

Citizenship and the Ummah

By: Rabbi Philip Lefkowitz

US Citizenship and Immigration Services recently announced a change in the loyalty oath for future citizens in respect to the Muslim belief that one may never bear arms against the ummah, the Muslim world. This fact has largely been ignored by the media

“USCIS Clarifies Eligibility Requirements for Modifications to the Oath of Allegiance

Effective July 21, 2015, new guidance (PA-2015-001) in the USCIS Policy Manual clarifies the eligibility requirements for modifications to the Oath of Allegiance.

Reciting the Oath is part of the naturalization process. Candidates for citizenship normally declare that they will “bear arms on behalf of the United States” and “perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States” when required by the law. A candidate may be eligible to exclude these two clauses based on religious training and belief or a conscientious objection.

The new guidance clarifies that a candidate:

May be eligible for modifications based on religious training and belief, or conscientious objection arising from a deeply held moral or ethical code.

Is not required to belong to a specific church or religion, follow a particular theology or belief, or to have had religious training in order to qualify.

May submit, but is not required to provide, an attestation from a religious or other type of organization, as well as other evidence to establish eligibility.

This guidance updates Volume 12 of the Policy Manual.”

Many years ago when I registered for the draft, there was the option to elect conscientious objection. If one claimed this exemption based upon his religious faith, he was required to provide a letter from his clergy person stating he was a member of the given church and that conscientious objection was a religious principle of that church. It was clearly stated to me when I questioned the conscientious objection exemption that one was unable to elect the exemption if one claimed Judaism as his religious belief, as Judaism does not endorse pacifism. One could, for example, as a Quaker, a religious denomination that teaches pacifism, claim conscientious objection. This new change in the oath of citizenship, cleverly allows one to elect conscientious objection as a Muslim, even to the degree of refusing to perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces. American history bears out the fact that in the past conscientious objectors did serve in noncombatant activities such as unarmed stretcher bearers on the battlefield. These men were deeply respected by their fellow soldiers for their loyalty to our nation and valiant service on the battlefield.

The Koran has over 100 verses which require the believing Muslim to go to battle with non-believers for the sake of defending and advancing the cause of Islam worldwide. Many of these verses are quite explicit containing commands to chop off heads and fingers and seeking out the non-believer wherever he is hiding. In fact, some verses state that those Muslims who, do not enter the battle are hypocrites and Allah will take His revenge on them. Here is but one example of such a verse:

Koran 9:29 “Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the last day, nor hold that forbidden which has been forbidden by Allah and His messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they are) of the people of the book (generally refers to Jews and Christians), until they pay

the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.”

As all these verses in the Koran refer to war with the nonbeliever, there is a sense among Muslims that they are forbidden to fight the ummah, the international nation of Islam on behalf of the nonbeliever. With the change in the oath of allegiance, Muslims may elect not to defend the United States as members of the Armed Forces, even to the extent of serving in noncombatant positions.

In the past, American Jews have suffered the false accusation of dual loyalty. Most recently, this ugly and untrue attack on the American Jewish citizen was subtly resurrected in an attempt to cower American Jewry into supporting President Obama’s deal with Iran. The dual loyalty accusation claims that Jews will stand with other Jews around the world and since 1948, the State of Israel even when the Jewish State is in conflict with the United States. This dual loyalty accusation had tangible negative consequences for American Jewry.

Yet now the United States government itself is recognizing the RIGHT for Muslim’s, to believe in a religion that, far from endorsing pacifism, urges war on a regular basis with nonbelievers, which would include the overwhelming majority of Americans who are Christians, to elect not to serve in any fashion in the Armed Forces of the United States when our country is confronted by other Muslims. Given today’s geopolitical realities in which many of our adversaries on the world stage are Muslim theocracies, the probability of further military engagement with such states, his probable. Further, it would appear a fair question to pose is whether Muslims living in the United States would feel compelled in time of battle to involve themselves in actions against their fellow non-Muslim American citizens.

I have been given to understand that this change in the law

was prompted by American Muslims.

About the Author: Rabbi Philip Lefkowitz is the rav of Agudas Achim North Shore Congregation in Chicago. During his nearly five decades in the rabbinate he has led congregations in the U.S., Canada and the United Kingdom and served as an officer, Executive Committee member and chair of the Legislative Committee of the Chicago Rabbinical Council.