

TEMPLE ISRAEL

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OMAHA 32, NEBRASKA

Study of  
Rabbi Sidney H. Brooks

November 18, 1960

President-Elect John F. Kennedy  
Hyannisport  
Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Kennedy:

Enclosed is a letter which I addressed to the  
President-Elect and composed on November 1,  
1960.

It was delivered as a sermon to our congregation  
on November 11, 1960.

With all good wishes, I am

Respectfully yours,

Rabbi Sidney H. Brooks

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November 1, 1960

Dear Mr. President-Elect:

As I write these lines I do not even know your name. But I do know that when the people of the United States have come home from the polls on November 8, 1960 they will have chosen a man of integrity and honor, a man worthy of the title of President of the United States of America.

I, for one, will welcome and support that decision no matter the outcome. For while at this moment I do not know your name, neither do you know mine. But we respect each other and we are dependent upon each other and we will serve each other. Because that is the way of a democracy and that is the climate of freedom and the imperative of the moral responsibility that binds the elected leader to the voting citizen. We do not know each other, but we are united in purpose.

The moment the election ended, Mr. President-Elect, the time for a different kind of thinking began. The campaign was a struggle for political power. Now the administration is a continuing struggle for national achievement. The campaign was a debate. The administration is a cause. The campaign was waged the length and breadth of the land. But your term of office will find its major battleground within your own soul. In the campaign you smiled and greeted millions. You shook hands and kissed babies and were exhilarated by tumultuous applause. You plotted, planned and calculated the effect of every word and syllable. You even said some things

in haste and harassment that were brash and you didn't really mean. You stood before the American people like a doll on a string manipulated by those contriving to make you look good. You were examined and probed, punched and tested, criticized and commended.

Now it is different. The applause is gone. The 'hoopla' is spent. The election is over. Now you are the most powerful and at the same time the loneliest man in the land. No strings now. The decisions are yours.

I do not know your name, but I am grateful for you. I do not know your name, but I pray for you. I don't know your name, but I salute you.

All these many months, Mr. President-Elect, you have spent much time and an effort almost beyond human endurance to tell me what you think, what you believe, what you intend to do. And I understand. The American people listened to you --- and to your opponent --- as never before a nation listened, and considered, and then decided. And we noticed you never said: "I do not know!"

Now, Mr. President-Elect, we are in this together. You, whose name I do not know, and I, just like many millions of citizens whom you do not know. But, we're in this together and I beg, having listened to you, to ask you to listen to us. You've said over and again what you propose to do. Now lend an ear to what we expect you to do.

Firstly, Mr. President-Elect, we beg to hope that, from now until your own successor takes from you the mantle of leadership, you will always put the welfare of our country above partisan political interest.

Ours is a great country. Its foundations are sunk deep into the soil of liberty, religious faith, the equality of its citizens and its destiny to meet its purpose as an example of humanitarianism among all nations.

Sometimes, Mr. President-Elect, the truth hurts us. But it is better to suffer hurt ourselves than to hurt Truth.

Liberty, Mr. President-Elect, comes at high cost. But we beg you, Mr. President-Elect, let us always be willing to pay that price. We shall pay in gold and in risk of life and limb. We shall pay in insecurity and in danger. But we dare not to enslave Liberty itself just to be safe.

Equality, Mr. President-Elect, is a high-sounding word, but a frightfully difficult way of life.

Let us, Mr. President-Elect, take the hard road even if it means loss and injured pride and some danger. But never, Mr. President-Elect, let us compromise equality by the toleration of an imbalance of human rights among us.

Secondly, Mr. President-Elect, let us be assured by every action of yours that Faith in our land goes far beyond men's religious affiliations.

I do not now know your name, Mr. President-Elect, so I cannot know now whether you are a Roman Catholic or Quaker. And you cannot know that I am a Jew. But here in America it is having a Faith that counts --- not what it is.

We would importune you as President of our great land to make it really safe and secure and right for every man to believe or to disbelieve as he wills. Enough in our life-time of persecution and bias and class enmities and inter-religious strife! May God uphold you, Mr. President-Elect, in your Faith, so that you may uphold us in ours.

And, lastly, Mr. President-Elect, though I know not your name, nor you mine, still we do know how to find each other. And, as we shall demand of you, I trust you shall demand of me and of every citizen of our land.

Don't coddle us!

The election is over and our land has great and good things to do. We must and shall work with you. We will dream with you, suffer with you, sacrifice with you. We will think with you and pray with you. But first you must have faith in us, call upon us, demand of us as you demand of yourself. Lead us. Don't go where you think we want to go. Rather guide us where sound judgment tells us the right road lies.

You, Mr. President-Elect, are either a Catholic or a Quaker --- at this moment of writing I know not. I know only that I am a Jew.

And my tradition tells me to thank God for men of wisdom and leadership and courage. I do.

I thank God that in some men there is so burning an ambition to leadership, so great a zeal for service, so wide a compassion and so deep a knowledge as to make them give up their own private lives and joys of family and personal serenity in order to serve their country.

I am grateful in words strange to you, but familiar to me, as I say in words of hallowed Jewish benediction: "Praised be Thou O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who hast given of Thy wisdom to mortals."

To this I would add, with the hope that all our countrymen join me, the prayer that you may prove worthy of your high office and we may prove worthy of our citizenship.

Then may both of us, the governing and the governed, devote ourselves with uncompromising zeal to the Truth as we find it, to our Faith as we believe in it and to whatever tasks and sacrifices may be required of us

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to serve these our United States of America.

With this wish is asked God's blessing upon you, and I remain

Respectfully yours,

Rabbi Sidney H. Brooks