

I imagine my family history bears striking resemblance to many of yours. Three of my 4 grandparents were immigrants to this country. Two of them made the crossing alone: one left behind his entire family, one left behind a brother, in order to rejoin the rest of the family that preceded her. One came on false papers, one lied about her age in order to gain admittance. None of the family left behind was ever seen again. My grandparents, like immigrants before and after, fled poverty and persecution; and came seeking economic opportunity and the chance to build a better life for future children. They worked hard here in the U.S., and were stoic about whatever discrimination or challenges they faced. They didn't like to talk about the past. My grandparents focused on the future. They made sure their children, my parents, had a good education and could have opportunities they themselves never had. Their immigrant story is the immigrant story.

So, following the devastating election in November, I responded immediately to Rabbi Latz's invitation to discuss Sanctuary. About 15 of us attended the first meeting and as we shared why we felt called to participate, echoes were heard around the room: "Because it is morally right, because my people were immigrants, because we as Jews are called to welcome the stranger, because I can't stand by while families are torn apart, because these are my neighbors, because people risked their lives to save Jews during times of persecution and genocide, because I am commanded to help repair the world".

We discussed whether it was essential to declare sanctuary or whether it was sufficient to support other congregations, and step into stronger advocacy on immigration. The decision of those assembled was unanimous- we must do it all, including being a refuge for those seeking safety and welcome. And when the executive committee and board discussed and voted, it was with unity and conviction. I've never been prouder of my congregation; we mean it when we say Radical Hospitality.

Shir Tikvah is part of a network of now 47 congregations in MN that have declared Sanctuary or Sanctuary Support. We meet monthly, convened by the organization Isaiah. It's a humbling learning process, requiring flexibility, and the need to accept uncertainty and risk. We are figuring it out as we go along, trying to be responsive to the shifting political and policy landscape and staying focused on being true allies to immigrant and refugee communities. I feel so grateful to work among such fiercely dedicated, open-hearted, and gracious people.

But I also feel tremendous remorse, that I've lived with the privilege of not recognizing and not addressing the crackdown on immigrants that has been happening in my name as an "American", with my tax dollars, for years-- well before this administration. Ignorance is complicity, silence is complicity, inaction is complicity. So, this period of t'shuvah (of return) is

a time to repent my past ignorance and neglect, and to deepen my commitment to hearing the cries of my neighbors and to seeing the heart of the stranger.

It was 10pm on a Wednesday in mid-July when Rabbi Rappaport forwarded me a message that had come through on the after-hours emergency line. It was oddly translated voice-to-text, but it roughly said “I’m in Chicago, but a friend of mine is in ICE custody in Minnesota. He is being released tomorrow and needs help getting a ticket to England because if he is deported to Turkey he faces a life and death situation, because he is Kurdish.” After a moment of hesitation, I gulped and returned the call. I spoke to Beth, a lovely Jewish woman from Chicago, who briefly shared her friend Ferit’s story. (She found Shir Tikvah, by the way, through the Isaiah network. Her mother, living in Rochester MN, sent her the list of Sanctuary congregations, which she began calling through; we were the first to respond.) Ferit was living and working, undocumented in Chicago, and came to MN to visit someone, he was picked up on a traffic violation and was detained. He was held in detention for two months, and because the conditions were so depressing, he requested -- and was granted—“voluntary departure”.

“Voluntary Departure” is self-deportation, (an option for a small subset of detainees). You pay for your own plane ticket, and you don’t have a deportation on your record which would make reentry a criminal offense. You retain the right to reapply for entry to the country sometime in the future. With “voluntary departure” you are often given a brief window of time to settle your affairs- cash a paycheck, close a bank account, sell a car. With deportation, you are swiftly and secretly removed under government expense, but the door to reentry essentially slams closed.

After speaking to Beth, I spoke to Ferit’s attorney and got a slightly more complicated story, I won’t go into the details except to say I was told he could get released the next day pending a departure the following Monday if she could find a host with a land-line, as he would be released with a house-arrest-type ankle bracelet. I promised her I would find someone. Jane and I thought about who we could ask, because as two women we always think about our vulnerability hosting a man in our home. But after a bit of discussion realized that **WE** received the call and **WE** needed to welcome the stranger. I accompanied the attorney to ICE the next day and met Ferit- through a plate glass window. The attorney needing to shout to explain that she was working to release him to my home that day, tears in **his** eyes at the prospect of getting out. I looked into the face of a stranger and I saw, a man, made b’tzelem Elohim, in the image of God. He was no longer a stranger to me.

