

Hadracha Choveret



תנועת בני עקיבא
BNEI AKIVA UK

BNEI AKIVA'S WEEKLY EDUCATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR MADRICHIM

In this pack:

1. **A Choveret with the theme of the week.**
2. **A selection of suggested games/activities that your madrichim can use in Sviva that are linked to the topic/theme.**
3. **Madrichim's Summary Sheet**
4. **A PDF of the slides of the Prezi if you need.** (Attached separately).
Please note the London Bayit has projectors and screens that you can borrow for your meetings.
5. **Further reading and resources on the topic**

Structure of the Choveret:

1. Key Definitions
2. Key Facts
3. Key Players – Whose Involved
4. Timeline
5. Texts
6. Our Response/Responsibility?

Theme and Topic of the Choveret:

This week's Choveret is on the subject of Asylum Seekers in Israel. There is currently a crisis taking place in Israel around the status and treatment of Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers. In the following pages we will be exploring and explaining exactly what's going on and why it's relevant to us in Bnei Akiva UK. The issue has been going in Israel for over 10 years but it has recently made headlines due to decisions made by the Israeli government in the past week.

There is a lot of information included in this Choveret as this is a complicated issue to understand and lots has been going on. Please refer to the madrichim's summary and the 'Takeaway' sections throughout for the key things you need to know.

Enjoy!

1. Key Definitions:

Migrant

At its simplest, a migrant is someone who **moves from one place to another in order to live in another country for more than a year**. The International Organisation of Migration estimates that 232 million people a year become international migrants and another 740 million move within their own countries.

There are many reasons that people become migrants, but those who move to work or seek a better life are generally termed economic migrants. There are, however, also international students, those who move for family reasons and those who migrate because they are fleeing war and persecution. An individual case can be a **mixture of all those things**. It is, after all, possible to flee the war in Syria and want a better life for your family.

Refugee

A refugee is a person who has fled armed conflict or persecution and who is recognised as needing of international protection because it is too dangerous for them to return home. They are protected under international law by the **1951 refugee convention (of which Israel was one of the first states to sign up to)**, which defines what a refugee is and outlines the basic rights afforded to them.

The convention's basic principle is that refugees should not be **expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom would be under threat**. **Once someone has been recognised as a refugee**, they are supposed to be given access to social housing and welfare benefits and helped to find a job and integrate into society. The **UN refugee agency (UNHCR)** estimates that there are almost 60 million forcibly displaced people around the world, including those displaced within their own countries. (Please note that the UNHCR is different to UNWRA, and UNHCR is almost unanimously considered to be a very reputable organisation).

Asylum Seeker

States are under international obligation to consider claims for asylum and not to immediately return asylum seekers to the countries they have fled from. The refugee convention states that they must be given access to fair and efficient asylum procedures and measures to ensure they live in dignity and safety while their claims are processed. In the UK in practice this means living in no-choice accommodation outside London and south-east England on a minimal level of social security.

➔ An asylum seeker is someone who has not yet been given the official category of 'refugee'.

2. Key Facts:

- Israel has 38,000 Asylum Seekers.
- Data from the Population and Immigration Authority suggests 27,500 asylum seekers from Eritrea are living in Israel, along with 7,900 from Sudan and 2,600 from other African countries.
- % of asylum-seekers in Israel from Eritrea (73%) and Sudan (19%).
- The rate of refugee status recognition around the world is 88% for Eritrean asylum seekers and 64% for Sudanese asylum seekers.
- Israel's refugee recognition rate for Eritrean and Sudanese people is less than 1%
- Israel erected a border fence between Israel and Egypt, which was completed in 2012. Since then no more African Asylum Seekers have entered Israel - we are talking about a fixed number of people currently in the country.
- In January 2018 (a few weeks ago) the Israeli Government has ordered the forced expulsion of this community to Rwanda, or they will face indefinite detention in a prison.

3. Key Players

Eritrea:

Eritrea is a one-party state in which national legislative elections have been repeatedly postponed. According to Human Rights Watch, the government's human rights record is considered among the worst in the world. Most Western countries have accused the Eritrean authorities of arbitrary arrest and detentions, and of detaining an unknown number of people without charge for their political activism. However, the Eritrean government has continually dismissed the accusations as politically motivated.

Takeaways:

Has one of the harshest dictatorships in the world today.

Many people have fled due to indefinite forced conscription at the age of 18.

When caught trying to leave, Eritreans are detained and tortured.

Once they have left, they are considered an enemy of the state and will be imprisoned or tortured upon their return.

The UNHCR has declared Eritrea as a country in humanitarian crisis. Citizens of Eritrea flee a country with no civilian judiciary, a country that never held democratic elections and whose citizens are obligated to perform endless national service. This service is unlike the service performed in other armies and includes performing various forms of hard labour for the benefit of the regime, including: mining, paving roads and agricultural work.

Sudan:

The War in Darfur is a major armed conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan, that began in February 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel groups began fighting the government of Sudan, which they accused of oppressing Darfur's non-Arab population. The government responded to attacks by carrying out a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Darfur's non-Arabs. This resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the indictment of Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court.

Takeaways:

Most Asylum Seekers in Israel come from the embroiled region of Darfur.

The conflict is made worse by devastating drought in the western regions of the country.

