

## Bnei Akiva Svivot 5780: Choveret Chinuchit

*The current refugee crisis is seeing people risk life and limb and forgoing all their possessions to escape the horrific conditions in their home countries. Few European countries are willing to welcome the enormous number of asylum seekers who are trying to enter, and the result is that desperate people are making dangerous journeys by lorry and boat to try and find a new home. Last week, 39 suspected migrants were tragically found dead in a truck in Essex, a grim reminder of the conditions faced by many who make such journeys. This week's parasha introduces us to the world's first refugees...*

*Zoe Daniels and Chana Bernstein  
Svivot & Hadracha and Chinuch Workers*

### WEEK 3: Noach the Refugee

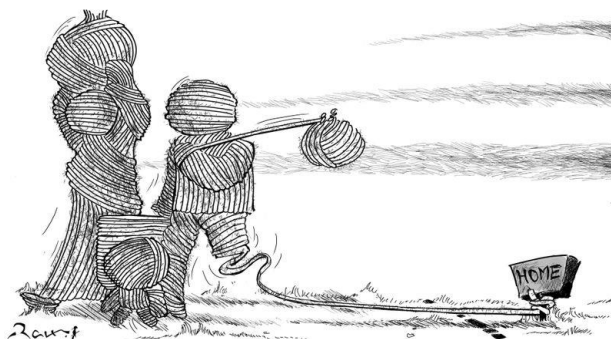
#### The first refugees

Noach is often painted as a hero. The only righteous man living in a violent world, he threw a lifeline to the wicked people around him, warning them of the impending disaster and the need to repent. Sadly, they did not listen to him, and Noach and his family were the only people worthy of being saved.

Yet Noach's life must have been bitter and painful. His attempt to act as saviour failed, resulting in the destruction of the world he knew and of every person alive. He witnessed a disaster of immense proportions, all while trapped in an unseaworthy boat along with an entire zoo and must have felt uncertain as to his future. Noach recognised and was grateful for the kindness performed to him by Hashem, and indeed his first action upon exiting the ark was to offer up a sacrifice expressing this. However, he was unable to adjust to life post-flood, and he drowned his sorrows in wine. He escaped death, but was left with scars and regrets, and a longing to forget his trauma.



"Ok, who brought the woodpeckers?!"



When a character dies, the Torah lists their offspring and the generations who followed them. With Noach, the phrasing is slightly strange. Rather than beginning "these are the generations of Noach", the passage begins with "these are the generations of the sons of Noach" (Bereishit 10:1).

Noach is the archetypal refugee. He was granted a new lease of life, but he was a product of the world that he had lived in previously. Noach lived

for 350 years after the flood and we are not told of any of his achievements in this time. His role was simply to keep his family alive through difficult times and once he had succeeded in this, the task of Jewish continuity was passed on to his children.

## The Jewish approach to refugees

The Torah is clear about how we are to treat strangers.

*"When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong them. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love them as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God."* (Vayikra 19:33-34)

There are two parts to this mitzvah. Firstly, there is a negative commandment not to wrong a stranger. This can be fulfilled by acting passively: if you don't do anything wrong to them, you have fulfilled this obligation. Secondly, there is a positive commandment to love the stranger and to treat them as one of your own. This requires more effort to fulfil: it is not enough to merely tolerate them, rather one must take active steps to welcome them in and to regard them as your own.

This is not something that comes naturally to us. Humans have evolved to be tribal in our nature, and we often focus on our differences instead of the things that we have in common. As we saw with Noach, refugees who have escaped a traumatic past often find it challenging to settle in to their new life, and it can be easy for us to view them as the 'other'. To overcome this requires sensitivity and compassion. We must be able to completely empathise with the stranger, and that is why the Torah reminds us that we too were once strangers, relying on the compassion of others, and that when this compassion was withdrawn, we suffered.

## Modern refugees

It is not only in ancient Egypt that Jews faced persecution and were forced to flee their homes. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jews have been uprooted from the countries that they were born in across Europe, Africa and Asia. The United Kingdom welcomed 10 000 Jewish children on the Kindertransport, and many of us today are descended from these children.

