



**Labor on the Bimah
2006: Immigration and
Immigrant's Rights**

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This resource packet was written and compiled by Labor on the Bimah Coordinator Matt Adler of Jews United for Justice (JUFJ). JUFJ’s mission is to engage the Jewish community of the greater Washington area as a partner in efforts for social and economic justice. We do this by *learning* and *reflecting* on our prophetic traditions, *connecting* Jewish institutions with the tools and opportunities to make a difference, and *mobilizing* the Jewish community to *act* in solidarity with others in local social justice campaigns. Each year, we engage dozens of congregations in Washington, D.C., Suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia in programming about workers’ rights over Labor Day Weekend. Our Labor on the Bimah program has grown in scope, so that it now aims to reach many parts of the community including youth groups, religious schools, and adult education programs. Labor on the Bimah would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of our JUFJ staff and Labor on the Bimah volunteer chairs:

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Introduction to Parashat Ki Tetze

Parashat Ki Tetze is a commandment-focused part of the Torah. There is no particular plot - nothing actually “happens” in this parashah. Instead, the portion is a series of guidelines for how we are to live our lives. The commandments deal with a variety of topics, ranging from clothing to food, marital status to the rules of war. Although these ideas seem disjointed at first, there is a crucial Jewish value that ties them together: social responsibility. It is within the context of this value that the text is particularly relevant to immigration and immigrants' rights.

Many of the commandments presented in Ki Tetze are about maintaining a successful, self-sustaining community. We are commanded to assure care for the widow, to return lost property to our neighbor, to provide food for the poor, to pay fair wages to employees. Yet our social responsibility is not simply a matter of “dos” and “do nots”. Rather, the Torah enjoins us to make the safety and well-being of all people a priority, an essential part of our thinking. For this reason, we are commanded to build a parapet on our rooftops, so that “[we] bring not blood upon [our] house, if any man fall from thence.” The radical and very Jewish concept, then, is that it is not enough to provide for the welfare of those who are in need. We must also take action to prevent that need from developing in the first place. Therefore, we must build a railing on our rooftops, so that we have done our part to decrease the chance that someone will fall from it. We must make it as unlikely as possible that an injustice will happen on our account.

This context provides an interesting lens for analyzing the parashah's statements about strangers. As is seen on the Dvar Torah Ideas resource, the text is explicit about the need to be kind to strangers, to not treat them differently under the law and in the workplace. The text reminds us that we were strangers in the land of Egypt, and therefore we must recall what it is like to be outsiders and be compassionate to those who are now in our shoes.

On a surface level, then, it seems that the parashah teaches that our responsibility is to avoid passing laws that unjustly harm strangers. If we do not actively discriminate against immigrants, it appears that we are obeying the commandment. Yet, in light of the overall message of the parashah, it is evident that we are expected to be proactive, to actually *preempt* the abuse of the strangers in our midst. Just as we must build a safe rooftop to prevent a person from falling from it, so too must we work with community partners to actively improve the lot of immigrants, both Jewish and gentile. By taking the initiative to push for policies that guarantee equal wages for equal work, that provide English classes and job training, and that ensure adequate healthcare, we bring to life the essence of the mitzvot in this parashah and ensure the dignity of immigrants and all members of our communities.

Parashat *Ki Tetze* – D'var Torah Ideas

1) **“No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the congregation of the Eternal...because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey after you left Egypt...You shall not abhor an Edomite, for such is your kin. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in that land.”**
-Deut. 23:4-5, 8

“Remember what Amalek did to you on our journey, after you left Egypt- how undeterred by fear of G-d, he surprised you on the march, **when you were famished and weary, and cut down all the stragglers in your rear.** Therefore...you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven. Do not forget!”
-Deut. 25:17-19

