

Introduction to the Prayer for the Country
Following an Insurgent Attack on the Capitol¹

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In *Pirke Avot*, Ethics of the Fathers, 3:2, Rabbi Hanina, the vice-high priest is quoted as saying: “Pray for the welfare of the government, for were it not for the fear it inspires, every man would swallow his neighbor alive.”

We witnessed this week just how necessary it is to still pray for the welfare of our government when an angry mob, incited by our outgoing President, stormed the Capitol in an effort to disrupt Congress’s acceptance of duly certified election results and thus overthrown the next duly elected President of the United States.

My friends, the sad truth is that the current crisis is far from over. Founding Father Ben Franklin, when asked if the United States was to be a monarchy or a republic, quipped, “A republic, if you can keep it.”

As a Jewish community, we have a vested interest in the rule of law and defending the Constitution, the two foundation stones of our security and success here in America. Jews have never done well where the mob rules. Perhaps you saw, as I did mob members waving Q banners, representing the far right, anti-Semitic conspiracy theory Q Anon. Or the man sporting a sweatshirt with the words “Camp Auschwitz” over a skull and crossbones.

I share these images not to scare you but to make it unambiguously clear that, regardless of one’s political opinions or party allegiance, the alt-right, and anyone who supports, enables or excuses them, is a clear and present danger to the welfare of our government, to the rule of law and order, and to the well-being of any minority, including us American Jews.

Despite this bleak picture, I find hope in the fact that our Congresspeople and Senators quickly reassembled to do the work of the people and confirm the electoral votes, designating our next duly elected President and Vice President.

I find hope that so many Republican Senators changed their intended votes and so many others have begun to speak out and speak up. I pray this sense of solidarity in the face of national crisis will continue into the next Administration as a spirit of cooperation in facing the urgent challenges of COVID, economic recovery, racial inequity, and climate change facing our nation.

I find hope in HOCO Courageous Conversations, that teaches us how to have meaningful conversations across our racial and religious differences. I invite you to volunteer to train as a facilitator, training for which starts this coming Tuesday, or join as a participant starting Tuesdays in February. Information is on our website, and in an email you received Friday if you are on Beth Shalom’s email list. You can also register at www.hococourageousconversations.com.

I find hope in all of you, who have come today seeking solace, community, and *hesed* (kindness) as the antithesis of the anger and hate we witnessed this week.

I find hope in our dismay and shock, for it tells me that our sense of what is right and wrong, our moral compass, is still intact.

I find hope in our God who inspired our founding fathers to fight for a more perfect union, by the people and for the people, however flawed yet always evolving, the same God, the God of our ancestors, who have guided our People through much darker days always to the light.

I find hope in having witnessed in our lifetime during this past week, the words of the prophet Zechariah, which we read on Hanukkah, and about which I spoke just a month ago: “*Not by might, not by power, but by My spirit, says the Lord (Zechariah 4:6).*” The might of a mob spurred on by the most powerful man in the world, the US President, ultimately did not diminish our spirit, disrupt our election, or undermine our democracy. For that, I am deeply grateful, as I am sure we all are, to our police and national guard, to our sane political leaders, to our founders, and to our God, who holds each of us accountable for our actions and inactions.

Yes, there is good reason to pray for the welfare of our government. Let us join together to do so on p. 148 in *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*. (A copy of this prayer can be found in the Shabbat morning service of *Siddur Sim Shalom* downloadable at <https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/form-download-e-siddur-0>.)

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