# Text Study:
# Refugees and Asylum Seekers

HIAS
Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.

*Read these texts aloud in English and/or in Hebrew:*

**Leviticus 19:34**

**ויקרא י״ט:ל״ד**

(לד) כְּאֶזְרָח מִכֶּם יִהְיֶה לָכֶם הַגֵּר ׀ הַגָּר אִתְּכֶם וְאָהַבְתָּ לוֹ כָּמוֹךָ כִּי־גֵרִים הֱיִיתֶם בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם׃

(34) The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I the LORD am your God.

**Bava Metzia 59b:14**

**בבא מציעא נ״ט ב:פ״ג**

מפני מה הזהירה תורה בל"ו מקומות (ואמרי לה במ"ו מקומות) בגר? מפני שסורו רע

Why did the Torah call our attention in thirty-six (and some say, forty-six) places about the stranger (*ger*)? Because their nature is precarious.

**Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *Faith in the Future,* p. 78**

"The Hebrew Bible contains the great command, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18), and this has often been taken as the basis of biblical morality. But it is not: it is only part of it. The Jewish sages noted that on only one occasion does the Hebrew Bible command us to love our neighbour, but in thirty-seven places it commands us to love the stranger. Our neighbour is one we love because he is like ourselves. The stranger is one we are taught to love precisely because he is not like ourselves."

*Discussion Questions:*

1. What does it mean to love someone – a stranger – as we love ourselves? How can we understand the fact that it is repeated so frequently?
2. How much weight should be given to the rationale that we should love the stranger as we love ourselves because we were strangers in the land of Egypt? How significant is the historical, lived, or even genetic experience of being a refugee as a rationale for assisting refugees of today?

**Deuteronomy 23:16-17**

**דברים כ״ג:ט״ז-י״ז**

( טז)לֹא־תַסְגִּיר עֶבֶד אֶל־אֲדֹנָיו אֲשֶׁר־יִנָּצֵל אֵלֶיךָ מֵעִם אֲדֹנָיו: (יז) עִמְּךָ יֵשֵׁב בְּקִרְבְּךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־יִבְחַר בְּאַחַד שְׁעָרֶיךָ בַּטּוֹב לוֹ לֹא תוֹנֶנּוּ:

(16) You shall not turn over to his master a slave who seeks refuge with you from his master. (17) He shall live with you in any place he may choose among the settlements in your midst, wherever he pleases; you must not ill-treat him.

**Mishneh Torah, Gifts to the Poor 10:7**

**משנה תורה, הלכות מתנות עניים י׳:ז׳**

(ז )שְׁמוֹנָה מַעֲלוֹת יֵשׁ בַּצְּדָקָה זוֹ לְמַעְלָה מִזּוֹ. מַעֲלָה גְּדוֹלָה שֶׁאֵין לְמַעְלָה מִמֶּנָּה זֶה הַמַּחֲזִיק בְּיַד יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁמָּךְ וְנוֹתֵן לוֹ מַתָּנָה אוֹ הַלְוָאָה אוֹ עוֹשֶׂה עִמּוֹ שֻׁתָּפוּת אוֹ מַמְצִיא לוֹ מְלָאכָה כְּדֵי לְחַזֵּק אֶת יָדוֹ עַד שֶׁלֹּא יִצְטָרֵךְ לַבְּרִיּוֹת לִשְׁאל. וְעַל זֶה נֶאֱמַר( ויקרא כה לה)" וְהֶחֱזַקְתָּ בּוֹ גֵּר וְתוֹשָׁב וָחַי עִמָּךְ "כְּלוֹמַר הַחֲזֵק בּוֹ עַד שֶׁלֹּא יִפֹּל וְיִצְטָרֵךְ:

(7) There are eight levels of *tzedakah*, each one greater than the other. The greatest level, higher than all the rest, is to fortify a fellow Jew and give him a gift, a loan, form with him a partnership, or find work for him, until he is strong enough so that he does not need to ask others [for sustenance]. Of this it is said, (Lev. 25:35) *[If your kinsman, being in straits, comes under your authority,] and you hold him as though a resident alien, let him live by your side.* That is as if to say, "*Hold* him up," so that he will not fall and be in need.[186]*See Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 63a.*

*Discussion Questions:*

1. What obligations for “fortifying” or “holding up” a community member are expressed in these texts? Until when should that support last?

2. Which aspects of support for refugees might be complicated by the dynamics of power and privilege? How can people support one another while making sure to respect each other's dignity and autonomy?

**Yalkut Shimoni on Torah 13:2**

**ילקוט שמעוני על התורה י״ג:ב׳**

התחיל לקבץ עפרו מד' פנות העולם אדום שחור לבן ירקרק. אדום זה הדם שחור אלו הקרבים ירקרק זה הגוף. ולמה מד' פנות העולם שאם יבא מן המזרח למערב ויגיע קצן להפטר מן העולם שלא תאמר הארץ אין עפר גופך משלי חזור למקום שנבראת אלא כל מקום שאדם הולך משם הוא גופו ולשם הוא חוזר:

God gathered the dust [of the first human] from the four corners of the world - red, black, white and green. Red is the blood, black is the innards and green for the body. Why from the four corners of the earth? So that if one comes from the east to the west and arrives at the end of his life as he neared departing from the world, it will not be said to him, "This land is not the dust of your body, it's of mine. Go back to where you were created." Rather, every place that a person walks, from there he was created and from there he will return."

*Discussion Questions:*

1. Are the obligations to refugees individual or communal? What can we expect from our society, and what should we do individually?

2. How do we move from seeing refugees as the "other" or "strangers" to seeing them as being the same as ourselves?