Israel is considered an enemy state of Sudan, and it is a punishable crime to enter, further complicating a potential return of Asylum Seekers.

The civil wars in Sudan that have been taking place on and off since 1955, the subsequent destabilization and economic collapse, and the fighting in Darfur, forced millions of Sudanese civilians to flee their homes and cities.

In the Darfur region in western Sudan, a genocide has been taking place since 2003. As a result, many of its residents became refugees and fled to Egypt. Added to those were refugees from southern Sudan, where civil war took place between the predominantly Arab Muslim inhabitants of the north and the non-Arab, Christian, inhabitants of the south.



Egypt – why don't the Refugees stop there?

In Egypt, there are approximately 19,000 Sudanese Asylum Seekers currently in the country – some do stay there. However their refugee status is highly disputed by the Egyptian government and they have been subject to racial discrimination and police violence. Egypt employs a "shoot to stop" policy against refugees attempting to continue to Israel through the Sinai Desert. Egypt's Asylum Seekers lack international assistance and regularly face jail time.

Takeaway: Egypt is a dangerous place for Sudanese and Eritrean refugees and they can't stay there.

Sinai Desert – What happens on their way out of Sudan/Eritrea and into Israel?

Between 2009 and 2014, there were large numbers of refugees who were kidnapped and held in Sinai. **Refugees from various countries were transported to Sinai and held hostage by members of Bedouin tribes.** Typically, the hostages were forced to give up phone numbers of relatives and were tortured with the relatives on the phone, in order to obtain ransoms in the range of \$20,000–\$40,000. If the families couldn't pay, the hostages were killed.

- Many of the hostages, refugees from Sudan, Ethiopia or Eritrea, **paid traffickers for transport to the Israeli border, hoping to cross into that country.** They were instead taken hostage by those they had paid. Others were taken by force from refugee camps in Sudan, as reported by the United Nations Refugee Agency in January 2013.
- Amnesty International published a report about numerous kidnappings in 2011-2013 in the Shagarab refugee camps in eastern Sudan, carried out by members of the Rashaida tribe, with victims being sold off to gangs in Sinai, where they would be brutally mistreated to extract ransoms.
- In 2012 Israel constructed a fence at its border to Sinai to keep out African migrants, causing the Rashaida to lose income from transporting willing refugees to the border; they then started to concentrate on kidnappings instead.

The phenomenon was first documented by Israeli organization Hotline for Refugees and Migrants in 2010 in a report entitled "The Dead of the Wilderness". (*Included in the extra resources for the Choveret*). The report was based on testimonies they collected from 60 asylum seekers, mostly Eritreans, who had been tortured for ransom in the Sinai desert. Staff and volunteers of the organisation mostly met the survivors in Israeli immigration detention centres where they were visiting recently arrived asylum seekers. Many people arrived with serious injuries, and some women arrived pregnant as a result of rape. Seriously injured people were immediately taken to hospital upon arrival in Israel.

Takeaways:

- Asylum seekers are either kidnapped from refugee camps in Eritrea and Sudan, or smuggled (initially) voluntarily, and subsequently sold or surrendered to Bedouins after being held.
- Often they are held hostage in inhumane conditions and tortured for ransoms up to \$50,000
- Large numbers of Asylum Seekers disappear – killed while being held or shot by the Egyptian military guarding the border with Israel after release.



1. Timeline

What has been going on in Israel in the past few years?

- African Asylum seekers started arriving at the Negev border with Israel in the late 2000's.
- At the peak there were around 60,000 African Asylum Seekers in Israel.
- Upon arrival they were taken to Saharonim prison in the Negev, and then given a one way ticket to the Tel Aviv Bus terminal in the south of the city.
- Political rhetoric at the time branded them as 'infiltrators' and worse language was used.
- Israel's inability/unwillingness to process or deal with the Asylum Seekers created many of the problems the country now faces.
- In 2012 Israel opened the Holot 'open prison' (detention centre) across the road from Saharonim prison and started detaining asylum seekers without trial.
- The Supreme Court struck down this law and ordered the prison to close several times, but the government soon passes another law that changes the circumstances and the cycle of litigation starts again. Meanwhile, more Asylum seekers are jailed, or 'voluntarily deported' to third party countries.
- The system of voluntary departure consists of Asylum seekers being 'encouraged' to leave Israel voluntarily to go to Rwanda or Uganda. They are coerced but not forced, and also paid \$3500.
- The Government also takes 20% of their earnings and puts it in a fund they can only access when they leave the country.
- In 2015 there was a key policy change that Asylum seekers would start to be forced to leave Israel or face imprisonment in Saharonim Prison.

What has been going on in Israel in the past week or so?

Background: November 2017 - "Increased removal" is how Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, at the weekly cabinet meeting, called the new policy in which asylum seekers will be required to choose between leaving Israel for Rwanda and being jailed indefinitely.

January 1st 2018:

The Ministry of Interior announced that asylum seekers would begin receiving notices that they have 60 days to leave the country or enter jail. Furthermore, that anyone who submits an asylum application from January 1st will not be protected from deportation, despite the asylum system being completely inaccessible for over a year now.

January 2nd 2018:

Ministry of Public Security received a mass transfer of funds to carry out the plan. The Immigration Authority issued a detailed procedure, detailing that women and children would be exempt – but only for now.

