



LeoBaeckTemple

Rabbi Lisa Berney

Yom Kippur 5785

Loving The Stranger: Who Will We Be in the Picture?

On May 14, 1941, about a year into the German occupation of France, the Paris Police office issued green tickets summoning more than 6,000 foreign Jews living in Paris to register for IDs at a local sports hall. Eager to demonstrate their deference to the state that had welcomed them—they had come from places like Poland and Austria when they were under threat several years earlier—nearly 4,000 Jewish men arrived, only to be arrested on the spot and deported. Eventually, most were sent to Auschwitz.

Eighty years later, in May 2021, France discovered and released an archive of photos depicting “The Green Ticket Roundup,” as this tragic episode in French history came to be called.

The photo depicts Jewish men being arrested by the Paris police as their wives and children plead with the authorities. In the very same photo, you can also see French citizens looking on nonchalantly from their apartment windows as nearly 4,000 men are arrested and deported on the streets below them.

A picture is worth a thousand words, and I’d say this one actually speaks several thousand about the many roles played in the tragedy of the Green Ticket Roundup.

First, there are the victims themselves. They had no reason to anticipate the country that had recently rescued them was now about to deliver them to the Nazis.

Then, there are the French officials who, despite their knowledge of the fate likely awaiting the deported Jews, willingly participated in this tragedy.

And finally, there are the bystanders, the French citizens who simply watched as thousands of foreigners were rounded up. Maybe they thought resistance was useless or that it was too dangerous to speak up or that these traumatized Jewish refugees were somehow a threat to them or their country.

Whatever the reason, we know that their silence endured. Following the Green Ticket Roundup, not a single protest emerged.

Even the Jews of France remained quiet, not wanting to be seen advocating for Jewish foreigners, assuming or hoping that their distinction as citizens would save them from the coming catastrophe...

But their silence fell woefully short of our tradition’s expectations. The Torah teaches, “Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor,”¹ while the Talmudic sage Rabbi Hiyya adds, “Though a person may be a scholar of Torah and a teacher of great renown, careful in

¹ Leviticus 19:16.

observing all the mitzvot and acts of kindness, if such a person is able to protest wrongdoing and neglects to do so, they are considered guilty of whatever crime they failed to protest.”²

Given the dark fate that ultimately awaited the Jews of France, judging their inaction alongside the other French citizens may seem unfair. After all, they couldn’t possibly have known how brutally the story was going to end for them.

Still, they ignored the moral call from their religion, one many of them had surely heard about in synagogue at some point... just as you are hearing today.

In better times, Rabbi Hiyya’s teaching about the guilt people incur when they neglect to use their power to protest cruelty is the kind of rabbinic saying that makes us feel proud to be Jews. The question is: How does Rabbi Hiyya’s teaching make us feel now, in these times, when it’s hard to escape what it demands from us?

Right now, it may seem like there are too many injustices to protest... too many wrongs to right. Right now, we may feel paralyzed by the torrent of troubling news competing for our attention or the feelings of futility weighing us down.

But, like the citizens of Paris, we don’t have to look beyond our city limits to witness the effects of unchecked cruelty. Although the Marines and the National Guard have, for the most part, departed, ununiformed, masked agents continue to sweep our streets, snatching immigrants from their homes and cars...from our courthouses, from our schools and parks, from our gas stations, from our freeway exits and restaurants.

Some have been taken from their places of work. Edgar, who works at a neighborhood carwash, barely escaped when the carwash was raided by masked agents rushing in with assault rifles. As he hid in a trash dumpster – in ninety-degree heat – three of his coworkers, including his nephew, were taken. Edgar doesn’t know if he’ll ever see his nephew again, nor does he know how he’s going to pay the next month’s rent without his nephew’s income.

Some have been grabbed from church parking lots. A pastor in Downey was preparing lunches for parishioners too scared to leave their homes when she heard screaming outside. Masked agents were seizing a man in the parking lot. When she attempted to explain that the lot was church property, one of the agents threatened her at gunpoint.

Some have been abducted from courthouses while trying to secure a date for their citizenship hearings. Juan’s father was taken after a routine immigration hearing. Juan waited patiently at the Federal Detention Center for news about his father, only to discover that he had to figure out how to tell his mother that her husband wasn’t coming home... how to tell his children that they would never see their grandfather again.

And some are U.S. citizens with or without identification in hand, seized – like everyone else – without dignity and without due process simply because they look or sound the part. Cary Lopez Alvarado, a 23-year-old Los Angeles native and U.S. citizen was nine months pregnant at the time of her seizure. Cary says she was handcuffed and detained for eight hours. By the time she was released, she was already in labor. Her boyfriend, who is also the

² BT Shabbat 54B.

father of her baby, was deported to Guatemala and has yet to see his now three-month old newborn.³

There are far too many brown-skinned United States citizens, just like Cary, needlessly detained for hours on end in today's America. Yet only a few weeks ago, the highest court in our country ruled that these injustices may continue, permitting immigration agents to detain anyone based solely on race, language, and employment.

