

Programming Content Resource for HIAS Refugee Shabbat March 5-6, 2021



Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

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Introduction

Participation in Refugee Shabbat can be as multifaceted as you would like.

Whether you signed up to participate on behalf of your congregation or as an individual, there are a number of options for how your Refugee Shabbat can take shape:

For congregations, you might consider including a liturgical reading on the theme of the refugee crisis in Shabbat services and/or dedicating a sermon or text study to the topic. If you have a relationship with a refugee, asylum seeker, or refugee agency professional in your local community, consider inviting that person to speak during services. You could also reach out to Refugee Congress (more information on page 6). In mid-February, HIAS will also provide a set of pre-recorded remarks from CEO and President Mark Hetfield.

In addition, you might plan a Shabbat dinner program after Friday evening services or a Shabbat lunch program after Saturday morning services on Zoom – it could be a film or book discussion or an educational program about the various contours of the global refugee crisis. We also encourage you to invite your community to the HIAS-led events on Saturday, March 6th and Sunday, March 7th (more information on pages 2-3).

In this document you will find several useful resources for building out your participation in HIAS Refugee Shabbat:

- a liturgical reading to include in Shabbat services or to share with congregants to read in their homes
- sermon talking points
- a text study to use during Torah study, Shabbat services, or as a stand-alone post-services program

We encourage you to think through which of these options would be the most appealing to you and/or your community.

For everyone – individuals and congregations alike, in this document, on pages 6-8, you will find a list of ideas for how anyone can take action on Refugee Shabbat.

Safety and Security

As you make arrangements to support Refugee Shabbat, HIAS would like to take this opportunity to remind you to consider safety and security as part of your standard event planning process. In this era of heightened anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, and Islamophobic violence, it is prudent to reflect on your community's approach to safety and security. We encourage you to consider which best practices are applicable to your congregation and facilities. In this era of virtual meetings, as you likely are aware, so called "Zoombombing" has proliferated, which is something to take precautions to prevent.

Publicity and Social Media

HIAS Refugee Shabbat is an opportunity for the Jewish community to communicate our strong, shared support for refugees and asylum seekers. HIAS headquarters will be working to tell the story of the Jewish community's participation in Refugee Shabbat, and we hope that you will do so too by contacting local media about your programming, inviting local elected officials to attend and/or speak at your programs, and/or writing op-eds about your participation for local news outlets. Please also consider writing about your participation on social media and in your community's newsletter or bulletin. Suggested language and logos for this can be found [here](#).

HIAS-led Events

This year, HIAS is leading two programs during Refugee Shabbat! We hope you will join us.

On **Saturday, March 6th at 8:00pm EST**, come together with hundreds of fellow refugee advocates and activists across the globe to send out Shabbat with a joyful *havdalah* led by HIAS Rabbi-in-Residence Rachel Grant Meyer, Rabbi Yosef Goldman, and Rabbi Annie Lewis. Our blessings will be woven together with the voices of historical and contemporary refugees. We will also enjoy a live performance of the song "You Were Strangers" from the spiritual folk-rock show REVIVAL written by Kristen Plylar-Moore and performed this evening by musicians Lea Kalisch, Julia Ostrov, and Rabbi Tobias Moss.

More information and registration can be found here: www.hias.org/get-involved/events/refugee-shabbat-havdalah.

On **Sunday, March 7th at 1:30pm EST**, join us for an international educational program on Zoom. We will hear from colleagues at HIAS and other organizations working in collaboration with Jewish communities in Europe, Canada, Latin America, and the United States in support of and in solidarity with displaced people, and explore how the emergent global Jewish movement for refugees is evolving.

More information and registration can be found here: www.hias.org/get-involved/events/zooming-perspectives-global-jewish-movement-refugees.

We would love for you to weave these programs into your community's Shabbat plans. Please share the links with your community and encourage them to attend and/or consider attending as a group.