These passages command us to recall the cruelties and generosity that various peoples visited upon the Israelites in their journey to the Promised Land. We are told to remember how the Ammonites and Moabites refused us sustenance in the desert, how Amalek specifically targeted our weakest brothers and sisters to be killed. Yet in the same passage, G-d also commands us not to hate the Edomites and Egyptians, as some of them aided us when we were strangers at their mercy. The parashah instructs us with examples of how not to behave and how we ought to be have. G-d reminds us of the hateful acts of the Ammonites, Moabites, and Amalek not only to condemn the perpetrators, but also in order for us to remember never to behave like them. As we think of how as wanderers we were once denied the basic elements of survival by those who could have helped us, we commit ourselves to act better than those that oppressed us. We think of those brave Egyptians who did help us when we were strangers, and commit ourselves to treat others humanely. The Torah demands that we show kindness to strangers and migrants, that we help them obtain the necessities of life. We show compassion to the weak and exploited wanderers among us so as to distinguish ourselves from those who were cruel to us and to honor those who treated us with graciousness.

2) **“When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, then you may eat grapes until you have enough at your own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When you come into thy neighbor's standing corn, then you may pluck ears with thy hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbor's standing corn.”**
-Deut. 23:25-56

The passage stipulates that one may not take *more* than one needs from another person's crop, for this is considered stealing. G-d tells us that we may, in fact, take food from wherever we find it, so long as we consume it on site. The implication of this is that you cannot carry the produce with you, i.e. take more than you need for yourself. If we take more than our fair share, we are in violation of the Torah because we are in fact stealing from our neighbors. G-d commands us to limit our desires, to harvest the food we need to survive, but not to carry away our neighbors' produce in glutton. Of equal importance, however, is that this quote from the parashah sets forth an important and radical principle of Torah: every human being is entitled to enough food to sustain him or herself. The logical conclusion is that G-d declares the survival needs of fellow human beings, regardless of national origin, citizenship, religion, etc. to be non-negotiable. While one may argue on the merits of guest worker programs, citizenship courses, and other policies, the Torah makes clear that when it comes to basic sustenance, all people are entitled. Although the Torah does not go so far as to say we are all entitled to the luxuries of life, it does suggest that those who are privileged

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reasonably constrain their desires and those who are less fortunate are entitled to food to their needs. In order to survive, you are welcome to sustenance and it would be a Mitzvah for us to facilitate such a reality in our day.

3) **“You shall not turn over to the master a slave who seeks refuge with you from that master.** Such individuals shall live with you in any place they may choose among the settlements in your midst, wherever they please; you must not ill-treat them.”
 –Deut. 23:16-17

This part of the Torah provides an explicit basis for the principle of asylum. When we encounter someone who is fleeing from bondage, we are obligated by the Torah to provide that person safe haven. The passage commands us to “not turn [the former slave] over” to the former master, and to let the escapee live with us. Furthermore, we “must not ill-treat them.” All too often, we forget the reasons why most people, including our ancestors, immigrate. Other than the few who can migrate for reasons of pleasure or new job assignments, the vast majority of immigrants flee oppression. The attraction of job opportunities in the United States is great, but it often takes catastrophe to push someone to abandon their family, friends, and home and move to a strange new place. The master many are running away from is far greater than one person: it is genocide in Sudan, civil wars in Central America, religious persecution in China. The Torah tacitly acknowledges that we are limited in our ability to prevent oppression elsewhere, as evidenced by the fact that we are not commanded to punish the former master. Instead, we are asked to treat the escapee with dignity and respect once he or she is among us. We may not be able to end oppression in other nations, but once we have the power to influence the fate of another human being fleeing affliction, it becomes our responsibility to care for him or her. When today’s immigrants, like our forebears, arrive on our shores, we must care for them and offer them shelter as the Torah commands. We must not deport them and return them to the suffering they once endured.

