

JEWISH SOURCES ON OUR ATTITUDE TO THE STRANGER

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Anyone who causes sorrow to the stranger contravenes the following specific prohibitions in the Torah:

- “And ye shall not wrong one another...” (Leviticus 25:17).
- “And a stranger shalt thou not wrong, neither shalt thou oppress him, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:20).
- “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 G-d” (Leviticus 19:33-34).
- “Love ye therefore the stranger; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:19).

A person who, of his own free will, leaves his people and country and chooses to be part of the Jewish people should be lavished with much love. The Almighty “loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment” (Deuteronomy 10:18).

The Torah notes a positive attitude toward the stranger in 36 places.

We are about to celebrate the Festival of Shavuot, at which time we read the Book of Ruth, which signifies the acceptance of strangers into the midst of the Jewish people, to the extent that Ruth, the convert, was King David’s great grandmother.

Other quotations from the Bible include:

“The same law applies both to the native-born and to the foreigner residing among you” (Exodus 12:49).

“The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born” (Leviticus 19:34).

“You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the Lord your G-d” (Leviticus 24:22).

“And I charged your judges...Hear the disputes between your people and judge fairly, whether the case is between two Israelites or between an Israelite and a foreigner residing among you” (Deuteronomy 1:16).

One of the reasons for the positive attitude to strangers is because the people of Israel were strangers in Egypt; and so “Thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land” (Deuteronomy 23:8). And “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt...” (Deuteronomy 24:18).

As we remember the humiliation and abuse that we experienced as strangers and as slaves in Egypt, we shall not behave in that manner toward strangers in our land. As Hillel the Elder said, "What is hateful to you, do not do unto others" (Shabbat 31). And the intent of "others" means there is no distinction based on sex, race, color, or religion.

The Torah also appeals to our conscience, in that "you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners" (Exodus 23:9).

Moreover, even in times of joy we are commanded: "And thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy G-d, thou...and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow that are in your midst..." (Deuteronomy 16:11).

And, when reaping the harvest, "Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner..." (Leviticus 19:10).