

The Letter© by Eva Freund
Rosh ha-Shana 1 Morning Service 5782

This letter is for all those who survived the dark cloud and the terrible storms that swept your world these past years. This letter is for all the children whose bellies and minds are empty through no fault of their own. This letter is for all the children of the world who deserve better than what they have been given.

The world you know is not the world that was envisioned. In the envisioned world you would have what you need to thrive and to grow; you would be claimed as a member of the world family, loved and adored by all regardless of your country of origin, the color of your skin, the God you worship, your abilities, or whom you love or have sex with. In the world that was envisioned you would have an equal opportunity to participate in your society.

Your world began when Abraham sired two sons each to a different mother. One son was destined to be the father of a great nation and the progeny of the other would become the direct line to Abraham. Those whose lineage was direct from Abraham and Sara became known as the Hebrews.

Generations later, as the Hebrews crossed the desert, Bezalel was chosen to lead the building of the Ark. However, he could do so ONLY with the approval of the community (Berachot 55a). From this, Rabbi Yitzhak (Babylonian Talmud) taught that "A ruler is not to be appointed unless the community is first consulted."

Over time their villages in Judea were ravaged, the people killed, taken prisoner, and forced to live in strange communities. During the years of upheaval the prophets and the sages did what they could to maintain a sense of spiritual

community, even though their physical community was no longer. It was important, at that time, to welcome and care for all who were dispersed and all who felt excluded.

The prophet Jeremiah, during this period of exile, wrote that we were to engage deeply in the communities where we found ourselves, to build houses, put down roots and to “seek the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you...for in its prosperity you shall prosper.” (Jeremiah 29:4-7).

How else could we engage deeply in the communities where we find ourselves than to participate in the electoral process? This we did by voting. There is a story of a man who came before the Chazon Ish (a Russian born orthodox rabbi) stating he had no money to pay his taxes and so he would not be allowed to vote in the coming elections. The Chazon Ish replied: “You should sell your tefillan and pay the taxes. Tefillan you can borrow from another, but the right to vote you cannot get from someone else.”

The Jewish requirement to honor the social contract strongly implies a duty to vote, which in turn, implies a right to a fair and just process that allows for and counts those votes accurately. In the view of the Rama, (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 163:1) an election’s legitimacy depends on universal notice of the election and the corresponding full and fair opportunity for all eligible voters to cast ballots.

Halachically, it was well settled that an election’s legitimacy would be undermined-and its outcome unenforceable-if the election was inadequately publicized or some voters prevented others from voting.

When the Hebrews were presented with the Tablets it was expected that these would provide guidelines for all the people to act in a responsible fashion. It was never anticipated that eventually some people would look for ways to act against the social contract. It was never anticipated that eventually some people would make choices in their own behalf rather than in behalf of the greater society. Perhaps the real problem is -- that it was never envisioned and so nothing was done to mitigate against it.

Today leaders have found creative ways to prevent voters from voting or votes from counting. These include:

- Requiring a street address from voters who live where there are no street addresses.
- Allowing the State Assembly to overturn the popular vote.
- Shutting polling places in areas inhabited by likely opposition voters

Leaders continue to fail because they fail to support the society writ large. They fail by saying there are no consequences for destroying the earth. They fail by telling you that what you see with your own eyes and hear with your own ears is not true. They fail by dividing families, neighbors and countries.

Each time your fore-parents were about to fall over the precipice they were provided with another chance to redeem themselves. Your new leaders must be truthful with those they represent. They must be truthful about the short and long-term consequences of the decisions they make. If they are not truthful; and **you** do not ensure that the issues are well understood, this may be the last precipice.

It is with great sorrow that I write this letter. I love you all, individually and collectively. I gave you to the world through Abraham and Sara. I gave you guidelines and ethics and I gave you the ability to choose. I gave you prophets, sages, and rabbis. I rescued you from your mistakes. I have nothing more to give you.

It is now up to **you**, to paraphrase Amanda Gorman, “to speak the truth and be an obvious and fatal danger to the powers that be.”

With Love,

Your God of 7 names.