SHELTER OF PEACE:
A SEDER ON MIGRANT JUSTICE
WHY A SOCIAL JUSTICE SEDER?

The Passover seder serves many purposes. First and foremost it is a ritualized celebration of the Israelites’ dramatic journey from slavery to freedom. But even early on, the seder was never just about history. As the format of the seder was finalized in Mishnaic and Talmudic times, rituals were included to make each participant feel as if they personally were experiencing the journey from slavery to freedom.

This theme of the seder goes beyond the Jewish people’s flight from Mitzrayim (the Biblical term for Ancient Egypt) and into the recurring fight for justice and freedom, a fight that is persistent throughout history and across the globe. The Passover seder tells us that just as our people experienced slavery, and just as we could not free ourselves alone, we have an obligation to also fight for freedom in every generation. The injustices of the world are many, but the Passover story reminds us of the words of Pirkei Avot: “It is not your duty to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it.”

Together, this Passover, let us use our collective power to further the causes of justice and freedom.

WHY A PASSOVER SEDER ABOUT IMMIGRATION AND DREAMERS IN BALTIMORE?

How can we NOT?

Can US Jews stand for our neighbors living in fear of the nighttime knock on the door?

Can US Jews watch while our friends are torn from their child’s side as they bring them to the schools that promised their children safety?

Can US Jews stomach the rhetoric of economic and social scapegoating being used against people who share our landscape and vision? Regardless of what language they speak, if they are homeless, have a drug problem, are in medical school or serve in our armed forces?

Can we? Of course we cannot. When did “immigrant” become a dirty word? All it means is a person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another. We’ve been known to do that ourselves...on occasion...on the very occasion we commemorate with this ceremony.

We, as Jews, raise our hearts and voices in solidarity with all immigrants in our midst. This includes DREAMers — neighbors, loved ones, friends who are here because they’re protected by the Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals enacted in 2012 by President Obama. DACA recipients are in danger. And we have the opportunity to support them in winning their fight for justice.
80% of DACA recipients in this country came from Mexico, most before they were old enough to tie their own shoes. Jesus Perez, one of 9,000 Marylanders who qualified, was five when his parents brought him from Mexico to the United States. He’s a research assistant at Johns Hopkins University now.¹

Immigrants go to high school and college here. They have homes, families, jobs. Clean criminal records, and some serve in the armed forces. To be in danger of deportation is a shadow darkening every corner.

When President Obama enacted DACA in 2012, he crafted a blueprint to strengthen both the recipients’ standing as future citizens, and the United States’s standing as a country that embraced them, shining from the inside out because of them.

Our current president is positively pharaoh-like in his fickleness, mulling over the fate of DACA DREAMers. “DACA’s on the table!” “DACA’s off the table!” “Let them stay – I want a solution with heart!” “Throw them out!” Their lives are political bargaining chips to him.

They’re so much more than that to us. We highlight, lift up, and support migrants in the United States with and without legal status. Because we’re Jews, and we have their backs. If we did not, it would be a shonda [shame] - and a betrayal of our ancestors.

Candle Lighting

As part of the candle lighting before each Seder, we recite the shehecheyanu blessing.

ברוך אתה יָהּ אֲדֹנָי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הַעָלָם, שֶׁהָעֵצִינוּ וְהָקִיםָנוּ וְהָגִיעָנוּ לַעֲצִינוּ הַעֲלָמָה.

Baruch atah adonai, eloheinu melech ha-olam, shehecheyanu vekiyemanu vehigianu lazeman hazeh.

Blessed are You, HaShem our G-d, Sovereign of the universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this occasion.

As we come together for Baltimore’s 5th annual Social Justice Seder, we take time to light candles. Let these candles serve as a reminder throughout the night of those in search of light in this world. Let it serve as a reminder of those who are seeking a path forward, and may we light the way, as our paths were lit for our ancestors and many of us who are here tonight.

Many of us in this room have stories of immigration: ourselves, our parents or grandparents, and some even further back. No matter the circumstances that brought most of us here, most of us were the seekers and recipients of light, looking for people to guide our way, to bring us from darkness to light. May we set intentions moving forward to be that light for those seeking refuge across the world, in the United States, and here in Baltimore.

