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What is the place that we call 'home'? In our Torah reading cycle, we are now firmly embedded in the Book of Exodus, where the Israelites are trying to escape Egyptian slavery and journey across the wilderness to a new kind of 'home', a 'promised land'. It is from this historical paradigm that the Torah derives the oft-repeated injunction to 'love the stranger, for you were strangers in Egypt'. The Torah plays with nuanced layers of home and belonging, with notions of transience and permanence, with home both as a physical place and as a spiritual ideal. Moses himself, the adopted Egyptian prince, had to negotiate and renegotiate what 'home' meant in his life and sojourning; from the palaces of Ramses and Pitom, to the oases in Midian, from the Sinai wilderness to the top of Mt. Nebo overlooking Canaan. At each juncture, Moses would have had to ask himself where 'home' was and what it meant to him.

As a seasoned immigrant myself, I can relate to Moses' experience. I've called different places

Home also embeds itself into your habits and mannerisms. I've significantly reduced my complaints about the winter cold and delight in taking my children sledding, find myself leafing through seed catalogues for the garden, have been hooked on following the caucuses and started dipping my pizza crusts in ranch dressing, although I still say 'soda' and not 'pop'. But most of all, home is what we make of it, the relationships we build and the work we engage in to improve our dwelling places, whether that's on an individual level or a planetary level. As we look forward to the cycle of Tu Bishvat, Purim and Pesach, we can find lessons in how home is either built up or torn down, whether we feel rooted and sheltered or uprooted and disoriented. As we journey deeper into 2020, and what promises to be a fraught year, applying the metaphors of our Jewish tradition can help us cultivate greater understanding of our place in today's world, through both challenges and blessings.