

## Protecting and Strengthening Our Country

On Wednesday a mob stormed the Capitol building, inflicted damage, and violently clashed with police. This riot was preceded by a protest rally featuring President Trump at which the results of the presidential election were questioned and rejected as fraudulent. January 6, 2021 will be a date that lives on in infamy. The events will be recorded in history books and taught to students. First political commentators and then historians will offer analysis and theories as to both the proximate and underlying causes of the unrest.

Some have already declared the event to be a coup, an assault on our democracy and our country. These types of uprisings happen in other countries, not America. The world looks to the US as a beacon of democracy. One major indicator of the strength of American democracy has been the peaceful transfer of power, regardless of how heated the elections were or how much the candidates disagreed with one another.

This peaceful transfer of presidential powers has always begun with the losing candidate conceding to the winning candidate. Until this year. There is no requirement for a concession to be offered, but it is a way for the losing candidate to demonstrate that the campaign was about a cause greater than him/herself. A concession indicates that win or lose, country, and the values upon which America was built, come first.

We are living in hyper-political times. Extremism is too common and moderation is viewed as a weakness, along with compromise. Too many people live in echo chambers, never bothering to listen to different points of view. It starts with not listening, and it ends with demonizing those with whom you disagree.

While there is still much to digest about the events of January 6, 2021, I'd like us to consider two thoughts that come to mind. **First, we need to learn how to be good winners and good losers.** In life we sometimes win and we sometimes lose. The rules of sportsmanship that we teach our kids when they're young are no less important for us to live by as adults. Some might argue that when the stakes are high we are no longer bound by the proper conduct of winning and losing. The opposite is true: the higher the stakes, the more important it is for everyone to commit to not being sore losers or sore winners.

Over the last two months I am reminded of what I would tell my kids all the time when they are playing games with others: Just because you lost, doesn't mean that the other person cheated. Such a simple and basic lesson of sportsmanship has been lost on so many people today, with tragic outcomes for our democracy.

**Second, we should not always trust our feelings.** In explaining why President Trump was pursuing legal challenges to the election, a campaign official said, "Last time I checked the people were still in charge of the United States of America and there are about 74 million people out there who do not feel like the result of this election that's been presented is accurate." Feelings can be terrible indicators of facts. We can acknowledge our feelings and try to understand why we are feeling the way we are. But before we trust our feelings we must investigate them and find facts that either support or challenge those feelings. Even after the facts prove your feelings wrong, it's still Ok to feel a certain way, ie disappointed or angry. So long as you realize that your feelings are not consistent with the facts, because otherwise you enter into the dangerous arena of delusions.

Every Shabbat we proudly pray for the welfare of the United States of America at each minyan. As we do so this Shabbat, let us remember that God helps those who help themselves. We must do what we can to protect and preserve a country and a form of government and political discourse that has been so beneficial for all American citizens and especially American Jews.