**Table Discussion**

**Welcome: Text Study**

Abraham is celebrated in Jewish tradition as the paradigm of *hakhnasot orchim* “the welcoming of guests into one’s home.” We read in *parashat Va-yera* that God appears to Abraham as he sits at the entrance of his tent. Receiving a visitation from God is obviously an awe-inducing experience, and yet Abraham does something very strange. He leaves God and runs to greet three passing travelers, warmly inviting them to eat and rest. The rabbis ask: what allows Abraham to ask God to wait, and what leads God to agree to do so. Citing this *parasha*, the Talmud records a striking statement: Rabbi Judah taught “welcoming guests is greater than welcoming the presence of the *shekhinah* [God],” (BT Shabbat 127a). The rabbis teach that God waits for Abraham because God understands that Abraham’s apparent turn away from God is, in the deepest sense, a profound turn to God.

**In the Next 5 Minutes**

Kindly introduce yourself to a “stranger” at your table. In groups of two or three, please think aloud for a moment about how radical the paradigm of *hakhnasot orchim* is in modern society and culture. What is Rabbi Judah teaching? When was the last time you welcomed strangers into your home or into your life? What does it mean “to welcome” someone? Why do we choose to welcome some over others?

**B’Chol Dor Va’dor \* In Every Generation**

*בכל דור ודור*

In every generation each person is obligated to see themselves as if they personally left Mitzrayim. In the Torah, God tells Abraham, “Know well that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years” (Gen 15:13). Three terms are used to describe the distress and hardship they will undergo: They will be strangers (gerut), they will be enslaved (avdut), and they will be oppressed (innui). Each generation tells this story.

But the Israelites aren’t the only ones to endure this fate. We must tell the earlier part of this narrative. Sarah “oppresses” Hagar, an Egyptian maidservant (Gen 16:6). The role reversal is stark: An Israelite mistress subjugates her Egyptian slave. Hagar’s name with a slight shift of vowels—“ha-ger”—means “the stranger.” The Torah teaches that Israelites are not always the victims, any more than Egyptians are always the victimizers. The Torah also teaches that the victim runs the risk of seeing themself as always and everywhere the victim, so even before the Israelites go down to Mitzrayim [Ancient Egypt], the Torah warns: Don’t forget how easily the roles can be reversed. We need vigilant self-awareness, lest we, like Sarah, end up victimizing others as one more tragic result of our own victimization. Each generation must resist becoming like Pharaoh.
Sing together:
_avadim hayinu l’pharoh b’Mitzrayim_
We were slaves to Pharaoh in Mitzrayim

FIRST CUP OF WINE: LEAVING

Just as we must tell the entire story of our enslavement by owning that the first Jews owned slaves, so must we tell the entire story when we explore the United States’ role in humankind’s universal journey, migration. Our idyllic national self-portrait paints us in a benevolent, gauzy light. We gather up the needy and down-trodden from other nations in our open arms, giving them a safe place to put down new roots and grow.

Reality is much more grim. Not only does our current administration openly loathe and persecute all but the fairest-skinned from other nations, our previous president set records for the number of deportations carried out, and giving the ICE machine momentum. Furthermore, honest self-reflection about our role in the world’s migration patterns demands we consider how the United States has contributed to instability worldwide.

Consider our world’s climate. From 1850 to 2011, the U.S. produced 27% of total carbon dioxide emissions - more than the 28 nations in the E.U. combined. 2 Droughts, extreme weather, rising sea levels resulting from this have produced paralyzing food insecurity in already vulnerable parts of the world. People in the Middle East, Latin America, Central Asia, and North Africa live in already-fragile climate zones. 3 If we in the U.S. contribute so freely and fully to making it worse for them, kindness and fairness dictates we welcome them with open arms to help make it right.

It’s also worth examining the effects of our foreign policy. The Central American refugee crisis grew because of ingredients past U.S. administrations folded in. In the 1980s, for example, the Reagan administration sold weapons and gave billions of dollars to murderous dictatorships in El Salvador, then abandoned the nation to rebuild on its own. Salvadorans displaced by the war came here, and if they joined gangs they were deported back to El Salvador (President Obama helped strengthen this machine) where, amidst the nation’s already-weakened state, they picked up the weapons we’d left there, and started their own gangs. 4

Our previous administrations’ contributions to their civil wars, disinterest in helping them recover, and indifference to the criminal gang-run governments the U.S. helped create are the exact opposite of tikkun olam. We owe them so much more than to be scapegoated and refused safe haven.

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Regardless of the facet through which you view the prism, we must examine and own how our actions and inactions have resulted in pushing or pulling people across their borders, either by dire necessity or completely against their own wills. Only then can true amends be made. How can we cast ourselves as benevolent givers when our misdeeds are a factor in why people have found their homes no longer their homes? In receiving the immigrant we must be prepared to repair the damage we’ve done, and have as our goal to heal any pain we’ve caused.

