for him because they think that he is qualified to be a senator. He beat an intelligent heart surgeon, because voters thought that it was either him or their freedoms and democracy, and they want their freedoms and democracy.

So, when Joe Biden was giving silly speeches about Ultra-Maga Republicans trying to destroy the country, lying about the economy and Covid and a host of other issues, and you were thinking that he must have lost his mind, you were wrong.

Apparently, his people had poll-tested every word of those speeches for their effectiveness. Not talking about inflation and the open border was not stupidity. It was the result of a strategy designed by skilled propagandists to steer the mind of the voters from the real issues, which would have doomed them.

So while Republican Senate and House leadership put together an agenda for what they would be doing should they assume power, very few people knew that there was an agenda or what it was. Voters thought that Republicans had no plan other than to take away freedoms and destroy the country. High prices, crime, and the general unraveling of accepted social norms were not a factor in how people voted. Even if they knew that Biden's policies caused the mess, they didn't know that the Republicans would seek to turn around the country's direction. Or the voters simply didn't care.

Arizona is a border state being overrun by people crossing in from Central America and the world over. Who would imagine that people would vote for the party that denies that there is a problem and is responsible for it? Yet Democrats won the major races there.

Democrat Covid lockdowns killed the New York economy, and rising crime brought on by woke laws affecting policing, jailing and prosecution is keeping the city down. The standard bearer governor held on against an energetic campaign by Lee Zeldin, who hammered the governor and Democrats on crime, yet he came up short. His defeat should not have come as a surprise, as he was behind in every poll.

It is very easy to blame Donald Trump for everything that went wrong, and many people – especially those who never liked him – are jumping on the bandwagon, especially after he issued bizarre and intemperate statements following the Red Fizzle.

Republicans at the top of the leadership, who allocated funding for races and organized the get-out-the-vote campaigns must share the blame. Their mistakes conspired with other process missteps to allow Democrats to over-perform.

But there is more at work here and there are lessons for us as well. I would say that the Republicans lost an opportunity to do what was expected of them and which every out-of-power party usually does in the midterms, because they don't understand public relations, marketing, and communication.

And to top that off, Republicans have not developed a competent method of getting out their message, even if they have one.

It doesn't make a difference what their agenda is, or what their message is, or what their response to Biden's attacks is if nobody sees or hears what they have to say.

Too often, they, and we, speak in an echo chamber. In our communities, we speak to each other, and argue and debate issues between ourselves, crystallizing our opinions and approaches, not always appreciating that there is a big world out there, and in order for us to be able to prevail, it is not sufficient to convince the people we daven with. We have to convince the big world out there.

Republicans didn't win because they have no platform from which to broadcast what they have to say. The media – with the exception of certain outfits all owned by one man – is all leftist, as it is in most countries. The media that "everyone" reads and watches reports everything from one biased angle in support of the Democrats.

Generally, any mention of Republicans, as a whole, or as individuals, is negative, and it is folly to think that people will be perceptive enough to recognize fact from fiction, especially when considering that the educational system is controlled and staffed by Democrats and leftists who have molded a generation to think and see things their way.

The Republicans haven't been able to break the stranglehold of the left on the media. Every so often, they will have a press conference and tout their great

accomplishments, or policies, and think that by doing so they have threaded the needle and advanced their cause. But the opposite is true, because they are only speaking to themselves. If nobody outside their circle is hearing what they are saying, then they may as well not speak. At least that way they won't delude themselves into believing that they are advancing their cause.

When Republican campaigns are covered and their speeches are quoted in the media, it is always designed to mock them, to prove the narrative that they are backward, extremist fascists who seek to take away the rights of women, blacks, senior citizens, and everyone else. The media and their opponents use their own words and quotes to undo them and make them look silly.

We don't watch television or partake of local media or have ongoing discussions and communications with members of the general society, so we aren't tuned in to their thought process or the way they view things. But if we want to convince them of the justice of our arguments and communal concerns, we have to speak to them in a language they understand with efficacious reasoning that will impress them.

