

## This is a Reckoning by Rabbi David Lerner

This is a reckoning.

On Wednesday, we witnessed the lowest moment in American history since slavery, the secession during the Civil War, and the Jim Crow laws and segregation.

The images are seared in our minds forever. An angry mob of rioters storming the capitol incited by the president of the United States.



The *president of the United States* and other elected officials and their enablers encouraging people to engage in domestic terrorism, an armed insurrection.

And they did.

I wish I could say I was surprised.

I am not.

I *am* disgusted.

I *am* saddened.

I *am* ashamed.

Our democracy has been sullied and violated in a way that it has not been since 1865.

Democracies are fragile; as Ben Franklin said, “It’s a republic, if you can keep it.”

If you can keep it.

If you can only keep it.

Can we keep it?

I honestly don’t know any more.

And we have shown that we have been far too complacent.

Too many of us have said Trump is just noise.

Or this one: “But, he is standing up for Israel.”

Or: “he is helping our economy.”

Or: “look at the stock market.”

I have listened to his supporters.

I wish I could say otherwise, but there is no justification for him. We cannot “stand back and stand by” as he told the Proud Boys in the first presidential debate.

I cannot stand idly by.

“*Lo ta’amod al dam reiakha* – do not stand idly by” – when blood is spilled and blood has been spilled.

Five people died on Wednesday. A woman who bought the lies spread by ReTrumplicans. A police officer. Three others who died of medical incidents.

56 police officers were injured.

This was not an accident.



This was caused by an act of sedition by Donald Trump and his son Donald Jr., Rudy Giuliani and others who spoke at the rally that sent thousands to attack the capitol.

Our members of Congress – from both parties – crouched on the ground, fearing for their lives.

The images are searing: Congresswoman Susan Wild lying flat on her back in the House chamber in terror while a former Army Ranger, Representative Jason Crow tries to calm and protect her.

The members of Congress running for their lives from armed insurrectionists.

The image of the officers in the Capitol with guns drawn to the doors to protect those inside. The president turning on his vice-president sending his “troops” to attack and stop the certification of an election.

Which is when these traitors started yelling: “Where’s Pence, where’s Pence.”

The endless lies that have been promulgated ceaselessly on Fox News, NewsMax, Parler, and by the Sinclair Media Group.

This led to tens of millions of the 74 million people who voted for this narcissistic psychopath to believe the election was stolen and thus, the only option for them was violence.

This is a reckoning.

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But it is not just about the unhinged egomaniac. That’s far too simplistic. That’s far too easy. This is not just about one man.

This is about a broken system with far-reaching flaws.

This is about a country that has a broken media that spreads lies worse than 1984.

This is about a country that shoots black men for standing on street corners and beats and shoots them at peaceful protests, but allows white supremacists to run willy-nilly through the halls of Congress, desecrating hallowed ground.

I have been to Congress, I have visited our elected officials there; it is an honor to lobby them, to speak with them – to engage in democracy asking them for support for Israel, asking them to stop gun violence. I have seen the hard work of the government.



But now, we saw 139 members of the Republican party join a farce – a lie, encouraging the overturning of an election. They had no right and NO basis to do this.

And some Republicans called them out for this terrible act that encouraged all this violence.

Three Republican governors including ours have called for President Trump to resign.

This is about a broken political party.

This is about Senator Hawley of Missouri who has blood on his hands according to his own hometown newspaper. His raising his fists to the terrorists, encouraging them to violence.

This is about Senator Cruz who supported and ran the president's delusional election claims.

This is about white supremacy run amok.



This is about growing anti-Semitism.

What did we see on Wednesday?

[The man wearing the Camp Auschwitz sweatshirt.](#)

[On the back it said “Staff.”](#)

The Neo-Nazis.

The 6MWE T-shirts.

What does that stand for? 6 million wasn't enough. 6 million wasn't enough!!! This is the basket of despicable deplorables the president mobilized.



What have we seen since Trump was elected?

He called those who chanted “Jews will not replace us” “very fine people” after the hate rally in Charlottesville back in 2017, then he engaged in frequent anti-Semitic tropes. He encouraged violence which led to the mass shooting at the *shul* in Pittsburgh since that synagogue supported HIAS, which is a Jewish organization that helps immigrants that the president opposed.

And these anti-Semitic tropes have been ignored because, well, he's so good for Israel – he moved the embassy.

Come on.

If you play with fire, you're going to get burned.

Where was the leadership over the last four years calling out the non-stop hate?

I have been told, “Oh, those are just tweets.”

Really, just tweets.

Words, words lead to violence.



Words kill.

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Now today, I could stand before you or rather sit and tell you this is a sad day for America, but new leadership is coming and better days are ahead. I could give an innocuous sermon and not get too “political.”

I could say this is a bad time. There are people saying negative things on both sides of the aisle.

But, I can't.

I can't do it.

I won't do it.

I have listened to different views. I have taken them in. I have meditated and thought about what's going on.

And this is not the time for that.

*That* is simply wrong.

My friends, this is a reckoning.

For all of Trump's apologists. For over half the Republican caucus in the House who still voted for the lie that the election was not fair.

This is a reckoning.

For those who arrest the Black Lives Matter protestors, but did not arrest those who committed treason on Wednesday, this is a reckoning.

Why were so few arrested?

Because this angry mob was white.

Again, we must come back to the racism deeply embedded in our country.

The Confederate flags.



This is a broken country. A country that cannot wear masks to stop a pandemic since its leader didn't think it looked good on him.

A country where there were other armed rallies all around the country like the pro-Trump protestors who broke through the gate at Governor Inslee's mansion in Washington State.