All Jewish holidays begin with blessing the wine — and our Social Justice Seder is no different. It sanctifies the holiday, makes it holy. On Passover, the first cup of wine also marks beginning of the Exodus story when Jews, enslaved in Mitzrayim, began their journey of flight from persecution. Let’s always remember what it was like to have no choice about leaving our homes, and allow it to simultaneously strengthen and soften our hearts in the presence of others who must face the same trauma.

[FILL CUP OF WINE]

Baruch ata adonai, eloheinu melech ha’olam, borei p’ri hagafen.
Blessed are You, HaShem our G-d, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

**Miriam’s Cup**

Miriam’s cup, a twentieth-century addition to some Passover seders, recognizes the often silent and unnoticed role of women in the Passover story. Miriam’s cup is filled with water in remembrance of the well of water that followed the Israelites through the desert as a reward for Miriam’s courage and dedication. And as the Talmud states, “If it wasn’t for the righteousness of women of that generation we would not have been redeemed from Egypt” (Babylonian Talmud, Sotah 9b).

Today we fill this cup of water to honor the immigrant women who have overcome immense difficulty. They have, in their righteousness, paved the way for their families and communities to not only immigrate, but also to thrive.

Women are uniquely impacted by the struggles of immigration both from policy and society. The largest numbers of immigrant women workers - 882,663 - were maids and housekeepers in 2015. Approximately 501,740 were nursing, psychiatric, and home health aides, followed by cashiers (480,391), registered nurses (454,057), and janitors and building cleaners (364,494).5

Though the labor of domestic workers is often unseen and unglamorous, it is work that allows our society to function. Women who perform domestic work, though, are among the most vulnerable and least protected by the law in most states. There has been an impressive drive to change this, though, and immigrant domestic workers have organized and built power through organizations like the National Domestic Workers Alliance.6

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5 https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/impact-immigrant-women-americas-labor-force
6 https://www.domesticworkers.org
We benefit as society when we educate women, and we are incredibly lucky for the contributions made by the immigrant women of this country. Today we lift our Miriam’s cup to honor the contributions of immigrant women in this country. We honor women who worked hard to care for their families while working multiple jobs and putting themselves through school. To the writers, painters, poets, community organizers, community builders, nurturers and fighters. We envision a world in which women are paid equal wages and given equal opportunity.

**SONG: COURAGE**

*Call and response song. After the first round the word courage can be replaced with another word (ex. justice, freedom). History: a liberation song sung by South Africans during Apartheid.*

(Call and response)
Courage, my friend,

(All together)
you do not walk alone

(Call and response)
We will walk with you

(All together)
and sing your spirit home

**YACHATZ: THE BREAKING OF THE MIDDLE MATZAH**

The breaking of the matzah is one of many rituals that transform the food of the seder into symbols of meaning. We are told that the matzah is the bread of poverty and persecution, of stretching one meal into two. In tearing the matzah we jar ourselves out of a sense of complacency. We honor those whose legal status is conflicted, contested, or under assault. We recognize that not only were we once uprooted and in search of shelter, but that persecution and deprivation are still very present in our world.

We think of migrant construction laborers whose passports are held hostage by their bosses until they pay off impossible debts, war refugees who face interminable waits for interviews, detained immigrants without lawyers who can’t get a day in court. We think of citizens whose land was stolen during times of war, and residents who can’t get residency despite living in a place their whole life. We think of residents who are being threatened with denial of their citizenship applications for accessing vital public services.

We invite a representative of each table to break the middle matzah on their table as we reflect on the right to leave, and the right to stay.
Ha Lachma Anya

Someone at each table should hold up or point to the matzah on the table as we say together:

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in Mitzrayim. All who are hungry, let them come and eat. All who are in need, let them come and celebrate Passover with us. Now we are here; next year may we be in the land of Freedom. Now we are slaves; next year may we be free people.

Our seder this year focuses on justice for migrants. But we would be remiss if we did not remember the forced migrations that were fundamental to building this country: namely, the genocide and expulsion of Native Americans, and the chattel slave trade of African peoples.

We recognize the Susquehannock and Piscataway tribes, whose stolen land includes the places we live and work. We lift up the memory of the millions of enslaved African people whose stolen labor built the material foundation of this country, and whose descendants have never been compensated.

While we acknowledge that the repercussions of these founding crimes are ongoing, we must support the resistance movements which daily challenge their legacies. We hold up the efforts of the Tohono O’odham nation to stop the border wall and end border policing that rips apart their traditional lands. As the Trump administration attacks the safety of thousands of Haitian and other Black immigrants, we look to the advocacy of groups like the Black Alliance for Just Immigration for multiracial democracy.

