

**Please God, Bless America**  
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This last Wednesday I saw something that I never could have imagined...a mob descend on the U.S. Capitol, broke into the building, looted and vandalized Congressional offices, took over the floor of Congress, and brought pipe bombs, Molotov cocktails, and assault rifles into the building. And as a result of this madness, they succeeded in creating a temporary halt to the democratic process as our elected representatives were trying to certify the lawful election of the next President and Vice President of the United States.

I sat in horror as it was reported that Vice President Pence and House leadership had been spirited away, that members of Congress were instructed to put on their gas masks and were then evacuated, and that members of the press were in hiding fearful for their lives. And this all happened not because some foreign power invaded our country, or some foreign terrorists attacked our capitol, but our fellow Americans, carrying the Confederate Flag and the flag of the President, staged an insurrection. An insurrection that had been encouraged and emboldened by the President himself. His rhetoric was meant to inflame and direct their anger so that they would take action in the Capitol and impose their will on our country. It was essentially an attempted coup by the Executive branch of government on another branch of government.

But Congress isn't just another branch of government, it is the branch that represents us. The Capitol building is called "the People's House." The Preamble of the Constitution begins with the words "We the People...". We are "the People." It was our house that was broken into and our Constitution that was desecrated this week. And this defilement was not caused by strangers, but by our fellow citizens. Citizens who are not loyal to our country, our flag, or our Constitution. But rather, citizens who have deified and idolized a human being and placed him above the law and our common good.

At first, I assumed that most Americans were reacting to the chaos being played out live on the news in a similar way as I was. But then, I wondered, what was my sister's reaction? My sister, for those of you who don't know her, is a very loving, deeply religious, Evangelical Christian. And while I love her very much, there are not many things that she and I agree on, and for most of the last 40 years, I have tried to avoid talking religion and politics with her in order to maintain and protect our relationship.

But on Wednesday, I just had to know, what did my sister think about what was happening in D.C.? So I went on her Facebook page and saw that she had posted the YouTube link for the President's rally, and wrote "We love our President Donald John (The Beloved) Trump!"

For those of you who are less familiar with the Christian Bible, according to Christianity, God calls Jesus "beloved" at his baptism and at the Mount of Transfiguration. And since in the Christian Bible Jesus is seen as the One whom God loves, "Beloved" – with the capital B as my sister wrote it, is a title for Jesus as the Christ figure.

For my sister, and for many of our fellow Americans, Trump is seen as a messianic Christ like figure, sent by God, to rule our country.

This was more than I could take. So I responded to her post, politely, but honestly, about what I thought about what was happening that day. And in response, she unfriended and blocked me from her page.

For the last 40 years, she and I have been able to overcome many differences of opinion, but this, this one revealed how wide our divide had finally become.

My brothers and I are suffering over this. We love our sister. We will always love our sister, but we can not accept her view that this man is a representative of the Holy One, or that he has a God given mandate to subvert or overthrow the will of the people or violate the Constitution. For us, this is heresy, both as Americans and as Jews. And the stakes are too high for anyone to be quiet at this time.

So where does this leave our family, and our relationship with her? I don't know. I have often wondered how could we have grown up in the same family, with the same parents, the same history, the same values, and three of us have landed in one place, and she in a place that is altogether different?

What is happening in our family right now is but a microcosm of what is happening in our country. Values and beliefs that we once took for granted as *shared* American values, can no longer be taken for granted. We have become a divided nation.

But I no more want to live in a divided nation than I want my family to be divided. I yearn for things to be different, and I fear what will happen if things do not change.

What happened in our nation's Capitol this week was not new, it was just new to many of us.

A month ago we celebrated the festival of Chanukah. It is a favorite holiday for many Jews, and yet, if you searched the Jewish Bible, you would find not a single mention of it. In fact, if you wanted to learn about the Maccabean revolt, you would need to look for it in the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha is a collection of books that were once sacred to Jews, but omitted from the final canon of the Jewish Bible, but is included in the Catholic Bible.

This is because the Rabbis who codified the Tanach did not want to glorify either the Maccabees, or their revolt. And what most people don't realize is that the war that the Maccabees fought was not just against the Syrians, and it was not just about the takeover and desecration of the Holy Temple, it was also a Jewish Civil War. It was a time when Jews murdered other Jews for ideological reasons.

The Maccabees were religious zealots who killed their fellow Jews who practiced Judaism differently than they did. These same zealots ended up becoming more corrupt than the system that they had fought against. And it was their self serving grabs for power and corrupt actions that led not only to the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, but also to the banishment of Jews from Jerusalem and ultimately, the nearly 2000 year Diaspora of the Jewish people.

The Rabbis feared that if their story was codified in the Bible, then their actions would be seen as sanctioned by God, and that future civil wars might occur. As a result, not a single story of Chanukah appears in the Jewish Bible. And furthermore, the Rabbis downplayed the actions of the Maccabees and refocused our attention on the rededication of the Temple, and transformed Chanukah from the celebration of a military victory into a Festival of Light and hope.

These same rabbis also taught us that the cause for the destruction of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple and our exile from our Homeland was not Rome's fault, but ours. That it was a punishment for "*Sinat Chinam*" – causeless hatred between one Jew and another. In other words, the fall of the Second Jewish Commonwealth was because of our lack of ability to behave like a united nation and treat each other with respect.

I fear that our country has been careening in this direction for quite some time, and is now on the brink of a dangerous precipice. Nearly every elected official, be it national or state, has to take an oath of office. In that oath they say:

*I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office on which I am about to enter: So help me God.*

All enemies – foreign and domestic. God help us, but on Wednesday we saw that many Americans look at each other as enemies.

What we need right now as a first step in fighting *sinat chinam* – causeless hatred - is perhaps an abundance of *sinat ahava* - causeless love, radical empathy, understanding, and a shared desire to repair our broken nation.

No, I am not saying that there should not be consequences, there **MUST** be real accountability, both for those who violently breached our capitol **AND** those who have deliberately cultivated the hatred and anger that was on full display with such ugliness this week.

We need to be a nation where just laws are enforced equally, where we are held responsible both for our words and for our actions, where justice prevails, and truth is truth, and there is no such thing as “alternative facts.”

It is important for all of us to understand that the rioters at the Capitol on Wednesday were not outliers or exceptions, they represent a significant percentage of our country, and we can not simply write them off, dismiss them, or turn our backs on half of our country. Because if we do, we will be marching into a civil war.

We must go forward, with eyes open, even as we work for peace and understanding.

Decades ago, my family made a choice, that no matter what, we will always be a family. It’s not always easy, but we *are* still a family. We were taught by our parents that we can dislike someone in our family, we can disagree with them, and we can even be angry or disappointed in them, but no matter what, we must never forget that we are still a family.

And like our country, my family is going through a bit of a rough patch right now. But the difference between our family and our country is that I *know* that with the four of us, our love for each other and our commitment to preserve and protect the family that my parents created will always prevail in bringing us back together, and I hope with every fiber of my being that the same will be able to be said for our country.

I pray on this shabbat for our country, and all who live here.

I pray that “we the People of the United States” will never waver in our pursuit of creating “a more perfect Union,” a Union that was established in the name of Justice, to ensure domestic Tranquility, to provide for the common defense, to promote the general Welfare of all people, and to secure the Blessings of Liberty for ourselves and our Posterity.

May it be the will of our Creator that we all renew a shared commitment to this grand experiment that we call the United States of America.

Ken yehi Ratzon – may this be God’s will.