4) **“You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay out the wages due on the same day,** before the sun sets, for the worker is needy and urgently depends on it; else a cry to the Eternal will be issued against you and you will incur guilt”
 –Deut. 24:14-15

While this Mitzvah appears rather self-explanatory, there is an important aspect that must be considered. It is apparent that we are enjoined to treat workers with decency and pay them their wages on time. The text shows an appreciation for the dependency of workers on their salaries in order to survive and for this reason condemns employers who delay or deny just payment. What is most relevant, however, to the immigration issue, is the inclusion of the phrase “thy strangers.” G-d emphasizes that this law applies not only to Israelite workers, but to all people, regardless of national origin. But if G-d meant for such a law to be universal, why wouldn’t the commandment omit any reference to “thy brethren” and “thy strangers”? Since we presume that every word of Torah is written for a reason, an explanation for this particular word choice could be xenophobia. The text seems to acknowledge that in all societies, people tend to have different economic standards for “natives” and “foreigners.” One need only look at the wage differentials for Indian workers in the Persian Gulf, Africans in France, the Thai in Israel, and immigrants of all stripes in the United States. All too often, societies are willing to ignore fair labor standards for immigrant populations, as they are a “foreign” constituency. The Torah recognizes this tendency, and commands us to overcome it- to apply fair wage practices to all people. Unfortunately, many immigrants in our own community are

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exploited and denied payment for work they have completed. Therefore, we must live up to our biblical obligations by supporting community institutions, such as day laborer and employment justice centers, that ensure that all people receive fair wages for the work they do.

5) **“You shall not have in your pouch alternate weights, larger and smaller. You shall not have in your house alternate measures, a larger and a smaller. You must have completely honest weights and completely honest measures, if you are to endure long on the soil that the Eternal your G-d is giving you. For everyone who...deals dishonestly is abhorrent to the Eternal your G-d.”** –Deut. 25:13-15

This passage commands us to remember that we must measure our goods and prices justly - in the same manner for all people. Just as a merchant may not measure one customer's product accurately and another's unfavorably, we too are enjoined to treat all people by the same standard. A contemporary example of why this commandment is so important is when some employers manipulate federal and state minimum wage regulations by threatening undocumented workers with deportation. By hanging this threat over the workers' heads, these abusive employers are able to pay sub-standard wages, even as they are aware that the law stipulates otherwise. Taking advantage of immigrants' linguistic and legal barriers is an egregious violation of this commandment. Ensuring fair trade and commerce means that native-born Americans and immigrants must both be “measured” with the same “weights”- with dignity and equal wages for the same work.

Jewish Textual Resources on Immigrants' Rights

Kindness to Strangers – Chesed Le'gerim

The Jewish tradition is explicit about the need to treat strangers with compassion and justice, as equals to other citizens. Given our experience as foreigners in Egypt, Jewish texts remind us to treat others who find themselves in that position with the generosity we would have desired.

“When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow- in order that the Eternal your G-d may bless you in all your undertakings...[a]lways remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore do I enjoin you to observe this commandment.”
(Deuteronomy 24:19, 24:22)

“There shall be one law for the citizen and for the stranger who dwells among you.” (Exodus 12:49)

"When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Eternal your G-d."
(Leviticus 19:33-34)

"Welcoming a guest takes priority over welcoming the Shechina, the presence of God." (Sabbath 127a)

“You shall not wrong or oppress the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.’ ‘You shall not wrong’ with words, ‘and you shall not oppress’ financially...”
(Mechilta d’Rabbi Yishmael Mishpatim - 3rd century Midrash)

“You shall not turn over to the master a slave who seeks refuge with you from that master. Such individuals shall live with you in any place they may choose among the settlements in your midst, wherever they please; you must not ill-treat them.” (Deuteronomy 23:16-17)

Discussion Questions:

1. The commandment to be kind to strangers is mentioned 30+ times in the Torah, more than any other Mitzvah. Why this repeated emphasis on treating the stranger equally? Why not simply say “treat all people fairly”? Is there a need to distinguish between “stranger” and “citizen”?
2. What does it mean to be a “ger” or “stranger”? Is this a permanent characteristic? When have you felt like a stranger before? How did it feel?
3. What are some reasons why people immigrate? Why did you and/or your ancestors immigrate to the United States?
4. What, if any, obligations do we have to protect strangers from harm? According to the last quote and your personal opinion, are there situations in which deportation is acceptable or unacceptable?
5. Are Jews “strangers” in the United States today? Who are today’s strangers in our country? Does being Jewish impact the way you view immigrants?

