

As soon as our friends in Florida learned that we had accepted a pulpit in Indiana, the jokes began. What kind of jokes? Hoosier jokes, or to be more precise, one Hoosier joke, which an incredible number of people believed they would be the only one to think of. I cannot tell you how many people wondered if my congregants here would ask, “Hoosier rabbi?” as in who’s your rabbi. Thus far, no real Hoosier has asked that question.

They also tended to say something like, “So you’re going to be a Hoosier.” I told them that I did not know for sure what it takes to be a Hoosier. Do you have to be born in Indiana? Do you have to grow up in Indiana? Or does one qualify for the title Hoosier simply by moving to Indiana? My favorite online dictionary defines Hoosier as a native or resident of Indiana, so at least by that standard, I am in fact now a Hoosier.

Those who know my background might think of me as a Floridian. That would be inaccurate. Two of my children were born in Florida and are therefore Floridians, but

although I lived there for eighteen years, I do not consider myself a Floridian. I was born in Philadelphia, grew up in the greater Philadelphia area, and Arlene and I lived in the city itself for six years when we were first married. There will always be a part of me that is proud to be a Philadelphian, and interestingly, the source of that pride stems from my Jewish identity.

There are many reasons to be proud to be from Philadelphia. It was once the capital of the United States, the Continental Congress met there as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were written and adopted, Benjamin Franklin lived and was buried there, and I could go on and on with these kinds of colonial examples. But for me as a Jew, there is a different source for my pride as a Philadelphian. That source is the Liberty Bell.

I love the Bell. I never tire of going to see the Bell, and I have taken our children to see it on at least two occasions, maybe more. Every time I go, I feel moved. Sometimes I

even literally get chills up my spine. The reason is not the bell itself, but the words cast into the metal. Around the top of the bell are the words *DhyjRbVvOy_IDkVI X®r™DaD;b rwÿør√;d M¶RtaðrVq...w*. No, the words are not written in Hebrew, but they come directly from our Torah, and the reference is even cited on the Bell itself. The Liberty Bell bears the words from Leviticus 25:10—Proclaim liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof. I am deeply moved by the fact that this proud symbol of America greets hundreds of visitors every day with a quote from our Torah.

But now I must confess that in truth, I am being a little bit unfair in being proud of my Philadelphia roots because of the Liberty Bell. The fact is that the Liberty Bell is not a symbol of Philadelphia, it is a symbol of America. Every American Jew can take pride in the fact that the Liberty Bell carries a verse from the Torah. To continue my confession, it is not fair to limit that pride to American Jews, because the Torah is not only sacred to us, but sacred to Christians as well. Each and every American

who believes in Judeo-Christian values believes in the value of liberty. Each and every American who believes, as President Kennedy put it, that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God, can and should take pride in the fact that this concept, this uniquely American concept, is cast forever in the great bronze bell that Philadelphia is privileged to house.

I am not sure if people will remember much of anything that I say in my sermons, but this one I think you will remember, because I am going to give you a little mnemonic to remind you of this concept which reflect so well on both the United States of America and our Judeo-Christian heritage. That mnemonic is a simple coin. On our coins you can find what has been called the American Trinity: E Pluribus Unum (From Many, One), In God We Trust, and Liberty. Every time you see a coin, let it remind you of that word, Liberty, and let it remind you that is was our Torah that inspired America's founders to make liberty one of the core values of this country. Let that be a source

of pride to all of us. Perhaps travel to Philadelphia some day and see this great national treasure for yourself. If you do so, please understand that as a rabbi, I cannot encourage you to sample Philadelphia's signature sandwich, the (unkosher) cheese steak, but I can recommend the soft pretzels, which are properly eaten with mustard. Pay Philadelphia a visit and you might find you sharing in my pride in the city and its Liberty Bell, just as my family and I share your pride in being able to say that at least according to Merriam-Webster, we are now Hoosiers.