January 3rd 2018:

Netanyahu announced that he was no longer sure if jail would be a good option, and that he would investigate the possibility of putting people on planes in handcuffs.

January 5th 2018:

Olivier Nduhungirehe, Rwanda's Minister of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, denied on Friday that his country has signed a deal to accept asylum seekers that Israel hopes to remove from inside its borders.

Today: Plans for the mass deportation are still going ahead.

Why is Prime Minister Netanyahu deporting the asylum seekers?

Prime Minister Netanyahu claims that the Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers are not actually asylum seekers but economic migrants. If they were actually economic migrants they don't have any protections under the refugee convention (international law of which Israel has signed up to) and there wouldn't be (that much of an) issue.

He claims that he is looking out for the demographics of the country and Israel cannot have huge waves of economic migrants coming in to the country.

However:

1. To determine the status of the Sudanese and Eritrean people in Israel the Interior Ministry has to process their asylum requests and examine the evidence to see if they are deserving of refugee status or if they are really just economic migrants. This process has not happened for the vast majority of asylum seekers in Israel. So it's hard to see how Bibi can make that claim.
2. Sudanese and Eritrean people who've fled to other countries overwhelmingly get granted refugee status after their asylum requests. Israel has only granted less than 1% of the requests made.
3. We're dealing with a fixed number of Sudanese and Eritrean people. Since the fence was built along Egypt's border, very few people have made it across and the 'huge waves' of people is a myth.
4. As of October 2013, there are 69,500 authorized migrant workers in Israel, and in addition, 14,800 workers who had visas but lost their legal status. In addition, there are 93,000 undocumented migrants who entered Israel as tourists but did not leave the country once the visa expired, most of them from the former Soviet Union. Nobody is talking about these people with the same rhetoric and vigour.

5. Texts: What do our texts tell us about this issue?

1: Shemot - 22:20-23

You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.	וְגֵר לֹא-תוֹנֶה וְלֹא תִלְחָצֶנּוּ כִּי-גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan.	כָּל-אֶלְמָנָה וְיָתוֹם לֹא תַעֲבֹדוּ:
If you do mistreat them, I will heed their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me,	אִם-עָבַדְתֶּם תַּעֲבֹדָה אֹתוֹ כִּי אִם-צָעַק יִצְעַק אֵלַי שְׁמַע אֲשַׁמַּע צַעֲקוֹתָיו:
and My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.	וְחַרְאֵי אֵפִי וְהִרְגַתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּחֶרֶב וְהָיוּ נְשֵׁיכֶם אֶלְמָנוֹת וּבְנֵיכֶם יָתוֹמִים:

2: Shemot - 23:9

You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.	גֵר לֹא תִלְחָץ וְאַתֶּם יָדַעְתֶּם אֶת-נַפְשׁ הַגֵּר כִּי-גֵרִים הָיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
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3: Yechezkel 47:21-23

This land you shall divide for yourselves among the tribes of Israel.	וְחִלְקֶתֶם אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְכֶם לְשִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
You shall allot it as a heritage for yourselves and for the strangers who reside among you, who	וְהָיָה תַפְלוֹ אוֹתָהּ בְּנַחֲלָה לְכֶם וְלַהֲגָרִים הַגֵּרִים בְּתוֹכְכֶם אֲשֶׁר-הוֹלְדוּ בְּיַדְכֶם וְהָיוּ לְכֶם כְּאֶזְרָח

have begotten children among you. You shall treat them as Israelite citizens; they shall receive allotments along with you among the tribes of Israel.	בבני ישראל אתכם יפלו בנחלה בתוך שבטי ישראל:
You shall give the stranger an allotment within the tribe where he resides —declares the Lord GOD.	והיה בשבט אשר-גר הגר אתו שם תתנו נחלתו גם אדני יהוה: (ס)

- ➔ The overwhelming narrative of our texts exhorts us to treat strangers among us with dignity, respect and to treat them as we would like to be treated.
- ➔ Q: Do you think this means we/Israel have an obligation to treat the Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers better than we are currently?
- ➔ Q: Do you think we/Israel should be providing asylum for the Sudanese and Eritrean refugees?

4: Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 75b

One who has not made good in one place and fails to move and try their luck in some other place has only themselves to complain about.	דביש ליה בהא מתא ולא אזיל למתא אחריתא. הדרן עלך איזהו נשך
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- ➔ Q: What do you think the Gemara in Bava Metzia says about What are the attitudes of this text toward migration, immigrants, and immigration? (Pay attention to the attitude of the narrator of the text and other attitudes that might be mentioned within the text.)
- ➔ Does this text seem to consider migration a normal or an unusual phenomenon? What are some of the reasons these texts give for why people might become immigrants? Do they still hold true for modern life?

More texts are included in the further reading section.

5. What do you think Bnei Akiva UK should be doing about this issue?

Guideline for thinking about this:

Message from Rav Aharon Herskovitz – Rav Shaliach

The Torah commands us (Devarim 23:16): “You shall not hand over a servant to his master.” The Gemara in Gittin (45a) explains that the Torah is referring to a slave who runs away from his or her master (even if they are Jewish) from chutz la’aretz to the land of Israel. We are commanded to not return this slave to their master, nor to have them remain as a slave to us. Rather, we must leave them free. The Sefer HaChinuch explains (Mitzvah 568) that the root of this mitzvah relates to the special nature of the land of Israel that Hashem wants us to maintain: a person has now arrived there and we must aid them in serving Hashem. Additionally, this act is one of chessed, of loving kindness, through which we allow a person who has fled a subjugated existence to experience freedom.