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Kindness to Strangers: Translation and Analysis – Chesed Le'gerim: Targum ve'Nituach

The Jewish textual tradition is filled with quotes obligating us to treat strangers with compassion and equality. One such well-known quote comes from Leviticus 19:33-34 and urges us to recall our own experience as strangers in Egypt. Look over the following translations and note how people have taken the same Hebrew text and chosen different English words to represent it.

וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ לּוֹ כְּמוֹךְ--כִּי-גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם, לֵךְ וְכִי-יִגוֹר אֶתְךָ גֵר, בְּאַרְצְכֶם--לֹא תוֹנוּ, אֲתוֹ
כַּאֲזָרְחָ מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר הַגֵּר אֶתְכֶם, בְּאַרְץ מִצְרַיִם: אֲנִי, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.

"When strangers reside with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Eternal your G-d." *(Plaut – Reform – 2005)*

"When strangers sojourn with you in your land, you shall not do them wrong. The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" *(adaptation by Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society – 2005)*

"When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not taunt him. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be as a native from among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord, your God." *(Chabad.org – Chassidic – 2005)*

"When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the Lord am your God." *(Jewish Publication Society – Conservative – 1985)*

"And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the home-born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God." *(Jewish Publication Society – Conservative – 1917)*

Discussion Questions:

1. *What differences do you notice between the texts? Look at word choice, order of ideas, plural vs. singular pronouns, gender, etc.*
2. *How do these differences change the meaning of each translation?*
3. *What is the difference between a "native" and a "citizen"? How do we determine who falls in which category in the United States and why?*
4. *What is the same across these translations? Is there a clear moral message conveyed by them all, despite their differences? Why or why not?*
5. *How do these quotes influence our understanding of what Jewish tradition says about immigrants?*
6. *What do the quotes teach us about immigration policy in the United States?*
7. *How might factors such as who the publisher was and when it was published have influenced the translation? Why?*
8. *Which translation do you prefer and why? If you speak Hebrew, which is most faithful to the meaning of the original text?*

Wages and Labor – Kesef ve'Avodah

Judaism makes clear that an employer has obligations to his/her employees. They are dependent on their boss for survival, and it is the society's responsibility to see that everyone is given adequate wages and time to rest.

“You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay out the wages due on the same day, before the sun sets, for the worker is needy and urgently depends on it; else a cry to the Eternal will be issued against you and you will incur guilt”
(Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

“The workers' employer says to them to either start early or stay late. In a place where the custom is not to start early or not to stay late, the employer is not allowed to force them. In a place where the custom is to feed, he must feed them; [where the custom is] to provide a sweet, he must provide [it]. Everything is according to local custom.”
(Baba Metziah 7:1)

“He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and he who gives gifts to the rich—both come to poverty.”
(Proverbs 22:16)

“Speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy.”
(Proverbs 31:9)

“Moses saw their burdens' [means] he saw they had no rest. He went and said to Pharaoh, ‘He who has a slave, and [the slave] has no rest one day a week, he dies; and your slaves, if you do not rest them one day a week, they will die.’ Pharaoh said to him, ‘Go and do for them as you have said.’ Moses went and fixed [lit: repaired] for them the Sabbath day for rest.”
(Midrash Rabbah Exodus 1:28)

Discussion Questions:

1. In commandments regarding wages, why does the Torah explicitly mention strangers? Why might our tradition assume that foreigners are likely to suffer labor abuse (e.g.- unpaid salaries)?
2. How do you define poverty? Is being poor only a matter of how much money you have or are there other factors to consider? Is poverty relative or is there a universal standard?
3. Do you see evidence of poverty in our community? Are there people who benefit from others being poor? If so, how do they benefit?
4. What does Shabbat have to do with immigrants' rights? Do you know of people in your community who don't get a “day of rest”?
5. In your region, are there poor Jews? Immigrant Jews? Do most of these Jews belong to synagogues? Why or why not?

