

Immigration Guide for **Sukkot**

**we were
Strangers too:**
the Jewish campaign for
immigration reform

A Family Experience

Background

Sukkot is a holiday of communal celebrations and gatherings that offer opportunities to reflect on our heritage, values and teachings, and to take action for social change. We invite you to study this guide which highlights the theme of migration within Sukkot and the Jewish response to the immigration crisis.

On Sukkot, it is customary to perform the mitzvah of hakhnasat orekhim -- hospitality to guests. The ceremony to welcome the guests is called Ushpizin -- Aramaic for "guests".

In addition to serving as a reminder of our duty to others around us, specifically the poor, Ushpizin also represent uprootedness. It is said that the Ushpizin would refuse to enter a sukkah where the poor are not welcome. Traditionally, there were seven Ushpizin:

Abraham left his father's home for the land God promised to show him [Genesis 12:1],
Isaac went to Gerar during a famine [Genesis 26:1],
Jacob fled from his brother Esau to the habitat of Laban [Genesis 28:2],
Joseph was sold to merchants and taken to Egypt [Genesis 37:23-36],
Moses fled to Midian after inadvertently killing an Egyptian [Exodus 2:11-15]
Aaron (along with Moses) wandered the Sinai for forty years [beginning with Exodus 13],
David hid from Saul in the wilderness [ISamuel 20, 21].

Each of these seven guests endured the difficulties of exile. The Ushpizin are a powerful symbol that remind us that we too were once wandering people and strangers in a strange land. Today, it is common for Ushpizin to represent other guests determined by those who made the sukkah.

It is common practice to decorate the Sukkah with posters and artwork. Contact HIAS or visit www.hias.org for copies of Sukkah posters and advocacy postcards on immigration.

Ceremony

In some Sephardic communities, it is customary to decorate a special chair in honor of the main guest of the evening on each of the seven nights of Sukkot.

Each night, reserve a special empty chair that represents an individual trapped in the broken immigration system. Start the ceremony by welcoming your actual and symbolic guests:

“Enter our guests, in the spirit of hospitality. Enter, our brothers and sisters who joined our country to provide for a better life for their families, escaped economic and political turmoil, who joined our county and contribute to our rich culture and heritage. Enter our Sukkah and share our meal. We remember that we too were strangers. Enter Jorge, Clara and Tola Zacharjasz, Pastor Mario, Signo Christelle Kouame, Julie Savitt, Muayeda Halboos Kamal, and Qweyonoh Parker.

Each night, read a story about an immigrant in the US, and explore how our Jewish history relates to these stories.



| First Night of Sukkot

Postville Story

Laborer's Story from Lauren

Jewish Perspective

Deuteronomy Chapter 15:7 commands us to care for the poor around us, as it is said: "if there be among you a needy man, [...] you shall not harden your heart, nor shut your hand from your needy brother." Undocumented workers, working to provide a better life for their families, are often exploited by their employers who take advantage of their vulnerable and desperate situations. Often, undocumented workers endure unfair treatment and wages because they fear losing their jobs or being deported.

Abraham left his father's home for the land God promised to show him [Genesis 12:1]

Second Night of Sukkot

Clara and Tola Zacharjasz's Story

Early in the morning of May 27, 1926, fourteen-year old twin girls Clara and Tola, Jewish citizens of Poland, were arrested in Bombay, New York, near the Canadian border and held in the Franklin County Jail in Malone, NY. They had crossed into the United States illegally, packed in a smuggler's automobile with four Irish men, an Irish woman and her four children.

They had come to Montreal to live with an uncle but altered their plans after meeting a man who promised to transport them to their parents in New York City. Tola said they had made part of the journey to the U.S. on foot, and part by car. For the smuggling services, according to the authorities, the girls' uncle had paid \$200. Local and federal officials recommended deporting the girls to Poland on the grounds that they had violated the law in several ways, including entering the United States without valid visas. The arrest warrants were voided and the twins were permitted to depart the country voluntarily rather than by deportation.

Their father's naturalization and the dropped charges made it possible for the sisters to eventually return legally.

Jewish Perspective

All communities at times do whatever they need to do in order to better the lives of their families, regardless of the risks. As told in the story above, Jews, too, would come without papers when there were no legal channels to immigrate to the U.S.

When Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe in the early 20th century, they faced harsh immigration policies and deplorable living conditions when they in the US. When Jews arrived at Ellis Island, they often underwent unethical medical exams and psychological tests. Many were slated for deportation and because of language barriers and legal fore Jewish community experienced very difficult working and living conditions.

Isaac went to Gerar during a famine [Genesis 26:1]

| Third Night of Sukkot

Pastor Mario's Story

After Pastor Mario's wife migrated to Chicago from the Philippines in 1977, she petitioned for Pastor Mario's migration to the US a year later. Because of the heavy influx of Vietnamese refugees, his immigration was delayed for two years. When he finally arrived in 1980, he quickly found a job and started adjusting to American life.

