

I am given to understand that there is an important election approaching this week; the most important election, I am told, since the one that took place here in shul just before Purim. And the looming reality of this approaching election fills me with conflicting thoughts about what to share with you this Shabbos. I am conflicted because I have two powerful rabbinic instincts that are telling me to do opposite things. My first instinct is that when anything you say is bound to arouse intense emotion, you had best steer clear of touching on everyone's nerves and just talk about something else. My second instinct is something I was taught by Rabbi Hauer, which is that when something is happening that is on everyone's minds, people need to know that the Torah has something to say about it too. So what to do? I have probably already insulted someone and I haven't even said anything yet. Perhaps we should just go straight to Mussaf.

But I do want to talk about politics and elections -- not to offer any comment on a specific candidate or policy or platform, but to share a thought about the way we relate to candidates and policies and platforms.

Avraham Avinu is in many ways another version of Adam Harishon. We noted last week that Avraham's name is found in the very beginning of the story of Creation: **בְּהִבְרָאם**, when they were created, is an allusion to Avraham. Adam Harishon is the beginning of humanity; Avraham is the new beginning for humanity. Adam Harishon sinned and changed the world forever; Avraham Avinu begins the process of fixing the world and returning it to the way it was supposed to be. And Avraham Avinu, in his life's work, concerns himself with the entire world. Hashem changes his name to Avraham because he becomes an **אב המון גוים**, a father of a multitude of nations. He teaches anyone who will listen, and it is certainly no coincidence that so many other religions lay claim to Avraham as their own.

And given all that, it is striking that in one important way, Avraham is the opposite of Adam Harishon. While Adam encompasses all of humanity, Avraham is referred to as Avram Ha'Ivri, the one who stood on the *ever hanahar*, across the river -- the whole world was on one side and he was on the other. Adam was created alone but the whole world came from him. Avraham is created alone and stays alone.

In many ways, Avraham personifies the foil, and the antidote, for the tragic episode that occurs just before he is introduced in the Torah. He first earned the name *Ha'Ivri* in the face of the Tower of Bavel, a project in which he alone refused to participate even as the whole world joined in. The goal of the tower's builders were for everyone to set aside their individuality, to let go of their personal ambition and sense of values; instead, everyone was meant to throw everything into building the edifices that would make them famous. If you want to achieve greatness, said the tower's builders, you have to throw your lot in with everyone else. But Avraham never surrendered himself and his

values to their project, or to any project. Avraham remained across the river; Avraham remained apart.

We, like Avraham, have provided much light to the nations. But we, like Avraham, have never crossed that river. We have thrived because we have found our convictions from within and projected them outwards, not the other way around.

I participated this week in a webinar given by our own Ed Miller, the Deputy National Political Director for AIPAC. While I have always maintained something of a sweet tooth for politics and would usually be self-educated about the political landscape, some other things have distracted my attention this year and I thought it would be useful to get an update. He said a lot of interesting things about the issues facing the country and our nation, but I will share one that stuck with me.

There used to be a proud American tradition of splitting the ticket, which is to say, voting for a member of one party for president and a member of a different party for Congress. In the Reagan years, more than 40% of ballots had this feature. But by 2020, the percentage of Americans splitting their votes has almost disappeared. It is as low as it has been in a century. Instead of basing their vote purely on the individual candidate and the issues at stake, people have moved almost exclusively towards choosing a team. And once they choose a team, they stick with it above any other consideration.

Teams and team loyalty are fine for sports. But teams are more dangerous when you start talking about things that matter. I am aware of the many reasons why this tribalization of politics has occurred, and some of it, no doubt, is legitimate. I will leave it to the political scientists to parse. But we, the descendants of Avraham Avinu, have to be clear about where we belong. We do not need to throw our lot in with a team. We can choose who and what we support based on what the Torah's values and attitudes instruct us to do, not because they align with an elephant or a donkey. We will always be on the other side of the river, not because we are afraid to cross but because everything we need to shape our values is already on our side. That is our team.

Every Shabbos, as shuls have done for many centuries, we say a prayer for the welfare of the president of the United States. Over the several centuries that shuls have been saying this prayer for the leaders of their countries, and over the past decades of this country's leaders, I am sure there are many who would have preferred to say the version of this prayer as it appears in Fiddler on the Roof -- may Hashem bless and keep the Czar far away from us. And after Tuesday, there will be many who wish they could say this prayer, no matter who wins. But that is not our way. It is not our way, at the end of the day, because we always know who truly holds the reins of power -- לך ה' הממלכה -- והמתנושא לכל לראש *to you, Hashem, is kingship and you are exalted above every leader.*

May we soon experience the day in which *והיה ה' למלך על כל הארץ*, *Hashem will be the king over all the earth*, and nobody will have to worry about picking teams ever again.