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Immigrants' Rights Text Studies – Leader's Guide

Context and goals

Kindness to Strangers – Chesed Le'gerim

These quotes are meant to highlight the Jewish tradition's commitment to treating strangers with respect and dignity. As Jews have often been viewed as "strangers", we have a special historical and religious obligation to be kind unto those who find themselves in our shoes. Throughout our history, whether it be slavery in Egypt, the Crusades in Europe, the Inquisition in Spain, Nazism in Germany, or even the Klu Klux Klan in the United States, we have been demonized as money-grubbing foreigners bent on conspiring against the world. By bringing up these examples of anti-Semitic persecution, it gives the students a more Jewish context for understanding the hatred immigrants often face today. The questions also try to personalize the experience, to ask participants to think of situations in which they, too, have felt like "strangers." Encourage the participants to make the connection between these experiences and how they treat people whose culture is different from their own.

Kindness to Strangers: Translation and Analysis – Chesed Le'gerim: Targum ve'Nituach

The purpose of the study is to better understand how language impacts understanding by analyzing different translations of the same immigration-related passage from Leviticus. Participants should be challenged to find differences in word choice, style, sentence structure, gender pronouns, plural vs. singular nouns, etc. Some key differences that should be highlighted include:

- use of singular "stranger" vs. plural "strangers"
- use of "him" vs. "them", "Lord" vs. "Eternal"
- use of "reside" vs. "sojourn"
- use of "citizens" vs. "natives"
- use of more traditional vs. more modern style

After examining the differences in the texts, encourage participants to draw conclusions about how these differences influence their understanding. They should consider how differences in translation affect the message conveyed by the passage. Also, prod them to find commonalities between the texts and to discern the shared message about treating strangers with kindness. It is also worthwhile to have participants question why these passages have certain similarities and differences. For participants that speak Hebrew, a useful add-on exercise could be to have them start by translating the quote and then comparing their wording with the ones provided. Finally, allow the participants to tease out how the historical circumstances of when and by whom it was published could have impacted the translations and their implications in regards to attitudes about immigration.

Wages and Labor – Kesef ve'Avodah

This text study emphasizes the obligations of employers and of society as a whole to workers. Regularly paid wages, decent living standards, and designated rest time are key components of Jewish ethical treatment of workers. The discussion questions challenge participants to think about immigrants in their own communities and why foreigners are particularly prone to exploitation. Encourage them to think about the results of this exploitation, including how poverty manifests itself in the Greater Washington area and also within the Jewish community (particularly the elderly). Educate them as to the fact that there are thousands of Jewish immigrants of a variety of economic backgrounds from Russia, Latin America, South Africa,

Israel, Morocco, and Iran in our area. Such statistics for the area Jewish community can be found online in PDF format at <http://www.shalomdc.org/getfile.asp?id=10150>. Challenge participants to think how these groups are integrated into our community's life and if there are things we can do to make the Jewish community more inclusive for poor and/or immigrant Jews.

Ways to run a text study

There are a variety of methods you can use these text studies to foster a discussion of immigration and immigrants' rights in the Jewish tradition. The texts and discussion questions were designed so that each study could stand alone and be done individually. For example, you could just lead a text study on "Kindness to Strangers" (and not utilize text studies #2 and #3) and feel confident that you have conveyed an important lesson to participants. However, for a more comprehensive experience, we recommend using all three topics. This can be done in one sitting or on three separate occasions. These possibilities are outlined below:

1. Choose one of the three themes and use it on one occasion.
2. Utilize all three themes on one occasion by:
 - A. Dividing into three groups and assigning each group one of the themes. Each group can present its findings to the larger group and/or lead a discussion on their theme.
 - B. Taking several quotes and discussion questions from each of the three themes and crafting your own text study.
3. Utilize all three themes by holding text studies on three separate occasions, each time focusing on one of the three themes. This allows participants to deeply experience each series of quotes and process their thoughts between each session.

