

**Family Experience Guide for**

# **Sukkot**

---

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

---

**An Educational Handbook  
on Immigration**

The communal celebrations and gatherings of Sukkot offer opportunities to reflect on our heritage, values and teachings. Sukkot is also a time 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 broken immigration system.

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, the 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 40 years [beginning with Exodus 13]; and
- 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, Ushpizin often represent any other guests chosen by those who made the Sukkah.

It is common practice to decorate the Sukkah with posters and artwork. Contact HIAS ([www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org)), the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs ([www.jcua.org](http://www.jcua.org)) and Jewish Community Action ([www.jewishcommunityaction.org](http://www.jewishcommunityaction.org)) for copies of Sukkah posters, advocacy postcards on immigration and related materials.

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 came to our country to provide for a better life for their families, escape economic and political turmoil, and contribute to our rich culture and heritage.

“Enter our Sukkah and share our meal. We remember that we, too, were strangers. Enter Quendy Alejandra Garcia, Clara and Tola Zacharjasz, Pastor Mario, Lenny Krayzelburg, Adam Savitt, Muhamed Kamal, and Qweyonnoh Parker.”

Each night, read about an immigrant in the U.S., and explore how our Jewish history relates to their stories.



## Quendy Alejandra Garcia's Story

"I was arrested in the Postville, Iowa raid at the Agriprocessors meatpacking plant [in 2008]. I was at work around 10 a.m., doing work that is very hard, lifting very heavy things and working long hours, and all of a sudden, people started yelling that [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] had arrived. We all started running and crying.

"[Immigration authorities] loaded us on a bus and from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. we sat and waited. We saw our male co-workers taken away and some of us women had ankle bracelets put on so we could go back to our children. After they let us go, I went to the church. My two daughters were there.

"We stayed at the church for the night, and then four more days after that. My seven-year-old asked me, 'What is happening to you and why do you have that [ankle bracelet] on your foot?' I explained to her what happened and that we would have to go to Mexico. She told me she does not want to go because she was born here, this is her home and she wants to learn more English.

"It is very hard for me, too. After nine years here, I don't want to go to back to Mexico. I came here to give my children a better future and I am hopeful that the last word will be good from the judge. Our only crime was to come here and work. Now that I can no longer work, I can no longer provide for my children, but I keep trusting in God that all of this will come to an end for the welfare of my children."

## Jewish Perspective

Deuteronomy 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, struggling 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.

JCUA and JCA have been working with the community of Postville since the raid to provide financial, legal and organizational support. For more information, contact Lauren Bastien ([lauren@jewishcommunityaction.org](mailto:lauren@jewishcommunityaction.org)) or Tom Walsh ([tom@jcua.org](mailto:tom@jcua.org)).

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

## Clara and Tola Zacharjasz's Story

Early in the morning of May 27, 1926, 14-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, N.Y. 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 made part of the journey to the U.S. on foot and part by car. For the smuggling services, 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

People will do whatever they need to in order to better the lives of their families, regardless of the risks. Just like Clara and Tola, Jews, too, came without papers when there were no legal channels to immigrate to the U.S.

Jews who emigrated from Eastern Europe in the early 20th century faced harsh immigration policies and deplorable living conditions in the U.S. When they arrived at Ellis Island, they often underwent unethical medical exams and psychological tests. Many were slated for deportation by the sometimes harsh immigration officials.

Because of language barriers and legal formalities, immigrants scheduled to be deported were rarely able to defend themselves. Like many immigrant groups in the United States, Jews endured very difficult working and living conditions.

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

## Pastor Mario's Story

Pastor Mario's wife migrated to Chicago from the Philippines in 1977, and she petitioned for Pastor Mario to join her a year later. Because of the heavy influx of Vietnamese refugees at that time, 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 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 saying 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 23 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]*

## Lenny Krayzelburg's Story

Lenny was born and raised in Odessa, Ukraine, but left for the United States in 1989. Although neither of them spoke a word of English, his parents migrated because they wanted their children to live in a place without the bigotry they often had experienced in Odessa.