Ferit did not end up staying with us, because the Government attorney worked out a different deal. He would stay in custody until the day he flew out, but they’d take him out of the

extensive monitoring system, which meant that Turkey would not be notified of his impending return. As a Yazidi Kurd, a persecuted minority, this would ostensibly protect his safety. All this is said with a wink and a nod. Basically, as long as Ferit had an itinerary that would take him on a direct flight out of the country, the US government didn't really care if he never made it to Turkey. I share all these details because it's important for **us** to understand how labyrinthine and callous our immigration system is, and how money is being spent on persecuting, prosecuting and dehumanizing immigrants. This is done in our names; this is **not** justice.

While I never got to see Ferit when he was released, I was able to **help** raise money for his plane ticket and to supply a travel bag with some clean clothes and toiletries. People are released with only the belongings on their person at the time of arrest- all of Ferit's belongings are in Chicago. Ferit flew to Amsterdam, and from there, rather than returning to dire conditions in Turkey, he purchased a ticket to Toronto and is now there applying for asylum. It's not an easy road there, but he feels it is more humane and he holds onto hope. He wrote me when he was released on bond after 2 ½ weeks in detention in Toronto. "Thanks for everything", he said, "I'm freedom".

The Torah teaches "Do not oppress the stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger because you were strangers in the land of Egypt". We are reminded that we must not oppress the immigrant, because we remember what it is to be oppressed and unwelcome. We must also remember the vulnerability and courage it takes to be the immigrant, reliant on the kindness of strangers, and we must commit to being worthy of that trust.

At Shir Tikvah, we are gathering supplies and remodeling a bathroom, but Sanctuary is much more than preparing a place of refuge for a person in need. It is about truly standing in solidarity with immigrants and refugees. It's showing up to follow the lead of immigrant leaders, as many of us did when DACA recipients bravely led a march to the county jail following Trump's terrible DACA announcement. It is advocacy, and protest, fellowship and friendship, accompaniment and witness-- from schools and living rooms, to the pews, the streets, and to the halls of power.

Our sanctuary work has led me to be an observer in immigration court. It is a study in "man's inhumanity to man". I observe in Detained Court- hearings for people held in ICE detention. Prisoners- housed in jail cells without windows, terrible food, no stimulation, restricted movement, often in a cell with violent criminals for days, weeks on end. -- They are shackled, hands and feet, as they shuffle into the courtroom in their bright neon orange outfits- down to their bright orange shoes- our government's dress code- to remind them that they are "aliens".

I try to catch their eye and smile, let them know that even if they have done something criminal (as many, but not all, in detained court have) I am there to support them. I say to them, over and over in my head, "I see your dignity, I recognize our common humanity. Your fate is bound up with mine".

I sit through the formalities in which their A# ("alien number") is read, the Judge is introduced and they state their name. They are asked if they have an attorney, which of course is obvious because the seat next to them, the counsel's spot remains empty. "No, your honor, I can't afford it", "It costs too much money", is what I hear, case after case. They are left to navigate our complex immigration and detention system, in a foreign language, on their own. Because while every detainee has a right to an attorney, one is not provided at the government's expense. **This** is not what I consider equal justice under the law.

The lucky ones have a friend, family member, or supporter in the courtroom, yet most do not. I will never forget Juan's face as he walked in and saw his wife and baby. ---Joy, and a glimmer of hope shone through, as their eyes met. When the brief proceeding ended, he reached toward his baby- the guard and government attorney leapt up- "**No!**" they shouted in unison, "**No contact**". The light extinguished on Juan's face. Tears in his wife's eyes. The child, thankfully, too young to understand.

Since almost all the detention facilities are out-state MN, most held in Sherburne and Freeborn Counties, the detainees are awoken at 3:30-4:00 am in order to arrive to the Whipple federal building at Fort Snelling in time for morning court. They sit shackled, waiting, sometimes for hours before their hearing, and hours afterwards.

There was Mikka from Micronesia, a few weeks back, shuffling into the courtroom after hours of waiting, only to be told, "I'm sorry sir, we could not find an interpreter that speaks your language. We will reschedule you for next week and try again". For this, the man lost a night's sleep. He likely didn't even understand what was being said, adding further to his sense of dehumanization and despair. I said in my head over and over "I see your dignity, I recognize our common humanity. Your fate is bound up with mine".

There was Miguel, desperately wanting to be released on bond awaiting a hearing, whose attorney did not show up. Who learned only then, that his attorney had been suspended. Miguel's wife stepped forward to answer the judge's question, "Were you told that someone would be here in court today?" "Yes, your honor I spoke to the office today". "We have spent so much money on this attorney, I don't know what we will do". The judge offers two weeks to

find new representation, the wife asks for only one- "Miguel", she states, "is suffering emotionally in detention, we want a hearing in just one week". I turn to watch their sitting daughter, lips quivering, tears streaming down her face. "I love you daddy", she mouths. My heart breaks. I walk and crouch beside her. She tells me she is six years old, and that she misses her daddy. I tell her she is brave, and that her daddy is **so** happy to see her, and that I hope he can come home soon.