Action Items for Everyone

This is a list of 15 ways that anyone can take action for refugees and asylum seekers in the week leading up to and following Refugee Shabbat, as well as on the actual Shabbat itself.¹ If you are participating in Refugee Shabbat as a community, consider selecting one of the items on this list to encourage all community members to do in observance of Refugee Shabbat.

1. **Bless with Intention** – As you welcome Shabbat on March 5th (or the date of your choosing), use [this reading](#) before reciting Kiddush (the blessing over the Shabbat wine) to set an intention to act in solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers around the globe.
2. **Find the Facts** – Check out this [list of articles and videos](#) to learn more about the global refugee and asylum crisis and share these resources with family and friends. Zoom or FaceTime family and friends to discuss what you have learned!
3. **Do Your Research** – Do some research to find out which state or local issues are affecting refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants on the local level in your area and explore how you can make a difference.
4. **Advocate to Elected Officials** – Send a message to the Biden administration and/or your Member of Congress. Check the “Speak Up” section of [this page](#) for the latest resources for taking advocacy action with HIAS
5. **Join the “Jews for Refugees” Facebook Group** – Joining this group is a great way to connect with thousands of other committed individuals across the United States and around the world, access up-to-the-minute information about the Jewish response to the refugee crisis, and share actions that you are taking. [Click here to join](#).

¹ We recognize that there are a multiplicity of ways that HIAS' supporters celebrate Shabbat. We encourage you to choose the activities that work best for you and to use the time leading up to Refugee Shabbat and directly after for any of the activities that resonate but are not in line with your personal Shabbat practice.

6. **Shop at Refugee and Immigrant-Owned Businesses** – Consider doing a Google search for refugee-owned restaurants and shops in your local area. Check out lists like [this one](#), [this one](#), or [this one](#) to purchase refugee-made products from around the world.
7. **Learn a Language with Refugees** – Sign up to learn Arabic, Armenian, French, Kurdish, Persian, or Spanish by employing a refugee as a teacher through [NaTakallam](#). You can even purchase “Gift of Conversation” packages for family and friends eager to learn. Professional translation services also available for individuals and organizations worldwide.
8. **Provide Housing** – [Sign up](#) to provide short-term housing for refugees through HIAS’ partnership with Airbnb.org (scroll down to the section labeled “Help HIAS Clients with Housing” for more details).
9. **Volunteer Remotely** – Whether you are an experienced educator or attorney, have language skills, or are interested in sharing what you love about your community with newcomers, we invite you to learn more about [volunteer opportunities near you](#). You can also contact your [local resettlement agency](#) to find out about additional volunteer opportunities.
10. **Donate Goods** – Donate old technology (PCs, printers, tablets or PDAs, mice, sound and video cards, etc.) through [PCs for Refugees](#). Donate new or gently-used baby carriers to refugees through [Carry the Future](#). Your [local resettlement agency](#) may also have other specific needs.
11. **Support Refugees and Asylum Seekers** – In the week leading up to Refugee Shabbat, set up a Facebook fundraiser to benefit HIAS’ work. For assistance setting up a personalized fundraiser page, please email development@hias.org.
12. **Become a Welcome Campaign Congregation** – If you are a member of a synagogue, [check this list to see if your community is part of HIAS’ Welcome Campaign](#), an action network uniting congregations across the United States in response to the largest refugee crisis in history. If your congregation is already signed up, contact synagogue lay leadership and clergy to find out how you can get involved. If not, contact synagogue lay leadership and clergy to encourage them to join.
13. **Donate to a Bond Fund** – Consider [contributing to a bond fund](#) to assist in releasing immigrants from detention.
14. **Organize and Speak Out** – Organize a rally or public action outside of a detention center and advocate for immigrants in detention to receive the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as possible.
15. **Design a Welcome Art Scavenger Hunt** – Together with a group of people who live nearby (local friends and family or members of a religious school class), create and decorate signs expressing your support for refugees and asylum seekers to hang in your window visible to the street. Over the weekend of Refugee Shabbat, hop in your car or take a walk to find all the signs in your neighborhood. Consider taking a socially distanced picture in front of each home and then creating a photo montage to post to social media or to Tweet to your local elected officials or Member of Congress with a request to support refugees and asylum seekers.