To our traditional prayer, let us add: This year we live in a land founded in slavery; next year, may we live in a world without settler colonialism.

Masha Gessen wrote in her 2016 book about her parents agonizing over whether to leave Soviet Russia, and the absurdity of the process:

“The plane’s destination was part of an elaborate charade. Our exit visas — small sheets of greenish-white paper, folded to make a book of three pages — were now our only identity documents, since we had been stripped of our Soviet citizenship as a condition of leaving. Fittingly, when we forfeited our Soviet passports, we lost the only identity documents that would list our nationality as Jewish — it was our citizenship that had been Soviet. Now we were ‘stateless’ in the eyes of the world.”

Second cup of wine: Journeying

With our second cup of wine, we set our minds on the journey in search of safety, comfort, and home that claims the lives of so many of our migrant siblings every year.

The number of displaced persons has now jumped to levels surpassing even the refugee crisis following World War II. Yet, while more than 60 million people remain displaced around the globe, decision makers in the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and elsewhere have largely sought to close their borders, leaving millions of migrants in limbo, residing in detention centers, refugee camps, and other temporary settlements. For many millions, this has meant lack of access to food, clean water, or any humane standard of housing or sanitation.  

More than 33,000 named individuals have died trying to cross the border into “Fortress Europe;” and in the United States, hundreds die every year crossing the Southern border. How can this be the case? Are our elected officials and government agencies simply “stand[ing] idly by the blood of [their] neighbor?” as our Torah prohibits? Actually, it is worse than that, as border control measures continue to be instituted which seek to make it more dangerous for people to attempt a border crossing, hoping that the stories of suffering along the way will deter people from trying.

On the U.S./Mexico border, border fences and frequent patrols at the most safely crossable places push would-be immigrants into more and more dangerous routes, often requiring hundreds of miles’ worth of travel through desert. Migrants often die along the journey due to exhaustion and dehydration; and reports have surfaced that both U.S. border guards and racist militia groups like the Minutemen routinely dump out water and destroy food left along the border for migrants, directly contributing to those deaths.

The journey that a migrant fleeing war, political violence, inhumane working conditions, and other natural and human-made disasters does not have to be dangerous; governments legislate ongoing death and suffering for border crossers when they choose indifference in the face of tragedy.

As we drink our second cup of wine, we envision a world in which our society reflects Jewish tradition’s most sacred teaching—-that all people are created b’tselem elohim, in the image of the Divine, and that a single human life is infinitely valuable.

[FILL CUP OF WINE]

כּוֹרָה אֲתָה ה', אֲלָהָהוּ מֶלֶךְ הָאוֹלָמ', בּוֹרֶא פּוֹרִי הַגָּפֶן.

Baruch ata adonai, eloheinu melech ha’olam, borei p’ri hagafen.
Blessed are You, HaShem our G-d, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

7 http://www.uniteforsight.org/refugee-health/module3
8 https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/05/migrants-us-mexico-border-deaths-figures
https://reut.rs/2AzdGJK
9 http://azc.cc/2F5q9Xb
Four Questions

Sing Together:

מה נשתנה הלילה הזה מכל הלילות

Recite Together:

1. In all other cases we try to keep families together; why do we allow immigration policies that tear families apart, while vilifying a system that allows family members to reunite?

2. Why does a country that celebrates freedom limit the freedom of immigrants through fear, imprisonment and deportation?

3. Why do we restrict human movement, but allow money and weapons to move freely across borders?

4. Why do we have borders in the first place, and do we need them?

The Seder Plate

What are all these things on the seder plate? Take a moment to reflect on what role they play in our lives and what they mean.

Karpas (green vegetable): Spring’s new buds remind us to look forward to the future. Traditionally, we dip the green vegetable in salt water to remind us of the tears the Israelites shed as they labored for Pharaoh. How we can remain hopeful when we are surrounded by pain?

Maror (bitter herb): Taste is the sense tied most strongly to memory, and the bitter taste of maror is meant to put us in the place of the Israelites suffering under Pharaoh. What bitter memories of migration from our own and our families’ pasts do we want to recall?

Egg: An egg is fragile, but its thin shell is enough to protect new life from a rough world. What small things can we do to protect new migrants, some of the most vulnerable amongst us?

