

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well

...

no one chooses refugee camps
or strip searches where your
body is left aching
or prison,
because prison is safer
than a city of fire

Warsan Shire, "Home"

This law, of shielding the alien from all wrong, is of vital significance in the history of religion. With it alone, true Religion begins. The alien was to be protected, not because he was a member of one’s family, clan, religious community or people, but because he was a human being. In the alien therefore, man discovered the idea of humanity.

Hermann Cohen in Hertz Torah Commentary

לא תונה ולא תלחצנו כי גרים היתם בארץ מצרים -
לא תוננו בדברים ולא תלחצנו בממון.

You shall not wrong or oppress the ger (stranger), for you were gerim (strangers) in the land of Egypt (Exodus 22:20). You shall not wrong with words, and you shall not oppress financially.

Mekhilta d’Rabbi Yishmael Mishpatim, Massechet Nizikin, Parasha 18

The people who are fleeing Syria are the most harmed by terrorism, the most vulnerable as a consequence of civil war and strife. They are parents, they are children, and they are orphans. And it is very important . . . that we do not close our hearts to these victims of such violence and somehow start equating the issue of refugees with the issue of terrorism.

In Europe, I think people like Chancellor Merkel have taken a very courageous stance in saying it is our moral obligation as fellow human beings to help people who are in such vulnerable situations. . .

And so we have to each of us do our part. The U.S. has to step up and do its part. When I hear folks say that, "Well, maybe we should just admit the Christians but not the Muslims." When I hear political leaders suggesting that there would be a religious test for which a person who's fleeing from a war-torn country is admitted. . . .That's shameful. That's not American. That's not who we are. We don't have religious tests to our compassion.

President Barack Obama, November 16th 2015

כְּאַזְרַח מִכֶּם יְהִי לְכֶם הַגֵּר | הַגֵּר אֲתֶכֶם וְאַהֲבַתְּ לוֹ כְּמוֹדְ כִּי־גֵרִים הֵייתֶם בְּאַרְץ מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם :

The strangers who reside with you shall be to you as your citizens; you shall love each one as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I Adonai am your God.

Leviticus 19:34

I used to think that the most important line in the Bible was “Love your neighbor as yourself”. Then I realized that it is easy to love your neighbor because he or she is usually quite like yourself. What is hard is to love the stranger, one whose color, culture or creed is different from yours. That is why the command, “Love the stranger because you were once strangers”, resonates so often throughout the Bible. It is summoning us now.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks,

“Refugee crisis: ‘Love the stranger because you were once strangers’ calls us now,” on www.theguardian.com

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה בְּאַלְנֵי מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח־הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם: וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיִּרְץ לִקְרֹאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אֲרָצָה: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי אִם־נָא מִצֵּאתִי חֹן בְּעֵינַיִךְ אֶל־נָא תַעֲבֹר מֵעַל עַבְדְּךָ: יִקַּח־נָא מֵעֹט־מַיִם וְרַחֲצוּ רַגְלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁעֵנוּ תַּחַת הַעֵץ: וְאָקַחְהָ פֶתַח־לְחֶם וְסַעְדוּ לְבַבְכֶם אַחַר תַּעֲבֹרוּ כִי־עַל־כֵּן עֲבַרְתֶּם עַל־עַבְדְּכֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ כֵּן תַעֲשֶׂה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ: וַיִּמָּהֵר אַבְרָהָם הָאֹהֶלָה אֶל־שָׂרָה וַיֹּאמֶר מִהְרֵי שָׁלַשׁ סָאִים קָמַח סִלַּת לוֹשִׁי וַעֲשֵׂי עֲגוֹת: וְאֶל־הַבָּקָר רֹץ אַבְרָהָם וַיִּקַּח בְּרִבְקָר רֹדֶן וְטוֹב וַיִּתֵּן אֶל־הַנֶּעֱר וַיִּמָּהֵר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֹתוֹ: וַיִּקַּח חֲמֹמֶה וְחֵלֶב וּבְרָה־בָקָר אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וַיִּתֵּן לַפְּנִיָּהם וְהוּא עֹמֵד עֲלֵיהֶם תַּחַת הָעֵץ וַיֹּאכְלוּ:

God appeared to [Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre as he was sitting at the entrance of the tent at about the hottest time of the day. Looking up he saw: lo—three men standing opposite him! Seeing [them], he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them, and, bowing down to the ground, he said, “My lords, if I have found favor in your sight, please do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought; then wash your feet and recline under a tree, and let me bring a bit of bread and you can restore yourselves. Then you can go on—now that you have come across your servant.” And they responded: “Very well, do as you propose.”