In 1985, he became a naturalized U.S. Citizen and immediately thereafter filed a petition for his brother and sister who were still in the Philippines. Four years after filing the petition and with no answers, his siblings' absence weighed heavily on his mind. He wrote to his Senator asking for help expediting his families' reunification. Pastor Mario received a reply that he would have to follow immigration guidelines with regard to the visa availability for his petition category. Unfortunately, the dream of uniting his family here in the United States died with his brother in 1994, whom he would never see again.

Finally, after twenty-three years of waiting, Pastor Mario received the documents required to process the petition for his sister.

Jewish Perspective

Family is the cornerstone of Jewish history, education, and values. According to Jewish tradition, "Kin and family resemble a heap of stones; if one stone is taken out of it, the whole collapses" (Genesis Rabbah). A fair and humane immigration system keeps families together. Immigration laws that separate loving families or force them to leave their homes, jobs, and communities in the U.S. in order to remain together do not honor the basic principle that families should remain together.

Jacob fled from his brother Esau to the habitat of Laban [Genesis 28:2]

Fourth Night of Sukkot

Signo Christelle Kouame's Story

Signo immigrated to America from Cote d'Ivoire by winning the diversity visa lottery. She came to learn English and obtain an American degree with the eventual goal of working for an international company. America offers everything she needs but her English is not very good, which makes it difficult to express herself and understand people. People often have difficulty understanding her because she makes so many pronunciation mistakes. The learning process is frustrating and embarrassing for her. To improve her English, she is taking classes to help her become more fluent.

In the United States, life can be difficult for immigrants like her. She struggles to communicate and misses the family she left behind. Though she has a masters degree she is unable to find a job in her expertise and after nine months of searching, she finally found a job as a clerk.

Jewish Perspective

One truth that has never changed is that immigration is of tremendous benefit to our country – both economically and culturally. The contributions of immigrants can be appreciated through the individual successes of those that HIAS has assisted, such as Henry Kissinger, Marc Chagall, and Elie Wiesel. Even now, the Jewish population continues to be comprised of immigrants, with ten percent of the Jewish community being foreign born. Today's Jewish immigrants come from an array of nations including Russia and other former Soviet states, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, and Iran.

Jewish interest in migration comes not only from our history in the United States, but also from the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger. In 36 different passages, the Torah commands us to care for the stranger in our midst, reminding us that we were once strangers in the land of Egypt. America, as a nation of immigrants, shares in this welcoming tradition.

It is in our interest both as Jews and as Americans to have an immigration system that functions fairly and helps new Americans integrate into society.

Joseph was sold to merchants and taken to Egypt [Genesis 37:23-36]

| Fifth Night of Sukkot

Adam Savitt's Story

Adam Savitt, an immigrant from Guatemala, was sitting on the front porch of his home in Highland Park on a Monday morning, when eight federal immigration agents showed up. Within minutes, they had taken him into custody and handed his belt, keys and wallet to his wife of seven years, Julie Savitt. They did not show her a warrant and did not tell anyone why he was being detained.

Adam was taken to an immigration detention facility. It took his wife four days to find where he was. Though Julie gave the immigration agents his diabetes and depression medication, Adam did not receive his diabetes medication for several days in the detention center, when immigrant rights organizations, lawyers and his Rabbi intervened. Eventually, Adam was deported to Guatemala.

The Savitts were going through the legal channels for Adam to become a legal permanent resident. Adam has helped raise Julie's three children and is supporting his two other children. Today, however, it doesn't matter that Adam Savitt married to a U.S. citizen, a successful businessman, a resident of Highland Park, a refugee who fled Guatemala during its bloody civil war, and an applicant for the marriage visa that would allow him to live with his family in the United States. What matters is that Adam was one of some 300,000 undocumented individuals plucked in 2008 from the lives they had built in this country and returned to places they had risked their lives to escape.

Jewish Perspective

Affording refugees the opportunity to seek safe haven in the United States has been a fundamental component of the American humanitarian tradition, international legal principles and the Jewish tradition of "redemption of the captive." Political asylum is a key element of refugee protection, and sufficient resources must be devoted to successfully fulfill this crucial undertaking.

Moses fled to Midian after inadvertently killing an Egyptian [Exodus 2:11-15]

Sixth Night of Sukkot

Muayeda Halboos Kamal's Story

In November 2003 Muayeda Halboos Kamal showed her 15 year old son Muhamed around a small apartment in Jordan, instructing him how to boil tea and cook their favorite Iraqi dishes. After assuring him that it would only be a few weeks, she boarded a plane for America and left him behind. Muhamed's separation from his family lasted four years.

