

“Love the Immigrant”: Our Sacred Responsibility to Care for the Immigrants Amongst Us

Religious
Action
Center
of Reform Judaism



Introduction:

The Torah instructs the Israelites no less than thirty-six times regarding the fair treatment of the immigrants who live amongst them. Today too we are commanded to love these people because they need justice, and we are God’s partners in ensuring justice in the world. We are obligated to look out for these immigrants because we were also once immigrants seeking freedom from the yolk of Egyptian bondage. More recently we have been immigrants to America, seeking fair employment, housing, and justice in all aspects of society.

Listed below are many of the instances in which the Torah explains this command order to experience the power of the repetition. This commandment to love the immigrant is the most cited commandment in the Torah.

As you study these sources think about the following questions:

1. *What is the power of examining all of these verses side-by-side? Why did the Torah, that never wastes words according to the Rabbis, find it necessary to repeat this command so often?*
2. *How do the different articulations of this command provide new understandings of what we are being asked to do?*
3. *Which of these articulations gives you the most courage to fight for the rights of those immigrants who are marginalized in our society? Which of these verses will fuel your advocacy for the long run?*

I. One Law for the Immigrant and the Citizen

1. Exodus 12:49

תֹּרֶה אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לְאֻזְרָח וְלִגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

There shall be one law for the citizen and for the immigrant who dwells among you.

2. Leviticus 24:22

מִשְׁפָּט אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לָכֶם בְּגֵר בְּאֻזְרַח יִהְיֶה כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

You shall have one standard for immigrant and citizen alike: for I the LORD am your God.

3. Numbers 9:14

וְכִי־יִגֹּר אִתְּכֶם גֵּר וְעָשָׂה פֶסַח לַיהוָה בְּחֻקֵּי הַפֶּסַח וּבְמִשְׁפָּטָו בְּן יַעֲשֶׂה חֻקָּה אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְלִגֵּר וְלְאֻזְרַח הָאָרֶץ:

And when an immigrant who resides with you would offer a Passover sacrifice to the LORD, they must offer it in accordance with the rules and rites of the Passover sacrifice. There shall be one law for you, whether immigrant or citizen of the country.

4. Deuteronomy 31:12

הִקְהַל אֶת־הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׂיִם וְהַטָּף וְגֵרֶה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלְמַעַן יִלְמְדוּ וַיִּרְאוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וְשָׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כְּלִדְבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת:

Gather the people—men, women, children, and the immigrants in your communities—that they may hear and so learn to revere the LORD your God and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to have one law in a society? Should everyone be treated the exact same? How should laws be created to ensure equity? What kind of equality is the Torah proscribing for immigrants?
2. In what ways are immigrants treated with equality under the law in America? In what domains of society have laws become different for immigrants and citizens?



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II. Let the Immigrant Live with you

5. Leviticus 19:33

יְכִי־גֵוֶר אֶתְּךָ גֵר בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנוּ אֹתוֹ:

When an immigrant resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them.

6. Leviticus 19:34

בְּאֶזְרַח מִמֶּנּוּ יְהִיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר | הַגֵּר אִתְּכֶם וְאַהֲבַת לֹו כְמוֹד בְּיִגְרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

The immigrant who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God.

7. Leviticus 25:35

יְכִי־מִוֶּדֶד אֲחִיךָ וּמְטָה יָדוֹ עִמָּךְ וְהִחַזְקֵתָּ בּוֹ גֵר וְתוֹשֵׁב וְחֵי עִמָּךְ:

If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority, and you hold them as though a resident alien, let them live by your side.

Discussion Questions:

1. What must be provided to ensure that immigrants can live safely within a new community?
2. What does it look like to love immigrants that live proximately to you? Is one responsible to do this at a personal level? A governmental level?

III. Do not take advantage of the Immigrant

8. Deuteronomy 24:17-18

לֹא תִטֶּה מִשְׁפַּט גֵּר יְתוֹם וְלֹא תִחַבֵּל בְּגֵד אִלְמָנָה: וְזָכַרְתָּ כִּי עֶבֶד הָיִיתָ בְּמִצְרַיִם. וְיִפְדֶּךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִשָּׁם עַל־כֵּן אֲנֹכִי מִצְוֶה לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה:

You shall not subvert the rights of the immigrant or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.

9. Deuteronomy 27:19

אָרוּר מִטָּה מִשְׁפַּט גֵּר-יְתוֹם וְאִלְמָנָה וְאָמַר כָּל־הָעָם אָמֵן:

Cursed be the one who subverts the rights of the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways are the rights of immigrants currently being subverted in America? What would it take to stop these injustices?
2. What factors make immigrants particularly vulnerable to discrimination and deception?

