

February 2, 2023
Weekly Message from Rabbi Peltz

This is the moment we've been waiting for. After hundreds of years of slavery, Pharaoh finally lets the Israelites go. Almost instantly he regrets his decision. The Egyptian pursue, the Israelites have their backs against the sea, and then a miracle occurs. The sea splits, the Israelites cross, the Egyptians drown, the people are free. Let's eat! We'll save that for Passover. Like all stories in the Torah, there are important lessons in this story that speak to us today. One of the most oft-repeated lessons is that, though none of us lived through the Exodus from Egypt, the experience of slavery in Egypt is etched into our collective memory. *"Do not oppress a foreigner; for you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners."* This command is repeated in the Torah 36 times. It reminds us of our historical experience in Egypt, as well as the much closer experiences of parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents, or perhaps even our own experiences, of being immigrants to this country. These experiences, both personal and communal, are meant to imbue us with a sense of empathy for those traveling a similar difficult journey today, and to challenge us to help where we can.

This is why we are participating once again this year in [National Refugee Shabbat](#), which is co-sponsored by HIAS and the ADL. This year has broken records. The conflict in Ukraine has led to the fastest-growing refugee crisis since World War II. At the beginning of the summer, the number of displaced people in the world exceeded 100 million. Our collective challenge is not only to how to help these refugees, but it is also how to fight against the hateful rhetoric and discriminatory policies that today, like so often in history, rise up when refugees come to our borders.

This Shabbat we will once again be joined by HIAS Pennsylvania Executive Director Cathryn Miller-Wilson for an update on the refugee crisis and what is happening locally to deal with it. [Cathryn will speak after kiddush in the Rose Chapel/Jenofsky Bet Midrash.](#) We hope you can join us for this important update. We want to thank our Social Advocacy Committee for continuing to work on these issues, and for helping coordinate our participation in National Refugee Shabbat.

Though we will read this Shabbat about how the Israelites finally got out of Egypt, we know that they still have many miles to go before they were truly free and had a sense of home. This ancient journey is one that echoes throughout world history and within our own family histories, and it is one that continues for too many today. Because we know how it feels to be foreigners, we have a responsibility to do what we can to help those experiencing it in our own time.

Shabbat Shalom