Sometimes we get wrapped up in a cause and act the same way as Republicans. We forget that we are fighting in a large arena against people who view us as extremists who are opposed to freedoms and education, as well as intellectual stimulation and cultural advancement.

When seeking to advance our cause, we aren't always cognizant of the inflections and nuances that will be used against us. Our arguments don't always consider the positions and thought processes of our opponents. We seek

to win them over with the same logic that seems so obvious to us and our colleagues, friends and community. And generally, that doesn't work.

So when we see countries turn to the left and in democratic elections vote leftists to power, we wonder how that could happen. Venezuela was a successful country, with a decent economy and government, yet people fell for the propaganda and elected a leftist. Today, Venezuela is a failed country, with an economy in shambles and many of its residents fleeing and sneaking into the United States. And instead of seeing that example and learning from it, people are shielded from the truth. Increasingly, leftists are being elected to power in Central and South American countries.

We follow the news in Eretz Yisroel and were thrilled when Binyomin Netanyahu beat the leftists, hopefully to return to power soon. It seems obvious to us that he, and not a buffoon like Yair Lapid, should be the prime minister. After all, he was Israel's longest serving prime minister, in the past he has restored the country's economy and directed its growth, he occupies a prominent place on the world stage, he is widely respected and renowned, he is tough on security issues, and he is a statesman and an orator.

Yet, the election was a lot closer than it seemed. The media in Israel is much like the media in the US, and they hate Netanyahu. There is rarely a kind word about him in the Israeli newspapers, or on radio or television, where he is portrayed as a corrupt, anti-democratic extremist. But there is a difference: There is a major newspaper that was founded by a wealthy Netanyahu supporter that counteracts what is said in the other papers, and the religious parties have their own newspapers which allow them to get their message out to their followers. There are religious radio stations where religious MKs and

other public officials and community leaders are interviewed and given an opportunity to explain their positions. Additionally, there are religious magazines and sites, which allow at least the religious community to be informed of the truth and push back against the constant disinformation of the left.

The counterbalance translates into many votes for the religious parties. Imagine if there was no religious media and the entire election campaign depended on tzetlach. I wonder how many seats the religious parties would get. Elections in that country and in this one prove the value of a frum media and of the ability to be able to transmit a message to the community.

Instead of us learning from the goyim, the goyim should learn from us!

In the parshiyos that we learn these weeks, we learn that Avrohom and Yitzchok Avinu dug water wells and we wonder why. There were definitely other water wells from which people extracted water for themselves and their livestock. Why did the avos need to have their own wells?

I saw an explanation that they dug wells because in their day, that was where people gathered. There were no newspapers, and people grew their own food and made their own clothes, so there was little need for going to a store. But everyone needed water, so people would head to the wells and they became public squares. Since the avos, starting with Avrohom, wanted to influence people and spread the concept of Elokus, they dug wells and would spend time there fulfilling their shlichus, speaking to and influencing people.

Today, we all have running water and don't gather at the well. It is impractical to stand outside a supermarket and try to sell an idea. Thankfully, we have other methods of mass communication, one of them being the religious media.

Think of the recent mass registration and support for the Zeldin campaign. Would it have been possible without a frum media? And this week's Torah Umesorah campaign? How would they get the word out about themselves and the campaign if they didn't have the frum media? There are so many causes that have been advanced through it, and many more that could be if people took advantage of the opportunity.

In effect, it boils down to education. If we want people to buy our product, if we want others to buy into our concerns, they need to be educated. Our arguments and pitches need to be carefully crafted and effectively communicated, whether we are looking for financial or moral support or to convince people of the correctness of our way of life. Doing so will go a long way for the advancement of Torah and communal causes.

Elections are lost and elections are won, but the causes remain, revealing the importance of ongoing advocacy and public involvement. Just because we lost a race or won a race doesn't mean that we can fold up our placards and disappear until the next round. The causes that got us involved are still pressing and require our vigilance and public involvement.

May our efforts be rewarded with eventual success.