Beet (or shank bone): The Israelites used lamb’s blood to mark their doors to signal the Angel of Death to pass over their home, sparing the lives of those who live under that roof. In the immigration debate, commentators too often haggle over which immigrants are ‘deserving’ — of citizenship, of the comfort of being reunited with their families, of the safety of living in peace. But by declaring any immigrant undeserving, or less deserving, it is as if we are unmarking their doors, and inviting in the power of immigration enforcement. How do we change our advocacy for immigrants so that we are not exposing anyone to harm?
**Charoset:** The chunky paste of charoset is meant to recall the mortar the Israelites were forced to use to build Pharoah’s palaces. The story of many undocumented immigrants today is bound up with unfree labor - in agricultural fields, on construction sites, and in restaurants. Tearing down the edifices that force immigrants into exploitative and dangerous work is equally as important as thwarting Trump’s odious wall.

**Matzah:** The Israelites did not have time to bake bread before they left the house of bondage, so they carried unleavened matzah. Today, immigrants are forced to choose what, how much, and even whom to bring with them on their journeys. At the end of the seder, we bring back the afikomen, the broken piece of matzah, to complete our meal. Let us work over the coming year to unify all immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers with all they had to leave behind.

**Orange:** The orange on the seder plate symbolizes our commitment to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer folks, and to a more fruitful Jewish community where all are welcome at our tables. Discrimination against LGBTQ migrants pervades the immigration system, including the threat of separation for same-sex couples, abuse of trans detainees in ICE detention centers, and convoluted procedures for refugees to prove that they are fleeing because of threats based on their sexual orientation or gender identity. The fight for a fair immigration system is equally a fight for the lives and rights of LGBTQ folks.

**The Four Children**

The haggadah presents four questioning children who approach the seder in four different ways. The wise child asks deep, probing questions that seek to understand the heart of the matter. The wicked child uses questions to create separation in the community. The simple child is only capable of asking about the basics, and the fourth child does not even know how to ask the questions. The story of the four children helps us to understand how our different perspectives shape how we approach an issue.

With the person next to you, look at the historical immigration cartoons.

Which one would you associate with each child? Why? What personal experiences might be shaping how you view the images?

*Keep in mind that this is a thinking activity, not a matching game! These images are open to interpretation - there is not one “correct” answer and you and your partner may find different meanings in each image.*

Then discuss, what does it mean to be wise, wicked, simple, or unable to ask when talking about immigration?
“The Immigrant: The Stranger at Our Gate.”
*The Ram’s Horn* (Chicago), 25 April 1896.
https://cla.umn.edu/ihrc/news-events/other/gatekeeping

Joseph Keppler’s cartoon “Looking Backward,” *Puck*, 1893
https://www.pri.org/stories/2016-03-05/anti-immigrant-political-movement-sparked-election-day-riot-150-years-ago
https://www.osu.edu/features/election/election-carousel/drawn-to-politics.html
Frederick Burr Opper and Joseph Keppler, “The Modern Moses” in *Puck*, 1881
http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/escape-from-the-pogroms-judaic-treasures

https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2014/06/20/old-yellow-peril-anti-chinese-posters/
10 PLAGUES OF A BROKEN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

God brought ten plagues upon the Egyptian people as part of the Israelites’ journey to freedom. Tonight we read ten modern plagues that result from our broken immigration system.

[FILL CUP OF WINE]

1. SEPARATION OF FAMILIES
2. LIVING IN FEAR
3. INABILITY TO APPLY FOR OR RECEIVE LIFE-SUSTAINING SERVICES
4. DEPRIVATION OF CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS
5. ISOLATION IN A NEW, UNFAMILIAR PLACE
6. FEELINGS OF USELESSNESS, AND INABILITY TO LIVE UP TO ONE’S ALREADY ESTABLISHED CREDENTIALS
7. INABILITY TO ACCESS EDUCATION
8. SCAPEGOATING
9. HOPELESSNESS
10. EXPLOITATION

THIRD CUP OF WINE: ARRIVING

With our third cup of wine we recognize that arriving to the “promised land” is often not the end of an immigrant’s journey to safety and security.

The history of US immigration policy is one of segregation, from the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) as a tool to hurt Chinese laborers in the West, to the Johnson-Reed Act (1924) which severely limited immigration from countries that weren’t considered white. It was not until President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1965 that we approached a more equal system that emphasized family reunification, and allowed a much broader array of immigrants.