Though the current reality of refugees to Israel does not necessarily correspond to the same reality that the Torah is describing, and there are certain additional factors that must be taken into account, our community both in Israel and out of Israel must not forget the root of this mitzvah and have it factor into our policy and outlook on this issue

What can we do?

1. Learn about the issue and talk to your friends and families about it. The more people that are aware of what's going on the more people there are who might do something about it.
2. Publicly oppose what's going on: talk about this issue on social media, write to your Rabbi/community leaders or to us in Bnei Akiva: ask them/us to publicly oppose the deportation and do what we can to campaign against the deportation.
3. Consider running a project or campaign in your sviva around this issue. Get your community involved!

Donate or encourage others to donate to the NGO/Charity that is going to be challenging the deportation in Israeli courts and who are supporting the Sudanese and Eritrean communities living in Israel. They are a reputable NGO and are doing amazing work on the ground.

Link here: <https://my.fundme.org.il/en/campaign/PreventDeportation>

Other NGOs:

<https://www.ardc-israel.org/>

4. Read about the personal stories of those involved. This is a human tragedy and not just about facts and figures. Personal Stories are included as part of the pack.

Summary Sheet for Madrichim

1. Migrant

At its simplest, a migrant is someone who moves from one place to another in order to live in another country for more than a year. The International Organisation of Migration estimates that 232 million people a year become international migrants and another 740 million move within their own countries.

2. Refugee

A refugee is a person who has fled armed conflict or persecution and who is recognised as needing of international protection because it is too dangerous for them to return home. They are protected under international law by the **1951 refugee convention (of which Israel was one of the first states to sign up to)**, which defines what a refugee is and outlines the basic rights afforded to them.

- a. The convention's basic principle is that refugees should not be **expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom would be under threat**. **Once someone has been recognised as a refugee**, they are supposed to be given access to social housing and welfare benefits and helped to find a job and integrate into society.

3. Asylum Seeker

An asylum seeker is someone who has not yet been given the official category of 'refugee'. States are under international obligation to consider claims for asylum and not to immediately return asylum seekers to the countries they have fled from.

4. Key Facts:

- Israel has 38,000 Asylum Seekers.
 - Data from the Population and Immigration Authority suggests 27,500 asylum seekers from Eritrea are living in Israel, along with 7,900 from Sudan and 2,600 from other African countries.
 - % of asylum-seekers in Israel from Eritrea (73%) and Sudan (19%).
 - The rate of refugee status recognition around the world is 88% for Eritrean asylum seekers and 64% for Sudanese asylum seekers.
 - Israel's refugee recognition rate for Eritrean and Sudanese people is less than 1%
 - Israel erected a border fence between Israel and Egypt, which was completed in 2012. Since then no more African Asylum Seekers have entered Israel - we are talking about a fixed number of people currently in the country.
 - In January 2018 (a few weeks ago) the Israeli Government has ordered what amounts to forced expulsion of this community, or they will face indefinite detention in a prison.
5. As of 1st January 2018 the Ministry of Interior in Israel announced that the asylum seekers in Israel will have 60 days to leave the country or to face jail.
6. Jewish people around the world are protesting and campaigning for the Israeli Government to reverse this decision.
7. The overwhelming thrust of Torah and Halacha places a huge responsibility on us as Jewish people to treat the 'strangers among us' with special care and dignity. This is based around the principle of 'קייגרים הייתם בצרץ מצרים' – 'for we were strangers in Egypt' and we should understand the hardship and suffering of those who are in a similar situation.

Key Definitions:

- ➔ Use this as a trigger activity to introduce the words: Refugee, Migrant and Asylum Seeker.
- ➔ Then discuss what these words mean. Refer to their definitions in the Choveret.

How To Play I Am Going To And I'm Bringing

This is a guessing game. If there are fewer than ten people in the group, one person thinks of a word - if there are 10 people or more, two people think of a word together, without the rest of the group knowing what the word is. They should sit at opposite ends of the circle, so that clues are only given once every few turns. One of them gives the first clue by saying, "I am going to" ... "and I am bringing" - something that starts with the first letter of the word. Participants then try to guess the next letter of the word by saying, "I'm going to" ... "and I'm bringing" - something that starts with what they think is the next letter of the word. If they guess correctly, the leader(s) says, "Yes, you can come," but if they guess incorrectly, the leader says, "No, you can't come."

You can adapt this game by changing the location of where you are going to - for example, , you can say, "I am going through the desert," or "I am going to Israel,"

SAMPLE: The word is "Refugee"

Start: I am going to Israel and I'm bringing a Rabbit."

1st Guess: I am going to Israel and I'm bringing an apple."

Response: NO, you can't come.

2nd Guess: I am going to Israel and I'm bringing an Elephant.

Response: YES, you can come.

This signifies to the whole group that the second letter has been guessed correctly, and now they use the same process to guess the third letter.

