

Opening the Door to Elijah

Incorporating Modern Refugees into our
Seder Narrative



Introduction

Pesach is a timely reminder to the Jewish people that we are no strangers to suffering. Our story of achieving freedom through divine help and human struggle has been celebrated for over three thousand years and is central to our identity, traditions, and communal legacy. As a Jewish community, we understand from experience why people seeking safety in the UK deserve dignity and compassion, not suspicion, punishment, and dehumanisation. Yet, this is what people who seek sanctuary on our shores face in the new immigration legislation and the increase in immigration detention that it necessitates.

This Pesach, we urge you to consider the plight of refugees in the UK today alongside our own story of enslavement and repression by utilising this Haggadah accompaniment at your Seder. We hope it will spark conversation around your dinner table and empower you to take action.

René Cassin, the Jewish voice for human rights, is named after the French-Jewish co-author of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Our **vision** is of a world where everyone thoroughly enjoys all their human rights as enshrined in the Declaration, and in which members of the Jewish community are actively engaged in promoting and protecting these rights.

Our **mission** is to promote and protect the universal rights of all people, drawing on Jewish experience and values. René Cassin works within the Jewish community – by **building support for human rights values amongst British Jews**; in the wider community – by **bringing the authority of a Jewish perspective** on issues that resonate with the Jewish experience.



The Hostile Environment

Since 2012, the UK Government has been committed to creating 'a really hostile environment' for those who arrive in the UK through irregular routes. The introduction of the Nationality and Borders Act, and potentially the Illegal Migration Bill, only serve to exacerbate this hostility.

These new sets of legislation, widely recognised to undermine international law, represent the biggest attack on the refugee protection system we have ever seen. The proposed Illegal Migration Bill strips people fleeing war and persecution of their right to seek safety and punishes them based simply on their method of arrival. It will further the mass detention of vulnerable people and deny those trafficked or exploited access to modern slavery support. All irregular arrivals will be detained for at least 28 days with no recourse to immigration bail or judicial review. Whilst the Government's position is that this detention will be temporary pending removal to Rwanda, the ongoing legal battle surrounding the country's poor human rights record is likely to extend it indefinitely.

Outside of very limited schemes, 'safe and legal' routes to the UK do not exist. This hostile environment does very little to 'stop the boats' and break the cycle of exploitation by human trafficking networks. People only engage in these desperately dangerous journeys because they have no other option. On *Pesach*, show your commitment to urging a truly compassionate response from the Government of the UK.



Elijah's Cup

What is Elijah's Cup?

Elijah's cup is the fifth ceremonial cup poured at the Seder. It is left untouched in honour of the Prophet Elijah, who, according to tradition, will arrive one day as an unknown guest.

At the Seder, the four cups, which we drink through the reading of the Hagaddah, relate to the 'Four Expressions of Redemption' in God's promise to Moses; ***I will take you out, I will deliver you, I will redeem you, I will acquire you.*** Elijah's cup is a representation that Redemption was not ultimately achieved in Egypt, but rather an ongoing process. **During the Seder, we do not just look back to the past; we also look forward to the future of Redemption and the 'righting of wrongs' in the world.** This is represented by the 'coming of the Messianic Age'.

What Can Elijah's Cup Represent?

Freedom is an ongoing process. The 'coming of the Messianic Age' is not passive but can be brought about through peace, understanding and compassion. **Elijah's cup holds us to this and marks our collective promise to actively participate in bringing freedom to everyone.**

Elijah's cup has long been used to promote activism within the Seder and recognition of contemporary injustice. Alongside the symbolic opening of the door to Elijah, we customarily declare the words '*let all who are hungry come and eat*'. כָּל דֹּכְפִין יֵיתִי וְיִיכַל, כָּל דִּצְרִיךְ יֵיתִי וְיִפְסַח. *Kol dichfin yeitei v'yeichol, kol ditzrich yeitei v'yifsach.*

At your Seder, join in this legacy of activism by explaining this context and participating in one or both of the following activities:



Discussion Activity

Step 1:

Begin your discussion by focusing on the lessons of the Cup of Elijah.

Example: Elijah's Cup is a reminder that we are striving towards universal liberation. How does Opening the Door and declaring the words '*let all who are hungry come and eat*' speak to that?

Step 2:

Consider what *personal values* we can all embody in keeping with this, and consider *individual acts of compassion* people have taken.

Examples: We can ensure to always care for people; perhaps we know someone or are someone who offered their home via the Ukrainian refugee scheme. Making an ethical decision when consuming items that may be produced as a result of forced labour and exploitation?

Step 3:

Consider why people may act as good hosts and be kind on an individual level, but this doesn't necessarily reflect their treatment of refugees as a abstract.

Examples: Using the refugee crisis as a centrepiece, have a discussion on how fear of the unknown, an abstract presentation, rather than focusing on real people causes a fallback on fear. **What is it about current legislation that is so devoid of compassion?**

Step 4:

Think about how we can promote compassionate responses and join forces with likeminded individuals.

Examples: Donate to legal battles, educate, volunteer through local support programmes such as drop-in centers for refugees, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants etc.

Step 5:

Together, engage in one of the 'starter actions' on the next page.

Interactive Activity

Step 1:

Split your Seder into two groups. Each group will be assigned a number of tokens to represent a fundamental human right and someone to distribute them. The first group will have more than enough for every person, whilst the second group will only have enough for half the people in the group.

Step 2:

The first group's distributor will distribute one token to each member of the group. The distributor should hold the remainder in reserve. Meanwhile, the second group's distributor will distribute their tokens; half of their group will not be able to have a token.

Step 3:

The first group's distributor should suggest to their group that they may want to allow those from the other group without tokens to join their group to share in the remaining tokens. **Use this as an opportunity to discuss with the group the reasons for and against allowing them to join the group.**

Example: 'They have no other choice in order to get the tokens they need, as their group won't give them any' 'if you let them have one then we might not be able to get extra tokens' etc

Step 4:

The first group should allow those from the second group to share in their tokens. **Everyone gets a token and is happy.** Discuss how through kindness and generosity, the members of the first group have made this happen. They have not only focused on the extra tokens available to them, but have noticed the lack of tokens available to group two and worked to create a solution for everyone by incorporating some of group two into their own.



Starter Actions



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from your
Community to
oppose anti-
refugee laws



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