

Don't Tell Anyone...

I wish I could tell you who I was. We likely have mutual friends, or may even know each other. But I can't reveal my identity. Why not? **Because I am Charedi** (wear a black hat, boys in cheder and girls in Bais Yaakov), live in RBS "A" **and I'm voting for Eli Cohen.**

The truth is that I've been able to 'read between the lines' that more than a few of my chaverim (including but not only those in kollel and chinuch) are thinking similarly — once you hear the facts, the case for Eli and against Abutbol is really, really strong. Still, to 'come out' publicly would cause too many problems for me and my family, so this letter is anonymous. I feel that I have an achryus to the tzibbur and so, in my small way, I am writing this letter in order to perhaps help others make a more informed decision. Whatever you decide is up to you, of course, but each of us should know the facts and not simply repeat what the mayor's people are saying.

Our family has been in RBS for many years. We spent a few years in Kollel in Yerushalayim and, when it was time to buy a dira, came to RBS. Prices were still relatively low and it was a young community of like-minded young frum families. In many respects, this was and is a great place to live. But in other ways, there are real problems here — and things are heading in a poor direction.

Let's start with basics: this town is disgusting. I know they've been cleaning it up over the last month... surprise, surprise — it is election time. But, over the last years, I feel like I'm living in an expensive slum. Seriously — my dira is worth close to 1. million shekels — as are many of yours — and yet there is garbage in the streets, garbage in the Mercaz, graffiti all over the place, etc. The municipality — if it was competent — CAN fix this. Beitar is not like this (and they have big families as well!). Har Nof is not like this. Even Geulah is not like this! Why are there only a few small trash receptacles in the entire Mercaz? Why only two on my street? Why is clean-up so random and ineffective? The previous mayor wasn't great — I voted against him, actually — but things have gotten much, much worse. My parents came to visit over bain hazmanim and couldn't stop talking about the (negative) change. Don't tell me there isn't money to clean up: (a) Abutbul has spent money on plenty of his pet projects; (b) he has put the city of Beit Shemesh into serious debt; (c) he just promised to build a 500,000 *baseball field* — yes, you heard right (He is a politician trying to buy votes, I suppose. Good luck.) My point is that there is money for things he cares about.

So I'm supposed to vote for Abutbol in order to protect Torah and Chinuch? I did that last time. Interesting that my daughter's Bais Yaakov is still in a caravan. Abutbol specifically promised to solve the problem. He has had FIVE YEARS and done *NOTHING*. In this and countless other areas, the incompetence of Abutbol is simply astounding. Call me a naïve chutznik, but I expect a mayor to actually improve the city. To do something. To help. He has made it worse and worse. Eli Cohen has been openly talking *for years* about the legitimate needs of Charedi kids to have proper schools and that all groups in the city will get along if their legitimate needs are met. I've done some serious checking: Eli is a straight, honest arrow. Above all, he is an able administrator. He is a veteran Likudnik. He openly quotes Torah and is a proud, traditional Jew. He is not anti-Charedi at all — quite the opposite.

Of course, I can't write this letter without mentioning the kanaim (the extremists). A small group of crazies — that is what they are — spit on a *dati* girl — and then spent *months* yelling "shiksa" at her and her friends as they walked to school every day. Terrible, to say the least. The Mayor had an opportunity — and I know for a fact it was suggested to him many, many times — to make a great Kiddush Hashem. He could have escorted her to school or asked for a group of volunteers to help. Instead, he rationalized, explained.., and did nothing. He didn't even condemn it until forced to, way after the fact! His reaction — or lack thereof— was universally panned and made a chillul Hashem into a massive Chillul Hashem. Do you know that our city is now the 3'd most known city in Israel? People around the world have heard of Yerushalayim, Tel Aviv... and Beit Shemesh. It is not famous— it is *infamous*. What an embarrassment. Combined with his colossal incompetence, his *international* reputation for weakness against the extremists is causing serious problems for the city: No wonder businesses are staying away. Connected to this is the whole attitude of too many members of his 'inner clique.' They have turned this city into an 'us-vs.-them' battleground. Non-Charedim feel under attack. We all know the city is going more and more charedi. But it can happen with ahava and achva or it can happen with machlokes, lashon hara, motzee shem ra, and worse. Doesn't all this sinas chinam remind you a little too much of Beis Sheni?

"But the Gedolim say to vote for Charedim".... I know. That is what I've been struggling with. I'm a yeshiva man. Pictures of Gedolim take up much of my wall-space. I am fully aware of how important Daas Torah is. But it isn't so simple. In the last national elections, one of the main local RBS charedi rabbanim openly pointed out that a Ben Torah does not need to vote for the charedi parties. I couldn't bring myself to do it - I've *always* voted Gimmel — and will continue to do so in national elections. (How else can we stop the terrible gezeiros against the Torah world?) But this is a municipal election! This is about cleaning the streets, balancing the budget, and other such topics. Besides, the Gerrer Rebbe said to vote *against* the Charedi candidate in the last election for mayor of Yerushalayim — he supported the (very) secular Nir Barkat! And, in our case, Eli Cohen is a very traditional, masorti Jew. This election has nothing to do with Yiddishkeit. In fact, Eli will be much better for our community.

Abutbol has proven himself completely incompetent at just about everything his job requires. He promises everything to everybody.., and accomplishes ZERO. Five more years of epic incompetence, machlokes, in-fighting, hatred and lack of planning? No thanks. Eli Cohen will clean the city. Eli Cohen will get the city's finances in order. In the long run, his victory will even help Shas and Gimmel by teaching them that they need to be competent, not just charedi! Eli's election will bring back business and investment to the city, leading to jobs, a broader tax base and better city services. His election will send a message of inclusiveness—that this city is not a model of hatred, but rather a model of achdus.

This city could have been — and can be — great. It can be a Torah city. It can be a clean city. It can be a city where the charedi community gets all the services it deserves — more than we get now! It can be a city where charedim, datiim, masortim, and even chilonim, get along and work things out. All this can and IY'H will happen — if we do the right thing and put Eli Cohen into office.

With warm regards

An anglo-Charedi resident of RBS "A"