Engaging Participants

In addition to which texts you use, there are also a variety of ways to go about engaging the participants. The goal of any text study is to provoke discussion and interaction amongst participants. By choosing methods that encourage dialogue, you will give your audience the chance to express their opinions in a comfortable environment. Rather than "giving away the answers" by preaching to participants, give them the chance to examine the texts themselves. Even as you carefully guide the discussion with provocative or leading questions, let them debate, let them disagree, let them be controversial. The best text studies don't necessarily end with everyone in agreement, but rather leave participants and leaders with new questions to examine when they go home. With this in mind, feel free to use any and all of the following methods in crafting your text study. Consider the age and background of your participants as you choose useful combinations of strategies:

- Have participants read the Jewish texts and/or discussion questions out loud
- Divide into smaller groups for discussion- you can assign a particular quote, discussion question (s), or even an entire theme (e.g. – "Wages and Labor") for each group to consider. Then, have them present their findings to the larger group.
- Allow participants to direct questions to each other, not just the leader. If dividing into sub-groups, allow Q&A time at the end of each presentation.
- Assign a group or individual within each sub-group to play the "devil's advocate" and argue against some of the ethical principles presented in the texts. Individuals can be selected publicly or could discreetly receive a slip of paper indicating their role. This works best for more sophisticated groups that might already have some knowledge of immigration issues.

- Have a participant or group of participants actually lead the study, with you as a supervisor. This is a great way to encourage leadership.
- For younger groups, encourage participants to act out several of the quotes. Have the other participants guess which quote is being acted out. Leaders can choose to initiate discussion after each performance (focusing on each individual quote) or after a series of them.
- If running short on time, have participants select their favorite question to discuss. This sounds simple, but it gives participants a sense of ownership and lets them feel like they are guiding the study towards what find to be most interesting.
- As leader, circulate throughout the room to prod discussion or simply to listen. This action shows your interest and keeps groups on track.
- Anything else you can think of! Leading a text study is a great opportunity to be creative and try something new!

Parashat Ki Tetze – Children's Torah Study and Discussion Guide

General Discussion Questions:

1. What kind of work do you do (chores, paid work, schoolwork, etc.)? What kind of work do you like to do? How is this work important? When do you feel proud of your work? How do you like to be treated when you work?
2. What do you think makes something a good job? A bad job? Who is most likely to end up with a bad job?
3. What kind of jobs would you like to have during your life? What do your parents do? Do you know what your grandparents did? Do you think they worked when they were your age? How have times changed?

Parashat Ki Tetze establishes many of the roots of Jewish ethics regarding workers and the rights of the laborer, instructing us:

“You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow Israelite or a stranger in one of the communities of your land. You must pay out the wages due on the same day, before the sun sets, for the worker is needy and urgently depends on it; else a cry to the Eternal will be issued against you and you will incur guilt” (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

This quote teaches us that we have an obligation to treat workers fairly, making a special effort to respect and appreciate poor workers, who are often the most exploited.

What kind of workers do you see in your daily life? Do you know workers from other countries? What would be some of the challenges of being a working immigrant? Do you know any poor workers? Do you think they are satisfied with their working conditions? Why might it be easy for other people take advantage of them?

This passage tells us to pay workers their wages promptly and to show compassion even when the worker's situation may appear very different from our own.

Do you remember when people have been in debt to you or have borrowed something and have not returned it? Have those experiences made you more sensitive to sticking to your end of an agreement? Do you think you are more likely to mistreat someone if they appear different from you?

Many rabbis interpret the phrase “urgently depends on it” – also translated as “he sets his life on it” – as a clear call for a living wage that can realistically support a family.

What do you think a reasonable salary should be able to provide? What are the necessities of your life? What are the luxuries?

This section also teaches that regardless of “whether [the worker is] a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land,” we must treat him or her fairly. We can interpret this as a message about the universal human right to fair working conditions, beyond cultural and geopolitical borders. Similarly, in Exodus 20:10, G-d emphasizes that the commandment to rest on the seventh day includes all creatures, including “the sojourner that is within your gates.” This teaching is especially relevant as we advocate for fairer working conditions for immigrants – even if these laborers speak a different language, celebrate different holidays and eat different foods, they deserve equality and just compensation for their work.

