

**Rabbi Lisa Edwards
Beth Chayim Chadashim
Shabbat Nachamu 5760
Parashat Va'etchanan**

Just before the 2000 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles

On Tuesday morning when we all woke up to the news that Al Gore had chosen an “Orthodox” Jew - a Jew! – to run for vice-president of the United States - my brother, knowing my mother turns on the news first thing every morning, called her and said “So were you surprised when you woke up this morning?”

My mother, whose 87th birthday is a little later this month, laughed and said, “What do you mean ‘this morning’? I’m always surprised when I wake up in the morning!” After the joke, though, they did have a conversation probably similar to the ones that took place around many breakfast tables and water coolers this week. The 87-year-olds among us never thought they’d live to see the day a Jew would be nominated for a national office. Even a lot of the “around 50 somethings” raised by those 87-years-olds, were pretty much drop-jawed at the news. Among the younger generation, I gather, the news was less of a shock, but no less exciting...once the initial fears wore off (how many times was our same old question asked this week:

“Is it good for the Jews or bad for the Jews?”
How many of you are pleased by the news?
How many of you are nervous?”

My initial response was, “an Orthodox Jew? Oh-oh, where is he on gay issues?” But it turns out he’s looking at least as liberal as Gore on those issues, and most of us for now seem willing to give him a passing grade anyway, so eager are we to see where all of this will lead. [Of course a few of us did consider inviting Senator Lieberman to BCC tonight, thinking he might be in town already for the convention (after all, last Friday’s edition of “The Jewish Journal” listed BCC as one of the 3 shuls closest to the Staples Center), but we didn’t want to put any pressure on him so soon ... maybe we’ll call him later in the campaign!]

What I’m finding most interesting, as the articles continue to flow, is finding out what people think about the Jewish experience in America, as well as the fascinating discussions that have begun in major news media of all sorts, about the different practices of Judaism. Who would have imagined, even a week ago, that Judaism itself would be getting so much press – mostly positive press at that? For us in the more liberal movements of Judaism, all the discussion has been a good reminder of what we have in common with modern Orthodox Jews, who, though we sometimes forget it, are the majority of Orthodox Jews, and whose politics and beliefs (and in some cases even practices), might not be so distant – at least not so alien - from our own. And that in and of itself, that discovery that liberal and Orthodox might not be so far apart on certain spectrums, can only be good for the Jews, don’t you think?

When Lieberman was announced on Tuesday, the day before the holy day of Tisha b’Av began, that sad day on which we gather to read the Book of Lamentations and mourn communally for all the bad things that have ever happened to the Jewish people as a whole, I thought, “oh dear, will this nomination turn out to be a new addition to our list of sorrows?” But just these few days later, it’s looking -for now anyway - more like the coincidence of timing is that this announcement came the week of Shabbat Nachmu, the Shabbat of Comfort, the shabbat that follows Tisha B’av and on which we read in the Torah portion the Shema and V’ahavta (the words that liberal and traditional Jews alike

more-often-than-not affix to the door posts of their homes). Perhaps among the coincidences (if there are any coincidences) is that this week we also read the Torah verse that says, "Take good care of yourself, of your soul, so that you do not forget the things you have seen with your own eyes, so that they do not fade from your heart as long as you live. And make them known to your children and your children's children:" [Deuteronomy 4:9]. Do not forget what you have lived to see with your eyes this week....

How appropriate too that on this Sabbath we read God's words to Isaiah, "Comfort, comfort O my people, says your God... and a voice calls: Prepare a road for the Eternal through the wilderness, clear a highway in the desert for our God." [Isaiah 40:1,3 Plaut Haftarah Commentary translation, p.440], Isn't it amazing that it might turn out to be politicians who are "clearing a highway in the desert," if not for God, at least for "public servants" whose lives include God in a way different from what we have become accustomed to in politics and government? Of all the interesting articles I read this week about the significance of the choice of Lieberman, one of the most articulate and inspiring comes from the editors of the New Republic magazine. Their editorial reads in part: "The Lieberman nomination did not create a climate of decency in America; it confirmed such a climate. After all, Al Gore picked Joe Lieberman not only for philosophical reasons, but also for practical reasons." [Listen to this... they write:] "We live in a country in which it may be in the interest of a presidential candidate to run with a Jew."

The article continues: "... America represents not only a revolution in the history of the world, but also a revolution in the history of the Jews. The freedom and the safety that the Jews found in America are not historical accidents, they are historical achievements. The United States is not just another address that is not Zion. America is itself a kind of solution to the torments of otherness that afflicted and nearly destroyed the Jews in Europe. It is (to use the old Jewish terms) a diaspora that is not an exile. The Lieberman nomination is another American challenge, the most astounding American challenge, to the lachrymosity [inclined to tears of mourning/sadness] of the Jewish tradition: this is the place in which Jews, and all other groups whose collective memory teaches them to regard the world with suspicion, must learn to take yes for an answer."

Is the New Republic prone to such love of country and such optimism about it? I'm not sure. I tend not to be. But this week - this week of extraordinary events, of "miracles," as Lieberman himself called it --let's spend this Shabbat Nachmu, this Shabbat of Comfort, remembering what we have witnessed with our own eyes, taking comfort in what has transpired... perhaps even "learn[ing] to take Yes for an answer."

Shabbat Shalom