



Park Avenue Synagogue ק"ק אגודת ישרים

Four Cups of Compassion

PAS Haggadah Supplement 5776/2016

Hag Pesah sameah!

חג
פסח
שמח!

The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I Adonai am your God.

—Leviticus 19:34

The Torah tells us to care for the stranger: to love the stranger, to welcome the stranger, to protect the stranger. The Torah repeats this instruction thirty-six times – more often than any other, including the commandments to worship God and to keep Shabbat and the holidays. For over 2,000 years, from the biblical Israelites to the Jews of the Soviet Union, time and time again, we have had to flee our homeland in search of safety and have found ourselves strangers in lands not our own. As we sit down to our seder celebrations this year, over 30 million human beings are displaced from their homes. Because of our own history, we have a responsibility to take note of their situation and respond to their suffering.

The word Haggadah literally means “telling.” As you tell the story of Passover at your seder, we invite you to use this Haggadah supplement as a gateway to consider the plight of today’s refugees. These pages suggest texts to read and questions to discuss at specific points in the Haggadah. Read them alongside the traditional text, or substitute them for the words in the Haggadah. Use just one or use them all! We hope that these selections will add another facet to your seder, enabling you to experience the story of Passover in a new way and stimulating you to rededicate yourselves to the central Jewish value of caring for the stranger.

Bryan Wexler, *Rabbinical Intern*
Marga Hirsch, *Director of Rothschild Library & Publications*
Rabbi Neil Zuckerman

Text 1

To accompany *Ha Lachma Anya*, “This is the bread of poverty and persecution”

Yosi ben Yochanan, a man of Jerusalem, said: “May your house be open wide, and may the poor be members of your household.”

—Pirkei Avot 1:5

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

—The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25

Commentary

We begin the seder with a ritual invitation to all that are hungry to join us. Yosi ben Yochanan, living in Jerusalem in the early years of the Common Era, advocated opening one’s doors to the needy year ‘round. In 1948 the UN announced in its Universal Declaration of Human Rights that all people have the right to food and an adequate standard of living. These two proclamations may have been separated by about 2,000 years, but their message rings the same: it is a human right to have food and a roof over our heads, and it is our responsibility to work to ensure this for all people. Nevertheless, today, the World Food Programme (a voluntarily funded part of the United Nations system and the world’s largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide) reports that five million displaced people in Syria do not have adequate food to sustain life and health.

For Discussion

- What does opening our doors to the hungry and the poor mean today?
- What can we do to work to uphold Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Text 2

To accompany The Four Children

#1 **The refugee, who is she?**
A refugee is a person who has been forced to flee their home country due to persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group (e.g., members of the LGBTQ community). The persecution a refugee experiences may include harassment, threats, abduction or torture. A refugee is often afforded some sort of legal protection, either by their host country's government, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or both. In the United States, refugees are hand selected by the US government and are screened in advance. They are subject to background checks and security screenings by multiple U.S. agencies. Only after everything is approved are they brought to the US to reside permanently.

#2 **The asylum seeker, who is he?**
An asylum seeker is a person who has fled persecution in their home country and is seeking safe haven in a different country, but has not yet received any legal recognition or status. In several countries, including the US, asylum seekers are sometimes detained while waiting for their case to be heard.

#3 **The internally displaced person, who is she?**
An internally displaced person, or IDP, is a person who fled their home but has not crossed an international border to find sanctuary. Even if they fled for reasons similar to those driving refugees (armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government – even though that government might be the cause of their flight.

#4 **The migrant, who is he?**
A migrant is a person who chooses to move from their home for any variety of reasons, but not necessarily because of a direct threat of persecution or death. Migrant is an umbrella category that can include refugees but can also include people moving to improve their lives by finding work or education, those seeking family reunion and others.

Commentary

The Haggadah teaches us with the story of the Four Children that while from a distance everyone's story may look the same, in reality, this is far from the truth. Every person is unique and has his or her own story to tell; part of the Passover experience is telling our story and hearing the story of others. Sharing stories helps us to better understand a person's circumstances, and just as the Haggadah suggests, meet each "child" where he or she is and answer their questions in kind. Just as the Four Children of the Haggadah are distinct and each deserves an individual answer, so too we learn that people leave their homes for different reasons and as a result, they need different kinds of help. This Passover, as we find compassion for those unable to be in their homes, and we strive to offer assistance, let us first take the time to hear their stories in order to understand who they truly are.

For Discussion

• In terms of our obligation to make the world a better place, if someone has nowhere to call home, do these distinctions make a difference?

