“Apres Moi, Le Deluge”: Spiritual Imperatives of the 2024 Election
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King Louis XV, who reigned over France from 1715–1774, is said to have looked at the state of his kingdom and remarked, “*Apres moi, le deluge*—After me, the flood.”

He was prophetic, because just 15 years after his death, the French people would rise up against their privileged and out-of-touch rulers, abolish the monarchy, and put Louis’s grandson and successor, Louis XVI, to the guillotine.

The flood had come.

The Revolutionary period was a time of enormous social and political upheaval. A new social order was forged in a crucible of chaos and violence.

In Charles Dickens’s famous words, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

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Our country is still trying to understand the meaning of Tuesday’s presidential election.

Analysts are pouring through the data. Commentators are opining. Some citizens are despairing; others are celebrating. Some are optimistic and excited, while others are anxious and terrified.

It’s so important for us to acknowledge the diversity and the intensity of emotions people in America—and in our own community—are experiencing right now, and to empathize with them, even if we don’t share the same feelings.

There’s more than enough speculation out there about why President-Elect Donald Trump won on Tuesday. I’m sure we all have our own theories about it, too.

Trying to understand the “why” of it is an important and worthy endeavor. But tonight, I am taking my cue from Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, who taught that even more important than the question of “why did this happen” is the question: “What does this moment demand of us going forward?”[1]

Tonight, I’d like to begin exploring what I believe are some of our spiritual imperatives in the aftermath of the 2024 election.

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I have said before that I believe President Joe Biden is America's version of Louis XV—the last of the Old Guard—and that after him the flood would come. And, indeed, it has.

Some believe it will usher in a new American "golden age"; others believe it will bring us a fascist hellscape. I suppose only time will tell.

But I do feel in my bones that, like France in 1789, we are entering a period of profound social upheaval and chaos.

I know that sounds ominous, but it doesn't have to be. As David Brooks put it in a brilliant piece in yesterday's *New York Times*, "[I]n chaos there's opportunity for a new society. …"[2]

This, in fact, is one of the great spiritual teachings of the Torah. "When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was *tohu va-vohu*—chaotic and unformed." (*Genesis* 1:1-2)

In the Jewish worldview, chaos is the wellspring of creation. Out of the chaos, God brings order.

We human beings are made in God's image, meaning that we, too, have not only the capacity, but also the duty, to *create*—to confront the formless chaos like an artist confronts a blank canvas, and imagine something new and beautiful, and bring it to life.

I won't be so naive as to say it's going to come easily. I'm pretty sure it won't.

There is something seismic happening in America, and to pretend otherwise would be foolish. Whether you're despondent about the outcome or thrilled with it, you know the significance of this moment. You can *feel* it.

That's why we're entering a time when, to quote *Spinal Tap*, everything will be turned up to 11—all the time.

If past is prologue, the air will be tense, people will be on edge, emotions will remain volatile, and too many people will not be their best selves.

It's hard to live through the flood. It's hard to leave the familiar for the unknown. But that's exactly what this moment demands of us.

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Our sages say that when God confronted the primordial chaos, God did not recoil from it. Instead, God looked into the Torah and used it as a blueprint to create the world.

For us, too, the Torah offers a blueprint for navigating the flood and doing our small part to help create the new order we envision. I'd like to suggest three of the Torah's commandments in particular that I believe are calling to us right now.

• One: "*V'ahavta l'reiakha ka-mokha*—Love your neighbor as yourself." (*Lev.* 19:18)

It's easy to do this when you like the other person and agree with them. It's much harder to do it when you dislike them or see the world differently than they do. But that's the crux of the commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself"—even when they're hard to love.

The philosopher Will Herberg believed that the whole aim of Judaism is to create a world based on "Love your neighbor as yourself." Well, if that's a vision we share, then we have to work for it. And that starts by extending grace, kindness, respect, and dignity to every human being.

• Two: "*Lo yih'yeh l'kha elohim acherim al panai*—You shall have no other gods besides Me." (*Ex.* 20:3)

I have long said that our society has fallen into an idolatry of politics. As the writer J. Peder Zane put it recently, "People have too much invested in the outcome [of the election]—literally, their sense of self. … We, the people, have painted ourselves into a corner by turning to the unforgiving world of politics to find identity and meaning."[3]

Like any form of idolatry, this warps our experience of the world and will eventually lead to ruin.

We need to decenter politics and seek meaning and purpose in the fullness of the human experience. As the psalm says, "I call out to God from the narrow place; God answers me in the wide expanse." (*Ps.* 118:5)

• And three: "*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof*—Justice, justice shall you pursue." (*Deut.* 16:20)

Actually, the word "*tzedek*" is probably better translated as "righteousness." The commandment is to strive constantly to be righteous and to do righteous things.

To be righteous is to treat others without prejudice, and give them a fair shake, and do what is moral.

It's to help people who need it, to do your best to make the world a little better, and to stand up for your values while also seeking common ground.

We should pursue righteousness in every sphere of our life—in the public square, in the workplace, in our temple, in our community, and at home.

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"*Apres moi, le deluge*."

What will come after the flood? I don't think we know yet.

It took 10 generations from the time Noah built the ark until Abraham answered the call of "*Lekh l'kha*—Go forth," and birthed a new way of being into the world.

And yet, each of those generations had a hand in paving the way for Abraham.

There is no doubt in my mind that we are, right now, in a period of transition and profound change.

Is it the best of times? Is it the worst of times? Is it both?

I don't know.

Chaos is inevitable, but it's also the clay from which we will create a new society. And every one of us has a role to play in creating it.

We can do it together by treating each other with kindness and dignity, by choosing expansiveness over narrow-mindedness, and by pursuing righteousness in our individual and collective lives.

May God bless us all with strength, wisdom, and peace as we answer the call.

1 See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Fate and Destiny*
22 David Brooks, "Voters to Elites: Do You See Me Now?" Opinion | Voters to Elites: Do You See Me Now? - The New York Times
3 J. Peder Zane, "The quiet before the storm," https://www.myjournalcourier.com/opinion/article/the-quiet-before-storm-19861255.php