



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's 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!"

A selection from **An Undoing World**

by Tony Kushner (Pulitzer Prize winning playwright)

Copper-plated, nailed together, buffeted by ocean weather
Stands the Queen of Exiles and our mother she may be
Hollow-breasted broken-hearted watching for her dear departed
For her children cast upon the sea
At her back the great idyllic land of justice
For exilic peoples ponders making justice private property
Darling never dream another woman might
Have been your mother
Someday you may be a refugee

A refugee, who's running from the wars
Hiding from the fire-bombs they've hurled;
Eternally a stranger out-of-doors
Desperate in this undoing world

Mother for your derelicted
Children from your womb evicted
Grant us shelter harbor solace safety
Let us in!
Let us tell you where we traveled
How our hopes our lives unraveled
How unwelcome everywhere we've been

Discussion Questions:

- *Do you find Emma Lazarus's poem relevant to our world today? Why or why not?
- *Emma Lazarus was proudly Jewish – do you think her Judaism influenced her crafting of this particular poem? Why or why not?
- *What are your reactions to Kushner's imagery as relating to the Statue of Liberty?
- *Does America have a special role to play in welcoming those fleeing their homes as refugees?

Who is a Refugee?

The 1951 UN Refugee Convention, amended 1967, states that a refugee is *“A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”*

Torah and Commentaries

Exodus 22:20

“And the stranger, you should not mistreat, nor should you oppress him, as you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

“...the Torah cautions us regarding our behavior toward the stranger no less than 36 times, the most repeated injunction in the Torah. Empathy is an outgrowth of experience... We are bidden to put ourselves in the position of the stranger by remembering how it felt when we were strangers in another land.” - Nechama Leibowitz (noted Biblical scholar)

“I used to think that the most important line in the Bible was ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Then I realized that it is easy to love your neighbor because he or she is usually quite like yourself. What is hard is to love the stranger, one whose color, culture or creed is different from yours. That is why the command ‘Love the stranger because you were once strangers’ resonates so often throughout the Bible. It is summoning us now.” - Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (Britain’s former chief rabbi)

Discussion Questions:

*The Torah speaks about the need to treat strangers well 36 times - more than any other teaching / requirement. Why do you think this is the case?

*Do you notice in yourself a difference in your ability to love your neighbor versus loving the stranger?

*What are some potential similarities between the stranger and a refugee? What do you think are the differences?

Estonia Wants No More German-Jewish Refugees
RIGA. (WNS) — Estonia will admit no more Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, O. Kask, Estonian minister of welfare, declared in an interview here. Kask said the Jewish problem becomes acute only in those countries where the small number of Jews strongly influences economic life.

-The Detroit Jewish Chronicle (July 29, 1938 edition)
courtesy of DJNFoundation.org

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 21b:

Rav Huna the son of Rav Yehoshua said: It is quite clear to me that the residents of one town can prevent the resident of another town [from setting up in competition in this town], but not, however, if he pays taxes to that town; and that the resident of an alley cannot prevent another resident of the same alley [from setting up in competition in his alley].

Babylonian Talmud, Baba Metzia 71(a)

"If you lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee..."(Exodus 22:24) What does this verse teach us? [It teaches that if the choice lies between] my people and a heathen, my people has preference; the poor or the rich — the poor takes precedence; your poor [sc. your relatives] and the general poor of your town — your poor come first; the poor of your city and the poor of another town — the poor of your own town have prior rights.

Discussion Questions:

*Do the Talmudic texts above seem to support or refute concerns about the economic impacts of taking in refugees (which many have and continue to express – especially given existing poverty in their communities)?

*How does the hierarchy of helping the poor as presented in Baba Metzia 71(a) sit with you?

Deuteronomy 23:16-17

You shall not deliver unto his master a bondman that has escaped from his master to you; he shall dwell with you, in your midst, in the place which he shall choose within one of your gates, where he likes it best; you shall not wrong him.

Discussion Questions:

- *How does this source relate to refugees / asylum seekers? (according to the UN, an asylum-seeker is someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated)
- *What exactly are our responsibilities to someone seeking refuge at our gates according to this source?

Vayikra Rabbah 27:5

The Holy One demands satisfaction for the blood of the pursued at the hands of the pursuers. Abel was pursued by Cain and the Holy One chose Abel... Noah was pursued by his generation, and the Holy One chose Noah. Abraham was pursued by Nimrod, and the Holy One chose Abraham. Isaac was pursued by the Philistines, and the Holy One chose Isaac. Jacob was pursued by Esau, and the Holy One chose Jacob. Joseph was pursued by his brothers, the Holy One chose Joseph. Moses was pursued by Pharoah, and the Holy One chose Moses. David was pursued by Saul, and the Holy One chose David. Saul was pursued by the Philistines, and the Holy One chose Saul. Israel was pursued by the nations, and the Holy One chose Israel.

Discussion Questions:

- *What is this source's perspective on looking out for those who are running away/ being pursued?
- *Is there value/harm in always looking out primarily for the "pursued" and disadvantaged?

A selection from **Crying Shame**

by Omar Offendum (Syrian-American rapper)

Now they say Syria's confusing
Can't decide which of the sides
They really should be choosing
Here's a thought:
How 'bout you recognize that we're all losing
And there's nothing civil about a war
Where kids are stabbed to death and mothers smothered
On a kitchen floor, or by the kitchen floor
Collapsing from a barrel bomb
Conspiracies we've carried on
Like baggage from our colonizers
Unified by our ability to seek the wrong advisers
Money hungry evildoers, power hungry presidents
Using hunger as a weapon to destroy the residents
Patronizing marathons of half truth on the news:
These bloody Arabs
Headlines or punchlines?
Come on man...two for one, I'm not amused
They yell, somebody tell these anchormen
It's best to keep it classy
Burgundy's the color of our blood
That's flood in the (Asi)
Civil disobedience flow within our veins
Our fathers went against the grain
While Hitler hid inside a lion's mane

Discussion Questions:

- *What are your reactions to Offendum's lyrics? What jumps out at you?
- *Have you ever been moved to the point of action by lyrics? If so, which and why?

An Endnote Regarding Hatred

Why should you not hate the stranger? – asks the Torah. Because you once stood where he stands now. You know the heart of the stranger because you were once a stranger in the land of Egypt. If you are human, so is he. If he is less than human, so are you. You must fight the hatred in your heart as I (God) once fought the greatest ruler and the strongest empire in the ancient world on your behalf. I made you into the world's archetypal strangers so that you would fight for the rights of strangers – for your own and those of others, wherever they are, whoever they are, whatever the color of their skin or the nature of their culture, because though they are not in your image, they are nonetheless in Mine. There is only one reply strong enough to answer the question: Why should I not hate the stranger? Because the stranger is me.” - Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Discussion Questions:

*Do the Jewish people have a special role to play as it relates to caring for those in need around the world? Why or why not?

*How do we act on welcoming/loving the stranger in our own lives? How do we wish we acted?

RESOURCES FOR GETTING INVOLVED

Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society

HIAS.org

<http://www.hias.org/global-refugee-crisis-how-you-can-help>

American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee

JDC.org

<http://www.jdc.org/jcdr/where-we-work/syrian-refugees.html>

International Medical Corps

internationalmedicalcorps.org

<https://internationalmedicalcorps.org/syria>

Multifaith Alliance for Syrian Refugees

multifaithalliance.org

http://www.multifaithalliance.org/#!get_involved/c8k2

Welcoming Michigan

welcomingmichigan.org

<http://www.welcomingmichigan.org/content/get-involved>