Text 3

To accompany Arami Oved Avi, “My ancestor was a wandering Aramean”

When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, you shall provide yourselves with places to serve you as cities of refuge to which a manslayer who has killed a person unintentionally may flee. The cities shall serve you as a refuge from the avenger, so that the manslayer may not die unless he has stood trial before the assembly.

—Numbers 35:10-14

Our Rabbis taught: A private path is of the width of four cubits; a path from one town to another is to have a width of eight cubits; a public road, 16 cubits; the road to the cities of refuge, 32 cubits.

—Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 100a-b

The court is obligated to straighten the roads to the cities of refuge, to repair them and broaden them. They must remove all impediments and obstacles . . . bridges should be built [over all natural barriers] so as not to delay one who is fleeing to [the city of refuge]. The width of a road to a city of refuge should not be less than 32 cubits. “Refuge, Refuge” was written at all crossroads so that the perpetrator of manslaughter should recognize the way and turn there.

—Maimonides *Mishneh Torah*, Laws Regarding Murder and the Preservation of Life, 8:5

Commentary

The emphasis on the great width and sound condition of the roads leading to cities of refuge, paired with the imperative to widely publicize the existence of such paths, demonstrates how seriously the rabbis took the responsibility to take care of refugees and displaced people. If our tradition displays such concern for people who have committed murder, albeit unintentionally, how much more so should we feel compelled to protect innocent refugees?

For Discussion

- What would be the equivalent today of the biblical cities of refuge?
- What can we do as individuals and as a community to make our community into a community of refuge?

Text 4

To accompany the Ten Plagues

FACTS AND FIGURES FROM HIAS

1. During 2014, conflict and persecution forced an average of 42,500 individuals per day to leave their homes and seek protection elsewhere, either within the borders of their own country or in other countries.
2. In 2014, 51% of refugees were under 18 years old.
3. All refugees resettled in the United States are screened by the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the State Department. Any time new information about the refugee is provided (e.g., a different phone number) the screening process is repeated.
4. In 2011, Lebanon hosted only 10,000 refugees and asylum-seekers. Today, they host upwards of 1.8 million in a country of under five million people.
5. Provisional data indicates that the number of unaccompanied or separated children seeking asylum on an individual basis has reached levels unprecedented since the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees started systematically collecting this data.
6. There are over 60 million internally displaced people, asylum seekers, and refugees worldwide. As of June 2015, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, or UNHCR, identified 19.5 million refugees worldwide. Of the total global refugee population, less than 1% are resettled each year.
7. The maximum number of refugees resettled in the US in a given year, which is referred to as the ceiling for refugee admissions, is determined by the annual Presidential Determination. For the last few years, the annual ceiling was set at 70,000. Recently, the administration announced that the ceiling will rise to 85,000 for 2016 and 100,000 for 2017, which includes both Syrian refugees and refugees from all other countries.
8. Close to one million individual asylum applications were registered in 155 countries or territories during the first half of 2015, significantly more than during the corresponding period of 2014 (558,000).
9. From 2013-2015, the majority of the world's refugees came from the following countries: Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Eritrea, and Iraq (in order of most refugees).
10. There are nine refugee resettlement agencies in the United States: HIAS, Church World Service, Ethiopian Community Development Council, Episcopal Migration Ministries, International Rescue Committee, Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Service, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants and World Relief. HIAS is the only Jewish agency among them. Any refugee resettled in the US is resettled through one of these nine agencies.

Text 4

To accompany the Ten Plagues

Founded in 1881 as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, HIAS is the oldest international migration and refugee resettlement agency in the US. In the 2000s, HIAS expanded its resettlement work to include assistance to non-Jewish refugees, and has since been involved in the aftermath of conflicts in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia, Haiti, Hungary, Iran, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Tunisia, Vietnam, and the successor states to the former Soviet Union.

Commentary

Rabbis love numbers, and therefore it is no surprise that immediately after the Ten Plagues are recited in the Haggadah, there is a passage in which the rabbis play a numbers game, each trying to prove that there were not just ten plagues, but actually, many more. They hoped that more plagues on the Egyptians would mean fewer on the Israelites. In a time when Jews were feeling attacked and downtrodden, the rabbis looked for a lighthearted way to tell people not to worry, it was not going to be so bad, because the plagues would be put on others. This is not the reality of our times and not how we hope to interact with *kol yosh'vei teiveil*, all who dwell on the earth. The world refugee crisis presents us with all sorts of terrifying numbers; however, our goal today is for there to be fewer plagues on everyone and for there to be less suffering in the world, especially for refugees, asylum seekers, displaced persons, and migrants. The goal of this numbers game is for it to be over. Today, we are no longer refugees or displaced persons. We have food to eat, clothing to wear, and homes to call our own. Today we do not try to deflect plagues, pain, and suffering, but to end them.