The common thread for generations, though, is that immigrants arriving to the United States have found themselves scapegoated for any number of social ills. Most recently, President Trump blamed “foreign, criminal gangs that have brought illegal drugs, violence, horrible bloodshed to peaceful neighborhoods all across our country.”10 Under Trump’s direction the Department of Homeland Security created the Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement office (VOICE) to work with victims of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants. In doing so he stirred up fear against immigrants and rekindled long-held racial prejudices. What he failed to mention was that studies have shown that immigrants commit crimes at a lower rate than the general public.11 When we do not protest negative generalizations against immigrants we harm...
both the immigrants and non-immigrants in our communities. Treating people as “criminals in waiting” makes society more dangerous for everyone, as it leads to mistrust of the police and a lower likelihood of reporting crimes. The Jewish community should find this tactic of singling out a particular group of people as dangerous particularly disturbing - it is exactly the same technique used in Nazi Germany in the 1930s to stir up prejudice against Jews.

The Trump administration’s rhetoric criminalizing innocent immigrants goes hand in hand with an immigration crackdown that is terrorizing immigrant families. The new directives allow immigration agents to pick up and deport anyone charged with even a minor criminal offense, or anyone who has already been ordered deported, regardless of whether they have a criminal record. This means that people who have been living in the country for decades are living in terror of having their families torn apart, some of whom might be sent to countries suffering from poverty and violence. The effect of this fear in immigrant communities is apparent. Immigrants are afraid to drive or even just to leave the house. They caution their children against speaking Spanish in public. They are forced to make contingency plans for US-born minor children, in the event their parents are picked up by immigration authorities. Many U.S. employers exploit immigrants’ fear, whether or not they have documents: pushing them to do more dangerous work for longer hours, discouraging union membership, and scaring them away from reporting employer and workplace abuses.

The story of Valeria, a student at the University of Maryland, is just one example of the hardships immigrants face. Her family moved to the United States in February 2007 to escape the ongoing violence in their home country of Peru, where an internal conflict has pitted the government against opposition groups over widespread poverty and lack of access to land. Valeria’s parents, who held master’s degrees in accounting, worked at a factory and McDonalds, since their degrees were not transferable. Receiving her DACA status in early 2016 ended years of stress for Valeria. After a decade of living in fear, finally she could work and study legally. As a DACA recipient she exercises constant vigilance, always careful to obey any law from driving under the speed limit to double-checking against plagiarism in her work, as she knows that any small misdemeanor could taint her record. The Trump administration’s announcements about DACA reopened a world of anxiety and uncertainty about the future, both for herself and her younger sister, who is still too young to apply for DACA.

[FILL CUP OF WINE]

כְּרֻךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעֹלָם, בֹּרֵי פִּי הָגָפֶן.

Baruch ata adonai, eloheinu melech ha’olam, borei p’ri hagafen.

Blessed are You, HaShem our G-d, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine.

13  http://wapo.st/2lxQvH1
FOURTH CUP OF WINE: DWELLING

Every Passover, we start a lot of our sentences with the phrase, “Because we were slaves in Mitzrayim.” We say this because it gives a shape to our story as a people - from slavery to freedom, from fear to hope. What we sometimes leave out, though, is that most of the Israelites began as migrants, not slaves. Jacob and his family left the land of Canaan in the midst of a famine; the Israelites dwelled in Mitzrayim and multiplied. Pharaoh was faced with a new nation growing within his borders. Both the Israelites and Pharaoh were faced with the unchosen condition of living alongside strangers. But Pharaoh, out of fear, chose to enslave the Israelites and forced them to work for his benefit. The whole Passover story follows from Pharaoh’s refusal to cohabitate with the Israelites, to allow them to grow and thrive.

We recognize Pharaoh’s fear of the fruitful Israelites in today’s anti-immigration xenophobia. When Trump and his retinue call for an expanded border wall and increased immigration enforcement, we hear the echoes of Pharaoh’s paranoia. When they propose to deny immigrant families access to green cards if they legally access social services like Head Start and SNAP benefits, we remember how Pharaoh targeted the Israelite children.

We are face-to-face with an inhuman immigration system, one that charts the distance between life and death in the possession of a piece of paper. We cannot fight it with a stingy toleration for select immigrants in our midst. Nor can we battle it with charity that affirms the separation between citizens and non-citizens. To topple a Pharaonic order, we must do the opposite of what Pharaoh did - namely, facilitate and support conditions for migrants to create liveable lives.

The Maryland Dream Act is a building block towards a world where all migrants have an opportunity to build livable lives. Very simply, the Dream Act welcomes undocumented students to higher education in Maryland on the same terms as students with citizenship. In a society that insists on the morally unnecessary distinction between citizens and noncitizens, extending access to education is an invitation for migrants to ‘increase and multiply’, to grow lives for themselves and their families. It introduces the opportunity for immigrants to be the choosers rather than having others’ choices foisted upon them.

