

WE WERE STRANGERS TOO

Passover Seder Haggadah Supplement on Immigration

Our ancestors were immigrants to Egypt. They came fleeing economic insecurity (famine in Canaan; see Gen. 42:5) and in search of stability and freedom. At first, because Pharaoh knew Joseph personally, he welcomed his family. But then, a lack of familiarity led to contempt; “a new king arose over Egypt who knew not Joseph.” (Ex. 1:8)

Despite the contributions of the Israelites to Egyptian society, the new Pharaoh’s ignorance led to fear and he began to agitate and legislate against them: “Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise from the ground.” (Ex. 1:9-10) The resulting experience of oppression became the point of reference for one of the most profound expressions of Jewish ethics (Ex. 23:9):



“
You shall not
oppress a
stranger, for
you know the
feelings of the
stranger, having
yourselves
been strangers
in the land of
Egypt.
”

- At the Seder table, we reflect on the current implications of the Passover story. We confront the ways that slavery and modern-day injustice exists in widespread immigration and refugee bias plaguing society today.
- At a time when immigration policy is ripping families apart, rejecting refugees escaping violence and brutality, and threatening our nation’s core values, we remember what it was like to be “strangers in a strange land.”



FOR DISCUSSION

- Share your personal or family experience as immigrants and/or refugees.
- What do you think it might be like to have to leave your home and suddenly move to another country that may or may not be welcoming?
- What do you know about the refugee crisis and immigration issues? What are your thoughts and feelings about it?
- How do those issues connect back to the Passover story?
- What do you think it means to “welcome the stranger?”

FOR DEEPER REFLECTION

- What stereotypes and bias have you seen and heard about immigrants and refugees? How do you feel about what you’ve seen and heard?
- How can we prevent stereotypes from taking hold and infecting immigration policy?
- What are the modern plagues that still oppress so many, including immigrants? What can we do to help?

Many of us now sit comfortably in our homes. Tonight we feast in safety and plenty. But as the Haggadah reminds us, citing Rabban Gamliel (BT Pesachim 117b), we should never forget our history or become complacent.

בכל דור ודור חייב אדם לראות את עצמו
כאלו הוא יצא ממצרים

In every generation each of us is obligated to see ourselves as if we, personally, had come out of Egypt. At our Seder table, let us commit not merely to remember, but to act so that all who seek safety and security will find open hands and open hearts.

HERE ARE SOME ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE TODAY

- Contact your representative in Congress to urge them to Stand Up for Refugees and pass the Dream Act in order to protect hundreds of thousands of Dreamers whose lives hang in the balance.
- Consider how you can be an ally if you see someone who is or perceived to be an immigrant being targeted either in your school, community or online.
- Educate others about what is happening around the increase of anti-immigrant bigotry and scapegoating by talking to others, sharing information on social media or helping to organize an education forum in your community.
- Make connections to immigration, undocumented immigrants and other issues of racial justice.

Visit [ADL.org](https://www.adl.org) for additional Passover resources!