

A Jewish Call to Conscience
by Amy Carr

I am an American and a Jew. I have lost relatives in the holocaust and I have numerous friends and acquaintances whose entire families have been decimated as a result.

I understand not just what Israel is but what its existence means. It means that "never again" is not just words. It is a phrase that is personified by the Israeli people, and it means that millions, the world over, stand behind those words, and are willing to do what it takes to see that they are made manifest.

Some people have been claiming that Barack Obama is not a friend of Israel, that the fact that Hamas had the audacity to endorse him tells us something about who he is and what he stands for [One Hamas spokesperson endorsed him, while another repudiated that endorsement afterwards—Ed.] First, it's important to remember that Obama did not solicit nor does he accept such an endorsement – any more than McCain courted the endorsement he received from Al-Qaeda. Moreover, we need to look at exactly what Obama does stand for with respect to Israel.

Obama has stated his position on Israel very clearly. It is as follows: "Our job is to renew the United States' efforts to help Israel achieve peace with its neighbors while remaining vigilant against those who do not share this vision....That effort begins with a clear and strong commitment to the security of Israel: our strongest ally in the region and its only established democracy."

McCain's position on Israel, although not implicitly negative, stands to do this precious country far more harm than good. As commentator Dylan Loewe puts it, "A McCain/Bush worldview will mean continued destabilization of the Middle East, which will pose a serious security risk to Israel. If McCain attacks Iran, as he has suggested he is inclined to do, the Sunni-Shiite conflict in Iraq could easily morph into a Pan-Arab conflict, in which recruiting aims could be achieved, in part, by launching sustained attacks against Israel. Four to eight more years of neoconservative policy has the potential to set off a powder keg of chaos, from which hard-liners and fanatics will likely ascend to power."

What further needs to be addressed is whether we, as Jews, will continue to act according to our moral imperative – to behave with thoughtful and tough-minded consideration of the effect our actions – in this case our actions inside the voting booth this Tuesday.

Make no mistake about it: what we do, collectively and individually, has the power to impact not simply our world, but the entire world. With this in mind, we must see to it that our actions are guided by intelligence and compassion, that we vote according to conscience, and not from what a distorted sense of what expediency might suggest.

In the words of Martin Luther King, a man whom a generation of morally-conscious, tough-minded Jews venerated, "The ultimate measure of a [man] human being is not where he [or she] stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he [or she] stands at times of challenge and controversy."

This is such a time, when the Jewish vote – indeed the vote of every single American – is crucial in the process of what will be a history-making election. And what is history-making about this election, despite what some people would have us believe, goes far beyond the fact that a black man and a white woman are on the ballot. What is seminal is that our nation is perhaps more vulnerable than it has been

at any time in our history, more in need of healing and of re-building, of a thought-infused, intelligently-conceived change of course.

We, as Jews, are called to empower this change, not simply because as human beings we are capable of it – although taking the moral high road is, simply put, what our legacy demands. We must do it because the times we live in demand nothing less.

We have an unparalleled opportunity to steer our nation onto a course of mindfulness – and away from the stance that dictates how we are currently viewed by the world – that of advancing imperialism and ethnocentrism. Since when are these things endemic to Jewish values, or to American ones for that matter?

This is not a call to vote for Barack Obama because he is a black man but because he is a man with a passionate commitment to justice, and because he possesses the kind of strength that breeds respect, not the kind that is typified by brute force and begets the same.

If we value our children and aim, as far as we are able, to secure the future for them – and for their children – it is in our vested interest to vote not simply in favor of Obama, whose plan it is to implement reasoned change on many fronts, but to vote against McCain, whose impulse, well-intentioned or not, is to continue the foreign and domestic policies that have rendered not only our nation, but the entire world, inestimably vulnerable.

And lest we forget, there is the question of Sarah Palin. As a woman, I am pleased to see that we, as a nation, have come so far with respect to giving women a chance that we have one running for vice president. Nonetheless, Sarah Palin, though a charismatic woman, is completely unqualified to fulfill this role. If she was a soccer mom like me, instead of a hockey mom, and we had children on the same team, I would probably like her. She would be the one who's perkier at 8:00 a.m., cheering the loudest and bringing the best snacks. But, give me a break, do these kinds of thing suggest she would be an appropriate head of state?

Sarah Palin might make a great CEO, a dynamite foundation head, even a decent governor of a small and frankly somewhat inconsequential state. Sarah Palin, if she doesn't, G_d forbid, become vice president of the United States, could also probably launch a successful career in television – tomorrow, or maybe Wednesday. But vice president and but for the grace of G_d, president?

In deciding whom to vote for, we would do well to reflect on what Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, whom some of you may know of, urged his fellow Jews to do. He insisted that we transcend the question of our belief in God and consider, instead, God's belief in us. Along the same lines, Talmudic rabbis described the primary goal of humanity as that of tikkun olam, repairing the world, and striving for a state of shalom, peaceful wholeness.

Tomorrow, we have the opportunity to do all of this – and perhaps more. We can act to advance G_d's belief in us as people who champion what is right. And we can demonstrate that we merit that belief by voting for Barack Obama, the candidate whose values, objectives and competence will enable him to lead us to a better, more hopeful place – G_d willing.