



# Seder Discussion Guide on Immigration

## Why Immigration? An Introduction:

When the Israelites were redeemed from slavery, we stood at the Sea of possibilities before us. Our release into freedom was about the release from the predetermined future of the slave. Because of this, the Passover season is the perfect time to open a discussion with family and friends on the topic of human migration. Thousands of people cross the US border every day seeking asylum. Our response is severely lacking.

In our day and age it is the norm to hear political messages of certainty. But it is uncertainty which gives rise to creativity and allows us to grow in our thinking. The situation is not simple. The goal of this discussion guide is not to flatten the realities or to convince an audience of one set of beliefs. Rather, it is to encourage you to grapple with our story, the Jewish story, and the human story. Let us see what our sacred texts can do to bring both truth and compassion to the reality of those seeking life in a new country.

### Genesis 3:23

So God YHVH sent away humankind from the Garden of Eden, to till the earth from which it was taken.

וַיִּשְׁלַחְהוּ ה' אֱלֹקִים מִגֶּן־עֵדֶן לְעַבְדֹת אֶת־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר לָקַח מִשָּׁם:

### Genesis 12:1

YHVH said to Avram, "Go forth from your land, and from your birthplace, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵרְלֹךְ מֵאֶרֶץ־וּמָוֹלָדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲרָאָךְ:

*The first humans were cast out of the Garden of Eden. What does that tell you about the condition of all humankind? The first Jew, Abraham (originally known as Avram), was asked to leave his homeland. Why do you think he had to leave? Why was the call to leave a precursor to Abraham's covenant with God?*





## Pesach Haggadah

Blessed be the Place of all, Blessed be He; Blessed be the One who Gave the Torah to His people Israel, Blessed be He.

בְּרוּךְ הַמָּקוֹם, בְּרוּךְ הוּא, בְּרוּךְ שֶׁנָּתַן תּוֹרָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּרוּךְ הוּא.

## Mishnah Pesachim 10:5

Rabban Gamliel would say: Anyone who does not say these three things on Passover has not fulfilled his/her obligation. They are: the Paschal lamb, matza, and bitter herbs. The Paschal lamb because The Place passed over the houses of our ancestors in Egypt.

רַבֵּן גַּמְלִיאֵל הָיָה אוֹמֵר, כָּל שֶׁלֹּא אָמַר שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים אֵלּוּ בְּפֶסַח, לֹא יֵצֵא יָדָיו חוֹבְתוֹ, וְאֵלּוּ הֵן, פֶּסַח, מַצָּה, וּמַרֹר. פֶּסַח, עַל שׁוּם שֶׁפָּסַח הַמָּקוֹם עַל בְּתֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם.

*One of the rabbinic names of God is **הַמָּקוֹם HaMakom** which means **The Place**. Why do you think this is a name for God? In the Passover Haggadah, this name of God appears before the telling of the Four Sons. Likewise, in the Mishnah (early rabbinic literature), **הַמָּקוֹם** is the name of God used to describe passing over the homes of the Israelites. If God is **The Place**, what does that suggest about the physical place in which we find ourselves?*



*The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees was established after the horrific events of WWII and the Holocaust, and states that it is a human right to seek asylum in another country when fleeing persecution. In the United States, the ceiling for refugee admittance, set each year by the President and Congress, was 125,000 persons in 2022, but only 25,465 persons were granted refugee status. Why do you think there is such a huge discrepancy? What can we do to help close the gap?*



*Many people seeking to enter the United States are fleeing poverty and/or general lawlessness in their home country and do not meet the definition of an Asylum Seeker. While some people will be able to become citizens and live here, most in this category will be refused residency. What can we do as humankind and as citizens of the United States to help improve worldwide living conditions and safety for all? Can you imagine some other paths to immigration?*





**Genesis 15:13**

And God said to Avram, "Surely know that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs, and they shall be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years."

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יְדַע תְּדַע כִּי־גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעִבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:

**Exodus 2:22**

Tzipporah bore a son whom Moses named Gershom, for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land."

וַתֵּלֵד בֶּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ גֵרְשֹׁם כִּי אָמַר גֵּר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ נְכַרְיָה:

**Exodus 12:49**

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

תּוֹרָה אֶחָת יִהְיֶה לְאִזְרָח וְלִגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם:

**Exodus 23:9**

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the soul of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.

וְגֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יָדַעְתֶּם אֶת־נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי־גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

*The word "ger" is found in the Torah 92 times. Ger may be translated as stranger, sojourner, or foreigner. Most often, we are told to not oppress the ger because we understand the condition of the ger, as we were the ger in Egypt. The context of this is when the Israelites are the majority and the ger is the minority. Can we take the commandment on how to treat the ger out of this context and apply it more broadly?*

*Why or why not? And who is the ger today?*

**A final note:**

Let us learn how to listen. YHVH finally acted with out stretched arm because our suffering could be heard. When we diminish the voice of the "other" we all suffer. The "other" may be sitting across from you at your Passover seder. Let all who are hungry come & eat.

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