Liturgical Reading: Together with Refugees: In Remembrance of Egypt, In Celebration of Creation

[Click here](#) to download this reading as a formatted handout.

Read the following aloud before you recite Kiddush (blessing over the Shabbat wine):

We lift this cup with words remembering our ancestors' Exodus from Egypt on our lips – *zecher litziat Mitzrayim*.

As we recall that ancient journey from slavery to freedom, we think also of the many times throughout history that our people have wandered in search of safety.

From tsarist Russia; to the horrors of the Holocaust; to persecution in Iran, the Former Soviet Union, Cuba, Ethiopia, and beyond, time and time again we have found ourselves forced out of our homelands for being who we are.

But, each time, we were held together by community and assisted by those who risked their safety in protection of ours. We continued to survive against all odds as our hearts grew to hold others who would come to experience what we had.

We fill our Kiddush cup to overflowing, hoping that the joy of Shabbat will spread into the week to come.

And so it is as we welcome refugees and asylum seekers into our communities today.

Recalling our Exodus from Egypt, the Torah tells us, “you know the soul of the stranger.” While our responsibility to protect the rights of refugees and asylum seekers does not derive from our experience in Egypt, that experience does amplify our obligation to welcome.

May our commitment to welcome fill to overflowing just as our Kiddush cup does, leading us to take bold action in support of refugees and asylum seekers from every corner of the earth.

Just as the Jewish people have thrived, so, too, do today's refugees of all faiths and ethnicities thrive as they rebuild their lives and become part of their new communities.

We lift this cup with the words remembering the ingenuity of creation on our lips – *zikaron l'ma'aseh v'reishit*.

We continue creating and repairing the world as we build our communities on the collective strength of each individual, remembering that we are stronger and strongest when we come together.

Sermon Talking Points

[Click here](#) to download sermon talking points.

HIAS will also provide a set of pre-recorded remarks from our CEO and President, Mark Hetfield, which you can show during Shabbat services or at a program before or after Shabbat. We will share a private link to this recording with all registered communities in mid-February.

Refugee Congress Speakers

If you are interested in bringing a refugee speaker to your community, consider contacting Refugee Congress.

Refugee Congress is a nonpartisan advocacy organization built and led by former refugees, asylum-seekers and other vulnerable migrants to promote the well-being, integration, and dignity of all vulnerable migrants. With delegates across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, they use their voices and experiences to inform and influence decision makers on critical domestic and international issues that affect their communities.

You can learn more at www.refugeecongress.org. To inquire about speaker availability, please contact Refugee Congress Communications and Advocacy Associate Dagemawit Kebede at Dagemawit.Kebede@refugeecongress.org.

Text Study: Everyone Counts

Items Needed

- Copies of the [source sheet with discussion questions](#) (download and email to participants in advance)

Framing

At the very beginning of the Torah portion for Refugee Shabbat (March 5-6, 2021), Ki Tisa, Moses is instructed to take a half-shekel from every person over the age of twenty when he takes a census of the community. This teaches us that people are not just numbers to be counted but, rather, valuable human beings who have valuable contributions to make. Moreover, because the same contribution is expected of everyone regardless of financial ability, we learn that no human being is more valuable than another. Consequently, when we consider how to integrate refugees, asylum seekers, and other forcibly displaced people into our communities, it can be easy to look at them as a monolith of 80 million, but we should resist falling into that trap. Instead, we should remember that 80 million is made up of 1+1+1 and on and on. Each of those 80 million displaced people is a human being who should be respected as an individual and whose contributions to society should be celebrated.

