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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
Reform Judaism is the official voice of the Union for Reform Judaism, linking the institutions and affiliates of Reform Judaism with every Reform Jew. *RJ* covers developments within our Movement while interpreting world events and Jewish tradition from a Reform perspective. Shared by 305,000 member households, *RJ* conveys the creativity, diversity, and dynamism of Reform Judaism.

DEAR READER

A Jewish Voter's Guide

The political season is upon us in the United States. What political guidance does Jewish tradition offer?

Democrats take note: Judaism recognizes the importance of private property and warns, in I Samuel 8, against the dangers of “big government” and the tendency of those in authority to expropriate persons and property for their own purposes.

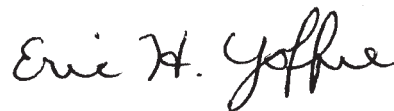
Republicans take note: Torah recognizes the need for periodic redistributions of wealth to minimize income disparities between rich and poor. In Leviticus 25, it calls for taking radical steps—cancelling debts every 7 years and returning land to its original owners every 50 years—to limit those disparities.

Both sides need to be careful when drawing inferences from Torah about the political issues of the day. In truth, Judaism does not endorse any specific political organization, party, or program.

This does not mean that politics is to be avoided; it means that *partisan* politics is to be avoided. If you say that Judaism makes you a Democratic or a Republican, you are mistaken; but if you say that Judaism has something to contribute to a political matter, you are likely right. Judaism, after all, is about the application of ethical teachings to the moral dilemmas of our world. Judaism responds to the misuse of power, oppression of the weak, and everyday injustices in society.

In short, Jewish tradition offers us an ethical framework to guide our political thinking. And the values it teaches are clear: dignity of the individual, *mentschlikeit* (acting with integrity), and, above all, *rachmanut* (compassion). God is addressed as *El Male Rachamim* (God who is full of compassion). Compassion is what enables us to go beyond ourselves to the beating pulse of the rest of the world, to feel the pain that is not our own.

Every time we hear a politician speak, whether about illegal immigration, or economic hardship, or human rights, let us ask ourselves: Are his/her words consistent with the values of our Jewish tradition? The application of these values to actual problems is never simple, but nonetheless the effort must be made. After all, the prophets, and the rabbis as well, were “non-partisan” but never uninvolved. For them, a synagogue or house of study could never be a place of escape or an excuse to avert one’s eyes from the problems of the real world.



Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie
President, Union for Reform Judaism

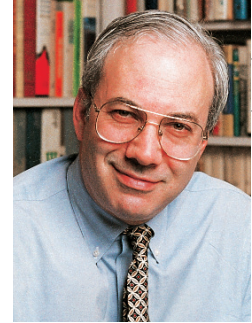


Photo by Henry Grossman

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