Our government claims these arrests target violent criminals who threaten public safety. But we know from ICE's *own reports* that only 28% of those arrested since January have any criminal record, the most common crimes being traffic offenses.⁴ Even then, that 28% only counts people they arrested—it leaves out people like Cary who were released after being detained without clear cause. If we include those who have been detained and released, the crime rate would be even lower.

Our government continues to miscast migrants fleeing violence, persecution, and poverty as dangerous criminals and portray immigrants who have lived and worked and contributed to our diverse city for decades as miscreants. But if anything, ICE's experiment with arresting them has only revealed that these are not the hardened criminals our government claims them to be.

No, these are our neighbors. They are children in our school districts... workers in our homes...and in our hospitals, hotels and restaurants... They are caretakers, day laborers, and farm workers. They are families...grandparents...parents and children... brothers and sisters. They are, perhaps, seated in this very congregation, or beloved members of your households. And like the French foreign Jews who dutifully arrived for registration... they are dreamers who wholeheartedly believed they would find a better life for themselves and their families in a new land. Just as so many of our own grandparents and great-grandparents did when *they* immigrated to this country.

In recent weeks, we've watched as this crisis has spread well beyond Los Angeles. During Mexican Independence Day several weeks ago, the streets of a Chicago neighborhood, which are typically bustling with parties and celebrations, lay bare without the usual tamale stands and other street vendors, emptied due to threats of raids that have upended their neighborhood and paralyzed its community members.

Meanwhile, over Labor Day weekend, 76 Guatemalan children were removed from shelters in Arizona and Texas in the middle of the night and placed on a plane set to return to Guatemala without even telling their parents until at the last minute a Federal Court intervened.

Families are being separated, neighborhoods are collapsing, and people are living in terror in our country, terror, right here, in our city.

With everything else going on in our country and in our world, it can be too easy to look away... to move on to the next big crisis... but this crisis is not over. This crisis is right here, in front of us, threatening our city, threatening our neighbors, threatening people who are

³ Nida Cavazos, "[Americans detained during immigration enforcement speak out about treatment by federal agents.](#)" *CBS Evening News*," September 23, 2025.

⁴ Melissa Goldin, "[Trump says he wants to deport the 'worst of the worst,' but ICE data shows 72% of people detained have no criminal convictions.](#)" *Fortune*, July 12, 2025.

not only vital to our economy, but who enrich our society...people, like you and me who share our American story, and our Jewish story.

You have heard us teach from this bimah over and over again the most repeated command in the entire Torah—36 times we are commanded to love the *ger*—the foreigner:

- *You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt* (Exodus 22:20). Our tradition calls upon us to create an alternative to Egypt—a society in which the vulnerable are safeguarded, not exploited...where the foreigner is protected, not oppressed.
- *You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of a stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt* (Exodus 23:9). As Jews, we are continually compelled to employ our empathy for we too share this story of being foreigners, wandering and oppressed as a People.
- *The stranger who lives among you shall be to you as one of your citizens. You shall love the stranger as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt...* (Leviticus 19:34) *And You shall have one law, the same for the stranger and for the citizen alike. I am Adonai, your God* (Leviticus 24:22). Our tradition understands that we cannot always rely on the goodwill of people to protect others. The Torah therefore creates legal protections within Israelite society for the *ger*, instructing us to maintain one law for the citizen and the *ger* alike. When the Torah demands the day laborer to be paid promptly before sunset each day, the *ger* is included. When the Torah demands the Israelites set aside produce from their trees and fields for those in need, the *ger* is included. Jewish tradition is clear that the stranger requires not just our empathy, but our protection under the law.
- *You shall love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt* (Deuteronomy 10:19.) We aren't commanded just to care for the stranger, we are commanded to love them – a pretty high bar to get over, one would think... being commanded to love anybody, much less a stranger. However, in his book, *Judaism Is About Love*, Rabbi Shai Held actually makes it sound pretty simple. You cannot call yourself a religious person, he explains, and hate whom God loves.

"The experience of being a stranger is thus built into the very cultural DNA of the Jewish people," writes Held. "To be a Jew, according to these texts, is to remember what it's like to be vulnerable and susceptible to exploitation—and to strive to grow in compassion"

Don't get me wrong. Our immigration system is complicated. And I don't have all the answers. But I know that misrepresenting immigrants as hardened criminals isn't the answer. I know that disappearing people off the streets isn't the answer. And I know that dismissing those whom God loves isn't the answer. It never is.