In 2001, Muhamed's father had visited Washington DC on a tourist visa with ambition to escape the danger imposed on his Shia family by Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime. He received asylum and was allowed to bring his wife and children to the United States in 2001, but everything changed on September 11, 2001.

In 2003 Muayedah and her youngest son Muayed were approved to travel to the United States by the American consulate in Jordan. Muhamed, her 15 year old son, was denied approval because he would have to submit an additional background check to the Department of Homeland Security. After weeks of waiting, Muayeda and her youngest son boarded a plane to California so as not to lose their visa.

Separations like this became common when a moratorium was imposed on Iraqi males over 14 after September 11. The petition for travel had apparently been approved in 2003, but Muhamed was left trapped in an apartment for four years because of a paperwork dispute where the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department who were waiting for each others' approval.

Muhamed had simply fallen through the cracks.

Jewish Perspective

Historically, the Jew has been considered an alien, a stranger, an outsider even in host societies where Jewish communities had flourished for thousands of years. Indeed, the traditional founder of Judaism, the Patriarch Abraham, was himself a migrant when he followed the call to leave his kinmen and his birthplace, Ur Khasdim, with its many associations and memories, and to migrate as a stranger and wanderer to Canaan, the Promised Land. From the Jewish perspective, migration has not only served as a safety valve to escape potential destruction, it is also fundamental part of Jewish history and culture.

Aaron (along with Moses) wandered the Sinai for forty years [beginning with Exodus 13]

Seventh Night of Sukkot

Qweyonnoh Parker's Story

Qweyonnoh Parker is a typical 17 year old American teenager, with one exception. Her mother is threatened with deportation every year, along with thousands of Liberians in the US on Temporary Protected Status. This status was changed to Deferred Enforced Departure after her mother was living here legally for over 18 years.

Qweyonnoh lives in constant fear that one day her mother will be forcefully separated from her. At times, concentrating in school is a real challenge for her. If her mother leaves, she is not sure what will become of her. Her mother came to this country 18 years ago seeking safety from the horrific civil war in Liberia. She has been a hard working, law abiding resident, paying her taxes and contributing to society. Qweyonnoh and many other children in her situation are at risk of being separated from their parents.

Jewish Perspective

Jews immigrated to the US for many different reasons: perceived lack of freedom; overpopulation; racial, religious, social or political oppression; limitation of educational opportunity; economic barriers; frustrations of cultural and ideological expression; discriminatory differential treatment ; desire for reunion with families, social and political instability in host countries. Immigrants coming here today seek residency in the US for many of the same reasons the Jewish community did.

David hid from Saul in the wilderness [ISamuel 20, 21]

Advocacy

We Were Strangers, Too is the Jewish campaign for immigration reform. We advocate for the following elements to be included in comprehensive immigration reform:

- o Keep families united and decrease the waiting time for family re-unification.
- o Create pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.
- o Create a plan for future migration flows in order to protect all workers' rights.
- o Empower immigrants to fully integrate by providing financial support to local governments and community organizations that offer classes and services.
- o Establishes border protection and enforcement policies that bolster our national security, while balancing enforcement with economic development and human and civil rights.

Advocate

Send an electronic letter asking Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform in 2009: <http://advocacy.hias.org/netcommunity/strangers>.

Plan an in-district lobby visit, organize a prayer vigil, or plan a pot luck to celebrate the contributions of immigrants with your Member of Congress.

Stand in Solidary with Immigrants

Visit immigrants in a local detention center to provide moral support and to listen.

Volunteer to teach English and Civics to new immigrants preparing to naturalize.

Educate

Host an educational event on immigration for your community. Contact HIAS for a copy of the Welcome the Stranger 90-minute interactive immigration event.

Host or deliver a workshop on immigration issues and immigrant rights.

Ask your Rabbi to give a d'var Torah on immigration.

Sample materials, including postcards, posters, dvar torahs, and organizing guides are available on HIAS' website: <http://advocacy.hias.org/netcommunity/strangers>.

Join the Campaign

Current Sponsors

We Were Strangers, Too is endorsed nationally by American Jewish Committee, Anti-Defamation League (ADL), B'nai B'rith International, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), Jewish Reconstructionist Federation (JRF), National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), the Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbis for Human Rights, Union for Reform Judaism, Uri I'Tzekek: The Orthodox Social Justice Movement, and Women of Reform Judaism. We Were Strangers, Too is endorsed locally by Am Kolel Jewish Renewal Center (Rockville/Beallsville, MD), Jewish Community Action (St. Paul, MN), Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (Rockville, MD), Jewish Community Relations Council of Durham-Chapel Hill (North Carolina), Jewish Community Relations Council of Southern Arizona (Tucson, AZ), Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (Chicago, IL), Jews United for Justice (Washington, DC), and Progressive Jewish Alliance (Los Angeles, CA). Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR),

Hag Samach

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