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"In our communities, how should we balance the demands of civility with the disapproval we may feel for someone's politics?"

Response by Rabbi Peter Schweitzer

There's a familiar saying: "Don't talk about race, religion or politics." Especially with family members who have diametrically opposing views. But that guidance is often observed in the breach, particularly at holiday gatherings. Tensions can run high and erupt into all sorts of vitriol, nastiness, and condemnation. All of this is fanned into flamed even quicker when there is an easy flow of liquor.

On normal years, many family members unofficially agree to leave their politics home and find benign subjects to talk about instead, with relative decorum and etiquette. But this year has been oh, so different! Last fall, when I led a pre-election discussion in my congregation, and then another one afterwards, more than a few members voiced their apprehension, or better said, dread, at seeing family members in just a few weeks at Thanksgiving. Even if not a word was spoken, how could they even sit at the same table as those relatives! In fact it made some so nauseous that their solution was to bail on the event. They simply said they wouldn't go and, as good Jews, would volunteer that weekend instead at a local church or soup kitchen.

But how long can you postpone seeing family? One person, who scrapped Thanksgiving, just couldn't put off the annual trip to Florida in December to see her aging grandmother who, horrors, voted for the other person! But my member decided that honoring one's parents and grandparents was the higher value and so she gritted her teeth, practiced calming breathing, and made the annual pilgrimage. The dread was worse than the bite and it turned out to be more tolerable than expected. The other family members brandished no swords, had no need to gloat, and were just glad she came. As was she, but what anxiety.