Let the people in!
A refugee Haggadah supplement for a time of closing borders

More than twelve months into the pandemic, our Seders in 2021 come as we reflect on a year different to any other in modern memory.

As many of us again find ourselves away from our families and communities this Passover, we also naturally express solidarity with those who have been forcibly separated from their loved ones, as they flee from modern day tyrants.

At this time, it is crucial that when we recall our historical and personal experiences of displacement, we consider connections between this history and the plight of present day refugees.

When we tell our ancestors’ journey from Egypt this year, we must also reflect on how the coronavirus pandemic has prevented many present day refugees from reaching the freedom we celebrate at Passover.

Just as we were granted safe passage on our journey from slavery, through the parting of the Red Sea, modern day refugees need routes to sanctuary and the chance to start their lives again.

JOURNEYS TO FREEDOM IN PERILOUS TIMES

Worryingly, more than 60 countries worldwide have used the pandemic to justify shutting their ports and borders to asylum seekers.

Where Pharaoh refused to let the Jews leave Egypt, many governments worldwide are increasingly now seeking to keep out those who seek asylum.

As fences and barriers are put in place, those searching for safety are forced into increasingly dangerous routes. Tragically, in 2020 alone, nearly 4,000 migrants, including refugees and people seeking asylum, died on migratory journeys.

The ‘Porta d’Europa’ memorial to migrants who died at sea, in Lampedusa, Italy
Sadly, nearly half of these deaths occurred in the Mediterranean alone, and in the past five years, on average more than seven people have died every day making this journey.

As we read of Moses parting the sea for the Israelites’ safe crossing, it is extremely concerning that many of those seeking to rescue drowning migrants in the Mediterranean are increasingly being criminalized.

Since 2015, over 150 people in Europe alone have been prosecuted or investigated for helping refugees and migrants in need, and activists and NGOs have faced rising intimidation and harassment.

Despite a record 79.5 million people now being forcibly displaced worldwide, only 22,700 refugees were resettled by UNHCR in 2020, the lowest number for two decades.

As we read of our 40 years in the desert, many refugees worldwide find themselves stuck in limbo, with resettlement schemes on hold and thousands of people left stranded in refugee camps.

**FOUR ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AT OUR SEDERS**

What can we do to ensure that more refugees are reunited with their families this year?

How can we draw on our personal histories, experience and Jewish identity to reinvigorate our community’s response, and raise our voices, to help modern day refugees?

How can we make sure that refugees are able to live in freedom once they arrive in our countries?

What can we do in 2021 to make sure our treatment of refugees and asylum seekers is enough?
Recalling the ten plagues sent to Egypt provides an opportunity to reflect on the adversity that continues to plague refugees and people seeking asylum. Consider adding the below to your Seder, or think of your own additional challenges facing refugees.

1. Dangerous journeys
A lack of safe routes, increasingly militarized borders and violent, illegal pushbacks make journeys to safety extremely dangerous.

2. Exploitation
Refugees and asylum seekers worldwide are highly vulnerable to sexual, economic and physical abuse, particularly if they lack the right to work.

3. Violence
Even after escaping persecution, conflict and torture, many refugees continue to face the threat of violence in the countries they flee to.

4. Racism and xenophobia
In recent years, refugees have sadly increasingly been subject to discrimination, vilification and criminalization by politicians and press.

5. Loss or separation from family
Many refugees worldwide have lost family members to violence and conflict, or been separated on their search for safety.

6. Threat of deportation
Far too many countries worldwide continue to deport asylum seekers to unsafe locations, where they face severe threats to life.

7. Poverty and destitution
Many refugees and asylum seekers worldwide face poverty, particularly if they are not allowed to work while their claims are processed.

8. Lack of access to education
Sadly, even prior to Covid-19, half of the world’s child refugees were not enrolled in school.

9. Climate change
Displaced people are particularly vulnerable to the impact of extreme weather events such as flooding.

10. Unsafe or precarious accommodation
Accommodation for refugees and asylum seekers is often unhygienic, crowded and poor quality, a significant challenge in the pandemic.

“You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Take action to support refugees this Passover!

Research what routes are available for refugees to reach your country. If your government could be doing more, take action and support campaigns to open or extend safe and legal routes for those seeking asylum.

Join with others in your community, and take action to ensure that once refugees reach safety in our countries, they can live in freedom and dignity.

Get involved with JCORE’s international Jewish refugee manifesto, which calls for governments worldwide to ‘Ensure that safe and legal routes are available to asylum seekers and refugees.’ Find out more and join the campaign: jcore.org.uk/manifesto