

October 17, 2008

Shabbat Shalom and Happy Sukkot (Moadim L'simchah!)

As the 2008 Election approaches, citizens around the country have either made their decision on how to vote for president or, perhaps, are still trying to determine the criteria to use as a basis for making a choice. Two lists of "qualities to look for in a presidential candidate" that have recently appeared in the media come from author and historian Doris Kearns Goodwin and Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California (who hosted both candidates at his church in mid-August). I also found a list of qualities shared by President/General Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1963 (see below). These lists relate not only to candidates for president but also to leaders in almost any group or organization.

I thought about these lists as I considered a passage in the Torah reading (Exodus Chapters 33 and 34) for the Shabbat during Sukkot that presents God's attributes. During the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur morning worship, we chant this section of Exodus as a reminder of the divine qualities (revealed to Moses as he went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of tables of the Ten Commandments) on which the Israelites could depend. This characterization of God is also intended to set a standard for us as we try to develop our own character. Exodus Chapter 34, Verses 6 and 7, declared that God is...

- *Connected to all life and always present*
- *Consistent*
- *Compassionate/Merciful (sympathetic to suffering)*
- *Gracious (helpful concern)*
- *Slow to anger/patient*
- *Abounding in love/kindness*
- *True/faithful (tied to love/kindness - sincere)*
- *Remembering the good that we have done*
- *Forgiving of our errors in judgment and moral decision-making*
- *Requiring justice when we don't return to the right path*

The lists below reflect some of these same sentiments. Leadership does require connectedness to others, consistency, compassion, patience, kindness, concern, a sense of fairness and an ability to move forward to accept new ideas and realities.

Whether such a list of leadership qualities comes from a sacred text, a religious leader, a noted author or a one-time "leader of the free world," considering these traits can play a part in how we choose those who lead us and how we conduct ourselves as citizens of a nation or members of a community. Let us hope all of this wisdom being shared now will continue to guide those in positions of responsibility both before and after any election campaign.

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

Presidential Qualities
Doris Kearns Goodwin

1. The courage to stay strong (determination in the face of one's own challenges)
2. Self-confidence (surround yourself with rivals whose diverse opinions can strengthen decisions)
3. An ability to learn from errors
4. A willingness to change
5. Emotional intelligence (a team approach to successes and failures)
6. Self-control (remaining calm in the midst of trouble)
7. A popular touch (an intuitive sense of the public sentiment, knowing when to wait and when to lead)
8. A moral compass (courage to follow one's convictions when the risk of losing popular support is great)

President/General Dwight D. Eisenhower (From Time Magazine, June, 1963)

1. Self-restraint
2. Understanding (for Eisenhower, respect for people's freedom to work for themselves and live with a minimum of government interference)
3. Inner calmness
4. Strength of decision (after consulting with strong advisors)
5. Experience (prepared for the crises of the presidency)
6. Strength of character (leadership based in principle)

Rick Warren

1. Compassion
2. Contemplation (thinking about responsibilities)
3. Cheerfulness (overcoming evil or pessimism with good and optimism)
4. Concentration (focusing on major priorities)
5. Courage (advocating for solutions whether or not they are popular)
6. Clear Conscience (integrity/trust)