Abraham then hurried toward the tent, to Sarah, and said, “Hurry, knead three measures of wheat flour and bake some [bread-]cakes!” Abraham then ran to the herd and took a young calf, tender and sound, and gave it to the servant lad, who quickly prepared it. He took sour milk and [sweet] milk and the calf he had prepared and set [it all] before them; and as he stood over them under the tree, they ate.

Genesis 18:1-8

א”ר יוחנן גדולה הכנסת אורחין כהשכמת בית המדרש. . . . ורב דימי מנהרדעא אמר יותר מהשכמת בית המדרש. . . . אמר רב יהודה אמר רב גדולה הכנסת אורחין מהקבלת פני שכינה. . . . ששה דברים אדם אוכל פירותיהן בעולם הזה והקרן קיימת לו לעולם הבא ואלו הן הכנסת אורחין וביקור חולים ועיון תפלה והשכמת בית המדרש והמגדל בניו לתלמוד תורה והדן את חברו לכף זכות.

Rav Yochanan said: Hospitality to guests is as ‘great’ as early attendance at the House of Study. . . . Rav Dimi of Nehardea said: It is ‘greater’ than early attendance at the House of Study. . . . Rav Judah said in Rav's name: Hospitality to guests is greater than welcoming the presence of the *Shechinah* (God). . . .There are six things, the fruit of which humans eat in this world, while the principal remains for them in the world to come: welcoming guests, visiting the sick, meditation in prayer, early attendance for study, rearing one's children to the study of Torah, and judging one's neighbor in the scale of merit.

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 127a

No Contracting State shall expel or return (“refouler”) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

Article 33, 1951 UN Convention on Refugees

הָא לְחֵמָא עֲנִיָּא דִּי אֶכְלוּ אַבְהֵתְנָא בְּאַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם. כֹּל דְּכַפִּין יֵיתִי וַיִּיכַל, כֹּל דְּצָרָךְ יֵיתִי וַיִּפְסַח.

This is the bread of affliction that our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Whoever is hungry, let them come and eat; whoever is in need, let them come and conduct the Seder of Passover.

Passover Haggadah

It was the Danes who finally wore the Majid family down. The family had fled war-torn Syria, taken a boat from Turkey to Greece, crawled under a barbed wire fence in Hungary, and slept in fields and on concrete sidewalks. . . .As the family crossed the Danish border from Flensburg, Germany, on Monday, the police stopped the train and took all the refugees and migrants off. . . .At the school, the Danes treated them with an iron fist in a velvet glove. The migrants were given thin foam mattresses, blankets, hot food and balls for the children to play with. But armed police guarded every door, sending a message that the migrants were prisoners there, not free to come and go as in the German shelter where the family had spent a night.

Anemona Hartocollis, “Traveling in Europe’s River of Migrants” in New York Times, 11 September 2015.

יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר, יהי ביתך פתוח לרווחה, ויהיו עניים בני ביתך.

Yosi ben Yochanan, a man of Jerusalem, said: “May your house be open wide, and may the poor be members of your household.”

Mishnah Avot 1:5

The Almighty is the great *makhnis orkhim* (welcomer of guests). God’s hospitality made it possible for humanity to exist, for the world to come into being. “To be” means to share in the infinite being of the Almighty. The Almighty, like Abraham, invites people to partake of God’s boundless existence. Creation is an act of *hakhnassat orchim* (welcoming guests). . . We are just strangers whom the Almighty has invited into [the Divine] “tent”, which is the universe. How beautiful is the doctrine of *tzimtzum*, of contraction. What is creation if not withdrawal by God in order to make it possible for a world to emerge in space and time? Infinity steps aside and finitude is born. What is *hakhnassat orchim* if not withdrawal by the master from a part of his home so that a stranger can occupy the empty part he vacates?

Rabbi Joseph Soleveitchik in Abraham’s Journey, eds. David Shatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, and Reuven Ziegler