

**Shabbat Evening,
April 30, 2010
Rabbi Heidi M. Cohen**

You Are A Stranger In A Strange Land. Now Show Me Your Papers

I cannot tell you how many times I have seen the movie, ‘Jazz Singer’. Not the one with Al Jolson, but the 1980 remake with Neil Diamond. What can I say, Mom loves Neil Diamond. And when the movie came out on VCR, Mom bought it and I think we wore out the first copy in a matter of months because we kept watching it over and over again.

Here was a young man, Jess Robin, whose given name is Yussel Rabinowitz. He’s a cantor who’s married, lives a religiously devoted life but aches to write and perform music for the rest of the world, not just his little shul.

Not to give the full summary of the movie, Yussel, Jess, leaves his small community, goes to Los Angeles, loses his wife, gets remarried, his father says kaddish for him because he’s afraid Yussel has forgotten who he is and where he has come from, becomes a big star, returns to New York to chant Kol Nidre at his father’s shul, begs forgiveness from his father to show that he has not forgotten where he came from and the movie concludes with the grand finale of Jess singing, “America!”

Far
We've been travelling far
Without a home
But not without a star

Home, to a new and a shiny place
Make our bed, and we'll say our grace
Freedom's light burning warm
Freedom's light burning warm

Free
Only want to be free
We huddle close
Hang on to a dream

Everywhere around the world
They're coming to America
Every time that flag's unfurled
They're coming to America

On the boats and on the planes
They're coming to America
Never looking back again
They're coming to America

Got a dream to take them there
They're coming to America
Got a dream they've come to share
They're coming to America

Home, don't it seem so far away
Oh, we're travelling light today
In the eye of the storm
In the eye of the storm

They're coming to America,
Today

My country 'tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty
Of thee I sing
Today

Where are you from? I don't mean, where were you born, but where is your family from? Every single one of us is an immigrant. Every single one of us in this room came from another country some time in our family's history. The only exception is if someone can trace his/her ancestors to the many native American tribes, but I think I can make a safe assumption that even if you have part Native American ancestry, there is also an immigrant relative in the mix.

Last Friday, Arizona Governor, Jan Brewer, signed into law bill 1070 which:

- Prohibits state, city or county officials from limiting or restricting "the enforcement of federal immigration laws to less than the full extent permitted by federal law" and allows an Arizona resident to sue an official or agency that

adopts or implements a policy that does so. The bill contains a "loser pays" provision meant to deter frivolous lawsuits.

- Requires law enforcement to make a reasonable attempt "when practicable" to determine the immigration status of a person if reasonable suspicion exists that the person is in the U.S. illegally. Officers do not have to do so "if the determination may hinder or obstruct an investigation."
- Makes it a state crime to be an illegal immigrant by creating a state charge of "willful failure to complete or carry an alien-registration document."
- Allows law-enforcement officials to arrest a person without a warrant if they have probable cause to believe the person has committed a public offense that makes him or her removable from the U.S.

Read more:

<http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/2010/04/23/20100423arizona-immigration-law-passed.html#ixzz0maWAZl4N>

Arizona's new law is one of the most stringent immigration laws passed by any state, and it has set off a wave of controversy not only around the country, but even around the world.

America has always been a land of opportunity.

American immigration can be seen through four distinct points of time: the Colonial period, the mid-nineteenth century, the turn of the twentieth century, and post-1965. Each period of time brought different national groups, races and ethnicities. In the 17th century, about 175,000 Englishmen migrated to Colonial America. Over half of these people arrived as indentured servants. The mid-nineteenth century saw an influx from Northern Europe; the turn of the twentieth century brought immigrants, many of our family members, from Southern and Eastern Europe, and post 1965 primarily came from Latin America and Asia.

With each of these waves of migration, America has passed numerous laws trying to control who enters the country. In 1921, Congress passed the Emergency Quota Act followed by the 1924 Immigration act attempting to lower the rate of immigration and make it proportionate to the ethnicities of the people already in the United States. This 1924 law was detrimental to the Jews in the early 1930s trying to escape Eastern Europe.

These immigration laws were motivated by the economic concerns and the high unemployment rate of the Great Depression. While it is estimated that 100,000 Jews were successful in immigrating to the United States in the 1930s, it is also estimated that another 200,000 could have been saved from the gas chambers if America would not have turned them away. It is painful to remember the SS St. Louis that sailed from Germany in 1939, carrying 936 Jewish refugees. In June, 1939, the ship waited in the Caribbean, between Florida and Cuba, waiting for permission to unload its precious cargo. This permission was never granted and the ship returned to Germany. Only one third of her passengers (365) survived the Holocaust.

The quotas from the 1924 Immigration Act remained in place until the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 which first limited the number of visas granted to 300,000, including 120,000 to Eastern European countries and no more than 20,000 to any one country. However, the number of family reunification visas was unlimited.

