Every March for Women's History Month, women would come into our elementary school classrooms, dressed up as great women of all stripes – artists and politicians and innovators, scientists – and tell their stories first-person. You never knew when it was coming – I'm sure it was coordinated with the teachers, but it felt like we were in the middle of a math lesson, or grammar, and into the room would walk a familiar woman. The teacher would act surprised – feigned or not, I don't know – and would say, "Wow! Look who's here! Let's give a warm Willow welcome to…" whoever it was. The woman would then launch in to her first-person narrative. "Hello students. My name is Martha Washington and I was born in 1731."

The kids in class would be excited, turning to each other and smiling, both because we would get a break from the curriculum, something like the history of California's Christian missionaries, and also because we would try to guess whose mom was dressed up, mouthing to each other across the room, "Is that your mom?" I remember one woman came in with these two huge huskies and introduced herself as Libby Riddles, the first female Iditarod winner. None of us recognized her as a familiar mom, and we were convinced it was really her.

She was the same age as our moms, why wouldn't Ms. Riddles stop by Willow Elementary School with her winning dogs to talk to us kids, one classroom at a time? It seemed totally reasonable for an 8-year-old.

My mom played such women as painter Mary Cassatt, poet Emma Lazarus, as well as stretching her acting abilities with roles like Connie Chung and author Yoshiko Uchida.

I loved when she came in. I knew some kids got embarrassed when their moms walked in the room, but I thought it was so neat. Where did she get that wig? That NBC microphone? The painter's palette? She was even asked to play Mother Teresa, but she switched with Melanie's mom, not wanting to wear the big cross and rosary.

The one that struck me the most was Emma Lazarus. Her famous poem, "The New Colossus" was posthumously displayed at the foot of the Statue of Liberty. My mom was so good that my fifth-grade teacher Mrs. Haas asked us to memorize the poem and recite it in class, same as we had done with the Declaration of Independence, the preamble to the Constitution and the Star-Spangled Banner. My dad got so excited by this project that on Friday night after Shabbat dinner, he took the L-volume Encyclopedia Britannica off the wall, turned off Jeopardy, and we started learning the poem together.

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame– wait, what's brazen? He tried defining it for a 10 year old. What is the Greek giant? Then he had to take out the encyclopedia volume about the Colossus of Rhodes.

With conquering limbs astride from land to land

Here at our sea-washed sunset gates…and this went on. Defining other words – storied pomp, yearning, wretched refuse, teeming, tempest. With my dad, nothing is a simple explanation. A short question gets a 30-minute long history lesson with reading assignments.

With my grandfather in the room, I got multiple perspectives on the politics and history of refugees coming to America. Looking back now, I am trying to figure out where my siblings were. But at the time, I was fascinated by this.

For the years since then, Ms. Lazarus's words have bounced around my head. I learned about Emma Lazarus again in Hebrew school, feeling extra special knowing that she was Jewish.

What does it mean to live in a country that is a golden door, a land filled with a dream to succeed? What does it mean that, with the exception of the Native Americans, who have been here for fifteen thousand years, every person in this country came here fairly recently with a story, either escaping something terrible, hoping for a better life, or by force.

The poem does not refer to the Statue as a gift, not as something from Europe, from France, in fact it rejects that narrative. It continues: *Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp.* You tell your tales, Europe, stories about how great you are. We here recognize what we are. We are tired, poor, huddled masses, yearning. Trying and hoping and eventually succeeding. We are the homeless of her poem, but the homeless with the opportunity to enter a golden door. On Pesach we say, "Arami Oved Avi - my father was a nobody, a wandering Aramean." Her poem embraces *that* narrative. We do not come from royalty. Keep, oh ancient lands, your storied pomp.

Conversely, Lady Liberty's poem feels like it could have been written about Emma's Judaism. We have wandered, country to country, trying to find a place to call home. Only in America had we succeeded.

Emma Lazarus's family was wealthy. She was privately educated. She traveled freely around the world. She was well-established, her family arriving in America before the Revolution, one of the first Jewish families here. She knew how great America was.