In the U.S., Lenny continued swimming lessons, which he had started taking back in Ukraine. The training was difficult, coupled with his after-school job, English lessons and immersion into a new culture. Lenny kept with it and today he is a three-time Olympic gold medal winner.

## 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. Ten percent of the Jewish community is 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]*

## Adam Savitt's Story

Adam Savitt, an immigrant from Guatemala, was sitting on the front porch of his home in Highland Park, Ill. 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, until immigrant rights organizations, lawyers and his rabbi intervened. Eventually, Adam was deported to Guatemala.

At the time, the Savitts were going through the legal channels for Adam to become a legal permanent resident of U.S.

Adam has helped raise Julie's three children and is supporting his two other children. Today, however, our laws do not take into account that Adam Savitt is married to a U.S. citizen, a successful businessman, a resident of Highland Park, that he 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.

## Jewish Perspective

Many immigrants and asylum seekers spend their days in U.S. detention centers, under deplorable conditions, thousands of miles from their families, facing deportation.

Judaism places a high value on hospitality, or *hachnasat orchim*. The Sages of the Talmud praised Abraham not only for his monotheism but for his exceptional hospitality (see Genesis 18:1-8).

Remembering our own migration history, Jews must take action so immigrants and asylum seekers don't languish alone in detention. Indeed the Talmud (Bava Batra 8b) says that captivity is worse than starvation or death.

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

## Muhamed 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 before they were reunited, Muayeda boarded a plane for America and left Muhamed behind. Muhamed's separation from his family lasted four years.

In 2001, Muhamed's father had visited Washington, D.C. on a tourist visa 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 Sept. 11, 2001.

In 2003 Muayedah and her youngest son Muayed were approved for travel to the United States by the American consulate in Jordan. But Muhamed was denied because he would need to clear additional background checks by the Department of Homeland Security. After weeks of waiting Muayeda and her youngest son left for the U.S. so as not to lose their visas.

Separations like this became common when a moratorium was imposed on Iraqi males over 14 after Sept. 11. Muhamed's visa had been approved in 2003, but Muhamed remained in Jordan for four years because of a paperwork dispute between the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department.

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, himself became a migrant when he followed the call to leave his kinsmen 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 a fundamental part of Jewish history and culture.

*Aaron (along with Moses) wandered the Sinai for 40 years [beginning with Exodus 13]*

## 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 U.S. in Temporary Protected Status (TPS). For the past 19 years, Liberians have lived in the U.S. under temporary legal status, allowing them to legally remain and work in the U.S. and become established in their communities.

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 U.S. 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; and social and political instability in host countries. Immigrants coming here today seek residency in the U.S. for many of the same reasons.

*David hid from Saul in the wilderness  
[1 Samuel 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:**

- Keep families united and decrease the waiting time for family re-unification.
- Create pathways to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.
- Create a plan for future migration flows in order to protect all workers' rights.
- Empower immigrants to fully integrate by providing financial support to local governments and community organizations that offer classes and services.
- Establish 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 Solidarity 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. Contact Irene Lehrer Sandalow ([irene@jcua.org](mailto:irene@jcua.org)) to plan a workshop or for additional educational materials on immigration reform and Jewish perspective.
- 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, Divrei Torah, and organizing guides are available on HIAS' website:

[http://advocacy.hias.org/netcommunity/religious\\_materials](http://advocacy.hias.org/netcommunity/religious_materials)

## Current Sponsors

We Were Strangers, Too is endorsed by numerous organizations.

### National Endorsements

- 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)
- Rabbinical Assembly
- Rabbis for Human Rights
- Union for Reform Judaism
- Uri L'Tzedek: The Orthodox Social Justice Movement
- Women of Reform Judaism

### Local Endorsements

- 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)
- Progressive Jewish Alliance (Los Angeles, CA)

## Hag Sameach

This guide was created by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs and Jewish Community Action.