America is a land of immigrants. While there are those who will proudly claim to be fourth, fifth generation American or Daughters of the Revolution, we are all immigrants and our families came here for opportunity, to avoid persecution and to seek a better life for themselves and their families. The majority of those who crossed our borders then and today are not looking for the easy way out. Our family members who

came to this country came to work hard and establish themselves. They worked in the sweatshops of New York, ploughed the fields of middle America, and established businesses that would benefit our countries economic greatness – even through today’s recession. America’s immigrants accepted menial jobs no one else would do because they knew then, as today’s immigrants know today, there is nothing gained without hard work and the sweat of the brow.

How many of us enjoy fresh strawberries bought at the little kiosks on the street or even in the big containers from Costco? How many of us have house cleaners who do the chores we seem to no longer have the time for? How many of us rely on private and public grounds keepers to keep our grass and flower beds looking beautiful because we do not have the time or maybe the skill to care for them ourselves? How much do these people accept as a salary? How much are we willing to pay? And are we willing to do the work ourselves?

Let’s face it, we rely on low-income wage earners to do much of the work that we either will not accept ourselves or feel we are too skilled to do.

Our country is built on the backs of immigrants and to be honest, I think we’re grateful for that. Many of us have benefited from this idea of coming to a land of opportunity for a new beginning, to care for our families and to live in peace and freedom.

In our recent history, a uniformed officer could legally approach a neighbor and demand their papers, arresting them if they couldn’t provide them. This was the case 70 years ago in Nazi Germany and 70 minutes ago in the state of Arizona. We know that our

immigration laws need refining. We know that the system is broken and something has to be done. But this law is wrong.

There is a need to be concerned and it goes beyond a specific law being passed, it is also about how we treat one another.

Carlos Galinda-Elivra posted a comment on Governor Brewer's Facebook page about his concerns for Bill 1070. Carlos then tells that "someone named Charles responded for me to 'move back to Mexico' and 'tell your son he is lucky your family did not get caught when you broke the law to get here ... go back!' My response to Charles: I was, like the Springsteen song goes, 'Born in the USA.' However, you just proved my point: you assumed that I was undocumented simply because of my surname and opposition to SB 1070."

There is a wave of concern and rhetoric moving throughout our country regarding immigration and public safety. However, what might be forgotten is that laws being implemented may not necessarily keep us safe, rather, they may endanger us instead.

Costa Mesa Mayor Allan Mansoor is attempting to introduce an even harsher anti-immigration law to the city. "Mayor Mansoor's proposals to have Costa Mesa police officers check the immigration status of people who cannot produce a driver's license when pulled over [...] are ill-advised and contrary to the best interest of the community." (from ADL letter of concern, April 29, 2010)

The Anti-Defamation League has suggested that this law will continue to foster hostility between the community and law enforcement. There has been an increase among both illegal and legal immigrants who are reluctant to report crimes or serve as witnesses against violent crimes for fear that they will be asked to present their papers

before law enforcement will consider their call. Fear is being promoted rather than community building to prevent violent crimes.

We Jews remember the Exodus from a brutal life of slavery and a great march through the desert to a better world. American Jews share a history of leaving persecution and prejudice for a land of opportunity, hope and freedom. We Jews have fought for the right to earn a decent wage, find accessible housing and ensure our children an education that will allow them to become our nation's great thinkers and builders. We Jews remember the battles to save our families from the fiery furnace of hate in Eastern Europe. We Jews were strangers in a strange land and we are commanded to care for the new stranger in our midst.

We cannot forget from where we came and we cannot turn a blind eye to those who struggle for freedom and opportunity. We must stand up against discrimination and marginalization and demand a system that will treat all people from all lands with dignity and respect while also protecting our country and all of those who live here.

We share more with today's immigrants than we might be willing to admit. And we cannot forget from where we came and tell someone else that they cannot fulfill their dreams for a better life not only for them, but for their children as well.

Yes, there needs to be immigration reform. Yes, we must protect our country from those who seek to terrorize us. Yes, we are concerned about our economy and the impact on our institutions when we have to care for those who cannot afford to contribute. However, we also cannot discriminate or show prejudice because we just assume someone is looking for a free hand out. We cannot assume that it is only those who are here illegally that are depleting our resources. America has more than her fair

share of destitute who have been here for generations and they too are seeking financial stability from our system.

We were strangers in a strange land and we are grateful that the gates were open when our families came to this country. Now, we must work together to ensure that our country can become more stable but not by asking someone on the street for his or her papers. We must keep the gates open for them as well.

(Blessing on page 112 – Mishkan T'fillah)

Amen

Temple Beth Sholom
2625 N. Tustin Ave. Santa Ana, CA 92705
Phone: 714-628-4600 • Fax: 714-628-4619
Email: information@tbsoc.com
<http://www.TBSOC.com/>