

My friends, before I get to my announced subject tonight, I would like to say a word about what would have been tonight's topic in virtually any other year. Today is Veterans Day, until 1954 known as Armistice Day. Today, every American should acknowledge his or her debt to those who fought, and in all too many cases made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the values for which America stands. May God bless all who have served.

On to my announced topic, which is the response to this election from my organization, the Rabbinical Assembly, and from this rabbi himself.

I have to tell you this, my friends, so you know from whom this is coming. Aside from the two dirty little secrets I shared in another sermon, my loving Judge Judy and stolen valor videos, I also love Presidential elections. I cannot wait for the New Hampshire primaries every four years, and it is this election-loving geek who begins tonight by saying I am beyond glad that this election is over, and I do not just mean the Presidential race. In some ways, it caused me the least distress this year in contrast with some other races. But let me begin with the Rabbinical Assembly. Our President and Executive Director, Rabbis Phil Scheim and Julie Schonfeld, released a statement. I will not read it in its entirety, but those who do want to read the entire statement can find it online.¹ Here are the first three paragraphs of the statement:

As the world responds to the US election, we reach out to you in shared love of Torah, Jewish community, family and friends. The past several months have been a volatile and challenging election season and it is fair to say that while we never know what lies ahead, feelings of uncertainty are particularly acute for many in our Jewish community at this time. Our RA re-envisioning process taught us to be sensitive to and aware of the many and varied views held by our members and members of our communities about any political figure or public issue and we

¹ <http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/story/ra-statement-us-presidential-election>

affirm with love and gratitude that we are one Rabbinical Assembly and one Conservative/Masorti movement family. We are grateful for the values and commitments of our family, emanating from the Torah's central principles of Tzelem Elohim [the image of God] and K'vod Habriot [Respect for living creatures].

This election cycle was marked by shocking and often frightening departures from the civil discourse of the United States and we share our serious concern for the safety and well-being of our community and for many diverse peoples around the world. But the election season has now passed and we all need to unite as one nation.

We call upon President-Elect Trump, in this new phase of his life, to be cognizant of the profound responsibilities that now rest upon his shoulders. We hope that he will embrace his duties to all Americans and to the people around the world who rely upon the United States as a beacon of freedom, justice and hope. We call upon him to repudiate any statements by his supporters or would-be supporters that vilify any group. We hear the real pain and suffering of many in the United States who are struggling to care for themselves and their families and stand ready to work with the new administration to meaningfully improve the lives of all Americans and of good and decent people around the world. We look forward to the continuing strong ties between the US and Israel which have long transcended any particular election.

As for me, I want to focus on the second paragraph of the RA's statement. If there is anything I disagree with there, it is the assumption that political discourse in America is generally civil. You have heard me regularly bemoan my belief that Americans have lost the art of civil disagreement. The idea of exchanging ideas for

the sake of enriching one's own perspective has all but disappeared. The primary reason for the exchange of ideas today is to convince the other that he or she is wrong, and all too often, not simply wrong but bad as well.

My friends, if the Talmud were being written today, I believe the Sages would have used this election as a prime example of *lashon hara*, evil speech. And I am by no means talking only or even primarily about the Presidential race. Here in Indiana, the home of something I have appreciated and now value deeply, Hoosier hospitality, we were subjected to a barrage of attack ads, one after the next, until watching television became an exercise in anger management. Shelli Yoder attacked Trey Hollingsworth and vice versa. John Gregg went after Eric Holcomb and Holcomb came back after Gregg. One ad linked Gregg and Mrs. Clinton not because of politics but, the ad charged, because they viewed public office as financially lucrative. Todd Young bashed Evan Bayh and Bayh bashed Young. No wonder I was so taken with an ad I saw on Facebook: If you can't say something nice, say it in Yiddish."

This ugly rhetoric is what ruined this campaign for me. I supposed it is not the election itself I am glad to see go, it is the terrible behavior exhibited in these ads. And let me acknowledge that some of the ads were approved by the candidates themselves, but others were aired by PACs, political action committees. Now you may understand better why I cannot utter the acronym AIPAC without immediately saying, "...which is not a PAC at all!"

My friends, I do have a message for the future tonight. I'll frame it by sharing a conversation I had with a very excited college student who called me the night President Obama was elected for the first time. She asked me if I did not agree that on that night, America showed the world democracy at its best. I asked her why she felt that way, and she replied that it was because we had elected a black president. I told her I did not agree and thought her view was racist. She was

shocked and asked why I said so. My answer was that for her, democracy was at its best when non-caucasians are elected to office, and that my description of democracy at its best was the peaceful transfer of power that occurs regularly in democracies, especially when that power is being transferred between two different parties. I'll never forget how beautiful I thought the silence was as she thought about what I said, finally responding that I did have a point.

My friends, at the risk of becoming known as Rabbi Obvious, on Friday, January 20, 2017, Donald Trump will be sworn in as President of the United States. On that day, our military will not be poised to put down a coup. There will be a peaceful transfer of power from the Democrat President Obama to the new Republican President Trump. President Trump will do what he thinks is best for America, just as President Obama did in his first four years. If the American people are pleased with President Trump, he will be reelected, just as was President Obama. If the populace is displeased with the Trump Administration, he will join Mr. Carter and others as a one term President. And for those who cannot wait for four years, there is a midterm election. If America is displeased with President Trump, his party will suffer in the midterm election, just as happened in 2014. But all of this, my friends, beyond even the slightest shadow of any doubt, will happen with ballots, not bullets, and no matter what the worst fears of anyone who is afraid of a Trump Administration are, I can promise you that whether it is a success or a failure, America will be here to inaugurate its forty-sixth President at a time decided by the American people. Now, if only between now and then we could begin to recapture the art of respectful and civil disagreement, no matter what happens, in that very important way America will be stronger than we are tonight.