Do you know the names of the people who clean your school (and for some, your house)? How about the cafeteria workers you see each day? Do you know where they are from and how they ended up with their job? What do you think they think of you?

Are you or friends of yours from another country? If you/your family immigrated to the U.S., what were the challenges you faced? If your family is from the United States, what challenges do you think your ancestors faced as immigrant workers? How can we address discrimination against workers from other countries?

As Jews we can relate to the hardships of being strangers in the Diaspora – the next parashah, *Ki Tavo*, even opens with “[m]y father was a wandering Aramean” (Deuteronomy 26:5). Just as many of our grandparents and great-grandparents were poor sweatshop laborers, so too in Deuteronomy (including 23:8) are we reminded that we were slaves in the land of Egypt.

Does your personal family history include poor immigrant laborers? What societal groups are most likely to be in this position today?

Another important verse in this parashah is Deuteronomy 22:3, which discusses the obligation to return a lost possession we have found. In this situation, we are commanded “not to remain indifferent.”

What's the difference between indifference and ignorance? Do you think you have an obligation to learn about the lives of the workers around you and how they are supporting your life?

Do you think being Jewish obligates us to take care of the poor and those without power? Does it make you feel more strongly about social justice?

What kind of situations and people are we remaining indifferent to? Why do you think we are inclined to ignore the struggles of others? What might move people to be less indifferent? What actions can we take to make sure we are responsive to unfair working conditions?

If we care, but we just don't know about the issue, we can start with the products all around us – do you know where your clothes, food and games were made? Look at the labels on people's clothing right now – do you know where these countries are located? What would you imagine the working conditions are like?

The Story of Clara Lemlich

In the early 20th century, many American Jews and other Americans, particularly those newly arrived in the United States, worked long hours at sewing machines making clothing. These workers were often paid very little and treated badly. They were often locked into the room where they worked, which at the Triangle Factory resulted in many deaths in a fire from which the workers could not escape.

Even before the fire, workers were trying to find ways to make their jobs and lives better. Many workers came together in a mass meeting on November 22, 1909, to discuss ideas for change. They sat for two hours discussing different ideas. Many people were afraid of the bosses, but they all knew that things had to change. Some workers wanted to strike, to refuse to work until their bosses agreed to treat them decently, but the idea was very frightening. Union and political leaders and other people talked and talked, but they were not coming to a decision.

Then Clara Lemlich, a high-school-aged girl, rose and burst into an impassioned speech in Yiddish. She told the crowd that she could not put up with the intolerable conditions any more, and proposed that all of them strike.

The crowd jumped up, shouting and waving hats, canes, handkerchiefs, and anything else in grabbing range. After five whole minutes, the man running the meeting was finally able to make himself heard to ask for someone to formally speak in support of Clara's idea. A second outburst arose, and the chairman said, "Do you mean faith?"

Borrowing words from the Jewish tradition, the thousand people raised their hands with the promise: "If I turn traitor to the cause I now pledge, may this hand wither from the arm I now raise."

After the meeting, all 20,000 of the "shirtwaist" makers refused to work until they were treated better. They helped win changes in the way that people who make clothing, cars and other products in America are treated, improving the lives of workers and their families to this day.

Suggested Readings for Children

Call Me Ruth, by Marilyn Sachs, follows the life of a Russian-Jewish girl who comes to the US with her mother in the early 1900s, and watches as her mother eventually become a labor-movement leader in the garment industry. Another Jewish perspective comes through *Hannah's Journal: The Story of an Immigrant Girl*, by Marissa Moss. This is an illustrated book about the journey of a Jewish immigrant family coming to New York in 1901, as the family faces the hardships of poor working conditions in the garment industry.

Immigrant Kids, a young adult history book by Russell Freedman, features first-person narratives by working immigrant children at the turn of the last century and classic photographs of children at work and play by Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine. Katherine Paterson's *Lyddie* is an acclaimed novel in which a young factory worker must decide whether to risk losing the job she desperately needs in order to protest the appalling working conditions, as she takes note of how much rougher it is for the recent Irish immigrants. A powerful account of immigrant labor for older readers is *Beyond the Western Sea, Book I: Escape from Home* by Avi, which details the struggles of Irish and English immigrants in the Massachusetts textile industry. *Good Girl Work: Factories, Sweatshops, and How Women Changed Their Role in the Workforce* by Catherine Gourley is a compelling presentation of primary source material and informative narrative to a young adult audience.

