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DREAM Sabbath

University Public Worship
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Biblical Dreams
(Genesis 39:1-6; 41:14-16; 38-41)

God said to Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.” (Gen. 12:1). Jacob fled alone from Canaan to Haran after he stole his brother’s blessing. Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea, initiating generations of wandering.

Texts sacred to Jews and Christians frequently describe a world of dislocation, of refugees, of immigrants and the ethics of how to relate to them. In Leviticus, we read, “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 am the Eternal your God.” (Leviticus 19:33-34)

For 130 years, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS, has transformed this text into its mission, “Helping the stranger among us.” While HIAS was founded to assist Jewish refugees, in recent years their work has evolved to protect and resettle refugees of all backgrounds, and to advocate for fair immigration policies. A few years back the New York Times reported on a significant donation to HIAS. The article began, “Were it not for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, there might be no Google.” HIAS helped Sergey Brin’s

family to settle in Maryland when he was six. 30 years later, on the anniversary of the Brins arrival in America, Sergey chose to help HIAS.

One of my friends is writing an immigrant novel whose working title is “The Real Americans are always on the Boat.” And whether they come by boat, airplane, bus or on foot, immigrants carry with them to this country precious cargo—they bring with them the promise of America.

Some of you may know Valentin Bolotnyy, who graduated last year. It is not January 1st that marks the New Year in the Bolotnyy family calendar. Rather it is August 25th— the anniversary of their leaving the Ukraine and arriving on our shores. This year, their 14th anniversary, Val had just started his new job at the Fed in Washington, D.C., and couldn’t fly back to San Francisco to celebrate with his family. But he could commemorate the day in a very special and profound way. Val made a pilgrimage to the National Mall. Walking through the Vietnam War Memorial, he reflected on the sacrifices that his grandparents and parents had made so that he could graduate from Stanford and live and work in the capital of the world's most powerful and prosperous country. As he ascended the steps of the grand and inspiring Lincoln Memorial with its message of determination, perseverance and love of country, Val meditated on how his family had persevered. They had arrived without English, without understanding American culture, with precious little

to live on, and now, individually and as a family, they have made real their dreams. Val sat down on the steps of the memorial and called each of the family members who had taken this journey with him—his dad, his mom, his brother and his grandparents. He wrote of this moment, “It was very meaningful to them to know that they were, through me, at the patriotic core of our country, celebrating how far we have come and how lucky we are, to be a part of this beautiful land of opportunity.”

Immigrants bring with them the promise of America. Some come to seek their fortune. Others were forced to leave behind their fortune. Some are living witnesses to the worst of humanity, but, in making their journeys, they personify humanity’s most enduring and inspiring attribute—the immeasurable quality of hope. Immigrants are our country’s risk-takers, our optimists. They believe in, indeed, embody the American Dream. Some young people—courageous undocumented immigrants—are publically “coming out” to advocate for the Development, Relief, and Education For Minors Act, otherwise known as the DREAM Act, which would grant temporary visas to those brought here as children so they could study or serve in the military, contributing to our country in preparation for citizenship. Many DREAMers participated in Junior ROTC in high school, and want nothing more than to enlist in the U. S. military to serve the country they love. In the small town

where we used to live, where everyone lined the streets for the Fourth of July parade, Latino and Vietnamese children enthusiastically flew the biggest flags. Immigrants are some of America's most compelling teachers of patriotism, resilience and counting our blessings. They return to us the sometimes lost part of our national vision of welcoming shores and beckoning dreams.

Rabbi Charles Feinberg, speaking in support of the DREAM Act in our nation's capital last year said, "I ask you to recall a young man who was a dreamer in a strange land. This young man was the favorite of his father, a very capable young man with big dreams for himself and his family. Yet, this young man fell on hard times. His brothers sold him into slavery and he became an illegal in a strange land. Because God had blessed him with insight and intuition, he was able not only to dream but also he was capable of interpreting dreams. Because he was so adept at dream interpretation, he became the second most powerful man in his adopted land. This young man's genius, his capability, his great skill, along with God's watchful care, helped him to realize his dreams. With God's help, this young man's ability and character overcame the prejudice and hostility that people in his adopted land had for the people of his native land. Ultimately, he became a source of blessing for his family and for the people he served.

Friends, let the memory of the biblical Joseph inspire us to help the thousands of young people in our midst who have become trapped and who are on the verge of exile because of fear and prejudice. Let us remember how “the illegal” Joseph helped save ancient Egypt from years of disastrous famine. Let us realize how much these young people love our country and want to be productive and responsible citizens in our country. We must make for them a path that will lead to citizenship and allow them to live and create without fear of deportation to a land they do not know.”

Today we have the privilege of hearing from a courageous DREAMer, literally, one of our own, a 2011 Stanford graduate. A Public Policy major, Fermin Mendoza may someday, like Joseph, be in a position that will enable him to look out for those most vulnerable in our country.

Leviticus teaches, “*Vahavta l’reacha kamocha, ani Adonai*” “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Eternal Your God.” Why are those two phrases juxtaposed? To teach us that how we treat our neighbors reveals how we honor and imitate God. Identifying with our neighbors, welcoming the stranger, revitalizes the sacred hopes of our own ancestors—those like mine, who left Eastern Europe to escape persecution, or like Rev. Sanders’

grandmother, who left Ireland to escape the potato famine, or like Dean McLennan's family, who left a barren and remote Outer Hebrides island in search of a better life. Carlos Fuentes once wrote, "Recognize yourself in he and she who are not like you and me."

Let us recognize ourselves, and our forebears in the story of DREAMers like Fermin Mendoza, with the courage, the drive and the destiny to contribute their gifts to our nation. May we do our part to make it possible for them to use those gifts wisely and for the benefit of all.