One of her other poems, *1492*, sees America as the answer to the cry of the Jews. It reads:

The children of the prophets of the Lord,
Prince, priest, and people, spurned by zealot hate.
Hounded from sea to sea, from state to state,
The West refused them, and the East abhorred.

No anchorage the known world could afford,
Close-locked was every port, barred every gate.
Then smiling, thou unveil'dst, O two-faced year,
A virgin world where doors of sunset part,
Saying, "Ho, all who weary, enter here!"

I love her image of the 2-faced year. 1492 - when this continent was discovered as the only known land mass that had never kicked out Jews before, just in time, as we - including her family - were expelled from the Iberian peninsula, setting off unthinkable destruction and bloodshed. O two-faced year.

How did you get here? Your family? Was it through Ellis Island? Galveston? Quebec? Did anyone help you? Maybe HIAS? What can you do to open that golden door for others?

To think of how many stories I have been blessed to hear, to bear witness, the stories of women and men recalling their childhoods on the run. Escaping Iran before, during, after the revolution, leaving behind all of their possessions to find a new home - anywhere that would take them. Not knowing a lick of English, not knowing the geography, not knowing if they would ever see their family again.

Escaping the Soviet Union, praying for a host family who would teach them to live as Americans, help them return to life.

The generations before - escaping horrors of Eastern Europe most of us could not fathom. Leaving behind art and houses and clothes, hiding in sewers, in rat-infested basements and attics, all after seeing their families destroyed, kids witnessing with their own eyes and somehow having the wherewithal to find the impossible path of exit.

The generation before - pogroms sending my family, seven of my great-grandparents, to leave everything behind in Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine and Russia, to find a way to Ellis Island in a world they did not understand.

I am caught in thought about the moments before their escape. How bad are things at home that they flee to live, perhaps, in a tent surrounded by tens of thousands of other tents, whole families sharing one open-flapped room without privacy or running water. Plastic tarps the sole protection from monsoons or heavy winds or extreme heat or freezing temperatures.

And then to say goodbye to everyone and everything you know – food, language, culture, friends, extended family.

To know that you are willing to risk it all, to acknowledge that things at home are only going to get worse, that you will accept refuge anywhere. That your sister's family is accepted to Toronto. Your brother's family will be leaving for Miami. Your best friends are going to Vancouver, and your family has just gotten notice that you will be going to Phoenix. You will never again see anyone you have ever known.

This is an American issue and we are in America. It is an American issue because tens of thousands of immigrants will come into the US this year with the aid of one of eight organizations. I think we need to help. If you are charitable, we need to help because we are Americans only by luck of birth and it is incumbent upon us to lend a hand to those trying to reach the golden door. If you are more skeptical, then we need to help because they are legally coming to the country whether we help or not, and our assistance will make sure that they get acclimated, that they get jobs and housing and food and medical care so that they do not drain our limited resources. Whether or not the US should be taking in refugees is not the question.

Whether you want to ensure their success so that they are not on Medical and food stamps for the next two generations is the question. As Americans, if we do nothing, it only hurts us.

But we are here today as Jews and, more importantly, this is a Jewish issue. The Talmud, the first tractate, compiled around 1600 years ago, teaches us that a synagogue must have windows. It must have windows because we must look out into the world and see what it is we are doing this for. Judaism is not self-fulfilling.

We do not get the God points just by being cloistered Jews. There are no Jewish monasteries. We are Jews of the world, interacting every single day with those outside our hallowed walls. The Jews of the Talmud spoke Aramaic - same as their non-Jewish neighbors. The Jews of Germany spoke German and the Jews of Iran spoke Farsi. We have spent the last 3,000-years adapting to cultures, absorbing and learning from them.

This week, we say hundreds of prayers, more than any other week of the year. Most of our prayers call God "Melekh Ha-Olam, Ruler of the World." We do not pray to a particularistic God, to the King of the Jews, another religion gathers to pray to the King of the Jews. We show devotion to the deity of all humanity. Melekh Ha'Olam. If you say these words, if you believe these words, then your God is looking out for everyone. Not a particularistic Divine, but a universalistic Divine.

