

I FELT a certain amount of pathos for Senator John Kerry when he said “I actually did vote for the \$87 billion before I voted against it.” The lack of clarity of that statement was partially responsible for dooming his candidacy. In attempting to express nuance, Kerry stumbled over his own words and his own ideas. I know how that feels.

As a rabbinical student, I am familiar with expressing nuance. Since childhood, I have never ceased to be impressed by the learned men and women who make religious complexity accessible and inspirational. In fact, it was the hope that one day I might inspire other Jewish seekers in this fashion that led me to leave my job as a lawyer and pursue the rabbinate. Along with this desire to express nuance has been my inherent mistrust of simple answers; answers that seek to inspire without requiring any effort.

It is these two values — values that stem from a lifetime of religious struggle — that informed my decision in this past election. This election pitted the absolutism of President Bush against the nuance and complexity of John Kerry. Although it seemed that I would know exactly whom to vote for from the outset, it was never so clear.

John Kerry never inspired; he never provided a good *drash*. And Bush was all *p’shat*, a plain-sense view based on absolute faith. Reading the *New York Times* a few weeks before the election, I was struck by a quote from a former presidential adviser who said that George W. Bush “truly believes he’s on a mission from God. Absolute faith like that overwhelms a need for analysis. The whole thing about faith is to believe things for which there is no empirical evidence.” (10/17/04)

None of us can *know* God and, as Jews, therefore, we emphasize humility. But, throughout the election cycle it was clear that this was not a virtue Bush possessed — neither in his political decisions nor in the certainty of his faith.

As the election progressed, I noticed that the debate was changing. Jewish values such as honesty, the struggle for truth, and trust in humankind’s ability to understand the most complex of notions, were being grossly devalued. Instead of explaining complexity, Kerry sought to publicize the sexuality of

the Vice-President’s daughter and politicize the last-minute tape of Osama Bin Laden. Kerry’s inability to be more certain than Bush, in part, cost him the election.

I chose to go to rabbinical school because I wanted to learn more about a belief that could be both inspiring and honest, a faith that would embrace complexity and nuance, providing a more meaningful world picture than simple absolutes. When the general election began, Kerry seemed to know this. What he didn’t know was that he just needed a better *drash*.

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