

for people of any cultural background and a model for democracy anywhere on Earth.

Alfred Wolf, Los Angeles, CA

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Now that the election is over, it is time that we put partisanship behind us and concentrate not on what divides us, but on what unites us.

To be sure, it is much easier to build bridges of solidarity in opposition to a common enemy than on the basis of shared values and ideals. In his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Henri Bergson pointed out that threats from without rather than love for our fellow human beings frequently forge the bonds of unity within a community and provide the foundation for its value system.

During the cold war, the Western world found its basis of unity in a common front *against* Soviet Russia. In the Jewish world, the absence of antisemitism often leads to a loss of Jewish self-identification.

The bitterness and anger displayed by the American electorate makes us wonder whether in the absence of a readily identifiable enemy, America can find a sense of national purpose.

But for all the divisiveness and partisanship, there still remains a core of common values we cherish. We may disagree on strategies and tactics, but we all share a commitment to democratic values and respect for the rights of individuals. Conservatives and Liberals may disagree on the meaning of justice, but we all are united in seeking a just society and abhorring exploitation and crime. We may differ on the precise definition of freedom of speech, but there is shared consensus that human rights must not be abridged.

It is on the basis of these values that we must combat rampant cynicism and replace it with the affirmation of the very foundations of the American ethos, which reflects so many biblical values.

Walter S. Wurzburger, Lawrence, NY

WALTER S. WURZBURGER is a *Sh'ma* Contributing Editor.

America is unified by:

Common Goals...The hope that still brings people from all countries to our shores--that they may do better,

Ta sh'ma

We invite you to send us your favorite text and comment. Submissions should not exceed 200 words. Be sure to include proper citation of sources. Hebrew will appear in transliteration.

Yehudah Mirsky

He has told you, O Man, what is good and what it is that God requires of you, but to act justly, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

MICAH 6:8

The verse addresses "Man" in second person singular, the individual. We have been told, we know what our basic human obligations are. They arise unavoidably with consciousness and they begin with life, for the elemental unit of meaning in our world is life, the life of sinews and corpuscles wedded to the life of choice and memory. We are commanded to further it, nurture it, by dispensing justice, by trying to bring daily life into accord with our vision of what should be. Robert Frost's description of poetry as "moving easy in harness" also holds true for justice; the verse suggests a delicate balance of well-defined form and a boundless passion, namely the love of kindness, the spirit of genuine concern.

This balance tempers our faith in action with humility, the understanding of limitation that keeps idealism from turning to cynicism in an imperfect world. We must never lose our sense of wonder, our awe at the silences pendent around us that our words will barely pierce, at the horror and exultation of being human, at the depth and ultimate significance of our lives as we make our way through time.

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or achieve more, or follow a dream--and with the possibility of success.

...Pursuing a common objective, such as winning a game in a sporting event, or collecting more money for a charitable cause this year than we did last year, or just accomplishing something in a group environment which gives that group a *unique sense* of satisfaction and well-being.

...And, at the opposite end of the spectrum, pulling together in time of need or disaster, helping someone because it is the right thing to do.

Common mythologies... Anyone can grow up to be President; any child who studies hard enough can go to college; if you start at the bottom and work diligently, you can improve yourself by your own efforts; every person has an inherent dignity which we ought to respect; and the belief that it is never too late to keep trying if the objective is worthwhile.

Common frailties... Heroes are not supposed to be subject to the same vices which most people naturally possess; the leader of unknown capability will somehow rise to the requirements of the situation; political leaders will perform in a statesman-like manner to do the "right" thing--and when we find that many of the conceptions will not prove to be true, we continue to hope that the next person to try will somehow be the right one.

What really unifies America and Americans is the fact that we continue to keep trying, and experimenting, and moving forward, because we believe that we have been given both the opportunity and the obligation to do so.

Burton A. Zipser, Oak Park, MI

We *must* unite, because (as our greatest American prophet reminded us) "A house divided against itself cannot stand." All it needs is for us to remember what unites us in the first place: We are still the only country in the world that was conceived in liberty, the only one whose organizing principle is not who your parents were or what language they spoke but what you yourself can offer to your fellow citizens and to the world. We all know it doesn't always work out this way, but this is what we all pretend to believe and try to live up to. Put that together with spacious skies, amber waves of grain and purple mountain majesties framed at either end with thousands of miles of seacoast to keep our sense of endless possibilities fresh, and the only other thing we'd need to unite us is a good slogan. May I suggest the one we already have?--*E pluribus unum*.

Michael Carasik, Brookline, MA

But others say about...

Forgive Germany?

Yehuda Nir (*Sh'ma* 25/482) offers a compelling argument when he points out the necessary, but often-avoided, distinction between the labels "Nazi" and "German".

Adorno has written: "The past would be finally overcome if the causes of the past were eliminated. The power of the past remains unbroken only because the causes still persist." On this premise, it should be clear that the root cause which led to the Holocaust does, indeed persist: Christian anti-Semitism. Until the "Germans" or "Nazis" accept responsibility and atone as "Christians", the rest is commentary.

Charles A. Salkin
Dover, DE

...Forgive the Germans who took my husband's parents and 6 brothers and sisters from Lodz Ghetto in Poland and it was January 16, 1942 and put them in mobile vans in Chelmno Forest and gassed them and threw their bodies in holes in the Chelmno Woods?

...Forgive them? Leo has no pictures at all of his family. Our 4 daughters have names of his brothers and sisters and our grandchildren carry names of his brothers, sisters, parents.

...Only the dead, murdered Jews could know should we forgive. If Leo had not survived almost 4 years of concentration camps after Lodz Ghetto, the Laufer family of David-Tauala Laufer would be gone forever. No one to carry on the family--finished and forgotten. Only *he* did live and carries on the Laufer name.

...Leo, himself, was 16 when he was taken away from Lodz, September 1940 to an area in Poznan, Poland--to a labor farm run by a Pole of German descent. He and about 100 young Jews were put into a filthy barn just emptied of dirty animals and the boys were to sleep on the same dirty straw--6 months, no bath, same clothes--6 months. Most died of starvation, disease and freezing as they worked at 30 degrees below freezing and their bodies were thrown into the river...

Forgive them?

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Sh'ma

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