A country where men with long guns roamed around capitals across the country, a country filled with right-wing hate groups who want no gun control and move freely with their weapons intimidating the rest of us.

A country which is trying to undermine the new administration before it even takes office.

A country filled with right-wing hate groups who posted on social media what they were going to do and no one prepared for it!

A country which allowed these criminals to commit crimes and then go home freely.

A country where some Republicans are lying about who committed these acts of sedition, claiming they were not Trump supporters, but Antifa.

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It's important to note that even the [Wall Street Journal](#) has finally awakened to the truth, asking Trump to resign.

This is a reckoning.

As Tom Paine told the colonists in *Common Sense* in January 1776, in a monarchy, "the king is the law, but in a free republic [the law is king](#)."

This is a man who said he could "[stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody](#) and I wouldn't lose any voters."

This is what he said, what he believes.

What does the president think about the storming of the Capitol endangering people's lives?

He enjoyed it. He liked seeing his name on large flags.

That's what ego-maniacs do.

What does he think about the domestic terrorists? He said: "We love you. You are very special."

This is a time for reckoning.

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This president would not agree to a peaceful transfer of power.

Why?

Because he does not want to.

Because his only objective is to retain power.

Because he cares only about himself, his money, and his power.

Most presidents don't want to give up their power, but they have and they do because it's how democracy works.

Now his cabinet, his aides are resigning.

Come on – too late.

Where were you before when we needed moral leadership?

Where were you when the president abdicated his leadership, letting more than 300,000 people die unnecessarily of Covid?

Where were you when we needed someone to protect the children – two-year olds separated from their parents at the border?

Where were you when the president made his disgraceful phone call to the Ukrainian president like a mobster?

Where were you when Muslims were being banned from our country?





Where were you when the president ridiculed people with disabilities?

Where were you when the president fomented hate?

Where were you when the president lied every day?

Where were you when the president was impeached?

Where were you then?

This is a reckoning.

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Our Torah presents us with a different image of leadership. Moshe is a shepherd, a leader who is filled with care and concern for others, for his flock. He is a person of compassion. A person with integrity. He cares for his entire flock, not just some of them.



After God hears the suffering of the enslaved Israelites, the spotlight turns to Moshe, who is driving his flock into the *midbar*, the wilderness.

Why?

Rashi says because Moshe was a moral person and wanted to make sure that his flocks would not graze on someone else's land.

Sforno, a later Medieval commentator, says Moshe went to meditate.

Rabbi Kushner in our *Etz Hayim Humash* points us to the wonderful *midrash* which explains that he went into the wilderness to rescue one lamb that ran away; God realizes this is a man of compassion.

What is a moral leader?

A person of honesty and integrity.

A person who meditates, searching for God's presence, a mystic who can be introspective.

A person of compassion.

But Moshe is more than that. According to another *midrash*, he was not the first one to walk by the burning bush; others did before him, but they did not notice it. Moshe stopped and noticed it.

And then, and only then, did God call him, did God speak to him from the bush.

A leader is someone who notices, who looks around and appreciates the world around her.

And how does Moshe respond to God's call: with the greatest response in human history: *Hineni* – here I am!

I am ready to be a moral leader.

I am ready to stand in the breach.

I am ready to call out injustice.

I am not afraid to call out horrible, seditious acts.

A moral leader speaks out against racism, mysogny, bigotry, hatred, anti-Semitism, violence, White Supremacy, and speaks for those on the margins, the poor, those who have Covid, those who are disabled, those who are in need of homes, those who are out of work, those who are hungry, those who might be evicted.

A leader says: *Hineni*: Here I am – I am ready to serve others, not myself.

And finally, a leader is reluctant to lead, a leader does not thrust themselves into the spotlight. When Moses is asked by God to go to Pharaoh, he says: *Mi Anokhi* – Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" (Ex 3:11)

Our ancient prophets, our great moral leaders from Moses to Jeremiah were reluctant to lead as they were filled with humility, not ego-centrism.

God chooses the humble to lead, not the arrogant.

That is the moral leadership our Torah calls for and that is the moral leadership that we need.

And while this is a reckoning, even amidst the violence and chaos, I saw the glimmers of that leadership.

On Wednesday night, I stayed up with the Members of Congress. I watched as they reconvened in the holy ground of Congress which had been defiled just hours before. I thought of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem when the Maccabees regained control after the idolaters were removed.

I thought of when I lived in Israel and people wanted to go to the cafes that had just been bombed by terrorists in order not to give them any kind of victory.

I thought of those, including me, who wanted to run the Boston Marathon after the Marathon Bombing.

Our representatives did not let domestic terrorists stop the certification of the presidential election, even though the president and his insurrectionists and ReTrumplicans tried to overturn it, and they succeeded in delaying it. Even with the windows and doors smashed in, they returned to their chambers to vote.

I never thought the most boring and rudimentary counting of the electoral college would be so moving...

I had to watch until the end and finally, at 3:39 AM the election was certified, every electoral college vote was counted.



Our representatives showed up, did their jobs, though those who voted with the president will have to answer for their actions. They will have to answer for their complicity.

This is a reckoning for them and their constituents.

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So, my friends, this is a moment we will never forget.

This is one of the lowest moments in American history.

This is a reckoning.

But, the Jewish way is to hold onto hope. Hold your children close, your grandchildren close, your loved ones close, your friends close, your community close, your country close.

Know that there is another model.

A model of moral leadership that Moshe exemplifies in our Torah.

A model of integrity, compassion, and humility.

A different model.

Let this reckoning bring about that moral leadership and let us all say:  
Amen.