A powerful thing about beginning, “Because we were slaves,” is that it reminds us that this condition of domination and oppression recurs again and again, but it can culminate in freedom. The contemporary Jewish philosopher Judith Butler reminds us that the refugee philosopher Hannah Arendt espoused a profound neighborliness: precisely because we cannot choose those who we share the earth with, we are required to find a way to live together across lines of language, race, and other distinctions. The alternative - statelessness, permanent exile - is so unthinkable that we are obligated to pursue equality with “those none of us ever chose (or did not recognize that we chose) and with whom we have an enduring obligation to find a way to live.” If we take to heart the Passover insistence that we remember we were slaves, we will recognize our solemn and cherished responsibility is to dwell together, because “we are all, in this sense, the unchosen, but we are nevertheless unchosen together.”

Even within Judaism, we suffer from division and isolation. We often hear the narratives of Ashkenazi Jews to the US, but there are also large communities of Sephardim and Mizrahi too. Because the different communities were separated for so long, they developed different practices and customs, as well as languages. Upon meeting in the US, the Sephardic communities were not always welcomed by the larger, more established Ashkenazi communities.

This is was true for Shayna’s family, the first Sephardic family to settle in Seattle in the early 1900s. Solomon Calvo descended, like many Sephardic Jews, from the Spanish Jews that were exiled from Spain during the Inquisition, and settled in the islands surrounding Greece and in Turkey. They held closely to their Sephardic traditions and Ladino language (a mixture of Hebrew and Spanish.) Calvo heard that there was fishing town on the west coast of the U.S. similar to his small island, called Marmara. He moved to the U.S. in search of a better life and more opportunities.

Upon arrival with his friend, they were introduced to the Ashkenazim living in Seattle. The Ashkenazim did not believe that Calvo and his friend were Jewish because they did not speak Yiddish. In an effort to prove themselves Jews, Calvo showed them his Tzitzit and T’fillin, but the Ashkenazim were still skeptical. They brought the newcomers to their rabbi. The rabbi made the men prove they were Jewish by having them read Hebrew. Still unsure of their Jewishness, he wrote a letter to an authority in New York, asking if these men who read prayers differently and did not speak Yiddish, but claimed a Jewish identity, were in fact Jewish. The New York authority responded that they were in fact Jewish, explaining the Sephardic story and heritage.

Even so, the Ashkenazi community stayed skeptical about the men, although they allowed them to participate in their community. When more Sephardic people moved to Seattle they opened their own synagogue and separated from the Ashkenazi community. To this day, their communities are located next to each other, and they have never truly integrated. The sad truth remains that when we Jews speak of healing the world, Tikkun Olam, we need to turn our gazes inward as well as outward.

The story of Solomon Calvo comes to us from Shayna Waldbaum.
Brich Rachamana ∆ Giving Thanks for our Food

בָּרִיךְ רַחֲמָא מַלֵּא מְאֹד עְלָמוֹת מְרֻיֶּה הָיִיתָה
Brich rachamana Malka d’alma ma’arey d’hui pita
Blessed is the merciful One, Ruler of the world, Creator of this bread.

SANCTUARY

HaShem prepare me to be a Sanctuary
Pure and Holy, Tried and True

BRINGING IT HOME: RESOURCES FOR YOUR PERSONAL SEDER

Thank you for joining us for tonight’s seder about immigration and migrant justice. While our seder has come to an end, the fight for migrant justice has not. As we conclude our seder, we individually and collectively ask, how can we can bring the knowledge gained tonight home? How can we incorporate this learning into our own seders and how can we animate our personal seders to also be inspiring vehicles for change?

Here are some key places where you might be inspired to bring tonight’s knowledge and message to your own seder. Of course, feel free to also find your own opportunities to share tonight’s message, be it at your seder, in your workplace, among your friends, etc.

IDEAS ON HOW TO INTEGRATE THESE TOPICS INTO YOUR SEDER:

• After singing Avadim Hayinu (we were slaves in Egypt) share some of the facts you learned tonight about state and national immigration policy, past and present. These realities remind us of our past oppression as Jews - use it to remind participants at your seder about the oppression so present in our own community for immigrants past and present.

• Before tasting the maror, invite participants to reflect on the bitterness present in their own lives, particularly as it relates to discrimination and prosecution. Reflect on the bitterness experienced by immigrants from unjust immigration policies- in everything from education to criminal justice. Before tasting the charoset, consider the slew of talents and various labors, skilled and unskilled, performed by immigrants.

