

DREAM Act Faith Lessons



Immigration and Faith Lessons

See also: **Six-week immigration study from the Unitarian Universalist Association**
www.uua.org/justice/issues/process/currentissues/immigration/studyguide/

Religious teachings ask us to help the stranger, to welcome and protect the sojourner, and to treat him/her with love.

Read the religious quotes from different faiths and discuss the questions below the quotes.

I. A Stranger in a Strange Land

"No stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler."
(Job 31:32)

*Israelites experienced being perpetual travelers and strangers from the beginning:
God said to Abraham "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land that I will show you." (Genesis 12:1)*

Jesus "will say... I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me in." (Matthew 25: 34-35)

"You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know how it feels to be a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Exodus 23:9)

- **If you were forced to leave this country, where would you go? Who would take you in?**
 - o How would it affect your spirit and well-being?
 - o If you had to leave quickly what would you bring?

II. In God's Image

"The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God." (Leviticus 19: 34)

"Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Hebrew 13: 1-2)

"All God's creatures are His family; and he or she is the most beloved of God who tries to do most good to God's creatures." (Prophet Muhammad)

"God created humanity in God's image, in the image of God, God created them." (Genesis 1:27)



- **How do we honor the divinity within each person, especially those who we are taught to dislike?**
- **On the Myths and Facts sheet (page 18 and below) read Myths and Facts #1, 2, 3 and 6. Then read the following paragraph and discuss the questions:**
 - o We are taught to dislike undocumented immigrants and we hear them called “illegals” and “criminal aliens.” How have words been used to hurt you or people you love? What can you do to be aware of your own speaking and those you spend time with so that your words reflect the idea that each human being was created in God’s image?

III. Love Your Neighbor

Read the short article (page 23 and below), and then read the two quotes below and conclude by discussing the questions below.

“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.” (Rumi, i.e. Muhammad Jalal ud Din Balkhi)

“And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbor that which thou choosest for thyself.” (Bahá'u'lláh – Bahai scripture)

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18)

- What feelings could you relate to in the story? What surprised you?
- What does it look like to be of service to equals who have a different life experience than you, rather than to do “charity work for those you pity”? How can you do community service for those who are less fortunate than you in such a way that honors the dignity and divinity of each person who you are serving?

IV. What’s Next

If you would like to stay up to date on these issues and get involved you can go to:

- Interfaith Immigration Coalition at <http://www.interfaithimmigration.org/>
- Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society’s (HIAS) website at hias.org and to HIAS’s Welcome the Stranger listserv sign-up at <http://capwiz.com/hias>



MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT IMMIGRATION IN THE U.S.A

Myth # 1: Immigrants Come Here to Take Jobs Away From Americans

Immigrants work in niche occupations; including many areas U.S. workers don't choose to work in. A recent study showed NO correlation between high unemployment in areas with many immigrants. Most undocumented immigrants are here to escape poverty, oppression, domestic violence and other unlivable circumstances. Many refugees are actually undocumented immigrants because the laws for who "counts" as a legal refugee are extremely restricted.

Myth # 2 Immigrants Increase Crime

New immigrants are *less* likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans. While immigration has increased since 1994, including doubling undocumented populations, violent crime rates fell by 34.2%.

Myth # 3 Immigrants Don't Pay Taxes

All immigrants pay taxes (income, property, sales, etc.). Immigrants pay \$90-\$140 *billion* a year in federal, state, and local income taxes. Undocumented immigrants also pay income taxes, evidenced by the Social Security Administration's "suspense file" (taxes that cannot be matched to workers' names and social security numbers). In 2002, this suspense file grew by \$56 billion in reported earnings, with \$7 billion in Social Security taxes and \$1.5 billion in Medicare taxes largely paid by immigrants who will *never* enjoy these programs. Immigrants contribute \$611 billion to our Social Security system; **a moratorium on legal immigration would raise the deficit 31% over 50 yrs.**

Myth # 4 Immigrants Don't Contribute Economically to Society

The immigrant community is not a drain on the U.S. economy but, in fact, is a net benefit. Research reported by the CATO Institute and the President's Council of Economic Advisors reveals that the average immigrant pays a net \$80,000 more in taxes than they collect in government services. For immigrants with college degrees the net fiscal return is \$198,000. Furthermore, The American Farm Bureau asserts that without guest workers the U.S. economy would lose as much as \$9 billion a year in agricultural production and 20 percent of current production would go overseas. Immigrants have a high rate of entrepreneurship, opening businesses and creating jobs.

Myth # 5 Immigrants Don't Want to Learn English

Immigrants learn English today at the same rate as Italian, German, and E. Europeans who emigrated in the 19th & early 20th centuries. There are not enough English classes to accommodate all the immigrants who want to learn.

