

IN honor of the new president's inauguration this January, a group of religious scholars got together to create something they are calling: 100 Days/100 Letters.

One hundred prominent religious teachers at seminaries and universities in 21 states and 68 different institutions, a bipartisan group of people of faith, are each writing a letter to the president about American and Religious Values.

The prompt was to articulate core American and religious values that have grounded our nation in the past and should guide us forward. Those writing include Christians from across the spectrum including the African American, Evangelical, Latino, and Greek Orthodox Church, Jews- also across the spectrum including a professor from Yeshivah University, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindu's, women as well as men, native born and immigrants.

As I share with you what they have written for these first five weeks (we were at 34 when I sat down to type this up), I hope that you will think about what you would draw from were you asked to address the President, Vice President and Congress?

In the letters that have been written so far the Hebrew Scriptures were pretty popular and not just with Jews.

I learned that the most quoted Biblical verse in colonial America's political conversation was Micah 6:8- do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Malachi (Have we not one God?) have also been quoted widely in these letters. The idea of humans being created in the divine image, male and female, was also cited repeatedly. The double commandment of loving God and loving your neighbor, from the Hebrew Scripture but also given prominence in the New Testament, was popular as well.

There was also a fair amount of "What Would Jesus Do" and discussion of the concept of the common good. 2nd Corinthians, of campaign fame, was discussed with its important teaching that one must share in sufferings as well as consolations.

Interestingly, there was also frequent reference to people outside the world of Scripture and one of the most popular of these was former President Ronald Reagan.

(6)Uriah Kim, dean of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, quoted Reagan on the uniqueness of America. He told the story of the time President Ronald Reagan shared a letter he received before he left office: “You can go to live in France, but you can’t become a Frenchman. You can go to live in Germany or Italy, but you can’t become a German, an Italian”. He went through Turkey, Greece, Japan and other countries. “But,” he said,” anyone, from any corner of the world, can come to live in the United States and become an American.” Reagan read this letter to affirm his belief that the United States is where foreigners not only can be welcomed but also can become Americans. (31) Yii Jan Lin from Yale Divinity School, quoted Reagan drawing on imagery from the book of Revelations, but we know it as well from the later chapters of Isaiah. In his **farewell speech** to the nation in 1989, President Ronald Reagan spoke of his vision for America, describing the country as a “shining city...with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity, and if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.”

Finally Reagan was also quoted by Jean-Pierre Ruiz of St. John's College, with his perhaps most famous remarks: "Tear Down this Wall". This led into a reference to Pope Francis and his recent statement: "A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian"

Eisenhower was also quoted as President and as a 5-star general, in remarks that parallel teachings from Matthew: "Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed.". And finally Amy Jill Levine, a New Testament scholar, from Vanderbilt University, quoted George W Bush retelling the story of the good Samaritan and our need not to pass to the other side when we see someone in need. No Democratic Presidents were quoted thus far perhaps because of whom these letters are hoping to influence.

Faith and faith communities play a significant role in American politics. I'm glad to see this effort to encourage people to think more deeply about what their faith demands. I hope it inspires you too to think about the guidance that Judaism offers in this time and place.