

Refugees are Looking for a Joyous Ending

By Karen Brodsky

The Purim holiday is near, and the story is familiar to most of us. It is a story with a happy ending. An evil man tries to rise to power; he plans to kill all the Jews of Persia. In the end a beautiful woman, Esther, with the help of her cousin Mordecai, saves her people and everyone is joyous.

Modern Persia is called Iran. In power there is an evil man bent on the destruction of Israel. Also in power are Islamists who believe anyone who is not Moslem should have no personal freedoms, no jobs, no education, and no future.

In countries throughout the world this story is repeated. Governments have been overthrown. Ethnic and religious minorities have had their rights taken, and they fear death and destruction to their families and villages. Country to country, the stories are similar—from Burma, from Somalia, from the Sudan, from Iraq—hundreds of thousands have fled, hoping to find safety and a future.

The United Nations High Command for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates there were 34.4 million refugees, asylum-seekers, internally-displaced people, returnees, and stateless persons, in the world at the end of 2008. For most of them, there will be no joyous ending.

Some, however, will be resettled in countries in the West and Australia. Of the 17 countries that accept refugees, the U.S. accepts the most—more than the countries combined. The number that the U.S. will accept is determined by the president and the Department of State. Last year that number was 80,000; and 68,000 were actually resettled in the U.S. in 2009.

Welcoming refugees in the U.S. is the life-saving mission of HIAS Inc. since the late 1800s. The Charlotte office continues the mission. HIAS NC settles refugees without regard to religion, ethnicity or race. Saving lives is a Jewish concept that is not reserved for other Jews alone.

HIAS NC saves lives on a daily

basis, said Ellen Dubin, executive director. Last year, the Charlotte office resettled some 260 refugees and “we plan to resettle 300 or more this year,” Dubin said. Saving lives is an obligation that is central to our Jewish tradition. In Leviticus we are told, “Neither shall you stand by the blood of your neighbor.”

Rabbi Jacob Elisha Fine, rabbi and assistant director of Hillel at the University of Washington in Seattle, in a commentary provided to the website, My Jewish Learning.com, said that “the classical rabbis developed the overarching principle of *pikuach nefesh*, which asserts the supreme responsibility of protecting individuals who are in potentially life-threatening situations. This obligation to protect life is considered of such great import that it trumps virtually all other legal considerations.”

Rabbi Fine further asserts that, “as Jews, the bitter experience of exile from one’s homeland should be something to which we are acutely sensitive. For 2000 years we have suffered through the challenge of being strangers in lands not our own. As is often noted, the Torah has more to say about the proper treatment of strangers than it does with any other set of laws, including worshipping God or observing festivals.”

As the executive director of a Jewish organization, American Jewish World Service, that has dedicated itself to helping those who suffer across the world, Ruth Messinger said of our Jewish community, “. . . this is a community that has the experience of being an outsider, and we know what happens when no one responds, when you call for help and no one’s there.”

At a moment in history when over 34 million human beings are displaced from their homes, Rabbi Fine said, “it is time that we rededicate ourselves to this central message of our tradition.”

HIAS NC dedicates itself to saving and rebuilding lives. You can help with cash donations, gently used furniture and house wares

and by volunteering. For more information, call 704-535-8803 or e-mail ellen.dubin@hias.org.

Like the Jews in the Purim story, the world’s displaced people

are hoping for a joyous ending. Esther didn’t save the Jews by herself. She had the help of Mordecai. We can help, too. ✨

WOMEN’S NEWS



Twelve Jewish women in Charlotte, NC, joined women in the Carolinas and across the United States in a day of Solidarity and Support of Nofrat Frenkel, who was arrested on November 19 at the Western Wall in Jerusalem for wearing a tallit (prayer shawl).

In Charlotte, Rabbi Judith Schindler of Temple Beth El led the gathered women in song and prayers, including *Hineh Ma Tov*, the *Shma*, and the *V’Ahavta*. The brief service ended with Debbie Friedman’s “Miriam’s Song.” In solidarity with Frenkel, the women in attendance wore tallitot and kipot (skullcaps).

The women in attendance were, left to right: Elsa Multer, Sara Schreiber with her grandson, Asher, Betsy Olinger, Amy Krakovitz, Susan Jacobs, Shari Hackman, Bettina Rappaport, Amy Lefkof, Sheila Peltzer, Rabbi Judith Schindler, and songleader Patti Hartman.

Some of the women in attendance wore tallitot purchased from Women of the Wall Foundation. Proceeds from the sale are used directly for defense funds. The Women of the Wall tallis can be purchased at <http://womenofthewall.org.il/wordpress/shop/>.

PHOTO BY EDDIE GLUCK

Hadassah Prepares to Celebrate Its 98th Birthday

By Bunny Bramson, president, Charlotte Chapter of Hadassah

As Hadassah looks forward to its 98th birthday, we look over our shoulders to the beginning which really began in 1904 when Henrietta Szold and her mother, Sophia, traveled to Palestine. They witnessed unmitigated disease and unrelieved poverty throughout the area.



Bunny Bramson


Henrietta had a study group for women in the United States. We are told that her mother said to her at this time: “This is what your group ought to do. . . . You should do practical work in Palestine.” The seed was planted and received. Three years after Miss Szold returned to the United States, her women’s study group

became an activist Zionist organization. We were born and the mission expressed in Hebrew and English was (and remains): *Aruhat Bat Ami* (the healing of the daughter of my people).

As a vibrant body we have been eclectic: teaching, healing, rescuing - a powerful leader on women’s issues in the United States. Our work continues to challenge us

in the fast changing world. The technological advances commit us to advance our humanitarian work which stretches and reaches well beyond America and Israel to the farthest corners of Europe, Asia, and Africa.


We take deep, unabashed pride in our beginnings; the future beckons with a new vigor. ✨



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