Instructions

Read through the texts on the source sheet as a group. Next, use the discussion questions to inspire conversation. The beauty of Torah study is that every person and every group has different insight into the text, so there is no wrong way to have the conversation. To help you towards a productive conversation, here are some of the points you might want to guide learners towards seeing in the text:

- *Contributions of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (Corresponds to question #1 on the source sheet)*
 - It is significant that each person contributes a half-shekel, rather than a whole shekel. In her [D'var Torah on Parshat Ki Tisa](#), Rachel Travis writes: "That each man contributes a half, rather than a whole, shekel symbolizes that no person is a complete unit on his own; rather, we become whole by contributing to the community at large."
 - This is salient when we think about refugees' and asylum seekers' contributions to building the communities they come to call home.
 - So often the dialogue around refugees and asylum seekers hinges on the idea that refugees and asylum seekers will take valuable resources.
 - What gets lost is the many contributions that refugees and asylum seekers make to their communities – whether to the [economy](#), to [art](#), to [science](#), etc.
 - Most importantly, we also need to remember that we should not prioritize the needs of non-refugees over refugees and that, in fact, we might conclude from this verse that we need refugees and asylum seekers in order for our communities to reach their fullest potential.

- *Equalizing the Playing Field (Corresponds to question #2 on the source sheet)*
 - The Torah instructs Moses to take a half-shekel from everyone – from the rich and the poor.
 - We might wonder why Moses would not have been instructed to take money from each person according to how much money they have.
 - In particular, why not take more money from those who have more money?
 - By taking the same amount from every person and not allowing those with more money to contribute more everyone is valued as an equal contributor to the building of the community.
 - Similarly, just because those born in the United States (or those born in any of the countries where refugees and asylum seekers seek safety) may – at least initially – have more material means than the refugees and asylum seekers they welcome into their communities does not mean that their contributions should be seen as more significant than those of refugees and asylum seekers or anyone else with less material means.
 - Saviorism – particularly the [white-savior complex](#) – can be an issue when it comes to helping refugees and asylum seekers rebuild their lives. Refugee advocates and activists have to take special care to ensure that we are working in solidarity with refugees; following their leadership; and honoring their dignity, capability, and resilience.
 - The fact that the Torah takes the same amount from both the rich and the poor is a way of safeguarding against saviorism – where the rich might be able to say that they contributed more to building the community (and, perhaps, are therefore more entitled to certain benefits).
 - Indeed, the Torah says that this payment is for expiation of the soul and, as Chizkuni comments on that part of Exodus 30:15, if the poor did not contribute

- as much as the rich, they might not be able to achieve the same outcome as the rich (and vice versa – the rich might achieve a better outcome than the poor).
- We can follow the Torah’s lead in avoiding perpetuating savior and/or white-savior narratives by not prioritizing what one person gives over what another person gives and trying to ensure that everyone has the resources they need to achieve desirable outcomes, including refugees and asylum seekers.
 - *Everyone Counts (Corresponds to question #3 on the source sheet)*
 - Everyone contributes in service of their individual atonement. It is that individual atonement that eventually leads to communal atonement (which makes the world a better place), but only if everyone is able to participate.
 - If refugees and asylum seekers are prevented from accessing the resources they need be able to contribute to the betterment of the community (think: asylum seekers and other undocumented immigrants being excluded from receiving stimulus checks during the pandemic in the United States), that is a loss for everyone.

Previous Resources

If you are interested in exploring resources from previous HIAS Refugee Shabbatot, you can find them [here](#) and [here](#). In particular, you might consider hosting one of the film discussions on Zoom or providing materials to community members to complete a Tallit for Welcome ([page 23 of this document](#)) in their own homes to be stitched together at a later time. Please note that some of the facts and figures in the various programs may need to be updated to reflect the most recently available numbers, many of which you can find in the latest [UNHCR Global Trends Report](#).