• Although not mentioned during the Passover seder, a central character to the Exodus narrative is Moshe (Moses). Moshe gave up his privilege in Pharaoh’s palace to defend the Israelites against the brutality of slavery (Exodus 2:11-15). Discuss how you can follow his example.
Glossary

DACA: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals - a program created by the Obama administration that allows young adults who came to the US without documents before age 16 to register and obtain valid driver’s licenses, enroll in college, and legally secure jobs.

Dreamers: Undocumented immigrants who were brought to the US as children.

Haggadah: The Hebrew word for “telling” or “narrative,” it is the name of the text that sets out the order of the Passover seder. Reading the Haggadah fulfills the Torah commandment that we must tell our children about our liberation from slavery in Mitzrayim.

HaShem: Literally translate to “the name.” The word “HaShem” refers to God.

ICE: Immigration and Customs Enforcement - the government agency that enforces federal laws governing border control, customs, trade, and immigration.

Mishna: An authoritative collection of Jewish law compiled around 200 CE. The Mishna is based off earlier oral collections of Jewish law (also known as the oral Torah).

Mitzrayim: The Hebrew word for historical Egypt, ruled by Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus. The word Mitzrayim can be traced to its Hebrew root, tzar, meaning a narrow place of hardship and oppression.

Passover: The name of this holiday comes from the Hebrew word, pesach, whose root is to pass through, to pass over, to exempt, or to spare (referring to the story that G-d passed over the homes of the Israelites when slaying the firstborn in Mitzrayim during the 10th plague). Pesach is also the term for the sacrificial offering of a lamb that was made in the Temple on this holiday.

Pirkei Avot: A tractate of the Mishna that deals with ethical teachings.

Racism: The classification of people into groups based on perceived differences, and the creation of power relations that perpetuate this classification. Because race is not biological, racism creates race through institutions that treat people and groups differently based on their assignment to a racial category.

Seder: A Hebrew word meaning “order;” this is what we call the ritual festive meal celebrated the first one or two nights of Passover. The meal is called a seder because there is specific information and rituals that must be included, and tradition has come to specify a particular order for the rituals.

Talmud: Discussions and elaborations on the Mishna’s collection of Jewish law, compiled around the year 600.

Torah: The Hebrew name for the part of the Bible that consists of the Five Books of Moses.
VOICE: Victims of Immigration Crime Engagement - the office established by the Trump administration under the umbrella of ICE to support victims of crimes committed by undocumented immigrants.

White Supremacy: A historically-based, institutionally-perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent; for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK:

Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, for providing the venue for our annual Baltimore Social Justice Seder. We are also grateful to the staff at BHC, especially Francine Gill, and to Tracie Guy-Decker from BHC Justice for connecting us with BHC.


Avi Roberts for the beautiful artwork on the postcard and haggadah cover.

Our speakers, for generously sharing their stories with us today.

Our partners at CASA for inspiring and leading us to act on this issue and for the important work that they do to make Maryland and our entire country a safer, more just place for all.

Pearlstone Center for donating our compostable plates and utensils and composting the waste from tonight’s program.

Our co-sponsors and who so generously supported this program.

Everyone who attended this program and believes in our power to create a better, more just Baltimore. We are honored to be working alongside you!

Thank you to SEIU for supporting the printing of this haggadah. The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) unites 2 million diverse members in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico. SEIU members working in the healthcare industry, in the public sector and in property services believe in the power of joining together on the job to win higher wages and benefits and to create better communities while fighting for a more just society and an economy that works for all of us, not just corporations and the wealthy. seiu.org

WE NEED YOU!

If you are interested in joining next year’s Baltimore Social Justice Seder committee, please contact Molly at molly@jufj.org. We welcome your ideas, energy, and enthusiasm!
Jews United for Justice leads Washington- and Baltimore-area Jews to act on our shared values by pursuing justice and equality in our local community. We work on issues like affordable housing, paid family leave, fair taxation and budgets, police reform, worker and immigrant rights, and safety net funding. Through campaigns, programs, and public education, JUFJ builds relationships and mobilizes the Jewish community to demand and win meaningful change. Our work is grounded in Jewish text as well as the Jewish experience of both prejudice and privilege. We envision a healthy, fair, and safe D.C.-Baltimore region, where the rights and dignity of all residents are respected and their voices are heard, where working hard guarantees a decent living and everyone has access to quality health care and education. We believe that the only way to build such a community is for Jews to join with our neighbors to demand social change.

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**Think Jewishly. Act Locally.**