

The Story of the 'Refugee People' is not over yet - a new chapter is beginning

By Kezia Niman



1. Jews at the refugee welcome march in September 2015

Jews are often called 'The People of the Book'. Our constant reading and re-reading of the Torah earned us this scholarly title, as we strive to look deeper and deeper into the ancient document, to glean more about our story and our identity as Jewish people. As our most holy festivals approach, we must ask ourselves again, who are we and what is our story?

Let's go back to Genesis, to Bereshit. There was darkness but then G-d said, "Let there be light," and created a world, our world. G-d created the first oceans and rivers, the first fish and plants, the first animals and people – and then G-d created the first refugees. Not even half-way through the first book of the Torah, Adam and

Eve are expelled from the Garden of Eden, leaving the first man and woman homeless in an unfamiliar, unforgiving world. And so, the story of the Refugee People begins.

The next to journey far from his home in search of a better life was Abraham, the first Jew, who settled in the land of Canaan on G-d's orders. Then there was Joseph and his family who escaped famine by moving to Egypt. Some generations later, the

Israelites began their long journey back to Canaan in order to escape slavery and persecution at the hands of the Egyptians. These early stories are precursors to great exoduses of our people yet to come. More recently, the Holocaust caused Jewish refugees to flee from a Nazi Europe in search of safety. From exile in Babylon to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 our story is one of a Refugee People, a fact which underscores our religious identity and cultural heritage.

Today's refugee crisis emerges as people from Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Eritrea trek across continents. They hope that they, like the Jews before them, can escape war, persecution, hunger and poverty and start a new life. As a people we have walked in their shoes time and time again. As individuals many of us have parents, grandparents and ancestors who were refugees. Our history creates an indelible bond to the people washing up on the shores of Europe.

We may think our story as the Refugee People is ending and that other communities better deserve this title but in reality a new chapter is only just beginning. For we may be the Refugee People but we are also the survivors, living proof that refugees can integrate into society and become successful contributors to British society.

Now is the time not only to stand up for fellow refugees but also to repay those who stood up for the rights of Jewish refugees during World War Two, like [MP Eleanor Rathbone](#) by doing for others what she once did for us. Now is the time to be the voice for hope and justice. We have a duty speak up for those who have no voice, as we once did. We have a duty to march for refugee rights on the on [17th September](#).

The world may be a dark ruthless place but we, the Refugee People have an opportunity to shed light on [indefinite detention in the UK](#) and the plight of people who are risking death in a bid to escape a life that is not worth living.

