

Jewish American Heritage Month

HOW JUDAISM SHAPED THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICA.



04 FREEDOM FOR ALL



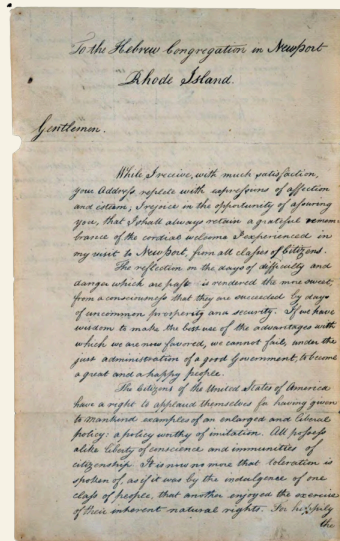
The inscription on the Liberty Bell is from the Torah.

“Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.”

-Leviticus 25:10



01 ANTI-BIGOTRY



President George Washington’s letter on tolerance to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island in 1790, quoted the Hebrew prophet Micah.

“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.”



Download our free curriculum on the History of the Jewish People here!

02 INSPIRING PROGRESS

“The Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations.”

-John Adams

03 THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

Themes from the Torah were central to the founding of America’s most prestigious institutions of higher learning, including Ivy League schools like Yale and Columbia, whose seals reflect this inspiration.



The Yale seal shows the Hebrew “Urim V’Tummim,” the Hebrew equivalent of Yale’s motto “Light and Truth.” The same words appeared on the breastplates of the Kohanim (the High Priests) in the days of the Temple. At the top of the Columbia seal is the tetragrammaton, the four-letter representation of G-d’s name, which Jews consider too holy to be spoken aloud.

05 HEBREW OR ENGLISH?

Due to the dislike of all things English, the early Americans considered making Hebrew their official language. In 1620, pilgrim leader William Bradford held a deciding vote on the Mayflower as to which language they would speak. Hebrew lost by one single vote.

06 THE AMERICAN DREAM

*“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

These final lines of “The New Colossus,” the sonnet at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, epitomize the open arms and promises of opportunity at the heart of the American Dream.

The poem’s author was Emma Lazarus, a Jewish New Yorker inspired by the Jewish ideals that fueled her passion for safe immigration to America and the Land of Israel.

