

As a rabbi, my job is to see and appreciate other human beings, their uniqueness, and their stories.

Armando Rojas, the custodian at the congregation where I am a rabbi...and a 20-year member of our communal family, was taken from us suddenly in February by ICE and deported back to a country he had not lived in for decades. Left behind were his two sons, his wife, and hundreds of families who have grown to love him in our community.

What none of us were prepared for was the peek behind the curtain we have gotten of a callous immigration system... [At Armando's final appeal], the judge said he had not read the attorney's brief but doubted that it could even be entered into the record... Months of waiting and building a case to present a fully formed human being to the government and, in the end, a government form dismisses his story and the very essence of his humanity. From the perspective of the government, all that was left to do was remove the "alien."

One of the reasons we as humans fear a flood is that it is thoughtless and indiscriminate as it uproots... Because our immigration system is hidden from view, it makes it easier for those working within it to not feel public shame for not seeing the people whose lives they hold in their hands. To not seem to care at all as we stand on the shore watching Armando carried out to sea.

- Rabbi Aaron Brusso,
Bet Torah, Mt. Kisco, N.Y.

מרור Maror

As we eat bitter herbs, we reflect on the bitterness of slavery and deportation through the testimonies of survivors.

"When Trump won, I was in a hotel. I was watching TV and I'm like, 'Oh no, I'm really getting deported.' [My trafficker] really took advantage more of the situation. The abuse started happening more often. Because he knew how scared I was to get deported. He was like, 'They don't want y'all here, if you ever call the police or do anything, they're going to send you back home.'"

- K.V., 23, from El Salvador, is applying for a visa for survivors of human trafficking. Never an easy visa to secure, the procedures have become even more onerous.²⁵

²⁵ <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/07/23/new-york-on-ice>

*Excerpted from an article that originally appeared at Slate.com:
<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/11/immigration-horror-stories-new-york-synagogue-ice.html>*

מוציא מצה Motzi Matzah²⁴

Hamotzi thanks God for bringing bread from the earth. This bread results from a partnership between God and humanity: God provides the raw materials, and people harvest, grind, and bake. So too must we remember that combating human trafficking requires partnerships: among survivors, allies, lawyers, social workers, law enforcement, diplomats, people of faith...the circles of involvement are ever-expanding.

*Baruch Atah Adonai,
Eloheinu Melech ha'olam,
hamotzi lechem
min ha'aretz.*

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה'
אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם
הַמוֹצִיא לֶחֶם
מִן הָאָרֶץ.

**Blessed are You ETERNAL our God,
Sovereign of time and space, who brings
forth bread from the earth.**

²⁴ There is a custom not to eat matzah in the weeks before Pesach, so that the taste is fresh at the seder. If your community seder is being held before the holiday, options include using egg matzah, crackers such as Tam-Tams, or having matzah present as a symbol but not eating it.

Similarly, the blessings for eating matzah and maror should only be said on Pesach itself, since that is when the commandment applies.



“We Are Not Tractors” Banner, signed by members of CIW, 1998

Created in response to an Immokalee tomato grower who said,
“The tractor doesn’t tell a farmer how to run a farm.”

The taste of bitterness reminds us that we were once slaves, that slavery still exists. In Immokalee, Florida, I saw the evidence of the bitterness of slavery: I saw the chains in the Modern Slavery Museum organized by CIW; I spoke with farmworkers who had gotten up at 4:00 am every morning to wait for hours in a parking lot, hoping for a few hours of work, doubtful whether they’d ever get paid. Bitterness reminds us, and its sharp flavor can wake us up. In Immokalee, I saw the amazing action that the taste of bitterness can inspire: weekly meetings of workers to plan their own liberation; marches on foot, on bicycle, to protest at corporate headquarters; immigrant workers who lack all legal protections creating a powerful mechanism to stop the abuses they once faced. As we bless this maror, let us bless both awareness and awakens — the knowledge of bitterness, and of the action it can inspire us to take.

- Rabbi Toba Spitzer,
Congregation Dorshei Tzedek,
Newton, Mass.

“When you’re there [in forced labor], you feel like the world is ending. You feel absolutely horrible...Once you’re back here on the outside, it’s hard to explain. Everything’s different now. It was like coming out of the darkness into the light. Just imagine if you were reborn. That’s what it’s like.”

– Adam Garcia Orozco, farmworker

“I was so tired and did not know how I could continue working like this. But I did not say anything to anyone. I did not know how I could do what was expected...All the time I was crying. Even sometimes at night I could not sleep. I would cry so hard I would have a headache. I would dream and see my family. It was a very hard time.”

– Elsa, domestic worker
(*Life Interrupted*, p. 90, 92)

I remember when he lifted up his shirt and I saw that scar. It was the first time I had ever seen a scar like that — it ran about 8 inches in length down the side of his body. It was unbearable to see. I had worked with sex workers in Guatemala, some of whom had been sex trafficked, and with refugees from East Africa in Israel, some of whom had been sex or labor trafficked, but I had not encountered organ trafficking in a real way before. This young Eritrean teenager had somehow survived and had made it to Tel Aviv. His scar was thick and frightening. His kidney was gone. I could feel the trauma he had endured and it seeped into me. I couldn’t sleep for nights after that moment. This is a type of human trafficking we often forget and overlook, but it is real, it is happening throughout the world, it is inhumane, and it must be stopped.

- Maya Paley,
Senior Director and
Co-Founder,
Change the Talk,
National Council of Jewish
Women Los Angeles