One of those children rescued on the Kindertransport was Lord Alfred Dubs. In 2016, Lord Dubs sponsored an amendment to the Immigration Act 2016 to offer unaccompanied refugee children safe passage to Britain amidst the European migrant crisis. Originally rejected by the House of Commons, the amendment was accepted by the government following a second vote in favour by the Lords. In February 2017, the Home Office abandoned the scheme after accepting only 350 of the planned 3,000 child refugees.





Since 1948, Jews have had a home in Israel which can protect them in times of need. Since the founding of the state, Israel has welcomed in Jewish refugees from places including Russia, Ethiopia, and numerous Arab countries. However, this privilege does not extend to non-Jews and in recent years the Israeli government has faced controversy over the treatment of economic migrants from African countries.

The conversation around refugees is highly politically charged. Integrating large numbers of displaced people into a society comes with many challenges, both socially and financially. Perhaps the thing that frightens people the most though, is a fear of change. When a group of people moves somewhere en masse, they bring with them their culture and traditions, and over time these will begin to shape the environment around them.

We as human beings value tradition. We like things to stay as they have always been, with the continuity this brings giving us a sense of stability. We are nostalgic for things that existed in our childhood, at a time when we felt safe and protected. But the world is constantly changing, and this is something we need to face up to. It can be scary, but it can also be exciting. Encountering new people, new cultures and new traditions give us an opportunity to learn and to expand our own horizons.

## Questions to ponder

- Why are people often suspicious of strangers?
- How does the reminder that we were strangers in Egypt affect our relationship with refugees?
- We are commanded to treat strangers as though they are our own – how can we achieve this if they have a different worldview from us?

## Peula Ideas for Younger Years

### Games about Noach

- Doves and branches: Hide paper olive branches around the shul. Designate one chanich as Noach. The rest of the chanichim are doves. Noach says “Fly away and bring me a branch.” The children scatter and look for the branches. When they find one they return with the branches. Designate a new Noach who can hide the branches and repeat the game.
- Noah’s Ark: Write the names of animals on pieces of paper, making sure there are two of each animal. Each chanich draws a name and must then act out their animal and find their pair. BONUS: if you have a big group, write down the name of a kosher animal on seven slips of paper.
- Float or sink: a science experiment. Fill a bowl with water and put different objects into it. Have the chanichim guess which will float and which will sink.
- One chanich, Noach, stands on one side of the room. All the other chanichim are given names of animals and they must stand on the other side of the room. They call out: “Noach the teiva man, may we come into your ark?” Noach responds something like, “Only if you have a tail,”

and every chanich who is an animal with a tail takes one step forward. The first kid to reach Noah becomes Noah, and everyone starts again.

### Games about refugees

- Balloon game: Imagine you are an asylum seeker or refugee trying to juggle all the competing pressures of living in the UK. Five balloons represent some of the issues you may face each day: Food, Accommodation, Education, Freedom, Language. Your challenge is, for 30 seconds, to keep as many balloons in the air as possible. You cannot catch a balloon. When a balloon hits the floor or falls out of the playing area then it is out of play. Start with making one chanich try to do this by themselves, then compare how many balloons they are able to keep up when they are helped by their friends. Discuss what the challenges are in each of these areas. (N.B. balloons cannot be blown up on Shabbat so you will need to prepare for this activity in advance.)

## Peula Ideas for Older Years

### Games about Noah

- Obstacle relay race – each person must complete the obstacle course with a cup of water held in their mouth. At the end of the obstacle course they pour the water into a bowl. The first team to fill their bowl wins.

### Games about refugees

- Passages: This is a game developed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 1995, available to view at [unhcr.org/uk/passages-game](http://unhcr.org/uk/passages-game)
- River crossing: each person has a piece of paper which is their 'raft'. They must all cross the 'river' by only stepping on rafts. Everyone must be on the river before anyone can get off the river. If someone steps off the raft the whole group must start over. No scooting or sliding on the sheets of paper. Rafts must be in contact with a human at all times or they will be swept away with the current. Once the group has started the process, your role is to take rafts that are "swept away by the current".

## Discussions

- Is it still important to recall the story of being slaves in Egypt when the Jewish people have more recent experience of being refugees?
- What ideas can you come up with to help support refugees?
- Should Israel welcome in non-Jewish refugees?

