

# Candidates and God

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Several months ago a friend referred me to a [website](#) that asks you a series of questions and then tells you which candidate for president of the USA was closest in opinions to yours. When I looked at the questions I saw that I would not fit any stereotype.

I may follow restrictive Jewish Law, but I am a complete libertarian when it comes to government regulation. I think the state should intervene in personal matters only when others are affected. I believe women should be free to choose what they do with their bodies. That's libertarian.

On the other hand, free health care should be offered only to those who cannot otherwise afford it, not to everyone regardless of means. That makes me a "conservative". So does my opposition to "positive discrimination", or "affirmative action" as the Americans delicately prefer to call it. (We Jews never got it and we did OK.)

But my loathing of guns and [American gun culture](#) and wanting to see them banned by law swings me as far away from the right wing as you can get, as does my implacable opposition to capital punishment.

I am glad the USA removed Saddam Hussein and is the unapologetic, if sometimes hypocritical, champion of freedom in a world too full of evil rulers that are kowtowed to by the United Nations. I like someone prepared to take a stand and act instead of being an appeaser. So that alienates me from the peace/appeasement camps, the Little America camp and others on the right and the left!

Yet I think more needs to be done to protect the environment and find other energy sources. We should charge petrol guzzlers a million dollars a year each to drive their obscene vehicles. People with lots more money ought to be taxed lots more. I strongly advocate the separation of state and religion, and yes, I think creationism should only be taught in Bible classes, as it has nothing to do with science.

I know I'm neither fish nor fowl. So imagine my amazement when I discovered that there was a candidate, of whom I had never heard, who thought almost the same way as I—one [Maurice Robert Mike Gravel](#), sometime Democratic Senator from Alaska, maverick, and oddball. Well, he withdrew ages ago, so what's left?

The presidential election is not till this coming November. But since last November we have suffered endless primaries, caucuses, delegates, superdelegates (it would take too long to explain the differences, try Wikipedia) just to find the candidates who will stand. Finally Obama got it. Hilary was flawed by association and divisive. She suffered from an America that is still rather male chauvinist. She was really driven, but relied on

party power and failed to adapt to internet politics. Obama was charismatic, inclusive, and plausible, and he promised a breath of fresh air.

He hasn't actually done anything or proved anything yet. He has voted, like every politician, for bad bills that will get him votes (like a bloated \$300 billion farm bill) and saying to the Israel lobby exactly what it wants to hear. Americans like ephemeral personalities (like everyone else). He'd certainly be the favored candidate of the anti-American world (cosmetic, of course, because hatred is an irrational emotion and burns regardless). The Republicans had it easier with McCain. Great on heroism, poor on consistency, policy, and treating his wife nicely.

Now the two candidates are de facto decided, we have another six months of daily canvassing, flip-flopping, sniping, charging, denying, posturing, and utter, utter boredom. No wonder Americans love soaps.

The truth is that it won't matter much. America steams on, regardless of political changes. Huge vested interests exercise far greater power than presidents. Even on the issue of Israel, so dear to Jewish hearts, there's virtually no difference between the candidates, and even if there were I do not believe it would make a difference. The only thing American can do, if it really wants to solve the Israel/Palestinian problem, is to put bodies on the ground. A different Iraq scenario might have gotten there. Not now. The intermittent low-grade war will continue, regardless of flying trips and photo ops.

The presidential race is a media event, a popularity contest, a bullfight, a cockfight, a chance to gather young enthusiasts and harness their energies before they get disillusioned. It is dreamtime, like in football. You want your team to win. It probably will not, and although you will be in a bad mood for a few hours, you will get over it and life will go on.

That is where God comes in useful again. No elections, no beauty parade, and present all the time, regardless. You might not be able to prove He is on your side, but then no one else can prove otherwise either! True, the Torah made some promises that still have not been fulfilled three thousand years later, and you might accuse the Almighty of appearing to have forgotten about the good guys sometimes too—but you shouldn't have been in it for gain in the first place. Religion might be weighed down with dirty politics, but the Almighty seems to have a pretty universal constituency of devotees. However, like [sportsmen who do their "Please, God" bit](#) before a game, fanatics of all religions haven't yet noticed that God is not always on their side. Perhaps they should focus more on being on His!