



Come and Learn: A Modern Immigration Midrash

We offer this resource to read at your seder table where your haggadah instructs you to read the midrash on “My Father Was A Wandering Aramean” during Magid. We hope this reading encourages your table to connect with the Exodus story and with your own immigration stories, and to see the role we all can play in building a world that is safer and more welcoming.

MAGID | COMMENTARY ON DEUTERONOMY 26:5-9

Reader 1

צָא וְלִמַּד מֵה בִּקְשׁ לָבֵן הָאֲרָמִי לַעֲשׂוֹת
לִיעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ: שְׁפָרְעָה לֹא גָזַר אֶלָּא עַל
הַזְּכָרִים, וְלָבֵן בִּקְשׁ לַעֲקֹר אֶת־הַכֹּל. שְׁנֵאמַר:
אֲרָמִי אֵבֶד אָבִי, וַיֵּרֶד מִצְרַיִם וַיְגַר שָׁם
בְּמִתֵּי מַעַט, וַיְהִי שָׁם לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל, עָצוּם וְרַב.

Come and learn what Laban the Aramean sought to do to our father, Jacob. For Pharaoh issued his edict against only the males, but Laban sought to uproot us all, as it is said, ‘An Aramean was destroying my father, and he went down to Egypt and he became there a great nation, strong and numerous.’

Juan’s story: “With much foresight to the oncoming political violence, my parents fled Venezuela in 2000, with my two brothers and me in tow, for the United States. In 2006, we learned that an immigration attorney had mishandled our immigration case, which meant that, after six years of legal fees and paying taxes, we were no longer on the path towards U.S. Citizenship.

“By the time President Obama announced the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2012, I had graduated from Florida State University with a political science degree. I fought (and lost) two legislative fights in support of the Dream Act, helped enact a law in Florida that would provide in-state tuition for undocumented students across the state, and helped organize thousands of Dreamers from all across the country. Since 2013, DACA has protected my brothers and me from deportation.”¹

The rabbis of the Midrash here are playing off an ambiguity in this verse from the Torah (Deuteronomy 26:5). The Hebrew word אֵבֶד *oved* in its original context likely means “wandering/fugitive,” with the meaning “My father [Jacob] was a wandering Aramean.” But it can also mean “destroyed”; in the midrash that forms the core of the Haggadah, the rabbis assign it this second meaning, changing the verse so it now reads “An Aramean [Laban] was destroying my father.” This highlights the kinds of oppression and danger that can cause people to flee their homes in search of safety elsewhere.

¹ Read more stories like Juan’s online: <https://www.dreamerstories.com/project/juan-escalante-is-a-dreamer>

Reader 2

וַיַּרְעוּ אֶת־נוֹ הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיַּעֲנוּנוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ עָלֵינוּ עֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה: וַנִּצְעַק אֶל־ה' אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַיִּשְׁמַע ה' אֶת־קִלְנוּ וַיֵּרָא אֶת־עַנְיֵנוּ וְאֶת־עֲמָלְנוּ וְאֶת־לַחֲצֵנוּ:

“The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. We cried to God, the God of our ancestors, and God heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression.”

Today, the U.S. continues to take steps that make it harder and harder for people fleeing oppression and violence to seek asylum in our country. Policies like Title 42 and asylum bans have been implemented by Republican and Democratic administrations alike. Even though seeking asylum is a fundamental human right,² lawmakers and many others are cowering to anti-immigrant movements and their fearmongering — rather than hearing the pleas and seeing the plights of those around us seeking safety.

Reader 3

וַיּוֹצֵאנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבִזְרֹעַ נְטוּיָהּ וּבְמַרְא גְדֹל וּבְאֹתוֹת וּבְמִפְתִּיִם: וַיְבִאנוּ אֶל־הַמְּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיִּתֵּן־לָנוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וּדְבָשׁ:

“God freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents, bringing us to this place and giving us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

On all days we are commanded to remember the Exodus from Egypt, and tonight we are commanded to feel that we ourselves fled persecution and found freedom in a new land. May we renew our commitment to ensuring that all who seek safety can do so and push our government to create policies that allow those who are in search of a new home to find security in our midst.

QUESTION FOR THE TABLE:

If your family has immigration stories, share them with the table. What do those stories have in common with the current stories of people seeking refuge in the U.S. today?

HERE ARE A FEW STEPS YOU CAN TAKE THIS PASSOVER:

- When there is a primary election for any political office, look up candidates' stances on immigration and factor them into your decisions, and make sure to vote! (Check out <https://www.usa.gov/election-office>)
- Learn about **Welcome Corps** — a private resettlement program that enables small groups of people anywhere in the country who want to sponsor and welcome refugees into their community
- Learn about T'ruah's latest actions by scanning the QR code at right



² Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>