**Text Study #1: Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:33-34**

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| **Translation** | **Original** |
| When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God.  | וְכִי יָגוּר אִתְּךָ גֵּר בְּאַרְצְכֶם לֹא תוֹנוּ אֹתוֹ: כְּאֶזְרָח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר הַגָּר אִתְּכֶם וְאָהַבְתָּ לוֹ כָּמוֹךָ כִּי גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: |

* Why do you think this commandment comes up so many times?
* What's the connection between this commandment and "I am the Lord your God"?
* What is the difference between not wronging the stranger and loving the stranger as yourself?
* Who are some examples of people who might be considered or treated as strangers in your camp community? In the Jewish community? In your country?

**Here are three ways to consider whether/how we’re fulfilling the spirit of this commandment:**

* **Am I actively welcoming those who are new to my community?**
* **Am I learning about who does not always feel welcome in my community (so that I can help to build a more genuinely inclusive environment)?**
* **Am I looking for ways to celebrate the many identities of the people around me so that everyone can be their full selves?**

**Text Study #2: Mishna Sanhedrin 4:5**

Furthermore, only one person, Adam, was created for the sake of peace among humans, so that no one should say to their fellow, 'My ancestor was greater than yours.... Also, Adam [was created singly] to show the greatness of the Holy One, Blessed be God, for if a person strikes many coins from one mold, they all resemble one another, but the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed be God, made each person in the image of the first, and yet not one of them resembles their fellow. Therefore every single person is obligated to say, 'The world was created for my sake.’

* What would it look like to live this idea in our day-to-day life as individuals?
* What would it look like for this idea to play out in our societal structures?

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| **What I Am***(names/titles/descriptors that you were proudly)* | **What I’m Not***(names/titles/descriptors that you don’t like and which have either been applied to you in the past or that you worry have been applied to you)* |
| ***What I Hope to Be****(names/titles/descriptors that don’t apply to you yet but which you hope will someday)* |

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## **Welcoming the Stranger, Living Our Values**

January 20, 2016, *Jewish Exponent* ([http://www.jewishexponent.com](http://www.jewishexponent.com/))

“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Exodus 22:20

The commandment to welcome and embrace the stranger appears 36 times in our Torah. Suffice it to say, it is a crucial element of our tradition, one that should guide and permeate our actions. Simultaneously, the tradition guides us to view others as created *B’tzelem Elohim*, made in God’s image.

These two concepts can serve as the starting point for the American Jewish discussion about the current humanitarian disaster in Syria and Iraq and the hundreds of thousands of people in dire need of refuge. I am proud that many segments of our Jewish community have taken a sensible, compassionate approach to the issue.

As an historian of American Jewry, and as the granddaughter of immigrants, I must point out that our people have both benefited from, and been victimized by, changes in U.S. immigration policy. Starting in 1881, with the assassination of Czar Alexander II, and the terrible wave of pogroms that followed throughout the Russian empire, masses of eastern European Jews sought refuge through America’s liberal immigration policy. Over the next 40 years, some 3.5 million Jews immigrated to America — a migration that forever transformed our people and our country.

The Immigration Act of 1924, prompted by growing nativist sentiments, had disastrous consequences for European Jewry. In the 1930s, the majority of the American public opposed admitting European refugees, including Jews. How many victims of the Holocaust could have been saved had our national leaders taken a more principled stand?

In the Jewish media, I have seen a considerable amount of debate devoted to the question of whether or not today’s refugees from the Middle East are analogous to Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe. Of course, the two situations aren’t the same; history rarely affords such complete parallels. But what is clear is that the Syrian Muslims and Christians and other religious and ethnic minorities, such as the Yazidis, are fleeing for their lives, trying to escape a calamitous civil war in which all sides are pursuing scorched-earth policies.

I understand and would never dismiss the public’s concern. Recent events have only served to remind us that the United States faces a very real threat of terrorism. The Reconstructionist movement embraces nuanced discussion. The U.S. approach to the new refugee crisis should be rigorous, with due diligence taken.

