

From the Pulpit

Cantor Shoshana Brown

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### **Maintaining balance as we seek to perfect the world**

Everyone is talking about politics these days: for some it is exciting and energizing, or at least suspenseful – as if we are living inside a political-intrigue suspense movie. Unlike a movie, however, it does not get resolved in two hours; each day brings new revelations, upsets, outrages. The letters in my email inbox from various organizations are practically shouting at me, goading me” “We are so disappointed in you. We’ve asked you for donations and you’ve let us down...” (Yes, they really send letters like this). Thus, for many (perhaps most) people this incessant barrage of politics into our daily life is stressful, no matter which side of the political divide you are on. So what do we do?

This question is particularly pressing for a person of faith. You might think that a “person of faith” would be more serene than most, that they would trust that the Higher Power that guides the universe has a purpose and is in charge of events, exercising an invisible hand in history. Certainly there is support for this kind of thinking in traditional Jewish and Christian theology – but the opposite is also true: both Jewish and Christian sacred scriptures urge us to take care of the poor, to uphold the cause of the orphan and widow, to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, to remember the sacredness of God’s creation and protect it, to “seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14, also invoked in 1 Peter 3:11). In other words, we were not put on this earth to simply sit by and “let stuff happen”; we are commanded to do our part to make the world a better place. For Jews, this type of action is called *tikkun olam* (“repairing the world”); Christians (I believe) call it “seeking (or bringing about) the Kingdom of God.”

But we all need *balance* in our lives. A person who is “fighting the good fight” (however you perceive it) 24/7 will burn out, be unpleasant for others to be around, and fail to enjoy their own life. It can take a toll on your health, your family relationships, not to mention your relationships with those whose political outlooks differ from yours. Now the urge to take *action* on issues that are important to you – whether it is by signing an online petition, writing or calling your elected officials, or attending a rally or “town hall” meeting – this urge is a positive thing. It is far better to engage with what troubles you than to give in to despair. But we also need ways to calm and center ourselves, to revive our wonder and joy in living, and to replenish our own inner wells so that we are able to give love to others.

Here are a few tips that I have gleaned both from reading up on this subject of “polito-stress” (a word I just made up!), together with my own recommendations:

1. Stop arguing politics on Facebook and social media. (I have disconnected my Facebook from my email account, so I only see it when I decide to go looking – which is not often!)

2. Take up a new interest (or revive an old one): take a class, do something you love regularly – it will renew your *joie de vivre*!

3. Meditate, do yoga, and/or attend religious services and truly immerse yourself in the beauty of prayer and song.

4. Exercise!

5. Do something creative: from adult coloring to cooking to pottery, photography, or poetry...getting your creative juices flowing will bring you amazingly positive energy.

6. Enjoy music (I am listening to Vivaldi as I write this): both producing music (singing or playing an instrument) and listening – whether live or recorded – is food for our souls.

7. Get out in nature! There is something about the sounds and smells in a beautiful natural place, the experience of sunlight on the water, the singing of birds, which helps to remind us that we are a part of a larger cosmos, and brings up *gratitude*, one of the most healing of all emotions.

8. Plan time with family and friends. Yes everyone is so busy, but we humans need positive social interaction like plants need sunlight. Go out and have fun – and stop checking your smartphones!

9. Take a tip from the Jewish tradition of the *Sabbath*: set apart some part of your week on a regular basis to “power down,” shutting off the TV, the computer, your phone, and just focus on being with others, enjoying a meal, reading, taking a walk, and – at the risk of sounding corny – “giving your troubles to God” for one day (or for whatever period you can manage) a week. Your concerns will still be there when your “Sabbath” is over, but you will be revitalized to take them on with energy and a fresh perspective.

A famous teaching of one of the sages of the early rabbinic period, Rabbi Tarfon, speaks aptly to our times:

*“It is not your obligation to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”* Pirkei Avot (“Ethics of our Ancestors”) 2:16

Whatever your political leanings, these are, to say the least, “interesting” times. So go ahead, get involved – but remember to seek balance: to have fun, to maintain genuine person-to-person interactions with others, to enjoy life, to give thanks to your Creator, and hopefully we will inch our way a little closer towards a perfected world.

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