

The Trump Administration and Jewish Values

By Lori Lefkowitz

On Immigration “Welcome the stranger for once you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Over the generations, the principle of welcoming the stranger has been echoed at the Passover Seder, when Jews the world over celebrate freedom and deliverance from tyranny and affirm our commitment both to upholding liberty and to maintaining humility. In the Jewish mythic imagination, our identity as a nation begins in enslavement and rests on gratitude for divine support for our redemption.

The words on the Liberty Bell come from the Levitical description of the Jubilee, “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all inhabitants thereof” (25:10), a sentiment enshrined also on the Statue of Liberty, in words by a Jewish woman who dedicated her volunteer energies to the resettlement of Jewish refugees fleeing Russian pogroms. In an allusion to the prophet Deborah, the “woman of the flames,” Emma Lazarus wrote: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.”

On Religious Discrimination When George Washington thanked the small Jewish community in Newport, R.I. for its welcome, he expressed his vision of America in the words of the Hebrew prophet Micah: “every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and figtree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.” America is founded in freedom from fear. America’s founding father went on to echo back the words that the Jewish community had written to him: “For happily the Government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens....”

On Refugee Policy and Treatment of Minorities So, too, the founding parents of monotheism, Abraham and Sarah, are most honored for their hospitality, and the Midrash imagines that their desert tent had four open tent flaps, so that travelers could be welcomed no matter from which direction they came. The book of Esther warns about the dangers of Jewish life in the Diaspora, where a mercurial monarch can be manipulated by a greedy, intolerant narcissistic advisor with genocidal impulses.

On Social Welfare The Jewish mystical tradition emphasizes the human power to repair cosmic damage by observing the *mitzvot*, which include the relentless pursuit of fairness and justice. Jewish values emphasize *chesed*, gracious generosity, and caring for the poor, the widow, and anyone who has been left behind. The Book of Ruth celebrates the landowner Boaz, who munificently observed the law to leave the corners of his fields for the needy gleaners, and whose marriage to Ruth, the foreign woman who attached herself to the Jewish people, led to the baby from whom the Davidic line towards Messianic redemption would continue.

On Democracy Judaism asks us to see divine glory in the faces of humanity, in all of its diversity, and Jewish values emphasize compassion, so that when we are judged, we may have earned mercy for ourselves.