

Rabbi's Column

Immigration, refugees, and interfaith support.

It is hard to avoid that this week. However, refugees have been on my mind for quite some time now. When I was in Omaha, I was part of the group working to help the second wave of Russian refuseniks become settled in America. I met them in the airport, I worked with a few of them on learning English (and they helped improve my Russian to a 2 year old level), and I helped work with them in the Synagogue and in the Day School.

More recently, back in 2015, I signed the Rabbinic Letter in Support of Refugees, which was written soon after more of the world became aware of how bad things were in Syria; that it was more than just the Christian Copts who were the targets of oppression, abuse and genocidal actions - it was also groups like the Yazidi and the Kurds.

There used to be 63 million refugees worldwide. According to an update recorded just last week, that number is now 65 million. Only a very small percentage of them are ever in the process of being moved to another country. Not because many of them would not be willing to leave where they are and move somewhere else. It is because it is a long process to get accepted into a country, and much of the time you spend away from home waiting for your final destination to open up.

In the US, there are 9 organizations that deal with immigration. Six of them are religious in nature (Catholics, Jews, Lutherans, Episcopalians and others whom I forget right now). The Mormons recently decided that the others were so good at what they did, that rather than try to develop the same kind of infrastructure, they would just help to financially support them.

All of them talk with each other and work with each other.

65 million.

I remember the discussions concerning going up to 100,000 refugees coming to America, and how that would be a problem. Somehow, though, I cannot get around that other number. 65 million.

It is very likely that next Sunday, in papers throughout the State, there will be a paid page thanks to members of the Cheyenne Interfaith Council and other religious groups, which will

contain snippets from as many statements as were provided by various clergy that had been promulgated by their national organizations in reaction to the events of the past weeks. I believe the bottom line will probably prove to be the same as my personal message to our State Senators and Representative - Vetting continues to be important, as if it should ever happen that the Boko Haram, for example, is militarily defeated, I would not want them in this country as war refugees. However, we should switch our acceptance from a random number to a percentage of the population. I would go with 1%, which would let us bring in 3 million refugees per year. (We might need to tweak that number and say 1% every five years, just to enable the refugees to each receive the help they need to integrate properly. This would still be more than anything anyone else has actually done recently.)

Some Americans are anti-semitic; some are anti-Muslim. A portion of those have been acting out their feelings recently throughout this hemisphere and in other parts of the world as well. Within North America for sure, and in a few other places in the world, Jews have been helping out Muslims, and Muslims have been helping out Jews. It is nice to live in a place where that can happen.

In the Torah, this week, we leave Mitzrayim and begin the journey to freedom from oppression and the freedom to act responsibly. May we soon leave the narrow straits we are in, and help bring people out from under oppression until the entire world acts responsibly. Let a plague of peace break out over the war torn lands, and may those who profit from death soon go broke.