There are a number of books featuring the role of adults' work in children's lives which are appropriate for any age. To start with, Patricia Pollacco, an insightful and entertaining Jewish author, wrote *My Ol' Man*, about her father losing his job and getting a new, more exciting one, and Virginia Lee Burton's classic *Mike Mulligan and his Steam Shovel* tells of a man who defies expectation to get the job done. Diana Cohn's bilingual narrative *Sí, Se Puede! / Yes, We Can!* offers us the perspective of a child who joins his mother in her fight for justice during the recent Janitor strike in L.A.

Among the many children's books about the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire of 1911, a tragedy which generated increased awareness of the exploitation of garment workers who were often Jewish, are the following: Bonnie Bader's *East Side Story*, about two girls who join a protest for better conditions; Holly Littlefield's *Fire at the Triangle Factory*, an account of two 14-year-old girls who survived the fire; Joan Dash's *We Shall Not Be Moved: The Women's Factory Strike of 1909*; Barbara Goldin Diamond's *Fire*; Zachary Kent's *The Story of the Triangle Factory Fire*; and Virginia Sherrow's *The Triangle Factory Fire*.

Taking it Home

Encourage children to talk to their parents, grandparents and older relatives about the work that they did and how they felt about it – At what age were their grandparents expected to leave school and start working? What were the working conditions like? Were they involved in unions organizing for a better workplace and fair wages?

Children interested in learning more about child labor – or working to stop it – can find information on the Internet. Some places to start are:

www.us.ilo.org/ilokids

www.unicef.org/aclabor

www.freethechildren.org

Tools for talking to children about work and labor can be found at www.aflcio.org.

*The Children's Resources section is an adaptation of resources created in 2003 through the contributions of Jess Champagne, Mackenzie Baris, Scott Dinsmore, Deb Rosenstein, Jevera Temsky and Abby Bellows.



J E W S U N I T E D F O R J U S T I C E

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JUFJ Mission

To engage the Jewish community of the greater Washington area as a partner in efforts for social and economic justice. We do this by learning and reflecting on our prophetic traditions, connecting Jewish institutions with the tools and opportunities to make a difference, and mobilizing the Jewish community to act in solidarity with others on local social justice campaigns.



Programs and Events

Labor on the Bimah

JUFJ engages 30 congregations each Labor Day Weekend in workers' rights education.

Campaign Activities

JUFJ mobilizes hundreds of Jews through canvassing, rallies, testifying and campaigning for workers' rights, affordable housing and other initiatives.

Labor Seder

JUFJ engages the community in a call to action each Passover through a Seder linking our story of freedom to present struggles.

Community Programs

JUFJ partners with synagogues, social action committees and other organizations to enrich local Jewish social justice programming.

Issues and Campaigns

Living Wage

JUFJ has brought a progressive Jewish voice to living wage campaigns in Montgomery County, MD, Washington, DC and Alexandria, VA.

Affordable Housing

JUFJ is campaigning to create more units of affordable housing in Washington DC, promote diversity and inclusion in neighborhoods, and to protect DC residents from eviction and displacement. JUFJ has steered affordable housing campaigns for Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning, Eviction Prevention/Emergency Assistance, and full funding of the Housing Production Trust Fund.

Workers' Rights

JUFJ organizes the Metro-DC area Jewish community to support workers struggling for living wages, benefits and dignity on the job. Currently JUFJ mobilizes support for domestic workers, hotel and parking garage workers in Washington, DC and Northern Virginia.

Immigration

JUFJ partners with local and national organizations working to protect immigrants' rights through Comprehensive Immigration Reform.



JUFJ: A Jewish Voice in the Progressive Community; A Progressive Voice in the Jewish Community