

There are those in this country—over 50%—who are pleased, excited, and delighted with the election result, with former President Trump being elected once again to hold this essential office in the United States.

And there are the other slightly fewer than 50% whose feelings differ, from disappointment to deep mourning.

While exit polls showed that people who identify as Jewish primarily voted for Vice President Kamala Harris to take on this role for our country, I can tell you with complete confidence that the Jewish community was and is divided politically. There are those within our community who see this election result as a great opportunity and those who will despair.

It is far from my role to tell you this Shabbat or, at any point in time, which side is right. Not only does that not align with our mission as a sacred community, but it also does not align with our mission as a 501(c)3. It would also go against who I am as an individual and a rabbi. Why is that? It is because I am not the rabbi of one party or the other.

I have always believed that this physical and spiritual space should be a sanctuary in time, a place where we can step outside of partisan boundaries and join together to celebrate Shabbat and Holidays, one another, and our community.

After all, the synagogue is called a *Beit Knesset* throughout rabbinic literature—a place of gathering. You will notice that identity is far from a place of division; instead, it is a place of being together. That does not just mean that this is a gathering place for sitting next to one another in the Sanctuary; it extends far beyond.

According to the great Rabbi Maimonides, the Beit Knesset - the place of gathering (synagogue) should be built in the highest place in the city or village—not to lord over anyone. Instead, it is to be at the highest point in the town to remind everyone that we are supposed to hold ourselves to higher ideals in how we speak and act. So, in the wake of the election held peacefully, fairly, and legally, how can we hold ourselves to higher ideals individually and collectively?

There is much to learn from this week's Torah portion, which explores the origins of who we are as a people. In Parashat Lech Lecha, we understand the role, motivations, and actions of the first Jewish person, who is called Avram ha Ivri—Avram the Hebrew. You will notice he is not yet known as *Avraham*; that will come later.

His label as the *Ivri - the Hebrew* - originates with Avram's specific action to start his journey. *Ivri* is connected to the word *Eyver*; which means to cross over or to be on the other side. Avram is understood as the first person to take on an identity as someone who stands on two sides of a division and then does something incredible: He walks forward not only as an individual but also as a nation.

The same is true for the Jewish people. We stand on two sides, some closer to the middle and some further apart, but we have the ability and holy task to walk forward together.

There is such incredible hatred for the Jewish people throughout the world. Just this past week, there was a pogrom in Amsterdam that saw the attempted stabbing, car ramming, and many other forms of physical assault against Israelis who went to a soccer game—identified as the enemy for their identity as Jews and Israelis.

The Amsterdam mayor said: 'Men on scooters crisscrossed the city looking for Israeli fans.' We will learn more about the attack as the investigation and details unfold. Still, there are videos that show the incredibly horrific pogrom through which we can recognize the reality of the situation, namely the realization of our greatest fear: Jewish people under assault for the perceived crime of being Jewish. And yes, this attack against Jews happened just before the 86th anniversary of Kristallnacht in Europe.

King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands said the attacks were reminiscent of "dark and grim times for the Jewish people."

"We failed the Jewish community of the Netherlands during World War II, and last night we failed again," the Dutch king said to President Isaac Herzog in a phone call on Friday morning.

Mark Twain said, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." I cannot entirely agree; history can repeat itself, and it did this week. Yes, officials across the political and international spectrum spoke out against the antisemitic attack. Still, the violence, hatred, and malice echo one of the earliest episodes of the Holocaust, which would mark the beginning of the death and destruction of European Jews.

On Wednesday at Depaul University, in an area that feels like it is just down the street, two Jewish students were physically assaulted for their Jewish and Zionist identities. It was another attack in Chicago against the Jewish community. It was only a few weeks ago that the Jewish man was shot as he walked to synagogue on Shabbat for being...Jewish.

Also, this past Wednesday, anti-Israel protestors descended on the Loop Synagogue in Chicago to disrupt a presentation from an Arab Israeli speaking to the general Jewish community about the current situation in Israel. The mass protests, which included two protestors who broke into the synagogue and damaged property, chose that location because it was filled with Jews and Zionists.

We are passionate about our politics and our view of what the future should look like for us and the future generations. Still, we are also a people who desperately need one another during this unprecedented time.

However, refusing to divide ourselves should not be solely for self-preservation. Instead, it is an essential part of our Jewish communal identity to go forward from strength to strength, hand in hand, no matter our differences.

Avram was tasked with the great responsibility of walking forward - God said, "Lech Lecha," and he was rewarded with a slight change to his name by stepping forward to an unknown destination. A Hebrew letter, *Hey*, was added to transform his name from Avram to *Avraham*, thereby signifying his spiritual growth and elevated identity. We have and will continue to face many tests in the days ahead. Will we

earn that, *Hey?* Earn that recognition that we lifted one another higher instead of pushing one another down.

In this morning's Haftarah reading from the Book of Isaiah, we find the powerful words that are also included in our morning prayers:

נִתֵּן לַיָּעִיף כֹּחַ וּלְאִין אֹנִים עֲצָמָה יִרְבֶּה:
Who gives strength to the weary,
Fresh vigor to the spent.

Many are weary and spent from the incredible challenges we have faced as a people, but together, we will be strong. Hazak Hazak v'nitzhazek - may we go from strength to strength as we strengthen one another.