We are tired. We are overwhelmed. We are depleted. The year 5785 has kicked us around and there has been so much our community must contend with. The ongoing heartbreak and aftermath of the fires... mass shootings and political violence... fractures in our democracy... fractures in our American Jewish community... Antisemitism that lurks in our schools and offices... the seemingly impenetrable impact of hate...

let alone the loss and the illness and the struggles we all face in our personal lives and all the uncertainty plaguing us as we question with heavy hearts what will come next.

With all we face as Jews and as Americans, it can be exhausting and terrifying, and hard to imagine putting more energy toward something else. Sometimes, maybe even right now, we might just want to be done caring about the country or the world so we can focus on our own very real and big challenges. So that we can just live our lives. It's understandable to feel that way. Sometimes, I feel that way, too.

But we cannot hide from this...we cannot separate ourselves from it... not while those we are commanded to protect...and love...suffer beside us. And not when we can never know just how close what's happening to another embattled minority may be to us as Jews: Remember, those French Jews who remained silent while their foreign brethren were rounded up and deported in 1941 – who thought they would be safe because *they* were citizens – they were rounded up and deported a year later.

When history looks back on us in eighty years, when some photograph resurfaces to paint a few thousand words about us and how we met this moment in time, who will we be in that picture? Will we be those people who looked on, nonchalantly, from our apartment windows while our neighbors were snatched off our streets? The people who didn't protest? The people who didn't speak up? As people of faith...people grounded in the values of our tradition... we must ask ourselves the same question that Rabbi Chasen asked us last night: What are we willing to risk?...to give up...in order to stand with our immigrant neighbors?

Some of you have already answered the call, taking people into your homes, providing groceries and household goods to immigrant families who are too terrified to leave *theirs*, sorting food to deliver, helping someone find needed legal assistance, or joining us at protests with our interfaith partners in solidarity with immigrant families.

But we're not finished. We can't be, not as long as our neighbors remain under threat. Our tradition does not permit it. Our consciences cannot allow it. And our place in history will not tolerate it.

One small action you can take today is to participate in our High Holy Day Drive to provide food and goods to help support our immigrant neighbors. You can still bring goods later today or tomorrow morning. Or you can join us and our interfaith partners in vigils and protests across the city to bear witness after a raid or to gather collectively in unity and prayer. Or you can engage in training to accompany someone to work or to a doctor's visit or to immigration court so they have more protection, reminding our immigrant neighbors and their families that they are not alone and that we continue to stand with them.

This might not feel like enough. Nothing we can do will feel like enough because this crisis is so much bigger than any of us. But then I think back to the stories of righteous Christians who took in Jews in the 1940s. And those who helped my great grandparents when they came with nothing to this country. Or members of this community who sponsored families from Afghanistan and Ukraine when they desperately needed it. And I think of the immigrant families today who have been able to locate their loved ones who were detained after not being able to find them only because someone cared enough to help. So, no, we might not solve this, but we *can* make a difference. And all of us in this room committing to action, well, that can make a big difference to a lot of people. PAUSE

This summer, just a few weeks after the mass immigrations raids began in LA and the National Guard and Marines were deployed here, several of us gathered at the Federal Building Downtown in prayer. Clergy of multiple faiths and races and backgrounds came together with hundreds of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, and others in solidarity.

We stood on the steps as DHS officers readied themselves right behind us and Marines lay in wait on the other side of the glass window. And we, clergy and people from diverse faiths who probably disagree on plenty of things, but whose traditions all forbid the mistreatment of immigrants, sang together “God prepare me to be a Sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true, and with thanksgiving, I’ll be a living Sanctuary for you.”

We call this Temple a Sanctuary congregation, a welcoming, safe haven for all people. But calling it a Sanctuary doesn’t make it one. WE, in this room, are the ones who must continue to make this place a sanctuary: by showing love, dignity, and compassion to the immigrants of this city, and by refusing to look on while families suffer right in front of us.

I don’t know how the story of the Green Ticket Roundup might have changed if people had come down from their apartments and filled the streets, using their bodies and voices to protest their country’s blatant cruelty toward foreign Jews.

And I don’t know how the story of this moment will unfold either. But Rabbi Hiya’s words continue to haunt me... and they should haunt all of us... especially today, on this holiest of days: “Though a person may be a scholar of Torah and a teacher of great renown, careful in observing all the mitzvot and acts of kindness, if such a person is able to protest wrongdoing and neglects to do so, they are considered guilty of whatever crime they failed to protest.”⁵

Our tradition doesn’t actually give us a choice in the matter. We are expected to stand against cruelty. We are expected to show up, with love and compassion, for the stranger among us. Because we are reminded again and again, both by our tradition but also by history, that their journey is our journey. For as many times as we waited, sometimes in vain, for others to stand with us, our neighbors are waiting for us to stand with them.

And when we do, we may not change history, but we will change the picture.

⁵ BT Shabbat 54B.