Once they have it, they then continue around the circle until they get the fourth letter, and so on, until someone guesses the word. That person becomes the next leader.

VARIATIONS - it might not be a word - it might be an action. For example, the leader might put his finger on his chin, and only let people come who put their finger on their chin. To make the game more interesting, you can mix it up between words and actions - the kids now have to figure out whether they are guessing a word, or an action. They might also decide to have the clues end with the letter that needs to be guessed, instead of starting with that letter. Let the kids get creative with this.

Key Facts:

- ➔ Use this activity to introduce the key facts:

How To Play Jigsaw Puzzle

Write the key facts on large paper and cut it into a puzzle. Ask the chans to put the puzzle together. For larger groups have more than one puzzle and make it a race i.e. one fact per puzzle.

Consider adding pictures/photos to each fact if you want to make it more visual.

Key Players:

- ➔ Use this activity discuss the key countries where asylum seekers in Israel are coming from.

How To Play Create A Commercial

This game can either be done using a phone and a laptop/tablet, or just acted out on the spot if you're doing this on Shabbat.

Split your group up into teams and give each team either Sudan and Eritrea which they will need to create a **parody** tourist video for. Remember these two countries are not particularly nice places to live in and the governments do a lot of bad things (refer to your packs). In the parody tourist video ask the chanichim to create a skit/video that purposefully focuses on the bad things that are happening but in the characteristic (upbeat and glitzy) style of tourist videos. **Remember it's a parody.**

- Avoid doing African accents and any casual racism please.

Send each team off to prepare their commercial then either get each team to individually film their ad, or just bring them all back to the hall and get them to act it out in front of each other.

For older years: Consider asking them to do the same of the 'journey through the Sinai desert'.

- **Remember that these stories are of immense suffering and pain. There is a big difference between parodying something in order to make a point and making fun of something just for the sake of making fun. It is crucial you bring it back to the very real situation in these countries and in Israel.**

Texts

Hand out some of the texts and have a discussion in a format that works for your group i.e. chavruta or chabura depending on numbers. Each madrich/a should facilitate the discussion.

- Remember: allowing chanichim to read the texts empowers them more than just one of their madrichim saying 'this is what the Torah' says. Our texts are subject to interpretation and you need to read them to do that.

Focus on what they think should happen, what Torah/Halacha might think should happen and on what is actually happening.

- ➔ Have the debate either in small groups, everyone together or even as a whole sviva.

Finally discuss what your group might want to do about the situation. We are very happy to offer any support you need in doing a campaign or project about this issue.

Bnei Akiva

Vayera – Refugees in Israel: Ki Gerim Hayitem be'Eretz Mitzrayim

Further Reading

NGO Reports on the Issue:

<http://www.hotline.org.il/en/activism-en/reports>

(Reports since 2003)

American Jewry response:

<http://www.truah.org/press/asylumletter/>

<https://www.facebook.com/notes/right-now-advocates-for-african-asylum-seekers-in-israel/breaking-north-american-jewish-leaders-urge-israel-to-protect-refugees-offer-to-/1768043646561554/>

<http://rhr.org.il/eng/2018/01/january-16-2018-conference-rabbis-educators-asylum-seekers-israel/>

Further Texts

1: Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 59b

<p>It has been taught: R. Eliezer the Great said, "Why did the Torah warn against [the wronging of] a ger [stranger/convert] in thirty-six, or as others say, in forty-six, places? Because the ger has an inclination towards evil." What is the meaning of the verse, You must neither wrong a stranger, nor oppress the stranger; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt? It has been taught: R. Nathan said: Do not taunt your neighbor with the blemish you yourself have. And so the saying goes: If there is a case of hanging in a person's family record, say not to that person, 'Hang this fish up for me.'</p>	<p>תניא רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר מפני מה הזהירה תורה בל"ו מקומות ואמרי לה במ"ו מקומות בגר מפני שסורו רע מאי דכתיב וגר לא תונה ולא תלחצנו כי גרים הייתם בארץ מצרים <תנינא> [תניא] רבי נתן אומר מום שבך אל תאמר לחברך והיינו דאמרי אינשי דזקיף ליה זקיפא בדיותקיה לא נימא ליה לחבריה זקיף בניתא</p>
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1. Rabbi Eliezer seems to say that the reason we should be especially careful not to harm the stranger / convert is that they "have an inclination towards evil." What do you think this means? How do you react to this? If this means that we are afraid they will revert to their previous ways and leave the community, how does this affect your reaction?

2. Why does the text interpret wronging a stranger / convert to mean taunting them about their past?

3. What does R. Natan mean when he says that the meaning of not oppressing the stranger is not to taunt someone about a blemish you yourself have? What is the blemish?

2: Vaykira - 25:23

<p>But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but strangers resident with Me.</p>	<p>וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַּר לְצַמְתֹּת כִּי-לִי הָאָרֶץ כִּי-גֵרִים וְתוֹשְׁבֵי אֲתָם עִמָּדִי:</p>
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3: Divrei Haymim I: 29:15

<p>For we are sojourners with You, mere transients like our fathers; our days on earth are like a shadow, with nothing in prospect.</p>	<p>כִּי-גֵרִים אֲנַחְנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ וְתוֹשְׁבֵים כְּכָל-אֲבוֹתֵינוּ כֹּהֵל יְמֵינוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֵין מִקְוֶה</p>
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Further Reading

4: Tehillim 39:13

Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my cry; do not disregard my tears; for like all my forebears I am an alien, resident with You.

שְׁמַע־תְּפִלָּתִי | יְהוָה וְשִׁעֲתִי | הֲאִזְנִיהָ אֶל־דַּמְעֹתַי
אֶל־תִּחְרַשׁ כִּי גֵר אֲנִי עִמָּךְ תּוֹשֵׁב בְּכָל־אֲבוֹתַי

1. How does the notion of being foreigners before God resonate with you?
2. What shared human experience do you think the texts above are relating in describing this sense of alienation?

The Need to be a 'Ger' is Fundamental to Being Jewish:

5: Bereishit 12:1

The LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַבְרָם לֵךְ־לְךָ מֵאֶרֶץ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ
וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֶרְאֶךָ:

6: Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, The Emergence of Ethical Man, page 153

"Bondage to man excludes Divine friendship. The beloved must tear down all the social and political barriers that fence in the individual and imprison his initiative and liberty. The charismatic person is anarchic, liberty-loving; he frees himself from all the fixed formulas and rhythms of an urbanized civilization and joins a fluid, careless, roving nomad society. An ancient Egyptian document describes the nomads as follows: „Here is the miserable stranger...He does not dwell in the same spot; his feet are always wandering. From times of Horus he battles, he does not conquer, and is not conquered" (Buber, Moses, 25). The stranger is indomitable; he may lose a battle, yet had never lost a war. He will never reconcile with political subjection. Roaming, wandering, he will escape persecution and oppression. When the need arises, the nomad stands up and fights for his freedom and many a time proves superior in battle to the settled king. Abraham's heroism on the battlefield is the best illustration,"

1. What do you think the Rav is claiming about the way that Jewish people should consider themselves? How might this tie into the earlier sources?
2. The Rav's depiction of the heroism of Avraham is focused on how an individual escapes their own persecution. What do you think our responsibility might be to help others do this, if we ourselves are not persecuted?

Mutasim Ali: Let my people stay

<https://www.thejc.com/news/news-features/mutasim-ali-let-my-people-stay-1.439178>

From Darfur to Israel – one refugee's harrowing journey to find stability for himself and for his people.



Whatever happened later in his life, Mutasim Ali was always able to look back and say: “This is not the worst that has happened to me.”

That was what he told himself when he attempted to seek asylum in Israel, and was repeatedly thrown into detention centres.

“The way the guards spoke to people in Holot detention centre – it was humiliating,” he says. “A lot of people suffered mental, psychological distress because they were there. But I’ve been in worse situations than that, experienced worse than that. So, for me, it was nothing.”

The worst happened very early on. He was a teenager, living in Darfur. His family was middle-class: they had a decent house and servants, and were able to send Ali to boarding school.

Like all the families in his village, his parents were farmers. Each autumn – the rainy season – Ali would return home to help his parents with the harvest.

He was home for the harvest in 2003 when news came that government-backed militia groups were planning to attack his village. Militia had been raiding villages throughout Darfur that year, seizing land and killing villagers.

So the family decided to escape to safety: Ali's parents retreated to a nearby village, while 16-year-old Ali was sent elsewhere in Darfur. That was the last time he saw them.

"I just left my village," he says. "I didn't know where I was going."

In fact, the militia did not come that day. But Ali had already left, and so he continued onwards to the Sudanese capital of Khartoum, where he enrolled in a geology course at university.

Two years later, his village was destroyed. Tens of people were killed; his family and many others were sent to displaced-persons' camps.

Ali, however, was still at university in Khartoum. Alongside his studies, he began speaking out against the regime in Darfur, and advocating on behalf of his people. Then, one day as he walked home from university, security services arrested him and threw him into prison. This, then, was the beginning of the worst.

"I don't want to talk about the details of prison," Ali says, his voice soft. "I had really to experience a lot of physical and mental torture. That's all I can speak of."

"You'd be alone in a small room. Nobody cares about your food and water. And, on top of that, there's torture."

"It's about humiliating and dehumanising you – that's the main purpose. You just can't really stand being there. Any day, it's hell for you."



He was released 17 days later, and returned to his studies and his advocacy work. Not long afterwards, he was arrested again and thrown back into jail.

Again, he was released after a few days; again, it was not long before he was imprisoned, this time for three weeks.

“The same thing happened over and over again,” he says, “The same experience, the same techniques, the same everything.

“In the end, how bad it is really depends on how many days you spend there. The last time was one of the worst experiences of my life, because it was three weeks, and I experienced torture every day.

“They said, ‘If you don’t oppose the regime, then you’ll have a nicer life.’ They said, ‘Then you’ll be able to go school and support your family.’” He pauses. “I was tempted.”

Ultimately, however, his resolve remained unbroken: “Because I’m not doing it for myself. I’m doing it for other people who can’t speak, and don’t have the opportunity to speak. I didn’t have any other choice.

“Imagine you have a home, and it’s taken. The friends and relatives who you grew up with are killed. There’s no way you can say everything is OK. You need to speak about what’s happening.

“I could have stayed silent and not said anything, and maybe stayed in the country and still been there today. But that’s not the person I am.”

When he was released this time, he realised that the only way to continue his advocacy work was to leave the country. So he decided to flee to neighbouring Egypt.

“The difficult feeling was leaving your country, not because you choose to, but because you have to,” he says. “And you don’t tell the closest friends of yours, you don’t tell your family where you’re going.



“I wasn’t sure what my future will be. That was a difficult feeling. But I had to make that choice.”

On arrival in Egypt, however, he discovered that he would not be safe there, either. Many of Ali's activist friends there had been deported back to Sudan, or killed in Egyptian prisons.

“I really didn't feel safe in Egypt, unless I kept silent,” he says. “And, if that was my choice, I wouldn't have left my country.”

So he reviewed his options. He could travel to Libya, but that too had diplomatic ties with Sudan. He could cross the Mediterranean to Europe, but he was reluctant to make the long journey. And then he remembered a third option.

“Israel didn't have any diplomatic relationship with Sudan,” he says. “And, when the genocide began in Darfur, when we felt really lonely and nobody spoke up for the people of Darfur, Jews were advocating for us. Jews marched on Washington, DC. Jewish youth movements were advocating for us. It was fantastic to see. I thought it would be safe to be among Jews, until I could go back home.”

He did not, however, feel safe enough to go to the Israeli embassy in Egypt and seek permission to enter Israel. “If you're fleeing and worrying for your life, you've got no time to think of waiting and receiving legal permission.

“Crossing the border illegally was one of the most difficult decisions I've ever made in my life: it was possible Egyptian guards would shoot me. And I wasn't sure that Israel would let me in.

“I was 90 per cent sure I wouldn't make it. But, if I remain in Egypt, I don't have even that 10 per cent. So the only option – the best option I've got – is to take the risk. I'd experienced worse. I didn't really have much to lose – I wasn't that nervous.”

Ali walked across mountainous terrain in order to reach the border with Israel. “It wasn't easy,” he says. “But the difficult thing I was thinking about was that it was possible I'd be shot, it was possible I'd be arrested.”

At the border, he saw the Egyptian guards, positioned every 50 metres or so. “I didn't hesitate. I just walked between two of them. But the minute I put my foot on the road, there was a wire that sounded an alarm.

“They started shooting from all directions. Luckily, they didn't shoot me. I had nothing to lose, so I kept running.”

He jumped over the fence; five minutes later, an Israeli defence force jeep approached. Speaking in Arabic, the soldiers said to Ali: “You have nothing to fear. No one will shoot you here.”

“I'd come from a country where people in the army are trained to shoot and kill civilians,” Ali says. “So that was an amazing thing to hear.

“But, because they were speaking Arabic, I thought maybe I'd made a mistake and was in the wrong country. Maybe I was in Jordan by mistake. Then they will send me back to Sudan.”

Reassured that he was indeed in Israel, he spent one night on the army base, before being sent to the Saharonim detention centre for illegal immigrants. “I wouldn’t call it a prison,” he says. “If I compare it to the prison in Sudan, it was like a hotel room.”

He was there for four and a half months. He asked whether he could apply for asylum, and was told that, unless refugees were Jewish, there was no real process by which they could seek asylum in Israel.

Then, one day, he was told that he had been released, and was handed a bus ticket to Tel Aviv. He had no money, and nowhere to go. “I was by myself; I didn’t have anybody,” he says. “But I was happy, because I was out of prison.”



In Tel Aviv, he approached an African man he saw on the street; the man happened to be from Darfur, and took Ali home with him.

Eventually, Ali found a job in a plastics plant in Tiberias, and he rented a flat. He began managing a community-based organisation, providing services for African refugees. And, working together with a lawyer from an organisation funded by the New Israel Fund, he petitioned for refugee status.

He had been in Tiberias for a couple of months when he returned to Tel Aviv to renew his visa. At the Interior Ministry, however, he was told that his visa had expired, as of that moment. He was taken immediately to the Holot detention centre, in the desert close to the Egyptian border.

“The conditions in Holot – basically, they make life miserable for asylum seekers,” he says. “They break the spirit of asylum seekers, so they will leave Israel.”

“You just eat and sleep, and there’s nothing to do. There was no education. There was nothing to fill the gap in the daily routine. We were in the middle of nowhere, so there was nowhere we could go.”

Repeatedly, the Israeli government told the Holot inmates that it would give them \$3,500 to leave Israel. That offer would not always be there, the officials added: best take it up while you can. Many inmates took the money and returned to Africa: of the 36,000-40,000 asylum seekers who were in Tel Aviv until recently, most have now left. Many of those were subsequently imprisoned or killed.

Ali, meanwhile, stayed in Holot, and began organising language classes and sports programmes for the other inmates. “If I’m given the option to go back to Khartoum right now, or to stay in Holot, I’d definitely stay in Holot,” he says.

“I still remember when I was in solitary confinement in Khartoum. I have flashbacks sometimes about that. It wasn’t an easy experience.”

Eventually, working together with his NIF lawyer, he was released from Holot and granted refugee status. He is now pursuing a law degree in Ramat Gan. He intends to use this legal knowledge to advocate for the people of Darfur, and to fight on behalf of asylum seekers in Israel.

“Life in Israel is completely difficult and hard. Super tough,” he says. “You never know what you’ll do next – the government can decide at any time to put you in prison and give you a deportation order.

“But I hope my case sets a precedent for other people’s claims. Because my story isn’t that different from thousands who are still in prison.”

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Personal Stories of Asylum Seekers in Israel

The Testimony of M.B.

<http://hotline.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Deported-To-The-Unkown.pdf>

I am citizen of Eritrea, I arrived in Israel on 12.12.2007 to seek asylum. Once I arrived I went to the UNHCR, I received from them protecting papers as an asylum seeker and later got a work permit. On February 26, 2014 I was forcibly sent to Holot. It was very difficult. Only eating and drinking, outside of that we were not doing anything. I am a human being, I needed to be able to do more than just eat and sleep. We were forced to sign in three times a day, this is not a normal procedure. As soon as I entered Holot, the Border Control officers told me that I can stay all of my life in Holot, I can go back to my country, or I can go to Rwanda. I felt that all the time I was being pressured to leave the country.

The final straw was before Passover, I went to ask to be released for the day because friends had invited me to the Passover Seder. The official said- "What do you mean you have a Seder? It's only for Jews!". I told him that I was requesting leave to celebrate Passover for the Christians (Easter). He said that he did not know what that was and that I should come back in a week. I knew that the next week, no one was going to be working, and that was that. My friends left for the holiday without permission and then they were put in Prison. (Since 15 One of the 10 testimonies provided as affidavits to the Beer Sheva Regional Court, taken in Kapala on August 21. 2015 23 they were unable to make it back for the 3 mandatory sign-ins that existed at Holot).

Shishai, the immigration officer, told me that Rwanda was good, there are opportunities to learn, that there's work. When I sat with him he asked that I list my professional skills and said that this way it would be easier for me to find work. I was promised that they would meet me there and give me a two days hotel accommodation. I was also asked to sign that I was leaving willingly. I left Israel on 7.16.2014 via a flight to Istanbul. There were six other asylum-seekers on the flight. When I got to Rwanda, I collected my luggage, and I presented my travel papers and went outside. I stood there and waited for my friends, but they did not come. I walked in and it turned out they were looking for the person who was supposed to pick us up.

A guy came from Rwandan Immigration. He took all of our documents and called a taxi driver to take us to the hotel. He introduced himself as Clever. We asked the taxi driver what happened to our documents. He told us that Clever would come back in the morning. That morning, one of my friends woke up early, and gave money to the guard (bribery, that allowed him to leave) and went to look for the Rwandan Interior Ministry, in order to apply for asylum. He came back when I was eating breakfast and said that when he arrived at the 24 Ministry, they asked him where he was coming from. He told them "Israel", and they said that they did not accept the requests of those who came from Israel. We were worried, and were waiting for Clever to arrive.

When Clever arrived, he told him about what happened to us, and asked what would we do if Rwanda was not ready to accept us. He said that there was no problem, and for \$200 for each of us he would arrange for us to go to Uganda. We all agreed, because we realized that we could not stay in Rwanda. We were driven to the border-first by bus and then by minibus. We traveled for several hours, and in the middle of the night, we arrived in Uganda. We went through the border by foot, and it took about half an hour. They told us not to turn our cellphones, because the light would get

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Personal Stories of Asylum Seekers in Israel

us caught. On the other side of the border was a man waiting for us with a minibus. When we were already inside Uganda, around four or five in the morning, soldiers stopped us to check our van. I was sure that whoever drove us from Rwanda to Uganda, told them that we are coming and that we had money. They did a search and found that each of us had \$3,500 (This was the amount we had received in Israel before we left). They threatened to put us in prison because we had no documents and we crossed the border illegally. We were really scared. In the end, we agreed that we would each pay them \$500 and they let us go.

I arrived in Kampala on 7.19.2014. After around 10 days, I went to the police, following the procedure, to seek asylum with them first. The officer asked to see my documents. I only had a photocopy of Teudat Ma'avar (Travel ID). The officer wanted to see the original, but I didn't have it (because it had been taken). After that I had a few meetings, including the police, and also the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). I never hid that I had come from Israel. While waiting for a decision, I could not work even though I tried to find a job. There is no work here. People only hire those who they already know. My situation started to get really hard. I reached the point where I had nothing to eat. I had to ask friends from abroad to send me money. While I wait, the only documentation I have is an Asylum Seeker Certificate. I have to keep on renewing this all the time. On 6.17.2015 I was given a meeting to receive an answer to my asylum claims. The clerk asked me "You have come from Israel?" I said yes. She told me "Your request is denied". I asked why. She told me that she didn't know. I asked for the rejection decision in writing, the clerk told me to come back the next week. I return there every week and have not received a decision rejecting the request of my asylum request. In the meanwhile they have stopped renewing my Asylum Seeker Certificate.

At the end of June, I went to the ministry and begged to have my Certificate extended. I did not have anything to eat, my friend had sent me money, but without the paper extended, I couldn't get it from the bank. They agreed to extend my certificate the next week. I went to the Refugee Law Project and asked them for help. They said without a formal rejection on paper, you aren't able to appeal the decision, so I am stuck. I understand that Israel wanted to get rid of us, but what turns out is, no matter where I am, no one wants to accept me because I came from Israel. I don't know what will happen now.

8.21.2015