

Our Voice Matters
Cantor Vicky Glikin
Rosh Hashana 2020-5781

November 15, 2001 is a day etched in my memory. On this day, in a crowded courtroom in Chicago, IL I recited the pledge renouncing my loyalty to any country other than the United States and formally accepted upon myself the rights and the responsibilities of an American Citizen. Chief among the responsibilities was the obligation to vote. The first Presidential Election in which I participated was on November 3, 2004. I never felt more American than in the moment when I cast my first ballot. In that moment, I knew that I had a voice and that my voice was powerful.

Rosh Hashana is known in the Torah as “yom teruah”¹, “the day of shouting or blasting.” More than the sound of human shouting, “yom teruah” refers to the piercing cry of the shofar, that visceral sound that seems to penetrate every cell in our body and wake us up to action. However, not all of Rosh Hashana’s voices are as loud and commanding as the voice of the shofar. There’s also the voice of Channah, which comes to us in the traditional Haftarah reading for today. As she prayed for a child, Channah barely moved her lips and spoke only in her heart, but her heartfelt plea was answered. Channah called her son Sh’muel, which literally means “God has heard.” However, many women’s voices were not heard throughout Jewish and American history.

This year we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th constitutional amendment, which gave women the right to vote. The journey to August 18, 1920 was long and arduous. One New York Times anti-suffrage editorial declared: “The benefits of woman suffrage are almost wholly imaginary...Its penalties will be real and hard to bear.”² It took over 70 years, almost two generations, to get from the official birthplace of the suffrage movement at the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 to a constitutional mandate that women should have the right to vote in 1920. And, even when we got there, not all women were included. Chinese and Native American women were excluded from the expansion of voting rights and still lacked a path to citizenship. While African American women and men voted without fear in some parts of the country, in other places they would remain disenfranchised for close to five more decades because of state voter suppression laws including poll taxes and literacy tests, or because of the fear of violence and lynching.

Even after Texas’s own President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965 into law, attempts to limit participation by African American, Latino and other minority voters persisted in Texas and other parts of the country. Over the years, our country has made noteworthy strides in improving access to voting for all eligible citizens. However, efforts to suppress voter rights continue to threaten the health of our democracy into the present day.

As I participated in my first presidential election in 2004, I believed that my voice mattered. It would take time for me to recognize that not all Americans felt that their voices would be counted. Today, as we face one of the most important elections of our lifetime, we affirm that each and every voice matters

¹ Numbers 29:1

² <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/08/17/us/suffrage-movement-photos-history.html>

and deserves to be counted. This is the premise behind Temple's Civic Engagement Campaign, which strives for Temple Emanu-El to be a 100% voting community. We invite you to take a pledge to vote. We invite you to register to vote and if you are voting by mail, to return your ballot promptly. We encourage you to vote during the early voting period to help manage traffic expected on election day. And, if your health and personal circumstances permit, we encourage you to work the polls since there's a significant shortage of poll workers for the upcoming election due to the ongoing pandemic.

Voting and ensuring that all who are eligible can do so is very American. It is also very Jewish. While the words "Thou shalt vote; I am Adonai, Your God" do not appear in the Torah, our mandate to repair the world and help make it more just is consistent and clear. What better way is there to help bring the world into alignment with our personal and our Jewish values than through voting? As Yitz Greenberg, a modern-Orthodox Rabbi reminds us, "...democracy is the political system most likely to advance the Torah's goal of *tikkun olam*—to repair the world—so that every human being is treated as an equal, valuable and unique image of God."³ Voting is the fuel of democracy and to the extent that it helps us to move the world from the way that it is to the way that it should be, voting is a mitzvah.

In the early years of the State of Israel, a man came before the Chazon Ish, a famed Orthodox rabbi, and explained that he didn't have enough money to pay his taxes and, therefore, would not be allowed to vote in an upcoming election. The Chazon Ish responded: "You should sell your tefillin and pay the taxes... tefillin, you can borrow from another, but the right to vote you cannot get from someone else."⁴ Chazon Ish's response and Channah's prayer are our reminder: each of us has a voice that deserves to be heard. And, so on this "Yom Teruah", this "day of shouting" we invite you to sound YOUR voice through civic engagement and the sacred work of *tikkun olam*, the ongoing repair of our fractured world. Shana tova!

³ "Ask the Rabbis//Voting"; *Moment Magazine*, May 6, 2016

⁴ "Lectures for *the Book of Genesis*" by Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl, pg. 156