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

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**

> תּוֹרָה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָאֶזְרָךְ וְלַגְּרָךְ בְּתוֹכְכֶם: There shall be one law for the citizen and for the immigrant who dwells among you.

2. **Leviticus 24:22**

> מִשְפַּט אֶחָד יִהְיֶה לָכֶם לְכָל אָדָם בְּתוֹךְ כֶּם לְכָל אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָמָה: You shall have one standard for immigrant and citizen alike: for I the LORD am your God.

3. **Numbers 9:14**

> וְכִי־גוּר אִתָּכְךָ גֶּר וְעָשָׂה פֶסַח לַיהוָה כְּחֻקָּת הַפֶּסַח וּכְמִשְפַּט כָּל־הַדֶּבֶר הַלֵּוִי:

> 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**

> מַקְרָצֵי הַקְהֵל אֶת־הָעָםָּו הַנִּשְׁמָּהְתָּו וּהַנָּשִׁמָּהְתָּו וּהַטְּפַף שֵׁר בְּשֵׁעָרְךָ לְמַעַן יִשְמְעוּ וּלְמַעַן יִלְמוּ וְיִרְאֵו אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדָמָה: 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?
II. Let the Immigrant Live with you

5. **Leviticus 19:33**

וְכִי גוּר אֶתְּךָ לָא תָּוֹנֵ֔ו אֶתְּךָ

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

6. **Leviticus 19:34**

כְּאֶזְרַח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶֽה לָּכֶם הַגּוֹר הַגּוֹר אִתְּכֶָ֑ם וְאֵלָ֖ו כְּמַ֣וֹךְ הֵֽיֶֽיתֶ֖ם בְּאֵֽרְץ מִצְרָֽיִם אֱלֹֽהֵי יִֽהְוָ֧ה אֱלֹּהֶ֜י יָֽדָם׃

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**

וְכִי מָ֣וּךְ אֶ֛זְיֵה לָ֖כֶם הַגּוֹר וְהֶֽחֱזַָָֽ֣קְתּ בַ֔וֹגְר וְתוֹשַּׁבְּךָ עִ֖מְךָ׃

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 תַטֶַ֔ה מִשְפֶַ֖ט ג ָ֣ר י תָ֑וֹם وְל ָ֣א תַח ב ַ֔ל בֶֶ֖גֶד אַלְמ נ ָֽה׃
וְז כַרְתּ ֵ֗כִָ֣י עֶַּ֤בֶד ה יִ֙ית ֙ בְמִצְרַַ֔יִם وַָָֽֽיִפְדְךִּ֛ יְהו ָּ֥ה אֱלֹהֶֶ֖יך מִש ָ֑ם עַל־כ ֵּ֞ן א נ כִַּ֤י מְצַוְּך֙ לַע שַ֔וֹת אֶת־הַד ב ֶ֖ר הַזֶָֽה׃

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

אָר֗וּר מַט ֶּ֛ה מִשְׁפַַּ֥ט גֵּר־יָת֖וֹם וְׁאַלְׁמָנָָ֑ה וְׁאָמַַּ֥ר כָל־הָעָ֖ם אָמֵֵֽן׃

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*

> וְּכִי גֵּרִים הָיִיתָם בְּאַרְצוֹ מִצְרָיִם:  
You were aliens in the land of Egypt.

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

11. *Exodus 23:9*

> וְּכִי גֵּרִים הָיִיתָם בְּאַרְצוֹ מִצְרָיִם:  
You were aliens in the land of Egypt.

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 יְהוָֽה אֱלֹהֵי אֲדֹנֵיכֶּם יִזְכֻּרֵן בְּאַרְצוֹ כִּי־גְּרֵֽים הָיִֽיתִּֽים בְּאַרְצֵּֽךְ:  
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.

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**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

וְׁכַרְׁמְך֙ לֹֹ֣א תְׁעוֹלֵֵּּ֔ל וּפְרַ֥ר טָכַּרְׁכֶּ֖ך לֹֹ֣א תְׁלַקֵָּ֑ט לְעָנִִ֤י וְׁלַגֵּר֙ תַעֲזֹֹ֣ב אֹתֵָּ֔ם אֲנִ֖י יְׁהוַָּ֥ה אֱלֹהֵּיכָּ֖ם

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

וֵֽבְׁקֻצְׁרְךָ אַרְׁצְך֙ אַתּ־קְׁצִֹ֣יר אַרְׁצְך֙ לֵֹֽא־תְׁכַל ֶ֞ה פְׁאִַ֤ת שֵָֽדְׁך֙ בְׁקֻצְׁר ֵּ֔ך וְׁל ַּ֥ק ט קְׁצִירְך֖ לֹֹֽ֣א תְׁלַקֵָּ֑ט לְעָנִִ֤י וְׁלַגֵּר֙ תַעֲזֹֹ֣ב אֹתֵָּ֔ם אֲנִ֖י יְׁהוַָּ֥ה אֱלֹהֵּיכ ֵֽם׃

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־תִעַשַֹּ֥ק שָכִ֖יר עָנִֹ֣י וְׁא בְׁיָ֑וֹן מֵּאַח ֶ֕יך א֧וֹ מִגֵּרְךֶּ֛ אֲש ַּ֥ר בְׁאַרְׁצְך֖ בִשְׁעָר ֵֽיך׃

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

כִֹ֣י תִּקְצֹר קְׁצֹר֩ קְׁצִֵֽירְךָ֨ בְׁשָד ֶ֜ך וְׁשֵָֽכַחְׁתָ֧ עֹֹ֣מ ר בַשָד ֗ה لִֹ֤א תָשוּב֙ לְׁקַחְׁתֵּ֔וֹ לַגֵֶּּ֛ר לַיָתַּ֥וֹם וְׁלָאַלְׁמָנָ֖ה יִהְׁי ָ֑ה לְׁמִַ֤עַן יְׁבָר כְׁך֙ יְׁהוָֹ֣ה אֱלֹה ֵּ֔יך בְׁכֹ֖ל מַעֲשֵַּּ֥ה יָד ֵֽיך׃

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 תַחְּבֹט זֵית לֹא תְפָאֵר אַחֲרָך לַגֵּר לַיִַוֹם וְלָאַלְּמָנָה יִהְּיֶֽה׃

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 תִבְצֹרּ כַרְמְך לֹא תְּעוֹלֵל אַחֲרָך לַגֵּר לַיִַוֹם וְלָאַלְּמָנָה יִהְּיֶֽה׃

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 תְכַלֵּה לָעֶת אֶת־כְלָמַעִית לְבָשֹׁת תָּבְעֹת לְבָשֹׁת בְּיַשָּׁר הַשְּׁלִישִׁית שְנַת הַמַּעְשֶׁר שְנַת הַשְּׁלִישִׁית שָׁנַה הַשָּׁמֶש שְנַת הַמַּעְשֶׁר שְנַת הַמַּעְשֶׁר שָׁמֶש וְנַתַּת לַלְּוֵי לַגֶּר לַיָּוֹם וְלָאַלְּמָנָה וְאֶכְלָה בַּשָּׁמֶש וְשִׁבְעָה וְאָמַרְתָּ לְפָנָי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בֶּעָרֶשׁ מִן־הַבֵּית וְגַם נְתַת לַלְּוֵי לַגֶּר לַיָּוֹם וְלָאַלְּמָנָה כְּכַל־מִצְוֹתָנָּה אָשֶׁר צִוָּה הַשָּׁמֶש שֶָׁר צִוָּהּ נִלְעַם׃

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 commandants about farming be reinterpreted or expanded to ensure that we provide for immigrants in our own communities?