Myth # 6 Immigrants Have a Way to Immigrate Legally; They Just Need to Wait Their Turn

There are no legal possibilities for many immigrants. Visa caps, complex laws including 1996 changes in the law means if an immigrant leaves and tries to apply to re-enter, they could be separated from their family for 10 years or more. There are virtually no permanent employment visas for unskilled immigrants; the wait is 8 years and no employer will hold a job open that long. **Immigrants can't wait in line, because there is no line.**

DREAM Act only hope for college for local immigrant

Author: PICO

July 9th 2010

Walking down North High Street in West Chester, she doesn't appear to be different than any other 21-year-old. However, what separates her from others walking down the street is not her appearance.

Sophia, who requested that her real name not be used due to her status, is one of over 11 million undocumented immigrants living in America.

Her father was already working in the U.S. when he decided he wanted to bring his family here when she was 3. However, the immigration process takes between eight to 12 years to complete and there is no guarantee of obtaining legal residency after this period.

For Sophia's father, it wasn't worth sacrificing his children's childhood to wait for the immigration process. He decided to rely on coyotes, who are paid thousands per person to smuggle people into the U.S. from Mexico, to reunite his family.

The coyotes bought the family across the border. From there, they made their way from Las Vegas to Chicago before being united with family in West Chester.

"First, we lived with family that was already here legally," Sophia said. "We tried to save money for a place of our own."

Settling in American culture, her mother was hired at Parkway Cleaners. After several months, her family saved enough to rent their own apartment. Sophia lived just like any other legal resident but her world would be flip upside down a few years later.

When Sophia was seven, officers from the Immigration Customs and Enforcement Agency raided her mother's workplace and took her to a prison facility outside of Philadelphia.

Sophia's mother told her that "if you did speak back to them [the officers] or try to argue with you, at that time, they did hit you."

"My aunt back-talked to them. She asked them 'Why are you taking us? I have children, they need us,' At that point, one of the ICE officers punched her and pushed her to the floor." Sophia said. "She fell to the floor, she was scraped and beaten."

After the incident happened to her, Sophia's aunt took the case to court and was able to obtain her citizenship.

"I had no idea what was going on. All I knew was that she wasn't there," Sophia said. "I remember going to school and I just felt so sad. I wanted to cry right there."

Without any contact from Sophia's mother for months, her father slipped into a deep depression and began drinking daily. Members of her extended family began to take care of his children. With finances now tightened, Sophia and her sister would often do odd jobs like cleaning houses for just \$20 a day.

Yet within a few weeks, her mother re-entered the United States undocumented.

"When she came back we were all sleeping. She walked in through the door and my sister ran down and started crying," Sophia said. "My mother said 'I'm back, but you have to get up and get ready for school. You have to go.' My sister then said, 'But if I go to school you won't come back again.'"

Her mother decided not to return to work due to the threat of deportation. Soon afterwards, Sophia and her siblings were able to obtain a sponsorship from her uncle for legal residency. Sophia went on to graduate high school with honors.

She applied to become a citizen, but for years her application was unaddressed. When she turned 21, it expired.

“I’m out of that application and there’s nothing I can do. The only hope that I would have is the DREAM Act,” Sophia said.

Under the DREAM Act, students who have lived in the United States for at least five years and have demonstrated good moral behavior would be able apply for six years of conditional status.

During this six year period, a person must complete two years of a four-year degree or serve in the military for two years. After this period, depending on the moral conduct of the applicant, legal residency would be granted.

Without conditional status, Sophia cannot pursue post-secondary education.

“Something that I think would really help people is if I would be able to do communications with Spanish and be an official translator,” Sophia said. “But it feels horrible, it’s like I’m lying here to my teachers telling them I don’t want to go to college. But I do, I still do.”

Sophia is not the only one. 65,000 students who graduate high school and have been in the U.S. more than five years face limited prospects for completing their education or working legally in the United States due to lack of documentation, according to the National Immigration Law Center.

While 118 representatives and 36 senators have co-sponsored the bill it still has not been brought to the floor for debate.

“Not everyone is here as a criminal or, you know, to steal anyone’s job. People just want to come here for a better future for themselves, for their families, for their kids,” Sophia said. “I think that a lot of students and people here are proving to this country that they are an asset and that they want to belong here, they learn English wanting to belong here.”

Despite her hardships, Sophia does not regret her family’s decision to come here undocumented.

“I said to my mom, ‘I’m glad you guys made the decision to be here, otherwise we wouldn’t have had the future we have now,’” Sophia said. “I feel very lucky. I feel so blessed. Obviously someone wants me here. Obviously I’m here for a reason.”

Update – At the end of 2010 the DREAM Act was approved in the House but ultimately lost because it was a few votes short of the 60 needed votes in the Senate. Students are still hoping to reintroduce the Dream Act in the years ahead.