

Imagine, Remember, Reflect, and React

Thought for the Day

Ephraim Borowski (Director, Scottish Council of Jewish Communities)

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Last week, Jewish Care Scotland, one of our main welfare organisations, celebrated its 150th anniversary, by re-enacting the arrival of refugees from Eastern Europe, to be welcomed – *this* time – by the Lord Provost of Glasgow kitted out in Victorian finery. Unfortunately the original arrivals were not so well received, just as later immigrants and asylum-seekers are all too often viewed with suspicion today.

We know that we are all descended from immigrants – whether from Scandinavia, or Ireland, or Eastern Europe, or Pakistan, or Africa. But sadly that knowledge often doesn't stop us wanting to put up the barricades behind us, to stop later arrivals from following in our footsteps.

This week's reading from the Torah in synagogues throughout the world reminded us of the basic principles of social justice – to support the stranger, the widow, and the orphan; to establish unbiased and incorruptible courts of law; and to respect the life, property, and rights of others. Nowhere there do we find that restricted to our own family, friends, or community. On the contrary, the Bible repeatedly reminds us that these obligations extend to strangers, and even – especially – to enemies.

Last weekend, Holocaust Memorial Day was marked by ceremonies focussing on the four themes: “*imagine, remember, reflect, and react*”. The first of these, *imagine* is sadly ever more important, as the generation who themselves *remember* the horrors of the death camps, whether as victims or as liberators, are no longer here to speak for themselves.

We have a duty not just to *reflect* but to *react* – to help the stranger, not merely to feel sympathy. That's a lot to ask. I can't personally feed the hungry in Darfur or Zimbabwe, nor can I stop Kenya spiralling into tribal genocide, but I can speak out – and so can you – so that those we elect to act for us know that we will not stand and watch, while what we all swore would never happen again ... happens again.

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