God has chosen us, not because we are better are we chosen, but to partner with God in the great and difficult work. Our whole premise as Jews is to be God's workers on Earth to help make it better. We know that the world is broken, and it is up to us to find the pieces, as God's chosen partners, and attempt to repair the broken shards.

This week we ask the troubling questions, "Who shall live and who shall die?" These are not questions we are asking God, pleading with God to save us, but these are questions God is asking us, pleading with us to save others. We are reading God's words. As global Jews, as people of the world, which is easier now

than ever before in history, we see, hear, read what is happening around the world in real time.

They are slaughtering people in Congo. They are attacking people in Afghanistan. They are routing people in Eritrea. In Syria, in Burma, in Darfur, the list, sadly, is aeonian. God is asking us, crying to us, to me, Who by fire? How many more by sword? How many more by forced famine? How many more before you do something about it? Did you see the floods? Those aren't my doing! How many more before you do something?

Rabbi Tarfon, two thousand years ago, knew the overwhelming nature of feeling trapped by responsibility. He said, "Lo Aleicha Ham'lacha Ligmor – It is not up to you to complete the task all by yourself, but you are not allowed to ignore it!"

I cannot stop the exile of the stateless Rohingya or the fearful escape of Afghan refugees, but I can make sure that those who have found sanctuary in Los Angeles have the resources they need to succeed. I need to stop being overwhelmed by the enormity of the cause and just step up and do something. Something. Anything.

What can we do? Here's an option: something. Small, big, we have to see what our capacity is. We want to make sure that people who are fleeing and coming here legally think – that they *know* – that they are wanted, welcomed, somewhere in the world. Join me as we help acclimate them to California – teaching them how to use public transportation, how to use American appliances. Maybe we can tutor the children so that they are caught up in education, on par with their peers. Maybe we can assist the adults who will get jobs. Many local companies are happy to employ refugees.

How lucky we are that we can do this! That we as an entire community have the time and energy to help others. We cannot keep this to ourselves. It is incumbent upon us to share our luck with those who most need it.

Our haftarah for this morning is this same idea through the mouth of Isaiah. "The Lord says, Clear the way and build a path. Remove any obstacles. Too many people have been humbled this year, have been struggling and brought low. I, God, will help heal them, will guide them and comfort them." Just to pause here, the haftarah from this morning is in conversation with the Torah reading from this afternoon, when we read, "You shall be holy as the Lord is holy." We are to learn from God what holiness looks like. And here, this morning, God is modeling it for us, and teaching us. Back to the haftarah, God tells us, "Be a shofar - have the courage to shout out when there is injustice." And we would respond, per Isaiah, by saying, "Did You see that I fasted? Did You see that I said all the prayers and beat my chest?" We are so proud of the fact that we got through the ritual.

But God roars back, "Is this what you call fasting? A one-day crash diet so you can check it off? An end in-and-of itself? No, this is what I call fasting: unlock the shackles of wickedness, set the downtrodden free, give bread to the hungry, bring the poor into your house, clothe the naked. Only then can you truly seek God."

What a world that Isaiah is imagining. Where we cannot ignore anyone whose station is worse than ours. Where we help out those most destitute.

When God calls out to Abraham, Abraham responds with Hineni, here I am. Essentially, I will do whatever you need.

When God calls out to Moses at the burning bush, Moses responds, Hineni, I will do whatever you need. When God called out to Samuel, the prophet and judge responded Hineni, I will do whatever you need.

The last time that word appears in our TaNaKh, in our Bible, is here in this haftarah. But it is not God calling out to us. It is not us answering. It is us calling out to God, from this place of purity and holiness, from this place of having helped everyone else, setting aside our personal needs in favor of those who need rescuing. If we act in this godly way, bringing humanity to all corners of the earth, to those who need it most, then God will be the one to respond with the word, Hineni.

I hope that my fast means something. Not to God. Not to my family. I hope that my fast means something to me. I hope that my day of prayer means something to me. I hope that I come out of this day, out of these ten days of tshuva, a slightly different, more patient, more caring person. I hope that I am taking the appropriate steps to make God's world a better, more holy place. I hope that I work with God to seal someone else in the Book of Life this year. And I hope you do also.

Gmar Hatima Tova.