

January 10, 2008

Dear Friends,

The first presidential election I was able to follow (and understand) was in 1964. My elementary school was a polling place in our neighborhood in Kansas City. I remember the signs for the candidates – Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater – outside the school. While my fifth grade classmates and I were outside for recess, a man came out of the entry foyer where they had set up the voting machines. We asked, “Who did you vote for?” The man responded very firmly and sternly, “Goldwater!”

I have a vague recollection of voting in the 1980 Ohio presidential primary, but it can't compare to the experience this year. Many of you told me about how accessible the candidates would be, and it was relatively easy to see and hear them in person. What I will most remember about election day is taking Adam to register and vote in his first presidential primary. Many parents mentioned that their children went with them to the polls so that they could see the “real thing” after holding a “simulated” election in school. Sharing the experience of voting is one way that we pass on to the next generation the value of active participation in our political process and taking advantage of the right to vote that we enjoy in our democracy. Hopefully, this particular presidential election will help to create a new generation of involved and informed voters, giving us all a source of hope for our nation's future.

The Torah reading for this week from the portion BO explains the importance of sharing a message of freedom across the generations. Exodus Chapters 12 and 13 describe the first Passover, outlining the rules and rituals of the observance that became, over the centuries, the familiar Seder meal. In verse 8 of Chapter 13, the Torah declares, “And you shall explain to your child on that day, “It is because of what the Eternal One did for me when I went free from Egypt.” This verse is included in the Passover Haggadah as the answer to the questions about the ritual from two of the four children. The EITZ HAYIM commentary notes that “if there are no children present, adults are obliged to ask the questions and recount the Exodus from Egypt each Seder night. It is especially praiseworthy to expound at length on the Exodus through discussion, debate and additional readings.”

We know that the rest of this election year will feature many experts, media figures and scholars who will expound at length and engage in discussion and debate about the results of the upcoming primaries and the possibilities for which candidates will represent each party in the fall. Let us realize, as we listen to countless predictions and insights, that every commentary offered is a reflection – and celebration – of our right to choose new leaders who take office in a peaceful transition based on mutual respect. Shabbat Shalom!

**-- L'shalom,
Rabbi Larry K.**