



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
Congregation Beth Tikvah
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday, July 2, 2021 ~ Parsha: *Pinhas*

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

In Celebration of America

For many years, I have had a tradition of sharing a document of great Jewish historical significance on the Shabbat that either preceded or followed July 4. I want to share it this week in my Shabbat message to the community. As you read it, please consider the audience to which it was directed, and understand the perspective of the small Jewish community in the USA in the post-revolutionary war era, a community likely numbering less than 5000.

Who were the first American Jews? They were Sephardic Jews whose ancestors were forced from Spain during the Inquisition, only to flee their own homes in Brazil when Spain wrested control of Dutch colonies in the New World and brought the Inquisition to South America. They fled to the United States, seeking religious freedom, economic opportunity, and a safe home. And they were followed by millions of Jews who have arrived during the 245 years of our nation's existence.

Only the "... self- evident truths" espoused in the Declaration of Independence made this possible.

George Washington, our nation's first president, visited Newport, Rhode Island in August 1790, and was welcomed by many city leaders, among them the warden to the Newport Hebrew Synagogue (now known as the Touro Synagogue). This was his reply to them.

Letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island

August 18, 1790

Gentlemen.

While I receive, with much satisfaction, your Address replete with expressions of affection and esteem; I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you, that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport, from all classes of Citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet, from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good Government, to become a great and a happy people.

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people, that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my Administration, and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other Inhabitants; while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

Go. Washington

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner