

During The Seder: *Making the Story of Exodus Relevant Today*



Celebrating the Refugee Journey from Harm to Home

The Jewish Holiday of Passover or Pesach honors the Biblical story of Exodus - how an entire nation was oppressed, uprooted from their homes, pursued by their oppressors into the desert, and then finally given a chance to rebuild their society in freedom. This story of Exodus comes to mind today as we consider the situation of the millions of people around the world who have been forced to flee their homes and leave loved ones behind because of violent conflict and disaster.

In observing Passover, the Jewish people are directed to not only share the original story of Exodus, but also to acknowledge and challenge injustice in their own times. This Passover, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) encourages you to share the stories of modern day refugees alongside the re-telling of the ancient story of Exodus.

The following are key points in the Haggadah where you can share the parallel experience of ancient and modern-day refugees.

I. Re-telling the story of Exodus
Talk about refugees in modern times

II. The Symbolism of Matzah - Forced to flee on a moment's notice
Share the need for continued, prompt response to humanitarian emergencies whenever and wherever they occur

III. Elijah - Welcoming the Wanderer
Share the story of a refugee resettled in the USA

IV. "Next Year in Jerusalem, Next Year in Peace"
Share how rebuilding and development work lay the foundation for a peaceful, productive future in post-conflict regions.

Ways to Take Further Action:

Educate family, friends and colleagues about refugee crises all over the world by incorporating it into your own Passover Seder, or bring this bulletin to the Seders that you attend.

Advocate on behalf of refugees by signing our petitions at <http://www.theirc.org/help/take-action>

Donate to the IRC and support our work as we help refugees in their journeys from harm to home.

The **International Rescue Committee** was conceived in 1933 as a network of courageous individuals who urgently banded together to try and deliver as many Jews and other targeted minorities from the genocidal intentions of Nazi Germany and Fascist Europe.

Today the IRC is an internationally recognized relief and development agency operating in 42 countries to aid people and communities affected by war, civil conflict or oppression. In the United States, the IRC's national resettlement network annually helps thousands of newly arrived refugees rebuild their lives in their adopted country.

Re-Telling the Story of Exodus:

Talking about refugees in Modern Times



Telling the story of Exodus enables Jews to celebrate their liberation, while serving as a reminder of other people currently in flight.

When Emergencies Strike:

At a moment's notice, the Jewish nation had to pack their belongings and flee with Pharaoh's army at their heels.

In the past year, humanitarian emergencies have emerged across the globe, uprooting hundreds of thousands of people forcing them from their homes.

- Since the war in Iraq began, 4 million people have been displaced from their homes, with hundreds of thousands forced across the border into Jordan and Syria.
- In May 2008, Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar, with an estimated death toll of 20,000 and as many as 2.5 million people severely affected.
- In August 2008, war between Russia and Georgia resulted in 2,000 deaths and displaced over 100,000 people from their homes
- In October 2008, a resurgence of violent conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo uprooted 200,000 people from their homes. Since 1998, conflict in DRC has been responsible for the death of at least 5 million people, making it the deadliest conflict since World War II.
- In March 2009, aid organizations were expelled from Darfur and from North and East Sudan. Some 1.4 million people were left without access to vital humanitarian aid.

Starting a new life, a new home:

The story of Exodus not only chronicles the danger experienced by the Jewish people while fleeing oppression, but also tells of the challenges faced during the long desert journey towards a new homeland.

Today the IRC is on the ground in 42 countries providing humanitarian relief, assisting refugees and rebuilding lives in the wake of disaster. Through 24 regional offices in cities across the United States, the IRC helps refugees resettle in the U.S. and become self-sufficient. The IRC assists refugees in every phase of their journeys from harm to home.

Building for a Peaceful Future:

The end of the story of Exodus marks the birth of the Jewish Nation complete with a framework of laws, new leadership and a community of people committed to building a prosperous and peaceful society.

In order to stabilize and foster healthy growth in a post-conflict environment, educational, health and economic infrastructure must be rebuilt, grassroots good governance systems must be laid out, and human rights protection must be fostered and championed by communities on a local level.

Imagine a region like Southern Sudan, where a civil war lasting two decades killed 2 million people, forced 4 million people from their homes, and devastated roads, farms, schools, hospitals, even entire cities. The IRC is working in post-conflict regions like Southern Sudan, Liberia, Nepal and Chechnya to lay the foundation for lasting peace.

The Symbolism of Matzah: *Forced to flee on a moment's notice*

Highlighting the need for continued, prompt response to humanitarian emergencies whenever and wherever they occur



During Passover, all forms of leavened bread are forbidden to remind the Jewish nation of how quickly and fearfully their ancestors had to pack up their lives and embark on an uncertain journey.

Similarly, when refugees must flee for their lives, they are rarely able to take more than what they can carry on their backs.

Humanitarian emergencies occur all around the world in all climates, in rural and urban areas alike. Refugees' lack of access to basic necessities (shelter, water, food, healthcare) can prove just as life-threatening as direct violence.



Camps for refugees or Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) are makeshift communities. For their own security and because land and shelter are scarce, people are confined to close quarters. Such conditions often hinder sanitation efforts, inviting vermin like lice and causing illnesses like dysentery, malaria and cholera.

In humanitarian crises, the IRC is committed to responding within 72 hours in order to provide lifesaving support and services.



In 2008, the IRC responded to the cyclone in Myanmar, the war between Russia and Georgia, the renewed conflict in eastern Congo and the cholera epidemic in Zimbabwe.

- Ten million children a year die of preventable and treatable illnesses. Children in conflict-affected areas are at the greatest risk.
 - During emergencies the IRC ensures access to safe drinking water in order to prevent cholera and dysentery and distributes mosquito nets to prevent malaria. IRC also sets up and stocks clinics and trains health workers and volunteers to provide basic healthcare in their communities
- Women and girls in conflict zones are especially vulnerable to violence and are often targets of sexual assault as a weapon of war.
 - In Congo, over 40,000 survivors of violence against women have accessed IRC services including medical attention, psycho-social support, legal assistance and counseling.

Elijah - Welcoming the Wanderer

Sharing the story of a refugee resettled in the USA



Shaimaa's Story: Out of Iraq

Symbolism of Elijah:

Opening the door to Elijah during the Seder symbolizes the Jewish community's greater commitment to extending a warm welcome to any wanderer who may appear.

Reiterating the message of welcome from the beginning of the Seder, take this moment to consider how you can extend a hand to newly resettled refugees in your own communities.

Fleeing Iraq:

More than four million Iraqi civilians have been displaced by the war in Iraq. Most have escaped to Syria and Jordan and live off their savings since they are not permitted to work. They are running out of money and can no longer afford the basics, like housing, heat and food. They face an uncertain future.

A New Home in the US:

The United States has admitted a relatively small number of Iraqi refugees in recent years. Since 2002, The International Rescue Committee has helped to resettle 3,700 of them, mainly in Atlanta, Dallas, Phoenix and San Diego.

The IRC assists newly arrived refugees as they settle into their new communities and rebuild their lives in a new society. IRC ensures that the refugees who have experienced severe emotional and physical trauma receive the counseling and medical services they need.

SHAIMAA

Shaimaa was a college student in Baghdad when the war started. As radical fundamentalists began exerting influence, she was suddenly told that she had to wear a headscarf and could no longer walk the streets freely.

As the violence escalated, it soon became too dangerous for Shaimaa to even attend college classes. She fled with her family to Jordan leaving behind many things she loved: friends, relatives, a culture and a home.

But then, she and her family were resettled in the U.S. by the IRC. With them, Shaimaa is now safe in New York City, working to get back in school, and learning how to live in a strange new country.

To hear Shaimaa's and other refugees' stories visit:

refugeejourneys.org

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PANTHER

As a child, Panther was driven from his home by the bloody civil war in Sudan. He spent nine years in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya before being resettled in the United States by IRC in 2001.

Panther is currently studying at Brandeis University.

To hear Panther's and other refugees' stories visit:

www.refugeejourneys.org

Panther's Story: Out of Southern Sudan

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Fleeing Southern Sudan:

The most recent conflict between the north and the south in Sudan spanned two decades, forcing many refugees to flee with little hope of returning home.

Four Million Sudanese from the south, many of them children, crossed into Ethiopia, Kenya and Northern Uganda, where they gathered in refugee camps. In response to this tragedy, the United States has extended to some of these refugees the chance to travel to the United States to rebuild their lives in a new society.

A New Home in the US:

Since 1999, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has resettled almost 3,000 refugees from Sudan in cities across the United States. Many had suffered physical and social trauma, malnutrition and had limited or no access to schools or vocational training.

Community Leaders:

Since their arrival in the United States, many of these refugees have played an active role in their new communities. Some have helped to raise awareness about the devastation wrought by the civil war between the north and the south in Sudan, while also speaking out on the continuing humanitarian crisis in Darfur.

"Next Year in Jerusalem, Next Year in Peace"

Laying the foundation for a peaceful, productive future in post-conflict regions.



*Returning after 15 years in exile, **Geoffrey Ladu** joined the IRC, and works to support the return and reintegration of other Sudanese returning home.*

"I was about 8 or 9 when the firing started in my village in Sudan, and we ran to the border.... People were shot in front of me.... Bodies were falling. I survived by chance."

"I was in Uganda from 1989 to 2005. I struggled for everything. I dug land before dawn then came home at 7:30 a.m. and went to school. I tried my best and got a scholarship."

"Now I have come full circle. I joined IRC's returnee monitoring program in March 2006 and went back to Southern Sudan. The information we collect is very important. With lots of people returning, IRC can share the information about what's happening in the areas of high return with refugees who are still in exile — as well as the government and other agencies.

"One agency used our information to decide where to drill boreholes to give clean water to the people most in need.... We might hold a protection workshop in areas where people tell us that there's lots of violence against women."

Reinforcing peace in Southern Sudan

Seders end with the statement "Next year in Jerusalem."

Tradition holds that the message of this passage is two-fold:

First, it relates to the aspiration of the Jewish people to be a free people in their own land.

Second, it symbolizes the goal of achieving peace, freedom, and justice for people throughout the world.

On Passover, as the Jewish people celebrate freedom from oppression, they recognize those who are still suffering oppression around the world, and commit themselves to build a world free from violence and injustice.

Just south of the ongoing crisis in Darfur, Southern Sudanese are struggling to rebuild after Africa's longest-running civil war, which ended in 2005 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Today an estimated 2.2 million people have returned to rebuild their lives and communities. But their prosperity and prospects for lasting peace are threatened by the lack of infrastructure and basic services. Hospitals and schools are few and far between, and job opportunities remain scarce.

- 75% of the people in Southern Sudan still lack access to health care.
- One of every seven children will die before reaching the age of five unless organizations like the IRC intervene.
- Southern Sudan has the highest maternal mortality rate in the world; a 15 year old girl is more likely to die in childbirth than complete her education.

Nevertheless, the promise of peace gives Southern Sudan a unique opportunity to rebuild, help stabilize the region and lay a foundation for lasting peace. The IRC is working with communities in Southern Sudan to train health workers, deliver vital medical services, provide education for children whose studies have been interrupted by conflict, offer job training and promote human rights. In regions of Southern Sudan where the IRC operates:

- Infant mortality has decreased by 81%.
- 100,000 more people have access to safe drinking water.
- Girls make up 50% of emergency education students.
- Hundreds of people have received job training and have secured long-term employment.