

CONGREGATION BETH ISRAEL

Established in 1858

Congregation Beth Israel, Portland – Clergy Statement of Principles

Immediately following the Presidential election of 2016, there was a great deal of fear and trepidation among many in our community. Many expressed dread that protections once afforded might be lifted and efforts to enhance those protections might be hindered. We heard campaign rhetoric leading up to the election which singled out certain religions, ethnicities and countries of origin for treatment negating equal protection under the law. At the same time certain groups, not necessarily sanctioned by the incoming administration, have become emboldened to express hateful rhetoric against various minorities and have followed up words with action. The incidence of hate crimes and Anti-Semitic incidents has risen greatly across the US since the election, including close to our own community.

The clergy of Congregation Beth Israel have counseled vigilance and patience. We respect the office of the President and challenge the occupant to live up to his stated goal of uniting our greatly divided country. We will remain watchful for actions that fail to live up to these goals and will organize and protest proposed policies which violate our principles. We publically reiterate these principles and pledge to do all we can to insure their continuity:

1. *B'tzelem Elohim* (Gen. 1:27)

- a. All humans are created in the image of G-d and are therefore deserving of full respect. We will protest vigorously any attempt to single out or denigrate any person or persons based on their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or country of origin. Based on campaign rhetoric we specifically reject:
 - i. Any attempt to devise a registration program based on religion or country of origin
 - ii. Any attempt to relegate individuals to a lesser citizenship status based on religion or country of origin
 - iii. Any attempt to require enhanced identification or more frequent identification checks for individuals based on their religion or country of origin
 - iv. So called “stop and frisk” techniques which target individuals based on perceived race, religion or country of origin
 - v. Any attempts to roll back protections or equal pay for women and minorities, or reduce a woman’s right to the control of her own body and reproductive choices
 - vi. Any attempt to reduce the civil rights of LGBTQ citizens by rejecting marriage equality, workplace protections or allowing any form of discrimination – including being denied services, products or housing based on their sexual orientation or gender identity

2. *Ahavat Gehrim* (Deut. 10:19)

- a. Love of the immigrant stranger is a commandment reiterated multiple times on the Torah – most often with the phrase “Love, therefore, the stranger – for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” As an immigrant people ourselves we know the incredible value that diversity brings to our nation. While recognizing the responsibility to maintain control of our borders and to moderate illegal immigration, we decry attempts to paint immigrants broadly as criminals and worse. Specifically:
 - i. We reject mass deportation and the breaking up of families.
 - ii. We support sanctuary cities and houses of worship who pledge not to do the work of federal immigration authorities
 - iii. We support pathways to citizenship
 - iv. We support children of immigrants who wish to take part in the American Dream

3. *Rapo Y'rapeh* (Ex. 21:19)

- a. “You will cause them to be thoroughly healed,” the Torah commands. Throughout the ages, our Jewish texts have supported full access to health care and a full commitment to healing. We support:
 - i. Universal, affordable health care and we reject attempts to limit that access through privatization and other means. Any proposed replacement of or adjustment to the Affordable Care Act must meet the criteria of broad accessibility, and rejection of insurers’ attempts to limit access based on pre-existing conditions.
 - ii. Government sponsored efforts to control disease and infections domestically and internationally, and to find cures – including “moonshot efforts” to cure cancer. We support efforts to engage in primary research, including in programs to better manage medical care and reduce costs.

4. *Lo Ta'amod* (Lev. 19:16)

- a. “You shall not stand idly by while your neighbor bleeds” we are taught. We see homelessness, mental illness and despair and we will not stand idly by. We support:
 - i. Programs to provide food for the hungry
 - ii. Programs to provide shelter for the homeless
 - iii. Programs to give clothes to those in need
 - iv. Programs to support children of homeless families to provide food, safety and quality education
 - v. We also support governmental regulations which help to save lives, including air and water pollution controls, food safety, and sensible gun violence protections.

5. *Et Beneihem Yilmedu* (Deut. 4:10)

- a. “That they may teach their children.” Quality education is a birthright for every child. We support efforts to improve education and reject attempts to limit access. We reject:
 - i. Effort to privatize education through vouchers and other means which strip funds away from public schools and eliminate oversight and standards
- b. We support:
 - i. Efforts to make higher education more affordable

6. *Dilma Damah* (Talmud: Sanhedrin 74a)

- a. “Who knows that your blood is redder? Perhaps his is redder than yours.” Raba’s dictum to resist the order of a commander who demands that you kill another reminds us that even in times of danger we do not take the life of another lightly. Similarly, to torture another in the hopes of some gain is an anathema.

We reject:

- i. Efforts to bring back “enhanced interrogation” or other forms of torture
- ii. Efforts to deliver combatants into the hands of foreign government in the hopes that they will torture
- iii. The reinstatement of secret overseas prisons where prisoners can be denied human rights
- iv. Any attempts to limit the civil and human rights of prisoners of war, including suspected terrorists

7. *Bal Tashchit* (Deut. 20:19-20)

- i. Even in a time of war, “you shall not destroy its trees” the Torah proclaims. We are enjoined to be guardians of this earth and to protect it for the ages to come. We support:
 - 1. Efforts to reduce the impact of climate change and to reduce the use and release of carbon dioxide and other ozone depletion chemicals
 - 2. Increased use of renewable and low carbon forms of energy production
 - 3. Increased protection of the natural environment

These seven Jewish principles are intended to help guide us in our decision making. They help hold our community accountable to speak truth to power, to stand and be counted, to make our voices heard. Now is a time for our community to stand together and help build and protect the kind of world we believe in. As Hillel reminds us: “If not now, when?” (*Pirke Avot* 1:14)

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