IV. You too were Immigrants

10. Exodus 22:20

וְגֵר לֹא-תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ: כִּי-גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

You shall not wrong an immigrant or oppress them, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt.

11. Exodus 23:9

וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יָדַעְתֶּם אֶת-נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי-גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

You shall not oppress an immigrant, for you know the feelings of the immigrant, having yourselves been immigrants in the land of Egypt.

12. Deuteronomy 10:17-19

כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וְאֲדֹנָי הָאֲדֹנָיִם הָאֵל הַגָּדֹל הַגִּבּוֹר וְהַנּוֹרָא אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִשָּׂא פָנָיִם וְלֹא יִקַּח שֹׁחַד: עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט יְתוּם וְאַל-מַנְה וְאַהֲב גֵּר לְתַת לוֹ לֶחֶם וְשִׂמְלָה: וְאַהֲבֶתֶם אֶת-הַגֵּר כִּי-גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

For the LORD your God is God supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the immigrant, providing them with food and clothing.— You too must befriend the immigrant, for you were immigrants in the land of Egypt

Discussion Question:

1. Is it possible to connect our historical or biblical status as immigrants to the fates of real immigrants today? What does it feel like to try to do that? How does it change our understanding of our responsibility toward immigrants?

V. Providing for the Needs of Immigrants

13. Leviticus 19:10

וְכַרְמְךָ לֹא תַעֲזוֹב וְפֵרֶט כְּרַמְךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעַנִּי וְלִגְרֹת תַעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

You shall not pick your vineyard bare or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the immigrant: I the LORD am your God.

14. Leviticus 23:22

וּבְקִצְרְכֶם אֶת-קִצִיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא-תִכְלֶה פְּאֵת שְׂדֵךְ בְּקִצְרְךָ וְלִקְט קִצִירָהּ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעַנִּי וְלִגְרֹת תַעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest; you shall leave them for the poor and the immigrant: I the LORD am your God.

15. Deuteronomy 24:14

לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂק שִׁכִיר עֲנִי וְאֶבְיֹן מֵאֲחֵיךָ אִם מִגֵּרֶךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּאֲרָצְךָ בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ:

You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or an immigrant in one of the communities of your land.

16. Deuteronomy 24:19

כִּי תִקְצֹר קִצִירָהּ בְּשִׂדְךָ וְשָׁכַחְתָּ עֹמֵר בַּשִּׂדֶּה לֹא תָשׁוּב לְקַחְתּוֹ לְגֵר לְיִתּוֹם וְלֵאלֵמָנָה יְהִי לָמַעַן יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ בְּכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ:

When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow—in order that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings.

17. Deuteronomy 24:20

כִּי תַחַבֵּט זֵיתוֹךָ לֹא תִפְאֶר אַחֲרָיִךְ לַגֵּר לִיתוֹם וְלֵאלֵמָנָה יִהְיֶה:

When you beat down the fruit of your olive trees, do not go over them again; that shall go to the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow.

18. Deuteronomy 24:21

כִּי תִבְצֹר כֶּרְמֶךָ לֹא תַעֲזוֹלֵל אַחֲרָיִךְ לַגֵּר לִיתוֹם וְלֵאלֵמָנָה יִהְיֶה:

When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not pick it over again; that shall go to the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow.

19. Deuteronomy 26:12-13

כִּי תִכְלֶה לְעֹשֶׂר אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשֶׂר תְּבוּאָתְךָ בַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁלִישִׁית שְׁנַת הַמַּעֲשֶׂר וְנָתַתָּה לְלוֹי לַגֵּר לִיתוֹם וְלֵאלֵמָנָה וְאָכְלוּ בְשַׂעְרֶיךָ וְשָׂבְעוּ: וְאָמַרְתָּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּעֵרְתִי הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִן־הַבַּיִת וְגַם נָתַתִּיו לְלוֹי וְלַגֵּר לִיתוֹם וְלֵאלֵמָנָה כְּכָל־מִצְוֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי לֹא־עָבַרְתִּי מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וְלֹא שָׁכַחְתִּי:

When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, you shall declare before the LORD your God: “I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the immigrant, the fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments:

Discussion Questions:

1. Why are these commandments listed in the Torah? What kinds of things are the Israelites meant to provide to the immigrants in their midst?
2. What might you add if you were thinking about these commandments in today’s context? How might commandments about farming be reinterpreted or expanded to ensure that we provide for immigrants in our own communities?