

Bet Shira

Port Townsend's Jewish Community

בית שירה



Bet Shira Stands Up for Rights of Refugees and Immigrants

Bet Shira, the Jewish community of the greater Port Townsend area, has a membership of people from diverse backgrounds who seek an active religious life on the Olympic Peninsula. The vast majority, if not all of our members, can trace their roots to other countries of the world. Their ancestors left familiar homes and came to America to escape oppression and / or to search for a better life and greater opportunities.

Those who arrived in New York Harbor after October 1886 were greeted by The Statue of Liberty, a universal symbol of freedom and democracy. The sonnet, The New Colossus, by Emma Lazarus, one of the first successful Jewish American authors, is graven on a tablet within the pedestal upon which the Statue stands.

These final two lines of the sonnet are as important today as they were when she composed them in 1883 and they steadfastly describe how we think about immigration and freedom today:

*"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!"*

We believe that America should stand out among all countries of the world as a welcoming place for people fleeing religious persecution, genocide, and terror while seeking to provide a safe haven for themselves and their families.

The Board of Bet Shira agrees with the eloquent and powerful statement supporting refugees of all backgrounds as expressed by over 1900 Rabbis from across the spectrum of Jewish thought, and put forth by the HIAS Foundation (formerly, the of Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society):

We appeal to our elected officials to ensure that the refugee program be maintained and strengthened for refugees of all ethnic and religious backgrounds – not halted, paused, or restricted.

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