For Discussion

- How did it feel reading the ten plagues and the ten statistics side-by-side?
- Which statistics did you find most surprising? How is the refugee crisis like a plague?

Text 5

To accompany Hallel

THE NEW COLOSSUS

Not like the
brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips. “Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”

—Emma Lazarus

Commentary

Women play a quiet but essential role in the Haggadah. Were it not for the women of the Exodus, the story might not have ended in triumph and freedom. There was Moses’s mother Yocheved, who hid her son as long as she could and then fearlessly gave him up, placing him in a basket of reeds in the Nile River, hoping he would be saved. Moses’s sister Miriam ensured his safety as she watched him float down the river to be rescued by Pharaoh’s daughter. She then had the courage to convince Pharaoh’s daughter to allow a Hebrew – his own mother, Yocheved – to nurse him. Shifra and Puah, the midwives charged with drowning all male Hebrew babies, were also heroes. Refusing to obey Pharaoh’s decree, they risked their lives to do what they believed was right. Finally, the Haggadah speaks of the Israelite women who made it their priority, despite the tyranny of slavery, to sleep with their husbands in order to ensure Jewish continuity. These women, both named and unnamed, ensured the redemption of the Jewish people. They have come to represent courage, foresight, and a willingness to stand up for what is just.

The Statue of Liberty was placed in New York harbor in 1886 with the thought that everyone who arrived by ship would pass by her. But it was the poem “The New Colossus,” written by Emma Lazarus, a Sephardic Jew, that established the great lady with the torch as a beacon for refugees. The second psalm of Hallel ends with the joyful acclamation *moshivi akeret ha-bayit eim ha-banim s’meihah*, God transforms the barren woman to a mother of children. The power of Emma Lazarus’s words transformed the statue from an isolated guardian of the harbor to *eim ha-ba’im*, the “Mother of Exiles” welcoming all who come.

For Discussion

- What can the women of the story of the Exodus teach us about today’s refugee crisis?
- Is there anything in your life that holds the symbolic power that you imagine the Statue of Liberty holds for refugees who enter the US through New York harbor?

Text 6

To accompany *Nirtzah*, the conclusion of the seder

President Barack Obama, Press Conference in Antalya, Turkey
November 16, 2015

The people who are fleeing Syria are the most harmed by terrorism, they are the most vulnerable as a consequence of civil war and strife. They are parents, they are children, they are orphans. And it is very important . . . that we do not close our hearts to these victims of such violence and somehow start equating the issue of refugees with the issue of terrorism. In Europe, I think people like Chancellor Merkel have taken a very courageous stance in saying it is our moral obligation, as fellow human beings, to help people who are in such vulnerable situations. . . .

And so we have to, each of us, do our part. And the United States has to step up and do its part. And when I hear folks say that, well, maybe we should just admit the Christians but not the Muslims; when I hear political leaders suggesting that there would be a religious test for which a person who's fleeing from a war-torn country is admitted, . . . that's shameful. That's not American. That's not who we are. We don't have religious tests to our compassion.

Commentary

We conclude every seder with the same refrain: *L'shanah ha-ba'ah bi-yerushalayim*, Next year in Jerusalem! Few, if any, of us plan to make aliyah before Pesah 5777, so why do we repeat this line?

Our tradition speaks of *Yerushalayim shel matah*, Jerusalem below, and *Yerushalayim shel ma'alah*, "Jerusalem above." Earthly Jerusalem is the physical city we know, beautiful to be sure, but a pale reflection of Heavenly Jerusalem, the Jerusalem of our highest aspirations, the true City of Peace. We build this Heavenly Jerusalem wherever we sit together with family and friends to make a seder and to celebrate Pesah. We build this Jerusalem when we activate the divine sparks within us and bring more compassion and wholeness to the world.

Perhaps *l'shanah ha-ba'ah bi-yerushalayim* does not mean that we hope to sit at a seder in *Yerushalayim shel matah* next year, but rather that as we conclude retelling our story of liberation, we commit to work toward even greater liberation. We say out loud, together, that between now and next year's seder we will work to build *Yerushalayim shel ma'alah*. What goals must we adopt and strive for? What effort must we make? What *tikkun* (repair) will we bring to the world? How can we help today's refugees reach their own *Yerushalayim*, where they are safe and secure (*l'matah*) and where they can realize their dreams of freedom and liberty (*l'ma'alah*).

For Discussion

- Go around the table: Make a concrete commitment that you can return to next year to build *Yerushalayim shel ma'alah*, to take a step to bettering God's world.



Pesah 5776 at PAS



Park Avenue Synagogue ק"ק אנדרטת ישרים