

Introduction

As we prepare to observe Tisha B'Av and commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem that led to the exile of the Jewish people for centuries to come, we are acutely aware that we find ourselves in the midst of the worst refugee crisis in recorded history, with more than 70 million people displaced worldwide. Given these extraordinary numbers, the continued attacks on asylum and the refugee resettlement program in the United States are even more inhumane.

Of course, we know that the proverbial 10th of Av will come, and we will rise up from our mourning with renewed resolve to support refugees and asylum seekers. First, though, we take time to dwell fully in the mourning demanded by the 9th of Av. We fervently lament the many cruel actions this administration has taken to limit the ability of refugees and asylum seekers to seek safety in our country, and we mourn for lives destroyed and lives lost.

The text on the following page is a modern addition to the book of Lamentations – a 6th chapter – meant to express our mourning over the contemporary refugee and asylum crises. Please note that, because the text is in English, rather than Hebrew, some of the trope markings will appear backwards (e.g., *munach*, *mapach*, etc.).

Lamentations 6

Eicha – Alas! A country once built on the promise of liberty and justice for all
now isolates herself from the cries of those seeking safety on her shores.
Built by the hands of refugees and immigrants, she
chips away at the right to asylum,
dispensing with founding principles so
essential as her DNA.
Forgotten are the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
Gone is the dream of protection in the face of violence and persecution.
“Her enemies are now the masters” (1:5).
Inhumane executive orders barring Muslims and refugees.
Jarringly separating parents from children.
Keeping out compassion and decency, a wall in their place.
Lady Liberty weeps at her shuttered gates.
Mixed multitudes we were when we left *Mitzrayim*, the narrow place;
now, the world narrows around the 70 million displaced people around the globe.
Only God’s voice can be heard bellowing calls to welcome, protect, and love the
stranger –
partners in continued redemption we are no longer.
Quiet in the face of moral depravity are her citizens,
reinforced by hateful rhetoric spewed from seats of power.
Self-evident truths –
that human beings are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain
unalienable rights –
undone by cowardice, malice, and greed.
Verily, we know where God dwells amidst this suffering –
God is in the eyes of those fleeing for their lives.
Why, then, have we forsaken the Divine call to love the stranger as we would love
ourselves –
xenophobia instead taking root in our souls?
You are the hero for whom you are searching:
Zion cannot be returned to if we do not first turn to those calling our names.