

Many Jews come from different places such as Russia, China, Austria, Poland, Germany, and Netherlands. These Jews came to America to get away from persecution and to get a job. People tried so hard they would walk 900 miles to get a boat from England to the US; it was not easy to get away from being treated unkindly. Why do we pass these stories on? We pass these stories on because this is how your life started. These stories will be passed on from generation to generation. Your relatives all went through some type of pain to create and start your life. **That's why we tell how our ancestors got free and came to AMERICA!**

(Jack Lesser & Ross Prince,
Beth David Religious School 4th Grade Class)

This phrase is sometimes translated as “My father was a wandering Aramean,” and other times as “An Aramean sought to destroy my father.” Somewhere between the two translations lies **the essence of the Jewish experience: a rootless people who have fled persecution time and time again.** [When you reach] this point in the Seder, walk with your guests to your front door and place a pair of shoes on your doorstep and read together:

“As we recite the words ‘*Arami oved avi*,’ we acknowledge that we have stood in the shoes of the refugee. **Today, as we celebrate our freedom, we commit ourselves to continuing to stand with contemporary refugees.** In honor of this commitment, we place a pair of shoes on our doorstep of this home to acknowledge that none of us is free until all of us are free and to pledge to stand in support of welcoming those who do not yet have a place to call home.”

(Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) Seder Supplement 2016)

MY ANCESTOR WAS A WANDERING ARAMEAN...

... אַרְמִי אֹוֶד אָבִי. *ARAMI OVED AVI*

MY ANCESTOR WAS A WANDERING ARAMEAN. HE DESCENDED TO EGYPT AND RESIDED THERE IN SMALL NUMBERS. HE BECAME A NATION — GREAT, POWERFUL AND NUMEROUS. THE EGYPTIANS TREATED US BADLY. THEY PERSECUTED US AND PUT US UNDER HARD LABOR. WE CRIED OUT TO THE ETERNAL, THE GOD OF OUR ANCESTORS. GOD HEARD OUR VOICE. GOD SAW OUR PERSECUTION, OUR TOIL AND OUR OPPRESSION. GOD TOOK US OUT OF EGYPT WITH A STRONG HAND AND AN OUTSTRETCHED ARM, WITH AWESOME POWER, SIGNS, AND WONDERS. GOD BROUGHT US TO THIS PLACE AND GAVE US THIS LAND, A LAND OF MILK AND HONEY...

(FROM DEUTERONOMY 26:5 - 9, AND THE HAGGADAH)

Maimonides, the medieval sage and philosopher (as well as doctor to the sultan of Egypt) was once asked **whether a convert to Judaism is permitted to say “God of my ancestors”** in prayer.

He responded: “Yes. For Abraham our patriarch [*the original wandering Aramean and the first convert!*] taught the people, opened their minds, and revealed to them the true faith and unity of God... Ever since then, whoever adopts Judaism is counted among the disciples of Abraham. Therefore, you shall pray, ‘Our God and God of our ancestors,’ because Abraham is your father.

No difference exists between you and us, and all miracles done to us have been done as it were to us and to you.”

(Adapted from *A Different Night*, by Noam Zion & David Dishon)



The conflict in Syria [*aka the Biblical Aram*] has produced the **largest refugee crisis in the world**, with 4 million people forced to flee since the conflict began. More than half are children, most of whom do not attend school.

Powerful social norms in Israel/Palestine assign Hebrew to Jews, Arabic to Arabs... What then, does it mean for the idea of Hebrew as the eternal language of the Jewish people and as the national language of the Jewish state when **Palestinian Arab citizens [of Israel] choose to write [literature and poetry] in Hebrew ...?**

Alternatively, what does it mean for second- and third-generation **Mizrahi Jews, descendants of Arabic-speaking parents and grandparents** [who lived in Arabic-speaking countries like Morocco or Iraq until they made aliyah to Israel], to write in a Hebrew that cannot elide the traces of the sticky Arabic-language past?

(From *Poetic Trespass*, by Lital Levy, Princeton University)

Discussion Questions

- What are the stories of wandering in your family?
- Do you agree with HIAS that refugees are a “Jewish issue” even when the refugees are not Jewish?
- In what ways have you been a wanderer, or —like the people in the Maimonides & Lital Levy texts on the left— a boundary crosser? Has this wandering been a source of pride or of struggle? How can spiritual journeys, cultural boundary-crossings, and shifts in identity be part of our Passover story?



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