

GIVE ME YOUR TIRED, YOUR POOR,
YOUR HUDDLED MASSES
YEARNING TO
BREATHE
FREE

**Immigration Reform
Hagaddah Supplement**



BEND THE ARC
a jewish partnership
for justice



Introduction

Every year at the Passover Seder we retell the ancient story of the Exodus, the quintessential immigration story. We imagine that it is we who are fleeing Egypt. With the sea parted in front of us, we walk alongside our ancestors on their journey from slavery to freedom. Reliving this journey helps us appreciate our own freedom anew, and invites us to empathize with all of those who live in fear and are seeking their own promised land.

This Passover, let us also imagine walking alongside our more recent ancestors on their journeys, escaping poverty or persecution and migrating to America. For millions of American Jews, the stories of how our families came to this country are a defining part of our identity.

But while many of our ancestors who came to America endured hardship, and struggled to overcome adversity, the overwhelming majority of them would not have been able to come here at all under today's immigration laws. It's worth asking, would your family – Bubbe or Zeyde, Savta or Saba – be denied entry if they tried to immigrate to America today? In fact, there's a very good chance that they would be.

The following stories are typical immigrant experiences from important moments in American Jewish history. As you share them, ask yourself if you hear traces of your own family's story.

David & Judicq

David arrived with his wife Judicq in the port of New Amsterdam (modern day New York) in 1654 on a ship from Recife, Brazil. The Portuguese had just reconquered Brazil, expelling the Jews, and leaving David, Judicq, and 21 other Jews – 13 of them children – to travel to North America, where they hoped to settle and freely observe their religion. Although the welcome they received in New Amsterdam was less than warm (the colony's governor, Peter Stuyvesant, tried unsuccessfully to expel them), they settled and began a life in what became the United States.



RECIFE, BRAZIL

1654

IMPERIAL RUSSIA

1889



Sarah

Sarah, traumatized, physically frail and malnourished in 1945 after having been liberated from a Nazi work camp, regained her strength in a displaced persons camp before deciding to leave for America. Her parents and siblings had perished in the Holocaust and she was determined to start a new life in a new place. She was able to get a visa to the United States, along with thousands of other Jewish refugees, because of loosened quota restrictions enacted by President Truman.



POST-NAZI EUROPE

1945

Leora

Leora, the youngest girl in her family of five, was 8 in 1979 during Iran's Islamic Revolution. Worried about how Jews would be treated under the new regime, Leora's family left behind all of their property and most of their belongings, making their way to Vienna, where they waited for a visa to the United States. After living on their waning savings for two months, they were able to immigrate to Los Angeles, along with many other Persian Jews, because the U.S. government considered Jews fleeing Iran political refugees.

TEHRAN, IRAN

1979



Vlad & Irina

Vlad, Irina and their two children lived outside the city of Smolensk in 1989, where their synagogue had been shuttered by the Soviet regime, cracking down on the practice of Judaism. Anti-Semitic books circulated and the climate became increasingly harsh for Jews, yet the Soviet Government refused to let them leave the country. Mounting international pressure, especially from the United States, forced the Soviet Government to change its position and allow families like Vlad's to emigrate. The Lautenberg Amendment, passed by Congress that year, classified Soviet Jews as a persecuted group, automatically qualifying them for refugee status in the United States.



USSR

1989



Discussion

Unfortunately, if most of the people in these stories tried to immigrate to the United States today, they would not be admitted under current laws.

The immigration system is much changed today, with few options for people seeking to come to America to find opportunity, enjoy political freedom, or escape persecution. There are strict quotas, years-long waiting lines, and much paperwork. For many, the only option is to try their luck in what's called the Diversity Lottery. To give you a sense of the long odds facing current immigrants, in 2009 the United States received more than 9.1 million entries to the Green Card Lottery from eligible residents of qualified countries, for just 50,000 Diversity Visas that are made available each year.

Questions:

- 1 Did you hear your family's story reflected here? Why did your ancestors migrate to America?
- 2 How does this discussion affect your understanding of the challenges facing immigrants today?
- 3 Do we owe anything to those who seek to immigrate here today to gain access to the same American Dream our ancestors came here to find?

Make a Difference at EntryDenied.org

You can join the movement of American Jews standing up for fair and just immigration reform.

Go to www.EntryDenied.org to see how your ancestors would fare if they were trying to come to America today and learn how to get involved in the historic opportunity to reshape immigration policy.