Between 1991 and 2008, the United States admitted some 50,000 refugees from Iraq. By nearly all accounts, this resettlement has proved successful. Why would we expect our experience with Syrian refugees to be dramatically different? Can our system guarantee the absence of risk? Probably not. But there are few such guarantees in life, and living in an open society guided by certain values has always entailed some risk.

In the wake of the recent attacks in Paris and California, Muslim-Americans are facing increased scrutiny and suspicion. The Reconstructionist movement believes it is incumbent upon American Jews to stand shoulder-to shoulder with our Muslim neighbors. In fact, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College is a founding member of an interfaith coalition named Shoulder to Shoulder. Our movement is proud to have congregations, faculty and rabbinical students who are actively engaged in building Muslim-Jewish relationships, and who are working closely with our newest refugee communities. We, too, were once recent arrivals to this country, facing mistrust and discrimination. That experience guides us.

For all these reasons, last month I was one of more than 1,200 rabbis, including at least 160 Reconstructionist rabbis, who signed a HIAS-sponsored letter calling on our elected officials to exercise moral leadership for the protection of the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program.

To conclude, I’d like to cite the letter. The “heartbreaking attacks in Paris and Beirut are being cited as reasons to deny entry to people who are themselves victims of terror. And in those comments, we, as Jewish leaders, see one of the darker moments of our history repeating itself.” It goes on to state, “in 1939, our country could not tell the difference between an actual enemy and the victims of an enemy. In 2015, let us not make the same mistake.”

Join me in calling for a national policy that welcomes and protects the stranger, a policy that lives up to the highest ideals of our faith and our country. Join me in defending our cherished values of welcoming and embracing the stranger.

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**Owning My Identities** By Evan Traylor, myjewishlearning.com

Since I was a little kid growing up in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, I’ve always known that I was somehow different in the Jewish community. I didn’t look like the other kids in Hebrew school. I was the only one to have Black family members at their bar mitzvah ceremony. And I eventually took on the expectation of providing the perspective and feelings of Black people to my Jewish friends in youth group and at camp. And for most of my life, I made the conscious decision to go with the flow. I figured that just letting these things happen and not really questioning their importance or impact on myself would allow me to somehow continue my life as usual.

However, throughout my time at college, I’ve had incredible professors, organizations, and friends that have challenged me to explore the roots of my past, including my relationships, and how they have shaped my life.

For the very first time in my entire life, as a half-Black, half-White member of the Jewish community, I have began owning my identities.

I no longer squeamishly describe my race – I proudly tell others of my diverse background and family makeup.

I no longer stay silent when racism pervades its way into the Jewish community – I am an advocate for protecting the dignity of all people, especially Jews of Color.

I no longer try to “play the part” of the Black person at Jewish summer camp or the lone Jewish student at public school – I am myself and act according to my personality and passions.

I no longer shy away from using my roles in the Jewish community to talk about race and privilege – I have realized how important it is to have these conversations.

I no longer provide a short answer when an acquaintance asks, “How did you decide to major in Jewish Studies, that’s so random?” – I understand which assumptions they are utilizing and provide them with a fully developed response that will make them think and grow.

Overall, I am a somewhat reserved and polite person, usually striving to avoid conflict and serve the “people pleaser” role. While, my natural inclination is to just allow events and ideas to pass without raising objection, my growth over the past few years has me asking a lot of questions and striving to orchestrate tough conversations in the Jewish community:

Are Jews truly committed toward helping people of color succeed?

How are congregations ensuring that they are inclusive and welcoming of Jews of all backgrounds?

How do White Jews truly understand and own White privilege in America?

While I think I have some of the answers to these questions, I am by no means the expert of this important and holy conversation. Additionally, I’m not completely sure there are “right” answers to these complex challenges. Unlike most articles, this one doesn’t have a pretty bow to tie up all of these thoughts. While I’m anxious to continuing thinking about and discussing these challenges, I’m excited for what the future could hold for the Jewish community if we just take a leap of faith toward meaningful conversations, strong relationships, and inspired action.