There is Bashir, who came to the U.S. 14 years ago, a refugee from Somalia and member of a persecuted ethnic minority. He was detained at the Canadian border after a visit there. He had failed to apply for asylum within a year of arriving to the U.S., which according to our crazy system, makes him ineligible. "Your honor" he says, "my mental health is very bad in jail, you can send me back to Somalia". The judge asks if he's ever been treated for mental illness, no he says, "this is due to detention." Thankfully, she implores him to fill out an application for relief under the Conventions against Torture act and reassures him he will have another hearing soon, so he hopefully won't be in detention much longer. If a person requests being sent back to certain persecution, rather than remain in detention, we know something is wrong with our system.

Several men have stated that they don't understand the judge's instructions "My mind can't remember; can you write it down for me", one asks? It is a lot to remember, technical information, dates, instructions. Yet there are no writing utensils allowed. A policy, I was told. Because even a pencil in the shackled hands of an immigrant, can be a weapon. This is **not** justice.

Sometimes I see a case which I find morally ambiguous. I see Khalid, for his 3<sup>rd</sup> appearance. He speaks through an Urdu interpreter, "your honor, I'm afraid to return to Pakistan". Khalid has a criminal conviction for domestic abuse. I believe I hear him explain that it can't be a crime because she is "his wife". Every feminist cell in my body shudders, but I say to myself "no one is defined by the worst thing he has done". Khalid, "I see your dignity, I recognize our common humanity".

The Torah says there shall be one law for citizen and stranger alike. For a citizen of this country, domestic assault results in a jail sentence, why for the immigrant does it mean jail, the loss of family, deportation, and the threat of torture upon return to a country left years ago. With a criminal offense, you can't be resentenced or re-tried if the sentencing guidelines change after the fact. But with immigration- you can be deported decades after a criminal offense which wasn't considered a deportable offense at the time. This is **not** equal justice under the law.

I think about the scale of this, in courtrooms and detention centers around the country. 37,000 detention beds filled every night. The prison industrial complex. In 1999, there were less than 10,000 ICE detention beds in the country. Now there are 40,000 and Trump has pledged to double this.

Initial bonds are set to \$15,000 on average, and rarely reduced below \$5,000-- to be paid, in full, in cash. And to be submitted in person, by someone who is documented. An insurmountable barrier for most. Those released on bond have about a 300% increased chance of winning their case, but few can afford bond. Deportation all but inevitable.

A couple weeks ago a group of us, including about half dozen clergy, stood encircling Rafael in witness and prayer outside the Whipple Federal Building. Rafael asked for accompaniment at a final check-in before "voluntary departure". He wanted a 3-month extension to care for his sick wife. As we filed through security with him, and waited in the ERO, enforcement and removal office, we were met with skepticism, incredulity, and derision. "Are all these people with you? What is this a wedding?" Rafael, accompanied by his 21-year-old son, was quiet and poised. -- We gathered together again after his request was denied. He faced an impossible and risky choice. Does he go into sanctuary, making his wife more of a target? Does the whole family go into sanctuary risking his wife's access to medical care? Does he depart for his country of birth, after 27 years in this country, not knowing when, or if, ever he will see his family again? To witness father and son together on the brink of this decision is to experience heartbreak. It is to stand in awe of human courage.

Injustice multiplied, indignity multiplied, heartbreak multiplied. And it's not just the men warehoused in dehumanizing conditions (though it is mainly men), it's the families they are taken from. Families who struggle now to make rent and feed children, when a family member is arrested or deported. It's the mothers looking into the frightened eyes of children explaining that daddy might not be coming home. It's the girlfriend, wife, mother, child who can't visit her loved one in detention because she too is undocumented and lacks a government ID required for visitation. And it's all those living in fear, living in the shadows, working under terrible conditions they don't complain about, for fear of reprisal or deportations. It's those families of mixed status, wondering if they will be torn apart or if they will leave together. It is those living with anxiety, depression and PTSD because of what they endured to get here, and what they endure to stay. Yet despite all of the cruelty and indignity our broken system heaps on them, immigrants have the courage to speak up, to organize, to advocate, and demand justice.

My eyes have been opened, my heart cracked wide. And this Rosh Hashanah, I commit to stay humbly on this path, learning from the diverse voices and moral courage in the immigrant community. On behalf of the Shir Tikvah Sanctuary Committee, I invite you to join me.

Shabbat Shalom